

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Arie Letzter
May 22, 2016
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PREFACE

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ARIE LETZTER
May 22, 2016

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. **Arie Letzter**, on May 22nd, 2016 in **Woodmere, New York**.

Answer: Correct.

Q: Thank you Mr. **Letzter** for agreeing to meet with us today.

A: You're very welcome.

Q: And to share your experiences.

A: Very welcome.

Q: Thank you. We're going to start at the very beginning. I'm going to ask many questions about your life before the war.

A: Right.

Q: And about your family. And we'll ask questions that have to do with factual information, as well as whatever experiences or memories that you have.

A: Right.

Q: So I'll start with the very first, basic question. Can you tell me what your name was when you were born?

A: My name was Mr. **Arie Letzter**. I mean, **Labe(ph) Letzter** –

Q: **Labe(ph) Letzter**.

A: – there, but th-then they gave me **Arie Letzter**.

Q: Your parents?

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A: No, after the war.

Q: After the war?

A: Yes.

Q: So you were born **Labe(ph) Letzter**?

A: Correct.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in **Poland**.

Q: What place?

A: The city of **Kolbuszowa**.

Q: **Kolbuszowa**?

A: Yes.

Q: And where is **Kol-Kolbuszowa**?

A: **Kolbuszowa** is near **Rzeszów**.

Q: **Rzeszów**?

A: Between **Kraków** –

Q: And?

A: – and **Rzeszów**.

Q: And **Rzeszów**.

A: **Rzeszów** was near th – was near – about 20 kilometers from **Kolbuszowa**.

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Q: Okay. And was – because I'm not familiar with Polish geography –

A: Right, yeah.

Q: I know, pretty much, where **Kraków** is, but **Rzeszów**, was that in the north or the south, or to the west of **Kraków**, go to the east?

A: I don't know exactly what is.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: I have to tell the true.

Q: Okay, that's all right. And what – what's the date of your birth?

A: May 18, '25.

Q: May 18, 1925.

A: Right.

Q: We'll talk about the differences on your documents –

A: Right.

Q: – a little bit later.

A: Right.

Q: But for right now you were born in – in 1925 in **Kolbuszowa**.

A: Yes, **Kolbuszowa**, yes.

Q: Can you tell me what kind of a place **Kolbuszowa** was?

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A: It was a small town, very small town. We didn't have no railroad, we just had buses, which they went to **Rzeszów**, and then also another city, **Szainszaszew(ph)**. Not far from us was also **Milicz**. Then – then there was a **Majdan(ph)**. We were surrounded all around these things, and were – the city had about 2,000 people.

Q: So it wa – you know, a small town.

A: Small town, yeah.

Q: Small town. It – was it mostly a Jewish town?

A: Ninety percent Jewish.

Q: Ninety percent Jewish.

A: Outside – outside were **[indecipherable]**

Q: Okay.

A: They called it new town, you know.

Q: How would you say it in Polish?

A: **Nowe Miasto**.

Q: **Nowe Miasto**, okay. And – but within the town itself?

A: Yeah –

Q: Mostly Jewish?

A: Mostly Jewish, yeah. In the town was about 15 percent maybe Jewish, but I don't know exactly is.

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Q: Oh, you mean 50 percent non-Jewish.

A: Non-Jewish, yeah.

Q: Yeah. Tell me about your – your family. Can you tell me about what your father's name was?

A: My father's name was **Haim**.

Q: **Haim. Haim Letzter**.

A: **Haim Letzter**, yes.

Q: Was he from **Kolbuszowa**?

A: Yes, he was born in **Kolbuszowa**.

Q: Do you remember the date of his birth?

A: No.

Q: The year?

A: No – it's '86.

Q: Nineteen – 1886.

A: 1886.

Q: And your mother's name?

A: My mother's name was **Taller**(ph). **T** –

Q: Her maiden name.

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A: Her mai-maiden's name. But they had – my grandfather had a – **Israelovich**(ph), that's – he kept his name, and his mother kept her name. I don't know the reason for it, but that's how it was, and she was a **Taller**(ph) [**indecipherable**] always knew, but also **Israelovich**(ph).

Q: Mm-hm. So what was your mother's first name?

A: **Scheindel**(ph).

Q: **Scheindel**(ph) **Taller**(ph)?

A: Yes.

Q: **Israelovich**(ph)?

A: And **Israelovich**(ph), yeah, the –

Q: **Israelovich**. And were – was her family also from **Kolbuszowa**, or from –

A: Yes.

Q: – someplace else?

A: No, sh – **Kolbuszowa** as far as I know, **Kolbuszowa**.

Q: Okay. And for the generations before then, had – did you know if they all came from this place, or had moved there from someplace else?

A: I really don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: I knew only they came – they were born in **Kolbuszowa**.

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Q: And can you tell me this, was **Kolbuszowa** in the last – in the 19th century, was it the part of **Poland** that belonged to **Austro-Hungary**, or the part that belonged to the Russian empire, or the ger – or the Prussians?

A: I think that was **Austria**, and then the Russians came in and made that pogrom, I know –

Q: Okay.

A: – in twenty something like this.

Q: In the 1920s?

A: Yes.

Q: Wow.

A: Or '19 [**inaudible**]

Q: Okay, so during the first World War?

A: Yeah. Yes.

Q: Did your father fight in the first World War?

A: My f-father was in **Vienna**, and my mother also in **Vienna**, they run away to **Vienna**. And my father work for the government. He would deliver – he worked for – to make uniforms –

Q: Uh-huh.

A: – for the – for the soldiers.

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Q: So he had a contract?

A: He had the contract with them, yeah, he worked with them.

Q: Okay.

A: And after the war, they came back to **Kolbuszowa**, because my mother's mother was in **Kolbuszowa**, and the father, too. My father was – had a-all family in the **United States**, he was only one.

Q: Ah, who le – who was left in **Kolbuszowa**.

A: Left in ko – kolba – there. And that's how he was always in **Kolbuszowa**.

Q: So in – in – can I make the assumption that your father kind of stayed behind and – stayed because your mother had a family.

A: That's what I think.

Q: Yeah.

A: That's I'll – I understand now. Before, I couldn't understand this.

Q: Yeah.

A: But as I grew up, I saw what's happening, because he didn't have no brothers, nobody around.

Q: How many brothers and sisters did he really have, even if they weren't there?

A: Oh, there were – in **America** it was about one, two, three – three, maybe four – four brothers, I think. Not from the same mother.

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Q: Oh. So his – was he – did his mother die in childbirth or something, or from disease? Do you know anything about the story?

A: I don't know about this, no.

Q: Okay.

A: I know that there – my grandfather remarried, he had other children, and my father, he was the oldest, and he took care mostly of them.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: What was your father it – was your father's profession as a tailor, or was it something else?

A: My father, as far as I know, he always dealt – he went to **Warsaw** to buy, to **Tarnów** to buy ready-made goods –

Q: Okay.

A: – and brought it into **Kolbuszowa**. But he also could – he gave out also work in the city, in our city. So he had to cut the – this pattern, or whatever it was, and he gave it out to work.

Q: So it was more than just a one man tailor shop?

A: Yeah, right. And he gave it out, he thi – didn't – we didn't have a factory

[indecipherable]

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Q: Okay. Did you ha – did he have any kind of office space, or – or storage space?

A: We had – we had a store.

Q: Okay.

A: Small store, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And we used to go on the markets; every day in the week was a different market in these small cities. We used to go from the – **Kolbuszow** to these small cities. We had special people which came, they knew what we doing. The same people came for us to go to the small cities, and go back to **Kolbuszowa**, after the day work.

Q: Okay, so would they – what would they do at – the people who would go to the small cities, to – to the marketplace, would they sell ready-made goods?

A: Yeah, ready ho – ready-made goods.

Q: Ready-made goods, okay.

A: Yeah, yes.

Q: And the ready-made goods were what kind?

A: For men.

Q: Men's suits, men's clothes?

A: Men's suits, coats, pants, yes.

Q: Any women's clothes, or no?

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A: There was a time where, as a child I remember [indecipherable] for women also, but not any more, I didn't know – I don't remember any more. Ma – not my age, I didn't remember.

Q: Did your father have any higher education?

A: I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: I know he had to take care of a lot of kids, and he did. And they all went to **United States**.

Q: Except him.

A: Except him, because he was married.

Q: Did he inherit the store from his father, or did he found it by himself?

A: I don't know. I think by himself.

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: Yeah, he was also young when he got married. I'm not sure –

Q: How old was he?

A: I'm not sure, but in the 20s somewhere.

Q: Okay, he was in his 20s, yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: Well, people got married younger.

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A: Yeah, right, exactly, yeah.

Q: And your mother, tell me a little bit about her family.

A: Her family, they had – they had about four sisters, I think there were. And –

Q: What did their father do?

A: Their father do it – you know, my grandma and grandpa, they took care of –
what do you call it – a big farm.

Q: They managed it, or they owned it?

A: They manage this.

Q: Okay.

A: Not – not manage, I'd say, my grandmother took the milk every day from that –
from the big place, three times a day they came with fresh milk, and – and my
grandfather, they had woods, you know, and – and he took care of to sell some land
and everything, for the same people. They call it a **Graf**.

Q: A **Graf**?

A: A **Graf**, the – the big sha – big company – I mean, they belong to a **Graf**.

Q: You mean like a Count?

A: Yes.

Q: He was nobility?

A: Yes.

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Q: Was he Polish or Austrian nobility?

A: I have no idea.

Q: Well, you know, if it's a **Graf**, then it's probably Austrian.

A: It could be.

Q: Because that's the German word.

A: Yeah, could be.

Q: Yeah.

A: I remember the **Graf**.

Q: Oh yeah? You remember him? Do you –

A: Who, my grandfather?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Sure. He died in '37, I think. Yes.

Q: So you would – you knew your mother's side of the family?

A: Yes, mostly, but n-not my father's side.

Q: Yeah. And do you know – do you remember the name of the parti – the nobility,

the man whose –

A: I have no idea.

Q: Okay.

A: I knew the **Graf**, that's it.

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Q: Okay.

A: And three times a day, they delivered milk.

Q: That's a lot of –

A: Three times.

Q: Yeah. Th – I guess there was no pasteurization.

A: No, no.

Q: Yeah.

A: And, you know, that's was something early. And when the war started, when the Germans, my grandmother, we made a meeting from the family, what we should do. And this was September 1st, 1939. And there was a meeting, but I was not at the meeting, but I was a child, 14 years old. And mine sisters al – my sisters also not, just the parents, I think, were there.

Q: You know something, I'd like to hold onto this –

A: Okay, good.

Q: – because we're sti – I'm still trying to get a sense of –

A: Yeah, right, right.

Q: – prewar life.

A: Yeah, but the one thing there –

Q: I know, one goes to – I know, I know, I know.

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A: Yeah.

Q: Did your grandmother help your grandfather in this job, in this work that he'd had for this –

A: I ha – don't know. I'd – he'd never mixed in to Grandma's business.

Q: Okay.

A: So I guess he himself did it.

Q: Okay.

A: Was a very honest man, quiet man, and – and that –

Q: Did you like him?

A: Oh yeah, it – he died something very peculiar.

Q: How? What happened?

A: I was Saturday by a friend of mine.

Q: You were what by a friend of yours? I was –

A: Oh, my friend, my friend's family. And I used to go Saturday [indecipherable]

Saturday there was no school, nothing, so I went there lot of times. And the one

Saturday, they came back and they spoke in Hebrew a lot, because he was a Hebrew teacher, the –

Q: Your friend's father?

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A: The family, the [indecipherable] father. And they spoke Hebrew, and I didn't understand Hebrew. And what they spoke, I don't know, but I saw that I am not welcome now here, or – or whatever it is, something happened, I didn't know what. So I said, I'm gonna go home.

Q: Okay.

A: As I walked home, about halfway home – it wasn't too far – somebody comes over to me, did you he – when did this happen that your grandfather died?

Q: So this is the first time you hear it?

A: Yes. And of course, you know how I felt about this, it was terrible.

Q: Yeah. Devastating.

A: It was on a Saturday. Just like this, died. He was about 76 or 78 years old.

Q: Was it a sudden heart attack, was it –

A: Something like this. He was sick already, but I don't know how sick he was. In that time, you never knew how sick somebody is.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: But he never complained. Never complained, yeah. And I didn't go to the funeral, because they didn't take a lot kids go to the funeral. And when they came back from the funeral, I ask my my mother, can you tell me why are people getting born, to die?

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Q: What a question.

A: Yeah.

Q: What a question from a child.

A: Yeah. Why are we born? What for, that we have to die?

Q: And she said?

A: We'll talk about it.

Q: And did you?

A: I don't think so.

Q: Well, it's a kind of question that how – not many would have even any kind of answer.

A: I know. It was hard for her to give me the answer, she didn't want to go in to make me even worse off, so we –

Q: Yeah. And this was her father.

A: This was her father, yeah.

Q: Was she close to him?

A: Oh, sure. They used to see each other every day. We di – they didn't far from us. He used to go the – the daughters used to come every day.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

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A: It was completely a different life. She was never alone, the grandmother with grandfather.

Q: How many children did they have –

A: They had –

Q: – in addition to your mother.

A: – oh, about – altogether with my mother, I think eight.

Q: That's a lot.

A: Lot of kids, yeah.

Q: Did they all survive –

A: The war?

Q: – into adulthood? That is – or did they die from childhood diseases?

A: Not of – now – I know for – I don't know nothing about that.

Q: Okay. So in other words, you knew that there were eight aunts and uncles?

A: Yeah, because one lives – two of them, I think lived in **Belgium**. Or three, three.

Yeah, three were – and five where th – were in **Poland**.

Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: Yiddish.

Q: Yiddish. Did your parents speak German?

A: Yes, they knew German.

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Q: Okay. I would have thought so because they were in **Vienna**.

A: Right, exactly, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And they spoke very good German.

Q: And did you also learn Polish?

A: Yes, I went to Polish school, I had to go to Polish school.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, actually on September, I finished that time, seven grades, when the war started.

Q: Okay.

A: I had to go to night school already.

Q: We'll talk about that.

A: Yes.

Q: We'll talk about that. In your own family, did you have brothers and sisters?

A: Yes.

Q: Were you the youngest, or the oldest?

A: In the middle.

Q: You were in the middle.

A: Had t-two sisters and two brothers. Were five kid –

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Q: Can you tell –

A: – five kids.

Q: Can you tell me their ages, or their – when they – in their – you know, who was the oldest, who was the next –

A: Yes. My oldest was this oldest sister, then came my brother.

Q: What was her name?

A: **Gittel**(ph).

Q: **Gittel**(ph).

A: And then came my brother **Wolf**(ph).

Q: Okay.

A: Then came my brother **Hirsch**.

Q: Okay.

A: And then came my name, and then came my little sister.

Q: And what was hers?

A: **Mindel**(ph).

Q: **Mindel**(ph). What year was your – what year was your oldest sister born?

A: I don't know exactly, but I think she was about 26 when the war started.

Q: Okay, so she would have been born in 1913.

A: Something like this, yeah.

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Q: Okay. So she was considerably older than you.

A: Beca – be – yeah, because I had – I have here pictures here from –

Q: Was she o – married when the war was over?

A: No, no.

Q: No.

A: She had a boyfriend already, but she was not married, no.

Q: So then comes **Wolf**(ph).

A: **Wolf**(ph), yeah.

Q: **Wolf**(ph). And how – about how much older than you was he?

A: He was about eight years older.

Q: So that would have made 1917.

A: Sevent –

Q: Something like –

A: – '18 – '18.

Q: 1918.

A: Yeah, something like this, yeah.

Q: And then –

A: Then came **Hirsch**.

Q: Two years older, three years older?

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A: Four. Everywhere was four years old.

Q: So there was four years apart every –

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Ah, okay. And then you, and then **Mindel**(ph) must have been born in 1929.

A: Something like this, yeah.

Q: Okay. Was your family very religious?

A: Yes, we were. All the Jews were very religious, but we didn't go – have this **payos**.

Q: You were not Hassidic.

A: No. We didn't want to, my mother didn't push it to it.

Q: Okay.

A: My father would like to, but my mother won. Didn't have this whole thing, it – as – I can show you pictures from my fa – brothers and sisters that this was not the case. My mo – my father wanted to do everything for my brother to put in a long thing, but my mother said no, they can't –

Q: And why? Why was she – why did she not want this?

A: My mother was different somehow than my father somehow. My father was more religious. My mother was religious, too, but sh – a different way. But my

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father didn't insisted, or beat somebody. I never heard somebody got hit from my father or my mother. No – nobody was hit [indecipherable]

Q: Was he a gentle man, your father?

A: Nobody hit nobody. There was never argument, my mother and father. Never that.

Q: Was theirs an arranged marriage, or was –

A: I don't know. No, I don't think so, because was the same city.

Q: Okay.

A: So that was – was – maybe at that time they arrange on – everything when they arranged, but they knew each other.

Q: Mm-hm. So they might have had some say.

A: Yeah, right, right.

Q: Would you say that your parents were comfortable, or was your family well off, or in – on the poorer side? How would you describe –

A: I would say from one to 10, let's say –

Q: Okay.

A: – we were not poor. This means about 5 - 6, but we were not rich. There was always food on the table. Never – nobody was hungry.

Q: Okay. Okay. Describe to me your home.

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A: We had the apartment.

Q: In the center of town, or –

A: Yes, everything neat – nearly was the center, but we were really in the center of town.

Q: Okay.

A: Had about three rooms.

Q: Was the apartment building a stone building, or a wood –

A: Stone.

Q: Stone.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: It was not my father's, he just paid the rent or something, whatever the – I don't know –

Q: Okay.

A: I don't know exactly.

Q: Was it the kind – I want to get an – a – a picture in my mind.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Was it built in the 19th century, or was it a modern building that was –

A: No, I think was built in the 18th century.

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Q: In the 18th century even?

A: Yes.

Q: It was a couple hundred years old.

A: Not a couple in the years, because those – this – we – we left of – was '39.

Q: Okay.

A: The war started in '39. Maybe 10 years – in 1900, so – 1890 or something like that.

Q: Oh, I see, about 1890s.

A: Yeah, yeah, something –

Q: Okay, so was in the – yeah.

A: – something like this.

Q: Okay.

A: With stones.

Q: Did it have modern conveniences? Did it have plumbing inside?

A: No, no. This didn't exist **[indecipherable]**

Q: Well, that's what I want – you know, people here, we won't know.

A: Oh, I know, I understand that.

Q: Yeah. Was there electricity?

A: No.

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Q: Okay. So how did you light the place?

A: With a lamp.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: We had the lamp.

Q: Kerosene lamp?

A: Kerosene lamp.

Q: Okay.

A: I mean, that's how – mostly the town was like this.

Q: And what about heating? How did you heat it?

A: We have stove.

Q: Okay.

A: **Kachelöfen. Kafli – Kaflin(ph). Kafala(ph).**

Q: Yeah, **Kafolen(ph).**

A: Yeah, it was big, it was big, yeah. My mother baked by herself everything, bread and everything. And Thursday night she started up, til Friday, and – and Friday everything was –

Q: Ready?

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A: – ready, and we had a girl to clean, and – and this was the Shabbat. And sometimes when we went to sh – to the synagogue, my mother stayed at the door, and she had a measurement there. She wanted to see how we grew.

Q: Okay, so what would she do?

A: She had to have a marker there.

Q: So when you'd go out, she would mark.

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: By the door.

Q: Okay.

A: Next to door. And she knew exactly how much you grew.

Q: Interesting.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Tell me a little bit about their personalities, both of your parents.

A: As I told you, I never heard a big word between them. And life was tough sometimes, it sometimes was easier. But I didn't know so much about it because I still was a kid. But I knew a lot –

Q: Okay.

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A: – because I always – my ears were open always. And the main thing, we were not hungry. If you talk to people in the city, they gonna tell you that, oh yes, this was a good home.

Q: Was there friction between the Jews and the non-Jews in **Kolbuszowa**?

A: There's no question about it, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Especially later, in the years of – when **Pilsudski** died –

Q: I wanted to ask you about that, mm-hm.

A: Oh yes, after this, became a little tougher. Was written in Polish to come into the store [**speaks Polish**]

Q: What does that mean?

A: If you are Polish, go buy by the Polish for things which you need

[**indecipherable**]

Q: Okay.

A: There was a store – couple of stores, they wrote this down. [**speaks Polish**]

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: [**speaks Polish**] what they needed.

Q: Did you lose customers? Did your father lose customers?

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A: We didn't have losing customers because steady customers was only for groceries. For suits and – and coats, and this, this was not steady customers. They went everywhere where they can find cheaper, with the right price.

Q: Mm-hm. Did you help your father in the store?

A: Oh yes.

Q: What did you do?

A: I put away things. Merchandise used to come, from **Warsaw**, let's say, and me, my middle brother, bet on what price my father paid for it.

Q: Oh really?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah?

A: And we knew how the – my father marked the price, how much he paid. So let's say if the ba – garment was 10 dollars – 10 **zlotys**, he's put in 40 **zlotys**. Three times mu – this didn't mean nothing, that just the customer shouldn't know exactly how much he paid for it.

Q: Okay.

A: Not for this price, it has nothing to do with the price, which was – and that's how I bet with him.

Q: So you would see the final price, and then you would –

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A: Yeah, I – of course, if he didn't see – we saw only the merchandise, and then we looked inside, we found it.

Q: Okay. And who was right more often?

A: Both of them. I don't know exactly, I don't remember. But it was – was something. Not my older brother.

Q: No?

A: No. He was not interested in this. He wanted to go to **United States**. He was learning English privately, and with friends, and he didn't want to know nothing about this.

Q: Okay. He was not interested in the store.

A: No.

Q: But were the two of you the – truly interested in what your father's business was?

A: I guess so. If not, we – we wouldn't look like this. I mean, it was –

Q: Okay.

A: – came in there just to betting, you know, it's – because we will know – who knows better about the ma – the costs, how my father paid for it, you know what I mean? It was not new merchandise, was old merchandise.

Q: Oh, was it?

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A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And that's why the prices were –

Q: Different?

A: Different. And we had new also, but the new ones is – was strictly one price, you know. But it – this was different. You had to look over the whole coat and then see the pr – to find out the price.

Q: What did y – did you see your father in action as a businessperson?

A: Oh yes, sure, of course.

Q: What did you learn from him? Wha – how – what was his manner?

A: He tried the best for the customer, because this way he always came back.

Q: Okay.

A: Even if he didn't buy it, but they came to see it. And this was very important. He knew as honest as – as it is. So always he had to buy something, or the two brothers th – recommended one another to go into the store.

Q: Did he also do custom made suits, or custom made, in addition to ready-to-wear?

A: No, he didn't. Not that I know of it. It could be that pants – could be somebody needed special –

Q: Okay.

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A: – that he could arrange this.

Q: I take it that – that all of the boys in the family were dressed through him? That is you – your own clothes?

A: Of course, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh, I just had a thought. Let's go to **Pilsudski**.

A: Yes.

Q: He died in 1935.

A: In '35, yes. I remember this.

Q: Do you? Tell me a – tell me about that.

A: It was a very b – terrible feeling. We knew **Pilsudski** was a right man, and the Jews were not – that he was not anti-Semite. And this was a terrible thing for us.

And when **Śmigly-Rydz**(ph) came in, was already a different story, it was – somehow that's how we f – we felt.

Q: Did – did life change, that affected you in some way, your family?

A: I am gonna tell you something. The principal of the school was Polish, a Polish man, because we went to Polish school. He was a anti-Semite that you never saw something like it. I remember he came in in the morning, and everybody had to say

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good morning, of course, we were all stand up, I stood up, and in the front of me was sitting a boy, a Jewish boy, and he had the payos. He walks over to him, he takes by his ears, and starts shaking him. He says [**speaks Polish**].

Q: What does that –

A: Without no reason at all.

Q: What does that mean?

A: You Jew, they smell from onions, and this and that.

Q: The poor boy.

A: Imagine the feeling what we had about this.

Q: And he's the principal of your school.

A: He's the principal of the school. Imagine this.

Q: And this is after **Pilsudski's** death. Or he was like that anyway?

A: It – it was – it was before, but this was already after he died, because at that time – I don't remember it because so far – it was too far already. Because it was a difference in four years, whatever it was. You go seven years to school, so I didn't – but we all – the – the Christians always, when it was, let's say **palze**(ph), I mean.

Q: It was a – recess.

A: Recess. We all stayed together, and their stayed together. Sometimes there was fights for no reason at all. It was not a good feeling.

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Q: Was there talk in your family of wanting to emigrate to **Palestine**? Were there Zionists in your family?

A: Oh yes, yes, my – my oldest dow – my oldest sister, she has – she was in a place where th – orga – organization were there – were there, and they wanted to emigrate to **Israel**. But nobody let you – no, you couldn't go nowhere. In **Poland** you couldn't go nowhere.

Q: They closed –

A: Everything was closed up, was.

Q: You mean travel was forbidden?

A: No, sa – not forbidden, they didn't give you – you permission, you didn't have the passports, the d – the documents.

Q: So it was difficult to get external documents?

A: Yes, sure, of course. To get permission that would go out from **Poland**. And then you had to have permission who do – who's going to take you in. There was nowhere to go.

Q: Okay.

A: We were surrounded.

Q: So, it wasn't a financial issue, of not having enough money to leave, it was more than that?

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A: I guess it was more than this, but eventually – it didn't help everything. It could maybe help, not too much. But there was nobody to give us permission.

Q: Did you – did you yourself ever have closer contact –

A: With who –

Q: – with Gentiles, with any of the Polish children, or –

A: No.

Q: No.

A: We had fights.

Q: Only that.

A: They lived in **Nowe Miasto**, in this – in this side. Sometimes with stones, with this, and we fight sometimes. We – we played military. If somebody that was wounded, we gave him a – some kind of –

Q: A – a – oh, a commemoration, some –

A: Yes. Kids.

Q: Yeah. Was – did it – did **Kolbuszowa** have more than one synagogue?

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: Okay.

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A: There were about three or four. And then there was smaller groups, which they had synagogues for – just for – for any people, whatever it is, the rabbis separately – they separately –

Q: And did it have a church?

A: Of course there was a church, a big church there. A big church.

Q: But I would take it probably not many, because if it's only 15 percent of the population –

A: But – but they came out from the – from the side, from the outside.

Q: Okay.

A: We had kids which came five kilometers every day –

Q: Wow.

A: – in the winter, with red cheeks. And they came in, we got bread – they gave them bread with – with some kind of white pig, you know, the – the –

Q: Lard?

A: – lard, yeah. And coffee. And they were – I remember they had such a red cheeks after this. It's [indecipherable]

Q: Well, you know, the coffee certainly woke them up.

A: Yeah, in the – in the winter especially, I'm talking about.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

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A: And they walked so much, I mean.

Q: Well, in your school, if the population of the town was, let's say, 90 percent Jewish –

A: Yeah [**indecipherable**]

Q: – was the school also about 90 percent Jewish?

A: Not so much, because they came from our side.

Q: I see.

A: They came from **Nowe Miasto**, from all around.

Q: Okay.

A: But ab – 50-50 I would say, yes.

Q: Okay. Okay. At home, did your parents ever talk much about the world outside, the political things that were going on?

A: When there was the **Kristallnacht**.

Q: That's one of my questions.

A: Yes. And I was by my grandmother. And she, every day was – my mother was there, and sister were there, grandfather, whatever. The grandfather was dead already. And they start talking, and then I see it, they don't want – I shall hear, so I made myself that I sleep. And I heard everything what's go – going on. But I couldn't understand so much.

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Q: What were they saying, your mother and –

A: That – that they heard about the **Kristallnacht**, that a lot of Jews got killed, and that they're taking away the business and everything, I mean. But I couldn't understand so much what's going on.

Q: So you heard things, but it didn't make sense.

A: Didn't make sense to me, I mean – we knew that we [**indecipherable**] because we used to talk outside. Kids, and – the older one, you heard what they're talking about. There was a special lamp there, not far from ma – my house, and they were talking for hours. And – but you couldn't understand of so much. Nobody could anyway.

Q: Were there Jews coming into **Kolbuszowa** from **Germany**, that you were –

A: Yes, which – yes, some of it.

Q: Okay.

A: They came back with she – they throw them out, which they were born in

Poland, in **Kolbuszowa**, they came [**inaudible**]

Q: Did your family know of any of these people?

A: Yes, yes. Actually, my father had cousins or something which they came, yeah.

Q: And what were – they were telling you?

A: This is very bad. Very bad. Was very bad.

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Q: So in your home, you – it's not only Polish – what was going on in **Poland** politically –

A: Yes.

Q: – that you too – talked about, it was what was going on in **Germany**.

A: Yes, course, all over the world was talked about, because there was newspapers.

Q: Okay.

A: Which they came from **Rzeszów**.

Q: Okay.

A: Every day, three times a day, or something like this.

Q: Was it a particular paper that your father read, or your mother read?

A: I don't know, because I d – I don't remember these things, but –

Q: Did they have a radio?

A: No.

Q: No radio.

A: My brothers – my brother be – belonged to an organization, and my ma – my sister there had a radio, and they knew what's was going on. There was not too many radios around that time.

Q: Did people have cars?

A: No, only one big person which dealt with livestock, whatever it was.

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Q: What was the economy of –

A: **Poland**?

Q: – **Kolbuszowa**?

A: It was not too good, was a poor city.

Q: Okay.

A: Very poor city. But nobody died from hunger. It was organized. If somebody didn't have, was taken – being taken care of with.

Q: So you do get news from the outside, you do have people coming from **Germany**, refugee to – Jews who had been born in **Poland**, lived there, and were thrown out.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: You're getting news that things are not good there.

A: Yes.

Q: Even your mother and your grandmother talk about **Kristallnacht**.

A: Yes.

Q: And the kids talk about war outside, you know, they – amongst themselves.

A: Not so much.

Q: Not so much.

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A: No, they were – they were standing – this was a group of people, older kids, I mean, but there were grown up people there, you know, to talk about the war. So we listened, but some did, and some didn't. They want to play, you know.

Q: Sure. Sure. Let's go now to – to what you started to tell me about before. Do you remember when the war actually started?

A: Of course.

Q: Tell me about – where were you?

A: I was in **Kolbuszowa**.

Q: And what – in a home?

A: Was frida – frida – Friday morning.

Q: Okay.

A: And it – there was a alarm [**indecipherable**] off. We didn't know what happened. And then right away, at six o'clock in the morning, we knew about it.

Q: You knew at six o'clock in the morning?

A: Oh yeah. And also, we went outside, we heard planes going through us.

Q: So you already saw German planes.

A: Yeah.

Q: Or were they Polish planes?

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A: No, they were German planes. And of course there must be also Polish planes, also, but not too many.

Q: I forgot to ask one other question, excuse me. Was there a cinema in –

A: Yes.

Q: – **Kolbuszowa**?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you go to the cinema?

A: Yes.

Q: And what kind of movies did you see?

A: I saw Polish movies and the j – Jewish movies also, sometimes. It was very funny about the movies. My oldest th – sister always took me with her friend, to the movies. But as a k-kid, I wanted to go more to the movies, of course. So I went, and I had some change, and I bought cigarettes, and I gave it – I gave it the guy in the back, which worked with the motor, because there was no electric, he had the – and I gave him the cigarettes, he let me in. And this went on for a while, til he told me, I know who you are. And he said, if you could bring me two pair of pants, or three pair of pants, I'll let you in forever.

Q: Oh my goodness.

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A: So I said to myself, you have a good case. I'm going to see for my father. Never your life.

Q: No?

A: [indecipherable]

Q: He didn't say – he didn't say –

A: I don't do it, nothing. I didn't want to see him any more. This was it.

Q: Ah. And so you couldn't go to the movies after that.

A: Only my mo – my sister, if she took me.

Q: I see. I see. Oh well.

A: Well, other kid could have done it, I mean.

Q: Yeah.

A: I did just – my father gonna take – no.

Q: One of the reasons I ask this is, did you see newsreels in the movies, i-in the cinema?

A: Sometimes. Sometimes they had. Not too many, but they had. Sure, of course.

Q: And did you ever see any newsreels from **Germany**?

A: I don't remember so much of it, but I must have seen it. Not too much.

Q: Okay. I would – I would not think – I would think that Polish cinemas – or cinemas in **Poland** would not be showing German newsreels, but I'm trying to get a

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sense of how much you saw the actual – did the – did you ever see a Nazi, for example, before the war? Did you ever see **Hitler** giving a speech, or hearing him give a speech?

A: Maybe once in a while I heard, but not too much.

Q: Okay.

A: Because the wa – we didn't have radios.

Q: Right, right.

A: And we kids were very occupied. School was til one o'clock, from eight til one. Came home, had something to eat and went back to Jewish school.

Q: Ah, in the afternoon.

A: Afternoon. And we came home around six, seven o'clock in the evening.

Q: That's a long day.

A: And then we had to go – they – which they gave us work for – from their Polish school to learn – to know, the next day.

Q: Homework.

A: Homework. So my mother used to sit with me and go through everything, til I knew exactly what's what what.

Q: Were you a good student?

A: Medium, but good, not bad. I never had problems. Only once, I think.

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Q: Only once.

A: Yeah, he hit me [indecipherable]

Q: Because you didn't know an answer?

A: Because – yes.

Q: Did being Jewish have anything to do with it?

A: I don't – I felt this way, but I didn't – be-because it happened also to ti –

Christians, so – but the principal which came in, which I told you before –

Q: Yeah.

A: – he just walked in, and just went to him, a kid that was six, seven years old, eight years old.

Q: Poor – the poor kid, you know.

A: Yeah.

Q: Poor kid.

A: And he was a good student. I remember him na – his name.

Q: What was his name?

A: His name was **Aaron**.

Q: **Aaron**.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you know – remember his last name?

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A: No, no, no.

Q: Okay.

A: He was a – some kind of rabbi's son, or something like this. But he was very good in school. For no reason he – just because he couldn't stand it

[indecipherable]

Q: Nothing that children – I mean, gives it – a child a sense of fear, of insecurity.

A: That's what it is, I mean.

Q: Yeah.

A: School was terrible, I mean, me – my – I used to sit til 10, 11 o'clock at night, with my mother.

Q: To do the homework.

A: Yes.

Q: Let's go to September first. You say alarms were sounding. You saw planes overhead.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you see any Polish soldiers in the streets at all?

A: A couple days later, yes.

Q: Okay.

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A: I saw a lot of Polish soldiers with horses. Somehow, was not far from my grandmother, I just walked there. All of a sudden I was surrounded, but I couldn't understand what's going on, because **Kolbuszowa** was not a city which there was a en – engineering of fabrics, of sov – of something, you know, very important

Q: Mm-hm, no factories.

A: – no factories, yeah. So I couldn't understand this whole thing.

Q: Well, what was – what was going on? Did you ever find out?

A: I – just they wanted to protect the city, so there it was.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: They tried to make a front, of somewhere.

Q: Was there fighting going on near kolbusz –

A: I don't know. That's why I s – it was a meeting on the –

Q: From the family.

A: – from the family, what they should do. So they decided that the women will stay home, and the men should go away, because they are not going to touch women. **[indecipherable]**

Q: The women were safer, yeah.

A: It was safer. And when the Polish gover – soldiers will push them back, they'll come – they'll come back.

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Q: Okay.

A: So my grandma, which had the connection with the **Graf** – oh yes, then my name came up on the table. I was 14 that time, and some uncle there said, why he should leave, because he's a child. Why should I leave? My mother insisted. He is tall for his age, I want him to go.

Q: And did you?

A: Yes.

Q: So tell me about the leaving. Who left – who le – you left together with other family members?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: The men –

Q: So your father?

A: My father.

Q: Your two brothers?

A: My three – three brothers.

Q: Okay.

A: And a uncle with the son, and a – an uncle which has just got married to my mother's sister. We were eight people, something like this.

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Q: Were you the youngest?

A: I was the youngest, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And she came – went to the **Graf** and they get a – got a pair of horses, with a wagon. This was on Tuesday we left already. Friday was the war started.

Q: So three or four days later?

A: Yeah, because – and sar – Saturday – Sunday, she couldn't go to the **Graf**. On Monday she went on the **Graf**, and Tuesday we left.

Q: Where did you go?

A: We left. We were trying to go to the Romanian border, which was far away, we didn't hear of something like this, you know.

Q: Did you have a wagon?

A: We had a wagon, yeah, of course.

Q: You had the wagon, and the two horses.

A: Two horses. As soon as we went out from the city, there was so much traffic already. And one wheel broke down right away. So anyway, was people there to fix it up, whatever it was. And also a lot of people – which they didn't, by chance, have horses for riding, put the valise on our things. We walked most of the time.

Q: Okay, so the suitcases were in the wagon, and the people were walking –

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A: Mostly. Some – maybe two or three people on the wagon, whatever – and I realize now that the horses were not such strong horses. That this was the best thing. You know, it came to me, you know, that was – everything – the war comes through up here all the time. Why such weak horses? It would be good horses, they would have taken us away from us.

Q: That's true.

A: It just came not long ago to me, why the – why the weak horses? Because they saw horses, the police, they want to take away. But when they saw this kind of horses –

Q: They let them go.

A: Let them go.

Q: Did you think the **Graf** had given you bad horses on purpose?

A: I don't know this. But that was a good idea.

Q: Okay. Okay. And so you're on the road and the road is filled with other people also trying to leave?

A: Yes, and once in a while a – a German plane came and threw a bomb, to make panic.

Q: And did it?

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A: Yes, sure, of course. I saw right away where was a fire, after they throw down a bomb, on whatever it is, with this panic, make confusion the people which, of course, from other cities they already run also.

Q: Were these mostly Jews on the roads, or Poles as well, or everybody –

A: Po-Poles, no. Poles didn't run.

Q: Okay.

A: And – not that I know about it. Then we went – not far from us was the first little city, a smaller city. And I remember a policeman took a rifle, and he start shooting to the plane, a plane, a German plane. And I said to myself, if this is going to be the war, that he has a rifle to put the Germans, this not a good thing. For myself I felt this way, I didn't talk about it. This not really good. Be not good.

Q: Not good morale.

A: No.

Q: No.

A: In the morning we went again. We went beside it. Later we had to go through a city, **Leżajsk**.

Q: **Lezhansk**(ph)?

A: **Leżajsk**.

Q: **Lezhansk**(ph)?

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A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Because there was a bridge there.

Q: Okay.

A: And we were afraid if they go to bomb the bridge, we wouldn't be able to go –

Q: Across.

A: – to crossing, but we wanted. And they didn't; we made it.

Q: Okay.

A: So we went to – but we walked a lot, a lot. Later on we walked mostly at night, because like this was not so much traffic.

Q: Okay.

A: And if we went to the – I found out we gonna go to – to the romane – Romanian border, but it was already closed up, they could – you couldn't go any more.

Q: They didn't let you in.

A: No. So we went to the Russian border.

Q: How far was that from **Kolbuszowa**?

A: I don't know, a couple hundred kilometers.

Q: Okay.

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A: And the horses didn't make all the way, they didn't. I mean, was not far, about 50 kilometers from e – from the Russian border. But we went as far as to the Russian border, one kilometer. So one [indecipherable] kilometers from the border. **Szumsk** [indecipherable]

Q: **Szumsk**?

A: Yes.

Q: Was it the Ukrainian border, or was it – because –

A: Was **Poland**.

Q: Okay, so **Szumsk** was in **Poland**?

A: Yes.

Q: And on the other side was Soviet **Ukraine**?

A: **S-So-Soviet Union** already.

Q: **Soviet Union**.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And was **shumz** – **Szumsk** already – this is the first week of – the first week after –

A: Was more than one week.

Q: Okay.

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A: Was already a week and a half, a week, nearly two weeks. By the two weeks we were already **Szumsk**.

Q: Okay. Now, at that point, had you seen any German soldiers at all, or just the planes overhead?

A: Just the planes.

Q: Okay.

A: I remember we were alone on the road. Was not far from the border, Russian border. And two planes started to go down on us.

Q: Shooting?

A: Shooting. They wanted to shoot – coming to shoot us. And I was running myself, a lot of went under the – under the – the **[indecipherable]** you know. But something happened, a miracle happened, that somebody was shooting to them. So they picked themselves up, and went **[indecipherable]** let us go.

Q: Maybe it's that guy with his rifle.

A: Yes. Yeah.

Q: Yeah. So that's – that's your – as close as, let's say Germans – you – German soldiers, military, got to you.

A: The German soldiers didn't never got to me.

Q: Never got to you, okay.

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A: No. We didn't – I didn't see nothing.

Q: Okay.

A: Because, you see, they had already made a pact with the – with the – with the Germans, the Russians.

Q: Did you know about this pact?

A: No, nobody knew about it.

Q: Okay.

A: And – but they knew about it.

Q: Well, what was the pact?

A: The pact, to divide **Poland** in two.

Q: Okay.

A: And I remember on a Sunday, I think it was, and you know, I – as a kid I saw – I saw – I wanted to be in middle everywhere. My uncle – uncle, he was single, he says, why you go mixing? Take it easy about it. I saw two soldiers coming with machine guns, on horses.

Q: Polish soldiers?

A: Russian soldiers. They came to us.

Q: And?

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A: [**indecipherable**] and they went to the – of where they ge – the government was in control, Polish government was in control there, whatever it was. And th-they were ready to shoot, but they didn't shoot nobody, because nobody knew who they are. Didn't even know who they are. But I saw them, the first thing, I saw them.

Q: So the very first soldier – foreign soldiers that you see –

A: It's the Russian.

Q: It's the Russian soldiers. In **Szumsk**.

A: In **Szumsk**.

Q: Okay.

A: And then they start going, then the tanks are – start coming.

Q: Okay.

A: And we didn't know what it – this is all about us. Then we saw they took half of **Poland**. Then it came out that they took over half of **Poland**. And the people were very nice there in **Szumsk**. And the Christians wanted to make a pogrom, they were calling to make a pogrom.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. So they ask the government, the Russian government to do that. They said, you cannot do that. We don't do – make pogroms any more. So they didn't.

Q: So did you feel safer there?

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A: We didn't know so much about it, you know. Everything was so fast. We'd have – especially me, I didn't want to talk so much, you know, I just listen. And – but they want – it was officially they ask for a pogrom. And they didn't let them do it. Course, they want to take everything out from the stores from there.

Q: I see.

A: And they went as far, divided **Poland**.

Q: Okay.

A: So we stayed. We want to know how far they're going. So they went through **Lwów**, til not far from our city, about another 50 kilometers, 150 or something.

Q: So **Kolbuszowa** was 50 kilometers on the other side.

A: Hundred and fifty.

Q: Hundred and fifty.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And I – I'm not sure exactly. And so when they stopped everything, we still were waiting because the railroads didn't work, and this didn't work. Anyway, we decided – my father decided with the uncles, that we go to go to **Lwów**, because it's a bigger city, and it's near to our home.

Q: Oh, I see, okay.

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A: And so in case maybe we have to go home, but we – we not going to leave my mother and two sisters alone.

Q: Okay.

A: So, it came out that we shall register if somebody wants to go home to **Russia**. So, we registered. And then they came and took us to **Siberia**, instead of going home.

Q: Tell me about that. Tell me about –

A: Anyway, living in **Lwów**, my father had people which he knew before –

Q: Okay.

A: – special like a woman – I mean, married woman which had four daughters, and she lived in **Lwów**, How my father found out about her, I don't know – where she lived, and of course, they knew each other very well, the [indecipherable] near my father's age. And she had the extra room on the side, so she gave over t – to the people which come from my city, to –

Q: **Kolbuszowa** –

A: – from **Kolbuszowa**, if somebody has – should go there. And every Friday night, we were invited for supper. Every Friday night. They were very good of – the husband was a very good man, and they were rich, looks like it to me, yeah. But, the

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father-in-law was not such a nice man. He didn't want us there, to come even, Saturday night. But the husband was very nice.

Q: So the woman had a husband and a father-in-law.

A: Yeah.

Q: And so his father wasn't very nice.

A: Yes, right, yeah, that's right.

Q: The husband was fine, but the father-in-law not so much.

A: Yeah, right. And the kids were very nice too. Four daughters he had.

Q: Nice for young boys.

A: Oh yeah, beautiful daughters. And –

Q: How long were you there in **Lwów**?

A: We were there about 10 months, something like that.

Q: This is quite a while.

A: Yeah, well they had to make a living, also. So –

Q: Did you know in this time – excuse me, I'm interrupting, but did you know in this time how things were going for your mother and your sisters? Do – was there any letters, or news?

A: Di – were – people come, sometimes the people were – the – the – let's say my uncle, which was – got married, I told you before, and –

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Q: Yeah, that's right.

A: – he went back – he didn't told us nothing, he smuggled himself in. Of course, his wife was pregnant.

Q: Oh.

A: So he smuggled himself in, and he was there, he didn't tell us nothing. And he was a very big help to my mother, and my two sisters, for the whole family. He took care, you know, he was very – a working man, a very nice man. And we thought we gonna go to – to my mother, to sister, because they – we cannot leave them. We are – want to be together. So one night we was – we – we were sleeping in our apartment, which was my uncle – two uncles and a cousin, and me, and my father. My two brothers were sleeping somewhere else. And about two o'clock in the morning, Russian soldiers came over. They want to see my uncle, the single uncle. They told him to get dressed, and he knew. He hated them so much.

Q: Did he?

A: Oh, he knew about the Russians. He was very intelligent, all with books, always with books, and – so he wanted to actually jump from the window. It was the third floor. They caught him, and they took him away, and we were waiting til lom – daytime will come, because my two brothers were in a different place; we wanted to

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know where they are, if they were safe, of course. But we decided not to sleep any more, we gonna go out the town for –

Q: So, not in that place.

A: Not –

Q: You weren't gonna stay –

A: Not – not in the same place.

Q: Did your uncle come back?

A: Which u – which uncle you ta –

Q: The one that jumped out the window.

A: He wanted to jump out, but they took him away.

Q: Oh, I see. So he didn't come back.

A: No, no, nobody come back. And I found out later that he took his life anyway, he jumped down from a train. He didn't want he – he didn't want the Russians, he hated them like –

Q: What kind of ye – I mean, you mentioned before that the Russian authorities prevented a pogrom from happening.

A: Yes.

Q: But you mention also that your uncle wer – didn't – hated them.

A: This same uncle which I'm talking, he jumped – who wanted to jump –

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Q: The same.

A: – he said, don't go near them. I hate them.

Q: And did he give you reasons why?

A: Because he read a lot, and he was older, of course, and he knew everything about they make pogroms when they came the first World War. So he said don't – be – and they made pogroms in now city in **Poland**. So he knew all about them. He said, don't go near them.

Q: Okay. Okay. So –

A: You know, a boy, I was so **[indecipherable]** I want to see.

Q: Of course, of course, you know. Curious.

A: Yeah.

Q: And what was the rest of the family's attitude? I mean, ye – the other boys, the other men. Did they have any opinions one way or the other?

A: Which ute – which men are you talking about?

Q: I mean, your father, and another uncle, and so on.

A: Well, they were not so good of – between them, because you know, we live in the same place, and specialty that my uncle, he married my aunt, my mother's sister, he was not such a nice man, and he never made a living. And all of a sudden

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the war, he found some way how to make a living, he thought he took over the whole thing, you know.

Q: What kind of living?

A: Well, ca – black market.

Q: Okay. Okay. And so your father disapproved?

A: My father didn't want to argue with him. Even – even his son said to – he should – but he couldn't, because all his life, he never made a living.

Q: Okay. So there was tension between –

A: Yeah, was tension.

Q: – there wa – between the men.

A: Yes, was **[indecipherable]** and we di – my father decided that we will go outside the town, and live in the – in the woods, you know, in – until – because they only came at night.

Q: Okay.

A: And this was going on nearly a week, and my father said, this not a good idea any more because they're gonna get us anyway. So –

Q: And you were sleeping in the woods at night?

A: Yeah. Hiding. Because my father was afraid, if we sleep separately, we going to be – to taked – we gonna t-take – we lose ourselves, like this –

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Q: That your brothers were –

A: – like this we were one family.

Q: Yeah.

A: We were **[indecipherable]**

Q: Your brothers had come back? They had – after your uncle was taken, they returned to you and your father?

A: Then my father – we di – were not – not without them any more.

Q: Okay.

A: We were all together –

Q: Okay.

A: – in the woods, and we bought things, prepare ourself in case we have to leave. And after five days, we saw there's no end, it's – was going on. Because during the day, everything was okay. They didn't look for us, nobody. Only at night they came. And I myself saw – I – I – I had a bottle of wine. It was on the black market, it was across the street here. The Russian soldier come over, he wanted to buy the bottle. So I said, well, you can buy it. Give me **ch-chevernnces(ph)**, three **chevernnces(ph)**. Was **chevernnce(ph)**, was traded lira, the rubles, whatever it was. He took out, they gave it to me.

Q: And he took the bottle.

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A: And he took the bottle, yeah. I came home, I said, I sold the bottle. My father wanted to kill me. What did you do? I'm not sure it was wor – wine, he says.

Q: What could it – oh. Oh ho.

A: He wanted to kill me, he says, what did you do? I said, he wanted the bottle, I gave him the bottle. It was unbelievable. It was some kind of a bottle, half wine, half not, I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: But they saw a bottle that – they only looked for bottles and drink and beer, with everything it is.

Q: Were people afraid, in general? Did you get the sense that people were afraid?

A: They was afraid because it started up already, but you couldn't get what you wanted. Bread was hard to get, you have to stay in line. Sometimes you stayed in line and you didn't get nothing. Was nothing left. And the stores sold out everything. It was har – very hard to get some food. And was – is not easy.

Anyway, my father decided that we gonna go to us – to them and then be here, be **[indecipherable]** because they were looking for us, whatever it is.

Q: Your – did you know that they were looking for you?

A: I'll tell you what, we did. My father was very smart, he says, we gonna go home

—

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Q: Okay.

A: – and live in one place. Maybe they'll come tonight, they'll come for us. They never had to wait for this – that woman which took care of the building. So, otha – she was happy that we came, now she can tell the officers, the Russian officers that they're here, and you can take them away. And that's what happened. Took a s – officer from the street.

Q: They took you from the street?

A: Yeah. She took –

Q: An officer from the street?

A: Yeah, and said here, they were looking for them. Here they are. So it was not far where the – the jail was. Was a jail which the – and so we were together. And my father had to prepare himself for a lot of things. He had a bottle of vodka, not because he wanted to drink, because if some kind of infection comes over, he said to him, we need this for these things. So he wanted just a bottle of vodka to the guy, the officer. My father said no. Not giving you nothing. Anyway, they took us to this place, and the officer went to a bigger officer and told him that he has a bottle of vodka, he doesn't want to give it over. So, he came, he looked at us, this father with three sons, and maybe he was Jewish, the officer. He said, leave him alone. My father saw this, he still needed some – something to buy from drugstore, whatever

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that it is. So he asks the officer, can I go out? I'll leave mine sons here, to buy what I need still. You can go. They let him out. He knew he is gonna come back. And he came back, and around 12 o'clock at night, one o'clock in the morning, we're put on trucks, open trucks. And there were two soldiers, one one side, and the other side. And they showed us, they put in bullets. In case somebody jumps or something, we're gonna kill you. And put us in trains.

Q: What did the trains look like?

A: Terrible.

Q: Describe them.

A: Did you see the "**Dr. Zhivago**?"

Q: Mm-hm.

A: That's what the trains were there.

Q: But describe them for me.

A: There in the middle was a toilet, covered up. And there was one shift, another shift, and another shift. There were a lot of people, I don't know how many, 40 – 50 people, with nothing. Move around.

Q: Were there children as well?

A: No, I was the youngest, I think.

Q: You were the – were there women there?

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A: Yeah, women also there.

Q: There were also women?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: [**indecipherable**] there too. And of course I went to the tallest thing, there was a little window, small window that's –

Q: Okay.

A: – and I could look out, and I was young, so I wanted to be up there, I went up there. And I was crying, of course. I didn't want my father shall see nothing. And I used to see small houses in **Russia** already, with lights at night, you know, it – how I envy these people so much.

Q: So you were on the – wa – did you know where you were going to be taken?

A: No.

Q: Did anybody tell you why you were being put on the train?

A: No, nothing.

Q: But you had register – be – is it – were you arrested because you were registered?

A: Looks like it, yes.

Q: De –

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A: Because they knew exactly where we are.

Q: And why would they – did you ever understand why you were taken?

A: By them, there's no answer. The government, the Russian government, you don't ask questions. And there's no answers for nothing.

Q: Did you have those questions in your mind?

A: Of course you – I didn't do nothing to nobody, why do they take us?

Q: Did you ask your father why they are taking you?

A: No, I didn't want to aggravate him.

Q: Okay. What was hi – what – you – it was your father, your brothers and yourself?

A: Yes.

Q: Yi – the one uncle had already been taken.

A: He was on a different train, he –

Q: Was a different –

A: – was different because he was single, this – put him somewhere else, and he jumped out.

Q: And he jumped out.

A: He killed himself.

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Q: Were there – by this point, were there any other men from **Kolbusz-Kolbuszowa** with you?

A: Ma – no.

Q: No, it was just you – your – your immediate family.

A: Yes.

Q: The four of you.

A: Yes.

Q: And did they tell you how long you would be on the train?

A: Nothing. Nobody gave you no information. At night, at two in the morning, they wake you up and they gave you something to eat.

Q: What was that?

A: A piece of bread, a p – a piece of herring, and some **kipiatok**. You know what **kipiatok** means? Hot water.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Whatever. Only at night.

Q: So during the day you got no food?

A: No.

Q: Did you have any food with you?

A: No. We had maybe something, but not much. Not much.

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Q: Did you know you wer – I mean, you – it sounds like you were prisoners.

A: Oh yeah, of course we were prisoners, of course. And this was going on for six, seven weeks, t-til we reach our destination.

Q: Were there – was this mostly Jews, or were there Poles in the – in the wagons? Who was there?

A: In the wagons we didn't see others, but when we – when we came to that place where they wanted us, there were some officers, Polish officers, different kind of people, single people. Was a mixture of people. And was already October.

Q: So you – if I can go – if I can try and do this chronologically, you leave **Kolbuszowa** four or five days after the war starts.

A: Yes.

Q: It takes you a number of weeks –

A: Oh yeah, sure.

Q: – to get to **Szumsk**.

A: Right. Two t – two weeks, at least.

Q: Yeah, two weeks. There you live for about 10 months –

A: Not in **Szumsk**.

Q: – in – i-in **Szumsk**, then you go to **Lwów**.

A: **Lwów**, yeah.

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Q: Yeah. And in **Lwów** you live about 10 months.

A: Yes, something.

Q: And both **Lwów** and **Szumsk** are taken over by the Soviets, based on the pact –

A: Yes, yes, right.

Q: – with the Germans.

A: Exactly, yes.

Q: And while in **Lwów**, one uncle goes back to **Kolbuszowa** –

A: Yes.

Q: – who – whose wife is pregnant.

A: Right, correct.

Q: And does he ever return to **Lwów**?

A: No.

Q: No, he goes back, he stays –

A: No, he stays there, yeah.

Q: – he stays there.

A: This was the whole thing about it.

Q: Okay, he stays there. He's with his pregnant wife, he helps your mother and your sisters as much as he can.

A: He – they lived together later on there.

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Q: I see.

A: This wa –

Q: But you do – you don't know about this at the time, or –

A: That what?

Q: – about what goes on in **Kolbuszowa**.

A: We had some mail to **Siberia** from them.

Q: Okay, that's later.

A: Later on, yeah. But my mother wrote – not a letter, but a card.

Q: Okay.

A: This way the Germans could see what's written.

Q: I see.

A: And that's why they let it go through.

Q: I see. So we'll come to that.

A: Yes.

Q: We'll –

A: Yes.

Q: We'll come to that. But when you're on the train –

A: Yes?

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Q: – do you have any idea of what's going on with your mother and your sisters in **Kolbuszowa**?

A: We didn't know nothing.

Q: Okay.

A: Actually, that time was not so bad yet. It was bad, but –

Q: Yeah.

A: – was 1939.

Q: Exactly, yeah. So, by the time you're on the train, it is no longer 1939 –

A: Was '40.

Q: – it's 1940.

A: Right, exactly, yes.

Q: It's 1940, and it's close to October.

A: Yes.

Q: So – and it takes about seven weeks.

A: Yes, it took seven weeks.

Q: It took seven weeks. Was there any conversation going on on that train?

A: Nobody knew nothing.

Q: Were people crying? Were you the only one who –

A: I were crying, nobody saw me crying.

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Q: Okay.

A: I was on top. I didn't want it – my father shall see it.

Q: Yeah.

A: Because he couldn't help me anyway. Whatever he could, he was trying to help me, but I was not the only one. There were other two brothers.

Q: So where, eventually, was that destination, that you were taken to?

A: **Severnny(ph) kalchuk(ph)**.

Q: How do you say it?

A: **Severnny(ph) kalchuk(ph)**.

Q: **Severnny(ph) kalchuk(ph)**?

A: Yes.

Q: And what was this place?

A: This place, it looked – it was in the woods, deep in the woods. It looks like it – that they built up th-this barracks for us, special. For people like us. Didn't take too long to make it, these kind of things. The barracks, and – and they put us there, in the barracks.

Q: Did they tell you at any point – at that point, why you were there?

A: Nobody there.

Q: Nobody. What you were going to be doing there, what was your status?

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A: Yes, there was – there was status. There was a man which showed us how to cut down a tree, and clean it up. And he was a very tall man, and very –

Q: A Russian.

A: – strong. A Russian, strong and other – there's a special word for this. I forgot the words, anyway. And he showed us. Took him about a half hour, by himself, he cut down a big tree. He clean it up. But he was very strong. So somebody asked him – I was standing on the side – how is life here? He says, you'll live, he says, you'll live. But you wouldn't want to have a woman in your life. That's how bad it's going to be. In Russian he said that **[indecipherable]** a dirty word.

Q: Okay. Can we stop for a second? **[break]** So let's roll again. I needed to understand a little bit of what this meant, and – and if I understand what you're telling me, is that this Russian, who was so tall, and strong, and able to cut down the tree –

A: Yes.

Q: – said that it would be – that you'll live – that everybody would live, but they would lose all their desires.

A: Right, exactly.

Q: Okay. And he said it in a crude way.

A: In very crude way, yes.

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Q: Okay. And that was the only news that you had of what was awaiting you?

A: Well, we saw something else there. That was a couple of horses that went a little deep in the woods. They were killed by wolves. So a lot of people went there to take the meat there, from it. It was just like this, just happened. There were a couple horses, and they just went to de – a little deep in the woods, they got killed.

Q: By this point were you hungry?

A: Oh yeah, we were hungry, and that – there was a terrible thing there. They gave us food which we couldn't eat. They used to give us fish soup. So we only saw bones with eyes, like this fish – from big fish. And the smell of this was so strong, that I couldn't eat it. My family couldn't eat it. Went by one day – the piece of bread was good, one day, two days, three day – took a week, we get used to it, and was good later on. You have no choice. The body got used to it.

Q: So when you arrived, you were put in these barracks. What did they look like?

A: The barracks look new. There was enough wood to – to be warm, which sometimes is not so good, because when it's very cold outside, it's even colder, because when you warm, you go out in this when you're warm – if you're a little cooler, it's not so cold.

Q: You have much more to adjust to when you're warm.

A: Yeah, exactly.

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Q: Was it a very cold place?

A: Very cold, very cold. We ha – we used to go to work to cut down the trees, you know? And we had to look at each other when we went home, if – see the faces, if the nose is white, or the cheek is white, so you had to take snow and rub it in, the circulation will come back. If not, it will fall off.

Q: Oh my, mm-hm. Was – were there guards? Was this surrou – did you have –

A: There – there was no need for guards. Where you gonna go? You're surrounded only in the woods. You don't know nothing there.

Q: Was there anybody who – in authority, in control?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And who was that?

A: His name was **Volgapolof**(ph).

Q: **Volgapolof**(ph).

A: Something like this, **Dulgapolof**(ph), yeah. Nice man. He had a wife, and a kid there. **Dolgapolof**(ph), **Dolgapolof**(ph).

Q: **Dolgapolof**(ph).

A: Yes. And he was very shrewd man, very –

Q: A what – a shrewd man.

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A: – shrewd, yeah, yeah. But he was also sent there because of this, that somehow, you know, they knew where – they always took people for nothing, they put them somewhere, for no reason at all, sometimes good places, sometimes the good pla – some the worst places. I remember one day I couldn't go to work. Was so cold, I couldn't work. I said to myself, this time I'm not going to go to work. So I went out, I had to go to the toilet, whatever, it was outside. And he saw me, **Dolgapolof(ph)** and he told me to come over, so I went over to him. He says to me, why don't you work? I said, I wa – I'm very cold, and I'm 15 years old, and the law says about 15 years old, I don't have to work. What's your name? So I told him the name, and took a red pencil, and make a mark there. But he didn't do nothing. And when the spring came, there was no night.

Q: So you're already in this place for half a year.

A: Yeah.

Q: From October '40 to spring 1941.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And at that time, it was no night. It was daytime.

Q: So you were that far north?

A: Yes.

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Q: Okay. Can you give me a sense geographically –

A: Where it was?

Q: – where this pla – yeah.

A: I can't. It was not on the map even, this.

Q: Okay.

A: They just cut out, middle of the woods somewhere, and they said, this is it.

Q: And your father and your brothers would go to work every day?

A: Yeah. Then I went back to work.

Q: Okay.

A: Went back. But that – that time – on that day, I didn't – I couldn't – you know, I couldn't go, it was so shivering. Was 40 below zero, imagine.

Q: What kind of clothes did you have?

A: That's a good at – not too good. Not too good. But we had clothes, yeah, we had things. But was – when you came to the barrack, was very good, was warm, because we had a lot of wood, all night long, 24 hours was burning.

Q: Well, did they give you clothes, or is this whatever you –

A: No, they didn't give us no clothes.

Q: Okay.

A: No.

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Q: Did they give you anything, except those fish soup?

A: The fish soup. Sometimes maybe an extra piece of bread or something, I don't [indecipherable] or a little butter maybe. I don't know, I don't remember. But the fish soup was terrible. You could see big bones, swimming with big eyes, we – was frozen for – from a barrel they took, and just took it. And that's it.

Q: And that's the soup.

A: That's soup.

Q: Were people – did anybody die from hunger?

A: This is a good question. Nobody died, only one old man died. But if you would stay there a little longer, it started up already, because we sold everything from us, which we have. There was always a black market somehow. And they sold, you know, we had pants, nice pants, so we made different pants and this and that. My father knew how to [indecipherable] with this. But we didn't have nothing to sell any more. And not only we, but everybody. If would stay another year, there would be a lot of casualties, a lot.

Q: So in other words, if I understand this right, you were dumped in the middle of the woods, and you're put to work.

A: Yes.

Q: You live in a barracks.

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A: Right.

Q: And the only other people around there are other prisoners just like yourself?

A: Right.

Q: Who did you sell the goods to?

A: There was people which came near us, which they lived there a long time. Also people [indecipherable] which they put down there. And they lived there, they had private houses already, it was different. They had a piece of land which is from here to there, that in summer, they put up a couple potatoes, a bit of fruit, or what, something.

Q: They were local people?

A: Local people, yeah.

Q: So they're not prisoners?

A: They were prisoners before.

Q: But they're released.

A: They – they were – they part also – they couldn't go nowhere, there was no transportation.

Q: Okay.

A: They didn't have horses, or whatever, just a – so they walked over, whatever there was, and they bought and they sold it, you know.

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Q: And what would you get for the things that you sold?

A: A potato.

Q: Okay.

A: Mostly a potato, that's it. Piece of bread was hard to get.

Q: Okay. When you said there's no transportation, you say that the train took you to
– for seven weeks –

A: Yeah.

Q: – did it take you straight into this woods, or –

A: No, no, no, no, we stopped, went, and then there were horses with carriages, and
they put us up to put – not us to – just to valise to – whatever we had, to put in on the
– and this was it. And we walked for three, four hours like this, maybe more, five
hours, til we reach our destination.

Q: Okay. So there is a tra – railroad that is about four hours walk from where the
camp is, from where this barracks is.

A: No, this – this was not a railroad there yet.

Q: Okay.

A: This was just some farmers, which they used – that lived there from before.

Q: Okay.

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A: And had small houses where the – I don't know exactly what was there. And they had a little bit of a garden –

Q: I understand.

A: – in the spring that they – they – and they sold this, they won't – because they couldn't get a suit, or they couldn't get nothing so – from us, they took us.

Q: Okay. And then you ran out, you ran out of – of things to sell.

A: That's what I mean.

Q: And – and in the time you're there, in the half year that we're talking about, in the spring, one woman has died –

A: Yes.

Q: – from this camp. About how many people were in the camp, do you think?

A: Not too many. About 350 – 400.

Q: Four hundred people.

A: Okay.

Q: And about how many barracks were there?

A: Eight, maybe eight.

Q: Mm-hm. And were you the youngest again, or were there other children?

A: I think so.

Q: Okay.

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A: I was the youngest, yeah, I was the youngest.

Q: Okay. And the only person in authority was dolga –

A: **Dol-Dolgapolof**(ph).

Q: **Dolgapolof**(ph), who had a wife and a child.

A: Yes.

Q: No other soldiers, no other people.

A: No, no. There was no need.

Q: Was there anybody official who ever visited that place?

A: Not that I know of. It – maybe they came and we didn't know because we were at work.

Q: And the law – you know, so you cut down trees.

A: Yes.

Q: What did you do after – it was only cutting trees, or was it doing something with the logs?

A: They were waiting til the snow was deep, then came tractors, and they took away the logs.

Q: All the logs?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

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A: And there were trees, smaller trees, so it made some kind of laying them make –
I don't know what you call it.

Q: Well, they put them on – in – in some order.

A: In order, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And then came – a tartar was there, a tartar.

Q: Okay.

A: And he marked what you made, and wrote down.

Q: Oh, so your production was noted. How much pro – how productive you –

A: How much, yes. But it was worthless, because he was a drunk, and he – he gave
him anything to drink, everyth – everythi – perfume, even, he – it went. When –
when we saw – I saw that once, and I – when he marked the – when they cut off the
marks, I came and marked it again.

Q: Now, that bottle of vodka your father had.

A: Yes.

Q: Did he still have it, or that was long gone?

A: I don't remember. My father never dranked it.

Q: Oh, I believe that, I believe that, but did he have to trade it, did he have to use it?

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A: I don't know – remember, you know, what happened, because took so many weeks and months, you know.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: But they were –

Q: What kind of conversation did you have with one another when you were finally there?

A: How long will it be? And then there was a man, about 15 kilometers deep – deeper, one man. And he used to come to us about bread which belongs to him, cause they couldn't deliver to him, so every time they send him somewhere else. He was living alone [indecipherable] barracks, and he says, the wolves were all around him. The men looked wild, completely. He had a beard, and had two guns. His eyes were like – you never saw something like it. They never saw a person. That's how they did.

Q: You say – did you get mail here?

A: No, I didn't get mail there, I got mail, I think, through **Lwów**.

Q: Ah, your mother had sent a card to **Lwów**.

A: And maybe one card maybe there also.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. And she never complained.

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Q: Do you know, was she still in her own home?

A: I don't know, she didn't write so things. She wanted to know if we are all right, hope we are all right, and – and she had mentioned that we have everything, don't worry about us. One didn't want tell the other about –

Q: About how many – was it like two cards that you got from her?

A: Maybe one or two, tops.

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: Because me – we wrote to them. I guess that they had our cards, because we didn't know where we were.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: [indecipherable] yeah, we didn't know it. Maybe one card, maybe. Maybe one card. Small card, open, we read. And she wrote it in Polish, I think, or in German, whatever it was.

Q: Did you learn Russian?

A: I learned a little bit. Course Polish and Russian were – my brother, my older brother, he was very intelligent, looks like it, but course when we get the paper – I knew sometimes we got the newspaper somewhere by chance. So he used to read it right away in Polish. He looked at it, and said it in Polish.

Q: Ah, so he could translate immediately from Russian to Polish.

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A: Oh yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Not everybody could do that.

Q: No.

A: No.

Q: No.

A: And then the war started. **Germany** invaded **Russia**.

Q: Okay, th – it's an interesting phrase, because it had already started, the war.

A: Yeah, but –

Q: But they were allies.

A: – this a different – yeah, they were allies.

Q: Yeah.

A: Now it's a different war.

Q: All right, how did life change?

A: They didn't want us there any more, the Russians.

Q: The war again – I mean, the attack on the **Soviet Union** was on June 22nd, or
June 21st, '41

A: Forty-one, yes.

Q: So you're in the camp at that poin, eight months.

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A: Something like this, about eight - nine months, whatever it was, I don't know.

Q: Okay, so they don't want you there any more.

A: Actually, I want to tell you something else. In the spring – in the summer there – it was amon – summer, a little bit. And there were some berries in the woods, you know, you can eat. But there were flies so big, if they touch you, the blood came out.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. So we couldn't eat some – but had some, couple of things, that's all.

Q: So the ber – the flies were on the berries, or –

A: No, no, no, no, flying around.

Q: Ah, so you couldn't pick them easily.

A: No. So this – it was terrible. As soon as they touch you, the blood used to **[indecipherable]**. So it wasn't worth it, the whole thing, yeah.

Q: You're in this ye – for how – you're in this camp for how long in total?

A: I don't know exactly, about 10 months or something, a year, whatever, something like this.

Q: Okay.

A: But I don't know.

Q: Okay.

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A: I don't remember. It started in June, right?

Q: Right.

A: And we were – left that time, I don't know, took us in the August that time, from
la – from **Lwów**.

Q: So how did – okay. Oh, so they took you in August to the camp.

A: Yes.

Q: You're there in October. You're there, and then the attack on the **Soviet Union**
happens the following year, June '41.

A: Yeah, correct, r-right.

Q: And then how do you find out that **Germany** has made war on the **Soviet**
Union?

A: Well, they call us, everybody, that we can leave the camp, your –

Q: You're free.

A: You're free to go. But – but you have to go over here, three places there;
Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, or other thing, you know, we didn't know. We wanted to
go where it's warm.

Q: So –

A: So **Uzbekistan** was the right thing, whatever it is.

Q: So **Dolgapolof**(ph) is the one who tells you –

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A: Yeah, right, exactly.

Q: – you are free, you can go.

A: Yeah. Yeah [**indecipherable**] we have to give you documents.

Q: Did they give you documents?

A: Yeah, yes, it looks like it, and also a ticket.

Q: Ah. Well, see, that was my next question.

A: Yeah.

Q: Because many people were told they could leave, but they were not given any help [**indecipherable**]

A: Well, we didn't have it, they had to give us help.

Q: Okay. So they – so they give you some sort of transportation tickets.

A: Yeah, gave you documents, cause of where we are, who we are. And now you can leave.

Q: So what happened, how did you leave?

A: The transportation to the trains was – came in with the horses, with [**indecipherable**] took us there, and then we wait for trains. In the beginning we – was terrible, and then it was even worse, because the war already started, there was a lot of wounded people, which they bring into deeper **Russia**, you know, the other side, because they are wounded. I mean, that couldn't just – so we had to wait, not

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always for the train, you know, we have to watch out you shouldn't be separated. It was not a easy thing, it was very hard. But we went for weeks, for weeks went.

Q: Really, it took weeks.

A: Weeks til they reached the **Uzbekistan**.

Q: So you could choose which of the three places you could go to?

A: We didn't know what the places are, what they're doing.

Q: Okay.

A: We just knew it's going to get warmer.

Q: Okay.

A: But we didn't realize that – that the winter comes and over there there's no work.

Q: Okay, so let's – you leave – you leave this – well, can you tell me again the name of the forest, or the place you were for 10 – for 10 months or more?

A: This was **Severny**(ph) **kalchuk**(ph).

Q: **Severny**(ph) **kalchuk**(ph). You leave there around August?

A: Something like that, because in June started –

Q: Yeah.

A: – maybe in July, end of July, something like this, yeah.

Q: Okay. So that you leave there, and it takes several weeks –

A: To reach –

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Q: – to get to **Uzbekistan**.

A: Stan, right.

Q: Where in **Uzbekistan**?

A: Well, what happened, that my brother got sick.

Q: Okay.

A: He had gangrene in his foot.

Q: Oh.

A: And this was already the city **Jizzakh** in **Uzbekistan**.

Q: What's the city?

A: **Jizzakh**.

Q: **Jizzakh**.

A: Is between s – **Tashkent** and **Samarkand**.

Q: This is **Wolf**(ph), or **Hirsch**?

A: This is **Wolf**(ph).

Q: Okay.

A: And my father said, we have to go down, because we have to give him to a hospital. If not, is gonna be very bad things. And my brother died. **[indecipherable]**

Q: In the hospital?

A: In the hospital, yeah.

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Q: Did they not operate on him?

A: I don't know what they did to him. I guess they didn't have the medication, because was so deep already, I mean. Yeah.

Q: Did you see him there, in the hospital?

A: No. Only my father saw him, and my brother. Me they kept always, everything, not to know nothing.

Q: Was that – did that make it harder for you?

A: It was harder one way, it was harder difference later on anyway, because I had to find out anyway. So I remember when he died, and I didn't know. And they took me to office, there's small office, ev-everybody was sitting there. He says, look, we going away for a couple hours, and don't move nothing, just stay there.

Q: Who said this to you?

A: My father and my brother, the middle brother. And we will come back soon. It's gonna be too much for you, or whatever they said, I don't remember. And of cour – of course, he died, it was the funeral, you know, th – they buried him.

Q: And you couldn't go.

A: I cou – I didn't know nothing.

Q: They didn't tell you.

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A: No. What happened, they came back, they didn't have to tell me. When I looked at their faces, I knew what happened. In hospital there was a woman, a surgeon. Her name was **Ganda(ph) Barisivna(ph)**.

Q: **Ganda(ph) Barisivna(ph)**?

A: Yes. Jewish. There was no medication here – there. There was no medication for the – and my father ask, can I bring my youngest son, you should hold him a week, he should come to himself. Only me.

Q: This I don't understand. Your father asked her what?

A: **Ganda(ph) Barisivna(ph)**.

Q: What did he ask her?

A: He asked that I – youngest son, we would like to give him to you for a week, maybe you can hold him in the hospital.

Q: Okay.

A: So she said, of course, I'll do that. But I want you to be in the hospital with – to my father.

Q: She wants your father to be –

A: Now, in the hospital, he should come to himself. So the father said, all right, okay. But she says, you have to cut your beard. I cannot take you in like this. She

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took him anyway in, she was hiding him for three days, and said to him, I cannot hold you any more.

Q: Why was she hiding your father?

A: Because she was not allowed to take him in with a beard.

Q: And why was that?

A: For cleanliness, or whatever it is, I don't know.

Q: For – for which reason?

A: To take him in?

Q: Yeah – no, for why – why is the beard a problem, that's what I don't –

A: Because that's what the – th-the – they had this kind of law there.

Q: Okay.

A: They cannot take somebody with a beard or something, overgrown or something, whatever it is.

Q: Okay.

A: She just – she was hiding him somewhere in a – in a different place. After three days she told him, I cannot hide you any more.

Q: Why would she need to take him in to begin with? Did he have no place to go?

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A: No, she looked at his face, how he – she knew him a couple days before, how he looked, and then after, how he looked. They saw that – she saw this, something is not right here.

Q: Okay. So this was to try to take care of him.

A: Him, yes.

Q: And – and it wasn't official.

A: Right.

Q: It was very unofficial.

A: Right, exactly.

Q: And he had wanted to – you to be taken in for a week.

A: Yeah, and I was taken in – and I was taken in.

Q: And you were taken in.

A: And I was there a week.

Q: And why for you? Why did he want you to be there?

A: Everything which they had was pushing me, the first – the youngest one, because I was the younger kid.

Q: Okay. So you arrive in this – in **Uzbekistan** and **Wolf**(ph) has the gangrene.

A: Yes.

Q: How long was he in the hospital before he dies?

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A: Not too long. Couple days, or –

Q: Okay. And could it be that the toll – that you needed some rest after such a trip from –

A: Whatever. Everybody could use it then –

Q: Got it.

A: – but not everybody could get in. She just did it not officially.

Q: Got it. Got it. So after three days she can't keep him any more.

A: No. Father was happy to go out because she had another son – he had another son.

Q: Right.

A: So –

Q: And yes, where was **Hirsch** during this time?

A: Yeah, he was – he was there. He came to the – over there we had a – a room, which they gave us there, which we worked – we start to work in the cake, the **[indecipherable]** the what do you call it? Which you make – a white – what do you call it, the – the –

Q: Cotton?

A: Cotton, yeah, the cotton.

Q: Okay.

A: To –

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Q: You would pick cotton?

A: Pick cotton.

Q: Okay. So, I want to make sure I understand this properly. You get off in this place called **Zizzakh**(ph) –

A: **Jizzakh**, yes.

Q: **Jizzakh**. And it's not where you really intended to go, it's because **Wolf**(ph) has gangrene.

A: Exactly, yes.

Q: And when he's brought to the hospital, he quickly passes away.

A: Yes.

Q: But you – your father, your other brother and you are given a place to live.

A: Yes, not in a – in a farm somewhere.

Q: Okay, that's what I wanted to find out is –

A: Yeah, in a farm.

Q: – where is it that you go, and what is it that you start to do?

A: It was – it was about, oh, I don't know, eight miles away, maybe, so I don't think – or maybe less, I don't know.

Q: And ye – and you – your documents allowed you to start looking for work like free people, is this it?

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A: The documents was only that we can live in **Uzbekistan**.

Q: Okay.

A: And nobody looked at us with the documents anyway.

Q: Okay.

A: And this kind of work was terrible, because you didn't have gloves, and you know, the cotton has pins like this.

Q: Like thorns?

A: Right, exactly. It's – the hand was swollen, it wa – became swollen. And you got a piece of bread for this.

Q: I see.

A: Nothing else. And it – the room was like **Afghanistan** you saw here. It's not far from **Afghanistan** anyway. Is sand inside, small windows, and –

Q: Very primitive.

A: – very primitive. There was no water.

Q: Okay.

A: The water you had to boil, and there was no wood to boil it. We had to find straw to boil the water. If not, you got sick right away, dysentery.

Q: It doesn't sound like it was that much better than the camp.

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A: It was even worst, because over there they gave you a piece of bread with a – with a fish. Here you didn't get nothing. Nobody was your boss, and you – nothing you can get. And no money.

Q: So who would give out the bread?

A: We got, because we worked in the [indecipherable] whatever it was. After we finished, how much we worked, they weigh it up, how much we have made, and they gave us pita bread, you know, pita bread, you know, that –

Q: Mm-hm, pita bread, yeah.

A: Yeah, the – and the – and then we worked also on the highway, because this was already finished. And then, all of a sudden it starts snowing.

Q: So your stays in zi – you stay in **Jizzakh**.

A: In **Jizzakh**. In a farm [indecipherable] thing.

Q: Yeah. And it starts snowing.

A: And it starts snowing, there's no work, there's no food, nobody knows you.

Q: Any other Jews there?

A: Maybe two, maybe. That's it.

Q: Okay. What language was spoken?

A: They spoke like you said, I s – told you before – I found out here in the **United States**, it's Turkish.

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Q: Okay.

A: And they hated id – id – the Russians, you cannot imagine. Because there was some kind of a general came in there years ago, and killed so many of them. Was – so they – they just hated it, the Russian, the Russian language, everything by **Russia** was for them poison.

Q: Okay.

A: And then my father, you know, he lost his son. And he says, how could I go home? I lost the older son. So, right? So, I don't know, it looks like it – my father made the appointment. Somehow I was back in – I was back in the – in the – in hospital there, so I do not remember why. And one day – this was later, and I remember we took sta – straw to lie down on the floor.

Q: In the hut.

A: In the hut there, to – where to sleep. And when we took out the straw, in between was 10 pita breads. Somebody was stealing, was holding it there, til he can do it – take it. So we took it, we had couple days good ones.

Q: A little bit more food.

A: Yeah, this was only food. And –

Q: **[interruption]** You're fine? Okay. So you find the pita bread, and you have three – three days of a little bit better.

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A: Yeah, yeah. And you'll be surprise how they pushed me I shall have more, all the time. Somehow, I don't remember exactly how it happened, but I was back in hospital.

Q: Okay.

A: Taken in. And it came around evening. My brother was at the window.

Q: **Hirsch.**

A: **Hirsch.** I was very happy to see him through the window. And he send me in two balls – four balls. Like a baseball. Dirty baseballs. I said to myself, what is this? Why is my brother giving me this, dirty baseballs? There must be a reason for it. So I found out it's – it's cheese, dried cheese.

Q: Dried cheese?

A: Yes.

Q: What color was it?

A: Was dirty because – it was white, actually, but was dirty like – like you played with it. And he s – I don't know how he got it, and he send me in four like this. They were so hard, you know, dried out cheese. And since then, I never saw him again.

Q: Really? What happened?

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A: I went home. It looks like he was also going that time when he gave me the ball, he was registered to the hospital, that he was sick himself. They didn't tell me nothing, they kept secrets from me all the time. And I was going home to my father. Of course, I left a couple days. And was Saturday night, Saturday night, yes, laying in the floor. My father woke up, and I see he – he tears his shirt. I said, Papa, why you tearing your shirt. Don't worry my son, everything is okay. I woke up, he was dead.

Q: No!

A: Yeah. Yeah, he was dead. I had to bury him. Was the winter, of course. It was hard, and I was crying so much that a Arab woman heard me there. She seen me before also, something, somebody wanted to kill us there, all the **[indecipherable]** from the – from that place. He wanted – he had the horse, and with the horse, he wanted to kill us.

Q: Why?

A: Two people.

Q: Why?

A: Just like this.

Q: Just because?

A: Yeah. And she came out, she was thouting – shouting, and he left.

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Q: So these were other workers who were on the cotton farm, who had wanted to kill you?

A: No, this was the main man from the whole farm, which was the – he was the maestro, whatever it is.

Q: He was the – the – the person who –

A: The **[indecipherable]** whatever.

Q: Say me that word in Russian again.

A: **Natchelnyk**(ph).

Q: **Natchelnyk**(ph), and what does it mean?

A: He was the – the –

Q: Foreman?

A: Foreman, yeah. And he had the horse. Everything was private also, whatever it was, and he wanted to kill us with the horse, you know, with the – and one he nearly killed. I went past, she came out, she heard shouting. She start shouting at him, and he left. Let us go, too. And at that time when my father died, she heard me crying so much, she took me into her house. She came and over this, that she warm up, and she gave me something to drink, but I couldn't drink, I couldn't eat, I couldn't drink. And I didn't feel good because, you know, what happened. And I wanted to go to the hospital because mine – I f – I felt that my brother is there. Was

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a Sunday. I fell asleep in that room wa – nor far from the office. And it was like anybody could go to take me, will kill me, whatever it is, I – I was out completely, you know. And at night they took me to the hospital. I was dirty, I was everything.

Q: Was your father buried by then?

A: Yeah, I buried him.

Q: You buried him. And your brother?

A: My brother was in the hospital there.

Q: Still.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: So, when they brought me to the hospital, was night. The doctor clean me up, and they called up again the **Barisivna**(ph), the doctor, she'll come. She came. She starts shouting at me, where is your father? I guess he promise he's gonna come for my brother, or whatever. She starts – she couldn't hear me, she couldn't hear me, my voice wasn't there, from all day long crying [**indecipherable**]. And I don't care what they do with me anyway. And shouting at me. Sh – when I talked to her, she didn't hear what I said. I guess my voice was not there. She was very angry at my father. I said, he is dead. When she heard that he is dead, she start tearing her hair out. Looks like my father had appointment there, something, whatever it was. Start

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tearing her hair, shouting, crying. She was completely out when I told her that. And she went home crying. And I was be – they put me to bed, and I say, please put me to room with my brother, not alone. They didn't answer me. For days, every day, they didn't answer me. And I knew already he's dead. I was the only one.

Q: You were how old?

A: At that time was '41 - '42 – beginning '42. The [indecipherable] '42.

Q: So you're si –

A: And I had gangrene also, my foot.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: So you're 17 years old, not even.

A: Not – not –

Q: Not even 17.

A: – no. I had gangrene in my foot. And of course, she had to take care of it[indecipherable] me. She cut off the bone, I lost all my toes, five toes. I have none on my left foot. And I was there three, four months. And I ask every time where my brother is. I knew already.

Q: But nobody – did they ever tell you –

A: Openly? No –

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Q: – openly.

A: – no. She didn't want to – she knew that I will understand that – that – that somebody told me, maybe a nurse or something. And that was it, I am alone now.

No money, no language. War. Only **Ganda(ph) Barisivna(ph)**, she know me.

Q: **Ganda(ph) Barisivna(ph)**. How did she –

A: She was there like I'm president of the **United States** in this city. Everybody knew about her. She could do everything. She didn't know what to do with me, looks like it. It was in the spring, around April, must have been April, cause there was a tree, a bench and a tree with white flowers, something. And the flowers was very sweet, they fell on the floor. And I picked this up, and I tasted it. Was sweet, this was some kind of a fruit. And she saw me picking this up, and the nurse saw this through the open door. There was a lot of people coming, visiting. I used to go even through the garbage, the cucumber, the – the –

Q: The peels.

A: – the peels and that. And a – a week – couple days later she called me in the office. She says, I cannot hold you more. So I have to let you out. But she didn't let me out like this. There was a older nurse living on the premises. She wanted me to stay there 10 days by her. She worked in **[indecipherable]** in the hospital, and I stayed there, to come a little bit to myself, to get used to. And then she gave me a

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piece of paper, something written up, to a Polish doctor in the city. When I went to the Polish doctor, he gave me somewhere to go, some kind of a – there are people there. There were about three, four wounded Polacks, single people. And they took me in, of course I'd had from **Poland**, Polish doctor, take me in. And they gave me a piece – a place where to lie down on the floor. There was a man in the corner, he was sick, very sick. And – and he saw that I'm Jewish, so he says to me, you a Jew, I'm going to kill you. I was the only one there. So I went outside, I slept outside, it was warm. I didn't care where I sleep. Of course, it was a bad – the water was contaminated. No food. Right away. And all – two days later, all these people disappeared.

Q: During the night?

A: Yes, some way, I don't know how.

Q: And you were left?

A: I was left with this guy. This was a Polish army, go to **Iran**, and this were – went to **Iran** from **England** something to do, these soldiers, Polish soldier and a brigade, some kind of –

Q: Yeah. So the – the – the people that were there, who disappeared, were they young men?

A: Yes, yeah, they were, 30s, 40s, something like this.

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Q: No women, no children?

A: No, no, no, no, there – nothing, nothing.

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: They disappeared, and – and I found out who they are, if I would be a couple weeks there, maybe I could have pushed myself through, go to **Iran**. But I didn't know nothing what's going on here, and I was just left with this man. And the man died, of course, and had to bury him myself.

Q: Oh no.

A: Yeah. And then I got a job in a building, or a house actually, on the premises there, to watch it. So I slept there. Didn't do nothing, and I got a – a pan of bread every day. But the bread was not bread. There was straw inside, water inside. You could make a brick out of it. But I said to myself, I'll save my money and that's – got 175 rubles a month they gave me, I'll save this money and I'll buy myself on the black market, a kilo bread. And it was like this. I went to the market, and I, with the ara – Arab woman, she was sitting – not only one, I mean, there was a lot of them. Everything was black market. And I made the price with her for the bread, 175 rubles, and I give her this 175 rubles, and she gives me the bread. A man beside me, standing in the back, I didn't know **[indecipherable]** as soon as I had the bread in my hands, he jumped and grabbed the bread from me, run around the bazaar, and

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swallow it and then stay still and [indecipherable] me something. Everybody was laughing. What shall I do? Back to the same thing. But I said to myself, I won't be able to hold on a year. I have to go on the black market also. I don't know what I'm gonna do for the black market. First of all, I got all kinds of diseases. Had malaria, dysentery, everything you can think about it, I had. No medication, hardly any food. How I survive, I don't know.

Q: This was still in **Jizzakh**?

A: Yes, everything in **Jizzakh**.

Q: Okay.

A: I remember the first time I went out from the hospital, so I had eight rubles, I forgot to tell you, had eight rubles. So I said to a bazaar – I wen-went through a bazaar, I ask them where this place is. So, I wanted to have a pound of – a pound of tomatoes. It was seven or eight rubles, and I said, I want to buy something to eat, something. I go and take out my money, the money was not there, somebody took out already from my pocket, the money. And I went this – that time to this place, and they disappeared, and I went on black market, and I saw boys older than me, what they doing, how they doing. Then the black market, they buy, let's say, 300 matches. They make packages of 10, sold three for so much, three for so much, three for so much on the black market, you know. And matches, you know, very

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few people had matches, they could – there was no fire or [indecipherable]. So you had to know how to sell the matches. If you took a match, you took it to the hair, it dried out, then you show them that it works. I learned this, and I tried to be, little by little, I was watching in so other boys like this, but ol-older. One was 45, one was 35. The youngest was 30. And I am here –

Q: Seventeen.

A: – seventeen. I was like a **schlepper**, but I was learning a lot of things. And little by little, if I couldn't sell something, I ba – I went to exchange for apple, for this, whatever it is, to survive. My surviving was only because I knew my mother and two sisters, I have to help them, I have to reach them. And every night I had to plan a different plan, how will I tell them? What shall I tell them how – what happened? This was my whole thing. And I learned a lot of this – one day I saw people sewing shoes – was not shoes, was slippers, because the Arabs, they went in slippers. To fix up slippers, you put in a piece, and two needles, and you fix it. I learned this too, by myself, watching.

Q: And were you still staying at that house that was empty now? You know –

A: Was already a different –

Q: Different place.

A: – place, yeah.

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Q: Okay.

A: Was a – and – because where the boys were, there a couple boys. And then there were people which were very bad. Jewish people. They made tricks with Arabs.

What tricks was it? They took money, counting money, and they would put together somehow that they counted twice, and there was only once, to change it on there. I couldn't do these things, I couldn't do it. But I just looked how to, and I learned. I said, if I fix your sandals, just give me food, I don't want no money, no money, no money. And little by little, I found out how to go through.

Q: Okay.

A: And one day on the big market – was once a week, it was a pla – it was the old – the old city, was thousands of people, thousands coming from the mountains, from everywhere, you know. And I had tea for sale everything. And somebody was holding me in the side there, I had put away, cause you couldn't hold everything, in case something **[inaudible]**. And all of a sudden everybody's moving away from me.

Q: From you?

A: Yeah. What is people moving away from me? I didn't know what happened.

Why is people – I said to myself, what's going on here? And I turn around. Was the **NKVD**, the Russian police. A woman sitting on a white horse. She says to me,

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golubchik – golubchik. It means bir – you bird. She says to me, you will stop it or not? She said in Russian [**speaks Russian**] Will I stop or not?

Q: What are you supposed to stop?

A: Selling these things. Because this is black market, everything was black market.

Q: That's right, it's black market.

A: So, what did I say, I said [**speaks Russian**] I'll stop. And I start walking. My ha – my feet didn't go. Didn't go enough fast. Was a terrible thing. She takes me, and she gives me [**indecipherable**] I'm finished. She takes me and I'm finished. She let me go. A couple hours later I went right back anyway. I was starving like this, or starving like this.

Q: Did sh – did you ever have a run in with them again? With the **NKVD**?

A: I saw her sometimes on her – her horse.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: Going back from the bazaar the time – was a couple times, I guess. I guess she was not a bad woman, she was too smart. What I did is sh – is nothing.

Q: Little things.

A: Little things. See, she knew I cannot exist. She was just – but if she would taken – and I was very surprised that she didn't take me in, because there was so many witnesses. And I pushed like this til one day, was already 19 years old, I had all

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sickness, I didn't see at night, couldn't see at night, couldn't. From here to here, I couldn't see. I didn't have vitamins.

Q: Did you ha – did you have any – did you make any associations? Did you have any human contact, did you have any friends?

A: Yes, these two people, these two poor people, which I told you.

Q: Oh, with the matches.

A: With the matches, with the – all these things.

Q: Okay.

A: He made cigarettes –

Q: Okay.

A: – exactly. Was one smart man. He made cigarettes. He knew how to make cigarettes with the filter, with everything. And I learned everything. I learned whatever I could.

Q: So you were alone, but you weren't completely alone.

A: No, no.

Q: Because nobody can –

A: I was with them just a boy –

Q: Yeah.

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A: – **schlepping** around and – and I knew it. I knew it, but they didn't mind, they didn't mind it.

Q: Mm-hm. Did you ever see **Gerda(ph) Barisivna(ph)** again? **Ganda(ph)**

Barisivna(ph).

A: Yes, I saw. I had to see her all the time [**indecipherable**] she let me out from the hospital. I went on crutches, and was always bloody. The blood used to come out and I had – the comparison in the hospital, was clean, and here, come here, dirt and everything. Infections. She says, how many times can I help you, I mean, is – but she did whatever she could, and that was it, I had to learn how to live by myself.

Q: And in what circumstances?

A: Very bad.

Q: Unbelievable.

A: I don't know how I survived. But the only thing that survived was my mother and two sisters, this little picture which I had. I don't know how I was holding -- the picture was there – how I was holding, where I was holding, that I all the time and never lost it, after so many circumstances, I don't know. And one day, I knew already how to – I mean, you get used to it. And then people know you already from the market, the people like me, everybody was on black market, you know. One [**indecipherable**] change for this, one change of this. And I got temperature,

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high temperature, very high temperature. I knew it's not something which I never had. So where do I go? **Ganda(ph) Barisivna(ph)**. She right away let me in to, she left everybody. So she ask me, what's wrong? I said to her, I have temperature, and it doesn't go away. Oh, she says, take off your shirt [**indecipherable**]. Makes like this. You have typhus. What do I do now? I'll give you – there's a hospital not far from here, I'll give you – they shall take you in right away. Okay. Walked over there. There's no room. What do I do now? I go back to her. That's the only person I know. She picks herself up, herself with me, walks over to the hospital. And as soon as they saw her, there was room.

Q: Whoa. Whoa.

A: So. And at night was temperature very high, and I realize now why it was right away a room for me. People were dying like flies, outside, inside, the whole city. People in the street died, typhus. They were holding me there and – and they changed the room. There was a Dr. **Abramovich(ph)**, also Jewish. He had a patch on his eye. I remember he looked at the chart of mine.

Q: At your chart?

A: Yeah. He looks and looks and looks and looks and looks. Starts walking away, I call him back. Dr. **Abramovich(ph)**, I ask him, will I hold on, or will I die? He didn't answer me right away. He says [**indecipherable**] you'll make it. And I was

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there about 10 – 12 days in the hospital, and that – remember when the – I went home, they gave us turtle soup, turtle.

Q: Turtle soup?

A: Yeah, from small turtles. It was so good, like chicken.

Q: This you got in the hospital?

A: In the hospital, yeah. This for going away, or out. It was so good that you cannot imagine. Never ate something like it. Anyway, I start walking home, was two – two miles, whatever it was, somewhere. Every couple of steps, I had to sit down.

Q: You were that weak.

A: I was so weak. I was crying for weakness. I haven't got the power. Took me all day long to come.

Q: To get home.

A: All day long. Anyway, I made home, where home, what home? Who's taking care of me? Only the street boys which were there to help me, yeah. And little by little, come back to myself. And I went one day, I – they told me that – that material which – to make a woman to wear, that was [indecipherable] things until the floor, the Arabs were wearing.

Q: A caftan?

A: Caftan, like this, yeah.

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Q: Okay.

A: They're making their materials that this was in **Samarkand**, was a big city.

Beautiful city. And I said to myself, I'll buy more goods, we'll bring it back

[indecipherable]. With the train you cannot go, they don't give you a ticket. So I was waiting for a truck with soldiers, they should take me. Then I found a truck, he took me there.

Q: Okay.

A: And I bought something, I put it in back. Also waiting for a truck. And they were laughing, the soldiers, because I was –

Q: With all these things.

A: And ha – they could have thrown me down in the hills there. This **[indecipherable]** now. And I made it back and I – somehow it didn't go good for me. I sold it, but at very little profit, I didn't do it any more. And –

Q: **Speculatzia**(ph).

A: **Speculatzia**(ph), and I had to find other way – you – one thing was good there.

Q: What?

A: The fruit was very good. When it came September, the grapes were so big, we took one grape – was cold in the morning because in the – that kind of weather, you know, in the morning is cool. And the evening – the evening is cool, and the middle

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of day is very hot. You took a grape, it was – you felt like you – you in seven heaven.

Q: So it cools your body.

A: Your body, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And this kept you, you know. And also, the people knew me already, where I lived. One side Arabs, the other side Arabs. They knew me special because I – I didn't deal with the others which they –

Q: When you say Arabs, do you mean Muslim?

A: Muslim.

Q: So they may not have been Arabs, but they were Muslims.

A: Muslims, yes.

Q: Okay. And – and so, there were that – you lived in this place where there were these other young men who were selling the matches, you know, you show – explained to me earlier.

A: Yeah, there was people, which still lived there –

Q: Okay.

A: – and they knew all kinds of tricks, how to make it. And there were bad people which they did wrong thing, I se – I told you before.

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Q: That's right.

A: They tried to cheat the Arab, whatever it was. But when you live long in one place, they knew you already.

Q: Yeah.

A: Some of them. Like I had the elder man, who used to go not far from me, every morning for a walk, clean, spotless. And how he greet me?

Q: How did he greet you?

A: **[Speaks foreign language]**

Q: Tell me what that means.

A: How are you, how are your family, how are things going?

Q: Very nicely.

A: Yeah, it was, I mean. And I also found a man, a very rich man, and he, in the bazaar, he made sweet things from eggs, and yellow things, and every s – everything something. And with pita bread that he so – used to sell this in the morning. And he was a businessman, and I talked to him all the time. I said to him, can I buy from you – can you find for me, I want to buy flour. I thought to myself, it's gonna be a year which I won't be able to do nothing, let me buy for the winter, flour. He said, don't worry, I'll let you know. He was older, of course. And then one day he tells me yes, I give you just about 15 pounds, something like this. Told me

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where to go, and how and when – what time to come. So I went. Was – was co – was a garden, some kind of the – whatever that was, I don't know. Nobody saw us, I mean, there was – and I come in, there's a table with eight Arabs – eight –

Q: Muslims.

A: – Muslims, and he, and me. When I came here – you have to be very nice, you have to **Salaam Alaikum [indecipherable]** and he tells me, **uter(ph)**. Sit down. And start talking, and they start talking against the Russians. I said please, don't talk about the Russians because if there – somebody find out what they're gonna – we're gonna get killed, all of us. Oh, they were so happy, and trust me, and – I'm just saying, you had to be everything **[indecipherable]** and he sold me this flours, and I went away. Then I saw him again, and there was a – a neighbor which her son killed a lot of Germans, was in military. So the government gave him medals, and a big party for him. They invited me. And I still remember what I ate. Was rice with – rice with – with l-lamb.

Q: **Plova(ph)? Ploff(ph)**.

A: **Pl-Plo** – yeah, **pl-paloff(ph)**. **Paloff(ph)** something –

Q: **Ploff(ph)**.

A: **Paloff(ph)**, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

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A: And I never ate this in my life, and with the hands, of course, you – such a good thing –

Q: Tasty.

A: So tasty it was unbelievable. Then the next woman, the husband had to go away for something, she wanted I should sleep outside there, by her. She had three daughters, or something.

Q: She wanted protection.

A: That's what it is, yeah. If they killed, they should kill me first.

Q: What a comforting thought.

A: Anyway, they had confidence in me, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: When I was there they looked at me completely different. You get – then came 1945, the war was over.

Q: Do you remember the day the war was over?

A: I think was May fifth, or whatever it is.

Q: Where you were, it was May eighth.

A: Yeah, I was there.

Q: Okay.

A: It was a whole celebration in the city. At that time, somebody knew my father.

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Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: Who would have –

A: From there, from there.

Q: From –

A: From the couple days which we lived.

Q: You mean, in **Jizzakh**?

A: In **Jizzakh**, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And he had apartment – he lived by a woman, and he didn't want ana – the people to know that he – they thought he is married, he is not married. He was a older man. But he wanted the protection, th-that she is actually a – not his.

Q: Okay.

A: He says, you gonna live with me. So things opened up a little for me, there was somebody – he was protecting me. In the morning, he made me breakfast.

Q: Probably the first time since –

A: Yeah, since I never saw this. I was completely different already. I have somebody. Very protective.

Q: So, he was like a father to you.

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A: Yeah. There was a girl which – a friend of mine got married to her sister, she wanted to get married to me, to be able to go out from **Russia**. He said no, you're not going to the – for no money world, I wouldn't let you, you're too young, no. And I remember so we did this [indecipherable] this three [indecipherable] went to celebration. And when we went home, I start – I cried. One of them says, why are you crying? War is over. I said yes, the war is over, but we lost. What is over? What is over, I said. I lost everybody here, what is over? We didn't win the war. We win, but –

Q: Yeah, I know. And how did they take it when you said that?

A: They calm down, they calm down. Somehow in me, was [indecipherable] what was it?

Q: Yeah.

A: We lost it. About three months later, somebody tells me there's a store here – the first time I saw this – they're selling bread. How much you want? I said, what? He says yes, they're selling bread. I never saw this, in all these years I never saw this.

Q: You never saw a bakery selling bread?

A: No, never saw it. Imagine, all the time. I walked over, I go in. Yes, everything bread, full of bread. It's from – it's made from a vegetable also. Anyways, it's mixed. And I walked out. I walked out, I was so shocked, I walked out. And it was

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waiting outside [**indecipherable**] to myself, I cannot imagine seeing so much bread in my life. Was something new.

Q: Wow.

A: And I was through, I bought a bread there, yeah.

Q: Pardon?

A: I bought a bread with something.

Q: Of course.

A: In that time already, bread was there. This was already end, in the beginning '46.

Q: Okay.

A: And in April, I think, something like this, I got permission to go to **Poland**.

Q: Well this is interesting, I wanted to find out how does that happen? You had your papers that let you leave the camp.

A: Yes.

Q: Up in the sa – up in the north.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you maintain and keep those same papers with you all the time?

A: No, no. Papers are worthless. Got new papers.

Q: So how do you prove that you're from **Poland**?

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A: They di – they knew all of the thing. They knew this is Polish people, because they came from there, from **[indecipherable]** or whatever it is there, you know.

You can let them go to **Poland**. And I know the reason also why.

Q: Why?

A: Because in **Poland**, there was s – was selections – elections.

Q: Okay.

A: So the Russian wanted us to be in **Poland** because the Polish people were not communists. A lot of them were not communists.

Q: Yes.

A: And they felt that these people will come there, to the – they can do something –

Q: To help with the elections.

A: Exactly.

Q: That is, your experience in the **Soviet Union** –

A: Exper – this experience – this experience, this is – I know a hundred percent.

Q: Okay.

A: Because I voted twice.

Q: Did you?

A: Yeah. Why?

Q: Okay, tell me why.

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A: When we came to **Poland** –

Q: Okay.

A: – first of all, I came befo – to a city, **Rzeszów**.

Q: Okay.

A: And then I had to take the bus to go **Kolbuszowa**.

Q: Did you know about the genocide?

A: What genocides, for what?

Q: Of the Jews.

A: No. We knew already later, much later, not so much.

Q: Okay.

A: We knew it's not good.

Q: Okay.

A: So I c – in **Rzeszów**, I went down, and the train was still standing, and I take my valise, say goodbye to the friends. And as I walked down, there's a man there. He says, where you going? I says, I was born in **Poland**, in **Kolbuszowa**, I left my mother and two sisters, would like to see her. He said no go – don't go. I said, why shouldn't I go? I couldn't understand this. They're going to kill you. I said, what are you talking about? I don't know who that man is. They're gonna kill you. I took the – do me a favor, he says, put down back the valise, go to **Kraków**. The train goes to

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Kraków, there's offices there. You write in your name, where you are, and somebody from your city, or somebody which knows you, will tell you exactly what's what.

Q: Did you do that?

A: Yes. Three people came up from my city.

Q: Really?

A: [**indecipherable**] people yeah, were saved.

Q: Jewish people.

A: Jewish people. And they said, nobody – everybody was killed.

Q: So this is the first time you hear.

A: I say – repeat again [**indecipherable**] said, nobody there, and the man which told you to go did the right thing. If not, they would have kill you.

Q: Why?

A: Because they didn't wanted to talk to that the Jews are all communists, they don't want communists. They took off Russian soldiers also, and killed them. Took the valise and went there. Anyway, I come there –

Q: This is **Kraków**?

A: This is **Kraków**. Was organization, something which –

Q: Jewish organization?

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A: Jewish organization. And they gave us food, where to sleep. At the same time, we have to learn how to shoot here. The government gave us rifles, grenades, machine guns. Polish government.

Q: But – but supported by **Moscow**.

A: Of course, the communists. And I wa – at that time I was in **Poland**, there was a pogrom, **Kielce** pogrom. They killed 53 people.

Q: Yeah.

A: I couldn't wait to get out of **Poland**.

Q: Did you ever go to **Kolbuszowa**?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: Just in 1904 – 2004, I went.

Q: 2004.

A: Anyway, was terrible, we have to watch kids, two, three years old, they shouldn't kill them. It was terrible thing. This is after the war, '46. Then I was there about two months or three – yes, I – I forgot to tell you that, I said to myself, I'll go to **Poland**, I have no money. How will I exist? So I bought myself every – as a **[indecipherable]** that every man smokes. I bought a very big box of tobacco, and I sold it on the tr – I mean, came – the **Polack** came to the train to buy things from us

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[**indecipherable**]. They gave me such a price, I – but I didn't know th-the – the **zloty** is worthless, I mean. But I had something, a couple **zlotys**. And a couple months later, we left po – **Poland**.

Q: But it's still – I want to stop by the moment when those three people from **Kolbuszowa** –

A: Yes.

Q: – talked to you. Did you know them before the war?

A: Oh, sure.

Q: Okay, so you knew them.

A: Was a small city.

Q: Okay.

A: They knew my family.

Q: Did they know details of what had happened to your mother and sisters?

A: Sure, sure.

Q: And they shared those with you?

A: They were bel – killed in **Belzec**.

Q: In **Belzec**?

A: **Belzec**.

Q: **Belzec**.

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A: Yeah, we have a picture. Over there they bring in the people, they took in – they gassed them right away, and killed them right away.

Q: Do you know what year they were killed?

A: It was the beginning of '42, I think.

Q: So all those years you had been carrying their picture, and that's when you realized that they were already gone.

A: This was the worst of my time. This was the end of me.

Q: That's what I – I mean, I can't imagine how that was.

A: It was something which couple people took their own lives.

Q: Did you think of doing that?

A: Yes. Was sitting like this, this was already in **Italy**, I went through th – everything up until – wanted to go to **Israel** that time, took us still to – what was this name, it's **Cy-Cyprus** that time. I didn't want [**indecipherable**] uncles write me, you have to come here. And so I sat like this and drink, smoked already. Who's gonna be with me? Nobody knows me. I have nobody left. What do you do?

Already you got food now, but in the – if you think what's gonna be with you, what are you gonna do? I sit on the steps like this –

Q: In **Italy**.

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A: – in **Italy**, yeah, in a camp, a DP camp, **Milano** DP camp. I see a man, walks out from the barrack. He has a brown bag under his arm, tiny man. I said, every day, eight o'clock exactly, he walks out. Because you could walk in [**indecipherable**] because there was nobody. I walk over to him, I said to him, you'll excuse me, but I'm have to ask you something: where you going every day? He had a wife and a kid. He was about 44 or 45 years old. I work, he says. You work? What kind of work do you do? I am a **kürschner**.

Q: What's that?

A: A furrier.

Q: A furrier?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And I knew the **kürschner** because my father, even home in **Kolbuszowa** made a couple things, you know, for the women –

Q: Okay.

A: – these things with the –

Q: With fur.

A: Furrier.

Q: Okay.

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A: The [indecipherable] was it. A furrier, I said. I opened up my eyes, I says, can you ask them they can use a boy to learn the trade? But one thing, tell them no pay. He says, what? I said, no pay. Remember what I'm telling you. If you want to do me a favor, just tell them this: there's a boy who wants to learn the trade, and tell them he doesn't want to get paid, he just wants to learn. Okay, okay, he said. Next day he says, come on boy, let's go. I go to **Milan**, to the city. Takes me up there; two partners, Jewish. They went through the war also, but they were furriers before the war. One had a wife and two kids, which the Germans killed, and he got married again in **Warsaw**. When he came back he was in **Stalingrad**, and he was a soldier. One was hidden somewhere, I don't know exactly where. There were about six people working, and a lot of people outside. I introduce myself. He said – they said, okay, you can stay, learn. They give me to stretch with the hand, the paws. That was not skins, you know, because after the war, everything was good. And they loved fur, the Italians. They knew exactly where they went, because before the war, **Italy** was the best place to make furs and sell it.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. Not **Paris**.

Q: **Milan**.

A: **Italy**.

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Q: And why did you insist on no pay?

A: Because if – anybody can come and say, find me a job. I said no pay, this way they have nothing to lose. They have nothing to lose, and I have only to gain, because I want to step in in my foot there first.

Q: And the d – at the DP camp, you were getting food?

A: Yes.

Q: So you didn't need food.

A: Need – exactly.

Q: Okay.

A: So I said no pay, and I told them a hundred times, no pay. Because this way they don't lose nothing to take me in. It no good, you can go.

Q: Okay, so they took you in.

A: They took me in. And I told them who I am, and what I went through and everything. They knew all these things because they were in the war anyway, also. And I learned stretching, and I wanted to learn, and I had a good eye. And stretching, and **[indecipherable]** you know stretching out through the whole body, with the whole thing, learned it. I worked about three months. I go over to the boss, I'm gonna quit here. He says, what? I'm gonna quit. What do you mean quit? What did we do to you? They liked me. What do you do? Didn't do nothing, I said. I will

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not stay and make only paws and stretching paws, this is nothing. You can take a boy from the street. I did my job. I want to learn the trade, I said. If you want me, tell me go to the table, mat – start matching with the other one. If not, forget about me. You have to defend yourself.

Q: Well, there's power in no pay, you know.

A: No, but he paid me anyway.

Q: Ah, okay.

A: No, if somebody wants you, he'll pay you. **[indecipherable]**

Q: That's right.

A: The pay was just to step in.

Q: Right.

A: And I start, and I was good in it, matching. And I helped out there other things, sewing, this, that. And I saw it's a business, and they're waiting in line for this, for the finished goods. Cause they sold it to people, which went to the furrier, selling –

Q: So skins? You were –

A: Not skins, it was make a plate, like this. Like this table.

Q: Okay. Okay, you make a plate.

A: And this was the back –

Q: Okay.

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A: – and then two sleeves attached to it –

Q: Okay.

A: – also like this square. And this they sold to the furrier, and they cut out the pattern which they had to do it.

Q: Okay.

A: So I was working there a year – no, before that, my camp went away from **Milan**, to the south. What do I do now? Anyway, I didn't give up. I went to the south, I checked in everything. I went in the office, I saw a man there working. I said to him, listen, I belong here now, you see. You can take every food they give you, everything you can take for yourself, and I'll give you the couple of liras also. But I want to be registered here. And I have to go back to **Milan** and work. So, was good.

Q: So – so they – you – and why did you want to be registered there?

A: Because I had to have a home, somewhere I belong.

Q: Okay.

A: Because I had – I didn't have no documents, again, no documents.

Q: No refugee documents, nothing?

A: No, nothing. Yes, I had something – nothing. So, he agreed, of course, he agreed for it, he didn't care.

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Q: He got all the – he got all your rations.

A: He – yeah, take everything, I said, everything, I don't care. [indecipherable]

Took 22 hours to go to the south and go on back. Anyway, I came back, I have to sleep somewhere. How do I get somewhere to sleep? So they both had a place where he ha – he's – used to live there, he's gonna talk to the lady there. He said, okay, we can give him a cellar to sleep, and I said, it's okay, but the only thing is, I need not to be registered.

Q: So they have registration in – in **Italy**?

A: Yeah, sure, they have to register.

Q: Okay.

A: You had to register. She said okay. It was a – a mother, a daughter and a son. He was a lawyer. And I went back to work. And one day, she comes up to where – the police was there with them. They want to know – you – you are not register – I registered you, she says. I couldn't hold you without registration. She tells me the true now. And people, when I went out from the cellar, they saw me washing in the winter outside, with cold water, which is, I guess something happened there. I couldn't go back any more to sleep there. I had to find another place to sleep.

Q: I don't understand this. Is it that it was not legal for you to work in – in **Milan**?

A: First of all, it was not legal to work.

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Q: Okay.

A: And a man has to be registered where he lives.

Q: Okay. And you were registered down south, at the DP camp.

A: DP camp, yeah, right.

Q: Okay.

A: Had to have some kind of home, somewhere where – where I belong.

Q: Okay. But you couldn't ha – be – you couldn't register down south and then legally register up north?

A: No, they – they – first of all, what are you doing?

Q: Okay.

A: Where do you belong?

Q: Okay.

A: This is after the war. And after the war, you know what they did, the Italians? They used to surround a café, came in, **documente**(ph), **prego**. Wanted to see your documents from you. Consider not having a cup of coffee. They knew where to go.

Q: Okay. So it was not legal for you to work, as a DP, you weren't allowed.

A: No, I was not allowed.

Q: I see, okay.

A: And I had no permission for nothing.

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Q: Okay.

A: So w-we found another place, and was good, she knew, was paid off, and was good, and – and I came back to work. And one day my boss tells me, he was very good in making the furs curly. They call it **riccio**.

Q: **Riccio**.

A: Yeah, **riccio** is curly. It looked like a skin, had the run like a skin, the hair, in small pieces, you have to realize, very small pieces. And he says to me, **Arie** – I was already like home there, I used to eat with him [**indecipherable**] everything. He says to me, I made the backs, but I didn't make the sleeves, and people are waiting in line here. What am I going doing? I'm the only one that can cut this. How will I do that, he said. I said – I called him **Yashi**(ph) already, his first name, **Yashi**(ph), I said, let me make a pair of sleeves. You? Yes, me, me. This man is staying 20 years here, my partner? H-He can make it, but it's not – you, after a year and a quarter, you want to make sleeves? You don't lose nothing, I said to him. If I make it, if it's not good, you fix it up. You turn around, make a hole here, here and fix it up different, you don't lose nothing. And he thinks, he thinks, he thinks already very far. And he says to me, okay, try. Okay. Brings me over the goods. And I say to myself, here I have a chance. I'll do everything I can, the sleeves have to be good. Of course, he had to be like a puzzle. Why like a puzzle? Here had to be

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the right [**indecipherable**] in the front. In the side, not such a good merchandise, because you don't see under the sleeves. And here it had to be [**indecipherable**] hair, because went down. But has to good – look good. A puzzle, two puzzle.

Q: So, in other words, you're taking little pieces of fur, and you're sewing them together –

A: No, I'm not sewing them.

Q: Oh.

A: I'm just putting in – under, like this piece of paper –

Q: Like a – like on here, like a plate?

A: Here, yeah, exactly. And I have to this – this size, let's say. And – and give it to sew it up. Cause – cause – cause I put it, the hair down, and the leather up.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: You had to remember every piece you put in there.

Q: Yeah, you ha – because how could see the hair that's down?

A: Yeah. And has to cover, and has to [**indecipherable**] the hide, and everything.

Was not just like this, that's a – was a puzzle. And when I finished it, he looked at it for 15 minutes. He said, I cannot believe my eyes, what I see here. They gave me only this to work. I was the maestro **Milan**. People were waiting downstairs for me after work, please come to me. They found out that I can do these things. I said, I

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am not going to nobody, because they gave me the chance, and I'm not going for no money in the world. I can go for hour, for two, but forget about – they thought they going take me in, forget about it. And one day my boss, he was not a citizen, a Italian citizen. So somebody calls him, says to him, **Yasha**(ph), you can [indecipherable] very well. I knew the people also. He had only permission to work, my boss, cause over there citizens don't go – they don't give out citizens just like this. **Sojourn**(ph), they give him, **sojourn**(ph) or something. Permission to work, whatever it is, in business, but oh no, I can make you a citizen if you give me **Arie** for three weeks.

Q: Oh my goodness. Did he?

A: In the beginning he said no. Then, he needed it. So he said to him, I'll give you **Arie**, but I come with **Arie**. The boss goes with me.

Q: What was his name, by the way?

A: **Rum** – **Rumelt**(ph).

Q: **Rumelt**(ph)?

A: Yes.

Q: And the name of the company that he had in **Milan**?

A: That was **Rumelt**(ph) until –

Q: **Rumelt**(ph).

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A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, **Rumelt**(ph). And by this time you're no longer **Laib**(ph), you're **Arie**.

A: **Arie**, yeah.

Q: When did become **Arie**?

A: As soon as I came to **Poland**.

Q: Okay. And why?

A: I felt a Hebrew name, and **Laib**(ph), you know.

Q: You wanted a Hebrew name rather than a Yiddish name, is that it?

A: Yeah, something like this, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Was **Arie** also there because this the same name [**indecipherable**] So I chose this. So that's –

Q: So the boss comes with you?

A: The boss came with me. Imagine. And this was **Milano** for me, mi – **Milano** was a city. They said, if you cannot make it in **Italy** – in **Milano**, you cannot make it nowhere. You have no idea what kind of business this was.

Q: No, I don't. But it sounds fascinating.

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A: I wa – I was there, I wa – I thought I'm **plotzing** there. I never saw something like it, people and money. And how many? Ten here, 10 – five – 10. And he worked all year round. All year round.

Q: And to think only a few years ago, you were scrounging for a potato, you know?

A: Yes.

Q: Now were – did you have any thought at that time of where should you stay, where should you go, should you stay in **Italy**, should you leave **Italy**?

A: I was so hungry for family, and I had in **America**, my father's side, and my mother's side. I was 20 years old, or 21 years old, whatever it was. I needed family. I didn't think so far. And there was another thing, somebody came to sell goods, you know, the real goods to them. They saw me working, said, if you come to **America**, I'll give you job. I said yes [**indecipherable**] Anyway, I went to **America**. I came here January 26, 1950.

Q: January 26, 1950.

A: I was dressed elegant. Why? I'll tell you why. In **Italy** – I don't know, all over **Europe**, I don't know, but in **Italy** –

Q: People dress nicely.

A: Not this. You couldn't go in a store, buying a suit. Everything was handmade. They used to come up to the factory where I was working, people which sold

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material, and they knew who to give it to make. And a suit took about five weeks, six weeks to make. Elegant. And – and I came here, I couldn't sleep all night. I dressed myself – I dressed myself for winter. I came here, there was 70 degrees. I was sweating. It was unbelievable, and I haven't got even a night's sleep, they took me to **HIAS**, where also a camp where there's 30 people in a room.

Q: Weren't your relatives supposed to come pick you up?

A: They pick me up, they coo – took me to **Macy's**, they took me to big stores, and took me to the stock market, and [indecipherable] me in the – the – over there, in **Lafayette**(ph).

Q: In haffa – in **HIAS**, then.

A: In **HIAS**, yeah.

Q: And **HIAS** is the Hebrew Immigrant Aid assoc – yeah.

A: Yeah, aid, yeah.

Q: Okay, so they didn't take you at home?

A: No. So was one Friday night, or the first Friday night, they invited me to **Brooklyn**, because they all – they lived in **Brooklyn**. The mother's side lived in **New York**. And the whole family came to look at me up. Gold watch, a suit. They didn't have this on the – combed, young. I have a picture there. What does [indecipherable] So one man says – uncle – one may calls me in the side, he says

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to me, **Arie**, you need money? No, I said, I don't need money. You know, it would be good if you go to school. My head was not to go to school after this whole thing. My head was not going – I went to school. A couple of words that took me a week, two weeks, I didn't had the – the patience to do these things. And I had the partner which came with me, he knew me from **Italy**. He was in the ge – in the English army. He was 10 – 15 years older, he wa – he – everything in **Italy** came with a new suit – up the – all of a sudden I hear that I am going to it – to **America**, he says, I am going too. He tells me he is going too. Why are you going, are you going? I said, you don't know me even. You live here like a king. Where are you going? You going, I'm going. He gave me food, he wanted to give me for a ticket paid, with a regular boat. I said, where will I take this kind of money to give you back? It was 250 dollars that time, in 1950.

Q: Did you come over on DP, on a quota?

A: Yeah, yeah. He was right, I should have gone that time. Took me to **Germany**, and took two weeks, three weeks there. Was terrible. For me was terrible.

Q: Why?

A: I didn't saw a German. I couldn't see – look at their faces, what they did, the people. I hated them so much. If they would give me atomic bomb, I would go with them, throw me down with them. This the true. I didn't care.

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Q: Did that ever change?

A: It was always change. I would never take a person, and kill him. But if it would come to something like this, they should pay for it, what they did. They killed so many people. And what way they killed those people, gassed them. Imagine, take my mother and two sisters gas chambers, as soon as they come in? And I – everybody's out. How do you live with you – I live all of my life like this. That's still mine. I don't go through just like this.

Q: No.

A: It's with me.

Q: Yeah.

A: Six months later I was for myself already in **Italy** – in **Italy** – in – in **America**. I went through which I'd worked – I'd worked in **Milano**. It's not the same. Here it wasn't good this – which I worked. Here was different, and I said to myself, I don't care what I deal with, that's – I became a dealer. And I said, I don't care what I deal for, as long I can make a living. People were only Persian. I went – bought everything which I could make a living. And I was very good.

Q: So you weren't a fo – you weren't a furrier here?

A: No, I was a dealer.

Q: Okay.

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A: Just after six months. So my partner went to – with somebody else. He says, if you wait til the end of the year, I'll go with you in partnership. I said, he's supposed to go with me in partnership. He went there, he said, I wanted to learn the trade, how that goes. So he took a man which never made a living. And I said to him, my par – my partner, I said, **Benno**(ph), I'm going for myself. If you want to come to me, you can come, but I don't care what you do. And I became a dealer myself.

Q: What are some of the things you dealt in?

A: Everything.

Q: Okay, what does everything mean?

A: Beavers, Persians, raccoons, everything –

Q: Fox.

A: Fox. Everything which –

Q: Okay, so all furs, you became a dealer in furs.

A: Yeah.

Q: I see. I see.

A: People were – that dealt with Persian, they didn't – they take something else. I said, I don't care what it is.

Q: Okay.

A: And I dealt with everything.

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Q: And what about family? You said you needed family. Did you find family?

A: Yeah, I wanted to tell you that that night which – Friday, which I was there, in the evening, so there was a aunt of mine, my father's sister, and she was married. And it was 12 o'clock at night. One uncle says, I'll take him to **New York** back. She says, give it to him – give him the – he should come to my house. No, no, he insisted that I shall go back, because I have to see – next day is a – she insisted, why are you taking him back? I want him. Anyway, I had to go. And that's it. That's the story. I got married in '52.

Q: And your wife –

A: She was from **Belgium**.

Q: From **Belgium**.

A: She was also a refugee, but her father spoke a good English, and he was a – a cutter in diamonds. And somebody in **Canada** wanted to make a factory they should have cutting diamonds, to teach. So they choose him, he was in **Portugal**. They went to run away from **Belgium**. And they took him to **Canada** to teach. They stayed in **Canada** til 1945, then they came here.

Q: I see.

A: Then I met my wife in –

Q: What was her name?

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A: **Sylvia**. I have it here, the picture, it's just there.

Q: We – we-we'll show in a minute.

A: Yeah.

Q: And her maiden name?

A: **Lederberger**(ph).

Q: **Lederberger**(ph).

A: **Sylvia Lederberger**(ph).

Q: **Sylvia Lederberger**(ph). You said that you did go back to **Kolbuszowa** –

A: Yes.

Q: – in 2004.

A: Yes.

Q: What did you find when you got there?

A: Not good things.

Q: No?

A: There was a special place where – from **Kolbuszowa**, from the – all the places over there. They buried them, th-th-th – they buried the – just the bones, or something there. And it was a small written up there that there was a concentration camp, it was six to eight thou – eight – eight – eight hundred thou – 800,000 people died, or something, in six months.

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Q: In **Kolbuszowa**?

A: Not in **Kolbuszowa**, **Belzec**.

Q: In **Belzec**, okay.

A: And I said, let me go there, at least. So I had the chance to go, I went there.

Didn't see nothing, just this – was stones written up, here's from **Kolbuszowa**, all the cities, which where all the people got killed.

Q: Yeah.

A: And they made a – a museum there. And they came from all over, the Pope sent a recommendation, there was Israeli soldiers with the Torah; they was there. And Polish soldiers, and a German ambassador. It was full of people there, full. And they said Kaddish, you know, I don't know if you know Kaddish. I couldn't say it, I was choked up. And I saw when I went with the bus, there were kids outside, and they show [**makes slashing motion across neck**]

Q: Still?

A: These kids never saw a Jew.

Q: Oh dear. Oh dear.

A: It was hard in **America** to make a living, to make yourself a name, and to have money to [**indecipherable**] which I [**indecipherable**] I overpaid, but I was so good in it, I did 10 percent which I overpaid, I made [**indecipherable**] and I worked

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myself in assortments. So I went through the same thing, and people saw me in completely different. They used to watch me how I work. Assortments.

Q: I want to ask something about, now that we've kind of come to – close to the end.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you, when you were a boy, you went to synagogue, you were – came from a religious family.

A: Right.

Q: Did you ever lose your faith?

A: Yes. I knew you gonna ask me this. It's normal. It's a good question. I lost it.

Q: Where?

A: Here in the **United States**. Over there it didn't go anyway, these all places, it came to the **United States** also. I never, let's say when I went to work on Saturdays, and I saw people going to – to synagogue, and I [**indecipherable**] that I used to smoke. Never smoked [**indecipherable**] I had to go – take a bus. I went to the bus – I never was somebody which pushed it away, but the same time I didn't believe in nothing because there's nothing to believe. Cause if you go through it, God can make a mistake once – even not once, because God is everywhere. When he saw this whole thing going for six years, or more, where was he? But I had things which

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– which a normal person doesn't do. I could be in business, and I know I'm doing the wrong thing. I did it anyway. What I mean is, I came once, I don't know if I shall tell this story or not. A man, he came from **Jizzakh**, in the section over there, he was born there, a Jew. Big family, Russian. And I spoke to him once in my life. I don't know, he – his name til today. And he ask me to lend him 5,000 dollars. I don't know your name, you – why are you coming to me to ask me? Go to the bank. He wants to give me 500 dollars in t – for three weeks, four weeks. Why? I'm not there in this kind of business, I said to him. There were two people, I had another man with me [**indecipherable**] deal. He knew him, he run away right away right away, and holds my hand to – and holds me like this, and I sit down the front, on 34th Street, you know, I sit there. And the father is about 20 feet from – his father. A Russian Jew, with the moustache and with the – he doesn't let me go. And I say to myself, what does he want from me? I don't know him. The man runs away, which dealt with him. What is this all about? But he doesn't let go. I give you 700 dollars for it, for three weeks, for a month. I said, I'm not in this business. Back and forth, back and forth. The father stays on the side. I tell him, listen, if you don't tell me my na – what you need it for, you're not getting a penny, I said. If you tell me what you need it for – because I thought maybe somebody kidnapped somebody, whatever it was. Because he was so insistent, eyes like this. Young, 32 years old.

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I'll tell you, he says. What do you need this money, I said. It's not that I don't need – I need the money, he says. I haven't got the money now, people owe me the money, and I need now money because there's going to be an auction of old machinery, what he uses. He was a dresser. Fur has to be dressed. If I can buy, doesn't mean nothing to me, the 5,000 dollars, th-th-the 500 dollars or the 700 dollars. So since he came up with something like this, I could understand, because is auction, 9:30, or whatever it was, the time, and they don't take checks.

Q: It's cash.

A: Cash, yeah. So I say to him, okay, you gonna get it. His face lighten up. And I said twa – to him, with one condition. Condition? Steps up, gets wild. I said, take it easy. One condition. What's the condition, he says. I don't want no interest from you. I don't want no money from you. I'll give you the loan, but no interest, if you want to. You agree? He says, course I agree. Not finished with him. Just want to bring you out for [indecipherable] By 12 o'clock, he is in my store. What's the matter **Ronnie**(ph)? I knew it was – his first name, the other. I didn't buy. Why? This was not for me. I told you he's gonna give me the money. Gives me two and a half thousand, and he holds back. Two and a half thousand, I'll give you in 30 days. Bartered me a little bit, but I said to myself, if he wanted to take away, he didn't

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have to come with nothing. So I'll wait another 30 days, fine. Thirty days, he paid me, gave me back the 5,000 dollars. Nice, right?

Q: It seems that way.

A: Yeah. Was not the finished. I got a call, American company, a big company, they were in **Newark**. They used for – for – material, make hats, beaver hats, whatever it is. I want to show you something, could you come over? Because I used to deal with them also, I used to sell them beavers pieces [**indecipherable**]. I said, okay, come. He is taking – picks me up at the station, shows me a sample, a beaver skin. Damaged [**indecipherable**] beaver skin, and this bleached, the hair, not the leather.

Q: They bleached the hair?

A: Yeah, and not the leather.

Q: Not the leather.

A: Yeah, the leather is still raw.

Q: Okay.

A: This is – have to be something special. He says, I'm using only the hair, he said. They go – and I have maybe 20 - 30,000 pounds. I needed – I said ta – I said to him, when he shows me, I said to him, why do you want me to do that? You have a man, you show me a sample, it's good. So why do you want me? You're right, he says,

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you're right what you're telling me, but he makes me only 200 pounds a week, and I need thousand pounds a week. Find me somebody, he says.

Q: To bleach the hair.

A: Yeah. I go to so many people, you have no idea. One burns, one this and one that.

Q: Okay.

A: Unbelievable, unbelievable. I go to a man which he knows me, which I used to give him skins to dress, whatever. He says to me, **Arie**, you know what you want? Did you ever see a woman half pregnant? That's what you want. It's not dressed, it's not **[indecipherable]** what do you want? Okay, take it easy, I said. I was disappointed, it was going on this for five weeks, six weeks. My wife said already, leave it alone, what are you doing to yourself? I have a feeling something, I said, I have to – as I go out this door, the Russian goes by, I catch him by his hand, take him in this door. Sure **[indecipherable]** and I tell him what I need. He never did it, he said. Give me, I'll make you samples. I gave him samples. One comes in good, so I give him six to make. One is not good, but it looks, maybe. I give him again more samples. One, same thing. Call up the factory, I said, look, that's in this, this, and I showed him there. Give him 20 pounds to make.

Q: They say.

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A: They say. I said okay. I give him 20 pounds. They said, yes, this comes out not bad. It doesn't look good, but comes out good. This which I said. Give him hundred pounds. I give him hundred pounds, the same thing.

Q: Not bad, not good.

A: It's good.

Q: It's good.

A: It looks bad, but this comes out good.

Q: Okay.

A: Two years I was working making money.

Q: Okay.

A: By accident. Think about this accident.

Q: The 5,000 dollars?

A: Yes. Think about it.

Q: I don't understand.

A: If I wouldn't give him the 5,000 dollars, I would never have him.

Q: Of course, of course.

A: It's just a accident by somebody's [indecipherable] cause this is not normal, you give money to somebody which you don't know.

Q: Of course. But you say it's a mistake.

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A: Was a mistake, yeah. I said to myself I wouldn't tell nobody about it, it became so good. Two years.

Q: So it wasn't a mistake.

A: That's what I mean. With normal, was a mistake. So imagine somebody sent me – like God send me in this, see. This was not normal – this is not normal to give a man which you don't know, 5,000 dollars.

Q: So did it restore your faith?

A: No, it – it came in to me [indecipherable] they say [indecipherable] something –

Q: That's right.

A: – lucky something. What is this I – other things like this happened to me.

Q: Do you believe in God now?

A: I brought up the kids with religion. I'll tell you why. Also something happened. I used to walk to the station, to the train station, it was a mile. Subway. And there was a school up the hill. People could [indecipherable] school. And I heard a language; never in my life such a dirty language. And I said to myself, my kids are going to go to this school, it's gonna be a disaster. I didn't bring them up like this. From me they never heard a dirty word. I couldn't bring up even this.

Q: I know.

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A: And what do I do? There was a yeshiva, and I told them everything. I have got no money, I just came and start business, I cannot pay you. I can give you some, but I want to tell you, I'll pay you every penny back. Take in my kids to yeshiva. And they hear there's no time to play around, because school is a different story. And they did.

Q: They took them.

A: And I didn't – I didn't – I didn't keep it, so mine daughter, the older daughter which you saw here, said Daddy, I don't understand something; explain to me. Because my – my daughters, I was like a friend, not a – yes, explain me, what is it? I go to yeshiva. Come Saturday, I go to my uncle to eat; you not home. I have a father too. Why did you give me to yeshiva? I said to her, my daughter, you're a hundred percent right. And I bought a house, you know. As soon as I moved in, I start going to shul. Don't go in Saturday to work. And that's what I did.

Q: So did – so, from this, does this mean that you –

A: It's not – I don't know. It's – it somehow – what I have inside me is something else, was outside is the – something else.

Q: Okay.

A: Because when I speak sometimes to people, to rabbis, and to [indecipherable] in **Florida**, whatever it is. **Arie**, they say to me, we have no answer what is

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[**indecipherable**]. There's no answer for this. So what I – it's me – it's me. What's outside is outside.

Q: Did you ever have the feeling that – did you ever have the feeling that some people said what you went through wasn't as bad as what your mother or your sisters would have gone through?

A: They don't have to tell me, I say myself.

Q: Okay.

A: Because it true – to take people just like this, killing them, gassing them for no reason at all? It's not a day.

Q: Yeah.

A: For years. I don't want to talk about it because when I talk about it, I cannot understand nothing.

Q: Did you tell your children about it, what you went through?

A: Oh yes, they know.

Q: They know.

A: Mostly know. I had to tell them.

Q: Did you tell the people outside your family?

A: Lately.

Q: Okay.

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A: Only lately. When I got older, that's when I got – but I have it every night – not every night [indecipherable] day, I have always in mind, those things.

Q: Do you have nightmares?

A: I [indecipherable] what happened. I cry for them. I'm old, I'm still crying.
There's no end.

Q: I'm – I am sorry.

A: I understand. But I can't help it. Something which very hard to live through.
Very hard to live through.

Q: You lost them all, yeah.

A: I could become a ga – a gangster. Nobody would know who I am. But I didn't become a gangster.

Q: No, you didn't.

A: I was different.

Q: Thank you.

A: Thank you. You've been very good.

Q: Thank you.

A: So good. I never thought that it can happen like this, to ask me the right things.

Q: I appreciate your words.

A: Was unbelievable, thank you.

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Q: You're welcome. With this, what we'll do is end the formal part of our interview, and then later you'll show a photograph and describe it.

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: So at this point, what I'll say, this concludes the interview with Mr. **Arie Letzter**

—

A: Yes.

Q: — on May 22nd, 2016.

A: Thank you very much.

Q: Thank you.

A: You were so good, that's unbelievable. Unbelievable.

Q: Okay.

A: From my left is my brother —

Q: Okay, so —

A: — **Wolf**(ph).

Q: So **Wolf**(ph) is on your left, our right.

A: Left here, right, right, exactly.

Q: Okay. And next to him?

A: Next to him is my little sister.

Q: **Gittel**(ph), was it?

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A: No, **Mindel**(ph).

Q: **Mindel**(ph), **Mindel**(ph).

A: And she was – when they killed her, she was 12 years old.

Q: Oh my. And then next to her?

A: Next to her is me.

Q: Uh-huh, I thought it was the – okay, I'm looking at the other way around then.

So from right here is **Wolf**(ph), then is **Mindel**(ph).

A: And this is **Hirsch**.

Q: This is **Hirsch**. Then it's – then this is **Wolf**(ph) –

A: That is **Wolf**(ph), yeah.

Q: I'm sorry. I know. But that's **Wolf**(ph) –

A: Yeah.

Q: – that's **Mindel**(ph), then is your mother, isn't it?

A: No, this is me.

Q: Oh, that's you? No.

A: No, you – this is – yeah, my mother, yeah.

Q: Okay, so I got confused. All right, so let's repeat all over again –

A: Yeah.

Q: – just from the beginning. Okay, so from this side –

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A: Is **Wolf**(ph) –

Q: **Wolf**(ph), **Mindel**(ph) –

A: **Mindel**(ph) –

Q: – your mother –

A: – mother, me, **Arie** –

Q: Okay.

A: – **Gittel**(ph) –

Q: **Gittel**(ph) –

A: – and **Hirsch**.

Q: – and **Hirsch**. And your mother's name was?

A: **Scheindel**(ph).

Q: **Scheindel**(ph). And tell me how – which photographs did you have with you through your whole time in the **Soviet Union**?

A: My mother.

Q: Your mother.

A: **Mindel**(ph) – no, no, that – my mother and **Gittel**(ph), and **Mindel**(ph).

Q: And **Gittel**(ph) – the three girls.

A: Yeah.

Q: The three women. So those three were – you had with you all the time.

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A: Yes.

Q: And these are – are be –

A: Pictures.

Q: Pictures.

A: Yeah, a picture. And then this I found from big pictures, which I can show you –

Q: Okay.

A: – where – which I was cut out, and people –

Q: So from relatives here?

A: People which I know from my city, which were –

Q: From **Kolbuszowa**.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Uh-huh. So that's how 50 years later, you get **Hirsch**.

A: Yes.

Q: – in there.

A: **Hirsch** was, at the end, he or she was my father's sister. And she was married and – and she was sick. She was, I don't know, in 90s, 95, something like this. And she needed help. So she took me, one day, and she says, you have to help me. I said to her, why did you pick me? You have so many nieces and this, which live here all the time with you. What do you want from me? Hardly saw you. So she says to me

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that her sister, **Gaydel**(ph), before she died, she said, if you need help – the one which wanted to take me home that time –

Q: Right.

A: – if you need help, go to **Arie**, he's gonna help you. And I used to help her, bring food every week. And one day I saw that's the end of her, she doesn't want to take a shower, she doesn't want to take this and this. And when she went to room – with me to eat, she used to take away the whole – the whole restaurant with her. I say to myself, she has to go to a home. The only thing I'm gonna do for you, I'm gonna take you to a hotel in **Long Beach**. If you like it, you'll stay. If you don't like it, you don't stay. Okay, I said, you don't have to stay there. I took her, because over there they gave you food, they took care. She didn't want to take a shower, so I took in people. Anyway, they did everything for her. And – and that's it. That's where I – and yes, they – she had apartment where she lived, she had to give it up because it was a – some kind of – you know, apartments you buy, it's not yours, or –

Q: That's right. She rented it, then.

A: – she rented it, whatever. I took in the people which work for the building. I said to them, listen, I want to clean up this whole thing here. If it's money, take it.

Everything you can take. If it's pictures, I want to see them. And I found **Hirsch** there.

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Q: That's where you found him. When did you put this picture together?

A: As soon as I had **Hirsch**.

Q: As soon as you had **Hirsch**. And the – and it's so unfortunate that your father's picture –

A: You're right, exact. My father had a big picture like me, bigger than this –

Q: Yeah.

A: – in the house.

Q: And – and he's in your memory, but he – you don't have one for here, but you have everybody else. Thank you for sharing it.

A: Thank you. Oh, you were so good, really. Thank you.

Q: You're welcome.

A: I appreciate everything what you did here.

Conclusion of Interview