

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Joseph Wardzala  
October 23, 1990  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Joseph Wardzala, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on October 23, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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**JOSEPH WARDZALA**  
**October 23, 1990**

Q: Could you please tell me your name?

A: My name is Joseph Stanley Wardzala. In English they pronounce Wardzala.

Q: Can you tell me uh where you were born and when?

A: I born October 11, 1923 in the town of Smidgnow (ph) by Tarnow (ph). This is district (ph) of Tarnow, in Poland.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents, when you were growing up?

A: Well my father was uh named uh Stanislaw (ph) and uh my mother named Maria (ph). They both have a farm, large, by...near Tarnow and uh for generations they have a house and a farm and people work on the...on on the farm for them.

Q: And you grew up on this farm?

A: I I born uh on farm and well, that place again called Smidgnow ...and uh I was the youngest of six sons. Uh my uh five brother...first was Wadislow (ph), like Walter, then Frank\_\_\_\_, like Frank, then Zigmund (ph), and Anthony and John....that's five and me, Joseph, was six. I was the youngest boy. Was uh...I come...I come latest in the fam...uh family because my uh parents marry in 1900 and uh after a couple of years all my five brothers born year after year, what you call, then there was break, a few years. Then I born 1923. Then I grow up uh place...going to school, local school. Uh first grammar school. Then went to public school. Then went to high school in Tarnow.

Q: Uh could you tell me what your religion is?

A: Uh...I don't understand...

Q: What what religion are you?

A: Oh, oh I was baptized in the church, Roman Catholic and uh I mean the church is next to our place and they call it \_\_\_\_\_, and then I was uh baptized as Roman Catholic.

Q: When you were growing up, did you go to church a lot?

A: Oh yes. When uh when I went to school...we have already \_\_\_\_ school and also prepare for first uh communion in the school and in the church uh there was tradition to go every Sunday to to church and other other different occasion, like uh Christmas, Easter...all tradition. So we...family went together to to church. Uh at uh next uh next village, you

know.

Q: When you were growing up, did you know any Jews?

A: Yes. Uh there was uh a man uh about ten houses from us, \_\_\_\_\_, and uh he was collecting the milk. Every every week he collect...uh he come to our place...I remember my mother uh gave him milk, about three or six sixty or more li...liter. The the milk was uh prepared...cultured because he have his own dish and my mother uh just uh put where he say and he take the milk in the container, about thirty liter container, you know them, on the wagon, and he had a horse and he he take to town, Tarnow, and he paid uh my mother every week for the milk.

Q: Did you help on the farm?

A: Well, I was the youngest uh so I was uh I was helping a little bit on on vacation but mostly I would study and uh mostly play with other kids after study and and I I helped what they need. I was...of course, but uh not so much because uh my father was pressing I finish school. I go...uh school...learning was more important, and I like book and I uh buy book...well, my father uh subscribe all Polish uh newspaper, magazine, and uh I I read it and also I distribute in the neighborhood the Polish uh book, because uh uh I like very much history and uh religion, so there was uh my hobby to get a book all the time.

Q: And and were your brothers always living at home while you were growing up?

A: Can I...yes...get out my notes...take off...because after a while I get better...\_\_\_\_\_

(TECHNICAL CONVERSATION - PAUSE)

A: My uh five brother...uh there was only two brother uh like younger stayed on farm and help my father, but other three...they went uh...one was in the service, professional service in Warsaw, military service. He was uh like MP. Uh he finished school...was Anthony. And uh other two brother, Wadislaw and Frank\_\_\_\_, uh have a trade of tailor, making uh dresses and they open a small dressing...dress shop and uh were and have a few, about six or eight people to work for with them and uh and they fin...make dress, men's clothes, dress, for store...for store in Tarnow. The owner of the store was uh was Jewish family and they was very very friendly with my my brothers, so so they was live only one block and uh almost like uh live together, you know, until war start.

Q: Now, now why don't we talk about that...about the war starting. Do you remember uh the time leading up to the war in 1939?

(TECHNICAL CONVERSATION - PAUSE)

A: Well, uh I was uh on vacation, 1939...home and I suppose to go back to school September. Uh everything ready and uh war start September 1st. And uh the first thing we uh I remember...the night uh they bomb uh station at Tarnow and it's only a couple mile and uh from our home. All the window was uh broke and shake, so the next uh morning find out uh were were were second \_\_\_\_\_. Hitler and his army invaded Poland and uh there was far from the uh battle, about...uh because from west Poland to where I I'm in the south...Tarnow is in the south, middle of Poland, in the south Poland...about uh about over two hundred kilometer kilometer from uh German border over...so in uh almost two weeks we see the German airplane uh go around, even shooting uh people from airplane on the on the field, all over uh on the town, but there was no much bombing uh in the Tarnow or Krackow (ph). Most of them uh was by Warsaw, where my brother was in uh...was married already and uh my brother Anthony when uh 1944 when was uprising, when the bomb was...destroyed Warsaw, his daughter, a five year old girl was killed. In uh '39 another brother in Tarnow was uh was uh when there was...the war action was shooting, my brother's six year old...he have...uh wounded, but he die after uh a couple day from the wound, when the front come through. Somehow there there was uh bullet go along and so uh he was uh hit in the house, so but uh then he have infection sometime after...he died after...it was my brother only son. Also the other brother in Warsaw...only daughter in Warsaw...she was...she died in the bomb. They don't even know where she was buried because there was...in Warsaw was uh...there was uprising in 1944 of two hundred fifty thousand people dead, all over bury on the street and it was very terrible mess.

Q: Uh can you tell me uh how your life changed once the Germans came to uh to Poland?

A: Well, uh change uh dramatically because uh I want to go to school and I couldn't go to school, so uh I study at home and I study uh with uh professor uh private privately because uh German uh take out, uh throw out professor from university, from Krackow, from \_\_\_\_ and uh send some to concentration camp and some sent to our place and uh we have to uh take care of them. Was two professor in my father's place, so we have to give them food and uh shelter, cause there was all this two men, so I have an advantage that they teach me uh during uh 1939 and during '40, because I was prepare for uh higher education, so they teach me. Then after the the German take them anyway in 1940. And there was uh first few months when German take over, was uh was quiet. Uh they put, posted all over be calm, go back to work, uh everything be OK. Then then uh everybody have to go register, have to have an have an ID card. Then after that the German advertising, uh 19...beginning of 1940, they advertising to work in Germany. Mass uh advertising that they needed...they say they have a good pay and so so but nobody want to go. Only people work in the Tarnow wherever there was industry, in the Tarnow...in some...the German opened the industry and make the people was before, but other people, they have no no work. There was no any other care uh only go to Germany to work, no other living. So some people go to underground to \_\_\_\_\_, underground...(Cough)...Excuse me...uh against uh German or they go to woods to live, hiding, and do a sabotage against German, uh start uh start uh be against uh sabotaging

and against the German...1940. But there was uh not...they was organized but it was hard because it was a cold winter and uh and uh German was powerful, have a motorized car and and motorcycle and go all over, so people escape. Go to woods and uh and that way survive. Uh and the farmer would feed them but uh that was 1940. Then they start arresting uh people. First uh they put in the city hall all the name, because they have it from ID cards, they have the name who you are and they wanted so many people uh report and go to Germany to work who have no way to live to go, uh to go by themselves. They go register because they have no way to live, like in the city have no no food or nothing so so they go...some people went and went to Germany to work. But not so many, so after they start arresting on the street uh just...Gestapo have uh on truck a dozen. Then the car stop on any of the street. Two two trucks, uh pick-up truck when it was with the Gestapo...one on the beginning of the street, on another. Stop the traffic and take all the people on the street. Uh young young young most of them...they look for them that be work for...and they put on the truck and sent to uh sent where there were examination and they sent to Germany to work for uh slave labor, forced labor labor camp in Germany, and during uh this uh 1940, the occupation, uh we have a flier that was come from England or uh or through underground all situation how is work German are and uh the people organize underground a a campaign against German, and uh all the...because a printing shop was all closed when the German take over, put people do by by uh called small, hand...uh by hand printed, so and uh we have a message what's going on from already the underground who already have. Then they print some note and we give a message to people, but if uh if they catch you, German, then uh then you sometime they kill you on the spot or send you...

Q: Were you personally involved or were any of your brothers or your your your parents involved in with what the partisans were doing or in handing out these leaflets?

A: Uh yes, my brother was involved in the Tarnow and I don't...still don't know how he got involved because there was always was secret and even never told me where he get it, how he get it...just told...he give me a few uh bundle of them and uh take down to to down where...and give people at the church, on on the village or wherever wherever he sent me, but I was uh...he give me a basket. There was a bundle of of the leaflets in a small basket like a fruit basket and on the top is hay and I put rabbits, and that's how I transport uh message, because if...excuse me...(pause)...uh that way I transferred the message in the basket with rabbits because when the when the Germans stop me on the...always was a patrol on the street...when they stop me, they look the rabbits and kick me and and I just hold it that they don't fall out...it was tight...because they don't like the rabbit. That way I went through and I was always dressed ragged uh there be...there be no suspicion that I something, you know. Also that way uh in another city, like in Tarnow, there was short on food. There was ration of food and so we, from the farm, we bring to my brother food that way uh just on the bicycle or I walk with the basket...put bread and uh salt pork and uh butter...also same way. Uh have a big basket, put on the bottom and put hay on the top and rabbits on the top, because if you have open and and uh German look uh they'll take it, so uh we transferred the food uh to to my brother and uh my

brother live in Tarnow, two of them. Neighbor was Jew, people where he was before work, before war he was work with them...also that they was still make the dress uh but for the store also, but the the Jew was uh persecuting and uh and uh buying...they can't go out. They have to have a a Star of David uh on their uh clothes and uh in Tarnow...that's beginning of 1940 and '41, so 1940. And uh my brother helped them uh with the with the food, because he also...my brother come, two of them, they come uh to my father and they transport the food to to town. Many time uh when they have a bigger amount, like potatoes or something, when uh when they got to the house, the German uh Gestapo spotted and uh they got beaten because they they know the Jew was live over there next door, so my bro...I was beaten a couple of times too, because they they saw me come out from the building where Jew was and uh somehow they know it and say are you a Jew. I say no, I have ID. So so uh they kick me, say what you do over there, you know. I say nothing, you know. Uh I I want buy some thread because I always had some little item for excuse what I what I was doing, because if you have nothing uh then then you're suspicious, so I have a little thread or some small item that uh to or even button, you know, because they have a store or or no...only small item, so that way uh that way I go away with this partisan you know...

Q: Can you tell me what happened next to you?

A: Well, then...that was 1940. I was twice arrested on the street because uh many time when I saw what's going on I...when uh was arresting...we we can see how they stop so I know which which way to run away to one one house and go outside on another street, but uh twice the the block so tight I cannot escape so I was arrested, put on the on the truck...usually the Gestapo. The Gestapo was special uh German police. They have a...on the front...they black uniform some and some they are grey uh and have a big under like a SS underneath, under Polish sign...special po...police. They have the power to kill you on the spot. You can do nothing, so uh they put on the truck, a pick-up truck, uh how many they can fitted...young people, then they go to the railway station...that was not far...and put on the wagon uh wherever was wagon. Usually was uh cattle but they usually...they don't do uh no more they usually do for concentration camp. They put on...they call third-class wagon, and lock personal (ph) and uh about a hundred people and then uh train go to Krackow and over there also we have to walk with the Gestapo to check point. Check point in the Krackow was in a big school because all school was closed. There was no no teaching during the occupation. Only...they only allowed first grade, first couple grades of public school and not not high school. There was...high school was empty. They using for transportation checkpoint, so there was hundred people and with no room to sleep or nothing. They will stand up in in each hall or class and uh have a kitchen, so they have something to eat, and they go through examination...doctor, German doctor examine each one and if alright go to next room and uh shave close all, everything, uh arm and all over, and uh put back clothes, get in and go another room and put on a train again. Another trip, you know, twenty or a hundred...it depends how many they selected and sent to Germany to work. So twice I was arrested. Twice I was...once I was shaved uh but he say you no have no...you have clean hair so you'll be alright...the barber said. Then I escaped

twice in Krackow because there was so many people so I was able to escape and my brother would know it and help me. He know what happened in Tarnow so he went uh and he helped me, so I come back home, but uh third time there was uh...it was so strictly uh tight uh guards I couldn't escape and uh then uh they send me to with other about twenty all just men...young all, not...well, healthy men...about twenty, to...uh all we traveled on the train all through Germany to a place named Hanover (ph) \_\_\_\_\_ and uh we landing in a in a place they called \_\_\_\_\_. It was industry, uh German industry that make all the war industry...hundred and sixty thousand slave work workers who was over there, and all different labor camp, all nationality and uh they put me in the one camp. It was a labor...forced forced labor camp. They call \_\_\_\_\_ and uh there was about uh a few thousand Poles in that one camp. Now we don't know each other because there was strictly to uh...we know where we come from but we was working and there was construction company. He take care, say twenty-five people are selected from the group and I was with the with the group to one construction company and and that construction company make shelter, bunker...uh shelter against air attack. Uh they make of cement a shel...shelter. Thick...about uh uh two meter...that's almost two yard thick wall and four story and uh very strong cement enforced with iron and the capacity for five thousand people, and when there was...there was prepared for war when the American and English bomb after, the bombs slide through. Nothing...because because that's two and a half meter uh cement, so almost two yards thick cement walls around and uh that...they have inside uh prepare for electricity, water, everything. They they was prepared for for long war, so I was in there camp labor, in the construction for almost...over four year, till 1945. It was terrible uh...it was hard work. Uh in the morning uh our company, the construction company, uh would have a pick-up truck, open pick-up truck, double. They come to barrack where we live and we we already was standing over there waiting for them, and we go on them. They take us to the place, about a couple mile, to make the shelter and also the construction uh company, uh German supervisor, German, but they using all the slave people like me, uh Polish, Italian, French, but Pole was uh separated uh. And also they take us sometime when there was bomb during day or night, so after bomb they take us to clean up the street but we can't touch the dead bodies of German or any object. Uh we'll get shot. We we find some dead...we have to tell them and the German take them and then we clean up the uh because it was from bomb, the destroy house was all over the street, so we have to clean the street so truck can go through, and we go back to work. Uh our regular work was uh make the shelter, bunker they call it. Uh sometime we start twelve hours a day because uh they make a hugh uh cement mixer machine motor and we fit uh with sand and cement and it was twelve hours sometime work. Some...uh six day, and after work they take us to uh to camp where we sleep. There was a barrack, wood barrack, and each uh room was about twenty uh bed, bunk bed like a wood box and was small and and a locker room so each one have a locker and we have some item, what you have items. You have a bowl, a round, half round uh bowl, metal for eat and a spoon and and uh card uh where they give you a ration card stamped so you have to take it and when they bring to camp, you go wash. You go room. Wash yourself and go in the mess (ph) room and wait for uh for the in the big kitchen and they open up the window. You give them the stamp and you get one...uh then you go another



window and you get little bread. And you eat this and after one hour you're hungry and you have nothing in the morning. In the morning you get coffee, but the coffee was made of hickory, sour like uh...something how. And lunch time nothing, only the evening. That's what uh that's what it was, day after day and uh uh the food was from beginning was a little bit more but uh 1943, '44, '45 was they cut the bread ration so was very, very hungry. Uh all the time...hunger is the worst thing for a human being.

Q: Did uh...now you say worked six days a week. What would you do on the seventh day?

A: Uh Sunday...uh sometime we have to work Sunday, but usually it was in uh we stay in the barrack. We clean. We clean up the uh...sometime...it's a big washroom, so we wash clothes. Uh but there was no no detergent, so they don't clean the \_\_\_\_\_, so...because we get uh only three months we get some clothes, like like underwear. Not regular like normal people. Just some funny uh special-make for us. You know, they would...because we wouldn't escape and go outside the camp. Beside that, when I get...uh everyone, when we get to Germany, we have a a the company take so many guys, you know, people uh men or woman, separate woman uh men separate, and every Pole like me they give us a little cloth like two, three inch square with name P and you have to put on the right uh side of your jacket, jacket and on the shirt and you have to sew yourself and you have to have all the time. If you don't have this, you get beaten very uh very strong and this was P for marked for Polish and I was one of the two million Polish citizens that was taken by force to Germany to forced labor camp and uh was all over in Germany, our people was stay over there work. Like me...I was...happened that I land in a construction company, what I say before. Uh now they call \_\_\_\_\_ worker.

Q: Was your camp guarded and were you guarded when you went to work?

A: Yes. There was...the camp was uh...there was about twen...twenty barracks. Each barracks hold about hundred people and uh wood barracks, and they was guarded. It was wire around. Not electric wire like some places, but there was guards. You can't get out. Uh when you get out, uh where you going to go? You you have no...you have a funny clothes. You have work clothes and the clothes is not uh normal clothes. Is uh special make like uh color brown or in other ways they recognize you you not German, and because they was in in was Germany, and uh besides that, you have to have uh the P on the right side of your jacket, so you you you...when you go out...some...sometime we have to ask permission go out uh repair the shoe, uh to get shoemaker uh or or buy the shoe, so uh you have to walk on the right side of the street and you you can't go in a store where food is. They won't allow you. That's why we have to have the P. When the the...you cannot you cannot escape. What people try escape that change...the the finer clothes, you know, but uh they're they're finer, because they was in in Germany. They was not in Poland. That's...

Q: Did you have any contacts...when you were on a construction site, did you have any contact with Germans who weren't guards, just the ordinary people on the streets?

A: Uh, well uh in uh when we was working, there was so many uh people, Poles and other nationality, Italian, French, and the...we don't talk much because uh German was like bosses and watchmen...was few watchmen with uh with weapons that you don't escape, and uh we we just have...we can't talk uh much. If you talk right away they see you and uh you get you get hit, so uh we we just have to uh work. We talk to each other very low...we we talked...we Polish...yeah, but not not hear, the German hear. And they always uh they watch us what we do good job and if we do something wrong, then you get uh you get very bad beaten with the shovel or with the rifle. Sometime...uh one day I have to bring uh cement from uh uh train...the two guy take it, a bag of cement and put on your shoulder and you go to the to storage. You have to run. Uh when it was rained, it was mess. Then if the bag of cement break then you get beaten, so...it is not your fault but you have to be careful, so they they was very strictly about uh sabotage. We couldn't do sabotage in in Germany, because uh even if you try, it cost your life and was not in Poland it was...yeah, it was different. It was organized and it was underground but here was uh constantly watched by by Germans.

Q: Was there a lot of illness?

A: Oh yes. Uh yes. Well, uh we don't know what uh what kind of sickness...uh was cold. Mostly everybody have a cold and others...and TB...then after we find out, after liberation we find out that half of them have the TB. Then they went to Poland. I don't have it, TB, but uh tuberculosis, because there was a bad hunger and bad weather conditions and work with water (ph)...I have a still...now I have arthritis all over because I was for the so many days in the water where we was also do something, broken water pipe...we had to stay in up to here in in winter time in water and fix it, so there was a a bad condition but many of oldest...I remember, oldest uh Polish workers, slave worker...they couldn't work so we helped them. We had to work double to help them to survive. When he when he pass out, he faint, we have to take him on a truck to take him out. We never know afterward what happened to him. We never find out. That's what we...they told us...when you will fall out, you you fall out. You don't come back.

Q: Were there any uh guards uh or Germans at the constructions sites who were sympathetic and who who tried to help you and were on your side?

A: Oh yes, some. Some German...yes. Some uh some German...what they have a lunch...at lunch time they have a half hour off...if there was some construction uh constantly to have a change, like twenty minutes, but sometimes we have a half hour lunch, because German like to eat, so to to eat and we sit down and drink water. So sometimes they uh they give me a little bread or apple. Uh uh was few of them uh was was like uh like humans, you know, because they saw that we was skinny and and hungry. They say why you no eat. I say we...I had a little bread last night. That's all and I get tonight. (Laughter) So and also uh was uh 1944...there was one engineer. He was very...was uh German...was a very intelligent guy and he uh he always asked me, noon, noon....lunch time where I

come from, like my family, if I have a letter from my family, because I was seventeen year old, eighteen. So ...

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION - PAUSE

...the name was...(pause)...OK...there was one engineer, German. He was helping me uh give me little food, bread, and uh he also asked me if I can come Sunday to his house in in uh spring and garden. So he have a little garden. He don't know how to do good. He wanted to put a garden, but I say, you know, I can't come because I get, you know, I get beaten. Don't worry about it, you know. So I went and I uh fixed the garden, so he give me bread and it was Sunday when I have that free, you know, because it was uh not far from my labor camp where I sleep. I asked permission to go and uh to come back, so they know I come back anyway, so he name...his name was uh \_\_\_\_ Meyer (ph) and uh after (cough)...there was a few time he helped me and after war we met because was not far and uh he told me was arrested for for associate while helping uh Pole but he don't told me about he was big smart engineer so he would fight with them and they let him go. And uh that and he let him...they let him go and he also saved me the because if he was uh uh bad, uh they could take me and uh also people like that who come out uh on the outside the camp, the labor camp where we stayed, and uh without uh, you know, come back and go with the German, you get really bad...they take you to called \_\_\_\_ lager, uh strict uh camp for two weeks. When you you lived there two weeks, you are lucky....but uh I when I never uh happened. Many of guys went uh take our Polish prisoner...were prisoner we call because was slave labor. One guy, he was fighting with the Germans because uh it was was something was wrong and the German was...they both was blame him, so he said...then he was fight...it was just verbal fight, so he got mad and uh next couple minute we see car come with the black uniform...Gestapo take him and he never come back. Young...nineteen year old.

Q: Did you uh have any contact with your parents during this time? Was there any mail or or packages or Red Cross packages, anything of that sort?

PAUSE

A: Uh after I was uh arrested first two times, we know the the getting worse and and uh my uh we get contact in Poland in case you...they send you to to Germany, so uh uh we somehow, you know, get a contact, so when uh when I was arrested and put in the labor camp, there was allowed once a month post card to your family, and uh I sent. They they got it and my parents, they have the postcard, but that was a thousand miles from home where I was, and uh then I got back. They send me postcard but they don't they don't say...you can't say much and uh they try to send uh three box. You you only can send nothing, only dry bread. I only receive one uh big package \_\_\_\_, dry bread. Otherwise you can...uh the German con...confiscated because Germany needed their own \_\_\_\_, but I uh I receive once a while, every few months...but not...we don't receive from Red Cross. In the concentration camp like like uh big concen...extermination camp, Dachau and

\_\_\_\_\_...the people uh the Red Red Cross send over there, because it was famous and so there was a political...yes...but where we was, there was so many thousand and thousand. We starve uh terribly. We we had no no way, and uh on...I remember some sometimes the truck broke so we had to walk to barracks, but uh one guard was in the front and one in the back and we we walked through through the street and uh there was...I remember there was October or something...there was apple on the street. We pick up the apple...oh boy...we got beaten, you know. You know, we can't pick up the apple, and it was on on the street.

Q: Did you have news during this time about the progress of the war, about, you know, the the Allies invading Italy and then France? Did you hear rumors and know what was going on outside, outside of your camp?

A: Uh yes, because German feed us with uh newspaper, with the German newspaper, and we uh...reading the newspaper, we know where fighting, what happened in Russia, what happened in....uh and we we realized what is going on because they always...they say uh where the front is and uh so we were uh about then, but no other communication. No radio because there was uh impossible because there was uh...against...it was imposs...uh hard to even to uh to...we can't have a radio or nothing, no. Only only the German newspaper. Then when there was uh uh start bombing, American and English uh so we was happy because we see the...you know, American bomber and dozens of them, but there was...was very hard. There was burning and uh explosion and of course was German was fighting uh terr..terribly but after was American and English take over, like 1944...there was day and night there was bombing and also our our people got killed too because they bomb next to uh industry where we are, where we was and they hit the barrack. It burned. I was burned on on my one arm from the from the \_\_\_\_\_, from the bomb, but we have to extinguish and my arm. When there was alarm, when American bomb come or night and there was a siren, so the German go to the bunker, to the shelter and we we stay in the barrack. We can't go no place. So go under the bed. (laughter) Or we go...because no no cellar or nothing.

Q: OK. Why don't we...the tape is just about over. Why don't we stop here and take a break and uh and then when we come back after the break then we can...

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: OK. We're on again. Is there anything else you want to add about uh your time in the labor camp?

A: Well, there was over four years terrible hard work and far away from family and with strange people, and most of them was uh were hardened with hunger because it was...everyday was uh think about uh bad...was was uh hunger all the time because it was very short of food. That was the worst part was during the the slave uh labor work in Germany. But I am uh sur...survived. Uh I don't regret or blame uh \_\_\_\_\_. There was war so I uh we we try...everyday we hope the war will finish and uh we be free.

Q: Can you tell me uh about how you came...how you got free?

A: Well uh on April 1945 uh we uh we know the American not far. We already hear uh uh shooting and uh and it was in the paper, newspaper that the German give us newspaper...they always say where where they are, where the American and English are. And uh the German advise to the German to hide their last men, so so and also uh uh were of us, the \_\_\_\_, like Polish and all other prisoners, because afraid of uh we do the revenge, so uh come April 12th, we we spot American tank and uh tank go by...one, two, three. We...and uh it was in the morning and first we knew, we go after the guard, because the barrack where we stay by the gate was the barrack and by the gate is more food and all ammunition and a guard and everything. We went over there. There's nobody there. The the guard, the German escape away before we don't even know it. They left some empty uh rifle in the window and it look like they there. And uh so uh American uh uh 9th Army came. First there was very \_\_\_\_ because people when they go home and was a thousand mile, kilometer from uh where I was, like \_\_\_\_\_, it's now West Germany...to my town is too far, so uh we stay in the camp and there come organization uh International Organization for Refugee...they call UNRA...and uh we put all together uh like in the one camp the Polish uh refugee in the one camp. Same camp where we where we was, but we clean up. We was uh free. We have a kitchen, but we have to do everything by own. Uh kitchen...we have to have...people have to work uh by uh in order to to survive...do everything by themselves in the camp. Uh uh there was also...we org...we organized school and chapel. We have a a priest. Many priest was liberated from Dachau concentration camp, so they come and the one we have in our camp, and I was work with him in the school, in the church because also was so many families the German take to work on the farm, so they left the farm when the American came and they come to camp. They call this place displaced person camp, DP camp in in West Germany, and there was under English occupied zone, but there was very strictly...uh we can do what we want but we can't go to Poland because it was uh Russia occupied Poland and was different government under Russian uh Russian, so many people take uh chance and go back to Poland and many of them wait in the camp for uh immigration so meantime I uh start school. There was also uh like a professor,

professional people, so I take examination and I pass and I uh receive a a diploma for teaching and we organize school and there was about...uh the camp where I was, displaced person camp, there was about two thousand, over two thousand Polish persons, uh men, women, children. Uh men like single they separate and uh lady, girl separate and family live together, also in the barrack, and uh about a hundred and twenty children, so I was teaching in the grammar uh level in the school there was in the camp too, and uh like I say organize Scouts. I was the scoutmaster. There was life like a little community in uh in the camp, because everybody have to uh work how...uh wherever he wanted, in the kitchen or in a guard, because we have to guard the camp uh just order, you know, like self uh self-organization, and we go out to uh German town. We can uh if we have the money we buy something or but nothing too big because we have no money and there was \_\_\_\_ was bad. The food uh we get uh we have ration also because uh Germany economy was bad and uh and uh international organization supply uh make the German supply some food for for us for a few \_\_\_\_, so there was a short of everything but uh uh because it was free so so we survived and everybody was waiting for uh immi...going...immigrate, go to Canada or United States or Australia. Whoever have a a relatives in uh United States or or Canada so so ask for signed papers, so then you wait and you get them, but uh see I wrote uh to home because uh many people go to Poland...(pause)...especially like a big family because there was not so good in a in a one room, whole family in a wooden camp, so they went to back to Poland and they write to us back uh you better try and go some other...find another country because Poland is now occupied by Russia and different government, but it's different situation. So uh I wrote to home and my mother wrote wrote my letter to me. I have...after a few months, long long time, she advised to uh see her sister because uh I say maybe I come back home, back to Smidgnow, so she write see my sister in \_\_\_\_\_. That's all she write, because there was a letter was censored. The communists censor the letter and uh her, my mother's sister live in Connecticut and brother too. My bro...my mother's sister and my and brother was in Connecticut, so my mother give me a clue...don't go back to Poland. Go to United States, so I write...the next time, next letter there was, have address and next third letter was another have address to uh Derby, Connecticut, so I have a full address and I wrote to uh to my aunt in Derby, Connecticut and an uncle and also my mother write to them in United States to ask them to uh help me, to bring me to United States but uh uh my mother, she was suggest uh I finish school so that was not so easy for them, my uncle and aunt to supply me for for college education, so so I was waiting for a visa five year, and during the five year I was teaching in a displaced person camp in Polish school and Polish Boy Scouts. Then came 1950, and I uh...came paper from Chicago. I was working with one priest in Germany after war, so he was uh in our camp. He went to Chicago year before and he sent a visa through his organization from Chicago to for me in 1950 in December. I uh I came to New York and to Chicago to...uh there was Jesuit priest in uh Chicago to have a publishing culture, religion newspaper monthly, so I was working in office and there was work for me for one month, but uh I want to see my aunt in Connecticut so I came to Connecticut and I stayed uh in Connecticut, still in same place in Connecticut, Derby, Connecticut.

Q: Did you uh...how did your...did your brothers all survive the war and your parents?

A: My parents, yes, survived but they have they are older and they live on a farm and uh they have to give uh uh pigs, cows to the German that come like every month. They have to give so much to the German, so that the reason their their farm survive because uh produce, they give it to to German, so the two brother uh was in and the two brother in Tarnow that have the tailor shop, they survive uh and only one brother uh son die after wounded and one brother in Warsaw also survive and his daughter died during 1945, during uprising. All my uh five brother uh survived and they was in uh in Poland. They working like different places, but they survived except the two two kids. And all my parents now...they all pass away and my four uh brother pass away. Only one brother is living in a place where I...by Tarnow.

Q: Uh have you ever been back to Poland?

A: Yes. (TECHNICAL CONVERSATION) I was uh...I uh I come back to Derby, Connecticut in 19...I start working. I was thinking to go to school but there was uh very difficult in 1951 to go to college especially I don't know...was no no English and uh first I have to work and start uh...so uh in 1956 I was uh married to a girl named uh Dorothy Goodrich (ph). She was Polish-American and uh we have two sons, Joseph now is 30, and John is is 26. He's in UCONN...University of Connecticut, second year, so uh I have a family in Derby and uh starting 1956. Then also '56 I become citizen, you know, of United States and I went to Poland uh '72...1972. There was still uh my brother was living...only only brother and uh I was only myself going because I was uh short of, you know, children was small, and uh I only stay for a couple of weeks. I see my family and I come back. And after a second time I went to Poland in 1970...'79 with my wife for two weeks for tour and uh since then I've been here.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add before we go to the documents uh about your...

A: Oh, uh well...after...when I start living in Derby I uh because I was teaching in Germany in a in a displaced person camp, I was uh...I was working in at all this time at Basset (ph) Company where manufacture \_\_\_\_ and uh working to provide a home for family, and uh I always interested in history and uh I am involved with organization like a church organization where I belong to local church and also organization, national, like Polish-American Congress (ph)...you know, of America and uh Polish National Alliance (ph)...all the Polish... \_\_\_\_ Foundation, so uh I uh organize some exhibit. My uh for bicentennial United States, 1976. Uh I have a uh in locally in Derby and \_\_\_\_, Bridgeport, New Haven...I have...there was a festival, a bicentennial of US and I have exhibit on Polish-American. I uh collecting all kinds of items and all history Polish-American and I publish a book, so I still doing this up even last week I have an exhibit and also I have exhibit last year as...last year was fifty year old invasion of Poland, so I have a large exhibit at the Sacred Heart University in Bridgeport for two months. It was exhibit on the Holocaust, on on uh invasion of Poland. And uh still I do uh uh this like

my hob...my my hobby but I getting now a little uh little too much because it's expensive, you know, but I try to uh to remind uh uh Polish-Americans, you know, of the past and the history and and the Holocaust.

Q: Thank you very much. That story was very helpful.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

End of Tape #2

Conclusion of Interview