

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Eugene Miller

September 13, 2010

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PREFACE

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Transcribed by Carilyn Cipolla, National Court Reporters Association.

EUGENE MILLER

September 13, 2010

Question: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Eugene Miller on September 13, 2010. Thank you, Mr. Miller, for agreeing once again to be interviewed by us. We appreciate the time you took the first time, and we appreciate it now. And, like always with our interview, we want to start at the very beginning like in the fairy tales. So where were you born -- your parent's names, what their professions were, a little bit description of the world you were born into.

Answer: Okay. I have to start even first.

Q: Before. That's okay.

A: My mother was born in Merez, Lithuania. My father was born in Moscow, Russia. Generally, since Lithuania was occupied by Russia -- or was part of Russia there -- they took -- they draft the young boys for 25 years to serve in Russia army. My grandfather evidently was well-off, and he sent his sons to United States. My mother was sent to Moscow to study in the Moscow University. When the Revolution came, she got married and lived in communist Russia till 1923. In 1923, Lenin decreed that the small bourgeoisie should be liquidated, and they started to arrest and so forth. Anyway, my grandfather and my father, my grandmother -- they all fled to Poland. My grandfather was killed. They went -- they got wounded. Anyway, they got to Poland near the Russian-Romanian-Polish boundary, and they settled in Lodz, L-O-D-Z, Poland. My mother went to Lithuanian boundary, and she was expecting me.

Q: So your parents were married already?

A: She was -- she was -- oh, sure. She was late 19 months. And she said, "Look, my husband is dead. I'm going to my parents. They wait for me to go." I was born in Merez. You know at that time people not registered right away when they were born. They waited for kids to survive. Anyway, making long story short, as long as she could - she went to Poland, wrote my father.

Q: First, let's say, were born in Merez, Merkinė?

A: But I wasn't registered.

Q: What date were you born?

A: Oh, I was born -- officially, I was registered in October 16, 1923.

Q: October 16, 1923.

A: Yeah.

Q: But you were born a few days before.

A: That's right.

Q: Do you know how many days before?

A: No.

Q: I know, my mother is the same.

A: You know. I mean, that really didn't --

Q: Wait a minute for a second -- wait, wait, wait.

A: Oh, I am sorry. By somebody from Holocaust Museum.

Q: Oh, really?

A: Years, years ago.

Q: Years ago.

A: That's right. But anyway -- coming back to this --

Q: So your mother gave birth to you October 16, 1923 officially --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and then joined her husband in Borch[?].

A: Yeah, she joined me, and I was registered as a child in Poland.

Q: So you were the oldest of the family.

A: I was the only child.

Q: You were the only child.

A: Yep.

Q: Okay. I'm not letting you do that yet. I want to find out a little bit more about your father. What did he do for a living? Did your mother help him? Did she do something else?

A: No, we were quite well off. We had a factory. And they manufactured -- they weaved materials, you know?

Q: Like ricotash[?] -- something like that?

A: Yeah. And we were very comfortable. I don't know if -- anyway, I was sent to, in Poland, to gymnasium. This is equivalent of academy in this country.

Q: Like a high school -- something like that?

A: Yeah, that's right. But very expensive one. So --

Q: I want to go even back further. Sorry. I want to ask you, "What are your earliest memories that you can recall from your childhood? From your mother? From your father?" I want to get a sense of where you grew up.

A: Could you take that off?

Q: Okay, we can pause. We will pause. All right. Let's -- this is a photograph of you with your mother. About how old were you here?

A: I imagine probably two, three years old. I cannot tell. My guess is as good as yours. But my uncle sent me the photograph, so --

Q: She looks very chic, very elegant in the style of the time -- your mother.

A: So I -- well, now I can continue.

Q: Yes.

A: So I grow up. I was the only child. Oh, I was born in 1923 when the war late in October. So, when the war started, I was still in the gymnasium or academy. And the Germans came. After a few months, they press us in the ghetto.

Q: This was Olen Woj [?].

A: Olen Woj, yeah. The ghetto was -- when they left, the ghetto was something between like 2 and 250,000 people. We were lucky enough -- we went here and there. We move to the area which was ghetto about two months a year. What happened, since we had a very nice apartment and lived in a very good neighborhood, the Germans used to requisition the apartment for the Germans which were expelled from Russia -- no, no. They came. They told us that you have two hours. You can take whatever you can carry in our hands. And don't forget to leave the flowers on the table. [chuckling]. Okay. We went, and we were able to rent a room in the only building which has a flushing toilet in the ghetto. One room. Okay.

Q: Tell me -- your father lost his business when the Germans came in?

A: They took it away -- sure.

Q: They took it away.

A: Yeah. They put it troiken[?] there, which is whatever that administrator, and -- well, okay. I was in the ghetto, and they are -- you see, there were a lot of Jewish kids who went to other gymnasiums -- who went to the public school and who went to other high school gymnasiums. And they put us all together and allow us to continue in school, which was located in the part of Russ -- near the the cemetery called Marysin. M-A-R-Y-S-I-N. And then we continue to school till 194 -- end of 1941. At that time --

Q: Hang on -- I have a few questions.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. First question -- about the school, the very prestigious gymnasium that you went to -- can you tell me a little bit about what this coursework was? What you studied? Was it a Jewish one? Was it a Polish one?

A: No. No. This school was a -- most of our teachers have Ph.D.s. The school was recognized by Polish authorities or government as a school which does not require examination for the entrance to university. So.

Q: It was very hard.

A: That's right. And we get two type of abitur.

Q: I know abitur -- so we mean high school diploma.

A: Two type of high school diploma. One was in Polish, and second was in Hebrew, and you could go from us -- you could go to Palestine at that time and enter Hebrew University without examinations.

Q: So it was nevertheless a Jewish school --

A: Yeah, that's right.

Q: -- you were taught Hebrew, and you were taught Polish as well?

A: Yeah. The head of schools -- there were two, three schools in Poland. One that was in Lodz. That was sometimes in schlunks. Silesia and some other place. And the head of school was a Polish -- she was appointed as a member of the senate. She was Polish senator. Okay. Well, that was a mishmash for me -- the ghetto students came from various schools. Anyway.

Q: My second question -- I'm so sorry for interrupting, but I need to get the context. You spoke which language at home?

A: I spoke Polish.

Q: And at school?

A: My parents spoke Russian among themselves. To me they spoke Polish.

Q: Polish. And in school you studied in Polish and in Hebrew; is that correct?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Did you know any German?

A: Yes. I had it as a subject at high school. German and high school English.

Q: Those were my other questions. By the time you got into the mishmash of the ghetto school, I wanted to get a sense of how many languages --

A: And I didn't -- you see -- if you want to know the sense, I will tell you how ghetto look. The Jewish community was essentially split in two parts. There was 250,000 Jews out of 600,000 people -- or 650,000 people. Half of them were hasidim, you know? And we seldom even went to their neighborhood, because they spoke Yiddish. I didn't spoke Yiddish. I had a problem. I went to one. I don't know why I went. I was close there, and I went to the school. And we all wore uniforms -- high school uniforms -- so I took my cap off. And the guy took a broom to me and wanted to chase me out. How is a Jewish kid come and embarrass her friend? I never went there. This was mish -- both of these communities were mixed in the ghetto. Well --

Q: What was that like?

A: What?

Q: What was that like for a young boy -- well, teenage boy?

A: Confusing. Although, I remember as -- I wanted to go to -- I wanted to -- you see, one of the brothers of my father was left in Russia. He didn't want to go. He joined evidently the party, become one of the editors of Isiestia [?] -- and he wrote to my father that "If you sent me there, I could -- he didn't have any children. He would send me to university." Well --

Q: What year did he write this?

A: Beg your pardon?

Q: When did your uncle write this?

A: In 1939. You know, when there was still peace between Russia and between Germany. My mother visited them in 1938, and she did -- you know, they gave her permission, but the -- they were -- they had to have a guide with them. And the guide was probably member of NKGB. So, when she came to see them, they saw the men who came with them -- they said, "Look, we are very happy that you are happy. You have your life. We have our life." And my mother understood what it is. She cried when she

came home. And she -- "We wish you all the best," and that was all. Year later, after the war, you know? He wrote to sent me there. Well, my father told me -- I wanted to go, we all go in Russian zone. He said, "Look, you can go to Russia. But, once you go, the door will open, but you never came back. I fled once Russia, and I am not going. The German are civilized people. You know -- blah, blah. And I speak well German. We will take our chances. We want to last longer." Well, when they ask us to put first the --

Q: The armbands?

A: -- the armbands. I told my father, "I'm not putting this." I went out. A Polish teacher recognized me and pointed to the Germans. And I came in, I was black and blue. And I went into hysteria. I told my dad that he's going to kill himself, your mom and me. And then my father didn't said very much. Next morning he said, "Look, we really don't know what's going to happen. If you feel that you can save yourself, go." They took my shoes. They putted [sic] some gold pieces in this, and they sent me. When I went away, my mom look at me and said, "Take a good look at your parents. You'll never see them again." And I was a 15.5 years old boy -- close to 16. And it hit my head, you know? I was -- I said, "If I survive and they die, how's I left my parents?" I was on the Russia boundary, and you could -- the Germans let people out at that time, and Russia admitted them. And I went back. When I went back, when I came back, shortly enough we went into the ghetto. I --

Q: Did your parents -- were they happy you came back, or were they distraught that you came back?

A: Would you repeat yourself? If my --

Q: Were they -- how did your parents react when you came back?

A: They were delighted, and they were very happy. That's about all. I mean, they regained back their son, and I was going to try. But anyway, when we went into the ghetto, I understand Yiddish, and I can probably speak halfway Yiddish and halfway German, you know? But I spoke -- I never really learned. Well, when they closed the school, I was at that time probably 17 years old. And in the ghetto --

Q: They closed the ghetto school.

A: Yeah, that's right. Well, close in ghetto, which was closed in 1940. I continue my school education until September 1941. Then they have -- then they closed the school, and they send there the transport of German and Czech Jews there.

Q: Until that time, you had a mishmash. But the mishmash was from Borscht [?]? The mishmash was Jewish community from Borscht. Nobody mixed in yet.

A: No.

Q: Nobody from any place else?

A: No.

Q: Okay. What was that like? Was Romkowski already the Jewish community leader?

A: Oh yeah -- he was already. That's right.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about him? What you remember? What did you see him?

A: I can tell you a lot about him. I lived under his regime for 4.5 years. Till liquidated the ghetto. Romkowski -- all right. Romkowski was a widower who was probably well comfortably, and he retired that he was on the board of orphanages. And he had his place by his wife, which was boarded over there. Over there it went to his head, and he started -- well, you know, he probably felt that the only way for the ghetto to survive is to -- not only to cooperate with the Germans, but to create industry in the ghetto so they would become indispensable economically.

Q: What kind of industry did he try to create?

A: Beg your pardon?

Q: What kind of industry did he try to create -- what kind of economic basis?

A: Oh -- oh, they made what you wanted. They made the shoes. They made the garments. They made the belts. They made all kinds -- that was all army resource. All come to this right here.

Q: Your father was a well-to-do person.

A: My father didn't want to be part of ghetto administration.

Q: That was my question.

A: He bring -- we brought enough money or whatever you had that just to take care on ourselves. Which you couldn't afford -- you couldn't afford -- food was extremely expensive. What we get was a 2-kilogram bread for one week and maybe few potatoes. There was no coal, nothing. People already started -- the poorer people started to die out pretty early. But Romkowski created industry, and people had to work. Because in order -- No. 1 -- we got a dose in school to get the soup. They got the soup in addition to the bread, which they got -- at the working place. When the school -- and that -- I -- well, my address in the ghetto was Berka Joselewicza 60 Brunnenstrasse 16.

Q: Brunnenstrasse 16.

A: Berek Joselewicz was the hero of one of Polish uprisings. They renamed it Brunnenstrasse. I told you that the ghetto was closed on 1940. I continued my high

school education until September '41. And, when the school closed, I was assigned to labor department. I was 17 or 18 years boy. I mean, you know, just out of school. So I - I did -- well, I worked in economic department that was called Vir turizam.

Q: Hang on a second. I want to ask a question about the school. So it was a mishmash you say. What was the quality of the teachers for the year that it existed?

A: That was a put-up faculty of the people -- a lot of people fled. I mean, teachers from various schools -- Jewish, we're talking Polish school and by us -- they made the -- they were our this. One of our professors -- his name was Silverbogen -- he became the -- he became the principal of the school. Well, anyway -- where I was? When the school ended, I did it whatever they asked me to do. I filed. I run errands. My working hours probably were from morning till evening, close to ten hours a day.

Q: What was the work of the Vir turizam? What was its purpose? The place where you worked.

A: They called Vir turizam? They administered -- well, it was one of the departments which he created. I think they assigned the living quarters. They make that administrative work. That was --

Q: So did you come into daily contact with him? With Romkowski? No.

A: No. I saw him one time in person for a long -- in 1944. I'll come to this.

Q: Okay.

A: Now. I was there to about 1942. Then I was reassigned to work in court. There was court. And they -- you know, they really had that "people stole this," "people stole this." Mostly -- they were mostly -- there were no murder cases, you know? There was crimes of property. Well, I work over there to about -- well, the running errands. Don't forget there was no phone calls. Those -- you know, if you wanted to talk to somebody five blocks away, either you went by yourself, or you scribble few words what you want and you summon a kid like me -- I took it over, I brought answer, you know? Well, in 1942, I got a job in a court. And again, I filed, you know? And I run errands.

Q: But you know, this seems like -- pardon me for thinking, but it seems like fairly easy work considering what kind of work it could have been.

A: Oh yeah -- oh yeah -- oh yeah. My cousin who was also in the ghetto; he was CPA in Vir turizam. So he got me over there. And, when there was reduction in force over there, because they wanted to have people to work in the resorts, which manufactured seats for the Germans. He got me in the court. So I worked over there.

Q: What did your father do during this time?

A: Nothing. Dying of slow hunger death. We bought it as long as we could. As the money lasted. Don't forget -- in 1942, the bread costs over -- loaf of bread costs over \$100, \$150. When the Germans troops came, they were quite well-assimilated. They were quite number of them were intermarried. Some came without something -- with wives, you know, that the -- or with the husband, who was German, didn't want in the ghetto. And I remember it would -- it is not comic. It is tragic. You know, when we were picking up, you had to work some place to get stamps.

Q: Right.

A: My father got stamps, because he was sick, okay? But -- so they got the stamps. And they were going to the head of the line some of them. And they said for science uda and the Reich uda[?] I am a German Jew -- and they expected that we let them eat. Well, the people were not in the mood. And this -- they were very brutally pushed to the end of the line. And a lot of them committed suicide. Large number of them committed suicide. They couldn't take it. Well, continue with me. I was -- in May 1943 -- I'll give you this -- I was transferred to the fire department. Well, we were not a fireman. I was a young kid. What our job there was, when we -- to work, you know, in the resort -- when people sit by machines, sewing machines, and this -- see that nobody smokes a cigarette, throws away, and if a fire would start and you couldn't put a bucket of water, we really had to call the -- [pause] -- well -- well, we look for unsafe practice like smoking.

Q: Almost preventative fire.

A: That's right. And, if the fire really started, we called the fire brigade who are trained as a firemen; they came and they took care of the fire.

Q: Can I just ask one point for clarification? When you talk about a "resort," you're make -- you -- it sounds like you're talking about a manufacturing department --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- not a resort.

A: That's Arbeits Resort. That's how they call in German.

Q: So it would be like a manufacturing area, or a workplace.

A: Shops. Or minor factories. That's more like a factories, because they -- you might have people, 5, 600 people working this. And, when they were doing shoes, they said when they all sat by sewing machine and another. And we were moved around, you know? I didn't work in the same place. Every day we were assigned -- "You go here," "You go here," "You go there."

Q: Were you ever -- was there any manufacture of German military equipment? Ammunition?

A: A lot. A lot. There were uniforms.

Q: Aha.

A: There were torn uniforms, which probably -- from people who died during the war. And there were -- they -- the Germans supplied the material. They manufactured material uniforms. The same thing with the shoes.

Q: What about weapons? Munitions?

A: No. One thing which we didn't do.

Q: Okay.

A: But that was economic -- what they Romkowski interested the union. He wanted to make himself economically indispensable -- or nearly indispensable -- to the war effort.

Q: Did you see selections? Were there selections in the Woj ghetto?

A: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. They demanded -- they demanded people who could work and so forth, and periodically they took. They took them. We didn't know where they went. They took them about 2 or 300 miles from Lodz. They were experimenting. There were no concentration camps -- crematoriums. What they -- when they came, they put them in a van, in a big truck, and the fumes were transported --

Q: So gas vans. It was gas vans -- murdered by gas vans.

A: That's right. Then, when they came, they unloaded this -- some of the prisoners -- other prisoners stripped them. Their things were stripped back in the ghetto.

Q: Did you know about this at the time if you think back?

A: Rumors.

Q: Rumors.

A: Rumors. Because, if a woman in a shop, she took a picture, and the picture was somebody whom she knew or knew about or what, they understood that these were personal things and something happened to the people.

Q: The person.

A: That was in 1942. And then later they were periodically -- they took people away, because people were unable to work. They got emaciated. They died out. We had about hundred funerals a day. My parents died in Ghetto 2. They died hunger death. I don't

know if it's -- it's very hard. Well, you can -- the worst you can put it. But to imagine how it looked. A normal person start to lose weight. He gets thinner, thinner, and thinner. Now, since most of the thing, what you had was a slice of bread a day, in order to fill the stomach, people used to cook -- put it in the water -- and make --

Q: Make it expand.

A: Well, that's right. And they started to swell. And you saw people who are unsteady on his feet, swollen, and so forth. At the end of the ghetto, I was also -- I was also swollen. I was taken to the hospital, and they took one liter of liquid out of my lungs. I'm getting a ghetto panacea for this.

Q: Who went first with your parents?

A: Mine father.

Q: Was he older than your mother, or was he sicker than your mother?

A: About four, five years older.

Q: So not much older.

A: Not much older. But he went first. My mother -- I remember when my mother told me -- "Remember Ami, if you ever survive, if you survive, you have uncles in the States. Try to educate yourself. Make something of yourself." She died in 1942.

Q: And your father before? So for several --

A: Before.

Q: So he fairly soon after.

A: That's right. And I lived by myself.

Q: In the small room.

A: Yeah. You see, what they did -- the family -- they gave one family per room. They might be seven people, might be three people. Everybody got their room. We got a room -- small room in this building -- because we came early, and we were able to rent for a lot of money. And so, they left me alone over there. I mean, I was working fire department too. They started to look for the ghetto.

Q: What were you working? What were you working at when your father died?

A: As a fireman.

Q: You were the fire -- you were in the fire --

A: Yeah. I was a -- they called us firemans. We were really, you know --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- untrained firemans. We were watching that people don't smoke cigarettes, that no fire starts.

Q: I'm sorry to keep back at this, but it is an important point. It is sort of chronicling sometimes the most difficult experiences. Were you at work when this happened? Did you come home from work and find he wasn't there? Were you expecting it?

A: No, my father died in sleep. My mother contracted typhoid, and they brought her home. And she did not -- another two weeks she died. Well --

Q: I see. Did you have any other close relatives in the ghetto with you or any family?

A: They all died -- my whole family. Everybody died. As a matter of a fact, one -- I was the youngest from all my cousins. After the war, when I tried to search for them, I found out that she committed suicide. You know, they experiment with a beautiful young woman. At that time I was -- 1944 -- I was probably 22, 25, 27 years old. And she was all cut up. And she didn't want to live. She committed suicide after the liberation. When I was -- well, the ghetto was liquidated in the 19 Lodz transport. I tried not to go. We didn't know where we were going. We didn't know that we're going to Auschwitz. Because, if you know what Auschwitz is, you have better to die there from the bullet than to board that --

Q: And people knew about Auschwitz already in the camp.

A: Not in the ghetto. Not in the ghetto. The German who was omslighter[?] of the ghetto, Hans Biebow. He and Romkowski, were going, "we are going -- try to go to families. Germans boys were dying on the Russian front. They want thank you that you work for us." Anyway, people didn't believe, but they didn't know what -- we felt that we are going to go to Arbeitslager.

Q: Work camp.

A: Yeah. I remember -- I told you that I saw Romkowski really close. One time -- because whenever they gathered us to send us to the various Arbeit resort this fireman that was huge -- about maybe half a square mile place -- he called all the people together and Romkowski got over there on a podium. Not a podium, you know, whatever table or this makeshift. And said, "Children, give me your own parents. Parents, give me your own children. So the rest of us can survive." I take that on my conscience. I mean -- otherwise, if you want to give it, the Germans will come and they'll take it. And there will be a bloodshed. Well, no, no -- we all go anyway. They declared spare us. Nobody could leave their homes for three or four days. They went from selection, they make selection in each building and took people.

Q: So Romkowski and his helpers.

A: That's right. All the people who couldn't work. Then I saw -- well, jumping back when they liquidated ghetto, I was -- that was 1944 in August.

Q: So you were a young man -- 21 years old --

A: That's right.

Q: -- almost 21 years old.

A: That's right. I waited -- well, I was very very thin, I mean, but I still could walk on my feet. Mengele was our -- the guy who select us. You went, and he "left, right, left, right," right you went later into Auschwitz. Left -- as a matter of fact what happened before -- you know, they told us we can take it so and so many pounds of baggage. So they figure that probably the best thing -- if people taking, they take the best thing they have it. When they putted [sic] us, they putted us like herrings -- 80, 90 people to a small cattle car. And one of the men told me that he knew my parents. I said old man, he was in his 40's. And "would you help me, I'm unsteady on my feet," and so forth? Okay. When we came -- arrived in Auschwitz, there was night. There was sea of lights. Out, out, out -- we all jumped. I tried to help the man. And they said, "Whoever cannot walk -- they were lined up Red Cross cars. He can go to the Red Cross cars, and he'll be transported there." The men -- I tried to help him, and I saw a guy in a striped uniform. I didn't know at that time that this was the prison uniform. We eventually found out. He grabbed me, "Where are you going?" And he was Russian. I didn't spoke Russian, but I understood Russian from my parents. And I try to explain to him that he's sick and this -- he told me, "Go there." I still try to proceed him. He grabbed me and give me a kick and shoved me go where other men were going. He saved my life. Because if I'd have gone there, they'd have straight to gas chambers. Well, I pass the selection, and I was in Auschwitz for about two or three weeks. I wasn't even tattooed at that time. This was September already. And --

Q: In '44.

A: Yeah. And the Russian army was on the march. So they were preparing to send us as fast as they can deep into Germany. And I was caught and pushed on a train and they sent us to Dachau.

Q: But you didn't know the Russian army was on the march at the time.

A: No.

Q: All you knew, you're pushed one place, you're pushed another place, and you're on the train. And so --

A: That's right. I mean, I found out after the war. When we came over there -- well, there was one time they tried to bomb us Allies. Let me show you something.

Q: Wait a minute for a second.

A: You have seen this. Well, anyway --

Q: This is a photo of Birkenau extermination taken by the Americans by satellite probably on 13th --

A: Not satellite; by American bombers. You see part of the Auschwitz. We are not in Auschwitz. We are in Birkenau. We call that such. Birkenau was Vernichtungslager.

Q: Was an extermination camp.

A: Yeah. Auschwitz also a working lager, and they manufacture artificial rubber. And the German needed this. So American plane came to bomb this.

Q: Do you remember those planes, or were you already on the way to Dachau?

A: No, I was still in Auschwitz. We just cheered and the -- and the -- and the --

Q: Okay. We can pause.

A: We were not afraid of bombs, because we felt that you never get alive from there. And so -- but they just flew. Well, this is another thing. I mean, this is a matter of big controversy why they didn't bomb -- why don't go into (indecipherable). So I went to Dachau -- Dachau was -- there was Dachau proper and there were some Dachau subcamps around. The Jewish prisoners were not transported to the -- to the Dachau itself.

Q: But to subcamps?

A: That's right. And we were building the roads and so forth, but we were -- a lot of people very often when our commander was hundred, hundred, 50 people who went to work, you had to carry three people who died because the tally in the evening has to, you know --

Q: Match.

A: -- agree. That's right. I worked for Organisation Todt. That was the Organisation T-O-D-T.

Q: Todt. 'Todt' means 'death' -- the death organization.

A: No, no, no, no, no -- that's not Todt. Todt -- he was man who -- the German who was in charge of road buildings. And we were building roads.

Q: So how long -- excuse me, you were in Auschwitz for a short time then?

A: Four weeks, maybe a month.

Q: Relatively short time. I mean, anything would be long.

A: That's right. But I still remember the planes. And over there we were -- a lot of people died naturally, but in the middle of April, they trans -- I became very sick, and they transported back to Kaufering, which was also a sub-camp --

Q: Of -- ?

A: -- of Dachau.

Q: I see.

A: They were supposed to finish at there. We knew. Weeks. We never believed we would come out of it. We knew that that's the end. Then, whenever I arrived there, two days later they put us on the train -- and this was maybe 25 miles from Dachau itself. And they kept us on the sidelines for about -- everything was bombed. After a few days, they unloaded us. In the mine train probably out of -- I don't know how many people -- 68, 100 -- most of them were dead. Few of us jumped. I was just half alive. Then we were liberated.

Q: By -- ?

A: And the Russia's history, you know? Okay.

Q: Do you remember? Do you remember your impressions of when it was the Americans who came? For Dachau?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember the first American you saw?

A: We were lame, and I couldn't walk anymore. Suddenly somebody -- some people came up in some uniforms, said "You are free. You are free." And one of them started to wave a small American flag, and all what we started are food. You know what are C rations? C rations is what the military gets. They were throwing us C rations. I was -- I met over there one of the chiefs. Not my particular this close friend, but I met him over there. And he was my neighbor. And I opened my box, smell it and started to vomit. I couldn't take it. He ate his and asked me, "Can you loan me yours?" So I said, "You'll get sick." "Look, we saved everything what we have it." Flower, carrot or whatever we found it. You are afraid of it? Here you are. Next morning he was dead. A lot of people -- right away the military who were in charge came in, and they tried to -- they chase out the soldier. "Don't give to the people. You kill them. You kill them, you know?" Okay.

I was liberated, and I went -- I decided to go back to Poland to see if anybody from my extended family -- because my cousins few years older than I, but they were, you know, I mean I knew that they were transported, so if anybody has survived --

Q: So you come to that.

A: You know, it's strange. We live in a house. Our neighbors live on a floor above us. The men was Polish officer, veterinarian Polish army, but he had a responsible administrative position. And -- but my mother carried their daughter, and she carried me on the hands. You know, two, three years old. And, before we knew that, we knew that our apartment is going to be taken over, because the number of people in the neighborhood -- there was a nice neighborhood. They were requisitioned. So my mom took the silver, everything what we had it. And she told them, "I don't think so you will see us again -- but in case anybody survives, we'll come back." We lefted [sic] them. I went up there and knocked to the door. And don't forget that the woman, I was closer to her than to my aunts. I lived, you know -- she opened the door, got all white, and tried to slam the door -- said, "We don't have nothing." And I just put my food inside, "Look, did anybody ask for me?" "No." And I played with her daughter in the sand; we were children. I could not -- I was just walking down, and the girl run after me and said, "Eugene, I want you to tell me where are you staying." I said, "Look, go in peace. Leave me alone. Best of luck." "No, my father would want to talk to you." She never let on. I told her I was staying. The men came in the evening and said, "Look, I don't know what you are thinking, but you have to understand what happened. I am a Catholic, and we don't divorce. I live my family. My oldest daughter married a folk Deutsch -- met a folk Deutsch -- it was ethnic German -- and my wife said, "This thing will bring us luck," and gave her everything. When the Russian came, since he was an ethnic -- that's right, they were both shot. But, when she saw me, she just froze. Then the men takes a gold watch and tell me, "That's all what I have, but I want to -- we live together. You live together with my children as neighbors all your life till you were taken away. I mean, why don't you have this." And I look at him, and I talk to him, "Look, I mean, in Auschwitz I saw blood, dollars, gold, everything mixed on the floor when we are dressing. I don't need it. I'm not staying here." And three days later I went -- at that time the Jewish emissaries from Palestine, or whoever wanted to go, they were guiding us out of Poland, and I went and I came to Frankfurt am Main. Well, that ends, I think, the story.

Q: So this --

A: That's right. Now, that what I told her later. This is probably you have thousand of these stories. And I understand the purpose of it. But I told him that at that point in life when we are -- you know, I am 87 today. What happened to the people after the war?

Q: I want to know that.

A: Well, we came here, and -- well, I met my -- well, no, no -- after the war, we decided that we are going to continue with our education.

Q: Who is "we?" By this point -- because you sound like --

A: Me and few friends in Salzheim, which was near suburb of Frankfurt am Main.

Q: I need to ask a question here. I can understand -- no, let me rephrase it -- I can't understand. I can't imagine what it would be like to go to a family friend with whom I was close and have the wife shut the door in my face. I can't imagine that.

A: I don't -- I never hate against her. She didn't know what to do. I mean, her daughter was dead -- everything -- she panicked.

Q: Okay.

A: And the daughter -- well, I know the girl all my life. I mean, she ran after me, and she wanted that her dad would come and explain to me what happened.

Q: What the situation was.

A: That's right.

Q: But what I want to say is, "That was more painful for you to stay and watch -- to stay there than to live, at least temporarily, in Germany?"

A: No, we didn't want it. We didn't want it. We just wanted out. Polish -- Poland was quite unsymmetric. And we felt that --

Q: There's no place.

A: -- there's no future there. I didn't know nobody; they were Poles. I met a few of my classmates who survived. Oh, what they told me, "Look, I mean, if you join, you see very few native Poles -- communists -- would arrest a priest." They wouldn't. To the Jews, who today you come, and they were in the uniforms of the Polish political police and this -- if you joined for a year and a half, they'll forgive you everything -- that your father own a factory. You know, it was communist Pole.

Q: That you were bourgeoisie, and so on so forth.

A: That's right. That you could go to university. I said "Good luck -- I'm going back." I went back.

Q: So for -- if I can paraphrase -- for a variety of reasons.

A: Right.

Q: No. 1 -- there's no family left; there's nobody close. No. 2 --

A: What would I do there?

Q: -- as a society, Poland is anti-Semitic. No. 3 -- your choices are to join the police to maybe arrest a priest, and that's your ticket to get to university.

A: That's right. That's right.

Q: And what choices are those?

A: That's right. I went back.

Q: I understand.

A: And I learned that in Frankfurt am Main, that was displaced person camp in suburb, maybe 20 miles Salzheim. And there were few boys whom I met who also were going to the same class with I. And we decided that we better go -- No -- and then we realized already -- it was 1946. We realized that we are not going -- that no country would admit us so soon. And to stay over in Germany, relented. So we went and enrolled in university.

Q: Which university is this?

A: Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität. I call this University of Frankfurt. What really happened, we went, and they were very, very forthcoming. "Oh, yeah? You are survivors? You don't have to pay the tuition. You'll get free books -- this, this. Where is your abitur?" You know what is abitur? Abitur -- it is probably something --

Q: Like a certificate.

A: -- like in New York Board of Regents certificate, okay?

Q: Yes, yes.

A: Well, we said, "Well, if that's what you wanted, you have to look in the Auschwitz for it." "Well, we are very sorry. You don't have the papers. We cannot admit you." And we decided to go to Wiesbaden, which was 20 miles from Frankfurt am Main headquarters of American army. And we got to so-called "education officer." He was a man -- I think he was some associate professor before at University of Michigan. You know Europe was very, very conservative. Could be 95 degrees, but when you go to table to eat, you wear a jacket. Here it's a guy with an open shirt, one foot on the table with big cigar, "What can I do for you, boys?"

Q: [chuckling]

A: And we are talking -- we are explaining to him. He interrupted us, and he said, "You know what it is? It's a telephone. All what I have to do is to give one phone call, and you'll be --

Q: -- admitted.

A: He said, "But what are you going to stay in Germany?" I said, "No, we want to emigrate." "Well, I will tell you -- I taught in the United States. As much as they will sympathize from you, you have to produce some kind of equivalence certificate before you got admitted to university. So what I'll arrange for you -- I'll assign -- I will call the hesen[?]. I will call the government of hesen, the education ministry, and they will assign three people, and you'll be screening people who want to continue education." We did. I was the first president of Jewish Student Association over there. In 1948, started with three or four people. Went to almost 100. But the 100, a great majority of them were kids who came -- who parents fled with them to Russia -- they came back. There were few programs in Poland. And they continue --

Q: -- West.

A: That's right. I met my wife. And she was in a nursing school. We got married.

Q: How long were you working with the Jewish students?

A: Beg your pardon?

Q: How long were you working there in Germany?

A: About three years.

Q: That's a long while.

A: That's right. I took a number of courses. But when I came here, the courses are called different. They gave me number of credits. They gave me number of credits. I -- I had to relearn the language. I was going to study pharmacy. They told us that medical profession's very hard to breakthrough for newcomers. But wasn't really the case. When I came, they told me, "Look, you have a lot of credits, but you're in Poland. When you finish school, you went to university. You didn't take sociology, you didn't take economics and so forth. That's all the courses you did in high school. In the university, you were studying in your faculty." So I had to take the courses in English --

Q: All this liberal arts stuff.

A: That's right. I'll show you something. Because, for me, it was mostly repetition.

Q: It was mostly repetition? This is --

A: That's a watch.

Q: That's a watch. But this is the gold medal, and it is --

A: You have it here engraved.

Q: Okay. Let me see what it says. "Awarded to Eugene Miller of the College of Pharmacy of Butler University?"

A: Right.

Q: And where is Butler University?

A: Indianapolis, Indiana.

Q: [to girl] You would know what it is, right? You went to school there?

A: [girl] Yeah.

A: [interviewee] You went to Butler?

A: [girl] Not to butler. Indiana University.

A: [interviewee] Oh, I finished pharmacy. Well, okay. (phone ringing)

Q: Okay. So, in other words, you didn't listen to them and you went to pharmacy school.

A: Yeah. I went. I didn't understand the system here. I could have gone to university and get most of the credits. But in Germany, your faculty was your state board. They were employees of the government.

Q: That's right.

A: Not here.

Q: That's right.

A: So I -- so they told me, "You have to." But anyway, I repeat it. I got my license. And -- okay. And I started to work, and I didn't care for a pharmacy here, because that's -- that's not even a drugstore. You got everything here. This is not aptekacia [sic].

Q: That's right. This is not apteka.

A: Anyway, I decided after 40 years, I told my wife, "You know what I'll do -- it's easy to transfer for the second shift. Everybody wants to work in the morning. Maybe I can make a master degree." I was -- and we were -- then we moved to Chicago. I was at that time in Chicago. We moved because my wife's family lived over there. And I -- I went -- I called University of Chicago, which is on quarter system, not on semester system. And I called in the middle of the quarter; I didn't want to be hasty about this. My wife didn't work. We have a small house. We have already two children. So I call, and I wanted to find out particulars. And a man answered. I said, "May I speak to the secretary of the department?" "Well, she's indisposed today. Can I help you?" Well, I told him. He said, "Why don't you come out here, Eugene?" And I came. He was talking to me. Then he take a piece of paper, "Sketch your grades." It was almost straight

A's. He said, "Look." He opened -- "I have here a pre-doctoral public health National Institute of Health scholarship. If I offer to you, we'll help you financially. Can you start tomorrow?" I look at him and said, "Doctor Roth," I told him. "You don't know much about me, but I have a house -- small house -- with a large mortgage. I have a wife, doesn't work now. I have two children, and I have a dog. I just cannot drop everything and live on the 600 -- or whatever they offer as -- to help." And he said, "Well, I'll tell you something. Maybe you can earn something. Anyway, this offer is good for three months to next quarter." I came back, and I talked to my wife. I talked her what happened. She said, "What's the problem? I'll go to work." She went on -- she went, took a streetcar, and the second day she had a job. So I went. And I finished. I got my Ph.D. in pharmacology in medical school, University of Chicago.

Q: Wow.

A: And as I was -- and I still was working and teaching in the lab. And one day the Food and Drug Administration Director of Bureau of Science was giving a lecture and chairman of my department introduced me. There were very few new pharmacology departments. That was in '60's. That was after the Russian put the Sputnik and Kennedy put money, you know --

Q: Right.

A: -- "Science, science, science." And okay -- so I -- I got over there, and to him for an interview. And he said, "If you want a job with us, you have a job." And I accepted.

Q: Let's see.

A: This is my curriculum vitae. I don't know.

Q: I'm interested.

A: You -- you take that. I will give it to you. That's a copy.

Q: Okay. And these are photographs?

A: This is when I was teaching the lab --

Q: And where are you?

A: -- in University of Chicago.

Q: Where are you in here? That's you behind? So we can't see very clearly there.

A: You can see me maybe over -- this is me too.

Q: Your mother would have been proud.

A: This -- I was campaigning for Jackson for president. That's Moynihan.

Q: Yes, I can see. I can see.

A: No, these are some boys from graduate. That's my wife at that time. I mean, she was in her early 20's.

Q: And this was you also as a young man.

A: I gave her copies of these things.

Q: Okay.

A: But this they send it back. They said "return."

A: Other guy who interviewed me.

Q: So that would have been Teresa.

A: Yeah, that's right.

Q: And this is the continuation.

A: So this is the story. I started over there; all right. That's the Johann -- the University of Frankfurt. And that's Butler University. And this is Ph.D. University of Chicago, College of Medicine, Division of Biological Science. All right. I started over there as -- well, the honors I got, I finished cum laude. I was elected to Rho Chi Pharmaceutical Honor Society, Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society of America, Sigma Xi Research Society of America, and I was a recipient of gold medal for (indecipherable) of science. I belong -- I was elected member of Society of Toxicology. American College of Toxicology. International Society of Xenobiotics. All right. Xenobiotics are things which get into our system -- like cadmium, lead, and so forth -- this my professional experience, you know.

Q: And all of this is yours?

A: No, no, no -- this was this. Then I started as a research pharmacologist. I moved later to section chief. I been, you know, you become 11, 12, 13 -- I'm not sure you are familiar with this.

Q: Oh, yeah -- because we're in a federal system.

A: Oh. Then I become GS 14. And then.

Q: GS 15.

A: GS 15, I was chief of metabolism branch. And I directed research -- the entire research. You see, we were a Freestone Facility in Belsford. That was -- we had a large animal facility. We done -- that was all kind of research done -- cancer, heart, brain, you know? It was a facility with the laboratories.

Q: I have a question -- there was someone who spoke to you this morning who -- is everything okay? Is that on the right? You want to fix it?

A: No, I want to get off. I want to show you where I was.

Q: Oh, you want to show me something. Good. So you show me, and then I'll ask my question. It is -- there are some people who would never be able to really get past what they went through, and today -- I mean, there's a lady who we spoke to who was amazing, but she told us that every once in awhile some wave will come upon her --

A: Oh yeah -- oh yes.

Q: And so, with -- to be able to have such accomplishments.

A: No -- let me explain to you something, and you understand -- that's very easy. When you came here, we wanted not to forget, but we wanted not to think, not to have the nightmares. So work, work, work, work. I worked two shifts. When I went to university, you know, I still -- that was my native language. You very simply tried to do whatever you could -- I mean -- and -- and I remember in the school, in the pharmacy school, where they are saying these things "I was on top of my class." I mean, look -- people like -- there were two or three. I mean, the older people -- I was in my 20's -- what we are, there are finals. A week before we have a big dance, and they are sitting and studying, you know? It isn't fair. Well, but that, you know, you wanted. You wanted to be busy, busy, busy. I did things besides going to school. When we came here, I was -- I worked in the neighborhood, and I -- I was the one who established -- we collected money, Neighborhood Tutor Organization Training Leader Conference in Wisconsin. And what we did, we financed this, collected the money. I was busy. I was busy, because simply you wanted to be involved in something, not just to be sitting. But there was a many nights. And German don't understand this -- or maybe they do -- you wake up all sweated because you have a nightmare. I -- I -- the boy what I told you who died, I was - - well, I -- I -- I knew him, but you know he was another boy in the class. He was the oldest son had a relatively young father. I remember when I -- when they liberated me after four or five days, I found a big stick, and I supported myself. I said, I was looking for, "Maybe I'll recognize some face." And her father, he called me in and said, "Did you?" I said, "Yes, I was with your son in Kaufering in Da -- in the various subcamps. And the guy just squeezed my hand. "I won't live till tomorrow. Tell me that my son is alive." I couldn't tell him that his son was dead. I said, "Yes, he is alive, but I'll come tomorrow." Tomorrow he was dead. I mean, and this things -- you know, hounds you. Not many times, but if this -- it is hard to take, but life goes on. You see, I have two kids. And they know. I mean, I told them. But they cannot understand. Well, they can understand, and they cannot understand. And my son is a nuclear engineer. He is in charge of nuclear reactor here behind the navy. My daughter is vice president of a large

pharmaceutical company. And they have their lives. They know from -- I really wasn't talking to them, because I felt that they would never understand how just frightened as a children. But they know. My daughter was very active in the neighborhood. You know they go. They visit Holocaust Museum. But --

Q: Did you have a conversation with them like we have today of, you know, such -- two hours?

A: Oh, they know. They know everything. But they -- it's very hard for somebody understand to see his parents, and almost yourself dying hunger death. You know, this is worse probably than the labor -- than the labor in the camp. I mean, it's -- no -- I still feel that somebody had to go through it.

Q: Absolutely. We're in the museum -- we're not --

A: My wife had a completely different experience. Number one, she's five years younger than I. And she lived in -- on the other side, on the Russian occupation Dugna, Poland. Now it's Ukraina.

Q: Can you pause for a second? Sorry. It's a golden rule with us that she calls me.

A: Well, she was 11 years old when the war started. And when the German -- and she was blond and had a green eyes, and she could pass -- if you know what I mean -- she could pass, and she couldn't pass. She never got -- oh, she got some money from Germany. But they rejected her application. They didn't understood this. One time she said -- her parents bought birth a certificate of deceased Polish peasant girl. Peasants don't talk with the same accent which people in big cities will speak whole Deutsche.

Q: That's true -- and chatte Deutsche.

A: That's right. So that was fine for the Germans. Blond, green eyes child --

Q: She's okay.

A: -- no problem. But in the village -- there was mixed village -- Ukrainian and Poles. And, after her par -- her father escape, he was in Parczew[?] with me. There were five, six people with guns, and they survive in the woods. He lived through liberation. He died here. And there were -- so they said that -- oh, and so, who saved her was their maid. She worked for the Gentile maid. She worked for them for 15 years. And she went to her village. But what -- but, when she would have grown up and talked to the neighbors, she just opened her mouth, they would know that she's not a girl -- deceased girl from a little Polish village. And Ukrainians (indecipherable) her and (indecipherable) her sponsor. So, when she wrote that this and this, she said "Well, how come she has the papers and she has to hide and this?" She said, "To hell with you -- I don't want the money," and she dropped it. She got some money later from Germany.

They give \$5,000 to every survivor -- that she got. But for the indemnity -- what she went as a halfway -- she said she's not going to go into it, it will tear her apart. Her mother was a pharmacist. The father paid somebody to drive a carriage, and he was supposed to meet them. She never made it. Her sister was dark. Her mother looked Jewish. The sister was dark-eyed. She was still some place on the way. And he survived in the forest. The men slept for two years on snow -- period. They stole few potatoes. The Poles -- the Polish farmers were afraid to tell Germans, because they're afraid that the people who survive will set their house on fire. So later, when the Russian liberated him, they sent him in the army. They took one look at this man and said, "He cannot serve in the army." And they sent him to Siberia to work as an accountant in a -- and that was not bad, she said. He walked three miles a day to here through the snow. Finally he got sick. Some Russian soldiers brought her, and he got reunited after the war with my wife. She wanted to go back. She wanted to go back. When she -- when the war ended, the village was about five or eight miles away from her town in Lewino [?] , so she went. And all she said that the house was bombed, her broken bicycle was laid. And she started to sit down to cry. So some neighbors came and said, "Look, there are some Jewish survivors. They live here and there." When she went there -- and she didn't know her father survived. She wanted to go back. Because what happened to the woman, she took her to a priest. And she said, "I'll tell you something. She doesn't look Jewish. If nobody survives, raise her as a Catholic. If her parents survive, let her go to her people." Well, she never found. She said, "I'm going to go back." She said, "No, no -- you don't go back. Not only kill you, they'll also kill the girl who sheltered you." So anyway, she later got reunited when he was sick, brought back with her father and her cousin. And we met in Germany. She was studying in Munich. I was studying Frankfurt am Main. But I was member of executive board of Jewish student unions in Germany. So, when I came over there, I met her through another girl. Well, we dated after -- we married in 1948.

Q: So it's been 62 years.

A: Yeah. But that's the story. And you can have a this --

Q: Thank you. I have one question.

A: Let me just show you one more thing what I wanted to show you.

Q: I wanted to ask you too -- did you ever regret that you came back from the Russian border and didn't go to your uncle in Moscow?

A: Probably I would have nightmares that I -- oh, I would have (indecipherable) cancers, because that's what I felt. "I was the only child, and I left my people to die." I don't know what would have happened. If I would have survived, they probably would have taken me in the Russian army. You see -- in 1997, we got in touch. And there was a number of us -- oh, I think around 60 or 70 people, and we decided to have reunion --

take a cruise together. So we went to Boca Raton in Florida, and we for three days there, and then we took a cruise.

Q: How wonderful. How wonderful.

A: You can have this too. I have a copy.

Q: Thank you. Thank you. Is there anything else that you would like to add to this interview?

A: No. No. But you have it essentially. I mean, all essentials are here. I told you other things, I mean, but --

Q: That's what we wanted to know. We wanted to know all of it.

A: That's right.

Q: Thank you very much, sir. This ends our interview with Mr. Eugene Miller on September 13, 2010. Thank you very much.

A: You're very welcome.

Conclusion of Interview