United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Samuel Marein-Efron
May 8, 2013
RG-50.030*0690

PREFACE

The following interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

SAMUEL MAREIN-EFRON
May 8, 2013

Question: This is a **Rebecca Dillmeier** interviewing **Samuel Marein-Efron**, on May 8th, 2013, at the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** in **Washington**, **D**.**C**. Can we begin by having you state your name, and spell your name?

Answer: My name is **Samuel Marein-Efron**, spelled – hyphenated last name, and I was born in **Budapest**, **Hungary** on May 5th, 1933. And my parents' names were **David** and **Dwojra**, **d-w-o-j-r-a**, which is basically Polish for **Deborah**. My father was born in a little town near **Bialystok**, called **Krynki**, **k-r-y-n-k-i**. And my mother was actually born in **Kiev**, in the **Ukraine**. And in order to – to get back in – into **Poland** after the we – welma – when the Russian revolution started, they had to f – get her a false Polish birth certificate. And theoretically, on official papers, it appears that she was born in **Bialystok**.

Q: Your parents moved to **Budapest**. When did they move to **Budapest**, and why? What was the –

A: Well, it – it's – it has the – it has a history. My father was doing quite well in **Poland**, until **Pilsudski** came in. Then there was something which is referred to historically as the **Ugannah**(ph). And basically what that was, it was a tax system which taxed artisans and industrialists, and didn't do very much for landowners, or others. So my father was pressed financially, and he gave up – basically they sold

their factories in **Poland**, and the – they – my uncles remained, and they used to rent space in – in other factories, but my father, at first, moved to **Finland**. And that was a little bit too far from – from **Poland**. So he moved again to **Zemun** in – well, today it is **Serbia**. And in **Serbia** he had a bad experience, he ran in with a cousin of the king, who liked his business, so they gave him 72 hours to leave the country. And he had a – a number of jobs, until finally he – he found a job with a very big Hungarian complex called **Csepel**, that was run by a – a Jewish entrepreneur, **Manfred George** – actually, **George Manfred**. Hungarians, they do it the other way around. And he was head of – he first became the head of the factory that they had in **Slovakia**, in **Zylina**, **z-y-l-i-n-a**. And first my mother wouldn't – wouldn't think of – of living there, and nunb – it was the center of – basically, of Slovakian nationalism. This man **Klinker**(ph) and – and **Tiso**(ph), this was their main – main center of operations. And so my mother was very unhappy there, so she said – she s – when she found out that she was pregnant, she decided that she – this was not the place to deliver a child. So, we moved to the headquarters of the conglomerate, which was **Budapest**.

Q: Could you say the name of the company again, and spell it?

A: It was called **Csepel**, **c-s-e-p-e-l**.

Q: And what – what did it do? What kind of company was it?

A: It was a huge complex, basically. It's – it's biggest income came from food, from importing and export – basically exporting Hungarian agricultural products, but he was also the main producer of aluminum in **Hungary**. He – they had a generators sunk into the **Danube**. And not only did they produce aluminum, they – they actually gave el-electricity to – to **Budapest**. And another thing which they used to do were – was airplane parts. They used to manufacture airplane parts, and they had a big, big textile complex on the island. It – **Csepel** is really the name of an island in the **Danube**, but it was called **Csepel**, the complex itself. It's – it – it basically – he – he was pro – th-the owner was probably the second or third we-wealthiest person in – in – in **Hungary**. And he – he – he was basically very, very friendly with the government. In – and – any time they were short 10 – 10 or 15 million dollars, he would lend it to them, in lieu of taxes, so you know, the – the – there was a very good relationship between him and the Hungarian government.

Q: And you were born in **Budapest**, after your parents had moved to **Hungary**?

A: I was born in **Budapest**, yes.

Q: When were you born?

A: May 5th, 1933.

Q: 1933. Can you describe your early life; what it was like as an immigrant in **Hungary**, or your parents' lives as immigrants; school, religion?

A: Well, I – I – I was literally considered a Hungarian, even though by law, I wasn't one. In **Hungary**, to be Hungarian citizen, you had to have your father to be a Hungarian citizen, which my father was not. He was a – a Polish citizenship. He – he – he was born actually in the Russian part of **Poland**, but after **Versailles**, that became again, it was recu – constituted as **Poland**, so he re – he became a Polish citizen. But I – I was considered a Hungarian in school and elsewhere. My parents – Hungarian is a very difficult language, and my mother spoke it passably, my father very, very little, and my sister learned to speak Hungarian quite – quite well, I mean. My sibling is seven and a half years older than I was, and she was actually born in **Bialystok**, and she – she did learn Hungarian quite well, yes. But we were both considered really Hungarians, even though nobody asked for our passports, which was a l – a lucky thing.

Q: So at home did you speak, Russian, Polish, Yiddish?

A: Well, this i – this is very complicated, actually, th-the – the home language used to be Russian. When I was born, I – I was not taught Russian. So basically, it became a mix – mixture of German of Yiddish. My sister spoke – didn't speak very good Yiddish, she talked mostly German, because she went to German schools. My father spoke Yiddish, my mother spoke very, very bad Yiddish. She spoke a very complex mixture of Yiddish and German. It – it's – it was a complicated affair. In

other words, no – no two people had a common language, you know, three people had a common language.

Q: And you also – since you grew up in **Budapest**, you also spoke Hungarian?

A: I spoke – I spoke at first only Hungarian.

Q: Okay.

A: And then I – I learned German.

Q: Okay.

A: And I went for a while to a German school, and then I – somebody heard a – a heart murmur in – in me, and so they put me to bed for six months. And after I – I got out of bed, the German school wouldn't have me there. So I had to go to a – a Hungarian public school, which was perfectly adequate and nice.

Q: How old were you when this happened, when you got taken out of school for a heart murmur? Do you remember?

A: I was taken out of school at about age five.

Q: Okay.

A: Five, five and a half. And I was put back in school around age six. And we left when I was age seven.

Q: Okay.

A: We – we – I have **[indecipherable]** my eighth birthday was in **Mexico City**.

Q: Oh. All right. We'll get there.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about the religious life of your family? Were they very religious, not religious?

A: Well, my father and mother came from very, very religious families, especially my father. My – my grandfather had been a **melamed**, a teacher. And he – he was considered a rabbi. I'm not sure whether he had the **smichas**, whether he had the – he could really be called a rabbi, but he was certainly – it – it seems, because I never met him, that he was considered to be an extremely knowledgeable person, and – and people used to come to him for advice. But my mother came from a reli – religious family, but – an-and we were relatively religious. My mother kept a kosher home to – to her dying day. And we – we used to go to holidays, to – to the synagogue, and my father worked on Saturday, so that didn't make him a very religious person. And when he was traveling, he – he ate whatever he could get, not – not basically very – he – he did not think of keeping dietary laws, and things like that. I would say we were – we were traditional.

Q: Okay.

A: Not – not religious, but traditional.

Q: Okay. And your father traveled a lot for work. He – what – and he worked for an **[indecipherable]** company. What, exactly, was his role in – do you know?

A: Well, hi-his main – first of all, he – he was a specialist in – in – in producing a fabric which was made of **[indecipherable]** coat – coating fabric which – the word that has come to – to us, is **loden**. And the reason it's called **loden** is that the fa – the main factory producing it, which was not from this complex, but from somebody else, a man by name of **Weingarten**(ph), was in a section of **Budapest** called **Loden**. So they used to say yes, we want the fabric from **Loden**, and the name stuck. But he used to be a specialist, and one of the biggest problems that he had was raw material. He had to find **[indecipherable]** and th-the – the – the two or three plants where he was working consumed a huge amount of this, and specially these are the years where armies in – in **Europe** had to be dressed, and this was the basic coating material practically for everybody; for the German army, for the Polish army, for the – you name it. Practically the whole western European armies used to consume this heavy, **loden** fabric. But the problem was to find raw material, which is why he ended up in the **United States**, as a matter of fact.

Q: Okay. We'll get there, too.

A: Yeah.

Q: Before I want to – di – you were quite young when you left, but can you tell me a little bit about what your life was like in **Hungary**? Do you remember when the Jewish laws were passed in 1938, how that affected your family? Do you remember those sorts of things?

A: Well, I'll – I'll tell you very truthfully, in **Hungary** there was so much latent anti-Semitism that with laws and without laws, it – it – it didn't change the situation very much. I was a little bit surprised at the question that I was asked, because curiously enough – and I spoke to my sister about this, it would seem that th-there was less talk of **Hitler** in **Hungary**, as there was more talk of **Mussolini**. So, some reason another, it was only in this corporate state was much more popular as a – as a piece of conversation, than **Hitler**. And anti-Semitism was latent. In – in – in the years before we left, where we didn't know where the outcome was, there was, you know, they were pe – recruiting Jewish young men, but some were sent to the army, some were sent to work camps. The work camps turned out to be pretty much extermination camps. I mean, they – they worked you to – to – to the bone, I think. There was a – a movie called rou – **Rosenschein**(ph), or something like that, which described one of these work camps in – in **Hungary**. But basically, no-nobody heard anything. At least w-we – we weren't aware of it. And going to a German school, we were not very aware of it. I mean, we were aware of it in that for

example, the – the Nazi clubs in which the youth – youth clubs, wouldn't have us. And that – certainly my sister was absolutely livid, because you know, uniforms and parties, and – and excursions, and whatever it is. But even the school, there was no – no – no latent anti-Semitism. There were quite a few Jewish students in – in the – in the German school.

Q: And when you went to a Hungarian school, was it any different, or –

A: No, no –

Q: The same?

A: – because we were all –

Q: Okay.

A: – I mean, since I – the – the language, my – should be saying my mother tongue was Hungarian.

Q: Yeah.

A: I certainly was not – not looked upon very differently as any – as anywhere else.

Q: I feel like you kind of touched on this, but did your family live in a Jewish neighborhood, interact mostly with Jewish people, or mixed Hungarian –

A: Well, basically, there was such a huge Jewish population in **Budapest**, that you can hardly pinpoint a – a Jewish neighborhood. I mean –

Q: Okay.

A: – all – all neighborhoods had Jews. We were living basically, in the area which – right – right on the **Danube** where – where actually, where the Swedish embassy bought most of those buildings, later on, I mean, we – were not there anymore. But that – that is where – where the Swedish embassy bought all those buildings. It was right on the – on the shore of the **Danube**, right in front of **Saint Margaret's** island, **Margitteet**(ph). And it was really – it was a wealthy community, it was – you had to have a certain – certain economic status to be able to live there.

Q: Okay.

A: And – but then there were Jewish synagogues, Jewish **[indecipherable]**. There were – there – there wi – there was even a synagogue three or four blocks down, on the street. But you couldn't pinpoint it as really – as a Jewish section. There were a lot of Jews in there, but not – not necessarily Jewish.

Q: Okay. So let's move forward a little bit, and talk about your father's travels, and how it brought him to **New York**, and – and the dates when that happened.

A: Well, my father, around 19 – well, he – he – he had constantly – was constantly on the move, trying to locate raw materials, he – he went to places, you know, which we thought were absolutely the end of the world, like **Greece** or **Turkey** or north **Africa**. But there were – there was considerable wool merch – wool – wool products, used wool products there. He had the brother, for example that he set up

in business in **Paris**, collecting for him. But no ma – he had – they had a relationship with the English company called **John Crowther and Sons**, in **Milnsbridge**, which supplied a lot of raw material too, but th-they were always starved for raw material. So my father decided that the only sizable place that he could think of that would have raw material was the **United States**. And basically, he also had there two brothers and a sister, which he hadn't seen in some 30 years. So he, you know, he figured all of these things together, my mother wouldn't go, because we had to go to school, and so forth, and so on. Those trips were long. And he – he planned to be away for a long, long, long period of time, because he had to set up this business. So he actually came to **New York**, and he – he set up a business in **Passaic**, **New Jersey**, and he spent here well over six months, I think about nine months, or something like that. And then he decided to go back to – to **Europe**, and he got as far as **Belgium**, and took the train to – to **Berlin**, but he was turned back, because the Germans had invaded **Belgium**. So, he basically got onto the same boat that he took to **New York**, and came back to **New York**. He made a second attempt to return to southern **Europe**, but he only got as far as **France**, and he had to turn back. And then, of course, the **United States** was very, very – should we say, not receptive to – to – to refugees from an – anybody from **Europe**, as they had this quota system, which I understand 90 percent of the quota were never filled.

But anyways, he – he applied to stay in the **United States**, and he was hoping to bring us all there, at least to sit out the – the – the war, because he knew that if he couldn't get back two ways, I mean there was no reason for us to – to stay there. So he applied here f – as a matter of fact, there's a man by the name of **Yrin**, who does genealogy in this country, **y-r-i-n**. And one day, from the blue, he contact me, because this – a second name in my last name is **Efron**, and he was making a history of the **Efrons**. And he asked me about it, and – and he seems to have found, in the **Springfield** repository of the national archives, actually first papers from my mother, myself and – and my sister. But first papers, we never got the visa.

Q: Right.

A: So the problem was that he was about to – to be deported. And somebody told him that in **Mexico**, if he showed a certain amount of money, you could get an investors visa. So, since he had a – he came with a considerable amount of money to set up this business, there was no problem with that. He – he – he sira – he – he presented his papers, he – he – he put in – he – he showed them the deposit in the bank and so forth, and so on. And I understand there was a – a – a problem with – with telegrams and God knows what, but basically he got the – the visa about two days before he was going to be deported from the **United States**. So he traveled by train to the border, to **Laredo**. And this was June.

Q: June of?

A: For – 1940.

Q: 1940, okay.

A: And **Laredo** in June is the – I think hell is cooler than – than **Laredo**. It's abou – about 105 – 110 in the shade, and no shade. And this was before air conditioning. The only relief was a movie theater, because the – they had these huge ice blocks, which somebody was – they had ventilators blowing on them there; called ice cooled, or whatever it was. So somebody told him that **Mexico City** was somewhat more pleasant, it a – the weather was – was more pleasant. So he took the train to **Mexico City**, he had a Mexican visa. So he took the train to **Mexico City** and – and true in – the temperature was like – like the **Balkans** and – and th – in the middle of summer, **Mexico City** runs around 22 to 26 degrees centigrade. Around 80, at – at best. So he found very pleasant. And by – by accident, he met some people that he knew from – from **Europe**. He was sitting in the park, and suddenly he saw people that he remembered in **Paris**. You know, the – the – you had to – you had to know somebody to get money out of **Europe** at that time. Everybody had a – a currency control system. So he had – he knew these two people, one from **Geneva**, one from **Paris**, who had been doing this for Jews, all over central **Europe**. They were moving money in and out of central **Europe**, and moving it to the **United States**, to

the **Chase Manhattan** bank, through **Chase Manhattan** in – in **Paris**. So he saw these two people in the park, and says, what are you doing here? They says, the same thing that you are. We are waiting for an American immigration visa. So my father said, you know what, we don't know how long we're going to have to wait, whether it's a week, a month, or – or – or years. And we're eating up our capital, you know, maybe we should start doing something. So they – they got together, and they started a business, which lasted 50 – 54 years, 55 years, and by the time when my father got his American immigration visa, he wasn't interested. He had already made a – quite a commitment to – to **Mexico**. So we – we – we remained in **Mexico**.

Q: While your father was in – well, when your father left, what was your family in **Hungary** doing? I assume – did he leave – do you know if he left for **New York** before or after **Germany** invaded **Poland**, in 1939?

A: He left – he – he must have left before the invasion of **Poland**.

Q: Okay.

A: He – he must have left around probably June –

Q: Okay, so just before.

A: – I – I rem – no, actually, he ma – may have left as – as – as much as late 1938 –

Q: Okay.

A: – to **New York**.

Q: Okay.

A: Because my mother and I went to see my aunt and uncle in **Bialystok**, and this was – it was not spring yet, in – in 1931 – 1939. It was late winter –

Q: Right.

A: – 1939 that we went to visit them. We stayed there for a month. And we – we came back to – to **Budapest**. I think the invasion was September, so –

Q: Right.

A: – basically, we – we – we were there six months before the –

Q: Okay.

A: – invasion, and my father probably went away in November or December of 1938, and –

Q: Okay.

A: – he was still in **New York** in late ’39.

Q: Right.

A: And – and – and he did trip back and trip forth, the – he was there still in 1940.

Q: Right, okay. And what was your – your mother and your sister and you doing in **Budapest** during this time? How were things going for you? Do you remember?

A: Well, my father, since he was still working through the company, we – we were drawing his salary, and my father was probably drawing one of his biggest salaries in **Hungary**, if not the biggest salary. So we were living quite – quite – quite comfortably, we – we had our apartment on **Santish**(ph) **Venut**(ph), which is a po – a – a very – was a very stylish, very, very well-to-do neighborhood, and we kept living normally, the way we had tha – lived before.

Q: Where – do you know if your parents started to become concerned when **Germany** invaded **Poland**? Were there ideas on getting out then, or –

A: Well, w-we were concerned, we were very concerned, because two things happened. The first thing was I had a cousin who was the daughter of my aunt in **Poland**. And she had – sh-she had not been able to get into an – a Polish university, because of the numerous clauses, because of the Jewish exclusion rule. So she had taken on – she had gone to the **Charles University** in **Prague**, and she was studying medicine there, and we kept very close contact with her. She – she used to come several times a month to **Budapest** to see m – to see – see our family. And basically, my father was supporting her. And she basically told us that, you know, they – she had been able to speak to her parents up to probably November of – of 1939. And the way she mi – she was able to speak to them is that basically she found a – a farmer – they found a farmer whose telephone was still working for

long distance calls. And every weekend they used to be in touch with her. And then suddenly, at the end of November, they – no more was heard from them. She tried – my cousin tried to go back into **Poland**, she was sent back from the border, she was not allowed in. And so, you know, we – we were extremely worried, because we – we heard nothing. That was the last thing we ever heard of my aunt and uncle. But my – my cousin was in constant touch with us. And as a matter of fact, even through the war, she was in touch with us. She – she was – again, she was being financed both economically, and false papers, by the management of the company with – which my father had a partnership in **Zylina**. So she basically – I – I don't know how this man did it, but he – he – through the red cro – we were getting Red Cross letters almost every two or – two or three months. Heavily censored, but at least we got news, and said that, you know, she was all right, and this and that, and the other thing, but w-we kept pretty – pretty – pretty much in touch with her til – til early 1944.

Q: Okay. And I definitely want to hear more about your father's involvement in finan – in, I guess supplying false papers to people in places. Is that –

A: Well, it – it is – the – the company, which was – my father originally got into the company by managing the – the – this huge plant that they had **Zylina**, in **Slovakia**. And the plant was managed by man called **Mousekopf**(ph). This man **Mousekopf**

was Jewish, and he – he managed to – to – since he – it was important for the German war effort – I mean, he was producing coating and fabrics for – for the German army. He was what they call a protected Jew. So basically he – he was able to move around and – and he was able to – to employ a lo – there was a very big ge – pop – Jewish population in **Zylina**. **Zylina** is very close to the Polish border, it's a Polish German border. So, he was able to – to – to supply jobs to a lot of the Jews in the – in the city, and many of these people were not supposed to be there. In other words, they – they had been refugees from **Poland**. So they – Mr. **Mousekopf**(ph) managed to get residence papers for them. And they didn't get residence papers, he did exactly what he did for my cousin, which is picked up papers of people that had died, or something like that. Which was very dangerous and not – not – it – it – you know, it's something that may have worked for a month or two, and then they had to fire them, a-and give them a new set of papers, and rehire them, because the Germans – not the Germans, but the – the **USB**, the Slovakian secret service suddenly got the list of people which had died, and this man – these peop – i-it was a – a very complicated undertaking, but he – he managed to – to save, I would say several hundred, if not – not – not a thousand, or more people in the **Zylina** area for – from the Germans, until 1944, when the Germans came in, got rid of the

Slovakian puppet government, and that was the – then there they took Jews, no matter whether protected or unprotected, or whatever they were.

Q: And is that the last you heard from your cousin?

A: And the –

Q: The last you heard from your cousin in – at that time?

A: Well, my cousin – my cousin is a – was a strange person. She was a strange person to the day that she died. She was a rebel, of the worst sort. I mean, as a child she had joined **Hashomer Hatzair** in **Bialystok**, which was not considered very – very Jewish, among the better – better members of the community, because they were the poorest of the poor, and the – the – they were definitely communistic. So, she had joined the **Hashomer Hatzair**, and of course, she in see – she was the only one that was living in the – i-in a decent housing area, all the meetings were held in her apartment, and my uncle used to absolutely blow his top. But it passed. And she was like that, too. She went to – to **Czechoslovakia**, and when the Germans invaded, she – she – she was part of the Czech underground. She basically spoke very good German, and she looked German. She – she was blonde, blue eyed. Blue eyed to the point of gray eye. So she made friends in the German occupation forces, and she got herself a job as the doctor. She – she was still a medical student, but she was in her process of getting her internship, whatever it is. So she was able to get

herself a job at the Gestapo jail in – in – in – in **Prague**, and she became the conduit between the people which were being held at the jail, and the underground and their families. And she did this til 1941, the Germans invaded **Czechoslovakia** in 1938. The university was closed, I think in November of 1938, because of strikes, student strikes. But she – she remained there, and she became an important cog in the communications system of the underground, with these people, until – until the end of 1941, when she suspected that she was compromised. In fact, we've gone to the Holocaust Museum facilities, German files, and it's a fact. I mean, the Germans had her take – they had picked her up several times and let her go. But there was a – a record that she had been caught at – as a Jewess not wearing a Jewish yellow Star of **David**. There were several reasons that she had been picked up, because she had managed to – she – she was extremely adroit at getting herself out of trouble. As a matter of fact, she got, at one point, papers, which Mr. **Mousekopf**(ph) didn't know it, but they were of a communist girl. And guess what? The Germans had her on the list of – of people that they – they had to – so she came – she was taken to Gestapo headquarters, she was taken to the Gestapo head. And she walks into her office – into his office, and she sees a picture behind his desk of **Bialystok**. So he – she didn't let him say hello, it's just – she says, you know, ho-how did you ever have this picture of **Bialystok**? So he says, well, you know, I was stationed there, I was

the head of the Gestapo in **Bialystok**. So how – how were you related to **Bialystok**? She says, well, I – I belong to the German population of **Bialystok**, which – which were factory owners, and my father was a factory owner. And this is how I know **Bialystok** very well. My – my – my parents were still there for a while, I don't know where they are now, because the general – **Generalgouvernement** is not very informative as to where people are. So, you know, he made – she made a friendship, and when she walked in, she was about to be sent to wherever – God knows **[indecipherable]** was sent. She managed to walk out four hours later. And she managed also to – this false paper that she had, she managed to give it a certain aura of credibility. In other words, you know, he asked her, well, how come you are a communist? She says, you know, these were things of when you are a young ma – person, you – you think of other people, and this and that, and not of yourself. But this is something which is – which is gone past. So she managed to – to survive this way, on this set of papers, for close to three – three – well, more than that, she – she – she crossed the – the – she's crossed into **Slovakia** from – from the **Czech Republic**, from the other half, the night of Christmas of 1942. They figured that, and figured correctly that the German guards would be all drunk, having a Christmas party, and there was a huge snowstorm that night, but they managed to cross into **Slovakia**. Into **Slovakia**, they already had Mr. **Mousekopf**(ph) to help

her, and she lived in **Nitra** from late 1941 to early 1944, til practically August, September of 1944. She – she had joined also, the Slovakian underground. There was a Slovakian uprising, I think in August – July or August of 1944, which was the reason that the Germans came in. They felt that the Slovakians couldn't handle this, so they came in, and they cleaned out the place, to their liking. My cousin, curiously enough, could have survived, but again, she – principle was – used to get her, and this time it got her, too. Was basically she – she – she tells that she was picked up by the Germans, taken to the Gestapo headquarters, and sat down with a group of Jews. And this man that she knew in the Gestapo walked in, and says, what are you doing sitting there? You're not Jewish. Go home. So she got up and went home, and she describes it as having had a terrible night. I mean, considering that the rest of the Jewish population was being done to something, and deported, or whatever it is. So she basically walked in the next morning, into Gestapo headquarters and said, you know, you're looking for Jews, I'm Jewish. The man was floored. He never in his wildest dream imagined her to be Jewish. She was about as far physically from being a Jew as – as – as you can imagine. Of course, didn't – this didn't help her. But she helped other people. She took Mr. **Mousekopf**'**s**(ph) wife and daughter. She – she – she was able to – she went to **Birkenau**, and in the same transport, Mr. **Mousekopf**'**s**(ph) wife and daughter were – were in that same transport. Mr.

Mousekopf(ph) had been actually – was able to hide with some – some Catholic priest. And she – she told the people at **Birkenau** that she was a surgeon, she was a – a doctor. So there was a shortage of doctors, not only for – for the inmates, but for actually the general population outside of the camps. So she was transported to **Gross-Rosen**, which was a satellite camp. And she said that she needed assistants. She was put in charge of a group of 200 agriculture workers, that were working in the fields around **Gross-Rosen**. So she said that, you know, she needed assistants. So she got the wife and daughter of – of this man **Mousekopf**(ph) to be her assistants, and all – all three survived the war. And she – she not only – she was actually taken by the camp commandant to his town in northern **Germany**, to see his mother, who was sick. And she says she could have stayed there. I mean, they liked her, they – they fed her, they – they clothed her, they – and – and they were very interested for her to stay around, because the mother seemed to be better with her being around. But she felt a responsibility, curiously enough, for those 200 people in **Gross-Rosen**, so she went back to the camps, and she stayed there til liberation, til – til May – May of 1945. Of course, we – we – we found out about her almost immediately. As liberation occurred, she was able to communicate with us, and we asked what happened to Mother and Father, and she says, we don't know. I lost total communications with her. I spoke to **Vera**(ph) the last time, which was

end of 19 – 1939, early 1940. And she – you know, she told us the whole story, but we were – and my father actually came back, and believe it or not, paid – returned the money to the company that had been given out for my cousin, not for the other – well, the others worked at the company. But he felt that, you know, property pro – propriety was important.

Q: Well, what was your cousin's name?

A: How?

Q: Your cousin's name?

A: Her name is **Shula**(ph) **Lozowska**. Her married name was **Graf**(ph).

Q: Okay.

A: As – as a matter of fact, it's very funny, but we were in **Prague** about two years ago, and one of the synagogues has all 50,000 deportees name on it. So my wife says, you know, do we know anybody here? So curiously enough, you know, 50,000 names, coincidence is un – unbelievable. Right in front of my face was **Shula**(ph) **Lozowska**.

Q: Wow, my gosh.

A: 1913, it didn't have a second date for her, because they knew that she was deported to **Birkenau**. Very, very few people came back from the – **Birkenau**.

Q: Wow. How do you spell her name?

A: **Lozowska** is spelled **l-o-z-o-w-s-k-a**. I will – I will send you – I – I'm collecting a lot of copies of papers that I have – I – I have her – her German **I**.**D**. documents, I have – I still have some – some things left over, and I'll let you have it.

Q: Yeah, we can put you in contact with the – the people who take care of that, definitely.

A: Okay.

Q: That would be excellent.

A: Cause, you know, it's – it's worth it.

Q: Yeah, no, that's a very incredible story.

A: Yeah.

Q: And this was all going on, your mother and you and your sister are still in **Budapest** until 1940, right?

A: No, we – we – we're – we're there til early ni – 19 –

Q: Forty-one?

A: – well, th-that was also a confusing issue. First, my father kept writing sa – horrible letters about **Mexico**, you know, poverty, dirt, this and that. My father – my mother said, you know, what are you trying to do to me? I mean, I'm perfectly happy here. **Budapest** is a nice, clean city, with no problems of any – any sort. So, basically, I actually think that somebody – a – a general, or maybe even a field

marshal – I mean, the German army, who was the buyer for the cloth for the German army, came to talk to my mother, and he told her, look, this is no – no time for a Jew to be in – in – in **Europe**, and you know the – this will take a year, two years, and everything will be settled again, everything will come into its normal course, and you'll come back. But at this point, this is no point – no time to – for a Jew to be in – in – in **Europe**. Convinced her. The next problem was how to – how to travel. My father had arranged for her to – to take **Verlichs**(ph) out of **Trieste** – th-the ship out of **Trieste** to **New York**, there were two problems. First of all, she c-couldn't – she – she – it was very difficult to get a transit visa to the **United States**, which I think she finally got. But before she could leave, **Mussolini** got into the war, so that cut it off. Next thing is how to go when there – there were a lot of Jewish refugees who went to **Russia**. In other words, they – they took the **Trans-Siberian** to **Vladivostok**, from **Vladivostok** to – to **San Francisco**, or if not, from **Vladivostok** to **Osaka**, or **Shanghai**, and from there to – to **San Francisco**. So she figured that that made sense. I mean, **Hungary** has a border with – with **Russia**, and she hadn't seen her mother for, I don't know, 30 years, or 25 years, 30 years, so she would do both things. So she started to get a – a – a Russian visa. She actually went to the Russian consul, and she applied, and she left, and – and obviously the consul was Jewish. And he came running after her, and he told her, look, I can give you a

visa, I can guarantee that you can get into the country. I cannot guarantee that you will be allowed to leave. So my mother, you know, advice to the wise – wise, you only give once. So she tried then, going out through – through **Spain**, through – well, there were several problems in there. First of all, the Mexicans did not wish to give her the visa on anything but the Polish passport. And the Cubans wouldn't give her a transit visa either on – except on the Polish passport. She still had the valid Polish passport. I mean, **Poland** didn't exist, but she still had a valish por – Polish pa – of course, here the problem came to the rest of **Europe**. I mean, place like **Switzerland**, a place like **Austria**, a place like unoccupied **France**. To them **Poland** doesn't – did not exist anymore.

Q: Right.

A: So, you couldn't – you know, you can't travel through us with that Polish passport. So my father's company, since they had such good relationship with the – with the Hungarian government, managed to get, for my mother, a **[indecipherable]** passport, a League of Nations passport. So, well she – she got herself into, you know, this is a complication. First you couldn't – at that time you couldn't travel with two passports. So one had to be very well hidden. So basically, she was – i-it took her a good six months, or seven months, to get all the transit visas there. The German transit visa through all – through then **Germany**, German

Austria, and you had to go through southern **Germany**, through **Münsing** to **Munich**, to the Swiss border. And then you went across **Switzerland** to **Geneva**, and then you took a – a train across **Vichy**, **France** to **[indecipherable]** in **Spain**. The – the most difficult visa of them all was the – was the French, the **[indecipherable]** government visa. She managed to – to get it. She – she was a very strong woman, and she wouldn't take no for an answer, so she managed to get everything together by about February of 1941. And we left for – for **Spain**, and traveled through **Germany**. We managed to – to be in men – min – **Münsing**, in **Munich** the night of the – of the speech of **Hitler** in the – in the beer – beer **stuben**(ph), in the beer – beer hall. And the British were bombing, and you know, being in the railroad station during a bombing is the wrong place to be. Anyways, noth – they did not bomb there. They were trying to get **Hitler**, so they bombed all of **Munich**, except for the railroad station. We got out of there, we got into **Switzerland**, we had to stay in **Switzerland** almost two weeks, I think. And then we went to **Spain**, and **Spain** was another problem, because **Spain –** this was the end of the civil war, and th-there was no food in **Spain**. So we were given the privilege to live in – in the hotel, which the Spanish government had for foreign dignitaries, which was not far from the **Prado**. So we stayed there til – til the boat that we were supposed to take, arrived in **Vigo**. We went to **Vigo**, we had a – a bad

experience there, too. My mother was a type which when she traveled, took everything with her. And imagine traveling to war torn **Europe** with 22 pieces of luggage, including two steamer trunks. She managed it. I mean no ha – anyways, in **Spain**, she made a – a terrible mistake. She met a Hungarian, and she said, you know, I worry about this and that and the other thing, because I took everything. I took my silver, I took my jewels, I took this, I took that, and everything is packed away in these 22 bags. So sure enough, it was a terrible mistake, because the guy went and spoke to the – to the Spanish customs. And we were already on the boat, and suddenly Spanish customs come up on the boat, and hold the boat, and they want to see my mother's bags. So they started opening bags, and my sister, in all innocence, she had a bar of chocolate, that we brought from **Switzerland**, and she offered it to the – to the inspector, to the Spanish customs inspector, you know, as a courtesy. Here, would you like to have this? Obviously the man hadn't seen a bar of chocolate in God knows when. He said, close up everything, we have nothing to do, we're just holding up the boat. Get out. So, you see, we were – we were saved by a bar of chocolate. But my mother was, in that sense, you know, very strange. She – she used to – people used to tell her, don't do this. She said, I'll do it, and I'll – I'll carry it through, and she – she was able to carry through almost anything that she undertook. She – very – very strong personality.

Q: Do you know what kind of visas your family traveled on to **Mexico**? Were you also on investor visas, or –

A: No, we had – we had an immigration visa.

Q: An immigration visa?

A: Yes. A-Actually, that was very lucky, because the Mexican insis – wanted to have a Polish passport, but they didn't trust passports in general. So basically, what they used to do is, an – and I'll try to get you a copy of that, too, they used to give you a – a – a – a piece of cardboard, with your picture on it, with a authorization to enter **Mexico**. So basically, you didn't have to have a passport. I-It – it was just shown that the – at the consulate, or whatever it is, and the consulate, put all the details of the passport in this piece of paper, and Mexican immigration didn't – the – the problem was, I understand, was **Portugal**, because in **Portugal** they wouldn't give her a transit visa, unless she had – showed a – a Polish passport, and she didn't want to show it. So, finally, after a long argument, saying look, **Poland** doesn't exist. **Poland** is now **Germany**.

Q: Right.

A: And we have no way of getting a – a German passport. So with that, and a little consideration, I think helped – helped us get a transit visa to – to **Portugal**. So what we did is we took the boat from **Vigo**, and the boat made a two day stop in **Lisbon**.

And in those two days that we stopped in **Lisbon**, my mother was able to pick up the Mexican visa, and she – we're also able to pick up matzos, because this was – this was Passover time. My mother had gotten from the Jewish community there, kosher **[indecipherable]** of food. I have no idea how she carried it though all of **Europe**, especially through **Switzerland**, because **Switzerland** forbade you – one of their – the only th-thing which was forbidden was to take food out of **Switzerland**. There was plenty of food in **Switzerland**, but you couldn't – you couldn't export any of it. My mother was able to pull that through, and quite a few chocolate bars, which were our salvation, sooner or later.

Q: Do you know if you went to **Mexico** – if the Mexican government knew that you were Jewish when you were getting your visas, or if you were just traveling at –

A: The Mexican – the Mexican government at the time was fairly liberal, and it was fairly liberal – this was the time of **Lázaro Cárdenas**. **Lázaro Cárdenas** was probably the only world leader which was supporting the republic in **Spain**. And he had given instructions to all of his consulates, to give a-anybody that walked in, you give him a visa. So, first of all, my father had the la – legal base to request a visa, but otherwise, you would have gotten a visa as well. They – they were extraordinary liberal. Unfortunately, very few people knew about this, so very few people availed themself of this situation.

Q: So you were able to get your Mexican visa while you were in –

A: In **Lisbon**.

Q: In **Lisbon**, okay. And you went to the Mexican consulate and got your visa to **Mexico**.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. And your boat ride over, who – were they mostly Spanish refugees? Were there other Jewish refugees on the boat?

A: Well, more than refugees, I think they were mostly people who had business in either **Cuba**, or –

Q: Okay.

A: They – they – there were refugees. We – we traveled with a very religious man from **[indecipherable]** through all of **Europe**. And there were sort of hair-raising experiences, I mean, we were crossing **Austria**, and this was right before the invasion of **Yugoslavia**, and there were a huge amount of German troops moving through **Austria**. The train was full of German – of Germans. And he, though, had to pray, I mean –

Q: Right.

A: It's more, I mean **[indecipherable]** and my mother was, you know, not very happy. I mean, not that she knew that – what was going on, but she – she knew

Germans, and Germans were anti-Semites to start with, and here you have a very religious Jew. Luckily there, I – I saved them, because the German officers were occupied with me, because basically, I spoke very good German, and – and they were fascinated with me. My sister helped me along, but basically it was I who – who they were talking to. A-Again, you know, the – an unusual situation wa – since the – since there – there was five of us, three a – three in our family, and this man from **[indecipherable]** had somebody else with him. Not a wife, but somebody – and not even a woman, but another man with him, which wasn't as religious as he was. But we were five in – in – in that compartment, so basically the compartment was for six, but we managed to keep the compartment for us five. So, basically, curiously enough, also the – the transit visa for **Germany** was given to us the same day. The transit visa from **Switzerland** wasn't. The transit visa from southern **Spain** wasn't. The transit visa to **Spain** took some time to – no-no-not as much as the French one, but it took – and of course, you know, there were things which I noticed. For example, when we were traveling to southern **Spain** – southern **France**, they came – people came with paint in **Geneva**, and they painted over the windows, which we are not supposed to look outside the – the – the windows. We – we – we – it – it was a long trip. Today – today it's also an overnight trip. We – we

made it, I think, in a day and a night, or something like that. We got to **Portbou – Portbou**, there was no – no con – there was no railroad connection in **Portbou**.

Q: Where is that?

A: That's the Spanish – Spanish border.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. **Catalonia**, and – and so we took a bus ride to, I think **Girona**, and that was a – believe me, **Mexico** has nothing to offer like that. It was a one – one – one lane road, an-and every time you met a truck – it was night – every time they met a truck, you know, it was a – a battle of words to see who would go back to a place where – where they could both pass. And this is not a very long trip, but it took about eight hours to – to get to **Girona**. **Girona** there was a train already to – to **Barcelona**.

Q: Okay.

A: We stayed in **Barcelona**, but in **Barcelona** we didn't – you could find two things to eat. One was bananas, and the other one was hazelnuts. So that was our – our – our diet was hazelnuts and bananas.

Q: How did your mother manage, with all of this luggage, when you were changing modes of transportation so often? Do you know? Did you have help, or –

A: I really don't know, I – I tell you very truthfully, I – I guess there must have been people to help you with bags, or something like that, because at that time, every time you got to a border, you know, the inspection wasn't on the train. You had to get off the train, take off your bags, take – take it to the customs house, get your document stamped at the customs house, have your baggage inspected, and get onto the train again. I don't know how she managed, but she did manage. I – I do remember some passengers being very unhappy of the train being held up because of my mother, but somehow she managed to do it, she – she – she – she got us through all of these country – all of these borders, into **Spain**. And she had a lot of valuables, because one of the things that we were not allowed to – to take out of **Hungary** was money. So we got valuables, so my mother had gold this, and gold that. My sister had gold. And my mother made a mistake, she – she put the gold watch on me. And the Germans looked at my mother, and let her pass. Looked at my sister, 14 year old with gold necklace, and some gold armbands, and God knows, and they had a few thoughts about that one. But when they saw a gold watch on me, then when they decided that they weren't going through, and a lot of this was confiscated at the German border. Not confiscated, because Germans are – were **[indecipherable]** very honest, so they – we gave them an address in **Budapest**

to send to somebody that we knew. There was a battle for this after the war, too, because after the war, he still had all of this, but he wouldn't give it back. So –

Q: So the Germans did send it back to **Budapest**?

A: Oh, they were, in that sense Germans were very, very, very precise, and very –

Q: And you guys were traveling as Jewish people at this time? Your documents said you were Jewish? Do you know?

A: Well, our papers didn't say that we were Jewish.

Q: Okay. Okay. Okay. So, can you tell me a little bit about the boat ride? How long did it take to get to **Mexico**?

A: Well, we left **Vigo**, between a two day stop in **Vigo**, it too-took the better part of three weeks. It took 17 days, I think to – to get to **Havana**. In **Havana** we – in **Havana** we – we were taken off the boat and – and also there was all kinds of papers, and this and that and the other. And they sent you to an island in the Bay of **Havana**, called **Trisko**(ph) **Onus**(ph). It took me a year – several years, 20, to find out that the place was called **Trisko**(ph) **Onus**(ph). My mother kept refori – referring to it as **Triskonia**(ph). We – we spent, I think two nights on – on this island, til they processed our papers. And then we were sent to **Havana**, where we stayed for about probably 10 days, because you know, th-the – the boats were not all at the same time, so you had to wait for the arrival of the boat. And this was a lib

– and the – and the boat which we had come to **Havana** with **[indecipherable]** is the **Comillas**, The **Compañía Transatlántica Española**. It's a boat which survived the war, and was still in service after the war, and the trip from – from **Havana** to **Vera Cruz** was on a boat – boat called the **Monterey**(ph), which was quite luxurious. Even I could tell that it was not – not th – the regular – regular boat, there were – there – we had the very – very ample cabin, very nicely furnished one. Everything was screwed down, but very nice cabin. And when we got to **Mexico**, there was again the problem of processing all of this, and – and processing the furniture, pro-processing the 22 bags, and the papers, and Mexican customs were not exactly the fastest in the world. So, actually, we arrived on the 21st of April, and I think by the fifth of May, we were still in – in **Vera Cruz**. And I wasn't very sure about **Mexico**. But then, the fifth of ma – May was my birthday, so I suddenly see fireworks, and parties, and whatever it is, so you know, I figured it wasn't such a bad country, if they celebrated my birthday. It was very kind of them to do so. But no, we were – in – in **Mexico** we were definitely known as Jews, we were – in – as a matter of fact, one of the problems was that the Mexican immigration square, that piece of paper with a picture, said very clearly that we were Jewish. It had a religion. Except, you know, we got it in – in **Lisbon**, so there was no – I re – I really wonder, I'll t – I'll take a look. I – I'll – I'll send you these –

Q: Okay.

A: – co – I can't give them to you because basically my sister wishes to hold onto them for a while. But, if – it can be –

Q: Yeah.

A: – it can be given to you, after – after we're no longer here.

Q: Okay, yeah, that – that would be – that would be very int – very –

A: But I can – I have a – a – a collection, strangely enough, papers, and some pictures survived. Survived because my mother took everything that she – was inside.

Q: Yeah.

A: And survived because my cousin had a very, very nice landlady in **Nitra**, in **Slovakia**. So when she was sent to – to the camps, the – this woman kept everything. In fact, even after – after she wi – she – she got – she and her husband got into trouble with the communists, despite the fact that, you know, they had – called heroes of the – whatever it is. My cousin's husband was – became the head of the biggest pediatric hospital in – in **Prague**. And there were other people who wanted the job, so he – he – he got himself into trouble with the communist authorities. My cousin as – as rebel as she has been always, she went to get her licen – re – to be relicensed as a doctor, so they told her, well, to be relicensed, you

have to take a course in – in Marxism, Leninism. My cousin said Marxism, Leninism, what part of medicine do they – do they specialize in? Of course, this didn't go over very well, and they were also – they had to leave in a hurry, **Czechoslovakia** – except they had a lot of friends there. You know, they were in the underground, so people in the underground told her, you – that the – that the secret service was – was being – looking for them, so they – they left with a small bag in the middle of the night. But again, the people where they were living kept everything, including the furniture. And – and you know, when these people in the underground became minister of defense, minister of this, minister of that, they – they actually sent a letter, says why don't you come back, at – at least to visit us. And they came for a couple of months, and – but they were already well established in **Israel**, and –

Q: Oh wow.

A: – they – they wouldn't go – they wouldn't stay. They – they had a great time, they had good parties, whatever it is, and then they said goodbye.

Q: You said – you mentioned that your family had trouble because your – your visas, your Mexican visa said that you were Jewish. What sorts of problems did you have?

A: Well, I'll tell you very truthfully, **Mexico** was a strange place at that time of – even though they – the government itself was very friendly, and didn't care whether you were Jewish, or not Jewish, or whatever you were. The question is, were you a refugee, or weren't you a refugee? And even though we had come in not as a refugee, the Mexican government was, very, very friendly, and very open. There was a movement in **Mexico** at that time called the – the Mexican traditionalist movement. And this was heavily anti-Semitic. Basically their – the people who had been there earlier, had – had an awful lot of trouble, because Jews began monopolizing some of the downtown markets in **Mexico City**, and the Mexican – th-the people who had been in these stores, in – before, even though they sold out, they – it's not that they were pushed out, they were sold out, they – they started bearing a resentment, and this traditionalist movement was very unpleasant. In other words, they – they used to come to the boats, and used to have placards, and Jews go home, and don't – we don't need you, and this and that and the other thing. Not only Jews, but the **refugiados**, which mean refugees in generals, and this was Spaniards, and – basically Spaniards. But Jews were also included in the – there – there – there – there are some books about it. There's actually a very interesting book written by a friend of ours. I can – I can let you have that too, eventually. It – it was called "**Momiento Traditionaliste Mexicano**," and it had two generals as

head of it. And they were very, very, very unpleasant. Instead of Brownshirts, they had **Camisas Parvilas**(ph), which is sort of a gray, like a mousy gray, but you know, it wa – they were inspired on the – on the Brownshirts. But th-there was always, you know, in – in – in **[indecipherable]** Catholic countries, **Mexico** was – it was always a lay – latent anti-Semitism. But for all its latency, never – never – never got over the age of the **[indecipherable]** it stayed relatively in its place. And it – it – you know, my father start in a place called **Pueblo**, which was basically an extraordinarily Catholic city. Su-Super Catholic city. The reason for it, of course, is that there was not – there were a lot of old Spanish residents there. Not – the new Spanish were communists and Socialists, and whatever it is. But the old Spanish residents were – were very traditional. As a matter of fact, the Spanish club in **Mexico** had – that time had a throne waiting for the king and queen to come, when there was no queen and queen – king and queen any more. And, strangely enough, they did get to use it when this man became – when **Franco** made this man king of – but curiously enough, the – the – there was – we – we – we never met up with too much anti-Semitism.

Q: Okay. From **Vera Cruz**, did you go to **Pueblo**, where your father was living?

A: No, from **Vera Cruz** we actually went to **Mexico City**.

Q: Okay.

A: My – my f – my father – my mother especially, didn't think very much of **Pueblo**. We – we – we lived in **Pueblo** for a while, because my father, you know, felt that somebody should be there. But they finally dis – th-there were several partners, there were three po – three or four partners. So, what happened is that each partner used to spend a week there. So basically they had one week in – in the month to spend there. Ma – my mother tried at first, but **Pueblo** was a miserable town, it wa – it – it was very close. It was – you know, it was still old **Mexico**, it was the – the place where – where women knew two – two – two roads in the city, one from – from their house to their mother-in-law's, and from their mother-in-law's to – to the market. That was – that was the extent of their – their travels. It was very traditionalist place. But th – th – you know, it was basically like **Hungary**. There was – there was – you could sense in the air, the anti-Semitism. But you – real – really, expression of it by violence, you didn't – you didn't see. Well, except for – for these **Camisas Parvilas**(ph). But these were also – they were not – they were not constant, they were intermittent. There was a man who was called the Mexican **Hitler**, **Abascal** – actually he's – he's – one of his sons became labor minister in the **Fox** administration.

Q: Oh.

A: And, a very unpleasant person. I – I – I happened to know him and his brother-in-law. His brother-in-law used to run a – a textile complex, like we – we used to do. But the brother-in-law was not that unpleasant. I-It – it – what – I'll tell you, the only violence that I had was, I was playing in the park in **Budapest**. By chance, you know, in **Budapest** you left your child, and you told him not to – not to go too far, and just left him. So I was playing around, and two – two obviously hoodlums, or whatever it is, caught me and I don't know why, you know, they did say you Jew, you're a Jew, this **zsidó**, whatever it is. And one pushed me, and he managed to – I managed to hit a stone – stone – I don't know what it was, it may have been some sort of a sit – place to sit on, or – and I had to get four stitches.

Q: Okay.

A: Luck – luckily, the – the doctor was in the same building as we lived, so –

Q: Yeah. And you didn't have any experiences like that in **Mexico**?

A: Overt anti-Semitism, no.

Q: No.

A: No. There was, but i-i-if it was, it was among the – the wealthy there. It – it was again – again, a strange place. If you went to the real high, conservative, old Mexicans, they – they fell in love with **Adolf Hitler**. They – in fact, they used to have oil paintings, and – of **Adolf Hitler** in their homes, and oil paintings, which

once in a while show up in antique shows – shops today in **Mexico**. And it was strange, because you know, at – it – **Hitler** used to occupy the place of the Virgin of **Guadalupe** in the home. In other words, the – his place was above the mantle, and whatever it is. Fortunately, Germans were not – you know, didn't think very much about Mexicans, you know, they were just one chain below – below whatever they – they liked. So, I happen to know a lot of people, and especially in the German school system, at th-that time, before they closed it down. The man who had actually run the German school in **Budapest** was running the German school in – in **Mexico**, and – and he had been very friendly. As a matter of fact, there was another couple of Jewish boys which had been in **Budapest** as well, which lived in **Mexico**, and this man wanted us to go – go – all go into the German school, because he needed the native German speakers, and couldn't find them in **Mexico**. So, my mother didn't want to, and the Mexican government was helpful enough in closing down the – the German school, because the embassy was – was playing games. But it was amazing to me, because th-the Mexican kids were handled very badly by the Germans, you know, with – no matter what their social condition was, they were really treated like second class citizens. Curiously, we were not. I mean, we were there maybe for a week, or two weeks, or whatever it is, but we were not – not treated like – like second class citizens at all.

Q: Is this in **Mexico City**?

A: This is in **Mexico City**, which –

Q: Okay, uh-huh.

A: – which, you know, if you look at it in the – in – in the distance, it was strange, because the – the man in **Mexico City**, the ambassador, was a out and out Nazi. And th-the person in charge of the embassy, who had been somebody living in **Mexico** was an out and out Nazi. And he didn't seem to bother us, but he – he bothered the Mexicans, and the mother – the mothers used to come crying to the – to the director, saying why do you treat my child like that? And they kept sending the children back, instead of taking them out, until the government finally closed down the school, and there was no – but it was, you know, like the American school later became the place to send your child, the German school were – for example, **Octavio Paz**, the – the Mexican diplomat and author went to a ger – to the German school, to the **Alexander von Humboldt** school, and so did a lot of intellectuals, along – in the 1940s, a lot of intellectuals went to the German school.

Q: Okay. And you said you spent about a week or two in **Mexico City**, and then that's when you went to meet your father, after that? And then –

A: We spent it in **Vera Cruz**.

Q: In ver – a week or two in **Vera Cruz**?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, and then – and then where did you go?

A: Well, we went to **Mexico City**.

Q: Right.

A: And then there – there was a que – a question of whether we would live in **Pueblo**, or live in **Mexico City**, and my mother did the same way. She wouldn't live in **Zylina**, and then to live in **Budapest**, she decided she wasn't going to live in **Pueblo**, and live in **Mexico City**. So, w-we basically lived in –

Q: In **Mexico City**.

A: – in the newer area of **Mexico City**, yes.

Q: Okay. And where did you and your sister end up going to school?

A: Where did I?

Q: Where did you end up going to school, if you didn't go to the German school?

A: Well, my sister, first of all, she – she had only two years to go. And she had – she – she – she knew some English. In other words, my – my mother had – had gotten somebody to try to teach at least my sister English. I was just listening. And my sister spoke reasonably good English, and she wa – went almost immediately to the American school.

Q: Okay.

A: I went to a public school for a while, until my mother was told by everybody that she was getting me just – lice on me. That, you know, I shouldn't do this, and I was taken out, and I was put into a – a – a military school, Mexican Spanish, ru-run by a former Jesuit. And I stayed there til about the sixth grade, seventh grade, and then my sister convinced my mother that I – I should be educated in the **United States**, so I, in junior – in junior high school I started going to – to the American school myself.

Q: Okay. Were you or – did your family learn Spanish while you were – when you were in school? Did you learn Spanish? I guess you had to?

A: Well, I'll tell you very truthfully, I – I – I didn't speak for about three or four months, and then suddenly I broke out spe-speaking Spanish; my sister likewise. My mother, she didn't speak good Spanish, but she managed. My father was not a linguist. He never quite spoke Spanish, but I was always surprised that the workers knew exactly what he wanted. And you know, this was mechanics, too, I mean, he explained to them, you know, a complex piece of equipment, that – what he wanted to do with it. I didn't understand a word of what he said, but the mechanic knew exactly what he – in other words, everybody seemed to meet halfway. In other words, my father's Spanish was understood by the – the Mexicans he was dealing with, but it was – he – he managed quite well, actually. He traveled all over the

country, and you had to – you know, you had to buy again, raw material. Wool was difficult to get from **Australia**, you could get it, but it was the – difficult those war years.

Q: Yeah.

A: So he – he used to travel all over **Mexico**, buying up wool locally, which was also in competition with various existing – existing companies. It's – actually, that was the only – the only anti-Semitic problem that they had. They had – there was an – an established Spanish company called **España Industrial**. And they were making money head over foot, and I mean, they were sending, for about nine dollars, something which cost them a dollar to make, or a dollar-fifty to make. And my father, since he knew the trick of using waste, was undercutting them, underselling them, so one day he was called into this Spanish company's whatever – offices, and was told that either he sold at their same price, or they will put him out of business. So my father said, you know what, I've – I've just escaped from – from worse than that, and you know, try, and see who – who – who is out of business first. They were out of business before we were. I-It's – th-th-there was latent anti-Semitism in **Latin America**. In – in – in **Argentina**, it's bad. In **Mexico** it was latent. There – there were some fantastic stories. For example, in **Pueblo**, there were a lot of Germans. And there was a hotel of all things, called the **Ritz**, in

downtown **Pueblo**. And on Friday nights, the German colony used to close down the – the hotel's dining halls, lock the doors. They used to dress themselves up in – in Nazi uniforms, and used to sing the **Horst Wessel** song, and things like that. Real – real Nazi. There was never in – in **Mexico**, despite some people who were try to make – make it up, there was never a – a real Nazi movement in **Mexico**, look like – like **Argentina**, **Bolivia**, and other places. Th-There – there was a lot of Nazi sympathy, but very, very, very little – curiously, the Japanese were more active in – in – in – in **Mexico**. They – they destroyed several bridges on the western part of **Mexico**. They – our competitor, one of the reasons we were able also to slow him down a little bit is that he had no compunctions of selling to the Japanese, and there were several Japanese submarines that – that came out to – to buy his merchandise. He had na – Americans wouldn't let him into the **United States** after the war. And basically, where you used to get machinery, and raw material was the **United States**, so – so he had a very serious problem. That helps him – put him i – put him out of business. Overt anti-Semitism, you know, actual violence, no.

Q: So would you say that your immigrant experience in **Mexico** was defined more by being a European, or more by being Jewish? Were you able to find a Jewish community, a European community, or –

A: Well, I – I – we were a little bit lost in the Jewish community, too, because there was a very big German community, it was called **Evuno**(ph). And there were a lot of people who – who had had troubles with Nazis, especially socialists. The – the former head of the socialist party in **Germany** was – was in **Mexico**, he – he became a photographer, and that's what he made a living on. But for a while, he was working with the Mexican government, especially with the socialists in **Mexico**. But there were a lot of Germans. There was **Frank**, and the – Dr. **Frank**, there was his – his grandson became health minister in **Mexico**, and there – there – there were a lot of – there – there were a lot of German Jews there. One of the – the grandsons of one or – other one, became the – the environmental minister of **Mexico**. And i-in – je – we – we – we were – we were more at ease with the Germans than we were with the Poles.

Q: Okay.

A: My father had learned Polish late – late in life, and so had my mother. And the few Jews who – all the – the Jews that came from **Poland** were very **Poland** oriented, which my father and mother – they used to go because, you know, it was one way of socializing. And the Poles had an own – their own club, and they used to get together once a week just to speak Polish. So my mother used to go, my father used to go. But they were uncomfortable there too, because they – they were

not Poles, they were – they – they – their allegiance was closer to Russian Jewry than they were to Polish Jewry. They were closer to **Bialystok** Jewry, which was not Polish, but rather Russian. But we – we mingled with them all. We used to go to the – to the Ashkenazi shul, the Ashkenazi synagogue in downtown **Mexico**. Then, since all the Jews left downtown **Mexico**, they installed themselves not far from where we lived, maybe 10 or 15 minute walk. And that's – we went there for a while. My father didn't like it, and curiously, one thing that he – he didn't like also, were these Hassidic Jews. But he – he and the Hassidic Jew bought a property, and made a synagogue for themselves. But it was basically – you know, my father was a traditionalist. He did beli – not believe in Orthodoxy, but traditional Orthodoxy. The – the Hassidim were rather southern – southern Polish. They came – most of them came from around **Kraków**. This man was – I don't remember which ra – rabbi he was the **[indecipherable]** of, but the rabbi's center was **Kraków**. And southern **Poland** and northern **Poland** at that time, were different worlds. One was – had been **Austro-Hungary**, the other had been **Russia**, so, you know, they – they – there was nothing to speak about, but they got along quite well there. And th-they – he liked traditional things, and th – the Mexican community was – was torn, it was either Sephardim, or Ashkenazim, and Ashkenazim so often were very religious, some of them were not religious at all.

Q: Yeah.

A: There was a lot of **Hashomer Hatzair**. This was, as I said, this was on – a very serious problem. My mother wouldn't send me to a Jewish school in **Mexico** because it was run by **Hashomer Hatzair**. And you know, as they say, you know, two Jews make three political parties, and this is a – this is basically what was happening, it was – but it was an interesting life, it was – you know, the – some people were traditional, they – they – for example, the park close to the synagogues where we were, on Saturday morning there were circles of, you know, whatever it is, socialists, communists, or – and they were having all kinds of discussions there, it was – it was – it was an interesting time to be there. But Mexicans really didn't bother us very much, you know.

Q: Okay. Did you at all become involved in Mexican life? Did you make Mexican friends, or –

A: Mexican?

Q: In mexi – did you make friends with any Mexicans? School friends, or –

A: Oh, very close ones.

Q: Okay.

A: Very close ones. I had an 80th anniversary, I had two couples which I know from –

Q: From a very long time –

A: Since primary school, I think, come. Oh, bu – th – I have – I have m-ma – made an awful lot of friends –

Q: Okay.

A: – in **Mexico**.

Q: How long did you live in **Mexico**? When did you move to the **U.S.**?

A: I lived in **Mexico** from 1941 til 1996.

Q: Oh wow. Okay.

A: So ma – I got married here in **New York**, my wife is an American, a New Yorker, but she – she came to **Mexico**, she lived there for 35 years.

Q: How did you meet her, **[indecipherable]** business?

A: My sister's mother-in-law, and my mother-in-law were very close friends.

Q: Okay.

A: And well, you know, it was a – it was a nice girl that they wanted me to meet, and she was a nice girl.

Q: One of the things she wanted me to ask you was about your last name, where your hyphenated last name came from.

A: Well, my – my – I had an uncle. His name was **Louie**, and he was recruited into the Russian army, a-and the Russians, you know, wanted to convert, and my – my –

my uncle was not very religious, but he wouldn't convert. So they – the tsarist officer gave him every dirty job in – imaginable, and he took it very kindly, until the day that the officer got really mad, and he horsewhipped him. I mean, there was probably a foot and a half difference between he and the officer, but he grabbed the horsewhip, and started horsewhipping the – the Russian. Of course, he didn't even stop for a clean shirt at home, he got the – he went to **Königsburg**, from **Königsburg** he went to **London**. He lived in **England** for four or five years, and then he moved to the **United States**. But the – the memory stayed with the Russian army, and – and you had to conscript yourself into the army. The only way that you could get yourself out of the army is if you were an only son, or there were no – no – no other – well, only son, meaning that if – if there were no other children, or the other siblings were women, you could be exempt from military service. So my father did this, he had a – a cousin by the name of **Efron**, who had two daughters. So when he had to go into the army, and he figured that he wasn't going to be treated very well, and he didn't want to go – I mean, let's be honest about it, he had himself apar – adopted by this **Efron**.

Q: Okay.

A: So, since he was already in business, you know, it's like my daughter. My daughter is a doctor, so she keeps her maiden name professionally, and so the same thing happened here, except you had to merge the two.

Q: That's a very interesting story.

A: Anyways, if you can later give me a card, I'll try to send you at least first of all, copies of papers, and all kind of –

Q: Yeah, yeah, no, I will. I'll send you an email this afternoon with –

A: Okay, that's fine.

Q: – the information in it. I had another question for you. When did your family find out what had happened to the Jewish community in **Europe**, and what was that like?

A: Well, we all – we all basically found out about 1944, when I think the "**New York Times**" published a whole story. But it wasn't only that, but you know, there had been an awful lot of deportations, and these deported people never showed up again. Of course, after the war, everybody started looking for – for everybody, and they found that there was nobody left, practically. We know that my aunt, uncle and cousin, were deported to **Treblinka**. It sounds like my cousin was killed before he ever got to **Treblinka**, because there was a – there – the people who – who took the – who were put on the train from **Bialystok** to **Treblinka**, were – there was a

rebellion, and I think my cousin was involved in that. After the rebellion, they were made to walk to the – the rest of the distance, which was not – not – not a – in the **[indecipherable]** considerable amount of – and a lot of people didn't make it. But it seems my cousin was – was – was killed before – before. But my aunt and uncle were – the rest of my family managed to survive, because they were in **Russia**.

Q: Mm-hm, okay.

A: Or, they had left **Poland**. I mean, basically, my father was the sole support of his father, and the sister, who was the mother of my cousin, and a brother who didn't stay very long, he – he helped my father for about 10 years, and then he went to the **United States** about 1912 or '13, or something like that. So basically we have no f – no – no – no immediate family in **Europe** at that time.

Q: Okay.

A: They were either in **Israel**, or the **United States**, or – or **Russia**. And the ones in **Russia** didn't – they didn't all survive. You had two uncles in **Leningrad** who died in the – in the siege.

Q: Okay.

A: But I don't know, we – we – we were very adventurous sor-sorts. I think one of my aunts had a child, and she decided that, you know, the child should be a rabbi. But how can he be a rabbi in – in the **[indecipherable]**? He had to be a rabbi in

Israel. So she – one day, she disappeared. Her husband didn't know where she went, nobody knew where she went. Years later, somebody said that they had seen her in **Jerusalem**. And as a – we – we have – we have some very, very – well, you know, the – it was an adventure to be a Jew, and people were very adventurous.

Q: Excellent.

A: We had – even my father's oldest brother, who was a rabbi, first went to **Sweden**. Couldn't make a living being a rabbi. Put up a hat factory, and I think wouldn't make a – a living with that either, so he went to the **United States**, and the **United States**, his wife didn't like it. So he went to – to – to **Israel**. And he lived quite well there. He – he – he – he was one of the founders of the **Bezalel** movement, of the art movement, and he was the – he became an antiquarian.

Q: Oh, mm-hm.

A: And, as a matter of fact, there were three generations of antiquarians in **Jerusalem**. And my – my – the – the – the last one, the cousin, anyway, she – she – she had also a very strange life. But she left me some of the stuff that she had in – in – in the store, and she – she had a lot of stuff, she – she ha – she was a specialist in real Ottoman art, and she was considered one of the top specialists in Ottoman art. She was also slightly nuts.

Q: Is there anything else you want to share about your experiences, anything you think we've maybe not touched on?

A: Well, there – there – there – there – you know, there – there are a lot of little things, about how our friends managed to get out, often didn't get out, some of them stayed there. My father, later on helped some of the technicians that he had at the factory move to **Canada** in 1956. And you know, it became – after – after – after the war, everybody was helping everybody. For example, my father sis – this rule that you had to have 20,000 dollars for a family, or 10,000 for an individual, people that had it, th-they recycled this money. In other words, there were – there were, you know, they were presenting as if this man had 20,000 dollars, you see. Only wanted to see the deposit, and that was it, it was – they showed the deposit, the – the money went to somebody else, or – so, you know, the – the – there was a – a really – I wouldn't call it an underground movement, but an over-ground movement to – to meet the legal – the legal restrictions. Because the **United States** really didn't open up til about 1944. My father eventually got his immigration papers, but as I said –

Q: Right.

A: – he – he wasn't interested at that time.

Q: Your father's involvement in helping people get visas, was this as part of some sort of organization, or was it just something that –

A: It's the community, so it was –

Q: The community, okay. Okay.

A: It was the community. We have this man **[indecipherable]** the one that has the **Monet** collection in – in **New York**.

Q: Okay.

A: He became a movie producer, very, very, very wealthy movie producer. He produced the movies of – there's a comedian in **Mexico** called **Cantinflas**, and he produced **Cantinflas**' movies. And he had no children, so he spent all the money on – on art. He – he has a – he – he left a – a huge Mexican art collection, to the Mexicans. And his impressionist collection, I think he has one of the best **Monet** collections around, he left to the **Metropolitan Museum of Art**.

Q: And your father helped him get out of –

A: He helped him.

Q: Okay.

A: And others. As a matter of fact, lately there have been some books appearing about people who – who – who came to **Mexico**. And I don't know, I'll try to get you some. It might be something worth keeping as a record in your library.

Q: Yeah, definitely.

A: I h – I have – the – e-even – even Mexicans are beginning to – to be interested in how the Jewish community – because the Jewish community actually started with the Sephardim coming –

Q: Right.

A: – the – the Turks. And then what happened is that in 1920s, when they closed the borders to everybody in the **States**, many people got stuck in – in **Mexico**, on their way to the **United States**. So, a lot of these stories are coming out. There are a couple of movies, which are very interesting maybe. I'll – I'll try to get you a copy, and – you know, it – it's – I s-see you do collect this type of –

Q: Yeah, we definitely – the library definitely has those type of things.

A: Yeah, yeah, so – so I'll try to –

End of Tape One

Conclusion of Interview