United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Boleslaw Brodecki
July 26, 2003
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Boleslaw Brodecki, conducted by Nina Ellis on July 26, 2003 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Richmond, Virginia and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

Interview with Boleslaw Brodecki
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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Boleslaw Brodecki, conducted by Nina Ellis, on July 26th, 2003, in Richmond, Virginia. This interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's post-Holocaust interview project, and it's a follow up to an interview -- videotaped interview conducted with Boleslaw Brodecki in 1989. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. I -- I saw your video interview recently, and it ended with you and Sonia coming to the United States, you mentioned it briefly, but I would like to go back a little bit in time, and talk a little more about the time you spent at Landsberg.

Answer: Mm-hm.

Q: And I'm wondering if you might be willing to start there, and tell me if you remember when you came to Landsberg roughly, if you remember the month, and tell me how you -- what you were like, what your -- what sh -- kind of shape you were in when you got there.

A: Well, we got there, I think the war ended in May and there we spent some times in Czechoslovakia, because you were in the te -- terezin -- Theresienstadt, and we were getting ready to be like -- there was like a resettlement place to go -- some people went

to their respective countries, and some people refused to go back to their own country, bad memories, you know.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And we were not treated very nicely when we came back to Poland. People would say, you still alive? A lot of goods were confiscated, and they thought we were gonna try to get it back, so that was not very popular thing to go back, especially to Poland, you know, and that welcome. So they start asking people -- they tried to send out the people from that area, like some people were from Russia, they going back here and there. And I decided to actually go to Russia, cause I didn't know -- I didn't know about America, if we can go here. So I knew Russians at the time, so I said I was from Minsk, cause I didn't want to go back to Poland. So they had a truck picking us up, and taking us somewhere, to a train station. And I forgot something, a sweater or something, I went back in the building. When I come, the truck was gone. So I was stranded in Czechoslovakia. And then they deci -- start talking about going to Israel, so they were giving us like false papers, because the English Intelligence was checking so people don't go to -- which wasn't Israel then, it was Palestine.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: They didn't want the people go that way, you remember Exodus and all. So they were giving us, like telling us that we Italians or Greek, so we can go that direction, toward the sea, you know?

Q: Whose they? Who was facilitating this?

A: Well, the Jewish organizations, you know, I -- I couldn't recall that.

Q: Oh.

A: But we -- we s -- so we were in a train going to Italy like, just to get closer to the sea, to go to Israel. And we supposed to be -- and I think, Italians and Greeks, or something like that, because they don't want to know we exist, because that would be obvious that we go to Palestine. So what happened, we r -- we ran out of food, so we talked to a American rabbi, which was in a uniform, if he can help us. He say, you're supposed to be Greeks or Italians -- I don't know how it came about, all of a sudden we got surrounded by a bunch of military vehicles, English, and they turned the train around, and we went back to Germany, which we w -- that -- at the time, I think we were in Austria. And end up in lan -- Landsberg [indecipherable]. And there was ex-military camp where they t -- converted to a resettlement camp. W -- when we got there, things were very primitive. There were nothing -- we met the American commander, who was over that camp at the time, Mr. mi -- Meyerhoffer. I met him here in a reunion, and I even got a book he wrote, that was a book with letters he wrote to his wife. And he says there was not toilet paper, there was nothing in there he ordered from -- from American supplies to send us toilet paper. You know, they put a lot of people in there, and there was no facilities, no nothing. So we started off a police department, and a employment, like bureau to get people jobs, and sanitary, and -- and like -- and a cafeteria so people eat there. Everything was s --

Q: Were there a lot of people there when you got there?

A: Yeah, was a lot of people. Now, I couldn't tell you the numbers, I don't have no idea about numbers at the time, how many people.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: Today everything is statistics, but that was camp in Landsberg.

Q: Yeah, well I know that at -- at one point that they had at least 5000 people there.

A: That's possible.

Q: Yeah, I don't -- do you think it was that many when you got there?

A: I -- I couldn't really tell you, I had no recollection in that area.

Q: Yeah.

A: It was a lot of people, and of course, a-at times they fenced us around because there was a lot of disgusted ex-prisoners going around in the German city, robbing, and stuff, you know, people were on the loose.

Q: Yeah.

A: So they even put G.I.s, you know, watching the camp, and one day we had the uprising over there.

Q: Over what?

A: Because s -- we were contained and -- and -- and they wouldn't let us out, so we just di -- di -- a whole bunch of people got together like a big march, and tried to break out.

Q: Yeah, they didn't want to be imprisoned again, yeah.

A: Yeah, so there's a lot of going on at the time. But anyway, we stayed there, and I don't -- I cannot tell you, that's where I met her.

Q: Well tell me about your job, you got a job.

A: Well, I went to the employment office trying to get a job, and the guy who was running the employment office was nominated -- he was a Jewish fellow, and a police chief, they got the same name. So instead of working in an employment office, I work in a police station. And you couldn't tell it's police, because at the time there were no uniforms, everybody was -- she's got a -- you know. So I said no, I don't want to be a policeman, you know, I've got bad taste of police -- policemen from the war, you know, and -- you know.

Q: Sure.

A: They were usually working for the other side. But he said, "That's not that kind police force," he said, "We just watch warehouses. But," he says, "you get a suit, and you can eat in the cafeteria now." So I said, "All right." So anyway, I stayed about four years in the police department, and that's where I met her, because she was 16, and her and a girlfriend went to a dance. And they supposed to been kinda cute, s-so one of the musicians followed them home, and broke in in their rooms, and they s-scream, and people call the police. So I was one of the rescuers, me and another policeman. So next day I come to see how they are doing, see? And --

Q: Did you take that guy away?

A: Oh yeah, we arrest him.

Q: Put him in jail?

A: He pull -- he pulled a knife on -- he got a stiletto on the table.

Q: He was threatening her?

A: I -- I don't know what he was trying to do, but they were screaming, and they called the police, and next day I came to see how they were doing, you know, and th-that's where is started.

Q: So you stayed there for quite awhile?

A: About four years.

Q: Yeah.

A: And then we went to Munich, and we start registering. Then I have no desire go to Poland, she went to Poland, came back, before she met me. She says -- she probably told you about it, it was terrible.

Q: Yeah, she did.

A: So there was different offices you can register, go to the United States, Australia, Canada, I don't know, different places. So I put -- put my name different places, you know. We had to get out of Germany. So we got a letter, which we were accepted, in the Richmond -- [indecipherable] in the United States. So I don't know if should put that on the tape, but I ask -- when the American soldiers -- we were driving around with the military police, I said, "Did you heard of Richmond, Virginia?" He says, "Oh, you're not going there." And I said [indecipherable] you know, so -- I -- that's just what -- I don't know what's going on, you know. When -- when I got -- we got the

letter, we went to Munich, and of course there were arrangements to fly to United States. But when I came to Richmond, I was unaware of the segregation. You know, when I was little, we -- we had the book about Uncle Tom, you know -- you know --

Q: Uncle Tom's cabin?

A: Yeah, cabin. I wasn't aware that there was a segregation, I would keep getting in trouble. I went to a black -- black barbershop, and then when I met the barber on the -- on the bus, I sat with him, and the guy said, "You better get up because they're gonna stop the bus, because black people should sit in the back." And you know, so I kept getting in trouble, because we -- after the war we didn't like discrimination at all, so that's wha --

Q: Let me go back and ask you a couple more questions about Landsberg.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: What kind of things did you do in your job as a policeman? I mean, you went and -- and inner -- stopped this disturbance, but what other kinds of things did it turn out to be?

A: Well, most of the time we were -- we were watching warehouses. Then a lot of times they were giving out food and supplies, so we had to stay there, keep order, you know?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: That was --

Q: Di -- did you notice the conditions getting better at the camp, over time? You said they were pretty bad when you first got there.

A: Well yeah, yeah, yeah, they were getting better, because it was getting a little more organized. And we also had a lot of trouble with black market. I guess a lot of people were -- you see, you couldn't use banks, so all the smugglers, you know, they -- they had people carrying money, and they were s -- well, we had a lot of trouble with that.

Q: Yeah.

A: And -- and that was not official, because we couldn't go to the official places and prosecute them or something.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: You know? And there was a lot of smuggle, with the cooperation of the American army. They were getting money together, getting the -- what do they call it, care packages. And what happened, those care packages were bought by groups of people, and when they came back to Germany, there was a crew unpacking everything and selling it on the black market.

Q: Before it got to the people.

A: Oh yeah, because it wasn't really meant for the people, they were -- they were meant for s -- they were using as a cover up for smuggling. Because sum -- they didn't have no license to sell cigarettes. And -- and they said, like Belgian or something, that was legal to sell American cigarettes when they -- wh -- where the trailer came with cigarettes, the destination was somewhere else, we stop there, and there unload, you

know, there was -- there was a lot of that stuff. And United States, I mean, you hear about a lot of offices were involved in that.

Q: Yeah, yeah. What other kinds of things were -- you've mentioned cigarettes, but what other kind of things were available or desirable on the black market?

A: Chocolate, clothing. Most anything can be transported.

Q: And -- and was there a place where you could go that you knew you could buy something, was there --

A: Yeah, in like private homes. Some women had a restaurant in their house, they were cooking, and go there and buy a meal. There was nothing official, you know?

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. But people -- because people were there for --

A: Then the ORT come in, the head of the ORT organization. They were trying to teach people trades, you know.

Q: Mm-hm. And they had schools, too?

A: Yeah, they had courses for people to, you know, to learn, although how much you can learn in a short time, but it was a beginning.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Tell me what you remember about your wedding. It was, I understand, probably one of the first weddings.

A: Yeah, we had the whole place show up. You know, like in America they ca -- call it covered dish party. Everybody brought something. And we even have a band. There's a lot of people call themself musicians but they're not, and they -- and we have a band t -- that you could die laughing when they were playing, they were making false notes,

and -- and everything. And there was a lot of people wini -- I never seen in my life. There's two floors with people.

Q: But it must have been a very happy occasion for everybody to experience a wedding --

A: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: -- even though they didn't know you.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Just to know that life goes on.

A: I know it.

Q: Yeah. Same thing when your son was born. I'm sure that was vicarious thrill for a lot of people.

A: Yeah, we got in trouble, I was out of town, and s -- and a neighbor of ours, she say that she got the pain, and a certain, you know, how you call it --

Q: Labor pains.

A: Uh-huh. And she went to hospital and they said they didn't have babies born this particular hospital, there was another place which called San Cotilion, where they were taking women over there. She when she went to the hospital, they told her to come back tomorrow, some like that. So she went back crying, she said, we have a neighbor, Dolly, or something, and she was a hostile person, she came back, she says, she gotta be here. And matter of fact, they called the police, because was some kind of a dispute, she wouldn't leave, she cry, and said the policemen were my friends.[indecipherable]

So then when -- at -- at that time they didn't give them anesthesia, anything, so they tell them to pull, or something. So when she -- I was told that when she got in bed, the doctor, who was standing [indecipherable] when he bend over, see how she doing, she gave him a slap in the face. But it was a dum -- it was a l -- a l -- litfak -- I mean, a -- a -- a Jewish fellow from Lithow, so she gave him a slap in the face. But anyway, that's the way it went, and when I came back, she -- he was born the 12th of December, and I'm superstitious, and I finally got to the hospital, it was like 30 minutes -- 11:30 or something, and I said to the nurse, "I want to see the baby." She said, "Take your time." And I said, "It's getting close to midnight, it gonna be the 13th," so I called the nurse and say you go -- she say, "What are you crazy, sir?" I say I want to see the baby now, you know, about five minutes to midnight, and I made it. Yeah, there was a lot going on in those days.

Q: Yeah. That must have been a happy time for you, after everything you'd been through.

A: I guess so.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I tell you, when we were liberated, when we li-liberated in Theresienstadt, nobody was happy, because you were kind of [indecipherable] and say why me, how about my family, you know, there was no joy. Took a little time to get over the whole ordeal.

Q: Mm-hm. But by the time you got married, and by the time your son was born, were you able to feel that joy?

A: Oh yeah, I guess so. I -- I -- you know, after all these years, today people analyze feelings, and everyth -- in those days we didn't think about all those things, you know?

Q: Yeah, yeah, that's true. I've heard a lot of people say that. So you came -- you -- tell me how it was that you got to come to Richmond. Was it through a c -- a certain organization that brought you here?

Q: Ah, H-Hebrew Ladies Benevolent, which is now Jewish Family Services were -- we were accepted in this community, of course, oh it was fake, there was no job, or no -- no place to stay. After we got here, they started accommodating us. But they -- you need somebody to guarantee they will -- you won't fall on nobody's mercy, that you will have a place to stay, and --

Q: Right.

A: -- and place to work, you know, so when we came here, [indecipherable] not 19th Street, and that was --

Q: Do you remember arriving at the airport?

A: Ah, where? In New York?

Q: Is that where you came in?

A: Well, we came in New York, and I -- oh, there was go -- some going on over there, screaming, I don't know. Were the Union Station over there wa -- they call it. And --

Q: You flew in, right?

A: Yeah, we flew in, and then they took us to the Union Station to bring us back to Richmond.

Q: Mm-hm, the train station.

A: So we stayed there, I don't know, several hours, overnight, and then we were put on a train that's coming to Richmond.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Now we came to Richmond, there was a railroad station which is now a museum, and we got off, and this guy from the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent took us, and ask if we were hungry, so he went across the street to a restaurant. And we are not -- we -- we were not used to that food, see? They gave you the sliced bread, and I take a butter, and I put the butter, and the butter went through the bread. You know, and we were eating rye bread and stuff, so we were not used to this kind of s --

Q: It was white, thin -- thin, white bread?

A: Yeah, the sliced bread. I don't know who invented it, but --

Q: Yeah.

A: So, that was kind of funny. And then we were end up in na -- North 19th Street, and she was pregnant. Like -- like Mickey Rooney said one time, he was -- he was made in England, assembled in the United States. That's what happened with our daughter.

Q: Your little girl.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you had a little baby boy, too.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: So, that's what happened, and --

Q: Did they find you a job right away, or did you have to go out and find it yourself?

A: Yeah, they -- they took me to a factory, and the place went on strike, and the people I work with were real nice to me, you know, they were happy, and I -- gave me rides home. So when people went on strike, I went with them. And the guy who owns the place, there was a Polish immigrant from World War One, I don't know, he came from New York, and sat in a chair and he tripped me. If you don't get off, I send you back to Poland. So that was a mess.

Q: What kind of factory was it?

A: There was tobacco machinery. I had the experience because during the war, in some concentration camps, I work in a machinery place. So --

Q: Uh-huh. It was processing? Like, was it a processing tobacco?

A:[indecipherable] machine, I know that.

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

A: So, you know, when I work in ge -- in Germany, in the machinery place, I was a prisoner, but everything has to be, like 30 minutes before quitting we had clean the machines, and I -- I came in here, and it's the biggest mess I every seen in my life. Tools were laying on the fl -- you know, how they waste stuff in here. Tools were laying on floor, you know? So I asked this guy, his name was Rudy Star, he was also a

German newcomer, if I can clean up, two, three weeks, pick up all the tools, you know, put them in a tool room. Then they went on strike. So I went to electronics. So from then on, I worked for -- you -- you heard of Circuit City?

Q: Uh-huh, yeah.

A: Well, Circuit City started in Richmond.

Q: Oh really?

A: What happened, there was two -- I don't know if you want to hear that.

Q: Sure.

A: There was two guys, was Mr. Sainwerso. Sainwerso had relatives in Richmond, and he was on the way to North Carolina buying land. So when he stop in Richmond, see his relatives, there was no TV stores, that was 1948. So he got a friend working for -- a relative, for a TV factory in New York, which was called at the time, Olimpy. And he says, that's a good place to move. So he went back to New York, brought TVs in his trunk. And there was a tire store here downtown, in [indecipherable] and there was a Jewish fellow, he says -- he gave him a corner to sell some TVs.

Q: In a tire store?

A: Yeah, and those TVs went kind of fast --

Q: I bet.

A: -- so he went and got more TVs, then he brought his partner, which was ha -- Mr. Haig from New York, and they open a store next to Sears, and call it Ward's company.

The reason called Ward's, because Wardsell was his name. At that time was Montgomery Wards, you see.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But -- but they start Ward's, you know, W, Wardsell. Alan was his son, Ruth was his wife, and -- and s -- that he used to name the comp --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- make Ward's. And then they went suing Montgomery Ward, because they -- they didn't put Montgomery on the front. So he got some -- I don't remember all the details, they sued Montgomery Ward, and he won. And -- and that's the way it went, and then they start up in more stores, and clothing, and all kind of finagling, and all of a sudden got a lot of employers, and everything and then they bought Lafayette stores, I don't know if you remember. Like Radio Shack, there was Lafayette stores, so he bought them. And -- and the [indecipherable] they were getting bigger, and bigger, that's what Circuit City is now. So we used to have lunch with the bosses every day, you know, with Mr. Wardsell. Matter of fact, when I [indecipherable]

Q: And you -- did you go to work for them?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: I we -- wor --

Q: And -- and what were you doing?

A: I repair TVs and stuff.

Q: In ’40 -- when you -- in ’49, or ’50 --

A: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: Yeah, huh.

A: Well -- and two of my witnesses when I become citizen, Mr. Haig and Mr. Wardsell, the -- the founders of Circuit City.

Q: That’s interesting. So you worked for them for -- for how long?

A: For about -- almost 11 years. Then I went in my own business.

Q: Uh-huh. Well, what was it like for you to be here? Where -- whe -- did you speak very much English?

A: Little by little, I was learning, I mean, you know. I keep checking at that time that I learn English, then I met some people from Poland, they tell me I speak Polish with the English accent.

Q: Really, huh. When you came, did you speak anything -- any English at all?

A: Very little. Not too much.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We didn’t have much connections with Americans.

Q: And what were your first impressions of this country, or did you -- did you have time to stop and think about it?

A: Well, I don’t know, it was kind of commercial, everything was money. You go in a restaurant, you want the jukebox play, you had to put a money in it. Everything was --

can -- then there was a lot of waste. I see somebody write with the pencil and then right there throw it away. I went and picked it up, I said hey, that's not --

Q: Even then, it was like that?

A: Oh yeah. People throwing stuff away. You go now in a thrift store, you'd be surprised at the stuff people get rid of, I mean like valuables, expensive stuff, and -- and they do that, I don't know. They don't have no patience. People who call me gave me TVs for nothing. Right now here, day before yesterday I pick up two TVs. The lady says -- from New York, she says, "I don't want them. You don't want to take them, I'll put them in a dumpster." I says, "I'll take them." And they three or four year old TVs. People waste a lot of stuff here.

Q: Yeah, yeah. What was it like for you socially? Did you socialize with other survivors, or not?

A: Well, we were kind of pushed together because they keep us more or less together, but we had here new American Jewish club, which was really founded by the German immigrants. So we belong to that club, and everybody was meeting in there, and for several years, and -- but a lot of people left Richmond, because Richmond was really dominated by the -- we're -- we're supposed to be Ashkenazis, I don't know, and they were dominated here by the Sephardic Jews, you know, from Spain and Portugal. And then the German Jews came in, and they kind of got on the top of everything. I don't know, they elect me president, I was the only Polish. They all -- there was a German club, and they -- they elect me president, I couldn't understand. So -- so a lot of people

just left. [indecipherable] people stayed and open grocery stores, because lab -- if you were a laborer, or something, there's a lot anti-sem -- anti-Semitism here, Jew this, and Jew that, Jew 'em down, Jew 'em up. I had several fights. I was mad after the war, somebody call me a name.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Boleslaw Brodecki. This is tape one, side B. You said that there was -- you encountered some anti-Semitism on the job here.

A: Oh yeah, there -- there was -- on the job. And as a laborer, you -- I mean like one guy, which was retired from [indecipherable] company, went to work for there for driving a taxi, and they call him Hebrew, you know? There w -- there wa -- it -- it -- I don't see it now as much as then. And they said during the war, they drew swastikas in the s -- they vandalized synagogues, but we didn't make too much fuss about it, even lately.

Q: During which war?

A: World War Two.

Q: Uh-huh. There was vandalism here.

A: Yeah, they put swastikas in -- in the departments to elevator and stuff like that. And vandalized some synagogues in a -- so I was in the Jewish community center, and it brought -- a lot of time they wouldn't advertise it, because you say if you put it in the

paper, it's getting kind of contagious. They just -- small vandalizing of the Holocaust Museum here a few weeks ago, but we kind of keep it under cover. That was a few weeks ago, they vandalized the museum. And then we had committee in the Jewish Community Center examining newspapers from all over Virginia to find if it was anti-Semitic text. And they were trying to publish a Christian telephone book, [indecipherable] buy it from [indecipherable] so that was a fight over that, and then we had another thing which, with high schools, like during Jewish holidays, so they don't -- they get credits, they can make up because th-this people of Jewish faith, that they wouldn't go to school during the Jewish hol --

Q: On the holidays.

A: That was a whole thing.

Q: And this was in the 50's?

A: No, that was lately in le --

Q: Recently?

A: -- last 10 years.

Q: Yeah. What about i -- was -- was the anti-Semitism such that -- were you afraid? Or was it just annoying?

A: It was annoying, because like I -- I grew up in Warsaw, and I -- we are on the warpath, I mean there was anti-Semites in Warsaw, but we're -- the Jewish guys, we were -- like I was carrying a wrench and a chain with me, somebody hit me, then I get him. We were -- we -- we were used to it, you know? And then there were Jewish

stores in Poland where they -- they were working with signs, don't buy -- don't buy from a Jew, you know, so we were beating them up. I mean, there was a la -- th-that's why I was in a place here friends of ours, and -- and her son told her that they were talking something against Jews on the bus, the kids. So she says, "Did you get off?" And he says yeah. And I say, "When I was in Poland, we got in a fight, we didn't get off." But here, was a different attitude, you know.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So, we were annoyed, we still get annoyed with that kind of stuff, you know what I mean?

Q: But it never got to the point -- there was never so much that you were afraid that something would happen to you or your family, or --

A: Why? Y-You get afraid because some things will overpower you, no matter what you do, you get overpowered. If you see somebody seven foot tall, a giant, and you're a little fellow, sure, you're going to run. Like David and Goliath.

Q: Right. But were there things that you would avoid doing, or places you would avoid going, or something, because you were afraid there might be a confrontation?

A: In Poland?

Q: Here, I'm talking about here.

A: I -- I -- I really couldn't recall it. I never been that bad, you know, actually.

Q: Uh-huh, that's what I'm trying to understand, you know, the degree of it.

A: No, no, no they weren't that bad, just mostly vandalism, or stuff like that. And it happened now with the -- they say it's on the increase. So, read it in the paper, they say it's on the increase [indecipherable] this -- i-i-it's complicated because, you know, in the United States, in the -- in the Congress, or what, they vote, and they try to -- people be against Israel, against Jews, so they spend money now, try to push that propaganda because everything if -- they [indecipherable] last summer, and they -- they voted on. So they try to turn people opinion of it. So it's nice when -- when the Saudi Arabian prince was trying to give six million dollars to -- at New York, to the mayor, he refused to take it, you remember?

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm, yeah.

A: So.

Q: When -- when your kids started to get older --

A: It was Giuliani was -- what I am talking about.

Q: Pardon me?

A: Giuliani is --

Q: Giuliani, yeah.

A: He refused -- they give him six million dollars, he refused to take it, even after 9-11.

Q: Yeah, yeah. When your kids started getting old enough to wonder where their grandparents were, you know, why don't we have relatives here, that kind of thing.

Did they ask you questions, did you tell them, did you want to tell them what had happened to you?

A: Wh -- when they were little we didn't talk about it. Now when they started getting mature, th-they were going to that center and all that, they were finding out things for themselves. It was -- I don't know, the fir -- the la -- last -- first 10 or 15 years, nobody was really talking about. And people really picked up interest after the '67 war in Israel. Even here we had troubles. We were collecting money for Jewish welfare for Israel, and one guy who is a lawyer said, "I don't give to causes like that," you know what I mean. And I ask one time, ah -- I -- owner of a big Jewish company store, he's retired, so I said now you ca -- you can visit Israel. He says, "That's the last place I want to be." You know? So there was, even among the Jews, there was some kind of a way, when they was talking from years ago when delegation went to Roosevelt about what's going on and -- and it was --

Q: During the war, mm-hm.

A: -- some ga -- and he says kee -- keep him out of here. You know, I mean the -- so where they making the mistake is like that you try to be loyal to a country, right? Like the Germans, right? They were fighting World War One, they were loyal Germans, they got iron crosses, it didn't make any difference. Yo -- you know what I mean? And here is s -- well, we love America and everything, but you cannot forget that it's still -- you got forces against you. No matter which -- you remember Rikover?

Q: Rikover?

A: He was a Jewish admiral.

Q: Yeah, Hyman Rikover.

A: Yeah, he -- he went with the [indecipherable] with the -- to the North Pole, the first --

Q: He was a nuclear submarine admiral.

A: Yeah, and he was day and night on the train checking out, and they -- and they say, "I hope you get enough medals to fall in the water and drown." They even took him for congressional hearings. They said, "Are you ready?" He says, "Yeah." I took a shave, and I shower and put a clean [indecipherable]

Q: When you were young, before the war, were you active in pro Zionist kinds of causes, or did you --

A: Yeah, we got -- we had that. We had Maccabi, that was a Jewish organization. And there were -- there were two kinds, there were Zionists, and ba -- Betarof Jews. Betar -- there was guy who was -- they said that he was a military kind of a -- matter of fact, we were in Israel, and we couldn't get to his grave, they say. They were against it for some reason. I don't know, like s -- you got parties, like here Republicans. Jeez, over there you got a labor party, you got differen -- different -- but we were Zionist.

Q: Mm-hm. And your father, too, your mother and father?

A: I -- I couldn't tell you really. I don't know.

Q: But as a -- as a young man, you were a -- a teenager, I guess.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: You di -- you were active in those things. So this was a natural extension of your interests from before the war --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- when you came here.

A: Well, we have one cousin who is [indecipherable] and they got uniforms and things, and they were marching across Poland, going to Israel to fight. But they broke it up at the -- that was Lola's brother. He wa -- he was a lawyer, and then he turn Communist. In Poland they were -- a lot of the Jews were Communist, and -- and first of May, he slept in our house, so he didn't get arrested for being Communist. You see the ru -- Russia was a big disappointment. I ran o -- ran off on the Russian side during the war, because Poland was kind of chopped in half. And when we got there they said they were the -- everybody's equal and all that, but still was anti-Semitism. And they put you in jail if you call somebody like here a Jew. They say evrai. That was against the law to do that, but they still were doing it.

Q: Hm. Given that you were active, what -- what -- what was it that made you want to come to the United States instead of go to Israel, when you had a choice? Or was it just that U.S. --

A: I ha -- I -- I -- I didn't have a choice.

Q: You didn't.

A: That was -- we were -- first of all, where everybody wants to go United States because, you know, is a -- gold is in the streets, you know. But what happened, I told you we were turned back from Israel -- we were in Germany.

Q: Oh that's right, when you were by yourself, yeah.

A: Uh-huh. And then when we register, I was married then, when we register. We were accepted in here to come only to Richmond -- come only [indecipherable] we went here. You know, when I was in Germany after the war, we were -- we were actually preparing go to Israel. We were even -- had the underground. There was [indecipherable] and -- and other organizations, so we -- like we was -- I was a policeman, and we had duty with American soldiers, and you know, we were talking about waste? Three hours later the -- the truck come and brang these soldiers, and pick them up, they left the coats, the guns, the shoes, they went -- so we were -- we were taking all that and -- and sending it to Israel. We -- we were buying guns, and grenades, you know, that -- the-there was kind of smuggle --

Q: Yeah.

A: Everything was working for Israel.

Q: While you were a policeman?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. I guess that was pretty common then.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. I want to go back to something you started to talk about before when you came to Richmond and you found out that there was segregation here, racial segregation, that --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- it was very disappointing for you.

A: Yeah, we -- we really didn't have no idea about it, but there were booklet given to us, and they says that we will encounter that, and they advised us that we always should be on the side of the right team, we shouldn't worry about it -- I mean, we should be against it in our government.

Q: Who wrote this booklet?

A: I don't know, the U.S. government.

Q: Really?

A: They gave us a book that we will encounter this kind of stuff, we were not to be afraid to be against it, this a free country, and so on, and so on. But we really run into that. And what would -- what got me is something we remembered from Germany, you know, the -- they paint a picture for Jews, terrible thing, but then if you were a friend with a German, he going to say, "The Jews are no good, but you are different." Because he didn't know the o-others. And we encountered the same thing, like I worked for Ward's, and we went -- the Windsor farms is the -- here that was exclusive area, no Catholics, no Jews, no blacks. And is a --

Q: And what was it called?

A: Windsor Farms.

Q: Windsor Farms. What was it?

A: Yeah. It's just a area, you know, like a --

Q: Subdivision, like where people live --

A: No, no, it's in the city.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But they -- they were like a -- there was no Jews, no blacks, no Catholics, you know, even then. So I go to service TV, and -- and the maid, and the lady of the house, and all watch TV soap operas. On the buses they couldn't sit together, so I say, what's that? Oh, Mary is different, you know? When I worked for Ward's, there were black drivers, you know, who were real -- a real low grade of people, not because they were black, but they were alcohol, this, that. During lunch all the women from the office, everybody sits together, so I say, "You -- you hate them, why do you sit with them?" "Oh, Norman, Jimmy, they are different," you know? Then one day they -- they send me to service a TV, some black men brought a TV, and the TV broke down, and that was surprise for his wife. So they want me to go first there and fix the TV, and it was lunchtime, so I said, "I get there, I gonna make him fix me lunch." And -- and -- and the girl in the office say, "You can't eat at a nigger's." So I say, "Every restaurant you go, they're work in the kitchen. What the heck is the different?" That was -- wa-was a story, which I don't know if it's true, but it's more or less a joke, you might heard it. Can I tell you? This -- during the war, all the men was in the army in Europe, here

there, and there was a graduation here, in the Windsor Farms, which is -- so the lady called Camp Lee, and asked the general to send some GI's to ask all the girls to graduation. And before she finished, she says, "We -- we a nice Christian family, and please don't send any Jews." So here the graduation day, a bus pulls up full of black people. And one black guy knock on the door and says to the lady -- and she said, "What do you want?" "We came here to ask out the girls to graduation." She says, "That must be a mistake." "Well," he said, "the general send us." She said, "The general must made a mistake." He says, "Lady, General Schwartz never made a mistake in his life." And I got a [indecipherable]

Q: What the heck.

A: You can [indecipherable]

Q: Yeah.

A: They said they --

Q: So what -- when the -- when your kids went to school, were the public schools all segregated?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Yeah. And what --

A: We would have a problem here, because they were signing a petition th -- when they went to the public school here, the lower school, they were segregated, so they call all the parents to sign a petition that they don't want any black people in here. I refused to sign it. But they took it wrong. They say, "They will come in, it's serious,

you better sign it." And I -- I say, "I didn't sign it on account of that, I just don't believe in it." They say, "If you don't sign it, they couldn't go to school." I still didn't sign it. I was stubborn.

Q: And the kids still went to school.

A: Now when I see black people who are anti-Semites, I say I don't know which way [indecipherable]

Q: But did your kids go to that school?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Kreschee elementary.

Q: What year was that? In the 60's?

A: Yeah, there wa -- there was -- in '58 - '59, or something like that. She went there wi -- to school, she parked the car, and she came on the other side of the building, told her the car was stolen. She called the police. She came in from one end, and come out the other end, and no car.

Q: Whoops. Oh.

A: So, she didn't see the [indecipherable] there was a green car, now there was another one.

Q: During those years, the 50's and the 60's, I -- I gather that their knowledge -- public knowledge about the Holocaust in this country was very small.

A: Yeah, we --

Q: People either did -- often didn't -- claimed that they didn't know, or it just was not discussed.

A: No, it wa-wasn't -- ver-very little knowledge, and -- and that's why the museum is doing a great job, have teacher seminars here, they're doing a great job. Th-Th-They got seminars for teachers all the time, we talk to schools -- I've been speaking schools and churches. Of course, not as much as some people who are retired, but I -- like some guy tows -- we were in Rockfield, and he says too many museums open up, but the idea is just like a lot of Walmart open up, to reach more people, and the same thing a Holocaust Museum. For example, people which come here, would never go to Washington, so the knowledge is important that people know about it.

Q: Right.

A: Not only on account of the Jews, there was a lot of, you know, especially in the Middle East, they killing people off in Africa. You know, the Tutsis and the Hutus?

Q: Rwanda, yeah.

A: It cha -- Rwanda they chop hundreds of heads off and -- right now, and -- and it's not a territorial kind of thing, it's just ra-racist kind of thing, because you know, so the knowledge, you know, tolerance is very important, and they do a heck of a job here.

Q: Hang on a second.

A: Tours, and everything.

USHMM Archives RG-50.549.02*0070

Q: We were talking about your -- when you came and -- and you were unhappy, very discouraged about the racial discrimination that you saw here. Did you join in any marches, or do anything like that?

A: There was nothing of that kind here.

Q: There wasn't? No?

A: No, I mean, I did not like it, but the -- there wasn't much you could do about it, but you just did no -- disagree with the situation.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Wa -- one day when we move over here, we invited the people who helped us move to the table, and there was black man and all, and -- and there was one -- a white guy, and I keep him in the other room. And then he said, "How come you didn't invite me to the kitchen?" I say, "You are southern, and you don't like black people, I didn't want to offend you, we don't mind." He says, "Damn it, let me go in there." And he came in and sat with us, remember? Because we said he came in later, we sit down, there was Jimmy Glynn, there was a couple who help us move, and we had dinner with them, and this white guy, he said, "How come you don't invite me there?" "Well," I say, "you a southerner, you don't like black people, I didn't want to have any friction." "Damn it, I'm going." And he came in and sat with us. But I mean, that is -- there weren't much you can do about it, because we were guests over here. Couple of times people said, "You don't like it, why don't you go back home?"

Q: They did? People said that to you?

A: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: They did?

A: Yeah. Ak -- a few times that -- and they say, if you don't like it, why don't you go back where you came from? Like I interfere with somebody else's --

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: So, we were kind -- in the middle.

Q: Yeah. What about when -- when -- when the Vietnam war happened.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: You must have had -- any kind of war must have brought out some strong feelings in you, I would think.

A: Well, basically, we understood -- I don't know everybody did, Nixon wrote an article in Reader's Digest at the time, if the Communists take over there, all the routes, trade and commerce, everything going to be affected, if -- if the Vietnam turned Communist, then -- we -- we didn't like what was going on, but it looked to us like it was the right thing to do at the time. But we didn't know that so much politics were involved, because -- what was [indecipherable] was that port [indecipherable] and now the supplies were coming in, and they never bombed that, they bombed it somewhere else. Then when Nixon went to Cambodia with the universities here protest, and it was -- you had to study the whole thing, really, to understand what was going on there. We didn't like -- the lot of people -- a lot of guys went to Canada, they don't want to get drafted, and we didn't like it either, our son was in college, so he had a college

deferments, though, and he was a heck of a baseball player, they were trying to get him in major leagues.

Q: Baseball?

A: Mm-hm. We had scouts about him, oh, we had New York Yankees, Pittsburgh Pirates, and -- and we had a friend here, Eddie Casko, he was a major league player, and he came, and we beg him to talk Gerard go into baseball, because he would had to quit college, if he quit college, they send him to Vietnam. We came out of a war, I mean, you know. They -- so he came in here, and talked to Joe, he says, and the major league is only 500 people, and half of them are black, and another part is South American, and a red blooded American boy don't really get a chance to get in the major league, and that's the only way to be, if you get in. And -- and tried talk him out of doing it, you see. S-So he kept in college, and he went to the National Guard. By that time, the war ended. But we didn't really want him go to Vietnam. He went to Israel twice when the war started, he volunteer. Well, I cou -- we couldn't stop him then.

Q: Did you want to stop him?

A: Yeah, she want to stop him. We didn't like him to do that, but we have friends in Israel, and their kids were in the army, and I just didn't feel like morally, I have the right to stop him. He sold everything, he went to Israel, and a --

Q: And he was a volunteer in a kibbutz?

A: Yeah, but the idea is -- yeah, but the idea is that Israel is very particular about their soldiers. If you go there they don't take you in the army, because you have no experience. They di -- put you in the kibbutz and different places. And he was in one kibbutz, there were rats, there was nothing to eat. Yeah, you know, it's -- but he went, he went. We couldn't stop him.

Q: Did you try to st -- talk him out of it?

A: Well, she was trying to talk him out of it as a mother, but I never said a word, because I just morally I feel like I have no right to do it. Cause a mother is a mother, you know.

Q: Hang on.

A: That was the '67 -- not, that was the '83, I think. Wa -- wa -- one of the wars. I think '67 he was too young.

Q: '73?

A: Maybe.

Q: Yeah.

A: Maybe, yeah. Boy, he -- the war didn't take very long, so that was all over.

Q: Ra -- in the sevend -- late -- late 70's, or early 80's, there was -- when there started to be a lot of awareness in this country, a lot of public discussion about the Holocaust.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: There was a television program about the Holocaust, and a lot of people, you know, who didn't know about it before, or didn't learn about it, became aware of it. And it's been getting more and more in the -- in the people's consciousness since then.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: What -- what -- what was happening with you at that time? Did -- did you feel the need to speak out more? Were you aware of this going on around you?

A: Well, there was -- there -- there was a general trend between [indecipherable] and Jewish community to have speakers go to schools, I went to several schools.

Q: You did?

A: Uh-huh, oh yeah, I -- I got the -- I got that many letters, I know, from different places where I was speaking. I got a whole library of it.

Q: What did you talk about?

A: About the Holocaust.

Q: About what happened to you?

A: What happened to me, and -- and other ways in the -- after we through, I'll show you something. I spoke to the governor's school several times. You know where the governor's school is. Outstanding students, above average. They have a separate school for them, they call it governor's school. And because they cannot survive in a regular school, because they are above average, you know? So they call it the governor's school. Matter of fact, they just build thas -- got a new building just for that. So I talked to the governor's school couple times, and University of Richmond.

And I went to Lutheran church, high schools. At the beginning I took my son a couple of times, because I need some criticism. And so he gave me some hints, he -- the SS is storm troop, th -- that was the bad people in Germany.

Q: Storm troopers, yeah.

A: Yeah, so like Gestapo, SS. So he says, “Don’t say that, say German guards, because when s -- y-you use SS here, it’s like support Saddam. You know, like -- said don’t use that term because the kids don’t know what the SS. And then -- and then people would say if I have any narrow escapes, and he says, “Well tell them that you had one foot in the grave, and one on a banana peel.” So that was his advice to -- I want them to listen, I want to tell them, because my English was limited, so --

Q: What was that like for you to talk?

A: I don’t know, I just kept talking. I -- I didn’t have no -- any script, you know. And then I-I tried to shorten my talk and answer questions, because you go to schools, the kids are in different grades, and different mentality, you know. So I don’t want to -- I didn’t want to talk above or below. So I talk for a time, and then I said, “I want to hear some questions.” Then I can go out to what they want to hear, you know?

Q: Mm-hm.

End of Tape One, Side B

USHMM Archives RG-50.549.02*0070

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Boleslaw Brodecki. This is tape number two, side A. You were telling me before about visiting -- ta-t-talking to the school kids, and -- and college kids, too, I guess.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Both. And you showed me the certificate you got from the Virginia Governor's school. When you started -- when you started talking to kids, did -- what did -- did it do something for you? I know I've read letters from school kids to Holocaust survivors, and I think I have a sense of how powerful an experience it is for the kids to hear those firsthand, it's different from reading it in a book. But what is it like for you to tell those stories, to go through those memories over and over, and i-it -- is there something -- do you like doing it?

Q: Well, see, not being a professional speaker, or politician who wants to get elected [indecipherable] so our motives are -- are different, you know? You don't speak for popularity, or -- so first of all, what it does to you, it refreshes your memory. Because if you don't talk about it, it kind of fades out. You'd be surprised how that comes out. At one time I went, and -- she, when we had something happen, a robbery, you know, and she was very much affected, and we went to psychiatrist, and sat in front of the psychiatrist, put you in the mood, all of a sudden you remember things you never thought you were gonna remember. I don't know -- and by talking to the kids, and students, helps you -- your own picture of what happened. Yo-You do more analyzing,

and remembering. Maybe if you wouldn't talk about it 20 years, you just -- and -- and the reaction make you feel good that they understand what you talking about, like this time I talk to the governor's school, the kids call me that I'm a hero. Then several girls asked me if I can adopt them. And a -- it's -- it's -- it's -- in a way, it's sad but it's fun. One day I said to a guy, a Jewish fellow, we had a sh -- like a Yom HaShoah or something, and all the horrible stuff, and I asked a guy, "Did you enjoy the show?" He said, "How can you ask me if I enjoyed it, it's not something to enjoy, you know." But you enjoy the reaction.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: You feel like you make friends, and -- and you doing for a good cause, because some people say it never happened, you know, and it -- a-and you get kind of, say heck, I -- it never happened, I have a number here, and they tell me it never happened, I'm a liar, you know. So you want to show you -- your side of the story, that this is not a lie, that it really happened. So this is one good part of it, you know.

Q: Mm-hm. But for some people, too, remembering is not a pleasant thing, and they don't want to do it, and they refuse to do it -- to go tell those stories, is --

A: Well, that -- that's some people like that. Some people don't want to see any movies, anything about it, because they say they just can't take it. Her doctor, she ask him if he --

A: Mine heart doctor. My cardiologist.

A: -- if he -- if he was in the Holocaust Museum, he says he just couldn't take it. I -- I had to take head shots for the movies --

Q: Head shots.

A: You know.

Q: Yeah, publicity, like --

A: Now, wa -- yo-you got casting places, when they need you, they call you, but they got to have a picture.

Q: Yeah.

A: Like the director comes to Richmond, they going to make a movie, say I want him, and I want her, you know. So they had those pictures. So I went to the guy who take pictures, and -- and -- and we said something about Holocaust and the guy got crying.

Q: Crying?

A: Crying. Was a --

Q: Because you told -- he -- you -- it came out that you were a survivor, and he cried?

A: Yeah, he got crying. So my daughter said don't pay attention to him. He says -- she was working for a big company, she got fired for some reason, so he says -- her -- her boss who fire her, he also was crying about Holocaust, but she -- she got fired anyways. So she said, don't pay attention to him.

Q: I lost my train of thought.

A: Can I ask you a question, are you Jewish?

Q: No, I'm not.

A: No, what -- I shouldn't be that inquisitive. What is your religion? Are you an atheist, or what?

Q: No, I was -- you know, I've -- I've had an opportunity to interview a lot of American combat veterans from World War Two, and many of them had very ta -- gruesome, terrible experiences, and experienced all their lives after they came back, flashbacks, you know?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Where suddenly they would be driving down a road, and all of a sudden they would remember something so vividly, they would have to stop driving, because it was so difficult for them, so real, those images were so real. Did that happen to you, too, that kind of thing?

A: I-I couldn't recall it. Some I recall, but not that intensive.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: You know --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- that there was some horrible stuff, I mean --

Q: I mean, you had a very, very difficult, horrible experience.

A: Yeah, I wa -- I --

Q: And for a long period of time.

A: Yeah, I was like -- I was in like seven concentration camps. The reason that many, because when -- when the Russians started advancing, they keep moving us, you see.

And a lot of time we were not even guarded, and -- but there was no place to go, there was January, was snow like this, and you go -- you had -- it was like in [indecipherable] everybody could -- now that you are in the -- and there was no place to run, you know. I was in the shlinterlovitch which was also on Upper Silesia. One of the foremans was not a prisoner, she was a civilian. And he was trying to help me to escape. And I didn't trust him. I didn't go in for it, I didn't trust him. And after the war I find out he become police chief in that area, because people were turning you in, you cou -- you didn't know who to trust.

Q: Yeah.

A: At least you were alive momentarily, and next day they -- somebody turn you in, you get shot, so -- especially in the winter, it's cold, and I mean you c -- you couldn't survive, you know. But the flashback, that's -- when we were talk, it comes back to a s -- when you talk to kids, you know.

Q: Yeah. Th-the question about trust, is something I want to ask you about, too. How did it -- how did you, over time, deal with the question of trust, trusting other people, and knowing that somebody wouldn't turn on you somehow, or how -- how could you assume that people were good?

A: Well, some I have no choice, you know, some I -- that's the only choice, you had to trust somebody. For example, when I was in one camp, working a vakhar, which is like a industrial place, and the railroad tracks on both ends of the -- whatever you call that. And there were guards, and they were calling a guy -- you know, we didn't have

anything, exe -- a little piece of cigarette, you know, where they throw it away, so the guards say, come on, get it. And he threw it on the other side of the track, where you're not supposed to be, so the guy go there, get it, and he sa -- killed him, you know? So -- and I had one of them, when we were marching to work, he passed by me and gave me some dry bread, put it in my pocket. Then when he was on guard, he called me, he says -- well, I trusted him, he says, "After the war, I have a farm, you're going to be my coucher." You know? And then he, one day he says he's in trouble, because if they find a guard helping the -- what they called at the time haftlinga, which is prisoners, they get punished, they might put them in a concentration camp. So he says, "Somebody, I think, see me helping you. We have to do something, we have to do something. I'm in trouble." So I said, "What we do?" He says, "You come up here, and when you come up, I'm going to start to call you bad names, and kick you, and call you," -- So I said, "Fine." So I went over there, he said, "You faftlifter, you the bingabanga woo woo woo." Then when I went away I [indecipherable] so it worked out pretty good. But you didn't know who to trust, you know, some na -- people hanging. People kill you for -- for -- for a bite of bread, and a -- especially when you in the camp, you see hungry people go mean. When we came to Mauthausen, they put 300 of us in a area maybe like those two rooms double, so they tell us to take the clothes off, put them together, and lay like -- like sardines against the wall. When they got another row, they had to put their legs between your legs, and another row, and another row. Now, it's cold, and people got to urinate a lot. At night, you cannot get

up, if you get up, you step on other people, you can get beaten. So if you really had to go, you'd jump, and you'd run on pe-people, and -- and you made up with a couple guys you -- you were laying with to show what place you left. And -- and -- and -- and it was a horrible thing because some people couldn't reach it.

Q: Oops. Hold that thought.

A: Some people couldn't leave, so -- so they just -- so they just -- just urinate, so you get up in the morning it's wet all over. And wa -- one night I was the -- see, we talking about after the war, we got back in the war this time. That what you say, we can jump back?

Q: I know. It's okay. Yeah.

A: I was [indecipherable] and I supposed to have typhus, and I have a constant noise in my ears. I couldn't eat, I couldn't keep balance. So a friend of mine, I gave him my portion of bread, so he was carrying me around so they don't catch me, because if they say you're disabled, bingo. So what happened here, when I came to the factory, I couldn't keep balance, so the guy make me work, and I didn't make it, so they send me back in the barracks. Now, during lunchtime or something, the guys were coming in, back to the barracks. So, there were bunkbeds. On every bunkbed, there was day shift and night shift was just one place to sleep ta -- every bunkbed was filled, three or four people. And, you know, you couldn't get in, because they push you out. So finally I sat on the edge of one, and I had a belt, which was cut in half so fix my wooden shoes so I don't lose them, you know? So I took the -- the belt I got in my pants, and put it around my throat, and I sit on the edge of the bunk, and tie it up, and I jump, to hang myself. And I lost conscious, you know? I open my eyes, I'm on the floor, and

the guy who I was giving the portion of bread, which was [indecipherable] he says, “You’re going to miss your bread portion.” And I could not move, I’m all shaked up, so he said it three times, and he left, because he was afraid to lose his portion. So then I say -- I had a little metal box, and there was a half a razor, and a couple cigarette butts. So I said, “I’m going to do the Japanese stuff,” you know?

Q: Kill yourself with it.

A: Somebody picked my pocket, and it was gone. So then I lay, I -- I don’t know how long, I finally got up, and -- and I was crawling around, trying to lay down somewhere, and the one bunk is -- only one person was there. So I figured he must be one of the kapos, you know, the fore -- foremans? So I can keep him -- one foot on the ground, and somehow I slip beside him, and I think I went to sleep. In the morning, somebody wake me, and the guy say, “You better get away from there.” I say, “Why?” “Somebody urinate, and there’s urine under the bed in there. Gestapo, when they come, they ba -- beat the heck out of you.” So I want to be nice, so the guy was laying beside it, I say -- try deliver the message, you understand -- the guy on the other side, “Leave that man alone, he been dead since last night.” That’s why he was sleeping alone. So --

Q: When you got out -- when you came here, though, and -- how did you learn to trust people again? Or did you?

A: Well, that was [indecipherable] I didn’t tell anybody how keep my money anything, I didn’t know [indecipherable] trust. I didn’t do anything except somebody can tell me, and there was just regular, every day life. You know, there’s no -- no matter of trust. There was no question of trusting, because there were no dangerous [indecipherable] illegally trust somebody, and they get you. It’s just -- I don’t know how to --

Q: But I would think that even in the -- even in normal, every day life, you have circumstances where you could assume that somebody is trying to take advantage of you in one way or another. You know, it may not be a life or death kind of situation --

A: Well yeah, well, if you -- if you --

Q: -- but it could be in a normal course of interaction, you could --

A: Yeah, well --

Q: -- you could have an attitude that everybody's out to get you. That would be easy to assume.

A: Well, tha -- that's -- no, I -- I don't think I was in that way. Well, usually when you make a transaction with somebody, people mi -- we were trusting, we were given the wrong [indecipherable] the insurance man sell me insurance, and half of it weren't true. The -- if you went to buy a car, they tell you lies, you know, this certain amount here of like salesmanship here, where people, they -- they say at [indecipherable] I got super salesman, and they got a super stupid people go in f-for the sales talk, I mean, you know? And a lot of time, people figured that you are -- this has nothing to do with it, but a lot of time people figured that you don't know anything. To give you example, when there was a -- a -- a -- they were going -- like the president, there was between Nixon and Kennedy.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: So me and my son took very much interest. We got a book from Kennedy, "Profiles of Courage," and we read the paper, we even listen to [indecipherable] radio, and all that. Where I go to fix a TV, and there was a guy, he's a president of this huge

company. I think his name was West, or he live on West Avenue, he says, “Mr. Brodecki, when you finish working on TV, I want to talk to you.” He was campaigning for Nixon. Okay, he not ask me if I know anything about it or not. So he says, “You sit down, I want to tell you so -- a little bit about Mr. Nixon.” So I played dumb, I said, “How did you know him, where did you meet him? Did you,” -- no, no, no. I said, “Did you go to school with him?” No, no, no. I say -- I didn’t tell him that I already knew more about it than he does. He was telling me -- he wanted to tell me all about Mr. Nixon, like I was -- I came out of the woods, so you got a lot of things like that here. Like you go look at the car, he says that’s the best car, and then you read the Consumer Reports, you know exactly who -- who -- what it is with that. A lot of people are just, you know, that way. A -- a woman ask me thi -- when I was working at Ward’s what’s the best television to buy. If I tell her, she buys something else. I say, “How come you did?” Oh, salesman told me that this is better. So you talk about trust, who is -- you trust, people -- you can not be knowledgeable on every field. So people will tell you stuff, and you believe it. But this is different kind of trust, during the war, where your life is in danger, you know, or your future. I mean there’s different degrees of trust.

Q: Right, right.

A: So, I don -- I know exactly what you’re asking, but I -- I don’t know how to answer it correctly.

Q: Well, I don’t know what the right answer is, so I’m just throwing it out there.

A: I don't trust one area, but the other area, you're too ignorant not to trust, do you know what I mean?

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: I wou -- I wou -- what hit me when we came here is the -- the advertisement, when they were advertising cigarettes, every cigarette was the best, you know? Pall Mall was the special people's smoke, and [indecipherable] is this, and that -- and we -- we didn't -- we weren't used to that kind of advertisement. It's just like I was driving here one time a couple years ago, and -- and sees a lot of restaurants in Richmond. The Barkley Hotel dining room is above a mall. I went there, and I got lunch. That was the biggest bunch of garbage I ever had in my -- so who do you trust?

Q: Yeah. Sometimes it's hard for me to understand, though, how you could go through what you went through and still have a sense of humor.

A: Well, I don't know, but there was -- there was a lot of jokes during the war.

Q: Yeah?

A: There was a Jewish woman, and she was cursing all day long, Hitler, then -- I hope you burn, I hope you drop dead, I hope this, I hope that, and continuously. So people say, "Why do you do that?" She says, "It's always a moment when it comes true, and I don't want to miss it."

Q: Yeah. I've her -- I'd like to ask you about when you came to the States, and you -- it was a Jewish organization that helped you get settled here. So I'm assuming that right away you had a chance to become part of a Jewish community here.

A: Y-Yeah, well --

Q: Yeah. And I'm -- I'm wondering if you ever experienced a situation where American Jews didn't understand what you've been through.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: What was that like?

A: I-I don't know, you didn't like it, but they didn't -- first they didn't be -- some of them didn't believe. Other say well, what's the big deal, a lot of people had trouble, Irish and Dutch, why I had to make a blow up about it. And well, you had to -- you had to understand that people rel -- regardless of religions, they grew up in this society. They even have Jews which are anti-Semites. I have a neighbor which is black, he hate niggers. I mean, he said they all crooked [indecipherable] so a -- a lot of people got their own opinions, they grew up in this environment, so when they -- why should they feel different than the next who is a Christian, unless they had some kind of education in that area? Those -- like we had a Yom HaShoah -- you know what that is?

Q: Yes. A Remembrance day.

A: One of the Jewish fellas didn't -- didn't show up. I mean, acquaintances say, well where were you last night? Oh, I don't believe in that stuff. And he was also a newcomer. He says people get killed here and there, why are the Jews making so much fuss about it, you know? So the people don't understand that they grew up in different environments, it's just that being Jewish is a religion, you might not even practice it. A

-- a lot of people don't come to any events, and so just being Jewish doesn't mean that you know everything, or you got the same outlook like the other Jews, you know, there's just a difference in people.

Q: Mm-hm, yeah.

A: You know, people -- was a amian lady -- you -- you know Armenia --

Q: Yes, yeah.

A: -- was taken away from Russians. Between the Turks and the Russians, they did away with it. There's a Armenian woman working in a thrift store here. You know, when they first come, they get the minor jobs, then they go -- and -- and we met a guy from Russia which is Jewish, he's a Russian. So, it just a mentality. I was -- I stop now and then in thrift stores, some might pick up antique or something, so this Russians -- Russian walked in, so I said to the Armenian, which she -- I said is -- one of your friends is a Russian. She said, "He's not a Russian, he's a Jew." So what no -- no matter what you do, you're a Jew. You're not American, you're not a -- I had that happen, one day when I was in a automotive shop --

Q: Yes.

A: -- and the guy said hey -- he's also a Polack. So he said, "He's not a Polack, he's a Jew." So wh-what you gonna do? There -- there was a joke with this, you hear that one? Where that drunk was in the -- and -- on the train, and he keeps saying that he hate Jews. So this Jewish fellow was sitting there, "And I hate drunks." So finally the drunk got laughing, and he says, "Wh-Why are you laughing?" He said, "I'm

laughing, I'll be sober tomorrow, but you'll still be a Jew." So you -- you -- don't make any difference, Hitler find out you great, great, great father has Jewish wife, so right away you -- you a Jew, you know what I mean? So what are you gonna do about it?

Q: Right, right.

A: If you -- if you convert to Catholic, you know what they say? He's a converted Jew.

Q: Right. I just -- I want to ask you if there's -- if there's anything you want to talk about, any subject that I didn't bring up, that you think is important for you to mention? Some -- something about your experience, or your attitudes, or anything?

A: Well, I -- I really don't know, you kind of exhaust the -- all the territory about the -- there's not much I can say. There was a lot of incidents during the war.

Q: Yeah.

A: Like I told you about when I was trying to commit suicide.

Q: Yeah.

A: And there was other incidents. There was a couple things which I never understood, and this is a little spooky. I was dreaming a couple people in front of a bridge. Next day we were marching to Theresienstadt, and I see those two people, just like I had a dream exactly -- I don't know what it means. A couple times I had a dream and the next day it kind of come -- come by me, just -- and I never understood how this come about, that you know ahead of time. So we're telling here one time that a couple, all of sudden the guy got up at night, turned to his wife to come on. And they got in the car

and went driving. Their kids got a accident somewhere miles away. Now this lady over there, we were resting on the bed upstairs, which we cannot see what's going on. All of a sudden there's a knock on the door, and she says, "Did you break your arm?" I said, "What in the hell are you talking about?" She ran down and opened the door, and my son walks in like that, he fell off the bicycle. And that's a true story.

Q: Yeah, she told me that story.

A: She told you?

Q: Yeah.

A: I don't know how.

Q: Let me ask you a broader question. [indecipherable]

A: I -- I know that your question didn't have nothing to do with that answer, but I didn't know how to get around to it, you just about exhausted the whole thing.

Q: Is it po-possible for you to -- after all these years it's -- to come to grips with what happened to you, to understand it in any way that -- that you can explain to other people?

A: Ah, I un -- I understand your question, but what can I explain. I would talk about it all the time there should be tolerance, understanding, and [indecipherable] not everybody so perfect to be Mother Theresa, you know?

Q: Do you think that it could happen again, on that scale?

A: Do y-you remember what Santiana said, if you forget your past [indecipherable] will repeat itself. I -- I think that in the small scale, it's happening every day, because

if you look at the Africa, some European countries, Asia, there's a holocaust against a lot of people. So it's not on the scale it was in World War Two, but things are happening, and if -- if you don't listen -- for example, we -- we tried to stop it like here they went to Iraq, and got Mr. Saddam Hussein Mr. Saddam Hussein would do like Hitler do, occupy lot of countries, he probably holocaust a lot of -- a lot of people. I don't know, they -- they -- I cannot come to detail, but they -- they -- he pois --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

[blank]

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Boleslaw Brodecki. This is tape number three, side A. You were talking about Saddam Hussein.

A: Yeah, well i-i-if -- if he wouldn't be stopped, just like Blair said, the English prime minister, he say if we went on the wrong information about the weapons of mass destructions, and all, but there -- the future going to say that we did the right thing, because he was a villain. He was killing people, so we will be forgiven for that. But that would be a holocaust if he -- he start with Kuwait, and goes Adurabi -- Abudabi, all those little countries. He probably kill millions of people. And so the Holocaust didn -- didn't end it. During the Holocaust -- it's just -- you got small holocausts different places to different people. I don't know, there's some American history, Billy Jack, and all that stuff was going on over here. That wasn't very pretty, either, so --

Q: What -- what Ame-- American history?

A: You know, like you got the Indians.

Q: Right, right. Yup.

A: Like I see old American movies, and I see the sign in front of a -- a -- a restaurant that say, dogs and I-Irish are not allowed, you know? They didn't discriminate against Chinese, who build the railroad from New York to California. I mean, you know, so --

Q: Yeah.

A: They're still in -- people, and it depends how many good people, how many bad people, the good people win, or the bad people win. You know? And if the bad people take over, you got another Holocaust, you know what I mean?

Q: Yeah, I do, I do.

A: Even in your country -- it's in Serbia over there, they were slaughtering people in a --

Q: Yeah. It's hard to s -- having -- being a survivor, what do you think that -- ho-how do you see the world as a result of that, and how does it -- how has it affected your life since the liberation?

A: Well, first of all, I'm glad I'm in United States. Democracy, you know. You can say things here where other countries you go to jail. You know what I mean? There's freedom, and a lot of people take advantage of the freedom. But in the -- y-y-you cannot take away the rights from people. Where they got that here, anti-demafa -- Defamation League? No one -- they might def -- defend Nazis and everything else because a free country. But a -- I think things are getting better, and I think United States stopped the Nazis, and Saddam Hussein, and -- and -- and they're in Afghanistan. Whatever the -- the reason was, they made the world better. Only thing I feel sorry for all those people get killed. She tell you I go twice [indecipherable] to --

A2: Tell them it was your idea.

A: -- to -- to the war memorial, and I put a wreath on it

Q: Which war memorial?

A: He-here -- here's a war memorial, in --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- Richmond, World War Two, World War One, they got all the names all over, and I might be able to show you what I do, after the session.

Q: And you put a mem -- you put a wreath at the memorial for the -- it's for -- for combat, for veterans?

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Because I feel bad.

Q: Yeah. You feel bad about what?

A: I-I started off in Richmond -- so --

Q: No, that's okay. Will you -- I wanted you to finish that thought. You feel -- you do -- why do you do that? Because you want to --

A: Because a -- a -- wh-when we came here, and I didn't know if United States would intervene in Europe, I might never see the -- time of the day, I might have been dead. And all this, 50 - 60, or how many thousand American boys die, and I went to homes, fix the TV, and here's a picture, on the top of TV of a G.I., and I say, "Who is that?" "Well, my -- my son, he got killed in Europe." Or my father. And I figured they're looking at me like, you know, I'm still alive, and those -- I -- I just felt bad that those people volunteer [indecipherable] sacrifice their lives for the freedom here, which the average people on the street don't understand that, that they owe somebody the

liberties they get now. Like today they dying in Baghdad every day. So I just decided to take a part at remembrance. And when we finish that, I [indecipherable] the wreath, I got it at home. [indecipherable]

Q: Okay. That's great. I want to ask you one more thing about your son's involvement at the Holocaust museum, and what that means to you.

A: Well, that means a lot. I mean, that he understand like h-he really got -- took interest in our family, then he went to Israel, and -- and he was a fundraiser that time, a-and he was in this house when they called him in, they couldn't raise enough money for the museum. He was awarded a United States -- so he went to work for the museum, and it was very difficult, but he says he wouldn't quit, or trust anybody with the job. And a -- and a woman who was dying, who want the museum to survive was Mr. Meyerhoff from Philadelphia, he put six million dollars for the museum. And he did it for his wife, I think sh -- I don't know if she was a newcomer, and he called Joe here, and Joe took the job. And he finished the job, he was -- you're going to see a Wallenberg there -- oh, on 14th Street, and in front, Joseph Michael Brodecki, National Campaign director. But what happened after Clinton was elected, a lot of jobs were appointed by the government, see? The people who started the museum, they were out, they appoint other people. You know, which were democrats, I think. But anyway, he finish his job, so he went to work for Apec, that's where he got the picture with the Jewish president. But he stay there for about a year, but he didn't like, because he said it was affected by local politics, like democrats, or republicans.

Q: Oh sure.

A: And that was above helping Israel and oh -- so then finally he quit that, but he's now with the st -- brokerage company in -- in Washington.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I think he started off, it's just a big, big, big company. They never advertise. So that's the story.

Q: So there's a Brodecki name right on the front of the museum.

A: Yeah, you gonna see the [indecipherable] I don't think they took it off, because that's the original people --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It's Joseph Michael Brodecki, National Campaign Director.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: He was going all over the country, every time he called me, I says, "Where you at?" "Well, I'm San Francisco." "Where you at?" "I'm Los Angeles." I mean, he was gone 24 hours a day.

Q: Mm. Tough job, yeah.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Well thank you, thanks a lot.

A: You're welcome.

Q: This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Bod -- Brodecki.

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End of Tape Three, Side A

Conclusion of Interview