

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Joseph Elman
May 19, 1998
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Joseph Elman, conducted by Katie Davis on May 19, 1998 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.

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JOSEPH ELMAN
May 19, 1998

Q: -- your family and -- and then we'll slowly --

A: Oh, from the fa -- yeah.

Q: Exactly. So, if you could just begin by introducing yourself and saying when and where you were born.

A: Okay.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. Yeah, my name is Joseph Elman. The Yiddish -- if you want the Yiddish name is Yossel Elman, and I was born in Proushinna -- February -- February five, 1922.

Q: Tell us about your parents, tell us -- your mom.

A: Well, my mother was named Seeril, my father was Binjomin, that's Benjamin and the s -- older sister was Hikae. I don't know how is in English Hikae, it's a Yiddish name. And the younger one was Shayna -- Shanebow.

Q: And there was a brother?

A: I beg your pardon?

Q: You had a brother, also.

A: Oh, yeah, I may -- my older brother. Yeah, my older brother was Louis. Louis Elman, yeah. He was -- he was twa -- three years older. We all were three years apart.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your grandparents?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember your grandparents?

A: Yes, well from my father's side, I never -- they were ta -- ne -- I -- the -- I s -- there was a picture in the house from my grandfather and n-no picture for the grandmother, they were already dead. See, it happened to be my fa -- my grandfather was at -- remarried, he had children from the second wife and my father was from the second wife. And Moss, the uncle here in Syracuse and three more sisters -- I would say, no it was -- in United States three -- yeah, three sisters in United States and one sister was in Poland -- not far,

in Chomes, you know which -- and my father's sister, this is from the second wife. And so sh -- you know the whole family perished. And -- and mother's sister was -- my aunt is in Syracuse.

Q: What [indecipherable]

A: So -- yeah? Should I say? So I think there were, in the family for my f -- my ki -- f-f- father and once sim -- or one brother and five si -- three -- five sisters in the family and -- and two brothers.

Q: What did your grandfather do?

A: My grandfather was a blacksmith in a little town. It was -- it's -- it's not a town, [indecipherable], I would say it's like a hamlet. Sukachee, Sukachee, which is in -- in eastern Poland, now that's Bellarouse. It's near a big city, what's I -- it's around -- in the Pinsk region. Pep -- yeah Pin-Pinsk region. And if -- this was making, you know, in Eur - - in Europe, blacksmithing, it was a big, a good -- good trade. A -- you know, all the farmers who didn't have any trucks and cars in this -- the farmers were depending on the transportation mostly. We -- summertime wagons, you know, horse and wagons, some wintertime sleds. And this was the only transportation which -- if the farmers mostly, it was ag-agriculture, you know, the -- Poland was agricultural country, especially in the Bellarouses, who I would say is 90 percent agri-agri-agriculture, not much industry. Most of the industry was located in central Poland and -- and in western part of Poland.

Q: Did you ever visit him while he was working as the blacksmith?

A: I didn't. He was dead already. He was dead already, yeah.

Q: How about on your --

A: But, from the mother's side, I have -- I have -- I have a grandfather what still was living in the ghetto and my grandmother passed away from other side. She passed away quite a few years ago, yeah. She had like -- we didn't know exactly that's cancer, she had cancer. And my grandfather stayed with his s-saw -- with his son for that -- for -- for this daughter-in-law and -- and he's went with -- was still alive in the ghetto and he went with the rest of them. Yeah. Now, my grandfather was actually the very few f -- you know, f-farmers in Jewish ca -- fashion. He was a farmer. He had a -- you know, he was having a -- a good size farm with -- with 50 milking cows, those years, and there were four more additional farmers, Jewish farmers near him. Near, you know, where he was located in st -- th-th-the voo -- the -- s not far from the city of Frushanil, about five kilometer and the place was called Sa-Simi-Simanchi -- Simanchi -- I have a map of that. So there were four more farmers and the other farmers [indecipherable] had more -- 100 cows more. So all together, there was so much milk. So was established in my grandfather's farm, a cheese factory. And they were making Swiss cheese. And -- you know, it wa -- and this

sa -- selling, the Swiss cheese, they used to -- besides, it was -- I remember it -- you know, big sa -- you know, big sized cheeses and used to go on export, I think, even as they sold it, it used -- was years before the war, when -- and down even to Germany -- Germany is -- you know, and they had the big market. So, it -- it was -- he himself, you know, they had a concession, some -- it was a father and two daughters. And they set up, and they ra -- they -- they ran that -- that factory and they made the cheese and they -- yeah.

Q: Can you tell us the name of that grandfather? The farmer?

A: Ofen fidali if afrom Yitzhauk. Abraham Yitzhauk Kaplan. He was a Kaplan. Yeah, he was a very religious man and that's -- we had, from -- from my mother's -- from iss side, there was my mother and another sister and two brothers. There were four children. My -- I had four uncle. It means three uncles [indecipherable]. And one of --

Q: [indecipherable] aunts.

A: And one -- one of -- another uncle of [indecipherable] or e -- was -- he had in Proushinna a flour mill, which was -- it was a ve -- this was considered a big, big, good business, because it was -- all the farmers were depending -- they used to bring down to the besides where they used to -- you know, make flour, you know, a flour mill -- flour to supply, there was two more for the city of residents. It was a big, big business for these farmers. The farmers depended on those -- you know, these the products from the mill, because they -- you -- they use it for baking, make into a bread and beside them, they not only u-used to make all kind of -- rye, ra -- flour for -- for -- you know, for rye and then -- then flour, for instance, for challah, you know, for all -- for all grades of -- of goods. And besides the farmers, they had to feed their cattle and then the -- the horses, everything. So, it was -- it was considered f-flour mill a very successful business.

Q: It sounds like you family was very involved in business in [indecipherable]

A: [indecipherable] yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah it was. And the [indecipherable], he had, besides the flour mill, but he was in partnership with somebody, he wasn't alone. He was in partnership with -- with -- with another -- with another person and they -- besides the -- they had -- the -- th-th-the flour mill, they had a soybean mill, because in -- in the vicinity around Proushinna territory, the farmer's used to plant soybeans and from the soybeans, besides the -- they used to ha -- make soybean oil. He had a -- you know, a compressing scr -- compr -- compress the soybean, make s-soybean oi-oil and -- and I know it's -- it's -- from the process, the way it was compressed and when the -- all the oil got out of it, of course what's left over, it was like this ground -- ground from the leftover, from the grain, this was used for -- the farmers use-used that for feeding their cattle. So nothing w -- it was nothing wasted, yeah.

Q: Were you around the -- these factories when you were a little boy?

A: Well, I used to -- I used --

Q: Or farms and -- and -- and mills?

A: Well, I used to -- yeah, I used to stop there. I was younger and I used to s-stop there and my older brother, [indecipherable] he was a little older, he -- he went and -- when -- he had -- on vacation time, they used to go and work there, help -- help around, you know, uncle around the mill.

Q: Hm.

A: And there -- like I say, the grandfather, he had the farm, so the son was involved in the f - in the farming and the son-in-law. And my father, now, you'll ask me that -- now my father was a Yeshivablocher, you know, you went to Yeshiva. And the -- in -- and it happened to be in Proushinna being Yeshiva. And the Yeshiva, the way it was set up, you know, each -- da -- each day somebody else used to -- you wite -- wite the Yeshivablocher for supper and on the weekends, Friday night, Shabbat, you was invited to my grandf -- my grandfather's place and eventually he -- that's where he met my mother, in there, and -- and he married my mother.

Q: So, you're saying that he studied and be-because he was away from his family, people in the community would invite him to dinner every night?

A: That's -- ya -- no, th-that's the way -- that's the way they're set up, you know? We didn't have restaurants, but that's the way they set up, yeah. Each Jewish family invites a Yeshivablocher, you know, when it was a holiday Shabvas, for -- you know, for after -- after the services to come -- come from -- from Shul to come to his place. It's -- it's --as a matter of fact, he had sometimes two or three Yeshivablocher -- to -- my grandfather.

Q: What -- what did your parents tell you about how they met?

A: Well, that's what -- it was -- it was like steady -- being s -- invited there for the holiday -- for holidays and -- and the -- Friday for Shabbat, you know. So -- and that's the way they met and -- and that's the way they -- when they got married. Now, you cannot make a -- a she -- Yeshivablocher, you know. They was going to take him in in the business -- in the farm, you know, in the -- in the farm business. But there's a saying, you know, Yeshivablocher, you know, learns, so [indecipherable] you cannot make a -- you cannot make a farmer out of Yeshivablocher. So -- so what happened, is -- this was, of course, before the first war under the Czar. And they had a little -- where the little f-factory, besides -- making cigarettes, just to make cigarettes and s -- and sell the cigarettes. But after -- after the war, when the Polish -- Poland became independent, they -- and what's - - it's the tobacco and cigarette business was concessions -- you couldn't -- it wasn't -- it - - it -- it -- you c -- you was allowed, they gave him a concession slip, instead they

liquidated, or they took it over [indecipherable] a little factory from the cigarettes and they gave him the right, a concession to sell tobacco products.

Q: The government took over the factory?

A: It was in Poland you couldn't have. It was -- it was concessioned tobacco, it was the same thing as liquor, it was concession. So they gave him half -- they gave him a permit, a concession and we opened the store. It -- we had the in Proushinna there was -- call it a -- on the marketplace over here, like all the -- you got your shopping centers, but those -- we had that -- we had -- in the center of the city was a marketplace and there were about - a big buildings with probably 100 stores -- you know, little stores and each store -- we mostly, mostly be Jewish merchants. I would say 95 percent. So you had a store, you know, like a tobacco concession store, hardware store, a liquor store and -- and a drugstore and you know, the -- with all this -- it's -- store, the individual stores, selling individual products. And so he had a store and selling tobacco products.

Q: What did -- could you tell us what the store looked like? [indecipherable]

A: Well, it wa -- the s -- the store, you -- it was all in one big building and they -- i-it was s-stores all around, east, west, you know. It wasn't really square, it's mostly I would say, shape like a -- a -- how would you call it?

Q: A rectangle?

A: Yeah, yeah. So I would say the -- for some -- like a big 25 -- 25 feet or 25 feet by 15 or something like that. It's not too -- not too big stores, because 100 stores in one building, not big enough. But that's the way -- all the stores were the same size. Now we had, especially it was im-important, the textile stores located in this marketplace and because in -- in -- in [indecipherable] -- in Proushinna, you couldn't go in and buy a suit or buy a pair of pants or buy a pair of shoes. Everything -- you had to buy clothes, you went to a tailor -- tailor made and the tailor made you a suit or the tailor made you a pants. The same thing, you know, there were leather stores there. So you went and you bought some -- you know, you went -- actually -- I mean either you went for yourself or da -- you ordered -- you went to your shoemaker, the shoemaker went to -- what you had to buy -- leather goods in the store. So everyth -- ev -- every store was -- was unique, the same size. The only -- the only yourk occasions, the textile stores and this was a very exceptional busin-bu-business, in -- in -- in -- in push -- in the market, because all the farmers -- we used to have twice a week, it -- we call it a farmer's market, where the -- all the stores were located and there was a lot of land -- I mean it wasn't -- it wasn't paved like over here, it was all with stones. It was where the farmers used to come twice a week. Used to come on -- I think it was the -- like on Tuesday and Thursday and bring down their products to sell. We depended on the farmers -- so all the vegetables, fresh. They sold eggs, vegetables, chickens, even meat. But most -- it mostly they was coming and selling their -- you know, the ca-calfs to the -- for the butchers, there was so many

butchers around, too. You would -- to buy calves and cows and -- and ships and chicken. So everything was brought from the farmers and there were -- they were spread out, I would say was acres, was acres of land around the -- that farm -- that marketplace where they used to, you know, they used to unload the -- and s-s-stay all day til sometimes the products were sold.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about now -- about your -- your home? Wh-Wh-What are some of your first memories of your parents and the house that you grew up in?

A: Oh, well, we -- you know, it's -- Pr-Proushinna was a city, it -- it was not a big city. The population in general was, I would say, around 12,000. And the -- 57 percent of the population was Jewish. So I would say it -- it's roughly put at 12,000 -- 50 cent -- it probably had -- had at least six or 7,000 Jewish families. And -- and see, we had a house on Kobrina, you know, [indecipherable] Kobrina, they c-ca -- that's another city, they call it Kobrine, was a -- a city a-about 40 - 50 kilometers from Proushinna, so they call it Kobrinska -- Kobrinska s-street, number 25 and it was mostly -- this street where we lived was mostly Jewish. There were some Gentiles, but a street full mostly with boys, very few girls on the whole street. Now, I -- I mean -- I had all my friends next, like a few blocks away, there was four boys and there was three boys. Now, we had -- in our family, there was two girls, they call it Kobrina street, you -- you know, if there is no girls [indecipherable] and boy street.

Q: What kind of games did you play with your friends?

A: Oh, games?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Oh. Well, we used to -- now you may -- you was asking about a house.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We had a -- we had a good size house and in back of our house was a little pound and in - - and really many times when it was raining -- of-often -- eff -- in the back were the big garden, very big garden. And you know, my mother and I and the children, we used to help. We enjoyed -- we rai -- we raised our own vegetables, that's -- we ha -- we raised our own, even chickens and ducks and -- and turkeys and -- and in the back of the ca -- back of the -- many times in the back of the garden, there was a little -- little pound and the pound just --

Q: Pound?

A: Pound.

Q: Okay.

A: Pound. A little -- like -- like a little --

Q: Water.

A: Yeah.

Q: Pou -- a pond.

A: Po -- p-o-n --

Q: D.

A: P-o-n-d, yeah, pound.

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

A: Yeah. And what happens, wintertime, it used to freeze up, so we -- mostly the -- you know, the younger ch -- young -- we were kids, we were skating on the pound. It was more -- you know, it's Saturday, it was boys and girls. Of course that time we didn't have the skates like here now. The first skates I remember I had was made out of wood, with a steel wire attached to it. Eventually, you know, we got some skates, which was sf -- you had to have a special -- special shoe and s -- and the-there -- there was a latch where you attach and -- and then -- and then you had to tighten it up. I mean, this was a real luxury. This was already -- we didn't have those -- like hockey -- hockeys boots and skates [indecipherable]. So wintertime we used to s -- mostly skate and -- and the big sport was soccer, you know, in Europe, where kids -- especially mostly boys, we used to play soccer. And they would -- so each organize groups and you know, we -- the youth belong -- those years in Poland, we used to belong to certain organization, was a Zionist organization. It was Zionist organization, consisted of so many branches. It was -- you had the -- you had the Shamir and you had the -- the Haroots and you had the Bitar and you had -- you know, all those -- all those Zionist organization. Leftist, Rights and left -- lefts -- Leftists. And girls used to belong to the -- those organizations and we used to meet -- meet in -- in certain halls -- we had a hall and play sometimes Ping Pong and play during the -- the weekend. And our -- was a big game -- boys, we used to -- we used to play chess in the evening. Chess was very popular, it -- as a matter of fact, my father was a Chess player. You learn how to play Chess. He was a good Chess player. So I used to play with him. And so I learned to play then. We used to get together in the evening and play Chess. Ch -- and -- but I was -- I had a -- a friend next to us, where we lived and they were -- they had a factory and they made soft drinks and seltzer water and this was a good business too, you know. Every -- everywhere, especially for the holidays and for Sabbath, you ordered those -- I remember the [indecipherable] where you get those, it was quess -- quess [indecipherable] seltzer water. Every Jewish family had that. And

beside, they used to make soft drinks, too -- out as -- you know, bottled soft drinks, or -- and they had a radio those years, they had a radio. And when I was -- this was for -- when I was y-young -- 13 - 14. So, we used to listen, usually in the evenings, beside playing Chess, you know, there's -- used to get together, not only s -- couple more friends and after playing Chess, we used to listen to the radio. This was before -- this was in the beginning -- in the beginning 30's -- 1930's. So we loved especially th-th-the favor of mine and all it was -- we used to put on the Gypsy music from Soffie -- Soft -- the capitol of -- I think it's from Sof -- Sofi -- Sof -- ei -- onc -- I said Onc?

Q: [indecipherable] Germany?

A: Soffi, yes. The capitol of Hungary? It's not Hungary. Fwonce --

Q: Sofia?

A: Sofia, yeah.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: It was a -- think it's a na -- it's Gypsy music. And the -- after, you know, when it started in the 19 -- 1933 and that -- and as -- you know, when that Hitler came to power and the Nazis overtook the -- the power in Germany and I was very interested in politics. So, his father, the -- my friend's father were -- you know, what I'm -- that-- we were visiting and listen to the radio and he was -- well, now [indecipherable], he was a intraer politician. And so that's -- they started, you know, listening to the -- what was going on and the way Hitler came to power and the rise -- the rise of the Reich and -- and eventually, 1935, when they -- they started the -- you know, the Nuremberg laws were -- and I followed that and -- and we were still in Poland, figure well, it was -- you heard about war is going in in Germany, but so you figured, you know, it's in Germany, but y-you -- you were concerned of course, but you still -- life was going on as normal in Poland, this was still in 1933 - '34 - '35. So we -- we still -- you didn't -- I mean you heard the news, but you tried to -- you tried to -- just to, you know, to listen to the news and -- and you w -- and you were concerned and -- not much, as long -- I mean you f -- it's far away, we didn't expect -- you know, you know, what's going to happen. We lived in Poland here. We live in Poland. And eventually, in 19 -- so -- and then it was interesting. It was a -- a doctor, lived not far from us, too. And her name is -- is Ola Goldfinich. Can you imagine a Jewish doctor, a surgeon in those years now and she was the only doc -- Jewish doctor. It wa -- the only Jewish doctor and -- and neighbor to the Goldbergs with their -- they -- they had the factory, the -- the -- the --

Q: Did they [inaudible]

A: Well, they had the radio there and so I was mixing -- what I'm mixing -- you know, there were -- I mean I'm -- little -- young boy mixing with them. You know, I was -- they were

speaking about the politics for what's going on -- what's going to happen and I was sitting there and listening and listening to them and I said, I know wh -- what I'm doing there. I didn't act --

Q: Can you remember anything that they said? Things that stuck with you?

A: Oh yeah, the -- you know -- I -- I remember that they -- they -- that -- well, it was the time -- it -- laws went in -- certain laws in 1935 in the Nurember-Nurember-Nuremberg laws went in and especially that happened in Germany that time that some stores -- the -- they put some law -- laws went in that -- for instance the Gentiles must -- shouldn't -- were-weren't allowed to go in and buy it in Je-Jewish stores and trade with the Jews and -- and eventually like teachers weren't allowed to teach in schools any more or were restricted and you know, and -- so they were concerned too, they were concerned, but you live with that, you just listen and -- and of course that time, if -- if you would know -- if in advance what's going to happen, you of -- for instance, you could have tried to immigrate someplace for -- I had relatives in -- like in -- in -- in -- in -- in Syracuse and in New York and we would applied -- we would applied for visas in the na -- beginning 1930's and tried to come -- you know -- come [indecipherable]. You didn't know it's going to happen, you know, atrocities. Y-You know, if this is -- you know and antise -- antisemi -- anti-Semitism in the smallest scale yet. And so you just lived with that. You figure well, you worry and it'll come to it.

Q: Can -- can you tell us a little bit more about your home life? Your mother -- what she was like? And your -- I'm -- speaking Yiddish at home?

A: Oh yeah, yeah. See my f -- my father's [indecipherable] was a Yeshivablocher, he was very, ver -- he's -- he was -- he was very educated. Under this -- before Poland was established, he was -- he was under the Russian Czar, so you went -- you know, you went to the Russian school and was -- became a teacher. Yeah, he was teaching -- a teacher, not -- not only Hebrew, he was teaching Russian. He knew -- he knew the Russian language perfect. And --and my mother was a housewife, taking care of four children and we were pretty good, I mean we would say middle cl -- we were pretty good off. And having -- like I say, my sadare -- he -- he was very active and he was very active in Shul. He was -- an-and my sadare and then my f -- my father later on, there were four -- were four in my -- you know, my father got married -- he was all re -- very active in Shul and he supplied -- as a matter of fa -- he supplied for all the Yidding, you know, where he didn't have -- gas, gas and oil were like over here, so he had to supply lum -- wood, for the Shul, to heat. So that was -- he -- he supplied for the whole winter and he was a [indecipherable] and he was very religious -- very religious man. He went to Shul three times. Shul was not far. We had in the city about six -- six or seven Shuls in the city, a small city. And my father just same, he was being a Yeshivablocher, so he was almost a - they call it -- he could have become a rabbi -- smeerhassa rabbi, if he wanted to. He had the -- he had the capability to becoming that. But he's -- he was able to read the Torah, he was reading the Torah so-sometimes a substitute reading the -- you know the Torah, the -

- and -- and -- and -- and many times they used to really -- wouldn't waise farther way and the widdow waizer was a hazan sometime. They -- you know, they used to cantor before the holidays. Yeah and I went to -- every Friday -- to Shul and Saturday to Shul. The reason I went to Shul Saturday, because I was -- my s -- my grand -- they say that my grand -- my grandfather, after coming from Shul, he always made a kitty, you know, a kiddish, [indecipherable] mostly, you know, have a full house and I wanted to know, so I went to -- to the -- to the house, because you had wine and they -- he had -- he had wine and he had a lot of -- you know -- and -- and especially the -- the cakes and the -- they call it an torte -- torte duddee. The -- another honey cake, the -- how did the -- oh, let's see, he had honey cake and -- and I like the -- the -- the plain what do you call it, what do you call it here? [indecipherable] So I used to dip, you know, go and dip the -- the little cake in wine, and enjoy and they had bisie ya having and -- and had a small table full with goodies -- full with goodies and the gefilte fish and having and -- even the versnapsam and whiskey always drinking [inaudible]. And they made me seem -- even my father, because it was -- it was re-religious and every S-Saturday, after the meal, when you come from Shul, you go, you have your meal, go home. We had the Kiddush, then you go home and have the meal. So, I used to come after the -- after the meal, used to make me to recite a whole sedra from that -- from the five books of Mor, the old sedra. I said, "I have to do it. I want to go out, play." And no, you got to do it, you got to say it all. Sedra took about an hour. And you had the sedra with the -- with the Aftorah -- the Aftorah. I still can do the Aftorah now. And my mother was busy, you know, busy with the four children. Besides, like I say, we had a big, big house and a garden, all the children, we all shared and helped. The garden we had our own vegetables, we had our own tomatoes and -- and -- and cucumbers and -- and radishes and -- and you name it, we had plenty. And besides, we had two cows, yeah, because my -- to say that it was, you know, it was a farmer, you know, so which -- you know it -- two cows, I want two cows - - to take care two cows and I -- you know, you know, I all -- so the ca -- you got to milk the cows, two -- twice, three times, just -- and you know, after you -- the children -- make sure the children get the fresh -- right of the cow, fresh milk right of the cow.

Q: When you were growing up, were you aware of any anti-Semitism -- when you were younger?

A: Well, it happened to be that I went to the Polish school. My brother went to the Talbud Hebrew school, that the -- that's the -- yeah, Hebrew school. See, we had -- in Proushinna, we had falshala Yiddish Shul, that means like a high school, but then we had a Talbud. That's a Hebrew school which is -- they had two -- it's little bit on the higher standard, as about -- you finish 10, see the sister was there, 10 classes in the Talbud. 10th grade -- for the 10th grade for the Talbud, when you finish the eeb for school, you went to the university. Something -- yeah. So my brother, he went to the Hebrew school and I went to the Polish school. Being in Polish school, there were --

A: When you finish 10, see the sister was there 10 classes in the Talbud. 10th grade -- for the 10th grade for the Talbud, when you finish the eeb for school, you went to the

university. Something -- yeah. So my brother, he went to the Hebrew school and I went to the Polish school. Being in Polish school, there were mostly the -- very few -- I would say maybe 90 percent were Polish Christians. 10 percent -- maybe about 10 percent were Jewish. And so they had, in the system, public school, they had that life had -- a lesson religion. Like, you know, like -- like history, geography -- a religion lesson. So they had a priest here to go, so we had to -- you know, the -- those belonged to the class, we went out for that time, outside til the class finished, 45 minutes.

Q: You left the class?

A: We left the class.

Q: Okay.

A: Because there -- you know, there was the pr -- it was mostly -- more -- yeah -- yes, was mostly Catholics, the Polish ca-ca-ca -- the Christian Catholics. So we left and -- you know, many times you came back, you know, back to -- for your next lesson in school, so you felt a little tension sometimes, you know. Depends what they were taught, what they were -- you know -- so it was not exception, you know, many times they came right -- you know, they calling you that -- the Jews is got something, the -- Christ killers, they tha -- they were calling you, the Jews. They probably -- you know, those -- th-those years, it was all, you know, it was probably in -- in the schools, they taught that, they tau --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: They were with the impression they -- that the Jews have something to do with Christ. So that -- is -- most like -- occasions like tha -- and -- but it was -- I mean -- it was no -- no ph-physical -- you know what I mean, there's nothing geared -- is ni -- you were protected. You were protected, you couldn't do -- I mean to -- many time, the only times you know, there was a fight, a prenf for you played -- Jewish group played soccer with a - - well, is -- with soccer up in the [indecipherable] you played with a Polish -- you -- with a Polish group now. When the Jewish group, you know, won, then the Polish were mad, so sometimes used to be a fight. That's normal, you know, you still fight. So you figure, well, after the game, take off. Take off right away.

Q: Run?

A: Ta -- ta -- stay away. Stay away and -- and -- but in -- in -- it happens -- it happened one time -- it was a weekend and I was -- we had a river not far from the city where the younger generation, you know, we were young, we used to go summertime swimming there. And s -- s -- usually on Saturday, there was no -- Saturday was no problem, it -- like -- like I say, there was a lot of Jewish people there. So, what happened to me one time, from my own s-school, they made a joke, so they -- it was on Sunday and there was not too many, not too many Jewish people there. So let's -- let's take Elman and throw

him in. We -- I had with my clothes, they threwed me in. They threw me in and they were -- he -- you know, and they -- we were -- so I got -- I -- I got that time. It's a good thing I -- it's a good thing I knew how to swim. I -- it was not --

Q: But they singled you out because you were Jewish?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Because to make it --

Q: But that was sort of a fact of -- of your life?

A: Well, i-it -- we were -- you know, we were used -- you were -- we're used to it once in awhile. We're used -- we're used to it -- to that. But -- but you were safe, because you see, there were some in Poland, in the religious, there was like -- there was always a blacksmith in certain territory, one family lived for this, then were a grocer in a hamlet on a village mostly -- mostly white Russians. And made a living, lived there runfel by himself -- very seldom, very seldom. Once in awhile you heard, you know, there was a killing. Like they say there was killing in -- in -- they killed a Jewish family once in awhile. But there was no pogroms in Poland. We didn't have any pogroms.

Q: If something like that happened, the first time it happened, did you go home and tell your mother and father and what -- what did they sa-say? How did they help you understand it?

A: You mean when -- when the -- when --

Q: Oh, like the -- when they called you maybe, a -- a Christ killer --

A: Well --

Q: Did you ever talk to your parents about it, I guess is what I'm asking.

A: Yes, well they knew th -- they knew that. It's nothing -- that's nothing new, because it was not -- it's probably -- it didn't happen only in school. Sometimes -- sometimes it happened in -- in -- on the market, for instance, certain -- certain farmers, if you dealt with them and they didn't like you, they will -- you know, if you bargain with them, or -- s-so -- i-it's not only -- it's not only in school, it was common. You know, it was common.

Q: Y-You said a couple times though, you said but -- but we were safe -- I mean, you grew up feeling very secure, it sounds like. Safe.

A: Well, if -- wh-when I grew up, yeah, we were safe -- was safe physically. You know, if I was strong, you know, and got involved, there's many, many times, you know, you got in a fight and you beat up -- you beat up your friends, you know, your Polish friends, or

your Ukrainian, yeah. But it -- yeah -- as -- as -- this -- you was -- you were safe. You were used to it to certain -- you know, to certain those a-anti -- you know, anti-Semitic expressions, words, or they'd say -- sometimes you heard, beside Christ killer, the -- they'll -- they'll call you a special name like bakram, you know -- up -- you know, Abraham they call you and -- I got a name, so -- it's not -- we were used to it. They didn't call me Yosef or Yushif. Abramshik. You know, what do you mean Abramshik? Abraham or Morska -- Moses, Morska, yeah. My life was going on like that.

Q: Did you have friends -- close friends, boys that -- that -- who were non -- non Jewish?

A: Ah, as a rule -- as a rule, we got mostly associated with Jewish boys. Yeah, mostly. In school, we do -- in school you met some friends, but they will -- lived in a different section, so you didn't -- you -- you -- you know, you didn't -- you didn't see and talk, only in school. And like I say, when you played soccer or something. So we were mixed, yeah. Well, there were some fr -- we had some friends. And it was very nice, you got along good with some of them, with --

Q: With -- with those at school you would speak Polish?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: That's Polish, strict Polish.

Q: And... When you were growing up, what did you think you might do? Did you have ideas about what you wanted to say or be?

A: Real-Really no.

Q: No?

A: Really no. It was a -- probably -- I didn't know exactly. This is in 19 -- speaking in 19 -- before '39, I was 17, still at the school, so I didn't make up my mind yet what I was going to do. I figured worse, you know, being -- being in the family, you know, having in the business family, an uncle, if I would want to go work for my uncle. It's -- my older brother, you know, the spare time worked there, you know, made extra money. And to go in in farming, I didn't think about it yet. I didn't -- it -- you know, it came, 19 -- in 1939 the war broke out. Nowadays, I don't know if here when you're 17 you know what you want to do. You know, I probably -- I probably, maybe -- my older brother did already -- decided to u -- immigrate to the United States. He was three years older and he applied now -- the -- now I couldn't do it because I'm -- we were so close with the family, so [indecipherable] and so -- and I was figuring he is going to leave the family. He applied and -- in 1937, for a visa to the United States, to uncle Elman in Syracuse and

it was -- it -- you know, it takes time. If not the war -- if the war wouldn't break out in 1939, maybe 1939, '40, we'd all be in the United States.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Yeah. But sp -- but me, I didn't want to leave, you know, I was close with the family.

Q: I think we'll stop there. That's an hour and we're just going to take a break.

A: That's an hour already?

Q: Uh-huh.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: I wanted to ask you a little bit about whether or not politics were ever discussed in your household. Wh-What did your father tell you about it?

A: Well we -- we were disc -- yeah, we were discussing politics, like I -- I went, like I say, every quite often to the -- my friend who listened to the radio and it was already, you know, '35 and '36 -- what's going on -- especially it started in -- in germ -- for -- in -- all -- all happened in Germany. I knew all the history. So we were speaking politics with my father. He was involved in politics. And I know all the history, like we work and -- then when it -- 19 -- the -- especially the laws, the -- in 1945, the Nuremberg laws came out, that you -- y -- y --

Q: 1935, yeah.

A: -- you [indecipherable] you know the Jews, that they -- there was posters on the stores, don't buy from Jews and all of j -- not allowed to buy and s -- and stay away from -- don't use the Jewish doctors and schoolteachers weren't allowed already to -- to -- to teach in school -- discriminated to teach in school.

Q: Where is this now? You're talking about in Proushinna?

A: This was a -- when we heard it, yeah.

Q: You heard about it, you mean?

A: Yeah, I he -- I heard -- we -- I heard what happening, yes. We knew all of this -- we all knew all -- all about it. We're figuring that time, geez -- well, why do they -- you know, they f -- why -- especially s -- if it's so bad, why don't they -- why don't they take off and -- and -- and get out?

Q: The Jews in Germany?

A: The -- the -- Germany. After all, if there is the law -- that's only Germany, you know. Don't do it -- but it's like the same, it was -- it was -- it was taw -- it was hard. You live all your life in a country, you build a country, so you figured some did, you know, left, who knows? Those -- some decided and they left, in the -- you know, already 19 -- 1936, '37, before they were able, they left and they had to abandoned, you know, they are -- they have to give up their businesses. I think in the beginning they were able to sell -- forced to sell. You know, it's -- it's the law changed so rapidly there, that in the beginning they -- they allow you to sell what you had to sell, you know, prac-practically to give it away. But at least you were able to sell and you were able to get out. You were able to get out, if you had a place where to go. So some went out. S-Some, I know, so in - - some German Jews were able to get out in that time now. Actually where you're going

to go depends -- depends who is going to accept you. You see, I know that. My brother, he -- he had a relative, so -- so many here -- relatives here and it took -- it took from '37 - '39, two years, it was a quota -- everything was in a quota. Polish quota and -- you couldn't -- you could -- there were so many, probably, applications, that you had to wait for your next. And probably the same as in Germany. Now, there was no place to go -- the only sodo -- the -- some went -- some went to -- some went probably United States, I understand now and they left for the United States, where we were able. I take it the majority mostly went -- if we didn't have a Jewish state, we went to Palestine. Yeah, that's the only he -- somehow, illegally went to Palestine. And those who remained, see, I don't know, either they still didn't believe -- this was before all the atrocities, before all the -- you know, before all the -- the c-camps and the -- the chambers. Gas chambers wasn't heard of yet in those years. They didn't know anyth -- you know, nobody knew about it yet, what was going on. You had some laws -- certain laws went in, okay, that ya -- there in Germany, I don't know if they had -- in the -- where those -- I don't think until late -- later they had -- in 1938, I think they had to wear their yellow stars, but in beginning they -- the beginning they -- the laws that -- you know, you weren't allowed to practice your profession.

Q: Y-You said that your father was involved in politics in Proushinna. Te-Tell us a little bit about that. How so?

A: W-Well, he -- he was -- the politics -- now, the later years already, it was when -- in 19 -- in 1939 -- so we were fortunate that Proushinna -- see, the Germans started the war in -- in September. The po -- you know, the war started September first, 1939 -- in all the history. You know they requested, you know -- bef-before it -- before it started the war with Poland. That's -- we call it actually when the second war started, but bef -- in 1938, the Anschluss -- you know they took over it -- they took over Aust-Austria without -- I mean the Anschluss, I mean they were invited without -- just marched in and took it over and they -- and they -- they were -- they were welcomed with flowers and they were -- they were -- you know, they were happy that -- and then I know it came with Czechoslovakia. You know, I followed all on the -- you know, I followed all the news with the checko -- in Czechoslovakia -- th-they requested the Sudinland -- Sudatenland. Now, Sudatenland, they choseu at that time, chare with what's his name, that if -- a foreign -- Foreign Minister from Britain, Chamberlain, he still went down, you know, and you made -- y-y-you gave him alcage -- they agreed, the Czechs agreed to -- to -- to give it up S-Sudatenland. The reason -- they were greedy, they claimed Sudatenland was -- once belonged to the Germans and there was a lot of German nationals. So we ke -- you always exclaim, I remember exclaim -- they said they were mistreated and this and that -- the reason given why he wants to give it Sudatenland. So finally -- you know the Czechs, they didn't have a choice, so they gave it off bit Sudatenland. But he wasn't satisfied and -- and -- and that's when the p -- you know, the pact was made with -- win Chamberlain and it was -- Czech, the Czech was sold out. See, Chamberlain thought he's got a pact, you know, with Hitler. You cannot make with -- make up with a tyrant -- [indecipherable] a tyrant like that. And -- and that came back and this, and he says now --

peace is now -- he established peace and the world is going to have peace now. And the -
 - you see the feather -- the -- the feather of the allies and finally he grabbed all
 Czechoslovakia. So then he started, in 1939, he started with Poland, but was -- speaking
 about Poland, now Poland was an -- see, they were an -- anti-Semitic later. In the
 beginning, when Poland was established, the president th -- th -- it was that Marshall
 Yusef Pulsutski. He was the one organized the army and liberated Poland. Under
 Pulsutski -- he was -- he was a social democrat iff, you know? And under him, it was --
 the Jews felt safe and they were -- you know, incorporated as -- as democracy, treated as
 any other -- or a -- you know, there was not too many in Poland. We had nationalities
 here, had Poles and you had -- you had Jews and you had some White Russian,
 Bellarouse. It's not like he -- United States, you have so many nationalities, so many
 groups -- or in Russia. So the anti-Semitism in Poland actually started after he died. Now,
 he was -- it's -- there was rumors even going on. I heard that -- that th-the Jews saved P-
 Pulsutski's -- you know they put the -- the -- the Russians were after him and they put -- I
 don't know if -- where is common, they put a [indecipherable] on him and twirl him and
 they saved him and he appreciate that -- that's fa -- you know? I don't know if it's -- you
 f -- where -- it's not written in the history, but I -- that's what I heard. So he was ca -- he
 was appreciate -- it was good. After he died, it -- this was in the late nine -- 20's -- and
 beginning 1930's, that's when -- you know -- it -- the ch -- it changed. And what
 happened influen -- the German influence a lot. So when the war broke out in 1939, the f
 -- the Foreign Minister of Poland, Beck -- disappeared and you find out he was a German
 spy, the Foreign Minister Beck. Now -- and he was influential to -- you know, they --
 they -- they knew in Poland that's the war -- you know, that the Germans, first of all, they
 requested -- they requested Danzig, that was the first thing. This was the -- the
 international port -- supposed to be -- did belong maybe one time, to Germany. So, okay,
 they gave him -- s-so they gave him danz -- they gave him Danzig. But he wasn't
 satisfied. Then h-he wanted -- he wanted the other part, we are speaking of -- about
 Poland -- he -- that -- the same thing in Poland, they were on that border with Germany,
 which -- there -- when Poland was established a independent state, there was a lot of
 German nationals there. So he -- je lee -- I remembered it exactly that the pretext that he
 says, you know the Poles are mistreating the j -- the -- the -- the German nationals and
 they killed German nationals -- is going to -- that's why he's going to just -- you know, is
 going to try and save his -- the -- his G-German nationals. It was a bluff. It -- it was a
 bluff, it was an excuse.

Q: When you felt things beginning to change like that, did you ever consider leaving? Did
 your father ever talk about it? Your brother, like it's -- it's --

A: In -- in --

Q: -- it's getting bad. S -- 1938, '39 --

A: Libby -- you -- in -- this is already -- in nine -- in 1939, see what ha -- see what happened
 in 1939, we were saved by the -- it's -- we ex -- the war started and the Germ -- we

expected the Germans. And the Germans came in our town. They stayed a day or two, was quiet. You know, we were in -- outside, we had to get water, you know, we didn't have water inside, running water. We had to go to the wells, get water on a. And the army, they -- it was -- it was quiet, he -- nothing, I mean, there was n -- and all of a sudden, overnight, they pulled out. So we didn't even know there was a secret pact between -- made between Stalin and Hitler. And then we realized, you know, finally, you know, that that's when it started in thir -- in '39. See, they m -- Stalin and Hitler made a secret pact and it promised -- gave Poland, it says, eventually you can -- you know, you can take over Lithuania, you can take over Latvia, you can take over Estonia and then gave him little -- if you want a little territory someplace -- you don't want -- this is -- between the Czechoslovakia and -- and -- and Romania, they call -- that's the part -- part of the territory they gave it to the Russians. And so the Russians came over to our city, that was almost -- you know, so we had from '39 to 1941 were the Russians. Well, under the Russians, when they came over, all right, I mean it was -- the system changed, but it wasn't like in the Soviet Union, you know what I mean? It -- the -- especially for the professionals, what somed -- was even better than -- than in Poland. You know, teachers were very important, you know, you could -- they had -- you remained the Jewish -- Jewish schools, the worn clothes, you went to a Jewish school, you went to Russian school, or the Polish school. They kept, you know the schools -- the schools the way -- the way it was before. And even -- even the farmers, they -- they didn't -- they didn't collectivize, you know what I mean?

Q: Collectivize?

A: Co -- Collect -- you know, like in Russia? They -- each farmer still operated and se -- but my grandfather, they took -- my grandfather was too big, so they took -- they took the farm away, yeah. They took the farm away and they'll -- they'll let him manage to -- put it this way, I mean it's already -- you know, and they paid him a salary -- paid him a -- paid a -- paid him a salary. So it means -- and -- but the profession -- doctors the same, were working in the hospitals and the -- the private practice and lawyers -- it didn't change very much. So we had a normal -- we had a normal life for another two years, for 1939 - 19 -- 1941. So I went to the Russian school. So, from the Polish school I had two more years, I went to the Russian school. And in the Russian school we learned Russian history and there was no anti-Se -- anti-Semitism at all.

Q: What was your grandfather's reaction when the farm was taken away?

A: Well, what ca -- the reaction -- of course, I mean it's -- not much, I mean the reaction, it - - it not much you can do. They took away the same thing, they took away my uncle's fa - - you know. They let him work there, he managed the mill at the same -- they took away. Yeah -- well, we expected the Germans. It's -- you know, we expected the Germans and it's already 1939, it's already too late. Where you going to go? I mean, if the German would come, there is no way you can -- nowhere to go. It's too late to go. So at least you know with the reaction -- you didn't like it, I mean, but at least we heard what's going on

on the other side of Poland there. All the refugees from the -- from the western Poland, they were -- they were flooding -- you know, trying to get in to the eastern, where we -- you know, where we were under the Russians. A lot of them -- a lot of them, you know, from -- from big cities -- from Łódź or from Warsaw, from other cities, they were able yet, in the beginning, you know, to smuggle through -- going through. And the -- and the Russian accepted them in the beginning, but there was such a flood later on, there was a lot of -- came -- came over with a flood, so the Russians sent them away up sisib you know, was too many, they send them to ser -- to -- to -- not to Siberia, but you know yur, there's a Azerba-Azerbaijan in Russia, they try to make -- now under the Russian, this was under Stalin, tried to make a Jewish re-re-repull like a Jewish state in Azerbaijan, you had the Jews there. Yeah, so they went there. [indecipherable] some of them survived. So it's better than -- we heard already, it's -- it's -- it's better than -- than the Nazis.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your political activities. You had mentioned earlier that you were involved in a youth group?

A: Yeah.

Q: Were you still involved in it or were you involved in any other sort of meetings or discussions about politics?

A: Yeah, I was -- I was all -- I was involved with each -- that's -- you know, in -- in Proushinna we had two groups. There was Zionist group -- like I say the Zionist group there were -- there was Shamir -- atsa -- Holatsim and -- and -- and -- and the Istad, there is a lot ou -- ou -- a lot of groups from the Zionists and then there were the Bund. You know, the Bund is -- this is Socialist groups. They believed -- they didn't believed in a Jewish state in Zionist, they believed that, you know, you live in Poland and you -- you got to be citizen of Poland and live in Poland and try to -- and try to get your education, you know, do the best you can and account for your livid. Yeah, that is the Bund. They were -- they were [indecipherable]. I was -- I was a Zionist and I was a Zionist and I would belong to Bitar, which is -- Bitar is the organization, they call it a leekhood now. What's in Israel, leekhood. I always believed that, you know, if you want to have a state now -- we always -- if you want to have a state, nobody -- you have to fight for state, even if not -- but even if you -- you know, we didn't have a Jewish state, we have Palestine. And so even if you tr -- you know, you -- you illegal, you get into Palestine, you have to be able to defend yourself. City Jews, you know, they settled there, they worked hard in the beginning and on the Kibbutzim and all that and eventually some Arabs, they came -- you know, there was a lot of -- and ca -- there was a lot of pogroms, they -- in -- in pal -- you know, in Palestine before the Jewish state. Because see, they didn't believe that -- you know, the Jews that -- in -- in -- what you call it -- in fighting or something -- resisting fighting. I mean, even if you -- if you leave your home there and you work -- and you -- you know these people work in the swamps, those pioneers. We had so many pioneers from my town went. I had a friend, his brother went before the war.

He was a pioneer, went to -- if we didn't have a Jewish state, they went to Palestine. And you -- you know, he survived. So I was -- I was a little -- they called us -- they did call us in -- in Proushinna, you know, they ca -- that time, you know, with the -- like -- in, say, the brown shirts, you know, brown shirts like, you know, fighters.

Q: They called you the brown shirts?

A: The Bitar was brown shirts.

Q: Bitar, oh, okay.

A: Bitar, you know the -- the -- the -- the -- the -- from the other side -- from the shar -- Ha-Halatsim and Shamir, from the other Zionists, Leftists organization what it was, you know. They called us -- we are writers, you know. We have more writers. Zha -- Zhavit -- you know, if you know, we know the leekhood. I remember Shaboutinski. You know for -- Shaboutinski, the leader? He believed that -- you know -- that you try to encourage the Jews to organized in the [indecipherable] to organize and to defend yourself.

Q: How had you come to have such strong feelings, though, about that? There you are, in Proushinna and you're growing up, it's pretty middle class, things are pretty good. How did you get such a strong feeling that you should be part of a youth group that would ultimately believe in fighting for a state?

A: Well, because -- because first of all my leader -- the leader of my group from Bitar, was the first one -- organized the a -- the resistance in the ghetto. And he was the first one who left the ghetto, which -- you know, very -- the ghetto was still existing when we were trying, you know, to arm ourselves. And he was the first for the 10 people who left the forest when the ghetto was still established, four months before the liquidation. So -- y-you know, when you belong to this group, you got -- you got somehow indoctrinated. I would sa -- I know indoctrinated. That's for -- that's what we were be living to, you know. We were living to -- you know, have all of Palestine now. I remember that -- oh, you know, the song, have all --

Q: What's --

A: They dote lier dade seshelon stador, dote lier dade seshelon. See, I still remember [indecipherable]. It means we will -- both side of the Jordan not enough, you know. We believed on the both side of Jordan. And now, you know, Miss Baggan, you know the Baggan, the Foreign Minister, badaway, he comes from Presque, chestatoffsk brest -- this was where the s -- a-armistice was signed. The first World War. It's not far. And Proushinna was the region of -- region on the -- from Poland, it were region of Jesht. Now Baggan was coming down, I was in the Bitar, you know, Baggan was come down in Proushinna. I redba -- I remember him, you know, eve already, all he is -- Baggan used to

come down and we used to -- you know, we were soldiers, we used to march and salute, you know. Yeah, I was a Baggan man.

Q: Interesting. Y-You said that you were indoctrinated at the -- tell us a little bit about a Bitar meeting.

A: W-We had meetings.

Q: How -- what would you talk about and -- and what would happen in those meetings?

A: On the -- in the meetings, well, in the meetings it was social. We were young sometimes, it was social. What it -- sometimes we're switched. You know, my brother was older, he switched from [indecipherable], he says, "There is nicer girls here," he'll [indecipherable] go, you know. This is stuff, we were young yet -- 15 - 16 - 17. So we stuck with the group and we used to get together once -- once -- at least once a week, sometimes many times you the week, we had a hall, they all -- each org -- you know, in Proushinna, each organization had a hall, used to have meetings, used to have speakers. Speakers used to come and speak and besides -- and there's a lot a -- we used to have outside -- what you call it? a cookout -- you go out in the woods, like a -- like vashomer and went to the woods and -- and marched in the woods an-and not far from Proushinna. And that's the way -- that's the way the organization, they operated, yeah.

Q: D-Did your father -- what were your father -- father's feelings about you being in Bitar and beginning to have these more political --

A: Well, he really didn't -- he -- he really didn't care. He -- my father -- he really didn't care if I was in Bitar and it wasn't that, he -- you know, it didn't -- it -- he knew -- he knew -- I mean the -- the philosophy of the Bitar, what it stand for and all that. But he really didn't care, yeah. But, you see, my father was a pessimist. Well, he -- well right -- this is speaking about ninet -- when the war already when we were -- the war in '41, you know, when the st -- it started June. This was [indecipherable] the Russians, I t -- like I told you. Well, normal ristu -- in 1942, in June, 22, when the -- the war broke out with the Russians and the Germans, this was terrible. Now, they marched the -- first of all -- see, they did, they tricked -- they did the same thing as the Japanese did with Pearl Harbor. You know, they have the same system. They utilize the time when the Russians were on what you call it? Was a holiday off. Most -- most of them celebrated. And that's when they attacked. And they -- it's about -- like I mentioned before, the border between the Polish - German, where the Germans are and here where we were is about press boog, there we were boog for -- press the tob chashed. The boog divided and out of sight was the Germans occupation, they were in the -- here were the Russians -- were the Russians. So, I remember it was the ficausit overnight they broke through. And that they marched. It was Panzer and tanks and motorcars and no one on foot. No one -- at -- less that, you know, through the street -- through the city and oh, outside the street for weeks, power -- open. I mean they -- they -- they already broke through, they [indecipherable] it from 50.

They -- they broke through right away there. And we went out, we had to come out, you know, like get some water. Everybody was afraid what sit in the house. And the only thing -- they didn't bother the army, they were marching, they didn't bother anybody, you went out to get some water. And the only question is -- they were asking how far is Minsk? Well, I says, Minsk, you know, I was -- I was outside, too, I says, "Minsk, you just cross the border." It depends -- it depends if they are from the -- you know, maybe they are from way back. I mean -- on the -- w-what -- the -- they probably started maybe the -- from Germany or from some -- western Poland my -- you know, the army. They says, "Oh you -- you have a long way to go yet, I think, to Minsk, you still got maybe a couple hundred kilometers." And it was open, you know. The tanks were open, they broke the line. And [indecipherable] Russian, where we retreat.

Q: The Russians were retreating?

A: They were in a panic, a retreated in that -- in that section. You know, there was three fronts. We were in the Bellarouse and there was Ukraine. They attacked from three sides. Now, the way I understand from -- from brief now a side, they broke through, right away they went through. First of all, yeah, I didn't mention. When the Russian took over Proushinna, they build a big airport -- right outside from Proushinna. We didn't have an airport. A big -- they probably prepared themselves, they -- either they knew, right near the border. And it was a tremendous airport. And -- and -- mi-military airport. And they were flying, training and flying pilots. So, in Proushinna, all the time was noise. During the night it was, all the time. And we got a kick out of it sometime, you -- in the day, you know, you saw the way the planes, you know, they do a -- they -- they -- they exercise in the planes. I thought, "Gee, they're going to drop down." It was -- you know, it was -- it was -- it's exciting things. So they had the -- the Germans bombed the first -- right away they bombed the complete -- whatever airplanes was on the airport. They destroyed them all. [indecipherable] see?

Q: Did they bomb Proushinna?

A: Not -- the Pr-Proushin-Proushinna, on the outskirts they did, but they di -- th-the airport and the outskirt of Proushinna -- so the airport was des -- was destroyed. And so f -- about maybe a month -- four or five weeks, that's all, they were marching, marching through the city. And everybody was sitting, was -- the people were sitting inside, were afraid to go out. But the German army didn't bother much.

Q: Just bu -- before you go on, just try to remember that month. What was going on in your house? You said a lot of people were sitting. What was your mother saying? What was your father saying? What were you and your brother doing? In that month where you don't know what's going on and the troops are coming in -- the German troops.

A: Yeah w-well -- well, we were -- we were -- [indecipherable] my mother saying that there is -- we knew -- we knew it's going to be -- we knew it's going to be trouble. I knew that.

Not my -- we knew it's going to be trouble eventually. We understood, but not -- what can you do, you know? You try the best. And so they -- wike went -- were -- the feeling - - what's -- we still -- you were still in your house, you stilled -- everybody knew the war is going starve it -- everybody prepared a little foods. You know, food and certain vegetables so last for awhile, whatever. And there's nothing unusual happened the first month -- three, four weeks for the [indecipherable]. But after, there were some military police took it over, yeah. And they were used to maybe grab sometimes, you know, certain Jewish people -- younger people, for certain work -- you know, clean up here, clean up there, whatever, yeah. But I mean there was nothing serious, unusual, serious happened. But when -- after f -- about a month, then the Gestapo and the SS came in. And they took over control of the city. So the first -- the second day, what they did is they requested -- they, you know, they had spies from the ca -- the local population collaborated. Most of the intelligencia from 20 -- I think was 18 people, right away, women and men. And somebody, you know, a leader from the organization, a leader from the Temple and if they knew somebody's a Socialist and somebody's a Communist and somebody's -- so they selected 18 men and they took him right out to the -- it was not far from Proushinna in the forest and they shot him. We knew that. We knew that. That was the first couple days.

Q: How did you know that?

A: Hm?

Q: How did you know that?

A: Because -- how did I know that? Because it was in ghetto established and we have contact yet with the -- we were free to go out and mix with the Gentiles and they -- you know, there is some religious around there, we knew that -- that, you know, they were shot. We knew that. It was no secret, everybody knew that. They took him out -- there were some witnesses and this was the first two days. And it -- it took them about -- so i-it -- they used to grab every -- you know, every once in awhile, somebody -- we were still living -- each one in -- you know, I lived in our house, each one was living in their own homes. It was not a ghetto established. So they used to grab many times -- I remember the ghetto was established, they grabbed some people to an airport -- I think I mentioned there was a airport near the city and the Russians left a awful lot of -- you know, and they were surprised -- is a lot of clean up -- debris is clean up and they left a lot of ammunition. And this was -- this was wintertime in -- no, they -- no, th-this -- th-th-they came in and no, that's not -- I'm sorry, in the winter, this was the 20 -- June the 20 -- June 22. So, clean the airport and sometimes, you know, you get with -- you know, y-y-y -- depends -- depends where -- which group you worked for.

Q: Were you ever grabbed?

A: Oh, well, yeah. I -- we were grabbed. For instance, what happened up -- now -- we were on the airport, now, it happened to -- you know, there was an engines -- I [indecipherable] an engine. Big engine weighs 1000 pounds. And they told me, two people to lift up the engine and put it on the truck. It's impossible, how can you put it in? I mean, you got to have a -- it weighs 1000 pounds, you're not going to pick it up. The [indecipherable] for them this was already -- you know, the SS and Gestapo. Pick it up. [indecipherable] you know, with a stick, hit you over the head, bang you. They know you couldn't do it. F-For them it was -- you know what I mean. So, they beat you up and that -- finally, you know, they says, well, get a couple more help and put it on on the truck. This was I -- the first days were I experien -- really experience. So, but -- you mean -- you couldn't do anything, you know, if they cat -- they -- they coo -- it was -- most of the time a cleaning up jobs -- only men, they didn't take any women that time, only men, young. Mostly the younger men for ca -- all kind of clean up jobs. And eventually -- you know, started dill -- it came in the laws -- before they stop this, the Judenrat, it came in already, certain decree, certain laws. I remember that, that you know, you had to -- you couldn't -- you still free to move outside the ghetto and deal and trade with the farmers if you had a little money and all that and so you couldn't work already, a Jew, you had before, the arm band. You didn't have the yellow star, you had a arm band on the right side, with it says Juda. So it means, you know, if you went out, they knew that say Juda, out -- you -- they knew you're Juda, that's -- they grabbed ou-ouch -- otherwise they're going to grab somebody by the ow -- how did they know you -- know to grab -- to gr -- to grab a Jew, because it's -- you have the arm band and they -- a Juda. Now, of course everybody followed, it's -- maybe some -- it wasn't s -- you know, you were scared. Inc - - you -- I mean, you put on the arm band, what would happen if you wouldn't po -- put on the arm band, I really don't know. I really don't know, sometime, if they would discover it, you know, maybe they'll kill you. Well, I -- it didn't -- I didn't experience that. And -- but it didn't lasted, it lasted about a month and they started to organize the ghetto. So -- and they -- before they organized the ghetto -- before they organized the ghetto, they selected a Judenrat, you know, they selected each -- you know, that's their -- that's the system. And they didn't install the Judenrat, they told the Jews that you install a Jewish council, that's a Judenrat, it's a Jewish council. Would represent -- represent a different -- different branches. Now, if we need labor, there you're going to be, there's Minister -- you ha -- you'd -- Minister of Labor, you're going to be Minister of Sanitation and Minister of -- of Police -- Jewish police. You got a -- you know, Jewish police to -- you know, in the Judenrat to keep order, the Jewish police for -- you had to keep the order, you know, there was some decrees for the Judenrat and if -- for no kind of branches, you know what I mean and that's the way and so they would select -- they try to select among the Jews, which is a select well -- in the beginning they selected, it was a a-attorney, a big attorney, Schreibman. All attorney -- well attorney, maybe we sho-should select Schreibman. And they decided, well, we going to -- they decided to select ha -- he was a big businessman, an educated -- yeah, so they -- It-Itsal Yanovitch. Very big extra -- you know, respective -- respected Jew businessman, respected by the -- all the community from the poor. You know, everybody, Poles and all that. And educated

man, so he was the president and then there -- the important job was the -- very important --

A: -- ovitch. Very big extra -- you know, respective -- respected Jew, businessman, respected by the -- all the community from the poor. You know, everybody, Poles and all that. And educated man, so he was the president and then there -- the important job was the -- very important job is that -- in charge of labor. Now, the Germans now, they're not going to pick this, you know, that's [indecipherable], so this was the Juden -- they picked the Judenrat, which consisted of -- I think it was 22 people all together. Each one has his own job. And they told the Judenrat that we going to establish a ghetto in certain spots -- you know, they picked -- they say the spot is going to be usually they picks the spots, you know, what is slum spots, not the -- not in the center. Yeah, and they gave you a certain -- certain -- 15 blocks or -- or so -- 20 block. The -- the -- the measurements exactly where the Juderat is going to be and those Jews who lived in -- you know, have their own, stayed there. All the Jews living outside -- on outside the Juden ghetto, had to abandon their homes. Of course maw -- there was very few Gentiles living in the slums, there. There was eve -- there was some -- they had to abandon -- they had to leave their homes. And so they were -- established the ghetto and it was -- you know, f-fenced, as all the ghettos -- fenced in with ba-barb wire fenced in.

Q: Who built the fence?

A: The Jews had to f -- build themselves, they told us exactly the measurement, the plan. You build it. We had to build it. We had to pay for -- our labor, of course. We build it, we paid for it, with all -- and --

Q: Did you -- you help build it?

A: Well, I really -- I really didn't help build it. Th-That -- it -- it -- they had -- they had the -- what you call it, ca -- c-carpenters, they had welders and they had -- I was too young, I didn't participate in building that, no. You know, professionals, which it -- and everything. Well, we didn't have the machinery, everything would had to -- done by hand. And that's the -- all the outside Jews were put in the Judenrat and the Burgermeister came in in town. That's the mayor of the town and he had -- he had the -- the authority for the whole city. Includes already, I mean, his -- the Juden -- already the Judenrat and all that into -- beside the SS and the Gestapo and the other units. So, when the Judenrat -- we had -- our house was in the ghetto, yeah, yeah. Our hou -- because it's -- it was the section there, somehow -- we had a big house, like it says, a pound way back in it, our house was still in the ghetto, so we remained -- we still remained in the ghetto. I mean, we remained in our house. And then, eventually the laws -- right away, laws went in that you have to -- of course you have to wear it -- that -- that you got to wear the yellow star -- yellow star on your chest, on the left side and the back, I think it's five inches -- you know each one, a child, everybody wear -- to wear the yellow star. And everybody had a little -- still -- ver -- food saved up and stored up for -- f-for little, you

know, for -- you were still be able befo -- able to go out before the Judenrat was established -- to deal with the farmers. You know, still free, but you still have the yellow band, you're still free if you had -- there was no money. If you had money, it was mostly bartering most of the time, you know, for the farmer. If you didn't have any money, so you have a pair of shoes, they gave you -- gave you sa -- they gave you, for instance, some vegetables, whatever or meat or -- or some butter or a little cheese or a suit or [indecipherable]. This was bar -- you know. This was -- you were -- what do you call it? Bar -- Bar --

Q: Bartering.

A: Bar-Bartering.

Q: Trading.

A: And -- because, yeah -- trading, because the ruble, under the Russian, the ruble was already not for -- you know, change wasn't considered [indecipherable] at all. They preferred tradder -- the farmers -- they preferred tradder -- you want something, they want something valuable. So -- but when that Judenrat was established, this was already - rationing went in at -- to effect. They gave you so much -- so much bread. We didn't get -- we didn't get bread. We got flour. My uncle's mill supplied the flour for the Judenrat. You know, we used to get flour. They figured out already, excess -- roughly how much flour -- 400 pounds, how much bread is going to come out. So it was -- I don't know, 25 grams or so much. 12 - fif - 25 grams of bread, then they rationing and so much little -- margarine for each family and little -- I think it -- they have -- it -- it was over here, what they call it, like oh, Jello type, little Jello, if you want I should, yeah. And then, right away l-law went in. They requested from the Judenrat that you have to -- half a million rul -- there's some -- you know, you have some money -- rubles left, you know, from the Russians, rubles left -- half a million rubles and this was the -- you know, this was as function already from the police, make sure -- you know, i-if they knew that somebody -- you know, rich, poor, you know. So, somebody didn't want to -- didn't want to give the police -- the Jewish police were forced, you know -- you got to give. Or somebody didn't behave or somebody -- you know, the police f -- the police function was to keep order. We had a lot of -- you know, there was a lot of stealing and -- and when you're hungry, you know, you know something, you'll grab -- so it's got to be, you know, got to be order. So the p -- the function of police to keep order in the ghetto.

Q: Let me just check this. You said there was a -- a -- a -- a law established to -- to get money from the Jewish community. Ho-How much did your family have to give and did you have the cash or did you have to --

A: No, we-well, the rubles, we gave some ru -- I don't know, it was a half a -- half -- it was a half a million rubles and it was about 10 kilogram of silver. It was the -- went effect right away and I think it's a kilogram of gold. So, each one, you know, in orders -- the

Judenrat is -- their function is to make sure that getting from the Jews and each one had to -- you know, had to give -- you know, if you had a [indecipherable] something, yeah, so that -- and besides, any foreign foreigncy not allowed, you know, that's strict, they were going to -- if they're going to catch you, you got caught with foreign currency, let's say a dollar, you know, the death penalty. For no -- no radios. All the radios has to be confiscated. Whoever had a radio, you could not --

Q: The radio next door?

A: Well --

Q: The Goldberg's radio?

A: They already had gon -- I mean, all the radios had to be confiscated. And all -- a Jew didn't -- you didn't -- weren't allowed to own a radio. You didn't wa-wa-weren't allowed to own a camera. You were -- they didn't allow to had Bell telephones. There was not too many telephone, radios and any other -- we didn't have the -- had like here now, you know, the television and VCR's and compasses -- I give you example, maps -- a map, a compass, anything like that, yeah, was not allowed. And had to be turned over and this is -- this is -- the first laws went into effect. And so it was the Judenrat in general, in Proushinna, you know, was -- did a good job. You know, they've -- some complaints in some other places, in other ghetto. They were -- they did a good job. As a matter of fact, they -- it -- it -- they came later on, in 19 -- it was establish in 19 -- it's '41 -- '41, from some other cities to learn the system the way, you know -- to learn the system the way we in the Proushinna ghetto operates. Now, eventually, in late 1941, that was established in June, late f -- 1941, they brought in f -- Jews from little surrounding towns. Most of the little towns were liquidated for -- on the spot. You know, there was families, a little hamlet or village, with 20 - 50 - 100 families [indecipherable] you know, the SS, they -- they -- they killed them on the spot. I know a fact, it is not far from Proushinna, there was -- we didn't have the statio-station in Proushinna, we had to go -- it's about 10 kilometers to the railroad station. We had a little trolley station. If you want to travel, you had to take the trolley and -- to Dalinavo, which is 10 kilometer and then there was a little town -- little village. There were about 25 families and in 19 -- in ni -- this was in -- right away, the first -- the first -- when they arrived, the first month, they killed them all out. In one family, somehow one person from that family somehow escaped and came to our ghetto. This was -- came to the ghetto. So, they -- yeah?

Q: I'm going to stop you there, because we're just about out of tape, yeah. You know, every --

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

Q: Okay, at this point the ghetto has been established, it's still fairly early on. What was a regular day like? What -- you would wake up in the morning -- at this point you're still in your house?

A: Yeah, well --

Q: What would --

A: -- is -- th-the ghetto was established in -- in August fir -- in August first. Now, that time already, the Germans -- any part -- any di -- what you call it, like we had the Burgermeister, SS, yes and the -- the Gestapo and there was -- there was an airport and there was some warehouses, so it was already a system established, when the Germans requested, for instance, 500 people one place, 200 people here. So the Juden, you know, they gave an order and the Judenrat supplied, sort of in the morning. And you know, they kept -- bookkeeping, you know, fair -- it means if I went today, somebody else will go tomorrow. Now, if I like -- if -- if I like the place where I was sent and they gave you, you know, some places -- they treat you -- they gave you a s -- sometimes a s -- extra piece of bread or something -- little margarine or something. So you were willing to go and work there and I don't mind going to work there another day. But there was some places where -- where you -- they and -- there was a -- a Leaman -- a Leaman commando, which they were in charge of the communication line and telegram and te-telegraph, telegram poles and they were rough people there, where -- you know, nobody wanted to go and work there, because they beat -- you went there and you know, they told you what to do and decided they were unsatisfied, they -- you know, they were beating you up and kicking you for no other reason. So, you say, "Well, I'm not -- you're sending me back to Leaman brothers? I went there yesterday, I don't want to go there," you know. So it depends. So each -- each gr-group from the Germans, they requested some people and it - they were fair. They kept somehow a list and -- and you did for -- went to all kind of different work. Especially it was winter, you know, wintertime the airport, which so big. On the airport you had to go -- now, they could have -- I mean they could have af-afford and -- and clean the airport miles for the runways with -- with snow plows and bulldozers, whatever. So the airport, thousands -- 2000, with the shovel -- we had to have shovels and wheelbarrows, so you know, that's cheap labor. So we had --

Q: So you moved the snow with your shovels?

A: Well, you know, we get in -- we get in -- that's in Bellarouse, in the part of Poland, a awful lot of snow and cold -- winter cold and snow, so you had to clean the -- you know and the snow, in that wheelbarrow with the -- for tu -- with the shovel and there was certain spot where you dumped it, you know, half a mile away and -- and they had cheap labor. So this was wintertime that lasted -- you know, had long winters, sometime for three, four, five months. And I was working -- everybody was working in the airport.

And besides, you were sent some -- for instance, to work in the woods, to chop for the Germans. They did -- that's the same thing, they had to -- th-th-that's the only source of - of cooking and so -- and heating sys -- heating. And so you had to go -- be requested, for instance, a group of a few hundred people to go in the woods. Now, we were fortunate, we had woods near -- about 25 kilometers, actually -- the nearest part, we had lot of forest. So, they were sending in groups to the forest and sometimes for -- you had to stay there a week, you know, because it takes 20 -- no, it takes a long time til you go there. So -- they supplied you -- the Judenrat, with certain rationing and you had to go there and chop wood, cut logs, chop wood and then bring it back to the ghetto and for that -- for the -- outside the ghetto population. So, this type of work. And -- and any -- I mean, there is -- there -- there was no labor -- it was no machinery which they had, no machinery. You know they -- they used cheap labor -- machinery. Especi -- for instance, now, they didn't like it -- the Germans were complaining. They said th-that they -- you know, when they marched in and if -- we didn't have the roads like over here paved, sarek -- so they were complaining dowse dumb, foolish Polish, they -- and over -- it was muddy, you know, they were go-going through the tanks and the -- you know, through the roads, they made holes and they made a -- it was -- it was a -- a ma -- I mean it was a lot of mud and all that. He says, "They -- that -- look at the roads they have," they didn't like the roads. Build them roads. So, we had to -- it was a -- a -- a caroda, that's a big job, always crush stones. You know, with a sledgehammer -- you know, big stones, crush stones in order to fix the roads. So this is -- this is all the time, hundreds of -- you know, which is -- it was hard work and how did you get -- you know, from big stones, you had to crush the stones til you -- you know, you crush them to s-small and that's the way it -- in roads and then you filled in the roads. They call it gravel here, like crushed -- you know, they -- when you buy, you know, want it crush or gravel if you want stones graded up some -- some lots over here you see sometimes here. So this type of work -- all -- all kind of work -- all kind of work.

Q: And -- and if you were working, would there be a German supervising you?

A: Well, a-as a rule, when there was a group, yeah there were -- of course there were Germans, a few German, they would supervise you, yes. They were with dogs, supervise you. And even -- even -- see, my brother now, eventually my brother was assigned, in 1942, they needed some -- the -- the -- the mayor needed somebody around t-t-t-the house -- well, they call it a chores boy -- a chores --

Q: Chore boy.

A: Chore -- I mean --

Q: To help him with chores.

A: Ch -- yeah, ch -- yeah, yeah, chore. Help him get -- well, he chopped the wood and all this and that. So he was picked up -- even though, he was picked up every morning from

the ghetto and to outside to the Burgermeister and they had them -- had a guard, you know, he had a guard follow him. He -- he had a mansion, you know. The law went in, you weren't allowed to walk on the sidewalk, you had to walk in the -- you know, on the what you call it, drain, in the -- on the road. On the right side of the road where the drain exists there. Yeah, and the SS man or whatev -- the soldier, you know, with the rifle, was following on the s-side of -- following and y-you had to walk -- you had to walk in the dr -- on the s -- on the road -- on the right side of the road only, yeah, you had to walk.

Q: But you're -- you're still living at home, in the house?

A: This is still -- this was still in the ghetto.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: Our house was still -- was still in the ghetto.

Q: Are you and your brother at this point, are you still going to your political youth meetings, Bitar?

A: Well, this was already -- forget about -- it was already not political, no, no, hm-mm.

Q: W-Was anything going o-on though, in terms of discussions, among friends, about --

A: Yeah, we --

Q: Tell us a little bit about that.

A: Yeah, yeah, we were getting -- we were getting around, you know, in the ghetto in the beginning, meeting in some houses and spend, you know, talking about a situation and -- and playing chess and -- and still -- you know, cards, chess and -- and try to spend the time, see. The Germans didn't -- when the Judenrat was established, the Germans didn't went in in the ghetto too often. See? They only came in -- you know, the Judenrat had a special building, mostly on the outskirts, near that opening -- they call it in German, shlotbarn, where the gate opens up and not far from there was a big house, where the Judenrat were -- were located. And it was a big house with a lot of rooms, you know, it was -- they took up -- rich person lived there. And the Germans used to have a -- I mean from -- from the -- not soldiers, but from the -- from the leaders, used to come down every day to the Judenrat with requests about labor, we need labor here, labor there. We need money here, we need always money and in the beginning, see, they could be bribed a little. The Burgermeister, even the SS, they could be bribed. They knew, you know, they mer -- you know, that they were looking for something. If they can get, they going to that. For instance, we had some selections wintertime in the ghetto. You know, they want to make sure -- do -- a do -- about the rationing exactly. If somebody dies -- many people or somebody gets born. So, they call that a selection. You had to go out and make

sure, check exactly if it's -- the number's right or not right. But they really didn't know the number and they didn't care. This was just -- you know, just fun for them to -- to -- they call it a selection, to go outside, you had to be -- wintertime, summertime or wintertime, go out --

Q: This is a -- a counting.

A: Accoun -- for --

Q: Where they would count everybody?

A: -- s-selection there -- for accounting --

Q: Okay.

A: -- and lined up in four lines and they going to -- yeah, they counting -- they counting and then it keeps you -- and they counted and then you know, you freeze, with little children, crippled people, no [indecipherable] to go out and sometimes it lasted for three -- for three or four hours, finish the counting, the -- I don't know. Counting goo -- you can go back, you know, go back. Quite often they did that. They called it the counting.

Q: H-How would they call you to that?

A: Well, they -- a -- well, they call it -- it forced --

Q: How would you know? Was there a bell or something?

A: No, no, the Juden, see, th -- they told the Judenrat that this and this day, at eight -- such a time, and the police and you know the wa -- police and it was postered, you know, on the streets, in the -- certain places and that you had to be out -- be ready for this time, you know, yeah. This is -- everything, see, organized. They didn't -- they had the Judenrat there to organize all that.

Q: Y-You had said earlier that -- that the Judenrat in -- in your town did pretty well --

A: Yeah.

Q: If you could talk a little bit more about how people felt about it. Were there conflicting feelings about what the leaders were doing in terms of cooperating with --

A: I understand your question --

Q: -- at some level, with the Germans?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, see, in general they did -- the Judenrat were fair in Proushinna. There were some complaints, you know what I mean. There's always certain complaint. But as a rule, on the average, there were -- they were trying -- they were trying the best. Now, they were against organizing or something, you know, they didn't allow that. They were responsible, you know what I mean? They -- you know, if they didn't know in the beginning, but eventually, when it came out, you know, later on, when it's got -- wh-what I come to, the 19 -- in the 1942, I know when they start already organizing. So they were of course against that, because they were responsible. First of all, they were responsible for the population of the ghetto and they were the first one we sacrificed. So, you know, you -- I don't know, you can blame him or you're not -- you know what I mean? It's a tough situation byegot, tough. Don't forget that -- to that -- it was reprisals, it's not like in normal times you get somebody or you get a -- you [indecipherable] a partisan, or a revolt or somebody -- instigator, you know, they take revenge. If the Germans find out -- for instance, if I did something or I'm doing something or I'm preparing for something, you know, not only -- you know they were, oh my family, my -- you know, they would get, oh my family and my ga -- uncles and -- and nieces and nephews and who knows how many, you know, responsible. It's -- so it was -- it was at -- yeah, it was risky. It was risky.

Q: T-Tell us --

A: It's very, very risky. You know, you didn't want to have on your conscience, that you know, you did something on account you saw and the same thing, the Judenrat had a problem. The same, they didn't want to -- yeah. But they didn't know -- they didn't know, they didn't allow. They lest eventually when they did discovered, late -- in the 19 - - late 1942, part of it, it was already too late, you know. It was already too late. You know, we had to -- you know, the way we -- the way you -- the -- the organization, we started it, had to be so secret, you know, you had to sa -- that you -- you -- even your own family didn't have to know what you're doing.

Q: T-Tell us about that. How -- how -- when did the idea first emerge --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- in your head, that hey --

A: Well, I'll tell you, because I didn't -- I want to say that in 19 -- when they established the ghetto in 1941, in -- in October -- now, in beginning 1942, they broke into Proushinna ghetto from surrounding towns, from Ginefcare, from Narefkar, from Bielovairsh and Karminitz. Four cities and then from Bialystok, those were little cities. And what

happened, fortunately, you know, most of the little cities, you know, in 1941 or in 19, beginning '42, they liquidated them, you know? They didn't bother even establishing a ghetto. They liquidate them -- they -- they killed them on the spot or they took them out in the woods -- took them out in the woods and killed. And then, after -- after that, it was of course -- it -- it was too much of a -- they didn't have the power yet, the -- the -- the manpower, it was a tall job. And -- so they start bringing in in Proushinna ghettos, of some -- those that are fortunate and the ghetto swelled from about -- we had -- like is mentioned, 6000 Jews, 1000 from here, 2000 from here, so finally the ghetto swelled to 12,000. And some -- some were brought in by trucks from Ginefcare. And some were marched by foot for 80 -- you know, from -- especially from the Narefkar, the city and we had to take in a family from there and they marched them. They marched them, you know, the whole -- from, it's about, I would say maybe 16 -17 kilometers, can you imagine? So half -- what happened to the cripples, from the children and the -- and the what you call it? A lot of them you know, lost -- lost parents, air children. They couldn't make it -- you know and those who couldn't make it, they shot them on the spot. And eventually those who made it, brought them in in the ghetto. So we heard -- we heard from those people, we right there you know, we had to take in. You had a big house, we take in some families, you know. Some says, you know, and they've lost a father or lost a -- lost a little baby or lost a child, yeah. And then they brought in from Bialystok, it's a big city, Bialystok, so they brought in 2000 from Bialystok in Proushinna, in our town. Now, I want to mention that Proushinna and the vicinity was enclosed in the Third Reich, they call it, you know? They incorporated -- favored the Third Reich, we going to be treated a little better. Well -- the reason they incorporated Proushinna in the Third Reich, is because we were near Bielovairsh and Bielovairsh a forest, were the famous forest in Poland. One of the biggest famous forests in Poland, that's about 60 or 70 kilometers from Proushinna. And there were famous for certain animals. And -- and Goering and all the groups and -- and -- and -- and Himmler, they used to hunt there. That's the reason -- that's the reason they incorporated Proushinna and even Bialystok, the certain territory and they call it to the east, Prussia. Not to -- you know, greater Germany is Prussia. So comparison with other ghettos, maybe we were treated a little bit in the beginning, better, because we didn't have those -- they call it aktiones -- actions. The German could -- you know, aktiones, like in other cities, they requested, let's see, right away, 1000 inslawnie 2000 - 5000 action and they -- they took them out someplace in -- in certain, you know, ravines and certain places right away and -- even 19 -- in -- in the beginning of the war, and they killed. So we didn't have that, we didn't have the actions, you know, like [indecipherable] hundred and except -- except it was -- you know, every once in awhile, every day there was some casualties, you know we had -- you know, the -- when outsiders -- some -- they took people off the street -- 60 years old. So it means some -- some were mistreated and some couldn't make it, some were weak, so there was some casualties. We had to bring them in in the ghetto. So we were told, you know, there is two or three, every once in awhile I heard that they brought them in -- in -- in the ghetto and -- for burial. Now -- now that -- my -- what I want to mention is this, I had an uncle the one -- the one was -- yes, you know, associated in the -- for the farm. Now, we had a bakery in the town -- in the -- in the ghetto. We weren't getting bread, we were getting flour. And

we were the bakery in the -- in -- in the ghetto and the fire -- the fire engine, you know, the f -- the -- it was -- it's -- in the ghetto, we suppose we were in a fire, you know, the -- the -- we had to take care -- the fire station was in -- the same -- already was -- it was stationed in -- in Proushinna ghetto and with a -- with a hospital in Proushinna ghetto. So, yeah, we had to speak in my -- my uncle, so he f -- like -- was a farmer and we had some -- a fleet of horses and wagons to -- any time the German requested, for instance, if you have to take down 50 people to the forest or 100 people to forest. So they told us, they were -- they were the truckers, we didn't have no truck, they were -- truck had taken the people down the forest and see, my uncle was killed. They -- they -- what do you call it? The experiments with dogs, yeah. He was torn by dogs.

Q: Can you explain a little more?

A: Hm?

Q: Can you just explain a little more?

A: Well, the experiments with dogs are -- one dog -- how long is going to take -- how long is going to take dogs to kill a person. You understand? Ah. You know, th-th-they experiment, they wanted -- they wanted to know how long is going to take one dog or two dogs, finally, yeah. So, that's -- that's a -- that -- that happened. That made a big impression on me.

Q: When did you -- can you tell us a little bit more about when you began to think and talk with your friends about your --

A: Well, this happened in 1942, this and then -- see, we had so many brought in in that ghetto, escapees. Like I mention, they brought some in from different towns. And then they used to pick some -- find some Jews from the outside -- for instance, and somebody survived and they used to drop him in in the ghetto. So, you know, we heard all this -- all kind of stories, so I was wondering, you know, they could have killed them, now why did they brought them in in the ghetto? Some work -- he was telling us that he survived somehow, I know some way and from the little village and he was wandering and they caught him and they put -- the Germans caught him and drop him in into the ghetto. So, it -- it mean -- it, you know, it reached your mind that understanding there is -- there is something -- you know, it's a matter of time. Now, why did they have to bring in -- I was o figure, why did they have to bring in those escapees, those -- those survivors? They could have killed them, they dropped them in the -- you know, many -- they dropped him in in the ghetto. We hear -- we heard all kind of atrocities with -- you know, leaving a trai -- you know, leaving witnesses. So we understood that's -- you know, there's a matter of time, you know, it's a matter of time. And -- and fortunately, when -- you know, in -- the -- when the group was established, many -- there's a lot of -- from the group, worked in different kind of places. One from our group worked in the woods, sent to cut fo -- for -- you know, for a week and he was work and they left -- you know, they stayed there in the

woods for a week and at night Russian couple -- couple -- Russian partisans came over. And the Germans slept already there. They came over and they says, "Well, if you going to get some arms, we'll take you in." They were -- it wasn't organized yet. You know, it was -- it was independent groups, I call it, you know it -- it was still -- you've -- you've -- you could find in the woods that time, criminals. You can find escapees from -- prisoners, Russian prisoners, [indecipherable] you know, they went in in the woods. They had the ammunition instead of getting, you n -- take a big -- taken in prison. And they -- there was all, you know, and -- and there was some -- for instance, farmers for the boys. The older people -- the older, they didn't take. If a farmer had couple boys, especially boys, they used to take them to work in Germany, to work on the German farms, because you know, they needed help. All Germany [indecipherable] all -- they can use all the -- all the -- all the men -- all the men they could. So they can get cheap labor, so they tried farmers, get the -- get those farmer's boys to shf -- go to Germany. Now, they didn't want to go and they knew the territory, see? Thes -- they went in in the woods. And -- and they stayed in -- you know, sometimes in the night they'll go back to their parents and find out. So -- so there was all kind of groups there in the woods and this is the first -- the first friend we met at two -- a Russian -- they were Russian Bitar, so they said, "Well, try and get some arms, or get some money and maybe we can, you know, if you get some ar -- money we can -- we'll take you in some." But, you know, one of the -- the -- from the -- the man from our group was responsive for this man. He was responsible for this man I mean, actually one or two or three could have -- could have -- they would have taken it. You know they would -- they would accept two or three, three or few, not ag -- not 50 or 100. But you know, he wouldn't -- you we -- were responsible were sent for the Judenrat and -- and if you don't come, you were accounted for the people. Now, if you'll come with three less, what happened to the other three? You know, it wa -- it -- you know, it was -- y-you had the moral responsibility.

Q: You're talking about why you didn't just run away right then?

A: Well, right then, well, I wasn't there, but I mean, I could -- if I were there --

Q: No, right, but what I mean [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, so, that's -- oh, there's some partisan in the meantime in the woods. so we started - you know, to get organized and try and get some arm and ammunition. In the meantime, we know there's some, you know, in the woods. It's -- this is far away actually, this isn't avail -- over here. Y-You know, this is about 50 kilometers. And so the youths, in general, got thats understanding already, you know, because you don't believe, you know, the human nature. You still believe maybe you -- I mean, you have figured -- it's - maybe you're going to -- the time will come, maybe the war will be over and maybe something is go -- going to happen, yeah, a miracle's going to happen. You're not going to have any miracle. It was a panic already in the ghetto in 1942, we heard about all the liquidations from the cities, and from the -- from other parts, from little towns and they were bringing them in in the ghetto and leaving witnesses, so we knew what's was going

on and all. So they -- every -- every -- you know, a realization that you might know. There's something, you know, there is -- there is -- tricky, we have to -- we have to do something, we have to get organized and -- and we not going to go -- we not -- you know -- when it comes for -- if and when it comes the time, we not going to go. Worst if -- even if we not going to get out, we figured we going to even burn up the ghetto or do something. I mean, even if you, you know, burn up, let's -- anybody, whatever ca -- can escape, can escape, wor -- worse scenario. So, y -- whoever's can escape -- they knew already in the ghetto, their -- it -- it co -- you know, when the group was established, now -- later on, when we got established, so it was a problem to get -- how you get arm and ammunition. Besi -- yeah?

Q: But, bef-before we go to that, let me ask you a little bit about -- I mean, did you actually have a meeting and -- with some of your friends and say, okay, we are a group now and these are the requirements to be in it? Or --

A: Oh, yeah, yeah. We had -- we had a -- we had a m-meetings -- we used to had a meeting and each, you know, from the group, each one worked in different kind of locations and one of our group worked in the warehouses where there were -- you know, there was 50 or 100 people working there, or one or two people from our group worked in the warehouses, where was the Russian leftover. And there was ammunition, they were cr -- you know, sorting and crating, to ship it to Germany. And so it was a plan that time when we're -- how to -- you could -- you know, you -- you could s-steal sometimes. It's -- it was easy to hide or something, but the problem is how you going to get in in the ghetto, you know? You could have -- it -- it was -- wouldn't be a problem to leave it outside a ghetto. Very easy, because they were working outside the ghetto, you could have buried someplace. But it's -- it wouldn't be used, you know, how you going to get to it? You know, the important thing is to have it with you in the ghetto, you know? The -- the -- you know, the arm -- ammunition or whatever. So this was a problem, because the ghetto was -- you know, like I mentioned, was surrounded and it was patrolled all the time with -- with police and they had the -- for dogs, Germans and collaborators. We had the -- we had the Lithuanians in Poland, too. And it was pretty strict, you know. You couldn't get out. In order, you know, it was you -- you were -- you were locked in. No communication with the outside at all. No [indecipherable] men and you know, not far -- what I mentioned one still living in h-homes, at 60 colone. We didn't -- we couldn't send any letters, we couldn't communicate, we couldn't travel, we couldn't go out. So, we had some people working there in the ammunitions. We had some people working in the woods, cutting the woods and we had some people -- we had a engineer. We had a secret radio -- a engineer, which he fixed up. We had a f -- secret radio, which we can listen for the outside world and you know, and you still worried whofer organized, a little bit. But mostly we used -- we used to get the news from the papers, from the German papers. They -- I mean yid -- they let you have a paper, for you can not read it anyway or something. So whatever, you know, we -- so we knew a little situation what's going on on the front, how far they are, yeah, how far they are, yeah. But it was a secret radio, so we knew a little, we'd from -- from the public -- Br-British public broadcasting.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Yeah, so we -- we knew from both sides. So that's the way the group started at. And --

Q: How many people?

A: It was actually -- the group was 18 and three women is 21, and 10 is 31. 10 from our group was out -- they had co-contact already, s -- in -- in another part, the adkund. This was -- what I mentioned they worked chopping the wood. Now, this was far away. Now, the nearest part from -- from Proushinna was 30 kilometers, the nearest wood. This is already the -- the -- they call that the trouknavitch, that's a mosher forest. Now, we got in ki -- a couple partisans got in contact with our group and they used to come in -- the group -- our group already had a secret tunnel, I didn't even know where it was. Only certain -- you know, I -- I know there is -- there is a se -- a secret tunnel going in and out of the ghetto. So, we s -- two part-partisans -- Russian partisans, they used to come in in the ghetto and be in contact with our group. And they -- the same, they told us to get organized and try and get some ammunition or money. I mean they figured money, they can buy it. It was not -- you know, that -- it was still independent groups, it was not -- no organization at all, it was the rule of the jungle yet. So you figured, get some money, you see? So they -- eventually 10 people from our group, left in Septem -- October, four months before the liquida -- in October, they left already in the woods. And they learned a little from those couple partisans, you know, from the Russians, how to make a bunker, how to live, you know, live in the woods. So they stayed there and quite often they used to warn -- a few of them used to come back here and in the ghetto, we had contact with them -- used to come in, I still didn't know how they went in through the secret tunnel. And that's the way we had -- we had th -- th -- we used to communicate with each other.

Q: Did -- did you have an oath or something, when you did form your group, was there any discussion at one point saying this is why we're doing it or I swear I will do this or that? Was there ever any sort of formal -- formalization to --

A: It's very secret.

Q: Commitment?

A: Yeah, it's a ga -- it's ver -- it's yeah, it's very secret, very secret and that's -- nobody knew about it. It was so secret and so confidential, that you know that your own parents didn't know what was going on. Because you -- you didn't want to -- you didn't want to -- what you call it -- tell even your parents, they wouldn't sleep nights, you know what I mean? They wouldn't -- I don't know if they would object or not object, but you -- you just -- you just couldn't do it, yo-you know what I mean? In case it is -- it had to be so secret that -- in -- nobody -- nobody -- nobody knew about this group, about our group.

Q: But can you tell us what it was? I mean, did you swear an oath, or --

A: Well, we didn't -- we really -- we -- we really didn't swear an o-oath, but we -- you know, we cooperated. We knew there was some -- you know, there was some cooperation between our group. See, my brother was little older and he was more instrumental -- I'm going to go -- this is later on, I would imagine, that -- so that's the way the group was established. So the 10 were there and we were working -- the 18. Now, there was some other groups, we didn't know about them. We not -- were not the exceptional, no, there was some other groups. You think there are -- you know, we thought we -- we di -- we thought we maybe were the only ones, but there was some groups, eventually we met them -- a gr -- another group, we met them in the woods. So, it was very secret.

Q: But you did know -- if you were in the ghetto, you knew the 18 people, you could recognize their face and they -- you knew they were part of your group?

A: Oh, we knew exactly, I mean, knew exactly.

Q: Okay. So you knew.

A: Each one knew exactly..

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, we used to get together and this group, the 18, our group, we had our own bunker, tunnel built. In case -- but we didn't have time yet to -- it was -- we found a spot somehow near the border where you can get out. There was some farmland and barns. It's easy to -- you know, easy to get -- easy to escape in case emergency.

Q: So, what was your goal at the group? You were trying to prepare for, is -- an escape?

A: Well, yeah. We were trying -- we were -- actually, we knew that we were going to get -- escape. We knew that we're going to either escape, if -- if not escape -- the 10 are already out. Now, we were left to organize some more, you know, til y-y -- it still, it -- it -- it -- in the beginning it wasn't 18, it was si -- 10, then 12 and then you know, it wa -- another one because we needed -- we needed a -- a -- a carpenter, because in order to smuggle in the -- the rifles, many times it's too long, we had to break it in half, break the wood off in order to, you know, in order to smuggle in, this is too big and too long. So we needed a carpenter in order to fix -- fix the rifle up, yeah. And -- and then there was couple from -- in the group and they were much older than I am -- two brothers and they were dealing in -- in -- they were dealing in -- in the -- f -- with lumber. And they knew the territ --

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Q: In Proushinna.

A: Yeah?

Q: You had a sawmill in Proushinna.

A: Oh we -- yeah, we had a sa --

Q: Yeah, okay.

A: There was a sawmill in Proushinna, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. So we took now -- and they were cousins to the one from the -- the 10 who left in the woods, it was my Bitar commander. He was the first one organizing, you know, th-the 10. And his name was Barro Sagell -- Barro Sagell. So, mostly I would say there's a lot of -- majority is -- is from Bitar, would say half of the group is from Bitar. Now, he va -- he is the first one that -- from the 10, he left his younger brother, then it went in the ya -- [indecipherable] saloontashur with his wife, he took his wife and he was a mechanic where he -- he belonged to the group and then it was a -- a britebar five, 10 and it was two from Bialystok. And th-those from the 10, quite often used to come down in -- wa -- like I mention, in the ghetto and we used to have contact with them.

Q: So you and your brother are doing this and you didn't tell your parents anything about it?

A: They didn't know, no. You see, I -- like I -- I mentioned to you before, my father was pessimist a little. Now, now, by ra -- by wanting -- geographically, maybe he was right.

No, he was a educated man, you know, he drew a map, never forget. He drew a map and he says, "Boys." We were ta -- no, we were talking some, we was talking about -- th-they didn't know the -- you know, that we are organized, what we should do or something like that. We, well -- planning, wer -- you know, saying some and w-we going to escape, no, we going to do something. H-H-He knew, but he didn't know about the group -- he knew there -- because he drew a map and he says, "Boys, look, here is Poland." And then he drew, you know, you got Czechoslovakia, he knew exactly all the -- Europe. He says, "You haven't got a single country -- neutral country. You got Sweden and Switzerland. Now, all Europe was already taken. Now, let's -- even if you'll get out the ghetto," he says, "you got such a long way to go and you going to be ca-caught," he says. "You know, you get a caught by the -- bun -- by the certain groups, let's see, unfriendly Gentiles, he'll -- he'll give you out," because it was a prize, you know, to catching a Jew, two kilograms of sugar. That's all. If -- you know, if you find a Jew hiding or if you find somebody and you deliver him to the Germans, you'll get two kilogram of sugar. And some went for that. Sugar was, you know, a luxury, two kilogram of sugar. So he says, "I don't," -- it's a lost cause to him. He says it's a lost cause, yeah. So he didn't vel -- you know, he disco -- he well, I don't know, he -- bara -- one thing he was right. He didn't know we had connection with Bitar. He didn't know, we didn't tell him that already and later on the connection, and all this. So he's -- I don't know to say if it was right or not right, who knows? I mean that -- geographically he was -- he was right, because it was -- you know, it's near, if you have a border, you could have even get out. But he didn't realize, you know, if we did know there is some woods, partisans, we don't have to go. Now, if we wouldn't have the woods near, you know, it'd be a problem, you know. Oh, you know, if some -- from Warsaw, other cities, from Łódź, where they going to go? You see, they fought, you know, in Warsaw ghetto. They -- you know, those -- those -- the resistant lasted for month. For month they resisted, it's longer than -- longer -- longer than the -- than the -- the -- than French [indecipherable], French capitulated in -- what is it, in 10 - 12 days.

Q: So when you -- I'm jumping ahead just a little bit now, but when you ultimately did leave, you weren't able -- I mean, were you able to say good-bye to your parents?

A: No. Because, you see what happened is, now we had to -- it was emergency already. We didn't expect that. It came an order in -- in -- it was ninete -- in -- in 1943, in January s -- the 27 it started. Sometimes a -- the 26th, came an order that -- you know, they gave it the Judenrat that the Jews from Proushinna are going to be deported. They didn't say where they're going to be deported to Saleesia -- Salessia, a part of Poland and you're going to be working -- because I -- I didn't escape the first -- you know, I -- I remember the first night and the men were going to be working, y-you know, nothing's going to happen to them and bitechis and what are you going to do the -- and the women -- and the -- all the women and the children are going to be near there, all kind of baloney. Who in the hell you going to fool, I mean. So we got already caught, we could have -- you know, we didn't expect the date exactly, we could have gone out before. See, we could have gone out before -- they said, you know, either through the tunnel, or we could have cut

the wire, the same thing or we cut the -- break the fence, cut the wire, what we did, yeah. So -- so it -- when it came out the -- they announced it -- the liquidation that time. We were trying to break through, our crew. And we were followed by a mob. It was six o'clock, you know, it was still light. And you know, the -- the ghetto was so packed, everybody's on the street and they see you. And, you know, everybody see you, everybody follows you and they figured maybe they going to go through with us. And it was imposs -- I mean, they would have -- we couldn't take a chance, because it would be a lost cause. The Germans -- the Germans, you know, the patrol would have discovered it. So -- I mean, such a mob. So we decided we going to -- we went back to a -- where the bunker, we sit out in the bunker -- with a bunker -- and we tried for the second night. But already it -- in the town, already they heard, they knew, you know, the group there, mumb boys -- there's the group exists. It was already going around in the ghetto, so the Germans probably knew -- know there is part of th-the -- you know the -- there's a group. So we hopes they're -- the -- they -- they were saying wa -- you know, I discovered that when I was liberated, you know, some of them ca -- some of them -- I didn't even know they were sent to Auschwitz when we escaped. We didn't know where we were going, see? And so they -- s-some girls were saying I hope, you know the group survives it. And maybe they going to have witnesses telling, you know, the story or whatever. So, the second night, we decided we going to fight through, break through, whatever happens. I mean, it's already -- so we still -- we still -- if w-we had maybe about 50 people followed us in our group. Some went through with us. Older people, older men with children. They went through. Finally, you know, they -- they -- yeah, th-they discovered -- they did dis -- you know, eventually, they -- the guard went by and discovered that -- you know, it is a mab something went through. And we f -- we -- we picked a place, exact -- you know, we picked a place where to go through, so we'll be near the Christian side where there is some -- not homes, but f-f-farmland mostly with -- with barns, big barns and hay piles around, so you can -- you can sneak it in and as long you get out, you know. So you have -- so you can -- you can take off.

Q: Okay. [inaudible]

End of Tape #3

Tape #4

- Q: I want to go back on a couple details -- you jumped ahead a -- a bit, but I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit about your brother -- your brother very active in this organization. And also the planning for getting arms for your group.
- A: Yeah. Okay, now there were some ways of getting in the f -- arms in the ghetto through a secret -- the only way is the secret tunnel, like the first -- the first 10, they cu -- they went in and they went out. So they could, you know, you could have send it out with them, a rifle, or bring it in, but in a -- in a bigger form [indecipherable] form, you know, it was a problem. Because every time you entered the ghetto by the gate, you were searched. All the time. You were searched completely. You know, maybe you have s-some -- it depends on the guard. Certain guard, if he'll find you carry a little extra bread, so he didn't mind. And if it's another guard, he'll stop you for -- you know, if you worked in certain place and they gave you a little extra piece of bread or something else, he'll let you in. You know, they search you pretty -- pretty thorough. And it was -- it was tough. Very stri -- t-tough to bring in arms and that. So you had to, in order -- in order to bring in a substantial amount -- a big amount and to increase the group, you had to f -- have a certain plan, a certain plan. So -- see, my brother was assigned, like I mentioned before, to work for the Burgermeister, actually for the wife. So, around the house, chopping wood and cleaning and sh -- the Burgermeister's wife was a -- what you call it? I would call her a soft -- nice, soft woman. And she f -- and she felt little sorry sometimes, so she'll give my brother a little extra sometime, to bring it to the family. And so we used, you know, the occasion on that, so figure -- one time he asked her, he said the mother is sick and you -- you know, and it's cold in the house, if you can have certain amount of -- he was chopping wood for them, plenty of wood anyway and -- and if he can take some home. Now, in order to -- how you going to bring it home? So he says, "You know, I'm going to get a sled." And so she agreed and the Burgermeister didn't object. So we had to build, you know, we had to, you know, it's not a sled with a ho -- with a horse pulling sled. It was a big sled anyway and like I say, we had a carpenter, so we had to fix it up deep enough, make sure it's got a good bottom, so you can put a good -- quite a few -- quite a few rifles. Now, on the ammunition is where it was easy sometimes --
- Q: You made a place, a --
- A: A double --
- Q: -- in the sled?
- A: It was a big sled, with a false back, enclosed, so and shou -- hollowed back. So, it's big enough in the sled, for instance to pu -- to -- two or three people to go in and hide. You -- space enough. So we'd -- and having those already the group -- boys, ha -- stealing and hiding, laying outside the warehouses, which is not far from the airport and it was not far

really, from the Burgermeister. Now, he had -- working for the -- for the Burgermeister, he was outside a ghetto, so he had a -- he had a -- a -- a paper, what you call it? A -- a card, so he know -- with his picture, so he could move. Sometimes she'll send him there - - so he could move himself already outside. Once in awhile -- not all the time, once in awhile. So, it was made the plan, that -- that is to the sled and he went to the -- you know, near -- near that contraband where it was -- where it was hidden. And there was couple, the ca -- from our group -- the couple guys, they had to [indecipherable] quick and load it, filled it up with that -- with the ammunition that time. You had a lot of hand grenades, especially they had type -- the Russian type ha -- hand grenades. It's a small and this was very important. Yeah, you know, the hand grenades. It's light and -- and you can do a lot of damage with that. It's more than a rifle, we had a lot of this and -- and we had a -- a mach -- a machine gun. I know that was -- you know, you know, you -- can you imagine with a machine gun? Machine gun -- how you going to smuggle in a machine gun? And seven ri -- I think it was seven rifles and a machine gun and three automatic rifles and a lot of ammunition. And brought it to the Burgermeister and loaded up the wood on top of that and he had to s -- he -- he -- somehow he had -- he's -- he is -- his assistant, whoever -- the chauffeur, you know -- you know, the bigger wintertime, say wintertime, he had a car, but wintertime he had a beautiful pair of horses and a sled, you know those -- you see it on the movies sometime. Oh, what a beautiful sled and horses and taking them down, wintertime to the ghetto, back and forth. And drive the car and the same thing, the SS, they had horses. So, he brought it back to the Burgermeister and he loaded up the -- and one of that -- she persuaded one of the chauffeurs to attach to the s -- to the sled with the horses and I was waiting already outside the -- inside the ghetto and here, you know, he had me in leftero for the Burgermeister, they know sled is coming, deal with that, it's legal. I took it right in -- into -- I took it right in. This was the time already, we lost -- our house was outside the ghetto. We had to move out or move to my aunt. We stayed with this one -- with the -- the widow, the one -- that one a -- the one lost, you know, the husband. What I mentioned was killed by the dogs. That's my aunt we moved in. We moved in with her and she had four children, four girls and we were four children, eight. And we stayed there already and we saw -- I brought in the sled and they were, you know, that time mother and the -- and the "Oh, good," you know, "wood. Oh good, good." But you know, I had to f -- had to find a place for to -- to -- to hide that and they had -- and they -- they had, where they stayed, they had a little barn down there anyways, so that's the way, eventually, was hidden there, and --

Q: In the barn?

A: In the barn was, yeah -- I had to take it in and they didn't have to -- no one in my family, they didn't know. Nobody knew about it. Nobody knew about it, not even the -- not even the other groups, you know, they knew they wouldn't know. I knew where it -- where I put it. I knew where to hide it. And eventually we used that.

Q: We-Were you afraid when you did something like that [indecipherable].

A: Afraid for -- in the ghetto?

Q: Well, when you were actually bringing the sled in, there are guns underneath. What if you're found out?

A: Who, who?

Q: You. Were you thinking about that?

A: Oh, oh, well, n -- it seems to me that time, it was -- we were pretty sure, if -- pretty sure if -- it's always a risk, but I mean, i-if was permission given and she gave -- the wife gave permission -- if you say the husband knew, because she had to tell the husband, you know, tell -- husband had to tell the chauffeur, she didn't have much to -- much to sa -- you know, to sa -- have to say -- have the authority to tell him. Yeah, the Burgermeister can tell that -- the chauffeur or -- or -- ta -- to do that. N-N -- Well, it was risk -- it was a risk, but w-we're sure that we're going to -- this -- I think we're going to make it. We're sure we're going to make it. As -- as -- as -- as long -- as long they going to stop it at the gate and then -- so they see it's wood, or something like that. It was a risk. It's a historical risk. It just -- you know, it's just a mazel, that's all. I mean, it's a --

Q: A what?

A: They say Yiddish mazel -- mazel, luck. Who knows, call it -- either -- either call it luck or call it -- I just -- grace of God -- I don't know, the word just to use for that[inaudible]. So this -- this helped us and we had silver and we escaped the second night. We --

Q: Bef-Before you go to that, I want you tell me a little bit more -- what was the idea -- did you actually ya -- you said you were going to break the fence, did -- what were you going to cut the wire? What was the plan?

A: The plan was, that time, on the second night, that we going to t-try and break through in that spot there -- where we picked out a spot near -- it's already the farmhouses there and -- and we'll cut, you know -- you know, we'll cut the wire and we'll go through. And in case we not going to er -- what -- in case we have to -- dis -- we'll be discovered, so we'll fight through. I mean, we'll fight through. There's no other chance. So it means, okay, whatever will go through, will through. I mean, they patrolled a few -- we'll fight through, whatever -- we'll go through there. We'll go through -- we lost -- we lost three men. You know, diff -- and like I said, a mob followed. Even though a mob followed us, about maybe 50, but I think 30 went through with us. You know, some survived. Older people, they survived.

Q: S-So you told everyone to come at a certain time and you gave everyone a gun? I mean, what did -- how did you distribute the arms?

A: Oh, this was -- oh this, they are -- that time -- the arms -- this was a -- about four -- three months before -- it was in a long -- three months before. Then we had to stri -- we distributed the arms. This wasn't -- this -- th-the night before -- way before. This was about three -- this was like I'm saying three or four months before, when we were -- decided, you know, the you decided that we going to -- that -- that we're going to do something. We had already f -- 10 men in the woods and that's all we are left is to -- just to organize and get arms. You know, get to -- get more organize -- more important was to get the arms, because we were told the -- the few partisans, it says we can not accept you til you'll get arms. Or if -- arms or money. Maybe they going to -- the money -- th -- I -- the understanding, I figure they would -- they wouldn't -- they would take the money. Those -- those time it was in the -- on the -- underground movement wasn't organized yet. Each one was -- each group was living independently. So, because when we went -- you know, when we went through, we came in the woods, we expected -- we supposed to -- you know, we supposed to meet them at a certain spot there, near and we didn't meet the 10 people. And it was tough and we had to, you know, we had to wander around, almost for days and we couldn't find them.

Q: Well, before we go on to that --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: I'm just trying to figure out, once you had all the arms in the barn --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- over those couple months, did you little by little say here, here's your rifle, here's your gr -- how did -- how did --

A: No, the group, it was all, yeah --

Q: Okay.

A: It was all the -- yeah, it was all distributed to the group -- to the commander of the group. We had a commander of the group, which -- he was Laser Israeleet, his name and he was - served in Polish army and he was a officer, matter of f -- matter of fact, the Polish army. And he somehow escaped, you know, wasn't taken prison. And so that's why we picked him as -- as the commander, because he's a military man. He were much older and he took his wife with him. He brought -- which we -- which was not allowed. We didn't even -- we didn't consider that, you know what I mean? We only knew -- that's where the three women is involved, one is his wife. All right, so if he brought -- he brought his wife with him -- in the bunker, by the way. So he stuck out already, so sh -- yeah, but -- but the original plan was only, mostly men.

Q: Mm-hm. And, so when you left that night, when you packed to go, what were you carrying?

A: What --

Q: The night that you escaped, what did you pack? Did you take anything?

A: Oh.

Q: Or did you just have your coat?

A: We sat -- we sat in the -- in the bunker and we went through, we had -- yeah, we had winter clothes there and we took certain amount, I mean we were prepared, you know, they call -- the -- over here you toast the br-bread, for instance, to last f -- to last for few days, it means when you -- we didn't toasted that -- what actually it was always stale bread, ha -- you know what I mean, har -- we took a little bread, a little to -- food to last for a couple days, yeah. But he was later -- Commandeer Laser, he was smart, he's a militil -- you know, military man. He had prepared himself pretty good with his wife. But, I mean know what -- you know, I mean they knew. He even had the -- what you call it, the military, where you carry that -- that can f -- for drinks.

Q: A canteen?

A: Canteen, yeah. A canteen. We didn't have a canteen, he had. Ah, so some -- so he'll last - - so he'll last him a little bit more. So act -- we didn't have too much, ac -- we escape with a little -- little. We did have clothes, was important. Had warm clothes, was wintertime, was very cold. And make sure you have good boots. And -- and a hat, a good hat. Different kind of clothes, it was -- it was no -- you know, you know -- everybody -- everybody looks like Santa Claus or something here different.

Q: Like Santa?

A: Yeah.

Q: Wh -- Do you think your mother and your father suspected that you were getting ready to leave?

A: Well, they -- we -- my father is another story. I didn't mention it there in the paper. With my father is another story. Now, if you want to know it, my father, will have to tell you exactly what happened my father. You want that? Yeah. Now, in -- this was 19 -- January, 1943, October. October, 1942, we got the same -- an order fr-from the SS to the Judenrat to be ready, you're going to be taken to exp -- on transport. Now, be ready at certain time, eight o'clock in the morning. I -- I mention we didn't have the station near Proushinna? It was 10 kilometer -- 10 kilometers away. And we knew that's the

liquidation. Somehow, was rescinded. Either -- I don't know, the per -- Burgermeister paid off, it's rescinded. The Judenrat decided that night, when the order came -- I don't say all the Judenrat, most of the Judenrat decided to commit suicide, see? And this doctor, I s -- I imagine, the Jewish doctor, she belonged to the Judenrat and she supplied pills for that -- you know, she had pills. We figured, you know -- and they went to a big house -- not all the Judenrat, maybe -- the Judenrat was 22, maybe about 10 or 12 decided to commit suicide. And -- and they were -- it wasn't successful. Yeah, I know it was, I remember that -- I remember that they took pills and then they put their lid -- the chimney and you know, they clo -- they made a fire -- firewood and they didn't open the chimney and they thought, you know, with carbon monoxide, somehow -- and only two died. Only two died. See, my father committed suicide. This -- this is the same night. See, he knew what was going on with the Judenrat, but he -- see, he hanged himself. So, at least we had three, four months left. We buried them, yet you know, in the spot in the ba -- you know and we still have time to say Kaddish and yeah. That's what happened to my father.

Q: Were you there?

A: Hm?

Q: Were you living at home when that happened?

A: This was -- we still were in our ho --

Q: In the house?

A: -- we still yeah, this was -- next month we moved to our aunt. It happen about -- about maybe two months when -- you -- you know, two -- you know, both, you know, umwannus widows. The three widows, yeah. That happened. I didn't want to write this in the paper, but this is -- this is the story. So, from -- so eanse we knew, he said all along, he says he is not going to -- he is going to -- you know, he is going to -- not going to be left -- go to the transports, you [inaudible]. Yeah, so he -- at least he had a little, I mean, if we had time to say -- in the same -- in the same house we stayed with my aunt, we had the meeann you know and -- and that's -- that's what happened.

Q: I've been meaning to actually ask you the name of your aunt's husband who was killed by the Germans.

A: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: What -- what was his name?

A: His name -- the last name, Maysha Shershefski. Maysha Shershefski.

Q: And it was your mother's sister's --

A: My mother's sister.

Q: Okay.

A: And they had four girls and in the range about -- about the same, this -- the older girl, you know, probably was my -- maybe a little bit older than my brother and the same -- she probably was already 23 or 24 and 20 and maybe 17 - 15 and a smaller one, four girls. And I had two sisters and two sis -- shane -- my two sister, yes, so they -- they all went to the same transport the same day, probably. I don't know it. I think it was the third. You know, they transported -- four days took that to transport the ta -- 12,000 Jews. They probably didn't have the -- the -- you know, f -- wagons and you know. So it was 3000. They divide it when it came, yeah -- this is January the third, 20's -- 28 - 29 -- the 30th. No, it's 27 - 28 - 29 and 30th, so -- so it was divided the city on four sections and they says east side, each day 3000 and now it was prepared, you know, you have to go to the station, we don't have a station [indecipherable] 10 miles. So farmers were already lined up for miles inside the ghetto and outside the ghetto. It came the order that you got to be, eight o'clock in the morning, to be ready, that's all is allowed to take a backpack, certain amount. It says, each one take a backpack. So it means get your better, whatever, because you didn't see the backpack anyway any more. So they prepare you to take the backpack, so you -- of course you put it in, most of your better belongings, or -- you know what I mean? And be ready and at farmer's market, and -- and y-you going to be sent to Salesia, like amerasion to work. Nothing about -- about concentration camps, you're going to be and the women, all this baloney [inaudible]. So it took them four days. Some tried to escape, I found out later, you know, from the wagon, you know, go and it's wintertime, the f -- it was way below zero. Can you imagine when you have to have family, two families, 10 - 12 or 15 people in the sled with the belongings and it takes about couple hours and you know, it's freezing, you have a child -- you saw some women and children, you know, froze to death. Some of them tried to escape. So, it didn't -- if you manage to escape from all the transport, some got shot on the spot, some managed to escape and they got them in touch with a certain friend, a Christian friend and they stayed there for awhile and they were told you know, there is some Proushinna, go and this way partisans and they reached the partisans there -- if they reached, you know, and they joined, eventually, our group. When we were in the woods, there was a na -- you know -- there is -- we found another group. So, the second night, I say -- when we es -- finally we escaped, it took us all night to reach the forest. We didn't -- we didn't meet those guys there that had -- and this was the worst experience of our life. We -- it was cold and hungry and -- and -- it's -- we were wondering around, maybe we're going to found them, because they supposed to have already s -- maybe a place -- you know, they -- a bunker, you know, we all live in a bunker in the -- in the woods, camouflaged somehow, but you can make a fire and all that. We did, you know, with matches, we did had -- made, at night we made a fire, emergency. We ha -- li -- you know, warmed up a little. But it was -- it was rough for the older, some -- some couldn't take it, you know. It f -- and so -- so we wandered around for about a week and we tried -- the group, our group,

the 18 and three women, to be independent. Which -- so we tried, we knew -- made a little bunker and we had plenty of --

Q: You dug under?

A: Well, the bunk -- you know what the bunker is? I-It is a -- we call, it's more -- about three, four feet in the ground, yeah. With plenty -- you know, in the woods, you have plenty of trees and logs and all that. So you try to -- you brace and then you're -- we knew -- we have an idea how the bunker -- you know, how to build the bunker so you can s-sleep about 10 on each side. So -- and just high enough, six feet, so you can -- you know, you can go in. And then you had the -- on both sides you had the -- what you call it? B-Bunk -- the -- the bunks where you can just lay around and sl -- you know, just lay around and sleep. And in -- in middle, eventually, in the middle of the bu -- middle of the bunker was a stove, made a stove. This was -- this was when we -- you know, we decided we had to go to get some bricks. We had to go to the farms, get bricks and ge -- and -- and build the stove, make that. Then we had to go -- go to g-get some -- for the food undertaking, you know, they call it in Russia bombioshka. To go to a farm, you got to eat. After a week, you know, you -- we didn't find leave -- we were hungry, starved. So --

Q: But what would you do -- how would you approach the farmers?

A: Well, here, the first time approach the farmers, so we decided five men from the group. I participated and we decided we going to go -- we were armed, we were going to go to a farm and get some bread and get some -- you know, if -- we're around, then we ne -- after all, that's the way they're -- they -- they -- Russians lived there so -- for so many month. They knew already the territory, they were there -- have guns to the farmer. The -- lessinder -- the farmer was caught in between, let's put it, caught wateeou in between. So -- so, on the way, the first -- the first undertaking, we met on the road, it was wintertime, a sled, a farmer had a calf and he had in his sled and he had some salt and he had some flour from the mill. So we took the sled and yeah, we soo -- the sled, whatever -- away from the farmer and we brought it down to the f -- to the -- he was riding just -- on the track, you know, between -- between the -- not far from the woods. We brought this in the -- to our place, our home there and on the way going -- you're going -- going to our place -- to the bunker, call it a home, we stopped another little farm, we got some bread, you know, the way the Russian did. They baked a big loaf of bread. If you get t-two loafs of bread -- it was rationing, so it -- mean, at least you managed, you managed. You know, one loaf of bread, you can -- you can make 20 or 25 portions. So you s -- you stayed on a portion. You know, we were -- we were fair. Each one got a portion of bread. These were the first days. Then we discovered that farmers were coming in the woods, chopping -- chopping -- you know, they came in and they were chopping wo -- woods, logs for themselves and we are pretty close there, so we had to abandon [indecipherable]. We had to abandon the first time with -- we abandon that place, already. And, yeah, this was when we went the first time, we had to go to the farm, to the farmers to get the equipment

in order to build. You ha -- we had to have like a -- a s -- a saws, we had to have shovels, we have to have picks in order --

Q: You didn't take that with you?

A: No, you -- no, we never [indecipherable] no, we didn't have this with us, no, we didn't have this. We expected the 10 men, they going to have a place, a home for us. See, we didn't meet them for -- took us a -- took us a long time. I think on the third week we met them. So, the first -- so we got -- we got all the equipment to build -- to build this gym -- we call it gymlamka, it means in the -- in the ground. And it was camouflaged with brush and -- and a -- in order to protect -- you know, the rain shouldn't go in, we had plenty sand, fill up with sand. But even though the sand, you know, went through, you know, it was -- it w -- in the beginning it -- it wasn't too bad, later on there was a problem. Later on was a problem, well you bouse -- you know, you got loaded with lice and fleas.

Q: With lice and fleas?

A: Oh, because from the sand and -- you know, later on. Even -- even -- even being, you know, when we organized being in the partisan with the -- all together, the Russian partisan. But we got used to is already. That time, we already had -- we had -- we call it - - they had a -- a steam room outside, yeah. A steam room, you went out -- I -- I don't know, you went out of the steam room wintertime, almost naked, then you run in in order to get -- in order to get rid of them. It was a problem because, you know, the bunks you slept, each time -- you never undressed, you never took your shoes off. You only slept on -- you know, like -- like a -- it reminds me the concentration camps, you slept close to each other and -- and you know, it's -- it's bound to get from this -- from the -- from somebody else or from the sand and somehow, get infested -- get infested. But we f -- we, from the experience idis we discovered, we learned, you know, we got rid of. We used to make a fire.

Q: What would you do?

A: Yeah, you know, in order to get -- in the beginning we used to make a fire -- well, this was already when we are organized. So he told us, m-make a fire and the smoke, make a big smoke, take off your shirt and hold it over the fire and then alls -- you know, thens -- then they all -- they all commit -- all drop. This was only in the beginning. Later on, you know, we were in 19 -- so this independent Jewish group, we lived for four months independently. We learned our lessons, then we moved three times. Here, was in a car you know, we saw farmers there. We went -- you know, like they di -- we were afraid we going to be discovered, so we decided we going to go in another place. Then we discover there's another group in the woods, about 12 Jewi-Jewish groups and there was another group, eight, there's another 20. We were already -- so, ev -- being maybe around 50 - 60, you got to have enough food, you know to -- so, we tried, the second time to go a bigger undertaking, they call it for -- f-food undertaking. And it was -- we went to a big

farm, not far from our town, you know this and we loaded up two loads, two -- i-it was still wintertime -- two sleds with lot of products, most -- you know bread, flour and the oats, whatever they had there. Potatoes. Now, potatoes wasn't a problem with -- potatoes, the farmers added -- all the farms, they s -- they had their supply potatoes outside. Supply for the whole wint -- for the whole season and the same thing, but covered with straw and then with sand, so you shouldn't freeze. Now, the same thing looks like a outside bunker, we were -- you know, we were inside -- outside. So we used to go -- potatoes, we used to go in and steal, was no prob -- we can always get potatoes enough. If you didn't have food, well you got potatoes. And you had a fire, so baked po -- used to bake th -- baked potatoes. Or that -- I mean a -- as long so, you got -- you got a -- you got along, you did -- wa-wasn't a hungry. And the only thing is we still -- we still don't -- where -- where is our voice? Where is our voice? So, we were wandering around, we met some partisans already that time in the woods. And they were already as -- dressed nice and they -- you know, driving -- during the day, right on the route. You know, in t -- near -- in the territory around the woods, they weren't even afraid. Driving around with a sled and the horses. And they met us and they says, "Well," -- the same thing -- those who are armed, they would take it. Those who don't -- hasn't got any arms, he says you got to have the -- they wouldn't nex -- they wouldn't take it in. They wouldn't -- they -- you know, they wouldn't accept them. So, they were friendly in the beginning. They helped us go, if -- you know, with our group and they participated and they helped us to go for a bigger undertaking, food undertaking. They knew already how to do it. See, we weren't experience. And they helped us with food undertaking. So it wasn't so bad and eventually, I think I -- on the third week, we found our group, see? And they were still, already incorporated with some partisans, with some Russian partisans. But it still was independent groups, each one living independently. But at least we had some -- so they -- when we met the 10 groups, they were already more experienced, we took on some military missions, couple. So, in order to get some more ammunition for the -- you know, where the -- you're about 60 there, some of them didn't -- came [inaudible] the 12 -- the 12, they only have maybe a couple rifles. Now, our group, considering the way we were armed, it's unbelievable, having -- because I -- I -- y-y-y-y -- in -- come to think of -- I was mention, in -- in Warsaw ghetto, it was so rough to -- you know, it was so rough to smug -- to get arms in. They tried the -- the -- the -- the underground, Polish underground. They supposed to help them and you know, with money to buy -- you couldn't -- you know, you had to buy guns and ammunition. Many times, you know they tak -- they took the money and they didn't deliver it. You know, they didn't deliver it. With so little, whatever they had -- with so little, you know, they stood out and they couldn't and the Germans had to bomb them out, in order -- can you imag -- in Warsaw ghetto, with so little. So comparison the little group, there was thou -- Warsaw ghetto with half a million Jews, 400,000 Jews, so you figured, "Gee, we are blessed compar -- unbelievable," we were blessed comparison. So -- so we managed -- you know, went to the farmers, they saw we are Jews, but what can they do? They looked around, a Jew, I mean some were unfriendly farmers, but they -- we took whatever we needed that. So when we met up with the other 10, we already -- I mean we got -- build some senti -- what do you call it, a bunkers, three -- three of -- 20 of -- we -- three bunkers in each side

and they helped us, we went have bigger -- you know, on food a-assignment, we had already help from the Russians -- partisans. They wo -- they -- they helped us. And many times we reciprocated, they says, okay, wi -- you'll have to go with us, they picked a few fr-from the -- our group, which -- you know, some not armed. Over -- he says, they ouv -- they going to protect us. They took us and they said we going to go on the track and you going to -- they gave us saws, he says, "You're going to cu-cut telephone poles and telegraphs and stuff like that." The Russian says, "Oh, you do, we -- they lay an ambush," he says, "we going to protect you, at" -- everything at night. S --

Q: Now, this now -- th -- y-you're talking now about a -- a mission now?

A: Well, this is -- this is a mission, but I mean it -- okay, cut tele -- yeah, I mean -- two -- you know, the old, each one on two sides, you -- the holes, we didn't have the electric saws. Had to saw the -- cut the telephone at night, saw it -- what's the -- through the -- disrupt the communication. They had to come back, you know, in the morning, you know, and the ki -- th -- chi -- group from German would have to come back and replace the poles. This was -- this was a battle for them. So this we did, before we even got organized with them, they made us [indecipherable]. I mean, it foo -- it wasn't so bad. After all, they helped us -- they helped us with food, but when we met up with the 10 -- f-first 10 already, we decided that we'll go for a little mi-mil -- missions. We'll go -- they knew and we went, for instance, three examples I put there. One time, we s -- we went to a -- to the -- to the -- there was -- I mentioned there was a sawmill in -- near Proushinna and there was a German -- you know, the German -- we went to the sawmill, there was -- they had a sawmill and a flour mill there and it's -- and -- and it was a big -- big operation see -- badaway for Jewish engi -- contro -- Jewish -- on the -- two Jewish people. So we went there and we disarmed -- we didn't kill the German. We went in the house, whatever we had, the guns, whatever we had, the gun. We took his gun, we took some clothes and we loaded up our -- two -- what you ca-call it? The same sleds, wagons, with how other products. There's a fa -- lot of products and we brought it in -- back to -- yeah, so -- this the -- that time, it helped. It's a little mission. And -- but the main -- the main -- the main mission was when we blew --

Q: -- bad. After all, they helped us -- they helped us with food, but when we met up with the 10 -- f-first 10 already, we decided that we'll go for a little mi-mil -- missions. We'll go -- they knew and we went, for instance, three examples I put there. One time, we s -- we went to a -- to the -- to the -- there was -- I mentioned there was a sawmill in -- near Proushinna and there was a German -- you know, the German -- we went to the sawmill, there was -- they had a sawmill and a flour mill there and it's -- and -- and it was a big -- big operation see -- badaway for Jewish engi -- contro -- Jewish -- on the -- two Jewish people. So we went there and we disarmed -- we didn't kill the German. We went in the house, whatever we had, the guns, whatever we had, the gun. We took his gun, we took some clothes and we loaded up our -- two -- what you ca-call it? The same sleds, wagons, with how other products. There's a fa -- lot of products and we brought it in -- back to -- yeah, so -- this the -- that time, it helped. It's a little mission. And -- but the main -- the

main -- the main mission was when we blew up -- this was with still Jewish group with other group. We -- we crept into the -- outside of the ghetto and we blew up the headquarters, the Gestapo headquarter, yeah.

Q: At this point the ghetto was empty, right?

A: Empty. Empty. I mean we just crept in -- you know, it was at night, we went in there and yeah, we burned it up, we blew up -- burned up the headquarters. It was -- it wa -- it wa -- it was a big house, where they operated from there. And -- and -- and on the way back -- on the way back there were -- yo-you know, and it was already late. We met -- there was three German patrols there, patrolling there, you know, we ambushed the -- he wa -- ambushed them and took their rifles away, yeah.

Q: Did you kill them?

A: Yeah. The three -- yeah, we killed the three Germans. We had to. We take the rifles away and es-especially the -- especially the winter, you know, the clothes and the boots was important. Yeah, yeah, this is a Jewish group, the [indecipherable]

Q: Did you get the boots? You, yourself?

A: Well --

Q: Did you get the boots?

A: Oh ye -- oh -- well, I -- well, I -- I wore the boots. Each one -- each one -- it was if you -- everybody was running, you know, later on, when it was organ -- everybody was running for the [indecipherable]. You know, we used to -- mine, for instance -- this was in 19 -- i- in 19 -- late 1941, I think, in June. They dropped -- now we were already -- it's -- it's almost five months as independent groups, with little Russians here and there groups, all kind of groups. Everybody was independent. And in s -- late May, they -- Russian planes dropped off military -- military what you call it? Men. And that's when the rule of the jungle finished. Finally came an order, they -- you know, they realized there is some partisans and they wanted to get organized more. So, for us, Jewish partisans, it was the rule of the jungle, becau -- was ended. It -- they says, no more. You cannot just go around and live off of your farmers and survive. You got to fight for -- you know, you got to fight the enemy. So, all the groups in the woods, the surrounding whoever, they found. Jews, Poles, Russian, White Russians. Was established the young ones belonged to a fighting group, the older ones -- you know we had some older escapees and couples, married the -- and -- and a family up front, you call it a boyavoyee and a family. Boyavoyee's a fighting -- fighting brigade and a family brigade. Now, the family, see the -- they didn't break it up. If you were husband and wife, it was in the family. Now, my commander with his wife went in the co -- went in in the family group. Older people -- you know, anything is the fa -- and the family was -- now, they had their own place. We

were responsible for them. And all the young ones, single young ones who were able to fight in the fighting groups. So that time I was assigned to the 16 of the -- all the Jewish partisans, 16 were assigned to the Kirov group. They called it Kirov brigade and this was a unit of the ien Ponnavaenko division. That's what it tells you, they're Ponnavaenko. This is -- our brigade belonged to the Ponnavaenko. And I was assigned and my brother was assigned to the Kirov brigade and the third battalion and third platoon somehow there. And that's the way we were assigned and th-the life of the partisan changed. We were already safer, because we lost, you know, we went one time from our group, we went for a underta -- food undertaking. Now we undertook too much and we came, successfully with two loaded wagons with food to our place, the bunker. And we st -- I wa -- I participated, my brother participated, that time was about 15 of us went. And the Germans followed. Eventually it was -- at night we were safe. And we were loading it, all the food and you were -- kept the -- you know the food, mostly you ke -- you kept it hidden in certain -- all around the certain places, make sure that in case you get chased out or you have to -- or you have to abandon the place. You had to be careful not only about y-ye -- for the Germans, sometimes from farmers or from even a -- you know, from they'll come in in the woods, or they had a lot of spies. You see, there was -- the Germans had a lot of spies. They knew there is some partisans. And they had a lot of collaborators from the Russians. There was a whole division, they call it the Valosoftsi. We ca -- we called them Valosoftsi, General Valosoft -- Valosoft went, the first day of the war is the -- two more -- they surrender to the Germans. Just -- and what happened, they surrendered. And the Germans didn't use them on the-- to fight on the front, but they used the all divisions, you know -- you know is a evosovla -- all army maybe, I don't know it -- maybe -- maybe two, three division. A division is 20,000 men. So the German used those Valosoftsi's, they -- those are the Valosoftsi's, as collaborators. They put them for alt -- you know, to do all the kind of dirty work in the -- in the garrisons, in -- you know, all kind -- in garrisons, or in the villages, in the cities and -- and they replaced the Germans -- you know, they did the work for the Germans.

Q: You were saying that sometimes you lost people and you started to tell a story after that.

A: Oh, well, ye -- see, what happened? So, all of a sudden the Germans, you know, there was a shot -- we had a shot. And those who were outside, we were outside, just ready and so we saw the Germans. So we tried to grab you -- the rifle, anything you could, we start to escape deeper in the woods. And here, the Germans blew up the bun -- there was about -- about eight of -- eight -- they didn't participated, but they belonged to our group, eight guys. So they -- that's all they did is -- is they -- with grenade, they blew up the bunkers and they -- they killed the -- thega -- they killed them all and they got one girl, they took a -- a injured girl a pri -- as a prisoner. The reason -- I don't know, they took the girl, probably they tried to squeeze -- find -- maybe to find out more information. So we had the -- that's -- we had one -- what you call it, tragedy. And, so we lost at that time, seven - eight men from our group. And seven men from the first group got killed before we got organized, by -- by another group of partisans, for -- the only reason they got -- were wot

-- killed, because -- for their clothes, for their boots or something. Because it was the rule of the jungle, before.

Q: So -- so people who were -- essentially believed in the same thing, they were partisans and they killed each other?

A: It was not -- it was -- what I mean, this is the rule -- they -- they are in the woods the same. They supposed to -- they supposed to fight and we all, but that's the way it was, the rule of the jungle. I mean, they didn't -- if -- if -- if they figure maybe you have a watch -- I don't know, we never -- we complained later on to -- you know, we were organized already in the -- you know, in the partisans. But it was too late, we says, well, not much -- I mean, that's -- that's a terrible loss. And the bar -- that commander and his brother got killed. That -- what I say -- that Barro Sagell. The first one, yeah.

Q: Let's stop. We'll stop now. They have to change tapes again.

End of Tape #4

Tape #5

- Q: When your group went from being more independent to more organized, did you ever have any military training?
- A: Well, I did a little. See, when you -- in the Russians class, when you reach 18 in Russia, they -- they taught you how to clean a rifle and take apart a rifle. It's by the Russians. So, in last year, I knew out -- you know, the Russian rifle -- how to take apart and clean a rifle and all that. But, we never -- we never went on the range for experience that, yeah.
- Q: Hm. Had you ever shot a rifle?
- A: Did I have a --
- Q: Had you ever shot a rifle, a gun? Before --
- A: Oh, before -- before that?
- Q: I mean, when you were younger, had you --
- A: No. First of all, it was ill -- you know in pole -- in Poland was illegal. It's not like here. It was illegal to have arm, any rifle, machine. Only the police or certain -- it was illegal, no guns. Most of -- most -- if you heard the -- what's -- if committed murders is just -- you know -- no gun used.
- Q: What -- what --
- A: I was trained. I was trained, that's what I want to say. Now, I was young and I was -- you know, I was strong. As a rule, most of the Russians are a -- a liltz -- some are -- I would say Russian soldiers, majority is not like Germans -- big guys. Small -- smaller guys. And we -- in the third where I was assigned, in the third battalion [indecipherable] brigade. We had a anti-tank gun. This is the only gun the brigade possessed that time. Now, they call that PT -- Russian is P-PTR. Now this -- this gun was used mostly -- we didn't expect to get involved, you know, with fweet -- with the German tanks or Panzers, or yur -- in battle. It was used mostly on the railroad to s -- to s-shoot in their engine and stop the engine all -- blow up the engine so the train can not. We were very limited in explosive that time. You know, ba explosives. So we used the PT and only gun. The -- it weigh -- it weighed -- it weigh -- it was very heavy, it weighed maybe 150 pounds. But it was -- you know, now there is -- the whole timer and it's two parts. It was -- y-y-you -- you could separate it in two parts, so I was assigned at number two and -- and there was number three -- three -- three pe -- thr-three guys used to be in charge of the PTR -- of that -- of --
- Q: To carry it?

A: Carry it and the number one, it was responsible by shooting it. Yes, so I was -- in the beginning there, you know, the number two and fin -- I was trained then to be number one, to use the gun on missions for the trains to -- to shoot ac-actually to -- mostly what you can do is, many times it -- in engines -- make sure that either yo -- either you destroyed the engine, you know, it wasn't -- it wasn't -- that time -- it's better -- I mean it's -- it -- it is -- it is the only ti -- the only gun we used on these certain missions. Now, later on, it was in the late '42, in the be -- in the l-late -- no, '42, in beginning '43, Russian planes already used to drop off a lot of explosives. And til then, it -- we had to -- besides using that -- that -- that what you call, anti-tank gun, the partisans dependent on the dynamite explosives to -- gathered from the outside. Now, how do you get it? Mostly from the outside. You know, the war was going on, you were finding shells here, you know, artillery shells and it was very dangerous to -- you know, sometimes a lot of them got killed in order to build a bomb -- to build the -- the -- what you call it? The -- yeah, the --

Q: The bomb.

A: The ex -- the explosive, yeah. So, but it -- they -- we did -- you know, already at that time, there were some specialists in from the Russians, which they tried somehow to get the shell apart and to build the bomb by hand and use -- use the -- the -- the -- usually what I mentioned, the hand grenades -- the hand grenades was very, very important for the purpose of the bomb, because it's all you had to do is pull the pin out and this can ex - - you know, this was used as a detonator for the bomb. But, later on -- like they -- they were -- the Soviets planes used to come down at night and drop off a lot of materials, mostly the -- you know, for the purpose of -- I would say a lot of automatic rifles, but a lot of em -- those m -- dynamite supplies, bomb supplies.

Q: Before you had the dynamite, just describe one mission. Would you go and set up the gun alongside a train track. How -- how would it work?

A: Well, it's very -- see, we used to -- we used to do -- this is now where I -- where I participate quite often with that. We used to reach a place, mostly at night and find a spot suitable for us to retreat in case, you know -- you know, right in the jungle or something, in the swamp. Find a spot there. Now, and we used to mine the -- the -- the -- the tracks, you know, [indecipherable] was -- was very -- you know -- they were in -- it was very easy, they weren't -- what you call it? Patrolled or -- and -- and watched so carefully. And you f -- you s -- now, you had a s -- there was so many -- there was so many brigades already in the woods that time, that each brigade had their own territory. You couldn't -- you know what I mean? You just couldn't go in anywhere near here. For instance, we got a section, they gave us a territory where we had to operate, far away from our camp. Let's see -- and another group was close to our camps, you know, and that's the way it was set up. So, we used to -- at -- at night, creep down, we had plenty of time -- small groups, about. On this missions the mostly -- the most is four or five men.

Very -- it's all -- you go -- first of all, you -- you couldn't find out exactly when the train is going to go, or something.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, and we were operating on the main -- m-m-ma-ma-main junction, which is [indecipherable] and means komoskwa -- the main junction where all the -- where all the t-trains were going, all the traffic. So, in the beginning, so you put the mine and you had to dig a little hole between the -- between the -- what do you call it? You have the railroad, the -- the -- the -- what do you call it, the wood, or --

Q: The tie?

A: Blocks.

Q: The railroad tie?

A: Tie, yeah, betwee -- the -- the -- between the railroad ties, there. And many times and it was a detonator sticking out. You know, they had a detonator sticking out. So the train goes by and it touches the detonator and it blows up. But the Germans got smart, eventually, you know what happens, so they were ripping the trains day and night and you know, the war was going on. So they tried to put -- before -- you know th -- before the engine, you know, before the engine goes, the -- first of all, the engine is going to -- what happened -- the engine comes first -- the engine blows up first. So that's -- that stops the whole operation, engine. So they tried to put two flatbed cars full with sand or bricks or -- or all kind of -- th-tho -- heavy material. So this should rip -- you know, it-it'll hit -- this'll hit first, so this'll ge-get blown up, it's not going to hit the engine. So they -- they're going disconnect, so they going to follow that, then it's -- it means -- and came to point, you know, this was very -- this was very easy because they couldn't control all the railroad. They were in such a p -- they -- they were in such a trouble, that finally they decided -- you know, they took farmers each from -- from the farms and put them at night -- forced them on the tracks to watch the -- you know, to watch the tracks. Many times I used to come on the tracks and there was -- you know, civilians. They got caught in the middle. I don't know, you know, it's tough. They got -- its' a war, they got caught in the middle.

Q: Well, what would happen to the civilians?

A: We told them -- well, w-we told them, "You better take off." Well, I don't know what happened, the German ac -- you know what I mean? We weren't afraid, we told them, "We're going to mine, you better -- you better get out of here. You better take off." So that's -- it means they're so desperate -- so -- so desperate to watch the traffic -- watch the traffic. But the main, the -- finally the main -- you know, the Russian, they discovered a trick that's -- in -- in order -- we were supplied with -- just like a bar of soap. That's all

it had -- and had a little detonator there. And that's all you had to rip the tracks instead -- instead the trains. Just rip the [indecipherable] rip the tracks, you know, the tracks.

Q: It would rip the tracks up?

A: Just rip the tracks, take a fist, you know. And this is so easy, we -- we went out sometimes 40 - 50 at a time for miles, miles of the track. That's all you had to do is -- as leedbat -- you know, it was something like a -- it's not a rope, but it had -- had -- it's not a wire, too.

Q: Leads?

A: No, the --

Q: Oh.

A: -- the -- the fuse was -- the fuse was inside a little bar of soap.

Q: [indecipherable], okay.

A: But you -- that's all you needed is a match and five or 10 minutes, til it'll -- it'll burn til it'll reach the -- til it'll reach the tracks, so you true retreat. So, we were laying right between it and it -- it fits right between the -- the railroad track, the railroad s-siding there, yeah. And this was -- th-th-th -- this was -- it was the -- blowing the tracks, day and night -- day and night. So this was minor tra -- this was already minor -- mi -- minor operation. It -- now, the big oper -- the bigger operation it came to point when the so -- in -- this was already 1944, we told -- you know, we told our commanders that in Proushinna, there were the Leaman brother -- that Leaman for the communication and the -- and the telephone lines, and he was the one -- he was a murderer, I guess. That's him -- nobody wanted to work or -- for him. So we told -- we told the commander, you know, why can't we go on this -- on the Proushinna - Voushanna line there and -- and -- and mine the road and we'll got -- you know, he was in charge of -- he was always in charge. Mine the road and we were in the forest that time on both sides, maybe -- maybe 60 or 70 men lay in ambush. So what we did is we cut the lines. We knew they left to come in in the morning, during the night. We mined the roads, because -- in case there was not too much traffic, only military. So -- and we mined the roads just -- in -- in the -- you know, in the morning. We knew that they going to s -- the minute, what you call it, sunlight, they going to ar-arrive and would -- you know, lay there in ambush on both sides and you know, two trucks, you know, with the Germans, each one -- 30 on each truck. Now, the first truck, the first one hit the mine and blew up. We knew -- the second one stopped. We knew that the second one is going to stop and we'll -- we'll -- we -- we laid on both side and this was a spot we picked -- it just -- you know, has got to go through the woods, through this -- you know, through the -- on both sides we are protected. Either we're going to cut off -- we can go to the right, we can run to the left --

we are in the woods. And -- and sure, the second one stopped and we opened a fire from -
- you know, it was from both side across. We killed them all, 30. Everybody was running
for the booty -- you know, booty.

Q: For the booty, mm-hm.

A: To get. To get -- you know, for -- arm we didn't need already maybe, the only thing was
important, pistol. I mean we'd -- we a -- you know, not everybody had a pistol. So, in
order to have the pistol, a guard -- or sometime -- this was already, you know, important
touch from both sides, you know, you were respected. You had a pistol, you must have --
you know, already -- you were already a respected partisan. You must have -- if you
picked -- killed -- got a pistol, it's yours. And no -- no, you can -- cannot take it away
from you. If I took the pistol, it's mine.

Q: Did you get one?

A: Yeah, I got a pist -- beside -- besides that, of course they had -- we took especially, the cl
-- the clothes what they had and all that. So, this was one of the -- one of the main -- it's
not the main mission, we -- where I participated and my brother participated. Later, after
that, it happened that, you know, my brother somehow -- with a post, so he fell asleep, so
they s-separated them, they dropped -- there was another group, they dropped down 50 -
some paratroopers and they needed local partisans, so all the three who were in the post
for a punishment, he says they needed -- they send them in to the -- to the o -- to the
others -- to the other group. And --

Q: So, they sent your brother away from you [indecipherable]

A: The -- ma -- my brother and the other two on the post as a punishment, because a
punishment could be -- you know, this is -- could be -- you can be shot when you fell
asleep on the post. So they -- I was separated and I didn't hear from him for the -- all that
time. I didn't hear -- I knew he is with the Capute -- eventually they joined they ca -- they
call it the Capusta brigade. I knew there, but we didn't see each other and we didn't --
didn't ca -- didn't communicate each other -- with each other. And only once -- I heard
once -- once that he's -- you know, that he's operating, he's alive, so forth, yeah.

Q: Could you just tell us a little bit more about when you weren't doing -- when you weren't
engaged in missions, wh-wh-wh-what would it be like back at the -- at the camp? What
would you do in the evening and what -- a lot of times you were working at night.

A: Yeah.

Q: W-Would it be during the day? What would you do?

A: Oh, well. Well, well, here it is. A lot of -- a lot of partisans were assigned at the camp. Now, at the camp, mostly those who were assigned at the camp -- pardon me -- their responsibility was to go and -- on the food undertaking for themselves and for the family -- for the family brigade, because there was all -- a lot in the families, yeah. Hundreds, you know, I mean -- you know, not only Jewish already, you know, from some -- you know, from Rofe and Belagooshins -- there's a -- this -- it was -- it was -- big camps, family camps. And so those who didn't participated, so they had to do local work, chop wood and stay on posts. The posts, that's boring, you know, stay on -- you know, there's a -- posts, there's a lot of -- y-y-you were s -- you were -- spread it for mi-miles away, you know. A post here, maybe 10 miles another one, two, three on this track, on the onther track. And the purpose of the post -- then you had -- they call it like a secret -- you had the secret parole they call that the secret code. You know, if you meet somebody, hey, even the partisans, it's -- you know it was every -- you know, it was concentrated with a command from the different -- from the different brigade. He had -- he knew the code, because if they were true and they didn't say the story, I say, "Stop, I'm going to shoot. Who are you? Give me the code." If he didn't have the code, he's a -- he's a spy, he's a traitor, he's going to get killed.

Q: What was the code?

A: Hm?

Q: What was the code?

A: Oh, they'll say a code, for instance -- any type of code, one f -- I give you example, 15 - 10 or of Vashilare beach or -- or Josie. You know, they picked any kind -- any kind of codes. Like in the military, you know, yeah. So it was -- you know, it was central command, very -- you know, with the discipline -- with the discipline. So they -- those who didn't participated were doing work around there, mostly on poles. And so they ju -- were just sitting, doing sometime -- they si-sitting, doing nothing too, you know. And that time, food were plenty. Three times a day, meals. Now, the meal consisted -- you know, not fussy. Now, what we had -- it came to point that we went -- we had to a -- to a farm. Now, our -- our duty was to go to farms to -- far away, like I say, each one was assigned a territory. We couldn't go to the poor farmers. We had to go to the rich farmers, because the ch -- we knew that the Germans gave them a quarter that they on -- they can only have -- raise a pig or two pigs and the rest of them, they have to give it or sell it. There has to be for the German army that stand. So, and the same thing with cows and with butter, whatever they liked, you know, they call it -- cheeses and butter. The Germans requested from the rich -- from the rich farmers that they s -- I don't know if they paid them something for it, it belongs to them, you know. And we had to go to those special farms to take away the German food, specially. Go far away and attack wi -- you know, sometimes, if we had a -- the assignment, undertaking, were in the hundred -- you know, sometime 100 - 200. Now they couldn't -- at night they were afraid, we controlled already that time the -- the woods. Even sometimes joonk -- the -- what happens, if you

went for a mission and let's say it's late at night already, you couldn't reach your destination to youk -- to your -- back to your -- to your -- ah, what's with -- to your bunker or your house. So, summertime, we had a -- summertime we had a privilege, you know, we used to go in and hide -- small groups. I'm talking about this -- a g -- smaller groups going on mission to mine the roads or mine the bridges on -- or rip up the tracks. So, we used to stop and go in in the field, you know, on the road, going in the field, sneaking in the corn field, in the -- in those field and st -- and stay up all day there. It was hot -- oh, it was ho -- you know, the sun in the hot day and -- and sometimes -- oh, we had -- you know, we carried -- we had some water, we had some supplies. It was so -- it - it -- it was a system -- it was a sys -- many times if you didn't reach, many times we forced in and I went in to a village -- not, I mean a single -- not in a be -- not in a col -- yeah, in a hamlet for is -- lot of farmers, like -- they call it a hoota -- a fa -- a big farmer had lu -- has got his house by himself someplace set up in his -- in his fields there. And so we -- we went in there and we kept him there and we didn't let nobody out. Anybody came in, we had -- they stayed there til night reached. We impounded them and we left -- night reached, we went out, yeah, yeah. I -- I discovered -- you know, I discovered there was two advantages about -- first of all, it -- about going on the missions, you know. You have two advantages. First of all, the food always the same is, on the camp. Three meals a day and soup and meat. Now the -- the staff, at a different kitchen, see that, and they have a different -- different -- and they had that -- that cook, a different cook. They had already -- we had cows. It came to a point we had cows, we had horses already. Many here -- I mean there was cows, let's see, sometimes 10 - 15 - 20 cows and the cows were milked and from the milk, this is for the staff. Now, when we went out, you know, you went into a farm, then you got -- first of all you got cleaned up and you had a changed [indecipherable] you know, while you -- the night you got to go in the pound and to go in and get washed and -- and take a dive, went in to the farmer and got some -- you know, und -- you -- cotton. Usually the farmers, they made their own -- they made their own clothes. Yeah, to change. And it -- it -- I'm -- i-i-it -- and one advantage and the second advant -- and the second advantage, you -- you -- you had -- you can -- had a little milk. You can -- you can have sometime only -- if you want a little booze, they used to make their own -- you know the [indecipherable] -- they used to have -- make their own, the farmers -- little booze. Well, I didn't -- once in awhile. So it's -- it's a different -- you know, when you go out, it's -- it sounds, it's -- it's March. It's -- it was safer in the smaller groups than the bigger groups. Because we didn't try to get involved the small group in the fight for the Germans. You know, we didn't -- we didn't know we na -- we didn't -- going to win the war fighting with the -- we just -- our -- our mission was to just -- to do as much damage -- disrupt the lines, cut the lines, mine the roads and mine the bridges and ge -- and give them as much trouble as -- as you know -- as much as we could, that's all. We didn't expect -- you know, the partisans, but we had -- you know, we had -- l-later on -- when it already this -- with the Soviets, when they dropped down -- the planes landed, you know, they already took certain injured partisans, they took them. They landed at night. You know, there was certain spots. Nobody controlled -- you know, ti -- ti -- a lot of territory. Even sometime during the day, they -- then they -- they were -- they were -- I mean they didn't have the guts to go in in the woods.

Q: Were there women fighters that you worked -- that you fought alongside?

A: Yeah, we had women, yes.

Q: Tell [indecipherable].

A: We had women. We had -- like I said, there weren't too many Jewish women, we had women, a few Jewish women participated in the -- in the -- in -- in -- in certain missions. But there was a lot a girls from the C-Christians, from the -- mostly the White Russians. F-From the villages, you know, there were certain -- certain villages, those were situated near -- near the -- the territory -- near the woods we have -- we operated. Now, see the Germans, what they did is they put garrisons in there. They knew the partisans are controlling the territory, so they put garrisons around those villages and l-lot f-from those villages, they cooperated. They were sympathize with us, because some of their -- some of their boys already were in partis -- in partisans with us, with other groups. And so we had -- we had g-good connections many times. For instance, when we went for a mission -- for big mission for food undertaking. You know, we found out before we went into village to find out if there is any Germans around. Is there garrisons around, because you know, you -- to make sure that -- that there is -- there is non -- there is -- we should be safe. But most of the garrisons, like I mentioned before, they were controlled by those -- by those Valosoftis. There was a lot of Ukrainians there, who are the la -- this -- here the Germans, the collaborators, they put them in there. Of course with the German control, there was some Germans with them. But the majority, the lot of -- they gave us a lot of trouble, see? They send a lot of spies in the woods. They -- you know, they send the Germans, a -- a lot of spies in the woods and sometimes it was -- they -- they gave you out. They -- sometimes they -- but we had good connections, we had good connections and the last -- like I say -- when we got supplied from the -- we got supplied from the planes and so we didn't have to go look any more for this -- make up our own minds and all that -- that -- everything was ready made and it was -- it was easy and -- and it was enjoyed.

Q: It was?

A: I mean, I -- I -- I enj -- I -- is en -- for me, it was enj -- for me it was enjoying. I did something -- I -- you know, I mean it's -- I would -- I would call. I mean I was a soldier. I didn't call it to arrange, but I'm a soldier. I'm -- you know, I can fight, like any soldier, can fight enemy.

Q: You became a soldier?

A: Yeah... Now, we had some problems though, in -- in the -- in -- in -- this was in 1944, you know, we went -- besides, when they put those garrisons, those -- those Valosoftis in there, we got an order to get them out. A mission, you know, a mission, you know, and

this is 200 here and two -- you know, and 200 there, 300 there. Sometimes we went for a mission where a few brigades took part. I would say 1000 - 1500, because if they had a power 600, you know, we had to double that. And we had to go and to a track and to destroy the garrison. I mean just many times, many times I recall, you know, it was house to house. How --

Q: House to house [indecipherable]

A: House to house, itch -- you know, they were -- there were -- into -- they controlled the village now. We went in and there was some those -- those Valosoftsis, you know, they didn't wear German -- they didn't ger -- wear German clothes -- German. They had a different, what you call? Uniform, yeah. They have a uniform. So, it came a -- came a order, we had to destroy it -- you know, vitist destroy them. Yeah, we had a lot of casual -- there was casualties, you know, over time. There was -- you know, Valosoft -- with Jewish -- you know, Jewish partisan. One here, couple there from -- from the 16 -- from the 16, from the -- from our -- my -- my brigade, which folong you know, there's quite a few got killed. Quite a few got killed.

Q: Did you ever have a close call yourself? Or you felt that maybe you'd -- you know, you'd -- you'd be shot or

A: Oh yeah, yeah. It -- it -- yes, it -- it happened one -- it happened one time -- we were -- we were -- we went -- we went for a mission and in the house -- it fa -- like to say house to house -- in the house was a German and I was there. Right in the same house. And I didn't kill him and he -- and he took -- you know somehow, you know we -- in the same hou -- he could have killed me and I could have killed him. And somehow, you know, it was -- it -- it -- it was -- what you call it? That time, we had a mission to -- to take the village, yeah.

Q: Well, what happened in the house? Did you both run away?

A: Well, I don't -- I -- you know, I came out, I says -- I came out I says, a ger -- I -- you know, there is a German there. Now, eventually we tried to look for him, you know, he disappeared too. Maybe he got -- you know, he disappeared, you know. On many occasions, you know, it was lot of occasions, where just like in the army, you know, just like in the army.

Q: D-Did you have -- what was your feeling about what you were accomplishing? Did you feel like you were con -- what did you feel you were contributing?

A: Well, first -- first of all, I felt a satisfaction that -- you know, that I'm a soldier, that I can fight and I can -- you know and I wouldn't call, really that -- I wouldn't call it revenge. I would call it that I was maybe blessed or something. That I -- I'm alive and I can fight, you know, I can fight -- fight the enemy. You know, I didn't think about -- feel like this

is my -- for my father or for my mother or something like that. No, I wasn't thinking about it. I was -- you know, I -- it was -- interested -- I was just interested. Well, another thing I had in mind beside that, I -- my feeling was for the -- actually for the history, besides, yeah. For the history.

Q: Can you tell --

A: Th-That was -- that a Jewish fighter is -- you know, because I -- I always thought about those -- you know, I didn't know where -- where -- where my family was taken and -- and til -- til you know, I was liberated 1944 and my feeling was that I'm doing something beside as a fighter, I'm doing a duty for the -- you know, something for the -- for the Jewish people... That -- and that -- I was able to do something... Now I -- I came back after the war to my -- I was liberated 1944, in -- in June. Now, they send me -- you know, I was a decorated partisan, so most of the partisans were taken on the front. The war was still going on. As a matter of fact, in June, when they -- the second front started, sometimes the allied started in -- I think the same time maybe the second front started, now. So I came -- they sent me and another group of -- of -- from the partisans, see and -- to Proushinna to establish my town -- to establish order. You know, I'm a decorated partisan -- a Jewish partisan. I came to Proushinna and I came to my house. And in my -- and the house was -- that wasn't destroyed and I found in the house was a family of -- you know, I don't think -- I think it's a Ballousha family. Have a few children and you know, she was surprised, you know, they were surprised to seeing, you know. I didn't -- I didn't even ask her how do you wind up in the house. My duty that time was to establish you know, like -- like the front is moving, you know. It's interesting the way -- the way I was liberated, you know. This is very interesting. We knew already that the -- that the Russians are coming now. And the patrol house already met with the Russian patrol. And we were told that time that we have all the brigades what existed in the woods, that we have to mine all the roads and all the bridges and let the Ger-Germans -- you know, to sla -- the retreat -- they shouldn't be li-living. You know, they were in a panic. I -- you know, that's disati-disatisfaction they were k -- you know, they were -- they were running back. They were -- the Russian were chasing him and -- and -- and bombarding them and they were running away so we tried our -- our mission was to mine the roads, not to let them through. Let them go into the side, in the woods and to the -- all the other -- to all other ways. And we were in the woods and -- and we were -- you know, we -- we were catching them by the -- by the hundreds. In the beginning we were sniping and we was killing them. I mean sniping in the wood. It came to a point, you know, there was -- we caught -- you know, we were complete army. You know, we were ca -- the partisans actually -- if we had an order, we could have gone in and liberate my -- liberated the -- th-the city of Proushinna. The partisan were strong enough to go and liberate it -- this whole city, all the cities around. You know, so they gave us the mission that -- that before I will -- came to Prou -- this was before, that we had -- had to participate and stop the enemy of -- you know, do as much damage as you can of retreating them. And that time came an order, you know, we c-caught so many prisoners, we still were in the woods. We already liberated, we are in the -- still in the woods, but we had to stake you know, and

join -- that's for our mission is to help the Russian army to disarm and to da -- day -- you know, and to -- to -- there -- it was a disarray. I mean the -- the -- i-it -- it's wordill -- it's wort -- wild to me to live through a period seeing the way they marched in with such a power, d -- you know, great big -- big, you know, army was going to conquer the world, seeing them in retreat, you know, dirty, you know. They tried to -- to -- you know, change their clothes in civilian clothes, they shouldn't -- you know, they shouldn't be recognize as Germans. You know, it unbelievable in the retreat. So they tho --you're asking me th -- to me it's the -- that I lived through to see the biggest satisfaction with my eyes. The retreat and the -- and the defeat. The defeat and disarray -- the ray -- the way a -- on that front -- on -- on the Russian front, the army. And the damage we did to them, yeah. We were laying -- we were assigned one time, of two -- on one bri -- there was a bridge, a very important bridge. Now we partisan, we had to control this bridge. We mined the road. Now, the German had to fix this bridge and now -- each time -- we were laying from both side in ambushes. Each time they tried to fix -- they were in retreat, you know, not the -- disorganized already, you know that? And they tried to fix the bridge, each time we opened fire. They didn't know if this is partisan or the Russian army. I thought I will fi -- I'm -- I'm sure that they -- they thought already, if the partisan they probably would take a chance you know, and -- and -- and -- and f -- probably -- clean us -- go in a battle with us and get a -- you know, fight with us. But I -- I'm sure they thought that was the Russian army at. And they never -- they were unsuccessful. They couldn't -- they could -- never could build a bridge. That's why they had to go around. We don't let them through the bridge, let's go around. So, then I was sent -- that's was already -- we already free people -- already we -- the Russian army free. So, like I say, some of them -- most of them were sent on the front. A lot of the farmers were sent back with the children -- families. The families sent all back home and I was with -- I was -- from the -- and that three of -- three more from the Proushinna Jewish partisans, sent to Proushinna to establish the order -- establish order. So my job, so I did my job, which satisfaction, I can say that.

Q: Tell us just about walking in -- on to your street to go into your house.

A: Oh, to the -- in my house, oh well, so I see that -- I see the family, with little children and I -- I says --

Q: Tell us just about walking in -- on to your street to go into your house.

A: Oh, to the -- in my house, oh well, so I see that -- I see the family, with little children and I -- I says -- sh -- and she was li -- probably a little scared and I says -- she's going to -- that's all I wanted, give me one room. You know, I had my -- my automatic gun and all that. I was in like a military. I had to control -- to take control of the city. I says, "I don't want anything, just -- just" -- she didn't have much to give me anyway, [indecipherable] poor. No, it's ju -- so, I stayed here -- I slept there and eventually we -- you know, they was -- came in -- the Russian took over this -- after a couple weeks, the Russian took over the city and I was still in -- in Proushinna and my job was that I'm to try and get all -

- mostly identify all the collaborators. All those collaborators who didn't have a chance to escape and to find out about all the card -- all the collaborators here, yeah. I was, you know, assigned, working with the -- with the -- we call that the internal police -- with the Russian internal police. And they know, they -- you know, they knew -- you know, I'm Jew -- a Jew -- I probably know -- I was in the ghetto, probably if I know who was a policeman, who was this -- who was -- who was a collaborator. So we'd -- we cleaned up q-quite a few collaborators and we send them that time -- you know, were sent to Siberia, yeah.

Q: Can you tell us a story? I mean, was there a particular one who had informed in a situation and you thought -- you know, this person, when we were in the ghetto, told on us and I want to make sure -- in -- is there a story you can tell us about a particular person who was a collaborator?

A: Well, this -- there is -- well, there were a lot. There were a lo -- there were quite a few, there was a lot. I mean, f-f-for -- like, for instance a policeman, he was a Polish policeman and -- was cabbage -- was cabbage -- you know he was my -- probably was my age. You know, th-that time -- you know, the ger -- the Germans, they didn't appointed those people. They were -- they were -- they were -- I mean volunteering. You know, there's not such a thing volunteering. Not everybody wanted to be a -- a cop or not everybody wanted to be policeman, not everybody wanted to participate and go and kill and -- an-and -- an-and -- an-and do all kind of criminal -- commit all kind of atrocities like that. But some figured, well, in the beginning, in '40, figured the Germans going to win the war. They never realized, you know, everybody was -- you know, everybody was impression. See, my father was a pessimist, he says, [indecipherable]. He says, "No, now boys, nothing doing," he says. "The Germans," this was in 1941. "They took -- they control all Europe, see?" So then I stayed in Proushinna and I got to tell you that. The doctor, which I mentioned, the neighbor of mine, that Olga Goldfein, arrived in Proushinna. She was saved -- now, she escaped from the trains in -- she escaped from the trains in the -- from the station at night and she came to Proushinna to the -- to that convent -- nun convent -- Christian convent.

Q: To a convent?

A: Convent, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: And she was befriended with a nun and her name -- you know, her name is DellaRosa. Because, she came with her in Proushinna, when I was in Proushinna. And I was shocked to s -- you know, how did you? So, what happened, she -- and she was probably -- I mean in the 50's, you know -- not the -- not the -- maybe -- maybe 60. And she escaped from that wagons and she followed 10 kilometers and she came to Proushinna to the nun. The nun gave her the -- the -- you know, she got the clothes and she put a c-cross on her. But

the -- the -- the -- she told -- she told me -- this is after the liberation, now, she told me that sh -- now the -- the -- in charge of that convent, they call it a -- the -- what you call it a maynon orsed something.

Q: Mother Superior?

A: The mother -- the Mother Superior, of course, wasn't satisfied, she says better take her and go away with her, deep in Poland, where nobody knows. She was afraid that -- you know, sometimes -- you -- you know, you -- sometimes maybe -- maybe somebody'll discover. You can't blame her, you know, they discover. So she took -- you know, when she came in and the next day, you know, with the blessing with the Mother Superior, the blessing, she went the -- she actually comes from the different town. She comes some -- the towns near Łódź. And she -- they traveled somehow with her -- with the doctor. And she spent all those years as a nun -- I mean as a doctor and n-not a doctor and she's wo -- you know, s-she was giving -- helping peop -- I mean, she's a doctor, they were so -- oh, they were surprised. So when sh -- she came back, in Proushinna with this nun, [indecipherable] the nun, of course I will help. So, I tried -- I cou -- was able to do a lot of things here in Proushinna. Oh, anything you know, I tried to help the nun with -- with convent -- even the whole convent to supply, make sure they have enough food. It was still -- you know, the wa -- still with the Russians. It's still -- the war was still -- 1944, still the war was going on and all that. And yeah, she -- she's on the list [indecipherable] Rosa, she's on -- you know, she's on the li -- she is on the list, I saw her in the museum on the -- from the Righteous Gentiles, yeah, yeah. The funny part is this, that this doctor - now, when I left Proushinna, my town, eventually I had to get out. My brother was in Bialystok and I was in Proushinna. And Bialystok was a temporary capital of Poland. They didn't take Warsaw yet. So, my brother was smarter, he wanted to get to the United States, so he didn't want to -- he knew he'll -- that as long he can -- he was nearer there, that he g-got out to Bialystok. So finally I discovered that he is in Bialystok. Now, for me it was a tough job getting out from Proushinna, because of my position. I told my commander -- you know, the commander from the -- from the -- from the brigade was in Proushinna too, he was there. So, I told him, you know, I have only brother and he's al -- left of family and he is in Bialystok and this is already Poland. Proushinna is White Russia. And so he said, "Oh yeah, you got a brother left? I'm going to se -- we going to bring him, send a plane, we'll bring him -- bring him here," he says[indecipherable]. So that's up to him, now. This was already a -- I was in Proushinna already about four, five months. This was close to -- the war was still going on, Russia wasn't taken yet. So, finally, he would release me, my commander. But he says, "It's not up to me, I have to go up to the -- you know, to higher -- to the region commander." Now, I went down to the region commander and he send with a letter -- and the region -- you know, the reason I gave you know, the only -- family I lost -- have the only brother. So the region commander says that well, that's good, yeah, t-take fr-fr -- it's a good -- I didn't know they sent me with a secret letter back in Proushinna, but then I discovered that it -- he -- he mentioned that it's a -- for me, if I want to take, you know, go on the front and kill svor -- kill as many more -- you know, take revenge for my family, as many to -- he is a

good c-candidate to go on the front. I'm a good candidate to go on the front, you understand? It means because, well they figured the c -- well, I want to get out, you know, it was you couldn't get out that time yet. 1944, you -- 19. Then they passed a law in 194- -- late 19 -- after the war, you know the p -- the law was passed that all those citizens, Polish citizens from before the war, Proushinna, I was -- was Polish citizens, because mostly partisans, lot of them -- lot of survivors from the Auschwitz, you know, they came back to Proushinna. And eventually was -- you know, you could apply, it was legal. You could have -- you could have gone to Poland. But it -- I had a tough time getting out.

End of Tape #5

Tape #6

Q: I just want to go back a little bit, to Proushinna.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: When you first returned and you're staying back at your house, did you th -- were people coming back? Were Jews beginning to come back?

A: Yeah.

Q: And did you think perhaps family members might come back?

A: When I -- this was in -- I was liberated in June, 1944. In Proushinna, only the few partisans who -- who were assigned to go to Proushinna and there I mentioned the doctors unusual case. And no, there was -- I left -- I left Proushinna in late '44. It means I didn't leave Proushinna. I had to take off abba partisan. I knew the territory. In order to -- you know it came to a point that I wanted to go to Bialystok and be with my brother. And while in Proushinna, after the liberation, 1944, I wrote a letter to my uncle, which probably you read, yeah? I had a chance -- it took a long, long -- I knew that -- that my brother's in Bialystok already, so I knew that he survived. So it took a long -- some -- a long, long time. I think they got it in -- sometimes in 1945 in May, almost from the war -- almost fr -- the war was over kind of late, took very long. And I left Proushinna in s -- close -- June, July, Aug -- maybe around September, and -- in order to get into Bialystok. So in -- I had to take -- I knew the territory, so I had to take the doctor and the nun with me and we -- you know, we crossed the water. It was between -- Bialystok was already Poland, not far f -- what I [indecipherable] over the border. So at night, somehow we smuggled through and with the -- with -- I was -- I -- I still was in charge, I could -- I'd been assigned, I can assign a farmer -- you know, to -- for -- for the job. I says, "We need you to go in here and there." So we assigned a farmer and the doctor and the nun and I left Proushinna and we were -- and we came to Bialystok. This was -- this was smuggling, I mean -- yeah. This was illegal. It's taking a chance for -- for that other -- other way. It was deserting.

Q: You -- technically you were deserting?

A: Well, I -- I was -- I was still assigned. They wouldn't let me -- they wouldn't let me go. I was still assigned there, the job. So, it means, you know, yeah.

Q: How did you feel about that?

A: How did I feel?

Q: About that? That you left?

A: Well, I f -- I was determined, you know, I was determined that -- that I want to -- you know, I want to go west, you know. I was determined -- feel about it. You know, it's okay, I was a fighter, but I didn't believe -- I wasn't Communist. I didn't -- I knew that's -- that's -- I -- I -- I appreciate and acknowledge the help the Russians did to us. But I wanted -- you know, I didn't want to stay. I didn't know that it -- you know, that eventually I'll be free and I'll be able to legally leave Proushinna, like some other ones. Now, I came in Bialystok, late '44. Now, Warsaw was still -- [indecipherable] wasn't taken yet, because there was a big, big battle [indecipherable] Warsaw, you know. I remember there was the Polish army which was associated with the Russian army. There was two Polish armies. One Polish army was established in Russia, which the Russian took prisoners, most of the Polish army. This was -- you know, when the pact -- unknown pact, Hitler and -- and Stalin made the pact and when the Germans in 1939 pushed the -- no -- attacked, most of the army retreated east, towards the Russian border. And eventually got trapped in Russia and took in prisoners.

Q: You -- a -- a minute ago you mentioned that -- that you were -- that you had gratitude towards the Russians for what they'd done. Can you just talk a little bit about how the Russians treated you? Did they treat you any differently because you were Jewish? Did you ever experience [indecipherable]

A: Th-There -- well, there was a little, not -- the -- t-to say, really the Russians, they -- the westerners in there. There were -- there were not so anti-Semitic than the eastern. You know, we had a lot of eastern Bellarussians, you know. And, very little -- there was the -- there was more, I would say, there was even in -- even in the -- in the partisans, you know, you felt like they call you some names. You know, the same.

Q: Were they fair to you, though, when you were under their command?

A: Oh yeah, they were f -- they were fair to me, because -- because they -- they appreciate my work. Put it this way, not because -- I don't know if I'm -- was a Jew, because they appreciated the -- the work I was doing and -- and I was devoted to doing the job. That's the pri -- that's the appreciation, I think they had.

Q: At this point, di -- what did you know, or what -- what did you know about your f -- your family, besides your brother?

A: Well, here -- I came in Bialystok and I s -- I wind up -- so we stayed in Bialystok for about maybe three or four months. And in Bialystok I met a girl, the first girl which was liberated from Auschwitz. This was in the beginning, 19 -- I think in the beginning -- beginning 1945. So, Auschwitz was liberated by the Soviet army, I think it was in -- sometimes in '45 in January. Now, she came to Bialystok. She was a young girl and I met her there and she's the one told me that Proushinna was taken to Auschwitz. Otherwise I wouldn't e -- I wouldn't even know that they took -- you know, she told me, she just --

she was survivor from Auschwitz. S-So I told her, you know, don't go to Proushinna, I'm just coming back from Proushinna. I can tell you who is there. She thought maybe you know, maybe some survivor, something, you -- you know. So, some -- a few though -- I think went back -- when they were liberated in 19 -- beginning 1945. I was in Proushinna, but I know a few came to Proushinna. And some -- there is a -- there is still in Proushinna I would say, a community. I would say maybe a self -- some came back s -- from Auschwitz and maybe they settled there. Some came back from the front. You know, a lot of Proushinna maybe was in the Russian army, you know. So there is maybe 50 Jews there, in the whole city.

Q: So when you left and you were on your way to Bialystok, when you left your house, did - did -- did you take anything from the house? Something small?

A: Nothing. I didn't -- I didn't -- I d -- no, didn't interest me, nothing. No, I didn't -- it -- the house. If I wanted, I didn't -- I wasn't interested that. I could have taken -- I have a -- I had a possibility of taking a -- a -- if greedy, taking a lot of things, because, you know, I - - I was -- you n -- I -- I -- I -- I had the power -- I had the power to -- to assign and take and do and anything. I just helped the doctor and helped the nun what I can and then, as a matter of fact, she [indecipherable] adopted me.

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: We a manats -- I mean that -- I mean she -- she was like a mother to me... Yeah... So, in Bialystok, when I wrote a letter and that time I got in contact -- I was from the first -- from the first -- you know, from the first survivors, we got -- they discovered about me, my brother, that's the organization we're already operating in Bialystok, we had already from the -- from the Joint Distribution, we had all -- we had from -- from different kind organizations, not only Jewish organizations. It was a lot of -- it was at -- esta-established the capital of Poland. So there was evil -- I didn't even know the evil was there in Bialystok, so, oh you been sa -- partisan, I said par -- yes. Well, [indecipherable]. They wanted -- you know, there was no survivors, yet we didn't know about Auschwitz, we didn't know -- the f -- we -- we didn't know where any concentration camp. So he says, "Did you kept the diary?" I -- I says, "What diary?" I says, "No." And they -- well they k-kept me there for couple weeks. They said, "Think." You know, go home, something. Think and certain dates, pick certain dates. For instance, what did you do as -- in the regional part -- Jewish partisan, this -- you know, or that day -- or that day, a few days, or -- especially, you know, about -- they were interested in activities, about the life. And they so -- I -- I've -- that time, I told them the same story. You know, little bit more -- the same story about the life in the ghetto, before the ghetto and all the same and I -- and -- and -- and about my parents and -- and -- and they were especially interested about the partisan, Jewish li -- Jewish -- the activities, tell me. So I told them, ya -- that we were a group and -- and -- and we escaped the same -- the date we escaped and all this, the same story of we did. How we organized, how we smuggled in this -- all this business and especially and they were interested in the J -- Jewish group and then if we participated in

any mission as Jewish group. So I told them yes, Je-Jewish beside that, we did participated. Like, I mentioned couple times that -- that we had those couple more missions as a Jewish group. We went in near Proushinna and we had to get some -- you know, we had to get some arms for the rest of the boys. We had a group of 60 there, you know, some olders. Not everybody -- wh-when the ro -- this is before we joined, you know, before we joined the Russian, but it was the -- it is -- we'll call it a s -- a c -- a command s-structural command -- command from Russia, an order with discipline and all that. So, yeah we -- we participated in -- one time we went near Proushinna and -- and we ambushed three German soldiers, we got three rifles, so we brought three rifles. This is beside -- beside what I participated from there. And especially this -- yeah, the activities. And I mentioned m-most of it, but the main th -- I've -- the main thing what I didn't mention, in 1944, in May, we went through -- this is called -- a call -- a raid. A -- a -- this mission, destroy -- the Germans mobilized three divisions. One German division and two -- this was in 1945 and two Hungarians, because I didn't know the Hungarians were allies for the -- the Hungarians, I think they -- they -- they allied -- they were with the j -- with the -- and Ro -- and Romania and Hungaria, you know, they were allies for the Germans. So they -- they -- th -- I mean, you know, they were in -- in the -- in German uniforms, though, in German uniform. And it came an order that we had to go through and clean them out once and for all. So it consisted from three divisions, 75,000 s-strong. And they came in -- we knew already in advan -- you know, we had tiptoe if we had lotake. We had good connection from the villages. And that time, it came an order from all the brigades, from all over stretching from this -- from eastern Poland, way up in Lithuania, whatever, deep to the Russian territory, that we have to -- this was impor -- imp -- that we, first of all, we have to mine all the roads and mine all the bridges. And we're not going to get involved in the fight with them. There's no match, because tanks and -- and artillery, there's no match. But the first priority is to save the family -- family u -- the family we -- units. And that was a job. So, we had to take them out, way in the swamps, you know, hundreds of them. And we decided that -- that we going to -- we going to even mine the little roads where it leads to our bunkers and to our -- you know, we had the -- the fields with the cows, everything was mined. We decided we're going to retreat in certain -- way up in the pinz -- the -- that -- that was swamps. So, in order to get int -- and in the swamps we had to go way up here in -- in mud, all the partisans. And some of the -- you know, those -- those who couldn't make it -- we had to help the elderly and you know, we -- in advance -- so we whack away that first olea -- the f -- the family airtrads. Unfortunately there is only one occasion, there is one group, a family was abandoned, yeah. It was from the [indecipherable], I think it's 18. Well, so they and from all this, they went through the -- all the woods. They went in, they discovered our bunkers, they find everything. But -- they destroyed our cows, they destroyed our horses, they blew out our bunkers and they destroyed our cemetery. We had a ce -- yeah, they destroyed our cemetery. And not a single -- we retreated at -- and well, there was 17 from the family which they found, unfortunate. It's -- we had very little -- th-there's very -- and not much, I mean casualties, very small. But, de -- what I'm saying, the big -- what they -- that's all they could do is to destroy and -- and even to dis -- dis -- the cow there -- kill the cows. They didn't take the cow, kill the cows, kill the horses and -- and -- and --

and -- and blow up the bun -- blow up all the bunker. And eventually we came, you know, they retreated. They retreated, that's -- that's all and finally -- next -- this May -- in June we were already -- in June we already -- we're already liberated. I mean they were so desperate, they figure they will pull out the -- pull -- you know, they were retreating, they were s -- getting such a beating. You know, there's such a beating, you know. Retreating in such a disarray, but it still -- they decided, well, we got to clean up -- we got to get those partisans -- to catch the partisans, yeah.

Q: Wh-While I have you talking about that, there was one thing I sort of skipped over. When you had described the machine gun that you worked with --

A: Yeah.

Q: And then never got you to tell us actually how it was used when you -- you shot it at the trains.

A: Yeah, it was a -- it -- this was -- this was very -- it's as just the same as a -- it's just the same as a rifle. It's a big gun, and there were more [indecipherable] the engine is so big, that you -- you know, you just place it -- you just place it, you know, and you shoot, you know. If you don't hit the first time, she hit a second time. This was -- yeah, it's -- it -- it was just a simple thing -- a simple thing. You know, you did -- you didn't -- you didn't try to pinpoint a certain -- it's a big, big, big engine, you know. And you lay -- it's got to go -- we were pretty close, you know, we lay in the woods there, near there in a spot, you know, waiting exactly when it's going to reach and there's a perfect time to hit it. There's no pro -- it was no problem. This was mine -- this was -- this was minor. This was very easy, minor. It happened one time that -- that we were cut off and we were chased and you know, the Germans, they yugerfer -- they called reinforcement and more reinforcement and they chased us in the wood and I had, you know and I had to run with that -- with that gun and I told the commander that -- everybody was in disarray, everybody was running and I says, you know, "Save the guy, it's heavy, I'm going to drop." I s -- told. So nobody wanted to replace, nobody wanted to replace. Everybody was running to -- deeper in the woods left and right. The commander -- the commander -- I told the commander save that -- save that -- you know, I'm going to -- I can't carry any more. So he took it over. He saved it. That's why -- that -- that's why they decorated me.

Q: Because you carried the gun?

A: Yeah. Because it's -- it's not so much I told him, I says, "Save the gun, don't save me, save the gun."

Q: Do you still have that?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: That -- was the decoration a pin or something?

A: Well, it's not -- th-they -- they gave me a decoration, that's -- they gave me at that time, they -- they -- you know, they -- when they -- we came, they -- they -- their trat was all lined out and they -- they -- we call it -- you know, the commander says for the bravery and this and that. I mean, it was not. They -- w-we didn't -- they didn't give any medals out like in the military [inaudible]

Q: But they honored you.

A: No, ou -- but they honored me, yeah, but I mean, it's not only what they honored me, I mean they respected me more than honor, see. That's why th-the respect alone is worth -- they respected me. And that's why I was -- you know, they sent me to Proushinna. I could have been sent on the front -- I would be on the front, maybe -- I don't know if I would survive or not. Because, you know, the front -- you know -- there's so many -- was terrible on the fr -- the -- you know, for the German -- Russian, it was so brutal. Can you imagine 3,000,000 -- 3,000,000 Russian soldiers killed? Not speaking about -- not speaking about taking prisoners. 3,000,000 soldiers... that's a lot.

Q: Wh-Wh-What was it like to be back in Proushinna? I mean, you'd grown up there.

A: Well --

Q: I mean you had to run away from [indecipherable]

A: Well I didn't -- that's -- that's dead -- I mean, didn't interest me. Y-Y -- I mean th-they say, you came back and there's no -- I mean you don't have no family, you don't have nothing and that -- it -- it why -- didn't i-interest me very much to be in Proushinna. Some settled in Proushinna, see? Well, I -- I knew I have an uncle, I have the feeling -- see, my brother, especially, we o -- he wanted to come to United States before. I was too young and now -- they were going to bring the whole family, see? My uncle -- I had -- I had my -- see my uncle in Syracuse was a belt -- you -- was a manufact -- pants manufacturer. He's esta-establish a factory in -- in -- I mean he had -- it's no problem, but even though -- even though with eff -- can you imagine, when you -- in -- we came after the war, we had to be two years in those DP camps, sitting, waiting. And they bombarded us with letters and my cousin wrote to -- he wrote to the consulate and -- and he says an -- those -- those little two devils, they -- who knows -- who knows -- those two devils, who knows how many -- how many se -- American soldiers they ma -- they saved through the war? But you had to wait for the quota, nothing else, so the consulate -- I still have the decor -- the consulate wrote to him, sorry, you know, and he -- well, he tried to get in through the -- through the Joint World Organization, but you know, you -- nowadays you got immigration, everybody -- even, you know, it's -- it's so easy and here you have -- you have papers made out, guaranteed job, guaranteed home, guaranteed everything and -- and -- and you have to wait from 1945 to 1947, til June 1947, I came.

Two years I had to s -- be in the unrah camps, you know. You heard it -- the unrah. It wasn't bad, I mean we had to -- we had -- in the camps they supplied us with already -- we had plenty of food, even beer, you know. So much, each one was assigned a portion -- a ration, beer. The Germans had a lot of beer. I remember we used to get beer.

Q: Wh-What was that -- tell us about when you finally saw your brother again. You had been separated.

A: Yeah.

Q: Where was he?

A: He was in Bia -- he -- he --

Q: What -- what were some of the things that you said to each other in those first hours.

A: Well, yeah -- well, he heard -- he heard already that I'm on the way with that -- you know, that's -- matter -- I brought a cow [indecipherable]. Now, the only thing what I brought from -- from -- from Proushinna, when I traveled, so I had a cow.

Q: A cow?

A: A cow, yeah, attached to the wagon, with the doctor. So I figure, what I'm going to take, the house? I'm my -- you cannot sell it. I mean the house -- y- you can -- what was -- what -- what is a house? I mean there is no value. I don't know -- I don't know there was a market for it. So I figure I'm going to bring a cow. At least in Poland, in Bialystok you can sell a cow and get -- and get the -- I don't know, 10 dollars or five dollars or something. And just for -- just for fun of it, sa -- that's all is I brought -- I brought a cow. So he heard already, you know. I think -- I th -- I -- he heard that -- you know, he's on the way. They -- you know, from rumors, he's on the way to -- traveling with a cow, with a doctor, with a nun.

Q: And how did you find him? Was it difficult to find him?

A: No, no. There was -- i-it was easy. You know that you -- like I say, you had that Jewish -- that's the Jewish o -- council there and you had organization and they -- it's -- I'm afraid -- they -- they didn't know much about all the survivors, but they knew, you know, they knew who was in Bialystok, you know. If you want to look for somebody, you go in there. And -- you know, had a -- a-anybody was registered right there, you -- from all these -- from all the survivors. Mostly -- eventually, like when I came, there was still -- you know, there's still -- the c-camps were -- I did -- the camps were still -- Auschwitz wasn't even liberated. And -- and -- I didn't hear -- that's -- I didn't hear about Auschwitz, even in -- see -- even in the woods. You see, it was impossible sometimes -- I would say to s -- there's never s -- never was an escapee from the camp. Speaking -- they

had -- they had -- they had not only Jews, they had, you know, prisoners, Poles and the Russians and they had Gypsies there, all. Sometime -- you weren't be able to escape from there.

Q: Did you find -- did you go and look? Did you -- in -- in -- in the lists of people, thinking that your sisters might be there? Or your mother?

A: Well, well, when I met the girl, the first girl from -- from Bialy -- the one in Bialystok, so I knew they went to Auschwitz. Now, I know they went to Auschwitz, so -- as a rule, you know my sister was -- the -- you know, they was -- they were too young yet, you know, in Auschwitz the way the system, so they separated those -- those -- those who are able to work yet, know -- women or men and th-they -- they weren't -- you know, I -- I -- I was sure that, you know, they went to the right or the left. They went to right, they went in the crematorium. Because otherwise you know, you do -- would have known. I didn't expect my mother -- I didn't expect -- the only thing I resent is -- you know, I could have -- if I would know, know -- that's what -- if I would know, I -- ner -- I could have saved one sister. If she would be with me -- with us in the bunker, like some other strangers, she would be -- she would survived. I mean, she would went through, see? Even though, well, she was -- she was -- would have been 17 years old, a big girl -- a big girl, see? So it's -- I don't know, like I say, it's hard to say if you did the right thing or na -- if I did the right thing or the wrong thing, I wouldn't say -- I -- they let history say, I -- I couldn't say the -- really, if it is the right thing. You know, I was asked -- I was asked this question. I don't know, you know, if it's, yeah do I feel? That's -- how -- about -- you know, about going through all that. But I know one thing that, you know -- that it's important as a survivor that -- I have a duty to -- to tell this -- you know, to the story for the future -- future generation.

Q: One thing I [indecipherable] think I read, that for all -- you told me too, that earlier in your life, you didn't really like to talk about this. That you didn't -- you really --

A: Oh no, I didn't --

Q: -- you wouldn't talk about it.

A: No, I didn't, I -- right, I didn't. I -- the children knew a little, I -- I didn't because I was -- I tried to -- I -- you know, I was raising a family, three children and I was in business and I worked hard and somehow, you know, I tried -- it was -- I tr -- I tried to -- not to advertise. I mean my family knew, the children, you know. I wasn't advertise. I was approached a way -- I was approached a couple times by -- you know, when it comes -- Yom HaShoah or something and I -- from the television years ago. And I didn't -- didn't want to re-really, you know, this twa -- the -- all the -- all the stories. Tried to -- I tried to, somehow to make peace with that. Forget it and make peace.

Q: So what changed your mind?

A: Well, I think my son influenced me, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And he's active and I'm glad about that, yeah. He's active. He influenced me, he said, "Dad, you got to tell your story." And finally up in public and this -- I started -- I wrote it in the -- in that -- first I gave him a chance. I didn't want to go to the papers. So, I figured for -- in Syracuse and I came ri -- you know, fir -- all the -- came right to Syracuse and it's 50 years. I decided it was 50 years, 194- -- 1994, 50 years liberation and, well maybe it's a time to say -- 50 years liberation. I was liberated in 1944 and this was 19 -- 1994, so I figured I'll write a little -- yeah. And -- and it was this -- the city was -- was shocked. They [indecipherable] I'm the only -- they say the only -- we have quite a few and there is a lot -- I mean, and of course the -- it's already the -- all the ones -- a lot of them are gone, you know, are gone. How many more years do I have? But as a rule, you know, I'm the young one, comparison -- I was only 20, you know when I -- 20 when I escaped, but if somebody was 30 or 25 - 30 or 40, th -- you know, [indecipherable]. So they probably gone, they -- [indecipherable] are gone.

Q: One story that I didn't get you to tell then, which is about the Leaman brothers and the rabbi?

A: Oh well, the -- well, the Leaman -- we killed the Leaman brothers. That's -- you know, I told you, we ki --

Q: Yes, but I didn't know the rest of the story.

A: I -- yeah, the Leaman brothers, you know, when we as -- we were assigned -- the partisans that time, we were strong together. We couldn't do it ourselves as a group. We could never do that -- we didn't have the power and the ammunition to do that. But from an -- already being assigned to the brigade, so I told the commandeer and he said, "Hadashov we'll -- let's try it." I says, "We got to get -- that's the easy job, to get this guy." Because he was -- he was a terrible Nazi. And I mean, it's -- it's worthwhile, so we got him. And the second -- you mentioned that -- yeah, but of all this, yeah. I -- I found out about the rabbi. Now, there's a lot -- among the f -- 22 Jewish Judenrat, is -- only two survived -- you know, 20 perished in Auschwitz and two survived. One is in -- this -- they already both dead. They -- they all -- I mean, they survived. One was in United States and one was in Israel. Now, they wrote the same thing at Yad Vashem, they wrote their stories. And the one is in -- the one was in the United States is a s -- is Sagell. He was the Foreign Minister. Now, he's -- before the war, he was ins -- in the business in Danzig, somehow in the export -- import you international. He s-speak fluently, German. An intellectual, you know, educated man, they made him Foreign Minister. So he wrote something -- you know, we had a pinkus -- you call that a me -- a memorial book. From - my story is from the -- is from the evewa -- you know, eva what -- what they -- eventually was printed in Israel in Yad Vashem. I didn't even know, I discovered that in the 1950's, that they had evewa eventually printed at -- in Hebrew. I wrote it -- you know, I wrote it in Yiddish and I had that in book in Yiddish. And -- and so this Sagell,

he was in charge about dealing and wheeling with the Burgermeister and all the transports, where is -- was coming in and anything coming in in the ghetto -- outside the ghetto, he was responsible, he was dealing direct with the -- with the Burgermeister, with the SS. So, he says, from the Bialystok I came in -- that's what I -- what came in a transfer from Bialystok, he had to receive them and they came in by truck. Because far -- like I say, some of them had to march -- they marched them. They brought in two hun -- 2000. It took about couple days. So, he says, here is -- you know, here is your shyser, you take them in now. I don't know if you understand in German?

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Here is your shy -- the Jews what from Bialystok. Here is your shyser, take him in in the ghetto. The shyser is partly -- you know what I mean in the shyser? Well, it's a -- kitty litter [indecipherable]

Q: Oh.

A: Here is -- you know, take -- here is your shyser, now you take him in. This is [indecipherable]. Now with the rabbi, this Leaman, I didn't know that -- you know, he took the rabbi -- it was a lot of -- he took the rabbi, he used the rabbi and he told him -- he was a heavy man, a big man. And he to-to-to-told him, take the tallis and twirl it and he told him to march and run, in the ghetto. Now, he was bribed many times. He was interested -- he was so interested in the bribe, the big bribe. He knew he is going to get -- he -- he could have -- I mean, actually he could have shot the rabbi, he can do anything, I mean he had the power to do anything he want. But he probably wanted a big, big bribe. So somebody noticed it, I didn't. You know, I didn't see it, but somebody noticed it in the ghetto, you know. You know -- you know, "The ra -- they marching the rabbi, Leaman." So they had to bribe him and in order to release him, see? And what happened, he -- he went to Auschwitz the same, he went to Auschwitz, the rabbi. But to them it's -- it's -- you know, it's f -- it's something unusual, right? But they ne -- he knew that it's got a twa -- a tallis. They knew -- he's got twirling. I mean they -- they -- they learned, the Jewish -- th-they -- the Jewish history so much, they knew more than I do, probably.

Q: Is there something I haven't asked you that you would like to say?

A: Well...well, the -- well I -- well, what I would say, that m -- that the wor -- ye -- I mean, the world should -- a lesson -- they should learn a lesson from the past, what can happen to a -- what can happen to a nation, it can happen to anybody, you know what I mean? It means -- it means that you have to f -- you have to f-fight and educate people and -- and - - and -- and hope -- and hope that -- that all those people who perished -- I would say didn't -- didn't go in vain, what you call that. You know what I mean? And they -- that -- that... that's what happened, it happened. Not much [indecipherable] happened, but I hope it -- you know, it's -- they sacri -- they should [indecipherable] sacrifice, they shouldn't happen such a Holocaust again. What else can I say?

Q: Can you show us some of these photographs? Okay, he has the [indecipherable] Would you explain what we're looking at.

Q: Yeah, you just hold them up and ex-explain them.

A: Yeah.

Q: Go ahead, what are we seeing here?

A: This -- this is a -- a group from my u-unit from the Po-Potomarenko unit partisan, relaxing in the woods. I don't see a fire, but I see a girl playing the -- the mandolin. Usually we were -- you -- when we were relaxing, sometimes you make a fire -- around the fire. And I think I'm here, on that side here, standing. The tall one, right here.

Q: Closer view of that side.

A: Well that's the same.

Q: Yeah. But maybe just -- it's a little closer.

A: No, this -- no, this is cut off. That's the same.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. Now this I -- here, I don't see it here, this is my commander from the platoon. Not this. Cole -- ca -- yeah. By the way, he got killed.

Q: Can you sh -- Can you show that to me?

A: His name -- this is C-Cole Camarack, the commandeer from the third -- third battalion where I belong. He ga -- he got killed in action.

Q: Okay. Do you have other photographs [indecipherable]

A: Yeah.

A: -- sometimes you make a fire -- around the fire. And I think I'm here, on that side here, standing. The tall one, right here.

Q: Closer view of that side.

A: Well that's the same.

Q: Yeah. But maybe just -- it's a little closer.

A: No, this -- no, this is cut off. That's the same.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. Now this I -- here, I don't see it here, this is my commander from the platoon. Not this. Cole -- ca -- yeah. By the way, he got killed.

Q: Can you sh -- Can you show that to me?

A: His name -- this is C-Cole Camarack, the commandeer from the third -- third battalion where I belong. He ga -- he got killed in action.

Q: Okay. Do you have other photographs [indecipherable]

A: Yeah.

Q: Could you tell us again sir, about the picture there?

A: Well, this -- this -- this picture is -- that's a group of partisans, Russian and Jewish partisans, relaxing in the -- from the -- in the w -- in the woods. This is from their unit for -- for the Marenko unit.

Q: And are you in the this picture?

A: And that's the one -- stand up on the left. Right there, with the big hat there.

Q: And -- and which was the commander?

A: And the commander -- the commander is there. There is molk -- Cole -- Cole Camarack is the short guy there on the right side.

Q: Mm-hm. And this picture, right?

A: Yeah, this is my family picture, which I got at the Un-United States. If I wouldn't -- the only one -- the only one I -- you know, was saved from my uncle. I got it here.

Q: Do you know what date this was taken?

A: Well, this here now, I prob -- now, the youngest sister would be probably four, seven, 11 and 14. That's my older brother. Four, seven -- I was 11. 11 years old.

Q: And where are you, Mr. Elman?

A: Oh that's an -- my brother is there, it --

Q: In the middle?

A: Yeah. I'm on this side, on the left... Picture taken in Proushinna after the liberation in '44, partisans relaxing -- this is at a cemetery, I wasn't -- I wasn't -- wasn't in here. I was already in Bialystok. But this is all taken in 1944. You can see there, in the picture, there's some older people which were able to survive with our group. Naturalization picture.

Q: This is from 1947?

A: This is nine -- yeah, this is 1947. This tells you the date when I arrived on there, it's July, 1947. Many years ago.

Q: Okay. I'm sorry. Could you tell us now who this is?

A: This is my broth -- older brother -- older brother, his name is Louis Elman.

Q: And when was this taken, do you know?

A: This picture was taken in Germany in 1945.

Q: And this picture?

A: This is -- this is my older sister Haika -- it's -- and the younger one is Shaindel. And I would s -- exactly, I wouldn't be sure the age, but I would say, maybe s-seven and 10 or 11. Let's say seven and 10. Yeah, it's three year different. Three young children.

Q: Tell us that again please. Who's this now?

A: This one?

Q: Yes.

A: Yeah. That's me, myself and my older daughter is on the right. Barry, my son is the youngest one, see, right here next -- in the middle. And this is my younger daughter.

Q: This was taken in Syracuse?

A: This picture was taken in -- this -- yeah, yeah, this picture was taken in Syracuse, yeah, because I lived in Syracuse, yeah. But then they were small.

Q: Do you know when this picture was taken?

A: This picture was taken in the mountains, it's probably, well, I would say, 20 years ago.

Q: And what is your wife's name?

A: Edith. She is -- she is a -- she is a Brooklyn girl.

Q: I'm sorry, but tell us that again, now.

A: This is -- this picture was taken in Feldifing. It was a big unrah camp.

Q: And what was the year?

A: This is -- I arrived in Feldifing probably -- it -- it was in 1945. Unfortu -- I don't have an [indecipherable] three together...partisan, [indecipherable] dressed up.

Q: So [indecipherable] we'll just have you say that again, Mr. Elman.

A: Yeah, this picture was taken in Proushinna after -- after I was liberated and -- from the partisans.

Q: This would be 1944?

A: It was taken in 40 -- 1944.

End of Tape #6

Conclusion of Interview