

Interview with Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996

Q: Okay, so let's start again, I want to ask you your name and address.

A: My name is Thomas Blatt, my Yiddish name is Toivy(ph). I live at 19427 Southeast 14th Street in _____, Washington, 98029.

Q: Okay. So I wanted to start with where you ended your videotape interview.

A: I don't remember where I ended.

Q: Okay.

A: I probably ended, I have the tape here but I can't _____.

Q: Well you ended by talking about how you joined a, a partisan resistance group.

A: Probably I ended where I met the first Soviet soldier. Liberation, probably.

Q: Okay no, you hadn't gotten to that, but maybe we can, I wanted to ask a couple of questions about that group that you were in and what it meant to be part of the resistance group.

A: Yeah.

Q: So what group was it and how did you enter it?

A: When I escaped from Sobibor, of course I was later hidden in a farmer's farm. He did try to kill me, I escaped and find myself in a village. In the beginning I was a cowhand, I helped with the cows because the farmer wouldn't keep me like this so I helped him out and once, a friend of my father, he was aware I'm Jewish, otherwise nobody did know I'm Jewish and he did want to help me. He called me and told me, "Tom, here's a piece of paper and an envelope, please deliver it to the next village, to that and that farmer." And I went over there. From that point, this farmer send me someplace else and finally I find myself not knowingly, working for the, in the underground. I didn't know what kind of underground, but I was delivering

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 2

2

messages and I was with them in the forest and once in awhile we did go out to mine trains, is _____, still not knowing what kind _____, but later I find out and that this is a organization, a peasant's organization called Battalione(ph) Hopska(ph), which in translation would meant, Peasant's Battalions. This was, on the political ground, it was in the middle, between the right and the left wingers. Later, after the Germans were chased out from Poland, some of them attached themselves to the Communist and some of them were the Nationalists, Akar(ph).

Q: So how old were you then?

A: I was in that time 16 years old.

Q: And you had seen a lot, you were not a child any more, it seems.

A: No, I wasn't a child, I wasn't a child a long time before this, but of course the war speed up our development, mental development, special. So I do, I did see a lot. You see, some survivors were in the camps, concentration camps or they were as Christians on false papers. I did go all the phases through. I was in the ghetto, I was in jail, in camp. I later was in Christian papers and later was in the fighting organizations, so _____ in all the aspects of the critical points of the hiding as a Jew. Not only in one place. So I know all the faces and all the difficult and different situations and I was of course liberated as a member of the organization, which later I was aware, the how, not by choice, but of course by accident. So many people by accident were in the Communist underground or the Nationalist underground.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 3

3

Q: So by accident. So that's what I wanted to ask about. You were 16 and this farmer asked you to start bringing things.

A: To deliver a message.

Q: And so at what point did you start to understand or think about or realize that you were part of this movement?

A: The moment he send me, when I took the message to the next village, I already understood that this is something, it's a new phase in my hiding, I had to say. And when I delivered the message, in that time, you see, every day you survived. It's like I was, was like a bookkeeping. Every day you survived _____ a new sight _____. So when I was on the farm, I thought oh, maybe I should sleep here, it'll be another safe day. So I went to the barn to sleep. I asked the farmer could I sleep. Oh, I don't want to go to make, back to my village, I am tired. He said of course you can sleep in the barn. And in the barn night time, some people started to arrive. About one o'clock, a group of about 25 people _____. And I was ascaresd they will recognize me as a Jew so I digged in deeper in the straw. And they laid down, they relaxed. And about two hours later, everybody left and the way I find out, from their conversation was they're going on to mine the railroad tracks someplace, not far away. So I understood, that I'm in the midst of a organization, I still didn't know what kind, but later, as you see, _____ special _____ once they did give me a horse and carriage, with a lot of leaflets from the Polish government in exile in London. And I supposed to deliver packages of the leaflets certain safe houses. So on that point I understood that they trust me already

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 4

4

because I did know all the circuit we were delivering. And I understood for who I am working. Except that this Mr. Russelinski(ph) who was the head of the organization, who took me in to deliver the messages, he only was aware I'm Jewish, in the organization. Nobody else did know. As a matter of fact, the next day, when I was sleeping in this, in this village I mentioned before, it was Sunday the next day and the farmer said, Tom, they called me Tolek(ph) in that area, Tolek(ph) we are going to the church today and this farmer said, "Tolek, come to the church, we are going to the church. Tolek, come to the church." So I said, "Okay." You see, I come, I don't come from an Orthodox family, but my old relatives were Orthodox and _____ watched out for me I should learn the Torah and everything else. My parents really didn't care much. And I believed in God and to be a nice Jewish boy. You should never go without a cap, you know, if you take down the cap, you should have a yarmulke. And still, no matter what, after _____ after everything else, I still felt uneasy taking down the hat. Now they're going to church, I was aware I must take down the hat and what makes it worse, you're going to the church. We went over there and they are taking down the caps, the farmers and there's a big cross. And to take down in front of Jesus and the cross, I felt it's something terrible, I can't do. So I didn't touch my hat. But the farmer looks at me and said, "Och, like a Jew." And he, with his hand he _____ and threw out my cap. So I remember, but later when I was in the church, pretending I'm praying, we prayed of course in Polish and I prayed in Yiddish and asked for forgiveness that I am praying in a church. So now I don't mind, you know, it's different, but that time, my mind

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 5

5

was set this way. So I feel to do some kind, how do you say it in English, blasphemy?

Q: Blasphemy, yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: So all these people that you worked with, the resistance, did not know you were Jewish and it was important not to tell them?

A: Yeah, it was important not to tell them because the organization, we talk about a political organization, underground organization in Poland. One was called Akar(ph), AK and I know they killed the Jews. But on the other side, some Jews were members. Mostly doctors and so. So actually everything depends on the person, on the individual and if I was in this organization, maybe one wouldn't hurt me, but I bet there were some would hurt me badly would they find out I'm Jewish. As a matter of fact my friend was hiding in the village. He attached himself to another organization, a leftist organization, where he should feel secure and he was killed by them.

Q: Why?

A: Because he was Jewish, so they killed him. So it was dangerous to admit, so I, I looked like a little shygitz(ph), shygitz(ph) is in Yiddish, is a little Christian boy, barefoot and I was wearing, I remember, over, overhaul, you know and I didn't stood up as a Jew, my nose wasn't as big as is now. You know very younger, when you, when you, when you grow older the nose, first of all the nose is getting older too, longer. No, I was, I was pretty good. They didn't recognize me.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 6

6

Q: And were there other Jewish young people or other Jewish people in the group?
Did you...

A: In the organization, no, no, not in this area. Oh no, no. There were living in this area, some Jews, there were two girls working as maids to Christians and there were one Jewish girl which married a Christian in another village and there was some Jews working as tailors, quietly, you know this was 1944, when the Germans actually didn't dare to come to villages like he used to come years before. When they did arrive in villages now, it's with big groups and very careful and so on and so on. So it wasn't so dangerous to take in a Jew for _____, like it was, for example in 1942, '43. I talk about little villages far away where the partisans had the upper hand for the Germans. So some Jews were in the villages, living half hidden, half open.

Q: But you stayed private about being Jewish?

A: Yeah, yeah, in the partisans at least, yeah.

Q: And so did they feed you, did they give you a place to stay, did they protect you?

A: They didn't need to feed me or give me a place to stay, I mean in daytime mostly I was working with this farmer. But if there was, as it called, action, we did need to go someplace, they let me know, come here and there to assemble, to assemble part. We went out to a railroad track or we had some meetings and so on, so on and daytime, even back to work, no one did know that we are farmers, although in daytime I used to deliver leaflets, I mentioned. Or messages. But it wasn't a group, we was always in the forest.

Q: But there were some that were like that?

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 7

7

A: Yeah, but _____, they weren't always in the forest. And every group had people which in daytime, every partisan group, resistance, had people in daytime were normal people and in nighttime they went for some actions, they were called. And some were always in the forest. Actually the village was in the forest _____, it was in the forest.

Q: And what was the name of the village?

A: Mchy. M-c-h-y. This is the Polish spelling.

Q: Okay. So a little while ago you said, then one day you met your first Russian soldier?

A: No then one day. Finally. This was in July and a German soldier arrived in the village. And it was obvious that he, that he escaping and he told us that is an end to the war. It was already July 1944 and _____ us aware that the Germans are escaping, finally they arrived in our village. And we have seen it, the older farmers left the village and went uphill, for the prepared hiding places and dig outs and so on, ditches, you know. But, I was without in a hiding place and I didn't know what to do because they didn't let in strangers, the villagers. And the farmer where I working as a cowhand, he was aware I'm Jewish and he was afraid to let me in the last minute, you know, never know what could happen. So I went down to the village and mingled with the Germans, they were on every, on every farm. So anyway I went into a farm house, picked up a cow and took the cow back uphill. On the way, a German soldier passed me and he was washing himself with, he was shaving himself actually. And he offered me a cigarette, he talked with me a little bit and

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 8

8

later I went down with the cow and to the field. And so if somebody stops me, of course I would say I take care of the cow, this is only, you know, belonging. So I felt a little bit safer, but later when the shooting is coming closer I was a little bit afraid and tried to get in, in a, you know, when they cut the corn, they but it in kind of a, I call it bundle and they put the bundles together so it forms like a, like a Indian shed, whatever would you call it? Anyway...

Q: Teepee.

A: Yeah. I went to, so there was in the field a few of them standing and I was trying to hide in one and when I was trying to get in, I notice a person's over there. And the person was a Russian officer who escaped from, a few POW's were in this village with the Germans and he managed to escape, they were kept in a barn and he was hiding, so I noticed him and I was very happy because you have somebody to, of course it was dangerous, but the Germans were down in the village, I says, _____ uphill. I was happy to see him and we talked and explained that oh, they're machine guns, which meant Russians about 10 miles from here and later when we heard single shots, he explained, oh now they must be someplace in about a mile from here. And later was quiet and he said, "You know what, I think we are liberated, because the front probably passed the village on the eastern side." And I looked down to the village and of course there were no more Germans, but there weren't a lot of Germans, I mean. A few of them and they were mining tanks and they exploded the tanks, probably they didn't have fuel to drive them so they destroyed them before they left and later the, the Germans left and was completely

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 9

9

quiet, like nothing. So I went down with this Russian to the village, looked around and later was walking on the road, not being completely sure that I survived, but I have the feeling, I think this is the moment. And finally from far away, I've seen a man on a bicycle. And I was wondering what is he doing with the bicycle and he was bicycling to the village. I'm waiting, waiting, when he comes closer, I recognize the Russian uniform, clean uniform. They're lighter than the Germans, than the German uniforms. He comes by, he drives closer, I recognize a Jewish, um a Russian soldier. He finally stopped near me and he asked me, "Germans if nicht(ph)?" There are no Germans here? I said, "No, there are no Germans here, they left." So he turns around, went back. Few moments later, I seen on the edge of the forest about 200 yards away, somebody in a house and a black coat, overcoat, looking around for a few minutes, turning around and went back to the forest. And I realized that this is, I must be liberated and I was shocked, because I dreamed over the years about liberation, how the liberation would look like, how I will grab this liberator, I imagined it must be a soldier always, and kiss him and be happy and dance. And really be happy I survived and dance for joy or whatever people are doing when they are happy. And it wasn't so at all, I was really, when up to now, I was full of energy and I didn't think about anything else, just to survive. Now everything collapsed. I survived and it was, it was a terrible, pity should I say, I don't know. I felt terrible that my, my parents didn't survive, my brother, was only a year difference. So I felt the heaviness of the past tragedy that just fell on my shoulder

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 10

10

and my soul and instead of be happy and joyful, I felt down and disappointed and it wasn't the way I meant, I thought it will be. And this was my liberation.

Q: You felt that way at one moment or did that feeling of disappointment come later?

A: The moment of liberation. Which could, as I, you say moment, it could be an hour, it could be, it could be a whole day I felt this way. I don't remember.

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah.

Q: And so thinking back on that now, is it still a disappointment?

A: You see, when I was in Sobibor you know Sobibor wasn't a concentration camps, Sobi was a death camp. A lot of people don't know the difference. A death camp, you come in, you go to dead, with_____. And I never cried. I lost my parents in a matter of a few minutes and my brother, I never cried. When a day earlier, when they took us, before they took us to Sobibor, if one of my parents would die, let's say my mother, happened she died in the street, a truck run her, run her over, I would cry, I wouldn't imagine a life without her, it would be a terrible tragedy. Now, a day later, hours later, I lost my whole family and I didn't shed a tear. And I asked my friends, I thought maybe something wrong with me. Nobody cried in Sobibor. Why? Because a mechanism, another way of thinking took us over. The nature helped us to survive by blocking out the past and the same thing was before. When I was liberated, my feelings, the normality of the person, of human feelings especially, was no restrictions, this is the reason I felt the true feelings which were earlier suppressed.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 11

11

Q: That's a lot of feeling for one day.

A: Yeah. And later, about a year later, I had another, I would call it, back down, not back down, another, when I did open completely because no matter what, I still, it still didn't reach me, the past deed, but in 1945 I was in a city called Gliveesa(ph), with a friend and I did drink a little bit vodka and I remember suddenly I started to cry and cried for a whole afternoon, maybe four hours. After that point, after I stopped crying, I felt really a different person. And from that point on, I, I think I started to live a normal life.

Q: That was how much later though, a year?

A: A year later.

Q: A whole year.

A: Over a year.

Q: So in that first day though, did you cry?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No, still not cry.

Q: You just felt the...

A: I very seldom cry, from that point. When I, when I did cry, I see a movie, from the wartime. I would, I would put in a few tears and that's all, when I see what's pictures from the past. That was the first time I cried really, besides this I mentioned this Gliveesa(ph) was a Polish movie I have seen called Channel, about Jews escaping through the tunnels and the shoes and so and so on and that time I cried. And other,

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 12

12

now, here, there, I see a Jewish movie from the past, a little bit, you know, uneasy. But otherwise I think I'm very hardened, yeah.

Q: Hardened, or?

A: Hardened, you see, I mean, I was a very sensitive boy as a kid. _____ and fighting and, but, what the Germans have done is not only killing people, the ones which did survive, the, the, the feelings was deformed. And I think the, the, the deformity for the rest of my life. I'm not as sensitive. I could look now to, to cripples or whatever, a divorce scenario and it wouldn't bother me really much. So, they changed my personality and...

A: Okay, let's go, I want to go back, let's come back and talk about this. So the day of liberation, you had imagined it and it was a little emotionally different?

A: Yeah.

Q: Why emotionally?

A: At that point. Later I was more disappointed.

Q: So what happened you know, the next day, the next day?

A: So I'm free. Where should I go? I'm going back to my town, Itsbeetsa(ph) because it's only three kilometers. On the way I notice a group of Jews, _____ and there was about five people of them, from Itsbeetsa(ph), I recognized them, start to talk what to do. And later they go to the marketplace. And there I realized again, that's another world, because this town, Itsbeetsa(ph) had come to be in 1917, in the 17th century, established by King Auguste(ph), only Jews lived there, 99 percent. The Christian was the mayor the city, commandant of the

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 13

13

police, the rest only Jews. And I did know every place and every home where I would step in in Itsbeetsa(ph), they would take me in like the best guest and now we are standing in the middle of the marketplace, strangers now _____, hostile all around, I felt the hostility. And I remember not far, next to the stores, was a man, in a uniform, in an officer uniform. He was standing with a woman, we were watching him and he was watching us and finally he did come to us and he told us that he is an officer, _____ in the Polish Akar(ph), in the Polish underground and he, he, he's, he's Jewish, he said and he, we're the first Jews surviving in hiding the way he has seen. And he talked with us and he left. Later we find out that he was killed. Because he was, in the Polish Akar(ph), the Polish underground as a non-Jew. And while talking with us, he betrayed himself as a Jew and he was later killed. And this told us his wife, much later was in Lublin and she survived _____ wasn't Jewish, but she told the story in Lublin later. The city I left later. Most of the Jews left for Lublin, from the little towns in Poland, being afraid. Now, so we standing, finally one said, "I'm going to Lublin." Then another one went to a friend in the town. And I went to people I was friendly with, our neighbors and there was a bakery, Kulikoffska(ph) bakery. I went to her, a short lady, probably in her 60's. She helped my before. And she said, "Toivy, you know what? Where will you go, where will you run? Don't go the Jewish ways, business, handle. You see what's happened? Start to work like all the honest peoples are working, I will teach you to be a baker." So I thought, let's see what happened. I was sleeping a whole day, I started to work about two o'clock in the morning, producing bagels. And we worked

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 14

14

til about eight and the bagels were _____ ready by eight for the _____ and eight o'clock I went back to sleep in the attic. And the oven actually was found there. One day, well night, somebody's knocking on the door. She runs, she was living in the first floor, she comes down, Kulikoffska(ph)...[End of side 1 of tape 1]...so, and she said, "Run to the attic and hide." So I hid in the attic and I was thinking, the war is over, I'm liberated, what is it? But after awhile she comes back. I heard some talking downstairs and I _____ the door locked and she comes, calls me down, "Come down and go back to work." Whatever else, I know the _____ a short fellow, forgot his name, he was a drunkard, but a good person, he said, "Toivvy, don't stay here, run while it's not too late." They were looking for you. He said, "Run." So I understood that there's still people after Jews. Same day, the day started, after I finished the bagels, I go out to go to Lublin. I didn't realize there's no regular communication. So I start to walk on the streets, people recognized me, because up til now I wasn't a baker practically. And I find out, as I said, there's no communication, just I must find a occasional horse and carriage or truck or whatever. There were some carriages leaving the direction of Lublin _____, but I was afraid to go over there, one by one with a farmer, who knows, I'm Jewish. So I was waiting for a truck. I tried to stop one truck, another one, _____ military Russian trucks passing by from Lublin to Zamush(ph). But they didn't stop me beside, they didn't stop in any small places, they were afraid. In that time was still a turmoil, you know. At the point, after about three or four hours, wandering on the street of Itsbeetsa(ph), the main street, I notice

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 15

15

that about three or four people are watching my _____, where, where you going? They going after me. At that point I recognized one, who shot at me, trying to kill me, who did kill my friend.

Q: Shot at you or shouted? Shot?

A: Shot.

Q: Shot.

A: So I realized, and shocked me, I realized the people I was trying to hide for so long, they shouldn't find me, that I myself practically _____ in, in their hands. Because the realized, they were looking for me, they realized if I survive, they will be punished. And so was there life or my life. And now, and they didn't even, they weren't in a hurry to kill me. They didn't want to do it probably in daytime, he was waiting til it be dark and it was without question they would shot at me. _____ where could I go, no truck stopped. Finally I've seen that it started another hour, so it'll be dark and that time I'll be really in trouble because even the trucks would not, the drivers will not drive at night time. So I thought, I will wait. And the next truck I will see, the next military truck I will simply jump in the middle and he could run me over and this is it. And so it's happened. When I've seen the truck, I jumped on the road and tried to stop him. He didn't want to, but finally he stopped practically inches from me and the officer, the Russian officer opened the door, jumped out, start to yell. Said to him, "Listen, _____, I am a Jew. You could run me over, but I don't move on that place, because here are my killers. If you wouldn't kill me, they will kill me. I prefer you should run me over than they must

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 16

16

kill me. Please take me." "I can't, because we have three people in the, in the compartment." So I said, "I don't care, I will drive on the back, I will ride in the back." And he had seen that he can't do anything with me, he said, "No, jump" So I jumped to the, on the truck and there was, I remember an anti-aircraft gun with a big seat and some, maybe six barrels. So I sat on the seat and hold on the handles from the, to hold on, not to shake in this truck. It was handling like an anti-aircraft gunner, you know. And the truck moved and I looked down and I've seen the four persons disappointed and the truck moved on and the people become smaller and smaller and smaller and finally I realized again, I made it. And this way I was taken to Lublin. And Lublin in that time, Lublin was the center of the surviving Jews from the neighborhood. Before the war, Lublin in this area, had most of the Jews in Poland. So whoever survived, went to Lublin. So Lublin I find a lot of my friends. And in that time was organization called I think, Umara(ph). United, I don't know, it was American organization which helped refugees and so on. And probably the joint too. And he had some houses where survivors like me did get a bed, a blanket, had a place to live. So I start to be over there. I start to, took a, a such a room with a few, another Sobibor survivors like Edda Lishtman(ph), her husband Ithsak(ph) Lishtman(ph), can't remember more. And _____ start to work in Lublin.

Q: So when you said you saw your friends, what was it like when you came upon someone again, and to see, to know that they had survived also.

A: Each new face which I've seen as a survivor and a familiar face, from my town or from Sobibor, you know, it, it, it was a, I felt happy, I felt, we felt close to each other.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 17

17

We're, we're wild too. We didn't know what, we didn't have, talk about kids my age, you know, when the war started I was 12 years old, I didn't learn a trade or anything else, my way of thinking was completely distorted. I remember wandering Lublin and I've seen policemen, two policemen that escort a man to the courthouse and I ask my friend, "What's happened with this guy?" "Oh he did steal a chicken and he was arrested." So I said, "He stole a chicken? Let me see what they will do with him." So we went to the court and he did explain the court, that, that or that and, and I wasn't able to understand it. It was to me, like unreal. I mean he stole a chicken, he said he stole, take him behind the wall and shot at and kill him. I have seen people killed for less than stealing a chicken. Why you wasting time? Two policemen, the judge and the procedure and time. I, I, I wasn't able to grasp it. Another time, I was like a newborn in the world. Another time, I went, I was hungry many times and somebody told me that the Catholic monastery, nuns, the nuns, they have a kitchen, a sort of kitchen, go over there and you could eat soup once a day. So I went over there. I felt uneasy being in a Catholic institution but I was hungry and I went in, in Lublin. And there were big tables and people sitting and the nun with the white cap comes and she brings me a dish, soup and I eat it. And she comes, she asks me, "Would you like more?" And she takes this, how you call it, this spoon, a big, big spoon and gives me more soup. And I felt that I am doing something wrong. I felt that I should tell her I am Jewish, she's too good to me. I mean, I'm cheating her, I felt. So this is the way, many, many things like that, which I did need to learn from the beginning.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 18

18

Q: So is it a, it sounds confusing.

A: Yeah. Somebody called me sir. _____. First time I still remember was in the train, called me sir. It was sounding, affirming that I'm a person and this took time. So I was in Lublin and I was ever so very shy, but over shy and instead to go to my father's friend, like another people done, a few my age who survived and he took care of them. I waited my father's friend should tell me come. Well, where are you, what are you doing, be with me. He didn't tell me and I didn't ask him, so I suffered. Years ago, when I met him in America, because later he emigrated, and this was in 1960, I asked him, I said, "Moshe," his name was Moshe Blank(ph). I said, "Moshe." I, he was my father's best friend and, "you've seen me, a lost fellow and why didn't tell, you had so many young men around you." Because he had a tannery, you know, he was very rich and I said, "You had so many young people, helping them, living in your house, why didn't you ever tell me, Toivy, you need some help, come be with me." So he said, "I didn't know. I mean, you should tell me. I be glad. I thought that you want to be independent." In a way it's true, I always liked to be independent, but also I did, I felt bad, I did want to be with somebody who, who will substitute my father, a family at least. So I was wandering and finally I have seen a shop, a bicycle repair shop and I asked them if they need help. In the wartime I worked in a bicycle shop. He said yes and I started to work. At a point I asked him, "Listen I will work for you, but you must pay me every day." And I remember _____ because I had to have money. So he paid me every day. And the day did look like that in the morning, I was in this house, from

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 19

19

the joint committee. Went down to the marketplace and there were farmers, mostly their wives, actually, with milks, was exchange, with milk, sour milk and this. So I bought two glasses of milk. Not sour cream, the sweet milk, sweet cream, two glasses and two rolls and when I drink this, right on the spot, this cream and the rolls and after that, I went to work and worked. We had lunch, I wasn't, I didn't go, I didn't take out lunch, I liked mine job. And once, I remember there, my boss said, "It's already five o'clock and we are closing, but Tolek(ph), if you would like, there's a man here has problems with a bike, you don't need to, but if you would like to, fix it." And I said, "Of course I will stay." And this happened a few times and finally the boss told me "Tom, I don't understand you. I have more people working for me and they're just waiting for the five o'clock to go home and you seem to be happy to work and always agree to work overtime. I like you. From now on you eat with me together." And from that time on, lunchtime he took me to his house as a member of the, I eat like a member of the family. But he didn't understand, this farmer, is this, that for the first time in my life, I worked, nobody beat me. I get paid. I mean, I didn't realized that it could be so, I was for five years indoctrinated in a different way. So I loved my job and I always was mechanical, handy and I liked it, really. So this was the reason I worked so nice and hard, the day did come...

Q: And the other people weren't like that _____?

A: No. _____, they didn't care. Went through a bottle of vodka later from, with the money. I did like _____, I did like and it give me a pleasure.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 20

20

From the past, they beat me and I was always in the threat of death and knowing that I will die and here I work and is a different world, so.

Q: But I guess my question was the other people you worked with had come from a different, they had not been through the same thing you had been?

A: They were Christian Poles, they were not Jews.

Q: Okay.

A: Had a different life, yeah.

Q: Even though this was, you were, you said it was a town of mostly Jewish people?

A: No, not mostly. Most of the survivors from this area, congregated in Lublin, but most of the Jews too, did go go in, in the business by themselves. I mean, handle, trade and so on. Very few, maybe I was even actual the only one who did go to work in a bicycle repair shop.

Q: And how old were you by then?

A: 16.

Q: Still 16?

A: Yeah, I know, '44, yeah, yeah, 16, 17, 16, end til 16.

Q: Couple questions.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. When you said you were in this house with the other people from the joint committee, did they feed you? You said you were hungry some days and that's why you went to that church.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 21

21

A: They didn't feel me, they give me a place to stay. But I think they had some kind of kitchen, I didn't know, I did never got to this place. I think they had in another street, called Shwartic(ph) Street, there another house, big house for refugees and I think, it's a possibility they had a kitchen over there, but I imagine, I didn't hear about this and I didn't go, but now from the perspective of time of the time passed, I think there probably there was some kind of kitchen, I didn't know about it.

Q: And so you lived with other survivors?

A: Slept.

Q: Slept? Cause everyone came back to the same house?

A: At nighttime we did come back to the same house.

Q: And did people talk about their, each, everyone talk about their experiences?

A: No, no. We come home tired and what's happened is there's this, we didn't, I had a problem, only which I was very ashamed of and I didn't know how to correct it, I urinated nighttime and in every, I did get up, I was in a puddle of this and I felt bad and I understood this problem _____ and very unsettled and this was the reason for. No, we didn't discuss, no.

Q: But probably other people had other problems.

A: Everybody had problems. I didn't know how, I know a few of us in this house, he doesn't live any more, he's he did became to be a multi-millionaire. He had gas stations in Israel, _____ and Canada. His name was, I can't remember. Anyway, he used to go out and other people and buy from the Russian soldiers, part of the uniform and later sell it in the market, you know. And the Russian soldiers,

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 22

22

especially in the hospitals, used to sell shirts and soap and this and they did conduct some trade, which I didn't do, I didn't like it and I didn't feel talented in bargaining and trading, so I didn't do it.

Q: And so you said people went to the market to trade, how did, you got a job, how did people get money, how did they start changing from having to survive every day to having some money and a job?

A: I will give you example. I do go work in the bicycle place. So I had the money because every day he paid me 17 dollars. The another one, the guy who did, which I mentioned, I forgot his name, unfortunately, but is a typical tradesman, he did get up in the morning, went to the hospital to work in the hospital. If you work in the hospital they give you food to eat, you know. While working, he had a package of cigarettes. So he trade the package of cigarettes with the Russian soldier which was wounded and he was in the bed and he sold his shirt. Later he took the shirt to the marketplace, was a spot, a marketplace in Lublin, where somebody bought a shirt. Later he bought 10 package of cigarettes. And later he did, when he went outside, I remember a year later I met him in Germany, in Frankfort. He was with a very rich man, this particular man, was very talented, very, he helped me a lot too. So and a lot of people started this way their fortune, their fortune, fortune, fortune.

Q: So how long did you work in that shop?

A: I work in the shop for awhile and _____ but my future. And I told him, "Mr. So and so, I'm leaving you." "Don't leave. Work for me, don't do like all them other Jews, just be the same," _____ Kulikoffska(ph) used to

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 23

23

say, "Work for me and later I will give you a paper, you will have the, the, you finish the exams and you will be, you will have a trade" and so on and so on, "like me." And have a little garage which was maybe four feet by four, four yards by four yards, a small, anyway. I thought, I don't like a life like this and told him now I'm leaving. "Oh, Tom, I must tell you, I never had such a worker like you." And so on, "You mustn't be Jewish probably, " he said. "Yes, I'm Jewish. So, did you have many Jewish workers?" He said, "No," "So how do, how could you compare that I'm not like another Jews?" Good, said good bye and left. What did I do later?

Q: Oh, my question was, did people still, was there still people who hated Jews in the village, in the town _____?

A: Did they still? In my Itsbeetsa(ph)? Why did I escape?

Q: And then in the next town? _____ you could be...

A: I was with _____ Jews and we had power, I mean, but they hated, a lot of them, it's a Catholic country. Jews, the Jews are Christ killers.

Q: So even though it was free...

A: How could they not hate Jews when they go to the church Sunday and there's a mass and they're, and they're, mass and the priest is telling him the story about Jesus going to the ten stations and how the Jews they cheat him and so on and come out on the church, not be anti-Semites?

Q: So it was still hard?

A: Yeah.

Q: So then you decided to leave this town?

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 24

24

A: No, I was _____ but, for awhile, looking what should do and later I remember the moment Warsaw was liberated, I went to Warsaw, ruins. I remember from that time, that I, I grasped the freedom, the way I could, just to convince myself I am free. I remember I had a habit and we were joking with my fellow survivors always, even a few years ago he was here from Brazil, Shlumer(ph) Schmizner(ph), survivor of Sobibor and he was joking, "Tom, " he said, "I used to ride with, work with you in the street of Lublin and there's a truck stopping, a military truck, and you see a military, a truck, you was, you went crazy, you just went straight to the driver asking, where are you going? To Posenun(ph). Will you take me? And you used to leave me in the street," he said, "jump on the truck and go." And I remember it was. I used to travel. I didn't care where and for what. Train, no space in the train, I traveled on top of the, of the roof, of the wagons holding on to the edges. And come to a city of, another city, I was wandering around and later I took a train or bus back. It was some, it was crazy, if I look now from the distance of the years, it was not normal, always traveling.

Q: Why, do you think?

A: I think confirmation of freedom, I could move. I remember the, the months in Sobibor, on this half a, quarter square mile is all, being like in a cage, had some effect and now I could move. And really we'd have _____ sometime will study the tape, maybe he will come up with something. _____, with that money. What should we do? I met, _____ and other survivors and one of them was _____ Schmizner(ph), later another one, Silva(ph) was his name and

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 25

25

later another one, his name was Felleck(ph), forgot his true name. And we talked to each other and I told to Schmizner(ph), Shloma(ph), who escaped with me from Sobibor, I tell him Shloma(ph) listen, tell them the story, I was sitting with another two boys from Sobibor in a farmer's place, the other two are not alive, I escape with a bullet, he has all our money, you must arrest him, you must get him too, because of killing. It was very dangerous to go there. I was aware that a farmer is in the village still. Why have I got to tell you this? Once I did go to, of course I didn't have shoes. The farmer once took our shoes away when we were in the hiding, the farmer who used to hide us, Bullyafski(ph) is his name, in the village. So I remember that he has our shoes, so I went to Itsbeetsa(ph) back from Lublin, find a little boy, I was afraid to go to the village of _____, so I find a little boy, give him a few zlotas(ph), Polish money, with a note to go to Bullyafski(ph) and tell him he should bring me shoes, boots, to the forest and I will be waiting here and here and here and here. And he left and after about an hour the farmer arrived, in the forest, near a special called Malinia's(ph) building. He did bring me the boots.

Q: The same farmer?

A: Yeah. I took the boots. He left his way, I left my way. Now when I think about this, I can't believe it, that I was so stupid. Hey, he could kill me and the boys who used to wander after me when I escaped to Lublin, he could call them and he could kill me, what did I do? But now when I'm thinking about this, I realize probably he didn't think I'm so stupid the time, coming alone. He thought maybe I told the police that I'm going and if I don't come back it's his fault. Maybe I have some friends

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 26

26

nearby watching me. I was alone, if he would kill me, nobody would know, I tell you. I still can't forgive myself how stupid I was, but it's the way it was. So I was aware that the farmer did not escape, he's in the village. So now in Lublin I told them, "Listen, he's over there, he's not punished, what could we do about this?" So, Felleck(ph) had connections to the Russian soldiers, officers. He told the Russian captain the story and one day we took a truck with soldiers and went to arrest this farmer. We arrived early in the morning in Itsbeetsa(ph), drove up to the village. The dogs start to bark, we come to this village, to this, to this farm and there his wife is, his daughter and we ask, "Where's the farmer? Where's Mr. Bullyafski(ph)?" "Oh, he left for Zamush." I really don't believe he left, he was hiding someplace, we did search _____ to find him. And we would find him, we wouldn't take him to court, we would have shot him right on the spot. But, you see, with Bullyafski(ph) it was like that with all the farms, they had good dogs. And when we were walking to him, the dogs already barked and he had time to escape to the field on another side and nobody would find him. We're over there, Stanislaw(ph) said, "Okay, if he is not here, we kill your daughter." And he took this girl behind the barn with the rifle. As a matter of fact you could read this in this book, Escape from Sobibor, Rachel, did you read this book?

Q: No.

A: Rachel _____ described this. So I was standing with him and told him, "Shloma, don't kill this girl, she is innocent." She was my age. "No, they killed those who were innocent, too." And while he was pointing, I heard the, the rifle and

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 27

27

he missed her, he didn't, I didn't let him shot any more. We going back and wait for the farmer. She said, "He is in Zamush(ph), we are waiting, he will come back." But in that time was still, even we had soldiers, it was still dangerous to be in the little villages too long. "So, where do you have the money?" "Oh, we don't have any money." "_____ the money?" And finally, probably she was, I don't know, afraid that we will wait maybe longer, "I don't know," she did come, she did go to a, we did go to a, she took us to the yard and there was a bunch of stones, a heap of stones laying. She moved away the stones, picked up a big pot with gold, with _____, with watches and diamonds. And he said, "Okay, this is it" and he took it. And the Russians took it...

End of Tape 1.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 28

28

Tape 2

Q: And so we were talking about when you went back to the farmer's house and you had the Russian soldiers with you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Is that, yeah, okay.

A: Yeah. So we take the money, we divide it, we left for Lublin. At that point, I had some money and, but it disappeared very fast. I don't know, _____ other people do some business and this and I remember that, had another complex, from Sobibor left, that money doesn't mean anything. Because I've seen people in Sobibor come in with a lot of money, gold, diamonds and they went to their deaths. So I thought money, what is money? Now I think a little bit different, but this was my philosophy and I spend it and was again very shortly without a penny. So what did I do, really, what did I do? So when the Russians advanced to Warsaw, Posenun(ph), Shilezia(ph), went into Germany, I did, I traveled to Shilezia(ph) and there are a lot of stores, which were completely open right after the _____ went in and I've seen a bicycle shop, so I went in and they called them, the people like me in that time, was a special name, Shabrovnik(ph) they called them. People who went to, to the west and picked up stuff like that, whatever they could and bring back to central Poland and sold. I was on big scale, here, Stanislaw(ph), he was bigger scale, he did pick up pianos, high quality pianos and took him to central Poland. I went to, I've seen a bicycle shop, it was open, I went in and took some little parts, brought them back to central Poland, make a few pennies, less pennies, really. But

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 29

29

one of my trips to Shilezia(ph), I met a group of people, Polish people. So, well maybe _____ was the first Poles, you know, over there in the city, so we kept together. They didn't know who I am, I know who they are, but they had weapons. Oh, to make a long story short, I find out it is a special group going after the, after some territory that's liberated, to look for Nazis for criminals. So I attached myself and pretty soon I was official member of the group and I worked with them until the end of '45. The end of '45, I went and had a conflict with a member of this group and I left them. Went to the city of Strachin(ph), I had a Polish officer uniform, but over this I had a civilian coat, went to Strachin(ph), trying to escape to east, to Germany. In that time was no east or west, was Germany divided in three, in three zones, I think it was, called Threazonia(ph). And finally, I don't want, I could say the details, but this would take too long, I find my way to Berlin. So, as a certain, beginning of December, I was forced to leave this group, deserted them, with the intention to escape to west Germany, right in the city of Strachin(ph) over there, I met a Polish soldier, who was arranging the transportation of, the illegal transportation of people to Germany, to the west. Was the Jewish sergeant, cost about 2,000 _____ zlotas(ph), I contacted him. I asked Jewish people how could they go _____ and they told me, here on this corner, it'll be the sergeant, you see and talk to him. I didn't have the money to pay for the trip. He said, "It will cost about 2,500 zlotas(ph). So he said, "You know what, you don't have the money, go and look for me for people. Cost 2,500 zlotas(ph), you find five, you go free." So I find him 10 and charge more than 2,500 but the extras I took. So I had someone already,

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 30

30

and he said, "Okay, in that case, maybe you would like to work with me." So I said, "We will see."

Q: But you were still a very young man then?

A: Yeah.

Q: But beginning to learn business?

A: No, I didn't care about business at this point, I think had to run away and I never intended to work with him. But cause I was in danger, if he would caught me escaping from such a military outfit, because it was a secret outfit, very exclusive, of the Polish army, interrogating, looking for the Nazis, I would go into the firing squad in that time, the war was still going on. Now? Sorry.

Q: This was after?

A: May, yeah, this was after, was after _____. But you know, after the war was still, it wasn't clear, it was still early, the war finished May and it was _____, it was after the war but still it was, like _____ I'm setting. There were no codes of law, later when it settled, but so I was in danger, I never intended to go back, but he thought that because I was so good I will come back and do _____ with him together. It wasn't difficult because you meet, he was in the area where people congregated which want to go to, go to the west and but certain areas of people like that were waiting, you ask and listen, would you to the, would you like, you like to go to the west? Yeah. Cost you \$3000 zlotas(ph). And if he said okay, so I told him, "You go to the Hotel Griff(ph)," this hotel is still over there in Strachin(ph). "Go to the Hotel Griff(ph) and go to the

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 31

31

manager and tell him that you want to travel to Posenun(ph) and he will give you a place to stay until the group will be assembled and we will go to Germany." And so it was with me. And finally the sergeant told me, "Tom, this night _____ tug will arrive, and prepare the group." I was in this hotel, two o'clock a truck arrived, we all went out, went to the truck and didn't take long. _____ from Strachin(ph) to Berlin, a couple hours.

Q: So people, a lot of people would say, why go to Germany?

A: Why? Mostly Jewish people. First of all I didn't want to go to Israel, we want to escape the Communists, that's all. Most of the Jewish people didn't want to be in Poland, was a lot of hate and so this way they crossed.

Q: And so what was, what was there that was _____?

A: No, when I arrived in Berlin, I've done a mistake, when I was, when I arrived in Berlin, was there a little place called Bernau(ph), suburb of Berlin, _____ and I made a mistake, instead to go with the whole group, we would go, we went to a under organization, a refugee organization and they take care of them, food and everything else, I went by myself. I always, I actual, up til now, I hate to go in organized groups, always, I'm individualistic. I went by myself, not realizing that in that time in Berlin, there are no restaurants, everything is by food stamps and so on, so on. So I was walking around, hungry, without a place to stay, look _____ into a restaurant and I've seen two Russian soldiers and, and two German girls. And soldiers _____ only one seat left _____, I sit over there. One thing you could order without money was beer, so I ordered beer and later we talk

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 32

32

with the Russians and I told the blonde girl that maybe she know where I could, a place to stay. She said yes she knows, a friend of hers. So when they left, she took me, she knocked on the door, on the window, to her friends house and she said, "Here's a gentleman that maybe you could keep him overnight." And they let me in, I slept. The next day, unexpectedly the same girl did come back and ask me if I slept good and something and she did help me with food. She was aware of some restaurants where you could eat without food, only soup. So anyway, to make a long story short, I was with her for quite awhile. But later, a jealous, her boyfriend, the Russian officer arrested me, put me in jail.

Q: For what?

A: Just like that. Because, put me in jail. I don't go any in details the way I went, he put me in jail. He was a higher officer, I missed a lot because the telling the tales will take ages. But anyway he put me in jail and finally while in jail, I've seen I could be over there months, because I wasn't registered, they just threw me in the cell. So once when we did walk, once a day we did walk, I've seen a Russian officer and I recognize, say he must be Jewish and I stepped out from the walking pattern and told him, "Listen I'm sitting here so long and I'm Jewish and I know it." So finally I was taken to the interrogation and they let me out immediately. So and I thought I should better leave Berlin. Now...

Q: Now, but there were many other Jews in Berlin then?

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 33

33

A: Yeah, yeah, but I was working alone, I didn't, I was in the organized camps and so I didn't like it, it remind me too much of a concentration camps, living together,

_____.

Q: And you didn't know other people, have friends there?

A: No, but I met another German, another German, who was smuggling people from east Germany, from the Russian sector, to the west Germany. Because in that time was, Germany was divided to the Russian sector and the rest was called Threazonia(ph), three zones. The Russian zone, I'm sorry, the French zone, English and American zone. So _____ he was a smuggler who smuggled people from the Russian zone to Threazonia(ph).

Q: Okay, so we just finished about you talking about you met someone who would take you to Threazonia(ph).

A: Yeah. So this person agreed to take me, but again I didn't have money. I always operated on a very low level of currency. And so I find some, another few people who want to go with me, the same thing, I repeated the whole, the story as before. But this time we took a train to the border, to a border village, which he did know and we single, but we're waiting until the, the, the border guard will go for lunch. It wasn't for some reason, they didn't change. One guard arrived, another one left. It was, looks to me, one set of soldiers and they took off at a certain hour for lunch and nobody was guarding the border. He was aware of it and he told me that this is, this is this way in this particular point. I don't know, maybe the way I paid some money, when we arrived on the border, there was a fence, we simply pulled up the barbed

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 34

34

wires and we slid underneath and we were on another side. When we're on another side, was about seven people and you stopped American soldier and he took us to a special camp. To my surprise, it was a camp of former Anised(ph) members from Poland. Anised(ph) was a very, very right wing group of underground partisans in Poland in time of the war. Killed Jews on the spot, very anti-Semitic. The worst guy you could meet, a Jew could meet. And of course when the Russians liberated the Polish towns, they escaped to the west. And this was their _____, people which, as I said, killed Jews in the hundreds, thousands. But it was the only camp where we could stay for awhile so they put us over there and I've seen the people and they were aware that we are Jews and I could see they hate, but we were standing over there for a couple days. They called us names. And later, they let us go, the Americans and I went to, where did I go. Ah, I had a name of a friend, Travinski(ph), he was, his story, he was Jewish, he was in his 50's. In the time of the war, he was a head, a leader of a partisan unit, Akar(ph), which I mentioned before, AK. A nationalistic unit, nobody'd know he's Jewish. The Communists arrested the leading figures of the Akar(ph), they arrested him too. He could go out from this prison if he would only say he's Jewish but he didn't want to do it.

Q: Why?

A: I don't know. So he was in prison and I find out about this when I was working in this special unit and I arranged his freedom and they let him go. Later I, how does, _____, I don't know, how come he was in Germany, in a village called Urgelsbak(ph). So I thought, I helped him then, maybe he will help me now. And

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 35

35

of course I went to this village and he was a very rich fellow at that time and he built over there a old factory and a bus line to Munich. So he was very active and I was with him for awhile. Later I left for _____ near Ginsburg(ph), near Stuttgart(ph), _____ and I was in the _____.

Q: So when you said you went to this man and you said you were with him, before you said you were too shy to ask another man to take care of you.

A: Yeah, yeah, but this, I didn't ask him to take care of me. He owed me a favor and I had come and this was already later a little bit, I did grow a little bit. And a simple, I didn't even and I didn't ask him, I just did come and say, "Hello, how are you?" And he, _____ did live in a villa, he offered me immediately. Maybe if he wouldn't offered me I would go farther. But he offered _____. Later we did went in that conflict and I was forced to leave him because he wasn't too faithful and I did know all his escapades and his wife was nudging me, "Where did he go, what did he do?" And I was forced to leave.

Q: You didn't want to get involved in that.

A: I told his family he was hungry anyway, I left and I went to the _____ camp.

Q: How did, did you want to go there or that was...

A: No, again, I didn't have money, I was hungry and over there a bed was waiting for me, a room, food, exactly in time, _____ good food, candies and even cigarettes. So I went over there. I still didn't live there, I, the first weeks, yeah, but later I took my cigarette rations and I went into a city called Ragensburg(ph) and

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 36

36

cigarettes were very sparsely so for a package of cigarettes, another way to say, I rent a room in a German's place and pay them with cigarettes. So I was independent, in a way. And only every week or so I did, go back to this, the _____ camp to collect my food and cigarettes.

Q: And why did they give you food and cigarettes if you weren't staying there?

A: They didn't know I'm not staying there. Only while _____ a refugee, which I was a refugee, but you see, I didn't want to live with a group of people, I want to live with myself, that's all, _____. So, but I was a refugee, was entitled to it. Now we come to a second period. When I left Poland, I was in love with a Polish girl and I left unexpectedly, she finded out where I am in Germany and she did come to Germany, she had my address in this private house and we did get together and everything was fine. Had a cousin in New York who arranged papers for me, but now she is and she did get pregnant and she didn't get the papers. So for me was either leave her and go to America or stay with her. And she want to go back to Poland, she's pregnant, she want to go back to her mother, she can't go to America, so I don't know what to do and finally decide to go back with her, which was very dangerous.

Q: Where in Poland?

A: Opolly(ph), city of Opolly(ph). Changed my name, told the police that I lost my papers and they give me new papers on a different name. Under this name, Polish name, under this name I registered with the Polish repatriation mission, was a special mission. And soon, in '47, we left for Poland. In Poland we married, she had a

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 37

37

baby, which lives now in Poland with my two grandchildren. And but I was discovered, by accident. A guy who did know me, who vowed earlier to get, he discovered me, but luckily he allowed himself to be bribed and I did bribe him with some stuff, I had a little store in that time and nylons were in prize and I had the nylons. He did come in once in awhile to the store, Tom I need for my wife, this or that. So he let himself be bribed. But in 1947, July 22nd, a big Polish holiday, the Polish government announced amnesty for all the criminals, political or whatever, so I heard about this, took off, took a train, went to the city, where I committed this terrible crime, escaping, deserting. And I said, "Here I am." All I remember was standing in the line with partisans, Anised partisans, we did come out from the forest. Up til now they fought. From the forest they come as _____, now they did, was amnesty, could go out from the forest, give your weapons and you're free men. Or whoever is in, has some problems with the law. And finally mine turn did come, I signed papers, did get a nice package of food for _____ and I was no more afraid. And this Pole, for some reason didn't know of and the next time did come, ask for some stuff for his wife, I told him, I don't have it. "What? You know what this means?" "It doesn't mean any more for me, it means now for you, because I could put you now in jail, you know." So he kepted quiet and everything was okay. Later we divorced and I went to study in Strachin(ph), I went to study medicine, I went to the preparation school for medicine. Over there I went in some trouble and I quit the school and went to work in a resort place. Here in America would call it social director. Mine job was to take people to different historical places, castles. In

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 38

38

wintertime teach them skiing in the mountains near the Czechoslovakian border. And I worked over there until 1957 when I, _____ did come to power in Poland. This was a person who was very anti-Semitic, but he did allow the Jews to emigrate to Israel. And I took my chance and left for Israel.

Q: So before we get too far, let's go back. The girl that you fell in love with in Poland, Jewish, yes?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No.

Q: Was that a big deal for you?

A: I didn't want Jewish girls. There's another complex I had. A Jew girl, a Jewish girl was for me something holy, you don't touch her. I mean was something which, was my mother. So I had a complex. I want a blonde Polish girl, Christian girl, I don't care. Blonde, blue eyes. It was, it wasn't normal, I wasn't normal, it was a complex which had grown me. This exactly what the Germans said is their, is their example of a perfect human, I wanted. So it's a good case, as I said, for a psychiatrist. So I had exactly a Polish girl, blue eyes, blonde and so on, so on, so on, so on, short nose, upside down.

Q: Because some people want, wanted, especially after the war, only to be, only with Jewish people.

A: A Jewish girl was, I felt for her so much respect and something, I _____, it wasn't so with me.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 39

39

Q: And what about her family, did her family know you were Jewish?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah. She has a brother and her mother. Actually they liked me, her mother you know, liked me very much and she was 18, her mother was I think 35, something, 35.

Q: And how old were you?

A: At that point I was 18 I think, 18 yeah, or 19, I can't remember.

Q: So that was a big decision, to not go and to go back with her.

A: Yeah, I loved her, it was true love. But later we divorced. And as you said, I left for Israel. In Israel I met American tourist, we married and she brought me here, to America. In 1960, I was in America, my son was born. I worked as a janitor in a hospital, my wife worked as a laboratory technician, I worked as a janitor. Learned the language, started to work in a factory as a punch press operator. Later I worked in a factory producing car stereos in Los Angeles. And later I went in to my own business, opened a store, electronics store, car stereo store in California, first in Oxnard, six months later in Ventura, six months later Santa Barbara and all were very successful and my intention was to go til the end, to San Francisco, on the coast and open stores in every little, small town in the coastline, but when I come to Santa Barbara I realized that I need to have more money to have the control of all the stores, so I stopped with the three stores and later, it was always in my mind to finish my books, my story, to make a documentary, to do a few things about Sobibor. So I sold one story, later another one. And 10 years ago I sold a third one, _____. At that point I said, "Now I have time to do whatever I want to do."

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 40

40

And what did I do? I set out to prove to people in America, _____ people, what's happened in Sobibor, that a place, which was, which has taken place, the only successful revolt of any camp under Nazi domination, nobody knows about Sobibor, is over grown and the history of Sobibor's changed. There's a big sign that here were killed 250,000 Russians, Poles, Jews, which is not true at all. And I set out at the time I must change it. And for close to 40 years I worked, it was very hard to change. I went even so far, I went to the Pope and not only this, they build a church over there in Sobibor, with a big carving, lifesize carving of a priest being behind the barbed wires of Sobibor, and what kind priest? Kolber(ph), very well known anti-Semite. Anyway, so, and I find out that in the sermons, which they hold in the church, they talk about the victims, the Christian victims of Sobibor and collect money. And this really, to say it bluntly, pissed me off, you could have it recorded this way.

Q: But you're going too fast for me.

A: Yeah.

Q: So this... [End of Side 1, Tape 2] So you had talked before about, when we first started about how you were very, you got very hardened and a lot of people would see that as not being able to open up, but yet you told me a story about deciding to go back to Poland because you loved this woman so much. Now a lot of people would not, who had lost their whole family, would be afraid to love that much.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 41

41

A: I don't agree, because it's not up to you, you can't calculate you love, nor you can love because this or that, it varies from the individual. If you love really, you don't calculate, it's happened.

Q: So you recognized that you had emotions?

A: It was natural, of course I had emotions.

Q: Now when you then got married and started your family, did all this time, did you think about your family that you had lost?

A: No.

Q: You didn't?

A: No.

Q: You couldn't? Some people wouldn't be able to think or you did in part, intentionally didn't think about them?

A: It's lost, what could you think about, is tell me? Over and over, is lost and lost and lost, lost, you go kill yourself.

Q: So you knew to move on?

A: Yeah, of course, yeah. I think now more than I used to think then.

Q: Why?

A: You're older, you have your own family and kids and you think sometimes what did your mother feel when they took the kids away. What, how did she feel when your kid went to the gas chamber? You could understand more your parents than used to be. You're in their situation and you have time to reflect and you get older, you do reflect.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 42

42

Q: So when you had your first child there, did you and my parents always told me we name the first child after a family member, did you do that, or?

A: Yeah, after my father, but I didn't let them circumcise.

Q: No?

A: No.

Q: Why?

A: Why? Because when I, the first time, in 1940, to the end, did try to escape from the ghetto, save myself with Polish papers, the problem _____ was circumcision and I remember my mother saying, why do we need this, how many Jews would be saved if not this? And I described this in my book, in my testimony from before and I promised myself, even that time, when I survive and have a boy, I will not circumcise and although all my family, from my wife's side, of course, insisted, I said, no. I'll leave it the way I want to. He wasn't circumcised. Well what's happened, after seven years, when he did try to go to the school, when he went to the school, he said, "Daddy, I'm different, I don't want to, kid's laugh at me, Dad, Dad." So he asked me to be circumcised and when finally I did give in, because he asked me, he was so happy, he did go to Methodist hospital like the sanitarium, so now he's circumcised.

Q: So were, I imagine you were afraid that that would be a way to identify?

A: Yeah, why do people need to be marked, for some religious reason? Somebody, _____ set up a precedence? Nature builds this way and this way is

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 43

43

probably the best way. Nature's know best. Mother Nature know best. Anyway, so.

Q: So that was a mark that Jews could be?

A: Identify, yes. Not, you see, not in America. America is too many circumcised, but in a country like Poland or you know, in Eastern Europe, is the only identification.

Q: Were there other things like that that you felt very strongly about?

A: No. I felt that I can be religious, very much so. I was a boy, when I was a kid, when I dropped a book, _____, Jews picked it up and kissed it, they were, a custom is you drop a book, you pick it up and kiss it. I never was able to say a vote against religion or against God. I did become completely different. It was a problem to be a believer or not. You can't just take something from one side. This was, few days ago was a, a plane dropped _____ fell apart, people killed 200, with one lady I heard on television said, "Oh, thank God that I intended to go with this plane, but I changed my mind. God say thank, God helped me." Very nice, what about the 200 people He, God didn't help? Same thing what was then. If I would believe in God, would still be a believer, I must also believe in the same God who witnesses killing of little children. Couldn't do it. Couldn't look on the one side, was the same God. So I must believe in a really terrible God and so I choiced to be an unbeliever. I like the tradition. I maybe a stronger Jew than many Orthodox Jews are, although I don't follow the ritual, but I know I am Jewish and, and always be. As a matter of fact when I married this Polish Christian girl, she wanted to convert and I was thinking about this and I was thinking, I'm a non-believer anyway, if it makes

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 44

44

somebody happy, why not? For me would be like changing my shirt. Make happy. But on the other hand I thought no, I survived. But if I would go now away from Judaism, I would be, Hitler would have another victim, would be a spiritual victim. And now I'm Jewish and my children are brought up, maybe not I mean Orthodox or whatever, but strongly Jewish. So, that what it is.

Q: So, did you, were you 13 already when the war started _____?

A: 12.

Q: 12. So, I remember in your interview you talked about, was it your aunt saying when you would be Bar Mitzvahed at 13, God would forgive you for eating pork? So by the time the war was over, had you decided it was a, God was a terrible God?

A: God is a terrible God, I mean, I, you know. You can't live in a twilight. The signs and everything is contradictory to the dogma of the religion. I mean, _____ revolution and in other aspects of our, of the world and you realize that, Bible, everything else, is simply a story. Stories people keep up because of the parents and grandparents and the tradition they did grow. And _____ Jewish tradition as I remember, is very spiritual, spiritual and very nice. I know, I did live as a Jew and I'd live as a Christian and the Christian society have, the Sunday go to church, otherwise you live your own day, but the Jews have Friday, every Saturday was spiritual and a feeling, completely different feeling. And so, people likes it, like this and it keeps up the tradition, but otherwise I, I'm not a follower of Judaism. I come to America and I hear the Reform Temples and Conservative. If I ever need to choose between them, I would go to the Orthodox.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 45

45

This is, beside I remember this from our home, this is another one I consider clubs, like a city, this is some kind, trying to hold back the Jewish people which otherwise would maybe drifted to another side. So it's a midway, but it's the true Jews I think _____ and the Orthodox are keeping up the Jewish continuity, that's all.

Q: So, if we look back we would say you were brought up with what we would call now, the Orthodox Jewish culture?

A: Yeah.

Q: But yet, by the time the war was over and you met this, you married this Polish woman, you were not, did you not consider yourself Jewish or you did by then?

A: Oh, I consider myself always Jewish. I'll go from the 1947 until '57, nobody in Poland was aware I'm Jewish except my wife. I was under a different name and very seldom, if I had told them, if I told them I'm Jewish they were aware, otherwise they weren't.

Q: So the period that you were in Poland and had this family and were living a different life...

A: Yeah.

Q: A lot of Jewish people were going from the camps and were going to the United States and to other countries.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you ever think you wanted to be part of that group?

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 46

46

A: No, I did try until I met this woman and this changed my mind, I went to Poland and later I did want to go from Poland, but it was impossible already. Until the first chance I had in 1957, which I took and left.

Q: And that's when you went, so let's go back to that, you went to...

A: Israel.

Q: Israel. To be a Jewish person in Israel?

A: As a Jew, I went to Israel. And over there I went to a friend of mine in a moushaff(ph). In the beginning he arranged for me a job, I was driving a Caterpillar on the fields, turn over the soil. And later I met this American girl. American, she took me to America.

Q: So when you went to Israel you were already divorced?

A: Yeah.

Q: Your son, did you have just that one son?

A: I didn't have, I had only a girl with this Polish, with my Polish wife.

Q: Oh, so, okay.

A: And then my first son was born in America in 1960.

Q: Okay. So even in 1960, no circumcision, you didn't like that?

A: No, no.

Q: Okay, so you were already divorced, you went to Israel and did your feelings for being part of the Jewish culture and the Jewish religion become stronger then?

A: I felt _____ like in home, a completely different feeling to being in Poland. It was overwhelmed, it was some kind of inner freedom, immediately, on the spot.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 47

47

And I felt good except the heat. I, people they ask me many times, why did you leave Israel and I hesitate to tell the true, because true is because was hot. Because they, they, they would think that is, oh a nice excuse, but the truth is, I can't stand the heat. If I would live in Israel, I would die a long time ago. I, even now I'm perspiring and it's not hot at all here, we have air conditioning. It's physical, I have something which is, can't stomach.

Q: Now did you go to Israel because you felt that desire to be in the Jewish homeland?

A: First of all, it was the only way to go out. This probably was the main reason.

Q: So if you could have gone...

A: If it be a nice climate in Israel, it wouldn't be hot, I would stay there, definitely. All my friends were there and, but I always thought to get out from over there.

Q: You said the only way to get out of Poland, the only way out was to go to Israel?

A: Israel, yeah.

Q: Where else, if you had been able to go someplace else?

A: I don't know what I would do, I don't know. I don't know, I heard so much about America, maybe I would go to America. But I always thought about Israel, I remember actually in the ghetto, I was arguing with a friend of mine about Jews living in Europe, in strange countries and I said, "Strulek(ph), if we will survive, if Jews will survive, _____ you should go to Palestine, that time was Palestine and build a country because you will always be guests any place else." On top of it, I remember the _____ like a childish comparison, but nevertheless I

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 48

48

will tell you this, I tell them, "Take a look. If you, if a friend of you, of you, would take into your home, give you a little room and you're smarter than him and after awhile you buy his table and you buy his dishes and finally he feels that you have it better than him. He would be angry and he wouldn't like you, the same thing is with Jews in Poland," I told him. We're able, willing, talented and we live better than most of the Poles. Not all of them, there were a lot in little towns, very poor Jews, but it'd look like the Jews are for some way living better than the peasant in the villages. So there's a lot of jealousy and there always will be trouble. There will be too many of us, will be trouble in any country. Anyway, so and finally he wind out, who was against it, wind out in Israel and I wind out in America. Now he lives there. Anyway, so after the war I went to him in Israel and he did give me the shop and to make it short, I met my wife, we married in Israel and left for America.

Q: And you went to America because she had a life here?

A: Yeah, she had a job here, she _____ a vacation from this job.
And...

Q: Was she Jewish?

A: Yeah.

Q: And that was okay?

A: Yeah, in that time was okay, you know, you, you, you, you're not, you're, you're, you don't stay in one place. You move on, you change your opinions. _____, you could be a Communist and later you see there's something, you could be a, a Nationalist. People, I think people which change their religion, I'm

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 49

49

sorry, their opinion are people which think. They find out this is wrong. They grow, people grow and when they grow, they understand more.

Q: So you recognize growth and change in yourself a lot over these years.

A: Oh yeah, of course.

Q: Now some people, I'm sure you've talked with a lot of other Holocaust survivors, a lot of them have not changed, cannot grow, cannot move on.

Q: You see, when I opened my first store in Santa Barbara, in Ventura, I liked, I liked very much Jewish music. And always I had a Jewish tape with Jewish songs. Later I sold the store, I sold the store to another Jewish survivor. When he did come to visit my store, always had Jewish music and I didn't care who was over there, I had Jewish music. When I had come to his store and put in a Jewish tape, "Oh listen David, listen to this tape," he did look ascares, he looked around, I said, "David, it's over. If I must hide here again, why did I come to America?" He still has the complex. I rather did try to demonstrate, that time, Jew and so on and so on, so on, so on and...

Q: So in the, I don't think it was the transcript but in one of the articles they sent me they talked about how you went, did you go back to the trials at some point?

A: All the time, yeah.

Q: And when was that, was that after you came back to this country or in Israel?

A: _____ they used to call me when there were the trials for the Germans, the Nazis, they used to call me as witness. From America they used to call me, dozen of times to Germany as a witness.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 50

50

Q: And what was that experience like?

A: When I first seen the murders in Sobibor and the bench in court, my knees, I was very nervous that I survived to that moment when they are behind bars and so on. But the next occasions it didn't bother me, if I would try to describe all the feelings each time I did come, against each of the Nazis, cause there are many courts against the Nazis, court sessions against the Nazis from Sobibor, against the Nazis from Itsbeetsa(ph), you would need to sit here for a whole week. But generally only the first time was a little bit strange and later it didn't bother me.

Q: Did you think about not doing that?

A: No. You see some survivors, they drift away from the past, they don't want to think about this and it's okay. They have families, children, grandchildren, they proved that they survived, this is their way of saying here I am. And some survivors they can't attach themselves from the past and they don't want to. Feel of guilt, I don't know, they want to do something. I'm the one who want to do something to, for the history, should be documented. Anyway, I'm very much involved with the past and cannot go away from it. And this is the reason that I was involved lately with Sobibor and I'm happy I did do something worthwhile.

Q: So at what point did you start writing down things and thinking the names, the dates, various specifics?

A: The first time I start to write down, I was in, before the war, I was in the public school. I wrote down with my _____ something I didn't want, somebody should _____, they had some special marks and, and although I was very bad

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 51

51

in mathematics, I was always good in writing, in Polish and it was my passion to write, in the wartime I wrote. Lost many times the notes. Some I did leave to Poles for safekeeping, some I took with me to Sobibor and a Nazi, _____ threw me in a well and everything went wet and ruined my whole, whatever written down. Next time, start to write again, I wrote all the time, in the forest, in piece of paper and give it to farmers and after the war I collected about 40 percent. In 19, in 1953, I put everything from the little notes in the notebook and in 1957, when I arrived in Israel, in 19, yeah in 1957, '58, I borrowed a typewriter, put everything in a manuscript form and later, and this was my whole story, that evolved at Sobibor. Later I thought, let me have the opinion about this book, if it's interesting. And I thought, who could give me the best opinion? Somebody who was in the camp. So I went straight, I forgot his name, he was the secretary of the Auschwitz organization in Israel. In Haifa he used to live. Said, "Mr. So and so, take this, read it and tell me, evaluate my manuscript." Three weeks later I go to him, he looked at me. "Oh, Toivy, you have an imagination. Never heard of Sobibor, never heard about the revolt." And I thought, I was in shock, you know, I was many times hit by the Germans in Sobibor, it didn't hurt me as much as his words. He, five years in Auschwitz, he doesn't believe my story? Who will believe it? So I put it away. For about 40 years, didn't touch it. Forty, I don't know, I started again about, this was in 1958, about 25 years.

Q: You put it away?

A: Put it away, because if he doesn't believe me, I was thinking about it many times and I find out, but I had come at a conclusion, that he wasn't really a good person to

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 52

52

evaluate. He was closed up in this Auschwitz. He didn't know the complexity of the Holocaust tragedy. And in a way, despite what you, many people think, it was much worse outside the camps, in many cases, than in the camp. In the camp you was, you had a good job over there, you was secured in a way, you didn't know, you could vision another day and so on, so on, so on. If you were strong, you was able to... And on the other side, hiding as a Pole in the forest, you wasn't sure every second of your life. So he didn't know this aspect of course. He didn't hear about Sobibor. Cause he went straight to Israel and so he was hidden. They tried to erase the memory of Sobibor. Poland didn't care. Why should they expose, even now they didn't take, they don't take people, why should they expose a place where the Jews fought back the Germans? They despised Jews, the cowards. When there were so many Poles in camps and they didn't fight back. So Sobibor was pushed away and I actually put it back in the view.

Q: So one man said that you and you, did you think maybe I did imagine or maybe it wasn't...

A: No, I know I didn't imagine. As a matter of fact in my book which I wrote now, which will be published by Northwestern University in the spring next year, I eliminate many things from the manuscript to make it more believable. Because it took miracles to survive the Nazis, so.

Q: So the time that you put your manuscript away, did you think about it?

A: No. Put it away. Actually it was always in my, in my subconscious. It started again when the film did come out in America, The Holocaust. When did come to

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 53

53

interview me and I think this film was a breakthrough in America. From that time on they start to talk about this. And I did go back to my manuscript.

Q: So it was a breakthrough for you...

A: It was, no, from this time on, if you will look the chronology of the history, I mean, the chronology, chronology, what's happened, films, books. From that point on, people started to publish memory, memories, books, films and so on. Was a, the Holocaust was a breakthrough from the taboo about the Holocaust.

Q: And did you feel, that's the first time we've used that word taboo, did you feel that there was a taboo, that there were people _____?

A: Yeah, yeah, they didn't talk about this, they didn't, who would believe them? So.

Q: Even though you knew other people who had had somewhat of the same experiences?

A: Yeah. You know, there's a lot of them because now they have, they, another thing, while it was the, it wasn't so public knowledge like now, because most of the survivors, some made it, made very fast a fortune and were busy still doing it. Some worked to make a living. Now most of them, the last 10, 20 years retired. They have time and they go back to it and they start to write. Before they were trying just to make a living. So this also a reason why now we have more, we talk more about this than before.

Q: I _____ about that.

A: Okay, let's relax.

Q: Okay.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 54

54

End of Tape 2.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 55

55

Tape 3

Q: So all the things that we've talked about today and the interview that you did originally, did you talk about all these experiences with your family, with your wife and with your children.

A: Yeah, not with the children, oh, the children know about this, but I talk with my wife, she helped me, book because see, see, my English was bad, it's still bad and she helped me with editing. We talk about this.

Q: But now would you...

A: As a matter of fact she went with me once to Germany and when I met this officer from Sobibor and I interviewed him, she was with me, helped me a lot.

Q: You talked about in terms of writing the book, but do you talk about it in terms of the experiences itself?

A: Yeah, of course, we talked.

Q: Now you say of course, but some people...

A: No, she was very much in it, yeah.

Q: But why not talk about it with your children?

A: Well, they know the story. And because when I, I made a lot of slides and I talked people, I told people the story _____ many times and they would, were sitting, listening. I didn't hide from them. Some them want to know stories when grown up children know anything about their parents and we don't tell them, they know from the beginning.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 56

56

Q: So were there things you wanted to protect your children from? Hide? That they shouldn't know about you from that time?

A: I didn't want to protect. I told them, it's not, you see I don't believe to do something, to protect, not to tell, not to do this because if you do this it'll be _____ or better. I believe, I'm not a Federalist, but I will believe, I believe what must be, will be and you could do your best trying to do it, to do something and could turn around, upside down. You really can do much to influence your future. Of course, you could do it, you could go to school, learn a trade, but a lot of things which you could, but another way, really, not talking about the past, _____ because the kids wouldn't have a complex. Talk, all because they should know the true. Depends on the child's character, about intelligence and willingness and upbringing. I told them, in any case.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: I have in Poland my daughter from the Polish marriage.

Q: Whose and adult now.

A: Yeah. And I have here a boy and a girl. The boy is about 36 and the girl is about 32.

Q: Adults?

A: Yeah.

Q: So do they ask you questions?

A: They don't need to ask me, they know everything. And my daughter called me up just yesterday. "Daddy, I'm so proud of you." "What are you proud?" I've seen

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 57

57

in the window in a library or whatever, I can't remember, the film, Escape from Sobibor and Schindler's List has recommended as a stand out literature for the schools and I've seen your name there. So they are involved in it and that's all.

Q: So, we were talking before about how some people didn't want to talk about the experiences, what do you think, why do you think it's important for you to have spent all that time writing and to have spent all the time making sure the story that you wrote comes out?

A: I survived. And I felt always, there's a price to pay back in surviving, that's all. You have something inside which you must release it for the, for the future. And I said before, and it hurt me when I come to Sobibor and I see a sign that here were killed 250,000 Russians. And was there a church next where they killed people, actually on the same spot they murdered people. So it did hurt me when I have seen this. When they build a church, I was in Sobibor, but I was misled, because of seeing an ad in the paper that a group of priests want to build a mausoleum for the memory of the Jewish victims of Sobibor. So when they were building I talk with them and I ask them if there will be some kind Star of David, so the priest told me, "Oh no, we can't do that." I said, "Why not? Only Jews were killed." So he said to himself, so he said, "No there wouldn't be, there will be, it will be a monument this church for the victims of Sobibor, but are they Muslim men or Christians or Jews? No, it wouldn't say so." So I said, "Why? Only Jews were killed here." So he said, "Yes, I know that only Jews. And people living here around, which still remember the times, they say that only Jews, but the sign doesn't say so." So I told him the

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 58

58

sign is lying. So finally, anyway it was next year and there's a church, no mausoleum but a church built there. So is, I was mad. And start to work with double energy, went to the commission for investigating, investigating the Nazi crimes and talk with them. Talk with the Minister of Justice, with the Minister of Monuments and inch by inch, I was a pest. To have more authority, I produce a film, a documentary called Past and Present. Did you see it?

Q: No.

A: To show what's going on. And with this help, I organized in Los Angeles, with the help, with the second generation of the Holocaust survivors, I establish organization, Holocaust Site Preservation Committee. Had some senators as figureheads and Asner and Fonda and _____, very good names. So I had a, the organization was called Holocaust Site Preservation Committee and was official non-profit organization and I had a letterhead and some support, but still was working alone. And so I, but now when I had appointment with a _____ official, I send him this letterhead with impressive names. And I did gain some appointments. And finally a writer, she wrote a book, it's a English writer, English-German writer, maybe you did read this book, Into the Darkness, Gitta(ph) Serran(ph) is her name and of course that is the best book about the Holocaust. She told me, "Tom," I told her the problem, she told me, "Tom, go to the Pope, talk with the Pope." So I said, "With the Pope? I need _____." She said, "It's not so difficult at all. If you want I should, I will help you." And she had a friend, a very famous Polish aristocrat, she's not Polish but she had this, I forgot his name,

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 59

59

he had, he was a, very close to the Pope, anyway to say it shortly, I did get out, did see the Pope. Talked with him 12 minutes, told about the church, about the lies, about what I would like from him is help. And soon after that when I was in Poland, I talk with the _____, I could go in details but it will take ages, so I would just tell you that, that we set out, when I had already set, the first version which they allowed me to change on the sign, only we pay money, we do it, the Polish did not want to put a penny, the cost was and I had about 25,000 dollars to my disposition from the collection American. The first version was to change that, in this place were killed 250,000 Jews and Poles and I thought this is the best of it and I accepted it. But later it did bother me. I said, "No, Jews and Poles, it's not so. There weren't Poles there." The argument from the Minister of Justice was that there were for sure converted Jews. As converted Jews, they were Christians. So I told him in this case _____ converted Germans, maybe he should put the Germans too were killed and so on, so on, so on. Anyway, they didn't want to _____. So I said, "In that case, I back out." "Mr., but you signed it already." "Yes, it's true, but I cannot follow it." And it come out another version, that in this place were killed 250,000 Jews and about 1000 Poles. To support my version, I played for him the tape, which I made with my interview with Frentzel(ph), the Nazi officer from Sobibor. I had with him my interview in Germany. And, and it was difficult with this too. I had already, they accept it and I said, "It's okay. 1000 Poles will show, 250,000 Jews, that will show that the tragedy really more graphic." And maybe because Sobibor's on the side, far away from the main centers, we will, hooligans will maybe have a

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 60

60

little bit respect and they'll not destroy this place. So I agreed. But still, hard to go about this? I have already the text, but I didn't have _____ permit to take out the old sign. Now I did work with the district, you would call him here, governor. Over there they called him _____. Went to him and talked and established some kind of friendships and I remember the day I invited them, not only him, him and his co-workers for a big dinner in a restaurant. In that time a dollar we changed for Polish zlotas(ph), you could do a lot. So I made a big dinner, with vodka and when we were practically drunk, I said to the _____, "Oh, Mr. Leshick(ph)," first name, "so what, will we finally change the plates?" And he said, "You have new one, do you have with you arranged everything?" I said, "Yes, is no problem. We must take down the old one, that's all." I thought the moment we will take down the old plate, we will leave a empty spot, we will have no way, we will need to fill it in because tourists our coming. So mine objective was to take it down as fast as possible. So I said to Mr. Leshick(ph), "We must take down the sign, the old one, because I want to put in a new one." And he asked me, "When do you want to have it done?" So I said, "I don't know." And I just, as a matter of fact, I didn't believe, I said, "Maybe after dinner." He said, "Okay." I didn't believe him, I look. He said after, I said, "Okay?" I wasn't, I was impatient to finish this dinner, we took a car to Vuldava(ph), the next city and he took, as a mayor, as a governor, he took some people from the city hall, workers, city workers, to come with shovels and they, it didn't take them long, took down the sign, I loaded my car. I still have it hidden in Poland, my daughter's place, in the garage. And now it's a empty spot, need to fill

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 61

61

it in, so I said, I thought, _____. So I ordered the new signs, five of them they made, put them on and organized a big 50, 50th anniversary of the revolt, when the signs were unveiled and now at least the truth over there. This accomplish I think I've done a little thing. Now, published this book about Sobibor, another book and could relax.

Q: Now you said that was giving back something. That's not a little thing, that's a big thing.

A: See. A _____ from the present Polish president, a letter, _____. Here, firing squad.

Q: So this was important, not only to you, but to other people. All these letters that are...

A: _____. I'm sorry. _____ is this. That most difficult I heard from Jewish people and I don't know why, because the Jewish people Israel, should bring up, take care of Sobibor. Because this was really the biggest revolt, if not the only successful revolt. Not talking about _____ ghetto, talk about camps. And I had difficult time to organize somebody from Israel. I went to the Israel ambassador, tell them, listen, I know the Prime Minister will come from Poland. _____ she's _____ Polish, I would like you should be there. I didn't, they didn't even let me talk to ambassador. They'd give me some kind political secretary there, a woman called Gordon. She didn't care, she just didn't want to go for the commemoration. So I said, listen if you don't go, I promise you, I myself am talking on the radio, on television. I will say that I tried to get somebody from the

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 62

62

Israel ambassador and they didn't give a damn, didn't even know what Sobibor is and what Sobibor was, so educated _____. Anyway, so she was scared and she did come. Otherwise nobody would be. But I arranged it very nice, if you want to see it in the tape, it's 15 minutes, I could show it to you.

Q: I have some more questions though.

A: Yeah?

Q: In terms of, in this course of this interview you've said how it's important to go on, to live, to survive, but yet you spent a lot of time on this. Why was it so important? Because they _____ or why?

A: It was important, I said in the beginning, you can't disappear from this world when you feel you have something, something unspeakable, something you must leave for the future. And now, I'm close to 70 years old, another half a year, I'll be 70 years old. I'm really satisfied that I left something for the posterity, for history. What do you think? People say, oh we should kill them all, okay, of course, _____ forward to kill the Nazis, but I think this is not, this shouldn't be the purpose, we should keep the emotions down. We should sue him, have court proceedings. Because I don't give a damn if he's killed or not, because takes a minute and he hangs and there's, this belongs to them. But most important is his testimony because this will last forever, if he had to document what's happened. So, what I have done is in a way, a document and now I'm really satisfied because that's all I could do. It was very difficult as I said, with help and look _____ at this letter, the organization, the Holocaust _____ committee, the head, the head _____ did

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 63

63

represent me as a figure at least, in the Polish and _____ for the Polish official, as a figure to _____ as an official from America and the true, was a little like I am, a little simple person, trying to do the best and I used it and I was received with respect by the Polish dignitaries, as a matter of fact, I grabbed one of us in a meeting, some kind of meeting in Washington and there were some diplomats and I grabbed the Polish Minister of Justice, Yushkevich(ph), had the collar _____ called it _____ and didn't let him go until he promised me 10,000 _____, he didn't keep his promise. For this money, I forgot to tell you, in Sobibor, besides the church and besides the sign, they establish a kindergarten, with swings and everything and I managed to throw them out and I establish a museum, now there's a museum there. So in my small capacity as small man, I think I accomplished something which let me, let me live a little bit in peace now.

Q: So in doing all that work...

A: Yeah.

Q: ...it also seems like you had to relive some of the pain, over and over and over.

A: No.

Q: No?

A: Okay, I didn't have to relive the pain, because after awhile, it neutralize you. You become a person, you're not so personal involved, your emotions is moving aside by the, by the action. You doing it and I used to come to Sobibor and I used to shake in the beginning, not now. The only one moment may be when I'm, I sometime not

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 64

64

able to control, I'm going to tell the story of Sobibor and the lectures here, whatever, when I talk about my parting with my mother. Otherwise, I'm in full control of myself.

Q: These are? Just a couple of other questions.

A: Yeah.

Q: So do you talk to other Holocaust survivors and encourage them to speak out or do something that's meaning, something that's meaningful to them?

A: No, the fact is, that the survivors from the death camps, act completely different than survivors from concentration camps. Concentration camp survivors have society's mauthausen(ph), prisoner's, Auschwitz organization and Buchenwald. You never hear of Sobibor or Treblinka organization. Or Helnot(ph). 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 and we don't have contact with each other.

Q: When you meet people either from the same types of experiences, or people who have had other types of experiences, but can't talk about it, who might have nightmares or a hard time having family relationships, what do you tell them? What can you tell them?

A: Repeat it please.

Q: I'm wondering, you're someone who has, who doesn't seem to find it hard to talk about your experiences, who has been able to go on and have a family and a career and business and _____, but yet there are some people who haven't, who can't. And I'm wondering what you tell those people, what can you, what advice?

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 65

65

A: I didn't meet, in my way a person who is complaining. Although yes, I, I actually hear, well this was the wife of a survivor. She doesn't want to talk about this, she doesn't, she doesn't want to hear about this. So we didn't talk about this. And but otherwise to engage myself in some kind help, in some kind advice, I had never a chance to do it, really, although I know that some people _____ want to talk about this and I respect it.

Q: You understand it?

A: Yeah, want to go away, they can, there's a lady in Santa Barbara, she shaking when we talk _____ about the Holocaust. Maybe she has some terrible memories and she doesn't want to talk about it.

Q: Do you think you'll remember everything?

A: You know, I could forget what we talked yesterday about, a date or whatever, but I will never forget what's happened 50 years ago or 55 years ago. Every single thing, I'll never. Little things I find out, I can't exactly, but basically everything, yeah, so.

Q: Do you ever wish you couldn't remember some of it?

A: No, no. _____ poetically, wish not to remember, but maybe _____. You survive, you remember, and terrible things happened, it just makes you think about people, how they act. People sometimes ask me, "So what did you learn from the Holocaust, what could you say?" And they expect I will say something poetical, something you know, high, some extra thoughts and what I did learn is this, it is not a direction what to do or what, a simple thing, I learned that nobody knows himself, nobody. I look at people, men _____ catch myself

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 66

66

wondering, especially if people are nice to me, in Poland or in Germany, I wonder, how would he act in that, in that situation? And that, what I know, nobody knows himself, how he could change, what he could be. Because I've seen it, you take now, five or ten mothers and ask them, if you have a choice, you should be killed or the child, would you give up your child and I'm sure all ten would say no, I would rather die and they think so. They don't say a lie, but I am not so sure if it would be like that if this would be the Nazi time. I think what I have seen, more than half would give up the child. Anyway, I have little observations, I wouldn't call it lessons about the human nature, I've seen a lot. And if I were to be an educated psychologist, psychiatrist, I could _____ on it and write very nice, scientific work about the human behavior, because I've seen it first hand. I'm not, I think I've done, well I was very busy usual always, writing this book, and another book now, I've finished it so I have more time and maybe I will write short stories, but this, would rather be, I think in a fiction form, based on true stories. That's all.

Q: So before, I'm sitting in front of this big Menorah, Menorah, yes and we talked about how, at some point in your life, the Jewish religion or practices wasn't all that important. Has it come back into your life?

A: It didn't come back, maybe if I would _____ a religious person, the tradition would come back. But in America again, in the beginning, we did need to work Saturday or not Saturday and we would never keep it up _____ Jewish spirit, the way I remember in Poland before the war, so the conditions changed, or the behavior changed. But I have very good memories from the past, from the tradition

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 67

67

and, which I never kept up now, for years. Saturday especially, when I was living in Poland, I didn't know what is a Saturday, is not a Saturday, Yom Kippur, not Yom Kippur, so.

Q: But your, the children that were born here, did you bring them up Jewish?

A: They know they are Jewish and I didn't care what either way they will go, whether they feel Jewish, whether not so. Not religious, they didn't go to religious schools.

Q: Bar Mitzvahed, Bat Mitzvahed?

A: No.

Q: None of that?

A: No, not at all. I don't care about this, it's a big show of _____ so many people I've seen here.

Q: And what about God now? You talked about there, God being a terrible God at some point.

A: Yeah.

Q: How does, how's God now?

A: I am at odds with God. So much I don't want to talk about Him, that's God. There is some, obviously, I lean, I lean rather to Spinoza(ph), _____. You know who Spinoza(ph) was? Jewish philosopher. He was thrown out in Jew's society, you know. There is some, you could say I'm agnostic, not atheist. There is some power which is ruling the world and of course obvious, the balance between water and the air _____ and whatever their ending is, you know, proclamation, generations after the generations. There is some logical balance and everything is

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 68

68

in logic and but I believe there's some power which we don't understand. It's either religion _____ logical explanation of things, come to a stop and people can't live in the emptiness, so they did think about different stories and one of them is religion, an explanation, people don't need to, to, to search for others, for an explanation, _____. So God, in the religious way...[End of Side 1, Tape 3]...Another way to say I don't believe in a theological God, I believe there's a power. And we don't know what _____, maybe someday we will come to the truth.

Q: But it's that power that you're at odds with, or?

A: No, but I'm not, this is, I'm a little dust in the whole machinery. I am against the imaginable God, which did come from different religions. But again, how could you be at odds, if you don't believe in Him. So, put it this way, I'm a non-believer, but a Jew. Some say you can't be a Jew if you don't believe in Judaism, in religion, in the past. But why not? You could be a Jew, you don't need to be a religious Jew.

Q: I know a lot of people who are Jewish but don't practice.

A: Yeah.

Q: But culturally they feel those roots very strongly.

A: I feel the roots strongly, yeah. It is something, you know, in the human life, in every life, irrational. If you didn't believe in that, why do you believe in that? This is one of them. I'm not religious, I'm a Jew. And I would like, I like the tradition and maybe I would be happy if I would have a partner who's traditional and so on, so on, but not everything is up to us. My life in this direction, this is it, nobody could actually set up his life. People get married, beautiful wife, live forever after, after awhile, start

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 69

69

to fight, get a divorce, so on, so on. So everything is, you never could set something in one set and will run like that. Some experience in my life, which what?

Q: Well, the important parts, the interview that we want to do is to find out what your life has been like, how the experience of the Holocaust has determined your experience?

A: Well the experience of the Holocaust first of all make me a agnostic. The experience of the Holocaust, not so, the history of the human beings, which I studied very carefully, history of Jews, history of the world and so on, make me wonder if it could happen again. And I think it could very easy happen again. First of all, if you learn from history, it's a very well, a very well known saying, history repeat himself. Why should it stop here? And it's proven, that the _____, our culture, didn't put a stop to it. As a matter of fact, the technology made it worse. Next time something will, something happened, there'll be computers. You wouldn't be able to say I'm not that or that. You push the button, they have your whole story. So it could happen. You could see the feeling against Jews is not, you scratch it in some societies and comes up, without scratching it comes up. People will always hate the smarter, the very well off and people will always look for excuse why they are miserable. So if like Jews, a nation didn't have anybody to protect them in that time, you could fell easy prey to hate. Now we have Israel, which in a way could protect, but from my experience, I don't talk, I don't look the positive way on the future. I think it could happen. It doesn't take much, it should change. I sometime go over on a bus in Los Angeles, I went to Nazi meetings, I get Nazi magazines, I subscribe.

Thomas Blatt
July 26, 1996
Page 70

70

Not for support, I'm not a supporter, but I want to know why they think. And you go to such a meeting, you really see it how it is, it's not so simple. The _____ America think we are fairly secure _____. To summarize it, I don't want to turn my head away, it could happen again.

Conclusion of Interview.