United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Haim Solomon
January 5, 2004
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Haim Solomon, conducted by Nina Ellis on January 5, 2004 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Silver Spring, Maryland and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Haim Solomon, conducted by Nina Ellis on January 5th, 2004, in Silver Spring, Maryland. This interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's post-Holocaust interview project, and it's a follow up interview to a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum videotaped interview conducted with Haim Solomon in 1995. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. All right. Good morning.

Answer: Good morning, Nina.

Q: We're going to start -- we had a little conversation a few weeks ago about where we would start this interview, and I would like to ask you if you could tell me if there is anything that you would like to go back over from your original interview, to add to it. Maybe there's some new information that you've come across, or do you want to -- I'm talking in generalities.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Not specific issues, specific dates or anything.

A: Well --

Q: But is there a-any -- any information that you've come across about your years before, say 1945 that you'd like to add to that original interview?

A: Before 1945.

Q: More or less.

A: I was going to -- to go over the last part of my interview for the first person, where I stopped with the arrival in Israel.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And to go over that, a-as we -- I left Cyprus, and f -- January first of 1948 -- '49, I'm sorry. December '47 -- January first, 1949. We arri -- we proceeded from Cyprus on a small fishing boat that came from Israel with permit to fish in Turkish waters, which is the northern part of Cyprus, and by prearrangement with the help of the Greeks on the island, th-the ship -- th-the fishers-man came close to the northern edge of Cyprus, with flashlights and signs and inflatable boats. They picked us up from the shore where the Greeks brought us and put us on that fishing boat named Karishe, and took us to Israel. Over there the British were still controlling the Haifa port, and we had to find a place where to land, which was in Netanya.

Q: How many people, roughly? I mean -- and how long did it take?

A: It -- it was about 80 - 90 people, because the exits or the escapes from the Cyprus camps were arranged of -- consisted of eight to 10 people per night.

Q: Right.

A: Once outside, the Greeks would pick us up and take us into an orange grove by the warehouse and lock us up there, so all day we could not come out, but at night they would come open the doors and we roamed somehow, in the orange grove.

Q: Hold on one second.

A: Okay, the fishing boat dropped us off on Netanya. They have -- two buses waited for us with food, clothes, blankets, whatever we could use, and took us 12 or 15 mile eastward, right across from Netanya, a pla -- a place called Baykleet. That was a -- a place where -- of induction to the im -- Israeli army. As a former Cyprus senior officer in the Haganah, I was immediately put in charge of inducting a-all sorts of newcomers with my several languages that I spoke, Romanian, Hebrew, French and some German, I was able to make the proper arrangements for these youngsters and keep them there for a while. The policy was that for -- to interview these youngsters and see what their future plans are, and send them to units where they could begin into that line of work. I was kept there til March the 15th or eight -- 16th, and as I ex-expressed my desire to study medicine, I was assigned to a military hospital. Was a formerly British hospital, and the hospital was called Tel HaShomer. Tel Levinsky that became Tel HaShomer. And that's where I spent my next 30 month in Israel. At this hospital I was supposed to be a -- every two month at a different, or a specialty wards, but I

started at orthopedics, and s-so -- liked it so much that I stayed there all the time. Orthopedics and paraplegics. And it was enough t-to come in contact with Israeli veterans or wounded soldiers, to become so convinced that -- of our righteous battle. All they wanted, these amputees and paraplegics, they wanted to get well so they can go back to the front and fight again. Ah --

Q: And you would talk with them, and you would talk with them about these things, not just about their -- their injuries?

A: Of course --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- of course. That's what kept them alive, the hope to get better, for a purpose. The same time we had new immigrants from Arab countries that -- that were so deprived of medical attention that some of them were absolutely paralyzed, or -- or -- they couldn't function. One particular case I remember, a young kid that would walk only on four, knees and hands and he was brought to us from Yemen [indecipherable]. And, smart little kid, but he just couldn't walk, and ma -- Dr. Goldman called me and had a little talk with me that if I agree and go along with him to do what he asks me to, I would -- we could make that child walk again. And we talked to -- the first thing he said, the first problem I have is you have to sleep with him, in the same room. And during the days we'll operate and at night he is all yours. So within a short period of time we realized -- we obtained that we

-- we realized that, and the child started walking with crutches and [indecipherable] but ultimately he walked with one cane.

Q: Hm.

A: That's just one example. Other examples were that many of the high officers in the military came to that hospital for injuries in the back and the knees. I remember [indecipherable] Long was one of the patients, I guess, Dayan and some other big officers as well, as Holocaust survivors. What was his name, he was involved in the Warsaw ghetto uprising. Not [indecipherable] Levitz, but his deputy. [indecipherable]. So, that's where I spent three month in Israel, during which time my family started coming ba -- over from Romania in 1949. My sister came, married, with her child. In 1950 my parents arrived and in 1951 my other sister. One brother stayed in Romania til 1959 and ha -- arrived later.

Q: Were you helping all of them, were you making it possible for them to come, or did they have some connections of their own?

A: No, no, no. They personally initiated and arrived in Israel.

Q: And when you were working in this hospital for 30 months, that's almost three years, did you intend to stay in Israel that whole time? Was it your intention to go to school there and -- and try and make a life in Israel, or were you --

A: Yes.

Q: That was your idea?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: In fact, 12 - 13 or 15 hours a day that I u-used to work brought me to exhaustion and the doctors would send me to Jerusalem for 10 - 15 days of R and R. And those days I would visit the university, which was then at [indecipherable] a big Catholic school that was changed -- was given to the university for beginners and just visitor -- visiting students. That was part of the R and R in Jerusalem, so that after two years of compulsory military in the hospital, they asked me to stay longer, and I stayed another six months, to make it into 30 months service. And that was the end of 1951 already, that I realized that the university in Jerusalem had no medical school or no beginning of medical school. They had many students that started out abroad, and only with the third year they would start them in the hospital, supervised by famous doctors and this way progress towards graduation. But the first two years they couldn't have, they needed dissections. The Orthodox Jews wouldn't allow Jews to be dissected. That's --

Q: And you needed those first years.

A: Absolutely.

Q: You had -- you hadn't had that yet.

A: No.

Q: What -- u-up until this point what -- what kind of education did you have, what -- equivalent to what?

A: In Europe and Romania, I graduated from high school with a baccalaureate it's called, a high school diploma. And realizing all this and being in correspondence with a brother I had in Detroit, who arrived there in 1946, maybe '47, I cannot pinpoint it, but I corresponded with him and explained the condi -- situation and he brought up the idea of coming here. And I liked it, and I prepared for it in a sense. I started all the necessary arrangements for going to America.

Q: Even though your family was coming over from Romania?

A: Yes, they all agreed that it's rough, tough, and I'm still young to recoup, or recover. So, late in 1951, I started the preparations or investigations into -- for going to America. Immediately I got me a English teacher, for more -- better English. I started the passport applications and visas for the Americans. First they indicated I get the visa and get to America and there si -- approach the college. Then they informed me that no, it's the other way around. First you have to be accepted by a school in the United States, and on that basis we can grant you a visa for a student. In Detroit my brother had a brother-in-law who was a professor at Wayne State University, and he made all these arrangements on the basis of that high school diploma and obtained from them a letter that I am accepted for the semester beginning on September 12 or so, 1952. But nothing was ready in Israel

for me to go. So I visited the American embassy, undergo -- went a test in English. All arrangements began to s -- to -- to shape up to the point where I received a visa and we bought a ticket at TWA and started my trip on November the second of 1952.

Q: Before you went, your parents had already come?

A: 1950 they arrived.

Q: They had already come, and your -- had brothers and sisters there.

A: Yes.

Q: Was it a -- difficult for you to go? Was it a wrenching, emotionally, to leave? I mean --

A: It had to be, but they themselves were in bad shapes, really. All they could afford or find were very limiting -- limited housing conditions. The first sister that came in ’49 had a one room apartment. It’s the same room with -- 1950 my parents arrived -- had to stay with them for awhile. Then the parent moved out and the other sister arrived. When her husband realized what’s going on, he took off into the desert, to B’eyr-Sheva, and there he found all they wanted. A lot of work -- he was in the building area, the building business, and he build up th-the Negev, the desert, all the way to the Dead Sea, kibbutzim and so on. So slowly, slowly things settled in Israel, but my going was part of their settlement and after leaving

the hospital and [indecipherable] to take off for America, I was unemployed -- oh, no, I worked for the [indecipherable] right in Jaffa, where my parents lived.

Q: I don't know what that is, what is that?

A: The [indecipherable] is the organization of all the Yishuvim, of all the Israeli kibbutzim and moshavim and all sorts of settlements, they are the government's arm that supplies them with administration and also money, funds for all the necessities. Ag -- agriculture implements, agricultural implements, modern agriculture -- tractors, plowshares, a-all sorts of things. And I worked there for four or five month. And -- while taking steps towards my leaving. The trip itself was problematic. At the time there were no straight flights --

Q: Excuse me, before we go into the trip I want to ask you one more question about your time in Israel if you don't mind.

A: Yes?

Q: You were there at a -- when the State of Israel was formed.

A: Yes.

Q: And you were there long enough, and -- I would think, to feel some identification with Israeli aspirations and because you m-met so many of these former soldiers and injured soldiers, and --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and had conversations with them, and --

A: Absolutely.

Q: -- and you were a young man, and probably had some idealism. Did -- did you feel a -- Israeli a-at that point? Did you feel like you were giving up something, or did you think you were going to come back, or was there any issue there for you of -- of -- of identity with the Israeli cause? Or were you just so focused on getting your education and that, i-it was a side --

A: The European experience plus the Cyprus retention of our going -- one year in Cyprus was enough to -- to store up venom, or -- or ambition to get out, do something more. And I did all I could during these 30 month, that's why I stayed longer, because I saw what is needed. But at that point I realized that there's very little I can do at the higher level, that I can do there, even though I travel and toured and visited all that historic places, and the military places where famous battles took place. Traveled the country it -- north and south, a lot to [indecipherable]. And more and more I became convinced that if I stay at that point, I can work at the [indecipherable]. I spent some time in Jerusalem taken just a biolo -- biology classes, more or less unrelated to medicine.

Q: Mm-hm, but you weren't going to become a doctor?

A: I did at that point -- more personally I was sure, or felt I can do a lot for these wounded people. And all my superiors at the hospital called me Dr. Haim and they thought I could make -- I would make a big -- a good doctor.

Q: Uh-huh. So, i-i-it was this very strong drive that you had to be a doctor and you -- and that wasn't going to happen if you stayed around.

A: No, it was not going to happen.

Q: Yeah.

A: Reality came in the first week in America, that in America you don't just go to medical school from high school as you do in Romania, as my wife went for -- at the age of 17 she went to medical school.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: In America you go into pre-med, and that takes four years.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm, geez.

A: And after that, if you push and qualify -- I kept applying for medical schools. So I -- I started this four year of pre-med, and I started liking it because at Wayne University -- number one, I arrived in November the fourth or fifth, into a semester that started September 15. And it was way up above my possibilities to catch up and do any good. S-So they put me into an English for foreign students, which is for no credit and it doesn't matter how well you do. I was able to do very well, especially in the writing, and I had to take a class on government, which was totally strange to me. One -- in the -- in history, but European history, it was easy for me. And from November til January the 15th or 20th, when the semester ended, that was a real killer.

Q: Frustrating.

A: Unbelievable. That's the story of America. If I had the -- the money, I would have turned around and gone right back.

Q: Back to Israel?

A: Back to Israel.

Q: In those first coup -- in those first few months.

A: On the first half a year or one year.

Q: Because it seemed like such a long --

A: Such a --

Q: -- impossibly long.

A: -- difficult, difficult obstacles.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And money-wise, I did not come with money. My brother who came to pick me up and did all these things preparing for me, he was not well-to-do, and I felt very bad and very guilty and was ready to do anything.

Q: Mm-hm. Let me -- let me turn this tape over.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Haim Solomon. This is tape number one, side B. What -- you're in Detroit now, it's --

A: Yes.

Q: -- late in the year in 1952.

A: Yes.

Q: You're living with your brother. What did your brother do at this point?

A: Really, clearly, I don't know, but we had an uncle that had the business in Detroit, but he lived in New York, and so my brother, somehow, managed his businesses. Business was in the manufacturing of shuffleboard --

Q: Hm. Equipment?

A: -- equipment.

Q: Huh.

A: Yes. Horrible, because some of these shuffleboards were installed in bars and in -- and I had to go with my brother and collect. If you know the shuffleboard, you open the box and you count the money and half goes to the bar, and half --

Q: They were -- so they were games?

A: Games.

Q: Bar games --

A: Yes.

Q: -- kind of. Uh-huh. Huh.

A: And people --

Q: And then you started full time taking classes in January --

A: Yes.

Q: -- 1953.

A: That was be -- starting -- becoming a lot simpler and easier. In the meantime I -- I met some other Israeli students at the university. A lot of Jewish students came to us. Detroit had something called a ZOA house, the Zionist Organization of America house. And every weekend they would -- all the Zionists would meet there, but on weekends they would give it to us and we brought together all the Israelis and all the American Jewish students, and we sang, we danced, we ate, we fraternized. The whole atmosphere became warmer and more reliable, and more -- you could turn to any of these American students for orientation, for advice, etcetera.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. So you started to feel more comfortable.

A: Start to feel more comfortable. Classes were easier. At the university, every student is assigned to an advisor, and mine was a Dr. Theodoro. Dr. Theodoro was the daughter of the ambassador from Thailand and London. So he-her teacher was Chaim Weitzman. When I came to her with my name of Haim, she -- come from Israel, she caught me, you don’t want to study medicine, you want to study

microbiology, because you're going back to the Hebrew references of Chaim Weitzman and tell me more of what you did. He was her professor, but Chaim Weitzman worked with an organism, a bacterium that he forced into producing acetone. The bacterium is called Clostridium acetobutylicum Weitzmani.

Q: Hm, named after him.

A: The -- this organism, if you feed it whatever is good for -- it prefers, this bacterium, it produces acetone and butyl alcohol, or Vitamin B_2. Chaim Weitzman was able to inhibit its second part production and en -- and encourage it to produce acetone, which the British needed in World War I. And for that he was rewarded with a Balfour Declaration.

Q: Was he someone that you knew about?

A: No.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I know of his activities, and he was the first president of Israel, and very active in -- in the process of obtaining independence from Britain. But all this personal connection of this Dr. Theodoro with him, and now with me, indeed. So she guided me into microbiology. I took a lot of classes in it throughout the four year studies towards a Bachelor of Science. And just because I had such choices, I took all sorts of classes that I liked in psychology and logic. French. French was something that I knew well so I took classes in order to raise my grade average.

Indeed, it worked. But she wanted me to work with that organism, but this time to do the opposite, inhibit its production of acetone and encourage its production of Vitamin B_2. Very important in Asia and Europe, too. But that was for graduate school, later on.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Ah, in the meantime in Detroit, as I said, I began teaching Hebrew.

Q: To?

A: To various Hebrew or Jewish synagogues.

Q: To kids?

A: Such as Temple Beth El, a Reform synagogue, and Temple Emmanuel, another Reform synagogue. Jews that wanted to be Jewish, you know. That was my greatest disappointment, that Israelis, or Hebrew teachers that they had, locals, wouldn't -- didn't want to teach in Reform synagogues. And I was so mad, I went to st -- teach at the Reform. And I'm glad to this day that a lot of kids were so curious about their Jewishness, and whatev -- in -- in -- to the degree, or to th -- way beyond what they saw in the house.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: They wanted to know more, and that's what I was teaching them. Anyway, the second job [indecipherable] at Temple Emmanuel was part already of the United Hebrew Schools. In all of Detroit there were United Hebrew Schools. United

Hebrew Schools you can be a teacher if you attend a Hebrew academy, or Midrasha to get a Hebrew teacher's certificate. So you take some education classes at the university, and Hebrew classes at the Midrasha, and become a Hebrew teacher, a certified Hebrew teacher. And I did that. And also within the United Hebrew schools, with all the Israeli students that functioned as teachers, we had a group of -- a choir and dancers, and we would travel around all the small communities in Michigan, and perform for them.

Q: You did, too?

A: I did, too.

Q: You're a singer?

A: A singer, a dancer, everything, like --

Q: Oh, mm.

A: -- to bring some Israeliskind they used to call it. In the summers I used to work [indecipherable] I was playing with the idea of going back. M-My brother --

Q: Let's take a break, just a second. [tape break]. Okay. You were saying? You were starting to say something about your brother.

A: Oh, yes. My brother was employed by the -- by our uncle, but it didn't do much and his income was very limited.

Q: Mm-hm. Did he have a family?

A: A wife, a child.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I was talking about leaving, because as a foreign student you're not allowed to work, and it -- if they -- if you get -- you come up to a B average, you can get a permit for 10 - 12 hours a -- a week to work. So with my brother, we discussed this -- this, and the only arrangement [indecipherable] him is to go back to what he knows best, and that is to open a store, a dry goods store.

Q: Just like in Romania.

A: Like in Romania, and I can work there unofficially.

Q: Mm, cause you were living with him the whole time?

A: Only the first six months, maybe. And then I just moved to a family that rented out rooms.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: One room, one. They usually would have one student.

Q: Mm-hm. And did he do that? Did he open a store?

A: Yes, he did that.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: He opened a store in 1953, late in '53. And after classes I would go to the store, send him home to help in the house with the child. And that started opening up th-the possibility of doing something.

Q: Where was the store?

A: In Detroit.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: On Third Street.

Q: Was it downtown?

A: Close, not really. Close to downtown. And I worked very hard --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- and very nice, and the main business is on the weekend and so I could work for 12 hours and keep it [indecipherable] became very -- did very well, to the point where some years later it developed into a wholesale -- to a distributor -- distribution import and --

Q: Of fabric?

A: Fabrics, shoes --

Q: Oh.

A: -- and shoes. But ready-made pants, shirts, etcetera.

Q: Mm. What was the name of the business?

A: Well, he bought it from another person called Bernstein, so everybody called us Bernstein's. But Henry was a very smart fellow.

Q: That's hi -- is that your brother?

A: Yeah.

Q: Henry.

A: Henry.

Q: Uh-huh. So you're in school full time, you've been encouraged to study microbiology --

A: Yes.

Q: -- which you did. You finished in four years? Did you finish in --

A: Right, in fift --

Q: -- that's pretty good. Working a lot, and --

A: Yes.

Q: -- teaching on the side.

A: Oh, yes [indecipherable]

Q: So you didn't have a free minute?

A: No. Really. But in 1956 I graduated with a Bachelor's degree in science. And in '57, I started the graduate school, with this Dr. Theodoro, with the organism what -- that I mentioned. No need to mention it again. And we worked on it, and I took a trans -- graduate classes. We worked on it for six, eight months, when she received a Fulbright scholarship to go back to Oxford and study there with Dr. Krebs. Weitzman was no longer there. Famous name, Dr. Krebs.

Q: Krebs cycle.

A: Krebs cycle, you heard of the Krebs cycle, yes.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: I have a book from that period, Dr. Krebs signature. So she went away and turned me over to another professor, Dr. Matman. This -- Dr. Theodoro was a physiologist of bacteria, and Dr. Matman was more of a clinical, so when she switched me to another thesis [indecipherable] but also with a organism that is anaerobic, lives in the absence of air. And what happened, the same, I worked in the store, I taught Hebrew, and attended classes. But in 1956, before she left, she made me into a laboratory assistant, and Dr. Rose -- Ross -- Rosen -- Gosen, he liked me, he wanted me as a laboratory assistant, but I couldn't become an employee of the university without citizenship. And so within a few months he arranged my conversion into a green card American citizen.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And throughout the graduate years, I was assistant in the laboratory, teaching the Hebrew at -- at -- evenings, working in the store, taking some summer classes, until 1961. Oh.

Q: Let me ask you a question about those four -- four years or so, four or five years.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Detroit was a very melting pot. People had come there from --

A: Yes.

Q: -- all over the world.

A: That's right.

Q: And all over the U.S..

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Espe -- all over the south, to work in the --

A: I know.

Q: -- to work in the factories.

A: That's where the store was. All those hillbillies --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- we called them, from the south.

Q: From the south.

A: They --

Q: But also people from eastern Europe and --

A: Yes.

Q: -- it's a very mixed population there.

A: Correct.

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism at that time?

A: Not really.

Q: No.

A: No. No, no, no.

Q: It was a fairly tolerant --

A: I --

Q: -- place, did you feel, or was it because --

A: -- I didn't --

Q: -- you were mix -- not mixing, or --

A: -- functioned in the Jewish committee, either Israeli or local Jews. My brother belonged to a Hooc ivri, a Hebrew speaking group. They would meet once a month and have lectures in Hebrew and those were European that came, plus American scholars, rabbis, etcetera. I haven't experienced any anti-Semitism. I-In school all the students and teachers were as nice and friendly and cooperative as possible.

Q: So you felt that th -- all the opportunities of any American were available to you as well at that time?

A: Yes.

Q: And you knew other people who wa -- were survivors, I would take it, because you did exist in this community, and you knew other survivors.

A: It's amazing that -- how everybody locked up like a clam, and nobody spoke anything. Only now do I realize two brother from Polish origin, they studied at Wayne State University. They live here now. They went through real difficult times. They -- in Poland they realized all their dif -- what goes on there. So they

ran away and lived in the woods with other partisans for months, for years. Right in the middle of German occupation. But we never talked about it.

Q: Mm. There must have been a lot of people in Detroit with stories like that.

A: Like that, yes.

Q: People didn't -- they just -- why didn't they talk about it?

A: I couldn't tell you. To this day, I never talked about it, I never asked anyone to listen to -- to what happened. Just keep on going and advance. Forget the past. Some from Budapest that went through their difficulties, but Poland mostly was the most dangerous place that they came out alive. Still, we didn't talk about.

Q: Hm.

A: Until now.

Q: Yeah.

A: Like my wife said, I -- we -- we didn't consider ourselves any survival -- survivors of the Holocaust. And knock on wood, due to my father's administration, we came out, the whole family, intact.

Q: Yeah.

A: Difficulties, dangerous conditions, but we came out.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. But you were also -- you were in a position to understand what other people had been through, and to know --

A: Of course, of course --

Q: -- to know th-the dire sit-situation that they had come from, how difficult life was for them in the United States, too.

A: Oh.

Q: So it's some un -- it's interesting that people didn't want to talk at that time.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: But I guess understandable too. Just wanted to move ahead. They were young --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and just looking at the future, and --

A: Right.

Q: -- struggling to get ahead.

A: Almost embarrassed of -- of telling it, what happened, and it's a Hebrew saying, we heard about you, we heard about you. When someone tries to tell of his past, th-the -- the -- the company would -- would ridicule you. Oh, we heard about your sufferings, we heard about your problems. In other words, don't tell us any of that.

Q: But you didn't ac-actually experience that, you just sort of assumed that that's what people were thinking, right?

A: Yes.

Q: Mm-hm. American Jews, mostly.

A: American Jews.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes.

Q: Did -- did you have any experiences with American Jews, encounters with people that tal -- that revealed to you how little they knew about what had gone on in Europe, or how much they knew? Did you have a sense of how -- whether or not people were well informed about what had happened?

A: American Jews -- the community in Detroit for instance, shook off their responsibility. Whatever needed to be done was supposed to be done in New York. And indeed there was a strong organization in New York, the American Jewish Committee and the World Jewish Congress and -- and the -- some other organizations that were supposed to protest and they did.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I realize it now in the -- that the archives, what I translate, what they did, specifically for Romania --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- which I translate, and I realize that they were all active and influential. Actually they -- they traveled to Romania. Rabbi Weiss traveled to Romania in ’42 and ’43, when things were really bad there and confronted the leadership in Romania. But it didn’t help, I mean --

Q: No.

A: Hitler went on burning Jews.

Q: But in Detroit you don't think that there was much --

A: No.

Q: -- activity along those lines.

A: I didn't see anything, even though there were a few famous Jews that could have or should have done things. They had their own problems, probably in Detroit. You may have heard of Father Kaufman and Henry Ford and all their venom that they spewed out on Jews.

Q: Father Kaufman was a -- a radio --

A: Ah, yes.

Q: -- he was -- he had a radio program that was heard all over the country, I think.

A: Right.

Q: And he was giving sermons that were very --

A: Oh --

Q: -- very right wing, was what we would call it today.

A: Very anti-Semitic.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: For revenge we used to go to his church on Christmas night. If there were no places to s -- to sit, we would stand in the back and he was informed of our presence. Just -- but this was in 1953.

Q: When you were a college student.

A: So he himself tempered down already, at that time.

Q: Hm.

A: ’52 or ’53 and ’54, two times we went to that church.

Q: Hm. So you’re -- we’re -- we -- you brought us all the way up to the late 50’s, you’re graduating.

A: Yes.

Q: Contemplating -- a-and you’re in graduate school.

A: Yes.

Q: And you’re a lab assistant.

A: Correct.

Q: And wha -- where are we going from here? You’re still in Detroit.

A: I was still in Detroit. I wanted to see the country here. So the summer of ’61, with another friend, we took -- we drove around 10 weeks. We drove around the United States, and stopped in all the parks in all the cities.

Q: Was that the first time you had traveled in the U.S.?

A: Well, during school years we would come for New Years to New York, drive -- driving a full car. That's about all. Maybe we went to Chicago once for a wedding, one of our Israeli students [indecipherable] maybe th -- Jankela. But otherwise, we didn't know the country and we had to really t-t-to integrate here, we need to travel around and see the whole place. Fascinating what America did. In 1961 or '62, the University of Arizona at Tucson, in their catalog suggested that either they have it, or they're going to open a faculty microbiology of arid lands. Very good for Israel, very good for south amer -- South America and ourselves. And that caught my attention. A friend of mine working at the U.N. suggested with my ability of languages and this kind of microbiology could really pick me up, bring me up. So I -- I applied there, I went there to find out that they don't have it yet, they want to develop it, and I could help them, be part of it. I didn't like it, but I was there already so I stayed for a year, and that's where I --

Q: And you were teaching?

A: -- accepted that position of Hebrew teacher.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Director of -- they never had anything and there were a lot of New York Jews coming to live in Tucson, Arizona because of their children --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Haim Solomon. This is tape number two, side A. We may have lost a few seconds off the end of the last tape. You're in Tucson, Arizona now.

A: Yes.

Q: And you've gone there and you're going to help them start up this graduate program in microbiology, and you mentioned that there were many Jews there from New York, people who had come --

A: Yes.

Q: -- in some cases because their children --

A: Yes.

Q: -- had asthma, and --

A: That's why they came, that was the place where it's so dry that the kids grew up very comfortably.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: But they needed some sort of Jewish education and I arrived there and they were very happy to bring them together. We had about 30 kids, and we would meet on Saturday and Sunday at a Kiwanis Club. There were very young kids that needed elementary Hebrew, but there were a few that needed preparation for Bar Mitzvah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And so that -- those were my duties with this school.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I enjoyed it, I liked it, it gave me a sense of doing something in addition, cause with the schooling I didn't see anything ready for me to proceed. So I took various classes in microbiology, chemistry, or whatever could be helpful for -- for the Ph.D. program.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And at the end of the year I -- oh, I started that in September '62 and by June I -- it -- September, but later on, for Passover, we drove back to Detroit from Tucson, two students from New York picked me up -- too -- dropped me in Detroit and they proceeded on. And while in Detroit for Passover vacation, or Easter vacation, I approached the University of Michi -- Michigan State University and explained to them why I don't like it there, and what I'm willing to -- able to do, and certainly for the fall of that year, '63, I would be accepted for -- at their university as a graduate student. And s -- exce -- I did exactly that. When the school year ended in June in Tucson, Arizona, I sold the car, packed up and came back to Detroit by train. Made -- started arrangements with -- at Michigan State University. Found a professor that thought I could help him with some of his

projects, and so I started with the program towards a doctorate de-degree at Michigan State University.

Q: In Lansing.

A: In Lansing, East Lansing.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Very interesting work. Now I started working with this Clostridium that I was familiar with, but this time with Clostridium botulinum. Famous bacterium that causes botulism --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- when consumed with canned foods or other foods. The question was -- Michigan was basically a dairy college or university and the question was whether this Clostridium botulinum would grow in milk. But the Clostridia have two kinds, one that spoils the milk and one that doesn't spoil the milk, but they both produce a highly potent toxin. So my project was to work with the Clostridium botulinum type E, the one that does not curd the milk, and see whether it will grow at the refrigeration temperature, and -- before spoiling the milk. So we did a lot of work on that when suddenly s -- all around the Great Lakes, a large die off of seagulls were washed off o -- on the shore. And all over Michigan there were smokers that smoked fish and sold them open on the roadside in stores. But when the plastic -- plastics came out, they started packing these smoked fish in plastics,

under vacuum, and that's exact the conditions that promote growth of this bacterium --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- to the point where it produces toxin, and if it's that type that doesn't spoil the milk, it does not show any decomposition. So people would eat and become sick and die. There were quite a few deaths in Michigan due to these smoked fish pla -- packed in plastic bags. One particular case of three ladies having brunch together where they ate some such fish or tuna. And the next day two of them were dead. One was dead immediately, one died in the hospital, a third one survived. And the -- the FDA in Detroit was in charge of this case. But this was already late, in 1965, '64, that two ladies died, one survived, and FDA in Detroit is investigating this case. Investigating means first thing go to their house and see what else there is there. They found a lot of cans and a lot of products that all had these toxin. Now the people in Detroit and the FDA didn't have any idea of how or what to do. They went to Wayne State University, and at Wayne they told them, look, we have a -- we had a person qualified to talk to you, but he is now at Michigan State doing -- working exactly on the same general situation. So they came to Michigan State and there I showed them how to do, what to do, etcetera, etcetera, until my professor walks out of the laboratory and they said to me [indecipherable] person, he says Haim, you have to come and work for us. Forget this classes here, and

come to us. And he kept coming every other week, every week and asking me, just don't -- why won't you come down to Detroit, see what we are talking about. So I did, after I talked to some other professors. And there he tells me, and I tell him what to do, he tells me what needs to be done. But when all is -- this is over, we need to do some other work with E. coli and salmonella and all such cases. And I say no, not for me. I'm strictly working with this Clostridium botulinum. So he calls up Washington and the division director asks him to talk -- to give me the phone to talk, and he talks to me about -- first he asks me are you married? No. Perfect. Smart [indecipherable] whatever he said. But he started enumerating the things that they want to do here. And they have -- just starting to organize one laboratory with -- and they have one person already from [indecipherable] Dietrich who worked on this and they are looking all over the country. So, really, they made me such offers I couldn't refuse. Early in 1965, we -- I -- w-we arranged a meeting in New Jersey, a convention. And there I met with them and again, they emphasized all the possibilities, you know, the activities, and what we can do and what we need to do, etcetera, etcetera. And there I was fresh with this experience from Detroit and at Michigan. And -- and they thought I'm gonna open up the place for them. We started investigating, first of all the smoke-fish industry, which was completely closed down, FDA came out with a clear arrangement, every one of these small places that smoke fish, just by touching, and ba -- just

estimating. Some arrangements were made with the banks, or with the department HHS, or -- for them to be compensated or bought out, and only a few large companies in Chicago and New York were allowed to take all these little places and develop a program that will assure a safe product. There was one incident, horrible incident. This smoked fish was tr -- sent out from Michigan to Kroger stores in the south, Tennessee, Arkansas. And the truck driver started out in Michigan, that suddenly the refrigeration broke down. When he realized it, it was already 10 - 12 hours, but he pulled into a garage and they started fixing it. Fixing it, cooled up the -- cooled off th-the truck and the products, and -- and proceeded to deliver the product cold, refrigerated, as though nothing happened. And the six or eight people that bought these fish, died. A lot of Jews. It was a Jewish tasting --

Q: Smoked fish.

A: -- product, smoked fish.

Q: Uh-huh. Huh.

A: They were beautifully yellow-bronze colored, and they were intact, now cooled, and you buy them, you eat them, and --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Levys, and Cohens and five, six people died. And others were affected, but survived. And so I'm now an employee at the Food and Drug Administration. I

came in 1965, the FDA was still located in the Department of Agriculture, the south building. Soon enough we moved into a new building on 200 C Street, southwest. It's still in the 60's and we are still involved with all sorts of outbreaks due to seafood products. [tape break]

Q: So you were able to do -- you were able to really do something important with your education, very [indecipherable] when you came to Washington, there was a great need for --

A: Absolutely.

Q: -- for what you had studied.

A: Yes.

Q: So you must have felt gratified by that.

A: Right.

Q: Did you have thoughts during these years that you were sorry you hadn't studied to be an M.D.?

A: No.

Q: It went out of your mind.

A: No, no.

Q: Good.

A: No, because bacteriology became more meaningful, and the situation in the American food industry was such that many, many of the food establishments

were functioning at a level very deleterious, or very inferior, or very business-oriented, but v-ver -- no regard to safety, and food safety. And all throughout the 60's, they improved -- it's called shelf life --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- of products that normally would decompose. Their main interest was to extend shelf life, extend profits and let -- let the consumer worry about safety.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So that in the 60's, really, we clean -- cleared out the fish industry, both the smoked fish, the prepared fish, even crawfish. Brought about rules and regulations that only the -- only the establishments that followed, and considered safety survived, or were allowed to continue, and all the others were restricted, and punished and forced out of their functions -- of their business. [interruption]

Q: I'd like to ask you, it's the mid-60's and you are -- now have been in the United States 13 years, you came in '52. And your parents and sisters and -- are in Israel.

A: Right.

Q: Ar-Are you in touch with them the whole time, and -- and -- and how are their lives going and have you any regret about not being in Israel, or are you content that you've come to the U.S. at -- at this point?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: Content? While during the school years I was not so much in touch with them all, not corresponding sufficiently. Now that I was at work and I had evenings, so a normal life, more or less. I was in touch with them, I started visiting them almost every summer.

Q: Starting when?

A: In ’65.

Q: You went to Israel?

A: After I finished school I went to Israel and then came to FDA in July.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Yes, in the meantime, they have reached better conditions and we corresponded; likewise my brother in Detroit advanced very nicely. So, in ’57 we brought our parents over here for five, six months. And in the meantime I would go there almost every summer. In addition to work h-here in FDA in the 60’s, I became very involved in Jewish organizations. As I did in Detroit, I tried to teach Hebrew at the Jewish center, here in Washington, and to adults, conversational Hebrew. But the Jewish center was still on 16th Street, we -- we advertised it and we had six priests s-signing up for it, and three Jewish students. So, after one encounter of a short period, we stopped it. In the meantime I became active in the Jewish Community Council’s single adult group called The Coffeehouse. I

became the chairman of The Coffeehouse and organized the well-attended meetings every Thursday night. We offered the -- we offered a good speaker, usually a ambassador. And danish and coffee and a place to meet young, Jewish people.

Q: And -- and did you feel that that was productive for those young people, did --

A: Absolutely.

Q: Yeah.

A: Because from there, as I indicated here, a lot of these Jewish youngsters, adults, singles, became more involved in Jewish affairs and later on when we organized the Washington committee for Soviet Jewry, they became active. United Jewish Appeal, they became active, and all sorts of other organizations.

Q: Was your intention when you started this Coffeehouse a political one, or a social one, or --

A: Social.

Q: Social.

A: Mostly social. We had four or five couples that got married --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- coming out of The Coffeehouse.

Q: So it was for fellowship and -- and just for people to meet each other, and --

A: Right.

Q: -- and -- and -- but then, political organization grew out of that.

A: Yes.

Q: For you, and -- but had you been active politically before that? I know you had -- you'd been teaching Hebrew to kids, so you had social --

A: Yes.

Q: -- activities, but --

A: I joined the Zionist Organization of America. I was active at the Hillel, at the B'nai B'rith, delegate to the Hillel organization at the George Washington University from B'nai B'rith. ZOA, uni -- Jewish National Fund, anything that needed a voice, or action.

Q: Mm-hm. And that was mostly when you came to Washington.

A: After I came to Washington.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Yes, in Washing --

Q: What was it that -- why do you think you turned a corner there, and what -- what do you think -- was there something going on in the world that politicized you, or do you think it was just an outgrowth of all of your experiences, and knowledge, and --

A: Well, again t -- these organizations were slow in -- in developing and needed more members and more actions and more activities. And I had a regular job and a lot of extra time.

Q: Mm-hm. And what about a girlfriend, did you have a --

A: Girlfriends. In Washington, some. When I left Israel my older sister gave birth to a little daughter, and those were still the days, 1952, when going to America meant being lost to the family. So she asked me when are we going to see you? And I said, I'll come to her wedding. The baby. So even though I went there every -- almost every summer, I just went to the wedding, and there I met my wife, at the wedding.

Q: Oh, in Israel.

A: 1971.

Q: Mm-hm. And she was a citizen, Israeli citizen there?

A: Yeah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: She graduated and worked in a hospital, op -- in that -- in Jaffa. Forget the name of that -- Jaffa Hospital.

Q: And she was a Romanian.

A: Yes.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: She was related to the groom at the wedding.

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

A: So that was my reward.

Q: For all your 20 years of --

A: Yes.

Q: -- lonely hard work, yeah. And -- and when did she come, when did you marry? How long after you met?

A: 1971.

Q: You met.

A: Yes. We met at -- I was there, she came here for a visit and then I went, and we got married in October 21st, and I returned and she needed about a month to make arrangements for her coming.

Q: On the record, why don't you say her name?

A: Mulva.

Q: What was her maiden name?

A: Mulva Isaac.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It was '71, in '73 her parents came here, because our older son was born, and we needed help. We didn't have much family here, so her mother was able to help out.

Q: So you went from living alone to having a family.

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Extended family.

A: Yes.

Q: In just a matter of a few years.

A: Right.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, and a son.

Q: And a son.

A: All the re -- in-laws stayed with us for six months, and then they moved out. What else could we discuss?

Q: Let me ask you about the -- the situation -- larger situation in Washington, and also Detroit, they were very segregated places. Civil Rights movement, I'm sure that you were aware of things that were going on in this country in the south, and --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and in places like Detroit and Chicago and New York, Boston. What kinds of attitudes did you have about what was happening in this country at that time and did -- do you think that your having --

A: Yes, good question, because among the Jewish students in Detroit -- American Jewish students that I associated with, some of them were very involved in labor unions.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Although they studied completely different areas.

Q: Excuse me, I'm going to have to turn the tape over.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Haim Solomon. This is tape number two, side B. The students were active in labor organizations.

A: Yes, some of these Jewish students were active in labor movements, for t -- plans and other plans. And I liked their activities, and I used to go with them. But then we -- at the university we had the advisor for foreign students, and he called me in one day and explained that I cannot get involved with these organizations that are considered left wing, and I should stay away.

Q: This was in the 50's?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. Hm.

A: And I did. We parted company, and I avoided all of those meetings and all of those students, and they were both Zionists, and were part of our meetings at th- the Zionist house, but on the other hand, they supported and lectured to these labor unions and encouraged them to take stands on their pos --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- fights with them.

Q: Was this a-advisor concerned for your citizenship, that -- that getting involved in these political activities could --

A: Yes.

Q: -- could endanger your --

A: Jeopardize, yes.

Q: -- your citizenship status?

A: Absolutely.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But --

Q: And ha -- and ha -- was that indeed happening to some foreign students in Detroit that you knew of?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: I didn't know many, or -- or any that would be attracted to this.

Q: So, but then your -- you became a citizen, and you were a government employee.

A: Yes.

Q: And in the late 60's, leading up to 1968 when there were riots in Washington, I imagine there was some tension here that you must have been aware of, racial tension?

A: Yes. I lived in southwest Washington, 240 M Street, southwest during the riots and if you're familiar with the area, right across from Arena Stage --

Q: Right.

A: -- is a church, and the pastor -- we would -- we made arrangements with that church, with the pastor, that Friday night we used to remove the cross and put a Torah, and have services Friday night and Saturday morning. So, by -- during these riots, the pas -- right across from where I lived were black -- Afro-American living in all these new, little houses. And behind us were those high-rises where mostly black people lived. And he asked us to [indecipherable] and join him in collecting food and taking to these citizens there, black people, because the Safeway, that was burned or broken into, and there was no way they could buy food, these black families.

Q: In the neighborhood.

A: In the neighborhood. So we collected canned goods, and oh -- we tried to deliver them, but the youngsters were very aggressive and verbally assaulted us, until their mothers came and silenced them. So that's what I experienced in the late 60's -- '67 - '68.

Q: Mm-hm. During the riots, was there any looting, or ra -- or rioting going on in the --

A: Yes.

Q: -- where you lived, in southwest?

A: Yes, the Safeway and the People's Drug --

Q: Oh, you mentioned that, yeah.

A: -- were broken in.

Q: Uh-huh. Do you remember that, those nights when that happened?

A: I didn't see it, but the next day this was common knowledge.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: This I remember, that we collected cans, canned goods and tried to go and deliver for the people, and we had problems.

Q: Yeah, yeah. In the early 70's now, you're -- '71 - '72, you're married, and --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- your wife was from Romania?

A: Yes.

Q: And you had some common background there. She's younger than you, I think, a little bit.

A: Yes.

Q: Maybe 10 years or so?

A: Yes.

Q: And -- but she probably remembers quite a bit of -- from the war years.

A: The war years --

Q: Not so much?

A: Not too much. She was a five year old --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- six year old child. Her father was taken to Transnistria. She grew up with her mother. Indeed, when he finally came back, she didn't know him --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- didn't recognize him.

Q: Mm-hm. And as a couple did you, the two of you, know other people who were either Romanians, or Holocaust survivors, or did you socialize, or --

A: No, but we s -- we had the -- I --

Q: -- get together with other people who had similar backgrounds?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: I mentioned the southwest church, and all the people who lived in these high-rises were part of that group that met Friday night --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- and Saturday morning at this church. So we became a group that would meet every other Friday, or once a month at the various member's houses.

Q: Mm-hm. For socializing?

A: Both. Services, discussion and socializing.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. What kind of discussions were they?

A: One of our members, a lawyer, attended yeshiva, so she functioned like a rabbi, and we discussed the weekly portions and -- of the Torah. And that group stayed alive for -- for a long, long time, until recently, when it started dying out.

Q: Only recently?

A: Yes.

Q: And did you all do that because there was no organized congregation in your neighborhood --

A: Correct.

Q: -- and you didn't want to travel to some other neighborhood?

A: No. That -- that's right.

Q: Or other parts of town?

A: Yes.

Q: But there were other congregations around Washington at that time.

A: There were, but really very few other Israel -- Reform Temple, a few known synagogues on 16th Street.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Beth Sholom. And this was a nice arrangement at the church and at houses. We used to have a rabbi come and visit us. And then sometimes we organized a common services with the church people. That was on G Street, there's another church that we met.

Q: Mm-hm. And those people, I would think those -- that group of people were good friends --

A: Yes.

Q: -- then, because you met for so long, so many years --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- every week.

A: Every other week.

Q: Yeah.

A: We met.

Q: Yeah. Tell me about your activities with the Washington committee for Soviet Jewry. This was in the mid-six -- mid-70's?

A: Early 70's.

Q: Early 70's.

A: Very early 1968 - '69, that friend of mine, Moshe Brodetsky and myself started talking about doing something about Soviet Jewry because the j -- Jewish community, the organized Jewish community didn't want to touch it.

Q: Hm. Really?

A: Jewish Community Council, not the center, Jewish Community Council, and that's where I met these young kids from New York that were equally inclined to do something, and we started the organization with a membership and newsletter, and -- and we found out that there are such organizations in other cities, and -- [interruption]

Q: And you said you had a newsletter, and you had regular meetings, and wa -- and what kind of things did you do?

A: Yes, we a newsletter that was nationwide, because there was a similar organization in Cincinnati and one in California, in Los Angeles, one in Florida. And so we had the newsletter that came out once a month. We had meetings. We would go out to talk to other groups, because the Jewish Community Council felt that we are interfering with their leadership, and we didn't, we weren't, we just -- eventually we made arrangements with the labor union right across the -- the Soviet embassy on 16th Street, where we organized a daily vigil, which the police told us we're not supposed to have any signs, or any speeches, or any

pronunciations, but it's okay for us to stand there. And every day at 12:30 to one, we would assemble there in front of the building, across from the Soviet embassy and just stand there for half an hour, maybe read some passage [indecipherable]. In fact, w-we had the pastor from the -- the big church on 16th Street in -- in Massachusetts -- was it 14th str -- John Steinberg -- Steinbrook.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: On the Jewish holidays he would take 10 of his people, and man the vigil. Protest marches we could not have five hu -- we needed to observe the 500 feet rule, so we would meet on K Street, with posters -- K and 16th and march around with posters, accusing the Soviets of oppressing the Jewish community there.

Q: And what was going on at this time, was that the sa -- the Soviet government was not allowing Jews to leave?

A: No.

Q: An-And -- and was it that general situation that you were i-in opposition to, or were there specific cases that you were --

A: Well, in the meantime, the arrested all the -- the activists that -- all those who applied for exit and were refused, so we had the list of refuseniks, and we produced bracelets with their names, and some sort of hanging with their names, and we went to various synagogues and asked them adopt one of these refuseniks and com -- and correspond with them, and send them help. In the meantime,

people would travel to visit Russia and meet with these refuseniks. The famous [indecipherable] Sharansky, she used to come here, and we took her to the various senators, congressmen. The famous Jackson amendment came out of our activities and our influence with Senator Jackson, of Washington, and his assistant, Richard Perle, who wrote the Jackson amendment, Jackson-Vanik, which made commercial relations with Russia related to their -- to their treatment of Jews aspiring to emigrate, the Jewish emigration from Russia to Israel, or to here, or to Europe.

Q: And were you specifically involved in the writing of that legislation, or consulting, or did --

A: No. No, no, no.

Q: -- you [indecipherable] the hill?

A: But it -- Moshe Brodetsky was advising --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- what conditions that they have in Russia that -- that Jackson --

Q: Did -- did people from the Washington committee go to Russia?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: Maybe just individuals that were just the paying members.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I know of a few that visited there and made contact with these refuseniks.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Who were now fired from their government jobs, and under -- under observance from all the KGB, and they were helped materially with money to just sur -- survive. And their names were specifically submitted to the Russians to allow them to -- whoever was president here, had these names ready to negotiate further.

Q: Mm-hm. And that worked continued for how long? Up until -- how long did that go on, the work, what you were doing?

A: All of the 70's, the struggle went on. I'm not sure exactly when the Russians finally opened the gates and they -- first they asked for payment for the education that these Jews received before exiting or leaving Russia and all the advantages they had enjoyed there. But eventually they opened the gates, and a large -- a large number of immigrants started out from Russia to Israel, and Germany, and Romania and Poland. They just went out.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. In the late 70's, I think it was 1979 specifically, there was a television program that aired in this country on ABC about the Holocaust, and a lot of people point to that nationwide viewing of that program as sort of a -- a beginning of -- of th -- of public education in this country about the Holocaust.

And a lot of people started speaking out about their experience in -- in the late 70's and early 80's.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: It -- it was a -- sort of a flowering of knowledge, and -- and dissemination and lot of young people started observing Holocaust Remembrance Day around this time.

A: Yes.

Q: And I'm just wondering, you know, what kind of a -- how did you -- what were you doing in those years and -- and did -- and -- and did you start speaking out about the -- about your experiences, or -- or about other people's experiences and getting involved somehow in -- in educating people about the Holocaust?

A: Not yet. Not in the 80's. But like Detroit, Washington had a Jewish Community Council, involved with Jewish affairs, and we in the committee were forcing them to pick up more topics, and more projects, and more involvement. So, when Yom HaShoah and the other such anniversaries occurred, of course we were there and we were approving and supporting these renewal of activities.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. You -- in the 80's then, you had young children.

A: Yes.

Q: And how did you and your wife d-decide to tell them about the Holocaust, or what kind of education did they receive in those years, or when --

A: Well --

Q: -- and -- and how did you approach that question?

A: -- first of all, from babyhood, we placed them in Jewish schools.

Q: Mm-hm. Let's wait a second. [tape break]

A: -- preschoolers.

Q: Okay.

A: They attended kindergarten at [indecipherable] up to age of five, and at that age they started Jewish Day School, Charles C. Smith Jewish Day School, for 12 years, up to graduation.

Q: Mm.

A: And that's where th -- they invited me to speak about -- for -- around Passover time, where every Jew is supposed to experience that -- the Exodus, so this was my story of the Exodus. What else?

Q: Was that the first time you had spoken publicly about your experience in -- in front of a group, and --

A: Yes.

Q: It was?

A: Oh, before that, for the Soviet Jewry activities, I worked the -- I talked to Hadassah group to s-si -- my own group that would meet Fridays.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Get them involved.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And oh, wherever I was, at a coffeehouse, at a -- oh, maybe that's an aspect that needs to be covered --

Q: Okay.

A: -- because when we started the Soviet Jewry activities and the Jewish Community Council was adamantly against us, we are disturbing the -- we voted ourselves into that Jewish Community Council, and there were plenty of other members that sided with us, and we were able to bring about, by democratic voting, activities that we wanted the Council to do, and indeed they did. And they approached this Soviet Jewry activities and protest as a community -- experience in community involvement. From Orthodox to Reform, we had more help from the Reform synagogues than from the others, and financially they said anything you need, we can help you. We needed to -- mailings and rallies and such organizations that needed money and they supplied us very nicely. The Washington Hebrew congregation specifically gave us money and told us clearly, whatever you need, you tell us. I was already prepared and understood that th -- this Reform movement in this city, or in this country, and I knew that they are with us, just as in Detroit, I was with them.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And they are looking for causes --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- to get involved in.

Q: Just as they were looking to educate their --

A: Pardon?

Q: Just as wa -- you found in Detroit, that they were eager to educate their children.

A: Absolutely.

Q: And --

A: In fact, when I came to Washington, I taught at the Temple Sinai for one year. It was late for them to prorate me into the Hebrew curriculum, but I taught history and [indecipherable] Bible. Prophets, specifically. Presently I'm ba -- the treasurer of an Orthodox congregation on 16th Street. But I feel fine in any denomination. Anyone that wants to be Jewish, and wants to experience Jewishness, is fine with me.

Q: And are you still s-speaking publicly when you're asked to do so, about your personal experiences? Do you do that very often?

A: No.

Q: No. But you do volunteer at the museum.

A: Yes.

Q: And -- and tell me about that. Tell me why you want to do that, and what it is that you're doing.

A: Maybe you know mor -- Marty Goldman, he is in charge of the Holocaust Survivors.

Q: It's an organization at the museum.

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: And way back when I was the chairman of The Coffeehouse, Marty met his wife there, and -- but before that he also became interested and involved -- in fact, at some point, when I could no longer do that, he took over the chairmanship of The Coffeehouse. And with him I would e-explain and talk about my experiences. So when he became the chairman of the Holocaust Survivors, he -- every time we had a meeting -- chance to meet, he would explain to me that I need to join his group as a survivor. Like my wife said I didn't feel like I went through the Holocaust horrors, cause with all the difficulties, our father c -- walked us through the Holocaust in safety. So I kept telling him that, presently I'm with the FDA and when I retire, I'm coming to volunteer there. And he kept after me, and he was aware of my interviews, and of the Shoah Foundation interview. And before I retired, I called him and I --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Haim Solomon. This is tape number three, side A. When you finally y -- did retire --

A: Yes.

Q: -- you kept in touch with Marty --

A: Yes, I arranged to visit --

Q: Goldman.

A: -- him on January the fifth, I retired on January the third. During that week, I guess, I met with Marty. He took me over to the library and the archives and made them an offer, he said, they can't refuse; a Romanian speaking volunteer. And sure enough, Henry Mayer, in charge of the archives explained to me that they have a large volume of Romanian documents, tapes, that need translation and they don't have any translator. So we started out with a short project of five tapes and another one, six - seven tapes and now I'm in a project of 1944 - '45 already, 17 tapes in that series that need translation. In the meantime they -- they send me 12 depositions of the Gypsies in Romania that were transported to Transnistria, and now they are about to receive German compensation. So they picked th-the 12 most violent ones that I translated and they are very, very happy, or so -- satisfied with that [indecipherable] I arranged that in a way that the importance is stressed.

Q: What do you mean?

A: I mean, they picked only the most egregious cases.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Where Gypsies lived -- they're either traveling from place to place --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- or they settled in one place in housings, but to get them out, th-the Romanian Nazis burned their villages. And they came out and they transported them to Transnistria.

Q: Mm. So you're translating depositions from these people that were done when? When were these interviews with these people taken?

A: They were done in Romania.

Q: When?

A: 2000. Ni --

Q: Oh.

A: Yeah.

Q: Hm.

A: 2000 - 2001. But they picked the 12 most grave -- grav -- and I translated them in a way that they could see exactly what they did to them.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And what does it mean to you to be doing this volunteer work?

A: It's very rewarding in the sense that it will become available in English. Not in detail, but only in titles, or summaries of the Jewish suffering in Romania during the war. The -- th-the -- the secrets or th-the -- the way they -- they brought about the loss of 400,000 Jews in Romania during these years, every new laws that they could use to -- to obstruct and to prevent Jews from just living normal lives. Professionals expelled from their professions, assets were nationalized, or -- as they called it. Romanians were allowed to buy Jewish properties for very minimal prices, then rent them out to the Jews. Even some that didn't -- the la -- the -- the rules were -- th-the laws were called, for people who didn't have any housing, to take over the Jewish houses. But these were just making business out of it, even though they had wonderful houses, they took over from the Jews, and rented them out to Jews. They would advertise them as such, Jews preferred, and exorbitant prices, and just made out a -- a business out of it. All sorts of aspects are -- atheistic Jews -- Jews or a -- or non-Jews, they were still considered Jews for deportation. And a bunch, a large number of baptized Jews, baptized to either Greek Orthodox or Catholic, and the Catholic Nuncio and the Pope insisted that they are Catholics and they are not to be treated or mistreated as Jews. But the Greek Orthodox, they insisted that they -- if they claim to be Christian, they should be deported as -- to go out and a-as -- what do you call it, to proselytize other Jews in Transnistria. So that was their position. And certain pogroms in

Kishinev and in Iasi. The one in Iasi, I personally experienced, in hiding. And a lot of things that even though I was youngster and lived there during these years, I did not understand it, and did not know it exactly the way it happened, until I meet it, or find it now in the Romanian text that I translate into English.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Now is being translated and indicated, it's too much for me, but some other people could write papers, books.

Q: About what happened in Romania?

A: The Holocaust in Romania --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- yes.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Well, if they -- if somebody does do that, some of the research and -- and translation that you've done will no doubt be available to them.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Yeah.

A: Absolutely.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: I haven't taken advantage of these things, th-the -- for instance, this Cyprus experience, and the specific boats that I --

Q: Mm-hm, were on.

A: -- took to -- from Romania. These interviews and the first person interview would help me in making up a personal history.

Q: Mm-hm, which you are doing?

A: I would like to do it. Expanse -- expanding it, and leave it for the boys.

Q: Mm-hm. You have two boys?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. One's 30, and the other one is?

A: 27.

Q: 27. And one of them, you mentioned to me, is very interested in your history and --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and understanding what happened to you, and what happened in your part of the --

A: Yeah --

Q: -- in -- in Romania.

A: -- in -- in general, th-the -- the Jewish causes.

Q: Mm-hm. Yeah.

A: That's the one in New Jersey.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: The younger one lives here, and was supposed to come here today, but he got involved in an accident. He is not --

Q: Can you bi -- be careful with this, it makes a lot of noise.

A: Hm?

Q: It makes a lot of noise when you handle it, so --

A: Oh. [indecipherable]

Q: S-So di -- are you -- so one son is in-interested in what --

A: Yes.

Q: -- in knowing, and the other one is less so.

A: Less interested.

Q: And -- and how do you explain that? And does it bother you?

A: No.

Q: Do you think he'll change his mind?

A: Probably.

Q: Yeah.

A: It's -- brothers, but they're so different. One is closed in, and the other one is all over, like his mother.

Q: Uh-huh, mm-hm.

A: He talks, he communicates, he goes, he comes, he's all over the [indecipherable].

Q: And you're going this summer to Romania?

A: He wants us to go and I agree, and maybe we'll combine it with a stop in Cyprus. He wants to see exactly where and how.

Q: Have you been back to either place?

A: No.

Q: No. So it'll be --

A: It will be --

Q: -- quite a trip for you.

A: Yes, for myself.

Q: Yeah.

A: I even start charting places.

Q: Mm-hm. And are you -- are you eager? If -- if it wasn't for your son's interest, would you go back, yourself?

A: No.

Q: No. So you want him to see that, it's not -- it's more for him than for you?

A: Both.

Q: Both.

A: Yes, before I close the cycle and turn over to him, I'd like to go back and [indecipherable], see exactly where he come from and how far we went -- we got.

I'm sorry my parents are not here to -- to -- to see it, but being the youngest, they could not catch all my developments.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: They saw the -- the other sister's and the brother's offspring, but maybe the -- no, my mother saw the older son, cause he is named after my father, and the youngster is named after him -- after Mother, in Hebrew at least. Her name was Sophie and his name is Sopher.

Q: Mm-hm. What do you think -- what do you think it's going to be like to go back, to see those places where such important events happened in your life? What do you -- what do you -- how do you anticipate it? Are you dreading it? Are -- you think it's going to be emotional, do you -- do you know what to expect?

A: Yes.

Q: You do?

A: The -- the very original place where I come from --

Q: Bivolari?

A: Bivolari is now -- one Jewish family returned there, and they're held in great esteem I understand. And my older son worked here for three months, at the National Food Processors Organization. He's a food microbiologist, and this was tremendous experience for him to see -- in addition to producing f -- [indecipherable] of food, distribution and placement of food is the second part of

food science. So there she worked together with the wife of an em-embassy of Romania employee. And sh -- her grandmother lives in Bivolari, so she told him there is electricity now, they are paving the road. It was -- Bivolari is one long street, unpaved, and muddy in the spring. So he should go, he should see it, and see the rest of the s -- country. It's a beautiful country, no question. But I want to show him Iasi, where the pogrom took place, that house where we lived, the place where my brothers were almost killed. Maybe Bucharest. We went from Bivolari to Iasi to Bucharest to Cyprus to Israel to Detroit.

Q: Hm.

A: It's a long journey.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: That takes away years. And here I am, I need to make it up and at the FDA, I really developed for all these years. The 60's, we -- we put some sense and some security, safety, into the fish industry. In the 70's we had the -- the mushroom industry, was poisoning people all over the country. In the 80's, we had the salmon industry, that we regulated. You know, the salmon industry is the larg -- the only country in the world that produces that much salmon, all around the world, except that the canning it -- of it was so primitive that they used to make a -- th-the cans, flatten them without the top or the bottom, and take them to Alaska, and there press into th-the -- the bottom of the can, fill the can, put the top and

[indecipherable] it. Well, people died. In London and Belgium and Australia, all due to American salmon. So FDA was able to a-abolish that system and FDA hired additional inspectors, about 600 of them to go around and look for these cans, and these cases. And finally we came about a safe product, the canning industry, the -- the salmon industry, the tuna industry, and a few, new modern means of -- of marketing foods that needed FDA intervention.

Q: I'm wondering if -- if your experiences, and -- and the things that you went through after the war, the depravation that you experienced, and -- and the danger that you put yourself in to help save people and yourself.

A: Yes.

Q: You were determined to save -- help -- help people --

A: Yes.

Q: -- even at a young age --

A: Absolutely.

Q: -- it seems like. And that motivation has been part of you ever since.

A: Correct.

Q: Did that motivation, do you think come from your experience --

A: Yes.

Q: -- or was it something that was there before, that came from your parents? Or is it all kind of come from the same place? You know what I'm saying?

A: Yes, I do.

Q: I'm trying to draw a link between the things that happened to you as a result of the war --

A: Certainly, yes.

Q: -- and the profession that you chose.

A: Yes, absolutely connected, the experience to what one does afterward -- the experience, after you come out alive from an experience, you try to prevent it from -- others from going through it.

Q: Mm-hm. Let's wait a second. You said that -- that when you live, when you survive an experience like that, that you -- you're motivated to help other people --

A: Correct.

Q: -- not have to go through something like that.

A: Exactly. Individuals as well as communities. Wherever there was a need, and no one went to fu-fulfill that need, I was ready to go, first to go.

Q: Were your parents like that, too?

A: To the extent that's possible. In Bivolari there was no time and no means, but still my father was involved with the community affairs, with the synagogue.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But that's -- was enough for me to see that in spite of this need and activities, that he was involved in, just to keep a family of five alive.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And we all tried to help during those years. The place was so primitive that everything had to be done from scratch. Even water wasn't available, or electricity.

Q: You've come such a long way in your life.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: To this beautiful home in a --

A: Yes.

Q: -- beautiful community here in Silver Spring, and --

A: Absolutely.

Q: -- you're a very lucky person.

A: Absolutely, yes.

Q: And you worked hard.

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: Everything was compensated. So this involvement at the museum is a plateau where I can walk through it, and just cont-continue. It also helps mentally to stay a-a-aware and alive. In addition to those two days that I -- I am at the museum, we

have meetings on Wednesdays many times. I also take some classes at a Jewish center in Rockville. Subjects of interest, and of distraction, of -- like music, opera. We're very avid opera lovers. During the Holocaust I studied violin, so I'm -- I like th-the classical music. My wife likes opera, so we -- she comes with me to concerts, I go to the opera. And many cultural activities.

Q: Do you still play the violin?

A: No.

Q: No. I remember i -- during your interview you talked about carrying your violin with you.

A: Violin, yes, I had a picture of that, carrying the violin.

Q: How long did you hang onto the violin?

A: Oh, two or three years.

Q: After you got to Israel?

A: No. No, no, no, no.

Q: Didn't make it that far?

A: I took it to Cyprus and they took it away from me.

Q: Oh.

A: They will return it to me afterwards, when I leave, but I left illegally.

Q: Mm-hm. Mm.

A: I didn't go far enough with the violin, but I remained an avid appreciator of classical music.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. I want to s -- go ahead. You wanted to talk about your time --

A: Yes, my a --

Q: -- at the FDA.

A: -- work at FDA was very satisfactory because I went into areas that were clear, clean, no -- no one did any of that work.

Q: Breaking of ground. Breaking of ground --

A: La -- breaking of grounds, correct.

Q: -- right.

A: And as a result, either as primary author or secondary author, I produced about 65 to 70 publications on Clostridium botulinum, mostly on -- in foods. But basic, physiological research on the organism that is presently public -- publicized, and used by others. We had, starting in '65, an organization of -- a long name -- of the IBRCC, the botulism research organization. But it met -- meets once a year. I made sure that it's not during Jewish holidays, cause we meet in the fall. And I wrote a history of that organization because I participated in it from the beginning. So this is what I leave as a -- these publications and leadership in that organization. So --

Q: And at -- and what kind of work is yet to be done in -- in th -- your field? What's -- where is it going now, when -- since you're --

A: Now it's become a weapon of mass destruction, and it's all bioterrorism. And on the other hand, they took this poison and made it into a medicine, Botox.

Q: Botox?

A: Yes.

Q: Oh my.

A: Comes out of there.

Q: How do you feel about that?

A: I feel that it's lowering, and some of our best researchers went into it to make money.

Q: Yeah. And what about the weapons of mass destruction?

A: That is another problem.

Q: Yeah.

A: And we need s -- rapid tests to detect it and products that might have the poison.

Q: And that's what FDA could do?

A: Right now at -- most of FDA's activities in the field are directed to rapid methods of detection, and the military is doing vaccinations. Like, I'm

immunized. When I worked with it, I was immunized to the point that even if I make a mistake or injure myself, I would be immune to it.

Q: Uh-huh. And so this work -- this new -- these new developments started before you left, before you retired?

A: Yes.

Q: So you were somewhat involved in this rapid detection, and --

A: Correct.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Yes.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But when we started in ’65, nothing, nothing was known of it, or how to handle it, how to avoid it, how to destroy it.

Q: Mm-hm, well, so you did a lot.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Quite a lot.

A: Right. Really look back and like it.

Q: You made a great contribution.

A: Presently all the young researchers are trying to get me to review their publications, but I left everything at the Food and Drug Administration, all my files, and I try to turn them down, or a few I know [indecipherable] I can do it.

Q: Mm.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Haim Solomon. This is --

A: Three.

Q: -- tape number three --

A: B.

Q: -- side B. You still have relatives in Israel?

A: Yes.

Q: And -- and your wife as well, have relatives there, too?

A: Ah, yeah.

Q: Yeah. How often do you go back?

A: We will try to go back every summer.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Even if it's for 10 - 15 days.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We will do that. We promised them, we promised ourselves. Last time we were there for eight days, we didn't get a chance to see everybody, but next time we'll take longer.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We traveled to other places in addition to Israel.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We combined with spots in Europe. Italy, Spain, France, England. And what else? We now go to New Jersey to visit our son, once a month. We go to New York, to the opera. [indecipherable] opera. And planning for future trips.

Q: Mm-hm, good. Good. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Haim Solomon. Thank you very much.

A: Thank you.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Conclusion of Interview