

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Fred Deutsch
August 18, 1995
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PREFACE

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FRED DEUTSCH

August 18, 1995

Question Would you begin by stating your name, date of birth and where you were born?

Answer Yes. My name is Fred Deutsch. I was born in Czechoslovakia in a town named _____, which is not far away from the Polish border. I was born on November 13, 1932. That was about one year before Hitler came to power. The town I spent my childhood in as far as I can remember, was a large industrial town which had big steel mills and coal mines. My father was a dentist. A very well to do dentist. I have a sister. We grew up in a large apartment in the center of the town. The first event that I remember from my childhood was when my father took me to a movie to see Snow White and Seven Dwarfs. Other significant event comes to mind that when we walked through the town, the town was full of men who exercised civil readiness against air attacks. Consequently, each member of my family received a gas mask and we had to exercise how to put it on and off. In my early childhood I contracted a middle ear infection, and consequently, I was more in hospitals than at home. One has to remember that penicillin was not invented as yet and therefore infections, they were very serious illnesses in those days. Because of my ear infection, I was unable to attend regularly school. At any rate, in 1938 I would have been going only to the first grade anyhow, and between my hospital visits, I had a private tutor who taught me how to write and read. At that time of course, I was a very little boy. I do not remember or did not know the reasons for our move, but in about 1938 or 1939 we moved away from _____ to a town called _____, which was more inland of the republic and further away from the Polish border. Looking at the move in retrospect today, I know that the region of _____ was considered part of the _____ and it was not quite certain whether it will not revert to Poland and taken away from the Czech republic. So, we moved to a town called _____ which was a place of birth of my father. It was a pleasant, nice little town with a population of about 10,000 people as opposed to 50,000 or 60,000 of _____. So, it was a move to a much

smaller town, but it was pleasant, quiet. It had a district and I remember every Thursday or Friday, peasants used to come to the town to set a market with their produce and life went on in a very pleasant leisurely pace.

Q. Before you go any further, let me ask you a couple questions. When in _____ you were all given gas masks and taught about the civil preparedness, what was this for?

A. At that time, in everybody's mind was one thing that remembering that the Germans in first World War used gas and everybody assumed that should an air attack materialize, the enemy will revert to gas.

Q. So there was already an awareness or concern about what was going on in Germany?

A. Yes. Now, looking in retrospect, it's easy to be a Monday morning quarterback, but in those days I didn't know about it, but Germany threatened that if Czechoslovakia doesn't surrender they simply will come with airplanes and bomb Czechoslovakia and everybody assumed that these would be gas attacks. For reasons obvious today but not known at that time, many people especially Jewish population of the Czech part of the republic, the majority of Jews spoke German where the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia, there the Jews spoke Hungarian and Europe being a relatively small continent, the radio at that time was the main media of communication. Many people who wanted to know what goes on in the world listened to foreign broadcast. It was very easy and very simple to catch radio from Berlin or Vienna and get their point of view across. Because the Czech newspapers unfortunately always tried to minimize the threat that is actually hanging over the country and one act of appeasement took place after another. The Czech government always hoped that this action will finally satisfy the German demands and that nothing more serious will come out of it.

Q. Do you remember your family listening to the radio or your parents talking about what was going on?

A. No. My parents didn't speak in front of the children about these things. That was the custom of those days that you send the children to bed before you started speaking of serious events. Something else comes back to my mind that friends of my parents, many of them started

to disappear. Later on, when I began to ask what happened to such and such, I was told that they left Czechoslovakia and settled in foreign countries. Namely, I think that there were people who saw what was coming and took steps while time was still available. I remember specifically two families that immigrated to Palestine. At that time the state of Israel didn't exist. They immigrated to Palestine. A couple of people emigrated to England. Some of them went to Egypt. Now, why some people were guessing correctly, I don't know. My father, unfortunately was not one of those that guessed correctly. He always thought that whatever exists is only a temporary situation and it will pass away, and therefore, we stayed.

Q. Was your family religious?

A. No. That is another interesting situation. The Czech intelligencia if I may call it that way, was not religious, including the Jews. It used to be said that the higher education you will obtain, the less religious you are. And my father, being a medical doctor, under Austro-Hungarian monarchy you first had to be a medical doctor before you were permitted to specialize in dentistry. So, we were not religious. When we did move away from _____ to _____, we used to attend a synagogue but attendance usually was not done for religious purposes. It was more done for social gathering. That's where you met your friends and your acquaintances.

Q. Did you mix with Christian kids? Did you parents have Christian friends?

A. I do not remember specifically Christian friends, except we did have a maid and my father had an apprentice who learned the technical side of dentistry. Otherwise, I do not remember coming into contact with Christians. However, you know, I was six or seven years of age and religion in those days didn't mean anything at all to me. I used to go part time to school, but whether my fellow students were Jewish or Christians, I simply don't know, but I don't think I would have cared.

Q. You don't remember other kids coming up to you and calling you a Jew?

A. No, no in those days prior to the war, no. Simply I think I was too well shielded because of the frequent illnesses. The ear infections, having a maid who took me to park for a walk. I do

not remember, with exception of one of my father's friends who had a daughter my age.

Occasionally she and I met and we played together, but otherwise I don't remember in those days having any friends. But, you know that was probably childhood stuff, typical childhood for those days. I do not think Judaism had much to do with it. It was probably more because of my frequent ear infections that influenced that kind of sheltered life than having grown up in a middle class family.

Q. You moved to _____ in what year?

A. That must have been in 1939, I think. The move itself I do not remember.

Q. Do you think this was before the Germans annexed the Czech republic?

A. I honestly do not know. That seems to me, but that is looking in retrospect, I think the Germans annexed Czechoslovakia March 15, 1938, I think.

Q. 1939.

A. Okay, '39, but whether we moved before or after, I do not remember. My next memory of _____ is I remember sitting in either the first or second grade elementary school and going there for maybe a half of year when all of a sudden I had to stop going. I was then told that as a Jew no longer can I attend this school. How soon thereafter the belt started tightening up, I cannot give you in terms of dates. I only remember more or less events. All of a sudden it usually I was told either by my father or by my mother that for example I cannot go through certain streets with the exception of between the hours of three and five in the afternoon. Many stores in _____ suddenly had a sign to Jews entry is forbidden. Other stores permitted visit from Jews between the hours of three and five. I knew I cannot leave the boundaries of the town. I knew I cannot go to a movie or a soccer game or to a public place. I can not go to a municipal swimming pool. I cannot go skiing because that would mean to go out of town. There was a whole host of things which were forbidden. Then as a next step I remember each Jew had to wear a star of David. A yellow star that had to be affixed over one's heart. That star always had to be made visible. You were not permitted to cover it up with anything. Jews were given special i.d. cards which had to be produced whenever policeman

stopped you and asked for it. Because even in the Czech republic, every citizen of Czechoslovakia has an i.d. card but Jews had a special i.d. card. Not having an i.d. card was punishable under any Czech law. Jews were issued ration cards which were much smaller than those of the Christian population. Events took place and I don't know in what order exactly it followed. We were, by we I mean Jews were requested or ordered to surrender cameras, radios. We had to surrender any passports if you had any. We had to dismount any brass objects from the apartment. Jews were not permitted to have any pets. The explanation for that was that the pets were slaughtered by Germans and that grease or fat was used to lubricate machinery. All the towns, including _____, lost their church bells. The paradox is that thanks to German occupation, Czechoslovakia acquired electricity of 220 volts instead of 110 which they used to have under the old republic. The reason for it is that the 110 volts were sent via copper wires and copper offers low resistance to electricity, but copper was needed very badly by the nazi machinery and all the wiring, copper wiring was replaced by lower conductivity wires which provided greater resistance to electric current, so therefore, they had to raise the voltage from 110 to 220. How beneficial it is, I don't know, but that was one benefit.

Q. What did a boy of eight years old, seven years old, do you remember how you felt about all of these restrictions? Did it make sense to you? Did it bother you?

A. I'm not quite certain whether it did bother me or not, because you have to keep in mind one that, that European societies especially those who used to be under Austria-Hungarian monarchy are very obedient people. They have much greater respect, always had much greater respect for authority than here, in a free society. In the old republic everybody had in his possession hundreds of documents. It was a society obsessed with documents. It's difficult to explain the futility of these documents because it's so laughable, but the bureaucracy was unbelievable. Therefore, when an order came, even if a foolish one, nobody asked whether it makes sense or not. The only unpleasant situations began to develop, but again, gradually, where came an order that Jews are forbidden to communicate with non Jews. That started to create problems. Now, I do not know what the Christian boys were told by their parents, but I do

remember that when I walked through certain streets that boys my age and older ones, ganged up on me and used to beat me up and calling me not only Jew, that would have been too simple, but they were infected by their parents. At that time, they used to call Jew, Christ killer, and by beating me up they believed that they are revenging the crucification of Christ that somehow I am responsible for it. That is one part of it which I never could have reconciled in my mind. How am I, if it is true that the Jews sold out Christ and crucified him, what part did I play in it, or my parents. Why am I being punished for something 1,945 years later. When I came to my parents with these questions, there were no answers. Simply, I do remember that certain things I asked once and then I did not get satisfactory answer or answer that I could have at that age comprehend, I didn't pursue it anymore. Because usually my parents' answer was when you are older you will understand better. Now you are still too young to understand. That is what I reconciled myself with. Perhaps when I will be older I will understand, so therefore, I didn't pursue many of these open questions.

Q. When you said that you generally accepted whatever rules were established because that was the way life was, still maybe I would question why these rules only applied to Jewish people?

A. Again, I do not have a clear cut answer because I'm not quite certain that at that age I was concerned with us Jews. I think I was more concerned with myself, why I cannot do something. I'm not quite certain I understood that there are others in town that suffer with the same restriction.

Q. Right, but what I'm suggesting is you couldn't do something but the boy next door could.

A. Yes, I was told simply because he was a Christian and that was the rule. I didn't ask why he and I not. I was told because you are Jewish and the rules said you as a Jew could not do that.

Q. At the time of all of these restrictions were you still able to go to the synagogue like you had been doing?

A. That comes the next step. Again, I do not know if it was 1941, certain things started to develop slowly. First of all, _____ was a town which had a large Jewish section.

It was called _____, Jewish town. All of a sudden, I began to realize that that part of _____, the population of that part, begins to increase in size. Namely, because I as a Jew was not permitted to associate with Christians, I used to go every day to the Jewish part of the town to play with boys my age. Not all the streets were closed to Jews or entry permitted from three to five, only the main streets. If I went in circles, I was always able to reach the Jewish part of town and play with the Jewish boys. That part of the town, the population began to swell. Everyday there were more and more people in that part of town. I was delighted because there were more boys to play with. It never occurred to me to ask why does the population of that part of town keep increasing. It simply didn't signal anything unique. The house which we occupied which we owned, also got additional tenants, so that finally we were squeezed into one room. We shared the house with people from other towns throughout the region who all were sent to _____ to the Jewish, and slowly it became a ghetto. Now, I do not remember any specific events except that Germans did not have any military contingent in _____ - that resided there. The nearest gestapo contingent was in _____, which was a larger town that _____. The Czech police played some ambivalent role in the whole situation. Some Czech policemen remained faithful to the fact that they were policemen and not nazis. Others saw an opportunity to enrich themselves and joined the side of the Germans against the Jews. So, it depended on your sin and who actually accused you of it whether you went free or not. The Gestapo came many a times and arrested people without any specific reason. Usually see bits of news you learned through the grapevine that such and such was taken away yesterday by the gestapo. Usually you never saw that person again or that family again. So, the Jewish part of town began really to explode in seams from influx of people, of the Jews.

Q. Your house was not in that area?

A. Our house was just on the border of the Jewish part of the town but not in it.

Q. So, when you wanted to go there to play with boys your age, did you feel safe? Did you parents show any concern about you wandering around?

A. No, not as long as they knew I was in that part of town. The only worry was that every Jew had to be off the street at 8:00 and if you were caught after 8:00 that was reason to be deported. But as long as I was home before 8:00 there was no particular worry. At least my parents never indicated to me that they were worried what I'm doing all day. They knew where I was. The only problem was not to commit some mischief, for example, not to go fishing.

_____ had a very pleasant river, plenty of fish, and that again was taboo. So, it was a tense situation, but I think that at that age, maybe you are looking at these things as more of an adventure rather than sensing the danger in it. Because after all, don't forget that the Germans atrocities that they committed, were all committed elsewhere until you actually got there, you didn't have the slightest knowledge of what is happening. We didn't have radio. The news came only through grapevine. The news was sanitized. In those early days of the second world war, things went extremely well for the Germans. They conquered France without too many problems. They conquered Poland. They were very close deep into Russia. The news that people were listening to, let's say the broadcasts from London or from Moscow were not very encouraging in those days. I may add one additional thing that in those days every radio throughout _____ or even under the Czech republic was registered in the post office. You had to renew your radio license every year by buying a stamp. So, that the authorities knew of every radio, who owns it, and where it is. One of the first things the Germans did when they occupied Czechoslovakia they removed the tubes from the radio. In those days they had huge vacuum tubes that enable you to listen to London or Moscow. That means short waves or long waves. We are not talking about am or fm. In those days, they had different waves in Europe, so you were left with a radio that was only able to let you listen to Central Europe radio stations, and Central Europe in those days almost completely occupied by the Germans. So, you always heard one and the same newscast and the Germans were singing praises to the victorious armies. So, situation did not look very rosy at all. As a matter of fact, one sort of a habit we used to have is we used to have a map of Europe and we used to tuck pins which town was conquered by the Germans so we had more or less create a picture how far the German armies had advanced.

Then you had another problem, you did not know exactly what was propaganda and what is reality.

Q. How much of what you're talking about were you aware of or did you even think about at that age?

A. Well, again, as I said at that age you look upon any military as something that you want to become part of when you grow up and _____ being a small town, occasionally a military convoy passed through and I remember I don't know exactly why one day came and contingent of German soldiers that were outfitted in African clothes they were the Africa corp that fought under _____, and strangely enough shortly thereafter after that contingent passed through town, the whole _____ block was required to surrender leather made luggage, pieces of luggage and leather made goods. We were told that that is needed to manufacture for the Africa corp shoes. They need a lot of shoes. We were then asking well what suppose the rest of the population to do? For example, if your shoe soles were worn out. So, then somebody introduced old tires from cars and used that rubber for shoe soles. As the next item, old tires had to be surrendered. People who used to have bicycles became very inventive. After surrendering the tires from the bicycles they mounted on a wire in very close proximity to each other, corks from bottles and ride the bicycle on corks. Gasoline was unobtainable because private cars were either confiscated or not permitted to be driven at all, and the buses were converted I do not know exactly how it worked mechanically but each bus had a boiler mounted on the side and I think it was propelled by steam. You had to create steam pressure in the boiler and then you were able to ride in it. Of course when the pressure went down, everybody had to go out. If the bus driver had some wood with him, then he again fired up the boiler. If not everybody had to go and gather pieces of wood and again simulate the steam pressure of the boiler before the bus was able to continue. These are some memories and bits and pieces that you heard through the grapevine about economic conditions and situations.

Q. You weren't riding on the busses?

A. Later on I had the opportunity. Later on in the war I had the opportunity to ride on one of those busses and experience it first hand, but that was after we fled.

Q. So, were you and your family ever forced to live within this _____?

A. No. I do not think that because it was so close to the _____ that we were actually in a way considered part of it. Maybe geographically not, but the distance was maybe a hundred yards to the _____. The only difference being was that the _____ at some point it had about four entries to it and there were guards posted there, and I think a gate was erected and anybody that went in or out had to show his i.d. card, but because we were outside of it, we didn't have to do so. So, if that is considered some privilege, I don't know.

Q. Who were the guards, do you know? Were they Jewish guards?

A. Yes, they were Jewish guards.

Q. So, did your general living conditions become more difficult in terms of was your father still able to practice dentistry?

A. No, no, father didn't practice. I think that we lived from our savings. The food rations well, if you saw that, they were minuscule. Even that which you obtained on the ration cards had a very dubious quality. For example, I do remember that we got periodically a cube of honey and I don't know why I still remember it, I was told that the honey was made from coal. I do not know chemistry. I heard it was made from coal. I do not know whether you have seen a book of coupons, but every week we were entitled to something. Let's say one week you were scheduled to obtain marmalade. Glass was not available, so you went to a grocery store and they put a piece of wax paper and weighed in to it marmalade. By the time you came home, not much was left. It all seeped out. Potatoes I think were our main staple. Bread which we got, was black in color. As a matter of fact, somebody made for me a friend a chess set from that black bread because that bread if you didn't consume it within a few hours, was hard like rock. I don't know what that bread was made of. One by product of the economic shortage was that the black market flourished in an unbelievable fashion. Unfortunately in every time of adversity, black

market flourishes and many people enrich themselves by being black marketeers. There was black market for gasoline. There was black market for cigarettes. Again, cigarettes were not available for Jews. I and a friend of mine became a little inventive. We wanted to make some extra money. In as much as cigarettes to Jews, however, what was available were filters, cigarette filters, and we used to buy in a store a hundred empty cigarette filters and used to utilize dried leaves and stuff that instead of tobacco and we were selling it. So, we made a little bit extra money by selling these awful smelling and tasting cigarettes. We were very inventive for example I remember my father used to have a fishing rod so we mounted on the tip of the fishing rod a sack made of linen and we used to extend that fishing rod to a garden which my neighbor grew apples and we used to steal apples from his trees with a fishing rod. There are childhood memories and it's interesting that poverty and hunger and need can be stimulate within you creativity and inventiveness and I think that's what made it in a way fun for us kids at that age.

Q. Your father, he was not working any more?

A. No, he was not working.

Q. So, how did your parents spend their time?

A. I think that the Jewish men of the _____ of the Jewish section used to spend most of their day playing cards and exchanging stories and trying to outguess the political situation and trying to guess when the war will end. That was the main occupation. That situation sort of a limbo if you will I think lasted for about a year, year and a half. Then the situation began to change very, very rapidly and very dramatically. By that I mean the order came that in alphabetical order by the last name each Jew has to come to local high school a register. There you obtained a number, a registration number which gain didn't mean very much to me. With the registration number, you were given a list and that list stated that the registration number will be your personal i.d. from here on and you should prepare for the relocation to the east. In order to provide supplies for the relocation you were permitted to take with you no more than 50 kilograms per person, 50 kilograms being about 80 pounds and it specified exactly what

you were not permitted to take with you. It left the relocation date open, but you should slowly get ready for it.

Q. What were you not allowed to take with you?

A. Well, again the Germans itemized the list for forbidden items that they took away from you a long time ago, but they wanted to make sure that somehow you didn't forget to surrender these articles. You were not permitted to take any gold, any jewels, radios, cameras, items which nobody had anymore anyhow. Now, a strange game started to develop. Everybody through grapevines started asking well what do we take with us. East, we are going east. Nobody knew just how far or where to or what time of year would it be. Do we take winter articles. Do we take food with us. What exactly do we take. There the grapevine started working. We still didn't know where we would go, but everybody was advised to take food. Now, with the ration coupons again the question was well what food do we take, how much. After all, the food is of so dubious quality it might spoil. I do remember that my mother used to prepare huge cubes of yeast. I never tried to analyze why yeast but maybe it has some unique nutritional value. We used to accumulate cubes with honey. I do remember that we purchased cubes of toothpaste and open the cubes in the back and stuffed into the toothpaste gold coins which we still had because nobody surrendered everything. So, in that way, we started preparing for a journey that we didn't know when would take place or where to.

Q. Let me ask you a couple questions and then we'll change tapes. Approximately what time period are we talking about?

A. That was about '41 or '42.

Q. When you got this information about going to the high school and getting a number and what you would take, did this come through some sort of Jewish representatives of the community or how did you get this information?

A. In retrospect in general I can make that statement. Everything that the community, that the authorities wanted the community to know, usually came via two systems of media. One was through loudspeakers which I think the Germans had mounted almost on every corner of the

main street. Then number two they had public bill boards on which they posted the huge placards and always writing and adding to whom it concerns and not reading the placards, advertisement was no excuse for not obeying the law was again punishable because every citizen was forced to listen to the loudspeakers or read it on the public bulletin boards.

End of Tape 1

Tape 2

Q. So, when we stopped we were talking about the registration and relocation.

A. Now, at home we did all sorts of exercise. The problem was that in as much as the leather luggage was taken away, we had paper type of luggage and the problem was how many pounds the paper luggage can handle. Then the question was do we carry it in two pieces of luggage or do we take a sack or where do we put what. But, I have to deviate a little bit from that to tell you a very important side of the story, namely now comes seeing my grandfather. My grandfather was a medical doctor who at that time was living on the Slovak side of the border. Before the war, he used to be a medical doctor in a glass factory that was situated exactly in the middle of the international border between Czech lands and Slovak lands. The factory was a glass kind of factory owned by Germans. When Hitler came to town, the Germans sold the factory and fled to Germany, and when that happened, my grandfather lost the place as a physician for the glass blowers and moved from that village to a town on the Slovak side called _____ where he opened a private practice. All the glass blowers that used to live in the village of whom he took care remained his patient and used to come visit him for consultations to _____. When the _____ emerged the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia became independent and became a puppet state under a president who was a priest. _____ was his name. He was a catholic priest. The Slovaks traditionally didn't like very much the union with the Czechs. The Czechs probably didn't like the Slovaks much either. They viewed the Slovaks like a bride who didn't bring into the marriage a dowry large enough, and therefore, the marriage was a very uneasy one. Furthermore, the Slovaks were always fiercely nationalists and the Slovak population was very clearly divided between the catholic population and the Lutheran population. So, Slovaks had a very small minority of gypsies but they didn't amount to much. But whenever later on we wanted to know whether a person is reliable sufficiently we always ask as a first question whether he's a catholic or whether he's a Lutheran but that came a little bit later. However, the Slovak part of the land was not occupied initially by Germans and the economy in Slovakia was flourishing. It was extremely

good going as compared to the _____ side of the country. My grandfather was always able to smuggle goods, food stuff, to us. Namely, the international board of _____ in Slovakia who went exactly through the middle of the village and the population from one country worked in the second country so that the German guards after a while already knew the people by sight and didn't ask anymore for i.d. cards and as long as you were dressed according to the local customs and habits and didn't behave in any conspicuous fashions the Germans usually didn't bother to stop you for an i.d. card. At least not during the regular day hours. They let the people cross the borders without any problems. And consequently, many of these farmers used to come to _____, which was not very far away from the border and brought us messages from Grandfather and brought smuggled food stuff. So, we were always a little bit better off than the other people who didn't have any contacts. The messages that my grandfather sent us usually were written on a piece of linen and sewed in a lining of a coat so that even if the Germans frisk you they wouldn't feel paper. My grandfather had his sources of information because the Slovaks were able to listen to radios easier in a freer form than we and he knew about these transports and where they are going. So, he kept warning us, alerting us, but at that time he did not indicate anything about being in a position to help us. So, after registration about a couple weeks later, suddenly again on these billboards came an announcement that registration numbers of between these and these numbers should report to the local railroad station on such and such date. Luckily enough, one farmer came on that day and brought us food stuff from our grandfather and on his way back to Slovakia we gave him a message that we have been scheduled for transport two weeks from today and this is goodbye. The farmer as we know today, succeeded and gave that message to our grandfather. About three or four days before we were to appear at the railroad station I was playing with the boys in the _____ as usually. Suddenly my sister came to fetch me and said quietly, go quickly to grandma, my grandmother from my father's side, the grandfather that was living in Slovakia was from my mother's side. This grandmother was from my father's side. She lived in the _____, go say goodbye to her and I will take you immediately home. Don't ask any questions. So, I

went to grandma and said goodbye to her. She apparently knew already and she started to cry. I didn't understand the reason for her crying, I said bye grandma and I left with my sister. That was late in the afternoon. When I came home, there I realized the flurry of activity. My mother was taking all sorts of clothes and bringing it to neighbors who lived across from our house. I remember the neighbor being a tailor and my mother always brought it over and came back empty handed and took another load and brought it again to the neighbors. I asked my mother what's going on. She said don't ask any questions, just get dressed very warmly. Take two layers of clothes and don't ask any questions. I didn't ask any questions. It was winter. I think it must have been Christmas day, probably 1942, 1943 Christmas. At about 8:00 my father, my mother, and my sister and myself gathered. We shut off the lights which was sort of a useless exercise anyhow because I should mention that in those days all the windows had to have heavy curtains because of air attacks. We waited and suddenly at about 8:00 in the evening somebody knocked on the door and we saw a stranger that told us are you ready and mother and father said yes and we left the house. We followed the stranger. We walked through the town which was already dark and heavy snow. We knew that we are out after 8:00 if we got caught that would be the end of it, but nobody paid too much attention to us. Because we are not situated geographically in the _____, that was in our favor. So, we in that evening we already broke all the rules and we broke through the edge of the town, where that gentleman had a car, a taxi. He motioned us to enter the taxi and he drove us away from _____. Well, we left _____ and at the edge of the town was a taxi waiting and the gentleman pointed that we should enter the taxi. So, my sister, my mother my father and myself entered the taxi and the taxi car started slowly, slowly edging away from _____. I do not remember how long we traveled in the taxi but it must have been a couple of hours because visibility was miserable. It was snowing very heavily and he was driving very slowly. After several hours we arrived at our destination. At that time I didn't know where we were but the taxi driver again said we should exit the taxi. He stopped, we should exit the taxi and outside was waiting for us a gentleman who took us to his farm. We walked for about a hundred yards

and we entered his farm. The taxi driver said goodbye to us and he continued in his journey. I didn't know where he came from or where he was going to. In the farmer's house we caught our breath, we got something to eat, and I was told that we will have to wait. I was not told why or for how long. After waiting for quite a while the farmer came back in dressed in a heavy coat and boots and said okay let's go. I didn't know where to, but as a good boy I didn't ask many questions and all four of us left the farmhouse led by the farmer. The farmer walked with us on the main road for about half a mile and then he left the main road and started walking towards the forest. We walked in heavy, heavy snow for about half a mile in the direction of the forest and when we entered the forest, we kept walking. I do remember the snow was coming down very, very heavily. I think at some point I lost even my shoes but we kept walking. I do remember as we were walking suddenly I saw a window from which light was shining. I heard some dogs barking and I heard singing and my father and the farmer indicated with their finger to keep quiet and to keep walking. After an additional half an hour or hour of walk we came again to a farmer's house where they already were waiting for us. We were totally lost, and we were led to an attic in which there was some hay and some straw and we laid and rested for a couple of hours. Only then I was told that we crossed the international border from _____ to Slovakia. We are now in Slovakia. In that attic grandfather and grandmother were waiting for us. We rested for a couple more hours and the farmer took us again to the main highway on the Slovak side of the border where there was a sled waiting for us drawn by horses. They took us deeper into Slovak territory to a farm house where we entered a barn and we were hiding there. Now, from events that later on took place, I understood that my grandfather and grandmother were afraid that once our escape will be made known the Germans will of course very easily figure out that we must have fled to Slovakia and in all likelihood will notify the Slovak authorities to arrest us. So, from that point on, we stayed in hiding until the end of the war, with grandfather and grandmother. For some period of time there was six of us, but at some point my sister separated from us because she was able to learn the Slovak language and being a woman it was virtually impossible to prove that she was Jewish for obvious reasons

and she lived out the rest of the war in Bratislava which was the capital of Slovak Republic working under an assumed name and forged papers and she worked as a secretary.

Q. A couple things, when you went by that house and your father told you to be quiet, who were those people?

A. That was a guard house, the nazi German guard house that during the day the soldiers were staffing the border crossing. Like majority of international borders you have that wooden bar that is down and the soldiers check your i.d.s but during the night when everybody is home and it being Christmas there was no traffic there. The soldiers instead of being outside freezing they went to the guard house to celebrate Christmas. Because after all, they were also away from their families and being in a warm cozy house, they were celebrating Christmas and singing. In all likelihood they had some alcoholic beverages too. That's how our journey into hiding began.

Q. Wasn't there some fear of reprisal from the Germans?

A. Yes, that was the reason why our grandparents left their home of the Slovak side and joined us in hiding because of the fear that the nazis, the Slovak nazis will put two and two together that we must have obtained help from the Slovak side and the logic would have pointed towards our grandparents that they must have engineered our escape. The assumption was a correct one because the neighbors of our grandparents later on told us that not long after the grandparents had left, the Slovak fascists came to the house to look for them. These are the distances are very minuscule and one telephone call arranges many, many things, especially when the caller is a gestapo high official so that we had a window of about two days because we fled about three days before the transport should have departed. Therefore we had some window in which to breath a little bit more freely, but once everybody reported to the railroad station they discovered very quickly that we are missing and they started very seriously looking for us. From that point on, we never stayed very long in any one place of hiding. Because of my grandfather's collections of a medical doctor, many farmers owed their lives to him. Many of them were helping us very willingly. There were a few who did it purely for monetary reasons and to those we had to pay very heavily. But the majority of them did it as gratitude to grandfather. The

problems were why we couldn't stay in any place too long, the reasons were very obvious. Number one, in those parts of the country people know one another. The grocer knows that when a farmer comes to buy his supply he used to buy for years and years the same amount of supplies. Suddenly he buys three times as much. So, it raises suspicion. Why do you suddenly need so much food. Problem number two, visibility. You always had to stay away from windows because someone may see you through the window. People know one another to such an extent that they know exactly in which room you are eating, your stove. Suddenly through a chimney that was not used for years, smoke comes out. So, these were all signs that some unusual activity is taking place in the house and therefore to lower the level of suspicion we had to be continuously on the move. Furthermore, the Germans from _____ issued a large monetary reward for our capture and that was very tempting to some farmers who always lived on the edge of poverty. Simply, we had to go from one place to another.

Q. As a boy, was this difficult or was it an adventure?

A. That already began to be difficult. I stopped seeing it as an adventure. Why was it difficult? Number one because I was a growing boy. My movement was very restricted because we had to stay in one room or always be on a lookout how we exit the room and where to. My movement was restricted and number two whenever we moved from one hiding place to another we did it in the middle of the night. I never knew how long we would stay in a certain place, how far away we would move and whether we would be for the next month living in an attic or a cellar. That at that point became very, very irritating.

Q. Did you know most of the people who hid you? Or did your grandfather know who they were beforehand?

A. In most cases he knew who these people were, in most cases. In several cases the relatives of those whom he knew but for almost all the time he knew the collections, how it all went.

Q. Do you maybe want to go back and get specific. Tell me about these places and describe what they were for us.

A. That part of Slovakia I do not believe has any thing compatible that I can relate to in the United States. That part in those days Slovakia had isolated farms. They were about two or three miles apart from each other. You could have seen from one farm to the other providing the weather was good, providing the terrain permitted you to do so. The farmers, during the summer months were farming. They had a cow or two. They had some pigs, they had some chickens. They had some small fields where they raised various things. During the winter, they used to supplement their income by tending the forests. They were also lumberjacks. Some of them during the long winter months supplemented their income by producing toys from wood or women were gathering feathers. In those days, most of these farms did not have electricity. All of it was done by kerosene lamp so that the life was very, very slow, but it was sort of a friendly relation because they all depended on one another. Most of the farmers knew that if they got caught, they would be shot. You were in no position to hide Jews and go to the police station and say hey I'm hiding Jews and want my reward. It did not work that way. If you wanted your reward you had to say that farmer over there is hiding Jews or partisans. Then you may have gotten your reward. If the Germans didn't feel like giving it to you, they may have accused you of being a collaborator and shot you together with that farmer who was hiding those Jews or partisans. With the Germans or Slovak fascist who learned all the tricks of the game from the nazis, you never knew where you were standing. You would never be able to outguess them.

Q. Did they have a large presence in the area? Were they always around?

A. We did discover an interesting phenomenon. The closer the farm was situated to a forest, the more often the Germans seemed to make their presence known. Namely, there were German units mixed with the Slovak fascists units who periodically conducted raids into the forest not so much with trying to find Jews but trying to find partisans. In one of such raids, we were caught.

Q. That's a little bit later is it not?

A. Maybe.

Q. I'd like to get back to a certain chronology, if you don't mind. The first place -- the second place you went after you came into Slovakia, you were in a barn or an attic with your grandparents. Exactly where was that and how long were you there?

A. How long I do not know myself. I only know that we never stayed in any one place longer than a few weeks, maybe a month and it would be futile to try to look upon a map and find the way we progressed because number one depending on the political situation, some farmers may have indicated willingness to provide shelter for us and a day later change their minds. Some farmers had various excuses. Yes, we would hide you but we have small children who go to school and they may say something. It took lots and lots of cooperation to find somebody who was willing to hide five or six people. As I said before some places we stayed longer, some places we stayed a short time. I remember one farmer had a pregnant wife so all of a sudden she started in birth. We had to leave. Although my father was a doctor, my grandfather was a doctor, but we didn't know ahead of time what complications may emerge and she may be forced to go to the hospital. So, that we continuously moved from one place to another. Some were better, others were worse but basically the pattern stayed the same. Avoid windows. Always ask if everything is clear if you want to go out, and when we did go out, it was usually during the night, complete darkness. We usually went out just to take a breath of fresh air and maybe walk a little bit, otherwise we were continuously most of the time in darkness and if we were in an attic the farmer usually erected a false wall between the house and the stacks of hay and we were separated by bales of hay. Because again, it was assumed that if a German patrol will come and search the house, maybe they do not realize that the space in the attic does not conform to the length of the house. But of course, looking at it later on when such raids were made, those units that were trained in finding partisans or Jews knew all the tricks of the game. They were not even afraid to set the house on fire if they had suspicions that somebody was there and they could not find him.

Q. Did that ever happen to you?

A. No, that did not happen to us, with exception as I said before that on one occasion we did get caught.

Q. When was that?

A. That was again, it happened because of a unit mixed Germans and Slovaks were searching for partisans, and I do not remember whether they came to the farm on their way back but I think that they must have come to the farm before their raid actually started and their destination was the forest, but they came to the farm to get some drink of water and they searched the house for partisans and they stumbled upon us. So, the commandant of the unit had a dilemma. In all likelihood six Jews, he did not want to abort his raid and bring six Jews with him to the barracks and show this as a product of a days work so he decided to continue his raid of the partisans and made us swear that next day we will voluntarily appear in his barracks. To emphasize, to stress the point that he means business, he ordered one of the soldiers to rape my mother. Her father, her husband and her son had to watch it. At that point we knew what was waiting for us. After the unit left, we fled the farm. It was in deep snow in winter and these units never ventured very deeply into the forest. They were afraid of the partisans. They usually went into the forest about a hundred yards and started widely shooting into the forest hoping that they will hit someone and some occasions they hit someone, but once they heard a human voice they entered the forest and dragged the partisans out. We knew they went in a different direction and we fled into the forest away from the farmer's house. The farmer sent after us a couple of his friends who inside the forest dug out for us a bunker in the ground in which we went in hiding. About two days later another farmer whom we did not know came to visit us and brought food supplies and told us that the unit returned two days later to the farmer's house and burned the house to the ground and shot the farmer and all of his family for harboring us. We spent from that point on time in that bunker underground. You know when I'm talking about forests, these were very, very deep forests. The _____ forest stretch for miles and miles. There is no end to them. We got a small stove and during the night we kept warm by feeding the forest with dried wood because dried wood does not emit any smoke. We were heating only during the

night. One time the sense that some German patrols didn't pass too far away from our bunker and when the farmers came next time, we dug out another bunker and we moved away from the old place to a new bunker. There was another horrible story. We discovered that not far away, by not far away I don't mean a hundred miles, I mean several miles from us, there were a couple other bunkers and the young men kept visiting the other bunker and while he was on his way to visit the other bunker the German patrol discovered this bunker in which his parents were hiding. They shot them. He visited his friends in the other bunker who were alive. He left them, after a half an hour went back to his own bunker. He found his parents shot. He returned back to his friends' bunker who in the mean time was discovered by the Germans and found them shot too. He was simply saved by the fact that he was on a trip between the two bunkers and the German patrol never stumbled upon him.

Q. How did you know about that?

A. Later on when he found his parents and his friends dead, he came to us and told us about it. We were a few times visited by injured partisans because of two doctors. They sought us out on several occasions. My father and my grandfather removed the bullets of the wounded ones.

Q. So there was some sort of communication information being passed between all of you in hiding?

A. Well, very careful, very limited, but there was some communication, yes.

Q. Were there a lot of other refugees in this area?

A. No, very, very few. After the war, a long time after the war has ended I found out I was already in Israel I found out that one family was hiding not far away from us and the German patrol was shooting into the forest and the father was hit by a bullet and he screamed the Germans came and dragged the whole family and sent them to a concentration camp, but they survived the war.

Q. Was the fear constant? Were you always very guarded about your movements? Were you frightened?

A. Well, in the forest time lost its meaning because what you were mostly observant you were worried about the weather. When it didn't snow, the forest was beautiful. The snow was clean, the trees were beautiful. The problem began when it rained because we lived in a bunker that was covered by tar paper. It did not keep the rain completely away, so we were continuously freezing, always cold. Cold and hungry because the provisions that we received didn't have many vitamins. For example, each scratch, the smallest scratch caused infection. So, you were always suffering from something. The life was simply I think the time lost its meaning. The only joy was when a farmer came to bring some provisions and telling you the latest news from the front. And logic kept telling us that when the Germans began to retreat they started slowly, slowly losing interest in catching Jews. Then apparently they reached a point in their philosophy that they considered the _____ and Slovakia to be free of Jews. So, they began to venture less and less frequently on these raids. The danger of course remained constantly that somebody will sell you out for the reward. That held true until the very end. That never ceased.

Q. This area that you were in, can you just for the record, name a few of the nearby villages?

A. I don't know if it's going to exist because as I said before I think, many of these villages were consolidated. Some of them even changed their names but we are talking in the vicinity of _____. The villages of _____, _____, _____, _____, otherwise all under normal conditions beautiful villages. Very, very friendly people under normal conditions.

Q. How would you spend an average day, if there was such a thing?

A. Doing absolutely nothing but sleeping. Sleeping, sleeping and sleeping and trying to save strength. Maybe once a day leaving the bunker for maybe half an hour and trying to gather twigs fallen from trees so that we will be kept warm during the night. But otherwise, doing absolutely nothing, not even talking.

Q. Was that your primary responsibility, bringing in the firewood?

A. Yes, that was my responsibility because I was the youngest.

Q. Did you have any contingency plans when you were in a place?

A. Yes, and that would have been something I definitely would have forgotten to tell you had you not asked. I did realize on several occasions that my grandfather had five or six buttons in his pocket and I was told they contain poison, which he would have given to each one of us to drink had he sensed that we were caught. That was the only contingency plan that we had. Luckily enough, we never had to make use of it, and that one time that we did get caught, it came so quickly that he was unable to distribute it anyhow, but that was because we were caught in a farm house where the dogs were already barking giving us warning. We saw already that human approaching from a distance. In the forest, I don't know -- I cannot describe to you a scenario how we would have gotten caught, whether the Germans would have had dogs with them, I don't know. But that I asked once Grandfather years after the war what was in those bottles and he told me, poison.

Q. You did not know at the time?

A. At the time I did not know.

Q. Now, was there ever a point when you were separated from the rest of your family?

A. Yes, I had a _____ where at some point my grandfather made some arrangement for me to attend alone by myself for one and a half years a school in a very distant small village under an assumed name and under an assumed religion. But after about a year and a half living in that village, the residents began to ask my identity. Some of them started to suspect that I am Jewish and one old lady asked me I should show her my penis, whether I am circumcised or not. So, when that came, the people who were hiding me said you have to go back to your grandparents and join your parents to hide.

Q. Why had your family decided to send you out?

A. Mainly because of the schooling because I had attended regular school. That was the only year that I had school out of the nine grades required by Czech law, I had three years all together, and that was one of the three.

Q. And they decided that even in this extraordinary times, you should go to school?

A. Yes, because again it was already when Slovakia was considered to be free of Jews so they thought that there will be no suspicion.

Q. Who was the family that did that?

A. That was a Lutheran minister and unfortunately he was imprisoned under the communists and died in jail for Lutheran religious activities against the communist state.

Q. And your grandfather knew him?

A. Yes, he knew him.

Q. I'm going to ask you more about that, but why don't we change types.

End of Tape 2

Tape 3

A. The life in that village was very, very pleasant change. It was a very picturesque village. The Lutheran minister was a bachelor. He owned I think it probably came with the territory, he had a little farm. There was a cow, and he raised angora rabbits. Each winter the rabbits had to be clipped and he had a sister also an old spinster who was living with him who kept house, and she was processing the wool from the rabbits, so there was a lot of spinning going on and combing the wool and knitting and again that village was without electricity so women used to go from one household to the other and block feathers, and all sorts of stories were told by blocking the feathers. The village had a post office which had a telephone. It was the only telephone in the whole village. Later on by pure accident I found that the minister had a car which was hidden in a barn under a stack of hay and that explained to me the occasional noise of an engine. Namely, what was he doing? He was recharging the battery by the engine and he used the battery for listening to a short wave radio. I caught him once listening to London and Moscow and he knew the latest news about movement on the fronts. There was only one impediment in the otherwise beautiful setting. That with him was living a young school teacher who was teaching in a neighboring village and he pretended to be a great enticement who always voiced his suspicion. Many, many years later I found out that he did it purposely to keep them on their toes. To keep me always alert. But otherwise, life in the village was very, very pleasant, very serene because the village was in a valley, mountains surrounded it. _____ was about two hours away by bus that used to depart from the village very early in the morning and used to come back late afternoon and usually the villages took a ride once a week to the nearest town when they had to buy something not obtainable in the village store. On one such occasion I took a ride to the town and strangely enough the town had a catholic church which the president of Slovakia at that time, _____ was his name, was a priest of, and he used to conduct every Sunday services in that church. _____ was the name of the town and on one such occasion, I went to the town and saw him giving this service in a catholic church. So,

when the people of the village began to ask my religion, apparently the Lutheran minister got in contact with my grandparents and I was shipped back to the bunker.

Q. While you were in this village, did you have false papers, did you try to pass as a Christian boy?

A. Yes. One of my grandfather's friends used to be a school teacher who issued in my name a false school certificate under an assumed name. I was named _____ of Lutheran religion. To cover up my inadequate Slovak language, it was stated in the certificate that I came from a town called _____ which was exactly on the border of the Czech and Slovak lands where they spoke a very mixed Czech Slovak language, the same that I was talking. But that persistent woman who wanted to know if I was really Lutheran, that certificate didn't mean much. She still wanted me to put my pants down.

Q. Now, did you learn prayers, did you go to church? What sorts of things did you have to do to pass?

A. Okay. To pass, that village was so small that it had a school with only one classroom. The teacher always divided the blackboard into various segments and while he lectured to one grade he gave assignment, written assignment to another grade. In the morning before we started the school we Lutherans had to get up and had to pray with our hands hanging loose by our sides. The catholics used to pray crossing their hands in this fashion. And they used to cross themselves where we Lutherans did not. Because I was living with a Lutheran minister I accompanied him every Sunday to the church in which in conducted the services and I had two tasks in the church. I was helping an older guy to ring the bells to call in worshipers to services. That was a great, great challenge, because I was very small and I think there were three bells. I was never able to master my bell to fall into step with the other two bells the other guy was pulling on because the rope of my bell when it went up, always took me along with it. I was not heavy enough to bring the rope down again, so I was jumping from one side to another. Then, because the village didn't have electricity, but the church had an organ, our school master played the organ, but somebody had to keep pumping the organ. So, again I took place among the other

volunteers to pump the organ. And again, I was very small and light in weight to pump the organ so that the sound of it did not diminish. So, these were some of the challenges I was faced with. Also, on one or two occasions, the farm help took me to pasture to guard the cows and once or twice the cow escaped from me and I had great difficulty finding the cow while he was taking a nap I had to gather the cow. But all in all, I think that one year that I was in that village was probably the most pleasant time during all those years of war that I remember.

Q. Even though you were separated from your family?

A. Even though I was separated from my parents and my grandparents.

Q. Did you have to memorize prayers?

A. There was always only one prayer in the morning which I still think I vaguely remember something like "Dear Father, give us our daily bread and forgive all our sins, like we forgive our sinners," something of that nature. It was not very long. Something came back to me, while I went to school in the _____ in the first grade for the short time I was permitted to attend we were learning to recite the alphabet and at that time the Czech alphabet has h and after h comes a combination of C and H which is pronounced _____ and when we came to that it was pronounced _____. In as much as the president of the _____ was a fellow named _____, we had to stand up for that split of a second when we recited the alphabet. But going back to Slovakia, the prayer was always one in the same. For appearances sake, I also went to Sunday school where we learned the theory of Lutheran religion. Inasmuch as I never was deeply involved in Jewish religion, it was quite pleasant, relaxing to learn about Lutheran religion. There was not a trace of animosity in it. The religion was not used in that particular village to antagonize anyone. It was just there to serve the people and to unite them under the umbrella of religion.

Q. Was there anything particularly striking about the sermon that Father _____ gave when you had gone to that town?

A. No, because number one it was a very large church. The church was a catholic church. It had very good attendance. I suspect that had Father _____ not been a fascist, probably

fewer people would have attended his services. The only striking thing about it was the church was very well guarded by armed tanks while he was giving the service. But when he came out, he looked very benign, very meek kind of fellow that probably wouldn't be able to kill even a fly. I do not believe that he made any everlasting impression on anybody. He of course was a hypocrite of first grade and as far as I know, he was the only priest that ever ended up on the end of a rope. After the war he was hung, which he deserved.

Q. You didn't feel particularly strange or uncomfortable being there?

A. No, it was something new, something never experienced before. It was curiosity that probably drove me there more than anything else.

Q. So, you went back to the bunker?

A. Yes.

Q. Can you just -- you told me a little bit about your life during that time, but what physically was this place like because you were there quite a while it seems on and off in this bunker?

A. It was a hole in the ground. In one corner a small stove and the long side a platform made of logs from fallen trees and on top of the logs was straw covered with a blanket and you have to visualize, we were -- our feet were facing each other. On one side grandmother with grandfather and on the other side my father, my mother and myself and we were touching with feet our grandparents. The bunker had a couple steps, I don't remember, three or four, and there was a make believe sort of a door that was blocking it so that it was always semi-dark in the bunker. When somebody had to go out, he had to go a couple yards from the bunker and relieve himself. So, before we went out, we always checked the weather and we tried to go out when it was either snowing or raining so to hide. There were wild, wild animals in the forest. We got a couple visits from deer. I think on one occasion I encountered a wild boar, but I think the boar was more afraid of me than I was of him, because he ran away but scared me. On one occasion I remember that it was snowing heavily and the farmer was unable to reach us with supplies. We were already starved almost close to death. My parents sent me to find out why the farmer

wasn't coming. So in the deep snow I was walking to the farmer's house, and I came upon a clearance in the forest, and as I came upon the clearance I heard the sound of airplanes. All of a sudden it stopped snowing. The clouds parted and brilliant sun was shining and I looked up skyward and I saw allied airplanes either going on a raid or coming back from a raid because the airplanes were glistening in the sun leaving a vapor trail and throwing small cuttings of aluminum foil. Allied planes always threw it to confuse German radar. But all of a sudden I heard a terrible noise and in the distance I saw a cow. I don't know, the cow was not attended. Some farmer may have let her to feed herself, and then I heard a tremendous explosion. What has happened? One of the airplanes, an empty gas tank and that gas tank hit the cow and killed her on the spot. That didn't happen very far away from me. I could have been killed instead of the cow. I reached the farmer and the farmer explained that not only heavy snow but also illness of his wife prevented us from supplying us, but he gave us some food supplies and he accompanied back to the bunker and brought us some supplies of food so we were saved once again from starvation.

Q. What kind of food?

A. We were talking about bread, potatoes, bacon, but all that had to eat very slowly and with great restrain because when you are not having food regularly over eating can kill you. Cheese, milk and he even brought us some bandages and that was one time when really we were in danger of starving to death.

Q. When you saw the allied planes, did that give you hope?

A. No. Number one the planes were very, very high. Then, I was not quiet certain whether they are allied planes or not. One plane made me to believe that it was not German because of its configuration, and I think many, many later I looked it up and I think it was a P-38 airplane that has a duel fuselage and that was a fighter which usually accommodated fuel for the bombers as an escort. At that time it was always our wishful thinking why can't they land and take us on board, but that was wishful thinking.

Q. When you were wishing did you think that you would get through this, that it would all be over with soon.

A. Well, at that time, when we saw the allied airplanes we began to sense that the end cannot be far away because the airplanes flew unopposed from the Germans. I had never experienced any bombing raids, but it seemed to me that when Germany is not opposing the allied planes that in all likelihood they don't have enough planes to do anything about it to begin with. So, we thought that the end cannot be too far.

Q. What other difficulties, or what were the greatest difficulties you had in hiding? Anything that you haven't mentioned?

A. Only the constant fear of getting caught. The constant fear of getting caught. That was the main, main issue item on our minds. When finally the war ends, that was the second item. Additional difficulty, not knowing whether the information we get is truthful. What does it mean. The people who were listening to the news kept always telling us which town fell into either Russian hands or allied hands, so we were always trying to figure out how many miles left before they reached us. Then came the disappointing news that the Germans counterattacked and reconquered the town that they had lost a week earlier. Or the news came that either the Russians or the allies suddenly stopped, stalled, not advancing fast enough. Then the question on our minds was what will the Germans do when once they begin to retreat. Will they scorch everything while retreating. What route will they take when they do retreat. Many, many thing, the majority of them I probably forgot already but these are some of the points that come to my mind today.

Q. Did you know anything about the camps at that time?

A. No.

Q. Did you know anything about the Slovak National uprising in the summer of '44?

A. Yes. Yes, we knew about that because when the uprising failed the partisans who participated dispersed through the mountains and some small units from it came to us with their injured. I should perhaps mention that my father voluntarily worked for one year in a Slovak

concentration camp as a dental doctor. I never found out how it came all about. Somebody arranged for him to work as a dentist. The name of the camp was Wilno. It is on the Slovak map of camps. He must have made arrangement with the commandant of the camp that he will voluntarily work there for one year and that at the end of the year he was let go. He was not part of the prisons that inhabited the camp, but I was never able to find out all the details about it.

Q. So, at that time he was not living with you?

A. At that time he was not with us in hiding. He joined us when the year expired, and strangely enough, I do not know whether the Germans knew about it, because they never made claim upon him. But again, from what I understand, the Germans lost interest in us not long after we disappeared because they had other worries than one Jewish family. Furthermore, there is an interesting point which probably very few people know or are aware of. The Germans shipped from Slovakia the Jews to concentration camps but the Slovaks had to pay for it. The Germans didn't do it for the Slovaks free of charge. So, therefore, the Slovaks on one hand yes, we want to get rid of the Jews but on the other hand we don't have money to pay you Germans for the shipments of Jews. I have some place at home a balance sheet of how much each Jew cost the Slovak government in money for his shipment to Auschwitz or wherever he went.

Q. Was there a sense of isolation?

A. Yes, that was -- we felt very, very badly, the loneliness, the isolation from the rest of the population. Always the shining star was that one day the war will end and things will be back to normal.

Q. Do you have clear memories of any of your rescuers, any of the farmers that helped you or housed you?

A. Only of one, because simply I have his photo at home. My sister sent it to me. He was probably the most decent fellow under the sun. His name was _____, very simple farmer. I'm not certain he knew how to read or write. He had a very, very small farm, but you have to look with a magnifying glass to find a more decent person than he and his wife were. That was a couple who practiced everything that was written in the Bible from A-Z, everything.

At that time, he was already in his sixties. He died a natural death. That unfortunately, when the war ended and I left for my trip to Israel. I left in 1949. I came back the first time for a visit in 1965. Most of the people who helped us during the war were dead already. Additionally those people who helped Jews during the second world war were not looked upon very favorably by the communist government for reasons that I don't quite understand but that's how things took turn later on after the war had ended.

Q. How were you liberated?

A. Oh, about a week before we actually were liberated the farmer came very excited that the Russian front is very nearby and we actually heard artillery nearby and he said that it's a question of days or weeks before the whole front will collapse. Two days later he came and said yes, I think it's safe for you to leave the bunker and you can join me and we will go to my farm and we went straight to the attic, because we were not liberated yet. I remember that wall of the attic that did not contain the hay had breaks in the wooden panels and I was looking outside and I saw soldiers fleeing, German soldiers fleeing. While running they took off their jackets, their trousers. Many times running only in their underwear, and then suddenly there was silence. The farmer came up and said it's all over, you can come down. We came down we stayed for another day or two. I think that was the first time I took a bath. So did my parents after many years. My father shaved for the first time. We threw away our clothes and got new ones and we went to the closest town which was already liberated. But the town was not liberated by the Russians, it was liberated by Rumanian units because about a year before the second world war ended the Rumanians switched sides and joined the Russians. My parents deposited me in an orphanage home run by catholic nuns while they went to _____ to see what happened to our house and grandparents went back to _____ to see what happened to their house.

Q. Do you remember the date of your liberation and the name of that town?

A. The name of the town was _____. It must have been in May of '45. I stayed in that orphanage for about two or three days until my parents came back to fetch me and took me back to _____. We got the house back and they arranged for me private lessons

with a school teacher because it was hoped and assumed that in September I would start a regular school year. So, I spent the whole summer trying to catch up what I missed for the past five years.

Q. You were just given the house back? It was that easy?

A. Well, it was not easy. We had to sue, but the police evicted the people who were in the house and said that should they win the case they will be permitted to reenter the house, but in the mean time we have the first right to our own house.

Q. When you returned was there a general feeling of welcome? How did the local people accept you?

A. Well, the neighbors where my mother hid so many of our possessions claimed that nothing of it survived, that the Russians stole everything from them, which generally the population claimed whenever Jewish property was given to them for safe keeping, they claimed that the Russians took it. The Russians were thieves, no doubt about it. When they saw an opportunity to steal something they did it. But they didn't do it wholesale, they did it sporadically here and there. In Germany they did it wholesale, but in Czechoslovakia they didn't do it on a whole sale scale. So, it was an excuse and many Christians enriched themselves with Jewish property.

Q. In general how did they treat you?

A. Many people came and openly apologized for not having talked to us during the war when the law said that Christians cannot speak to Jews and Jews cannot speak to Christians. Many store owners who had these signs, Jews not welcome, didn't know what to say so it was a very sort of an ambivalent situation. There were some Christians who openly said we are very sorry that Hitler didn't kill all of you. It is difficult to generalize.

Q. What did it feel like going back to this atmosphere?

A. I think that our initial feelings were okay. Nobody now shoots at us. We can eat. We can sleep in our own beds. We can start living or go back to normal life. I think it was a tremendous sense of relief. I do not believe that anyone that survived this holocaust had any

desire for revenge at least not from those people who survived the war in the form in which we survived it. Now, I cannot speak on behalf of those in a concentration camp, but we had personal beef against that unit that participated in raping my mother. We went to the trial and were called as witnesses against the Slovak members of that unit. The German soldiers, they disappeared. They went back to Germany, but the Slovaks were caught, because they participated in other atrocities, and each member of the Slovak party got the rope. That was some satisfaction.

Q. Any uneasiness when you came back?

A. Well, uneasiness we did not know exactly how the future will evolve. There were of course trials. There were many Czechs who occupied high positions in the nazi government, but to what extent they influenced actually our departure of the transports, it was hard to ascertain. Because the atrocities were usually committed by the small guys, the big guys up in the hierarchy, they just signed the documents giving the order, but the actual killing was committed by the little guys with the rifles, the bayonets. So, you are wondering how do you divide the guilt. Is that guy with the pen guiltier than the guy with bayonet. I don't know, I'm not God.

Q. So, did you continue on? Did you go to school in the fall?

A. Yes. I went to school. My father got replacement for his dental practice but in a different town. We sold the house in _____ and we moved to a different town where my father opened a dental practice. I kept going to school. I finished the required number of years of schooling by the Czech law, but then another disaster struck. The communists came, 1948. Somewhere and that now comes history into play, Truman Churchill and Stalin divided Europe and decided that Czechoslovakia will be under the Soviets influence, and the Czech government agreed. There again were traders that sold out the democratic government, the communist government, which was in exile. There were two Czech governments in exile. One in London, which came back and was governing until 1948 and there was a lesser government in Moscow that also came back and was undermining the democratic government and succeeded overthrowing the democracy in 1948 and took away its power and came to existence as the

communist government of Czechoslovakia. We Jews who survived always thought about the Soviet and Russian pogroms under the Czars and we were afraid once Russian come to Czechoslovakia once again the anti-semitism for which the Poles and the Soviets are so very well known that there will be another Holocaust. So, the majority of Jews, I among them, emigrated to Israel which in 1948, in May became a nation. My parents never accompanied me to Israel because the Czech government, again even under the communist realized that too many doctors are leaving and they considered doctors to be of great importance to the national economy and my father was caught in it and not permitted to accompany me to Israel, and I never saw my parents again.

Q. They lived out their life there?

A. My mother committed suicide in 1953 and my father died of natural death in 1962 or 1963. I came for my first visit in 1965 back to Czechoslovakia. I left Israel in 1959 and came to the U.S. so in 1965 I finally had enough money to afford a trip back to Czechoslovakia, but by then my father was dead already.

Q. I know that this is a difficult thing to speculate on, but do you think that your mother's death was very much affected by these war time experiences?

A. No doubt about it. No doubt. As a matter of fact I have proof and I'm in the middle of a fight with the Czech government about it. We were helped during our hiding years by two Czech fellows. These two fellows after liberation of Czechoslovakia joined an organization called American Czechoslovakia Friendship Club. When the communists took over Czechoslovakia, they became possession of membership lists of this club and they arrested all the members on the list. These two fellows, somebody alerted them to the fact that they will be arrested and because we lived not too far away from the Austrian border, they came to us trying to cash on their favor they did for us and my mother tried to arrange for the two of them an escape to Austria. Somebody revealed that plan to communist police and they arrested my mother. And they tortured her. So, under nazis she was raped and under communists she was tortured. On one occasion while at the police station, she jumped from a window and committed

suicide. I have her death certificate issued by the Czech government but they are not willing to admit that she committed suicide because of the torture by the communist police. That I cannot forgive them.

Q. This must have been hard on your father?

A. Yes, but I was never able to talk to him about it because when I came he was already dead some two or three years.

Q. You weren't able to correspond with him while you were in Israel?

A. Yes, we did but you have to understand that correspondence was censored. You never knew what to write whether that which you are writing will not be detrimental to them.

Q. Now, the grandparents, you left behind, did you ever see them again?

A. You mean my grandfather and grandmother who were with us in bunker?

Q. No.

A. Oh, my grandmother, she went with a transport and I do not know exactly whether she died in _____ or in Auschwitz. That transport, the _____ had 900 people went with the transport. I think 26 came back. There were in Czechoslovakia I think about 270,000 Jews. After those that came back and went to Israel, Czechoslovakia was left with about 12,000.

Q. What happened to your sister?

A. My sister survived the war under the false papers. She came back. She joined us, but she never from that point on, was living as part of the family. I think the years that she was living under the false papers as a secretary gave her a feeling of independence and after a few weeks of living with us, she left and lived always in different towns completely independent. She worked as a secretary. She had great aptitude for foreign languages. I think she also for a time a teacher in a _____ school of languages. She knew extremely well German. Later on she got married and had children of her own.

Q. As a Christian or a Jew?

A. She married a Christian and I think that she raised her daughters without any religious affiliation. She still lives in _____. One of her daughters unfortunately was killed in a freak accident. She was a school teacher. The other daughter lives I think at the present time in the capital of the Czech republic in Prague and I think she works in a hotel as a receptionist.

Q. How difficult was it for you to rebuild your life in Israel and in the United States? Was it easy to sort of start all over on your own?

A. Well, I think that each country provided me with different challenges. I don't think you can put them under one umbrella. The Israeli experience I think was the harder one of the two because I was much younger. I was only 17 when I came to Israel. About a half a year after coming to Israel, I was already in the Israeli military. It was a newly established state which still had many, many problems with their neighbors. First of all, in Israel, I was completely on my own. There is absolutely no resemblance of the Hebrew language to the Czech language, so the Israeli experience was much harder than the American experience.

Q. Were you lonely?

A. In Israel? Very lonely. Very lonely, because in Israel, unfortunately we were always told of the harrows under the Nazis. The Israeli government was hoping to keep all the emigrants there by reminding them that only in unity is there strength. And that is one of the reasons why I never liked Israel because I always felt that the wound of the holocaust will never heal if you will be continuously reminded of it every day and every day.

End of Tape 3

Tape 4

Q. You stayed in Israel until when?

A. 1959.

Q. Why did you decide to leave?

A. Well, those relatives that I had in Israel they were number one, very distant relatives. They all had families of their own. Israel was a new country which at that time was in a constant danger from its neighbors. Israel every day another group of emigrants came to Israel. There was a great deal of unemployment and I was there as a seventeen year old boy when I came. I was barely 20 when I exited the Israeli army, when I was discharged from the military obligation. I didn't have any schooling. I didn't have any skill and under conditions that existed at that time in Israel and my non existing support from relatives I was unable to learn any skill. Furthermore, the Israeli economy was very hard to figure out. You never knew what would be worthwhile studying or learning because of the influx of immigrants. Furthermore, the political line that Israel in those days pursued didn't give me any hope that one day there will be peace with the neighboring countries. Additionally, every year I was at least two or three times called to serve in the military reserves. Inflation was tremendous. I was always on the edge of subsistence and I didn't see any future for myself in Israel. So, I contacted my grandfather who saved us from the holocaust and he once again put his machinery into work. Alerted the Israeli relatives who were dispersed through the war, whether one of them could help. For a long time I was led to believe that it will be my uncle who will be in the best position to help me. My father's brother who did not participate in the holocaust. My father's brother was a very wealthy textile merchant in Czechoslovakia who used to travel every year for his vacation to Switzerland. When the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia he was in Switzerland, so he never came back to Czechoslovakia. He lost most of his fortune, because the nazis confiscated and closed all the Jewish accounts, but he was still left with a comfortable amount of money in Switzerland. But the Swiss made clear to him that he cannot remain and he purchased from someone an entrance visa to Canada. While on boat to Canada it was discovered that the Canadian visa was forgery

and instead of landing in Canada he ended in the U.S. That is also something that he never wanted to reveal to me how he did it. But, elaborating on something which I did not cover earlier, there were people who already with the rise of Hitler sensed that the catastrophe facing Europe and left Europe in time. There were others who waited until the last minute and who in one way or another succeeded leaving Europe. I have relatives who for example found a safe haven in Shanghai having been occupied by Japanese. But the Japanese by far didn't match the brutality of the Germans vis-a-vis the Jews, and the emigrated after the war to Australia. My uncle emigrated to the U.S. Other distant relatives emigrated to Palestine. So, my grandfather manufactured for me exit from Israel either to Australia or to the United States, but my uncle, for reasons of his own, never sent me the required documents. Those days, there was a crucial document for coming to U.S. called Affidavit of Support. That I finally obtained from much more distant relatives in the United States and I was able to come in 1959 after having to wait five years for the entrance to come. The United States had a quota system. I don't know whether they still have it, and Czechoslovakia having been a very small country has a very small quota system, so the wait was very long.

Q. When you first got there, what were your first impressions?

A. Number one, because I came from Israel that despite its small size, Israel is a democracy, many tourists from United States are visiting Israel, so I was very, very informed as to what I can expect to find in the U.S. Once I was able to overcome the disappointment that it was not my uncle who sent me the Affidavit, I was able to take off almost immediately. I landed in New York. I was living in a rooming house. I found employment as a shipping clerk. I started going to night school. I was finally able to finish evening high school. I enrolled in a college. I paid for it from my own pocket. I finished that in ten years. I joined the U.S. Secret Service, which paid for my master's degree. After I got my B.S. I went back to Czechoslovakia and married my sweetheart and brought her over here. I was fine once I came to the U.S. When compared to Israel or Czechoslovakia it was a cinch. The labor, the investment was visible immediately here

in the U.S. if you are willing to work, there is no limit how high you can go. Absolutely no impediment.

Q. You were pretty resilient?

A. I think the nazis had something to do with that. I think that I personally find in U.S. everything I was seeking. Let me put it this way. It's a love and hate relationship. It depends on what you read in the newspapers, how many murders we have. There are many aspects of life in the U.S. that are not very nice, but when you put everything on a scale, I think that there is no other country that comes even close to the United States in its opportunities.

Q. What did all the experience -- did it impact your sense of being Jewish or sense of being religious at all, or the fact that you were hidden by Christians make you think differently about being Jewish?

A. You know something, people always ask me do you think Judaism is a religion or is it a race. I'm not certain. It depends where, when and under what conditions. The Germans considered it a race. In Israel I think it's considered a nationality because you would be surprised when I came to Israel how very, very few Jews ever attended synagogue. The feeling there in those days was that now that I am among my own people, why should I go to synagogue. The children in Israeli schools learned about the old testament, not from a religious point of view but from a historical point of view because it's Jewish history. Yes, I think that the feeling of Judaism which I have has been instilled on me by wearing the Jewish yellow star. By the years of reading the signs, Jews, to entry is forbidden. By being called Christ killer, these are the things that make me aware of my Judaism.

Q. Stigmatized?

A. Stigmatized.

Q. Do you feel any of the positive or spiritual aspects of it?

A. No. I still keep looking over my shoulders and try to remain inconspicuous as possible.

Q. So that's an obvious statement?

A. Yes, definitely. You know, occasionally I do meet people who went through the same thing that I did, but those people who experienced it at a later stage in their lives, it seems to me were able to better cope with it than I. It didn't seem to have left such an everlasting impression. At least the first part of their lives was normal. In the middle of it they had a break, a bad break, but because they were older when it happened to them, maybe they were able to figure it out in a more sensible form than I was. I experienced that it became part of my growing up, part of my childhood and definitely the nazi era has changed my life from A to Z. I have no doubt that millions of other people have the same problem. Many of us immigrants wouldn't be here in the United States had it not been for the holocaust. I don't know whether the state of Israel would exist today had it not been for the holocaust.

Q. Let me talk to you a little bit more about how it has this impact on you, how it has affected who you are today?

A. Number one, if I can retrace my step and draw a line number one I would have had regular schooling that every child has. I would have been able to judging by the fact that my father was a very well known dentist, I grew up in a middle class family, upper middle class family, I probably would have been in able to have a professional background in the Czech society. Probably instead of going to night school I would have been going to a regular school, and I would have achieved self actualization stage at a much earlier age. I would not have been forced to learn two foreign languages. Had I learned foreign languages, it would have been because I wanted to learn them and not because I needed to make livelihood under their umbrella. It's pure speculation.

Q. What about emotional or behavioral scars, have you thought about that?

A. Yes. I do get very easily intimidated, very easily. I always seem to be looking for excuses. I'd rather switch than fight.

Q. Because?

A. Because I'm afraid to confront an unpleasant situation head on. I would never be able to occupy a position like Ralph Nadar. He always confronts head on every situation. I would make a very bad politician.

Q. How do you think that seeing what your mother went through affected you?

A. I cannot clarify it entirely because when I left Czechoslovakia it only began.

Q. I'm talking about her attack.

A. Oh, you mean when she was raped. I do not know. I cannot isolate that instance and take it out from the whole thing. I don't know how I would feel had it not taken place. I also cannot speculate that the raiding party caught us on the way back to the barracks rather than on their way out, and had they taken us with them. There are many, many things left to speculation.

Q. Are there certain other images that stick with you that you dream about at night that you have never lost sight of?

A. Yes. One image of that light coming from that guard house when we were crossing the border to Slovakia. The noise of the dogs barking and the singing of the German soldiers that keeps coming back and back and back again. I don't know because it's relatively benign, but I still see that window. They had electricity in that hut. They didn't have any curtain. The light must have been visible for miles.

Q. What do you think got you through all of this?

A. Luck and please don't ask me to define luck, I don't know. If you want to be more realistic and not satisfy it with a phrase luck, I think that it was our grandfather who got us through it. Without him, never. We would have never been able to survive. But once that whole move was put into motion, the whole thing was luck nothing more and nothing less.

Q. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A. Probably not.

Q. Thank you.

A. My pleasure.

A. (Viewing pictures) Now, you are seeing a star which every Jew throughout _____ had to wear over his heart. It was against laws to have it obscured in any fashion and the problem was that it had to be sewn on. You could not use any temporary attachment of the star to your jacket or to your shirt. You were responsible always for having the star visible.

Q. How did it make you feel wearing it?

A. Well, have you read Harthorwn's Scarlet Letter? Like you are branded like cattle. What you see here are two passports of my now deceased relatives who exited Austria in 1939. At that time Austria was already under German occupation and it was considered part of Germany and as you can see the German passports were especially stamped with the letter J to alert the examiner of this passport that this holder is Jew. Women had inserted after their first name, middle name Sarah, to fortify the fact that she's Jewish. As you can see, the photos all are stamped by Nazi stamp with the usual swastika and obtaining such a passport in 1939 was extremely difficult. There are many phases to these which are somewhat obscure because in some cases the Germans permitted Jews to exit Europe but later they stopped it completely. What divided that line of thinking is not even very clear to historians and there are still many debates about it. Here you see a photo of me with my mother and father and it was taken in 1933 in _____. At that time still unoccupied Czechoslovakia. Here you see on this photo my grandfather. The photo was taken in _____, here I am probably four years of age. This is my grandfather's dog. I remember his name was _____ and I am also with my sister. In all likelihood we are there on vacation.

Q. And this is the grandfather who saved you?

A. Yes, who saved our lives, yes. This picture shows me in the Israeli military and was taken in all likelihood in 1951. That of course was taken in _____ Israel.

Conclusion of Interview