

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Yehuda Mandel  
November 13, 1990  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Yehuda Mandel, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on November 13, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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## **YEHUDAH MANDEL**

### **November 30, 1990**

- Q: Okay. We are on now. Would you tell me your full name please?
- A: My full name is Yehudah Mandel, or in English Lewis Y. Mandel. The Y, of course, stands for Yehudah.
- Q: Where were you born and when were you born?
- A: I was born in a very small village called Csepe, spelled C-S-E-P-E in Hungary. That in the part of Hungary which was extremely religious. Later on, it became \_\_\_\_\_.
- Q: What year were you born?
- A: In 1904, March the 3rd.
- Q: Will you tell me about your parents and about your family as a young child?
- A: This village or rather the inhabitants, Jewish inhabitants of this village, were extremely religious, very observant people, and so, of course, were my parents. My father who had ordination to be a Rabbi studied in his youth as a...different Yeshivas, but he never was a Rabbi to be employed as a Rabbi. My mother was a sweet, wonderful soul who unfortunately ended in Auschwitz. My father died at age 53. Now we were seven brothers and sisters. I had three sisters and beside myself...I'm the oldest one of the boys...there were other three boys. You want me to give you the names. No.
- Q: No. We'll get the names later.
- A: What...uh...Tell me about what your life was like as children.
- Q: As children, everybody's life was the same as mine, so I will tell you about my own life. At the age of 3, 3 and a half, maybe 4...uh...I started to go to Cheder. That's the Jewish school. And I think when I was four, maybe 4 and a half years old, I read Hebrew very well. I, of course, didn't understand, but I knew how to read Hebrew very well. And I went on through that Cheder and in that Cheder where we started first to learn prayers. Later on we extended to other things, like the Bible and so on. And...uh...this occupied our lives. We went to Cheder in the morning about 6:30, stayed there, had a service in the Cheder proper, a daily service, and at 8 o'clock, we had to go to the public school. We were in the public school until 11:00. From 11:00 to 12:00, we went back to the Cheder, and were there until noontime. The main meal in Europe, you know, used to be in noontime. \_\_\_\_\_ And...uh....in the afternoon, the same thing happened. After we had lunch, we went back to the regular school and...uh...at 4:00 when we were dismissed, we went back to Cheder until about 6:00 or 6:30. And this is...this was their current day by day, day after day.

Q: What was it like being a Jew in that town? Was there much anti-Semitism? Were you comfortable? This village had two...uh..churches. One was a Greek Catholic church, and the other was a reform church. The priest of the Greek Catholic church did announce before Passover...weeks before Passover...that now will come the time when the Jews are looking for blood to the...for the Matzahs. Now you can imagine what impression this made on the inhabitants and the children who were taught by this priest and his helpers. So that it happened that when we came out of the Cheder, our own age children were waiting for us with big heavy sticks to beat up the Jewish children, Jews, because we killed Christ and so on. That the...all, that's all they knew. The reformed priest...uh...priest, he was more consilient. And from that school...from that church, we have never heard this kind of...uh...pronouncement, let's say.

Q: As a young boy, you early became interested in music. Uh...Tell me how you became interested in music and what happened with the music.

A: I did not become or rather I wasn't able to study music, if you are referring to study music, and prepare myself for my profession. However, I knew one thing. I had a very nice, pleasant voice and when I was 8 years old, let's say, it was a rarity to...to happen, I was chosen to perform on the three festival days, the evening service, the Maror service. And I did that. And I had a very pleasant voice and that's all I knew, but there was no possibility to study music as much. I...I couldn't do that at all.

Q: Tell us really about your growing up and how you did be...be able to study music eventually.

A: I...I was...I lived in my little community up to the age of my Bar Mitzvah. After Bar Mitzvah, I left...uh...my village, and I went to study in a place. It was close by, about 15 kilometers from our village. And I studied in Notchulus. That was the Capitol city of our State. I come from a State which was called Ugochar. And while being there, we had a special minyan for the Bikurim...for the Bikurim. And the Birkurim minyan.... uh...being that my friends and the other students knew I have a pleasant voice I was always asked and...uh...sometimes forced to perform the services like the Musaf services on Sabbath or when it was Rosh Hodesh, something like that. So from there on, I knew that I have voice...a voice and it seemed to be I have a nice voice because I was engaged by a \_\_\_\_\_ who...who...who served a larger community \_\_\_\_\_ to sing with him at...in his choir on the High Holy Days. That was all musical...uh...preparation I could have.

Q: Tell us about what happened. Follow your growing up for us.

A: Now, I stayed in Nochulus for 2 years. And there I...we were not allowed to go to regular public schools. We had to prepare our studies privately and take exams at end of the season, at end of the year in the public schools from or given by teachers who were public school teachers. And I finished there Junior High in Nochulus. I studied in Yeshiva, and studied privately for the exams in the Junior...Junior High School. I stayed in Nochulus up until

19...1918, and from there because the Rabbi in a certain big place, big congregation, big city, Umgra was a former schoolmate of my father and they studied together. They were \_\_\_\_\_. My father insisted I should go to study in Umgra. I went and stayed there for close to 4 years. I got my first...uh...Hirua from...from Umgra.

Q: Your what?

A: Hirua is the written...uh...document to be qualified as a Rabbi in \_\_\_\_\_, and from Umgra, I studied there up to the point where I was drafted into the Czech army. Now, in Umgra I don't have to tell you it was an extremely...uh... religious community as well, and for instance, we, Bikurim who studied under this Rabbi who I told you about before, were told that when we walk by the Reform Temple at a certain street we cannot...we shouldn't walk on the side of the temple. We have to cross the street and walk by to the next block and only then go back to that side of the street. This...from this can give you...uh...picture the way we lived. Now, one thing, however, was very good. The...uh...discipline, not only this which may sound here in America funny and foolish, but the discipline in every way was so immense, it's hard even to describe it. Everyone stuck to...to the...to the rules of...of Yeshiva, whatever it was. The best (clearing throat) (drinking water) (pause) To give you an idea how strict the discipline followed or...or prevailed there, I have to tell you a very little story. I had a nice voice, and when I was already about 15 or 16 years old, somehow the cantor of that community, of that congregation, which was strictly 100 percent an orthodox congregation, and their cantor was a man by the name Gottlieb, who heard my voice and wanted me to join his choir. My father, who was a \_\_\_\_\_ friend, former schoolmate of the Rabbi under whom I studied, came especially to Umgra to speak to this Rabbi and ask him could I, would I, would he allow me to sing in that choir. The Rabbi did not give me permission or whatever. He used to go to that shul.

Q: Okay. Take some water. Take your time.

A: So I did not have the opportunity to study music even to the degree what this choir that sang in the Orthodox shul would have given me. And so I grew up without any musical background. However, I was a very good \_\_\_\_\_, which means I could lead any service and so on. The voice was nice and here I come again to a...to a story...uh...in Umgra. Again, my friends who came together with me to Umgra from my previous Yeshiva knew that I have a nice voice and there was one Friday, a Rosh Hodesh. I'm sure you know what Rosh Hodesh is.

Q: Explain it for the camera please.

A: It is the first day of the month where in the olden days, of course, sacrifices used to be introduced in a...in the Holy Temple, and now we observe this beginning of the month by having special services. We have included Hallel and Musaf service and so on. Now the Yeshiva in Umgra had a so-called \_\_\_\_\_ where the Bikurim, the students of the Yeshiva, could get food. And they did. And people, very religious people from a neighboring village

called \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ in Yiddish used to deliver the milk for the Yeshiva it should be...uh...100 percent kosher. And so...uh...uh...one day at \_\_\_\_\_ where my classmates and other Bikurim forced me in...in...in to perform the service, the Musaf service. One man who brought milk in the big can walked by and heard me. And he asked one of the Bikurim who is the \_\_\_\_\_ who is governing there. So he says he's not a \_\_\_\_\_. He's just a one of us, \_\_\_\_\_. And the man then waited for me until I was finished and spoke to me. Because this was very close to Umgra they would come and pick me up. Would I perform a service of Shavuot in their congregation...in his congregation. (Clearing Throat Pause) We went out there. Yeah. He also said I can invite as many friends as I want and they won't come back empty handed. So I performed the service, got paid...uh...in this \_\_\_\_\_ and my friends were loaded up with all kind of goodies. Butter and cheese and...and eggs and what not. So everyone was very happy. Later on, this went from mouth to mouth and I was invited to different towns for little congregations, bigger congregations. I became a star. And I \_\_\_\_\_ and this maintained myself financially plus my two brothers who came to study in the same Yeshiva later.

Q: When...as this developed, tell us what...when did you get your first...your own congregation?

A: Now, after the Yeshiva...let me go back for a moment yet to the...to the Yeshiva. My father...before the brother was the youngest, David, brought up my...my youngest brother in short...in shorts to...to be introduced to the Rabbi and asked if he could join also. The three of us were already studying there, so maybe David could study too. And the Rabbi took a lot at him with the short pants and said, "No." He told my ....my father gave this Rabbi...uh...a lot of ...uh...uh...honor. They used to be on first name term as young people. He called him Rebbe and he called my father Avrom. So he said to my father, "Avrom, I don't have a Cheder. I have a big Yeshiva." So my father told him. I ask of you one thing. Listen to this young boy with the \_\_\_\_\_, the short pants. He knows the pages of Talmud by heart almost. The Rabbi gave him an exam and told my father, "You know what. Your fourth boy, David. Buy him long pants. He can study in Yeshiva." Now you asked me when did I get my first professional...uh...engagement let's say. (Pause - drinking water) Actually, I got my first professional engagement when I was drafted into the Czech army. We finished the semester in Yeshiva. And I had to report to the...uh...military on the 1st of October. However, it came out that the beginning of October were the High Holy Days. So I traveled and finally I got the position in a place \_\_\_\_\_. And there I done the whole service. There was an orthodox congregation where I did the main service, the Musaf and so on. And \_\_\_\_\_ in the Organ Temple in \_\_\_\_\_ uh...the \_\_\_\_\_ and other things. And actually, they paid me very well, and that was the amount of money I took along with me to the...to the Czech army and I was never...uh...I had enough money to...to help myself if I needed.

Q: Excuse me. By the Organ Temple, you mean the Reform Congregation.

A: I mean the...it wasn't Reform as in...no. In Hungary, there were...there were differences. There was the Orthodox, the Nelro. Nelro didn't mean reform. It just meant that Jewish congregations were something like...here let's say, they're conservative. Some of them had organs. Some even had...had mixed choirs and there was the status quo when the

two...namely, this is history, when orthodox departed from the Nelro congregations, there were some who didn't go on either side, but remained where they were status quo. No change.

Q: Thank you. Okay. So you're now leaving the Czech army. What happened?

A: I served in the Czech army and maybe it's a very interesting thing too. And indicative of my life and the way I...the way we were disciplined and the way we lived. At...uh...the basic training which everyone had to follow...follow through, I think at the beginning of November when the birthday of the President of Czechoslovakia, at the time, Masaryk, which was President, was celebrated. Uh...First Lieutenant came out to the training grounds and asked if is there...if there is someone who has a nice voice and could sing the Yanick part in the \_\_\_\_\_. I never in my life up to the 20th birthday was in a movie or knew what opera is or knew what a note is or knew what music ...musical training is, but my friends who were from the same Yeshiva and in the same...uh...group...uh...told me, "Why don't you tell them. Why don't you go? You...you have a nice voice." So finally one of them told him that this young man has a nice voice. And...uh...he said, "What he wants? Do I know what opera is? Could I learn it?" I said, "No, I have no idea what you are talking about." So he gave me an order on a certain hour to see him in his office. He was the superintendent for...uh...entertainment for the...uh... military. The Czech army stressed very much learning of any kind. There were many, many people who came into the army and didn't know how to read and write. So the army taught them. And finally, he gave me an order to be in this hour, in a certain hour in his...uh...office. I went there. Uh...He asked me do I know this? Do I know? "No, I know nothing." So the end was that he asked me to sing something, anything I want. So I sang a Hungarian song. And...uh...he liked it, and after that maybe for weeks and weeks, he taught me phrase by phrase, note by note the melody what to sing, how to sing. At the time, I didn't even speak Czech yet. So that was another question. However, I learned everything. And you know, at the time I was young and...and the brain...uh...uh...was good so I...and the ear was good. I learned it. He said, "I will be along side of you at this performance. I will tell you and push you in when you have to go in and do and sing this and that. And I will motion to you when you have to come out." And this is the way the...uh... \_\_\_\_\_ went over. You can imagine what a great performance (laughing) it was...it was, but that's...that's the way it was.

Q: When did you leave the army?

A: In 1926, April. I had a plan because I was influenced by a brother of my latest teachers, Litest Smiller, who told me that I have a beautiful voice, but it...it is not worth too much. I...I don't know how to...I don't know any music. So I want...I thought...Yeah. One more thing about this...uh...First Lieutenant. This First Lieutenant went to the point, because he liked my voice and so on, and was a very decent person and said, "You have a beautiful voice. I will apply to the Division." That's...uh...I don't know how many...uh...to the Division of...of I don't know what part of the military. "We have scholarships. I will try to get you a scholarship where you will be able to study for 4 years in the Academy and prepare yourself

for...for...uh... operatic career." I was flabbergasted and I didn't know how to handle it, and I didn't dare even to tell my parents, namely my father, that this kind of a happiness and great career was standing before me. However, I had an uncle, my brother...my mother's brother who was a lawyer, who studied in Budapest and came down, was a lawyer later on in our vicinity. Was about 40 miles...40 kilometers from our village. I wrote to him. I didn't dare to approach my father directly. So he went over and told my father about this big luck, tremendous thing what...what I'm confronted with. And my father's answer was, "Moshe,"...that was his...my uncle's name...."We have four sons and three daughters. If ...that's my Yiddish name...will do that he will go to the \_\_\_\_\_ and desecrate the Sabbath, and desecrate the High...the Holy Days and sing in this career," which in my...in his own opinion wasn't...uh...the way a Yid should lead his life, "then please tell me that we have only three sons and three girls." That's a cruel thing, but it ended my operatic career, so when I came home... My father wanted, of course...I was already 20...in my 21st year, I should get married and settle there in a beautiful store, very rich people, and the only thing I would have to do is count the money and be in the...and so on. Uh...So I didn't want this. I wanted still to go privately and study music. And my father didn't give in on the other hand, so the deal between us was made. No Academy of music. No marriage. But back to Yeshiva. And then I went back to Yeshiva to Pressberg where I studied for about...uh...2 years and that was my last Yeshiva, and there I got my second \_\_\_\_\_ which is....you know what a \_\_\_\_\_ is?

Q: Explain it for the camera.

A: Yeah.

Q: \_\_\_\_\_ is again a written document of the Rabbinic court that the person is qualified to be a Rabbi. That was the second part. From there, from Vienna which is very close to...from \_\_\_\_\_, Pressberg, which is very close to \_\_\_\_\_ once in a...in awhile I used to go to Vienna. I had a teacher there and there I already I already started to learn some music. However, I stayed the Yeshiva. I...I couldn't leave the Yeshiva.

Q: Did you father and the Yeshiva head know that you were study?

A: He wouldn't have like it. He wouldn't have like it. Uh...Maybe he wouldn't have minded my knowledge of the music, but he surely would have minded that I'm leaving Yeshiva and go to there to study. Now in Pressberg there were many smaller congregations, synagogues and they knew that I knew how to \_\_\_\_\_. They invited me. And this is what I made a living for myself from, and this is what gave me the opportunity financially to travel to Vienna and take some lessons. So there it started. One Saturday, when I \_\_\_\_\_ after the \_\_\_\_\_, a man came over to me and told me he is from Vienna. He works in Vienna. He's originally from Pressburg, works in Vienna at \_\_\_\_\_ and is a member of a congregation called Temple. \_\_\_\_\_, and their \_\_\_\_\_, a young man just left and he thinks I will be the proper person for them. Why don't I apply? So the next time when I went to...uh...Vienna, I applied. They invited me for a Shavuot ...uh...to perform the services. I performed the services and I was elected to be their cantor, and was with them for about 3 years, something like that.



After this, there was a \_\_\_\_\_ written out for...uh...the \_\_\_\_\_ looked for a cantor for its 21st \_\_\_\_\_. That's a district.

Q: \_\_\_\_\_.

A: The \_\_\_\_\_ is not as strict as the Budapest \_\_\_\_\_ because there the

Q: Translation.

A: Taxes. The taxes were not collected by the...by the state if the person, let's say a Jew didn't pay to the Jewish community. However, it was extremely well organized and the...the \_\_\_\_\_ central congre...central congregation let's say had its offices and its administration. They...uh...they...uh...the nations and the...were always coming in well, and they never had any financial troubles. There the only thing was...was similar to...to the Hungarian setup was that they also had synagogues for each district, led and controlled by the Central Congregation. Now when I applied for this...uh...congrega...for this position at the \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: In Vienna?

A: This is in Vienna. When I applied, there was to my luck, a person by the name Gross, Mr. Gross, who every year for the needs of his business traveled to the Leipzig international market. And on his way home to...back to Novi Sad, where he lived, by special permission he listened to the applicants which...uh...were quite a few. I think a hundred, over a hundred applied, and 16 people were given permission \_\_\_\_\_. In order words, a check...checkup on the person who eventually will get permission to perform a service. And I was one of them, and this Mr. Gross like me, and went home and because they didn't have a cantor → ...the chief cantor left them...their chief cantor left them a year and a half ago or so. He went home, give a report and ...uh...I was invited to give a...a...uh...a \_\_\_\_\_, a trial performance in Novi Sad.

Q: In Novi Sad or \_\_\_\_\_.

A: No. This is already in Novi Sad from...from Vienna. You see this man, this Mr. Gross was from Novi Sad. And...uh...I came down, gave the so-called Proba, the trial service and I was elected. Few...few days later I got a phone call I'm elected. On the 28th of April 1928, I came down as the elected chief cantor of the congregation in Yugoslavia in the town of Novi Sad. I lived there and married there...uh...for...I married...I lived there for 6 years. I had a ...uh...lifetime agreement given to me by that congregation the third or fourth year. And if you are interested, I will tell you what happened from there.

Q: Yes. Let's go from Novi Sad.

A: Yeah. In Novi Sad I had a magnificent position. There was one congregation. No small

shuls. No side temples. No nothing. One congregation with 800 Jewish families, an organ, a magnificent choir of 40, a choir leader, an organist. In other words, the service was organized better than any one or as good as anyone could imagine. As I say, I served there for 6 years. Between the 5th and 6th year, I get a letter from a man by the name Mr. \_\_\_\_ from all places in Kovno, from Kovno. He writes to me and says, namely in the 30s. This was around the 30s. I started to give concerts of Jewish content, of synagogue contents, let's say, in the state radio in Belgrade. And I used to give these concerts and he heard me and said...he wrote in Yiddish that he liked what he heard and he would like to know if I would be willing to come down to that part of the world, Kovno and so on, to give a few concerts. Money is no problem, and in order to make sure that I understand it money is no problem, he will have in a few days write to me and suggest to me by an official office concert bureau, and this bureau, which is a recognized concert arranger and organizer, will write to me and I should be in contact with them, tell them what I want, and he is backing it, and money is no problem. I shouldn't forget that. So when I started to prepare for this road from south...he was from Yugoslavia, which was south, ....uh...to the cold vicinity of Kovno, Russia...former Russia, my own family asked me, "Are you crazy? You have the most magnificent position here. Everyone likes you. You have no problem. You make three times as much money as you can spend. Even your wife is...is engaged by the State." She was a school teacher. "Where are you running? What are you trying to accomplish? What are you trying to do?" However, as a young man...let's not forget, in 1933 I was still only a very young, very, very young man. And I was interested what's on the other side. So I went. And I sang two Saturdays. I performed services in Kovno, in the so-called \_\_\_\_\_. That's a big time temple there. And...uh...I sang twice for the benefit of Yeshivas, \_\_\_\_\_ Yeshiva. And all under his guidance. This man...this Mr. \_\_\_\_ was a millionaire, very rich person, and he had part of his...of his mansions, so to say, advice given to me so that I can study and sing and learn and do whatever I want and he made sure that one of his...uh...uh...carriages...uh... Of course, it was a carriage and horse wagon will take me whenever I have to go to rehearsal, whenever I have to go for a...for a choir practice and so on. And I was there for about 2 weeks. Suddenly, and everything was beautiful, very good. So suddenly, one Shavuot he introduces me to a man by the name Mr. Becker. Mr. Becker was the President of the \_\_\_\_\_ in Riga. And Mr. Becker told me, "They are seeking the services of a Hazan for 2 years already. \_\_\_\_ was their cantor before I came there, and they would like very much if I could come over for...to give a audition in the \_\_\_\_\_. I went and performed services and it was left to...rather they had 82 people for... uh...to audition, and they...they were left with three. One was their former cantor, \_\_\_\_\_, who was a great opera singer in his time, and the second was a man by the name \_\_\_\_\_ who was...came from...uh...from Yohannesburg, and myself. In Riga, it developed to be a great...uh...a great affair let's say. There were the \_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_. However, there was a great \_\_\_\_\_, the so-called \_\_\_\_\_ with whom I became very friendly. And...uh...when these people just couldn't get to first base and many people wanted me and this...uh...the end was \_\_\_\_\_ told them, "If you want \_\_\_\_\_, you'll take Mandel. If you want opera singer, you take \_\_\_\_\_ and so on." So finally, I was elected in the \_\_\_\_\_, and we went there. And we lived in Riga for 3 years. As a matter of fact, Manny was born in Riga.

Q: Okay. So you are in Riga. It was 36, 37, early 38. What was it like. What were conditions like in Riga at that point?

A: This is a very good question. I will answer it to you. My answer to my own people who criticize me that I'm leaving Novi Sad was this Mr. Becker took me, showed me Riga. First of all, he got a magnificent city. Not that there's anything wrong with Novi Sad, but Riga was a magnificent city. A tremendously, culturally developed...high culture in every way you can mention. There was a steady opera. There were Jewishly spoken. Mr. Becker took me not only to Yeshivas, but he took me to day schools where the teaching went on from kindergarten on up to university. Everything was taught in Hebrew. And these schools were recognized as regular schools and you could go to any university with a diploma from that school, from those schools. And I said to myself and with my wife, "Look, if we will ever have a child, let me him go to this kind of a school because there is Yiddish \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, Jewish...Jewishness and humanism bound together as I have rarely seen it anywhere else. And this was one of the reasons we went to Riga. In Riga, we acquired many, many friends...many, many admirers. However, when...uh...the call came from Budapest that they need a Hazan in \_\_\_\_\_ Temple, I thought this is still the highest point any cantor can...can look for or wait for, namely Riga itself as beautiful congregation as it was, it wasn't an organized congregation, let's say like Budapest you know where law ruled the congregation, where church and...uh...and faith was...was divided. So after long, long, long speculation and consideration, we...we decide we both were born in Hungary, spoke Hungarian very well, and...uh...and we decided to leave Riga. Now, how I came to Budapest is the story...

Q: We're going to have to condense it. Can you just tell us about being in Budapest.

A: Now, I came to Budapest, and I put it this way. I came to Budapest in 1936. I was elected and I did not go back to Riga anymore because I was concerned if I go back, I won't be able to...to leave there. Because people and I have many, many friends and admirers and so I stayed in Riga...in Budapest, with the excuse that I will start now to rehearse for the High Holy Days. In Budapest, there were two main temples. One was the traditional where I served, the \_\_\_\_\_ Temple, and the other was the \_\_\_\_\_ Temple. The \_\_\_\_\_ was bigger, had close to 5,000. Still stands. That's the only synagogue which was...remained so-to-say in existence, in comparatively good shape. And in our...in other words, the Dohime Temple had an organ, had a mixed choir, men and women, and...uh...very fine choir leader. The \_\_\_\_\_ was a traditional temple. In our temple, there were 40 in the choir, men and children, soprano and \_\_\_\_\_ were sung by children. Now...uh...I started as I said in 1936 and was in Budapest the chief cantor of the \_\_\_\_\_ Temple for 10 years. You have also to know that the Budapest, the Pest \_\_\_\_\_ because at the time it wasn't Budapest \_\_\_\_\_ yet. It was Pest. And the Pest \_\_\_\_\_ community had synagogues according to need in every district. If two were needed, there were two synagogues. But chief cantors and chief Rabbis were only in the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Temple. So the Dohime Temple had two chief cantors, and the \_\_\_\_\_ Temple had two chief cantors. In the Dohime, there was \_\_\_\_\_ and in the \_\_\_\_\_ was Bornstein and Mandel. Uh...In these congregations, you asked me before if there were many people. There were so many people, the \_\_\_\_\_ Temple had about...uh...3,000 seats. So many people that because it

was a narrow street, police had to be brought in every time when we had services in order that when the people leave the synagogue they shouldn't kill each other. And this I think is a very interesting thing, and I want to include it in this discussion here. We were down as I have already said, we...I served in...uh...Budapest 10 years, from 1936 to 46. In 41, I think it was...

Q: Let's not jump. Okay. Let's...Let's try to stay in order here. Okay?

A: Okay.

Q: Okay. Uh...Things began to change. You were here as the...the chief cantor, but the world around you began to change in 1938.

A: Right.

Q: 1939.

A: The first...

Q: How did things begin to change?

A: The first and second...uh...Jewish law against the Jews rather. You know what that means. Jewish law. That meant Jews couldn't hold any positions at government. Jews couldn't later on have even their own business. Uh...Non-Jews couldn't have been seen by Jewish doctors. Jews couldn't serve as physicians in...in hospital or even have their own office. This was in...started in 1938 and continued in 1939 and went on to the point when...uh...the German then occupied Hungary finally. But as far as...uh...the beginning is concerned, it was...when I came to Budapest, I was given working papers, so-called working papers, permission to work as a non-Hungarian citizen in Hungary for...I got permission for 4 years. In other words, I should have been in good order up until 1940. But as soon as...after the first High Holy Days. That means before 1937 already, the French police. The ones who controlled the people who...who are not citizen but in and they made sure that we will be asked to leave Hungary or arrest us. So that danger was tremendously big and that was the time when I think in 1938 or the beginning of 39, I went to London to try out there. And I was elected. However, I came back to Budapest because 3 days after this...uh...Saturday when I performed services, \_\_\_\_\_ the President of that congregation, I should have been elected to be the cantor of the Dukes Place Synagogue. But this wasn't to be because the night after we...we had a meeting with the Board, I got a telegram from Budapest sent to me by Secretary General saying your case is in good order again. We expect you home lovingly. So, being that my family was already settled in Budapest and so on, I didn't ask for expenses. I didn't ask anything. I ran like crazy and went back and...uh...went back to Budapest. It seems it's all fate because I could have...I could have just signed the agreement and stayed in London, but no, it wasn't to be. So I came back to Budapest. Now, during these terrible years, 38, I was...the first time I was called into labor camp was in 38 or the beginning in 39

because the big trouble really continued, which started as a said before that the doctors couldn't be doctors. The lawyers could be lawyers. The professionals couldn't be professionals anymore. It expanded to the point where me, at the time, yet younger Jews were called into labor camp and I was one of them. I was called in and...uh...I served for the first time in...not too far from Budapest, in a place Shirastopeck, meaning nothing. We built airports. I'm asking you for what. I don't think an airplane ever... ever appeared there. But we did. Just to...to make it hard on us. And this went on almost to the very end. The first two years I would say 38, 39 and maybe the beginning of 40. Yeah. I was still within the border of Hungary. I was called in many, many times, but not over...not sent over the border. Later on...uh...toward the end of the...of the war, we were in Galicea. We were in Poland. We were in former Russia up to the Dunn River we went, and that's the way they \_\_\_\_\_ us and gave us difficulties. They finally...

Q: We don't..We want to go to the end. Okay?

A: Yes.

A: The thing I would like to do is (coughing) is to pause here and change tapes and then we go back. I want to know more about the labor camp. Okay.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: Okay. We're on. Yes. The camera is back on. Uh...Cantor Mandel, in Budapest around 1941 with all of this happening, what was it like for you, for your family, inside the house?

A: It was terrible and worse yet in other families, but as far as I and we were concerned, I was still employed by the congregation. I got my monthly check and we could make a living. However, my mother remained at the time still in that village where I was born. My father has died already, so I brought her up to...to Budapest and she lived for a very short while in our house and later on, she lived...my brother became a student at the Rabbinical Seminary at the University because that was...uh...the Seminary student had to finish college as well. They had to get a degree from the university. So in order to save him from labor camp when he came up, I made sure that he is...he will be there as a student of the Rabbinical...of the Rabbinical...the Rabbinical...uh...Seminary. It was no problem because he had a tremendous amount of Hebrew knowledge. And...uh...in...uh...1939, 40, even the beginning of 41, if we wanted to get something good, it had to be sent to us from Novi Sad. For instance, we...we needed some meat for Passover, so my in-laws sent with a cert....by a certain man, who was the superintendent of our buildings in Novi Sad, they sent up...I don't know...geese and whatever we needed. Uh...Jews...later after the second law again the Jews couldn't go out to the store at any time during the day and buy anything. They had a certain hour or two...I don't remember exactly...during the day when they could go out. And of course when they...when they could go out everything was gone. It was a very, very hard life with a lot of things missing. We were very lucky because my in-laws who lived in Yugo...in Yugo...again that was formerly Yugoslavia was Hungary again. They helped us out with many things. Now, as far as within the family, everything was fine because we had the...the benefit of the big congregation and everyone knew...uh...who we are and didn't bother us too much. However, when it came to...uh...being a Jew it didn't make any difference when the...when it was handled by the Nazis, the Hungarian Nazis. And so...

Q: What does that mean?

A: It means that when the hack and cross, the...the Hungarian Nazis, you know, came because they were members of...of their...their organization, and they wanted you to show them where you are born and then you have the right to be here and you are a Hungarian citizen. Even if you were a Hungarian citizen, it didn't mean a thing because the laws covered...covered already everything what could destroy Jewish life or Jews in general. Now, when a family cannot go out and cannot live their own lives for...for...this is against the law, that's a terrible, terrible thing. I did one more thing in Budapest which I probably have never mentioned, but I will mention it now. This Mr. Epler, who was the Secretary General of the congregation, after the first Jewish law, after the first law against the Jew....when that was passed, he asked me if I could help out in the congregation and organize a district in the 7th district, which didn't exist before. People were taken up or rather thrown out from their own homes and they were moved together with other people, so there was a big problem. One family was kosher, kosher; the other wasn't. One family had old

people; the other had the young people and children. But they were moved together in apartments, and other apartments were taken away because there were some districts where the Jews couldn't live at all, and these Jews had to be placed where this was still a possibility for them to live. Now, I organized the 7th inner district at the time, and made sure that we know who is a Jew, who is not a Jew, who keeps a kosher home; who doesn't; and so and so that they forced getting together of these families in one apartment instead of three or four was let's say a little bit easier done than it could have been done if this information wouldn't have been available. And I was the secretary of that 6th...7th district for quite awhile (drinking water) so that we had a complete listing of the Jews who lived around us, about.... Yeah, and this, of course, was already done and allowed to be done by the Germans and the Hungarian Nazis because this was preparatory to the ghetto so that the Jews would be together already. And this was done. Now what is your next question?

Q: What happened to you as the years progressed?

A: As the years progressed, 1940... Yeah, all the time, starting from 1938, either I was home for 4 weeks and then called back to the labor camp and was there for 2 months let's say. And I had the congregation force their way through their influences that I was allowed again to come home for let's say the month of the...of the High Holy Days or any holiday or Pesach or Shuef. So I came home and I stayed home for...for the time I was allowed to stay home...to stay home. And the winter months as a rule were taken more easy than the summer months. Summer months we almost constantly were in camp and for the winter months, sometimes we were allowed to...uh...go home and we lived there. Now what happened for instance, I can tell you one interesting thing about 1941 if we have time. In 1941, my sister-in-law who lived in Novi Sad, came for a visit to Budapest. And at the time our son, Emmy...Manny, was a very small child. He was born in 1936, and this sister-in-law, who loved him with all her heart, she told my wife, her sister, "Look, the child has a cold. He's coughing and all that. Novi Sad is still about a 100 kilometer south. I will take him down. Maybe his cough with subside easier there." So we went with her and...uh...I made arrangements because there were two chief cantors in \_\_\_\_\_ Temple that my colleague who was with me will take over all my duties for Sunday. There were many, many weddings and all kinds of things. He will take over, and I will take over for him the next time when it's his next. So we went down to Novi Sad on Thursday and stayed with this sister-in-law in her apartment and Friday morning before...at dawn, my father-in-law, who lived close by, came over to his daughter, to us, to tell her, tell us, inform us that there is a pogrom outside and the Jews and \_\_\_\_\_ are picked up and congregated somewhere. So it was a terrible thing. That was a Friday. We...we waited in the house. About 11:00 the gendarme with full glairy, fixed up with his machine gun and all that came to take us to a certain spot where the Jews were con...were gathered, and from there they were marched down to the Danube. We didn't know that this will happen, but this is what it was. The Jew...the \_\_\_\_\_ and the Jews were down...were taken down to the Danube River. The Danube River was frozen maybe...I don't know how many inches thick, but they...they threw some...uh...material, some military bomb or something into the water, probed the...uh...the thing open...ice, the ice open and took the people into a place where they had to undress and naked to go on the trampoline which was over the

Danube River, and they were shot into the River. They were shot and fell into the River. Now, this went on for a long time. We saw trucks arriving there with \_\_\_\_\_ and Jewish people and they were all put into a line. I think a line of two and there was always a gendarme or a policeman who was told and informed by the government that all these people who are being...who are being taken here are being taken here because they are the enemies of Hungary. The really...the newly occu...back occupied Hungary because you know that was Yugoslavia. It was Hungary, then Yugoslavia, then the Hungarians occupied it again. So when our next came, before us was standing the owner of the house...uh... where my sister-in-law lived. When our next came, the policeman came over. I was holding Manny in my coat, in my fur coat because he...he had fever, and...uh...he took a look at me and said...uh..."What are you doing here? Chief Cantor, what are you doing here? You are not a Czechnik?" Czechnik meant the...the people who hated Hungary. The ~~serp~~ people and others who hated Hungary. You are no Czechnik. And he was all terribly excited, and ran over to the Lieutenant who was there was in charge and told him, "The...the Chief Cantor from the \_\_\_\_\_ is here. He's...he's not a cheknik. He's...I know him, and I'm there many times." Namely, as I told you before, the \_\_\_\_\_ Temple was a very narrow street and because people were pouring out and would have been in danger, endangered each other, so he was...he and other 10 people were there and he was in charge of that group of policeman. So he knew me very well. And this while he was running back and forth, and at the third or fourth try, the lieutenant told him, "Put him aside. Stand him...let him stand aside." This saved our lives because Hortee (pause - drinking water) Hortee then called off the killing, and this is when it stopped at our \_\_\_\_\_. So if anyone will tell me this story, I wouldn't believe it, but it's true.

Q: Can you go back to that scene with these people at the River? Tell me what it was like, what you saw, and what you were like. What was the scene like at the River?

A: The scene was...the scene was 29 degrees celsius. People were crying, and when we heard tut, tut, tut, tut, another few shots, we...we knew what's happening. We imagined what's happening. And people were crying and hollering and...and throwing themselves to the floor, to the ground and as...as...as can well be imagined what happened. But before we should have gone in and be the next ones to be killed, the killing stopped. From there, we were taken into a...into a gymnasium...uh...walked back and...uh...when we spoke about where we are going and...and what happened, the...uh...one of the policeman was walking along side with us told me, "You are very lucky people. I don't know if you know what's happened inside the \_\_\_\_\_ they called it. It was a bathing stop at the Danube in Novi Sad all the time, and then it became the killing spot. So he said, "You are very lucky people. You don't know....do you know what happened inside?" And...uh...he told us the story. It was Friday afternoon when we arrived to this gymnasium where we were held...uh...for a couple of hours and told that now we are clear...we are in the clear. Everything is fine because it was proved that we are not chekniks. And then we went home to our apartment and, of course, as you...we didn't stay. Saturday evening we went home, back to Budapest. In Budapest, it was...this kind of thing at the time did not happen yet. 41. It happened many times after that in 42 and 43 when groups of 50 and...and maybe hundred were gathered and were taken to



the Danube River by 10 or 12 and shot into the River. This happened. Later on, this became a daily occurrence in 43 and...uh...and 44.

Q: Did you see some of these roundups?

A: The roundups I did see because even from the place where I stayed... My family wasn't with me at the time. They were in Bergen-Belsen at the time because...uh...there was... uh...an effort to save some people, and there were sixteen hundred and some people...Jews who were transported from Budapest to...uh...through...through different stops, but finally they got to Bergen Belsen. This was a Catholic group if you know about it.

Q: Alright. I would like you to pause. I would like you to tell us the story of how your family became part of the group that went to Bergen Belsen.

A: Now, my family became part of...of this Bergen Belsen, the Kosner group as they called it...uh...because my brother and I were very active in Zionist work and the people knew that so whoever was in charge of this Kosner group they said...though I wasn't home at the time...I was probably in the Ukrainian at the time already...they said, "Though \_\_\_\_\_ (that's my Hungarian name) isn't home, we cannot forget...uh...Ella and...and their...their son, Emmy, and they...they were engaged and my brother-in-law's still there as a Rabbinical student he was not taken into...into labor camp. So he was extremely active. He probably had something to do with it to...to bring it to the attention of the people.

Q: You would have been in the Ukraine in labor camps?

A: Yeah.

Q: In labor camps?

A: Labor camps. And my family was...was in Budapest. So they were taken with the Kosner group. First it was that they go straight to Israel, then it was said the...as I hear now from people who were part of the group...uh...they were...they were supposed to go to Auschwitz and finally, they made up to go to Bergen-Belsen.

Q: How did you find out that your family had been taken?

A: I did not find out...uh...until I didn't come back...until I didn't escape in...uh...November, the end of November. In \_\_\_\_\_, I left the company, \_\_\_\_\_ company, and we walked mainly nighttimes...uh...

Q: Excuse me. I'm confused. Could we stop?

A: Yeah. Go ahead.

Q: You are in which town where? You are in where?

A: Now, you have to understand what happened.

Q: Yes, please.

A: As the Germans got...got...as...the Russians performed their attacks against the Germans pushing them from east to west, so the labor camp people...the labor camp laborers, Jews, were always pushed together with them. Why? Because the Germans and even the Hungarians had a tremendous amount of food and other necessities in different places and we had to hurry up and load the wagons and...and trains for them that their material should be taken...uh...westwards instead of being taken by the Russians. So we moved always with this ...with this attack. (Cough) And finally, when we got to ShotroyRehe, I heard that...at ShotroyRehe, there is an organization (coughing - drinking water) which takes the Jews in the direction of Vienna they told us at the time and whoever cannot walk is shot. So I spoke to a few people who I could reach and told them I am doing this. If you want to come with me, maybe a great risk but this is what I will do. And that must have been the beginning of November. When we were already pushed back to the point of...uh...my birthday's let's say...or...or

Q: November of what year?

A: November of 1944. And so we left the company and tried to get in the direction of Budapest and it took about 10 or 12 or 14 days until we accomplished our goal to get to Budapest.

Q: Could you tell me...Really, I would like to know how you got away from the camp and what that walk was like.

A: The...the getting away from the camp was simply take a risk every second of the...of that time to be shot by a Hungarian Nazi. Not necessarily a...a man, but a 12, 13 year old boy who had a gun and if he shot a Jew, they probably gave him a thank you. Not...uh...he didn't...he wasn't exposed to any punishment or anything of that. And this is the way we got away. We just slipped away, left everything what we had, and had the same clothes and the same shoes, maybe sometimes without soles, but we...we went in the direction of Budapest because we thought there is the revenge. I remember walking through a town immediately...uh...the...at the border of Budapest where there were Hungarian papers who said THE FALL OF BUDAPEST IS EXPECTED ANY HOUR. THE RUSSIANS ARE HERE AND THERE IN THIS AND THIS SPOT. And when I came to Budapest the ghetto, of course was...I...we...we didn't know that there was a ghetto in Budapest. The ghetto was already working. The Jews were already concentrated in the ghetto. As I heard later, the Germans have prepared to...uh...to put some bombs in the ghetto and...and to kill all the Jews who are there, but this didn't happen and when I arrived in...uh... Budapest the 17th of November, I took my life.... I knew already that my family is in Rome.

Q: How?

A: Because my...the place where we lived was part of the ghetto, and a friend of mine who lived in one of the so-called...uh...houses which were...which were not... which were except...an exception and not ghetto...how did they call them?

Q: Protected house?

A: Protective house. Uh...He told me that my family went with this and group to the Kosner group and he doesn't know where they are now, but they are not home. Ella and the child and another...uh...relative's child of ours went with my brother and my wife to...with...with the Kosner group.

Q: Tell us what you.... You can slow down. Please. Tell us what your reaction was when you heard this news.

A: My reaction was...first, I will...I will...I'll start at the first reaction which I got when I arrived and I took my life into my hand because you couldn't walk into the ghetto and walk out of the ghetto. So we were about...I was about 2 blocks let's say from the place where our apartment was and I at one...one early morning, as I have said, took my life into my hands and through all kinds of machinations, I got to the place where our apartment...the house where our apartment was. Our apartment was on the top floor, magnificent apartment, with Persian rugs and pictures and this and that. And every piece of furniture in that apartment was done by the...by the \_\_\_\_\_ meister, you know. And when I came in through the bombings and so on, snow...this was the top apartment. Snow was falling in...uh...very freely on the rugs. And the...the where we had our dishes, let's say, which Rosenthal dishes, there were pieces on the floor because a bomb hit it. And...uh...I was told that...that...uh...uh...80...80 some people are living in our apartment. At the time when I came into the apartment, it was not locked and I could in...could get in to the apartment, and I saw there is no roof. There is no...nothing. Now, this was the first impression. The family isn't there. This is the picture I found, so if I didn't get a heart attack there, right then and there, it is just by...by the grace of God. From there, I went back to this friend who told me about my family with the Kosner, \_\_\_\_\_ Kosner group and we started to speculate, "What can I do?" So I, at the time I was quite young yet and my face was full and I looked like a real peasant so the idea was by the people who led this rescue mission there, that the best thing for me would be to pose as a non-Jew who was on the front and came home now...uh...because of...uh...he got hurt and was in the hospital. And of course, I got papers for all this because the...our...our machinery worked perfectly to make any kind of false papers. And I got those papers. I was called a runner. What was the runner? Uh...The Schutzpass business started. Was already on at the time when I came home, when I arrived home in 1944...uh...November, December, so the... the request to me was made. I should be a runner for that commission about whom no one knew, at least we thought so, and they will give me papers as a Goy who was...who was injured on the frontline and came home and now I'm here on...uh...rehabilitation and spend the time in Budapest. The assignment really was to go

to the...the...uh... Swedish man, Raul...uh...

Q: Wallenberg?

A: Wallenberg. To the Wallenberg offices, get the Schutzpasses, be told where they have to be taken because they were in contact, and I as a Hungarian soldier can walk on the street freely...uh...I...it wasn't so, but...but that's the way it was planned and I should take these Schutzpasses to the different spots where they are needed. This was my work after I came back from...from labor camp let's say. Many times I did something else. People were by the hundreds maybe thousands gathered in the concentration prison. There was such a thing in Pest, and there they were not only mishandled and so on, but many, many terrible things happened to them. Once we were told that in the Tolence house, that's the place from where they are thrown over the border, there...I don't know how many people...and we...the people who were assigned for this mission, dressed up in Hungarian gendarme uniforms and went to the place where they were gathered. This is in this case the Tolence house prison. And we cursed them and we said the worse things about the Jews and so, but we took I don't know maybe 50 or 60 Jews, and we had machine guns and \_\_\_\_\_ and we...we ...we got them out. The \_\_\_\_\_ got them out by false papers, of course, that we will take care of them. We are Hungarian gendarme, and we will take care of them. We'll...we'll... \_\_\_\_\_. And so they were given to us and we marched them back to different spots, different places. These...uh...houses which were...uh...saved I'd say or posted as non-\_\_\_\_ as non \_\_\_\_\_. And this is...this is...between these two occupations, there didn't remain too much time too...uh...you know.

Q: Can you...did you ever meet Raul Wallenberg?

A: Yes, I met him many times. But I...I never had a chance to sit down with him for 5 minutes because as...even if he was in the office when I came there and there was not one of us...he was in different places.

Q: You're talking about Raoul?

A: Raoul Wallenberg. Yes. He was there and he saw me and secretaries and so on knew who I am and they told him. And he said...he spoke German there. He said, "Give him...Give him whatever he has to get fast. Let him go because every minute is a loss." And they...they used to give me the papers, these Schutzpasses, big pieces of paper. They looked beautiful falsifications. And I used to \_\_\_\_\_, so I...his...there I had an interview with some people from...from one of the Scandinavian universities whom I don't remember anymore. Time ago. And...uh...he asked me, "Tell me the most important thing you can...you can think about when you think of Wallenberg." So I told him, "You know what it is. My sadness that I never had a chance to sit down with this angelic person to...to talk to him for 5 minutes.

Q: What was the scene like inside the Wallenberg offices? Was this in the Consulate or was this elsewhere?

- A: Yes. There...there...there were offices, official offices where only the Consulate or close by. They occupied another room or something. They did the best they could. There wasn't you go out and rent an apartment or rent an office. They did it the best they could. The official business was always handled from the Consulate itself. The non-officials, the falsifications, the printing jobs, the...the military there, what...what we used...uh...I don't know...uniforms, guns, and so on, they were kept somewhere else. And meetings were always in...never in the Consulates of course. They were in these private places.
- Q: Did you meet other people connected with Wallenberg?
- Q: Only my own kind because many people did one thing or another for...for the...for the cause. There was a Dr. — who worked very closely with...he was one of the Rabbis in Budapest at the time. Very closely, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ and others and...and my kind who either went in because they really were excellently qualified to do the administration or they came in on a basis like myself. And what myself is I don't want to prepare you.
- Q: Can you describe to us...take us through one of those courier runs, from the time when you went in to pick up the Schutzpass to when you dropped it.
- A: Now, I was at the time, of course, not in my house because I was never in the ghetto. In one of the...one of the houses, you mentioned before the name...
- Q: Protected house?
- A: Protected houses and \_\_\_\_\_ the protection, the little Nazi, Hungarian Nazi, came in and commanded everyone down. And whoever he wanted, he took and said, "They'll be back. They'll be back." He took them. They never came back. So this was the story. Uh...So I got dressed and tried very carefully to leave the protected house so that no one would see me and I got, let's say, to a...to a Consulate, a Swedish Consulate which was in Buda and there...I got there. I never remember to have to wait because all the officials, all the workers there were told not to delay, not to delay. First of all, in some cases the Schutzpasses were respected, you know, and if...uh...a call came by any Nazi, they show them the Schutzpass, he respected it in case...in some cases, or rather in many cases. Now, I got there. Of course, I had to walk because at the time there was no more...uh...uh...street car or any...any communication, anything. So I walked to the place. I tried very hard no one shall see me when I leave the Consulate. Uh...Sometimes I succeeded, sometimes no. Sometimes, I met...uh...people who...who were Nazis and we had a discussion like, "Aw, those terrible Jews, what they did here," and because I spoke the language fluently in many cases, this helped me. And I tried to get back as soon as I delivered what I have to deliver to get back to the protected house. And I waited until I got a...the next command to go either to free Jews from the...uh...from the Tolance house which is the the last stop before they are shot in the Danube or...or do something else, whatever I was told.

Q: Will you know take us through one of those trips where you freed Jews from the Tolence house and tell us what that scene was like.

A: The scene was 10 or 12 Jews, strong, young people.

Q: Excuse me. Repeat...repeat questions so the camera knows where you are.

A: Huh?

Q: You were asked where were you?

A: In Budapest. And...uh...they...our administration knew very well who they have, and people who they could count on. In other words, they were really not broken down old people or ...or young people who can't move. They were people who were strength and energy and they...they knew if they will be dressed up as gendarmes, they will be gendarmes. They will act as gendarmes. Uh...

Q: The Tolence house now.

A: Yes. Now, so when we got the command, let's say to go free these people in the Tolence house we got dressed and got together at a certain spot, wherever we were told. On a street corner because we...we weren't Jews. You know, we were...we were...uh...Christians and...uh...we got together wherever we told and from there under the direction of the one who was assigned to be the...the officer, the commander of this group and who was dressed up as a...a lieutenant or something like that, he...we went in marched form up the place where we had to do the job. And when we got there, the man took the paper and showed it to...to whoever it was in charge there and told him we will take these damn Jews and do the right thing with them. Don't worry Comrade. Just give them to us. So...uh...if there were 20 or 50 or...or whatever amount of people, we took them and while we...and as soon as we got out of the...of the Tolence house which was, of course, protected by all kinds of gates and what not, as soon as we felt that we can tell the people, we marched close by to them, "Don't worry. This is...this is just a play. You will be saved. We take you to this and this place, and we came here. We are Jews and we will...we will ...we won't kill you. You...we take you where you should be." And so the people quieted down and they...they came with us and marched with us, and we took them wherever they...we were told to take this. This is...this was the scene. Uh...You have to know that in those days the streets of Budapest were completely empty. There was very little ...uh...uh...cars, very few cars. Anyhow, but there...there was no...no...no communication. People didn't walk on the street. They simply were scared, let alone...I mean like cars or something like that. You very very rarely that you saw that at the time. First of all, most of the vehicles were taken by the...by the military, and second of all, who dared to go to the street? I mean there was bombing going on and...and what not, so they were just scared. Uh...Jews, of course, didn't dare to go out, and other people were scared too. So we could...uh...we could very well do our stick, whatever we had to do there.

Q: What other kinds of things did you do with the underground? This was with the Zionist underground?

A: Yeah. With the Zionist underground. What other things? I stayed in...uh...we had to be...we had to bring...and we had to bring in paper and we had to...any kind of thing, whatever there was to be done. There was no such a thing like...we didn't have any water in the last times already because the water was cut off. So I stayed with a...with a dish and waited until I got enough water to bring it up to make a tea or..or boil it to some soup with...with something in it or...or bring it to an old person, an elderly person or a sick person. Give them a drink of water. That was one of the jobs we had to do. And it wasn't only myself. Many people...uh...did the same thing. We went down to the cellar where a little bit of pressure was still on, and gathered the water from the pipes which were in the cellar and so we took it up to the 4th, 5th floor for...to be used for...for whatever it is needed. And that went for...for bread and for cheese and for...for...for whatever we could put our hands on. Now, I had to go out and let's say bring back some bread. So I knew where the bakeries are for I live in Budapest. And...uh...so I went there, and if I got some bread I had a...uh...coat, a white coat. I put my...I put...I'll never forget that...that was a specialty...have a bag, put my hand into the suits there. It's in my pocket, but actually I was holding the bread underneath my coat, and I walked home. Now, you know, the...this kind of terrible, terrible experience teaches people to do many, many things which you never thought you are able to do.

Q: The...the winter of 44, I gather, was very cold. Will you tell me about it?

A: Terribly cold. Terribly cold. The main thing I can tell you is...then I have to flash back to...uh...uh...Novi Sad. It was 28 below celsius, is...that would be about 50 something like that. And while we were, let's say, in ...uh...in...in Budapest during 44 and so, we were very young and we could stand it. And then we had very good training in Russia and with the Ukraine where we were in labor camp to get used to these things. Sometimes, the snow was a meter or meter and half tall or high, and people slept on...in the snow.

Q: They slept in the snow?

A: In the snow. Yes. Put on their coat. Crawled into the...in the snow and the snow kept them warm. Yeah.

Q: In that winter of 44...

A: Yeah.

Q: 44, early 45, who were your friends in the underground that were doing the same things you were?

A: As I told you, there was this Haskowich, who was one of my best friends. He was a brother

of a colleague of mine. And ...uh...he...he gave me the first information about my family. Of course, I tried to get to Kosner. I had difficulties to get in. He was an extremely busy person, but finally I got to him and found out that my family is still not in Switzerland. They are still in...uh...in Bergen-Belsen. Uh...During this...uh...1944, after January...I don't remember, probably the 18th of January, when Russian soldier appeared in the cellar of that house where we were, we knew that every minute, every hour is danger. Nothing else. When this Russian soldier arrived, we thought we are freed, but it wasn't like that. The Russians just didn't...didn't just redeem us. They brought all kinds of problems. I...you probably know about that. Uh...There's a story in that. And there were cases where soldiers carried 15 and 18 watches and put them on their arm, and \_\_\_\_\_ is a very well know phrase known to everybody. "Give the...Give the...Give me your watch." It was a hard, hard, hard life, but...uh...when it came we tried to get back to our own homes, and I went back to my home after...after a certain while. I didn't leave Hungary until 1946.

Q: Let's stop a minute. You gave...when the Russians came in, you eventually got back to your apartment. What about your family?

A: My family was still not there. My wife never, never wanted to get back to Hungary. She was so hurt in her...in her personality, in her humanness so to say, that she never wanted to step on the ground of Hungary anymore. I remember when we took our first trip to...uh...Israel, we had to...she still had...at the time, she had an aunt who she liked very much in Budapest. And we had to wait a day and a half in Vienna for the airplane for...for the plane.

Q: Excuse me. I'm confused. I...I need some order here. You are in Budapest. You find out about your family.

A: Family. I write to them. I write to them. I try to get...uh...get them to phone. There was no phone, of course. One letter after another. Finally, I got a letter from my wife saying she does not want to come back to Budapest where I have magnificent...uh...prospects in Budapest because (clearing throat) I kept my position. Though our, my Temple, was used as the ghetto...uh... the...uh...actually, they had no...in that vicinity where...where the ghetto was, originally, they had no hospitals. So they organized a ghetto hospital so to say in my Temple. And...uh...this place...I don't have to tell you how it was by the time the Russians came in. All dirt and all smut and all...all this. So I organized (clearing throat - drinking water) and as I have said, we were freed, liberated about the 18th of January or sometime in that...that period of time and...uh...my birthday is on the 3rd of March. And while we were in labor camp, I always tried to keep our people warm and together. Speak to them, tell them things. I mean bring a little bit of...uh... \_\_\_\_, of humanity. And...uh...they remembered that, my comrades, and...uh...said...what...bread for instance was impossible to get and other things, and they asked me what would I want for...for birthday present. So I told them (cough) about 10, 15 people. You know what I want. You become for a day or two or three again a laborer. Come here with a pick and shovel and let's clean up the \_\_\_\_ Temple. So the...the...the...uh...back yard and the yard and the front was cleaned at least to the degree that you could walk. It wasn't all...all dirt and...uh...I organized the rebuilding committee, and



rebuilt the Temple, the part of the part of the Temple which was ruined. This was what I did after the...after the liberation. Between the...so that on the High Holy Days, we already went back to the Temple as a Temple and had services in the Temple, though there wasn't a seat left or so. But temporarily it was...it was fixed.

Q: Tell us about finding your family. The time is short.

A: Now finding the family was this. As I wrote from time to time and didn't get answers, finally I got an answer. This letter that I told you about before. I knew...finally, I had to realize in spite of the wonderful prospects I have in Budapest where I could keep my position. I could become the Secretary General of the Jewish Chaplaincy Service in Budapest because Dr. Heroshi was the Chief Chaplain and he begged me to...to be his assistant. I cannot wait or I cannot hope my family should ever come...come back. So... uh...my first...uh...my last...uh...cable or was it a letter, I don't remember...reached already my family in Bari, Italy, on the way to Israel. So that my wife who was a teacher by profession went to Israel. She had a very dear friend, her classmate from first grade, who was a lawyer in Israel, very respected lawyer. And when they spoke about what she should do...is to go to a kibbutz or take courses and...uh...become a teacher in Israel. She knew Hebrew quite well. Uh...The decision finally was made, "No, she should go to a kibbutz with the children. So, they went to Sharharmikim, where she became a worker, a laborer there first, and later on she became the main...uh...the chief...uh...the chief cook of the kibbutz and I must tell you her food was...what she cooked was extraordinary. And this is the way then finally I took 3 months of absence, of vacation to find my family. I knew where they are, and I knew I will never come back to Budapest and I started out to Budapest. Maybe here's another interesting point. When I started out and the congregation this time already, the \_\_\_\_\_ gave me permission for 3 months to...to for a leave of 3 months. The organization which took care of people to get them back to their homes made...and many, many people wanted to go to Israel. At the time it was the...the pressure was great for people to get to Israel. So...and from Hungary, you couldn't just go to Israel. You had to have special permission.

Q: Excuse me. We...we need...we have very little time.

A: Yeah.

Q: So if you could just tell us about coming to Israel and finding your family.

A: This is exactly what I wanted to tell you. Uh...So I went...80 people. The story about them was that they were so badly beaten up by the Germans that they lost their hearing and they were all...they were not able to talk. So I was there commander and so we went through Yugoslavia, through...uh...through Zaga and other places to Italy. There were all kinds of things. In Zaga, we had a man who kept up this finger and had a...something...uh... piece of material on it, and we had just to follow him for the one night we spent there. Then we got to...to...uh... to Italy and the final thing was that we got to preparatory to boarding the boat to Israel. We got to a place called Statsia, a little fishing village in Italy. There the English

made the Italian government, the Italian forces to arrest us and we spent in Statsia about 9 weeks or 10 weeks. It was about Pesach time. I performed Seder services there I remember. Finally, Morrison, who was the Secretary of Labor in the English government and a Jew, came down to us and tried... Yeah...we...we...to convince us we shouldn't have a hunger strike and we shouldn't do this and that, and I wrote especially hymn for the Holy Pesach there and...uh..and that c'est l'appell was everyday and everyone came out and we had a hunger strike for 98 hours. Then he came and convinced us we should stop the strike, the...the hunger strike, and really we did stop and we got permits to go to Israel. So that to Israel, I arrived legally as a legal immigrant. And there...uh...my wife was waiting for me, but we didn't meet at the boat. Why not? Because I was appointed to be the commander of that boat where \_\_\_\_\_, and the commander is not allowed to leave the boat until everybody and everything what...what they brought is taken off the boat. And I had...I had to wait. And my wife was the kibbutz \_\_\_\_\_. He brought her, and he said, "Look, it's ridiculous. Why shall we wait. \_ probably didn't arrive." I didn't arrive and I did arrive and went down the boat, left the boat and there was a taxi driver. I had one English pound in my pocket and I told him, "Look, I have this and this is all I have. I'll give you this. Take me to Sharharmiking where my family is and my wife is." So he said, "Put it away. I will take you to Sharharmiking for nothing." And so I traveled for the first time to Sharharmiking, where I asked for...for my wife's Hebrew name is \_\_\_\_\_. I thought she's in Israel. Probably she took the \_\_\_\_\_ name back. So they told me, "We have no \_\_\_\_\_." Who do you have? We have Ella Mandel. She kept her regular name. So finally, we met and I don't have to tell you what that...what that meant to all of us. She lived in a little hut there, but it wasn't too bad.

Q: We need to cut this. Could you just tell us when you came to the United States. You and Ella stayed in Israel how long?

A: We stayed in Israel...I stayed for 19 months. Ella stayed for a longer time, probably 3, 4 years.

Q: And when did you come to the United States?

A: I came to the United States in 1948, March, and my family...is it 1940.....yes, I think it was 1948, March. Yeah.

Q: And your family?

A: About a year later, a few months and a year later.

Q: Okay. Cantor Mandel. Thank you very much.

A: You are more than welcome. If I added something worthwhile, it's my pleasure.

Q: Thank you. That's it.

End of Tape #2

Conclusion of Interview