United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Joseph Elman
October 8, 2004
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Joseph Elman, conducted by Margaret West on October 8, 2004 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, D.C and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Joseph Elman, conducted by Margaret West, on October the 8th, 2004, in Washington, D.C.. This interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's post-Holocaust interview project, and is a follow up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Joseph Elman on May the 19th, 1998. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. Mr. Elman, please start by telling me your full name and your date and place of birth.

Answer: Yeah. Oh, you ga - now? My name is Joseph Elman, and I was born in 19 -- February 5, 1922, in the city of Pruzana.

Q: Did you always use that name, or would you have been known by your Yiddish name during those years?

A: This is -- I always used this name.

Q: We're going to jump ahead now to -- from the -- well, to the time of liberation. So please go ahead and tell me what you remember about being liberated in 1944.

A: When I was liberated, it was in June, I don't know exact the date, 1944. We f -- I remember that when the Russians arrived, they assigned most of the partisans to the army, because the war was still going on. And I and another group and one of the commandeers were assigned to liberate my town and the vicinity of Pruzana. So ra -- time when I -- when I came to Pruzana, the most assignments what we were given was to first of all, to s -- look and find most all the collaborators who collaborated with the Germans. This was one of our mission, and then we were sent surrounding towns around Pruzana. I recall one place, it was near -- not far -- 50 kilometers from Pruzana. We went in a little town, I think it was -- let me [indecipherable] the town. Think it was Bielsk, Bielsk. And I remember a farmer came over to me, and he was telling me there is -- this farmer was eding -- hiding out one of the Jewish -- a Jew -- a Jewish boy. And the farmer told me, he says, I been trying to tell him that the war is over, come out from there. He was in the barn, in a hay barn they're hiding. And he -- he's heard -- he didn't believe him because it was still going on, a lot of bombardments, the Russians, you know, the airplanes, they bombard at the retreating German army. So I remember I went out to him and I says, come out, I'm a Jew, and I spoke to him Yiddish. Finally he came out. Of course, he was all unshaved, dirty and oof -- this is -- this is occasion that I can never forget. Then, while being -- eventually, when I settled in Pruzana, I came to my house and the house, a lot of houses were destroyed during the war. My house was still existing there. And I came to my house and there was a family with a lot of children, awful

lot of children. And she nice to be to me, nice to me -- she tried to be an -- a Gentile ca -- a Gentile [indecipherable] they tried to nice to me. And she tried to, you know, give me food and I saw they haven't got much for themselves, they were -- I just asked her a place to stay and sleep because I was still working, I was still in my uniform, was still given a job to look for all those collaborators. And eventually the -- another historish -- historic movement -- mo-moment, I would say, after a -- a few weeks or a couple mo -- maybe -- maybe six weeks, showed up in sh -- in Pruzana a doctor, her name is Olla Goldfine, and she was a neighbor of mine. And before the war, you know, I was in y -- you know, listening to these -- to these history what is going on with the Germans, with the Nazis in Germany, and so what I'm [indecipherable] I was only 15 years old that time, I was surprised and she told me -- and she came with a nun, and she told me that she escaped on the second -- this was January the -- I -- I think it was the second transport, January the 28th, 1943, at night from the -- from the cattle car, and she -- sh -- wandered around all night til she reached -- in Pruzana we had nuns -- what is the name? A c -- a c -- you know, it was a house of nuns.

Q: A convent?

A: Convent, right. A convent. And she came there, she was very, very known in the city and respected. And sh -- one of -- one of the nuns asked them there, the Mother Superior if she can, you know, that -- to accept her there. But she was afraid and she wasn't, I would say, it was a problem for her. So eventually what happened, the nun

gave her clothes, and put on a big cross on her, and she took off to a town in central Poland, and there she spend most of -- most of the time til, in 1944 when the Russian moved up to near -- near where she was staying, liberated her, and she came back to Pruzana with a nun. Of course, I tried, you know, I was able to do a lot of things that time when I was as-assigned to -- in Pruzana. I helped them very much, and eventually, when I left Pruzana, the nun and the doctor followed me and I brought them out to Poland. The war was still going on and we settled wa -- in Bialystok because Bialystok was already liberated, and Bialystok was assigned the temporary capital of Poland. Coming in Bialystok there were already lot of organizations, like different organization from different -- from different nationalities, from churches, some from -- and they helped, you know, that time to find housing and to settle down temporarily. So, it happened to be my brother, we call him Shmeril, my brother Louis was already in Bialystok. Now, he was liberated almost the same time that I did, but he was able to get into Bialystok in Poland and I was stuck in Pruzana.

Q: Did he have any interest in going back to Pruzana, to your home?

A: I?

Q: No, your brother.

A: My brother? No, he didn't want to go back there because he was -- he -- he wa -- a -- he was -- he was lucky that he got out from -- from that -- was -- yeah, this was -- our part was the Soviet, you know, Russia, Soviet Union. And in 1944, you

couldn't -- you couldn't get out, you couldn't -- you couldn't emigrate, you couldn't get out from -- from the Soviet Union. And I had a big problem getting out, but thanks to the doctor and to the nun, they smuggled -- I remember they were -- they had papers to go into Poland. And I got smuggled in somehow, you know, it was a-assigned a -- a horse, you know, a horse and wagon, you can put in all your belongings there, and I was going up in the horse and wagon with straw and we crossed the border and that's the way I arrived, I arrived to Bialystok.

Q: So they would be taking a great risk.

A: Oh -- then I found out that I was -- they charged me as a deserter. You know, I left -- actually I left -- I -- when I was working, assigned to pru -- my town, Pruzana, I was in uniform, Russian uniform, and I have a gun, and I have a -- you know, it's just like duty, like a soldier. So --

Q: Mm. What -- what did that uniform look like, the Russian uniform?

A: Well the Russian -- well, we had -- we had -- this is a shirt and pants, khaki. And the shirt was on the outside, and you had a -- you know, over here you had a belt crossing your shirt. And -- and you had a cap, you know. And your -- you had shoes [indecipherable] Russian shoes. So I heard afterwards that they were looking for me.

Q: Let me go back to the actual moment of liberation. Wh-What exactly took place then?

A: Well, in the -- actually being in the group, being in partisans in my group in the woods, we already heard couple days ahead when -- before we were liberated, that

the Russians already are -- you know, are moving forwards and -- and chasing, you know, and chasing the Germans. Already moving, chasing the Germans. But they kept us there for few more days and they told us to mine all the main roads and bridges, not to let the German army retreat so easy. And we did that, and I remember that the German army was in disarray. Some of them tried to get around the main roads, and they went the side roads, where we caught them near the w -- near our territory, our woods, we caught them that time by the hundreds, and eventually thousands. And we had to march and was order, we had to march and -- and deliver them to -- it was a camps ja -- in -- in -- in Rujani, about 50 kilometers from town, where we had to deliver them, you -- you know, we had the order that you have to deliver them, you cannot kill them or take advantage of them. And that's what I remember before, and after a few days apparen -- after a few days we are, like I mentioned before -- of course my brigade consisted about 800 -- 800 fighters, most of them were assigned on the front, sent to f -- to fight on the front. And I was privilege enough to be sent with two more Jewish partisans, and Russians, to establish order in the occupied territories.

Q: You mentioned the young Jewish boy hiding. Were there a lot of instances of Jews who were hiding in the dense forests, who would come to light? Were there other -- were there other stories?

A: Well, this is already -- this is -- already is a -- a farmer, you know, the farmer risk his life. And only -- I don't know what happened to the rest of the family, but it was

just one -- some -- it was Jan Vyat, maybe. He kept them -- for a year and a half, he kept them, and of course nowadays they call those people the Righteous Gentiles, and he is one of them. And the same thing I want to bring out about the doctor, Olla Goldfine. Now, the nurse -- the nun who saved her, I'm sure that she is recorded in -- in Washington museum as a Righteous. Her name, I have it marked down.

Q: Do you remember what it was? We --

A: I have a name.

Q: Yeah. We'll come back to it later, if you like, but --

A: DellaRosa, but that's not her real name, but then maybe she goes on DellaRosa, but her name is [indecipherable]. I have it marked down, because I cannot remember the name.

Q: Yeah, yeah. We'll come back to -- to it -- to it later. Please continue to -- to -- with your story, what happened next?

A: Well, like I mentioned, when I arrived in Bialystok, and -- with a nun, and with the doctor and I had a cow attached to them, I gave them a cow. And they came -- well, nothing else, you couldn't take a house with you. Well, that time, you figure a cow, you'll bring it on the other side to Poland, maybe you can ge -- you know, you can get a few dollars, you can -- you can benefit little bit, have extra money, whatever you need. Because you had to leave everything behind, you couldn't take much -- much -- oh, much -- the furniture [indecipherable] house, you know, like a mansion I left my house, my house was there, right, and -- and when I came in

Bialystok, I got united with my brother, older brother, and th -- it was -- people were coming in, I remem -- in Bialystok, some survivors f-from different kind of experiences. Some came, you know, some came in from hi-hidden by farmers, some were hidden in the woods. And it was a mishmash, it was, you know -- you figure at that time that you are liberated already, that time will be f-for the better. But actually this wasn't the case. This wasn't the case. That time families from ruta -- uprooted and destroyed, and everybody was looking for survivors, maybe sometimes you had a brother, sisters, parents. And a lot of organizations was established already Bialystok. That time they knew what was still going on. Warsaw, the capital of Poland wasn't taken yet. But a lot of Jewish organizations, and a lot of Christian organizations were established in Warsaw -- in -- in Bialystok, and they gave a temporary help, housing, food and so forth.

Q: When you saw your brother Louis in Bialystok, how much time had elapsed since you had last seen him?

A: I want him -- I want him -- I -- I want to mention my brother Louis. We escaped together and when we were in a group together, Hassidic Jewish group, and when we were, you know, assigned in the later round, in the -- in the brigades, Russian brigades, he was assigned in a different place, in a different brigade. And I didn't hear from him since, for a year and a half, since I was in the woods.

Q: Who --

A: But -- but once in awhile, through contact with partisans, I found out that he's there and he's still alive. But no communication at all for yea -- for the -- since a year and a half, over year and a half in the woods.

Q: Was that very difficult to lose touch with him? I-I wondered what your relationship was, and if you very much relied on him at the time when you made the decision to flee to the forest?

A: Well, we actually -- it's a difficult, but I didn't think about it very much, because we were busy, day and night busy, when we were assigned, you know f -- taken in in the kiro brigade in the -- for the Marine corps unit. We were busy day and night with missions. And so you didn't think so much about it, about him, but once in awhile you t -- you -- you was thinking about your family.

Q: When did you come to terms with the fact that your family had been lost? Was that when you went back to Pruzana?

A: This happened in Bialystok later on. See, I had been in bial -- bi -- when -- we been in Bialystok for quite a few months. We arrived, I think, in late 1944, I don't know exactly the month. And eventually, when the Russian army pushed ahead, and liberated Auschwitz, people were coming in -- people from there were coming -- going east to this town, to the cities where they belong. And it happened one time in Bialystok, I met a girl, sh-she was young, maybe she was only 16 years old or something, and she survived the Auschwitz, and she came to Bialystok. And then she told me that the Bialystok -- that the Pruzana, the Jews were sent to Auschwitz.

And she mentioned, I think I saw your older sister there, but she wasn't sure. So at least I know that my older sister wind up in the labor camp to go [indecipherable] the rest, my father and my mother and my sister, they went to the crematoriums, ovens.

Q: Mm-hm. Well, your father had committed suicide --

A: Well, it wa --

Q: -- just a little earlier, is that right?

A: Yeah, not wa -- I -- no, I want to retract that, retract that. My father, my mother and my two sisters, and my grandfather and my aunt and my uncle and two kids, they went together the same -- the s -- the same time -- the s -- when it was, you know, the evacuation, they call it. Took four ti -- four days, four nights, they couldn't -- they couldn't transport all the 12,000 people from the ghetto in one night, so they -- they broke it down in four sections, first, second, third and fourth. See, my father was -- it happened s -- I think was in Oct-October -- October 1992, we were at that time still in the ghetto, I remember we were operating our group and it came an order the same that all the Jews for the ghetto h-had to get certain -- certain -- certain warning to get ready ce-certain place, this was, I think be -- by the -- by the market in the center of the city, and be ready for transportation the same way as the last time. That time, the Judenrat, all the Judenrat, the Judenrat, this is the -- the leadership of the ghetto decided to commit suicide. They thought, you know, it's already the last minute. And what happened, I remember the doctor, she arranged

the [indecipherable] from the Judenrat, and it wasn't successful, and I think there was only one died. You know, she gave them pills and they -- they s -- they -- they lit the stove in order to get the s -- you know, the -- ta -- sa-saphistic, you know, to get -- get the --

Q: Carbon monoxide?

A: Carbon monoxide.

Q: Mm.

A: To mix carbon monoxide. This night one of the Judenrat and my father -- my father commi -- didn't belong to the group. See, my father always said, I remember, Dad is not going to go and see his family destroyed. And he planned that, and he planned it with a way that he locked himself up, you could never get in, in one of the sections in our house, and he hanged himself. Eventually we found it. But we are fortunate we were able to get -- bury him. And, you know, with honor in -- in the back of our house in -- in the -- in the yard in back of our house.

Q: And it's -- and with -- you're able to give him a religious burial, which I gather was important.

A: Still -- yeah, yeah, and still -- religious burial and still we're able to -- we're able to have the -- they call it -- this happened eventu -- when we stayed in our -- this was we still stayed in our house, that's why we were able to bury him in back of -- and still, you know, have -- have a minyan and give him services every day, three times a day. And what happened is later on -- this was, I think it's around December 2000

or two. One of my uncles was -- he was, you know, was s -- they used to take you to work outside the ghetto, and he was, I would say, dogs. They charge dogs to find out how long it take, how long will it take one dog, two dogs, three dogs. And they ripped them up pieces. And then we moved in, we had to give up our house because already it's -- the house was up --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of an interview with Joseph Elman. This is tape number one, side B.

A: So that time we moved in with -- with my aunt, and we were able yet for couple months afs -- in her house -- it's already two widows, my mother and her s -- her sister, two widows, that conduct the services in her house.

Q: How did you -- how did all of you take your father's death? Wh-What impact did it have on you and your brother, Louis?

A: Well, this was -- you know, it was rough. It was rough especially, you know, especially for the older family, especially for my mother, and -- because he knew, my father knew that we are involved in underground movement. He knew. But he was a pessimist. Little pe-pes -- I'm saying a pessimist is because I'll never forget -- he was a educated man, but he -- on a piece of paper he described all the countries. He says, boys, you don't have a single country, a single like independent or neutral country, which was that time Switzerland and on the other side is Sweden. You

know, encircled here you are. You gotta go through all this, all this, Holland, and then France in order to -- in order -- in order to reach Austria, in order to reach, you know, this -- even if you'll get out, you'll be able to get out, he says it's a lost cause, boys. That's his opinion, see?

Q: And that also seemed to be the opinion of the Judenrat, who w-were c-considering suicide.

A: Well, it -- it was -- the Judenrat, because they still believe this was already the last minute -- beca -- the Judenrat was at the responsible job, while -- while you -- the ghetto isn't existing. You know, they had -- they -- they had a -- a responsible job, make sure, because the Germans and all the, you know, the branches, they dealt with them. If they needed a hundred people here, and a hun -- a hundred people there, it was -- they went to the Judenrat, in charge of the labor. Minister of Labor, Minister of [indecipherable], Minister of -- of -- of -- of -- of Health. You know, it was -- so they were responsible and they were responsible, I mean they did a good job til the last minute, even though they were against -- they were against, it has to be sec -- nobody knew about the o-other movement. My parents didn't know. They knew that we gonna -- we think about it, but they didn't know, the last minute when we went out, we had the bunker, we went out, we had ammunition and all that. So --

Q: And you didn't tell them, to protect them, wha -- and to -- and to protect yo-your movement.

A: Oh, we couldn't tel -- we -- we couldn't tell them because they were against that. And you don't blame them. Don't forget you have to -- you know, there is -- there is a different, you know, with the Nazis, if they f -- they found one person guilty, or a group of guilty, the whole community is responsible for that. You know what I mean? It's not, you know, nowadays that you go, you know, children, the brothers and parents are not responsible for them. You see what is going on, you know where the -- where the -- where the -- those suicide bombers and -- and so far, they -- you know, they farm the k -- young kids, they are trained, they're coming out, and they -- they blew themself up, they are desperate, you know? Int -- what you call it in -- they are in -- they get them -- they teach them. Anyway, so that was -- that was a problem. You know, we were very careful. We could do a lot of things. Don't forget, you know, the Gestapo came out in the ghetto, one or two by themselves. We could have killed them easy.

Q: Mm-hm. You were taking --

A: But we didn't do it.

Q: -- enormous risks, yeah.

A: We couldn't do that because that's the one thing, you know, they -- they kept a whole ghetto, a whole community responsible for one act of sabotage, or one act of killing or doing something against them.

Q: Mm. And when you and Louis fled to the forest, that was just after --

A: That's --

Q: -- one day of lit -- what do they call it, liquidating the --

A: One day, ye -- we tried the first day. We -- the first day, it started January 27, 1943. But we couldn't do -- go through -- we -- I mean, we could have -- we had the group already, we had a bunker nearby, and could have went through there, but a mob of people followed us. You know, th -- people were sleeping on the street, people were all over and they noticed u -- they noticed us, and a mob -- it's impossible, we would have been -- we would have been betrayed, and we -- and -- and discovered. So we decided, we retreated. And the second night -- we went through the second night, and even the second night, about -- I estimate from 25 and over, people who doesn't belong to our group went through with us. Elderly, even elderly couples, but -- and some survived.

Q: When you were -- when you fled to the forest and were with the partisans, what was the age of most of the men? Were you all very young, like you and Louis?

A: Well, most of it -- of course, in our group, 18, there was the commandeer, took his wife. Mostly I would say, when -- young, you know, y-ye -- mostly younger, younger. And I would say some o -- some -- our young didn't have their chance even to serve in the army because you had to be 21 years old. Mostly young.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And mostly men.

Q: Now there was a -- th-th -- the -- your leader took his wife.

A: Yeah.

Q: And there was one other woman, who is she?

A: The leader -- this is a brother-in-law. His brother-in-law. The -- he took his wife and a brother and a brother-in-law with his wife. See? So even though -- I mean, I could have taken my older sister, too, but I mean, it shows you, they were -- they're road ready, and they were in the bunker already and they went through with us. They didn't belong even in our group.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But then after the war, you know, there was some -- there was some discussions [indecipherable]. They didn't like the idea, but listen, a time like that, everything goes, see?

Q: Mm-hm. Did -- did the women survive?

A: Yeah.

Q: Mm.

A: The women had a bigger chance -- see, the women had a bigger chance to survive because most of the women worked in the kitchens cooking for -- you know, for the whole brigade, and especially the top brass, they got special meals with special ca -- with special waitr -- with special what you call it, cook, yeah, most. So it turned out that they were saved, they were never s -- inside, never sent on any missions. Their job was mostly taking care the kitchen, taking care of the cooking.

Q: And these forests were so -- so big --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and so dense that you were able to have fires, and smoke would not be seen, and to --

A: Well, at --

Q: -- sing songs, and have --

A: -- yeah, this -- it happened already -- this is in the later years, 1943, when we were taken in, incorporated in their brigades, I didn't realize how strong, you know, how strong your brigade. We had that time already, planes at night used to come dow -- fly over at night and drop down all kind of ammunition and especially those bombs and those what you need, you know, the -- the toob -- you didn't have to worry already about going and building those explosive bombs, they were already all ready and there was no problem. Before that, we used to have to go and look for shells, and make up, you know, make up those -- those traps and bombs for my -- for th-those mines, what you call it, to mine the road. So life that time, it was actually -- looks like we controlled through the night especially, you control the whole territories. And the forest were c -- were connected with the other forest, and was stretching from eastern Poland, way up to deep in Russia and deep in -- deep in Belarus and Ukraine. So there was -- it was established after the war, there were a quarter of a million partisan operating in the woods. So i-it came to a point that time that we had plenty of food, and of course the food consisted from three meals a day, mostly soup and meat. S-Soup and meat. We used to go on for those mission and get food. Those, you know, cows and pigs taken away not from the farmers, but taken

away from the German warehouses where they take away for the farmers. Came an order already not to rob the farmers any more. Go and take it away from the warehouses where the Germans rob the farmers and try and to ship it away to Germany.

Q: From the o -- from the enemy.

A: For the enemy.

Q: Yeah.

A: So was plenty of food.

Q: Yeah. What were your living conditions like? You -- you were a -- a year and a half --

A: Mm-hm. Well, the living conditions wa -- this is o -- the only problem we had, was rough, because the what we called the bunkers where we slept was crowded, and it was bunks on each side. You know, you had a a-aisle going in, then bunks on each side, and it was -- we didn't have -- we did mostly straw, we didn't have mattresses with straw. The problem was fleas and lice. You couldn't help it, it was terrible. But you got so used to it, the only solution that we learned from experience, we used to make a fire, and the smoke -- and even wintertime, take over -- take over you underwear, you clothes, and just hold it over the top, and not on the fire, the smoke, they'll drop out. But it helped a little. But those people who used to go on missions outside of camps, they were better off. I used to go a lot of missions. The reason is, we used to reach at night the farmers, and there, sometimes near, getting

certain cl-clothes from the farmer, new. Drop out the old one and get a new one. So once you [indecipherable] for awhile, then you liced up, you know, again with fleas, with lice. This is impossible. It was impossible. But later on I think they built, it was, they call it steam. They -- they build a steam room, so you could go in -- you know, there's no water we had, but you know, you couldn't take a bath, you couldn't take a shower, so they build a steam room, and it was enclosed. So used to go in once in awhile in the steam room, and that helped you, you know, clean it up, and it helped, you had clean clothes, it helped you f --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- it helped you a lot. But this was there, it was a problem.

Q: Could you swim in the summertime, you were -- it was one summer.

A: Well, w -- first when you went on missions, you were able -- sometimes you go all night during the night, reach a little river on the way, a little -- those s -- where is [indecipherable] the chance, you know what I mean? Even -- even -- even near a -- a water when you had tho -- where you get your water. So you were able to wash yourself up.

Q: That was the least of your problems.

A: No, this wasn't -- no this wasn't a big problem. As a matter of fact, I gained some weight there, even though walking nights, ma -- ma -- a hundred miles or more. The food, because three meals a day and you eat a lot of meat and fat meat you know,

they didn't bother, you know, cut up chunks, and soup. Mostly the soup is potatoes. This was most of the time, three times a day.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So it's plenty, you know what I mean?

Q: Did you feel that you had widespread support from all the farmers in the surrounding areas?

A: We had some support from the farmers, and some -- and some not. You see, when -- when the war started, when the -- you know, Russian, the Russian-German war, a big army, Russian army in the first days surrendered to the Germans. It was General Vlasov -- you've her -- you heard of, and there's another c-co -- another general. See, I don't remember now. And what happened, the Germans used them. They didn't send them on the front to fight, they used them in the rear, and they established posts all over around the woods, even all over the territories. And of course, Germans in charge, and they -- they used to do most of the dirty work. They used to -- but as a rule, the farmers got caught in between. I-I -- I feel sorry for, they caught in between. You know, the ch -- the -- the partisan came in and they took certain from them -- from -- a loaf bread, whatever. They were [indecipherable] in the beginnings. And then the Germans retaliated because they supported the partisans. Both side. Poor farmers. I feel sorry for them.

Q: Mm-hm. Let's go back to Bialystok and your linking up with Sam and by then he was married, is that right?

A: Wa --

Q: You linked up with your brother Louis.

A: Oh well, I want to say but -- yeah, in Bialystok, you know, like I mentioned before, there was already a lot of organizations established. Joint Distribution Committee, HIAS, and -- and some -- it was [indecipherable] in Israel, some from the Haganah. And they tried, you know, to -- the war was still going on. They figure the war will end, they tried to organized most of those to go to Palestine. And I mentioned that I met -- I, you know, she -- the girl from there, she told me that she was in -- in sht -- in -- in Auschwitz. Now another thing I want to mention, first days when we -- I was in Bialystok, oh, I met there -- you know there was some survivors like from different, all kind different way, hiding in the woods, hiding in -- by farmers, hiding in bunkers. And some came from the wa -- survivors from Warsaw ghetto. Later on came from Warsaw ghetto, I don't think Warsaw was taken yet, but they were s -- they came to Bialystok. I met there in Bialystok, you know is very eas-eas -- in the museum, you know, he's a hero. Itzhak Perlman and I told him -- he said, Jossel, you are the man [indecipherable] Palestine. You know, he went to pales -- yeah. And see, and I says, well, I says, maybe, but this is my only family, what's left in Syracuse, and I want to -- they send me papers, I like to go to United State first. And then, so I -- he didn't have kind -- he didn't have any relatives, he didn't have any relatives. I remember just like that. But I have a big family here. He says,

you don't belong there, you belong to go to Palestine, he says. Itz -- Itzhak Perlman. He a Perlman or Perlmud? Per --

Q: I think Perlman, but I'm not sure, We'll have to check.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, on -- on -- honestly, yeah.

Q: And of course that was the -- there was a very powerful political push to have the Jews go to Palestine.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, so what happened when it was, but it -- the war was still going on, it wasn't finished yet. So then they found out about me and from the -- what they call that? Organization there in Israel. And they say, oh, you're one of the partisans, you have your -- did you ke -- did you keep a diary? I said, di -- what a diary? Oh, you gotta keep a -- oh, you go ahead and think and study certain things for Yad Vashem. It was [indecipherable] Yad Vashem, but this was for YIVO. YIVO stands for Jewish Research Organization, e -- I think YIVO. And then, you know, I try -- I try to thinking and they interviewed me, and I told them a lot of things about the int -- what did you take part? Especially about you, what day do you remember did you take part? Do you kill any Germans? What happened in this day and this day and this day? So I told him whatever I, you know, I remember, and eventually I know it was -- the write-up is in Israel, and you know, you heard [indecipherable] about [indecipherable]

Q: Yes

A: Something, yeah, the same thing, my story. What I tell a little bit about here.

Q: Then wha-wha -- when did you move from Bialystok --

A: No, I'm in Bialystok with my brother, and eventually we stayed in Bialystok -- it's probably we arrived quite a few -- maybe five, six months we stayed in Bialystok. And eventually there was a family, a whole family was -- survived and the farmers saved them. And -- and one of -- there was a father and a mother and three daughters and a bo -- and a son, four children. And eventually my brother ca -- you know, met one and he married one of the ra -- Rachel -- what was their last name? I forget it. My brother passed away, by the way in 19 -- 1998, and she -- the my sister-in-law, she's alive, she's in Florida.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So, he get married and then it was already I, my brother and Rachel, and the doctor, and the -- and the nun, and the girl what I met. I t -- I told her -- she wants to go to Pruzana. I says, I'm just coming back from there. You stay here. I says, I can tell you who survived, there's no one there. She was looking for family, see? And so what happened, this girl -- so we -- from Bialy -- we stayed in Bialystok for awhile, and then when -- you know, til Warsaw, the capital, was taken. And then Lódz was taken, big city of Lódz. We came to Lódz with a nun, and with a sister, and I and my brother and my sister-in-law and the girl. In Lódz we stayed for a little while, of course, til the war ended. In Lódz -- now I -- I want to mention, I forgot to mention, when I was liberated, being with my brother in Bialystok, we send a letter in 1944, this was about in June. We send a letter to my -- I knew I have an uncle in Syracuse,

because he used to send letters home, sometime you know, in the letter put in a 50 dollar bill, 20 dollar bill. So I knew there was Uncle Elman of Syracuse, that's all. No address, nothing. So I wrote a letter, after the liberation, it took til May before the war ended, '45, to get the letter from Bialystok. And that's that, he got the letter, and we were moving already [indecipherable] Lódz. And then he writes that -- in Lódz we got a [indecipherable] of letters, that you boys, you're moving. I cannot send you papers til you settle down in one place. Settle down in one place and don't move around from one place to another one, because I got to have the address, I got to have the city and so forth and so forth, to make out the papers. So we settled down, we stayed already in Bialystok for a l -- for -- in Bialystok for a little while. And this same thing. We had -- it came in Bialystok, you know, there was so many homes, Jewish homes, we got settled. The doctor, and -- and the nun [indecipherable] gave her apartment, we have an apartment and we get [indecipherable] that time was rationing, you know, we got food from the UNRRA or from -- we were already Displaced Persons, DP, no par -- you know what I mean --

Q: Yes.

A: -- survivors. No matter wh-what, you can -- you can re-return to -- you are from Poland, or you are from -- from France, from Greek, from Hungary, you name it. No passport. We registered on the Polish quota, so we had a little problem with the Polish quota. So now, from being in Bialystok, eventually we got in contact with

some organizations there, and they were pushing people to Palestine. Some wants to go especially to Greece and Italy. I don't know why, because not to the American zone, but before the American zone they tried to -- Italy and Greece. Looks like fr -- the kw -- from there there was some connection to go to Palestine. So, eventually we got connected with a group. I don't know, you know, through the organization, and they ch -- and 50 refugees that time, we were living Lódz. From Lódz we went to Austria, Vienna with a tr -- with a train. One group, somebody had papers, you know, follows [indecipherable] this is a group of Greeks, or whatever, Greek Jews going -- so went to -- we went to -- first was in -- in -- just mentioned -- Austria. And then from Austria we went to Bratislava. In Bratislava -- this is Czechoslovakia. Then we stopped in -- in -- in Bratislava, we stopped, you know, we were DPs with a group in some kind of hostel, or it's hotel. And the first time -- I never, never been in ins -- and a -- on a inside swimming pool. They had a inside swimming pool there. And we were slipping on the floor, of course, in the hostel there. And there ha -- misfortune happened to me. You know, you fell asleep, they took so -- you know, somebody, while you ab --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Joseph Elman, conducted by Margaret West, on October the 8th, 2004, in Washington, D.C.. This interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's post-Holocaust interview project, and is a follow up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Joseph Elman on May the 19th, 1998. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number two, side A. You were telling me what happened in Bratislava.

A: I was carried, you know -- I was carrying a pair of boo -- German boots, good boots. I didn't wear them. I took them, you know, I -- I took them off and they took the boots aw -- they stole my boots, and a briefcase. I had some, you know, stamps, I was stamp collector all this times. So anyway, it's a misfortune. Then from Bratislava we went to Graz, Austria, and there to the English zone first. We tried to avoid the Russian zone. We didn't want to go into the Russian zone, so we went to the England zone, because from Poland first is the Russian zone. Berlin had the Russian zone. So we went -- in Graz, eventually there was a camp there, near Graz, Trofaiach. And we settle -- it was run by th -- by the British and it was u -- UNRRA sup -- supported by the united --

Q: Yeah, United Nations, yeah.

A: -- United Relief Organization, by UNRRA. And we settled there. The doctor, still that -- you know, the nun. All -- all the group what I mention. And some -- some what we left a group of 50 -- some other ones, and we settled in this camp. This camp was in the al -- Alps, in the mountains. It was surrounded with barbed wire, but of course we had -- of course, we had bunks already there. We had enough food, but on the walls, and on the ceiling, names from the Russian who got killed there. It was a camp, the German camp Russian prisoners, Russian soldier by the hundred. This one -- this one died this and this year. In case somebody -- this one and this one died this year. And we stayed in this camp, and --

Q: For -- for how long were you there?

A: Oh, probably -- maybe a month or six weeks. Now, in this camp, the British find out about the doctor, and she told them that she has a daughter -- she had a daughter in France, married daughter, her husband was a doctor. And eventually they got her a plane, he was sh -- left the camp, went to France. And that's it, that's the last thing what [indecipherable]

Q: They were able to -- they were able to trace her -- her daughter?

A: Yeah --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- the daughter was alive.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I want to finish [indecipherable] about this doctor, eventually -- she stayed with her daughter, and when a state was established, Israel, she went to Israel. She lived in Israel, she helped -- you know, in Israel to help those older refugees fo-for 10 years. And she died there in 1968. I think she was 71 years old.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: That's the story that I heard.

Q: You know, i-interesting story. Now, she had been a friend or a member of your f -- your family community long before. And did she have a role with the Judenrat?

A: Well, she -- she had a role, but she was -- she was active in the community even since Poland was established. A very respectable member of the community, very. Even assigned to the local and state in the state government. And this is -- this is a -- that's -- that's a -- you know, a story, which is --

Q: A remarkable woman.

A: -- that's -- that's a remarka -- a story we -- that she's -- she was lucky, escaped. God wanted this way and she went through -- all to hell like that. And eventually the nun settled in Poland.

Q: Oh.

A: She went to -- she went to Poland. She want -- she wanted to follow her, but she said that, where you gonna go? There's not a Israel [indecipherable] you know. So she probably settled Pole -- she's definitely here. Definitely here.

Q: At the museum? Yeah.

A: Here is the name. Jennufa Chulak.

Q: The name of the nun.

A: Huh? Yeah.

Q: Yes.

A: DellaRosa or Jenna -- Jennufa Chulak. Because they mention -- somebody writes about her, they mention she is -- she is -- name is in here.

Q: Yes. One of the Righteous.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Righteous, yeah. Tell me about the -- you -- when you moved from Graz --

A: Oh, eventually, yeah. Okay. Now, in Graz, when the doctor left for France, eventually it was a b -- it's not far from the American zone. But we had to -- I-I remember it now, it where the leader brought us in from Graz to the American zone and we reached Feldafing.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Now, in Feldafing there were already established camp -- DP camp for the survivors, and there was a lot of survivors from -- from my town, from Pruzana, who went through the Auschwitz. I think there was about 200, I heard.

Q: Mm-hm. Now, Feldafing was a displaced person's camp near Munich?

A: Right, right. Feldafing near Munich. And there they, you know, they registered us, and we joined them there. And we stayed in Feldafing. Then from Feldafing, of course, we moved to Neu Freiman. This was -- Neu Freiman, that's was -- near

Munich. A real -- almost on the outskirt of Munich, because my brother -- I mean, th -- was born in -- in Feldafing, had a baby when we arrived Feldafing. We stayed in Feldafing maybe -- we st -- we stayed in Feldafing -- yeah, I think we stayed in Feldafing maybe five or six months.

Q: And your br -- and your brother and his wife -- am I understanding it? They had a -- they had a child while you were there?

A: A child was born in th -- in the camp there, so with a child, this is a more little advanced camp, Neu Freiman. This is a camp, it was already little apartments. So we all stayed, you know, we got a little apart -- apartment. And for neu -- neu -- we stayed in Neu Freiman til we got in contact already, you know, I mentioned to you with my uncle and the cousins. And we were waiting, see -- part in Feldafing and part in Neu Freiman. The rest of the time we emigrated, I -- from Neu Freiman I went already. This was in 1947 in -- June seventh , I think, June seventh arrived in the United States. I came first. See, my brother came with a baby, he came a com -- a couple months later. So, direct from -- oh, y-you know, di -- we went to a port of Bremen in Germany, sailed the ship, it was a commercial ship, Marlin -- Marlin? Marin? Marlin. And we arrived, and it was -- yeah, July -- June -- I think it was June eighth, or June seventh, 13.

Q: Oh, yeah, I did research on this, so June the seventh.

A: Oh, June the seventh.

Q: Ellis Island.

A: Ellis Island.

Q: 1947.

A: I'm not a little -- you know, it's -- it's experience. Coming -- while we were on the ship, we were given certain spending money, American money, we going over United State. And we were getting on the ship, you know, we're getting food, oranges, we -- Poland ha -- was expensive, never had an -- oranges. And coming over the ship, there was a stand someplace there with oranges, and six for a dollar or something. Then I discover -- we came back, I was telling si -- oh, don't -- you could have gotten -- you could have gotten six for a quarter, or something like that. Everybody was rushing with their dollars. We had -- I-I think they give you a dollar or something, a day spending money. So we spent the money on the oranges. Walking out, oh there is a stand with oranges, everybody was grabbing the oranges. So we came to Syracuse, right direct from -- from the ship. Now, ca --

Q: Oh, you did, you -- so who met you --

A: My cousin.

Q: -- when you arrived in this country?

A: My cousin.

Q: Okay.

A: But --

Q: Never -- you'd never met him before?

A: Ah, you know, did I tell you? Never -- no, I took a train, I came over, I took a train, I ca -- somehow with a train came to Syracuse, and he was waiting for me by the ship there. Eventually came back, I was asking to Syracuse, they told me go -- this train goes to Syracuse. So then I discovered -- eventually my brother came, and I had another uncle, and I never knew this actually. She -- his wife was a sister to my father. Cooper. Well, they worked together, and I didn't know that -- I didn't even know there was two more aunts in the city, but oh -- they already were -- see, my grandfather was married twice in those years. He had children from the first wife, and had the children from the second wife. I don't know exactly -- he had eight children. So three or four from the last wife.

Q: And that was -- your father was --

A: My father -- because the disparity was 20 or -- I don't know, you know, I -- you know, my uncle, he lived, you know, he was 80 -- when I came over he was 80 -- 80 years old, and I was twen -- it's a big disparity something. And we saw -- so, five children. So that time already, when my brother came, so they divided. One uncle took one -- sa -- Elman took my older brother, and I worked -- see, I-I didn't even know he was a very successful biz -- a rich man, businessman. He had scrap yards, and he has manufacturing, in Watertown not far -- you heard about Watertown, New York. You heard about water --

Q: Yes.

A: Watertown, New York. And he was -- he had a place there, and a place in Syracuse. And so my older brother works for the pants factory there, and I work f -- and I was working for the uncle. But his son-in-law ran here, the uncle was in Watertown, his son-in-law was in Syracuse. And -- so right away they put me to work, you know, I went -- was -- oh, it was, first of all, yeah, I remember it was outside on the yard, you know, they call it a scrap yard outside a yard. And he had those -- those years he had those old -- big alligator shears cutting na -- big steel. So eventually we -- after awhile I [indecipherable] I didn't complain. Eventually I had an accident there. Two men, a helper, had to put in, you know, cutting the steel, the beam, somehow [indecipherable] back and it broke my ankle. So I was that time in a cast for almost six months, six months. And of course my aunt was mad because she was ashamed because the son always said, why did they have to put him right away on the yard there? He could have put him inside [indecipherable]. So she --

Q: Could you walk on your cast?

A: I could -- well, I wal -- you know, those years they had a cast up here, and each time ca -- each time you had to change it, they have to cut a cast to put a new, so it wa -- was six months I couldn't. But I got compensation, you know, worked for compensation, so worked for -- so then, after this happened, so uncle took me to Watertown. And there he told me, I'll -- I'll -- you know, I was learning already even in -- even in Syracuse on the yard, with the shear trimmer inside, you know, trimming metal. This is -- this is -- they call that the -- not -- not iron, scrap iron and

steel, but this is non-ferrous. Non-ferrous, that means, you know, all the other ki -- copper, aluminum, brass, stainless steel, all the -- all the --

Q: Non-iron.

A: -- non-iron metal.

Q: Yeah.

A: And that's where I learned the business, they took me in Watertown. This happened in 1950, and I -- in 1947 I worked in Syracuse til sometimes -- '47 when I came, '48, and '49. But maybe couple years. Eventually I went, you know, when I got -- my foot got better and all that, he took me to Watertown. It happened to be at that time in 1950, I was introduced to my wife, Edith Rogan. She's -- comes from Brooklyn, a Brooklyn girl, and she had a cousin in Syracuse, a s -- a Holocaust -- he went -- he went through Auschwitz. Those years when I was -- arrived in Syracuse there was quite a few survivors, they're most like -- from concentration camp. And he was engineer. And I got acquainted with him, and he says, you know, he's gonna go see his cousin -- no, it's an uncle that's -- that's a cousin, her parent. Why don't I go? And we went. I -- I was already couple times in New York because I had relatives, you know, from my side. They were two sisters, my father's sisters or several -- you know, lived in New York. And -- but I didn't -- you know, I didn't see them too often, I was mostly with, you know, the relatives in Syracuse. So eventually, you know, we got acquainted, and she was visiting here, and I visit there. She didn't -- sh-she didn't li -- you know, a -- a New Yorker girl, for her even

Syracuse is lizador -- little town. So that time -- and I was working -- working in Watertown, I took her over to Watertown. It was already -- I knew her maybe quite a few months, was a little bit serious, and I introduced you -- you know, to my uncle [indecipherable]. They liked her. He says, [indecipherable] in Watertown, he'll give her a job. She didn't want to [indecipherable] in Syracuse that, you know, made a big party for her, thought maybe -- she so -- eventually [indecipherable] Watertown. In the same time, while it goes on, I -- I met -- I wasn't married yet, I met in Syracuse -- he was -- his father, a peddler's son [indecipherable] he just came on the service in the Jewish Community Center in Syracuse. I got acquainted with him, he says, you know, you know the metal business -- you know, he was probably p-peddled with his father before. I know at that time, you know, the rags, they used to peddle with rags that time. Mattresses and stuff like that. And it was a place in Syracuse, those years when I came over, and there was a lot of little scr -- it was necessary to have a special permit to operate a little junkyard. We call it scrap yard, you call it junkyard. Lot of -- you know, there was quite a few there, elderly had it, and they was -- they retire, they want to sell it, lease it. So he said, there is a place over here, the Lifsin. He retired, he wants to, you know. He's got -- he's been here for so many years, 40 - 50. Let's rent the place. So somehow -- by time working for my uncle. So, they were surprise, i-it -- you know, I want to give credit to my uncle, gratitu -- a smart man, smart man. A good man. So he says, you know, Joe, th -- and the wife [indecipherable] the children, they were [indecipherable] he just came over, he says,

what the hell, he's got a job. Everybody's got -- working for Cooper, what is he looking for? What does he have? Meshuga, you know what? Meshuga, crazy. So I told him. So he says, you know, Joe, you'll never be tru -- you'll never be satisfied til you try it. If you try it, you know at least, and you fail, you'll come back to me. See? And you --

Q: He was generous.

A: Genero -- no.

Q: In his spirit.

A: Spirit?

Q: Yeah.

A: Generous, I mean, you'll never be satisfied because you'll figure you -- oh, I could have gotten that. Try it, it's not so easy, he started to -- then you'll come -- at least you'll come back to me. And so he ha -- I started [indecipherable]. Why don't you take a truck and go right -- peddle? I gave him a tr -- he said, you want to start it, take a truck and go out, peddle to the farmers, first learn how to peddle. So I did, and eventually --

Q: And -- and peddle means tr-trade?

A: No, peddle -- you know what a peddler means? Yeah, trade, if those -- those years of -- you know, those peddler used to stop in a farmer --

Q: Yes.

A: -- and see if he's the little old --

Q: Yes.

A: -- old machine, a little -- a little so -- or something, or copper, little stuff.

Q: Yeah, we don't use --

A: And buy it -- to buy it.

Q: -- we -- we -- we just don't use that word as much now, I think, but peddler, peddling, yeah.

A: Well, those years was peddler [indecipherable]

Q: Yeah.

A: -- a peddler. Okay. Well, I hooked up with this one, and we didn't -- you know, we didn't need too much money. Of course to start it, you need -- that guy had a little money, that guy. The wa -- he wa -- he was the only son, he had a little money. I had to put in a little money. This was a time when I was already -- when I got married, I already got married with my wife when I started up with him. I worked, peddler work.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Yeah.

Q: So where did you live then? And you'd be about 28 then, something like that? How old would you be?

A: Fi -- 50 -- it was -- this was the 1950 -- 1950 I was 28 years old.

Q: Yeah.

A: I was 28 years old. So we -- there was some, you know, those years was peddlers, you know, with horse and wagons you never experience -- do you ever experien -- see horse and wagons, a lot of those. Jewish peddlers, oh, he had a horse, some had pushcarts. They push that, they pull -- they find little mattress, little rag here, rags, and little pa -- or with paper, too. And some with wagons, and it was near there. So we did, it was rough. It was rough. See, that time, my wife had a few dollars already. You needed at least, at least a few dollar, at least. I think we started up with 5,000 dollar, that year was a lot of money.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So we scraped out and we started, and --

Q: She was willing to bet on you.

A: Hm?

Q: She was willing to bet on you.

A: Well, I don't know, she's willing, yeah, she's willing. So what happened here, well then it broke out in 1951 the Korean war broke out, gave us a break. You know, the war, everything skyrocketed. And so, just get enough mattresses, get enough this, get enough ca -- metal. Pillows, get the feather pillow. I don't know, they send them, you know? They were coming in from -- they were coming in from New York called the [indecipherable] people, oh don't you -- save the pil -- we used to -- everything used to go mixed rags. Pillowcases, you na -- sweaters, wool sweaters. It was cold, probably and you needed to process that stuff. Oh, do -- save all the

sweaters, save all the pure wool, save all the wiper, save all this. So it gave us a break, and then, you know, it -- it's a lo -- it's not finished yet. So after, in 19 -- we stayed 1950 - '51. In -- I think in 1952, late ni -- we pr -- he sold -- th-the owner who owns that, we didn't have a lease. He says, boys, I'm gonna give you the first preference to purchase the property, the building. And he had -- he had -- it was the building in the back, a driveway, and he had houses on both sides, you know, the s -- older houses. But it was, I think a few tenants here, few tenants there. I didn't know anything about tenants, you know, income. Somebody bought it, and it's an income, and gave us 30 days to move. It was a [indecipherable] according to the law, 30 days. It's tough. It's tough, it's bad. Finally, well we -- we had to s -- ask the -- you know, ask the owner, give us a chance, let us sell out, whatever, clean it out, it's not so easy. You know, we had already a machine, pressing machine, baling machine there. So resolved -- got resolved in 19 -- 1952.

Q: Mm-hm. You wouldn't have had the capital to buy it?

A: No -- well, they say, you know, I did sometimes. I spoke to Uncle Elman in that time, but he figures, he said 52,000 dollars. We didn't know -- you know, because i-income from the houses, somebody bought it, I don't know, he ask you -- for us 52, we couldn't afford it, we couldn't [indecipherable] we couldn't afford it, we lost that. So we lost that. Finally I took that time, I and my brother we got another place joint together, with my brother. He was working with Uncle Sam. So he got another place was for rent there. We -- we got another place, and we stayed there til 19 -- til

1940 -- no, no, wait. F-F -- ’52 -- in ’53 to ’57 stayed with them. Eventually, well what happened is, it was too mu -- it didn’t -- for two people, two families somehow, you know what I mean, it was okay that time, we did a little business for those years. But it’s -- well, it came little friction. It says, I had a chance that time. So we were dealing with somebody and it was -- he was Italian guy. He had a little place too, but it had a good -- good equipment, and we were dealing with him while I was with my brother. And eventually I knew he wants to sell it. He said, Joe, find me a buyer. [indecipherable]. He was maybe -- this guy, he was little crippled, with one leg, was operating by himself, he did a goo -- pretty good business for himself, but he had a good machine, good equipment. The first presses, you know, automatic presses, what you don’t have to -- it’s in the ground, you just strap it in in the ground and press it [indecipherable] side. You know, we had the old fashioned pre -- you had to ho -- he had a -- he had a good press. So eventually I figured well, I’ll buy him out. We do business [indecipherable]. He had -- he didn’t have much room there. So I bought him out and he was a nice guy. He even took the mortgage and he never charged me even interest, he was so desperate to sell it. And I build up this place, and stay there 1957 --

Q: And your brother carried on --

A: Yeah --

Q: -- his own?

A: -- yeah, we were -- and we were dealing together, we were not --

Q: Yeah, okay.

A: -- you know, he -- he is on the ea -- he is on the east side, I am on the west side.

Q: And your Uncle Sam Elman lost both of you, is that right?

A: Yeah, well, let's say I [indecipherable] of you. I'll tell you, there's a lot of thing I can tell you. You know, it was a big union tha -- you know, those years, for the textile.

Q: Yeah.

A: Big, big union. And my brother wanted, you know, to be a helper, to learn for cric -- a -- a -- what do you call it, a cutter. Cutter in the clothes, what do call it, cater, cutter?

Q: Cut-up, I think.

A: Cut -- cutter.

Q: Yeah.

A: Couldn't do it, you know, couldn -- couldn't do it, they wouldn't [indecipherable] came over there is ahead of him. What's the matter [indecipherable]

Q: Oh.

A: -- uncle, no, the union. Couldn't do, the union, nothing. So he is [indecipherable] here. In 1959, it was the place where him on the road, was involved in a public domain, they build the road.

Q: Oh.

A: They needed the place.

Q: Yeah, compulsory purchase, or --

A: No, you know, compul -- public domain --

Q: Oh yeah.

A: -- is -- is for the public --

Q: They can seize it.

A: -- they can [indecipherable]

Q: Yeah.

A: -- but pay you the pri -- you gotta go to court, pay you the price. So -- but this was already in 19 -- yeah, eventually -- but I had to apply to move. I have a business, you can't knock me out this date. Tough business, oh. I had to stay there, they let me stay til the last minute. But all the street, all the houses, the building were demolished and I was fighting about relocation. Everywhere I want to go, the people don't like me. We don't want a junkyard here.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: -- tinuation of an interview with Joseph Elman. This is tape number two, side B.

A: So -- and I'm a -- I'm applying, I'm finding -- and another thing, you know, you have to -- you find a place, you cannot -- you cannot buy you know, whatever, because it's got to be subject of approval. I like your place, but I can't buy it til the city approves it. Someone shows some, you know, oh, the city, I'm going to put on the market, somebody else wants to buy. Means you gotta pay the price, right?

Because [indecipherable] I dragged around and I'm still in the back. They cut half of the building off, but they left me the press. I'm still doing business there, and I applied here, rejected here, rejected. Finally the last place, it was where I am now, it was a existing building, commercial building, with lot of land around. I had to go to court. Had to go to court, and my attorney, this guy, he is a Holocaust survivor, he came in this country and is building a ba -- a ha -- got a -- I had already, I had a -- let's see, this was -- I moved in 1960, I had already three children, three children. And here, and here, the pro and against. You cannot put a man out of business. You take his place, replace him, please. Finally I had to be, you know [indecipherable] even politics, it was seven Republicans and two -- had to bribe the Republican. And to bri -- sometime my lawyer says, well, he says, you're gonna become a member, you gonna -- they having an affair, you gotta buy a table. A table for 500 dollars, because for -- you know, because they otherwise -- anyway, it was approved, and I start building the business there. And eventually, you know, it was a -- it was a -- in this business it was, if you know the business, a lot of work, day and night. And I was a hustler, young. The kids were a little bigger, I took them in at nights, we can -- billing paper, you know, it was before the recycling was -- been in effect. You know, I was getting that -- six trucks, I was getting -- I was getting paper from all the boy scouts and all the churches, and all the girl scouts every weekend. Here, bring a driver, here's a truck. So I got the paper, 10 tons, in those years, you know, paper was sometimes a dollar a hundred, sometime was a dollar and a half a

hundred. Eight ton paper is a 160 dollars, 200 dollars. It's a big profit for the -- you know, what are -- you know, the churches used to drop the truck, you know, Sunday, coming to the church, everybody with a car. You know, load up the truck [indecipherable] like so, with bundles paper. Those years, you had a -- and I had -- so I had presses, I compressed the paper. And the same thing cardboard, you know, corrugated cardboard. And I was dealing with the mills directly, selling you know, I had a warehouse after the -- after that, after I got -- moved there, I got a warehouse nearby to storage the bales and all that. It was hard work, but -- [tape break]

Q: Let's leave your business just for a moment, to go back to your -- your children. And you mentioned the three children, but tell me their names and ages and wa -- when they were born.

A: Well, I -- I married my wife in 1950 in May. Sometime -- I think May first, if [indecipherable] second, I don't know exact date, but it was in May, in New York, wedding was in New York. And our first child was born, my older daughter, she is Cheryl, Cheryl Elman, sh -- sh -- she goes under the name Elman, and -- of course. And she's got two children, one Joshua, the son is now -- he is graduated from ca -- from New York, what is the university? [indecipherable]. Big university, New York.

Q: New York University? Columbia?

A: Columbia.

Q: Oh.

A: Columbia University. And is majoring, he wants, in international journalism. And he is 25. The other grandchild, daughter, I better tell you about my daughter first, right? Cheryl? She is -- she's got a Ph.D., a Doctor of Sociology, and she teaches in -- in u -- in University of Ohio. What's the name? Akron, Akron. See, Akron, Ohio. She's still there, she -- and so Joshua and the older one is Rayna, and she is in Japan. She likes Japan. She graduated and sh --

Q: So this is another granddaughter?

A: That's -- that's my older daughter, yeah.

Q: Yeah. Oh.

A: She is in Japan. She is going to come back. And she is, I think, 28. She wind up there as -- as exchange student, she took up eastern -- those japa -- Chinese eastern languages, culture. And she stay -- stay in there. And the next one is Marsha Elman too, Rubenstein. No, wait -- Bernstein, Marsha Elman. She lives in Toronto, Canada, and she is a psychiatric social worker, works for city of Toronto. She's got one child. And st -- Ari -- Arielle is 12 years old. My son is the youngest one, was born 50 -- '57. Makes him 46 year old, Barry. Yeah, and he is a graduate from Cornell with -- in planning and environmental science, and he works for the EPA in Washington, D.C., in charge something there. He's got a good -- and this is my children.

Q: So they have all --

A: He's got -- Barry, my son, got married late, and has got two little -- two little girls, one is three years old, and one is a year and a half.

Q: So he's busy.

A: Oh ho, ho. Was you -- wa -- you saw him here?

Q: No, no, no, but I -- I know that you are staying with him at the moment.

A: Well, he was here when you walked in.

Q: Oh, I must have been inside already.

A: Wa -- you didn't see with the baby he wa --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- baby -- brought me with the baby.

Q: Yes, yeah. Well, often they say that the children of survivors are superkids. You know, they feel a pressure to succeed. But it may just be that they have opportunities that you didn't have.

A: It's possible, it's possible.

Q: Well, I was thinking of your father being a scholarly man.

A: Yes.

Q: And just having fewer opportunities then, because you --

A: Oh, the [indecipherable] don't compare the lives.

Q: I know, I know.

A: Lives those years and here. My mother could make a meal for nothing for the whole family.

Q: Yes, yeah. You know, when you came to Syracuse, did you ever think about getting further education, or was it out of the question?

A: Right away I got put to work.

Q: Yeah.

A: No, I didn't even think about it.

Q: Nobody thought about it.

A: No, no, this is already [indecipherable]. Came to Syracuse in 1947, I was 25 years old.

Q: And lucky to have -- and lucky to have a family member willing to help you with --

A: You mean the family?

Q: Yes, I meant -- would that be the -- how you would regard it at the time, you needed to make a life for yourself and your uncle was willing to help --

A: Yeah, they -- you know, they are [indecipherable] we came over, they gave us, you know, a hou -- housing and -- and til we got the jobs assigned.

Q: Now, what was your wife's background, Edith? She's Jewish?

A: Yes.

Q: And had her family been here for generations?

A: Well, yeah, she's -- she's Jewish and the -- she's the only child. As a matter of fact, when we got married in 1950, I think they came in, the parents came in, he had a business there, he was dry cleaning and tailoring, and both you know, her father

and her mother worked the same -- she was -- she was e-excellent -- excellent at making spa -- for women, clothing.

Q: Mm-hm. Dressmaker.

A: Profess -- dressmaker, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And so they moved into Syracuse later on, maybe in five or seven years later.

Q: Moving from --

A: From New York.

Q: Yeah. And they bought a place in Syracuse in the same thing, in dry cleaning and -- tailoring and dry cleaning. And she -- sh-she was, like I say, a la -- only child. You know how it is, a only child.

Q: Well --

A: Love [indecipherable] only child, the parents didn't want to lose her, see? So instead, they figure, instead I go to New York, she'll settle for Syracuse, she didn't want it, oh. Lived all your life in New York, all the family in New York, lot of -- on the other side, lot of family, relatives.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Well, many -- many survivors marry other survivors, but di -- di --

A: No, well, I --

Q: -- did she have a -- an understanding of how much you'd gone through?

A: Well, she knew. She knew she was a p -- you have a picture somewhere there, you know, I don't have to show you. She was a pretty girl. I don't know, I was lucky

maybe, I -- you know, I better tell you that when I came over, my aunt, the one -- you know, the one -- my father's sister, she was a [indecipherable] in the scrap business. So she sa -- oh, I -- you went through so much. [indecipherable] Look at your [indecipherable] look at something, she says. She was -- she was s-so ex -- I mean, she didn't expect to see something [indecipherable] nephew, saw a human being, nice looking boy looking at him, oh and she -- don't go out with these girls, you know. She ju -- she's -- she's going to tell you with whom to go out and whom to date.

Q: Yeah.

A: And she was good to me.

Q: And -- and perhaps your -- your wife was especially good for you because you were putting all the -- the pain of losing your family behind you, and you were very busy with your new life.

A: Well, besides -- no, besides there, you know, in the beginning we -- when they moved, when I got married we used to live in apartment. Now, when the parents came in we bought a two family, the [indecipherable] live altogether for -- til -- til I would say one had passed away. Very close, very close.

Q: So they'd have a very meaningful -- they'd be a meaningful part of your children's lives.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it was -- it was -- see, we s -- we got an -- we got another family from my wife's side. And she had lot of -- she had cousins and -- and aunts

and uncles in New York, no lo -- not in Syracuse. [indecipherable]. We used to travel quite often, quite often to New York. See, I was married to my wife for 49 years, 1950 til 1999. Then when sh -- you know, in 1999 she passed away. [indecipherable] she had cancers of the lung. In 1990 operated, she was okay for three years, and I think in 1996 she was operate, they discovered.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And eventually, eventually it spread to the brain, and I lost her then.

Q: Was she a smoker?

A: Never smoked in her life.

Q: Oh.

A: Never smoked. Her father smoked.

Q: Oh.

A: The father smoked.

Q: Yes. One of those things we never know.

A: Well, who knows the -- who knows the risk, yeah. We had a good life.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Finally I remarried in -- in -- this is 2000, or one. You know, a neighbor, not far, she lost her husband. We both belong -- her husband belonged to the Mason, the same organization. I knew her well, nice girl. She wanted to marry me, so -- you know, sometimes you know, those -- they stick together many times, you know. One -- one -- once in awhile [indecipherable] marriages, but very rare, I would say, very

rare. Most of the -- most of the survivors, they married -- they married a -- those -- those [indecipherable] a lot of survivors in Germany over here, or -- it was exceptions, but it's not too [indecipherable] rare.

Q: Yeah --

A: I know most of them who came to Syracuse, there were some married ones [indecipherable] they ma-marry them either before the war, or after the war, you know, they match up.

Q: Yeah. And every survivor's experience is different. Your --

A: Oh --

Q: -- yours is -- was very different because you were a partisan fighter.

A: -- well, well, ev-every -- yes, every survivor is -- is different. Now, they really went through the hell, those who were in concentration camp. Now when I hear it, you know, what they suffered, what they went through, it's ha -- it is -- it's a shocking. Then you figure, you know, my family went through like that. To see young sisters and all the cousins. So I could have been among them, just miss -- you miss a day or two, you wind up -- because fa -- the ghetto, you know, after the evacuation, even you -- you were hiding in the ghetto, the dogs [indecipherable] most of them, oh, unless those who -- those who were hiding outside. Was a lot of them [indecipherable] outside, were able to get out.

Q: Yeah, or -- or I think again of the doctor, who is --

A: Well, this is --

Q: -- the narrow escape at the transport station.

A: -- this is -- lost her husband, this is her historical something, you know, can write a book about it. She was not a youngster, don't forget. She must have been, you know, in Poland those years, people -- those years, 50 years ago, they didn't live the -- those years, like you live here in United States. 60 - 65 was already, you know, you're whole person. I don't know if she could do it, she was 60 probably.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Or 60 [indecipherable] how could she do it? And to walk 10 miles to the -- from the train to the -- to the convent. Made it.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But God willing, God want it to be like that.

Q: Yeah. Did you feel that the way you raised your children in any way was affected by your own experience? Did you want them to understand your story and background, did you want to bring them up in a s -- a ri -- a riru -- with a religious back -- observe --

A: Well --

Q: -- observances, and so on?

A: -- no. Well, a -- well yo -- my children, actually I wasn't talking too much. I don't think -- I don't think -- my wife, she knew, maybe I told. But I wasn't talking too much about back experiences. When they grew -- when they grew up a little I

mentioned it, you know, I mentioned it, in later years. I didn't want to talk too much about it.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I didn't want to real fra -- relive this again, every time you talk, it's not so easy. You try to forget.

Q: Do you feel that your -- that you were changed because of those experiences? Because you were a survivor? Did it -- did it affect your life in a very deep way?

A: Well, of course I changed. Of course I changed, that's why I saw, you know, I saw myself what happened, what happened to a community. You think about -- about my uncle. I had an uncle, had a su -- had -- had a f -- had a -- a -- a flour mill and a sawmill. Those years -- I don't know where he got this money, I heard he -- he won a lottery, something like that. But this is supplying -- supplying the -- the whole city and vicinity and all the farmers, you know, farmers surrounding, we talk about thousands and thousands of farmers and what -- see what happened? See -- see what happened? I'm -- I -- a lot of people here in United States, you know, even among the Jewish people, and you tell them, says I -- you have to learn a lesson. I mean, it's too bad you gotta a -- a price with your -- and a lesson what you went through with your whole family and all that, you know, that be good. Because money doesn't buy nothing. Even you're rich, I saw rich people. Now, when you tell them, rich people went. Rich or poor, sick or healthy, no matter what. Everybody went the same, the same way, lost everything. So now, you know, I have the experience. Now over here

some people, some people some time, they -- to them, when it comes to certain things, donations or something, helping. It's nothing. [indecipherable]. I mean, you live in a free country, you didn't went through that. You have, I mean -- you know what I mean?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It's different. So, when you pay the price, it's different, it's different.

Q: Mm-hm. Now did you, with your family, did you observe religious holidays and go to the synagogue regularly?

A: You mean, before?

Q: No, no, I meant, your American fa -- the American Elmans --

A: Well, no -- no --

Q: -- you and Edith and the children.

A: -- I belong to a temple. I'm not -- I'm -- I'm not religious at all. I belong to a temple because you have to belong to a temple. I mean, in this city, in Syracuse if you don't belong to a temple, you had -- send children to school you gotta belong to the temple, you gots -- you know what I mean? Day school, Hebrew school, you have -- it's different than the big city. So you have to belong to the temple. And I was -- I was not religious at all, even home. We were not too religious. My father was educated, was a yeshiva bocher, went to yeshiva, but -- but here you have to -- you have to belong with the temple. You know, I belong -- I donate a lot of money to the Jewish Federation.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And th-the same federation, I'm active. And to me money is nothing. I can't see.

Q: Cause life has taught you --

A: Yeah, money --

Q: -- a deeper lesson.

A: -- money -- it's as long you have your he-health, health, health --

Q: Yes.

A: -- that's what you cannot buy.

Q: Yeah.

A: But money, if you have, for crying out loud.

Q: Did you have any adverse health effects from the rough times living as a partisan?

A: Well I -- well, I -- I had -- I had trouble with my stomach since I came out. And when I got married, it's 1950, I went to -- in New York to Mount Sinai hospital. And I always complained I had cr-cr -- you know, si -- no headache, but stomach pain, stomachs, I thought maybe I -- maybe I have -- I checked in Syracuse when I came over '47, all those years and they didn't find anything. And when I got married, she insisted go and check. I went to Mount Sinai hospital, went through all the x-ray, all the -- all the tests, and they says, we don't find anything wrong, physically, just -- what he says, they call it something like -- not physically --

Q: Psychosomatic?

A: Psychosomatic. That's what it is.

Q: Yeah. What about your brother Louis? Was his health good when he came to this country?

A: Yeah, he was all good, but the -- the same thing, he had a si -- see? He never complained that -- he had a cerebral helmbridge -- cerebral [indecipherable], and suffered for a year. All over she was -- he was -- she was with him in Florida, she was with him Rochester, all the hospitals. He wasn't si -- he had the same thing. Stomach trouble. He had ulcers, and bec -- eventually -- eventually they cut out -- he had half of his colon cut out.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It's probably that's all from -- yeah. He -- [indecipherable] affe-affected him, yeah. And has to watch his diet. Finally decided, colon operation.

Q: Yeah. You know, when he was -- when he was a very young man, you mentioned that he was thinking he wanted to come to the United States, really when I think he was in his late teens.

A: No, he was, let's see. In the 19 -- in the1939, he was 20.

Q: Yeah.

A: 1939 he was 20. Before the war [indecipherable] decided, because -- that he wants to go to United States. He says --

Q: Why -- why do you think that was?

A: Well, he didn't want to go to Palestine bec -- I don't know. He was the type -- there was no future there, actually, you know, a young boy of 20, and he went to the Hebrew school, that gymnasium, and th -- we knew already in 1939, we heard, you know, what was going on with the Nazis, they were -- march of the -- of the Nazis. I think it was, you know, what's happened to Austria, what happened to Czechoslovakia, in 1938 we heard that. And that time, it would have gone if not bro -- maybe if the war broke out not in 1939, the Polish -- the second war, maybe '40. But he applied, the uncle would have brung him in, yeah, he brought in everybody. See, my parents could have come here, too. But what happened, he didn't want to come alone. He was married that time, and had a child. He says, I'm not gonna leave my wife and my child. If you can bring us all over, yes, but not -- but you had to -- all the kids who were brought over, they were singles, all the sisters, 18 years old, 16 years old, so forth. Because first you come and then you settle down somehow, you bring your family. That was the si -- that was the papers, sa -- made out like this. You couldn't bring the whole family out.

Q: Mm-hm. And it wasn't easy to come. I understand there was --

A: Well --

Q: -- an enormous amount of paperwork to be done.

A: -- now, let's -- coming to United States, even for us, from 19 -- we came in -- in f -- i-in Germany, in Feldafing, Neu Freiman in 1945 in June, and we came. Two years later, you see, we registered on the Polish quota. And the Polish quota was

overfilled, because a lot of -- most survivors mostly -- you know Poland had the popula -- three million people before the war. And most of us survived. Most of majorities from Poland, comparison any other country, and of -- from my city alone of 200 people, well don't forget, from a population of 15,000. So the Polish quota was -- it was impossible. Was -- we could have -- wish we'd known, we could have registered [indecipherable] Germans you could have registered you're from, or Lithuanians, little countries the quota was better. But we -- when you got registered, you got -- put in your picture, you couldn't change it. So we have to wait there for two years. Okay, I mean, we were in the DP camp, we have -- we have no complaints about food, shelter and medication. It was under UNRRA in the American zone, the American government. And the same thing -- those camps are, you know, I want to mention, there was a lot of camps, UNRRA camps, they were especially for Jews. There were camps for Yugoslavs. There was lot of camps for Poles. Separate they were, you know what I mean? They had their own sections there. And they had their own, you know -- you know, their own UNRRA, the same thing, and -- and the -- those -- it was sometime those who didn't have relatives -- you know the churches, if you had a church sponsor, was quicker to come in, you know what I mean, than to a relatives, because the churches, they didn't have the big quota. A few here, you know, the church sponsor, they took them right in. But the church are responsible for them. When they come in they gotta give them. So we had a tough time for two years. All the correspondent with the cousins, you know, I

have so much I like to say, so much correspondent. You know, it figures, they thought, they got money, and they send affidavit, if you got, you know, affidavit, 150,000 dollars, I'll give you example. Or a quarter of a million dollars. All lot of money, you got a chance to come in quicker than somebody said affidavit, I got the job making 5,000 dollars, and I got a home. But it didn't work this way. Doesn't work this way. So we got stuck with it, that's why it took so long.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Joseph Elman, conducted by Margaret West, on October the 8th, 2004, in Washington, D.C.. This interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's post-Holocaust interview project, and is a follow up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Joseph Elman on May the 19th, 1998. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number three, side A. You were telling me about the correspondence with your --

A: Yeah, so they tried --

Q: -- people.

A: -- for a few year, you know, with a political, with officials, and wrote up -- he wrote a letter to the consulate, my cousin. He says -- he figures, you know, emotion to make the conne -- the consulate answer them. He says, those two devils, those two devils, how much they went through already. Who knows how many -- indirectly how many American life they saved, through the war? Because we were i -- we were in the war, right?

Q: Yes.

A: We were indirect --

Q: Blowing up trains, and --

A: Yeah, I mean we were [indecipherable] we were allies. Who knows how mu -- you know, we're fighting the Germans, and they have to struggle with all the papers, with all the, you know, we k -- guarantee this and this, and -- so the consulate says, I understand, but it's the Polish quota, and so [indecipherable]. As soon they reach their quota, their name, I'm sure I'll take care of them.

Q: It was hard.

A: Huh?

Q: It -- this was --

A: Well, this -- he answered that. He answered that.

Q: So i -- I -- I simply -- you know, I read that the -- the numbers -- the numbers of Jews who came t-to the United States were -- was it a hundred thousand?

A: I --

Q: But they were not big.

A: I-I didn't even -- see, I really didn't follow that. You mean since then? How many came in?

Q: Well --

A: How ma --

Q: -- it was -- I simply know that it's considered that it was the -- some feel that the United States should have admitted far more Jews.

A: I don't even -- I know that, but did they -- there was so many admitted, a hundred thousand? I don't think so.

Q: Oh, well I -- I shouldn't --

A: No, at -- maybe a hundred thousand all together. Because a hundred thousand --

Q: Yeah, that -- that's right, it would be all together.

A: -- you know, because a -- a hundred thousand [indecipherable]

Q: And there was lege --

A: -- because some of them went to -- some of them went to Canada. Some of them went to, you know, to Palestine. So -- Cuba didn't allow, the same thing. Some of them went to Australia, some of them went to New Zeal -- they had relatives [indecipherable] you know. They spread all over, so I don't know if United States, a hundred thou --

Q: Yeah.

A: I never read up -- I -- I -- that's interesting for me, I'd like to know. They know roughly how many s-survived.

Q: Yes.

A: And, do they know here [indecipherable]

Q: Yeah.

A: They figure.

Q: And I know there was legislation in 1948 that helped surviving Jews to come into the United States.

A: In '48?

Q: In '48.

A: Oh.

Q: Yeah.

A: A -- about ’45?

Q: Well, that’s why you were --

A: See, later on again, later on --

Q: -- wondering as a displaced person --

A: -- people came over.

Q: Yeah.

A: It changed already.

Q: I-I -- I’d like you to tell me more about what you saw in Feldafing. You -- you re -- covered that very quickly, but what -- what do you remember of your time there?

A: Well, in Feldafing everybody -- you know, we were assigned certain, you know, even locally there, you know, some -- there were some teachers. I had a cousin taught in school there. And -- but I was told, and my brother, the family -- those years in Feldafing and in the other camps, a lot of them you cou -- you were free to go out and you come in in the camp. You got -- you got -- you were getting rationing so much. You were getting cigarettes, you were getting beer. I don’t know, I didn’t smoke a pack a -- a pack a day, a pack a week, I don’t remember. Cigarettes was very s -- ec -- it was very precious. People used to go out and barter and trade with the Germans. Now, if you get five pack of cigarette a week, or three -- for a cigarette, pack of cigarette, you could have gotten a camera. For a pack of cigarette

you can sometime a pair of pants or boots or something. So people -- but it -- they were to -- you know, there was a lot of black market going on among those. And what happened, you had to take currency. Now, the Germans, there wasn't a currency if you want to trade in the American zone, some had -- some had dollars. Even among the -- even a-among the camp [indecipherable] in camp, you know. Oh, you got a camera, how much you want? 50 dollars. Oh, you got that, you want -- you know, it's little -- but we were told that -- don't -- you have to -- maybe they heard don't get involved with any black market, or any, because this is gonna affect your visa.

Q: Mm.

A: You know? This -- if sh -- if they'll find -- many cases, if they found a few dollars with you, you know, when you come in sometimes -- in the camp, I remember when we went in, they search you, they check you, the a -- MP. Okay, we got the invitation to go in, but I don't know how they figure those years -- they did check you, they figured now if they find -- if they find a dollar, or a few dollars, oh where do you get the dollar? Black market. Then you got already a stamp, you know. They take you and sometime they arrest you. Oh, I got these dollars, I got this dollar my -- oh -- when you say if you got -- if you got a father or somebody survive, brother from Poland, you got to explain that, where did you get it. It was -- you had to be clean, in order to get. So we didn't get involved too much. I was reading a lot, going to the libraries, reading a lot that time.

Q: Yeah. Now --

A: [inaudible]

Q: -- many people in the displaced person's camps married very young.

A: They d -- there is a --

Q: Did you come close to marrying? I -- I think a --

A: No, over -- no -- well, [indecipherable]. I mentioned -- I mentioned the girl I met. Now -- and you know, she was maybe 16 years old. This was in ni -- in '45, or may -- no, she probably 16 years old when sh -- they took her, because otherwise, you know -- you had to be -- you had to be already -- I mean, somehow al -- I would say, physically not a childish, you know, in order to pick you to labor.

Q: Right.

A: You know, they took men, whatever. But she -- she probably -- you know, you got to be a little tall not to look like a child. So anyway, so -- yeah, and -- and she want, you know, I like this girl. But I couldn't bring her to United States, because I didn't registered her. My brother -- eventually the letters for we got from my relative who is -- I used to get letters from Joseph and Louis, who is Rachel? Well -- and then, who is -- who is the boy, little boy? Later on [indecipherable] later was attached. So -- and another reason, she had relatives in Cuba, and she thought she's gonna persuade me maybe. Then, was late. I could have put her in maybe, said she's my girlfriend. Uncle, he would bring her in, you know, s-save another child, you

know, it's not a big deal. But she decided she wants to go -- sh -- she has uncles and aunts in Cuba. She wants -- and she went to Cuba. And I went to United States.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So that's the -- tha -- that's --

Q: Do you know what happened to her?

A: Well, she married in Cuba. She married somebody who made -- who went to Cuba before the war. He's a elderly -- you know, she was young. I remember him when I was a kid, because in our city in the 1930's, a lot of them, those younger ones went to Palestine. Those, you know, they already dreamed about. There's no future, you know, in a [indecipherable] in Poland. Young, they figure they'll go there. There's some girls went there, too. Boys and girls went there, and some went to Cuba, some went to United States. We heard -- we heard about that, so we know who went -- who went. So she's -- I think she's still alive, she is in Florida. And I heard -- I used to see her si -- see the group from the Pruzana survivors. We used to get together every year for the memorial, January whatever, 27th, or 28th, they made it January the 30th. And from all over we used to come down to New York. People even from all over United States. Some of the people from different countries used to come out. So we used to meet each other and it still -- it fall apart couple years ago. Most of them got old, and you know, mostly -- I'm from the younger ones. And it's got neglected, and the second generation is falling apart. You know what I mean? There's no leaders from the second generation. And this used to meet once a

year, oh you know, this one from there. So, I heard that she is -- got park -- no, this -- not the Parkinson, the -- it's a little bit forgetful, what do you call that?

Q: Oh, Alzheimer's.

A: Alzheimer's --

Q: Yeah, yeah. But she's had a -- she's had a good life, I hope.

A: Oh yeah, she -- yeah, she wa -- she was married. She was married, her husband in Cuba had that store, a business, I think a ladder business, if I can recall.

Q: Mm-hm. What was the mood like in Feldafing? Were people -- were people optimistic about their future?

A: Well, that's the same -- it's -- at Feldafing this is already the last stop. So like I mentioned before, after the liberation, everything was -- all Europe was in a mess. Everything was in a chaos. People were moving from one place in another. People were looking for some relatives, whoever survived, and eventually where they wa -- you know what I mean? They were going to here, they're going to there, maybe -- oh I heard this one had got somebody, a brother survived. But eventually, later on when you settled in Feldafing, that was already the last -- you know what I mean, finally the last journey. From there you go someplace. That means if you know or -- don't go to United State, you go -- you go -- well, some people stayed there, I don't know, in the camps, still 19 probably 50 some -- a lot of them went to Israel. And of course there's some, not too many, some went back, those survivors [indecipherable] just went back to their own countries. Not too many like from

Poland or France, or -- or Lithuania, Latvia. A few wanted to go back and settle there. Well, now you know that the ca -- now those countries are different, you know, now those countries are trying to absorb as many as they can, the Jewish people.

Q: Mm-hm. Have you had any interest in going back in --

A: No.

Q: -- recent years to Pruzana?

A: No, no. I -- the reason is I saw Pruzana after the liberation. I came into Pruzana, I saw what -- what's the remnants, what it's left, the few. So what I'm going to do there? It's no -- you know, it's different if somebody oh, survived they never went back. Some of them going back now. Now it's easy because my town is now incorporated in Belarus. And Belarus became a country, independent country. Now some -- this is all part of Poland. Part of Poland was now -- is Ukraine, became a country, Ukraine, right? Lithuania is a country now. So what happens now, now it's easier to go, but I don't want to go my age already, it's too -- no. Haven't got no interest to go.

Q: What about your children? Do they have much interest in your -- in the Elman side of their history?

A: Well, my -- well yes, yes. My son -- especially my son. My son, if not for my son, he encouraged me, he says [indecipherable] that he said he's gonna disown me if I'm not gonna come out and tell my story. You have to, he says. You have to tell it

for the -- you know for -- for generation to come, you have to tell for those people who cannot tell themselves. So I'm blessed to come out and tell the story.

Q: Mm-hm. Yeah. And you -- while you -- while there -- there are no more Elmans in Europe --

A: No.

Q: -- of your immediate family, then you have now quite a large and thriving family here.

A: Well, I have five grandchildren -- I have five grandchildren, three children. Now my wife, on her side, she's got two chi -- two children and three grandchildren. So all together --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- see, the big family from ma -- my wife's side now, in Syracuse.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: She's got a big family al -- otherwise I wouldn't have nobody.

Q: Yeah. Well you're richly blessed in that way.

A: Yeah.

Q: But you're also -- you're also being very philanthropic as a community member. You -- it seems to me your -- you're a -- a good citizen in supporting worthy causes.

A: Well, like I say, well, I ca -- I can -- thank God I can afford, so I can, I'm doing that. Even if I couldn't afford, I would, so I'm -- I'm doing that. I belong -- you know, I was giving to the Jewish -- United Jewish Appeal since 1958. In 1958 I was

assigned -- I was in charge of that certain division. I didn't bring you that -- that I have a -- I have a -- you know, a thank you from the United Jewish -- ni -- 1958. So it's already, I would say, 45 years I'm giving. It's not, you know, giving to the federation, and the temple. I'm a good member of the temple.

Q: Tell me about the Jewish Memorial Sanctuary in Dewitt.

A: Well -- well, it happens in -- when we were a group yet, you know, coming and later on, the later years -- I think this was in the 19 -- I would say 19 -- beginning 1990. And we were -- and we had our organization there from the survivors, a group from the survivors. And used to meet once in awhile, you know, just social. Tell, you know, what -- what's going on, how you're doing. And we were discussing about, you know, there is so many different cities like they have memorials, sanctuaries you know, where they -- where they memorialize their families. And, you know, they just build -- they moved, the last 15 years, I think this is. And -- and of course it was a drive for the ca -- you know, for the building front, I gave them money. So we thought it would be nice, why not -- why not in Syracuse? We deserve. So they figured well, you got -- cost a lot of money to build it on the outside, you know, something. But strange, somehow it's no -- not too much help from the outside, they wanted -- they wanted we should pay for the whole expense, you know? And there was not too many people can afford that. You know, we had a group I would say maybe around 20 couples, it's fr -- you know, what -- I would say 40 survivors there, 20 -- some singles. And they were discussing, they would try to

get some money, but there is no money coming out. You had to -- you had to da -- you know, you had to -- many times fight for that. So eventually they decided, okay, inside a building, inside the Jewish Community Center. And they decided -- there was three. You're gonna [indecipherable] the sanctuary is going to be -- have thris -- three nominations. The Wall of Remembrance, Contemplation, and Library, three. So I picked the Wall of Remembrance. Yeah. You want to know how much I gave, I'll tell you how much I gave.

Q: And also, tell me about the -- w-would you -- on the Wall of Remembrance, would it list the names --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- of people who had died --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- relating to Syracuse families?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: So your sisters --

A: Yeah, all -- all syra --

Q: -- yeah [indecipherable]

A: -- for the Syracuse, yeah. All -- they have a chance, you know, because the temples don't have that.

Q: Yes.

A: Temples, you know, they have, but they don't have that from somehow, I don't know. So we decided Jewish, the Jewish Community Center. Yeah, so I donated them. I gave them 15,000.

Q: Yeah. Good for you.

A: Huh?

Q: Good for you. And --

A: I'm still not through with that. I'm still planning to -- in Syracuse, if everything goes well, i -- I don't know, they want me through the organization. But my son i -- my son, he'll -- he'll probably [indecipherable] a certain amount for the study of -- the study of the Jewish Holocaust.

Q: Is there quite a strong Jewish community in Syracuse?

A: Well, they have about 8,000 families.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: 8,000 families.

Q: Out of a total number of what?

A: Population?

Q: Yeah.

A: Population is -- used to be not quite 200,000. Used to be --

Q: Yeah. And di-did -- I mean, I -- w-was there a big increase in Jewish settlers there after World War II, or --

A: You mean -- you mean --

Q: I just wondered if a lot of se --

A: -- in ge -- in general?

Q: Yes.

A: Or just survi --

Q: No, I just wondered if there had been a Jewish community there --

A: I think --

Q: -- for a hundred years or more [indecipherable] they were --

A: -- yeah, well, I would say we are actually losing, not getting more. We are losing, in general. Not only Jew, in general the city, Syracuse, it is a lot of -- there's a lot of industry lost, and a lot of --

Q: Oh, as --

A: -- we're losing -- we're losing a lot of -- a lot of people, families, because don't forget, we had -- we had a big industry in Syracuse, we had -- we had the cr -- Chrysler -- Chrysler plant. We had -- we had -- it's -- it's falling apart, you know? Take for instance Bristol-Meyers, we have it still. Okay, they moved up, moved a lot of them. Then we have Carrier corporation, big, it started in Syracuse, and it -- it employed one time 10,000 that's left now what is about 15 -- 1500. So you see, a lot of those engineers, they -- they going out -- outside.

Q: Yeah.

A: We lost a lot of industry. General Electric closed.

Q: Oh, of course, loss of manufacturing jobs in the United States.

A: General Electric, big plant in Syracuse. They clo -- I mean, they not gone, they closed the plant. And mention -- could mention a lot more.

Q: Did you ever, in those early years, did you ever feel that there was anti-Semitism?

A: Well, actually, I wasn't -- you know, the people I dealt with, I had, you know, mostly Gentiles outside. I didn't feel, you know, sometime th -- the opposite. You know, they liked me, and I was getting inv -- they like you sometimes, you know, you ca -- you know, they -- you getting business. I ca -- I ran -- I ran it honest, the one thing is, you gotta be honest and -- and loyal, especially honest business, because in this business, when you weigh -- you have a scale and you weigh certain materials, they trust you. If they trust you -- if they don't trust you, for instance, they not going to come to you. But they find out, you know, you're honest, at least you know, you -- your -- your word is what -- good, and you -- when you give a price on the telephone, or you make a contract, you follow up that. That's very important I learned, for the business. You gotta be honest and follow the rules, otherwise you don't last very long.

Q: Yeah. I'm going to jump back now to something that you said earlier. And this is when you were telling me about the -- one of the reasons for you giving time to speak about your experiences, wa-wanting the world to know of the resistance efforts. And you mentioned the -- the Bielski brothers. Tell me about them.

A: The Bielski brothers? Well, they were located not far where -- from my brigade, I would say in the forest connecting. We were in the Michalin forest, and Bielski was in Nowogrodek forest. That's a -- that's about 50 - 60 kilometer apart. And we heard about the Bielskis. They were there before I was even there. I think the Bielskis, they e -- they escaped there in -- in -- in 1941, right away when the war started, because they were located right a -- they were -- the father had a windmill someplace in a little village, was only family there, and they were raised, brought up in that village, and not far from this village, there were forests there. And he already, I think the -- i-it was three brothers, but I heard about a first one, what's his name? What was -- he was a [indecipherable]. Bielski. Anyway, they were hiding already in the forest since the war started. And eventually, of course, after the liquid -- later on, they saved a lot of Jews around from there, and took them in in the forest there. And a -- and eventually they grew -- they grew, I think they -- they had, I would say over a thousand, or 1200 or 15 something, something grew to, and th-they -- among their group there, they had a lot of those sp -- those professional craftsmen. They have tailors and they have shoemakers. They have blacksmiths, you know, for the horses, and they have -- you name it, they a -- they -- they used to make -- they had -- they had -- they established a factory there where they used to make leather from the hides from the -- from the cows, so -- and those Russian -- the top, you know, leaders and some, in order to -- used to come in, and they wanted a pair of boots, they wanted -- they wanted clo -- know, make a sheepskin, you know, clothing and

all that. They -- they got in -- in return they ask for some food, and certain, you know, products. Because they had a lot of -- a lot of families with children, women, pregnant women, elderly and they had an obligation, you know, to support all those groups, people. And that's eventually grew, you know, that's -- it grew to a st -- to like a community, you know, a Jewish community there, on account, because, you know, they were helpful, you know, we need it, we needed those craftsmen, we needed those people. And they accepted, that's the only -- I remember, they accepted escapees who cou -- wouldn't be accepted in the -- in the fighting brigades, because elderly, of women and children. So they used to, you know, send it, when they were found in the woods, go to -- deliver them to the Bielski [indecipherable] I remember that.

Q: How -- yeah, now the -- they -- they were a Jewish family.

A: Jewish, all Jewish [indecipherable]

Q: And they were -- what age would the brothers be?

A: Oh, they were young that time. One was already -- one was already a soldier in the Polish army. I would say, you know, sometime 21. When you go in the army, 21 til 23. They could be in the middle 20's and 30 you know, from the upper 20's and the 30's. You know, because -- because they were already -- he's a soldier, he was th -- you know, he served in the army.

Q: And how was it that they escaped attack? How did they protect the people in their community?

A: There?

Q: Yes.

A: Oh, they -- they protect communi -- besides, they had a lot of young -- younger -- beside the elderly and those, you know, families, they call -- this was a family brigade. And a lot of stuff was brought in to them. You know, that was a -- you know, feed and -- and -- and clothes, 1500 people, you gotta have a lot of -- it's not -- you gotta have a lot of -- a lot of territor -- I mean, lot of help. A lot of help in order to go in and get the food for them. And --

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: -- with Joseph Elman. This is tape number three, side B.

A: You sta -- getting a lot of help from the rest of the brigades surrounding, because they did a job, you know? They d -- you needed -- you needed those craftsmen, fix -- fix a rifle. Clean -- you know, fix machine gun. Make a part, a machine -- machinist -- they had machinist there, and like -- like I sa -- mentioned, and all those craftsmen, shoemaker, blacksmithing. No f -- there were some horses, you know, the commanders were riding horses. A fleet of horses. There were dozens, hundreds of horses around in the territory there.

Q: Now th -- wh-when you think about weaponry, I'm reminded that we haven't talked about your -- your -- your job with th --

A: Well, I was trained --

Q: -- anti-gun --

A: See [inaudible]

Q: -- equipment.

A: The reason -- is gotta be a reason why I was treated and I was honored in the group, because it was even -- it was anti-Semitism, even in the g -- in the brigades. Mostly from the local -- you know what -- local. It means from the local Belarus, that was Belarus, from the local Ukraines, local Poles. There was all kind of nationalities. But the -- the east -- the Russians, they would never -- they -- th-they -- they -- th-they didn't -- we never felt -- but sometimes they used to, you know what anti-Semitism it means. They tr -- do -- de -- they -- we were treated, you know, otherwise, but sometime called names. You know, call name. I have a name, so okay, call me, you know, I'm Joseph. Jusef in Polish, Jossel in Russia. No, it's Moshka. You know, give you a name Moshka. Jew Moshka. Like the Poles used to sometime, anti-Semitism, they used to call -- they used to call --

Q: Is that Moses, Moshka?

A: Yeah, Moses, something mo -- Moshka. So they said, oh Moshka. I got a name. Was -- do this. I'm -- oh, yeah. What happened? Now, I was assigned to carry -- we had in our brigade, we had in the beginning one anti-tank gun. And the purpose of the tank at this -- it was a old fashioned one, but it was heavy, and you had to car -- weighed 150 pounds. And we used to use this gun in order to go and shoot locomotives, stop the train. We didn't ever stop -- shooting at ta -- we didn't ever get

involved with Panzer tanks and that [indecipherable] that's unusual, you know, it's useless. This was, you know, this was important, because at night you reached that -- this destination, you find a place where you lay in ambush. You figure the train, you know, among bushes [indecipherable]. The train is gonna come down. The first thing when it comes,, it's [indecipherable] shoot the locomotive. Now I was assigned, I was strong, you know, young, strong. Number two, carrying the ma -- it was a number one, a number two and three. The number one shoots. He doesn't have to carry nothing, he just -- comes the time, he gotta shoot. The number two has gotta carry. And the number two has gotta change and carry. Because when we go out on those missions sometime, we -- we walk 50 kilometers during the night and [indecipherable]. It happened one time, we lay in ambush, that's not far, you know, in the partisans, we mined the road and two truckloads with soldier -- German soldiers arrived. We mined the -- we mined the roads, we knew they have to go through this road, because farmers, they don't have a -- they don't have trucks at night, usually. So you wait. Either they'll go through, they'll come or not, we'll retreat. But actually, they went through, and blew up one truck on the mine, on the -- you know, on the main road, blew it up. And scattered. And the next up, that other truck stopped, we opened [indecipherable] you know, with plier. We stopped the other one. We killed a lot of them there. But reinforcement came in and they cut us off. We tried to retreat, you know, on our side, the road towards -- towards our destination, and they cut us off, and we running. You know, we [indecipherable] a

lot. See, in 15 minutes, we thought we gonna hide there and the s -- I would say awful lot, lot of Germans because fi -- a fi -- 15 - 20 - 25 wouldn't dare go in in the woods there, maybe couple hundred. Now group was only had -- the most was [indecipherable] maybe was 25 or 28. I was carrying that gun, and we running, and they chasing out in the woods. It was dangerous. And I has -- and I asked, you know, the guys, I says, you know, I'm gonna drop it, I cannot run any more, save it, take the gun. Nobody wants to take the gun, nobody. And where was the Germans, right in back over, the German. The commander is there. I s -- told the commander, I says, I says -- I asked -- I says, nobody wants to take the gun, I'm gonna drop it, I says save the gun, don't save me. He took the gun away from me. And then that's helped me. Then I became a hero with them, see?

Q: Because you s -- pointed out --

A: Because --

Q: -- the importance of the gun.

A: -- because I said, save the gun, don't save me.

Q: Yes, yeah. So your stock went up, you mean?

A: He took it.

Q: Yeah.

A: And what happened eventually, they chased us. He got killed.

Q: Oh.

A: The command -- he got killed.

Q: And he was carrying the gun?

A: Well, eventually he gave it to so --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- it -- it quiet down already, you know?

Q: Yeah.

A: Eventually -- and he went to a village, and he figured he's gonna go in, and in the village were Germans, and they caught him there, and he got killed.

Q: Oh.

A: I think him and a couple other guys. So see, that's why, after that, you know, they respected me. So -- so -- I used to go -- eventually I told them -- very seldom used to use the gun, going on this mission, not too often. Because most of the time you carried a -- you carried a bomb made up to, you know, to just lay it on the -- or dig it in under the railroad or whatever.

Q: Right.

A: It wasn't useful so much, that. And it -- you didn't have to carry that. So eventually I ask him, I says, I want to go on missions. I-I want to go on missions instead that, it's safer and it's better. Because on missions, when you go they send a small group. Five or seven with, you know, with -- with this dynamite, with a bomb, tell you what to do, either on the bridge or on the road. And that time you find a quiet time, you take off, it's qui -- then you go into the farmer's house, and you have -- you gonna have a picnic. You ca -- sometime you got a little booze. You know,

this is all the farmers which you know them. They have connection, you know what I -- we knew certain farmers worked with us. So we reached there, and we stayed a couple nights, and it was -- we spend a little time. So it was -- it was -- a more convenient. First of all, you get some time for a change, better food, because you get tired of that -- you know, if you get a little bread, even a little -- with a little garlic --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- you know, that's missing. You wa -- get a little bread or garlic. Or you get a little bread sometimes with a -- with a -- with a kielbasa, you heard what -- you know what kal -- a little kielbasa, som -- we didn't have that. All the time just meat and meat and -- and ca -- and slonina, you know what slonina is?

Q: No.

A: You know they used to eat, you know the pigs? The fat of the pigs.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, you trim it, sometime it's two inches thick. They send you f -- you know, many time with -- with bread and a slice of this --

Q: Oh.

A: -- yeah, well, see, that's what -- that's -- nowadays over here they say crazy, it's so fatty, right?

Q: Yeah.

A: What do you call that?

Q: Well, it's for -- it's -- it -- we would think of it as too fatty, but it would be rich in flavor.

A: Yeah, well --

Q: The bacon rasher, or the --

A: The ba -- yeah, the -- see the -- the Germans ate that.

Q: Yeah.

A: The German soldier ate that.

Q: Yes.

A: So after -- so -- so fa -- after that I have it, you know, the respect, I mean, I had it. That's why they sent me to Pruzana, otherwise I wind up on the -- otherwise I would wind up on the front.

Q: They respected you and sent you there to do that work.

A: Yeah.

Q: Checking out -- yeah. Well, I wonder if there's m-more you wanted to say about resistance on the part of Jews. You were fighting as part of the resistance, but there were many acts of resistance that went on in the ghettos.

A: They went on -- yeah, th-the -- well -- well, the resista -- in the ghetto -- the resistance in the ghettos is -- this is resistance. Because if you resist in the ghettos, like I mentioned you before, we could have killed those SS men coming in in the ghetto, they have a guts. And that -- you know, and the chutzpah, the guts to come in in two, three in the ghetto, where is going on turmo -- so much turmoil. And now

they're afraid they're going to get killed. But they c -- you couldn't get killed. They could have, but you couldn't do that. I couldn't do that because I didn't want to have the responsibility on my conscience that after that, on account me, all the ghetto is going to be going on fire, destroyed. No --

Q: That's right. There's wise resistance and there's --

A: Couldn't do that --

Q: -- unwise.

A: -- it's [indecipherable]. It's one the reason that it was impossible, but it was exceptions in some, you know, there was -- I read there was some uprising in -- in one of the concentration camps that blew up a -- a -- one of those ed -- there the -- what do you call it? Ovens, ovens [indecipherable]

Q: Oh yes. Yeah.

A: That was a big, big obstacle. But there was, you know, there was. That's why I want to bring out that.

Q: Yes.

A: That it was not easy, but it was -- it was done.

Q: Yeah. Now, there -- there would be some Jews who would believe that it was wrong to resist, is that right? Was there a tendency of Orthodox Jews --

A: Well --

Q: -- t-to feel this was God's will, and --

A: -- well, I don't know. I -- o -- you know, is -- I-I -- I don't know [indecipherable] the or -- the Orthodox Jews, we had some Orthodox too. I don't know why would sh -- well, first of all, the Orthodox Jews don't believe even now, they don't believe in defending. You know, Orthodox Jews, they don't believe in defending yourself. If you get killed, God wants that, okay. It's the same thing like you say the -- the terrorists, they say.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah. They -- God wants it, the Jihad, with the parents tell you, you get killed you go to heaven, and there you gonna have a party, you'll met your parents in paradise. All this, huh? But th-the leadership from the ghetto, the Judenrat wa-was against that. And they had a reason to be against it, they don't want to be responsible for the -- you know, for the -- all the community in the ghetto, and they don't want to be killed themself first. They didn't -- but later on, later on they ch -- they wanted to join, it was already too late.

Q: Yeah. Did you feel after the war that you -- that your -- that you needed to mend? Did you feel a trauma that your suffering was so great that you needed time to heal? Or did you feel that you were pretty well balanced to go on with life?

A: Well, I didn't -- I didn't feel really too much trauma because comparison what they went through, I remember, you hear what they went through, eventually we were liberated. So what, comparison, we didn't have it as bad as they, we had okay. I mean, it was rough in the beginning and -- but eventually, you know, we had

enough food and listen, you can't compare that. You can't compare that, you were fighting, you know what, you figured, you know, that -- but it's still, you know -- you know, it always comes to you, you know, that here you had parents, or it comes to you you have sisters, and you always wonder, I hope they'll forgive me that, you know, that I didn't went with them. I don't know [indecipherable]. This I cannot tell. Why I'm better than them, they can say, see? I went. They knew I escape, but I didn't know -- they didn't know if I'm alive or not, eventual was gonna be there. And maybe they thought -- maybe thank God, maybe the boys gonna survive and take advantage. I don't know what was their mind. They knew that we are away. They knew that.

Q: I th -- I would think your mind should be at ease on that, that you were --

A: Well --

Q: -- but -- but these are things you ponder over, I'm sure.

A: Well, it comes, you know, every once in awhile, if you dream, it comes. This you cannot help.

Q: Yeah.

A: I ra -- I don't want my wife to know about it.

Q: No. Did you ever get depressed in those -- in those -- either during the war, or -- or later on, or -- or were you spared any -- I ju -- I just wondered if you had any difficult periods when you --

A: The worst --

Q: -- when your spirits sagged and you couldn't keep going?

A: The worst period of my life, it was when we broke through and escaped in the woods. That time we were marching. We heard, you know, the reason, that's supposed to be some partisans there. And we marched. It was January 28th, you know, in Poland, cold. But way below zero. And we had, the first day, we took certain, you know, products, bread and certain stuff with us. But we have to, in the woods, wandering around for over a week, maybe 10 days, with our water and without, you know, without. And that time, this was, I remember, because I remember my brother was sitting by a tree. He was almost -- and I says -- I says, what are you doing here, come. He almost would -- froze to death. He says, oh, I'm s -- I want to go home. I want to go home, get warm. This was -- this was the worst we acce -- I mean actually -- actually this was, I can remember --

Q: Touch and go --

A: -- was tou -- no, we didn't know. We didn't know that we gonna make it, and we were -- it was just a matter of time, we figured, well -- but after th -- after s -- a week, we met a couple partisans. And they told us that if we have ammunition, guns, or money, then they would take us in. Otherwise -- and they helped us that time. They went with one of the group, and they helped us to get a little food. And they told us to build a home, a bunker. And they told us how to make a fire, and how to get water out of snow. Boil snow to make water. But this is -- this is as far as my -- was the worse than in the ghetto. This is worse than the ghetto.

Q: Well, what has been -- that was the worst of times, what do you think has been the best of times? You -- you mentioned feeling great satisfaction when you were successful in blowing up a train. But --

A: Well, that gives you --

Q: Yes.

A: -- that gave -- that li -- it gave you some satisfaction. As a matter of fact, I f -- I -- I-I don't know what to say. I [indecipherable] volunteered. Volunteered. I volunteered --

Q: Yes.

A: -- f -- to go and -- and for these missions. This was easy. This was easy. Many times I remember -- I remember we were assigned three brigades. Took part, I think maybe hundreds of people. And we had to destroy three garrisons. Three, in different kind of places. And they are entrenched there, you know what I mean? They are there entrenched with bunkers.

Q: In trenches?

A: In trenches.

Q: Yeah, literally.

A: And a rocket -- a rocket, blue racket was sho -- got shot out [indecipherable] in order to see when to attack, you know? And the same time, and we had to attack and we had to kill -- destroy the three garrisons. There was about f -- let's say this is maybe hundreds of us. There was 50 in this one, 80 in this one. This was Germans,

and the -- and the Russian, the [indecipherable]. They had garrisons, and they would watch all around and tray -- you know, to trace us and kill us. And it was at -- you know, the only th -- came to a point sometimes they speak Russians. But [indecipherable] distinguish. Every day we had -- we had code [speaks foreign language here] I'm going to shoot you. Tell me the code. If he doesn't have a code, boom, you get killed. It's not bec -- everyone before going on the mission had a code, and for all this -- you know, it was ce-centralized, organized, that anybody doesn't know the code is a spy, had to kill him. So a lot of missions like that, I mean it -- what I -- what I participated.

Q: Mr. Elman, we were talking about the -- why the allies didn't intervene, and was that a question that you would ask yourself when you would be with the partisans?

A: Well, when we were with the partisans, we didn't hear either you know, from the Russian side. They never mention anything, even if -- I don't even know if they knew -- if they knew they didn't say in the partisan, we didn't know. We mostly wa -- it was a radio in the central location, and whatever Moscow tells them, the -- you know, whatever each day what's going on with the war, it was repeated. We knew that before that the advance of the Russian army already reaching here gonna be near us pretty soon, then -- then -- so we know what was going on, but it was ne -- never mentioned during the war about the concentration camp. No, they never said. Yeah, I don't know if they knew, because the allies, this was later on, you know what I mean, when the Russian reached there, to the Auschwitz and before, you had

-- most of the camps were in the Polish -- in the pa -- in po -- in the Polish territory. So even if they, you know, reached before, it was the first camp al -- what is that belez -- belez -- belez --

Q: Bergen-Belsen?

A: No, no, no, this is -- this is -- no. Belzec. Bel -- it's a co -- a concentration camp in Poland.

Q: Ber --

A: Then it was Majdanek.

Q: Yes.

A: And then was Treblinka.

Q: Right.

A: And then was -- and then was Belzec, Majdanek, Sobibor --

Q: Oh right, yes.

A: -- Treblinka and Auschwitz were all in Polish territory. And -- and -- well, when I was liberated, there was -- the camps were on the west [indecipherable] you know? Those -- they didn't reach any camps there so I couldn't hear anything, maybe, if they knew or didn't know, you know what I mean?

Q: Yeah.

A: But I never heard -- I never heard aft -- if they never heard, but they saying we reach here, or we found something. We heard about Babiy Yar, which of course on Russian territory. This was in 19 -- when was ba -- Babiy Yar was 1941. Ni -- yeah,

I think it was 1941. We heard -- they were mentioned something later on when we were in 19 -- late ’42, ’43, ’44, mention Babiy Yar there. But what was going on, they killed so many, they took some from Kiev, or from other cities. But never -- never heard about the camps, you know, about Auschwitz, and -- and Treblinka and the other ones. So that’s why I was just wondering. But the Americans were bombarding, see? The Russian were not bombarding those places, they were -- they were tied up in the east there, you know, chasing the Germans. But Americans, when they started -- the second front started, they already bombarded the territory, Germany, right? They bombarded Germany. Berlin, there was so much Berlin, and -- and -- and -- and all the other places. But this is the only question of -- I was -- and even about the Jewish community, United States, the reaction. I never found out what was their reaction. Did they knew, what they did.

Q: We have two unanswered questions on our --

A: Oh this is --

Q: -- on our -- yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: We’ll find out more, if you do. W-When you were -- when -- when you were first here, did you feel different? Did you f -- I mean, as a -- as a new American? I mean, I know you -- you adjusted to life here very successfully.

A: [inaudible]

Q: But did you always feel that you we -- that you were different or -- or -- or not?

A: Over here? No. No, I didn't f -- since the minute I came in t -- to this country, I right away adjusted myself, because I right away became, you know, got a job and got paid. Became independent, which I never had it my coun -- you know what I mean? I was young yet. I never expected to have this opportunity in my country. And it was -- it was open for you, you know, all opportunities in the world. Because to me it was -- it was like a paradise. And it's like a paradise. First of all -- I mean, you can -- you can do what you want. You free to sp -- you know, you free -- you free to -- t -- you're a fr -- you're a free man. You can follow your religion. You can -- you can -- you can mingle. I mean, there's no discrimination like, you know, what I went through in Poland when I was a kid, you know, and I went to schools. So it was -- what a different. And I was fortunate enough besides that I have relatives here, so I was not completely cut off. And they recept -- they accepted me and my brother, you know, with all they could. And they were proud of us, and proud of me for going through that, all this. And I mean, it's -- is a fr-free country, opportunity for everybody, if you follow the rules. That's all i -- that's all. And I -- I took, you know, had the opportune -- opportunity, whatever I wanted to do --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I could never have done that in my old country.

Q: Mm-hm. You had to learn English. You knew Polish and Yiddish, or --

A: Well, I -- yeah. I s -- I went to the Polish school, in public -- public school, and I s --

End of Tape Three, Side B

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Joseph Elman, conducted by Margaret West, on October the 8th, 2004, in Washington, D.C.. This interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's post-Holocaust interview project, and is a follow up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Joseph Elman on May the 19th, 1998. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number four, side A. Now you're saying you spoke Yiddish?

A: Well, Yiddish, we spoke, you know, we spoke with my family Yiddish. And a pa -- and Polish, I went to the Polish school. Then I went to the Russian school from 1939 til 1941. This part of Poland was incorporated to the Russians. We expected the Germans and they came in in town and we didn't know what's going on. And two days later they disappeared and the Russians came in. This was the secret pact between Stalin and Hitler. So I was -- had opportunity at to go to the pole -- to the Russian school. I went to Russian school there two years, I learned Russian and -- and -- under the Germans, you know, I learned Germans a little. Germans a little, and Hebrew I learned from my father, he was a Hebrew teacher.

Q: So you've -- you have many languages, but w -- have you been able to use this knowledge at all in your work?

A: No. Not -- no -- not -- not really. Not really. I -- I did ha -- i-it's useful, very useful because I had -- I had customers, you know, Polish customers. I had customers, German customers. I had -- I had -- I had Lithuanian in this country, that's a mixture of [indecipherable] all nationalities. And eventually they found out, so they -- I spoke to him -- I spoke to him th-their language. It helped. It helped, using all the languages.

Q: When --

A: Of course there -- this is older generation, the younger generation, you know what I mean? When I came over was young, but the people already those -- dealt with the people that were ready, all the generation, middle class, all the generation. 50 - 60 years old, 40. I was 25.

Q: Yeah. When you retired, did you sell your business?

A: I just sold my business. I retired in 1996. And I was -- it's actually when my wife got sick, I tried to sell the business, because the ki -- all the kids are outside [indecipherable] no one in Syracuse with me. And it was hard, I decided that's enough. And I had to spend some time with my wife. As a matter of fact, I went with her -- stayed with her in reha -- rehab, almost for two years. Left the house and stayed with her in rehab and -- and different places and finally to the last place. We have, in a retirement place in the -- this is in-independent, they have those -- those help you -- those retirement arti -- but in a retirement place. I left the house and I was, you know, it was hard for me. But eventually I found a buyer in 1996, I found a

buyer and he was from German descent. A young, young boy. And they bought the business, and they very successful. They didn't bil -- they didn't buy the property, they bought the business, my recycling business, with equipment and all the customers, all the accounts. But he just lost his job, too, and eventually he outgrew me. He moved to a ex -- bigger -- bigger place. This was -- this was too small for him already, because he needed a warehouse. He knew I had a warehou -- I sold the warehouse f -- actually, and it was hard for him. But anyway, I sold the pr -- I sold the bi -- the property last year, too. So I sold everything.

Q: Oh so you -- now you've sold the buildings as well?

A: The building -- I sold the buildings as well.

Q: Yeah, mm-hm. And you are now spending a lot of time working on Holocaust memorial causes.

A: Yes, I spent -- after -- when -- after my wife passed away, so I started, they -- they knew about me in the community and since I wrote the articles, I think it's 1998 or so -- the articles, I -- in -- in the two papers, I got a lot of calls from personal and from organizations and from schools, so I -- I'm very active to -- in the schools, quite a fe -- all the schools, and -- and I was -- I -- in Syracuse University I spoke to them. And in -- I have now a summer home in Florida, so I spoke to the -- the Florida -- what they call it -- Florida University -- Florida University, Boca, yeah. Florida U. in Boca. And so every once in awhile -- I don't know how long I'll be able to, but I'm still active in tr -- and try to teach them the Holocaust.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So hopefully -- we hope it should neve -- never happen again, but it's obligation, I say, it's obligation to tell the story while you're alive, so the younger generation -- for the younger generation, so they should learn and know what happened. What -- it can happen again.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It shouldn't happen again. What happened to humanity, it shouldn't happen again.

Q: Well, there are l -- there are profound lessons, and -- and there -- there are many lessons, I think. Wa -- I -- I think of the m-much smaller part of it, which is the emigration. I mean, issues that tell me that it was very hard for you to --

A: Oh, oh, well --

Q: -- leave after the war --

A: -- it's --

Q: -- and remember the St. Louis? Wasn't that the vessel --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- of the coast of [indecipherable]

A: -- well, it's a -- it is comparison especially when you tell people now, it -- th -- the emigration during the war, it was -- it was strict and forbidden, very -- I mean, even -- can you imagine, even if you got out, you had a chance, it was tough to get out, even when you got out and reached certain destination, you weren't accepted.

The fact is Cuba and the United States, they shipped -- you know, they shi -- the sh-ship wa-was -- was turned back, you know, over 900 people. That's what I know, I don't know any other incidents where ship back. So we can see the different in immigration those -- even when I c -- my immigration -- my immigration, considering being the pe-person in Germany after going through all t -- all the hell, and having relatives trying to bring you over and they s -- to bring you over in this country and you couldn't get in. You had to wait for two years in order to get your permission visa. Compare nowadays, ca -- ca -- people are coming in from all over. I mean, legal, or not legal, or even you know, or -- or even for temporary visa. My relatives, they -- anyth -- they would do anything even to bring us over temporarily til the -- but the laws were -- the laws were so strict. So you t -- so what I'm saying, it's hard to -- people don't believe that, honestly.

Q: Yes --

A: When you tell them, really?

Q: It was difficult.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Now, I'm going to jump around with some questions that have -- that I feel we haven't mentioned. When you had your own children, you named them names that to me seem very American. The -- the old Polish tradition would have been to name them after their forbears, is that right?

A: Yeah be -- yeah -- well, my -- the first child, my daughter Cheryl was named after my mother.

Q: Caroline.

A: Cheryl, Cyril.

Q: Yes.

A: My second daughter --

Q: It's spelled differently, but the same name again.

A: Yeah, that's Cyril [indecipherable]

Q: Yeah.

A: And my son Barry is named after my father Benjamin [indecipherable]

Q: Oh.

A: Barry is Benja-Benja -- it's actually Benjamin Elman, in short it's Barry Elman.

Q: Okay.

A: And Marsha was named after my wife's parents. No, aft -- [indecipherable] they were -- let's see. No, more fr -- more -- my wife's family, yeah.

Q: So they were traditional, they seemed to me very American names. Barry Scott, and --

A: Oh, Barry Scott.

Q: -- or Marsha Kaye.

A: Well, they [indecipherable] well, Marsha Kaye --

Q: But -- but they really --

A: -- well, they -- I'll tell you, Marsha Kaye, Kaye is for -- this is a cousin of ours in Syracuse. She passed away, a close cousin, was Marsha Kaye. But Marsha was named -- this is -- this is -- I gave the same thing. This is from my wife's side. I got two from my side, and one from -- you know, she had lost a lot of -- my wife had relatives in Poland.

Q: Oh, so on both sides of your family you had --

A: She had -- father came to this country the same thing, before the war, but they had -- there's a lot of -- lot of brother, lot of from the -- from the father's side perished. And that's a old story about, you know, about -- but this is nothing to do with the Holocaust.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: This is nothing to do with the Holocaust.

Q: Yeah. Do you still play chess?

A: Well, I used to play. Not lately. I used to play chess when I was young, you know, before the war. We didn't -- we used to play soccer. My father was a [indecipherable] chess player, he learned how to play chess. I did play here with my son. This was, oh about 10 years, but otherwise I don't -- no, I don't play too much chess.

Q: Mm-hm. I know that the museum has a photo of your -- of your unit in the forest, and it -- someone has a guitar there.

A: Well --

Q: But I just wondered if you love music and enjoy singing?

A: No, this was -- it -- actually I didn't even know they took pictures there. But it's -- it -- this is exactly what used to happen there. We used to, sometimes, in the evening, on a holiday in the evening, certain group, this is, you know, each brigade had the [indecipherable] they c -- they call it rotas and -- and you know, [indecipherable] 250 and from 250 [indecipherable] on 25. This is [indecipherable] this is like a -- a group, it happened and in the evening there was, especially in, we use -- in the underground th-there was a lot of players. The Russian, they play the ham -- what is that? Harmonic --

Q: Harmonica?

A: Harmonica, the Russian and dancing. They used to -- we used to play that and they used to dance at night, he is -- you know, and she's [indecipherable] girl. Yeah, there were some musicians that -- so, used to play. Came a time already sometimes even -- that was -- that was so safe, even [indecipherable] the later, you know, later on. Because, see, the Germans, they getting bitten, they were -- they were -- they were knocking the hell out of them, the Russians where they marched. Terrible. And -- and s -- so -- see, I forgot already where I started. We talk about [indecipherable] play.

Q: Well, we're talking about playing music.

A: Y-Yeah. They -- they played. Even sometime -- some -- sometime during the day, a lot of music, a lot of music and sometime a lot of dancing, round, you know,

in the fe -- in the woods. S -- we had certain places was knocked out, they knocked out all the -- all the logs for -- for cooking and you know, for heating. And around there there was a space you know like a -- like a field, you know, used to have entertainment, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Even -- even -- even -- even during the day, even. It's -- it's amazing. Sometime it's unbelievable, where sh -- ek -- a -- a whole -- a whole unit, a whole army in -- in the back, in the -- you know, in the rear. But they didn't have enough, they -- they were bleeding. They didn -- they couldn't do anything because they had to had a million army to -- you know, in order to -- they never, never went through the woods, the main roads. They were afraid. You know, the -- many times there were so many roads, which, you know, trucks or tanks can penetrate through the woods. Once in awhile, since I been in the woods, I remember they decided to cl -- go, a clean up operation to get after the partisans. And they came in. They pulled out from the front -- this was in late 1943, three divisions with tanks, and they went through the woods. And what happened with the tanks, we -- we are -- we are -- you know, when you with -- got tipped off in advance, so we retreated. We didn't get involved, you know, with -- with the army, with an army di-division, 30th, you know, 90 or 50,000. So we retreated from -- they found -- they did found. This is the only time where they found on a -- a -- you know, the bunkers when we were -- where we were living. And this was all over t -- the territory. Even -- even the Bielskis, you

know, they pulled away, they went in the -- they went in the swamp sometime near -- near -- this is city near Pinsk, Pinsk [indecipherable]. They went there, retreated. So what they do? They -- they did found -- and that's -- we came next day when they retreated, next day, they -- they didn't have the time and they couldn't afford. This is the only time they tried to clean us out. But it was a job that were in that time, and we had to go in in -- in mud, in those swamps, up to here.

Q: Up to your waist.

A: Up to here. They could have -- you know, they never -- they knew where we are at the other side, but they were afr -- they didn't want to go in the swamps like that, you know, the -- the soldiers and all their tanks, how would they get in in there? So we bit them, we sh -- you know, it was -- it was predictable, they couldn't win the war with the partisans, actually.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Couldn't win the war with the partisans.

Q: Then I want to jump back to a -- an unrelated question. The -- the ghetto in Pruzana, would -- how is that protected or fenced in -- I mean --

A: I know what you mean. Yeah, when they established the ghetto, this is their system, you know, all over, because if they establish a ghetto, they figure it -- they gonna herded in th-the community from the -- and bring some out from different towns and [indecipherable] villages, if -- in the ghetto. Otherwise, the smaller

communities, they killed them right out, you know, with -- they had their system the beginning, with trucks and the mobile --

Q: Mobile kill units and so on.

A: Yeah, you know,

Q: Yeah.

A: They didn't have yet -- they didn't have yet the -- the -- the -- those camps, you know, the mass -- the mass -- mass killing. They didn't -- weren't ready yet for the mass killing. So when they tr -- they t -- they picked a section in a town. Of course the section is mostly the poor section, dilapidated section and all were mostly -- those Jews they were -- lived in the section, 10 blocks, whatever. And they surrounded the section with barbed wire, and they have one gate open from that ghetto section that -- to come in and to go out. Workers, every time. So the system with the ghetto, it was -- they established a Judenrat, because before they do the ghetto, establish a ghetto, when they needed work, a certain -- any kind of work, they used to grab -- oh, you had already wearing -- you were wearing it, that time, already, that yellow --

Q: Star.

A: -- oh, star, they knew you are Jewish while you still wasn't in the ghetto. So you mixed with the population. But when the ghetto established, that's it, you were [indecipherable] used for -- herded there. And they used to come in, the SS, and the -- the mayor, Burgermeister, and all the other re -- you know, German in the ghetto,

whatever they needed at, they asked for. Labor, money, gold. You know, you couldn't have anything. Cameras, we -- okay, well there is no televisions, telephones, that -- it's not allowed. And they as-assigned, when you were in the ghetto, they knew how many people are in the ghetto, because if sometimes -- the reason I know that, see, my father belonged to the Judenrat, he used to tell us what's going on. Somebody died, you have to report it, less your portion, then you get le -- and you were getting portions for so many -- so many humans, so much every day. Bread, then they give little sometime, not butter, margarine and sometimes little Jell-O. And little those -- make soup, for instance, I don't know, those are grain -- grain from the mill. And they supposed to supply this to the ghetto. Now, people were c-coming out and c -- okay, you coming out, it means it's always was a leader for the labor, or whatever, one man in charge, and you represented the group, whatever, a hundred, a thousand. And coming in in the ghetto, you wa -- have to go through the -- that gate, they call it in German, schlaband, the gate, and there was a sa -- you know, a soldier [indecipherable] SS, and they watch you and check you and search you every time you come in. Now, besides the barbed wire in the ghetto, they had patrols patrolling all the time. And they have posts -- post, let's see, every couple hundred to so -- or 300 feet, a post and there is look -- see in -- hi -- l -- can look, see what's going on in the ghetto. That was -- this was the system in the ghetto. So of course it was every time you ca -- you came in, you were searched. Impossible to smuggle in. You couldn't -- even they found a piece of bread -- sometimes you

know, in you worked for the German, there was some -- they f -- they felt sorry for you, they g -- they'll give you. You -- you know, they throw it out so much food for the dogs there, for the cat. So they'll see us, they'll give you a piece of bread, whatever. She'll cake -- take it home for your parents or for your sister. And -- but you're coming in sometimes they find you, they beat you up, they take it away. You know, that was strict in the ghetto, so you were -- so you were locked up, locked up. That's the ghetto. Now --

Q: But -- but for a long time, in Pruzana, you said it was the -- the ghetto was there, but you lived beyond it and w -- and were able to come and go. That would probably be at an early stage in the war. So f --

A: In the -- in the A list, well, our house -- our house was outside, you know, our house was outside of the ghetto.

Q: Yes.

A: It took a lit -- eventually you know, we had to -- we had to abandon the house --

Q: And move in.

A: -- and go in in the ghetto. But we had some -- there was a group before we left, this is a group, you know Betar? Belonged to organization Betar. I don't know if you heard Betar?

Q: Yes.

A: Yeah, Betar. And Beryl Segal was the leader of the pe -- of my -- I belonged to Betar, my brother -- Betar. He was the leader. Now, he was able to get out the ghetto

before the ghetto was liquidated. Months before, and he went with a group of nine people that's all belong to our group, and they went in the woods. And they got contact with some peop -- you know, partisans, Russians and Polish in the woods. But they were still working independently, you know, they were -- it's -- it's before we got incorporated there. Now, this group used, once in awhile, used to come in in the ghetto, and find out and told us what is going on. You stay or you had to get -- try and get some more ammunition, try and get some. And a way -- and they used to come in the -- later, before the liquidation, they used to come in in the Judenrat and they knew already when it was. We knew it's -- it's a matter of time, because the first -- the first c -- what they tr -- when they gave the order to assemble, and it wa -- and it was [indecipherable], I mentioned to my father this was in October, so this -- they [indecipherable] all of a sudden. I don't know, nobody knows the reason, it was just the same. And so they used to come in and tell us what was going on. But we never -- we had a problem when we came to the woods, remember I said, the worst time of all? We couldn't find them. We couldn't find them. And what happened, later on when we found a c-couple, you know, a few of those Russians, partisans, they helped us and they told us about them. Eventually, later on, we -- they steal -- they were already hooked up with a group Russians there, but we were still independent. That's when we had some contact. We -- we knew what's going -- what contact on the outside, and they were coming in and we were telling them, you know, what's going on, that you know, we c -- we -- we got some medication, cert --

you know, like pills, or -- or -- and --wh-which was needed, and bandages, and -- and all, you know, for first aid, certain for first aid, in case they needed. So we used to, you know we used to give it to them.

Q: Yeah.

A: It was little organized.

Q: Yeah. I just -- I just knew that the different -- different ghettos --

A: Well --

Q: -- had different f -- different barriers, fences, walls --

A: Yeah, yeah --

Q: -- what have you.

A: -- now -- now, the system, they built ghettos, but if it's smaller ghettos and a bigger ghettos. Ghettos like in --

Q: In Warsaw.

A: -- in Warsaw ghetto, 400, it's -- you cannot 400,000 Jews that herded in there. It's impossible to feed 400,000 people, you know what I mean? Even when you smuggle in sometime, maybe they barter, it was a way. We only had 12,000. It was, in many occasions, you know, I know because my father s -- they used to bribe the Burgermeister, you know, the mayor of the city.

Q: Yes.

A: What the hell does he care. Used to give him [indecipherable] gold. Used to bribe him he should give little more flour. We didn't get bread, we got flour, and the flour

mill, you know, and each one from the flour used to, sometime, bake your own bread. We got rationed flour, not bread. So once in awhile when it -- you could have bribed certain time, even the SS, what do they care? As long as they enrich themeself. You know, we give them diamonds, gold, money, whatever. You let -- you let in sometimes a cow, you'll smuggle in it -- in it. It's -- it wasn't so strict comparison Warsaw ghetto with so many people. And besides, Warsaw, we had surrounded with, you know, farmland, woods surrounding, you could smuggle in faster.

Q: Mm.

A: That's the different between small -- small ghetto --

End of Tape Four, Side A

Beginning Tape Four, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of an interview with Joseph Elman. This is tape number four, side B. Le-Let me go back to June 1947, and Ellis Island.

A: Well -- well, we were coming with that -- we arrived, I think it was the seventh, yeah, seventh of August, 1947 in Ellis Island. We went through there.

Q: Se -- it was seventh of June. We -- we --

A: Oh, wait, it wa -- that -- that's --

Q: -- yeah, we do -- we're just getting -- yeah.

A: -- no, June.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, seventh of June, and I know we went through there. And I came from there, I came to New York.

Q: Was it -- was it very exciting to you or did you pretty much take it in your stride?

A: Well, it was little -- it was little exciting there int -- in -- a-actually a-at -- we were told ye -- I think we are -- I don't know if we the leader there, going through there, and it takes a little time from there to reach, isn't it, from -- to reach New York, isn't it?

Q: It probably does take a while.

A: We had to register there, and then, like I told you --

Q: What time of day would your boat come in?

A: It was -- it was during the day. Otherwise, you know, at night -- it was during the day. Because I remember s -- having -- o-on the outside there was some stands with fruits and vegetables, oranges. So we are -- we were trading our dollars for the oranges. I don't even reme --

Q: And then you would travel to New York and get on a train --

A: I think from there -- from there we traveled to New York, I think by train, too?

Q: Could be, but --

A: Yeah, we had to go, either by -- I had to go by train, or I'm -- I'm sure we di -- I didn't -- we didn't fly, we went by train or by bus. This is something I don't remember.

Q: Yeah.

A: I remember -- I remember coming to New York and they brought us a certain spot there in New York and my cousin's supposed to -- my cousin's supposed to pick us up in New York. And somehow I missed him and I took a train to Syracuse and I came to Syracuse. Then he came over to Syracuse, he was laughing. How did you -- how did you -- how did you get to the train, I don't know, I just got to the train.

Q: And -- and right away they had fixed up accommodation for you in Syracuse.

A: Well, ye-yeah, well, we came -- I came first. My brother came, I think, three months later because the [indecipherable] child.

Q: And the wife.

A: And the wife. And yeah, I came, and it was arranged. I -- it was arranged. I think the first thing, I stayed with a -- a -- a old woman. This is my uncle. She c -- you know, she gave me a room, and -- and meals til -- for a little while. Then when my brother and my sister and the child arrived, then we got apartment near -- in the Jewish section there, apartment, and I stayed -- I -- I stayed with -- you know, with my brother or my sister-in-law til -- this was -- yeah, I -- I s -- I stayed with them all the time til I got married.

Q: That would seem --

A: Then -- yeah, I stayed with them. And then, when I got married already, then the first -- the first night we rented -- we rented. It was a furnished apartment. And we stayed there for a couple years, and then I remember we applied -- there was a ap-

apart this -- there was a apartment building, but it was hard to get into that bu -- you know, those years you had the big waiting list and I th -- I don't know, I think we had to pay a little money under to get in. And fi -- this was a nice -- this is already -- this is after you have to -- marriage, and we stayed there for -- in this -- in this place for quite a few year til the parents -- when her parents came to any -- from New York. Then we bought a two family house and we stayed that time together. It is -- probably it was in the f -- middle 50's. Got married 1950, five or six year later they came, they settled, sold the business in New York and they settled in Syracuse. So it was easy for the children, my mother-in-law, you know, helping u -- he-help -- helped to raise the children, it was easy for us.

Q: Yeah. Nice for both generations.

A: Yeah.

Q: Firs -- were there -- in your years in America, have there been foods that you've loved to have that reminded you of childhood? I mean, were -- were there -- were there sausages or sweets or something that you would have had a child that your wife would indulge you with?

A: Spec-Special food? Oh, s -- well, actu-actually, in the beginning, see, my sister-in-law, she used to cook, you know, like she used to cook the same thing, while being in the [indecipherable] in Feldafing and the other one, and steal all the old European type cooking, yeah. Oh, yeah. And I'm still -- took me a long, long time to get used to it, especially to the Italian -- you know, you go in Italian restaurant?

Meatballs and spaghetti, we didn't have that, or -- or your co -- what else, your [indecipherable] you got the -- from -- the chicken parmesan and the veal parmesan. That's good now, I like it. I like it, it's good. So I'm -- I'm learning. You know, when my wife was sick, I was learning a little cooking.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So, not fancy, but I know how to, you know, broil fish and --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- broil hamburgers, and chicken. You buy now a chicken, you don't have to cook. You buy all broiled, roasted chicken. Here it's easy. Here is very easy.

Q: Well, you make me think now about gender issues and ways in which -- you know when we were talking hours ago about your father and I was wondering if there was a -- a different burden on him because he was a man, and I w -- I was thinking of a gender difference, that as the head of the family, would he have felt even more devastated by the fact that he couldn't save his family. I mean, I just wonder if a male f --

A: Well, you see --

Q: -- felt worse about things.

A: -- it -- it's -- it's actually, it was a big shock to us. We never believed that, but you see, he made up his mind, he told us he made up his mind that he's not going to go and see, because we -- til the last, you know, even til the last minute, we weren't -- I -- I -- we weren't told, because the first night we tried to go through, and th -- I

remember the order it came, that you have to get ready in the morning, this and this date, and that's all that's allowed to take each one a backpack and be ready. In the center of the city was a farm -- farmer's -- farmer's market. You know, like over here you have those -- you got malls, there was a hundred stores in one building, big. The farmers used to come down, sell their products, and used to buy. Each store had, you know, pharmacies, you name it, and groceries and -- and all that. Tobacco products. And so everybody was, you know, everybody c -- but was a question, the -- you didn't really say what, where you gonna go, they say you're gonna be transported. Never forget. You'll be transported, and you're going to be working. But they didn't say where, what. What [indecipherable] they probably didn't know -- you know, those local police, whatever. They probably knew, or maybe didn't know, because -- you know what I mean. In -- I don't think all the Germans knew what was going on.

Q: Right.

A: I don't know if they told them from the top command. All they heard, you gotta, you know, get them ready, they're going to be shipped. But about all this -- you know, pregnant women, sick, elderly, children, and you would s -- they going to be placed? They won't be able to work, I mean, you got [indecipherable]. Oh, they gonna -- I mean, they used to tell this story, but people believed that. People believed that -- some, I don't know if all, because you could never believe, you

know, that human beings, to a -- you -- you [indecipherable] yeah, I mean planning and it's --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- it's -- it's planned, a planned destruction, an annihilation of people.

Q: It was too awful to be believed, yeah.

A: I mean -- I mean, those year, you heard, you know, certain things. At ch -- how can you, you know, there's so many, how can you kill so many people? It's impossible, we never in history heard s -- s -- you know --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- atrocities like that.

Q: Anyway, it may not have been -- I was just thinking of the roles of men and women and whether they --

A: Yeah, that's --

Q: -- felt things differently and --

A: So, that's th -- see, and he made up, you know, I tol -- I told you, he -- he -- he draw a map and he told us, he says [indecipherable] boys, even if you get out, you gotta go through such a, you know -- I mean --

Q: He couldn't see hope for you.

A: No hope. He says, you couldn't -- hostile territory. If you not gonna get caught, you gonna get caught here. And you know what he says? That's all they have to do, to pull down your pants.

Q: And they'll know who you are.

A: And they'll know who you are.

Q: Yeah.

A: A woman maybe could have gone, you know, if you speak Polish or something.

Q: Yes.

A: That's what he said.

Q: Yeah.

A: See?

Q: Yeah. A wo -- wo -- it was easier for a woman to hide or to --

A: Well, yeah, I mean yeah, I-I mean --

Q: -- pose as a Gentile

A: -- you'll say no, you can speak Polish all you want.

Q: Yeah.

A: Or something like that. No, there are -- I mean t -- this was -- that was -- he made up his mind. He never --

Q: Yeah. I'm sure that sort of thing happened i-i -- they were such terrible times that some people could keep going. Others, perhaps sometimes the most sensitive --

A: Well, listen, it sho --

Q: -- you know, everybody's different, and --

A: -- it sh -- no, it shows you after all, what I went through, could not comparison [indecipherable] thanks God I'm 82 years old.

Q: Yes.

A: Don't forget. So I don't know if affected of me -- affected me or not, but I -- I tr-tried, you know --

Q: Yes.

A: -- try as much. You know, I don't think so much about it too much.

Q: Yes.

A: No, I try -- I tried to avoid, not to -- to think so much this --

Q: You're a doer.

A: Huh?

Q: A -- a doer, a --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- man of action, more than -- yeah. Well --

A: They ask me now. I don't know, they figure I still -- what do you think is -- did you did the right thing or the wrong thing? I don't have an answer for that. Do you have an answer for that? Did I did the right thing? I don't know. It's not so easy. You leave your parents. Why I'm [indecipherable] I'm better? You figure sometimes, why do I deserve that and they not? I says, I don't know. Let history decided that, eventually, if I'm right or wrong. I never want to pr-present myself as, you know, a hero.

Q: Well --

A: I could have, if I wouldn't lose my parents, my -- my family. That stops me. And I want it -- don't want to be treated as an hero. I'm just a plain man.

Q: I think that's a good way to end our interview, Mr. Elman.

A: Yeah, okay. So how many hours we got?

Q: And I'd like to thank you.

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh behalf of the --

A: Four hours --

Q: -- on behalf of the museum.

A: -- did I get four hours?

Q: Yes.

A: Did? [tape break]

Q: Mr. Elman, do you have a final comment on your -- your experience and world affairs or national affairs now, and what -- what your experience teaches us?

A: Well, actu -- I would never believe in my lifetime that we have to go through the situation now. It's worldwide, not only here, about those terrorists. I mean -- I mean, this is something I -- we never heard of in the history. A-After that, they still -- shows you there is still lots of anger, and [indecipherable] anger -- bigotry, anger, anti-Semitism. And in this world, after the lessons, since we learned since the Holocaust. Look at what's going on even now in some countries, there is genocide going in in different countries in -- in Africa. They killing each other, for what? The

same thing -- see what's going on here in this with the -- with the terrorists attack in this country. Those are -- they are betraying, I don't know, those are worse -- the same thing as Nazis, worse maybe than Nazis, because even those people who commit those crime, they betraying their own religion. Their own religion, because I don't think -- I don't think there is a justification for all those killing and bombing in this world. I hope I live long enough and see this problem resolved. And hopefully we should live in peace all over the world.

Q: This concludes the USHMM interview with Mr. Joseph Elman. Thank you.

End of Tape Four, Side B

Conclusion of Interview