(BS--Wentworth Films, Kovno Ghetto Project. Interview with Ivar Segalowitz, I-V-A-R S-E-G-A-L-O-W-I-T-Z. 5-5-97 Sound is on sound roll 10 at the head, camera is on 19)

(Camera roll 19, mark 1, mark)

SB: Can you first tell me when and where you were born and a little bit about what your childhood was like.

IS: OK, I was born a town called Memel or Klaipeda, a seaport on the Baltic sea. Come from a educated middle class kind of family. My father was in the flax export business. He bought flax from the local farmers, graded it, sorted it and bailed it and then shipped it to Ire land, Czechoslovakia, or any place that used manufactured linen. I was an only child in, amongst a family of about 2 sets of aunts, an uncle and my parents, my grandmother. I was the only so as a result I was badly spoiled. I had a, a maid that took care of me and I had a, I was brought up like a little prince in some respect. I my aunts would take me, I did more with my aunts than I did, did with my mother and father usually. they, they took me to

cafes, and my one aunt took me, she was a little more interested in sports so she took me skating and to the beaches. We had beautiful beaches in Memel. I went to a secular Hebrew public school. It was totally not religious. It was basically a Zionist type of school where they taught us modern

TIMECODE NOTES: Hebrew and Jewish history, not Bible studies as such.
And at the time it was a unusual education also. We lived in a very nice house. We had a whole floor of a three story house. I had my own room overlooking the river that passed through the town, saw ships going by all the time and as a result I still like them, I am now involved in sailing. Sundays and weekends I remember being taken at a little ferry across the bay from where we lived, was a place called Zancove and we were again, I would be taken with my family to, and lots of older people always to cafes and I really did not have much opportunity to play with other children because I was always entertained with adults somehow. It was just a very pleasant life in general.

SB: And then, when, how did things start to change. What do you remember that you saw and you heard.

IS: Well first of all we had the radio at home and my father would be glued to the radio. And I mean you kept already hearing of what was going on in Germany even

though Memel was half German speaking that it was not a German town. It was a Lithuanian town and there were eventually we heard of invasions of, of Czechoslovakia and I could even as a child sense that the uneasiness of my parents. Also I had an uncle and an aunt who had already come to the United States and they kept writing. We can, they were trying to bring us over an trying to bring us over. But there was trouble getting affidavits and somehow that never materialized. And

a few months before Hitler invaded. I don't know exactly the date, but Hitler invaded, took over Memel and that's before the war with Russia started. And we had to move to Lithuania proper. And my parents even though we lived in Lithuania, had German citizenship and we were not allowed for some odd reason to live in the capital of Lithuania which was Kovno or Kaunas at the time. So we ended up first in Siaulilai and

then in Panevezys and I mean suddenly from this, I had my own bedroom, we had a dining room, a living room, a breakfast room, I, it was, it was, wasn't palatial but it certainly was near that. We lived in very cramped quarters and in the back yard near my father somehow, either competition or a colleague in the business. And things just changed drastically. However my school I continued going to the same type of a secular Hebrew private school in Panevezys and, and kept getting this rather interesting education. I also remember and this must have been I must have been ten at the time, the day the Russians invaded Lithuania and the tanks coming through and the first time I saw people from other, I saw Khirghiz who looked like Chinese people and, and so as a child for me this was a great thing to see, all these tanks rolling through town. But I could, my father even though he was a German citizen, was born in Russia and escaped prior or just after the revolution and was very. I think he was more concerned at the time of what the Russians would do to him than what the Germans might do to him. So he, he was

really quite,

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TIMECODE NOTES: quite worried and I mean as, as a ten year old you, you
always try to have fun and go around and,
and with your friends but you sense this
unease in the family at that time. And then
when the Russians came again being German
citizens they did not want us to live in the
provinces so they made us to go Kovno or
Kaunas proper. And now the whole family, 2
aunts and another uncle and

we all got crammed into even tighter

quarters. In Kovno. Under the Russians.

The russians did not allow Hebrew or Yiddish

or any sort of education that was other than

Lithuanian or Russian so I was put into a

Lithuanian school and I didn't know what was

going on at all because I didn't speak

Lithuanian. In Memel you could get by with

German which is what we spoke and Russian

which my father spoke with his sisters. Um.

Again as a child you have funny experiences.

I mean in this house that we lived in the

back yard Russian soldiers were quartered

and once I knew enough Russian, and a

Russian soldier calls me over and he says

you want to have a smoke in Russian, hochet

pokurete. He says. And I say sure and he rolls a cigarette from the stem of tobacco and he and I smoke. And I come home and I threw up the whole afternoon and my mother said what happen, what did you eat. And finally I told her I smoked with a Russian. And she, she let me have it. I mean it's a. But that was still under Russian occupation. Then I clearly remember the day when the Germans invaded because it's the first time that I heard planes overhead. And bombs fall, falling so you know it, just this gorgeous life that we had in Memel

and. A lot was hidden from me. But I always saw my parents and, and talk in hushed voices, and Ivar is coming, stop talking. And you know this, this kind of stuff. I still remember. So even though I didn't, wasn't told specific details of what was going on, I sensed the fear and the, the worry of my parents at that point. And then the next thing, once the Germans had invaded it didn't take long. I and I don't quite remember how but the next thing I know is I, I'm in a ghetto and now we are really cramped. Maybe the whole family in a room, one or two rooms. And that's again the two aunts, an uncle. And interestingly enough there was a refugee from Germany to

Lithuania by the name of Carl Natkin who became involved in the ghetto gate keeping police of some sort. And he was a German Jew who knew his way around with the Germans. And he had, he was married to an non Jewish woman who maintained he was a rather wealthy guy. He lived with us and he sort of became like a protector of the family because he was involved in the, in the I don't really the administration of the ghetto. And, and was friendly with the Germans knew how to bribe them. And so but anyway things were really crowded, tight. I always had enough food because I guess as a child they gave me all the food that they didn't have, that the others didn't have. So this protective life in a way continued for me. Um.

(change rolls)

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/IVAR SEGALOWITZ
page 6 Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854
TIMECODE NOTES: (beep)

(Camera roll 20 is up)

(Camera roll 20, marker one)

SB: In the first few months of the ghetto, describe how you felt. Were you afraid.

IS: You know my reaction was always in watching my parents and, and my surroundings because much was hidden from me. I was at the time about 10 and 11 years old. And I could see of course by the way my parents were that, that they were in a constant state of fear

and, and that really a catastrophe had befallen us. And so I was of course frequently not allowed out on my own or at all. There were, there was obviously a shortage of food, although we were not starving yet. It was not at a point where and I know that my mother always finagled something and food ended up on the table somehow, but the food I mean there was no meat, there was always this well I remember like fake, fake chopped liver made out of peas and things like that. Today that's considered good. And so but as a child I also remember occasionally when things calmed down in the ghetto, I would be allowed out and I would have friends and we would go play and we would play soccer. And you know as a child we tried to maintain things in, in as normal a fashion and my parents sort of helped me in that. At some point during this period, I ended up in

TIMECODE NOTES: this workshop. Where which to the best of my knowledge
was con, was continued, the continuation of
the ORT schools which had existed in Russia

and Lithuania before the war which were basically vocational high, vocational schools. And I was trained to, to become like a locksmith and a machinist and, in some instances. I mean I remember having to, being given a large block of steel and having to file the thing til it's perfectly square on all the corners. You begin with a big block and you finally end up with something rather small. I remember having to hand fashion a lock and make it out of metal. And then we did some routine work. I would guess some production for the Germans. This is you know from what I understand in retrospect is that because I was in this workshop during some of the selections or so on, while these were occurring I was in a workshop and worked and therefore was not so this was something that eventually helped me save, save my life. And yet as kids we, we did nonsense too. Right

in, in this ghetto. I mean we, we, we they had welding equipment and there was some, some material called carbide, which is not the same as carbide here. If you mixed it with snow in the winter and threw matches in it and the darned thing would explode you know. And I mean I think we made believe we were fighting the Germans with that. It was of course silly. Um. Of course at, at the beginning, it's, it's I remember as things went on frequently being, being hidden. We had a hidden chamber in the house which was behind like a big chest that was, was a very narrow passage between two

TIMECODE NOTES: walls. And there were in the house that we lived in
there were I don't know there were at least 4 or 5 other families crammed in and in this during the summer of the selections I was down there. Um. And there were I mean maybe I was 12 at this point and we were told to be absolutely quiet. yet there was a woman there with a baby and the baby would cry and you know and this was where this guy Carl Natkin came into the picture. The, during the selections apparently one person was always allowed to stay in the house. Sort of to watch it or something. And when the Germans came by he spoke perfect German and he, he bribed them with alcohol and whatever else and, and the Germans would just come in and, and very quickly leave the house. So in a way this guy protected us and probably I owe my life amongst many other people to him also. Um. The, the worst thing that I remember was the hanging where everybody had to show up and I didn't remember the cause but. I mean this was the first time I really saw, I must have been 12 or so at that time. People just being hung and you had to you know the whole, the whole ghetto was in this open field and had to watch that. And I think at that point things really dawned on me that things were not just bad but horrible. Um.

SB: What about the Knight fort. Did you know the Knight fort was there.

IS: I did not know that of the Knight fort.

No,I, I mean I'm, I, that probably was just

kept away from me.

SB: Tell me a little bit more about the training and organizing for food. Did you, were you ever able to do anything.

IS: No, I think my parents and mainly we depended very much on this Carl Natkin who was a bit of a wheeler dealer and he, he brought in the food and, and arranged that both my uncle and my father were on work details which were, I don't know if they were in better or worse but they certainly was involved in that. And so I, I do not remember that personally.

SB: And what about books and school.

IS: That's interesting. My mother was educated in Germany and she brought into the ghetto a lot of books and she made me read Goethe and Schiller and, and so I as a child knew here the Germans were persecuting us and at the same she taught, those were the books she had so that's what she made me read. Event he Niebelung. You know the, the whole story of Siegfried. You know the whole story of Siegfried and all the Wagnerian operas are there from. I mean it, it's what my mother sort of taught me at that time. And I mean looking back upon

that it's, it's ridiculous but I, my family was not a particular religious family. My father was what you would call a Yom Kippur Jew. I mean he went once a year to synagogue. But I was approaching my 13th birthday and I remember being sent to a, to a rabbi and

 being taught, prepared for my bar mitzvah. And then I remember that the Germans did not allow any synagogues but there was some sort of an apartment complex and in it was a, they had this hidden synagogue and I was bar mitzvahed in front to the whole ghetto, amongst this whole horror going on. So and then my mother, my mother continued teaching me mathematics and whatever she could. And of course I was in this workshop where I learned the machine shop trade sort of. And so I, my education I mean it was not education in the class, in the traditional sense but it sort of continued. At least, at least until about just until the bar mitzvah. After that things started to really deteriorate in the ghetto. I mean there were frequent selections and I started to become more cognizant of what was going on and um so .

SB: And when was that. When was the bar mitzvah.

IS: Well that would have been in August of 1947, 1943. I'm I mean my birthday is in August and 13th birthday would have been August of 1943.

SB: Tell me more about the changes that you noticed in the ghetto.IS: Well there was you know here I, I came I was a kid who came from a family where I had custom made clothes. And the clothing started to be ragged and dirty and my parents looked and wore ragged and dirty clothes. I mean that certainly was, was something that I noticed. There was less food. I mean, and when there

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TIMECODE NOTES: was food served from I remember that my plate was

always fuller than anybody else's. The,

there was just the bare, bare minimums of

food that were available and I mean as a

child my I, I just felt this constant fear

that of that by now I knew that if you ere

caught by the Germans you were done for you

were finished.

(Camera roll 21 is up)

(Speeding)

(3 marker)
SB: Take me back to a couple of those times when you got hidden. Was it like a sudden frenzy and everyone scurried or did you know what was, just describe it to me or describe the

IS: Well. I think it because we had this

guy Natkin who knew sort of what was going

on, we, it, it was not a sudden frenzy usually. It was, we knew that we had to go down and hide. But from just watching everybody around me I mean I could see this incredible fear of everybody that of being discovered in that, in that hiding place. And I, I distinctly remember this woman with this baby because I mean she almost smothered that child because if they,if anybody would have heard that baby that would have bene the end of, of maybe 15 or 20 people that were hidden in that place. I remember being in there. I mean I couldn't tell you how many hours but

TIMECODE NOTES: it certainly felt like sometimes more than a day I think. I remember ending up just in the morning and then probably staying there a day or two. And then, I always remember that some food was kept in the reserve down there just, just for that eventuality so that when one had to go down there was something to, to keep everybody nourished. Um I mean it was like, like you were huddled and, and, and you had to be quiet and there as no place to sit or to sleep. I mean we slept on the, on it was just plain ground.

SB: Describe the place that you hid most often.

IS: Well there, I remember the house being just like, like a little Russian peasant house almost. And there, there was from what I remember like a big cabinet against a wall. And I think they had constructed or widened the wall taken space away from both sides of the, inside the wall was a stairway that went into this basement or what, whatever that was into this dugout. And everybody would go down there and, and then this armoir would be put back again and the man that stayed up there was this guy Carl Natkin who, who then placated the Nazis as best as he could from one and he kept them from really searching the place too much.

SB: How big was the actual dug out and how

many people would be in there.

IS: I, I would guess about 15 to 20 people.

How big.

 No, maybe 10 x 10 or 10 by 15 feet. It was very very
small. It was I mean we were just body to body in there. It was not the, there was almost no room to, to walk or anything.

SB: Could you stand up.

IS: Well I could. I was very short. You know I, I did all my growing after the war so.

SB: And the Jewish police, what did you think of them.

IS: I, I don't know much about those. Uh I mean as kids there were people that we are

told to stay out of their way you know. Jewish police or what I remember and you just didn't but I, I didn't really have any contact or feeling about it so I wouldn't know.

SB: Tell me a little more about incidents you remember that were fun or pranks that you pulled or games that you played.

IS: Well that must have been still in the early parts of time of the ghetto like probably 41, 42. Somehow in the workshop we located long metal cubes and we were able to get hold of peas, dried peas and we would use as a pea shooter and there was an old lady in the house. And we would shoot it against her window. I mean I remember that distinctly. I mean the stupid stuff like this you remember. Then she would come out

SB: Let's go to when things got very bad at the end and what happened to you. Toward

when the ghetto was.

IS: Well I,I just remember that everybody was more and more despondent and, and really sort of it was like a hopelessness in the whole family. Additionally at that point one of my aunts died of cancer in the ghetto and, and whatever resources the family had like there was still some jewelry that was not given to the Nazis was sold to try to save her but it whatever there were some decent doctors but they obviously had no, no not much medication. And it she was a very beloved aunt of mine. And, and so that, that was part of the hopeless that she couldn't be helped at all. So and it was just that everybody I mean by now I realize that, that the chances of surviving were, were rather slim I would think. Um I don't clearly remember every day of the, of the last few months of the ghetto except that you saw fewer people. I mean when I first got into the ghetto that the streets were full, at the end you hardly saw any people. And they were walking around. I wasn't allowed out virtually at all, except when I was

 at the workshop. So it, it was just not good I mean.

SB: And how did you leave the ghetto.

IS: Well that I remember rather clearly because I remember the whole family being, being put into a one of those cattle cars. Um and that was everybody, that was my two, my, my one aunt at this point and, and my uncle and my father and my mother and myself. And at this point I mean even the, my parents still tried to say you've got to hope for the best, you'll survive and you'll, you'll be all right and that kind of stuff. I mean you could see amongst the people that you were that you had nothing but talk of being sent to the concentration camps and of being exterminated. But.

SB: How did you get to the cattle cars.

IS: I think we walked.

SB: And do you remember being ordered to go. Or do you just remember that one day you ended up walking there.

IS: I remember just one day being going there and walk, walking there and being on the, on the trains. The real things when I really realized that that things are horrendous was when we finally ended up in Stutthov after a few days. I don't know was a day or two or whatever uh and at that point my aunt and my mother

were taken away and, and I mean this is I mean I spent

 virtually all my time crying from that moment

on. And
the train then continued to Dachau. Uh I ended up with my father and the uncle and this Natkin. It was then probably a week. There was selection of about 120 kids or so at that point. And they were in Lanzberg my father and, and uncle and we were sent to Dachau proper. And oddly enough that was a very neat camp somehow. It, it, beds and stuff like that so it was, but I mean all I remember is crying. I mean I was at that point 13 or 13 and a half or so. Almost 14 and I think I was in Dachau maybe a week and then was put on another transport to Auschwitz and I do remember going through the selection, did not know what was right or left. And ended up in one of the camps in in Auschwitz where they put the number on, on me. And then I had some luck because I was put to work on a farm in Birkenau. And I was given responsibility to take care of a horse of all things so I ate the turnips that the horse was given. And that sort of kept me alive and, and going. And in the winter I worked on the, on a compost pile and that was warm for so I mean I, of course was at 13 I suddenly realized I was all

alone. I mean there was just nobody to help me and, and do anything. And I was very small at the time and so whenever there were line ups and selection and anything, I always hid myself behind other people, tall people so I, I made myself not visible as much as I, I had learned to do that quite effectively. So as a result I, I, I stayed alive til the closing of Auschwitz. I, I again as a child you have odd curiosity. When the Russian front

TIMECODE NOTES: started to approach, they started to shut down the
crematorium. And I remember one day I don't know why I wasn't working on the farm or something but I the crematoria were all shut down. I, I walked in there, I walked around the place and I saw the corpses and the ashes and then I mean I, and it was pure curiosity on my part. I just went there and came back to bags and, and I mean I knew what was going on. Also when I first arrived I ended up with the measles in Auschwitz. And somehow I, I was in some sort of infirmary right next to the crematoria. That's before the invasion started and I did see the, the smoke coming out. And everybody said you're next. You know there was this gallows humor going on, in the bags. And then I remember the Russian front approaching. And I remember one day where the,

where this farm was being bombarded by russian fighter planes and that was like a great, great thing. I mean we knew we were we might be hit but I mean we knew that at least that the Russians were approaching but unfortunately I got again put on the transport and was sent to Buchenwald. And I think that, that transport did me in. I mean I was, by the time I arrived in Buchenwald, I, I was rather weak already and run down. And Buchenwald I mean as horrible as Auschwitz was but I was on the farm, so that wasn't quite so bad. And Buchenwald, I mean that was the conditions were just horrendous. I mean first of all even I walked in the crematoria at Auschwitz I didn't see dead bodies laying around in Auschwitz. In Buchenwald you started seeing dead bodies, you see so emaciated people on the ground. And,

 and then the constant fear was that you were coming

next. I mean when you started to become totally emaciated, they used to call you a

mussel man and they started calling me that and, and then at some point I, I just don't remember what happened. And I, I do remember the day of, the day after liberation that I was liberated. I mean that's. So. There, there's an interesting side story to this liberation. I, I remember and I know there is a controversy about being liberated by black soldiers, notwithstanding what some people are saying. Because I remember being carried out on a stretcher, out of wherever I was by two black soldiers. Um a day or two of liberation and then I remember being in an American type of hospital and I was being rehabilitated. And then I ended up in France with, with 600 other boys that were liberated in Buchenwald. And then things started picking up. They sort of improved and in France I was with an organization called ose which was an organization run by French Jewish, run by French Jews and was in a castle near Rouen. And they fed us and, and trained us and after probably got there in April or May maybe. A few months later they sent us to various homes. And I ended up in a home with French children who had

been hidden during the, French Jewish

children most of whom had been hidden and a

number of whom were with me in the camps.

And I spent 2 years there and went again to

vocational school because you are a

machinist, you know started off as that.

And they are in French. Then shortly after

liberation I knew I had this uncle and aunt

in

 the United States. They were contacted and they said,

sent me a telegram saying we want you over

and two years later I was in New York. And

where do we go from here.

SB: That's it thank you.

(end)

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