United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Kurt Ticho Thomas
June 23 &24, 1999
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Kurt Ticho Thomas, conducted on June 23 and 24, 1999 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The 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.

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Interview with Kurt Ticho Thomas
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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: -- recording. Yes. Okay. Can you just tell me -- I'll -- I'll hold the microphone and I'll --

Answer: [indecipherable] you'll go like this.

Q: Yeah, I'll be going back and forth a lot --

A: Okay.

Q: But right now we're not officially starting.

A: Okay.

Q: I just want you to --

A: Okay.

Q: -- to talk a little bit. So maybe you could tell me about -- tell me about your neighbors.

A: The neighbors? On the west side of our building is a married couple, childless as far as I know. He's a principal in a high school, and she's a -- and his wife is a libra-librarian. And we don't even know we have that neighbor. That's how na -- na -- quiet and nice they are. On the other side, it is not as nice as we would like to. Is -- Did you already -- Is it already okay?

Q: I think it's fine.

A: So then I don't -- don't have to tell you any gossip.

Q: You don't have to tell me any gossip, okay, let me -- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection, this is an interview with Mr. Kurt Thomas, conducted by Arwin Donohue, on June 22nd --

A: 23rd.

Q: -- is it the 23rd, I'm sorry. June 23rd, 1999, and this is a follow up interview to an interview conducted with Mr. Thomas, by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, on videotape. This is tape number one, side A. Okay, I'm interested in starting with you, this -- this date is a very significant date for you, can you tell me what this date is?

A: Yes, it is 57 years ago, when my parents and sister were murdered in the gas chamber of camp Sobibór. In the early -- In the early hours of the day, as I know, being there later, the whole procedure, how they -- how -- how it was handled.

Q: Do you have a special way, every time that this day rolls around every year, of -- of recognizing that? Do you memorialize them in a particular way?

A: No, not as -- not any specific way, although I -- I awake in the morning, on the 23rd, or rather on the 22nd, already, when I saw them the last time, and think of them. I know I think of them and of the events, daily, without wanting to even, it just come into my mind, and I am trying to analyze and study what actually happened, and why it happened.

Q: You're still trying to -- You're still questioning on that level, is that what you're saying?

A: No, I don't question any more, I think that I have my answers. I think I have my answers. I feel that the German nation was misled, and that there is not only -- there are

two entities who are guilty of mass murder. We know of the executioners, it was Hitler's political cronies, who went along with him, to eliminate the Jewish people wherever he could get them. But anti-Semitism was -- or racism, whatever you want to call it, goes back centuries, many centuries, and the original sin was committed by Christians, by the church, which actually propagated, I would say the -- the persecutions of Jews, by accusing the Jewish people of whatever was convenient for them. For instance, up to today, the idea that the Jews killed Christ, prevails within a large segment of people who do not know history. It is known, for instance, that the crucifixion was an act of erga -- Romans. It was their law by which they -- by which they sentenced people to death. The Jews stoned. And I want to tell you a very interesting story. I met, a year ago, a lady of the name Anna Rubenstein, who wrote a couple books, I believe three books. She a foo -- survivor of Auschwitz, and after the war, because of her English lang -- English knowledge, she got a job in a little town someplace in Germany, to help displaced persons, from all over Europe, of different nationalities. And she became responsible for -- I believe, if I remember well, for 8,000 people, and got a very responsible, big job there. One day she got -- she was asked by a German doctor, whether she would come with him to inspect a ward of sick people in the hospital, which was also in that same s -- in that same area where she worked. And when they entered a ward, a woman attacked her verbally and physically in Polish, and told her, "You are Jewish, you should not be alive. You killed Christ." With this one sentence, this Polish woman told the whole story. The curse on the Jewish people, which is a historical injustice, carrying on through centuries, which culminated this time in the Holocaust, but there were many events prior to that.

You can look at the Inquisition, the Crusades, at individual abuses of führer, masters in Europe, in Russia, all over. Wherever Christianity was the main religion. And never was anything done on the side of the church, to dispel these wrong rumors, even up to today. Whatever that Pope has done up to now, is by far not enough. I think the church owes us an apology. They should -- stop it, please -- they should admit, confess, and atone for what they have done. I think this is what they owe us, and it would also elevate the moral standing of the church, which up to today is only hiding and el -- and not coming out s -- directly of what happened. There's another interesting thing which came into my mind. Protestantism was founded in Germany at least, by Martin Luther. Martin Luther originally protested against the abuses of the church, by being bought off for money, and ultimately was the founder of the Protestant movement in Germany. Although he was sensitive to what the abuses of the church, he took with him the anti-Semitism of the church, by putting his feces on the church, I believe, in Brittenburg, where he asked for the banishment of the Jews unless they became Christians, and of their -- of killing them, which is very interesting, and that only sh -- tells me how great and how deep the belief of the Jewish guilt was implanted in not only the population, but also among the intellectuals of the church itself.

Q: Let me ask you something. You've been living in a Christian country in the United States, for the last 50 years.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you feel that there's a danger of something like what happened during World War Two, in Europe --

A: No, no.

Q: -- to the Jews again? Do you feel that anti-Semitism is --

A: I -- I do not believe that anything like that would be possible again, and I want to emphasize today, in my own mind, a tremendous change in government -- in government forming of -- of laws. Originally, if a government persecuted people, oppressed people, killed people, nobody interfered. At best -- There was an article in the paper, thanks to the courage of our President Clinton, and to NATO, that a change in this attitude finally came about, when we declared war on Milosevitch, who was oppressing his own people, and abusing the other minorities within Yugoslavia. This is a historical event of tremendous impact for the future. And I think we should call this the Clinton Doctrine. I am -- I am highly impressed and very satisfied and happy that this happened, not because -- not because of myself, but in general terms, for the sake of mankind.

Q: You think this is the -- the first time that something like this has happened on a governmental level?

A: I don't think, I know this is the first time, and never anything -- never anything like that happened. Even, you have a case here with Pinochet. There is still a dispute whether he is guilty or not guilty for killing people during the time when he was in power. Now they figured out that he is guilty now only from a certain date in England, when they reversed their thinking.

Q: Do you think that -- that Clinton's and NATO's actions in -- in Yugoslavia are -- do you think there's a chance that they had anything to do with -- with Holocaust memory? Like if you're thinking back on what happened during the Holocaust and what -- what

America and the world did not do, there -- there -- perhaps there was pressure on the governments to actually take action now, in a way that they didn't then.

A: Well, I believe that a few sensitive people might have been influenced by the tremen -- - by the terrific injustice which happened during the second World War, toward the Jewish people, and those who resisted the Nazi doctrines. But generally speaking, if -- if NATO, under the leadership of Clintons, wouldn't have done what they have done, the thing could have been again forgotten. As a matter of fact, from what I have been listening, to stories about the -- memorials about the Holocaust and so forth, nobody ever touched the church, which is guilty just as much as the Germans themselves, for what has happened.

Q: Talking about -- about faith, and -- and religion and -- and -- and the influence of religion on prejudice, can you -- can you tell me the role that that's played in your life, and in -- in your own sense about --

A: Oh, I -- I can tell you as far as the religion is concerned, I personally believe that religions were necessary to raise the standards, the moral standards of the population. Whatever abuses happened later on, by trying to exert power over their own people, and oppress others, this is a different story. Personally, I was raised in a home -- in a Jewish home, by birth, but we were not religious. We kept a kosher house, because of my father's father, who was a widower. When he passed away, in his early 80's, my sister and myself said, "Mom, let's stop that kosher deal, we want to eat everything." And that was the end of the kosher household. Personally, I believe that Moses himself was one of the greatest, if not the greatest statesman, by inventing the 10 commandments and giving

them to the people as a guide for morality, for life. And I also am convinced that Jesus, another Jew, was another very great man, great statesman, who spread the teachings of Judaism in his own way, as a Reformer of Judaism rather than sticking to the old ways of the Jewish religion.

Q: So do you see them more as politicians in a sense, than spiritual figures?

A: Oh, they were spiritual figures, but with a political result. And the spirituality is terrific, if you can believe in it, and important is that you should then do what they tell you to do, what they wrote down that God said, but not whatever pleases anybody to his own advantage.

Q: You were just mentioning a moment ago, off tape, about yo-you -- before the war, as you said, you were an atheist. What did your experience in the camp, how did that influence your feelings about religion in any way?

A: Ah the experience in camp only confirmed my conviction that there is no God, that it is people who make their life, for other people, either nice, or miserable. And anything else is just an individual need. Some people need to believe that they will go to heaven after they die. I believe that I will go -- after I die, will be either co -- cremated, and that will be the end of -- because I don't believe in -- either in heaven, nor in a purgatory.

Q: Let's go back. I wanted to -- t-to bring us back to the beginning of your life. You -- You mentioned -- Why don't you just tell me what your -- your name was at birth --

A: Well --

Q: And tell me something about your original name.

A: My original name was Ticho, T-i-c-h-o, which is an old family name, which goes back into the 13th century, in Boskovice. There were, according to the chronicle which I read, long before the war, but which I cannot locate now, and I tried to ask people to find it, there were originally, in 1492, that was the year when Columbus discovered America, three Jewish families living in Boskovice, under the castle. Their name was Horvald, Stefanski, and Ticho. The-There are very interesting things. One of the people who survived the war, was Mr. Ignatz Horvald, who was married to a Gentile woman, and he was, at that time, when the war broke out, he must have been in the late 60's or early 70's and somehow the Germans didn't even intern him, at the end of the war, what they did to every other member of a mixed marriage. He survived, and he lived in the same section, which is mentioned in the chronic, under the castle. Now, at my time, there were my family Ticho, then there was a company of the name Brothers Ticho, which was owned by two brothers of a family of 13 children, two daughters and 11 sons. They were not related to us, we did not acknowledge any relationship between us. Then there was a third Ticho, Max Ticho senior. To distinguish it from my father, Max Ticho junior, who was the son of George Ticho, who also did not acknowledge any relationship to the other two Ticho families. During the occupation of Czechoslovakia, there came to Boskovice, another man of the name Ticho, a tailor who lived in Vienna, but originated in Boskovice, and then came to Boskovice, my father's cousin, from a little town called Switofka, and these were all the Tichos, as far as I remember. But I met in Vienna, another Ticho, his name was Franz Ticho, a tailor, who came f -- or his parents came

from Marish-Ostra -- Morifska-Ostrava, to Vienna. That is all I can tell you about th-the Ticho roots in Boskovice.

Q: Wa-Was your father born in Boskovice?

A: My father was born in Boskovice, yes.

Q: Your grandparents?

A: Also, Joseph Ticho.

Q: So you -- you would be pretty certain then, that you are ru -- descended from the Tichos who were --

A: I -- I am convinced of that, that my roots go back into that Ticho family, which was mentioned in that little chronic.

Q: Have you been back to Boskovice?

A: Once, yes, after the Communists left -- were expelled f-from the government in Czechoslovakia, I went back. I was there. I went to the cemetery, I went to -- to see the city, I was with my high school chums, we had the dinner together -- rather, a lunch together. It was a nice meeting.

Q: High school chums meaning non-Jews, or -- or survivors?

A: They were non-Jews, yeah, there was -- there were no Jews left. As a matter of fact, some 443 people, if I am exactly to the -- to the exact number, were deported on March the 14th and 15th, 1942. Of those, seven came back alive. The Hanak family, with Mr. Horace Hanak, his wife Greta, and their daughter Vera, they survived in Theresienstadt, because he was maintaining the water works, or work -- or works -- worked on the maintenance of the waterworks in -- in Theresienstadt, and the Germans needed the water

for themselves, is where three people. The fourth was a Mrs. Clara Stickelmacher, who had some kind of a job, and survived, was four. Eric Brill, who lived today in Frankfurt, who survived Dachau. Mitzi Brown, a sister of Mrs. Hanak, who survived Auschwitz and other camps. She is still alive in Bernau today in the capital of Moravia, and myself. And I would like to ask you to incorporate my original family name, so that it would be -- it would be part of my name, like Kurt Ticho Thomas. Thank you.

Q: What was it like to -- we're jumping around chronologically a little bit --

A: Oh, that's alright.

Q: -- but we'll go back and catch things, but while we're on the subject, what was it like to return to Boskovice and meet all of these people who you had been friends with before the war, but who'd suf -- had not -- you know, you -- your pe -- your family had been wiped out, what di -- what was that like?

A: Well, to that point, I want to -- I want to bring out a very pleasant yet painful experience. I came to Boskovice with the -- with the Czech Legion, which I joined in Saragura, in Romania in 1944, in the fall of 1944, and I was home with my unit on May the 12th, 1945. The transport stopped on what they called the Walhoff hill, where the city started. And as we stopped with our trucks, I jumped off the truck, and out came from the first house, a woman. And she looked at me, and recognized me and said, "Where do you come from?" And I says, "I fell down from heaven." And she crossed herselves and run back into the house. When we were f -- in Boskovice for a day or two, the commander of my unit, a Slovak mayor -- major -- major, not mayor, major, came to me and says, "Sargent Ticho, I know that this is your native town. If you want to stay here, you can be

here as long as you want to, just join us, our point is Prague." I says, "Mayor -- Major, I appreciate your offer, but I can't stay here, because when I look around, in the windows where I knew all those people, they are gone. And I rather go with the unit to Prague."

Q: I think we need to back up. You -- Just to remind you of where the last interview ended, you had just talked about, in your video interview, after you had escaped from Sobibór, you found your way back to Piaski, you found your way back to the home of the farmer --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: -- who had been so kind to you.

A: Yeah.

Q: And they hid you again, and -- and you described that you were hiding in -- in a pigsty or a --

A: Yeah, I -- I was on the attic of a pigsty.

Q: Tell me about that year, or however -- how many months was it that you spent there?

A: Well, I escaped from Sobibór on October the 14th, which was a Thursday, 1942. And I slept in the forest called Sobibór. Soba in Polish means an owl, and bor is a forest. Sobibór means actually the forest of the owls. I slept in the forest and the next morning -- no, the same evening yet, Chaim Engel approached me to go with them. When I say with them, with his girlfriend Selma, her name was Weinberg, from Holland. I figured where they are two, the third one with be superfluous, and I thanked them for the offer and I went my own way. W -- I -- I was sorry that my f -- girlfriend, also from -- from Holland, and it was Minnie Katz, did not come out, and I would like to tell you the story what

happened before. A couple days before the uprising, I asked Minnie to get herself boots. And she says, “It’s still warm, what do I need boots for?” So I says, “It might get cold any time now, please get yourself boots.” And she went into the -- into the warehouse where the boots were located and got a pair of boots. I didn’t want to tell her about the uprising to upset her, because I figured, at the time, she will come back into camp one and we will get away together, but unfortunately she didn’t make it. So, that night --

Q: Can I ask you a couple of questions about that before we go on?

A: Go ahead.

Q: You -- You met -- Did you meet Minnie in camp?

A: In camp, yes. Minnie came from Westerbork, from Holland, being discovered in hiding, and that’s how we met. She was a very well educated lady. She spoke Dutch, English, French and German.

Q: And you were able to carry on a -- a courtship with her in the camp?

A: No, after work, we had a f -- a couple hours, so we -- we -- we spent time together. But courtship, you cannot talk of any courtship, it was just th-the be-best we -- we -- we sat together, we talked to each other. When -- We rem-remembered things, and at one time, Minnie said to me, “Do you think that we will come alive out of here?” I says, “Minnie, my brain tells me no. My heart tells me yes.” She was of a very nice background. She told me that her parents sent their money from Holland to England, instead of going themselves. And I believe that none of their relatives survived.

Q: You lived in -- in camp one, in Sobibór, is that right?

A: Yeah, you see, the camp was divided into four parts. Originally three, later on four. Camp one was where the ramp was where the victims were brought in on -- by railroad or through the gate by truck or walking, whatever. And also, it was the living quarters of the Germans. Camp two was the sortier section, where you sorted clothing, and whatever. In camp one there were also all the trademens shops, like tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, goldsmith. People who worked on mechanical things, what-whatever. And in ca -- camp three, was actually the gas ca -- gas chamber and the cremation -- cremation, not chamber, i-it -- it was, as far as I na -- heard, done on roasts, on steel roast, where they burnt the people. And then later o --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: Go ahead.

A: It was in 1943, probably in the early summer, when the Germans established another working s -- working spot, or whatever you want to call it, where mostly women were employed in cleaning ammunitions of the enemies -- of the, in our case, of the Russians. That was camp four.

Q: Okay. I want to ask you something about that, because you mentioned the -- the women cleaning ammunition --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- in connection with the uprising --

A: Right, right.

Q: -- and -- and the plans for the uprising. And I'm interested in hearing more about how you knew about the plans for the uprising. Y-You --

A: Well, one day, a fellow of the name Feldhandler, I forgot his first name now --

Q: Leon.

A: -- came -- came to me -- do you -- what did you say?

Q: Leon.

A: Leon Feldhandler came to me and asked me whether I would be willing to cooperate in an uprising which is being organized. I says, "Leon, I am risking my life every day by cheating on the Germans in s -- in stealing medications and covering up for sick people. I will do anything what is necessary, but I would not like to go into any meetings." Now, for the uprising, they also wanted the women to bring hand grenades, but they didn't bring them the first day and they were afraid to bring them the second day, and so the definite date for the uprising was set for October the 14th, because a day or two later, Sharführer Wagner, the most brutal, and I would say the -- the -- the most intelligent one -- not by education, but by s -- by nature, by character, was coming back and we didn't want him to be there. We wanted -- wan -- wim -- we wanted to do it before he came back. So that wa -- that was the day, Thursday, October the 14th, at four o'clock. It started before four o'clock already.

Q: Let me ask you this. I had been reading in -- in the book by Yithzak Arad, are you familiar with the -- the book on Sobibór --

A: No, no.

Q: Belzec, Treblinka. Well, he mentions in this book that the -- that the uprising was postponed, that it was originally planned for October 13th, and it was postponed for the 14th.

A: No, it -- it originally planned for the 12th. 12th and 13th, and the 14th and we did it.

Q: So I'm -- I'm interested in hearing more of the details of how -- how you knew what you knew. Did -- Did Feldhel-handler keep you abreast of what was going on --

A: No, no.

Q: -- even though you weren't in the meetings?

A: No, I did not get any information from any more, but the news leaked through and I knew that we are preparing to get hold of the -- what they called wuffencummer, which is the chamber of weapons, which was a wooden building in -- in the what they called four lager, in the -- that part of part of camp number one, before you got into the -- that part where we slept and where the artisans had their shops. And once we get hold of the weapons, we will walk out like a armed unit, and that would have been the end.

Q: So it was your impression that the prisoners in general, knew about the uprising and that most people were aware of --

A: I -- I would say that it leaked through. How many knew, I have no idea. For instance, Minnie Katz did not know, because otherwise she would have probably done something, and I didn't tell her. I feel guilty about it, but I can't change that any more. And there must have been -- there must have been some people of non-Polish, or non-Russian ethnicity, who probably did not know what was going on, because the -- the uprising was

entirely in the hands of one Russian officer, and a group of Polish -- other Polish Jews, and they didn't trust anybody else. They treated me as an exception.

Q: Why do you think that was?

A: Because I proved through my behavior that I'm not a traitor, that I was helping anybody who needed help and I could do anything for him. By which I mean -- I believe it was in March -- end of March or beginning of April, 1942, when Dr. Subeese, Dr. Nink, and Dr. Breslev. Breslev was Polish, Nink and Subeese were Dutch physicians. Breslev was a specialist for dentistry, but he was still an MD. In Europe you had to become an MD and then specialize in dentistry. And th-these men came to me and told me they heard a rumor that the Germans will allow the Jews to be sick for three days. And they said, "Providing that would happen, we would like you to take on the job." I says, "Okay." It didn't take long, and during the appelle, Chaffearal Fransel, I guess, who I testified in Hagen, two times and once in Frankfurt, I believe -- Frankfurt or col -- Cologne? I don't know now, which one of the two cities -- told us that they are looking for somebody who will take care of the sick. And I raised my hand and he said, "What kind of a qualification do you have, or how -- how can you do that?" So I lied to him and I told him that I was a sanitary non-com officer, in the Czechoslovakian army, and I got the job. Now since I knew that Jewish people can be sick now for three days, as soon as somebody was not able to go to work -- prior to the point of course, if you couldn't be able to -- if you were not able to go to work, they took you what they called in the -- into the Lazarette, and they shot you. Pardon me. So I wrote down, for instance, Arwin Donohue got sick on June the 22nd. So you -- w-we --were legally sick, allowed to be

sick, 22 - 23 - 24. On the 25th and you still were sick, I threw that old card away and wrote a new one. And that's h-how --

Q: How did you throw it away, did you have to burn it, or did you --

A: I didn't -- That -- That was my own -- my own invention, my own set up, nobody told me. But it was good that I had it, because at each appelle, at noon time and in the evening, they counted us. And they knew, as an example, that they say are 480 inmates. Now, they counted and they've howd -- only 472. So the -- then they said, "Kurt, how many sick?" I said, "Eight." In most cases, they accepted my number, but sometimes they went to the barracks and all the sick one had to come out, to double check, and that Fransel did it that way, and Wagner, he never let them come out, but I had to come with him to the door of the barracks and call the name, and the sick one had to answer, to make sure that there is no cheating. Now, through my function, actually, I'd had to save my life. There was a fellow of the name Leon Friedman, he cames from washa -- Warsaw. A ve-very nice young fellow, maybe 19 - 20 years old. He developed -- but I told you this story already.

Q: Yeah, this is on the -- this is on the other tape.

A: So why should -- why should I repeat it?

Q: Yeah, yeah. I didn't want to interrupt you. But, let me see. You did tell that story, you -- you, and we're just kind of filling in on a few things that -- that I was interested in hearing more details about. And one was, so you -- you mentioned about the -- the women with --

A: Who were supposed to be [indecipherable]

Q: -- who were supposed to be --

A: Yeah.

Q: Was that something that had just filtered out in the same way?

A: I doubt it. That I doubt.

Q: How did you learn about that?

A: I found out about that when they postponed for the first time, the uprising -- the date of the uprising, why it was postponed. But I don't remember who told me, that I don't know.

Q: Okay, okay. I had read something -- the reason that I'm asking about that is I had read something that said that the date was postponed because there were a group -- an unexpected group of SS officers, from Osova, who came into the camp, and that was the reason why it was postponed. Do you think that could have anything to do with it?

A: I ha -- I -- I remember something about that, but I don't remember any more. I couldn't give you any detail, I would only made up a s -- make up a story, I don't want to do that.

Q: That's fine, that's fine. Okay, you talked about your escape. I had one more question about Minnie. How did the SS and the camp personnel respond to romances, relationships, inside the camp?

A: They were not, at the time -- First of all, it was not during working hours. After appelle, after we came back from work and we are counted once more. I don't know whether we were counted after work, in the evening or not, I don't remember now. But anyhow, we got our coffee, and 10 people got a loaf of bread and maybe some

marmalade, whatever, out of beets. That was the end. There was no German with us any more, in -- on camp number one. And by nine o'clock we had to be in our barracks to go to sleep, and that -- that was the end. But say from seven til nine, although I was busy with working on people who had cuts, or bruises, whatever, you know, with bandages, and -- and so forth, dispensing aspirin, whatever. That was the time when we could associate among ourselves.

Q: So you -- you had a little bit of --

A: A little bit of --

Q: -- freedom and leeway in that.

A: -- yeah, yeah, in that. As a matter of fact, I would say today, in retrospect, that it was the German's negligence that it -- that the u -- that the uprising happened at all. Th-They were so -- so content with that -- wi-with the run of the mill, that that was not -- not enough, I would say, diligence on their part, for which I am very happy, although they were still brutal in killing. But i-in other words, I would say they -- they missed something, th-they -- otherwise, it couldn't have happened. I mean, it was very cleverly put together, how to -- how we got rid of the first of the -- all 11 of the SS men, you know. But somehow, there was something missing on the diligence, on the -- to find out what's going on among the Germans.

Q: Another question related to the uprising. You mentioned when Leon Feldhandler came to you --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and asked you --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- if you would be involved.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you said that you -- you were involved in being a medic and that that was enough of -- of a risk and you didn't want to t-take that chance. How did he respond, did he accept that? Was he understanding?

A: He accept it without any -- without any remark. When we -- we parted, we were ver -- on a very friendly basis, respecting each other.

Q: Okay. I had asked you early on -- you described in the first interview how -- how you escaped and how it happened that you and -- and Otto --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Came to return to -- to the farmer's home. Can you tell me -- First of all, you mentioned that you and Otto parted ways. Did you -- Do you remember that moment of making the decision to -- to go on your own way, and f -- and to separate from him?

A: No, no, that is a misunderstanding. When we arrived, on Monday the 18th, on the -- on the outskirts of that little village, Selishkey, we set down in a ditch, because it was still daytime, and the -- the dusk was coming in. And I told him under the w -- on the way, under those -- during those four days, the whole set up with the farmer, his family life, and what I did there, and gave him a complete information. As a matter of fact, I gave him even some money on the way that if he would have chance to buy something, that he would have some money. I then, when it got dark, I simply decided, "You wait here, and I'm going to find Pocharlie's house." And as I walked maybe 20 - 30 steps, there is the

barn of his estate. So I passed the barn, and there was the dog, Caesar on a chain, and he licked my hands when I came to him, he recognized me. And then I walked down to the house. Excuse me, I have to powder my nose.

Q: About --

A: Oh yeah, I stopped --

Q: You mentioned you were -- you went and, Caesar, the dog [indecipherable]

A: Yes, I went into the yard, and opened the little gate of -- which was surrounding their thatched roof house, and looked into the kitchen through the kitchen door, where they were eating dinner, and on a -- with a petrol lamp. And a little while later -- it was pitch dark, it was a cloudy day -- cloudy -- cloudy night -- a little while later, the homeworker -- his name was Joseph, opened the door and went down the two or three steps to the gate and left, didn't see me. And it dodn -- didn't take long, and the farmer came out on the usual routine, to check the barn, whatever, and let the dog loose. And as soon as he opened the door, I whispered, "Koss padashu." That means in Polish, farmer, but it's -- it's a title at the same time. And he recognized me immediately, and he says. "Where do you come from?" And I says, "I escaped from a camp and I came to save my life with you." And he says, "Marno." That means in vain. And then he says, "Come with me." And --

Q: W-Why do you think he said that, in vain?

A: Because he probably wasn't ready to -- to keep me. And then, as we walked toward the -- this stable, the horse stable and the cow stable, he said to me, "I owe you some money." From that you can see what an honest person he was. I sold him a suit in which

he took a picture with his wife. I have that pic -- I have that picture, and I says, “I don’t need any money, I have some money.” And then he says, “But allete samiastish.” That means, but you are alone, with an emphasis on the but. And I said, “Yes.” Because I figured out right away if I would have tell -- told him that we are two, that my chances would be even smaller. Today I know that I was thinking of Otto, but he was thinking of Emmie, my friend from Piaski, who once in awhile came out onto his farm in summer, and sunned herself on the lawn someplace, and then in the evening we went back together into the ghetto. And he wanted probably to know whether Emmie is with me. That -- That’s where the misunderstanding, and it came into my mind only much later. Anyhow, we came to that stable. He says to me, “You wait here,” and went out and locked it from the outside -- the door from the outside. I couldn’t get out. After awhile he came back. Brought me a bottle of hot -- hot tea, or hot coffee, if you may -- want to call it coffee, it was chicory with milk. And the bread, which they baked every Monday, for the whole week, but they break fo -- they bake one loaf of sweet bread, and then I told you, I believe, in this story, too, which was a mixture of poppy seed and sugar beets and white mea -- white flour, while the rest of the bread was rye -- wy -- was rye bread, dark rye bread. So that he gave me, and he spread on the f -- on the floor, in the straw there, a little home-woven carpet and said, “I come to see you in the morning,” and locked the door from the outside, and that was it. I had no way to get back to Otto. Early in the morning, he took me -- he opened the door from the stable and took me across the ya -- across the yard in the barn and says, “Crawl up there someplace and hide.” Which I did. In the afternoon, when I was really rested, I came down, and later on, Mrs. Pocharlie came with

another bottle of hot tea and two big slices of rye bread with lard. And that was the first food I had on that day. And she told me that at night, partisans came and wanted their bicycle. So I put one and one together and figured that I told Otto that Toidya, their daughter, Theodora, commutes on a bicycle from Selishky to Piaski, where he -- where she worked. And he must have been -- come into touch with them. That is my theory, but I believe it makes sense. When I came back after the war, I tried to find Otto, whether he came back into his native town of Chabeetch, in Moravia, but nobody knew of him, so he must have perished during the war.

Q: Do you think about him?

A: Yeah, I think about him once in awhile, but I didn't know him too much. He came into the camp, maybe only with the last transport from Bialystok, which must have been two or three weeks before the uprising. There came a few Czech people, he was one of them, a fellow of the name Shtasni was another one, and otherwise, I -- I don't remember any more. But hi -- While he were -- While we were already in the forest, he just came to me, and he says, "I'll go with you." And that's how it happened.

Q: Tell me more about the time that you spent in hiding. How long were you in hiding in that pigsty?

A: I was in hiding from Friday -- no, from Monday, October the 19th, until the very end of July. And I know it was the very end of July, because my late sister's birthday was the 20 - 24th. I knew the date once in awhile, because my farmer threw up to me, a paper which he bought in Piaski, whenever he went to Piaski. And that gave me the date, and I knew when a Sunday was, because there was quiet on the -- on the yard. Th-The pe --

The f -- The farmers did not work on that day. So I knew on the 24th -- the 24th of July, I believe was a Saturday. I would like to check this out that I am right. And on that day, on that day, a tank went through the yard, which was the way into the fields, and also to the main road to Piaski. And I remember being in the straw there, I hear a noise coming closer and closer until everything was shaking. And I went through to the straw roof and looked through my little peephole, and there I saw a tank going through and leaving. That was the 24th of July, I believe, on m-my sister's birthday. I would like to check whether it was really a Saturday. And then, a few days later -- then there was shooting, and whatever, which I dis -- already mentioned in my report originally -- in the interview. The --

Q: Actually, we don't have anything in your interview on this -- on this time, so --

A: No?

Q: Yeah, you -- you [indecipherable] into details.

A: Then I will -- Then I will tell you what happened.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: A few days before that tank already came, I could hear far away, artillery shooting, artillery cannon. Then later on, I could also hear machine guns. And then that -- one day that tank went through and a day later, I believe, I see a commotion in the yard from my vanta -- vantage point on the attic of the pig sty, from which I could see almost the whole length of the yard, not what was beyond me on the side where the barn was, where the barn started, but down there, yes. And there I see that my farmer, in a hurry, is putting the horses i-into the wagon and she was bringing out stuff of the ho -- from the house, to load

it on the -- on the cart. And then suddenly I could hear bzzzz, like a whistle, and then an explosion, and that was a sharpnel. And the farmeress stood there with a mug in her hand, and when she heard that noise, she crossed herself and got really pale and was beside herself. And her husband -- and they were a nice couple, he came to her and he says, "Those," -- I could hear it, "Those which you can hear, they are not dangerous. Those which you don't hear, they can kill you." By wi -- By which he mine -- m-meant that those which he hears, they are flying far away. And then they disappeared. Now, from Toidya I have later found out that they spent two days in the forest, hiding. And after they came back one morning, I can hear a noise, a commotion on the yard. No, before that, pardon me, I-I am -- I am going too far ahead. Then a group of Germans -- soldiers came into the yard and disappeared within three or four hours. As a matter of fact, there were U-Ukrainians among them, mostly Ukrainians. And one of them opened the door to the shack, from which you then could get up onto the roof of the -- of the pigsty, and was looking around there what's going on, and I s -- I -- how do we say, crawled on my stomach to the edge. Luckily, he didn't hear me, and when I saw him, it was a Ukrainian soldier, one of those who actually guarded us in the camp. I slowly, but without any -- causing any noise, retreated and -- back, so that he wouldn't see me.

Q: You mean one of the actual s-soldiers? One of the same people?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Really?

A: And I can tell you, I heard my -- my heart poin -- pounding in ma -- in my -- I remember that like today, that it was the lucky day, because that was the crucial time.

Shortly after that, the Russians came. And he then left -- And then they left. Suddenly that -- the -- got a command and they left. They were retreating. Then one morning, I look out, and I can see a lot of commotion again in the yard, and there were carriages there, with one horse between two like wooden shafts, with little carts. And there were -- the soldiers were mostly women, big busted, short women. They were Russian women soldiers, who now were in the yard. And I think that they disappeared either the same day, or the next morning. And then my farmer came to me and says to me, “Don’t come down yet. Wa -- Let’s wait a couple days or so.” Which, I was a -- wh-which I agreed upon. And then when he told me, then I came down and left -- or when I -- when I came down, we star -- we stood at -- it was around noon time, we stood at the barn. And he says to me, “You know,” he knew that I wanted to fight the Germans, “there’s a Czech legion someplace. It is in pon -- Pordales Pordalsk. There you could join them.”

Q: Stop here and flip the tape, change.

End of Tape One Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is tape number two, side A, of an interview with Kurt Thomas.

A: Kurt Ticho Thomas.

Q: Kurt Ticho Thomas.

A: Thank you.

Q: I'm trying to --

A: I think I stopped telling that I came down and we stood together at the barn. And Mr. Pocharlie told me that there is a Czech legion, with headquarters in Communist Poldalsk, which is, I think the Ukraine. And I thanked him for saving my life, and I was sorry that his wife wasn't there. And I told him, "You raised yourself a son." And I hugged him, and I left. He had -- Oh yeah, pardon me, he also told me, "Don't go through the village," which is characteristic of the situation as he knew it. And he said, "Because, if they would know that I saved a Jew, they would not -- they would now kill me." And by that he meant his -- his villagers, which is another proof how deep the anti-Semitism was imbedded in the Polish population, generally. Although my -- my lifesaver was an exception. And I think these exceptions should be remembered someplace, so that the stigma of generalization would be punctured.

Q: Was your lifesaver ever honored in any way?

A: Yes. Mr. and Mrs. Pocharlie were named as -- were -- were honored as Righteous Gentiles during a ceremony in -- I believe in Warsaw, on my -- on my re-request.

Q: Are they i-in yadva -- by Yad Vashem?

A: By Yad Vashem, yes, by Yad Vashem. As a matter of fact, I have seen the tree with their -- with -- with the little what is it, the little metal plate where their names are listed, and they are -- their name is also listed among the maybe 15 or 1800 Polish Righteous Gentiles who saved Jews. And by the way, I want to mention that there are more Jews saved by Poles than by any other nationality, at least in Yad Vashem, at the time I was there. There was not one, as far as I remember, mentioned from the Czechoslovakia. There might be some, but I haven't seen them.

Q: So do you think that it's -- So often we'll hear about the anti-Semitism of Polish people. You -- Do you think that that's exaggerated?

A: No, it is not exaggerated. It is actually and unfortunately a truth, a sad truth. But there were a few who were -- very few, who had character, who had compassion and courage. This is what ven -- was needed. You know, the Mrs. Pocharlie always addressed me Mister. These people treated me unbelievably respectfully. I did my best to work for them, but I think in that respect, they are an ec -- an exception to any other savior.

Q: How do you -- Di -- Have you tried to explain that to yourself? How it is that they came to be the way that they --

A: They're -- They're -- They were just plain very, very nice [indecipherable] noble people. You know that he -- After I had to leave their farm because the Germans gave orders at the end of October, that no Jew can work out of the ghetto any more, and I -- when I came -- before I came back, she told me I should hide behind the farm, and when everything will quiet down, f -- I should b -- I come back out again and that we will kill a pig and eat pork and cabbage during the winter, then in spring the Mister will be able to

work with us a-again. But, in spite of that, I went back to the ghetto, and while I was going back to the ghetto, there was a Polish peasant with a bicycle and he was intoxicated, he was drunk, and couldn't use the bike, so he used it more as a support and he s -- yelled to me, he says, "Jakog dat yadesh," Jewboy, where are you going? And I says, "I am going to the ghetto." He says, "Don't go into the ghetto, they'll kill you." That was his warning to me. While I was a few days in the ghetto, somebody told me that I should come to the fence, to the barbed wire fence. And when I got there, I see my farmer with his horses alongside, and as ha -- as soon as he spotted me, he lifted a s -- burlap sack and threw it with a heave over the fence, and took his whip and he whipped the horses to get away. He gave me in that sack, I found a lard and potatoes. And if anybody would have seen him on the German side, I wouldn't be here, and he wouldn't -- and he wouldn't have lived to the end of his days and died of a normal life. That's how cor -- courageous and loyal he was to me.

Q: Tell me about your contact with him after the war and -- and what became of -- of them, and of your contact with their daughter.

A: A-After the war, I didn't have any contact at all. I left Czechoslovakia at the end of January of 1948, or -- or -- or middle of '48, yeah, for England and sailed on the Queen Mary from Portsmouth, and arrived in the Uni-nited States on February the fourth, 1948. On the boat I wrote a card, or a letter, to the Pocharlies, and forgot all about it, until Toidya, with who I am still in touch, told me that she would like to find that piece of mail, but she never can find it. And then I started to correspond with -- with them in Polish and in Czech, and they answered in Polish and then later on, the Pocharlies gave

up their farm and moved to Lublin to the daughter, and there they died. And then the son-in-law started to study English and from then on, we started to correspond in English.

Q: Did the son-in-law study English so that he could communicate with you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Was that his motivation?

A: That's what -- That's what I understand that he did it, because of that. Maybe he had other -- Maybe he had other reasons, too, but to me he learned English, because he wanted to help his wife to stay in touch with me and make it easier.

Q: You mentioned that at first you were communic -- you were writing to them in Czech and they were writing to you in Polish?

A: Yeah.

Q: How did you communicate to each other verbally?

A: Polish, because I learned a little Polish while I was in Poland, and it's a Slavic language, and I had a -- I think I have some talent for languages, so I caught on. As a matter of fact, while I worked on th -- first on the farm and then later on for him, at noon time, we took those things which we smuggled out of the ghetto of Piaski, to sell them in the village. So we went from house to house and we started to talk to the people and that's how we learned a little more Polish.

Q: Going back to the issue of la -- or staying with the issue of language for a little while, you mentioned in your first interview that your -- your father was a German n -- speaker.

A: Yeah.

Q: And that you spoke -- you learned German in the home and you learned other languages as well, and it sounded as if Boskovice was -- had a lot of German speaking among the Jewish community there.

A: Yeah.

Q: What -- Did you speak German in the home?

A: Yeah, we spa -- spoke German in the home and I will give you the historical reasons for this. Mora -- Czechoslovakia was originally part of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy. And the Jewish people were very grateful to the -- to Franz Joseph, I believe, who came out in 1848, with some rights for the Jews. And one of the -- one of the strings attached were that the Jews have to go to Jewish school -- to German schools, to help Germanize the non-German speaking regions. Now, Boskovice was about 8,000 people, of which there were probably 350 - 400 Jews. There were more deported, because many came from other towns at the time of the deportation, to Boskovice. So we spoke at home -- my father had only Jewish -- German schooling. My mother had German and Hungarian schooling, because she came from Slovakia, which was under the jurisdiction of the Hungarians. And I considered myself a pure Czechoslovakian because my mother was Slovak and my father was Czech. I am the only Czechoslovakian who escaped and survived Sobibór. I don't know how we came to this. Yeah, the -- the historical reason why we -- we spoke German, but in 1918, when Czechoslovakia was formed and I was four years old, there was still a German school. But in 1920, the German school was closed, and by the way, it was not attended only by Jewish children, z -- but also by some Gentile children, whose parents wanted them to learn German.

Q: Did anyone in the Jewish -- Did you speak any Yiddish in your family?

A: No, no. We didn't talk any Yiddish at all, we spoke only German, and I went to Czech schools and then later on, we spoke Czech at home. But originally, my mother language was German.

Q: Was the Jewish community in Boskovice generally pretty assimilated? Did they not speak Yiddish or Hebrew?

A: Nobody spoke Yiddish in the community, with the exception I know, that our cantor, Mr. Gross, he spoke with his wife, Yiddish. And I really don't remember whether the rabbi spoke with his wife Hungarian. He came from Slovakia and he had Hungarian schooling. Or, whether he talked with her j -- Yiddish, I don't remember that. But the Boskovice Jewish population spoke only German, and had only German schools.

Q: And did your father idealize Germany in any way, or was he germ -- did he -- you mentioned that he spoke German, did he also feel --

A: He was politically an organized member of the Austrian German Social Democratic party. We had in our home, pictures of Victor Adler, who I think was the head of the Social Democratic party in -- in Vienna, and another one, Shoemayer was his name. I remember the names and these pictures were in our house and my father was a devoted German S-Social Democrat.

Q: Was he very shocked by the developments in Germany after the rise of Nazism?

A: Well, he was not only shocked, disappointed and -- but what could he do, I mean, there were many more people who considered themselves Germans, or were in the sense of Hitler's, real Germans, and still did not go along with national Socialism.

Q: Did you -- Did you --

A: But they did not -- nobody ever thought that it will come to a organized extermination of the Jewish people. Nobody ever thought of that. As even I, I found out only when I got to Sobibór, after a day or two, what's happening.

Q: That must have been an incredible shock.

A: It was, it was. As a matter of fact, for about two or three days, I didn't want to talk German. And I don't know -- I think I mentioned it in my a -- interview in Washington, D.C., after I was taken out from the ranks of those who arrived that day, around 3,000 we were, fr -- between the ghetto from Piaski and Izbitsa, they asked for textile experts and I raised my hand and I was taken out. And in the afternoon, I was already sorting the clothing of those who came with me.

Q: Yeah, you did talk about that.

A: But before I even start working, while we were getting soup, I see there a girl who was with my in Piaski and worked with me in Selishky, on that -- on the estate of that Polish nobleman who fled to England. His name was Bertha Collek. The same name as the long-standing -- long and well-known mayor of Jerusalem. That was Teddy Collek, and her name was Bertha Collek. And her father happened to be the mayor in a little village not far from Bernau, in Dumborshitz. And she came to me and I says, "Bertha, what's going on here?" And she says, "Kurt, be happy that you are here. The other people will have it much worse than we here." And with that she left with tears in her eyes.

Q: How did you find -- I mean, realizing what was going on, that you were in a death camp and that -- that you were just being kept alive for economic reasons, how did you find the -- what gave you the will to -- to survive at that point?

A: Well, you remember when, under Eisenhower's government, when Kruschev was in Russia at that time, the political boss, we had a spy in the air in a -- in a drone plane like. I forgot his name now. That man was -- landed -- I think he was shot down and landed alive. He had with him cyanide pills, I believe, to finish his life, but he didn't. And Kruschev at that -- that time said, "Shtoji ott, horchesi ott." Whatever is alive, wants to be alive. And that was with me and with all those others in the camp, too. We hoped that it will not u -- be us. Gary Powers, I think was the name of that f -- of that pilot. You remember the -- the thing, no?

Q: No. Tell me about -- we were just talking about your father and your -- and his political orientation.

A: Yes.

Q: And I -- I had -- it reminded me of a question that I had. You mentioned that at one point, he was arrested early on in the war.

A: Oh yes, he was arrested and they wanted him to inform about the Gentile population.

Q: Do you know what made them think that he knew anything about that?

A: Well, he had -- he was close with -- with a few Gentile people, and I believe that one of the Germans, local Germans, told the SS that my father might be the one who would be able to give them some information. The man I think who I have in mind was Estelberger. And that is a very, very characteristic story. Before 1918, there were actually

two political entities in Boskovice. One was the Jewish community and the other one was the non-Jewish community. We had our own mayor, and our own police department. And the policeman was this Mr. Estelberger, who was brought in from Austria to become the Jewish policeman in Boskovice. That guy became a good Nazi, and I believe that he gave the Gestapo the information about my father. He didn't survive the war. I -- I think that he committed suicide. He had a daughter who had a son, his name was Alphonse Beçka, B-e-c-k-a, with a little hook on the c. Beçka means a barrel. Mr. Estelberger forced his daughter's husband, his son-in-law, to become Germans, by which the grandson, Alphonse, became -- became liable to serve in the German army, and he lost his life, shortly after the war, in Russia. He paid for being a good German, Mr. -- Mr. Estelberger.

Q: So your father had a reputation for being very s --

A: My father --

Q: -- socially integrated?

A: -- We -- He had Ge-Gentile friends, customers. For instance, one o-o -- was the man who distributed cigarettes for the city and the vicinity and that does -- that was a position which you could get only when you were an invalid, a veteran after the first World War. And that was a Mr. Kosheneck. And -- And Julius Kosheneck had a reputation of being the most unfriendly person you can find, but he was very friendly with my dad. And o -- one day, I remember, during the war, he brought a piece of pork to my mother and ask her to prepare it for him with spices and pepper, you know. And he did it and he brought it back to him in his -- in his store, whatever. I didn't know anything about it. When I came back after the war, I went into this Mr. Kosheneck's store. And I said hello and we

talked a little bit. And then I says -- And then he offered me whether I would need leather for soles. I says, “Thanks, Mr. Kosheneck, I don’t need any.” And then he says, “I also could give you hen -- honey.” Because he was a beekeeper, that was his hobby. I says, “Thanks again,” and I want to say goodbye, he says, “Just a minute.” And he says, “Pull out the drawer from that desk.” I pulled out the drawer, there was nothing in it. He’s, “Now, put your hand into the opening, and to the left.” And there was another opening -- ano-nother drawer, another handle, I pull this out, and there were a few jewels which my father left with him. That’s how decent the man was. There were other people where I took stuff of ours, and either got back half, or nothing. But that was the unfriendly Mr. Kosheneck, you know? He had character and he was decent.

Q: I don’t think you actually mentioned in the first interview, what your father’s profession was.

A: My father was an agent. He represented insurance companies. He also represented a s -- manufacturers who supplied -- who made linings for the local ready to wear industry, and buttons. That’s what he did.

Q: So you were following in his footsteps?

A: No, I was working with a friendly family, who manufactured clothing.

Q: Yeah, you did --

A: A fellow --

Q: -- you did talk about it.

A: And I mentioned that when I saw the wedding picture and the picture of the three little girls, in Sobibór, I -- I’m sure I mentioned that.

Q: Now that I don't think you mentioned.

A: I did not?

Q: The wedding picture of -- of whom?

A: Of Ilsa Bruell, my boss's daughter, oldest daughter and Ziegfried Lerfber, who he married during the war already.

Q: Okay. What was your boss's name?

A: Karl Bruell, B-r-u-e-l-l. If I didn't mention this, then this is a big omission that is very interesting. One morning, when I went from camp one, into camp two, to pick up some drugs -- I was allowed to get cotton, iodine and salves. As I go -- walk through the lawn there, whatever tha -- it was, there I see a little pile of clothing. And as I got closer and to it, I see on top two pictures. One was the wedding picture of Ilsa Bruell and Ziegfried Lerfber, my friends. And the other picture was of Ilsa Bruell and her two younger sisters, Ruth and Lydia. And then there was that little -- pardon me -- that little pile of clothing. So I knew that they came at night, and they were shot right away, of course, and had to undress and they left it there. Now, when I came back to Boskovice, the father of the three girls, Karl Bruell, survived because his second marriage as to a Gentile woman. And I slept in his house and he asked me when he can expect his children. And I told him, "You have to be patient." I couldn't tell him what I know -- what I knew. He died in '47, I think. Yeah, '46 or '47.

Q: Tell me more about th -- your parents. We -- We never got much of a sense of your relationship with them.

A: Oh [inaudible]. Well, we had a very nice family life. My mother was the most loving mother I could imagine. They were tolerant people, liberal people, understanding people. I had a very nice relationship with my sister. It was a -- We were a very nice family. And we were five years apart. She was born 19 nine -- six years -- nine -- 1919, I was born 1914, five years apart.

Q: And her name was?

A: Maryann.

Q: You -- There was something that -- that you had written in a letter to the Holocaust museum that you wanted to mention in your first interview, about your parents, and -- and one -- one story about your mother telling you something about crying, do you recall? She said -- I don't want to -- I want to hear the story from you, but it -- but it had to do with we should not let them see us cry.

A: Oh, yeah. And then, let's not forget about the taw my father was called to the Gestapo, to Bernau, and when he came back home, at the first interview, he was mistreated. And he had to come back one week later, and my mother went with him. And the Gestapo says to -- the Gestapo man says to my wif -- to mother, "What are you doing here?" Says, "He is my fa -- my husband, and I want to be with him." And they kick both of them out and sent them back. Now my mother told us in the ghetto, when we were in desperation, we had nothing to eat, we had -- just miserable, "They never must see us cry." By that she mean -- meant the Germans. That's what a person she was.

Q: And you took that to heart --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- very much. Did you -- Did you ever cry for her, or mourn for her, with tears?

A: I really do not remember. I do not remember, but I probably did, but I couldn't tell you any instance, but I only know that in 1942, when I already knew -- no, 1943, when I already knew that they were murdered and let -- and -- and ended their lives in Sobibór, I lit a candle in memory of them, which is a Jewish what you call it? Not habit, a Jewish --

Q: Tradition?

A: Tradition. To light a candle for a deceased.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: Tape two, side B, of an interview with Kurt Ticho Thomas.

A: I brought something out here, which I didn't publish yet. In April of '90 -- '98, I got an inquiry from the directory of the museum from Boskovice. Among other things he asked, he says in his letter, "In the Czech Republic with -- with it's growing racism, it is very important steadily to remind what happened in the first half of the f-forty -- for -- year -- f -- 40th years." And I answered him then, all his questions, in a 14 page long letter. But I want to tell you only what would be interested to this interview, regarding the position of -- of the Jewish people. Just a minute. You may stop it, because -- The magister -- Trimisal Ribel is his name -- is the -- is the director of the museum in Boskovice. I answered to him with regard to the racism which he is mentioning in the letter to me. "In your letter you mention racism and the need to remind the public what happened during the Hitler's reign. I concur with you completely, but I have to call to your attention on circumstances responsible and -- and enabling the operation. I will

never forget and never forgive the generation of Germans who so heartily supported Hitler and his volunteers. All across Occupied Europe, the unhuman murderers actions against helpless -- helpless and innocent victims, of Jews. The reasons of which nobody mentions anything to doe -- today, go deep into history. As a survivor of the Holocaust, I have the obligation to witness -- to be a witness, not only against the known executioners of six million innocent people, but especially on the" -- [indecipherable] name. Hold on please.

Q: Sure.

A: "On the unresponsible -- unresponsible propagation of hatred toward the Jews by the church and it's," -- the Franciscans and the Dominicans, what do you call them?

Q: Orders.

A: "Orders. There lies the original guilt. Deeply rooted," -- [inaudible] "rooted prejudice, which were sown and cultivated by the church, which for centuries influenced and infected and poisoned. In God believing, good people of the chris -- of Christian Europe. To survive and to be a witness of the deepest moral [indecipherable], -- deepest moral depth, over the history of mankind, gives me the right of an accuser. Aryans were also -- were also victims of the murdering, but the murders in itself, were all done by nominal Christians. The suffering of un -- The suffering of a -- a -- unre -- un -- unrem -- repentable -- un," -- oh no, not repentable. "The suffering of tremendous losses are steady o -- are steady on my mind. I'm going to bed with them, and I getting up with them after unruly nights. The result of my impotence to stop the cruel injustice, which will be with me to my last death -- to my last -- last" --

Q: Days?

A: No. Oh days, yeah. E --

Q: Breath?

A: Breath, breath. That's what I want to say. "The e -- The -- The," -- take it off, please. "The subconsciously sleeping matzilous or wirus, if awoken," [indecipherable] "is responsible for deep, uncontrolled madness and appears like a black line in the history of European Christianity from generation to generation. What we call today racism, will -- was known for centuries as anti-Semitism." [indecipherable] that means malice. "Ma-Malicious murderers, anti-Jewish hatred did not start with Hitler's arrival on the stage of history. If it would be this way, his defeat would be the logic end of racism. Anti-Semitism is almost as old as Christianity. It's cradle is the church and it's," -- again, th-the word, the organizations.

Q: Order.

A: -- "and the Orders in Europe. Christian Europe looked at the Jews with opo -- opo -- opov -- opover jainy, contempt. Vi -- They were accused an -- without being guilty -- guiltless, and suffered for centuries. They didn't have any rights, only duties. The laws which were guilty -- which applied to Christians, were not appliable to the Jews. They were accused of -- of the murder of Jesus. They were accused of epidemies of infectious sicknesses, of poisoning of wells, of killing Christian children for the -- for their blood, to be used for -- for religious rituals. Without the right of movement, they were excluded from the -- from the f -- general life. The guilds would not accept them. The arbitrary banishment, or -- or pushing them out fr-from their homes, by the -- that time -- that time

political elite -- elite period. Ma-Marriages were allowed only to the oldest son of the family." That was in Austria-Hungary, at least, "for usually -- for usually dues and high taxation, there were -- they got the allow -- they were allowed to be active within mon -- in money business, in finan -- in financing The position of the church, hardened in the minds of the believers in the worthlessness of Jewish life, which is still -- the urge is still noticeable in actions of many believers. They believe and are convicted -- convinced that Jews are sh -- Jews are deser -- are deserving God's punishment. It would take hundreds of pages to depict, to describe all the sufferings, injustices, persecutions, pain and losses of life during the his -- during the ce-centuries, during which the church had an un," -- [indecipherable] church had a "unrestricted power and influence over the population. The brotherly love and hatred against the Jews were simultaneously preached during services from -- from the," -- wherever the priest stands in the church.

Q: Pulpit?

A: "From the pulpit. The infallibility of the church was the justification of any injustice. The worthlessness of a life of a Jew was accepted without exception by God believing and fearing good Christians in the world, of all castes, of all grades . . . It's . . . It's mental and soul," -- what do you call it? You -- You mentioned that name, that word once before.

Q: Spiritual?

A: Spiritual.

Q: Okay.

A: “The mental and spiritual thinking, and -- and per-persuasion, were formed and dependent entirely on the teaching of the church and it’s priesthood.” Now I -- I am going to te -- Martin Luther. “Martin Luther is a classical example how virulent -- how virulent prejudices were just as deeply imbedded in the thoughts of Catholic intelligence, as of it’s,” an alphabet. If -- If you don’t know how to read and write.

Q: Illiterate?

A: “Illiterate l-like l-l-lay people. The German monk protested publicly against the selling of,” -- to forgive. Th-There’s a name for it. Ott pusskey. A selling of -- church was selling, f-for the promise of doing good and forgiving -- forgiving -- forgiving the -- the sinner.

Q: Good deed -- yeah, good deeds, charity?

A: No, but I mean, there is a word for that.

Q: For the forgi -- forgiveness?

A: Yeah, th-there’s another word.

Q: Redemption?

A: No. I -- I -- I’m -- I’m sorry. I should have translated it before you came . . . I -- Yeah, “He -- He protested against the selling and forgiving of -- of sins and of the general decay of the moral quality of the church. The pure teaching of Christ’s was his justification for the f-fight of cleansing. He left the church and became the founder of Protestantism. Being -- Being to death -- condemned to death by the church, he escaped thanks to a German nobleman, who was his partisan. It is interesting that he took with him, the anti-Jewish attitudes, which were -- which were on 96 dissertations, affixed to the door of his

church. Through his rabid anti-Semitic stand, he confirmed the infectiousness of the church. He -- He demanded -- He demanded immediate" -- pardon me -- "christening of Jews." What do you call it wh-when you --

Q: Christening.

A: "Christening of Jews."

Q: Or Baptism.

A: Yeah, "Baptism of Jews, or banishment, or death -- or he -- or their death. Maria Theresia, well known for her deep church ordinast -- loyalty, gave a order to expel all Jews from Prague, only something that -- more than 200 years ago, during a cruel -- during a cruel winter, thousands of Prague citizens left their homes. Hundreds perished during the march, and many more hundreds did not live long enough to come back to their beloved town. Christ's teaching of love and compassion disappeared. S -- In order to save their lives and could -- continue in their faith and traditions, 10 thousands of Jews left, during the Spanish Inquisition, their homes. Their goal was Portugal, whose king, yim -- on whose king promised them haven. On the pressure of the Spanish government and it's emissaries, the king gave up the -- the protection of the exirons. The Jews were dragged onto ships and brought to North Africa, where they were sold as -- as slaves." Do you want me continue?

Q: Well, let's hit pause --

A: The murdering during the Crusades, the Heersnow affair in Moravia, the Dreyfuss affair in France, the pogroms in eastern Europe, have the same background. My friend Joseph Stanyek, who is a Gentile man, writes me from Czechoslovakia, I o -- because I

told him why doesn't he declare himself non-Catholic? And he says, "There is no -- There -- Nobody carries an evidence of Catho-Catholics. Nobody leaves the church. It wouldn't be -- to tell it to somebody, if somebody would like to -- to -- to leave. I am a born Catholic, which during my lifetime, parted because of the behavior of the Catholic hierarchy, who, in all Czech history, did not love the Czech people, the Czech nation, but rather corrupted it. Sho -- They always -- It always went mainly for the power over them, and for the -- for the miatac -- for the -- for the -- what they possess -- possessions. Christ would not enjoy them." Then, I'm writing here about Mrs. Rubenstein, who had that accident -- that episode in the hospital. "Without the hundred -- century old persecution of the church -- of the Jews, it would not have come to the Holocaust. Hitler was not the first initiator of killing Jews. He had very good -- a very good teacher in the actions of the church. All German governments after the war, we -- with -- with a -- with no exception of political -- political s -- parties, starting with Conrad Addenower, accepted publicly, the responsibility for the guilt or the tragedy of the German nation caused by the Nazis. They did not express their sorrow, their sincere sorrow by words only, but by deeds. They returned all political rights and legal -- legal dif -- off -- legal defense. Former -- Former people of German nationality, and their -- and their heirs, through return of possessions and restitution for suffering, and -- and for not being able to get educated and for loss of health, and through big support to build up the state of Israel, defending and protecting religious freedom and through persecuting anti-Semitic propaganda. So Germany was accepted into the circle of civilized nations. The after war period, over 50 years old today, all full of -- full of opportunities for Rome, to ac -- to -- she's not -- to -- knowledge -- for

Rome to acknowledge, and to -- and to atone for the sins which were done to Jews for centuries, did not -- were -- were not done, up to today. Small -- Small -- Small actions didn't have any influence on the thinking of the Christian -- Christianity. The heroic acts of individual Christians, laymen, priests and nuns, are a witness of the sadinbanny -- of the neglected moral duty of an institution whose basis is love of the neighbor, compassion and help those who are -- those who helped save lives of Jews during the war. Infor -- Information of the horrible things which happened on the -- in the -- in Europe, occupied by -- by the Germans, we're s -- being sent from far away, over farmhouses and bishopbrits, to Rome. In spite of the deep hatred against the Germans, for the loss of their freedoms during the occupation, all over, developed and grew, spontaneously friedalik doubleworny" -- stop.

End of Tape Two Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is tape number three, side A, of an interview with Kurt Ticho Thomas, and we're continuing with a letter that he's translating from Czech to English.

A: "In spite of the deep hatred against the Germans, because of their loss of national freedoms and occupation, all over grew" --

Q: The voluntary --

A: -- "volunteers who nachanya -- who enthusiastically supported the murderous actions of Hitler, e -- prove that anti-Semitism, spread by the church, was part of the culture of the Christian public. It is necessary to proclaim that Jesus was a yew -- Jew, that the crucifixation -- the crucifixion was a Roman way of executing to death. The Jews stoned. The permanent -- The permanent -- The permanent destination of one Sunday of the year, by the church, with the purpose of pocanee -- of atonement, through prayers and -- and preachings, for forgiveness of the s-sins of the past, to what their Jewish brothers will be as -- insurance and -- and [inaudible] -- will be a insura -- will be an in-insurance and confirmation of the sincerity of the church's decision, necessary to better the living in lares -- in respect and in peace. Started in February and ended at the end of April, 1999, Kurt Ticho Thomas." Now I got it off my mind. I hope you don't mind.

Q: No. Tell me what -- what the writing of this letter meant to you, and -- and of your process of developing the thoughts that are in it.

A: I tell you, he actually provoked me, because he probably -- he -- he means it well. But I want him to know what caused the idea of getting so rabid against the Jews, and that he, if he -- if he is -- if he is really sincere, should tell the other people, wher -- where the

reasons sit. It is not only the Germans. To the Czech people, it's the Germans, period. But actually, it goes back hundreds of years, and the Czech people too, were influenced by the chur -- by the church, to hate the Jew. That is the reason. And -- And it's logic. And I am -- I'm a person who goes to the root of something, if I can. And there is the root. This is where it is buried, th-the whole -- the whole tragedy of history is buried in the original position of the church, and they still didn't do a thing about it.

Q: Tell me how you came to ha -- develop these thoughts. Did you -- Did you think of it after the war? Was it something that before the war you were thinking about?

A: Before the war I never thought this way. Bes -- Before the war I was liberal thinking, social thinking, [indecipherable] a person of social responsibilities. And I knew there was a friction between the Czech Catholic and the Czech Jew, historically, because we were talking German, and there was a certain -- a certain social envy also, because the Jewish people, in most instances, owned stores, or manufactured, and were more educated than the average non-Jew. An-And so I -- I could understand that, but I tried to overcome this also, by spoke -- speaking only Czech, of course. And Czech history was my history. I hated the Germans, because I was taught in school what they did to the Czechs. And I was one of the Czechs.

Q: So after the war, did you do some reading, or did you do -- was it something that happened during the war that made you --

A: Yeah, reading and hearing. For -- For instance, as of today, the Czech government didn't return 90 percent of what was left after the Jews, only to those who either came back, or to their heirs. There are many, many properties, which nobody claims, because

they were entirely wiped out. But they didn't return anything. I have a friend here in town, whose father owned, with his three brothers, the largest ready-to-wear factory in Prostejov, he can't get a penny. They -- Th-They just are stonewalled. I have a friend who was born in Theresienstadt, his name is Peter Steinlay, he lives here in town .He showed me the picture of his house -- of -- after his father's, and he went there, and the person who lives in it, he says, "I am not giving it back to you." And he -- he wouldn't know where to go, how to get it back. There is a -- a-another fellow in Prosnitz, his name is -- whatever the name is, he -- he tried to claim a house after his parents have -- his father was a doctor -- he can't get no place. That is all there and today when they claim there -- the -- when their -- that they are democrats, baloney. They belong to NATO today, they never should have been accepted even, to NATO, because they live still with Hitler's and Stalin's ideas, at least a great part, and do not give anything back, what they should have done already, years ago.

Q: You're talking about Germans, Germany?

A: Am I -- I'm no -- The Germans did, but the Czechs did not.

Q: Czechs didn't, okay. You were talk -- When you talked in your other interview about your pre-war life in Boskovice --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- your relations with your Czech neighbors were very good.

A: Yeah, I -- I mean, my -- all my friends were not only Jewish kids, but also Gentile kids. As a matter of fact, I res -- correspond today with the one surviving lady who went with me to high school. I am in contact with her. And with a younger lady who is retired,

who I only knew that -- she was a little girl at the time when I was grown up. And then with this Mr. Stanick in Bernau, for whose father I worked during the war, when I couldn't work for my old boss, who was Jewish. So I have still contacts -- Christian contacts, and these people are honest, but they have no influence, they can do nothing.

Q: Do you -- They -- So your -- Are you differentiating between the Czech government and the Czech people?

A: Definitely.

Q: Do you think that Czech -- Do you think the Czech people are more aware, more enlightened?

A: The Czech people -- The Czech people should be led by the government, who would explain to them, "Listen, these were our people. Their properties were stole from them originally, by the Germans. Then they were nationalized or stolen by the Communists, and now we are free and we should have the decency to return it to those who are still alive, or to their heirs, as much as they are around."

Q: Does your experience with Czech people, non-Jews, tell you that they are accepting of that and that their anti-Semitism is not such that they would not recognize their responsibility to do that?

A: No, I had no discussion with anybody. At the time when I was there, I didn't have a discussion, because it was too early, the Communists just left, you know, and I hoped, in my naiveté that everything will be fine, but it wasn't.

Q: Well let's go back to that time, immediately after the war when you're -- you're -- you joined the Czech legion --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and you ended up in -- in Boskovice.

A: Yes.

Q: And your goal -- Was your goal at the time, to fight the Germans?

A: Of -- No, that's why I joined the army. Th-That was my goal, to -- to -- to -- to for -- fight Hitler.

Q: Did you end up in combat?

A: I was with a artillery unit, and they were never up front. Also, I didn't feel -- I was -- I was sickly, actually. I -- I was -- from all those things which I had behind me, the camp and then the hiding, I was -- I was not myself. But luckily, I was with a unit which didn't go into action, and not only that, at that time, the Russians did not use the Czech unit any more, because they wanted to come with some Czechs home, because there was another unit in England, and they didn't want to come with a hundred people. And the English-Czech unit came back with a few thousand, you know. So th-that -- they -- they didn't want to either. So, for that reason, we were somehow protected, toward the end of the ye -- of the war.

Q: What was it like to see again, the townspeople who you had -- you know, you had been put into this ghetto and -- and herded off. Did -- Did anyone say -- Did anyone seem disappointed that you had survived? Was there that kind of experience, or did you --

A: I didn't get your question.

Q: We were talking earlier about the anti-Semitism of the Poles --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and how deep that was.

A: Yeah.

Q: When you returned to Czechoslovakia --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- did you find that these former neighbors, who you had been close with, were --

A: In Czechoslovakia?

Q: In Czechoslovakia.

A: I was disappointed, because there was one who was a very good Catholic, and he had all the silverware of my aunt, who perished in the camp. And she told me that he has it -- she has it with this fellow. I went to him -- Nowordny was his name, he said, “I didn’t even know your -- your aunt.” He denied everything. I mean, i-it was just -- it was a material greed. I didn’t get more than a half of my sister’s dowry back. Linens from a tailor, who also was a very well known Catholic. Kosheneck was also a Catholic. That was the guy who had the -- this -- diversion of cigarettes. He told me, and I didn’t even know -- pardon me -- that there was anything what my father left there, because he didn’t tell anybody. So, I mean, there were two different types of people, that the great majority either didn’t care, or enjoyed it.

Q: But here we’re talking about a place where your family had been for centuries upon centuries --

A: Right.

Q: -- you have very deep roots there.

A: Right.

Q: Did you feel like all of that was erased, or --

A: Not -- Not -- Not when I came back, but when -- while the Communists taking over. And then there was the process against the Jews, if you remember, they were sentenced to death, eight or 10 of them. Honorable Slansky, Rightsin, and [indecipherable]. Then I lost entirely -- I lost entirely my -- my historical connection as a Czech, with the exception of the few people with who I am still in touch. But I disliked the -- the action, I -- I abhorred the action.

Q: Do you still feel that that historical connection is gone? Is it gone forever?

A: To a great extent, it is gone. To a great ec -- ec -- a-a-and I'm angry when I think of the people who can't get anything back, who are there. I have a friend in California. She owned with her brother, a large apartment building in Bernau, in the capital of Czechoslovakia -- oh, Moravia. The brother unfortunately perished, she survived. And it's her property today, because she inherited one half after her brother. She can't even find a lawyer who would take over the case. Originally the lawyer told her that she has difficulties because she became an American citizen. Now, the -- later on, there was some reform in that respect. So she wrote to that lawyer, and she wouldn't even talk on the case any more. It is really miserable.

Q: How long did you stay in Boskovice with the Czech legion?

A: Two or three days, that's all. And then I went to Prague.

Q: What did you do in Prague?

A: Well, then I was discharged, in fall I was discharged, and I went back to Boskovice, and stayed with this Hanark family, who came back. And then I got a job in what they

called the Sudeten, where my father's cousin represented a manufacturer, and this manufacturer happened to be married to a Jewish woman, and he was still in -- in Kernoff, and I went up there and got a job with them. And then they nominated me to become the trustee. And I resigned from the job after a short while, because I didn't feel that it is right, that it should be th -- given to the man whose it was in the first place, and at the same time, there was some Jewish -- an-anti-Jewish grumblings, that the Jew became now the trustee. So I just quit. And then I -- I went to Prague, and from there I went to England and to the United States.

Q: So, originally, in -- in those -- that time immediately following the end of the war --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- did you have thoughts that you would stay in Czechoslovakia permanently?

A: No. As soon as I got in touch with my relatives in America, my uncle and his sister, my aunt --

Q: I'm sorry, this picked up a --

A: Oh, that's okay.

Q: -- noise.

A: That's okay. I -- When I got mail, they offered me an affidavit again, which we had already before the war, but the quota was exhausted, so I couldn't -- you couldn't use it. But then of course, I could feel that the Communists are taking over, which I hated. So I was eager to get out. I got out at the end of January to London, and arrived in the United States on February the fourth and within two or three weeks, there was the coup and the government -- the Communists took over the government in Prague.

Q: This is 1948?

A: No, this was -- yeah, 1948, yeah.

Q: And you went to England just en route to the United States?

A: Right.

Q: That -- It was no plans to stay?

A: Right.

Q: Okay. Go ahead.

A: I stayed there with a man whose father and mother I met in Prague. They came originally from Lublin, Poland, where today Toidya lives. And I stayed in his apartment in London, while he went home to sleep every night, to Blackpool. He -- His family was in Blackpool, but he commuted. But he had an office in London, and a room there where I slept for a few -- I would say a week in London, before I got to Portsmouth in -- on the Queen Mary.

Q: Let me ask you something about -- again about returning to Boskovice after the war. Your -- You were -- You were the survivor of a very unusual experience.

A: Right, right.

Q: I mean, not only ha -- were you a survivor of a concentration camp, but you were a survivor of an extermination camp. Did anyone ask you what you had been through?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, people were listening and I had a need to talk. I had a need to talk constantly. But it was one ear in and the other ear out. Didn't make -- Didn't make any -- any impression, any -- any lasting impression. And today, I want to tell you honestly, so they do talk, what happened, and everybody comes to meetings, you know, but that's all.

Nobody talks about the real reasons why it was possible to happen. Go back into history. And I intend to translate this, and then I will have an opportunity to talk about the camp and the life, I will bring this up, too. Then, if you want to, I will send you a good translation of the whole thing.

Q: Okay, yeah. I'm sure the archives would be interested. Did you have the feeling that people believed you when you talked about what had happened?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. They believed me, but they didn't care. As a matter of -- I -- I have a very funny experience. I was at one time in Naples, Florida, and there my wife's two cousins were very friendly with some non-Jewish people, and we had a meeting, and he wanted me to tell them what I went through. And next to us stood a group of Jewish women. As soon as they heard my story, they left. They didn't want to hear it either. That doesn't mean that others would, but that group, they didn't want to hear it, it was probably too emotional for them. Please excuse me [inaudible]

Q: Okay, sure. -- block.

A: When I left the farm, after hugging my -- my gospardash Pocharlie, I went past the barn and into the field, and there I was approached by a Russian soldier, with a automatic carbine and he asked me who I am and I tried to tell him in Czech and he finally let me go. And I went through the fields in a big circle, and came to Piaski, where I have seen the city half destroyed. Horses on the street blown up, dead of course. And then I joined a huge crowd of people which were walking, and I walked with them, I don't know where I went. I know only that from the time I left Selishky, and arriving ultimately in Saragura in Romania, it took about six weeks. When I first found Communist Poldalsk, in the

Ukraine, and there the railroad station was destroyed, the city didn't exist, actually, and somebody told me that -- I don't know who, that they moved, the Czech unit moved to Saragura in Romania. Now I had to go to Romania. At one time I got caught by Russian -- by Russian soldiers and put together with German prisoners of war, into a train. At another time they kept me with Germans prisoners of wars in a barn. I remembered one night I slept in a little farm i-in -- in the stable with the cows. But I cannot tell you how I got either to Communist Poldalsk, nor to Saragura. As soon as I was in Saragura, I somehow changed my whole mentality. I must have been absolutely depressed. And when they took my clothing -- I had a pair of pants and boots -- shoes, and wouldn't give it back to me, I started to raise hell, because they were ma-making money on the clothing. And I forced them and I h -- I had a fight with them, and I -- the first day, I got it back.

Q: When you escaped from Sobibór, were you wearing a uniform of some sort?

A: No, I had beautiful black boots. You see, in the camp, you could have gotten any clothing you want to, the Germans didn't care, because in the end they will get it anyways. And there were warehouses, or sections in a warehouse, where there were boots for men and children's shoes, and men's pants and men's coats, whatever. And my new winter coat was in another building, where they -- where we -- the sorters, were f -- were instructed to deposit it there f-for their own benefit, because they then took it to Germany, so -- with so many other things. So, I had a pair of britches, beautiful black boots, which the Russians took away from me and gave me another pair of bad boots. And then they took those away from me, another Russian, and gave me regular shoes, with laces. So I cut off the front and put the money which I had had, into the lining of the

shoe, because I figured these shoes, nobody will take and I will keep the money. But that's what I wanted to tell you about the fact that I'd s -- could not recall my being lost for those -- about five, or s -- maybe six weeks.

Q: What changed once you got to Romania?

A: Yeah.

Q: H-How did -- How did that --

A: Or -- Or -- Or Saragura --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Once I got to Saragura, I was again -- I wasn't myself, but I could again think right, at least, you know.

Q: Why do you think that is, why the sudden change?

A: I -- I -- I have no idea. That was a -- That was definitely -- There was definitely something what happened to my mind, because o-on the farm with Pocharlie, I had at least the haven there, a certain degree of security. But here, I was under -- among strangers, I didn't know the language, nothing. Yet, I made it. And this is what I'm writing him, this Mr. Ribol, the director of the museum, because he wants to know all the details from my youth on, and what happened during the war and where I was and -- and I tell him that, it's an absolute blank, I don't know, couldn't answer that.

Q: Is he going to use that information in the museum in --

A: I hope, I hope. But I tell you what happened, why I say I hope. A few years ago, I wrote an answer to a historical book written by a fellow of the name Professor Bronsky, about the Jews of Boskovice, and there were quite a few misstatements and anti-Semitic

hints, and I wrote a letter, happened to be 14 pages again, and I succeeded through my Gentile friends in Boskovice -- the local paper wouldn't print it, because I told them what I know about the Gentile people in Boskovice, how they behaved, almost like gen -- Germans. A -- My professor of Latin's son joined the German army, and then he got -- then he disappeared -- it was one of them, but I had quite a few cases, where I told him what he didn't know, or what he didn't want to publicize, and the paper wouldn't publicize this. So then my friends arranged for having it in the museum, to visitors of the museum, and I sent them one issue, covered in plastic. Now, I found out later on again, through this Stanick, that the thing disappeared. Allegedly for historical reasons, they are studying it. And in the letter to Ribol, I'm writing now, also, "I hope that it came back, and tell me why they took it away in the first place." I never got an answer from him yet.

Q: I want to talk about your journey to the U.S., but actually first, I want to go back to one more thing that you mentioned --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: -- off tape. You didn't mention -- there was something that you didn't mention during the interview that you wrote in a letter afterwards, an-and I thought you might want to add it to this tape, and that's -- it was a recollection of your father, from the time that you were, I believe, working on a farm and bringing home a lot of --

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: -- food in Piaski. And he said something about how he would rather --

A: Oh yeah, I remember that. No, that was not in Piaski yet, it was in Boskovice. When I had a job with this Mr. Stanick, the son, and that -- the father of Joseph Stanick, which

you are mentioning in the letter there. The tailors were home tailors, they took the stuff home to sew it and bring it back to us, and I got him merchandise, I got him business from Vienna, and from Stuttgart in Germany, because I knew perfect German, how to write and I wrote to the Chambers of Commerce, and these people didn't have labor, but they had some materials, so we are fini -- we were finishing it for them, and the tailors from the little villages around, which did the work for us, they were very grateful to me, and were bringing me illegally food, like butter, eggs, chicken, whatever. And I sent them to my mother, to the house directly, and she paid them for it, and then gave other people who needed it. And my father at that time said that I would rather eat dry bread and drink plain water in freedom, than have plenty of here to eat. That's what it was.

Q: And how did you respond to that at the time, what did that mean to you at the time?

A: Oh yeah, I think I mentioned that too. It didn't come into my mind the deep meaning of it, until I was in the concentration camp, or in Piaski, in the ghetto, you know, how much ahead he was of thinking, and how already thought that I know everything. I was about 28 years old at that time. Yeah, I remember that. But I forgot all about it, you brought it back now into my mind. And -- And that I did -- I said, I think I said it there.

Q: So you -- What did it -- Can you say more about what that meant to you?

A: What it meant to me, that freedom is priceless, period. And for freedom you have to fight, and you have to be watchful it shouldn't be taking away from you.

Q: And you --

A: And this is why I love so much this country.

Q: Tell me more about that. Tell me more about arriving in this country, your expectations and -- and what's it -- it's meant to you?

A: I -- When I arrived in New York, at the pier, my uncle was waiting for me. He was an employee of the Shanley Hotel in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a very -- the finest hotel in town, he was a maître'd'. And he came to New York to pick me up, but the crossing was 48 hours late, th-the first time ever for the Queen Mary, because of very bad weather. And he couldn't wait any longer, because the FBI took me to Ellis Island, because of that dumb doctor in Prague. When he examined me before the government would give me a visa, they had to confe -- somebody had to confirm to them that I am well. So he asked me, "Were you ever seriously sick?" And I says, "Yes, at the age of 15, I had pleurisy," with an [indecipherable]. And he wrote --

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: Tape three, side B, of an interview with Kurt Ticho Thomas.

A: And he asked me then, after he examined me, whether one can hear anything by listening. I says, "Doctor, you just took my x-rays and listened to me, you should know whether there's anything or not." And he wrote a thing down that I had pleurisy at the age of 15, and when I arrived in the pier -- at the pier in New York, the FBI took three people from the boat -- four people. Two, I believe, either Russians or Ukrainians, one woman who was Jewish, but allegedly was coming into the country on a proxy marriage, which something was not right, and I. These three people went into the -- on Ellis Island, into the political section. I went into the Merchant Marine section, for an additional

examination. And two days later, one man came to me, I was playing chess with a German sailor, and he told me that I can get dressed and get out, and the German sailor translated it to me in English. And when I came then to the -- to the window, leaving Ellis Island, there was a fellow waiting for me. His name was Kaufman from the -- from a Jewish organization, from the -- I forgot now the name, and he took me -- w-we went on the ferry from Ellis Island to long -- to -- to Manhattan. And there we went to a restaurant and I had a sandwich with cheese and ham, and some milk. And he ordered sandwich, and then I asked him how much I should tip, and how much I should tip in the check room, and all that. And he brought me to the Pennsylvania gr-gr-grandel -- the Pennsylvania railroad station, the Grand Central Station. And there I took a Pennsylvania train to Pittsburgh, where I arrived around one o'clock at night. And in the meantime I called -- pardon me -- I called from Ellis Island yet, and he actually put the call through and I sat down and before I could sit down, it rang already. I was amazed, because I got the call immediately. In Czechoslovakia, when I was calling somebody 20 miles away, it took a half an hour before I could be connected. So that was the first pleasant surprise, h-how communications work.

Q: Let's back up a bit. Can you remember where you are if I interrupt you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. I wanted to ask you a little bit more about your trip. How long did it take to get o -- to get across the ocean on the boat?

A: The ocean? Two ye -- Two days longer, 48 longer -- I believe five days, instead of three, or six instead of four. I don't -- that I don't know any more. That was the old Queen Mary.

Q: Do you remember what your thoughts were on that trip, what your expectations were of this country?

A: I was -- I was -- I was happy that I was -- that I was going to America. I slept together with another fellow, down in the lowest quarters, on a berth above him. And he was born in this country, but fortly before the war, his mother came back to Slovakia, his father was still here. And then he came back again as an American citizen, but he didn't speak a word English. So I says, "Where are you going?" He told me in Slovak, of course. He says, "Connecticut," and the city, he forgo -- I forgot now the city. He pronounced it, the -- the -- the phonetic way, as it is written, you know, that was so funny, today. At that time, I didn't know better, either. I forgot the name of the city.

Q: What languages did you speak at the time?

A: Czech and German, and a little Polish. And a little -- I learned a little Jewish in the camp, too, from the Polish Jews, you know.

Q: No English at all?

A: No. Oh, I -- very little, I mean, I tried to learn English, but this was all forgotten.

Q: But you were excited to be coming to America?

A: Oh yeah. So then, when I arrived, they were waiting for me, my aunt, my uncle and my cousin, they had the DeSoto car, and they took me home in the -- into their house, and it was a nice little house, in the campus of the Carnegie -- the Carnegie Technical

Institute. And I was going to med -- I was going to English elementary school with little kids, for about six or eight weeks. And then I went to high school, Taylor Alderdise High School in Pittsburgh, and then during the summer, I took summer course, again in the al -- Taylor Alderdise High School, and because my uncle didn't want me to go to work until I get a little bit settled, and he was so good to me, like a father.

Q: What was his name?

A: Leo Steiner. That's -- There's his picture. That's the man. And then he -- I got a job through my cousin's wife's father, who had a store with pants, and through the salesman of the company for who he was buying, I got the job as a cutter, in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. I had to get up at five in the morning, to be, by 6:30 or so, in the railroad station, Pennsylvania, Lake Erie railroad, to get to Beaver Falls before eight o'clock, to get into the plant. And then, in the evening I rushed home, and twice a week I went to the University of Pittsburgh, to get English history and English. And there were two veterans, GIs who copied my work.

Q: Really?

A: I'm not kidding you. And when I came back home from school, I was so tired that I barely ate my dinner, and lied down, and the next morning, again to the railroad station. At the end of the year, before Christmas, they gave me a box of candy and told me I shouldn't come any more, because they are closing up the plant, which I was so happy that I didn't have to go back to that work any more. Then I had other jobs, in a -- in a grocery store, in a umbrella shop and again in a pants factory. I mean, that one I was packing rather than cutting. No, I was working in the cutting room, too. And also in -- in

the -- in the room where we put orders together. And from there I went on the road with ready to wear, through the help of a Miss Bertha Strouth -- Strouse was her name. Sh -- H -- She was a buyer in a -- one of the department stores in Pittsburgh, and through friends who I made in Pittsburgh, their name was Albert and Laura Davis, they wanted to help me out of my menial jobs, and through them I got acquainted with her. She acquainted me with a salesman who didn't want to travel in Ohio. He wanted to travel only in and around Pittsburgh. So I took his line on, and that's how I met my wife, because she owned with her brother a little ready to wear store, ladies ready to wear.

Q: What was her name?

A: Her name was Tina Zacks, Z-a-c-k-s.

Q: And -- And when was this that you met her?

A: I met her in 1953. In 1952 I started to travel, in 1953 I met her, in 1954 we got married and I moved to Columbus, and then my ankle -- uncle and my aunt moved also to Columbus. That was his sister, they were brother and sister. She was a widow, and he was a bachelor.

Q: They must have -- So, did they come for -- because you were here?

A: Yes, yes. They came here because I was here.

Q: Tell me more about your relationship with them in the early days. Were they -- Did you talk to them about what your experiences had been during the war?

A: Well, we were always a very closely knit family, my mother and her four siblings. One brother came here already before the first World War, but I never saw him because he died before I arrived. And then Uncle Leo, who took over. His sister, with two

children from Vienna, when Hitler came in there. And -- And then I had the two cousins here, and another cousin who lived close to Pittsburgh, and they tried to make my life very nice. I have a very nice relationship, they were very kind to me. And I finally Americanized, you know, and became, I hope, a good citizen.

Q: Did you talk to them about what did happen to you during the war?

A: Oh yeah, yeah. As a matter of fact, when I wrote my first letter to the United States, when the mails started to function in ’49 -- 1946, I wrote to Uncle Leo and Aunt Ilinor, my life in the camp, and he used this during one of the meetings of some organization in the Shandley Hotel at that time, I remember -- I was told later on, when I came here, of what was going on.

Q: Did they encourage you to -- to talk?

A: I don’t think that they did have to, because I n -- I needed to. Today I don’t. Today I --

Q: That’s interes -- Oh, sorry.

A: Today I am not hundred percent, but I would say maybe 90 percent of what I used to be, before all this happened.

Q: It’s interesting to hear you say that you had the need to talk immediately after, and not so much now, because I’ve heard other people say, “Back then I wasn’t ready to talk about it yet, and people didn’t want to listen.”

A: Oh some of them didn’t want to listen and some people told me I should already stop, you know. They me -- They meant it well. Th-That was my imbalance. There was a mental imbalance, definitely. I said yesterday, I -- accidentally, to my sister-in-law, the wife of my wife’s brother. My wife’s brother was her husband, he passed away. I says,

"Florence, you know, when I got into your family, I wasn't right." She says, "I know that, Kurt. We know -- We knew that." But they -- they accepted me too, and treated me just like I would be theirs.

Q: In what way -- when you say --

A: In any way. Any way. I had to -- the same right and the same obligations, like anybody else.

Q: But in what way, when you say I was not right, what do you mean?

A: I -- I was not my old Kurt. I was very much influenced with my past.

Q: You were thinking a lot about what had happened?

A: Not that I was thinking, but I ch -- i-i-it influenced my thinking. I was -- As I told you before, when I finally hit the SS man in the jaw, after that point, even in my unconscience, I was afraid.

Q: Tell that story on tape, because I -- I think you didn't tell that on tape, about your -- your dream.

A: No, that was when -- in -- in this country already, I was dreaming -- I had a nightmare, always the same nightmare, that Sharführer Wagner is -- was chasing me, and I always escaped someplace in the straw. Jumped someplace and lie in the straw, and he couldn't find me any more. Until one night, I'm dreaming again the same thing. Suddenly I stopped running, and made a fist and hit him in his jaw. And from then on, I never had the nightmare any more, and I improved definitely, in my mental attitude, toward the public -- toward the non-Jewish public, because at the time when I came, I suspected in the first place anybody again, who is non-Jewish, might be -- want to harm -- wanted to

harm me, or whatever, you know. Thi-This is something, but it's not easy to understand, and it is not easy for me to explain.

Q: How long did it take for you -- How long were you having those dreams before you turned around and socked him?

A: That I -- That I don't remember, but it was quite awhile. It could have been a couple of years, I don't know. But I do not know, I really can't -- this is just a guess.

Q: And then -- And then --

A: As a -- As a matter of fact, I was so intimidated also, that I didn't talk English in the public, when I was in a bus with somebody, I wouldn't open my mouth. It took me two years, before I started to talk English in a bus, or in a restaurant, you know? I was -- Because I felt that I'm foreigner, I have an accent -- today it doesn't bother me, I know I have an accent, but I don't give a hoot.

Q: What language did you speak with your family?

A: We spoke English, only English. When I arrived, and we got to bed at night, and the next morning, when I came into the kitchen, and my aunt was giving me breakfast and she started to talk to me German. I said, "Auntie, please, don't talk to me German, only English, whether I understand or not. I don't want to talk German, I want to learn English." And we never spoke German.

Q: That's very impressive. What were your -- What were your ideas and expectations about America? What was your idea of what America was?

A: You know, the expectation of America were very much different what the reality was. I thought that everybody is rich, and that nobody works. And I found out that the majority

of the people are not rich, the great majority, and even the rich one work. I also thought -- I -- I -- I was not aware of the fact of the national coherence of ethnic groups. I thought that they are separated, but as far as the nation concerns, America, if he's Polish or Italian, you say something against the country, and I'm sure that they would -- they would not like it. Th-That was another very pleasant experience for me. And the equality, that everybody is protected by the law, and has the same obligation, like anybody else. And the idea of a Lincoln, to build a nation by -- by mixing, by respect and cooperation and understanding for everybody, this all I didn't -- I have no -- I had no idea who Lincoln was. It was en -- It was entirely -- I was tra -- a transplanted tree, from one orchard, into another orchard, in another climate.

Q: But then you started to study about American history.

A: Yeah, I was interested, I want -- wanted to know what was going on and what -- what's going on now, and so forth.

Q: You mentioned that in -- in the early days you -- you felt suspicious, and -- and insecure about non-Jews, and not -- not sure whether you were safe.

A: I didn't know -- I didn't know how to take it. I didn't know how to take it, because nobody made any remarks. As a matter of fact, I got -- I arrived here in 1948. When I got married in 1954, we took a honeymoon to Canada, and there, for the first time, I heard an anti-Jewish remark. In Canada, not here.

Q: What was the remark?

A: I don't know any more what it was. We were in a store and somebody made some nasty remark about Jews. In Canada. I don't know any more which city it was, but I re -- that I remember dis-distinctly.

Q: And by then had your feelings changed, about --

A: Oh yeah, no, I was -- I was already Americanized. I was already a American citizen. No, I was not citizen yet. Yeah, I was citizen, yeah, because otherwise I couldn't have gone to -- to Canada.

Q: Tell me about becoming a citizen, when did that happen?

A: That happened, I believe, in 1953. The huge gathering by a judge, and a clerk of the court, in a big building in Pittsburgh, downtown. I don't know whether it was the courthouse, or whatever. And there were for -- I was prepared, I was studying for it, and then they gave us a few questions, and if you answered, you became a citizen, and if you didn't answer, you get a citizen too.

Q: Was it a very important occasion for you?

A: Definitely, but I want to tell you, once I got into this country, I got a little green card, for identification. Not once, until I became a citizen, was anybody ever asking me about my identity. No policemen, nobody. It was just a entirely different life. In my old country, if you went to visit somebody for more than 48 hours, you had to report it to the police. That's what they call a police state. When my late grandmother came to visit with us, she had to go to the police and tell them, "I came from Warscarvas, I'll be staying with my brother -- with my son-in-law and my daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Ticho," such an address. And the day before she was leaving, she had to tell him she is leaving, where she

is going again. And that was a democratic state at the time, already. All Czechoslovakia was a democratic state. The only one in central Europe.

Q: Did you have friends or acquaintances that you got to know who were non-Jewish at the time, or were you mainly moving in -- in the circle of your family?

A: Where, here?

Q: Yeah.

A: I did not have any non-Jewish acquaintances, with the exception that when I traveled, I had to, of course, approach any buyer, whether he was Chinese or Protestant, or Jewish, whatever. But these were nice business friendships. As a matter of fact, I am still in touch with the former buyer of the May Company, Betty Flaherty, and one happened to be a Jewish fellow, Buddy Fagersner, who was also in a Cleveland store. But I was very friendly with -- with my buyers and they had great confidence in me. And when my wife died, I remember one of the ladies made some preserve, then gave it to me, you know, I shouldn't -- I should have some home cooking, whatever.

Q: How did you meet your wife?

A: I was selling these dresses, trying to sell the dresses, when I came into the store called Taft's, in Columbus, Ohio. And she wasn't there at the time, her sister-in-law was there, and she asked me, "How does your wife like it when you are travel from col -- from Pittsburgh to Ohio, and you are at home only over a weekend?" I says, "I'm single." So then they introduced me to the single girl in the family, and that's how it happened.

Q: Was she Jewish?

A: Yeah.

Q: Was that important to you, to -- to marry a Jewish woman? Was your Jewish identity very important to you at that point?

A: Oh, i-i-it -- it was, yes. It -- It -- It -- It was, although it didn't matter to me whether she was ir-irrelig-religious, or religious, but somehow there was a cultural background, a cultural need.

Q: And you were living in --

A: I don -- I -- I didn't know any Gentile women anyways. So, I mean, I don't know whether -- if I would have l -- fell in love with a Gentile woman, maybe I would marry her too, I don't know.

Q: Did you talk to your wife about what had -- what your experiences had been during the war, and what had become of your family?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, the whole family wanted to know, they were very interested in what -- what's going on, and they were very -- they are very active in Jewish causes, you know?

Q: Did you feel that they were capable of -- of really understanding what you had been through?

A: Oh yes, oh definitely, definitely. For instance, my nephew -- my wife's nephew -- former wife's nephew, is today president of the Jewish congregation in Columbus. He's very active in Jewish activities, and also a very ardent Republican, who is very friendly with -- for instance, President Bush. And his mother is a outstanding -- absolutely outstanding -- I would call her a genius. Not only in Jewish causes, but sh-she's an inventor, and she very g -- very generous, help people. Not only Jews, non-Jews -- non-Jewish organizations. I remember sh-she helped a woman to become an opera singer, for

years supporting her, a non-Jewish woman. And when she was finally an opera singer and gave a performance in Cincinnati, we went down there to see her.

Q: What was her name?

A: I would have to ask Florence, I don't remember.

Q: You mentioned coming to the United States, and having some awareness of -- of some of the ideals of this country, and you came in the early 50's. It wasn't long after that, that -- that there were a lot of civil rights issues going on. Was that something you were particularly aware of?

A: I want to tell you, for instance, there was this Korean War. I didn't understand it too much. I was a cutter and I was tired, and I read the paper, but I didn't -- I was not in -- not into the global politics yet at all. That came at -- That's why I say, I changed. I developed again into what I used to be. It was a long process. On -- Only it -- it -- and only it came along because of the environment in which I lived, and it was protect -- it was protective and understanding.

Q: Do you feel like you're back to a hundred percent now?

A: No. I would say it's about maybe 90.

Q: You m -- also mentioned -- and this is something that I saw written down somewhere, but you didn't tell the -- tell the story in your interview, something about your involvement with the trial of one of the SS members --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- in Sobibór, Frenzel.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell me about your involvement in that trial?

A: I tell you how it happened originally. A fellow with who I worked in the camp, together in a little -- a little building, his name was Friedberg, Alfred Friedberg from Frankfurt, Germany. He was a -- His hobby was painting. And we worked together in this little place, on little items, sorting them out and deliver them to the Germans. And I found [indecipherable] money. And one day one of the Ukrainians, which have close by kept the horses, came into our place, and picked up a fountain pen and a pencil, whatever, and I had the money there prepared, and he picked up the money too, German marks. And the next day he came and brought us a liter of vodka and a kilo of Polish kielbasa. And that went on all the time I -- we worked in this -- in this little place. Every second day we got a kilo and a liter. The liter we gave away, we didn't drank it. Gave it to some other goy -- boys. But the salami kept us alive, until that stopped, the job there stopped. There was no- nothing met to sort, and I went back into the sorting department and then I became sick. Got the flu or the typhoid fever, I don't know what it was. But that I mentioned in the -- in my --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- memories there. And then I became the sanitator, the man who was taking care of the sick people. And what did you ask me originally?

Q: I was asking about your involvement with the trials, the post-war trials of Fre-Frenzel.

A: Oh. Oh yes. This Friedberg got the job to make the labels for the SS when they were going back to Germany, the address labels on their lugga-luggage. And he had any name but of the commander of the camp and of Sharführer fr -- Wagner. Wagner was too

shrewd to give it to anybody. And at one time he told me, “You know, Frenzel lives in the -- close to Berlin, and he gave me the n -- city’s name, which contained the word lerver, lion in German, and I think berg or borg. I don’t know how it happened, after the war I wrote a letter to some German office, mentioning that we had Sharführer Frenzel, who was very brutal, and he lived in this city, which has the word lerver and berg or borg. And I didn’t pay any attention to the whole thing, I didn’t hear anything. When I was in Frankfurt, I believe, at the trial, it was the last trial, there was a public persa -- persecutor, his name was Pfeiffer, very nice young man, and he called me aside and he says to me, “You know, because of your tip, we went to -- we went, looked at the map, found the town next to Berlin, found Mr. Frenzel working as a carpenter, which he was originally, on a stage in a theater. And that’s how we got him.” And then I testified against him, I was called as a witness. The first time in 1966, and then later again, and then he was sentenced to life and then he got out on some kind of a legal point, I don’t know what, and I had to go to testify again, and then he got again arrested, and ended in jail. He is not alive any more, I don’t think so. He was a year or two older than I.

Q: Let’s pause.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is tape number four, side A, of an interview with Kurt Ticho Thomas. We're -- We're resuming on the following day, it's now June the 24th, 1999. And so do you want to start by telling me -- you had a couple of things that you remembered, that you wanted to add. I'll hold --

A: The first thing what I want to mention is that when I was translating the letter to the director of the museum in Boskovice, that the word which I was missing, which actually is the deed, when the church was selling what it's called indagencies, to those who sinned, and were buying off their -- their sinning. That's number one, number two, when I was translating that same letter, I omitted, I believe one sentence, which I definitely want to repeat, namely, when I say that Christianity is a noble religion, which will be here for eternity. And now, if you allow me, I would like to start to read two letters from Theodora Toidya Cobaletska, that's her -- that's her married name, the daughter of the farmer, which she wrote me on my inquiries in the 90's, what happened during my stay there, which I could not know, because I couldn't get out, and after I left. All right then. Here is the first letter from Toidya, dating into September 19, 1993. "Dear Kurt, in reference to your letters of March 15 and August third, 1993, I am conveying to you information regarding my parents and my family. My mother Anna Pocharlie, nee Lipa, was born April 15, n -- 1890, in Wallagarja Nitzca, near Pableshk Piaski lubareska, while my father, Stanislav Pocharlie, son of Michael and Maryanna, was born on April 21st, n -- 1890, in Sialishky, near Piaski lubareska. Together they will work as farmers on their farm in Sialishky. Through their own daily work, they managed to acquire a larger farm,

and until Hitler's German invasion of Poland, in September 1900 and 39, they were leading farmers in the village. After that, my father worked simultaneously in the Casa Shef-Shef-Shefsheek Savings Bank in Piaski. The invaders ran a wasteful, exploi-exploitative regime and the for -- the for -- their forced deliveries of goods ruined the Polish countryside. The invaders ran a wasteful and exploit-ploitative regime and the forced deli-deliveries of goods ruined the Polish countryside. Not fulfilling the quotas was cruelly punished by the German administration, with arrests, and with sending people to concentration camps. The period of the German occupation was a brutal time, a time of violence and terror. There was a lack of food, and the basic food articles were distributed by means of ration cards. I remember that Mama used to prepare a syrup from sugar beets, and we sweetened our black coffee with it. There were times when there wasn't even flour for bread, which Mama baked herself. Our basic diet was milk and potatoes. Thanks to the resourcefulness of my father, there was never any real hunger. I remember the day when you came to us at night. My father warned Mother not to give you any food that was too fatty or excessively rich during the first few days of your stay with us. After the camp food, it might have caused serious health consequences for your stomach and your whole digestive system. At that time it was not easy to get medicines and curing you would have been made significantly more difficult under the conditions of your concealment. I want to mention that my parents were afraid f -- of the neighbors, who were numerous around our farmyard. A woman by the name of Fran-Franechka, who was very nosy, was specially dangerous. She loved to look after -- around everywhere, in the outbuildings, and tell the whole village what was going on around

there. For that reason also, we had to maintain the greatest possible vigilance of all costs. After that, there was a young girl in our house, by the make of Kriska, who was with us as a helper in the housekeeping. Her mother asked my father whether she could work for him so that she could be registered in our community. Wer -- This registration saved her from being carried off to forced labor with the Germans. I remember also a conversation of my father with his brother, who likewise lived in Sialishky, who told father that a neighbor had told him that there was someone hiding in our outbuildings, because one night you could hear coughing. This information from his brother made my father very uneasy and he told you about this occurrence, indicating that he would have to change your place of hiding. Father," -- pardon me, he didn't tell me about that, but he said that I should not cough, but he didn't tell me why. I -- I had no -- I had no idea about the reason. "Father and Mother were considering how to do this in order to create safe conditions for your further stay in hiding. With that goal in mind, both of them went to Mama's brother, who was living in the village of Wallagardianitska, about six kilometers from Sialishky, in order to discuss with him the matter of transporting you to that locality and of concealing you at his farm, but that event turned out differently. It happened that my mother's brother was being sought by the Germans and had to hide himself as well. In that situation, Dad and Mama decided that you would remain further at the place in Sialishky, whatever the consequences. In regard to Kriska, you -- who had seen you in the barn, Dad explained to her, if I remember correctly, that you were one of the partisans, who was hiding there. It goes without saying that it was impossible to let her know who you were, and in the interest of the safety of all of us. Apparently, she must

have believed Dad's explanation, because, as it turned out, the matter never came to public attention. Further -- Fortunately, as you know, we endured those hard times and lived to see the liberation. For us, the day of liberation, which came in our area in the second half of July, 1944," -- it was rather at the very end of July -- "was a special day. It was possible for you to leave your hiding place, and you were able to return to a normal life. We were overcome with great joy. That which had seemed an impossible thing, had become a reality. Our faith and confidence, in the help of God, and also our prayers had been answered. After your departure from Sialishky, at the end of July, 1944, we continued to be uneasy about whether you had made it in s -- in safe and sound to your home in Czechoslovakia. Your letter, sent from the ship Queen Elizabeth,"-- but it should be Queen Mary -- "saying that you were alive and on your way to United States was an enormous comfort to us, and finally permitted our hearts to be at ease. We were able to think about you -- your new life, with a feeling of relief, and to wish that it would be a happy one. Our country was free from under Hitler's occupation and we thought that the peaceful life would now en-ensue. In the meantime, from the very beginning, there were starting to be arrests, death sentences and deportations to prison camps deep in the Soviet Union, from which many Poles never again returned to their country. They a -- They arrested members of the National Army, and those who did not accept the new political order. A difficult period for the Polish society had begun. Many innocent people died during the consolidation of the people's government. The truth about these times of violence and repression has just recently begun to come to light, little by little. In September '44, my father was arrested on the charge of possession of weapons and of

concealing partisans. In our home, a rigorous inspection was carried out by functionaries of the Bureau of Security. Mama and I were terrified and beside ourselves at the thought of what would become to us in the future. At a certain time, Mama and I left our home and possessions. Our neighbors took care of the entire farm during our absence. Such a situation could not continue, however, and our return to Sialishky was necessary, without regard to the consequences. That was a very difficult time for us. The Bureau of Security, after many interrogations, was not able to prove the charges they had brought against my father, that his possessions of arm, and concerning partisans. Father did not return home until December fi -- '44. However, there was not any further peace. Difficult times began to wealthy farmers, so-called kulaks, by the people's government. My father was likewise accounted as one of these kulaks. Extremely high tax charges and mandatory deliveries of agricultural produ-produce, and livestock, were imposed by the office of the community, aimed at liquidating the so-called kulak farms. If the farmers did not comply with the community prohibitions, they were e -- threatened with serious penal consequences. With hard labor, my parents endured even this hostile rate of taxation, of the people's government, or wealthy farmers. They worked on their farm until advanced old age. My parents did not want to leave Sialishky, here they had their family, neighbors, their home and their free life. On the other hand, being with us in Lublin, they were condemned, as it were, to idleness, to a lack of -- to a lack of neighbors with whom they had lived together, or a -- great part of their lives, and to lack of all of that which surrounded them in the village. Simply put, they never im-imagined a life in town for themselves, and I am not surprised, because the link with their environment, which accompanied them almost

throughout their lives, was so strong that it could not be broken. My father, right after Mom's death, when we wanted to bring them to Lublin, put off his arrival for month, two months, and not until December, did he decide to come to our home in Lublin. While he was with us, he was extremely homesick for Sialishky, and it might be that the homesickness and idleness hastened his death. Mom died June 28th, '71, in Sialishky, and Father on April 1972, in Lublin. They are both buried in the cemetery in Piaski. I want to mention that I have been married since December 31, 1945, and from the start, I lived in Piaski, and worked there initially, in the cooperative agricultural market, afterwards in the cooperative savings bank, and later, after bringing up the children, in the post office. There was always frequent contact with my parents, especially during the times of intensified field labor. All my family [indecipherable] these jobs. Our children spent July and August vacations in Sialishky, and to the extent they could, helped their grandparents with the harvest. Myself and my husband, who likewise are work in Piaski, took a leave of absence at the time, and spent it working on my parents farm. In 1966, we obtained an apartment in Lublin, in Kalanovsheesna Street, and a new phase of our life began for us. My son Andre finished at that time, the [indecipherable] technical school. My daughter Alsberta finished liberal arts gymnas-gymnasium, college preparatory high school, and the younger daughter, Eva, went into the second class of basic school. I, after coming to Lublin, have been working continuously at the post office in Piaski, which allowed me to be continuous -- in continuous contact with my parents, to whose house I used to ride after work on my bicycle, about three to six kilometers from Piaski to Sialishky. At that time, my parents were already over 76 years old, and had less and less edj -- energy to

work. They sold part of their land because they were no longer in any condition to manage it, and earlier -- and -- and earlier, a part of the land had been sold to pay taxes imposed yearly by the people's government of the community. They were on what remained of their farm right up to Mom's death. My father, after the final liquidation on the farm, came to our house in Lublin in December '71. All my family hold them in fond memory. They were people of high moral le-level, upon whom it was all -- always possible to depend. Their most particular character trait was kindness and fondness for the family, and that was felt in every step in their contact with us. For that reason also, our children were always very eager to be with them, and received each announcement of a trip to Sialishky with joy. For us and our children, my parents home was always an oasis of peace and joy, where everyone always felt happy and secure. That resulted in their positive influence on our hearts and minds, and arose from their deep faith in the values of the Christian teaching, on which they were followers. Kindness, tolerance, and mutual respect. My parents and all of us were eager to see you after years, once again in Sialishky, but that has turned out to be impossible. I think that this will come true to a certain degree with your meeting with your son -- with our son Andre and his family al- although in America, where they have been living permanently since September 1988. May he represent those who have already departed from this world, my dear parents and us all, living in this country. We have the hope that this meeting will take place. Lublin, December 19, 1993, Theadora Kobaleska." And now she's got a beautiful letter --

Q: Let's pause for -- Let's pause for a minute, don't --

A: Okay.

Q: -- read those yet. Let me ask you something about that. Did you -- Did you -- Did you ever go back and visit?

A: No, no, I never went back. I was afraid of the Polish Communist government, I -- I never went back. But we are continuously corresponding and I am helping them out.

Q: Did you know Toidya while you were there?

A: Yes, I s-saw Toidya a few times. She was a girl about 18 years old that time, and I don't know whether I mentioned it in my story, at Easter, 1943, she came out of the house while I was watching the yard, with a little basket on her arm, and with her came a young man. He stood in front of the house, on the side in front of the house and she went toward my hiding place. And when she got in, she reached me the little basket. And there were Easter cookies, and colored vodka to drink. There -- There -- They regarded me as a member of their family. It was really a beautiful relationship, and I told him he raised himself a son, and I am treating her like a sister.

Q: What -- How did you start to correspond with her? Was that something that you had been doing over the years?

A: Well, originally I wrote to her parents, but then when they passed away, and we continued some corresponding in Czech and Polish on either side, her husband Yanoush, started to study English, and from then on we started to correspond English on both ends, and you could have seen the improvement in his English as time went on. It was really interesting. And he's a very find ma -- very fine man too. By the way, their oldest son Andre came a f -- quite a few years ago with his wife and two daughters to the -- to the United States. They've -- They left Poland. And they live in San Diego, California. And I

tried to send them some money and the first time they finally took it. And then he told me they don't want any help, they want to do it on their own, and a very, very proud, fine, noble people.

Q: This is the second letter that -- will you say something --

A: I am now continuing with the follow up letter after receiving the first one, I wrote her and this is the answer, dated Lublin, December the 17, 1993. "Dear Kurt. In reference to your letter of November seventh and to the information which I sent you in a letter on September 19, I would like to finish describing those events that I still remember from that letter. I began working at S-Spudsyairna rawneecho handlovay in Piaski in September, '41, and my work there prevented me from being taken to a forced labor camp in Germany. In the fall, and especially during the winter, I frequently spent the nights in Piaski, and during the spring and summer, I often came home to -- by bike. I was in Piaski the day you arrived at my parent's home, on October 18, 1943. The next day my mother came to me and told me about your arrival and that same day I came to Sialishky and we were tell -- talking. I believe roo -- you remember that moment." I don't remember that she was talking to me, that Toidya was ta-talking to me. "I stopped working at the Sporgiana and came home to live with my parents with my father -- when my father took me from Piaski. This happened when the Germans and Soviet armies were approaching our village. During this time, attacks from wa-war planes, were intensifying, which were bombing German regiments and fleeing Germans and has set Piaski aflame. At that time, retreating German er -- regiments and civilians, referred as to the Volksdeutsch, had penetrated into the village, took horses and anything else they could,

and fled west. I and several other people from the village, took our horses from the stables and we ran off in the meadows to prevent the Germans army from requisi -- requisitioning our horses. We spent the night in the fields, in the bushes, where we safely waited until the morning. The German army horse corp, and along with them civilians, arrived in our yard that same night. Many farmers ran off into their meadows, whereas my parents and our neighbor, Adam Smoleara remained in the building. In the morning my mother came and told us not to return home yet. We returned to the village only in the afternoon, once the Germans left. As we later discovered, rebels from the Polish underground army ambushed them outside of Piaski. Most likely they were Germans and Ukrainians. A portion of them who survived, returned to Sialishky and ordered us to leave our buildings because the Soviet army was going to occupy them. My parents quickly loaded the wagon with foods and clothes, and at that time, informed the military personnel that the messengers from the village went to the commander in Piaski to verify whether this order was reliable. They were surprised by this information and shortly afterwards, left the village. Our village is located between two main roads, which when leaving Piaski, one leads to Holm and the other one to Zamosc. The Polish and Soviet armies were advancing on the road to Holm from Piaski, where the German's army was retreating likewise it on the road from Piaski to Zamosc toward Lublin. Both sides were exchanging machine gun fire from both Jal and the highest point -- from both Jal and the highest point in Sialishky. The villages, Drizishky, Drazitchae, Jelltov and Piaski, and the surrounding area were aflame, but our village was preserved. During this shoot out, we were sitting in a man -- manhole across from our residence, that was dug up by my father

and our neighbor Alexander Pasternak. In your hi -- In our hiding pl -- In your hiding place, there was another exit through the attic into Pasternak's shed, that led to the meadow. My father explained to me that in case of any danger, you could have run away by opening the door of -- to the unlocked shed. After the German army retreated beyond Lublin, I decided to turn to work in Piaski. That was at the end of July '44. The day you left our house, I was at work. In my father's opinion, the main roads [indecipherable] Piaski Lublin was the safest and directed toward the road, because that was where the Polish and Soviet regiments were located. On the side road, Sialishky Pershki, there were many deserters dressed as civilians, of whom my father was suspicious, so he decided to lead you to the road beyond the yard, that led to the main road." That is not so in my memory, but it doesn't really matter. "You asked in your letter if anyone heard you coughing. That was our neighbor, Adam Smalleara, who walked by your hiding place to his farm buildings every day. He told his neighbor Constanti Pocharlie about the coughing in your -- in our buildings. He was my father's brother and frequently came to our home. The next thing you asked is where my mother and I were when we left our home in Sialishky after my father was arrested, and who took care of our farm. My father stayed with the si -- her sister, who lived in Volla Garjanitska village, and I stayed with my cousin in Lublin. In our absence, my father's brother, Constanti Pocharlie and his wife Elixa, who resided in Sialishky, and lived near us, took care of our farm. They informed us through acquaintances that it was possible to return to Sialishky. Was Kriska in Sialishky? She did not live there. She was from Walla Posi -- Biasetska village, a municipality of Piaski. Some information about my family. My husband Yanoush worked

in Piaski, where [indecipherable] during the German occupation and several years after the liberation in -- until 1949, and subsequently in Lublin, December 31st, 1981. From January first, ’82, after 40 years of working, the -- h-h-he retired. Our son Andre was born January 10, ’47 in Piaski and graduated from a technical school in Lub-Lublin, and as you know, lives in the United States. He has two daughters, Monica is 17 and Biara is 16. Our daughter’s Edjberta, her married surname being Warchieska, was born January first, ’48, in Piaski and received a degree in Lublin, and subsequently in Warsaw. She was 21 all -- She has a 20 year old daughter, who il -- Ivana and lives in Warsha -- Warsaw. Our daughter Eva have -- her married surname being Remish, was born December second, ’58, in Piaski, and received her degree in Lublin and has a 12 year old son, Pavel and lives in Lublin. We move fi -- from Piaski to Lublin, with our entire family in ’66, where we are still living today. If you would like any more information, please write, and I will gladly send it.” That’s the end of the second letter.

Q: It must have been interesting to learn about what was going on from their perspective during that time that you were there.

A: I -- I remember when I got married, in ’54, I think not too long later, I got a request from them, the only time they asked for anything. They told me that the oldest son, Andre, who now lives in San Diego and the second born daughter, will have Confirmations. And they need for the girl, a little white dress. So my wife Tina had made up a dress with the -- with the repair seamstress in the store, and we send it to them. It had a stiff crinoline, and they thought that the crinoline is being worn outside instead of supporting the dress, and I got the picture, the confirmation picture with that crinoline on

the outside. I never told Toidya about this mistake, but it was really funny, and a beautiful picture. I have the photograph someplace.

Q: What --

A: I have also the photograph of Stanislav Pocharlie and his wife Anna, in the suit which I sold him, f -- and which he mentioned to me that I owe him -- that he owes me some money for it. I have that picture, too, and the suit is as crinkled as it was when I s -- when I smuggled it out of the ghetto into the village to him. But these were beautiful people, and they were so kind to each other. A beautiful married life and a beautiful family life, the daughter, she was -- she was a queen, yet she was a wonderful daughter, you know, Toidya. I have -- I have very warm memories, full of gratefulness.

Q: What was it like for you to learn about some of the trials of the Poles in the area, and just to think of it from their perspective?

A: That's what I just wanted to let those know who will study the situation, that the Polish people, who were anti-Semitic, unfortunately, but that was again the fault of the church, later on suffered so much by their own Communist system, undeservedly. In other words, they were always between two big millstones. On the west was Germany, and on the east was Russia. And Poland was actually divided, I believe three times during the history. The last time it was unified in 1918, when the southern and -- and western part belonged to Austria-Hungary. The northern part belonged to the Germans and the eastern part was Russian. They -- They had very -- a li -- very few periods of their own nationhood, I think under the yagalons, which was a -- which was a -- they are kings, the yagalons, they were very, very well known, historically. But the Polish nation as such, I -

- I can see a very smart people, lacking some education and also infrastructure. Communications, roads, electricity, that was missing. But the people itself, are just as good as any of the civilized nations, or more civilized nations. I w -- I wouldn't -- I wouldn't say that they are not civilized, but less me -- technically mes -- less developed.

Q: Do you want to say anything else about them before we move onto a different subject? [indecipherable] question --

A: No, I really -- I -- I -- about the Russians?

Q: No, about -- about the -- your -- the family?

A: About the -- no, no, I -- I -- I think I said everything I felt and feel about them, bef -- if I should remember later, I might be sorry, but right now I do not know what to say.

Q: When we stopped yesterday, we were talking about your experience with going to the post-war trials.

A: Yeah.

Q: And that you had testified a few times against Frenzel.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you said something about how he had -- he had -- about what his sentence was. I wanted to get more of a sense of your experience with going to those trials, and what did you testify, and meeting other people who had survived Sobibór while you were there, and wh -- and what that was like.

A: The trial, generally speaking, were organized in such a way, that one witness per week. I did not see a witness who was before me, or the one who came after me, because

the court worked only on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, I believe, and Thursday the -- the court wa --

End of Tape Four, Side A

Beginning Tape Four, Side B

A: -- ee -- during the trial against the accused, Karl Auguste Frenzel Rosen, Undersharführer, or Sharführer of the SS. First in Hagen, where I was two or three times, and then in another time, I was either in Frankfurt or in Kur-Kurnamrine -- no, I was in Frankfurt, Frankfurt mine. Anyhow, at one time, he denied that I am the person who was in the camp, and the presiding judge, I believe his name was Schneider, stood up angrily and he says, “Mr. Thomas, how did they call you in camp?” And I says, “Kurt.” And then he said to Frenzel, “Now, don’t you remember a Kurt in the camp?” He says, “Yes, I remember a Kurt, but this is not the Kurt which was there.” He deny -- He was lying through as much as he could, but ultimately he was sentenced to life, because there was no death penalty in Germany, which he later on, for some legal reason, renewed the -- the trial, after being jailed for quite a few years, and the last trial confirmed again his guilt.

Q: What -- What did you testify, and what was it like to te -- to be faced with this person and to testify against him?

A: Well, I felt a certain satisfaction, that he could see that some of us survived and that he couldn’t get away with what he -- what he actually was doing. He was really exploiting us very badly. I am -- Otherwise, I -- I do not remember now anything during the trial, but I would say this, “There were actually three German families, which took care as much as they could om -- om -- of us witnesses. One always was resting, while the other

two were active, and in my case, it was another judge, who was very kind to me, with who I correspond once in awhile, and then there was the wife of the principal of a high school, their name was Wagner. Very, very kind, nice people, who tried to make us feel a little bit at home while we -- while we during the trials in Germany.

Q: What year were those trials taking place?

A: The first one was in 1966, and then I couldn't tell which following years when it was. But the last one, I was a re -- I was real surprised, because it was quite a few years when they started a retrial, after he claimed that he was sentenced innocently. And that was quite a few years later, it must have been in the 70's, already. And also Germany looked entirely different at that time, than during the first time of the trial. Even the hotels were so much better, and -- and the food and the -- it was an -- it was already a Germany restored, almost completely, economically.

Q: What was it like for you to be in Germany, and how did you find the Germans?

A: Those Germans which I encountered, were very, very nice, very kind, decent people. And I believe that the German people are a -- are very -- very, ve-very good nation, like anybody else, but they were misled by a -- by a government, by getting promises, and also because they suffered of the -- of the defeat during the first World War, which was interpreted to them as a -- as a reason to avenge it. But nobody wa -- was telling them that they actually started the war themselves, I mean it -- the war started in -- in -- after Ferdinand Testi was killed in -- in Bosnia by Gavria Princip, a Bosnian nationalist, who killed the successor to the throne of the Hapsburgs. And they gave the Serbians an ultimatum which they couldn't accept, and that's why the -- how the war started. And

when Austria declared war on os -- on Serbia, the Russians declared war on Austria, and the French declared war on the Russians, and -- and Austria, and the English way north, and the first World War started.

Q: Did you feel any anger at all towards the Germans when you were ther -- there?

A: When I was in Germany? No, not personal. It was rather a historical feeling, but I had nothing against the German population any more. They -- They were defeated, they changed their political system, and -- and they were admitting their guilt, and paid restitutions, so what else can you -- can you ask? I think they were, in -- in the aftermath, they were the most decent ones of all -- of all the nations who were involved in the war and took advantage of the superiority of the German army, o-of the -- of the -- the German government.

Q: Did you ever feel angry at anyone?

A: No, I was -- certainly had no friendly feelings toward Frenzel. As a matter of fact, I just remembered, I was waiting one morning on a stone bench in the courthouse. I came earlier than necessary. And next to me sat another German citizen, he was -- at that time, at least, I would say 20 years older than I. And I told him -- he asked me what I am doing there, and I told him that I am there, being summoned as a witness, and mentioned Frenzel, and then I mentioned another -- another SS man, whose name was Gomersky. And he told me that he knew the Gomersky's boys, pre-war, that they were very, very poor people, they had nothing, they didn't have even a bicycle. And when Hitler came into power, or rather, before he came into power, the n -- the National Socialist Party supported the family, for the promise that they will be voting National Socialist. That's

what he told me. And Gomersky, I have seen, he was already sentenced, I think. He died in prison.

Q: You mentioned earlier that right after the war, you'd sent some information to the West German government about Frenzel, and about his hometown, and where it was --

A: Yeah, i-it wasn't the government, it was some kind of a court.

Q: Okay.

A: But it was a -- it was a government institution, but not directly the government, and I -- I mentioned that Frenzel came from a city, as I said this before, which consists of two nouns, lerver, lion, and borg or berg.

Q: Yeah, yeah, you mentioned that and what I was wondering is whether -- did you feel -- did you trust the German government to actually persecute it's criminals at that point?

A: Well, I-I really -- I knew that the Germans are persecuting those Nazis. It never came into my mind that they will not pick up the information which I gave them or -- or -- or simply pigeonhole it someplace. But it never came into mind either, that they will take a map and find the city and -- and -- and find then Frenzel in this theater, working as a carpenter. It was just a lucky coincidence that Friedma -- Friedland -- no, Friedberg, told me where he -- where his hometown was. If I would have asked Friedberg at the time, "Give me all the names and addresses of all the people," he would have given it to me, but who thought of that we will come out one day and be able to use it?

Q: I wanted to ask you about the -- So, during that time, you didn't actually meet with any of the other Sobibór survivors? The time that you were testifying?

A: No. I didn't see any of the survivors, although I think that at one time, I was going back to the United States with Samuel Lehrer and his wife, Gail. No, no, no, they were still there, and they asked me because I will be home in [indecipherable] sooner than I, to call their children that they are alright. I think we -- we -- we saw each other there for -- for a short while, in Germany.

Q: Have you had any other kinds of -- of gatherings, of that -- that group, or any [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, we had some gatherings. One time we were together in New York, when the movie about the uprising of Sobibór was premiered, and we, the survivors, saw it first. At that time, the United States witnesses came to see the movie, and even one fellow who was in South America, Shlomish Misener, he -- he too came. The movie was financed -- The making of the movie was financed by the Chrysler corporation, and it is often shown on PBS, the uprising in Sobibór.

Q: That's the one called, "Escape from Sobibór?"

A: Yeah, "Escape from Sobibór."

Q: That's right.

A: At that time I had a dispute. I, on one side, against all the other former internees, because I didn't like what Hollywood made out of the story, by adding things which never happened, and not telling about those things which were just as important, and didn't show them in the movie. And they were angry with me that I was mentioning that. And I said that history -- as these documents should be a historical document, should really tell the truth, and not be biased by some filmmaker, who made up a story.

Q: Have you had a -- There's been so much material on the Holocaust coming out ho -- in Hollywood and popular culture --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- lately. Have you had a problem with that?

A: Well, some of the literature, I will have to mention my former colleague Blatt. He issued a little booklet, and it is in such a low standard, and so uninformative, actually, that it's ridiculous that somebody even printed it. There is another book which I read, by Jules Scurvis. He's a -- a Holland citizen, from -- from Holland. And he spend one hour in Sobibór. When his transport arrived, they pulled out from the transport, 80 typographers, and he was one of them too, but he was not -- he was not taken. So he asked an SS man whether he could join them, and the SS man kicked him in his butt into the group. Now there were 81. They were used during the war for typographical -- for -- what do you call it, when you print books? Printing purposes, and also, I understand, for falsifying British currency, counterfeit. It's interesting that of the 81, he was only one who survived, and then wrote a book about Sobibór, and it was interesting. He put into it -- I have it here, all the names of the some 34,000 Dutch people who came from Westerbork to Sobibór by transport, by date, and alphabetically. And that book was reprinted many times, because people were interested, not only about knowing about Sobibór, but about those who perished there. That book is there, I can see it from here. It's in -- It's in -- in Dutch, in Hollandish, and I got later on a translation in German. It was translated into German.

Q: Did you say something in your first interview that Jules Scurvis had told you something about the fate of your family, or am I misunderstanding?

A: No, Jules Scurvis could not tell me, I told Scurvis about the fate of my family, and he put it in the book.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: There is also my -- a picture of mine in that book.

Q: What about other times that you've gotten together with survivors from Sobibór, has that happened? Have you maintained contact?

A: Yeah, it happened, because I used to go once in awhile when I was in New York, on business, I used to go to wine land, where quite a few of the former survivors of Sobibór were in the chicken business, and egg business, you know? So I met with them there.

Q: What was that like?

A: It was a friendly get together, you know. We -- We were happy that we are around and that we outsmarted the Germans. I also forgot to say yesterday, after the war, when I came to the United States and I married my wife, I worked for awhile in their store. Her brother and his wife were together with a partner in a business where they manufactured slippers. Originally -- The original trade name was Angel Treads. And then they came out with another line called Deerfoams. And when the -- Prior to that yet, I was working in another branch of their business, called House of Foam, which was selling foam rubber. We represented Firestone in Akron, and I was active there, traveling a little bit, and selling the stuff wherever I could. And we made pillows. And then when they came out with the line of Deerfoams, the company's name is R.G. Barry Corporation, with

headquarters here in Columbus. I got a line of these Deerfoams and started to travel, to introduce that line of slippers, washable slippers in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, I forgot now where else. Min-Minnesota, and introduced these slippers and got them into big stores, and as the distribution rose, and I could not handle that many states any more, I was giving up territory, and ultimately, I landed with four or five cities in Ohio, like Columbus, Cleveland, Dayton, Youngstown. That's about it. And then I retired in -- and that's how I make an -- a living, and a nice living.

Q: Di -- Was your work an important part of your life, was it particularly --

A: Well, I devoted all my energies to my work, and -- and to my wife. These were the two main objectives, and I was successful building up this business, and the company was very nice to me, too.

Q: Did you have any children?

A: No, I didn't have any children from my -- with my first wife, neither -- nor no-none with my second wife, of course, we were too old already.

Q: And you mentioned that your first wife passed away?

A: Yeah.

Q: When was that and -- and how did that happen?

A: She had circulatory problems and later on also developed Alzheimer's, and he passed -- she passed away in '82.

Q: And -- And your -- you remarried when?

A: '84.

Q: In ’84?

A: In ’84, yes.

Q: Will you state your wife’s name?

A: Gloria, Gloria. She’s American born also, just like my first wife was.

Q: We pause for a second. It’s -- Well, it’s interesting that you -- that you pulled out the -- the book that Thomas Blatt wrote --

A: Yes.

Q: -- because I had a quote from the interview that we did with him.

A: Yes.

Q: And -- And I wondered what your response would be to this. And he says, “The fact is that the survivors from the death camps act completely differently than survivors from concentration camps. Concentration camp survivors have societies -- have societies. Mau-Mauthausen prisoners, Auschwitz organizations, and Buchenwald. You never hear of S-Sobibór or Treblinka organizations, or Helmno. First of all, that’s you on the left, but people ask me, do you get together? No, we don’t get together, we don’t get together because our memories are too terrible, really, to talk about, so we don’t have contact with each other.” It sounds like what you’re saying is different.

A: It is not only different, this is -- he personally, had with him -- Shlomish Misener, staying for six weeks, when they were trying to put together a book. So, th-that is already in contradiction that we ne -- didn’t get together, we did get together. I was together this last winter with Esther Robb and her husband, which was not in the camp, and with Samuel Lehrer and his wife in Florida, and it was I who initiated that meeting. And we

already set for next year, that we will make it so that we could be longer together than a few hours.

Q: And -- And he emphasized --

A: I went, for instance, to Chaim Engel's son's Bar Mitzvah in Connecticut. And I try to be in touch. But then, when I had that controversy, that dispute about the movie, with which I cannot come out publicly, because I didn't want to put wind into the sails of those who denied the Holocaust. I felt originally, and I -- now I -- it watered down, definitely, that me -- that feeling, that the only thing I have in common with them is, the physical living together in the camp, but that intellectually, we are far apart. That was my feeling at the time, and I was very angry and frustrated, because they were at me like I would been a traitor, when I mentioned that the movie is not really a hundred percent correct. In -- In the basis, it was correct that there was a camp and there was killing going on, murdering, and that we s -- that we had organized an uprising and some of us survived. That is true, but certain details were not -- were not true.

Q: Did they not agree with you that certain details --

A: That's exactly, they disagreed with me, because he didn't want -- they didn't want me to even mention that there's anything wrong, which shouldn't have been there in the first place, and that they omitted other things which they should have put in. And I think the -- the -- that -- that is my -- my -- that I put one and one together. The main reason why this happened to us, Esther Robb went to Yugoslavia twice when the movie was made, as a consultant. First she went as a -- as a volunteer, and then when they saw that she could give some information, they made her a consultant. And she had in her power to do it

right, because she has a good memory, she's a smart girl. And -- But she let them do whatever they wanted to do, and -- and on that she -- in that sense, she is guilty in my own mind. But I forgave her already, because it doesn't make any difference.

Q: Okay, there was some -- something else -- on the -- the whole idea that survivors of extermination camps, as opposed to concentration camps, have a very different kind of experience, do you think there's anything to that?

A: I don't believe that, what he said, because it was the trauma of the beatings, of the servitude which we have to manifest and -- and the horrible conditions, and to know that many people got killed. What is the difference? I -- I don't -- I don't believe that I suffered more than somebody who survived Mauthausen and Dachau. I personally don't agree with that, and I don't know how he came to that conclusion, as if he would be a better, more elite caste of the survivors.

Q: You mentioned something yesterday about how, immediately following the war, you had more of a need to speak about it than you do now.

A: Yeah, yes. I don't have any need now at all. But at that time, it -- I think that there was -- there was something mentally, because wherever I had an opportunity, I started to rattle down my experiences.

Q: Did you ever meet -- Did you ever do any public speaking?

A: No. I had one little speech at the university here, and it was a fiasco, because first of all, there were only very few listeners. More than half of the listeners were friends of mine, instead of students from the university.

Q: When was that?

A: Oh, maybe four or five years ago.

Q: Hold on. Did you say that you had gone to visit in -- in Boskovice, one time, after coming --

A: Yeah, it was a --

Q: When was that?

A: That was, I -- in the 90's, in the early 90's, after the Communist system s-stopped to exist. Later, a year later, I think, I went to Czechoslovakia and was in bo -- was in Boskovice for about three days, but I stayed in the hotel in Bernau, and we commuted by taxi, because the -- the accommodations in Bernau were -- were easy and also I had friends in Bernau, survivors.

Q: Will you tell me something about that trip, and what it was like for you to visit again?

A: Really, it was nothing dramatic. The most dramatic thing was when I wanted to visit the graves of my late grandparents, my father's mother and father, Josef and Rosaria Ticho. They had two very nice tombstones, and before I went to America, I erected a plate -- a marble plate, which was affixed on the two tombstones, in which I remembered my parents and my sister, that they perished on June the 23rd, 1942, in Sobibór. The stones were -- were -- f-f-fell down and -- no, at that time they were still there. No, at that time they were already gone. It was -- The stones were f -- laying flat on the ground and the tablet was torn off, and I could not -- I did not know that I need a key to get into the cemetery and I didn't even know wh-who the key -- who the -- would have the key. I crawled over the fence, into the cemetery, and that was the most dramatic thing on -- on the whole trip. As a matter of fact, we went first to -- where did we go first? First to

Hungary, and stayed in Budapest, and my friend Rudolf Hurlinger, with his wife Inga, who live in California -- she unfortunately died a few months ago -- went on a trip with a group. And as it happened, they also went to Hungary, to Budapest, and also to Vienna, and also to Czechoslovakia. And we, my wife and myself, we were on our own. So we happened to meet in Budapest, in the hotel, and when I was leaving with Gloria, the -- their room, I took the elevator, and in the elevator I see a man, and I look at him, and I says, “Sir, aren’t you a senator of the United States?” And he shook my hand, and he says, “I am Sam Nunn, and this is my son.” He introduced me in the elevator, and that was the day when Yeltsin stopped that tank in Moscow, during the revolution there. And I says to him, “You know, Senator, we were lucky in -- in Russia.” He says, “I just came from there, and we were really lucky.” And in the meantime the elevator stopped on the first floor, and there were people waiting for him already, downstairs. That was in Budapest, and then we met again in -- in Vienna, and then we met again in Bernau.

Q: With Senator Nunn?

A: No, w-we --

Q: Okay, okay.

A: -- my friend, Rudy and Inga. And we wanted to go to -- to see the Spielberg, which is the same name as the producer of the movies, Spielberg, the same spelling, which was originally a torture camma built in the mid ages. And they tortured their people for religious and political reasons, but it wasn’t accessible, so we decided instead, and took a cab and went to the Matzocra, which are limestone caverns, built by -- partly by the water seeping through from the outside, and there’s also a river on which you go on the little

boat called Punqua, which was very interesting, that we spent together there with Rudy and Inga. Where else did we -- Oh, yeah, then in Vienna, I knew my best friend's brother --

Q: We s -- sorry, why don't we switch the tape now, it's about --

End of Tape Four, Side B

Beginning Tape Five, Side A

A: -- which was a younger brother of my -- of his brother, who was a very close friend of mine, and we arranged a meeting and we met at the opera house. Inga, Rudy, myself, Gloria and Emmanuel Ohare came too, and we had dinner together and -- and then we went to see the opera. I forgot now what we saw. And then in Prague, we met again with Rudy and Inga. And we stayed downtown in a hotel, and they stayed on the outskirts in a hotel, with -- with was originally built during the Communist system for Communist's functionaries only. It was a luxurious place, I went there, with every amenity you can imagine, with terraces in front of the rooms. And they stayed there for two or three nights and we stayed, as I said in the -- in downtown. And there I met one of my school chums, from high school, Rudolf Bubla, who helped us in Prague. He was a very nice fellow, who became a professional officer of the Czechoslovak army, and then I found out later on, when I met him after the war, in Prague, how terrible all these officer were treated. He worked in a coal mine for years, because he was a officer of the Czech army during the occupation of the Germans.

Q: During the war?

A: During the war, yes, yes.

Q: He was not Jewish [indecipherable]

A: No, he was not Jewish. Otherwise, he wouldn't --

Q: He wouldn't [inaudible].

A: Cramp -- Cramp in my foot. Yeah.

Q: What about return visits to Sobibór?

A: I never made it, and maybe I should have gone, but what would I have seen there? I have ha -- I have pictures. There is nothing there but a elevated mass of -- of soil, and a monument in memory of those who got killed there. And I c -- I couldn't -- I couldn't do anything for them anyways, so I -- no -- so I -- I never went. There was a big -- There was a big gathering, and I think that Mr. Blatt was there, too. I was the only one missing, at the 50th years anniversary of the uprising, I believe. That would have been '43 -- in '93, there was. And I have, someplace, even pictures. You can remind Mr. Blatt that he was there too.

Q: One more question then. Did you make a conscious decision not to have children? Was that something that -- that meant anything to you?

A: I tell you, we considered -- we were talking about adopting and I could not, at the time at least, accommodate my mind, that I could love a child which is not of my blood. So we dropped the idea.

Q: Is there anything you want to add or say?

A: No, I want to thank you for being patient, and coming here, and I hope that we fulfilled our historical duty, to put on the tape, whatever I could remember.

Q: Thank you very much, appreciate it.

A: Yes, it was a pleasure, you are very nice lady, and you are very good looking, too.

Q: Oh, thank you. We'll have that on the record. Okay, this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Thomas Ticho -- with Kurt Ticho Thomas. Thank you.

End of Tape Five, Side A

Conclusion of Interview