ABRAM JAKUBOWICZ
July 14, 1999
Tape 1, Side A

[copy checked and partially authenticated by AD on 8/31/05]

Q: This is an interview with Abe, Abram Jakubowicz. It's July 14th, 1999. And this is part of a collection of interviews with Holocaust survivors living in Kentucky, sponsored jointly by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Kentucky Oral History Commission. The interviewer is Arwen Donahue. And for this interview we are going to not go over all of Mr. Jakubowicz's experiences from his Holocaust and pre-Holocaust years, because he has already been interviewed by the Survivors of the Shoah Foundation. That interview was conducted on February 19th, 1996. So, we're going to just briefly summarize what was said in that interview and ask some questions to fill in and then we're going to go on and explore his post-war life in more detail. This is tape number one, side A. Okay, so, you tell me if I get any of the facts wrong and I'll tell you what I have written down from your Shoah Foundation interview. You were born… hmm?

A: I'm listening.

Q: Okay. You were born in Piotrków, Poland on September 24, 1924. Grew up in Grodzisk, Mazowiecki. Your grandfather Chaim Jakubowicz was the head of the Jewish community there. You had one brother, Gershon, he was born in 1929. You mentioned that your parents worked, say again what their work was?

A: My grandfather from both sides, my grandmother, had shoe stores. But my father, he bought from the tannery, when they make the leather, one part is what makes leather, the other part is like beady stuff. Doesn't smell good, you know it. They use it mostly for glycerin, Vaseline, chemical factories. So in any tannery, when they had enough that we could send in a truck, you know it, so we could pick and give it to the tanneries. I don't know how I can explain it closer.

Q: What was your mother's maiden name?

A: Bluma, B L U M A and Hannah, Hannah was her middle name. Bluma Hannah.

Q: And we got your father's name and her name on the other interview. Okay, now you mentioned that you went to high school in Warsaw. Is that correct?

A: I went to Warsaw and I went to Piotrków. I went to Piotrków first and I was away too much from my parents and I got homesick, so they took me back. They sent me from Grodzisk to Warsaw. And the gymnasium was not in [INAUDIBLE], it was… came out from the Jewish Federation, not Federation that time… the Gemennah *(ph).*

Q: Were you in Warsaw when the war broke out in September, 1939?

A: We lived Grodzisk, but Warsaw is only about 30 kilometers, 20 miles from Warsaw. Now I know, I found out they attached it to Warsaw, but at that time not.

Q: Okay, so you were in Grodzisk.

A: Grodzisk.

Q: Grodzisk. And you were there, living through the various restrictions that happened, that came along with the German occupation of Poland?

A: Yeah, not quite, because the fifth of February, 1941, all the Jews had to leave Grodzisk, and we all had to go to the ghetto. And before this there was kind of restriction, but it wasn't that bad, you know. You had to go to work, you had to do other things, but it was not too bad.

Q: Can you, you did describe your, some general things about your experiences in the Warsaw ghetto in your interview, in your prior interview. But I wondered if you would say something more about it, in particular something about your living situation there. Where did you live and with whom?

A: We lived on Twarda *(ph)* 24th, Twarda 26, as far as I can remember now, was a corner from Chepa *(ph)* and they called it the small ghetto. So, I went to school, when I went to school, I went on the bus two streets away from the Twarda. You know. So I knew this very good, the surrounding.

Q: Who, what was your house like? And who did you live with?

A: Okay, we got moved in and there was two young girls, approximately 18 and 20, and their parents went to Russia. You know, and they ran away and they couldn't get back or whatever it is, so we lived with the girls in that flat, in that apartment. There was my grandfather, from my father's side, my grandmother, and there was my father and mother and my brother, including me. We were the same. I can't recall was it two room or three rooms. I don't remember. It was there on the second floor.

Q: Was it a comfortable, living situation?

A: It was not comfortable. It was, you know, you had to live. But comfort, in the ghetto, there was no such a thing. You know, but it was better than a lot of people, they got worse apartment.

Q: I was asking because I know that so many people were so crowded and it sounded like you had a relatively…

A: Relatively we had, not bad, you know it, because it was second floor. It was only two girls, what they lived before. So it was crowded, but it was not too bad. You could live, you know.

Q: And you kept going to school.

A: Later on, since I went to the school before and there was only one school in the Natenzona *(ph)*, you know I told you it came from the Jewish, you know what they call it, the Jewish Federation, so they opened it. It was still open and I got a chance to go, yes, in the school.

Q: This was the same… let me make sure I understand. This was the same school that you had gone to before?

A: Exactly the same school I went before.

Q: And it just ended up being within the ghetto?

A: Yes, it was in the ghetto. And it was about two blocks, you know, where we lived from there, or three blocks. So it was close. It was not too bad.

Q: What was the name of the school?

A: Natenzon *(ph)*. And it was a technical school, if you want to be an engineer or something… as far as I remember in Poland we had, I think it was in 1933, every student had to wear, I don't think in the ghetto was, but before the war – it was on your arm, on the left hand side.

Q: Did you have a goal of becoming an engineer at the time?

A: Really, not, you know it. It's only for the while. It was close because I came from Piotrków back. I couldn't stay, so they put me in there, more than to go in another high school. You know, at that time, you still don't know what you want to be.

Q: So you were, you also mentioned going to the movies and cultural life, I wondered if you'd say a little bit more about that?

A: In the ghetto? In the ghetto, yes, they had a lot of operettas. They had some movies and when you had a little bit money, you know you could enjoy, do a lot of things with it. But we had to watch out. I went out a lot with my mother and friends, we went to it, yes.

Q: How did your family get money?

A: We could bring certain things in. We rented a cart, with a horse and buggy and certain things we brought in. And soon when we saw that it starts running out. We didn't know it would last so long. And that was the reason why we later on, about three months, we left the Warsaw ghetto or it would mean starvation.

Q: Okay, so you left the Warsaw ghetto after about three or four months…

A: That's right.

Q: …when your family decided to separate and to escape.

A: That is right.

Q: You and your mother and your brother went out of the ghetto together and then you met your father there? Did your grandparents…?

A: No, no. My grandparents stayed, from my father's side. But we went to Piotrków and you needed, in order to escape if they caught you, you got shot. So, we thought we'd split up and then after a certain amount of time, I don't know exactly how long, my father joined us. He escaped the same way, you know it, and joined us in Piotrków, because there is where my grandmother from my mother's side lived.

Q: And what was her name? Your grandmother?

A: Zudla Ritterband, R I T T E R B A N D or sometimes I see now, Riterband with one T and one with two T's, so I don't know, I get confused.

Q: And so you lived in the ghetto in Piotrków…

A: Yeah, from there we escaped the Piotrków ghetto.

Q: And your father worked in a glass factory there.

A: That is right.

Q: And you worked for a company that made office furniture for the German army.

A: That is right. Aus Deutsche Republic *(ph)*.

Q: Did your brother work? Gershon?

A: He was too young. He was born in 1929, though and I was born '24. No, he did not, because in 1941, he was only 12 years old.

Q: Did you have… were you and Gershon very close?

A: Yes, we were very close. It was a close family.

Q: I wondered, just speaking of your family, I want to back track a little bit, because I had wanted to ask you, you mentioned that your grandfather was the head of the Jewish community.

A: That's right, he had a shoe store.

Q: Would you say something about your family history? Was there a long tradition of leadership in the Jewish community?

A: Yes. About the Jewish community. My father was only one son, but yes, every certain amount there was always election. And they elected who they wanted to represent them. And he was always involved in politics about the Jewish people, you know it. So he always, as far as I can remember, always was elected.

Q: Your grandfather?

A: My grandfather. And he had a shoe store, but mostly it was run, and years ago, it sounds funny, the women ran the store. And they were doing a good job. So mostly Jewish men of that time, say they divided their time, mostly. But for a lot of them, for the community… or they went to the, they studied the Torah. And he was in that time, fairly religious.

Q: Had your family been in that area of Poland, in Grodzisk, for a long time?

A: My mother was from Piotrków. And as far as I know it, my grandmother from my father's side was from Piotrków. And at that time, marriages was made in matchmaking marriages. So, since she came… she was highly intelligent and her father was dead, so you know it, at that time years ago with a dowry, you know. They didn't care, they were fairly off, they wanted somebody highly intelligent in their family. I don't know, now it doesn't make sense, but that's the way what it worked.

Q: Yeah, I understand. So then on October 13th, 1942, the ghetto was encircled. And it was liquidated within one week.

A: That is right.

Q: And then the 2,000 people who worked in the glass factory were allowed to stay.

A: Yeah, because the factory didn't let them out. And then they made *staravarshaska (ph)*, we called it the yiden *(ph)* gas. And on the other side was the gun, *staravarshaska*. I remember. There was only one block, a big block, where they made wires, you know, where you couldn't go. And then they brought them back. When everybody, everything was liquidated.

Q: And your father was working in the glass factory, so he was allowed to, he was allowed to stay.

A: That's right, there was a few of them. There was Hortensia *(ph)* and one was Kara *(ph)*. He worked with Kara. They made glass and it was, in that time it was a war, so they put pieces of metal in it. If the bomb fell, they didn't split any, it got… you know, so…

Q: Your mother had the foresight to volunteer you as a carpenter.

A: When we came to go away, you know, there is no volunteers. They ask, "Who is a carpenter?" So, my mother said, "He is a carpenter." And I had a piece of paper that I could leave the ghetto, before it, in order to go to my work. She said, "He's a carpenter." So, this way they didn't ask questions, just pulled me out. And I went as a carpenter. What was the carpenter work? It's to make shelves in one of the buildings, Kompu-Stego *(ph)*. And they bring from the old houses,

you know it was about 20,000 people, 21,000 Jewish people. So they emptied everything and later on they shipped it to Germany.

Q: And you saw your father occasionally, but did not live with him?

A: No, I couldn't.

Q: Right. About two months, two or three months later, it was decided that about 1,000 more Jews would be deported.

A: Were liquidated, not deported. In fact there is now a monument, maybe you saw it, where they, I don't know, six, 700 people, they got killed. They took all the people in the synagogue, you know a lot of the kids, they got shot inside. It was really bad circumstances. You cannot describe it. After two or three days, you know, the screaming, they took us out and we were supposed to be shot. And when they took me out, happened to be a gendarme, you know, a police man, a German police man, whom I happened to work with. He says, "Hey, what are you doing here?" Like I volunteered. Kicked me out of it. You know, he would say, "You don't belong here."

Q: I wanted to ask you about that particular moment, because it was striking to me that this gendarme saved your life. Do you think he intended to save your life?

A: He intended, yeah, because, a lot of the Germans, they go, "What you doing?" And he saw that I had a job. See? Most of them, they were hiding out and they had no jobs and there was a lot of children. But he knew that I worked there. Not because he wanted to save my life, no. I didn't know him so much. But he only knew that I worked for him.

Q: So, you didn't have a personal relationship with him?

A: No, I didn't know this guy at all. But I remember his name, Meister Poltin. Yeah, he was a stiff man, was an older man, in fact, a day before, two days before, he shot a little girl. She was 17, 18 years, because he thought that she stole a pair of stockings, you know, when they put these things in. He shot her, so… no, he did not know.

Q: So, he was certainly not sympathetic…

A: No, no. I didn't know him, no.

Q: How did you feel at that point about the Germans in general? Were you getting a sense of what it was that they were capable of? The depths of…?

A: Oh yeah, I knew. You know this didn't come overnight. When you saw it all the time, you know what they did. And then when I was on the…when they took the people to Treblinka. And when somebody didn't go fast, they shot him. When an older woman couldn't move, they shot her. You saw literally corpses everywhere. You knew it. Despite what my parents, especially my mother tried to keep me sheltered, but I knew it, you know. You cannot close…

otherwise I wouldn't be normal. Yes, we knew it. In fact, a few days before they took Tomaszow, they took already one. And they said to put him to death, put him to Treblinka. We could still not believe it. Why would they take people and put them to death? So it didn't make any… you always, as long as you live, you have a little bit of hope that the people are lying. But deep inside we knew it, yeah.

Q: At that point, what did you know about Treblinka? Did you know…?

A: I didn't know it even existed. They only said they go in a place and I didn't know it was Treblinka. A place where the people get gassed. I didn't even know what place.

Q: But you had heard that there was a extermination…?

A: Yes, there was an extermination camp. That's right. It takes people, and you know they bring them there… how or what, its only main purpose to liquidate the people. A liquidation camp, you know.

Q: So, your mother and your brother had already been taken at that point, to Treblinka.

A: Yeah, that was… you know, the date when they pulled me out, they went already there.

Q: Did you know at that point, were you certain at that point that they had been killed? Or was there a question in your mind that they might still be alive?

A: It's always a question in your mind, but you know, certain things in life you know it is. It's easier to believe things what you would like to believe, even when we were there, we say, "They couldn't do it. They didn't do nothing. What do you want to take so many people and kill them at the same time?" You know? But it was true. But I didn't know. I knew it and I didn't know it, you know, because I wasn't there. But people talked about it.

Q: After this gendarme took you…

A: Meister Poltin *(ph)*, yeah.

Q: …took you out of the group, then you said in your testimony that the other 900 or so people who had been gathered, were taken away.

A: Eight or nine, later now I see it's seven you know it, because some of them got killed in there, inside and I didn't count them. You know I knew it was a lot. I did not know that they got shot.

Q: Oh, you didn't? At that time?

A: No, later on, when I came and they… we knew that they took them. Rakhov was a little bitty forest and they shot them.

Q: So, you found that out. Did you find that out after the war? Or..?

A: No, right away when I was in the ghetto back. Because they always took other Jews to cover the graves and everything. The Germans didn't do this, so they took somebody to do it.

Q: So, the word spread fast.

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: You mentioned something I wanted to hear more about. That the role of the Jewish police in this. Can you say more about that?

A: Jewish police was not angels. When they put me in the synagogue, the Germans didn't put me in, the Jewish police. The Germans probably told them we needed so many to put in and catch everyone. So, they did the dirty work for the Germans. It's like anything else, somebody wants to be very good and is a hundred percent, when they ask you. One thing you want to do ten percent better. Okay? And certain people, it is a matter of survival, they have to do what they have to do. But they didn't do more. But certain people were bad. Jewish or not Jewish. Maybe they thought only this way they can survive. I don't know it. Certain people couldn't do it. You know?

Q: Going on with the summary. After a few days, you were among 20 boys and 20 girls who were sent to Tomaszow.

A: Tomaszow Mazowiecki.

Q: Mazowiecki. You were there a few weeks.

A: That's right.

Q: What were you doing there?

A: Same thing what we did, what we did in Piotrków. We made shelving. Collected everything and then we brought it to Piotrków. They called it *sammische, sammische stellen (ph)*. That means they brought everything together and they shipped it to Germany. When this was finished, they didn't know what to do with us. Luckily for us, they sent us to Starachowice.

Q: Where you made ammunition for the Germany military.

A: That is right. As I said, called it Hermann Goering werk *(ph)*. There was already a big factory. But, I guess so, probably we did a good job. And then to be truthful, I think at that time, we was watched by guys, other *viklestande (ph)* division. They were not so hateful, you know it. They were young and we were young, so we talked. They weren't about to kill you. Maybe they put in a good word. I don't know it, but anyway they took… because 40 people doesn't mean nothing… so we went to Starachowice from there.

Q: So, is this right? That was around June or July of 1943?

A: That's right. Wait a minute, 1943? Yeah.

Q: Tell me some more about your time in Starachowice. You didn't tell very much about that in the first interview.

A: Starachowice was a big ammunition factory. They made 1.5 though 15 millimeter… they made 8.8 millimeter and 7.5 millimeter. From the beginning I worked there, where you know, before you put it in the press. There is a hydraulic press. You have to make it very, very hot, so the hydraulic press can press it out, you know.

Q: Press out bullets?

A: Yeah, they pressed out only the shell. The bullets come later on, you know. But this was the shell what they made. Oh, they get cleaned and all kinds of things they would get. So, I worked there and it was very hard and very hot. Luckily for me, I met a guy, his name was Chaim Enischmann *(ph)*. And his brother was from the Jews, the head of the Jews. You know, that the German told him… you know it…

Q: In Starachowice…?

A: Yeah, and this Chaim Enischmann, I didn't know it before, he… and there was four other boys. There was five boys and he by risking his own life, he brought us always food in the evening. You know it. Ironically, he never survived. Was a very, very good person. Only one from the five boys, no, two. Is me and there was another guy. Heniek… I tried to remember his name, but I can't. I saw him after the war. He went to Frankfurt and to college. He was surprised that I didn't go to college. But stupid Abe got married. (Laughing.)

Q: How did you find out what happened to Chaim Enischmann?

A: Chaim, what's his name, from him, from the other guy, he was with him together. Enischmann.

Q: Say his name again?

A: Chaim Enischmann.

Q: Enischmann.

A: Because his brother, had from the camp, from the Jewish side. And he worked, his brother worked in the kitchen. You know the older, when we came home, he made sure that we got something.

Q: Why this… five particular boys? Did he chose you out or were you part of a group?

A: Yeah, no, we slept together, you know when you go up on the benches and you sleep. Some of us slept together. And you know sometimes a chemistry from a person to a person. He didn't

want nothing in return. He just wanted to help. He knew he cannot help more. He can't help everybody. The other four boys, probably he knew them from before, they already were from there. And somehow he said, you know, "I'll help you do whatever I can." In life, what I found out everywhere, you need a little bit luck, but other people will help you. You have to be in the right spot. And he just, you can say, it's God's will or not, if you are religious. And he really helped me, you know, there.

Q: Speaking of religion, was religion a really important part of your life, up until that point?

A: Religion was a very big point until 1939. You know, I was not… my father… you saw the pictures from my grandfather, you know, he was religious. He had a beard, he had the traditional thing. My father, not more. But we went Saturdays to the synagogue. We ate kosher. You know what kosher is? We Jewish people separate the milk from the, you know, you have to wait when you eat meat six hours after it. It's one way of hygiene or something. We did this. That was… I knew what I was. Like some people maybe they would die for it. And if somebody were to tell me, Abe, if tomorrow you are a Christian and you live, I would chose either side. You know, it's like, you know, always like in Spain, when you had….

End of Tape 1, Side A

Tape 1, Side B

Q: This is tape one, side B of an interview with Abe Jakubowicz. You were saying about religion…

A: Yeah, until then, you know, it did not, I knew where I belonged. I like to help the people, because I know what this is. But it was not later on, the main. I suffered because of it, but it was not my main thing, you know.

Q: You mentioned that when the war started, that changed. Did your feelings about religion, about God change?

A: No, what had changed is that you couldn't go in the Synagogue no more. Because they caught you, you know, they shoot you or they shot you or they did something to you or they beat you up if you was lucky. So, we were scared. So… it did not change. I believed certain… if you ask me now, I think God is for everybody. There is no such a thing about being closer or not. We're having to live together and if you try to separate yourself, you end up like in Yugoslavia. Can't do it. There's not a Jewish God, there's not a Catholic God. It's a God, you know.

Q: Did you think about, I mean at this point, when the war is well underway… at the time you were in Starachowice, you were separated from your entire family. You didn't know whether they were alive. Did you feel, did you think at all about your spirituality, your relationship with…

A: Number one at that time, is survival. You want to survive, regardless. You want to survive. You ask yourself, "Why me, oh Lord?" You know. But you want to survive, you know it, that's all what it is. Like an animal, we become simply like animals, you want to survive. Only certain people would do more to survive and certain people would do less, something different, but we all want to survive.

Q: So, there wasn't the time or the experience for that kind of questioning?

A: No, we did not, no, there was not.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say about Starachowice?

A: In Starachowice, when we saw the Russians came too close, and there was already a train standing. We did not know where we are going. We thought we all will be liquidated. So, we saw a lot of them, maybe 50 people. So that… and we run always, you know, a place, and we run away. I… some they went with machine guns. A lot of them got caught. I happened to be, but I didn't get shot by the machine gun. And being there one night, two nights, you need to eat, you have to get something. There was very big forest they called *Lasisvindikshe (ph)*, very big forest. And then I came, I saw a hut standing there. And I thought "Okay, I'll try," and I go in. And when the guy saw me, he said, "Hey," he said, "Jew. You're a, you know, really, you're a Jew." "Wait a minute, because when the Germans come they will shoot me." But he went on the street and he saw the German police. But this is military police, you know, they directed already, you know it… brought 'em in. So Abe, now you're at the end of it. He says, "Okay,

where did you run away?" Listen, he didn't know it. I said, "I was in this camp, and we all, we get, you know…" He says, "It's good. I will take you there back."

Q: Tell me again who this was? What nationality this person was?

A: Pole. He was a Roman Catholic, or whatever it is, but not Jewish. And I went to the… so, they took me in to… and luckily I told you this Enischmann. All day he talked… he says, "Okay, we're going now to…" He knew already we're going now to Auschwitz. "Why now do you want to shoot him? We take him with us." And then I went to Auschwitz.

Q: So, you were deported with Enischmann and the five other boys?

A: Yeah. But I was not with them. This is his process. I don't know what car they went, but we all went to Auschwitz.

Q: So when you were deported from Starachowice to Auschwitz, you weren't necessarily with people that you knew and were close with?

A: No, you just, you are a number. You are not… it was maybe a hundred people in a train. You know, maybe you thought you were… And they'd say, "Get out, get! Get! Get!" You know, so you were scared. No, I could not see him anymore in Auschwitz, either. Somehow I got away from them.

Q: When you look back on that time, to me something that really is striking is that you had been… I get the impression you were such a close-knit family and your family was all depending on each other and counting on each other. And all of a sudden, you are thrust, you're just thrust into this independent and solitary….

A: Then it takes over something else. You want to survive to tell it to the other people. I didn't care to survive, but they would tell me, "Listen Abe, you will survive." For one year, until it was fine. That such an atrocity happened. I owed it to my parents. I owed it to… it takes over in your body, the will to survive. And if you have to crawl, if you have to eat something, you have to do it, you will do it. And when you are younger, you got a better chance. Say you stood near… if they want to shoot somebody, it was you, it was you. There was not anymore… you know. Sometimes it's luck, too.

Q: Uh huh. But it was almost, it was as if this whole different person, you became a whole different person.

A: A whole, completely different person. But later on, it's a funny thing, when I was liberated, I was the same me, you know.

Q: So you left Starachowice, according to what you said before, around March 1944, as a ballpark guess of when you left. And then…

A: '44, that's right. Because when the Russians came closer… yeah, it's a ballpark. I don't even know it, but it's probably, it is. It's probably in the ballpark.

Q: And you described your journey and you described arriving in Auschwitz and being taken to the Gypsy lager.

A: Gypsy camp. They did not make selections, because they saw all these people worked and they needed at that time, they needed workers. And a lot of Hungarian Jews came in that time and mostly they put them in D camp. So, since they didn't have any place, they put us for a while in the Gypsy camp.

Q: Did you have any interactions at all with the gypsy families that were there?

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you describe what kinds of interactions you had?

A: You went out and you saw there was whole families living, you know it, and they had a curtain, not a curtain, just a blanket, you know it. And here was this family, there was that family and that was as far as the interaction. Because being there a few days, they liquidated all the gypsies in that camp. At night you hear the cars, you know, going back and forth, trucks taking them to the crematory. But it was three days and I came over to the family and everything is fine.

Q: Had you known at that point that the Nazis were exterminating other groups than the Jews?

A: Oh yeah, sure. Yeah, we knew it. I knew if you wasn't their way, they exterminate you. But I didn't know before that they took the Gypsies. You know, only when I was in Auschwitz, I saw that they disappeared. I knew where they went.

Q: Did the Jews in the lager and the Gypsies generally interact with one another? Talk to one another?

A: We spoke, yeah, we spoke, but that is it, as far as it went. In the first few days, we were in quarantine. We didn't go to work. We stayed there. You were afraid to go far. They catch you….But yes, you get to talk to some of them. They said their son is on the front, works for the Germans, makes ditches, you know.

Q: And then you described how you started working with the Canada commando. And I wondered how it was that you got that position, because that was a somewhat coveted position.

A: No, nobody wanted it, nobody wanted it. Usually when you stand, you know, I worked that time before I worked in katowe bunker *(ph)*, you know, where the potatoes was. And you had to, there was two people, one in front and one in the back and then they filled it up. You lift it up and you go to other place, you know, and filled it, put it in there. Because mostly when they came with the railroads, they dumped it. And I knew one thing, there was always selection going on. There was selection to go in the crematoria if you didn't look good or if they didn't like you.

So, you always watched out. Your eyes went the right way. Somehow I missed him. He was standing in front of me. And he said, write down here the number. You know, my number what I got right here on my hand. He wrote it down and they called me out. I didn't know where we'll go. You know, nobody wanted to work in two different places. Sonderkommando, where what the people burned them, you know it. And Canada, where you take the clothes. You told them, "Oh you will live, and it's nothing," whole kind of thing, "Take off, when you come out, you will find it." You know, we had to take it away, and they sold it. But this meant a certain death, too. Say, sonderkommando maybe three months, the other one may be six months.

Q: Well, it's interesting to hear you say that nobody wanted it, because I've heard other people say that it was, that they would try to get a position, because you would have advantages of clothing and food and so forth.

A: Now, you had advantages, but you didn't want to, because you knew that you would be dead, too. And you always have that little hope, you know? They did not, they picked you, you didn't pick them. They picked me out. And I said, "Oh," you know it. No, I didn't like it. I had a little bit of food, but then I had to watch out. Somebody would see me shoving it down my mouth, they would kill me, and all these things. But in a way, this food helped, but I didn't want to, no. So I was in Canada. It's like nobody wanted for the Sonderkommando.

Q: Did you have friends in Auschwitz?

A: Friends what I knew only, I met them in the camp, but nothing else. Friends, but I slept with them, but no, you did not have friends. You didn't have nothing. What binded with them, they all had a miserable life, but that was it. No, I did not have nobody. Some brothers stayed together, or even high management maybe stayed _____. I did not. Somehow I, I got away somehow.

Q: Okay, back to the summary. Something that you mentioned in the first interview that I wanted to ask you a little bit more about… you mentioned that God was watching over you. Did you feel that at the time that God was watching over you?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No, I felt later on when I saw all the deaths, that he was watching over me. In fact, the opposite. I always ask, you know, "Why me, oh Lord?" You know, to have suffered. And a lot of people, you know, they was weak, they grabbed the electric wire. If I had guts I would have done it, but I have no guts to do it. But no, no. Later when I see so many dead, I say probably God was watching over me. This is what saying about God.

Q: So, about September 1944 you were shipped to Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen.

A: That is right. And there we stayed about two weeks, I think. And that was a quarantine, you know, it was near Berlin. In fact, we saw, you know, we were in a station in Berlin and there was bombing, all things. It was already going, you know, everything going strong.

Q: And I was a little confused about what happened next. I heard something… either you went to Ohrdruf or you went to Krauwinkle *(ph)*?

A: At first we went to Krauwinkle. Krauwinkle was a little small place, you know it? But then we had to build this big place for all the people to come, because we built the tunnels, you know, in the mountains. So Krauwinkle was, yes, Krauwinkle was a very, very small place.

Q: How long did you stay there?

A: It all went fast, about a week, two. I remember it was so cold in the mountains, you know. I remember we had to go so far, to the mountains, to drill and do this here. In fact, at times they didn't have a lot of SS guarding us – it was a *volkstrom (ph)*, was an old man. Almost as old as me. And they guarded us.

Q: And did you do something, taking care of a dog?

A: Yeah, when I was, late in… was it Ohrdruf or was it Krauwinkle? I had an SS guy ask me to take care, really it was not to take care of the dog. Really it was to make chopped wood for his wife, if she wanted something to do, you know it. But beside there was a German Shepherd, he told me to, you know, feed him too, and this was just caring for the dog. So he gave me permission to go in the SS kitchen, you know and pick up all the bones. But everything was edible, so you can imagine. I always got beat over by the dog. He gives him so much food, and he's so skinny. _____. (laughing)

Q: But you got a little bit of extra food by doing that?

A: Yeah, you got always a little. Not from him… the food what I got in the SS kitchen that I could steal. Nobody gave you anything extra, you know. Extra you had to take. Was it in Krauwinkle? You see he picked them… you know, in that time they told me, if you let yourself go, you don't wash yourself, you go down very fast. And I didn't want to go down fast. And also our hopes for the war, it's winding down. I only thought they would shoot us before… you know it. So, probably I was maybe cleaner like near the time. You know he said that I should take care… you know, for his wife, and other things.

Q: So, you found ways to wash yourself through that time?

A: Yeah, you go and, washings, you know, it was cold, but they want you to wash yourself, you know it. So, what I did, I did. The other ones were afraid, you know, it's cold, they didn't want to, not all of them, ninety percent washed. It's only when your mind goes down, your body goes with it. Your feet start swelling and you give up. You can know it. So in that time I didn't give up yet.

Q: When you were in Auschwitz and the other camps before…?

A: I still tried to maintain, you know, as much as I could to be clean, because otherwise they would put you in the selection, to the crematoria.

Q: How did you… was it difficult when you were in Auschwitz to obtain water to clean?

A: No, no, no. We got, there was a shower, only you went in, you know, you were supposed to wash a little bit. It was not difficult. In fact they didn't want any sicknesses to break out either. They cut your hair, pick lice all around your arm. No, I could wash, it was not that hard to shower, but they took us so we could wash ourselves.

Q: After you arrived in Ohrdruf, you started to build a camp, build the camp?

A: That's right, we started building the camp. The camp to Treblinka, no to Krauwinkle, we went and built the camp. And then they moved us over into the…

Q: And then you described that, your time in Ohrdruf in the first interview. And then in February 1945, around, around then, you set out on a death march towards Buchenwald.

A: That is right. The Americans came closer, that's right.

Q: And you talked about how you thought you would die before you arrived in Buchenwald.

A: That's right.

Q: And the Dutch prisoners, Jewish prisoners helped you.

A: I assumed it was Jewish prisoners, maybe not. It was Dutch people. I knew that they spoke Dutch. And they dragged me in to Buchenwald.

Q: It's kind of remarkable how there were certain key points where people, people were there for you.

A: It was, if they could help me, I was too. Lot of times I was younger than an older man, if there was something to do, I tried to do it, too. You tried, you know? You didn't lose your humanity, you got a sense of survival, but if you knew it's a danger, you stayed away. But if you could help somebody you were there. Because I was, when I was in Ohrdruf, we went, there's a city called Arnstadt and we had to make ditches, because they laid cables. And there happened to be a Jewish guy, much older, and he told me he was head of one of the Jewish bigger newspaper from Heit *(ph)*. He told me, you know, and we talked and I tried to help him as much as I could. Whenever there is an older person with who his work was pen and pencil, wasn't as good at ditch digging, you know, to dig the ditches. You know, and I was a young kid, and you learn. Not that I was better, but I tried to learn much better than an older person.

Q: Did you, you talked in the first interview about being in Buchenwald and recovering and about how at first you were in a horrible place, and then you walked out of there.

A: That is right. When they brought me to Buchenwald, they dumped everybody. No shower, no kind of thing. This guy came to me, this Kapo and he said, "What you got? You got diarrhea? You got stomach, you cannot control your bowel movement?" I say, "It's okay, it's fine." He said, "Go in here." There was a place about five and I got on top, got the place he told me to lay down…

Q: Five bunks?

A: Ya, ya, so I was there, but I thought, my gosh, if I have to survive. Here's a death, here's a death, smells horrible. And I went down and I told the guy, "Hey listen, I'm nice and clean, but I don't really do such things." In the meantime always when, *simples Juden ein treiden (ph)*, all the Jews should go because they put them on march. I said, "My gosh, I cannot go, they have to shoot me, let them shoot me here." And I ignored it. And they needed a few clean people. They had a small place where girls worked and they needed a few cleaners, because they wanted to keep for the SS some woman, you know? So they put me in there and I was liberated there. That place was a little bit cleaner.

Q: What were the nationalities of the women who were kept there?

A: Oh, this was prisoners, but mostly they spoke German. But they was prisoners. But they keep them, you know, as nurses for the people that worked there. But this was only to pretend, to show, you know, it was not…

Q: It was a kind of brothel, you mentioned.

A: That's right, part of a brothel.

Q: And how did they, can you say how business was undertaken?

A: No, I was there in that time. I was really sick. Then Americans they say they come. And they probably went, whatever it is. I don't know it. I would have had to invent it, but I don't know it.

Q: You don't know whether they were forced into the…

A: They were forced, ya, surely, yes they were forced.

Q: At that time, you, were you so sick it was hard for you to even get up? Or how…?

A: I couldn't get up. I could really not… I was, when I came into Buchenwald I had already diarrhea by myself. I had to run. And after a while if you have nothing behind, you get weaker and weaker. But I was… in fact after the liberation it took about six weeks, six months, until I could learn to walk again. So, when the Americans came, I couldn't walk. They told me that the Americans are there, but I… And there were two Polish guys with me. Got still some pictures

from them. They brought me a little bit food, they brought me that, you know it? They could move better than I could. I couldn't move.

Q: Do you remember when the Americans came into the camp?

A: Oh yeah, I remember, it was, you know it. But that was the eleventh of April. But probably a little bit later, but then you saw the people came and took pictures. You know, ironically today, I went out with a guy on *Shoah*, he spoke as a liberator. And he came to Buchenwald one day later that it was liberated. He's Mr. Knight, his son happened to be an opthamologist.

Q: You went out with him today?

A: Yeah, I went out today. He's 81 years, with his wife. And we went out to eat something. I say, "Hey you liberate me, I go and meet."

Q: Have you been in regular contact with him?

A: I met him only… no, I met him when I went first time to *Shoah*. And he spoke how they liberated Buchenwald. And then I went to him. I say, "Hey, I was one what you liberated." So, I give him my telephone number and he gives me his telephone number. So, we happened to go out today.

Q: So when you say you went to *Shoah*, what do you mean?

A: Once in a year, it's a memorial for the Holocaust survivors.[1]

Q: Here in Louisville?

A: In Louisville, it's everywhere. And the last few times, he's always picked me, but you cannot always pick the next, the same person to speak. First you hear it, and then it gets like old coffee. So, last time, I didn't, they did it differently. But I had got to light the candle and all the things, yeah. And this guy spoke as a liberator from Buchenwald, but I didn't know him before, you know. So, we went out today.

Q: How did that go?

A: Oh, it was nice, you know, my gosh. I only wished we came in _____– when I was sick and was liberated, people came with cameras and the press and everything and made pictures. I wish I would find somewhere a picture from me, because I've got at least thousands of pictures what they made. But I didn't get it. I'm still looking. My wife says, "Why do you watch it?" I say, "I want to recognize me somewhere." (laughing)

Q: Did you talk today with him about…?

[1] Yom ha Shoah, the annual Holocaust remembrance day.

A: Oh yes. He was as much interested as I was. He told me what he was, he was a platoon leader and he was in Weimar. Weimar is, I think seven kilometers from Buchenwald. So, he had to buy some things, so he went with a jeep and drove in there and what he saw. You know, so we talked about it, yeah.

Q: Was he Jewish?

A: No. No, he's not, but you don't have to be Jewish in order to see it, you know?

Q: You were, you remained in Buchenwald then for how long after the liberation?

A: Oh, I did not stay in Buchenwald very long. I stayed maybe a month, or maybe three weeks and then the next little, tiny city was Blankenheim. They evacuated schools and they put us in there, you know it. I remember a room like this, who knows how many beds. And most of them, they give bread to each one. It was plenty, but they didn't want to give, because they was afraid they will die. So, she gave me bread and the other ones couldn't eat it. So sometimes I ate twenty pieces of bread and… "Oh!, you will get diarrhea and you will die." I tell you I was only one from few that survived. I got the diarrhea and survived. (Laughing.) But I gained every week, about five pounds. And they were all the meat… I couldn't walk. They had to teach me how to walk and to go. So I was in Blankenheim. Ironically, now let's go farther, one of the doctors, Doctor Lucas, I met him later on in Frankfurt and he was head from TB hospital. And I had TB, so we became really close friends, you know, he always took care. I remember when he met this girl and he want… you know, he told me, everyone around. There was a bond because he saw how I was.

Q: And you did mention him…

End of Tape 1, Side B

Tape 2, Side A

Q: This is tape number two, side A of an interview with Abe Jakubowicz. Sorry, we got cut off and you were just saying that he was a German prisoner of war.

A: Prisoner of war, that's right. And they got a lot of doctors, German prisoners of war, so his nurses, they were German prisoners of war.

Q: Did you… so some people, of course, feel that the German nation as a whole was responsible for what the Nazis did to Jewish people. The fact that you were able to befriend this man, who was a German, non-Jewish man.

A: I say the German was responsible, but I didn't say that every German killed or a German hated. Fact is, you know it, it was their _____, you know it. But I think there's some good and some bad in every nation. And I believe, first, life is too short to hate. Secondly, I believe if I teach my kids to hate, somebody will hate them and it is a vicious cycle. The cycle has to stop. And my mother always told me, "You know Abe, if somebody throws a rock at you, throw them bread back. Take a piece of bread and throw them back, don't hate." You know, so I… even when I was liberated, I wanted to tell my story, but I didn't hate. It's wrong to hate, I can't. I think that people what hate, they are born… as you see now in Yugoslavia, they take kids, for two year, _____ throw them down _____, and the training, and the ditch. It takes a special person, but everybody can do it.

Q: So, you weren't angry even then? Were you angry?

A: I was angry, but I didn't hate. I was angry at the SS. I was angry, but never hate. I think they should be punished, what they did, but not hated. In fact, my wife is German, you know. I say you can't make everybody responsible for something. But then I would be the same thing like Hitler, he said all the Jews are bad. Maybe some of them were. It's like now in Russia, I saw in today's paper, the anti-Semitism. Because they blame the Jews for what's going on now, and Jews had nothing to do… there's only a few of them. The difference is, now the Jews have a way, they can run away. I couldn't. And I would run for my life, but I couldn't.

Q: What was the name of the doctor again?

A: Lucas.

Q: Did you talk with him at all about any of these issues?

A: Yes, we talked a lot about it, because he saw and we became good friends. Certain things I tried to avoid, I didn't want to bring up things, you know, because I knew it will not help me and it will not help him. He had already his opinion formed.

Q: What kind of things did you not want to bring up?

A: Oh, the cruelty, because he saw it. Why try to win if there's nothing there to win, you know? He knew it, he saw it, so certain things I tried to avoid.

Q: What was his point of view that he shared with you?

A: No German will tell you that he agreed, they only got forced to do it. But I knew he got forced to do it, you know. He was too smart. He was not in the SS. He was a good person. Certain people, even when you are good, you can't do nothing about it. He was good in my book. He was a very nice person.

Q: It strikes me as very unusual that you were able to separate your anger from your hatred and to have meaningful relationships with…

A: You have to, otherwise, you become very bitter. I have a lot of friends, you know, friends from there. They are bitter. And it doesn't help you really. And if I go around and be mean and mistreat other people, would my mother want me to see this way? No. So I have motive to show that you are not the same. You have to be different. I am different. I would force myself more to be mean, you know, than that is my nature. You know.

Q: Did you have friends or acquaintances who were Jewish, at that time, who couldn't understand why you would want to be friends?

A: Oh yeah, I had, especially when I married my wife. They was against… they say, you know it, "How can you do it?" I say "Listen, I go to them, they are very nice, they open the door. I'm sick, so money doesn't play any part. I met the most beautiful person and now this married to me." _____. Here she was a young girl, good-looking, and at the time, I tell you the truth, looking back now, I needed somebody. I really needed somebody. You know, I was not the one what could live alone. You know it. And it was nice. And then when we went out. And I would be cruel and leave her. And only because she, it was nice. Then I leave her out. Then the Germans later on will say… you know it. So it's again another thing, I would have to think a lifetime on it. And I tell you, we are 52 years married, we had all the kids college graduate. We never had any problem about the religion, about other things. I think our marriage has evened out.

Q: Did you, you were in the TB hospital for…

A: Ya, this is where the Dr. Lucas was head of it, the TB Hospital.

Q: Okay, going back to the summer, you were in Blankenheim first…

A: Ya, and then the Russians came in. And I couldn't stay with the Russians. They ask you why you don't go home. They thought because I murdered somebody. You know, therefore I don't want to go. I told them everybody got killed. So I _____ away. There were a lot of Jewish guys. We went to the railroad, we drove to Berlin, and from Berlin we drove to Frankfurt. You know we came over in the American zone.

Q: Before you go on from there, regarding your statement that you knew you didn't want to go back to Poland because everybody had been killed.

A: I just thought everybody was dead. It was a cemetery. I'm sorry.

Q: Did you get definite news at that point about your father and your brother and your mother?

A: You ask, that's true, you ask. In fact, when I came to Berlin and it was all the troops from everywhere, from Russia. And there was a guy, he exactly looked like my father. And I want to believe and I asked him. I just direct asked him, you know it. Surely it was not, but I wanted to believe it. You know, I didn't know it. I found out later on from people what were with him, that he died in 1945 in Dora, you know, not far away from where I was. Maybe the mountain was from the other side, but I didn't know it. He died in 1945, in the beginning of '45.

Q: When did you find that out? And from whom?

A: I happened to be, you know, when you come after the war, you ask everybody. "Hey, you didn't you see?" "Where are you from?" "Piotrków." "Piotrków? Did you know my dad?" You know, because in Piotrków… and he said, "Yes." In fact, this guy, his name is Rappaport and he became a dentist in St. Louis. He's dead now, too. But I found out in Rupertstein *(ph)*, he was sick on TB, too.

Q: And when did you learn about Treblinka and what Treblinka…?

A: I knew this all, this I knew right away. That the whole transport went to Treblinka. When you went to Treblinka, it was death. And I knew this, so I didn't have to ask anymore.

Q: Right away after the war, you mean? Or right away…?

A: Yeah, right away after the war. In fact, I came late, because I was in Buchenwald, you know, and then I was in Blankenheim, in the hospital. So it was a few months after the war already. I would say, we got liberated in April, maybe six months later, because I had to walk and I couldn't walk right away. I got there about six months, seven months. Then it was awful cold and I didn't feel good. And I was coughing. And I got x-rayed and they told me, "Abe, you've got TB. You better go to the hospital."

Q: And that was when you went to Rupertstein? You were in there for quite a while, weren't you? How long were you there?

A: I stayed in Rupertstein until 1947. No, '57, '57. I got married in '47.

Q: You stayed in the town?

A: Ya, in town. I was in hospital maybe two, I would say to about a few months before I got married. End '46 or the beginning of '47.

Q: What did you, was that time, what was that time in the hospital like? Were you really sick and out of commission? Or did you…?

A: No, you were sick. You felt good, TB doesn't hurt you. So all what in that time, now you got penicillin and streptomycin. In that time, all what could help you, so many people died… in fact, a lot of people what I wasn't there was liberated, they died. You got to lay down and breathe fresh air. It was high in the mountains. They give you decent food, and that was it, you know. Mother Nature in that time had to help. So certain people didn't make it… because a lot of people years ago died on TB.

Q: So, during your, what did you do to keep yourself busy and occupied during that time?

A: Well, we went in the village. Really a lot of people weren't supposed to go, because there was, they call it, plus and minuses. If you got the bacillus and you don't have it, but you still had TB. I could, because, you know… but a lot of people had it and went any way, because the Germans at that time would not stop you, you know. So, we went in the village. I got some… from UNRRA, United Refugees… anyway we got some packages and we traded. I couldn't eat, how much sugar can you eat? So, we traded for some different things, you know. Some had fruits. You know, it was a village more, you know it, we traded with the people. We got coffee, you know at that time coffee didn't mean nothing to me, but to them it meant a lot, you know.

Q: You said something earlier about how when the war ended, you became again, the person who you had been before.

A: That's right.

Q: Did you start to go to services in any way?

A: There was not anymore services. There was in Salzheim. When I was in Rupertstein, I was alone, you know, with a few other people. But I had, not a cousin, but a relative far away and he… Windheim *(ph)*. He was liberated. No, he ran away on papers that he's a Pole or something. So, we went, for the high holiday, he invited me. And we went to the synagogue. Because there wasn't a synagogue really, in Frankfurt everything bombed out anyway. It was in the Rochiltalay *(ph)* there was a meeting where you could pray. So, I went for the high holidays, but otherwise all what you wanted really is to survive.

Q: And after you, so you still felt, even after the war ended, that your main goal was survival for a time?

A: When you are sick, you want to get well. And if that's not the goal, then you see, see a lot of people, they survived and they're dying. But you wanted to survive, you wanted to live. I was only 21 years old, 20 years old. But now I got surely, the will to live is very, very strong.

Q: Did you start to have, as you started to recover and to feel healthier, did you start to have other goals for what you wanted? Or did you start to remember, have thoughts about the past? What was going on inside?

A: In my brain?

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, from the beginning when I got better, then you know, you want to live, you want to go to a dance. You're still young. I met my wife and we got married, then you got children. So, maybe I didn't start it from the right side, but sometimes time dictates it. You know, certain people were different. They first want the career. I wasn't smart enough to do all that thinking. I become a child again. (laughing)

Q: Can you talk about, more about meeting your wife and what that was…?

A: How I met my wife? We knew a girl, a Jewish girl, and she was not quiet sick. So, they had a house, and were rented the rooms there for her. Her name was Lutia *(ph)*. And she happened to be from Lodz and my friend was from Lodz. We always went there to see how she was doing. Nothing else, we want, you know it. So, when I came, I say, "My gosh, that's a good looking girl." But then you forget a lot of things. Oh look at this, he has all _____. My wife… and at that time girls played hard to get. But when you talk a lot and you talk and you know… my goal was, not to stay in Germany, having children and leave, maybe for Israel, maybe for the United States. But since I had TB and I was sick, Israel and the climate would have been very tough. I was supposed to come here in 1952, but my wife talked me out. She says, "Listen, these people want to go. Look here we got the nice apartment. We got everything to eat. Why do you rush so much?" So, I gave in and in 1957… was Hungarian uprising in 1956. And I knew that's the last way I can get out, and still I didn't want to. But that's the way we got here.

Q: Was it difficult for you to live in Germany during those years?

A: It was really not, because the Germans are very, very nice, even when what they think is something different. You learn to live with it. You know, if you have something, if you have a hunchback, you learn to live as a hunchback, you know. (Laughing.) You cannot go against a trend. They was extremely nice. And then I thought I needed a trade. So, I went to work for the IG Farben. And they sent me to a school and they taught me, you know, about the way. So and the people saw and I worked with them, that I was not different. I was not what they had told them I am. You know, so, no… in fact, when I was supposed to go to the United States, I told them. They said, "Listen, we give you a year leave of absence and if you don't like it, you can always come back." And they made an album and everybody wrote something nice in it. I am not a person what carries around hatred.

Q: So, did you know when you started working for IG Farben, what their role, their history had been?

A: Oh yeah. I knew it, because I told you, I saw the Zyklon B, and all the gas. In fact, near Auschwitz there was a, called Buna, they made gasoline from coal. And as far as I know it was conducted by IG Farben, too. Yes, I knew it, but I had to… when you have to live, you have to

live. I want a trade, and then first things first. And then it's different. You cannot kill before you're dead. (Laughing.)

Q: But how ironic that they were, that IG Farben had Jews working as slave labor during the war and then you were working…

A: That is right. I worked there, because I wanted to learn a trade. I cannot work physically hard anymore and there was… they paid me good. They were extremely nice. They went out of their way. And sometimes you have to take advantage, later on, you cannot forget, but you have to learn to forgive a little bit.

Q: Did they know that you were Jewish?

A: Ya. And I didn't have to be ashamed then later on, you know. Yes, I told them.

Q: You didn't experience any anti-Semitism from them?

A: If it was, it was only behind my back. They wouldn't openly show it, no. Germans are different, you know. See, a Russian, if he is, he tells you. And Germans will be very, very nice, you know. The nicer they get, then you know you have to watch out. (Laughing.)

Q: Were you afraid, at all?

A: Why would I be afraid? No, I wasn't afraid.

Q: You didn't feel that there was a danger of any Holocaust happening again?

A: In Germany now? I will say Germany now is different. I was there a few times. You got still a few, but they are, but most of them, they're educated, they're adaptable, you know. They know it was wrong. They know what Hitler… the older ones. All it brought them is, they couldn't speak, they couldn't do. Now, they have a nice country built. When we went to Israel, saw a lot of German tourists. They're interested. You know, sure they will always find… like anything else, here too, people would relate. And no matter what, if somebody tells me he hates blacks, I know right away he hates everybody, stay away, you know. And I know it. So, this type will always hate and you know why? Because it's an excuse for their misery. They will not say it. I didn't go to school because I was dumb. If the Jews would not go, I would go there. You know? It is the same thing. What do you agree it is this way? It doesn't work the other way.

Q: There was a Nuremberg trial, a case brought against IG Farben that came to trial in 1947, 1948. Were you following that, interested in that?

A: No, no. '47, '48 I was still… you know, I just got married. I followed a little bit, you know, you always, but no.

Q: When were you working for IG Farben?

A: I was working in 1954, '55, '56 and '57. But I tell you a story, while I was working for IG Farben and now when I retired, the German government couldn't say I was not _____. You get the SS the war years, they had to give me the war years, and I got a nice pension from Germany. Beside being a Holocaust survivor, you know, because they had to give me all the years. And they cannot say, "Hey, we give an SS man." Say yes, wasn't in the war, and while I was in concentration camp, I don't get it. They had to pay me back so much. I said only I'll try, but in this case they was very generous.

Q: How was your relationship with your wife's family?

A: Oh, it was good. They was not… really you know everybody can say, but then when you live so long, you see the history. You know, they live in a little village, they minded their own business. They never knew Jews. Maybe if they knew they would hate one, but they did not know, I know it.

Q: Did they have an understanding of the extent of what had been done in the name of Germany to the Jews of Europe?

A: Oh ya, oh ya. They tried those, a lot of them German… they tried to excuse and they didn't do it. I know a lot of them didn't do it, but that's the way, what it was. Yes.

Q: So, they talked to you about it and…?

A: We talked a lot about it, you know. But they was really, they maybe had to play the game, but nobody was in the Party. And in a small village, everybody will talk about you. In a big city, you don't know it. All you had to do, is go to the neighbors and you know everything. You know even what they cook.

Q: Did you have friends who, you mentioned something earlier about how some of your friends were saying you shouldn't…?

A: Yes, I was in the hospital with them. They were my age. A few of them, ironically, came from Blankenheim, you know, from… after we was liberated, they came with me in the same train and we stuck kind of together. He found out he had TB and I had TB, so we were kind of, there was a bonding. If you have nobody, your friends become your relatives. You're bonding, it's true. And we could speak openly, you know, that is their opinion. And I value their opinion. I don't say that they were wrong. I really didn't know, maybe I was mixed up and didn't know what was right or wrong.

Q: Did they come to your wedding?

A: Yes, yes, ironically they came to my wedding, too. In fact, one was the best man, Trebletski *(ph)*.

Q: What kind of wedding did you have?

A: As little bitty as we could. It was not very much. We went only to the Justice of Peace. You know. And he said, "You are man and wife." So, we made a little bit, what we could get at that time. It was not very much. But it was… like the style you would say was very poor, but it was fine. I got the bride anyway. (Laughing.)

Q: Right, that's what matters. Did you talk before hand about, I imagine you did, about what you were going to do as far as religion?

A: Well, sure. My wife is not Jewish. And I figured with the kids, it would not be fair for me and she would not make a good Jew anyway. It is only because to please somebody, like I would not make a good Catholic. Doesn't mean that I hate the Catholics, by no means not. But my kids got to choose what they want to. Like Janet, she goes always on the holidays she goes with me to the synagogue. And my oldest daughter, she lives in Barrington, in Chicago. She does a lot. And what I'm mostly proud is that they're all involved in the Holocaust survivors, the second generation. They're active. It is not that they hate. It is not to let people forget, look here what happens. You cannot make it back. I cannot turn the clock back. But we can let the people know what hatred can do.

Q: So, at that point, religion, which had been important to you before the war was not as important to you…

A: No, I saw what people, if they become fanatic. And you start to put religion in front, then you lose your sight. You have to first see, and really what's good when you are religious and go pray and don't live up to it. I call them the hypocrites. So you have to have it in the heart and nothing else. And nobody can force you to be something. If you don't have it, you don't have it.

Q: Why did you want to leave Germany?

A: Because I didn't want my kids to be exposed anymore. And truthfully, very truthfully, I didn't want them to get married there and be there, you know? I wanted them really to get away. That is really my, to give you the best answer what I know, really.

Q: So you didn't necessarily feel fully trusting of Germany and the German people?

A: Yeah, but, I feel trusting, but if you get wounded, a scar is there. Okay? I had the scar. But that doesn't mean that can function perfect yet. You've got now a lot of Jewish people that come from Israel, even, they live, and a lot of them from Russia. You know, but for me, was too much experience and I didn't want to rub salt in the wounds. You know, I want to stay away. Maybe it was the easiest way out. I don't know it. This is just what I felt, you know.

Q: Was talking… during those years just following the war, was talking about what had, what had happened to you, and about your past and about your feelings about losing your family… was that important to you? And was it a critical part of your relationship?

A: It is still very important to me. In order to clear the air, you have to get everything on the table and then you can go on. If you play a game, it will be still there. Can't do it. So, yes it is fine.

In fact my wife now, "Why do you watch all that?" I say, I still have to watch it. It brings back bad memories, but you still have to go on, and not forget it. I will not forget it regardless, you know.

Q: Did you have… I'm sorry, let me stop and flip the tape.

End of Tape 2, Side A

Tape 2, Side B

Q: You mean both sides?

A: Being here, and after liberation, how I felt… being a little boy…

Q: Yeah, well, it's so complicated, isn't it? To try to think of what came before, and what…

A: Life is complicated. You know it. You have only to learn to make the best right away. You have to learn not to let it go, let it get to you, the teflon mentality, because otherwise you get soaked on with it, you know.

Q: The which mentality?

A: The teflon mentality.

Q: I thought that was what you said.

A: You've got to, because otherwise what are you going to do? You know. It's part of the Bible, too.

Q: Well, I appreciate you taking the time to do this.

A: Any time, you know.

Q: You just mentioned something about other interviews. I wondered, have you been interviewed? Have you done other interviews besides…?

A: Only for Shoah[2].

Q: Uh huh, Shoah.

A: And then came a lady, she did interviews for that, but besides she did it for herself, too. So, I got another interview. And then I had a few speeches for the… you know, when it's the Shoah. So I went and I spoke a little. It is not as easy as you think, when you see so many thousands of people. And to show, you know, your people and show _____. I can speak about everything, I have no problem. But this is hard. And then you don't want to show your emotions. The emotions come, you know it? So you know, this was the… you have to do it, what you have to do.

Q: Yeah, I wondered whether when you first started, when you first had the experience of trying to systematically tell the story of your experiences, whether that was a powerful experience for you?

[2] Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation.

A: It was. It was for me and it was for the other people, too. You know it. Because, you know, it's really nothing to make you happy, basically, and nothing to be proud of, you know, it's part of what you went through. And you have to do it. I told myself in concentration, if I survive and I can do something, I will go out and not tell the people, I will scream to the people. But the real world is different.

Q: You mentioned that two of, was it two of your children were born in Germany?

A: Ya, my oldest one.

Q: What's your oldest one's name?

A: Bluma, is after my mother's name. Yeah, she was born in 1948. In July, no in June. And my son is born in July. His name is Ben, you know it, and he was born in July, in 1954. And Janet, the youngest is when we came to the United States, my wife found out she is pregnant and then Janet, she was born here. That was in 1957.

Q: What made you want to come to the United States?

A: To get away and to be a free person, you know. To be free. I knew always. The United States, sure there's people like KKK, you know, but most people, they are not from here, they understand if somebody is nice to me, what do I care if he's an Arab, or _____ but he's nice to me. Like my neighbor, Scotty, you know it, we've already forty years to go. And we always used to go, when we were younger, together out. You know, so, it's too much of a mixture to undo it. And in Europe, you've got only two religions. Say, go to Ireland. It was Catholic, only one is Roman Catholic and the other one is Protestant and they hate each other, you know. So when you got a minority, you know, it's only two, always will be the same thing.

Q: So, it appealed to you to come to a place that had a real mixture of people.

A: That's right, people understand different culture, that's right. People are more tolerant.

Q: Is that why the United States appealed to you more than Israel, for example?

A: Israel appealed to me very much, but first thing, you know, I was too sick. I would have to stay much longer and then go to Israel. And I knew in Israel I would have to work much harder and that the climate is much more, you know, it's warmer and hotter. So, if I had, had another choice, I would go to Israel, yeah.

Q: Did your wife have any feeling about where she wanted to be?

A: My wife really wanted to stay in Germany. And I told her about the kids and everything. She says, okay, then we try and if I don't like it, you can always go back. The worst thing in life is when people don't try. And you don't know, you don't know your potential. You don't know nothing. You have to be willing to take risk and try in your life. And if it didn't go right, don't blame nobody. Pick up the pieces and keep on going. But that's life things.

Q: Did you have relatives in the United States?

A: Yes, I had relatives, but they was very, very far, you know. From my grandmother, had a sister, they lived in Philadelphia. And when we came there, they were so nice and they tried to help you. But really, what you can help, is help yourself by doing… you know. But they were nice, in fact, we correspond a lot, a long time. He just died, he was 88 or something, you know, you get old. He had two children. In fact, his daughter came to visit us, you know. I got now relatives. I got a cousin and he came from Israel. But still _____, from my grandmother, she had another sister and she went to Israel. The name was Goldstein. And after 1947, he wanted to study engineering here in the United States. And he really told me in his mind was to, cooling systems, because they need… but when he came and he studied here, he went to Berkeley. He got approached by the Bechtel Corporation, if he wanted to take atomic engineering. He said, I don't know nothing about it. They say, we will put you through college and everything. So, he went and studied atomic engineering. In fact, he is now, he's built so many reactors, and you know? And then he taught at Berkeley too for a while. But even nowadays, retired… his name is Golan *(ph)* now, from Goldstein changed. He still likes _____, like… when it was in Russia, when the explosion was in the, what was name is it? They went there to see what they can do.

Q: Chernobyl?

A: Chernobyl, ya. So they still, like last week, he went to Paris, they have all this, scientists. In fact, two months ago we went to visit him. He lives in San Francisco.

Q: What's his first name?

A: Simcha. Simcha in Jewish means happiness and the last name is Golan from Goldstein. Ya, he was here visiting. You know, it's family, so we stay close.

Q: How is he related to you?

A: My grandmother had, she was the oldest and she had five sisters. And one went to the United States, one went to Israel. One, she lived in Lodz and went together in the same train with my mother and my grandmother to Treblinka. And she left a son, he ran away. She had a few kids, but they all went together. He survived and he lives now in New York. And one lived in Warsaw with the _____, he was Rudja *(ph)*, he was the youngest one of them. From these two, later on when you have no family, you look and whatever you can find.

Q: Did you know very much about the United States when, before you came here?

A: I knew quite a bit, but what you knew as a boy, it's completely different, you know. I read Jack London and had dreams and all kinds of junk, you know it. It's completely different. But later on, I thought you know it. A place if I would like to go. I would like to go really to the United State. And we spoke fairly a little bit English already. We knew more than the average. When

we needed some oil, we could buy oil and we didn't come home with vinegar. (Laughing.) You know, _____.

Q: So, your wife also didn't speak very much English?

A: Yeah, she didn't speak very much, but we understood. We took lessons. We prepared ourselves a little bit, because we had time.

Q: In Germany?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you have an idea of what you would do once you were here?

A: No, I told you, I wanted to go in chemistry. But most of them, like here when I came, they couldn't hire me, because I was a citizen… I was not a citizen. So, I got my first paid job for a person who made glasses. For a dollar an hour, and then it worked out and I liked it. Now, we got the 20/20 Eye Care store. We're doing very good. If you feel you like it, you try it. And if you don't succeed, try it again, get stubborn.

Q: What were your initial experiences or your first impressions of the United States?

A: It was always… oh! When I got my first paycheck and, you know, you are not spoiled. And you can buy so many things. And it's a free world. We lived on, you don't know it here, St. Catherine Street, you know it. And you hear the bells from the church ringing. And the sunshine's nicer when you like it, you know. And we lived near a park and we took the kids to the park. It was nice. Yeah. We loved it right away. Even if we didn't have nothing, but we loved it.

Q: But you didn't come straight to Louisville, right? You were in…?

A: I was first in Philadelphia. And in Philadelphia I didn't like it, only because my wife got pregnant, was pregnant. In Germany we had the best hospital, the best everything. And since I worked for IG Farben, I could get anyplace, you know it, they had always. And we had a nice home. So it was an adjustment. Like the garbage emptied only one time in a week and was standing around. And we was in a hotel, very old. The Gladstone *(ph)* Hotel, I remember this. We was maybe on the 17 or 20th floor, but when you want to see what kind of weather, you have to open the window, everything was dusty. I didn't care for it, particularly, but… I had this one friend, Colrink *(ph)*. And he says, "Abe, if you want to come here, I'm working for Ford Motor Company. I can get you there a job." So, I came to Louisville. First I came and I said to my wife, "If I get the job, I gave you and, you know, call you up, and you come with the kids." Well even then you don't react. You've got all this luggage, pregnant, two kids, you know, _____. But that was what we did. So we stayed in… we came over here. We rented an apartment. And here it was different. It's a smaller city, everything was organized. I worked for Ford Motor Company and at that time made about 100 dollars a week. My gosh, I could for ten dollars, load up so much groceries I couldn't even carry it, you know. So.

Q: Did you have any knowledge about Louisville at the time? Or what you might have expected?

A: I didn't even know that Louisville exist. No.

Q: So, you couldn't have any prejudices against it, then.

A: No, I did not. No, I did not. But it's still a nice city. People are nice. I like it. In fact, my daughter, she went to Lexington. She went to Law School. She went to Lexington.

Q: During this time when you're beginning to rebuild your life, did you take time to mourn what you had lost?

A: No, you took later on. From the beginning, you couldn't even tell nobody. People wouldn't understand it. They thought that you are freaks. They tried to stay away from you, you know it. You didn't act like the people here. In fact, it was hard on the kids, too, you know. We didn't speak any perfect English, you know. It was hard, but we knew that we would catch up. First you have to have a footage and then you get time. No, not from the beginning, but later on, yeah.

Q: When were you able to take time to do that?

A: When I saw… I went to the Jewish Community Center. We took the kids. Later on when I quit, not I quit, they quit me from Ford Motor Company, because they laid off the whole second shift. And I went to work for dispenser Eli Jaffe *(ph)*. He was Jewish, so I could at least speak with him. How well you can speak to somebody else. So, it takes, it's a slowly thing. It doesn't come overnight. It does not, you know. And then you didn't want to offend nobody. You didn't know how the people would react, you know.

Q: Did people ask you about your experiences?

A: If you don't tell, nobody will ask me. And I didn't tell from the beginning. It's only the last, you know, about ten years ago. No, we went, ten years, we went to Washington. Holocaust. So, maybe about 15 years, yeah.

Q: And how was the Louisville Jewish community? Did you become involved with people here? Jewish people in the community?

A: Ya, I came involved. But still, they in that time didn't want to hear it either. In order to find a listener, somebody has to listen, you know. So, until later on when they found out that we are not lying, that such things exist. A lot of people didn't want to believe that such exists, you know. So, it took a while. I don't know how long. But I know it took a long time, you know.

Q: So, when you met people and they knew that you were from Europe, they just would, they wouldn't ask you where you came from, anything like that?

A: No, no. In fact, when you interview people now, they will tell you the same thing. They had a very hard time to communicate with them, you know it. Because you was different. They had their problems, they didn't want to hear my problems, even it was not a problem no more. Still sooner or later, you know… it was not overnight.

Q: It seems like that would have made it difficult to form relationships, trusting friendships.

A: It was not. Somewhere, I'm already better than 90 percent, because I'm easy trusting, so I have no problems. But a lot of them, they couldn't trust, they still cannot trust. And in fact, I cannot blame them. They are different.

Q: Did you start meeting people who were Holocaust survivors in the Louisville area?

A: Yeah, that was the first, you start to look for somebody what you got something in common. And people what came mostly, you know, we call them the *greenah (ph).* You know the green people. That was the Holocaust survivors who are, you know. And then you want to show to the people that you aren't a loser. That is not true, what they said, you know. Then you try to work harder than the other one, you want to be better than the other. You try to… you know it. The kids didn't understand it, but it was true.

Q: So there was some competition going on?

A: Not between the other ones, no. Between… I try to prove to the other world, that I am not really, one what they think I am, you know? And then you've got a guilt feeling too. They think, "My gosh he survived, how many people did he kill in order to survive? How come the other ones didn't survive and he survived?" So, there was a guilt feeling, too, you know. How come I survived?

Q: You felt like people were judging you for surviving?

A: I judged myself and other people judged me, too, you know it. I must have been very bad, when the other ones didn't survive and I did, you know. So, you got the double whammy. (laughing)

Q: Was there any kind of formal meeting of Holocaust survivors in Louisville?

A: No… they lived here and they tried to share, it was a little bit longer than I am, where they shop, and then we bought some records, from old country. Yiddish. I still like to listen to them, you know, and we formed a world within ourselves. But you cannot live in this world, because there is no walls. And certain people they still live with it, you know, they don't speak much English. They don't trust other ones. And in this case I did much, much better than the other ones.

Q: How did you find the other people? Was it through the Jewish community?

A: Right, through the Jewish community center. And then when one found out, he told the other one, so you knew them right away. Word got very fast out.

Q: So, were your meetings usually just one on one or did you ever gather at the…?

A: Oh, we went to the Jewish Community Center, for example, you met them there. And if you liked somebody, you invite them to your house or they invite you. You cannot like everybody the same way. God didn't meant it to be this. You know? Somehow the chemistry has to match.

Q: Were you aware of other things going on in Louisville at the time that you moved here? Such as Civil Rights movement?

A: Oh yeah, I could read the paper and I read the paper. And I was completely on their side, you know it. Because it's more than fair, those people. In fact, I found out then, the German prisoners of war could go in places where they couldn't, when they were fighting for the United States. To me it didn't make sense. Oh yes, and the one thing about our kids, we do not hate, you know.

Q: Did you see a parallel in the situation, between the situation of the blacks in the United States and the Jews of Europe? Of course, they're not at all the same. But did you see the issue of racism as being…

A: The Jews had the advantage in this case. Because a lot of them don't look like blacks, so they don't judge them, you know it. So, if they want to beat up, it was first the black and then the Jew. They didn't hate him, they didn't like him, but they didn't know it, you know, what you did. So… _____. Yes, if somebody will come to you and tells you, "I hate blacks," you know automatically he will hate you. Or somebody, I hate something for some reason, then you know this man or this woman put their mind on hating or looking for excuses, because they are a failure and therefore they hate. There is no reason. If you want to be, it is an open country, you can do much better, work harder. We came in '57, you know. In 1960, we bought the house. We worked hard. We couldn't maybe have afford it in that time, oh I could afford later on might be, but it doesn't mean the kids… you know. But, and if I say "Ooh, I'm living a lifetime here and can't afford it." Yes, if you go out and spend your paycheck, then you can't afford it. You have to know it, what you got, and then they have a goal, what you want to _____. Do I want to go and drink it away or do something, you know, you can do it. You have to balance your money.

Q: Did you experience anti-Semitism in Louisville at all?

A: Really, really, no, you know. At first here where I live there is no Jewish people. No, I did not, to be truthful, no. And in business, where I had a Jewish boss, or here when I do this. I tell them, you know, I'm Jewish. But they work for us, so I don't think somebody would go out and… no. But we treat them right. If we don't give them a choice to be not to. You know, we give them health care, and a lot of things. I know what it means to make a very dedicated employee. There is no one way street. You cannot exploit somebody and tell them I'm your friend. It doesn't work.

Q: Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood when you first arrived in Louisville?

A: No. I lived on St. Catherine Street, which wasn't a Jewish neighborhood. I tell you the truth. Sometimes it crossed my mind, why don't you go move near the Jewish Community Center. But then I thought, you know what, sometimes it is better when you stay away, even when you go up, you climb. The higher you go, the more you can observe. You know it. So I say if I want to go, I can go there, I don't have to live there, you know. Back in the ghetto, they created their own ghetto.

Q: Do you, how have you, how do you feel about living in Kentucky? Do you, do you like it?

A: It's a very nice state. And you got equal opportunity and it is not like a Southern state, now I know more about states. People are different here.

Q: How are they different?

A: They're more tolerant. They're much more tolerant. Sometimes in life you develop, something what you can judge already, called instinct. I might not be always right, but sometimes my instinct is right, you know. So, I know it is in there. If I go to New York, hustle, bustle, too much running, going to work so long and coming home, you have no time to spend with the family. Here you are right close to everything, you have more time to spend with the family, I think. To bring up children, regardless, Louisville is a nice city.

Q: Do you travel around elsewhere in the state at all?

A: Yeah. We got stores, you know, but this is stores, but otherwise, yes. We go in state and out of state. Yes, we do a lot of things. But sometimes I combine my work, you know. We got in Elizabethtown, a store, we got in Litchfield, a store, we got in Jeffersonville, a store, you know. We'll go around and, you know, talk with the people. See, I'm 75 years old already. Have to be thankful for a lot of things.

Q: You must enjoy your work a lot.

A: I enjoy my freedom. It is not so much the work, as I enjoy talking to people. And this what I like about uptakes *(ph)*, you try their glasses, you can talk to them. I always enjoy talking to people.

Q: Do your employees know anything about your history?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do they ask you about it?

A: In fact, yes, a few times. Some of them came when I had, told them I'm speaking, if you want to… And everyone knows everybody and we got a lot of black people, they got to high positions, and they're doing good. To me, it is a person. Because we got here in Fern Creek one and he is a very good employee. And my wife says, "Why do you take the _____,

and unfortunately people are prejudiced." I said, "You know I came from Poland. They hated the Jews, but every Pole had his own Jew." You know, they come and ask more for them, they ask for me. You know, they're good. What does they care, when they go out, and they see the glasses is good and he's nice to them, after a while they forget it.

Q: And what do your employees think? Do they tell you what they think of knowing something about your past?

A: If you want to go this way, they all will be nice, but I know deep inside, you know what, I don't give them a chance not to be nice. I'm very nice to them.

Q: They haven't talked… have they talked to you directly about your Holocaust history?

A: Some yes, some of them didn't, don't even know the subject. We've got a lot of young kids, 20, 25, you know, you cannot put it up on them anyway, even if I would want to, you know. They've got their struggles. They're married. Especially now, when two people go to work.

Q: Part of the reason I'm asking is that I think people have in recent years, become so much more aware of the Holocaust. And young people have become so interested…

A: I saw it on television and I thought so. And they know my feelings, they will come and tell me, yes, you know. But otherwise I will not go there. If they do not approach me, I will not approach them.

Q: What kind of responses have you gotten from people, when they've heard you talk, for example at the Shoah day?

A: Oh, very, very nice. People are different, you know, they got their own struggle. And they see on television what you went through and now you've got the Bosnia and you've got this. So, you know it. And now you've got in Russia, you've got a powder keg, too. You know, so.

End of Tape 2, Side B

Tape 3, Side A

Q: This is tape number three, side A of an interview with Abe Jakubowicz. When did you become a citizen of the United States?

A: After being five years here, exactly, you know it. We came in '57, 1962. Yeah, we didn't wait very long.

Q: Was that a significant, important occasion for you?

A: Very, very much. Now you feel, you saw this, yesterday, Kruschev's son became an American citizen. And they asked him about it. He said it is a big honor. So, me a poor, Jewish guy got it, it's a very big honor, yes. You know, yes.

Q: Can you recall some of your feelings at the time? Your thoughts and feelings?

A: I felt like I am a part of the family. The circle is now getting closed. What's gone, you cannot forget it, but now I'm a part of everything. I'm a citizen. I represent the United States and I know I will make a good citizen. I knew it at that time, you know it. I think I made a very good citizen, you know. We're involved in a lot of things, you know, so we're doing it. We're paying back to society, too. You have to and it's much nicer to pay back than receive, much nicer.

Q: A lot of people don't see it that way. (Laughing.)

A: Yeah, if you need everything, all what you see, the things what I need. But you never see the reward, you know, in giving. That's why I always say the poor has one thing that he can afford. You know, the reward of giving. And giving is very, very important. We got raised even as a child, you know, that you have to collect more to help the other ones. We call it *Schtucka (ph)*, you know it. So to me it is _____ you, it is always you are there. If I were to take a job for an hour, for a dollar an hour, I'm ordered not to get it. You know. Because I saw there's other people that need it more. You know, but it's nice, a good feeling.

Q: Do you still, do you observe…?

A: High holidays?

Q: …high holidays and do you go at any other time, too?

A: No, any other time, no, but the high holidays, I'm going. And the main thing what I'm going to is because that they have a prayer for the death, you know it. And that's the only one thing, I know that I can't help them, but at least I can be with them in my mind. You know?

Q: How much of a role in your daily life does that memory play? Is it there always with you every day?

A: Oh, I have to be thankful always, every day to my mother, to my father, give me life. They taught me what's right and wrong. And they were good to me, really good to me, you know. Yes, I think of them, in fact, I got their picture hanging where my bed is. To me, because we know everybody has to die, period. But they got taken away this way, to me they are still the two young people, you know, my brother, it's different. Yes, it plays… they still, if you see your mother die or father. They're old, they're 80 years old and we know everybody can die. And they get wrinkled. I saw them only as young people. You know, so maybe it's a difference.

Q: You mentioned that it was maybe ten or 15 years ago that you really started talking about your…

A: Because nobody wanted to listen.

Q: What happened ten or 15 years ago that made you start?

A: They came out with the Holocaust survival. They showed movies. People suddenly started realizing, you know. And not only the other people. Jewish people didn't want to listen, too. You know I speak about people. And you cannot speak when nobody listens.

Q: Do you remember any particular events or incidents?

A: I don't know it, because it's so many events, but suddenly something clicks.

Q: I was wondering, just going back for a minute to the issue of when you became an American citizen, and you talked about how important that was to you. You work a lot with young people, young Americans in your work and I was wondering if you see, if you see people as taking, young people as taking that too lightly… because I think, or taking it for granted?

A: I speak to schools, a lot of the time, I get invited by a school. And the young kids. And I will say, we don't give them enough credit. Surely they got now the pressure, they got now more divorces, where parents go to work and it's harder. Surely when you have a little bit money, you send them in private schools. But I will say, if you are open when you speak to them, they can absorb as good as anybody else. But you need guidance, you know. We didn't have so many things when I was, I tell you I wouldn't have done it. We didn't have drugs. I didn't even know such things exist, you know it. We didn't have a lot of things, so how in the world can I judge and tell them they are bad? They are not. My kids are good. Their kids are good. Sometimes you are lucky. They hang out with the wrong people… you have to control it, which rooms they go. You form only one opinion, but you have to trust your kids. And watch out with whom they go. It is very important. And I will say it again, and if a child makes wrong, don't tell him he's dumb, he's stupid. Tell him that he made a mistake, but you're always there, because I know my mother would be there, you know. This way you don't break off the communication. I wonder sometimes how come all this homeless people come from, you know. Don't they have a family? Don't they… everything, you know? And I have no answer for it. You know.

Q: You mentioned earlier that your children have been interested in Holocaust remembrance.

A: Yeah, in fact they belong to the second generation. How? It's the same thing, it's nothing what you can change, but we can promote, you know, that people should listen what had happened. Changing, we cannot, because a lot of people don't even believe that such a thing existed.

Q: Did you talk to them about your past, your experiences?

A: Oh yeah, surely, my kids have very open minded, you can talk to them. You know, yes.

Q: When they were children did you tell them about their…?

A: Very little children, you can't, because you break their growing up period and you put something in it, what they will have a hard time. When you have formed your opinion, when you are grown up, then it is different. At least I feel about it this way. Not that I'm right in everything. I'm wrong in a lot of things.

Q: Has that been something that they've been particularly interested in learning about from you? Do they ask you a lot of questions?

A: Oh, I can do nothing wrong. I am the greatest in their eyes. (Laughing.) No. No, if they have something, they ask me, you know. Or even Jessica, you know, she goes now… I have one granddaughter, she goes to Berrington. She told me she would like me to speak for the class in Berrington, Illinois, you know. So, I think I got a lot of letters and all kinds of things from them, what they spoke about.

Q: It must be very gratifying.

A: It is gratifying, you know it. Especially when you don't expect a lot, then it's double gratifying. If I would expect, then it's something different, you know. But I don't and it's double gratifying. My youngest, she goes now to Purdue, she got accepted there.

Q: Your granddaughter?

A: Yeah.

Q: How many grandchildren do you have?

A: Seven.

Q: And what are their names?

A: Richard, Ben, then comes Jamie and Josh – we've got a lot of J's, and Jessica and Jacob. See, a lot of J's. And there's my daughter, Janet. (Laughing.) You know, so we've got a lot of J's.

Q: Richard, Ben, Josh, Jacob, Janet, Jessica? No, not Janet.

A: No, Jessica and then we got Jacob and then we got the little baby, she's just born. She's one year old, name is Edie.

Q: Is there anything else you want to add today?

A: It was a pleasure to meet you. (Laughing.)

Q: It was pleasure to meet you, too.

A: You ask me all kinds of questions. What can I do, I don't know it. You know. Keep on doing the good work.

Q: One thing I didn't ask you about, I haven't quite figured out how to phrase the question, but it's so impressive that you came with nothing to this country, not even being able to speak the language. And how many, how many eye care stores do you own now?

A: Five.

Q: Five.

A: We could have owned more, but we have to go slow, you know it. You know, and I did it more for my kids, they are doing it now. I'm only a, you know, checking… at 75 you can't do very much.

Q: And you live in this very lovely house. So, it's just very impressive that you…

A: Yeah, you know it is livable. My wife would like to move out. But I figure, you know, 75, where do I want to go, you know?

Q: How do you, do you wonder about that or do you think about how it is that somebody can go from having so little to just building up so…

A: Oh, some people got it even better. No, it is, in life, as I told you, you have to take risks. You try to do good and be fair with everybody. You got friends, you know it. And when you have this, they will support you. You cannot go through the world alone, you know it, you need friends. You need family, you know. And then you take a risk and when you lose, you didn't lose everything, you made a wrong judgment. So as in life with the kids, I told them a lot of times, when you make a mistake, so you made a mistake. You know, pick yourself up and keep on going, but don't brood on it.

Q: I didn't ask you about your journey back. I know that you made a journey back to…

A: Poland.

Q: …Poland. And you talked some about it in your videotape, but I wondered if you…

A: Yeah, my kids, we decided we'd take the kids, Janet. And they're always busy now. And Bluma would live in Chicago. And Ben…

Q: Whose idea was it?

A: Well, I would say my daughters' more, because they want to keep on this relationship. More my daughters, Janet and Bluma. So we lived in, I told you, in Germany. And my wife got a lot of relatives still in Germany. So, we rented a car. Going to Poland, you don't get a car, because they say they steal it. So, anyway we used all the relatives and we rented a car. We flew into Frankfurt, from there we went to Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia, why Czechoslo…, because Auschwitz is near the Czech border. And Czech, it was just liberated, you know, the Russians. And if you have money one time and want to have a nice trip, go to Prague. It's observed, the Germans didn't bomb. All the antiques are still there. It's a lot of culture. So anyway, we went to Prague. We stayed two days in Prague and then we went to Krakow. Krakow is near Auschwitz. We went to stay the night in Auschwitz, at Krakow, then we drove into Auschwitz. We stayed all day long. And we had already made reservations in Warsaw. But we had a car, you know, we drove. In Warsaw we made reservations at the hotel. And then from Warsaw, we made all our journeys from there. First we went to Grodzisk where I told you.

Q: What year was this?

A: In 1992, I think or '91 or '92. And the kids, we went in the same house. You felt the hostility from the Poles, but give them a few dollars, it's okay, you know.

Q: How did you feel it?

A: First, they are afraid that you come here and you want to take the house away from them and all kinds of things. And then you, let's see, a lot of graffiti on the walls. You know, I still speak perfect Polish. So, I knew it. But if you win their confidence, at least they are not so hostile, you don't trust them, but you are _____. So, and this lady, I told her all I wanted was to show my kids where my mother lived, where my father lived, you know, and I give her a few dollars, so she spoke already different, you know. In fact, to be honest with you, before we left the first time, you know, we had candle sticks, some silver. We didn't want to take it in Warsaw ghetto and they showed me where they buried it. But I saw the Poles, I didn't want them to risk myself to go take a look. They're probably not, but I didn't want to. So, anyway, we went to Grodzisk. Showed them where we lived. Showed them where my grandfather lived, where I went to school. Oh, I made a lot of pictures, too, you know it. And then we went back to Warsaw. Next day we went to Piotrków, you know it. And same thing, I showed them where the ghetto, and where we were. One thing what I couldn't bring myself in, to go in this room where my parents and my grandparents went out the last time. I told my kids, I can't go in, you know, somehow I couldn't. So anyway, so we went there and we went back to Warsaw. And then we went to Treblinka, this is on the other side from Warsaw. And then we stayed there and then we went back to Germany. Went to Buchenwald, where I was liberated. And so we made our way home. At least I showed the kids, that we still lived, we had an apartment. Really it was our house. You know, we were still something. No doubt that we didn't come out from a rock. (Laughing.)

Q: Do you think this was important for your family?

A: And for me and for them more, because I knew it. They didn't. Yes, it is very, very important.

Q: Do you think they had a new, a different understanding of…?

A: Not a new different understanding. They knew, they trusted me, they knew that I didn't lie. But it, seeing with your own eyes is different than imagine.

Q: Was anything from that entire trip particularly important for you, personally? Did you come to terms with something?

A: For me? For me was the worst thing was when I was supposed to go in that room, you know, where we lived, in the ghetto, in Piotrków. Couldn't get in, didn't go in. This sticks out.

Q: Why that room in particular?

A: In Piotrków. And that is Fitarska *(ph)* ten, you know it's an address. And across the street, it was high holidays in that time. And the people went over and cried and cried. I couldn't go in there either, you know. This is what sticks out in my memory the most. You go to Treblinka. You see all the rocks and all the things. It's cold. Here, you know, your mother got killed, but you didn't see it visually, but the other ones, you know, I saw it. And when I went to Auschwitz, you know, and saw the crematorias there. I think I didn't have to see, I knew it. And you saw the gate where everybody in *Arbeit Macht Frei*, you know.

Q: Did you ever, I saw last time that you still have your tattoo. Did you ever consider having it removed?

A: Why would I remove it? I will have to die with it. To me, it is now an honor, you know. I will not remove it.

Q: Did people pressure you after the war to remove it or tell you that they think you ought to?

A: No, no, nobody pressured me. In fact, if somebody would pressure me, I would tell them different. No, no. They can't see me for my other side. I might not tell it in a harsh way, but I can tell them in a nice way. Put them in place. No, it's my arm anyway in the long run. (Laughing.)

Q: That's right. And do people comment on it, when they see it?

A: Yeah, they saw it now. You see it on television. Now it's different.

Q: Do people stop you to say anything to you after they see it?

A: It's most was when you speak to the kids, they're more sensitive. You know, you do not tell it in a graphic way, because you do not want to hurt them. But they are more sensitive. They argue and it's honest. And otherwise you don't know it. You might question it or not, that's fine.

Q: Okay, I'm done. Do you have any other things you want to say?

A: Listen I told you enough, to repeat again, I appreciate it and I like you for it, because you do a lot of things, which is good. Thank you very much.

Q: Thank you very much.

Conclusion of Interview