United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Isaac Nehama
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PREFACE

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ISAAC NEHAMA
October 22, 2004

Q: Good morning, Isaac.

A: Good morning, Joan.

Q: It's nice to see you.

A: Nice to see you, too.

Q: Isaac, what was your name when you were born?

A: Isaac David Nehama. In -- in Greece, or in Sephardic communities, the middle name is always the patronimic, the father's name.

Q: Which is different in the Ashkenazi tradition, which --

A: Sure.

Q: -- you, it's never that.

A: Right.

Q: Yes?

A: Yes.

Q: Now, you had a nickname, didn't you?

A: No, it wasn't a n-nickname, it was the diminutive, which is often done in -- in Greece, to take the ending of the name itself. So Isaac is Saaco, and it got shortened to Zako, and that's how I was known by my parents, my brothers, and friends.

Q: And this was when you were very -- as -- as a young kid, I gather, yes?

A: Yes, I -- that's right, but it remained like that, and today my wife addresses me as Zako.

Q: But no one else does?

A: I think one friend that I met in California. I told him about that, and he still calls me Zako.

Q: Now when were you born?

A: I was born in 1926, April 29.

Q: And you were born where?

A: I was born in Athens. My parents had migrated from the city where they were born, which was at that time, when they were born, called Monastir, part of the Ottoman Empire. And after the first World War, they left because the conditions there were terrible, and ended up in Athens, and that's where I was born.

Q: L-Let's -- let's talk a little bit about what it was like to grow up in Greece, and what it was like in particular in your family.

A: Sure.

Q: First let's talk about your parents, and then we'll go to your two siblings.

A: All right.

Q: T-Tell me about your father and your mother.

A: My father was -- when I began to understand the situation, my father was an accountant. He was th-the chief accountant of a very large company that dealt in -- in importing textiles, and selling wholesale. My father was lame because he had polio as a young child, and essentially almost a club foot, which had then to be corrected in an operation that took place in Paris, when he was a teenager. And he stayed on in Paris, and did -- studied accounting. My mother was a -- a teacher in a school in the town where she was born, in an Alliance Française school. So, because they both very proficient in French, then it was compulsory to speak French at home. Between themselves, my parents talked in Ladino, or Judeo-Espagnol, which I had to do also with my maternal grandmother, when she visited us, because that's the only language she knew.

Q: Now, did your parents come from a wealthy background, I mean, your father had been in Paris, and having medical care there, as well as studying, or -- or not?

A: Well, it's interesting that you ask that, because it's now that I'm finding out, through some of the work that I have done for the -- for the Holocaust Museum, about my parent's backgrounds, and very slowly I -- I have found out, that especially in my father's family, they were very prominent. Both, I think, in financially, but also as leaders of a community. My great-grandfather, Solomon, was one of the first 13 signatures in 1864 to open Alliance-Française schools in Monastir. My grandfather Isaac, whose name I bear, which was another tradition in Sephardic homes, was a president of the Jewish community of Monastir. And my Uncle Solomon, who was my father's eldest brother, was president of the Joint Distribution Committee. So, apparently they must have been a very prominent family. My grandfather -- and I still remember a letterhead, it was in several languages, but the one that I remember was in French, fournisseur de l'armée

turque. And we see he used to s -- to sell goods to the Turkish army. Grain, and other material, not -- not weapons, but -- so they had been in that business for a long time.

Q: So wha -- it's -- i -- why did it take you so long to find out, did your father not tell you about the history of the family, or --

A: He -- you see, you have to remember, I think in Europe generally, avi was something peculiar to my family, parents don't exchange a lot of confidences when you're young. Things immediately change, magically, when you reach manhood, or adulthood in -- in Europe. And then you become a friend, and things then open up. You see, I left Greece when I was 19, to come to study in United States, so I didn't have the opportunity to engage my father in reminiscences, so my brother -- younger brother, who stayed with my father until my father's death in Greece, he knows much more sometimes, about stories that my father told him, than I had an opportunity to do -- to do.

Q: So tell me what sort of a person your father was as a father to you. Wer -- were -- did you -- would you have considered yourself close, prior to the war?

A: Yes, well not really close, again, because of what I mentioned before. We were not distant, but my father was a -- a very even tempered individual. He encouraged me in my studies. He insisted to review my homework even, I think, when I first went to high school in the gimnasium. There were things that he had no notion at all, whether mathematics, or physics, and yet he insisted to review the homework. I -- by contrast, my mother was a -- a very demanding person. Having been a teacher, and also temperamentally, she asked of me to do things -- to excel, to study my f -- French lessons, to practice -- at one time I started learning the violin at the Athens Conservatory, but the war put an end to all of that, so I didn't pursue that instrument. So there was always a contrast. My -- my mother was much more demanding individual, my father a much more even tempered, but still expecting things.

Q: Mm-hm. And -- and would you say that as a child you felt close t -- though they weren't sharing information with you --

A: Right, yeah.

Q: -- were you able to come to them with difficulties, or -- or were -- would you talk to your friends about those kinds of things?

A: No, I would -- up to a certain point, then ev -- eventually I would have to learn to talk to my -- my parents, but I would talk to my mother, because I lived all day long with -- with her, and it was almost a natural thing for me, the first person to think of telling her about something.

Q: And it would be her.

A: It'd be her, yes.

Q: Did you go -- y -- s -- when we wer -- drove here in the car, you talked about taking your kids for a walk. Did your father and mother go for walks with you, and -- and do things with you?

A: My father did not, because -- as I mentioned before, because of his lameness. My mother took me about four or five blocks away from -- from the house where we -- I grew up. There was a little park, and then she would take us, I'm sure when I was very young. Later on, when I reached the age of 10, I then started taking my younger brother on walks. Another thing that I remember we did very frequently was -- as I said, my maternal grandmother visited us twice a week, she lived with a -- an aunt. And it was really for an able person, it was let's say, a 15 minute walk. But for my grandmother, it turn out to be maybe a half an hour, or a little bit more, because she was older, and she would have to rest from time to time. And the little park was on the way, so we're -- I would go to the keropper, and we would eventually reach the park, sit at the bench, let her rest. And my mother would come sometimes together.

Q: When di -- because I didn't know this, when -- when did you start violin lessons?

A: Oh, I started violin lessons when I was eight or nine years old, maybe 10. But I started school when I was four, the reason being that that was when my second brother was born, Samuel. And I don't know, perhaps I was too much, and my mother needed to have free time to care for my brother. She knew the teacher in the Jewish school, which was around the corner from my house. So she asked her if sh -- I could go there for a few hours, just sort of to be kept, and not to interfere with the house affairs. But apparently I must have picked up, because there from then on, I continued, and I went to -- to school. But I think usually at the end of a school year, then my actual age would be apparent to the teachers. So the first six years of primary school -- at the time I went to school it was six years primary, six years high school, or gimnasium. For the first seven years of sc -- of schooling, I changed school every year, because -- for the reason I mentioned before, they would find out from my behavior I was a lot younger than -- than my grade, and they would wo -- washme -- wanted me to -- to remain for another year in the same grade, but of course, my parents did not want to do that, and I continued.

Q: And your violin came in the midst of this?

A: The violin came -- yes, I started with a -- a private teacher, who lived a few blocks from my house, for about a year. And then my parents decided that I ought to go to the conservatory, and I had to give an audition, and I was then admitted, and I started studying. I have -- I have to change, because now I remember, I started in 1939, so I was about 13 then. The reason I'm saying that now, in recollection, was because I was at the conservatory for two years -- two and a half years, and then after the -- the occupation, after the war, it closed.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: It closed for a -- at least a year, year and a half, that's what interrupted the violin lessons.

Q: So you were very good to go to conservatory, no?

A: Well, but for only a year, year and a half, I didn't reach any exalted levels.

Q: Did you love it?

A: At that time I did. The violin is a very hard instrument, and to -- to -- to make it make a pleasant sound, it -- the technique in itself is very hard. I had a boyhood -- childhood friend, two years older than I, Saby Shabetai, he lived in the apartment above ours. And when I would eg -- do exercises, then the windows were open, and then from time to time he would shout and tell me to stop that horrible sound. But I -- I persevered, but the war put an end to that.

Q: Right, right. And you have two brothers, Samuel, who was born in 1930, I believe?

A: In 1930, yes.

Q: And --

A: And the youngest, he was named Nehama, he was born in 1934.

Q: Right. Tell me a little bit about Samuel. Was this hard for you, when the second brother -- you were four -- you were four years old when he --

A: It wasn't hard --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- but I think it's -- I can see it in my own children and grandchildren, that the four age difference, for the first 10 - 15 years, is almost an -- an unbridgeable gap. You have different friends. I -- I -- I didn't have, I ca -- as I recall, any problems with my younger brother, but I wasn't really that close to him.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But in contrast, with the youngest brother -- let me call him Meko, because that's how we -- we called him, from the diminutive Nehameko, I was much closer to him. I was sort of his protector. I would take him for walks to the park. I would sometimes supervise the first lessons that he had in going to school. And this is how we were growing up. I'm -- I'm sure that a little bit later on, if -- if things had not happened w-what actually happened, I would have been friendly with all of them.

Q: All of them. How do you account for being so close, or wanting to do things with the littlest one, and not with the one [indecipherable]

A: I think simply that -- that I thought it was a natural thing. I -- I don't think I was asked by my mother, but simply I -- I felt that it was a natural role to play, because I was now big enough to protect him if he would go out and play, if another kid would attempt to beat him up, I would be around to --

Q: Right.

A: -- to protect him.

Q: Yes.

A: It was just a -- a role I -- I -- I fell into naturally. I don't think I was asked to do it.

Q: Was yours a religious household?

A: We were observant in all the Jewish traditions, I'm talking the Sabbath, and of course, all the holidays.

Q: So you observed the Sabbath?

A: Yes, I think at the age of five and on, my Friday chore, before the actual Sabbath started, was to deliver a bottle of olive oil to the synagogue, because in Sephardic synagogues, there are no candles. Everything is in glass containers with olive oil and wicks that burn. And the thing that you do is to keep the synagogue supplied with oil. And since it was so near my house, then I would be asked to deliver a -- a bottle of oil. Also, my memories, both of the Sabbath, and -- and -- and the major holidays, they are visual, oral, and olfactory, because Friday afternoon, before the onset of Sabbath, when the dining room and the living room were closed, the floors were waxed, and I still remember the -- the wax smell, which wa-was indicative of the preparations for the Sabbath.

Q: And do you remember the smell of food, specific food?

A: A little bit at times. I have more visual memory of the dishes that my mother cooked. Some of them were, at least visually, very attractive. And I also le -- remember at times when she would do a number of desserts that required the rolling of dough to a very thin layer, which today you can buy at the store, it's called phylo -- phylo, which is a Greek word. But in those days, she did it, and if you don't -- you cannot roll it, you roll it up to a certain point, and then I remember she wore a sleeveless dress, and would powder her arms with flour, and then get under the dough and begin to pull it from every corner. And you have to be very careful. Very often it would break, and there's nothing you can do. You would have to start all over again. So I remember these things.

Q: Now, in the Sephardic tradition, are there particular kinds of Jewish dishes within that tradition?

A: No, I don't think it's a Sephardic tradition so much, as it is the tradition of the territories. I think that if you take the cuisine that I think my mother -- first of all, I think because of the way she was taught, butter was never used. I don't remember seeing butter in my home.

Q: Oh.

A: Yes, it was -- first of all, you wanted to avoid having butter, in case inadvertently you used it with a -- a meat dish. But it was partly that, partly that both in Greece, and in where she was born, there is not much dairy. At least -- Greece is not a country with lots of dairy land to grow cattle to produce dairy products. Ev-Everybody cooks with olive oil. So there's a tremendous similarity. So, the -- the infusion is p-partly Mediterranean, partly Turkish, partly Greek cuisine, but I think in -- in my mother's case, there are some remnants of dishes that hark back, I think, from the 14th or 15th century in Spain, because they were descendants of the Sephardic Jews who were expelled from Spain.

Q: You were -- were you going to synagogue on a regular basis, or more --

A: Every Saturday.

Q: Every Saturday you went?

A: Every Saturday.

Q: And did your mother also go?

A: Yes. Now, I don't know if she went every Saturday, but a -- frequently -- certainly the holidays she went. And perhaps you know that in Sephardic synagogues, the women's section is usually a balcony that's above it.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Right.

Q: Did you ever question that when you were a kid?

A: No, you sort of accepted, as being either tradition, historically, until the new -- you find out that there's also some religious grounds.

Q: And were your parents active in Jewish community affairs that you knew of?

A: My father was in the B'nai Brith. And again, because of his lameness, I remember a first cousin of his, a m -- I don't know [inaudible] was very active in Greece, especially in the late 30's when refugees that would appear at the Port of Pireas were not al -- were allowed to disembark. Perhaps some of them ended up in Palestine. Others, I think -- it's

not like that famous ship that roamed the -- the oceans, and eventually had to return. I forget it's -- the name of that ship, but the Holocaust Museum ha -- is --

Q: The Saint Louis.

A: The Saint Louis, yes.

Q: That had to go back to Europe, right.

A: Yes, yes, right, to Europe. So he couldn't do -- be as active as my -- my -- his cousin was in going and delivering goods, and food, and money, so he -- he did it through whatever -- his -- his appearances in B'nai Brith, and my mother was a member of WIZO. So she would frequently ha -- go to meetings, and whatever as they -- they --

Q: Right.

A: -- they were doing.

Q: Now were you involved -- were there Jewish youth groups in -- in Athens?

A: Not really. Athens before the war had a population -- a Jewish population of approximately 2500 persons. In a city of 800,000, or close to a million if you add the suburbs and the Port of Pireas, and they were dispersed. This is in contrast to Salonika, which had a -- a pre-war po -- total population of about 125,000, of which half went -- slightly over half was Jewish, and who lived also, traditionally, in sec -- sec -- sectors of the city. They were not ghettos, but they were distinctly Jewish neighborhoods. There were no such thing in Athens.

Q: So how -- how are you feeling as a Greek boy, who is also Jewish in this -- in this context? Did you feel Greek, were you feeling separate as a Jewish person, or was there a good deal of integration?

A: Oh, there was a lot of integration, there was no overt anti-Semitism, other than these mindless thing that boys sometimes cruelly would say. For example, sometimes I would be called a Jew by little, younger boys in -- in the same class. Or at times they would fling this silly thing that Jews grab Christian children and put them in a barrel that has nails inside, so they roll the barrel to extract the blood, so that they can drink it. You know, the -- those famous blood libel. But this was only for children. You asked af -- before, about Jewish groups. There was really not a -- not Jewish groups as such before the war. There may have been a -- a small group of [indecipherable] call themselves Maccabis. But I was too young to -- to join. I think around the age of 10, perhaps -- yes, 10 or 11, I joined the Boy Scouts. And it turned out that there was a group of about perhaps 18 or 20, and we belong to that same group, and all of them were Jews. The leader was a prominent young man at that time, 20 or 22, of a very prominent family. And so we called ourselves Maccabis, but it was primarily as Boy Scouts. But that ended in 1939 because the then Fascist regime of Metaxas abolished all Boy Scouts, not the

Jewish, every Boy Scout, or any other organization, because they wanted to promote the then nascent Fascist organization.

Q: And when did they take over, when did the Fascists take over in Greece, what's the [indecipherable]

A: 1936.

Q: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. So did your life change at that moment very much, or not so much?

A: No, no, no.

Q: No.

A: I -- I -- this -- this was -- had only a -- a visible effect, I think, to those who were politically involved. And I don't mean only all the left, or even the far left, but generally in Balkan politics, the [indecipherable] opponents get not to be treated very well. But in the Fascist organizati -- regime, it was merely ignorance, or shoving them to the side. They were sent to prison, they were sent to islands in exile. But I didn't know that then, and this did not affect us in -- in a daily, visible way. You could see that principally in that -- with the formation of this youth group, then very often y -- friends would appear in school already dressed in that uniform, not only -- not because they really wanted it so much, because they were ready to go to a meeting afterwards, and they didn't want to go back home and change. But this didn't last very long, because this thing didn't take hold until '39 - '40, the establishment of this youth movement. By '41, Metaxas was dead, and -- and the country was occupied.

Q: Right, right. In addition to the conservatory, you were going to school in addition to the conservatory, right? The conservatory was only part of what you were doing, right?

A: Oh yes, oh conservatory was only two or three times a week.

Q: Right.

A: No, the schooling was -- and I went to a special high school that was of a kind -- because from early age my father determined that I should be an engineer. So I went to a -- to one of two special high schools in Athens, where the emphasis was in mathematics, or mathematics and science, therefore aiming to eventually go to the Polytechnic Institute for engineering.

Q: Mm-hm. I'm going to have to change the tape, so we'll stop for a second.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: Isaac, when you went to this special gimnasium, or high school, were you as happy to be going there as your father was to send you? Was -- were these the subjects that you liked the most?

A: I think yes. I think after perhaps the age of six or seven, either by dint of repetition from my father, and also because I perhaps began to -- to like, or had no difficulty with mathematics, then I didn't question it. I was going to private schools, although I -- I mentioned to you earlier, I was changing because of this age phenomenon. And in order to transfer from a private school, to a public school in Greece, at least at that time, I had to take a special exam, that I could make a grade. My last year in private school was in a Catholic school. That's a different story, because my father had gone to that school in Monastir when he was young, because it was the only school where you could learn foreign languages. So there was an equivalent school in Athens, so I went to that. Then I had to take a special exam. I did not -- luckily I didn't question it, it was almost a natural thing to me, it was an -- an expected thing, and I think that I -- I -- there was no reason to even think about it, I thought it was just a natural progression.

Q: Did you have hobbies when you were growing up?

A: Oh yes.

Q: What?

A: I think, in retrospect, I -- and I say that now because now I can see how this thing is traced, I liked to build things. For a -- I build all kinds of kites. You have to remember that you couldn't go in those days to a store and buy a kite. We only buy materials, from the skeleton, of course were pieces of wood, to paper, and then you had to construct it, then assemble it, and eventually fly it. Then, I would build lots of shadow puppets. Do you know what shadow puppets are? These are f-flat -- if you take a -- a -- a figure of an -- of an individual, and say articulate it at the legs and at the arms, and if you hold this cardboard piece behind a screen that is backlit, you hold it against the screen, then the audience on the other side see the -- the puppet, which is essentially it's outline, and it's -- although it can be colorful, because the colors go -- come through the -- for screening we used to use a sheet, a white thing. So, I used to make that. Now, it progressed. In the beginning, of course, you go to the store and buy the -- a -- a book of the outlines of the figures, which you had to cut very, very carefully. And in the beginning, as a child, I would do them out of cardboard, but to -- to do it with cardboard, which was [indecipherable] you had to have a chisel. Well, chisels were not that readily available, so what we would do is to eventually get a very large nail, and take it and put it on the track of the streetcar. And when the streetcar went over the nail, it would flatten the edge, and make it a chisel. So we would use that to cut the -- but after, if you become very proficient, and you continue, then you begin to make them out of thin plywood, which of course required different tools, you had a drill, and of course a coping saw with a very thin blade, that you have to be very careful because they break very, very frequently, and

it's a very elaborate thing because it's a full -- a [indecipherable] you know, the -- especially around the hair. These are the kinds of things I would do. Then, I built a -- a radio, you know, out of crystal. I had to go and find appropriate crystal, and get the -- the things, wind the coil. Then we used to try to build telephones. We begin with the usual telephone of two cans with a string, but then we got a little bit more elaborate, and started building things that will go a longer distance, with actual wires. So that's -- I think I trace my interest in -- in building things.

Q: When you were doing these puppets, did you actually do little shows for [indecipherable]

A: Oh yes, of course, af -- after all this -- there were also books, because first of all, th-the main character is called Karagioz, and it's a remnant from the 400 years of Turkish occupation of Greece, because literally Karagioz means black eyes. He was, I don't know, perhaps Pucinello in Italian Renaissance plays, or Tilolenspiegel. It's a combination of a character who was perhaps completely illiterate, but street smart, and who would always outwit more serious and officious, in particular, because the -- the -- the opponents were always Turks, you see, and -- and -- and al -- all --all the police, or some -- a clerk, so always the street mart boy -- actually man later on, because he had children himself, would outwit them all. Of course we would learn the parts, and then at that time we would try to invite[indecipherable], and we sometimes ask for a fee, you know, for those who would come, and we would put on a show.

Q: That must have been great fun.

A: Yes.

Q: And I gather, because you were doing this with other people, that these were friends of yours, of like interests.

A: Right, they were either people in the immediate neighborhood, or later on, for more serious things, that they were much more complex, there were, I'm sure, school friends, school mates.

Q: So your memories of your childhood are very pleasant?

A: Yes, why, because family life was good, pleasant. School was pleasant too, at times difficult, which is something that -- that every child meets. But nothing dark until '40 -- late '40 or '41.

Q: Are you hearing things about -- I mean, I know in 1933 you're a little bit too young to have begun to hear things about what's happening in Germany, although I don't know, I mean, did you have some sense, as you began to be six, seven, eight years old, that something was going on in Europe that was no so good?

A: Yes. I have to speak for myself.

Q: Yes.

A: I think my earliest recollection, which I date my becoming politically aware, is 1936, with the onset of this Spanish Civil War. I think the reason being primarily that it was written up in the newspapers. My mother and father, in particular my mother -- and I really do not know why. I try sometimes to understand why, because obviously I didn't have conversations with her about things like that. But she was very interested in politics, and I know she read, and she discussed things with my father. So I would then read the articles also. So I began to become very sensitive about the situation in Europe. Then, in '37 or '38, the interest broadened primarily because in -- in the synagogue, during for instance the break in the entire day of Yom Kippur, after the morning prayers, we wouldn't even go home, although it was around the corner, we would stay in the yard. And we began to see for the first time, people who -- who had never seen before. And these were Ashkenazi -- Jewish people from Czechoslovakia, or Germany, who had found refuge in -- in Greece, in escaping the na -- so one couldn't help being sensitive to this, primarily because my parents talk about it, even when na -- friends came to visit, and we could overhear their conversation. It -- it's went around, things like this. So I -- I -- I can -- I can date my awareness. I don't -- and also I had begun to be very interested in -- in history. I always loved history, I -- I read history books for children from an early age, including myths, and mythology. Excuse me. So I was aw-aware from the middle 30's.

Q: Did you talk about this with your friends, or did you just mainly keep it to yourself?

A: I think we would talk a little bit primarily about following the headlines. Re-Remember there were stories which went in is -- Spanish Civil War, then I remember stories of bombardments by German planes, and we would ask, what -- what -- what are Germans doing in -- in Spain? But of course, now one knows that there was a contingent of a -- a -- it became almost a proving ground for many of their -- their -- their weapons. Or the Italians, you know, also the same thing. By contrast, although the French and the British were neutral, and in fact at times m-made terrible obstacles to try to help the -- the loyalists, you have to remember that because of -- of speaking French, I have to say that we were a very Francophile family, so I -- I had read French history. My father, after the war, had bought a book about the second World War that was illustrated with photographs, and I remember spending endless hours leafing through the book, looking at photographs of the French generals, French soldiers, battle scenes, plus also the text.

Q: So you -- bef -- before 1939 - 1940, were you worried about what might happen to Greece? Do you remember as a child worrying?

A: No, no.

Q: No, you weren't.

A: No. And that's why, in 1940, when Italy declared war, when we -- Greece went to war with Italy, I think it's fair to say that it was a surprise to everyone. I -- there may have

been understanding by much more politically savvy individuals than a 13 year old, that perhaps Greece inevitably, or no part was going to be spared, and we always get to be involved. But I don't think anyone expected the sort of -- of overt th -- move on the part of Mussolini to -- to demand access to Salonika, which of course has to be refused, and the rest, as we say, is history, right?

Q: Did -- were you forced to join a Fascist group? Because I know that Samuel was in one.

A: Yes, yes, not I, because what happened was the dissolution of the Boy Scouts -- and I still remember, you see 25 March is the national holiday in Greece, because it's when the war of independence in 1821 started against the Turks. So, usually were parades, and we as Boy Scouts participated in the parades. But in that year, in 1940, which was the order to dissolve the Boy Scouts, it was our last day, we were all dressed in our uniforms and so forth. But the Fascist youth begun, I think first year of high school, and they would gradually proceed to the later grades. But by 1940 or '41, I was in now the fifth grade, which was the next to last grade, so I didn't have to. That was one reason. The other reason is that if we insisted, as aliens, not being Greek citizens, we didn't have to be part of it. But I think in Sam's case, instead of making a fuss, he put this blue thing.

Q: So you were not citizens?

A: No, we were not Greek citi -- I came to the United States, as I mentioned to you earlier in private, on a Yugoslav ci -- passport.

Q: Right, right. Hm. So when the occupation happens, the invasion is 1940, and then the Italian --

A: No. Excuse me. In -- in O-October of 1940, Italy essentially gave an -- send an ultimatum to Greece, to essentially let it come through. Which was effectively like saying we want to occupy you [indecipherable]. You Metaxas even said no, and the war started between Greece and Italy, primarily taking place in Albania, because the Italians had already occupied Albania, so they tried to invade that northwestern part of Greece known as Epirus, from the Albanian border. Well, they were not only repulsed, but also the Greeks began to advance. So for the full of -- of '40, and the spring of '41, the -- the -- the war in Greece was only between the Italians and the Greeks. It was not until April of '41 that Germany declare war, and -- an-and -- and invaded, and the reason principally is that in Yugoslavia, the then regent had, not necessarily allied himself with Germany, but had signed a non-aggression pact with Germany, but then there was a revolution, or a coup by young officers in the Yugoslavian army, and they expelled the regent, and elevated the young then King Peter, who was a minor, to become king, and overturned the arrangement with Germany, which infuriated Hitler, and in -- in a lightning campaign that lasted, I think, about three and a half to four weeks, all of Yugoslavia and Greece were overrun.

Q: Mm. And that was in April of '41?

A: Yes. The Germans entered Athens April 30th of ’41, the day after my birthday.

Q: And -- and how was that in relationship to your Bar Mitzvah, that -- was your Bar Mitzvah later?

A: No, but -- no, Bar Mitzvah was earlier because I had my Bar Mitzvah when I -- in 1939, and it was a very elaborate affair, at least as I --

Q: Yes? As you remember?

A: As I remember, we were, you know -- first of all, the preparation itself. Actually, when I we -- first went to school, first grade of primary school, I went to a Jewish school. I would have continued, but the school was bursting, they didn’t have enough facilities, so they had to close it, because they were going to build a different -- a -- a much larger facility. So I began to go to -- to Greek schools. So I had begun to -- to read Hebrew, and understand at least a little bit of -- of Hebrew. But that, essentially did not continue, because then I started going to Greek schools. But I think about six to seven months before my -- my Bar Mitzvah, I began to take then lessons, with the then rabbi of Athens. So I got well prepared, and so I --

Q: Was it a big party?

A: Yes, I remember it lasted almost all day long --

Q: Really?

A: -- because the -- the people came sort of in waves. I-It was -- we received in our apartment. In those days I think nobody would go and -- and -- and engage a hall someplace, and -- and -- for guests. So I think people know that they had to stagger, so they came after the -- the ceremony in the synagogue, they came in continuous waves, that lasted practically all day long.

Q: And these were children and adults, or only adults?

A: Both.

Q: Both.

A: Both. [indecipherable] were children of comparable age.

Q: Right, not little.

A: Right.

Q: So when the occupation hap -- do you remember seeing German troops?

A: Absolutely.

Q: Yes.

A: Yes.

Q: [indecipherable]. So that must have been really frightening.

A: Well, it was frightening because for one thing, by -- by that time, we knew what had happened to Europe, what -- what ha -- what happened to Jews in particular, so we -- we knew it was not a good thing for us, all right? But again, th-there's another th -- aspect which becomes important for our story, that Athens was occupied by Italians. I think Hitler, as a sop to Mussolini, gave him Athens, and a few other larger ci-cities, and regions of Greece to occupy. Unfortunately, well -- I don't know if that would have made it -- it may -- it might have made a difference. Salonika was under total German occupation.

Q: Right, right, and that means that the greatest number --

A: Right.

Q: -- of Jews living in Greece were under German occupation.

A: Right. So, vi-visibly, of course we could see Germans, ma -- German soldiers, but Italians were a lot more visible. And all this would cha -- were issued, as any occupying authority does, promulgating laws, and things like this, always, although there was -- they were coming from the quisling government, the collaborating government, but generally it was according to the orders of -- and they would cite, in particular, Italian thing.

Q: So in '41 and '42, does your life change very much, or is there a kind of -- once the occupation starts, does it settle down?

A: Well, it changed in many respects, but I -- I continue with school, I f -- I finish high school in -- in '42. The winter of '41 to '42, which was the first winter under occupation, turn out to be the most terrible winter of the occupation from the standpoint of famine. For the first time, you know, we had begun to see weak people who had fallen in the middle of the street, and gradually even some of them who were left there, and some of them dead. So it was a very, very -- and it -- it -- be -- coincidentally also, Athens, generally, had mild winters. I remember only once in my entire childhood remembering snow. Snow, it was only something that you read in books. And we woke up one day and the roofs were a little white. And some of us went immediately to try to make a snowman, but the moment we reached the street, the snow had melted. There wasn't very much left. But that was a very rough winter, it was very, very cold. There was no heating, lack of food. I think that probably what happened is that the black market and other clandestine ways of getting food -- also, people didn't know what the occupying powers were going to do in grabbing hold of the agricultural produce that naturally came out of --

out of Greece. But in -- in -- in short, it was a terrible winter, but then things begun to be better. We did not suffer very much in our family, because -- although we didn't get the kinds of foods that we were used to. Then I remember being sent by my mother to stand in -- on queues, in lines, to buy a piece of feta, a piece of cheese. And sometimes we would stand on line for hours only to -- to reach the door practically, and then be told that there's no more l-left. So we spent a great deal of time like that. But I was not directly affected with it in school. We had to be very careful, I -- we were advised and admonished by our teachers not to make any politically overt statements in class, for obvious reasons. But ho -- yor -- y-you knew that you were not entirely free to say what you wanted to, and you had to be very, very careful. There was no curfew in Athens because at least at that time it would have been almost impossible to enforce. A -- as soon as I finish hi -- high school in '42, normally I would have then taken the exams to get into the Polytechnic Institute, but it was closed. The university was closed. So I then, until the beginning of the Jewish persecution in Athens, I worked for slightly over a year for a man who was in -- during the occupation there was a clan-clan-clandestine stock exchange. We're not talking about stocks, or bonds, or -- the only means of transaction, the only thing that was transacted was gold. Gold coins, English sovereigns, French gold francs, Swedish francs, and occasionally bars, small bars of gold. And this market was obviously entirely underground, because it was under penalty of death if you were caught with gold. The way the market was done, it was strictly over the telephone. Somebody would call and -- in the morning and say, "I have 10 -- 10 liras," they used to be called collectively, "to sell, what is the asking price?" And this market would fluctuate entirely on what would happen in the international news. If the Germans were winning, then the Greek drachma would lose even more of it's value. We talk about, by that time, a million drachmas, you know, it was -- millions was just like to buy some candy. If the allies were winning, on the contrary, then the drachma would rise, because you know, naturally people thought that with the allied side winning, then the days of liberation for Greece would come, and therefore the drachma would gain, you know, gain value. So that's what I did. I mean, I would then -- my -- my -- my -- the -- the man I worked for would be the middle man. He would then sell -- get a buyer, get a seller. And then I would then have to from time to time, deliver the goods, which were rolls, maybe of 10 silver coins, and I would deliver them to the -- go pick them up, and -- and deliver them. And it was, you know, it was a dangerous thing, because if I was fa -- fa -- if I were found out, then it would have been terrible. But I was not found out.

Q: Let me go back to the school for a moment.

A: Sure.

Q: Was there propaganda in the school, or were there -- were the classes really pretty straightforward?

A: There was no propaganda. There were -- especially in that high school. I -- I -- I think it was too early. There was not enough time for the occupying forces to begin something overt that would trickle down into the lessons themselves. I mean, what we were -- as I said, admonished by our teachers not to do, is not to make overt statements against the

occupying powers. Even in -- in jest, you know, for obvious reasons. But there was no -- no effect -- no visible effect.

Q: So there were y -- there was no -- you -- you didn't have to do a --a -- a heil to anybody?

A: Oh no, no, none of that.

Q: Nothing?

A: No, no, no.

Q: So it was very straightforward?

A: Right.

Q: Okay, we're going to change the tape.

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

Q: -- his job is the accountant with the textile firm in ’41 and ’42?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Yes.

A: Because the firm continued, and then there was no -- they didn’t shut down any businesses. Again, I -- it -- it requires emphasis to contrast it with not only what happened afterwards, but also with the situation in Salonika, in that there were no effect on Jewish businesses. The Italians didn’t shut any -- anything down. So there -- the textile firm continued, and my father continued.

Q: Was this surprising to you, given that the Italians were allies of the German?

A: Well, it were not surprising -- I mean, I di -- I -- I don’t --

Q: You didn’t know what to expect?

A: Right. And -- and you see, I’m -- I’m -- I’m -- we begun to hear not only stories, but things which I remember y -- I knew my parents were discussing. Very early after the occupation, in the fall of ’41, the Germans in Salonika conscripted all males, I think between the age of 18 to 45 or 50, and they were taken into forced labor along the Greek Bulgarian border to do road work. I think it was primarily harassment. And I remember wer -- of course lots of conversations that my parents and their friends are discussing a delegation from a number of prominent Jews of Athens and Salonika, including I think the rabbi in Corats in Salonika, went to Vienna. And after a few weeks they came back, and there was a deal struck, apparently, where a head toll had to be paid to sort of get th- those Jews -- Salonika Jews, released from the forced labor. But you see, the -- again, these things are happening in Salonika. The things trickle down, or come down relatively quickly, but the Italians refused to do -- to take any anti-Jewish me -- measures. If I -- I have looked into that. I -- very often, I -- I t -- I say to my children, other people that I think I survived because the Italians did not enforce. I have spoken to a number of people, some of them even s -- students of that period, and no -- knowledgeable. They ascribe to the f -- these thing to the fact that the Italian army refused to take any political measures. So they say it was not an attempt to save Jews, but because simply they refused to get involved politically. However, now I have read, and I have seen tremendous instances where Italians, and the only ones were army contingents, really did go out of the way to save Jews. So Athens was fortunate in that regard.

Q: Now, you said when the Germans came in, when the occupation happened, when the Germans and the Italians came in, that you and your family knew something of what had been going on in Germany, and Czechoslovakia --

A: Sure.

Q: -- and in Austria.

A: Right.

Q: What was it that you knew at that point about what the Germans were doing?

A: We knew that -- th-that they had lost livelihoods --

Q: Right.

A: -- they were not allowed to be in many professions, many of them had to leave. We saw visibly, with our own eyes, refugees. I, in the winter of ’40 - ’41, I would send my -- my father to take classes -- not classes, to be taught by a private tutor, who was a Jewish top engineer in the scuda works in Czechoslovakia. I was sent there not because I needed any tutoring, but because it was an indirect way to really contribute something for this individual and his wife. And I still remember this man, relatively young, you know, extremely bright, and so we -- all of those things were known. The Kristallnacht --

Q: You knew about that?

A: Of course.

Q: And this is from the newspaper as well as from stories people are --

A: Right.

Q: And the radio, perhaps?

A: I don’t know if -- there may have been ra -- we were not avid listeners of -- of the radio news a-at that time. This became the case after the occupation, in listening, in cl -- cl -- clandestinely --

Q: Clandestinely.

A: -- to BBC and other broadcasts.

Q: There is a difference once Germany attacks the Soviet Union, because now it isn’t simply oppression and people losing citizenship, and -- not that that’s simple, but it becomes much worse, because murder starts happening. Now, did you hear about the murder of Jews after the attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, in June of 1941?

A: Yo-You say murders of Jews in Greece?

Q: No.

A: Oh.

Q: No, no, no.

A: Oh.

Q: I'm wondering what you're hearing about --

A: Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, in occupied --

Q: -- what the [indecipherable] are doing --

A: -- in occupied --

Q: -- yes, in occ -- in occupied Europe, and whether you -- eventually you begin to hear that the Salonikan Jews have been deported, or --

A: We'll come to that, but --

Q: Okay, all right, then let's press on.

A: -- i-it would take f --

Q: Awhile, yes.

A: Let's say -- let's go, because the sec -- second half of '41, after the beginning of the occupation, well the principle thing at that time was really the scarcity of food.

Q: Right.

A: That was most prominent thing. So we go -- get into '42 now, and the only thing that we are able to learn forst -- firsthand, because from the radio, which is under control of the Italians and Germans, of course, you -- you're not going to learn anything. And the newspapers also, were all of them simply writing handouts, and nobody would write anything that was in any contradi -- but of course we knew from other sources, including listening to foreign broadcasts about how the war is going, and -- and you know that until late '42, things were not very good for -- for the allies. But there was nothing until the beginning of '43, when in very quick succession, we began to hear about things which really were not only palpably true, but were very close to home. Perhaps we will come to that point if you ask me again in the beginning of '43, but I can re-remember palpably, around the beginning or -- or end of March of '43, and beginning of April '43, suddenly a -- a -- the -- my parents look was dark, and didn't change. It was not something that was temporary that something was bothering them, or something like this. It just -- something descended, a pall. Now, we were not told about it, but I now, in retrospect, and I think I know that the fate of the relatives in Monastir, which occurred -- the fateful day was 11 March, '43, which I know subsequently, and the Salonika -- the expulsion of the Jews

from Salonika took place early April of '43. That was just the beginning, for me at any rate, of an extremely visible effect that I saw, and I began to feel, but it was vague, because no one knew at that time about concentration camps. The story was relocation, which of course, that's what the Germans were giving out. But definitely, that's -- something like that, that I -- I -- I -- I know was a -- a tremendous change, which lasted, of course, and persisted.

Q: Right. Do you think your parents knew more than you did?

A: Oh, absolutely, yes. And again I have to s -- to -- to -- to stress, I don't think that my -- my parents did not tell us, for the usual reasons that sometimes -- or the phrase, to protect our sensibilities. It was not -- not that. But the thing was so immense, and yet, they themselves having suffered so much in the b -- bombardment in the second World War, because Monastir was a pla -- a -- a battleground between the -- the Germans and their allies, and they --

Q: You mean the first World War.

A: The first wor -- I'm sorry, the first World War, right. Having lived through that, and also, you know, in th-the psyche of the Sephardim, going back five centuries, But I remember just a few weeks before the Germans arrived in Athens, that I don't know, perhaps a childish, but I remember asking my -- my father, why don't we leave, and get on a ship and go away? Because during the war, and listening to what was happening to France, and -- and Poland, and things like this, there was definitely a feeling that we -- we began to get bombarded by the Germans. Now, of course my father not -- he didn't really ridicule the thing, but I mean, it wasn't really that easy to just get on there, we go where, you know, at that time. Where were we gonna go? But I still remember that I had reactions, because I had heard what was happening in -- but it was something that was so vague, that I couldn't put something, you know, a face, or something concrete in the way of measures. But definitely a -- it was something -- I thought it was a dark cloud that grew, and ga -- became darker, and then enveloped us all.

Q: And you became depressed as you saw your parents beco -- I mean, it's -- it's as if there -- there's a shroud on them, on your face.

A: No, I -- I -- I think at that time, I was in a kind of schizophrenic situation. I used to go to work, then in the evening I would go with my friends, my schoolmates, most of them. And i-in fact, it was a -- a kind of a thing tha-that very often one considers that there was more going on in Athens at that time, especially it's night life. More cabarets, and more [indecipherable]. It's almost as if people think that since there is no tomorrow, they might as well do what -- whatever they can for the time that they have left. I was too young, I didn't go to cabarets, but we used to go out, an-and go occasionally t -- and drink a beer, or something like that. So, I was then able to en -- en -- most of them, there were about four or five, were Greek Orthodox, there's only another Jew beside myself in that small circle. The depression would be felt at home, because again it was so apparently overwhelming, and it was impossible to -- oh, except only to see them visually in my --

my parents faces. They didn't talk about it, and I think they probably became even very careful in even ve -- when they were talking to each other, lest the -- they be overheard and frighten us unnecessarily. Not unnecessarily, but at least in ways that children were not to be expected to be able to cope with.

Q: When you were out was it mainly with boys, or is it a mixed group of girls and boys?

A: Oh no, no, there were no mixed groups.

Q: Oh, no mixed groups? No.

A: No, not in those days, no, no. It was primarily boys. Occasionally you try to -- to chase a girl or two, but there were -- there were no mixed groups.

Q: So you didn't go out with any girls of your -- at -- and you're [indecipherable] 15?

A: Yeah -- no, no, not at that time. I look at them, but never go out.

Q: So the girls would go out together, if they would go out, and probably wouldn't go out in the evening alone?

A: Probably not. Most of them were, you know, very restricted. I mean, they would go, they would go out in a big company, either with their parents, or with their brothers, or cousins.

Q: I see. So it's a little different than probably some of what happened in Europe at that time?

A: Oh sure.

Q: There may have been --

A: Oh yes --

Q: -- a different kind of social existence.

A: Right, yes.

Q: And how was your brother -- your two brothers doing at this time?

A: Well, you know, they -- they had their own friends.

Q: Right.

A: Again, schooling continued, so in -- in some aspects, it's almost an unreal situation to talk if there is a -- a continuing normal life going on in the face of impending danger, but

could you -- one has, even I think very clever people had the foresight to really imagine it's dimensions. And I don't think that -- that -- that necessarily this thing I mentioned earlier about so many nightclubs in Athens, I mean this feeling that well, there's only another day to live for, so let's, you know, make merry. I don't think there was very much of that, but the uncertainty of what hap-happens, especially seeing in the winter of '41, dead people in the street, so -- made everybody aware that there was a lot of fragility, not in life in general, I -- even in normal times, but especially in those -- in those times.

Q: Did you see dead bodies in the street?

A: Oh yes, oh yes.

Q: What did that do to you? Do you remember your -- the first time?

A: Well, o-of course, in the beginning you do -- you don't even believe it, you know, then people who w -- would surround some person, you know. In the beginning, of course there was attempts to -- to -- to help, and carry. But when it became more prevalent, and it would become such a -- a common occurrence -- I don't want to give the impression that that's just a little, but, you know, they were there. And I think the thing that struck me after a little while, something that led -- I also had to do, is you don't even stop. You just go on, because you know, practically, there is nothing you can do. In one of the main squares of Athens, it's called Omonia, which mean co -- means Concorde -- Place de la Concorde in -- in Paris. It was a station -- a subway, the metro, but was un-underground. And on the square itself, above the metro, the metro station, there was a grate where most of the warm gases that emanated from -- and, but it was filled up with derelicts that were homeless, and filthy, because that was the only warmth that they could get. They would hover over the grates, and so that became a part of daily life, and I'm sorry to say in retrospect, that one becomes inured to things like that.

Q: Yeah, yeah, it's interesting that you talk about sort of living -- you live on two levels.

A: Right.

Q: One you ke -- try to keep normalcy --

A: Right.

Q: -- and yet, at the same time, you have this very different thing.

A: This pall, this different -- this different thing, this -- this thing which was visible in my parent's faces. First, any -- even in their own comportment, I mean, I don't remember, you know, for those six or seven months prior to the dispersal, seeing them even smile. And I can only imagine the kind of burden that they felt.

Q: Did you have relatives living in Salonika?

A: No.

Q: You didn't?

A: No. We had lots of relatives in Monastir.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: My father, brother and his family, a sister, and her family, in fact two sisters and their families, but on the maternal side, there were two aunts, my mother's sisters, living in Athens with their families. The eldest sister had migrated with her family to Palestine. They lived in Salonika, but in '30 -- to '33, they left and went to -- to Palestine. So, w-we had -- then there were cousins, all of them in Athens. We had no relatives in Salonika, except that some who were fortunate enough -- and there were very, very few, one or two who escape Macedonia, Monastir or Bitola, as it was called, and make it to Athens, and in fact -- t-to -- to -- first to Salonika, but very quickly, my f -- father's niece, my first cousin, and her husband and young daughter came to Athens, but we had no -- but I -- I think that there's no question that my parents knew, or had heard, although I'm sure it must have been a very murky story, because the details do not even a -- become known until after the war, and -- and years after the war, that all the Monastir Jews, all the Bitola Jews were expelled, as well as those in Scorpia expelled. They were -- they were -- th-they disappeared.

Q: And was that area under Bulgarian occupation?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Yeah. So they were actually, they were deported before the Salonika Jews.

A: Just only three weeks --

Q: Oh, this is -- this is -- yes.

A: -- three weeks. It was a con -- a -- a -- a -- a concerted effort. It was not only the Macedonia Jews because the Bulgarians were given that part of former Yugoslavia, and -- as well as part of northern Greece. And the Jews in Thrace, and other parts of northern Greece, under Bulgarian occupation, also were deported by the Bulgarians. Their fate was slightly different from those of Monastir because they were taken by barges up in the Danube, one of them was sunk, and people drowned, and eventually they got them to rail heads, and took them by transports to Auschwitz, and to -- but all of the other Macedonian Jews, all of them ended up in Treblinka. And nobody returned.

Q: Right. Did you have to wear a Jewish star?

A: No. Again, I remind you, and I -- and myself, because the Italians did not enforce any laws -- any racial laws.

Q: But when -- excuse me -- in 1943, after the armistice in Italy, and the Italians are no longer occupying the area that you're living in, the Germans occupy.

A: Yes.

Q: So something changes radically --

A: Immediately.

Q: -- at that time, right?

A: Immediately, yes. Well --

Q: Did you, by the way, know what was going on in Italy, that the allies --

A: Sure, of course.

Q: You did?

A: We know what's going on in North Africa, the allies are winning, then the invasion in Sicily, and then finally the a -- a -- ar -- the Italian armistice. But things happened so fast, there was no time for reflection, because I -- I think within a day or two, I think it's around September eighth, or ninth, or 10, or '43, the Germans take over Athens. And we didn't have time to see visually what the effect of the change was, but practically the second or third day, we already are told by the rabbi of Athens, that the Germans are now asking f-for Jews to go and register. And be -- because, I think of the knowledge of what had happened in Salonika, that this was essentially a -- a core to disperse. So within a day or two after we received this news about first registration, we then abandoned everything and went into hiding. So there was no time, and by therefore even -- since that happen, there were no Jews around Athens to be told to go and wear a star.

Q: So how -- do you know how the decision was made to disperse? Had your father been preparing this? As if this might happen, do you know?

A: Let me tell you what -- what I -- I -- I remember.

Q: Okay.

A: I -- as I say, it was, I think evening -- the first thing that I know is that my boss told me that he is obliged to close shop. He is -- he has to go into hiding. So I say good-bye to him, and it must have been a -- as I said, perhaps two or three days after the -- the armistice and the occupation of Athens by the Germans. When I return home, it must have been around six o'clock, seven o'clock in the evening, my father convened a family council, which was a first. And -- but very calmly, but with a few measured words, simply said, "We have to go into hiding, because the Germans are taking over, and

they're going to come after us, personally. So we're going to have to go into hiding, and we have to disperse. We cannot take anything other than the clothes on our backs." I had begun to think about that, because I had heard a little bit about the Salonika thing. So, I had spoken to one of my friends, ones that I went out with who was a former schoolmate of mine from high school. His name was Thanassis Michalopoulos. So as soon as my father told us what the decision was, then wa -- he turned to me, and he says, "Well, you're going to go in here." Apparently he had spoken to a friend and neighbor. And I told him, "All right, but let me -- also, I have spoken to Thanassis Michalopoulos," he knew him, "and he was going to menti -- talk to his parents, and I'm to see him tomorrow, why don't we wait until tomorrow?" He says, "Fine." So, ev-eve-eventually -- I mean, the following day, I spoke to Mehanis, and he said, "You are welcome." And I had not even met his parents. I went to their home, and immediately they, with no fuss, no nothing, said, "You can stay with us for as long as you want." Then I went home, it was the last day that we were together, and my mother and Sam, and Meko were going to go together to one of the suburbs, as the -- again arranged by my father. And my father with another Greek friend. So, well, we know, we said good-bye, embraced, but of course I -- I was told by my father his address, because I would need money from time to time, and I would have to go and see him. But then I went with the few clothes I had with me, and stayed in Thanassis's house.

Q: I think we should stop the tape --

A: All right.

Q: -- now, because the story's going to get very complicated.

A: Right.

End of Tape #3

Tape #4

Q: -- unusual. This is the first time you ever had a family --

A: Council.

Q: Council. Was -- was he very explicit with you? It -- beyond saying we have to disperse, we have to go into hiding because the Germans are going to come after us? Did he -- did you say, well what -- what are they going to do? Did [indecipherable]

A: No, no. Yeah, he was -- I mean, I -- because it was, a first experience, but in other words, even in retrospect I remember even at that time, or a day or two later, in thinking what he said, I'm sure he didn't rehearse it. He didn't -- I mean, he -- obviously he knew what he wanted to say, but he did it with -- quite directly. He was quite clear, in other words, he set the scene, and said we are coming under German occupation. We now know what happened to the Jews of Salonika, and their fate is unknown, but it can only be a terrible thing. That is why we are now been given the signal. And I remember he used that word, we be given the signal to disperse all of -- all those who can, because we should not fall in -- in German hands. So he -- he set the stage rather clearly, it wasn't -- it di -- did [indecipherable] or things like that. It -- having then set the stage, then just as clearly he then said what my mother and he had decided to do, that we would have to split because we couldn't all remain together, unfortunately it was impractical going into a friend's house that people are not ready to take on five people. So all those things were very clear, very measured, and I don't recall -- I mean, there was -- I mean we looked at -- at each other, my brothers and -- and I, and we looked at them, but it was done in such a realistic, businesslike way. There was no -- there was no emotional ah -- I mean, I -- my -- I saw my mother crying, but not in a -- in a loud or emotional outward way, was just silent tears coming down -- down her face. But I think probably my father wanted to make sure that he could convey this news without causing, you know, u-undue anxiety, or panic, more than simply what the situation dictated.

Q: Isaac, you said to th -- this was a few minutes ago, off camera, about how you wish, but there's no answer to the question of the look that your parents had, a sort of gray -- grayness, and no smiles.

A: Dark, black, black.

Q: And dark, dark and black.

A: Yes.

Q: That you wish that they had been able to communicate what it was that they were feeling or thinking. Is it possible also, that they had very little information? That they knew something was ominous, but they -- they also had no words. Is it --

A: Oh, yes, I mean, s -- I'm sure they had no conception of the dimensions of the horror, but on the other hand, I mentioned earlier, as early as '41, the Germans did the conscription of the Jews in Salonika.

Q: Right.

A: Ransom had to be paid. Then the deportation occurred, and actually, this was written up in the papers, because the then archbishop of Greece wrote a -- a -- a letter to the Greek prime minister, the -- the collaboration government, protesting the -- this treatment of the Jews of Salonika. And very well known, he was threatened to be shot by the German general occupying Greece at that time, and there's a equally famous reply that he made, and he said, "General Stroop, Greek -- Greek clergy are hanged, are not shot. Please observe this tradition." So, information was available. Finally, I -- I -- I have to tell you -- which I have now pieced together subsequently, is my father's niece, the daughter of his sister, and her husband had escaped the last minute from Monastir, went to Salonika because they had family there, but they were told they were crazy to come to Salonika, because it was under German occupation. Go to Athens. So they came to Athens, I imagine around May of '43. Italian -- I mean, that's still under the Italian occupation. And I'm sure that from Allegra -- that was my cousin's name, Allegra Russo, and her husband, they were told whatever they know, because they had seen these things first hand, I mean, the treatment of the Macedonian Jews of Bitola, it was unspeakable from the first minute of the occupation. So they knew.

Q: But obviously, you picked up enough to talk with your friend even prior to this family council.

A: Yes. I had --

Q: How --

A: -- pe -- I -- I -- I -- I be -- I sensed, a-as well as heard, because after all, also, my -- the man I worked for himself was from Salonika, and had left Salonika a y -- a year or two earlier to come to Athens. So, y-you -- you piece -- piece this together, and you know. But I have to -- to tell you that I didn't discuss the possibility of going into hiding to my friend Thanassis in the hearing of the others. I don't know why, maybe the subject was so delicate, I think, that I spoke to him alone.

Q: None of your other friends were there?

A: Right. So it isn't something that I had been preparing. And possibly I must have to Thanassis maybe a week or so before the -- the actual happening, when we put it into effect.

Q: Now, you also said that very quickly the Jews of Athens dispersed, many of them would just --

A: Disappeared, yes.

Q: So this means that the population of non-Jewish Greeks are very open to helping the Jews. Or is th -- am I -- is that not --

A: No, of course it -- it's -- it's --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: We are -- those who survived -- those -- we survived because of the Greeks.

Q: Greeks.

A: And, I mean, I think most of them, great majority of them knew the risks that they were running, because to be found out doing that, you yourself are to be shot, or -- or imprisoned and so forth.

Q: Right, yeah.

A: And th-th-the only thing I -- I -- I -- I remember some Gr-Greek family that hid Jew -- Jewish people, were asked wh-why do they do that. And they said, "We are human beings." And I think that I have no other word, or better word than humanity. It was nothing ideological, they didn't -- it -- it wasn't an exalted thing, or philosophical, it was just sheer humanity, goodness.

Q: Had there -- had there been a census of Greece within, I don't know, in 1933, 1936 --

A: Of all of Greece?

Q: Mm.

A: I'm sure there might have been, but it was not as regular as it's done in the United States, or even other parts of Europe. But, if you talk about -- particular about the Jewish population --

Q: I am.

A: Now recall that in every community, births and deaths were registered in the Jewish community, but also with the Greek authorities. So it was known --

Q: Who was Jewish --

A: -- for example -- yes, because these were remnants in Greece, and in -- in -- in the Balkans of the 500 years of Ottoman rule, where not only the Jewish communities, the Greek communities under Ottoman rule, they were a se -- effectively self regulating, and self governing, except, of course, for matters of war, or crimes, or things like that. But

Jews, or even Christians under Ottoman rule, if they had the dispute with -- as a business dispute with a partner, they didn't go to Turkish court. There was a Jewish court in the Jewish community, that adjudicated things like that, which is a long tradition, as we all know in Europe.

Q: Now the reason why I'm asking is because does this mean that the Germans, when they come in, can easily get a list of who the Jews are, and where they're living?

A: Yes, the answer is, I think, yes. Now, the list may not have been up to date, because effectively, some people who are coming from Salonika and other parts of -- of Greece to Athens, because of the favorable atmosphere of the Italian occupation, they didn't necessarily go to the community and register. I believe, but I am not entirely sure a-about what I'm going to say, that when the rabbi received the instruction to issue then a proclamation for the Jews to come and register, I think the paperwork also went with him. So he -- he or -- or -- or other people in the community that went into hiding, hid --

Q: That paperwork.

A: -- the -- the -- the main files.

Q: So does that mean that most of the Jews did not register? Some must have.

A: Well, unfor -- unfortunately, month later -- by that time I'm in the mountains, but I'm -- I -- I learn after the war, some people, you know, foolishly, in March, or April '44 -- now, we're going about a year later, the Jews issue another proclamation -- I mean, the Germans, saying Jews can come and register to get matzoh distributed, and some of them, believe it or not, did go, and they were grabbed, and --

Q: Now, before you go to the mountains, you are hiding for about how long?

A: Two or three weeks, yeah.

Q: Two or three -- just a few weeks?

A: Yeah, two or three weeks in Thanassis's house. I -- I go out in the evenings, at times. I -- I went, saw my father two or three times. I went and saw my mother and brothers twice. And --

Q: And you were the only one who could do that? In -- the other mem -- other members of the family didn't come to see you, you went to see them?

A: No, yes. First of all, now I got -- my younger -- two younger brothers lived in an eastern suburb of Athens. I -- my friend's house was a 10 minute walk really, from the apartment where we lived. So it was much more, not only convenient, but I think more prudent for me to go -- my father, of course, could not navigate, as we know, and I went -- took the

bus, and went to the suburbs, and saw my mother and brothers twice. I saw my father at least three times, including when I went to tell him of my decision to go to the mountains.

Q: And what did he say?

A: Well, he tried to dissuade me, because he said that I am young, and this is not a -- a life that somebody of my age can cope with. But I think when he saw that I was determined, he insisted that since in my travels I may have to go through checkpoints, if somehow I were discovered, he begged me, in fact he insisted that I then run away on purpose so I could be shot and killed, so I would not fall alive in the hands of the Germans. He -- he gave me some money to pay for my passage to the mountains, and parenthetically my friend had also asked me that -- that he had decided also to go to the mountains, but his parents did not know, and he -- but he didn't have enough money for the fare, so I asked my father for that also. I did not go to see my mother, because I th -- believed that it wasn't an attempt at dis -- dissuasion, that it would be something more emotional, that I possibly could not then handle. And when I -- I -- I was concerned that she might succeed. And since I was determined to go to the mountains, I didn't go to see her, and this is something that I have regretted, and I will possibly regret forever, that I -- I didn't -- I didn't -- I didn't say good-bye to her.

Q: Or to your two brothers.

A: Right.

Q: How did you make the decision to go? What -- what made you, since you weren't very political [indecipherable]

A: Well, we knew -- y -- people know, because they talk -- you hear things. First of all, people are shot at times because a German soldier was killed, assassinated by the resistance, then they grab people at -- at random, and shoot them. And it was known, I mean, we knew that there was a part of Greece, generally in the northwestern part from the direction of Athens, in those mountains around Thessaly, and that -- that there was a portion which, if I re-remember hearing maybe as early as the summer of '43, it was called free Greece. And that's all that -- that I knew personally. So when I made the decision, because I -- what led me to make this decision first of all is the negative factor that I couldn't possibly remain in hiding for goodness knew how long. No one knew how long the -- the situation may last. A few weeks, maybe a few months, it's something, but what if it's years? So I -- I decided I have to get out some -- somewhere. So I said, all right, I'll go in the direction which I hear is free Greece. When I talked with my friend, Thanassis, he was much more politically involved, something that I did not know until that moment, that yes, he also had decided to do that, and he wanted to join a specific group of the Greek resistance, known as the Zervas forces. He knew that they were in a specific part of Thessaly. So that's why we decided to take the bus, which was not a bus, it was a truck, and -- and head to Thessaly. But from my standpoint that's all the information I -- I -- I had.

Q: You had. Now let -- now let me go back to this choice that you made not to see your mother, a-and your brothers. Do you --

A: Choice.

Q: Choice.

A: I --

Q: Do you really regret having gone to the mountains? You don't.

A: No, I'm alive because I went to the mountains.

Q: You went to the mountains.

A: No, I -- well, two things. First of all -- or many things. At times in the mountains I thought about -- I -- I thought about them continuously, but th -- I had no news. But I thought instead about what was going to be after the war. See, being the eldest child, and my mother was a rather dominant and strong willed individual. We had clashes at -- at times. And I remember them saying that well now, I w -- I -- I was growing up, now all these things were behind me, and how things were going to be a lot better, and I was really going to be now a magnificent child, that my mother will be proud of me and so forth. So there was a lot of that kind of a thing built up, which came crashing down when I found out that they were not around any more. And then subsequently, from my brother, I learned that my mother was terribly worried about me, because she did not know where I was. She had -- they had no news, no -- we could not communicate. There was no way for me -- there were -- I couldn't write them a letter, for obvious reasons, and there were no visitors in the -- especially in the mountains where I was, there was no one that I knew could g -- bring them news. So all these things have a -- had a cumulative effect, and so since the regret -- I had the regret when I made the decision, and maybe a few days, and a few weeks, and a few months, and every time I think about it, it becomes bigger, because of other things that I've learned. So it piles up.

Q: Right. But she knew that you were going to the mountains because your father had [indecipherable]

A: Of course my father -- now, [indecipherable] where my poor father, what did he know, other than I -- I was leaving, I was going to go in the direction somewhere. And --

Q: And of course, he doesn't know --

A: He doesn't know where I --

Q: [indecipherable] you not make it.

A: No, of course not.

Q: So, in some ways you create a level of anxiety that you didn't want to create with people, but you had tried to make a decision that was best for you.

A: Right. A-And I ended up in a place, and at the time where -- I'm not trying to rationalize or excuse it, it would have been almost impossible for me to even send word.

Q: Sure.

A: For example -- perhaps we will come to that point later on when I got to the mountains, because Thanassis decided not to stay, and then he -- he returned. I did not dare tell Thanassis where my father was, because we were told, and enjoined when we had this family council, we were going to go into hiding, and other then because of need, like going and -- and -- and getting money, or seeing, you know, a -- a loved one, we are not to divulge where they are.

Q: Right, right.

A: And I said, I -- I know from my brother when they were caught by the Germans, they were beaten, because among other things, that -- that they wanted to do is to reveal where my whereabouts were, and where my father's where -- whereabouts were.

Q: So they knew you existed?

A: Oh yes, oh yes.

Q: [indecipherable] they knew this, what this family make up was.

A: Right. Oh, sure.

Q: Was -- was there a s -- a network of people who were rescuing people, or were these really individuals that had been chosen by --

A: Yeah, there was no network.

Q: No network.

A: We don't have anything, as in Denmark, which was -- wasn't a network so much, but you know, an almost simultaneous reaction of putting all of the -- all -- 99 percent of the Danish Jews into boats and ferrying them across to Sweden. All these things were done, I think, on individual measures. There were -- but there is no question that, for example, in the -- in the northern parts of Greece, I mean, I know that there were at times, attempts by the partisan forces, to encourage Jews to leave their homes, and go to the mountains, which is not an easy thing to -- to do, but nevertheless, they -- they did.

Q: Were you frightened by your own decision, or were you excited that you were finally making a decision to do something, as opposed to waiting?

A: I was not excited in the sense of -- that I would -- I looked at it as an adventure.

Q: No [indecipherable]

A: It was primarily, you know, a relief that at least I -- I wouldn't have to -- to live in hiding, and -- and be a burden on -- on these friends and so forth.

Q: Right.

A: But there was a great deal of uncertainty, which lasted for about a -- a few days, until my journey to the mountains, because I went into an unknown. I could have gone to a different region, where I wouldn't have found anything. Fortunately, I found this specific thing, and I -- and -- and before [indecipherable] got transformed, so I didn't go into this thing either as a, you know, a -- a -- a youthful adventure. It was not all that, it was a -- a serious undertaking.

Q: A serious undertaking.

A: Right.

Q: But you did not have a -- in a certain way, a political point of view, except to get away from the Germans.

A: Right.

Q: Whereas your friend really wanted to join what was an anti-Communist group.

A: Right, yes.

Q: He -- is it this -- pronounced --

A: Zervas.

Q: Zervas.

A: Yeah, he was a -- a former officer in the Greek army, who had formed his own bands in the mountains, and who for a time, they were all collaborating, until they became politically at loggerheads, and started fighting each other, which was a horrible thing, but --

Q: So it was -- you didn't care which group you got to, at first? It was just getting out.

A: First of all -- right. F-For me, it was getting out, and -- and -- and -- and escaping the Germans. I had no background or predilection, politically speaking, about which group I was going to -- to join.

Q: And your -- your friend Thanassis --

A: Right.

Q: -- left because he couldn't get into that group, that group was not [indecipherable]

A: Well, when we got to --

Q: Well, actually

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Let's -- let's go back.

A: Right, okay.

Q: The day that you're going to leave.

A: Right.

Q: Right?

A: Yes.

Q: What do you -- what do you have, the two of you?

A: We just have the clothes on our back.

Q: Your clothes. You have a little money?

A: We have just enough for the fare, which I had gotten the day before, and a -- a -- a few spare drachmas --

Q: Right.

A: -- you know, for something to -- to -- to eat.

Q: And he did not say anything to his parents?

A: No.

Q: Worse than you.

A: Worse, right.

Q: [indecipherable] he didn't say anything.

A: And he was -- and he was the only child, as well, yes. So I can only imagine their horror, dismay, and so forth. So we got to the -- I want to call it bus station, there were no -- there was no bus station, it was a -- a place in Athens where all the -- the -- the trucks -- because the o -- there were only trucks available to do that, and they w -- there was no gasoline. They were powered -- it was in the rear of the car or truck, a -- something like a -- a furnace where you burn wood, and the gases would be diverted to drive the pistons for the engine. So we got there, and th-the usual thing was that first th-the goods were piled up on the truck, and then the passengers, in that particular case, for us it was about a dozen or so, simply sat on top of an open truck. And that's -- was the -- the only way to travel.

Q: Okay, I think we'll stop the tape --

A: All right.

Q: -- and when we begin next time, we'll begin the journey into the mountains.

A: Sure.

Q: Okay?

A: Right.

End of Tape #4

Tape #5

Q: Isaac, when we -- we la -- the last part of the tape that we were on a few minutes ago, you were getting on top of the flat bedded truck that has all of this material on it, and I gather that these trucks were always going to the mountains? I mean, did they, or not?

A: No, not to the mountains. They were essentially traveling from Athens to various towns or cities.

Q: Uh-huh.

Q: And some of them was going also in other directions, from -- between other cities. It was primarily commerce because there were no -- at that time there were no -- not only -- no highways, as we know it, but even routes that an ordinary trucks, even with powerful engines, could possibly negotiate to go up mountains.

Q: And so who's on, besides you, and --

A: And Thanassis.

Q: Thanassis, who -- just --

A: People -- villagers who -- people who travel, I -- I imagine, because with the -- especially with the advent of -- of the black market, or let -- let's call it the underground market, right? The villagers would bring things that -- that obviously are important to Athens, food primarily, and in turn they would exchange it for goods of all kinds, and principally textiles. Occasionally some light machinery, or -- that existed at that time. So, it was primarily a commercial thing. Of course you had also -- excuse me -- not tourist, but passengers who visited relatives in Athens, or vice versa. These are generally the [indecipherable]. But I think all the -- the buses, if I can call them that, were -- that I saw at that time, because they were so laden with goods, and because they were so expensive, they wanted to make sure that cargo would be transported, as well as passengers.

Q: Did you have an I.D. card of some kind?

A: Ah, as in -- im -- important, very interesting. It was necessary for me to get an I.D. Before the German takeover of Athens, I had an I.D. with my real name, but now I had to f -- get a Greek identity, that's to say a Christian Orthodox i -- identity. Thanassis had a friend who was a policeman, and I guess he was trustworthy enough to ask him to help me get an identity card. He was able to get the card itself, I gave him a photo, and he did the appropriate thing of pasting the photograph in the appropriate place, plus filling out all the -- the other things. But there's wa -- there was one thing that had to be done to which he had no access. And the last thing was that the seal was embossed. But that seal was only at headquarters. So he, having no access there, he told me, "I regret it, but I cannot get you anything more than that." So before embarking on my trip, I took an old coin, a pre-war five drachma piece, and I put it at the corner of the photograph and

hammered it, so that it left an impression, because the coin, in it's face, had embossed letters, I'm sure it had said Elliniki Dimokratia, Greek Republic. But it had to be some semblance, so I think it would not have withstood the scrutiny even by an amateur, but fortunately the only two checkpoints we went through from -- after leaving Athens, to my eventual destination in Kardhitsa, in Thessaly, it was during a driving rain. We were, of course, entirely soaked to the bone, on top of that -- those trucks, but by the same token, the -- the guards, which were -- were Germans, with Greek police, didn't pay that much attention. So I didn't have to -- to do what I had promised my father I would do.

Q: Now, Nehama must have been clearly a Jewish name.

A: Oh yes, right.

Q: Right? So you would have been too noticeable.

A: Oh yes, my Greek name on that fake identity was Yannis, or John Dimokritos, which is a rather famous name of a -- of a Greek philosopher. In fact, the first one to declare, on no evidence at all, other than his -- his mind, the existence of an atom.

Q: Atom, right, right. All right, so you're on this -- you go through two checkpoints --

A: Right.

Q: -- so you don't have to run away the way your father --

A: My father --

Q: -- has suggested you do if there's a problem.

A: Right. But because, you know, those trucks, as I, I think mentioned, possibly in the last tape, they were not driven by a gasoline engine, but by burning wood. So they didn't have that much of power. So it's another -- a long trip, and because of the rain, we then had to stop in -- en route, in a town called Lamia, which is, you know, a sizeable town. So we stopped there for the night.

Q: And where did you stay that night?

A: Well, we arrived there, because we were soaked, the first thing we thought was to dry ourselves, so next to the station where we stopped, if you can call it the -- the bus station, was a restaurant. We were very hungry. So, we went there, and really stood near the kitchen, so we could -- the heat would dry our clothes. And when we were ready to go out after the meal, to find a place to stay, a hotel, if there such a thing existed. But then they told us in the restaurant, that in five minutes the curfew began. And it was patrolled by German patrols, and you shouldn't be found out walking after curfew time. So where do we go? We had no place to go, but next to the -- to the restaurant was the -- I think the one and only bordello in town, so that's where we ended up.

Q: So tell -- so just because it's a little bit funny --

A: Yeah?

Q: What was the situation, you go and you say we're two kids, and we have no place to stay, will you let us stay here? Is that what you end up --

A: Well, they welcome you, of course you are obliged to take a girl.

Q: Aha, yes, really?

A: Well sure, o-otherwise you [indecipherable] alone for the entire night. I mean, they knew that, of course the curfew had started, and so the price was appropriate for -- for night.

Q: So this is a new experience?

A: Yes, this was.

Q: Yeah.

A: Right.

Q: And you spent one night there?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they feed you breakfast in the morning?

A: Feed who? No, no, no, I di -- not -- at the place?

Q: Yeah.

A: No, no.

Q: No.

A: No, we just -- we -- we knew, were told that the -- the bus people would come around.

Q: Right.

A: Because they knew some people probably were there [indecipherable]

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And -- because they wanted to -- to start early.

Q: Yeah.

A: So we left a-around seven o'clock, and -- first of all, I -- I think I -- probably you know that in the Balkan countries, generally people don't have breakfast. If they have, they may have a cup of coffee. I don't know if we had anything, so we just got on the bus, again on the -- on the truck, and by the end of that second day, we arrived at our destination, Kardhitsa.

Q: And then what happened? [indecipherable]

A: Well, we alighted, and we got off. Now for us was -- was the end, and nearby was [indecipherable] Kardhitsa, although it was not part of quote, free Greece unquote, but it was near enough the foothills of the mountains that there had been no Italian or German presence in Kardhitsa. This was voluntarily, they had left it, but it doesn't mean -- but it was still -- still it was on the plains of Thessaly, it was not occupied by the partisans either. So let's call it a no-man's land.

Q: Right.

A: So, the -- we -- we looked around, and we struck up a con -- a conversation with the teacher, a teacher in one of the schools of -- in Kardhitsa, and ha -- Thanassis, who had a specific destination in mind, I think very quickly asked the -- the teacher, we're going to go and join z -- Zervas, so where do we go to do that? And the teacher said, "Zervas was around this area, but that's a few months ago, and there's been some fighting with ELAS," so that was the other side, "and I'm afraid that the nearest place that you can find Zervas was Epirus," which is near the -- the Albanian border, which was very far away, and totally beyond our means, even if we could find transport to go there. We didn't discuss it very much more at that time, and the -- the teacher was really kind enough, we didn't even ask him, but he offered to let us stay in his house overnight, and we could decide what to do the following morning. So he offered us food and -- and lodging, without payment. When we -- we got up the following day, Thanassis apparently having reflected on -- on the situation, and he really didn't give me many reasons, but he said to -- to me, very clearly, "I really cannot proceed any further. I understand that in your case," -- because the only other choice that was available is to join ELAS, who -- who were only 30 or 40 kilometers away from Kardhitsa. "I understand your situation, but I cannot, and I will therefore return to Athens." But he had no more money, I had no money left. We embraced, I thanked him. We took l-leave of each other, and I mentally, visually, still remember seeing him walking, because even the directions, he wasn't going to take a highway, there was no such thing, or a route, so he's following the railroad tracks. So I -- I see the railroad tracks, and Thanassis walking. It's like a -- the end of a -- of a movie, as it fades, you know, in the -- in the background. So, I then asked the --

Q: Let me -- let me ask you a question, though --

A: Yeah? I'm sorry, yes --

Q: -- before you move on.

A: All right.

Q: How do you understand his decision now? Do you think it was because he didn't want to join the -- the Communist group, he really wa -- wanted to join the other [indecipherable]

A: The -- it -- the former, but let's be careful.

Q: Yeah.

A: ELAS was not a Communist group.

Q: Right.

A: In included, obviously, but it was not a Communist group.

Q: Right, okay.

A: Only for --

Q: Right, no, no, that's important.

A: Right, right. And, it's only --

Q: So it wasn't anti-Communist?

A: No, but --

Q: So that it would include Communists?

A: Right.

Q: Right.

A: Right. It was a coalition of leftist parties.

Q: Right.

A: There's no question that it was dominated by the -- the far left, because they were the best organized group of resistance, but EAM ala -- EAM was the political side, and ELAS was the -- the military side.

Q: Yeah.

A: But they were a conglomeration, and I met lots of people who had nothing to do with the Communists up there. Perhaps later on, but it's -- it's appropriate now for me to tell you, because you asked me this question about Thanassis, that at the end of the war, when I returned to Athens, within a couple of weeks there was the so-called troubles, between the central government, now liberated. And I had not even had the chance to visit him and his parents, and thank them, and tell them that I have survived, and everything like that, because this problem arose, where the streets now, there's shooting going on between factions. And it was at the end of December, after my return from concentration camp, the British concentration camp, [indecipherable] in Egypt, that I learned that Thanassis was killed during this month of -- or couple of weeks of trouble. So here again, in a different vein as my mother, here is another case of somebody who went with me, I didn't have a chance to see him ag -- again after we -- we parted, but there's no question that he was really a member of an extremely rabid right wing group. And therefore, it would have been unthinkable for him to -- to -- to -- to join --

Q: To join, yeah. But -- but even being a member of such an extreme right wing group didn't mean he wouldn't help you as a Jew.

A: No question.

Q: There -- that there -- the anti-Semitism was nothing in his situation.

A: No, no, nothing. These thing, they're two separate things.

Q: -- things. All right, so -- okay.

A: So that's cr -- Thanassis is gone now, unfortunately.

Q: Yes [indecipherable]. So he goes, and now you have to [indecipherable]

A: I asked the teacher, I said, well -- and he -- he -- it was very easy. He says, "Do you see the top of this mountain?" And he pointed west, almost straight due west. "That's where you go." And that's what it is. I just following that kind of thing, I began on the road, which is in the beginning a g -- visible road, and it fades into a -- a kind of a track, and it took close to five hours to negotiate that. And I was reaching -- I could see the monastery becoming bigger and bigger. But the biggest shock was just I think half an hour before I went -- I got to the grounds of the monastery te -- all of the surrounding area of trees, forest, grass, all that, is filled up with Italian soldiers, but all of them armed. And I'm walking through, and I see partisans with beards talking to the Italians. Now, I know there was an armistice, but of course I had no idea what had happened in the -- between, and I -- I -- especially armed Italians. But -- well, subsequently I learned it was a -- a regiment of Italian cavalry called Aosta, from the region in Italy, that voluntarily joined the -- the partisans. And course I had more dealings with them. And so I got to the -- to the monastery.

Q: Did they stop you, these soldiers, as you were walking --

A: No, no, no, no, no, they just chatting, and passing the day.

Q: And here's this kid walking?

A: And this -- this kid walking, and I reached the monastery, I saw a number of partisans, and some of them -- it was still early afternoon, the sun is still shining, although it's close to November. It was a warm day. And I don't know why they were naked to the waist, but I learned subsequently why. But I asked to go and see the leader. And I was shown up to the leader, a tall man with a long beard. And I immediately -- I briefly told him that I had come to join the partisans. He didn't laugh [indecipherable]

Q: He didn't laugh [indecipherable]

A: He didn't laugh, but -- but at least he -- he smiled, he says, "Look, th-this is -- this is extremely rough life, you are very young." And then, just as simply, I told him that I had no choice. I'm a Jew, and the Germans are -- are persecuting us, and I cannot return to Athens. He says, "All right, stay. Stay." And that was the end of it. Tha --

Q: Did you also tell him that you had been a Boy Scout, as if that might be --

A: Yes, tha -- to convince him, yes, I told him I was a Boy Scout, he -- he laughed.

Q: Did he laugh?

A: Yes, he laughed. Then I went to the yard again, and finally I got enough courage to ask, because then I began to observe the partisans who were naked to the midriff, because they were feeling their shirts. And I know what they were doing, they were killing lice, okay? They were delousing themselves, just -- and I, for me it was such a -- a -- a new thing to see fact, that I asked one of them who was doing it, how many had he killed. He looked at me. Oh, such a crazy question. He didn't count. But to -- to sort of [indecipherable] he said, "47." Such a great number. Little did I know that very quickly, I will be doing exactly the same thing.

Q: So did -- did the leader, the -- of this particular part of the resistance immediately say you can do x or y, or --

A: No, no. I mean, he [indecipherable] all right, but we'll have to decide what we -- you're goin -- we're gonna have you do. But almost immediately, the following day, I was then assigned the -- if I can call it the graveyard shift of being a telephone -- telephone operator. These telephones were military field telephones, strung with wires. And there was a little room, this was a -- in a monastery, a former monastery, there were cells on all floors. And there was a little telephone room. Now, my shift started around 11 o'clock at night. Before going there, I had to go to the commissary, or what -- yeah, to get a little tin container that was filled with rough kerosene oil, because that was the only light that was [indecipherable], they had no electricity. So -- so we had this lamp with a wick. And I

knew from the very first day after -- at the end of my shift, my throat, nose, and everything else were black, I would spit black stuff. I'm inhaling the smoke that came out of that wick during -- during the -- the shift. Of course, when the phone would ring, then I would respond, take notes. Times I was given messages to -- well, I remember the -- the second night, before starting my shift, again I was going to the commissary, but I have to -- to remind me -- myself and you that when you -- the first noticeable thing when you are in the mountains, and anyplace is how black and dark it is. In cities, even in a darkened place, the glow of city lights still there. But in the mountains, two things are immediately noticeable. The silence is deafening, literally, you hear nothing. That's why you can hear things from a distance. And it's also very dark. But there were no lights in the monastery corridors. So I'm going to the mo -- to the commissary to fill my lamp with oil, and then the first thing I know is one leg is going through a hole, and then instinctively the other leg is going through a hole, and I'm falling through space. And in -- in the middle of the fall, I hit a -- a beam on the side, and after a couple of other seconds, it was -- actually it only took a few seconds, I fell through two floors. And I -- I must have screamed, in the process of falling, and they came running. I just got up.

Q: You were --

A: And they -- and they all marvel, and they thought that it was a miracle that it happened, they said to me that you're -- I was particularly lucky.

Q: So that was your introduction.

A: My introduction, and I stayed on on that particular job for about two weeks. And then for the following two weeks, I was then made a messenger. I had to take messages to -- but to division headquarters. And the higher in rank was the military unit, the higher was also physically, in the mountains, the division was higher and higher. And this is when I was given a rifle, I was given -- was an Italian rifle, and -- a -- a -- two rounds of -- of --

Q: Ammunition?

A: Ammunition. Then I was then given the messages, and I was given the general direction of a -- just march that way. And I didn't know whether my destination was, and we would meet an occasional shepherd tending goats or sheep, and you would say, how long is, and then mention the name of the place, and he would say half an hour. They have no conception of time in terms of the units that we use. You walk for another three hours, and it's still not there. And that's what I did for the next week or so.

Q: Now what --

A: Yeah.

Q: Let me ask you something. Do you become a messenger because you've done your telephone operator job so well, or did they just happen to need [indecipherable]

A: No, they -- th-they -- they just -- they -- they decided that now they needed somebody to carry messages, and I became available, or I could be spared from the telephone thing. After all, as I said, there were three shifts, because the thing had to be tended all the time. And that's when I became a messenger, but when I returned from the last trek in delivering a message, then there was a general retreat, because the Germans decided, which they did periodically, to do a sweep. And in fact, we could begin to see, at the distance, the trucks coming up, and armored vehicles, you know, because they didn't have tanks, or anything like that. And -- but this what -- what happened throughout the occupation, the Italians would sweep up from time to time. Sometimes light sweeps, sometimes very heavy. And this was a heavy sweep, so we are retreating. So, the monastery was evacuated, the Italian soldiers also accompanied us, and we're going higher and higher. There was no action, other than occasionally firing a gun out toward the Germans, but we don't engage heavily armed enemy, that's not what partisan war is. And after about two or three weeks of going higher than, the Germans decided that they had done as much damage as they -- they could, which really didn't do anything other than burning some villages, they went back to the -- to the plains. And that's when, then, I was able to join a -- a real unit rather than a band, th-th-the -- the -- the -- the group that I saw in the monastery was a portion of a major unit, which the first regiment of Thessaly, and the first regiment of Evzones, to which then I became -- I -- I joined.

Q: Let me ask you something. Did you, when you became a messenger, did you wear special clothes, or you were wearing the clothes you came in?

A: I'm still having -- there were no clothes to go around, you know.

Q: Right. So you're still wearing [indecipherable]

A: I'm still in the civilian clothes, which are beginning now to -- to tatter, and --

Q: Right.

A: -- also get dirty, and filthy, where I was able to scare up another pair of underwear to -- to change, [indecipherable] if I see things of that kind. That's it. I still remember that fortunately, I don't know why, I had traveled from Athens to Kardhitsa wearing also a -- a blue overcoat, which was sort of a lined overcoat, maybe a treated fabric that will withstand rain, but it was a very, very handy thing, because I went through a whole heavy winter in -- with -- with only these clothes.

Q: And the rifle that you were given, were you trained on the rifle?

A: No.

Q: They just gave it to you?

A: They gave me the rifle [indecipherable] you know, the -- the -- the cartridges were in a clip, five to a clip, and they -- they pull the -- I forget now all these terms which I f --

know from the army, and you push the clip down, push the bolt back again, and you are ready to fire. I had never fired a rifle, and I still remember I'm marching about an hour away from the monastery. I'm in the middle of a natural plateau in the middle of the mountain, there's nobody around. Total silence. And I fire the first bullet of my life, just to -- to even get familiar with the sound. I didn't fire at anybody --

Q: Right.

A: -- was toward -- towards the sky. But I -- that's the first time I fired.

Q: All right, let's stop the tape.

End of Tape #5

Tape #6

Q: -- you're at a very high point in the mountains and you've joined a real regiment, I gather.

A: Right. I should have go-got interviewed by an officer, not -- he was not the commanding officer of the regiment, and I think they are probably debating about what -- to have me do. Certainly I was not either trained, or old enough to join a -- a -- a fighting unit. And then, the -- the same afternoon, I am called to go and talk to the second in command. Let me parenthetically note that in ELAS there was always dual leadership. There was the military commander -- I don't want to -- I -- th-the -- the -- the second in command, it was not a rank, but he was the equivalent of a political officer. If you want to call it a commissar, right? Well, they were called captanios, which is a gen -- generic name for captain, or -- or an officer of some rank. So I go to his office, and he told me that he has an important mission for me. He didn't know me, but he had ler -- known that I was from Athens, that I spoke French, and some Spanish, was a very important mission. He says, "Every year, the little rivlets, or even creeks, which are dry most of the year, but in spring, after the snows fall, then these creeks flood, and even the little rivers flood, and -- and always there are people who drown. Now, our mission, or the mission I'm going to entrust you with is this. Because we don't know when the next sweep is going to come, and we want to be sure that our line of retreat is available to us, we don't want to have to ford something that's not passable. So what I want you to do is, I'm going to put you in charge here," I'm 16 and a half years old, "put you in charge of a -- a group. And there'll be two Italian officers, they are both engineers. And your mission is to go to a number of villages," which had -- he had written down, near some of those rivers. "And you will tell them that you have orders for the village people to help you do two things. First, cut down trees to provide material for building the bridge. The Italian officers would measure, and find the appropriate place, and then you would -- the villagers would help with labor to cut the logs, and also with material such as nails, and things like this, as well as labor, to assemble the bridge." And so he gave me official orders signed, whatever it was, I don't even know if it -- there was a seal. So -- and then I was introduced, there were in the outside, these two men, who had officer uniforms. They were also armed, you know? Now, I did not know Italian, but between French and Ladino, I could make out a few things, and we could begin to understand each other. I think they had been briefed -- that's now th-the word, about what the -- the mission was. And so, the following morning, you have the Nehama group walking to our destination. And it took us --

Q: This -- this --

A: Yeah?

Q: Isn't this rather unusual, to have a 16 and a half year old who -- who -- who hasn't been in this group for more than four or five weeks?

A: Look, I -- I can only speculate that probably it was either a stupid, half-baked idea, or it was a serious idea, but a half-baked notion of how to implement it. Or, it is not they wanted to get rid of me, you know, from there, but I -- the -- the -- the -- the plausible explanation is that i -- this was a real need, all right? That was not the only way to skin that particular cat, or fording a bridge, but they thought, why don't we take advantage of -- because the military engineers are trained to do things like this using what locally available materials are. So, it was not a crazy notion of trying to build -- and we aren't talking about large rivers, I'm talking maybe the biggest one that we -- we would have had to do was for to five meters, which is 15 - 20 feet. Not -- we weren't talking about huge things. So, the -- the -- the notion was certainly plausible, and necessary, you know, in order to maintain, you know, open slide of communication. You don't want to be retreating, and then suddenly have your backs to the river. But, I mean, if they wanted to do it very seriously, they wouldn't have sent a 16 and a half year old boy, they would have something else, maybe another contingent of two or three, who would then also participate in the actual building. But --

Q: Up to this point, these few weeks that you're in the group, do some of the older men befriend you? I mean, do you feel s --

A: Oh yes.

Q: They do?

A: Oh yes [indecipherable]

Q: So you -- they wi --

A: Sure.

Q: -- they welcome you in?

A: Right, right, yeah.

Q: And do they, in some sense try to ta -- you're the youngest person there, right?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And there are no women, it's all boys -- men? Or are there women?

A: Ah, there are women, but I didn't see them yet --

Q: Aha, okay.

A: -- in the partisans, until after the end of that mission that failed, right.

Q: [indecipherable] okay. So you feel very comfortable with these people?

A: Sure, yes.

Q: And --

A: I share their life --

Q: Yes.

A: I eat with them, we talk.

Q: Now, all this time, of course, you are still preoccupied in some way with what's happening to the family?

A: Yes, I'm preoccupied, but it's the kind of a thing that th -- is -- is -- I don't -- I have no contact left any more. I'm thinking of them, but it's -- it's a kind of thought that goes nowhere, because there is nothing I can do in trying some method of trying to get news from them, either deliver my news, or their news. So I -- so that I'm getting adjusted even to the notion of being out of contact.

Q: Do they ask you about your family, these guys?

A: Look, I don't think we spoke very much. I mean, occasionally the conversation would come back, because later on, when I was part of a real, ongoing military unit, after thes -- this mission of -- that I returned from. And there was a large contingent of regimental headquarters, where we were really living, and staying together, and talking. Then we started exchanging, but in the first month or two, most of the time we are talking about is -- first of all, the next preoccupation, or the only preoccupation is what are you going to eat, because there is no food to be had there. This is not a unit where you're going to go for chow, when something rings, you have to scrounge for things. So most of the th -- of the time, and necessarily is you're thinking about only one thing, survival.

Q: All right, let's -- describe this -- it ends up being a somewhat --

A: Oh, right.

Q: -- failed mission of bridges.

A: Failed mission. Very briefly we went to the first village, I approached the teacher, I showed him the orders. And they said, sure, sure. The following morning we will gather, sure, sure, because they put us up for the evening. They were a little skittish I could see in their eyes of that -- of having to b -- to also host two Italian officers, armed. Because you got to remember, for the previous two years, that region -- you know from time to time you would have incursions of Italians who would burn their villages. I mean, I saw the rems of that, the hulks of -- of just nothing but walls with -- with the open sky. But at

least they did not a-attack us. They would put us up. But they wouldn't show up. And although tried to get [indecipherable] would say again following morning, the long and the short is we went through two or three other villages with almost identical results. But the -- the third or fourth village, it was just, I think, after Christmas of '43, maybe December 28 or 29. We got to this village, and -- although the sa -- the story was the same tomorrow, but they didn't put us up in a house in that -- in that village. Instead they guided us something like close to a half an hour walk from the village. And in the middle of nowhere there was a little barn, and it was two stories. And in the lower part was a tethered donkey, and the upper was just a -- a room, but it had a fireplace. So he says, "This is where you're going to -- to stay for your -- during your stay." All right. So that's where we slept the first night. When we got up the following morning, it had begun to snow incessantly, which continued for a week. Now, very quickly we were totally snowbound. Fortunately -- I mean, the way we survived is once a day, around midday or so, a poor, elderly woman from the village would trudge all that distance, with a sack of roughly ground corn flour. And that's our subsistence, we would take the corn flour and melt some snow, knead it into some kind of a dough, and pat it to a semblance of a bread, and then we would burn it on the fireplace. That's what we ate. Now, the -- I think the second week, she brought us an egg. And we were, of course, you know, we haven't seen anything like this, and we were overjoyed, but very quickly we decided that it would be -- to divide it into three -- I mean, we would not even feel it in our mouths. So we decided to keep it as a symbol of our eventual deliverance, both from the snow outside of that [indecipherable] the mission as well as the war, because -- and then I continue, very quickly, I mean we used the egg to play games with the mice. The mice would come out at night, because it was the gallery of all the [indecipherable]. And we had not thought, we had left the egg someplace, and then in the glow of -- still of the fire -- we used to go out and gather branches, and burn them. We saw how mice steal the egg. One mouse takes it in it's paws, and sort of -- and the others drag it by the tail. So we discovered the game, so we used to take the egg, and have bets made, and races. We would leave it like this, and then we see the mouse come, and we say -- the bet was how fast he will get to the hole, of course, by the time he reached the hole, we grab the egg again, and -- so that's the way -- and that's how I began to learn Italian because spending all day long, we used to sing Italian songs. And I clearly remember the first day that -- when the s-snow ended, it was the kind of a thing that you know when the snow clears, and the -- the sky is completely s -- cloud free, and bright, blinding brightness because of the white, and we heard that drone of aircraft, which was an incredible sound. And we look up, and we see huge formations of bombers, which we di -- concluded couldn't be anything but allied, because the Germans didn't have very much of an air force. And -- and -- and -- and I think in retrospect, because we -- I know I can tell you, I can -- the direction which they were flying, namely northeast, they probably were coming from Italy to bomb the oil fields in Ploesti in Romania. So, you know, we could almost -- the kind of a thing that we all three of us looked up, and -- and sort of begged that the day will come for us very quickly. So, after -- after the second week there, we, you know, concluded that we were not going to get anywhere, especially now since the ground was covered with snow, even if things had changed, the attitude had changed. So, we -- I had lost also a sense of orientation where we were. Where is the nearest partisan unit? We had been on the road for practically a month. So I was told, and we were pointed to some direction, and we got

there, and the first person I saw was Saby Shabetai, my friend and neighbor from our apartment in Athens. I approached him, I addressed him, he turned around, he says, "Who are you?" And when I told him, he was, you know, horrified, dismayed. I must have been filthy, in rags, you know, uncombed, literally dirty, because we had no means of bathing, washing, or anything like that, as well as, of course, hungry. But -- so that's was regimental headquarters, and that's the unit I then became part of for the remaining of my --

Q: And he was part of that unit

A: No, no, he was --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Saby told me very quickly -- Saby, he was a very clever fellow, but he didn't have any training like I did. He was two years older. He became a spy. And that was, he would -- he would go to Trikala, wer -- w-wearing decent civilian clothes, and I guess he -- there must have been contacts, and he would stay with them, but he would -- the spy part was they try to find out movements. Are there convoys of trucks, or is there a train that's coming, passing, that's laden. So that if there would be any action to be taken against either a convoy of trucks, or a con -- or -- or blow up a train, [indecipherable], the British had much greater network of intelligence in Greece, and all the major actions that took place was always because the British knew, and then they would -- they would agree with the guerrillas, to blow up a train, or to destroy a bridge, the [indecipherable] the most major action was done at the request of the British. And a big viaduct was blown up. That was quite a few months before my arrival. During my time, there were two actions of blowing up bridges in the area where my regiment operated. I was not involved in that.

Q: So when you, or the ra -- do you end up being able to take a shower or something, is it [indecipherable]

A: Eventually, yes, I took a bath, there were no showers, a -- a bath, and -- and given a -- actually, we were -- the pants I had -- oh, and then, I had lost my shoes, because in fo -- in fording up one of the rivers, I was told by a partisan, which is true in all armies, that when you are going to cross a river, tie the shoelaces, and tie them around the rifle, and hold them like that. So I don't know, maybe I didn't tie them well enough, and we're in the middle of this little rivlet, this little stream, but it's quite swift, and one of the shoes falls, and I -- I see disappearing down, and it's going too fast for me to do anything. So I was left with one shoe. So I thought, okay, I will wear only one shoe, but it's bad, because then you begin to hurt all over. So I threw the other one out, and I was barefoot. All of this time, the snow, and so forth, it was -- I was totally barefoot. But the pants survived, after my return, after they were washed by a villager. And I was given a tunic. At the top -- a tunic, an Italian soldiers tunic, but no shoes, but a -- a villager gave me pigskin shoes, it's just a piece of pigskin, which is then pierced, and tied with -- with string. Which is all right, it's like a ballet slipper that you use, which is fine. But two weeks later, when I was asleep, a dog ate one of the shoes, because it was food for them.

Q: So, did you get frostbite on your feet? Did you --

A: Fortunately not, you know, the feet would get very, very cold, and the -- the -- the Italians, you know, maybe they had been taught, or they knew, they were much, of course, older than I am, to rub -- rub them with snow. And if you do that, I don't think it's the rubbing with snow, but rubbing them fast, it just restores the blood circulation. This is what you have to make sure, you know, fortunately I didn't get frostbite. But three weeks after my arrival at headquarters, I got, you know, pleurisy, a very bad cold, I mean, when a little bit of fluid collects in -- in the pleura, not the lungs, but in the pleura. And -- but there was a ni -- a little infirmary, and had an Italian doctor, I can still remember him, he was a -- a short, very intelligent looking Sicilian. He was almost entirely black, from brown skin, but very, very capable, very clever with -- practically had no facilities, but took care of his patients.

Q: Was -- did he misdiagnose what was wrong with you?

A: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

Q: No.

A: Everything was -- was fine.

Q: Well, what did they give you for this?

A: Nothing.

Q: Nothing.

A: Just simply to be covered, you know, with additional blankets. They -- they had no -- there -- there were no medicines to be had. Sulfa was beginning to be known at that time, and of course, they were equipped in their own army, but we didn't have su-such supplies.

Q: So you were sick what, for a week, 10 days, something like this?

A: Yes, unfortunately be -- behind -- it was in a -- in a abandoned church, an old church, and so looking out of the window was the cemetery. It was not a -- and I remember another fellow patient and I were talking, and we were s -- thinking that, well okay, they won't have very far to travel if we have to end up there.

Q: So you get another job?

A: Yes.

Q: After you get sick?

A: After I got sick and recover, I was --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- because by that time, there was also another transformation that had taken place a few months before my arrival in the partisans, namely the partisans became organized as a modern army, with echelons, distinct divisions, regiments, battalions, companies. At least on paper, all right? And -- whereas before, these were independent units, marauding, doing whatever they could, but this was put on a much more professional footing, because by that time, the -- the man in command of the entire ELAS was General Sarafias, who was a professional military officer before the war. So when I then was assigned to the regiment -- now the -- the regimental commander was a -- a man who permanent [indecipherable] was a major in the former Greek army, by the name of Karfis. And he happened to have as an adjutant, a recent graduate of the military -- Greek military academy. So he was the usual, you know, not spit and polish, because we didn't have the things for that, but saluting, although there wasn't s-so much saluting with the partisans, you know. The method of addressing each other was synagonistis, which means fellow fighter. It was -- it wasn't comrade, it wasn't mister. It was even t -- with an officer of superior rank, you would address him as fellow fighter, and then his name. So, because I think of the fact that my background, finishing high school, command of a language, and so forth, I was given a -- a clerical job, primarily enciphelment -- codes. Because by that time, there were even radios, and nearby, because very near the regimental place, there was the -- the airfield, if I can call it that, it was just a bare piece of ground, but it was situated in the natural plateau, the one that I fired, remember?

Q: Yeah.

A: My first rifle. And when in the su -- in the summer months, when the l -- land was dry, then it was able to support the weight of an aircraft, and they would fly them over there, from Egypt, and for missions back and forth. And because of the proximity, then there was a permanent detachment of British officers, liaison officers, that have been parachuted, or brought by aircraft, next to our regimental headquarters. So at times, I would then be asked to go -- I did not know English, but some of them, some of the English officers knew French, and I was able to converse. Plus they were the only ones that had long range, short wave radios. You know, the rest of -- I mean, the partisans, only division had a radio, and in our headquarters we didn't have a radio in the beginning, so everything had to be through again, field telephony. But by then, it was necessary, because of certain engagements, to encode messages, and so I was pressed in that job.

Q: Did you like that job? Was it interesting?

A: Well, you know, no clerical job is interesting, everything becomes routine a little bit, but it was -- the thing that that -- am-amazed me is that after awhile, I didn't have to look at the decoding book to decode text. I had begun to learn, and -- and visualize the -- the

decipherment -- th-the [indecipherable] and -- but I didn't -- I didn't want to sh -- people to see that, because, you know, I was told that -- that, you know, if you eventually memorize it, then -- then you -- if you are ever caught, then under torture you may reveal the codes, although I'm sure that the things that they had to communicate were not of momentous strategic im-importance to --

Q: But they would also change the codes

A: Yeah, but -- bu-but, you do that -- we didn't have -- in all that -- I'm talking about practically from February through November, practically the nine months that I -- my remain -- stayed with the partisans service, we changed codes routinely only twice. So there wasn't that kind of a [indecipherable] because I don't think they were high level codes. But they were important to us, and -- well, th-that was not the only thing I had to do. Then the adjutant orders had to be typed. We had -- we found a ramshackle typewriter, and some paper. I was the only one who was able to use that and type some orders.

Q: So you had learned typing, sort of?

A: Sort of. More of the two or three fingers, which I still have to use today.

Q: So, I've -- how are things now, is this unit now going out and doing sabotage, or is it quiet, and that's not what you're doing [indecipherable]

A: No, no, no, no. Again, because it was regimental headquarters -- now, it's fighting units, and sabotage are in the region. I mean, if I drew a circle, it would probably cover, you know, a radius of 50 - 60 kilometers. 40 miles, you know, because the [indecipherable] adjacent things. By that time, in the beginning of the partisan war, the major things that the partisans had to do -- wa-wanted to do, was A, kill known collaborators, primarily to elevate the morale of the people. You know, begin to give them a sense that there are people who are protecting them. That those who collaborate with the enemy are going to get their just desserts. And because you cannot fight heavy engagements, there were occasional skirmishes, and fi -- and attacks with -- with isolated Italian, or -- or German units. But in our sector, when we begun to do a systematic thing of attacking convoys because our unit was the nearest to the main road that goes from Trikala to eventually Kardhitsa, and then Lamia, and so forth, to south [indecipherable] Greece. So that -- that was essentially the -- the -- the mission, if I can call it, of the regiment. We -- we never got engaged. We don't do that with the -- the light weapons. The heaviest weapons I remember we had in the whole regiment was two heavy machine guns. You can't engage an enemy that has armory units, with two heavy machine guns.

Q: Okay, we've come to the end of the tape.

A: All right.

End of Tape #6

Tape #7

Q: Are you getting news about the front? I mean clearly the -- the -- there's a turn in the war, and there's been a turn in the war since '43, or late '42.

A: Right, well, most of the spring, we knew -- first of all to us, through the British connection, primarily, as well as independently, the Greek connections, because of course, division talk to the agency in Athens, or the top command of ELAS. So -- but it would come to us two or three weeks late. So it primarily still involves the -- the campaign in Italy. The -- the great event occurs June six, when Normandy occurs in the war. We -- we get also news of the eastern front. But that was the -- the -- the first major event. That really didn't have an immediate effect, other than si -- psychological, that now these two great parts of the allies are converging. But I think through a -- the stream of -- of messages coming from division, and from ELAS headquarters, definitely show an increase in the pace of operations, for two reasons. First of all, visibly, from reports, Germans are abandoning smaller towns, and concentrating in major arteries now. Why would they do that, since no -- no -- nobody thought that the Greece itself was about to be invaded by allied troops. So -- so that was one -- one reason. Then, also, the news began to -- to trickle down again. We had more contact even from tiko partisans, who had much better communications, and already we began to see that the Russians are approaching the silent part of Europe, namely the Balkans, and it doesn't take a strategic, Napoleonic mind, a short look at the map indicates that -- because Greece is al-almost like a peninsula, the bottom of the Balkans, if the Russians were advancing that much, I think which eventually what happened is that the Germans would have an untenable position in this. So, this explains why the Germans were consolidating their lines, and because in the meantime, attempts had been made by the British mission to try to unite the warring factions of the Greek resistance. And eventually, in the -- in June or July of '44, there was a -- a s -- a signed agreement that was signed by representatives in the Middle East, in Lebanon, I believe, Beirut, which then held until the end of the war. So -- so we had this pace going on. But again, the day to day life for -- for us, food was very scarce, as usual, although it was regimental headquarters, th-they didn't grow crops or -- or other food. Also clothing, and -- and -- and sanitary conditions were not -- I mean, if you went to sleep at night, especially in -- in the winter, well in the middle of the night, you know, people are getting -- or you sleep on the floor, people are getting up and stepping [indecipherable] sometimes on bodies, make their way to -- to go out, maybe to relieve themselves. But very often it was not for that reason. You would go up, and open the tunic to let the cold air come in to quiet the lice, because in sleeping ne -- bodies next to each other, the lice begin to get warm, and begin to -- to move, and you -- it's not particularly pleasant, and to quieten them again, you go out, open the tunic, let the cold in, and they quiet for a bit, and you sleep for another hour or two. Th-This -- this -- this persisted until when it became real warm in the mountains, May, June, and on, because then you could go bathe in the streams, and that would -- we used to do that every day, and at times it effectfully -- eventually happened to me later on, a month or two later, when I went swimming, and I had been perspiring, running to get to the place to swim, and I must have caught a cold, which was then misdiagnosed as malaria, and I had other problems. But this was -- the pace noticeably started. There were more action from our

units in the [indecipherable], plus the -- the clear indication where they had come from headquarters in the Middle East, or from ELAS headquarters, to harass Germans, even notably those who were retreating and going north, but not to attempt any major action, even if we were able to. The reason being that they didn't want to infuriate the Germans, because fay -- they didn't really have to infuriate them, they were doing that anyhow in many cases, namely, a scorched earth policy, they attempted to blow up the port facilities in Pireas, and it was only a last minute action by the partisans in the city, that averted the blowing up of port facilities in Pireas. So -- so noticeably we saw the pace accelerate.

Q: Did you want to join them?

A: I?

Q: Yes. Would --

A: I hadn't seen any action, I -- only action I saw was a -- a month later, which was -- came out in -- inadvertently. I don't think I had -- I -- I knew that it wasn't a question of roughness or the danger, but that really I had no experience, and I had seen enough of what had been going on to know that I should not be entrusted with lack of appropriate training, on -- on anything major.

Q: Let me go back for a moment.

A: Yeah.

Q: There wasn't that much food, but you all were smoking cigarettes, which [indecipherable]

A: Well, food was always, I think once a day. And most of the time, because that which was -- was available were -- I still remember them, black eyed -- they look like black eyed peas, or black eyed beans. But these were from old, even sometimes abandoned governmental warehouses. There -- the villagers would make flour available, whatever they were able to do. And those things were usually spoiled rotten, and you'd find little crawling worms inside, but not after boiling, we used to joke that we would eat meat also, while eating the -- the beans. But, again, rel-relief would come from hunger in -- in the summertime, when -- because of vegetables [indecipherable] vegetables. I forgot what you asked me --

Q: I was asking about cigarettes [indecipherable]

A: Oh yeah, yeah. Well, the only way to relieve hunger --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- and that's where I learned to smoke, but we didn't have tobacco. So you would take leaves from trees, and dry them, and crunch them, and usually find a piece of newspaper.

In -- in the area where we were, a governmental warehouse had been raided and tons, literally tons of contraband cigarette paper, which was -- used to be sold legally to roll cigarettes, had been found. But because it had been contraband, it was so massive, you cannot burn paper so easily, as you know, even in fireplace, if you put a book, it takes -- it's hard to burn it. So, the government had fumigated these warehouses with sulfur, which had permeated the cigarette paper, so if you use that, which was from some respects easy, but it stunk, and smelled, and tasted of sulfur so much, we use newspaper. The problem with the newspaper is you take a puff, and it -- a flame at the end of the thing, instead of burning as a [indecipherable] a flame burning. And this is the reason why, it was primarily to assuage hunger.

Q: So it was very difficult to actually do that --

A: Right, right, yeah.

Q: -- given the circumstances.

A: Later on, occasionally, somebody would find -- because that region of Greece also is a tobacco growing region, which wa -- we were able to find tobacco [indecipherable]

Q: Now, were you finding that in the villages in spite of your bridge failure --

A: Yeah?

Q: -- that people were supporting the partisans, or not?

A: Oh yes, there is no question, because first of all, there is no question that without the support of the -- the people who had suffered a great deal, who also knew that harboring villagers, really almost invited punitive raids by the Italians, by the Germans. And in spite of that they persisted, and without them I think no -- not only our movement, I think no partisan movement can possibly exist, survive, let alone thrive, and operate.

Q: The ital -- the Italians taught you songs --

A: And -- and also, you know, poems, and --

Q: Right, uh-huh.

A: Right, yeah.

Q: So, you got a certain kind of education from them.

A: Sure, sure.

Q: W-Were -- were there partisan songs that were sung [indecipherable]

A: No, the only Italian, or foreign partisan songs that I -- I learned was from a captured German soldier, who turn out to have been a -- formerly in --in Nazi prisons, but as the war is progressing, and manpower is lowest, the Germans began to free -- free, I mean let the prisons out, and sometimes eventually including criminals. But first they started with political prisoners, former Communists, Leftists, Social Democrats, you -- you name it. But when they set them free, so to speak, they put them in special German units, in fact they had a number, I forget it, it was 888, or 999, something like that. And they were never let in big numbers, they were dispersed and sent throughout Europe. And generally they would be given menial, or clerical, or support jobs, so they were not in any armed way, or possibly representing a risk to the other German military. And so he -- he -- he was captured, after he came also willingly, and he was acting in some cases as an interpreter when we captured others, and interrogate them, and he taught me all kinds of songs that were sung throughout Europe in French -- I learned the in -- the Internationale in French, a couple of partisan songs in German, some in it -- lots of them in Italian. Bon dira rosa, which was Red Flag [indecipherable]

Q: Do you ever sing them again?

A: No, occasionally I -- I wanted to -- I remember many of them, not sometimes the complete words, and I try to find disks, and eventually so-some friend located, but very few were songs that I remember we sang. I think that what happened some group got together, and maybe officially these s-songs were called the songs of the resistance, but they were not have been s --

Q: Things that you were --

A: -- we sang every day.

Q: I -- I have a song that I taped --

A: Of the Greek resistance?

Q: Not -- no, it wasn't the Greek resistance.

A: Oh, no, no.

Q: Although actually I interviewed someone who was in the Greek resistance --

A: Uh-huh.

Q: -- an -- publicly, and he and someone in the audience sang one of the songs. I'll have to find it for you so you can hear it.

A: Sure, sure.

Q: And see whether you recognize it.

A: Of course.

Q: There was an Italian woman that I interviewed, who was in the Italian resistance, and she played from a tape, one of the songs. It's a wonderful song --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and I'll have to -- I'll have to play it for you also, so you can --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: Is there anything you could sing now, that you remember?

A: Oh yes, you know, I -- I'll sing, as I said, a -- not a st -- a whole stanza, but it -- it would start, [sings]. And it goes on. And it literally means we are not -- we are not afraid, we are not scared of German guns, or of the Fascist swords, because we are all fighting for democracy and freedom.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Many, many tunes, you know, as you know, they came from partisan, Russian partisan songs, but with Greek words, yes.

Q: Yeah. Now you -- it's clear that the war is closing, but there is an -- an action that happens that's sort of by accident.

A: Right, the -- that's right, the only one that I participated.

Q: Yes.

A: Well very quickly, one -- one morning, if I -- I remember, it was close to 10 o'clock in the morning, and I was sort of manning the telephone, and it rang, and they asked the other -- at the other end, to speak to the colonel. So, but I couldn't get the colonel, I got the adjutant. Well, very quickly what tran-transpired, regimental headquarters was in a part that was really a short distance from the plains of Thessaly, but it was a -- a suitable elevation. And there was a -- a kind of like an entry, a pass, a mountain pass, and essentially what the telephone call said is four or five or six German trucks have entered this pass, which had been manned by a very small unit of partisans, about five or six. And we, of course knew that coming to the pass and going south, ended in a cul-de-sac, because there was nothing, after you've gone for another kilometer, just there was a w -- a mountain wall. So, when they saw that happening, you know, that's why they called to alert us. They were not able, those who were guarding the pass, to engage how many Germans there would be, and the nearest unit that -- of a sufficient strength, was at least three or four hours away. So very quickly the commanding officer decided that the [indecipherable] is to fool the Germans into thinking that they are surrounded, that there

are many more than actually we were. So he dispatched anybody who could walk, including us clerical personnel in the regimental unit, to go, so we grabbed the -- our weapons, and after running for about 45 minutes, and out of breath, you could see down in that cul-de-sac, and all the -- the Germans had se -- literally circled the wagons, and some of them had gone hiding. And as they were being fired by the unit that was guarding the pass, they would return -- was rifle fire, they didn't have anything heavy. And so we started firing at them, and they were firing at us. And they -- since they saw things coming from both directions, they really concluded that they were in -- in dire straights. And we were afraid that they would communicate via radio to their original unit, and they would come to relieve them, with a much bigger force. But apparently, they either didn't have radio, or if they had, they didn't know where they were, see, they got lost. And by that time, in about three hours, or -- the main fighting unit came, and started -- the partisan unit, firing at the Germans, and then, after about a few minutes, you begin to see a white flag, but just before that happened, suddenly there was a little noise, or -- or -- or sound near where I was behind a rock. And at the same time that I heard the sound, I also felt a -- kind of a -- of a pain, temporary pain in the right knee, and when I bend down I saw it was a tear, and something -- oozing a little bit of blood. And it must have some part of a -- of a bullet that had hit a rock and splintered, and part of the thing ricocheted, but it didn't go inside, I didn't find anything, it wasn't a major wound, and it didn't hurt, but nev-nevertheless when I was taken to [indecipherable] I was bandaged by a woman who turned out to be a Jewish woman, who had gone to school for midwives, with a -- a -- a young girl, who was next door neighbors to us. So -- but it was the only action that I saw. I mean we -- we -- the number of Germans killed was, I think, eight or nine, and two were wounded, they were carried out with a litter and three prisoner.

Q: And did you shoot when you were --

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Yeah, you did.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you hit anything?

A: Oh ye -- you shoot -- you, first of all, we di -- we -- we didn't see -- we didn't shoot at the soldiers, because the only thing [indecipherable] was the trucks, so we s -- we sh -- we aimed --

Q: At the trucks.

A: At -- at the -- not the trucks so much, but again, it was psychological to impress them that fire is coming from both directions, so they feel that they are trapped, and they -- which they were.

Q: What happened to these two guys that were captured [indecipherable]

A: The three who were captured --

Q: Ah, three --

A: -- the two were -- I think one was a very young -- young fellow. I can still remember, he must have been really almost my age, really -- at least he looked it -- like that. And I remember he, all throughout the time that he's marched, and taken up to -- he's yelling German curses, which I do not understand, and heil Hitlers interspersed with German curses. [indecipherable] And when we got there, he was then in-interviewed, or interrogated by this German solider, who came out, and he told me in French, because that's how I communicated with him, in French, that it was a hopeless case of a fanatic member of the Hitlerjugend, who -- and I think he was -- he was shot -- actually not shot, he was killed, but again, because of a bullet was a scarcity, I didn't see it, I didn't witness it, but the following day I was told that they had cut his throat. Also, it would have been a little hard to carry, I mean, we be-began to be more ba -- mobile, and we didn't have the facilities to -- to carry extra.

Q: Did they kill the other two?

A: No.

Q: They didn't?

A: No, no, no.

Q: And did they --

A: They -- they -- they -- they were given to the British.

Q: So there were a lot of British --

A: Well, it was not a -- a --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, a mix thing, but I mean at least the -- the -- the British -- they didn't incarcerate themselves, but they made arrangements with the local gendarmerie in Kardhitsa to -- to guard them. That's after we begun to descend.

Q: From the mountain.

A: From the mountains. We kept them until then.

Q: And the British were not terribly fond of your particular group [indecipherable]

A: They were not. Th-The British meddled a lot in -- since -- in fact, after the -- the War of Independence in 1821, they always thought of Greece as a -- a part of their own backyard. But, look, they -- they were primarily, interested as they should have been, in making sure that the Germans felt the brunt -- whether it was harassment, or actual, you know, telling action like blowing up bridges and so forth. Because if nothing else, it kept units pinned down. Now, we could not account for pinning, you know, crack divisions, but anything, you know, a help. But there's no question that they were much more inclined to help the Zervas forces than -- but, eventually they saw the -- the light, and -- and it was almost like a kind of contract. You take this action, blow up this convoy, and then the next two weeks, liberators would -- would uppen, so I -- we used to go and that's when I got my first shoes, after an air drop.

Q: Really?

A: Finally, yes.

Q: So you -- you were for weeks, months, without them?

A: Months without --

Q: Months without shoes?

A: -- without -- with pig shoes, you know.

Q: Well, except one -- one got eaten --

A: Well, yeah, but it -- I -- I --

Q: -- but you got another one?

A: -- I regr -- I replaced it.

Q: You replaced it?

A: Yes, right.

Q: Were you wearing socks?

A: No, no such thing.

Q: No. So did they cover your toes, these things?

A: Yes. This is like a ballet -- like a ballet --

Q: Yeah [indecipherable] like a ballet --

A: -- slipper, yes.

Q: I see. It's a good thing it was warm weather. Now, it's clear that liberation is going to come.

A: Right.

Q: It won't -- may -- maybe a few months --

A: No, it began to be visible in beginning of August, even --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- it was -- maybe the ending of August, in two ways. First of all, because our units are more active -- but I have to tell you that I can remember it now in my mind's ear, because I had never heard all these months the sound of artillery. You know, there's no artillery in partisan, but now you begin to hear, at a great distance, this dull thud, boom, boom, boom. And at night, you know, it's not a heavy sound, it's not continuously [indecipherable] but it's there. And at night you hear the same sound, but at the same time you see also the illumination in the horizon. So you -- you -- you know somebody is firing, all right? So essentially what's -- what's happened is by then the Germans are in very well organized retreat, they're abandoning Greece. And of course, that's understood, and known, and so the partisans units physically are themselves beginning to move first to harass the rear of the departing Germans, but also to get low, because the lower parts now are themselves free. So -- so it became a combination of news, combination of an action, a combination of hearing things, seeing things, and then beginning to assess the [indecipherable] because as soon as these things started, headquarters wasn't going to stay in the rear where we were. We be -- ousess began to descend to lower elevations.

Q: Are you also hearing about killing centers in the east?

A: No.

Q: You don't hear anything?

A: That -- at least -- I mean, i -- I cannot le -- I did not hear --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- at all. Whether it was known, or whether it was known at the higher levels, at headquarters, I do -- I don't think so, because for example, I read the memoirs of Yugoslav partisans, some of them Bitola Jews, one of them, Zamilla Kolomonos, who was my fa -- my mother's maiden name, although no relation. And they only find out at the end of the war, because coincidentally, Ilia Aaronburg, the Russian author, had been to a tour of concentration camps, and who had been a -- obviously -- apparently to Treblinka, and who told the survivors, 67 out of 3500 Bitola Jews, that all were

exterminated in Treblinka with no survivors. So I don't think that this kind of thing was -- was known until really I think se -- the Russians I think, because they wer -- they were the first that liberated parts of Poland. You know, my brother, when they had to abandon Auschwitz, was because of the approaching Russians. So I think through that way, but it did not reach the partisans, certainly, and I think even -- even after we were liberated, we didn't understand the kind, as well as the magnitude, both in -- in -- in kind, and -- and -- and -- and size of the horror that had occurred.

Q: Mm-hm.

End of Tape #7

Tape #8

Q: W -- let me ask you the same question that I just asked you.

A: All right.

Q: What -- di -- was it in some ways helpful to you that you didn't know? Would it have actually made a difference?

A: Either I did not know, or did not learn about the --

Q: Know about the [indecipherable]

A: -- the extermination?

Q: Yes.

A: It's very hard not to -- to put myself in a kind of a frame at -- of mind that I had at that time, and try to speculate what it would have caused if -- if I had known. I s -- I think, as I mentioned earlier -- perhaps we were off camera, I don't recall any more, that it's a lot -- both easier for me, and much more pleasant in my mind, to tell you what my mind was occupied with during -- especially the su -- the late summer months, as we begin to really more than hope now, we can see this being a tangible, reachable goal, to be liberated. That more increasingly, my thoughts are, constantly are with the family, and of course the big unknown. And I -- I -- I can still remember going on long walks in the middle of the mountains, and sitting on a rock, and looking at the horizon, beyond which you cannot see, because the next ridge intervenes, and try to go mentally beyond that ridge, and then I would see the family. See, it -- I mean, picture them in my -- in my mind, but almost all the thought were, no matter how they started, were all how things are going to be, not how things they were, but how they are going to be, and I was -- it was this -- this feeling that with liberation there will be really I -- a -- a greater, brighter thing for everybody, and now the experience in the mountains and so forth, had begun to ba -- I -- I grew up, almost overnight.

Q: Yeah.

A: I had -- I don't think I had another childish thought after I -- after the monastery in Messenikolas. So this is what was -- I was preoccupied with, that I -- that I would have to go to the university, and how it will be with my mother, my father, and my brothers. How I would able to guide them, and with all my experience. So that was what was preoccupying -- you know, it would have been te-terrible, you know, to -- to -- to have had these kinds of things be disturbed by if we had learned what was actually happening.

Q: Right, what was happening. So, in many ways you were constructing a future --

A: Right.

Q: -- at this point.

A: I don't know, perhaps temperamentally, I've always been much more f-forward looking --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- than retrospective looking. And it's essential for me to have a -- an objective, so I would always formulate objectives that would be reached, that I can then act on. And that's what was the primary -- and the -- the -- the closer this thing is -- is coming, the more eager I am to -- to do it.

Q: So tell me about what liberation was like, how -- what led up to --

A: Very quickly, the thing that -- like many things like that happen very quickly, and that was -- towards the tail end of September, maybe beginning of October, we are issued orders that indeed we have to start descending down, and we physically begin to descend, and out of nowhere, I thought no one -- because I had -- in the month I had never seen that, a tiny little Fiat automobile, which was a -- a captured It-Italian army vehicle, which I think the Italians called topolino, which means little mouse, which was -- it was smaller than a VW. And that's where -- there was a driver -- imagine that little thing, four people. An-And I don't know why, here's the colonel sitting in the passenger seat in front, and in the rear seat is the adjutant, who has the rank of a captain, and me. But it's almost -- what -- as we are unload -- or taking the few files that we took with us, and maybe because I was helping, I just got in, and that's it. So for hours we are driving down very rough roads and things like this, stopping every so often, until finally, towards 10 or 11 o'clock at night, we stop someplace to -- for a relieve and -- and even to have a bite that we had carry with us. And we slept on the ground, and we are already now in the plains of Thessaly. And the following morning as we are ready again to -- to proceed, the colonel turns the adjutant and says, "What's Nehama doing here?" I mean, I've been with him for a whole day, talking and driving. He just then realized that I was there, apparently. Out. So without any other thing, I'm ordered out of the vehicle in the middle of nowhere, and they left me. I mean, I had my rifle, and a few personal belongings. But -- but -- but soon, very soon, I -- I could hear even a truck coming, and it was a truck that the -- the g -- the partisans had commandeered, and it was -- so they stopped, and I -- I got on.

Q: They picked you up.

A: And it took us to -- to Trikala. So as I said, these things occur very, very fast. And in fact when I was left, and then I boarded the truck, that's was the first time when I saw visual evidence of the German retreat, because on the side of the road, there were burned vehicles, because they had been attacked, and I saw a considerable num -- number of dead German soldiers. Dead, in fact I still remember one of them on his back with a belly distended, because you know the corpse inflates after awhile, and stinks. And these were visual, you know, again, evidence, th-that -- that they finally had left. And so we reached

Trikala. And I don't know whether we encamped someplace. But then, a couple of days later, we were ordered to get to Larisa. Larisa is a much larger city, and happens to be a -- also most central city and strategic city, because the railroad line runs through Larisa. So I got to Larisa, and essentially I rejoined the regimental unit.

Q: And what constituted liberation, I mean, how -- how did it happen that somebody said it's over, the war is over?

A: Oh, nobody said that, I mean --

Q: Nobody said that, just --

A: Again, this is not a single event.

Q: Right.

A: So last night you're a slave, and the next your -- you're free. It's happens, but the reason I'm say it happens with such rapidity is, we didn't -- we were not in constant touch, so we did not know if indeed we finally have seen the last of the rear guard of the retreating Germans, you know? Units are moving up, but there may be others coming behind them. But so -- so all these thing you are doing, partly by your feel of the terrain, and what's happening in front of you, at the same time also, you're receiving orders which themselves are -- are delayed because again, the communications are not what we have today. So it would take hours until you begin to get confirmation that yor -- you're f -- f -- eventually seeing the end of the German columns. Let alone that some of our outlying units, on purpose were harassing the retreating Germans so to -- to speed them o-o-on their way.

Q: So is there a moment, let's say you -- the war -- the war is not over --

A: Right.

Q: -- for a number of months, but in terms of Greece --

A: Yes.

Q: -- is there a moment that you remember saying there is not just this free --

A: Right, right.

Q: -- little area, it's -- it's the country?

A: Yes. The moment I got to Trikala. You see, since I thought maybe it's a local situation --

Q: Uh-huh, mm-hm.

A: -- but there, I -- I s -- talked to people in the city, in -- and as well as other parts, as from other units, and because by that time they knew, because they knew that Athens was free, and Pelaponsis was free, and Lamia was free, and therefore they were free, and so that's -- that's when I knew that's it.

Q: Did you feel physical relief? Did -- do you remember?

A: I -- first of all, I -- I still remember that as we are coming down the mountains, almost as -- as we are reaching the plains, not on purpose, I think accidentally I turned west, and I saw the retreating heights, where I spent the previous 13 months or so. It's almost like visibly doing two things, thanking them for saving me, and two, you know, saying good-bye, that's why I've had since then, a tremendous love and affinity for mountains. So that when -- when I finally got to Trikala, and I -- I -- and I was told that -- that then the rest of the country was free, there wasn't elation. I -- I -- I don't believe that either mentally, or psycholo -- it was definitely not a letdown, but it was a kind of calm that now said, all right, now you have to cease worrying about survival from the standpoint of an enemy action, all right, and what di -- the German represented. And soon you've got to be able to gather forces to do what I had been planning to do in the mou -- in the mountains. So there was -- it was a feeling of -- a great deal of something, some weight lifted from the mind, that that part you don't have to worry. But that didn't linger, and inst -- and it was s-supplanted by now, in the coming days, you're going to rejoin the family and you will then be able to pursue what you've been hoping to do. It was more serenity than elation. I mean elation was there, I mean we shouted a little bit, but it was -- it didn't last very long, there was much more -- I don't know whether I had a presentiment, I -- I -- obviously I -- I -- I didn't, but I -- it was -- I think others had the same thing, because when we went to Larisa, I met another Jewish boy, actually the son of the owner of the f -- company that my father worked for, who was the -- almost the last person I could imagine would have been there. But he was there, and we had -- we talked for hours. And I think we almost shared similar -- had similar reaction to the events.

Q: And his name?

A: Saby Camhi. He's -- he's been dead a number of years now.

Q: Now, some woman came by, Popi?

A: In -- that was in Larisa. In fact, the day after I -- I saw Saby Camhi, whom I encountered in -- it was a little park across the building where we were housed, and I had gone for a stroll. And the following day I was maybe typing something, or writing something, and somebody come and told me that there is a lady at the office of the adjutant, which was next to the colonel's office, asking for me. First of all, who could have possibly be asking for me in Larisa? So if -- i -- I went there, and she told me her name, Popi Stassnopoulos, and she told me that she is passing on her way to Trikala, and somehow my parents has learned that I was with this partisan unit. Maybe Saby Shabetai or his parents ha -- because Saby still part of that. And so she had been asked by my father to get in touch with me, bring me news of the family, and to urge me to go and see them as soon as

possible. I had no thoughts of that yet, because I didn't know by what means I would -- I would leave to do that. It didn't occur to me to do that -- first of all, it was really almost a -- a week or two after we -- no, less than that, and we -- we liberated. She asked me if I had money to travel to Greece. I -- I had no money, the -- the -- we did get paid in the partisans. And she opened her purse and gave me -- which I thought it was a large -- rather a large denomination bills, or several of them, and told me that that would adequately cover a bus ticket. And all the -- she was on her way to the station to go, and I -- and I offered to -- to walk with her. She says no, thanks a lot, but -- but she -- I asked if was news about my mother, but everybody wa -- were -- there were anxious moments, you know, during all the hiding, and so forth, but they're all very well, and extremely anxious to see you, and so don't tarry. I have to -- to -- to let, I -- just a month before, in the middle of the summer, I had caught a cold, and I was offered a leave o -- a medical leave absence, but at the time I was offered, where was I going to go? I didn't have relatives in the middle of the mountains. But I had asked the doctor if he could ge -- keep it for me. And so after I saw Mrs. Stassnopoulos, Popi, then I remembered this promise, so I went to him, and I said, "Is this still valid?" Sure. So immediately he signed the three week medical leave, which I then presented to the adjutant. He said it was fine with him. He says, "When do you want to leave?" I said, "As soon as I can." So I went to the bus station, and I booked a s -- a seat on the bus on a Sunday, which was November, I think November 19. And that was the end of my stay with the partisans.

Q: Had you dreamt -- do you remember dreams during this time?

A: I'm sure I dreamt, but I don't remember.

Q: [indecipherable], uh-huh.

A: Yeah.

Q: So you get on the bus November 19th, to travel, yes?

A: It's a Sunday.

Q: It's a Sunday.

A: That's important, I'll tell you why.

Q: Okay.

A: But unlike when I came up from Athens, this time it was a regular bus, so it could make good time, and we arrived in Athens in -- around three or four o'clock in the afternoon. Now Athens pre-war, as well as post war, I mean, I think all cities on Sunday, they are so quiet, it -- it -- it sounds almost de-deserted, especially in the commercial. So I -- so we end up in the bus station, and I got out of the bus, and I call on the telephone. Now actually, in my house we didn't have a telephone, we share it with the people upstairs, the Shabetais, and so I think Mrs. Shabetai answered, and I said I just arrived, she says, "All

right, come on, come on." "All right," I said, "I'm going to take a -- a taxi." So I got on a taxi, and eventually f -- it wasn't really -- it was Omonia, that square I mentioned to you earlier, where people will sit on the grates during the war. It's a 10 minute ride at most. And we got to the front of the house, but there's no one there. I thought that by -- by then, by the time I made the telephone call, I would find my younger brothers there, eager to -- to see me arrive, there's no one. And so I opened the main en -- entrance door, and I go up the stairs to the third floor, where our -- our apartment was, and I knocked on the floor, and the door opens, and who do I see? Popi. Mrs. Stassnopoulos. She is the woman that had come to Larisa to talk with me. And she went like this, go upstairs. I mean, I'm too dumbfounded to even ask her why. So I trudge another -- another floor, and I knock on the door, and Mrs. Shabetai opened the door, and she embraced me, and she takes me by the hand into their living room, and there's my father. And I still remember him, because that -- it was a -- a kind of a thing that he wore in winter, a flannel robe. And he's sitting in a kind of deck chair, because he -- he liked that kind of thing, with armrests. Well, I went in and embraced him, and he kissed me, and -- and I see he is crying, and I say, "Where is mother, and where is -- where is Sam, and Meko?" Well he -- I don't think he was in a state to -- to talk, but Mrs. Shabetai came again, and put her arm around me, and Mr. Shabetai took hold of my arm and told me that things were -- had been terrible, you know, and the only thing is that they were caught somehow, but nobody knew now where they were. This is what I -- I found when I got there. I really cannot even remember the remaining of -- of the day. I'm sure I must have something to eat, because I hadn't eaten all day long. I don't know whether I ate it, when apparently I then -- and we went downstairs to our apartment, but very quickly to not make a final tie with Mr. and Mrs. Stassnopoulos, whom I met. When we're ab -- left our apartment, then people who were looking for places, they -- and the Stassnopoulos found, or got ahold of our apartment, and they moved there, and at liberation, they could not be expelled. They didn't even have a place to go, so for a -- they stayed in the same place, we shared the apartment for a number of months. And relations were not really the best after a-awhile, it was difficult to do that. But essentially my father and I shared a room, and they shared the other bedroom. You know -- and even I know that the following -- I don't know whi -- how I slept that night, how -- how I was able to sleep, I didn't know what to think. And I'm sure I must have asked my father, but he -- he had no details as to exactly what had happened, how they had been caught, or -- now, he knows, because other people had said that -- that -- that they were taken to Haidari, and that from there nobody else then knew. Actually, we know now -- I know now that my mother and my two brothers were put on the last transport that left Greece, that -- and the reason that was being delayed was because they were waiting for the 2400 Jews of Rhodes, which again, you know, with the Italian armistice, they had the Germans occupied, and they had rounded up, and they're bringing them by boat. And they made the last transport in -- in -- in August. It's very hard, you know, sometimes when I think that the first time I began to learn and see that indeed the -- the Germans may be on the way out from Greece, it must have been July, maybe, or maybe early August of '44. And to think that within a month they would be t -- being transported literally, you know, along the railway line in front of me in Thessaly, well, figuratively speaking -- well even harder than after another month or two, would have been over. Well, it happened.

Q: Was your father able to talk with you about what he experienced --

A: Slowly.

Q: -- or was [indecipherable]

A: Slowly, yeah, he -- you know, I -- I -- I cannot -- now, and then, but of course more now, having children myself, I -- I began to feel, you know, that as soon as he emerged from hiding, he finds that he has no wife, and -- or children. He doesn't know where I am, or where the rest of the family are, and -- and he has no answers, you know, nobody can -- can tell him. I mean, in the case of my mother and my brothers, he has surmised that something horrible happened. At least I had told him I was going to go up the mountain, but whether I'm alive or not, he had no idea until the Shabetais return, which was not until, you know, two or three weeks later. And only slowly he began to -- to tell me how it was. I'm -- in fact I remember he told me that around September, he finally, in the last place where he was hiding in one of the suburbs of Athens, he got up, and he knew it was Yom Kippur, and he begun to pray. And out of the window, he saw another man in the -- in the yard in the adjacent house, who was also praying. And that's when he realized it must be another Jew, and i-it wasn't in yet the liberation, not freedom yet, and when they got liberated, they -- they -- and he did -- he was another Jew. So, I mean for my father, s -- being immobilized, first of all because of his -- of his leg, but even because of hiding, you know, when -- even people who were fully functional were -- couldn't roam around the streets, you know, from fear of being seen by somebody, denounced, there were many of -- of this kind of people, in fact, you know, my family, as I know from my brother, were found by Rekanati, who was a -- a Jew, a Salonika Jew who worked for the Germans, and well, he was, you know, shot. And so we were trying to pick up life again, out of the -- but no sooner are we doing that that the troubles start. And at one point, because I didn't know what to do, I thought that I want to rejoin my unit, and my father went into hysterics, literal hysterics, which I thought a little bit ludicrous for a man of his age. But now I can understand. I mean, he is the only son that's left to him, and he's now talking about going and rejoining the unit, you know. And it -- well, it wasn't so much his shouting that kept me there, but the doctor who gave me the leave, turn out to be staying at the apartment across the street from us. So I went and I -- I said to him, "What shall I do?" He said, "Don't go anyplace. Stay here." Yeah. And that's what I did.

Q: How old was your father at this time, you think?

A: My father at that time must have been in his late 40's.

Q: Okay, let's change the tape.

End of Tape #8

Tape #9

Q: -- how long was it wh -- after you had seen your father that you knew it was [indecipherable]

A: Right. May I fo -- spend a couple of minutes --

Q: Sure.

A: -- to mention what happened to me after, in December of '44, when finally the problem -- the political fighting was over. Our neighbor, who w -- was liberated by German -- I mean -- German -- British -- British troops, and Greek police. And, I mean everything had been closed, there would have been -- had been no food, other than what one had, you know, kept in before the trouble started. So the following day, I went and stood in line at the grocery store two blocks from our apartment, waiting to get whatever, you know, was -- was available. And five minutes later, after I started s-standing in line, a number of police officers, gendarmerie come, and they're going down the line, who is Isaac Nehama? So, me. Well they take me, and first they took me to the apartment, and I saw my father, there were other policemen and gendarme around, some of them in civilian clothes, some of them in uniform. And my father is really half hysterical, half -- not hysterical, I mean vocally, but frightened, but at the some time, also resolute, because they are doing searches, and so forth, and he had a few gold sovereigns left on his person, and they found it. He -- at -- for a moment he thought that they were going to grab it away, and there was the only thing that we had left to our name, so he started shouting, and screaming, and so forth. Well they -- they didn't take the money, but they took me away, they took me to the police station and they began to pummel me with the butt of the rifles, because they wanted me to reveal names of EAM/ELAS people in the neighborhood. I told them I hadn't been in the neighborhood for over a year. I was not a part of that before I left. Yes, I was in ELAS, but I went to survive, not to -- for political reasons, and certainly I did not know anyone in the neighborhood of that. Well, I was beaten for -- for quite a time, but at the end I was put in a -- in a car, and taken to the place which ironically, in the center of Athens, was the place where the Gestapo used to round up their prisoners in the basement. It was a -- an office building, had the basement, or the base for a garage. And by the time I got there, it was dark, and I was -- a door opened, and I was shoved, almost total darkness, except you could feel the smell and the noise of lots of other people. In short, they had been rounding up people, and the following day they put us in trucks, they took us to a -- a c -- a mini camp, a detention camp with barbed wire, near the shore, Glifada, which is a suburb of Athens, a s -- beautiful spa. And I -- I was kept there for a -- a day and a half, and then we were taken, and put on to Pireas on ships. We didn't know where we were going, and after a traverse of I think three or four days and nights, then also it happens in darkness we will disembark. And we found ourselves in -- in the middle of a desert, at least it looked like a desert. Now subsequently I learned it was Lugia. Well, what had happened, the British then had taken all these things as prisoners, because the people of ELAS had taken some British soldiers as -- as prisoners, so it was kept as a kind of bargaining chip. Well, fortunately, in the meantime, my father, through frantic efforts, and a cousin of his, knew

the Europe Times correspondent in Athens, who knew Damaskinos, the archbishop, who had become regent by that time, and told him about the fate of this Jewish boy who goes to save himself, loses most of his family, and -- and now he's a -- a prisoner of the British. Because two days after I arrived in Lugia, then once a day some British soldier will come with a clipboard and mention names. And somebody said to me, "Your name has been called." So effectively, the word had come down, and I was repatriated. So I think this needs to -- to have a nice book end for my partisan --

Q: And -- and this lasted for a week?

A: F-F-For a -- from the time that I was picked up, till the time I returned was, I think, 15 days. And I came back, I think, the seventh or eighth of January of '45.

Q: Now, you were --

A: I think you were asking me earlier about when Sam returned.

Q: No, but let me ask you something.

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Was this the first time in your life that you were beaten?

A: Yes, by supposedly our allies.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Well, look I can understand they -- they -- you know, they -- what they were trying to do, I -- I wasn't beaten by the British themselves, I was beaten by the Greek gendarmerie, who were, of course, doing the beating of -- of the -- I think the British, wa -- once I got to the detention place in Athens itself, and to [indecipherable], once we came under English army control, people not beaten. If anything else we were well treated. I mean, food was there plentiful. In Libya one day, a man came, an English, with a English uniform, and I saw in his shoulder a patch that said Palestine. I took a chance, and I addressed him in Hebrew, the only phrase that I -- I knew, do you speak Hebrew? And he says, "Are you," -- I didn't know how to -- I didn't know any more Hebrew other than that, but I told him my name. Then he said, "Okay, come in the evening." Then in the evening he brought me a couple of bars of chocolate. Tha -- of course, it wasn't really in his power to let me out. But I was let out in a few days anyhow.

Q: Were you very hurt when they -- when they hit you, I mean you --

A: I mean, I don't know if they did it on purpose, they really pummeled me in the upper body and the legs.

Q: With the butt of a rifle?

A: Yes, and at -- at one point, the man had this -- th -- even a bayonet fixed, and he went like this, I'm -- I'm sure that -- and because I think he -- it pierced my overcoat, that famous blue overcoat, which I mentioned to you, I had -- I had still saved it from the partisan days, and had rit -- brought -- brought back, but it was just a -- a -- a -- a savage beating.

Q: Did that do something to you, as a human being, did that --

A: Of course, I -- well, first of all, I was -- I was really, for one thing, taken aback that -- that such savagery was possible, and especially for something that w -- I had not done, or for -- I could not fulfill a request which in good consc -- I wasn't hiding anything. It wasn't as if they were asking me the name of my unit, or where are they? I would have told them. There was nothing s-secret about that. But they -- they were -- and I can see that this was not done at the request of the British, but it was simply on their own initiative. It was that horrible thing. Greece, unfortunately, is the only country where the resistance, which in spite of all of this horrible political infighting, at least did something to shore up the morale of the people, inflict losses on the Germans and the Italian. It was never officially recognized until about 10 years ago, when finally Papandreaou, the minister who was now the prime minister is dead, rammed a law through one of the two Houses of Parliament. He didn't even clear both of them. And this is the tragedy, the pity of Greek political life and affairs, that even after 50 or more years, they are not even willing to say bygones be bygones, at least recognize a contribution that was made, of substantial dimensions.

Q: Okay, Sam.

A: All right. Well, I then resumed my life in the sense that I began to prepare myself. Now it's beginning of the year of '45, for taking the entrance examinations at the Polytechnic Institute in -- in sep --

Q: Mm-hm. The same place you were going to go to --

A: In September, right. But it means preparation. Well, of course the war -- war is still raging in Europe, I mean, still going on, and finally it ends at the end of April of '45, and soon thereafter, the stories first trickle, then becomes a torrent, both in the newspaper stories, as well as the newsreels, to see the emaciated, things in extermination camps, the crematoria, the piles of corpses, and all this horror. Well, what can one do but, you know, without any trace of where our loved ones are. And it was not until I think beginning of August, of '45, that first on the radio -- at the time of news, they didn't have the things as bulletins, at the time of news, it would be an extended time that they took to recite names, because as news be-began to trickle down, and come down from Europe of prisoners from the -- the concentration camps, some -- in some cases the Greeks themselves, political prisoners who were in Dachau, then there was also news from contingents of Greeks that had gone, some of them forcibly, some of them voluntarily, to work in German factories. But they got, of course also co -- caught by the fighting of the war. Some of them never returned, and so they also had to be listed. And then one day in the

beginning of August of ’45, a neighbor called me and told me that she heard my brother’s name mentioned. But because I -- I didn’t wa -- I didn’t know whether she had heard correctly, whether she made a mistake, whether the -- the possibility of there being another person of the same name. I didn’t tell my father, and I immediately came down, it was very early in the morning, and I ran to the offices -- the nearest office of the newspaper. I went to the -- and I -- and I told them what I wanted, and they had the list that it was going to appear in the afternoon paper, and then I saw Sam Nehama, comma, Athens. So I was confident enough because I knew that they -- we are the only Nehamas in -- in Athens, so I then brought this thing with me, and show it to my father. And now of course, there is no way, I mean, I asked at the newspaper office how can one get in touch, because usually this information came via UNRRA, who was the relief organization that shepherded all these DPs, in the displaced persons camps. But there was nothing tangible, but while we are fretting, I mean, when we gonna hear, and when is he gonna come, the following day he called on the phone. Now, on the phone he told us that he was in Bari. So, I thought meant that he was going to take the -- the ferry, which takes about a day to get to Corling. And then -- so we thought that it was going to be a few days more. And then, about half an hour later, the phone rang again, I remember it was at the neighbors, and I had to run upstairs, and it was Sam again, he says, “I -- I -- I called you from Corling. I didn’t want to break the news so suddenly upon you that I’m here, I’m not in Bari, I’m already in Greek territory, I’m in Kolif, which is an hour and a half. So, I told my father, Sam is here, he couldn’t believe it, of course he couldn’t come -- I -- and ran to the railr -- railroad station. He came off, you know, was whole hundreds, literally, of people retur -- returning from Germany, and Europe, and he had on short corduroy, brown corduroy pants, in the manner of lederhosen, you know, which I’m sure he must have gotten in Germany from one agency or the other. And of -- of course, first of all the -- what impressed me was his size, it was -- he was a grown man, and -- and certainly he was not thin, he looked rather -- very, very healthy and well fed. And --

Q: And how old is he now? You were nine -- you were --

A: At -- at -- at the moment we are talking about our reunion --

Q: Yeah.

A: Okay, he was 15 years old.

Q: And he’s a grown man [indecipherable] because of what he [indecipherable]

A: No, no, he’s -- he still, you know, has a youthful face.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But he has the stature of a grown man, he was not the little, short boy that I had left before. And let alone that in my mind’s eye, having seen the newsreels, and read the stories, and when I knew that he was also liberated, you know, I thought I was going to see a broken individual, not -- if not ema-emaciated, or a s -- a skeleton with skin, but

certainly even with premature gray hair. Fortunately none of that had touched Sam, which I'm very, very happy for him. I think in contrast, I think I had been much more affected by the -- the war, though I did not see the -- the horrors that he did, but by the separation, because I was at an -- at an age where I could begin to -- to think about things like this, and in -- in -- internalize them.

Q: It's interesting, because one would assume, theoretically --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- that a young boy who went to Auschwitz would be more affected than the boy who was in the resistance.

A: Sure.

Q: Yes?

A: Originally, when I was told that you were interested in interviewing me, I told Sharon Mueller that I have nothing to say, compared to what Sam went through. But Sharon is a wise lady, and she said, "The invitation is not proportional to the travail that one has undergone, with what one has to say." So that persuaded me to come and -- and talk with you. But I always think that the -- compared to what he saw, and what he went through, mine really paled [indecipherable] insignificance, except that things that -- the way they affected me.

Q: Affected you, yeah.

A: I would -- perhaps I would have felt -- and I've had the same kind of -- of -- even if I was in hiding, because I was at a -- you know, even two or three years made a difference, and maybe my own inclination [indecipherable] was to -- to think about these things, and I thought a lot about them. And the -- the -- the pain of not finding them, seeing them in newsreels what had gone on, and seeing the enormity of these things, all of those things then combined to very quickly l-leave, at least in me, what I perceive -- I cannot obviously speak for Sam and what is deep in his mind, but I had a -- a much more -- I felt it, I think more than he did. That's -- I -- I think that I did, I'm -- I'm not sure that that's true, objectively.

Q: But you also, in terms of being with the partisans, and maybe this makes a difference, not only were you older, but you had time to think about it, you had time to --

A: Yes, although in both cases, there was always the question of survival.

Q: Yeah.

A: But can you imagine me -- when -- when he retells in his tape the Death March from Auschwitz to only a rail head, which is less than 50 kilometers away, and it took three

days, and no sleep, and you don't dare fall by the wayside, because you're gonna be shot. I think a minute of that is more than the entire year of what I went through.

Q: My suspicion is, but I don't know, is you didn't ask him, immediately what happened, you wa -- you waited until -- or did you? Did you go alone before you went to see your father?

A: Or -- no, no, I -- I didn't -- no. I knew that my f-father was waiting and anxious. I wouldn't have dare take Sam and say let's go and have a chat. So no, we went. But even in the subsequent days, because I did not know, number one, seeing the horrors in the newsreel, and not knowing yet to -- ho -- how much they had affected him. Now, outwardly he's -- he's j -- fine, but I wanted to be careful, so I -- I -- I did not broach things like this. And really, even things like -- when did you arrive in Auschwitz. Even I asked him a few years ago, because then I wanted to find the exact date. He said, "I can give it to you within four or five days." Well, I went to the Holocaust Museum, I went to the library, found the famous Auschwitz Chronicles of Danuta, and what do I see? 17th of August, an entry that a contingent is expected tomorrow of 20 odd thou -- thousand and t-twenty -- 2100 Jews from Rhodes. It was a mistake, they didn't put the Athenians. And then it says, me -- X number of males were given numbers, starting from B something to B -- and I know Sam's na -- number is B7464. So he was right smack in the middle of that range, so I know now the day they got to Auschwitz. Now, I asked Sam what time of day, and he told me it was still dawn, almost, just before dawn. Because I've tried to think when did my mother and father -- and my -- my mother and brother die. Nobody knows, but from Sam I know it was either the same day, or the latest the following day. They didn't keep them. They had no place to -- to -- they had to dispose of them. So at least I -- I can -- I have narrowed the day of my mother's and brother's deaths.

Q: But his coming -- his coming back was confirmation that no one else was coming, right? And how do --

A: First of all, I didn't -- I didn't know whether he was coming back, given his age, and -- and -- and -- and seeing that at the time of the arrival, the very young, the very old, or women with very young, regardless of their own ability to work or not, the freakle finger deter -- I mean, who do you expe -- how do you expect that -- wha -- what expectation do you have that a 14 year boy will appear capable of concentration camp labor? So, I mean, only the darkest thoughts exist, and it's a -- it's a miracle that -- that I think this arrived, because he was bigger for his stature for his age, plus that thing that he did in the Greek concentration camp, I think is responsible for his not being chosen to go the other direction.

Q: What did he do in the concentration camp? Because anyone who watching this will not know what that means.

A: Yeah, well, Sam is very good about that, he says well, first of all he had to go undergo quarantine that lasted for several weeks. Wa -- there was very little to be done. Then, he was taken and to -- there was a neighboring camp, actually a farm, and it was about 10

kilometers from the main Birkenau camp, called Budi, which was a -- a farm, more a farm complex. And that young kids were doing far-farm work, picking things up, and things like that. And that's from where he -- he eventually had to do the -- the march, and get to Buchenwald, and -- and I think the interrogator asked them what he did in Buchenwald, with [indecipherable] did, he says, "Nothing." Because in Buchenwald was not that kind of a camp, it was not a -- a labor camp.

Q: Right. How did your father, when he met Sam, it must have been that he was extremely [indecipherable] with joy at seeing [indecipherable] children, and the loss of his wife --

A: Right.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: I -- I -- I can see the scene, and he is crying, well, but I think both he and I, without even discussing it, we -- we took it easy, we didn't -- we didn't ply Sam with lots of questions right in the beginning. And in fact, some of the details which I -- he relates on the tape, in particular the -- the beating that they received at the hands of the German police, I only heard it for the first time myself on the tape. So I -- because w -- we did not know what effect this kind of questioning would have on him, it certainly would open up wounds that perhaps ought to be left to heal for a bit. So we were very, very careful. Course, you know, unfortunately, I -- I don't know, y-y -- you realize tha-that -- that although you want to know, you're -- you're hungry for that, but it isn't gonna change the outcome. So, waiting a little bit longer, I -- I -- I don't want to say that we -- we didn't want to know. What I think was much more [indecipherable] was we wanted to tread very carefully, because we did not know what this might do to s -- to -- to Sam. In the same way I think that even my father did not ply me with very pressing questions continuously about my experiences in the camp. I mean, after I told him -- I mean in the ca -- in the -- in the -- in the mountains. After I told him of -- of traversing the [indecipherable] and getting to Kardhitsa, and then how finally I got there. But [indecipherable] from time to time I would tell him a few things that happen in the mountains, but he didn't press. I think that if I had stayed longer, we would have exchanged stories. He would have told me things about his own childhood, and I would have told him about my mountain experiences.

End of Tape #9

Tape #10

Q: Did you ask your father about his year in hiding?

A: Yes, several times, but the --

Q: Two years, actually.

A: Two year?

Q: Well, it was a two [indecipherable]

A: No, no, no, no. It was from September of ’43, to October of ’44, 13 month. The -- es- essentially the same period for me in the mountains. Two things. My father was, because of his leg, was not a mobile individual, therefore it is that he missed going out. Of course, being cooped up, he -- I think he changed altogether, three locations. He went with some friends in the beginning, then just for security, and -- and before suspicions would a -- a -- a -- be a-aroused, he -- he -- he moved. I don’t think he had, first of all, things to read, like books or things like this. And I don’t think my father read that much, as compared with my mother, who was an avid reader. So he told me -- well, primarily of -- of A, thinking about the rest of us, counting the minutes and the hours and the anxiety that he felt -- he -- he -- he spoke about that. And always, before my mother and brothers were caught, he l-looked forward to seeing, occasionally, when they would come, my mother ventured, I think once or twice, to come down. Very often I think was really Sam who played the intermediary, or my father would then use still some-somebody else to deliver money, or -- or news. So, I think that the picture that I have now of my father, and the conversation that I had with him was that he simply spent this 13 months in -- in a -- with a mixture of despair, stoicism, hope. I -- he didn’t express much more than that, and I know, I cou -- I cou -- I could imagine how it must have been for him cooped up in -- in those places.

Q: Now, in 1946, you went to the -- the Polytechnic Institute of Athens?

A: Mm, at the end of ’45 --

Q: End of ’45.

A: -- I took the entrance examinations, and I was accepted. But almost simultaneously, I was informed -- because I did not know that until after it happened, that my father, all this time after the liberation, even -- even before Sam returned, was working behind the scenes -- at least he did not tell me, that’s what I mean by behind the scenes, to, through his contacts in -- with the B’nai Brith, to see what he could do to assure my education. And so finally things have progressed far enough, I guess from the other end, from the United States, that he had to tell me. And my first reaction was, I have to confess, a little bit negative because -- not so much the idea of going to the United States to study, but that suddenly my future had been already prepared for me. When I was a child, to be an

engineer is fine, and I grew to like it, but later on, you know, I -- I -- I'm now an adult, I can -- I ca -- I have to decide for myself. But that only lasted for a few hours, or a few days, and so I attended classes at the Polytechnic only for, essentially the first semester, because then everything -- I had to get to ready to come United States. Among other things to get ready is getting the visas and passports, but even more than that was transportation. Remember, it was still a year after the war, and we had to wait for the next available ship with a opening that was traveling the United States, and that -- the first opening was in October of '46. And that's when I --

Q: Now let me express some surprise to you.

A: All right.

Q: Here your father has two children, lost his wife and his youngest son, and he, it sounds like almost immediately began to plan so that you would have a different sort of future, that wouldn't be in Europe. So he loses you in a certain way, at least in terms of every -- how do you unders -- I mean, it [indecipherable]

A: I'm -- I'm -- you're -- you're -- you're -- you're -- you're kind, because I thought you would continue, you would carry it one more step and say how did I dare then leave him?

Q: Well, I might have gone there, so it's good that you said that.

A: Well, there is no question my -- my father, I mean, he wa -- he used to tell me, I remember, even when I was already in high school, if I would ask him for some money to do so something like, I don't know, go to a movie, or something -- or -- or go buy something, he would say to me, "Look, I don't have the money to give you for that purpose. But if you were to ask me that you want to go buy a book, even if I don't have the money, I will tell you what I will do. I will not smoke for a week to save from smoking, so -- so -- anything that has to do with education, I, you know, I'll do, or that," -- so it's not surprising to me, and I -- and I know in some respects, because I learned these things subsequently, my -- my f-father would say things that were not true, fibs, lies, but they were lies in -- for good purposes. But even before he worked this thing with -- through the B'nai Brith for a scholarship for me to come to the United States, I know he wrote a letter to Churchill saying -- which was a bit of an exaggeration, that he, at the risk of his life had hidden a British soldier who had to go into hiding -- because a British contingent had come to help the Greeks when we were fighting the Italians. And then, of course, in '41. It was partly true. There was a man who was in the British army that happened to be f -- his parents from Monastir. And he came to the synagogue, you know, for Pessach. And so we invited him, and he joined us for [indecipherable]. That's what happened, that's true. But he was not really hiding.

Q: Hiding.

A: And so -- so he -- he -- in other words, my father would do anything, even embellish the truth, or stretch it, to assure that I had the proper education.

Q: And he really thought you couldn't get it in --

A: Oh no, no, it wasn't that.

Q: It wasn't that.

A: No, no, no. No, that -- that -- that -- that -- on the other hand, getting into the United States -- because for a long time, in a c -- in a certain ways my father was naïve. When I was growing up, I was going to be a textile engineer. Well why? I mean, dit -- what does he know about textiles, other than some son of some business assoc -- associate had gone and studied textile engineering in Yaszh, in Belgium, which a-apparently had a well-known textile engineering school. So I was being prepared fully for engineering, but also for textile engineer. Of course I -- all of that got changed, you know, when I decided to be an electrical engineer, and [indecipherable] textiles. But h -- he understood this much, that opportunities in Europe, education opportunities, let alone the United States, which was a mirage, you know, sort of not only far away physically, but so distant emotionally. So he would do anything.

Q: So r -- let me then ask you the more difficult question. How did you dare leave?

A: Well, how I dare leave, first of all I was i -- after awhile inebriated by the thought that I was going to go to the United States. Second, Sam had returned, so I knew my father was not alone. Third, I was joined by a cousin, whose -- whose father was my father's cousin. I -- I -- with a young man, Jeff Levi -- lev -- Levis was his name, we came together on the same ship. He went to Iowa, I went to Illinois. We related from both sides, the maternal and the paternal side. So, and he was an only child. And therefore, I -- putting all these things together, there were no limits to that what parents would not do to further -- after all, I was going to study. It didn't necessarily mean that I was going to go there forever. I could have easily, in normal times, be sent to study in Manchester, which has another textile engineering sch -- school. So there were -- th -- there were no thoughts -- now, if -- if Sam had not returned, I can, as they say in Greek, I could put my hand on flames and swear that my father would have done the same thing, and he would have pushed me, and encouraged me, and really shoved me, because he -- he felt the -- the value of -- of education. And I did it.

Q: You had no family here?

A: No, I had --

Q: When you came -- th-that cousin --

A: -- my -- an uncle --

Q: Right.

A: -- an uncle in an uncle in New York whom I saw when I -- when I landed.

Q: Right.

A: But that's it, I -- I then went to school in Illinois, and --

Q: Did you have English by then?

A: No, but you see in engineering --

Q: You didn't -- yeah.

A: -- you don't need very much, especially in the -- in the beginning, which is mathematics. I -- in fact, I knew more mathematics than -- than they taught in the first two or three years in -- in ri -- in college, because in high school, especially the one that I went, which I -- it was so intensive in mathematics and engineering. No, I had no English, but I learned it.

Q: And you liked this country when you came, or didn't you?

A: Of course -- well --

Q: Okay, it must have [indecipherable]

A: In the be -- well, first of all I, again, in the first four years, I was busy learning and getting and education, trying to get a degree. Then the decision to go to graduate school was really, of course, mine, primarily, but I began to get encouragement from professors that I had in undergraduate school.

Q: Right, right.

A: And I was encouraged enough to -- to stay in, although I had no means of, you know, independently, I was given a -- an assistanceship -- a research assistanceship, which would pay the tuition, and 103 dollars a month, and that's all I had to live on, because my father from time to time would send me in a letter, a five dollar bill, or a 10 dollar bill. So it was primarily the encouragement I got from -- from teachers that made me stay, and in fact I stayed another two years in Illinois.

Q: [indecipherable]. Uh-huh.

A: Right.

Q: And where did you go to graduate school?

A: In Illinois also, yes.

Q: In Illinois, you stayed in Illinois.

A: Yes, that's right.

Q: And the first time you saw your father after you came to the United States, and your brother?

A: Ah yes, finally I left Illinois, I began to work at Bell Telephone Laboratories, and within a few months after starting work at Bell Labs, I was drafted.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Because the draft was still on, and of course I would have had the choice of not going to the army, s -- being an alien. But of course, I could never again stay in this country. We haven't talked about the fact that -- that it was in '50, at one point I was to be expelled by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, because I had essentially overstayed my student visa. It's another long story, but my professors intervened, and the long and the short is that Senator Douglas introduced a private bill in congress, and I got to stay in the United States on a law named for me, for the relief of Isaac Nehama, signed by President Eisenhower.

Q: Really? No kidding.

A: Not too many people have laws made for --

Q: No.

A: -- for them individually. And -- but coming back after Bell Labs, I was drafted. Of course, within six months after Europe, drafted in the army, you don't wait the five years, for obvious reasons, the country asked you to go and -- and s -- maybe die for the country, they don't make you wait for citizenship, so I was naturalized in Colorado Springs, where I was stationed.

Q: So you -- that was in '50 --

A: In f -- between '53 and '55.

Q: Does that mean that you -- well, you didn't lose Greek citizenship because you -- you never were a Greek citizen, that's right.

A: I was never a Greek citizen. I was a Yugoslav citizen, but I didn't know Yugoslavia.

Q: Yugoslav citizenship, right.

A: Right.

Q: So after that you went back and visited?

A: No, no.

Q: No?

A: During my s -- years in the army, a-after the -- a few months after arriving in Colorado Springs, I got a call from the Red Cross, my father had an accident, he -- really he fell. He slipped, the cane slipped, and he fell, but because the left leg was always the weaker, he fell with the weight of the body on the leg, and broke it. So I was given compassionate emergency leave, which in order to use it, I hitchhiked, and it took me three weeks to get there. Hitchhiking means I will go for air base to air base, and ask if there is a plane going in that general direction. So I -- I got from Colorado Springs, eventually to Stuart Air Force base in Massachusetts, then in the Azores, Libya, Athens. And fortunately, then I presented myself to the military attaché at the Greek embassy -- at the American embassy in Athens, and that's when he stamped my order and the 30 days counted from the day of my arrival.

Q: Oh, how nice.

A: Well, eventually it was over, and on the return it took two months to find -- ah but I -- again, I -- I got stuck in Washington for the first time, for three weeks there were no planes going in the general direction of Colorado Springs.

Q: So when you look back on all of this, ho-how do you place your life in context of those years?

A: Which years? The -- the -- the partisan years, the --

Q: The war, and the partisan, yeah.

A: The -- the -- the context is that t -- two aspects about it. One, that it's definitely it was a s -- extremely significant period in my life, and I think to a large extent, a considerable extent, also forming. You know, it was the kind of a maybe -- I don't want to use the word crucible.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: But -- right. The -- the second part, when I reflect, at times -- and it lasted for -- fortunately for me, and I think for my family and all friends, a very short time, mainly -- especially when I first came United States, I was surprised, because many of my fellow citizens were veterans, American veterans who had flown missions over Germany, and very dangerous stuff. In fact, I arrived United States November '46, the day before mid-term elections. And when I asked the question, are you voting tomorrow, first of all they didn't know there were elections. Now, in European tradition, university students are always at the forefront of political activity. So here are people, not only students, but you

know, veterans of a war. So for a bit I got so disoriented that there was no -- that -- that my experiences really, you know, I was beaten into wonderful shape, and very quickly, I think, after I began to think seriously about that time, how ludicrous the thought is, because I would have preferred a banal, normal childhood, with my mother and brothers and family than -- than being formed into a fine shape. No thank you very much. I would not wish it, you know, on -- on anybody else.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to s-say that I -- that I missed, or you'd like to say --

A: No, I'd like to thank you, almost in the same -- for the same reasons that Sam says the same thing to his own interviewer, because the other reason, other than Sharon's very wise statement persuading me to do that, is that it leaves something for either my descendents, number one, as well as perhaps people in the future, who might be interested about this particular period. And this I'm saying now, following a year and a half of work as a volunteer for the Holocaust Museum and doing this thing for the Bitola Jews, I have lived with, essentially almost 2000 faces of people who are all dead, and who -- whose names then I had to type it into a database, and who become alive, and then reading books, and talking about that. So, I want to thank you for then doing that, because it leaves something which might be of some small value or use to some interested historian, or -- or person in the future.

Q: Well, I want to thank you. You tell a very vivid story. And your -- your articulateness is really appreciated. I want to thank you very much for being willing to do this. I know that it's not easy.

A: Yeah.

Q: Thank you.

A: Right. Fade.

End of Tape #10

Tape #11

Q: Isaac, what is this picture?

A: This is the house where I was born. It was built by a sculptor, a Greek sculptor in 1867, and the legend is that the two kariatids, the two women, the statues, were in honor of two beautiful sisters who lived a block away from there.

Q: And when was this taken?

A: This photograph was taken in ’79, I was on a visit to Athens with a son, and my sister-in-law came with me, and she took the photograph.

Q: And this is the same? Whoops.

A: It’s the same, but this is taken from a book of photographs by the famous French photographer Krastier Brason. It attracted him aesthetically, artistically, and he took quite a few photographs of that house.

Q: And this one?

A: This is a watercolor by a modern Greek painter by the name of Yannis Tarushios. And he calls it simply, “The House of Kariatids.”

Q: Go ahead.

A: This is the same place, restored. For more than 20 years there were articles in the press, decrying that poor shape in which this classic, or example of classic Greek architecture was left. So there was enough of -- of pressure on the authorities to do something, so eve -- effec -- eventually, with some contribution from the ur -- European community, the place was restored, and this is what it looks like now. And this -- this happened, in fact, the façade was revealed early this year.

Q: And this one?

A: This is the apartment where I lived when I grew up, with my family, most of my life. It was in a -- the third floor of a -- an apartment house. The address was Asomatin 11, and the reason that also this particular place was restored because it is an example, perhaps the first example of a multi-storied edifice in Athens.

Q: And this?

A: That’s the apartment restored.

Q: Why is there a flag there?

A: I have no idea, because I know this much, that it's not inhabited by renters, it's -- it's not an apartment house any more, it's offices. Some of them governmental, some of them an association. So perhaps for that reason there's a -- a flag.

Q: And this?

A: This is the view from the house where I grew up, from the roof, or really -- it was really not a roof, you went up a stairway in the back. It was like a -- a terrace, where we would sometimes have picnics there, or sleep in the summer months. But if I looked towards the southeast, this is what I would see, the Acropolis.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: This is my mother, Sarah, her maiden name Kolonomos. It's the only photograph that is left to us that you can see full face, but actually it was a -- a passport picture, and the only surviving thing. We have other photographs which have her with my brothers, but this is the only full faced photograph.

Q: How is the likeness, is this how you remember her?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Yes?

A: Yes.

Q: And this one?

A: This is my father. He was known as Dario, actually his name was David, but Dario was a diminutive, or a familiar name for David in -- in the parts where he was -- where he was raised.

Q: And this photo?

A: This photo was taken when I was one year old, around 1927. It was taken in Lutraki, which is a spa of natural springs of water that's believed to be beneficial for what ails you. And here's my father with a cane, and my mother in the foreground. And in the back it's a nanny, I don't even remember her, or know her name, and myself as a baby, possibly a year old, or even less.

Q: And this?

A: This is a studio photograph taken of me when I was about a year old. And which was used as a postcard my father sent to a number of relatives.

Q: Do you remember that outfit?

A: No.

Q: And what about this one?

A: This is a -- I'm around four, ready to go to school. This is a -- also another studio photo, you can see the kind of fake background. Again, that also was used as a postcard for mailing to relatives.

Q: And you're wearing -- you -- you're holding [indecipherable]

A: Yes, and -- and I think that from the outfit, including a -- and outercoat, I'm -- I'm positive that it must have been taken during the winter.

Q: And it looks like you're wearing a woman's sweater.

A: It was my mother's probably, first, and I was --

Q: And this?

A: This is a photograph of my maternal grandmother, her name was Miriam Kolonomos, and my two younger brothers, Sam on the left, and Nehama, or Mekos in the middle. Taken in the little park which was only a few blocks away from our home.

Q: And this?

A: Studio photo of myself at the age of five, standing, and my younger brother Sam stand -- standing on the chair.

Q: And this?

A: My mother and younger brother Mekos in the park near our house.

Q: And how old do you think Mekos is there?

A: Five. So this must have been taken in '39, the latest '40.

Q: And this?

A: This is the youngest brother, Nehama Mekos Nehama. And the -- it's so true to the way he looked, and the expression on his face, I -- very much alive for me right now.

Q: And this handsome gentleman?

A: Yes, this handsome s-shot is of Samuel, my second brother. And this was probably taken in '48 or '49, after I had left for the United States, and Sam must have been 17 or 18.

That is to say, after he returned from Auschwitz. This a photograph of a friend on the left, by the name of Sam Armorilio, and myself. It was one of those so-called --

Q: Instant.

A: -- instant, yes, instantaneous pictures taken by roving photographers in the streets of Athens, they would shoot, give you a ticket. If you were interested, you call them. But the significance for that is that it was taken in January ’45, so it’s probably the first postwar picture that I think was ever taken of -- of me.

Q: Is that snow on the ground?

A: Yes, remnants of a -- of a dusting, which is another rarity in -- in Athens. All right.

Q: Very good.

End of Tape #11

Conclusion of Interview