United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Leon Chameides
November 23, 1999
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Leon Chameides, conducted on November 23, 1999 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in West Hartford, Connecticut and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

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: -- first to start by saying your name and where you're from and where we're -- where we are right now, and the date.

Answer: My name is Leon Chameides, originally pronounced Humeidis and we're now sitting at 65 Westbridge Drive, in West Hartford, Connecticut, my current home. I was born in Cutuvitsa, Poland in south -- southern Poland, in 1935.

Q: Okay, now, Dr. Chameides, I -- I'd like to start a little bit -- just before the period that we -- we were planning to begin. Just at those -- those last days that you recall before liberation. Did you have an anticipation that something was -- was going to happen. What -- Do you recall what your feelings were at thas -- that time just before -- just before liberation?

A: I think, first of all, I have to emphasize the fact that in 1944, I was nine years old. And I had been away from home for a little over two years, since August of 1942. And if you remember your feelings at nine years of age, it's very difficult to separate out, and to recall exactly what one's feelings were at that time and what occurred later and I'm very -- always very careful not to read in things that occurred later and attribute them to that time. I was in a small village by the name of Univ, which is near the large city of Lvov, now in the Ukraine. Univ was very close to the extermination camp of Belzyce. But I was hidden in a monastery, the Univ monastery was the mother monastery of the stunite

monks of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. I was, by that time, a Greek Catholic in my -- in my approach really, but with fairly vivid feelings and recollections of being Jewish. And we, of course, knew that things were happening, because the front was coming closer and closer to us. There were the tremendous amount of warfare. The Ukrainian partisans were fighting on the German side and then saw that Germany was going to lose and there was a lot of confusion. So a lot of the village people were involved in the fighting, and the fighting -- the front came close and closer to us. We could hear it, we could see it's effects. I'm not sure that I had any feeling in terms of that I was going to be liberated. It was -- There was a certain amount of excitement in the -- in a war coming, but of course we had been through this so many times before, that the issue then was primarily how to survive and how to get the next meal. I think those were much more of immediate concern to us -- or to me, at least, than anything else. For reasons I'm not clear, we had one healer, I don't know whether he was a physician or not, but one person who knew something about medicine in the area, that I managed to become his helper at the ripe age of nine and we set up a -- a hospital in the church and we brought in -- the wounded were brought in from the -- and one of my jobs -- course, we had no medicines at all, and one of my jobs was after the battles, to run into the forest and to rummage around, find dead soldiers, particularly if they were German, because they would usually have bandages and first aid material on them, and get as much of that material as possible. If they were bandaged -- their wounds were bandaged, I would take the wou -- bandages off and then run back and wash them, so we could use them on the -- on the

Ukrainians. This helped me a great deal. It taught me a lot and also, it -- it helped me because on Sundays, the farmers, the families would come and then -- and they would -- to see their husbands and youngsters and -- and I would always be around and so I would get eggs and cheese and milk and so there was food. So, we knew something was coming, the front was coming closer to us, the bombardments were more common. One heard a lot of shooting a-around and so we knew something big was -- was about to happen.

Q: Mm-hm. And then, a-a-appreciating the fact that you were nine and that you're not going -- going to recall, of course, all the details or even, you know, looking back at -- those number of years to exactly what you were feeling at the time, and appreciating that fact that you don't want to reconstruct something, as you just said, what do you recall about those actual first moments of realizing that something was really changing now?

A: Well, unfortunately for us, again, in my position, not that much changed, because when the Russians entered, I was on the wrong side, because almost as soon as the Russians entered, which as I recall was in June of 1944, Stalin, as you recall, was a firm opponent of the Greek Catholic Church. The Greek Catholic Church was a nationalist church, it was very much bound up with Ukrainian nationalism and with a drive for independence on the part of the Ukraine, from the Soviet Union. And so Stalin, who eventually outlawed the Greek Catholic Church, imme -- almost immediately began persecuting the priests. And so, we would see now, instead of Jews being shot, we would see priests being shot. And so, one day, I had heard that there was a -- a horse drawn

wagon going to be going to the big city of Lvov and I felt that I had to get out of Univ and so I took one of the younger boys, who is now in Israel. His name now is Oded Amarand, but at that time, his name was Dodo, and we decided we would walk to this nearby village -- I have no i-idea of how much of a distance that was, in order to try to get this wagon, and on the way, we were stopped by Russian soldiers a-and a Russian patrol stopped us. And children were very often used as spies, so we were highly suspect. And I remember sitting in, behind a bush, crouched with my arms up in the air as this Russian was standing in front of us, not knowing -- with a tommy gun -- not knowing what to do. And finally, after what seemed like an eternity, I talked them into allowing us to go to a farmhouse and -- which he did, and eventually he let us go back to Univ. A-And then, it was I think several weeks before another horse drawn carriage was going -- this time I think from Univ, if I recall correctly, and to Lvov, which is a ridiculously small distance when covered by car, but is incredibly lengthy by horse-drawn carriage. And I was able to get on that and went to Lvov, to the mother church, Santa Yura -- which is the Ukrainian for Saint George, in Lvov. And it was in Santa Yura, and I don't know how long I was there at this time, I don't get the impression it was a long time, but I really don't have a good concept of time, it could have been weeks, or might have been months, I'm not sure. But i-it was during the morning mass that I remember, which was celebrated by Brat Yosef, Brother Joseph was his name, I remember the way he looked, a bald head with a white beard. And he was celebrating the mass and in the middle of the mass, in walked two boys who were dressed differently than I was. But the dress and

their faces were familiar to me, but I wasn't sure from where. I was dressed at the time in pants made of burlap, because we had nothing, and shoes made of -- of wood, soles made of wood, because there was no leather. And here come these two boys, who are already better dressed. They're in short pants, in a western style, better material. And that was -- one of the boys was my brother and the other one was a young man who is now a chemist in San Francisco. And they motioned to me and -- and I went with them and I remember going to have something to eat first, because we didn't eat before mass and so we had something to eat and -- and they took me out of the monastery. So -- So that's how I got out of the monastery.

Q: When did you realize that that was your brother?

A: I -- I think -- I think I realized almost immediately, but I wasn't a hundred percent certain. I hadn't seen him in a -- two and a half years and at that age, there's a big change that occurs in -- in people. But I -- I think I realized almost immediately that it was. Cause I had thought about him a great deal while I was in hiding and the -- the Studite monks made a tremendous effort to always keep us separated, because they were afraid that if we were ever together, we would not only give each other away, but they were in mortal danger themselves, because they were really -- would -- would have been killed had it been known they were hiding Jews. So -- And I remember once, I was in Univ, in the attic. I found a pair of pants that I was absolutely certain were his and that were hidden there, but I'm -- I'm not sure the --

Q: Do you recall when you finally realized and when you did, you know, connect with him? Do you -- Do you -- Do you remember? Was it -- Was it sa -- Was there enough tension so that the -- the reunion wasn't particularly joyful at the -- at that moment or d- do you recall?

A: You know, I don't, and I honestly don't remember emotions very well and -- and again, you know, we had been through so many eventful days and so many eventful months and years, that it seemed like I was almost numb and that nothing surprised me, so here it is. I mean, I -- I don't -- unless I don't remember correctly, which is also possible, but I do not recall a particularly strong emotion.

Q: That makes me wonder whether, I mean, especially with children and you see children nowadays in Bosnia, for example, whether they -- di-di-did you have an idea that this was not normal, what you were going through, or did you just think this is what hap -- not that you would have consciously thought, but did -- do you recall if you would have thought, "This is not normal, this is not supposed to be happening?"

A: I -- I don't think I had -- I don't think I had sophisticated thoughts of that nature. I -- I think clearly, you know, at -- at least at the very beginning, I missed my parents tremendously. I was terribly scared a good portion of the time. But -- But the immediate things were hunger, were -- were loneliness, were trying to make sure that one didn't give oneself away by either saying one was Jewish -- we were particularly marked because it -- we were in a society where only Jews were circumcised, so I was always -- I had to be very, very careful, never go -- to go to the bathroom when other boys were there, never to

bathe together. So, I was always conscious -- so it was this type of peculiar thing, where on the one hand, you know, I followed the ritual of -- of the Catholic church, on the other hand, I -- there was a conscious part of me, because I had to be conscious in order not to give myself away. But, I think children have an incredible capacity to adapt and -- and I think only those who adapted remained alive. I think those who didn't adapt or couldn't adapt, didn't survive. So, in a way, there's already a group that's -- there's a selection process there. [sneezes]

Q: Bless you.

A: Excuse me.

Q: So, what you're describing, in terms of -- whereas for some people in -- in other parts of Europe, there -- there was a liberation, there was a sense that, you know, this chapter is over. But in -- What you're describing is -- is at least up -- up through parts of 1946, exchanged one oppressor for another, such --

A: Well, not through '46, because this was -- we did not stay under the Russians til '46, so -- so th -- what I'm describing now, is the immediate liberation by the Russians. And again, you know, I think every person, of course, is different and -- and adapts differently, but also, I think the age makes a big difference. I notice, for instance, people who were just a few years older than I, had different reactions than I did, because they -- I think you develop a sense of perspective and -- and -- and knowledge of the world, which, I think at the age of seven, or even nine, y-you just don't have. So, y-you have a different, you know -- you may develop the skills for survival and the skills for turning

yourself into someone else and pretending to be someone else, but -- but -- but you can't put that into a perspective. So, I mean, to me it was very confusing, because my native language, my mother tongue was German. And -- And as I was a youngster, that was the height of culture. So -- So wh-when the German invasion came in, I thought this was great. Now, I'll be able to speak my language. So, you know, I was naive, I didn't know anything about the persecutions which had already -- I didn't know much about Hitler or anything like that. I was in a different age frame and I had a different, you know, perspective on it.

Q: I guess the reason I -- I mentioned '46 was not necessarily that it was going to be continuous oppression for you, but the events of -- I guess it was June '46, and the rampages in -- was it Kilsen?

A: Kelsen.

Q: Kelsen.

A: Well, I was already out of eastern Europe by that time. We, just to go back a little bit, after I was taken out of the monastery, we went to -- the person who was responsible for even knowing that we were in the monastery was Rabbi David Kahana, who became the chief Rabbi of the Polish army. And he himself and his wife and two children were hidden in the monastery. He as a priest, his wife as a nun. He wrote a book called, "The Lvov Ghetto Diary." And he was a -- He was good friends with my father. And, in fact, the two of them went to metropolish -- metropolithishipditsky together, which eventually led to th -- him hiding us. So, he knew of our whereabouts. He also knew that our parents

didn't survive. And so he made it his business to make sure that we were taken out of the monastery, whereas, as you know, there were children, including a good friend of mine who was with me in Univ, whose parents not survive, who simply no one knew that they were there and they were just left there, and then became the object of a lot of post-war court cases for the community to try to get some of these children back. So, we went with my brother and -- and Nathan, who was the other boy, to Rabbi Kahana, and Rabbi Kahana told us at that point that our parents had perished and he had a -- a little note that my mother had written, which she gave to him for safekeeping, which he gave us. And then the question was, "Do you know what to do with us?" I was nine, my brother was 11 and a half and my brother had been placed with a family who had survived the war and there was a husband, wife and the young son of his age and they were willing to take him in. And they knew of a woman by the name of Tolla Wasserman -- her maiden name was Ashkenazi, who had been born in 1909, in Lvov and who had gone through the war, was hidden by her maid, she had a Polish maid who was able to cordon off one room in the apartment, very much like Anne Frank's thing, and they remained there for 18 months. And so she was the only one in the family who survived, she was alone and Mr. and Mrs. Frost, who were the people that my brother was staying with -- and went to her and asked her whether she would be willing to take me in, and she did. My brother did not remain with the Frosts, he -- he had a lot of difficulty in becoming a part of any new home at all, and -- and left, but I remained with -- with Tolla Wasserman from 1944, I believe

November, until her death in 1964. And, it was really, I think a great deal. I think, thanks to her that I am where I am. So --

Q: Why do you think that -- wa-was it the age difference th-that made it so difficult for your brother, whereas it was possible for you to adapt, even thought it's only two and a half years? Perhaps a significant time.

A: Mm-hm. You know, one of the difficulties we always have in -- in trying to ascribe any reasons for anything, is that we have no controls. And I don't know what would have happened to me had I been his age. I think part of it was age, but I don't think it was all age. I think I have had, since then, and -- and before, a tremendous ability to adapt to reality, which served me well, so I think part of it may have been age, but I don't think all of it. I think part of it has to do with personality.

Q: Mm-hm. So, when you -- I want to ask you to back up just a moment, when you learned of your parents death, was this something that you were almost anticipating learning, or were you shocked?

A: No, I -- I was not shocked and I would have been, I think shocked had I learned otherwise. It -- It came as a -- when I think back on it in a very, almost unemotional matter of fact issue. Everyone was dead, I mean it's much more shocking to me now, looking back, than it was at that time. Perhaps that was a protective mechanism, but I didn't -- I don't remember, either shock or sadness, or any type of real feeling about it at the time. It's much more painful to me now than it was then.

Q: Do you -- Do you recall at all, what your actual reaction was when you learned? What you said, what you --

A: I -- I don't recall, but I -- I don't -- I mean, I remember being in the room and I remember being told, and I simply don't remember any reaction at all. I -- I had -- I don't -- didn't have any reaction.

Q: Uh-huh. Do you f -- Did you feel that living with -- with Tolla Wasserman was -- was like being in a new family, being in a real family, or how did -- how did you feel about her, and --

A: Yeah, well, we -- we became very close. I started by calling her Chacha, which is the Polish word for aunt. And within a few weeks, I asked her whether I could call her mother, which I did. So, we became very close. And she had no one. She was a wonderful, wonderful human being, and so I was part of her family, although there was her -- she had lost her husband and lost her family.

Q: Uh-huh. So, did you live in different places together or to --

A: Well, in -- in Lvov, if you remember, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin met at the altar and divided th-the eastern sphere and Lvov was given to the Soviet Union when the map of Poland was redrawn. Part of that agreement allowed former Polish citizens to choose whether they wanted to remain there or to move into the western part of Poland, and of course, our intent was to move westward. So, I started going to school in Lvov on -- in Russian school and I did have some education in -- in -- during the war, in Univ, but not a lot. So, I think it was the first time that I really went to an organized school, and then

we were given the opportunity to -- to go by train to western Lvov -- to western Poland. We went there sometime in 19 -- I believe it was in the spring of ‘45 and we went by cattle car. Those were -- The only trains available were cattle cars. And there were horrendous stories be -- circulating, of people who had gone before, who would be going on open cattle cars, a distance that before the war used to take maybe two or three hours to cover by train, taking two and three weeks. And the Russians would simply stop in the -- in fields and then -- and just refuse to go on. And there seemed to be no schedule, there was no control. Th-The war was still going on and -- and people were freezing to death in the fields. So there was a lot of fear about going on those trains, but we were very lucky for two reasons. One is that Tolla Wasserman, my new mother, had befriended a person -- a doctor and each train had a -- one covered cattle car, which had a Red Cross on it and he suggested that we go in that car, so we had covering. And the second thing he did was, he bought, at enormous expense, a -- a bottle of -- a -- a case of vodka. And the first day we were out, the train stopped in the field and he called the engineer into this covered car --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: Okay, continuing now.

A: Mm-hm. He took a bottle of vodka out, showed it to the engineer and then heaved it out the open door, and it shattered. And the engineer showed his anguish and he said, “I want you to know that every morning, I’m going to take a bottle and I’m going to throw

it out the door. Whatever is left in that case when we get to our destination, is yours." And we got there in two and a half days, which is absolutely amazing. So that's how we got there, but now that I think back on it, we celebrated the end of the European war, VE Day, while still in Lvov, because I remember, we were living at that time on -- in an apartment on 15 Mawitskago Street, in Lvov and the apartment was deemed too large for just my mother and myself. So they billeted a whole slew of Russian soldiers with us. And many of the soldiers were wounded. There was a -- an elderly gentleman who was the father of one of the younger soldiers and then there were other young soldiers. Many of them had lost arms, lost legs and therefore they were taken from the front. And they had bought a case of vodka and mother said, "No, you're not going to get drunk here." And she locked up the vodka. And then they said, "No, no, we're going to celebrate, because it's the end of the war." And she said, "I don't believe you, but if it's really the end of the war, I will buy you another case." So, we went out to the main square, because no one had radios, we went out to the main square and after awhile, Stalin came on the loudspeaker and -- and announced the end of the war. So the -- I think that was VE Day, so we were still in Lvov at that time. During that time also, I went to school, as I mentioned. I also worked after school in a cosmetics store. And I remember Russian soldiers used to come in and they would buy five bottles of Eau de Cologne and they would hit it against something, take off the tops and drink -- drink that down. They'd drink anything that had any kind of alcohol content in it. And I was at that time already, very cute. My hair had grown back, and mother made sure that I was always dressed

meticulously. And so, I reminded many of them of their own children, I think. So they would very often come to the store and after buying something, they would ask me to come with them for a walk or to come and drink beer. There was a hotel by the name of Hotel Georges, and they used to take me to Hotel Georges to drink beer. And then I would always go with them, and --

Q: This would have been ‘40 --

A: This was ‘44, beginning of ‘45, really ‘45, and I would go with them and on one occasion we were coming back and there was a street photographer and so he took a pho -- they asked to stop, and they took three photographs and one of those photographs of me and two Russian soldiers is hanging on my wall in the dining room. Often wondered where the oth -- soldiers are. And then, the other thing that used to happen to me again, to show you the adaptability, is that the Black Market was the only way you could make a living. You couldn’t make a living any other way, so everyone was Black Marketeering. And the Black Market at that time consisted of soldiers who were stationed in Germany, bringing stuff back from the west. They would bring stuff back from the British or the Americans, who would barter for -- for stuff, and then they’d come back and sell it and then we would sell it further. And one of the big items was, for some reason or other, mother of pearl buttons. So we used to get a lot of mother of pearl buttons in the cosmetic store, which was a state run store and those would be held under the counter and then people would come in who knew about it and would buy them. And whenever there was a raid or anyone would come, they very often would put the mother of pearl under my

shirt, around me, because the soldiers were less likely to search children. And -- So I would find myself with mother of pearl buttons on a -- sewn on a -- on material wound around me. And one day they found it on me and they -- they took me to the Encoverdare, as the NVD was at that time called, Encoverdare headquarters. Mother came with me, she was very shocked and -- and she of course knew about it, but she was shocked that I was taken in. We went both. And no idea what was going to happen to us and the Encoverdare officer closes the door behind him and -- as we're shaking, and turns to us and -- and -- and says in Russian, "Veehad sheety zheets, yatazhoy." "You want to live, I also do." And so he became part of the smuggling ring after that and he got a cut. And that was the end of that. So -- So that's what life was like, you -- you adapted to -- there was one other episode that I remember from those days, and that was that the elderly gentleman I told you about, the Russian soldier, yeah? I don't know when I say elderly, what I really mean. He probably was 40, but to me he was elderly.

Q: It's amazing how our perspective changes with the years, doesn't it?

A: Right, and -- and one of them was -- one of the young men was his son and I remember one day, it was the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur -- I -- I had no idea it was Yom Kippur, because I had just come out of the monastery. I -- I had brought from the -- from the monastery with me, and -- my clothes that I wore and three items. I brought my rosary, I brought my prayer book and I brought a blanket with which I covered myself during the two years and I learned never to give up that blanket, because that was the only thing that stood between me and the Ukrainian winter. Somewhere, the rosary and

the prayer book got lost. My very strong suspicion is that Mother threw them out. But I'm not certain of that and maybe it's unfair to accuse her of that, but I suspect that. But my -- Oh, no, there was a fourth item I brought with me, and that was a picture of myself in front of the church, which I still have, but, the blanket I still have.

Q: You still have the blanket?

A: I still have the blanket.

Q: How do you look at the blanket now?

A: Well, again, it's taken on more meaning as I've gotten older. And we just had a grandson and we used -- we used that blanket during his circumcision. So -- where was I, where was I? Oh, I know wh-why I was telling you this.

Q: C-Could I interrupt for a moment?

A: Sure.

Q: Anyway, please continue.

A: So, the reason I was telling you this in a roundabout way is because of this old -- probably 40 year old gentleman who had came to Yom Kippur, to the Day of Atonement and as I said, I didn't know that, because Mother was really not very observant -- religiously observant. So, we didn't celebrate that at that time. But, he came to me and he asked me if I would stand at the door -- at the kitchen door and look out and warn him if his sons or any of his friends came. And I said, "Why do you want me to do that?" And he said, "Because I'd like to say some prayers, but I'm afraid that they might turn me in." Because in the atheistic system in Russia, that wasn't allowed and he was afraid of his

own son, that he would turn him in. That made a big impression on me and I remember it to this day. The reason I mention this, is that -- is that I think another thing that I was very fortunate in was that I wasn't thrown immediately from one religious experience into another. If I had been, my suspicion is that I would have rebelled. But, as I mentioned, Mother was not particularly a religious woman. On the other hand, she took a tremendous -- she had a sense of responsibility which she took very seriously, to make sure that I was brought up in a religious atmosphere, because my father had been the rabbi of Katowice and she felt an obligation to bring me up in the way they would have wanted. And so I did, later on, but I'm getting ahead of myself, go in to go to Yeshiva and so on. But at that time, as I think back on it, it was very -- I was very fortunate not to have been thrown into a religious environment.

Q: So -- Well, in -- in the -- in describing the -- the stran -- this rather rapid train ride, d- due to the strategy of -- just jumping ahead again here --

A: Right.

Q: -- we're talking about the end of 1945, in that period, beginning of '46?

A: Well, '40, no it was probably the middle -- was -- I don't remember, was VE Day in May '45? I think --

Q: I don't remember the day [indecipherable]

A: I believe it was. And -- And that we still had in Lvov, so it was probably in -- somewhere in the -- and I remember going -- it was in the spring that we went, so it was probably the end of May of '45 that we went westward. And the place we went to was a

town by the name of Bittum. Now Bittum is in western Poland and actually is just a tram car -- street car's ride away from Katowice. So I came back to where I had been. And in fact, I had had relatives in Bittum who -- who had lived, before the war, in Bittum, were very wealthy people, owned a factory there, but none of them survived, all the descendants. But we went to Bittum because the other family that I had mentioned, the Frosts, with whom my brother was still -- he was still with them at that time, had gone to Bittum, and -- and so we went there thinking we would try to settle there, at least for awhile. The idea always was to come to the United States. Mother had actually registered to come to the United States before the war, but her number hadn't come up. So she was still hopeful that she was in line, in terms of the numbers and that eventually that number would come up and that we would be able to come to the United States. We went to Bittum and I started going to school, but it became dangerous -- not became, but it still was dangerous for Jews to be identified as Jews and the Kelsa program is of course, one manifestation which occurred later, but one manifestation of that. So, i-it wasn't good to be a Greek Catholic, which would have been natural, because we were now in western Poland. So, I went to school now, and -- as a Roman Catholic and my name became Leslef Kusharetsky, because it was impo -- for me to have told anyone I was Jewish, would have been very bad for me. So -- So I became a Roman Catholic at this time, not that I was baptized or anything, but as far as my schoolmates were concerned, and my name was Leslef Kusharetsky.

Q: Now, did you have any experiences, either in Lvov or in your new home. You -- You mentioned you -- you ha -- you were faced with having to deny your identity and change your name, which is obviously a -- a drastic and a necessary thing to do. But did you -- did you -- were there times where you experienced personally, anti-Semitism in the post-war period in Poland yourself, or -- how else did you see it? Was it just all around you, what -- what's happened in places --

A: You know, anti-Semitism is -- is very relative. We had just gone through the worst anti-Semitism there is, where we saw people being dragged through the streets by their beards and shot and killed. So, anything that occurred, the fact that someone would throw a stone at -- would call a name, was so minuscule. So, you know, the Russians to us, were the liberators. They were our friends, they were the people who defeated Hitler and so there was enormous amount of -- you know, they evoked a positive image in our minds. There was a lot of anti-Semitism around, but it was -- it was a -- it was as natural as breathing and it was so minuscule compared to what had just happened that it really was insignificant.

Q: It did-didn't reach you --

A: No, no.

Q: -- in that sense. I remember reading in one o -- some of the literature, I don't know if it was from the encyclopedia of the Holocaust or where, but there was reference to the -- the sentiment just among the citizenry in Poland that u-upon greeting a Jew, somebody

would often say, “Oh, I thought -- I thought the -- the Germans got rid of you all,” or something to --

A: Oh, yes. Yeah.

Q: Was -- Was it -- Wh-What -- Was the atmosphere on that level of -- of hatred --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and dehumanization?

A: Absolutely, absolutely. But again, you know, it’s -- it’s -- it -- one should not generalize. There were good people. And -- But -- But there was hatred and there was -- and -- and you know the fear? Don’t forget that a lot of the Poles were living in Jewish homes and eating from Jewish dishes and their fear was someone was going to come back and reclaim it. A-And the fear toda -- to this day is someone’s going to come back and reclaim it. So, you know, th-there was a lot of anti-Semitism, but again, relative to what we had gone through, it was quite mild.

Q: So then, you’re -- you’re -- by mid -- middle of the year in ‘45, you’re now in western Poland, and -- and how long did you stay there?

A: Well, we -- we -- again, we had difficulty making a living and -- and one of the things that everyone was doing was buying and selling and you’d go to the market and you would stand a-and you would see something -- with a few do -- few zlotys, and you would see something and you’d buy it and then you’d move two steps further and you’d try to sell it. And I remember one amusing incident was that we once bought what we thought was a lovely pair of shoes for very little money and when we looked at our most

magnificent find, we found that we had been sold two left shoes. And here we were, having spent a fair amount of whatever we had on these shoes, hoping to make a good profit and here we had two left shoes. So, the question then was, how could we sell two left shoes? And the feeling was that a child would more likely get away with it than an adult. So my brother ended up selling the two left shoes to some other poor sucker, who thought he or she had gotten a bargain. But that's the way life went, you know and -- and -- and so on. But the -- What happened next is that my mother's parents had lived in Germany and managed to get out of Germany in 1938 and go to England. And their son and dau -- two daughters, also were in England, s -- and my uncle, their son, they lived in Newcastle on Thames and in -- immediately at the end of the war, they began making inquiries about our family and found out that the children had survived. So they petitioned the religious council of England, th-the chief rabbi at that time was Rabbi Hertz, to try to get us to rejoin them. And there was a Rabbi Solomon Shunfeld, who was a strikingly handsome gentleman, with a red beard. He worked for the United Nations at that point -- for the UNRRA, the relief organization. He fashioned himself a uniform, which was a British uniform with a -- with a leather strap across his chest and -- and looked very, very elegant. And he basically made trips on behalf of the religious -- the chief rabbi's religious council of England, to Poland, in order to find Jews who had survived, to help them, to try to get children and see whether he could transport them to England, get permission, and they were able to get a certain number of visas from the British government. And so my uncle approached them to find us and -- and he in fact

did and I remember when he came to -- to Bittum -- and that was in 1945, probably mid or late ‘45, to inform us that we had grandparents and uncle and two aunts and that they were anxious to get us to England. And my brother said, “Great.” And I said, “I won’t go without Mother.” And they had no permission for a visa for an adult, to they had a problem. They wired my uncle and my uncle said he wasn’t ready to bring anyone else, but he wanted us, so they tried again. And I told him in no uncertain terms that there is absolutely no way in which they will get me into any kind of vehicle alive, and -- to go to England. So, he wired back saying that he would not participate -- he would not do that. And finally they got a visa for Mother. So, in the very end of 1945, I think it was December the 31st, of 1945, we left -- well, we first went from Bittum to Warsaw, stayed with Rabbi Kahana, who was -- then lived in Warsaw and every day we would go to the airport, because we now had permission to go to England, and every day we would be told that the planes were not flying because it was too foggy.

Q: Was this true?

A: And this wa -- yes, absolutely, because at that time, radar was in it’s infancy and -- and these were Royal Air Force planes, which were basically troop transports, they weren’t commercial -- you know, they had canvas seats and they basically transported troops. But they were willing to transport us. And -- So, for about two weeks, there became a standing joke, we would go in the morning to the airport, we’d be back in the afternoon and then finally one day we went and we took off and we went to Berlin and then from Berlin, flew to London, where we were met by my aunt, and then took a train

to Newcastle. And we remained in Newcastle for the next -- well, in England for three and a half years. Oh, when we -- originally they gave us a visa which was valid for one month's visit. But our Polish passport, which I still had, states that it's valid only one way, so, I'm not sure how that worked. But when we came to the airport, the official said to us, "You only want to visit England for one month?" And we said, "Well, we'd like to visit for a lot more, but we're only allowed one month." So he crossed out one month and he put three months. And I still have that document. And so every three months, we had to renew our stay in England and we did that for three and a half years, until our number came up to come to the United States. So this was now 1946, I was 11 years old and I came to England, to Newcastle, and started going to school there and I didn't know a word of English and I had to learn another language and then --

Q: Which would have been your -- how many languages now, by the --

A: Well, my native was -- was German and then Polish and then of course during the war, Ukrainian and then after the war, Russian.

Q: Ukrainian and Russian are quite similar?

A: Very. They're both Slavic language, but -- and they're both written in a Cyrillic alphabet, but they're are significant differences between the two.

Q: So you -- you were at your fifth language by 11 years old.

A: So -- Right, so I had to learn English and unfortunately England had a terrible system at that time, which they have since done away with. And that is that they had an exam called the elevenses. When you were eleven years old, you took an exam and if you

passed it, if you got above a certain grade, you were destined to go to a university. And if you got below a certain grade, you were destined to finish your education at the age of 14 and to the factory. And I arrived there just before my 11th birthday. And so, I took my elevenses, not knowing how to read one word, and of course got zero. And so, I was placed in a school that would have ended at the age of 14, in a factory. But, again, Mother had other ideas and -- and in 1948, she left Newcastle with me and we went to London and she got a job as a maid in a home on Goldessgreen Road and enrolled me in a Jewish secondary school, because you could avoid that whole system if you went into a private school. And so from ‘48 to ‘49, I went for the first time, to a Jewish school and got a little bit of a beginnings of a Jewish education at that point.

Q: Let me ask you, as -- as we’re moving forward in time and -- and it -- and it’s getting a little bit further away from the horribly traumatic experiences that you’d had during the war, and you’re getting older at the same time, at this point are you beginning to feel certain things, remember certain things, realize the -- the depth of -- of tragedy of what had happened to your family and -- and -- and to you personally, or -- or was this -- or were you just sort of going on in life and moving forward and you’re living another life and going ahead?

A: I think a little bit of both. I think, you know, our world was a world which was not normal, because the people, all of our acquaintances were refugees. People who -- who had been lawyers and professors in Poland and now were doormen and -- and -- and janitors. It was a world in which the topic of conversation was dominated by what was

and what was lost. So it -- So that was always, I think cloud that -- that was there. Whenever -- I don't remember one day that it, you know, became, but certainly, as I think back on my teenage years in this country and so on and later on, I never was the same as other kids. I could never let myself go, I was always separated, by my own volition. I could never participate in -- in something pleasurable for it's own sake. It had to have an ulterior purpose, it had to have -- there was always that serious element to it.

Q: To have a certain usefulness?

A: It had to have a certain usefulness, I had to -- I was constantly aware that I had a responsibility, that my life wasn't fully my own, that I had to fulfill certain responsibilities. At the same time, I must tell you also, that it -- it -- my past experiences have been of enormous help to me. And no matter what crisis I faced afterwards, I would always say to myself, "Well, there's nothing to this." It's a piece of cake, right? So -- So, from that point of view, everything always compared itself and -- and so from -- so it was helpful, but there's no --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: Well, you were talking about how -- how this has been helpful for you to be able to tap into -- tap into this knowledge that, you know, everything that's a challenge from now on, is nothing, compared to what you've been through.

A: Yeah, I think that everything always gets compared to that and no matter what crisis may arise, it -- it pales to insignificance when compared to what one has already been through, so you can always say to yourself, "Well, if I've gone through the worst, I can get through this." And -- And so no crisis seemed as great, yeah.

Q: Now you're -- you were just mentioning that you felt -- now, if you're getting into '48 and '49, you're 13 - 14 years old, a -- a sense o-o-of -- of not being able to do something fun for fun's sake, or joyful for joyfulness' sake, that you had a sense of responsibility. What -- What was that responsibility to? Was it to a thing, to an idea, to a person, to yourself? What was it to?

A: Well, I am not sure that I articulated it that carefully at that age. I can only talk about the results. Obviously, I've articulated it more clearly in my mind since then, but to be fair about it, at that age, I didn't. But again, to get -- I'll get back to your question in a minute, but to get back to those days when I went to the Jewish secondary school, to the [indecipherable] grammar school, I lived in a dormitory -- and this was from '48 to '49, and every youngster in that dormitory that I lived in, was a survivor. And every -- just about every youngster was without parents. And so it was a -- again, a peculiar atmosphere that one was in, so the -- the -- the thing continued. You're never very far

from it and w-was during wa -- those years that one of my -- my very first girlfriend that I had a crush on, unfortunately committed suicide. And so there were people with a lot of problems, a lot of unhappiness.

Q: Despair --

A: And I was very fortunate among them, because I had -- I had an anchor, which they did not, which -- which was of tremendous help.

Q: What -- What -- What do you recall about when this girl took her life. Your -- Your own feelings -- was it -- was it -- was it despair for her, just utter despair? Or do you --

A: I -- I think it was despair for her and -- and as far as my own feelings, I was, of course, very sad to lose a friend and sad that it occurred at that point. But my attitude was, if that's what she needed to do, that's what she needed to do. And it wasn't -- a-again, you know, coming from an environment so surrounded by death, it -- it -- it -- it was one more and the -- the war didn't end in 1945, it continued. And it continued to claim it's victims.

Q: So this anchor for you is just so -- just so important.

A: Was terribly important, and again, as I said before, I attribute all of my good fortune to that and then what I've been able to do, yeah. But you asked me before, in terms of -- of responsibility to whom, and of course, that, I think, probably changes as your age changes and as your perspective changes. I don't think you make a decision for life and then you stick with it, I think it -- it changes. But it was always a sense of responsibility, but I owed it to Mother, I owed to make something of myself, it was never th -- it was

unthinkable that I would not achieve something, in some field. So I had that responsibility. I felt a -- a very keen sense of responsibility to my parents. I felt that when I came to the United States, I felt I needed to delve more into -- into Jewish learning, in order to learn what motivated them and -- and it became important for me to have children and grandchildren.

Q: Did you, at any point, feel -- in talking to -- to other people, I've heard before and there's a -- you know th-they use the terminology which I th-think sometimes it -- you boil things down to -- to too simplistic when you use terms that people use, term survivors guilt or the sense that wh-why, you know, I've talked to people, why did I survive? Even if you can intellectually understand the circumstances in which you survived. Was there any of that, or -- or -- a-as you -- as you looked at it? I ma -- I'm not -- I'm not hearing you say that, but I'm wondering whether you sa -- had a sense of like, how could all these other people perish and -- and -- and I'm here?

A: Well, there is that question in terms of what makes the world go around and -- and the how come and tha -- there no -- no question that these questions occur to you. I've never interpreted these as being guilt, certainly it -- it could be, that on unconscious level, there is guilt. But I've never felt, on a conscious level, particularly guilty. I felt -- I felt blessed and lucky. But I don't think -- I don't think guilty. I don't -- I don't feel that.

Q: So, well, there are so many -- so many strains of your story, that --

A: Mm.

Q: -- that -- that are so fascinating and -- and -- and powerful. Guess I'd like to ask you to go back now to -- we're in -- in London, right, in -- in '48 - '49, yeah?

A: '48 - '49, right, we left Newcastle in '40 -- yeah, '48.

Q: And what's London like? Wh-What do you remember from it? You're getting to be a teenager now.

A: Right. Well, I didn't take that much advantage of London as a city. You know, it's of course, a wonderful city and we did go to museums and so on as a -- on school outings, but Mother, as I mentioned, worked as a maid. Worked for a family by the name of Bodner, on Goldessgreen Road and -- and she was constantly working, so she had no time and -- and certainly no extra money to do anything with and she spent on my schooling and whatever extras. But we would go to the movies and so on, but most of my life revolved around the dormitory where I lived and taking the bus to school and coming from school and doing homework and the usual types of things. We -- At that time, we still had ration books in England and I remember people were always complaining about the rationing of food and -- and -- and to us, when I say to us, I mean in -- in the dormitory and so on, we always thought it was rather amusing, because we thought that th-this wasn't a shortage, this wasn't deprivation in any way. But -- But we did have ration books and -- and yeah.

Q: So, now you -- you're still in a -- in a kind of a lottery or a waiting line, to -- to --

A: Right, right.

Q: -- to get to the United States. What was that process like, waiting?

A: Ah, well --

Q: [indecipherable] terms of the procedure as well as the feeling of -- of waiting?

A: Well, it was a -- a being in limbo, basically, and -- and not being able to get on with your life, because every three months you had to go to the Home Office and plead for another three months extension of your visa, or another six months extension of your visa. Mother was not allowed to work, that was one of the conditions of the visa. So that had to be done surreptitiously. And so -- so, there was a certain degree of discomfort, but -- but even though this was a rather mild getting around the government regulations, compared to others, so that wasn't much of a problem. But you sort of had a feeling that you were in limbo, waiting for something, and that you really weren't going to ge -- get on with your life until that number came up, which it finally did and we left in June of 1949. Now, I must mention that my brother had also gone to that school, but before me. And then in 1948, I was walking with him on the street one day in London, and -- and he said to me, "I will share something with you, but you mustn't tell anyone." And I said, "Okay." And he said, "I'm leaving next week." And I said, "Where are you leaving to?" And he said, "Guess." And I said, "Is it to Asia?" And he looked at me and I said, "Asia Minor?" As it was known at that time. I said, "Palestine?" Shh. And indeed he took an illegal boat from France and went to Palestine and participated in the various wars there, worked in a lot of different professions and then was sent out in the embassy to Europe in 1956, and in 1956 decided that he had had enough of politics and international relations and everything else, and he went back to school and got a degree in physics and he got a -

- came to the United States and got a Bachelors, a Masters and a Doctorate in physics and then went to teach in Australia, but -- from England -- so we -- we came to England together, but almost immediately when we came to Newcastle, he went to London to school, and I stayed in Newcastle. And then when I came to London, he had left for Palestine. So we really never had -- were together very much.

Q: Did you -- Did you miss each other, or -- speaking for yourself, I mean, especially after having lost your parents, did you feel like I -- you wanted to be with him, or was it -- was --

A: I -- I did. I always, you know, admired him a great deal. He is a -- was and is an exceptional person in terms of his -- extremely bright individual, with a -- with a tremendous depth of knowledge of all sorts of esoteric fields. He developed a computer program for writing Chinese and in fact that we were in China a few years ago, I was there as a visiting professor and -- and he was there trying to market his Chinese computer. And so we were sitting in Beijing, over a bottle of plum wine and -- and we were reminiscing and we were saying, “Isn’t it strange, here is a Polish Jew from Israel, trying to teach the Chinese how to write. So, I’ve always admired him very much, but -- but he has always borne a tremendous burden and -- and never -- has never been able to make peace with himself or the world, and I’ve always felt very deeply for him, because of that. So, I understand him, and yet I don’t.

Q: Do you se -- When’s the last time you’ve seen him?

A: He was here just a few years ago and he was supposed to come again this fall, but couldn't and he's thinking now of coming in the spring. So, every few years, we see each other for a few days.

Q: Do you -- Do you get to -- Have you ever been to Australia to see him?

A: No, we have not. We have not.

Q: Oh. Oh that's -- that's a story of -- all in itself, isn't it --

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: -- it so -- sounds like movie, the two of you sitting there --

A: Right.

Q: -- having the plum wine in -- in Beijing, it really does. So -- So now, when the -- when the number -- when -- do you remember the day that th-the number came in?

A: Oh yes, yes, very --

Q: Tell me about that.

A: -- very much. Well, we -- we -- my mother called me to tell me that she had gotten a letter from the US embassy and that we had to go in for physicals.

Q: Did she know what that meant?

A: Yes, oh yes --

Q: She pretty excited?

A: -- but that we -- but that we had, finally, the number and that was a very, very big thing, we were very excited, and --

Q: Did you -- Did you cele -- Did you go out and celebrate, or --

A: I don't think so, because I don't -- we had no money. I think our big problem was we -- we just had no spare money whatsoever, and -- and so -- Mother was making, I think, I don't remember, two or three pounds a week, or -- there was never any spare money. So, we -- But I do remember we were terribly, terribly happy and unfortunately, my uncle died just at that time. He had had an asthma attack and at the age of 34, died. So -- So that was a sad event and see, that was just before we left. And we left and I was also very excited because we were going to go to the United States on the Queen Elizabeth, that was the Queen Elizabeth number one, not number two. And we arrived here, on June the 13th of 1949.

Q: June the 13th, 1949, do -- so, can you -- can you bring us onto the ship and -- and -- and what do you recall of actually boarding? Were you st --

A: Well, the ship was -- oh, the ship was very exciting. Of course, I was -- I was 13 years or 14 years old and -- and -- and to any 14 year old, to make an Atlantic crossing on the Queen Elizabeth, a very, very exciting event and we -- I know one thing that did occur was on the morning of when we arrived in New York harbor, I was -- must have been up at four in the morning or maybe three, and I was on board and everyone was there, waiting for the Statue of Liberty to come into view. And at just about daybreak and we were still a little further -- far away, so I couldn't see it. Up came someone and said that the morning prayers were being said and they needed a 10th man. So I went down for the morning prayers, to the chapel. Someone had the -- to say Kaddish, so there I was and I missed the Statue of Liberty by the time I came up. We had passed it, so -- so --

Q: You must have been crushed.

A: But -- But anyhow, we landed and it was Flag Day. A gentleman came up who was selling flags, he pinned a little flag on my lapel and waited for some money. I had no idea how much to give him, but in England, you could buy a loaf of bread for a penny farthing, which was a penny and a quarter. So, a penny was a fair amount of money, so I thought that would be good. So I gave him a penny and I heard a string of curse words as only a New Yorker can use. That was my introduction to America.

Q: So -- So you had a -- a rude introduction to the United States of America?

A: A rude, rude introduction. Now, I must tell you, that as you know, when one used to be able -- when one got a number to come to the United States, it was based on the fact that someone in the United States had filled out an affidavit sponsoring you. The person who filled out an affidavit was Mother's half-sister. And so we arrived, and arrived at the port, and found no one waiting for us. So everyone -- we were waiting at the port and everyone dispersed, everyone disembarked and we were left alone. Of course, speaking the language well, but otherwise strangers in New York port. And we were amazed that no one approached us. So we went over the to the HIAS desk --

Q: The -- The what desk?

A: HIAS. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which was a wonderful, old organization which has helped for many, many decades, Jewish immigrants to this country. And they got us a cab and we got in the cab and I think we may have had three suitcases, maybe four, but not -- not more than that, with all of our possessions. And we came to -- near

King's highway in Brooklyn, on 34th Street and found the address of Mother's half-sister and rang the doorbell and she came to the door, looked down and said, "So many suitcases? Where am I going to put all of this?" So that was the greeting and it portended not a very good future. That evening, she decided that she would take us and show us Brooklyn and she took us to Pitkin Avenue. And she thought that we would be oohing and aahing at the neon lights and so on and when we didn't express any exhilaration, having just come from London and she was very upset. She also informed me in no uncertain terms, tha -- in the United States, we don't speak the way I did, because I had a thick English accent. That we say, toity toid street and not 33rd Street. And we stayed there for about three days and then it was quite clear that we were not welcome. We were very grateful for the affidavit, but it was clear we were not welcome there.

Q: Right. Tell me the address again, th-th-the --

A: It was on King's Highway, I think on 35th Street -- 34th or 35th Street. 34th, I think.

Q: So this is Queens?

A: No, Brooklyn.

Q: Oh, King's Highway, okay, Brooklyn.

A: In Brooklyn.

Q: All right.

A: In Brooklyn.

Q: And what part of Brooklyn would this be, if it --

A: Wait a minute. East, no, it was 34 East 58th Street. That's what it was, 58. East 58th Street.

Q: In -- In Brooklyn.

A: In Brooklyn. And, at any rate, we -- we left there after about three days, got in touch with HIAS and HIAS was kind enough to put us up at a transient hotel, which was called the East Broadway Central Hotel, down on the Lower East Side. A very meager, transient hotel. And then we managed to get a room on West 102nd Street. One room for Mother and me. And she managed to arrange a cour -- to take a course in baby nursing. Her idea was that every mother who comes home, needs someone to take care of the baby for a week or two and so she would take this course and -- and be able to find work, which she did. After a six week course, she found work and she would work for 30 hours a day and then have four hours off. And so she worked very, very hard. In the meantime, I -- this was in June, so it was at the beginning of the summer. It was a very hot summer in -- in New York. I had never experienced heat like that. But someone had told me about a school in New York called Yeshiva University, where I could get both a general and a Hebrew -- a thorough Hebrew education. So, I took a subway, went up to Yeshiva University and pleaded my case with the admissions office. They asked me what my background had been, what I knew, whether I knew any Hebrew, and I didn't. I had had that one year in London, which barely I was able to read, but that's about it. And they told me they didn't see how I could possibly keep up, that all their students had had eight years of thorough Hebrew education, that the language of instruction in the Hebrew

department was in Hebrew and they didn't think I could -- I could manage it, so -- but finally they decided to give me some books and si -- told me to take these books and study them, and come back in September and we'll see what we can do. So, I took them home and there was absolutely no way, I -- I couldn't make heads or tails out of them. I used to sit and try and it was very hard, I was really very discouraged. Came back in September and fortunately the registrar of the teacher's institute of Yeshiva University, Dr. Greenstein took pity on me and said, "Well, why don't we try you." And -- And so I started in the lowest grade -- in their lowest grade, where everyone was already speaking Hebrew. And I remember my first word that I learned, that I could understand and -- and I spent the next six years at Yeshiva University. I graduated their high school at 16 and then their college at 20 and at 20 also received a Hebrew teacher's diploma, and a diploma from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in proficiency in the Hebrew language, and learned Yiddish and -- and received a Bachelor of Hebrew literature, as well as a Bachelor of Arts, before I went to medical school. So, it's possible. Yeshiva University was incredibly kind to me. I had a difficult time there, I won't say it was easy, I had a difficult time, but -- but Yeshiva University gave me a scholarship. They provided me with a card which was worth eight dollars per week, through which I could eat. And they would, from a financial point of view, in terms of financial help, they were -- I -- I really couldn't have gotten that kind of education if they weren't around, so I'm very, very grateful to them and to President Velkin, who was always very kind to me.

Q: So there were some real organizations and institutions that -- that gave a real helping hand to you [indecipherable]

A: No question, no question, HIAS, with all of it's faults and problems, and there were many, was -- was tremendously helpful and -- and as I said, Yeshiva University.

Q: Are there other groups or -- of -- especially as you're trying to get on your feet in those first months?

A: I think those were the two that really helped us most, I think.

Q: I'm also wondering what -- if you have any particular memories of those early days of -- whether it revolved around -- I don't know if y -- if you perhaps brought anything with you, you know, mementos of -- of -- that you brought with you, things to remember, or -- or whether there was specific things that -- that happened on the streets, that -- that you recall, in those first days?

A: Well, in terms of mementos, yes, of course, I brought a number of things. From the war, I brought my blanket, but I was busy really building a future and not dwelling that much. The past was always there, but I wasn't dwelling on it. I also brought a little book that I had borrowed from the library in Univ and never returned, and I still have to this day. I don't know what the overdue charge for that [indecipherable].

Q: Pretty far up there.

A: And I also have a handkerchief which my father gave me when he left me at the monastery, cause I started crying and he gave me a handkerchief. And that's about it.

Q: And you carried those things with you in New York? You have them at home, anyway.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, and a few photograph. But, in terms of the early days, no, I think it was a -- a lonely existence, because I really didn't -- I didn't -- I didn't really fit in, in many ways. My accent was strange, I had a British accent. Didn't know anything about baseball, didn't know anything about American football.

Q: Well, were they strange sports to you, did you -- you just didn't connect with them?

A: They were -- They were strange sports to me. I had learned a little bit about soccer, but even that was strange. I -- I found it very difficult to identify with the idea that someone would run after or hit a ball and then get all excited about it. I mean, that just didn't seem to me to be the essence of life. And I -- And I -- I could never participate in any of these activities, I just thought they were silly. And so -- so I really was -- I really, I think, I felt myself different. Fortunately, at Yeshiva University, there were a number of young people who came from Europe and we formed sort of a clique. And there were a number of Israelis who were strangers here. There were a number of people from South America who were strangers, so there was this -- there wa -- there were a number of people who felt themselves alienated or strange in the environment. But my purpose was to learn, and I did and -- and -- and that's the important thing.

Q: Okay, I'll just switch.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: So, you didn't -- you described it, in a way, those years, of being quite lonely and yet, you did make some other friends, that -- did you feel sort of ou-ou-outsider in those first years?

A: I was an outsider, no question, I was an outsider. I never had -- I didn't have -- I had one close friend, who was from Costa Rica.

Q: At Yeshiva?

A: At Yeshiva. And I had one close friend, who has since died, who was also from Europe, but I really didn't have close friendships. I never -- I, for instance marvel at the fact that in the six years -- I came from Europe and in the six years that I was at YU, I -- I never saw the inside of a home. I was never invited to anybody's house. I never -- was never anywhere for a meal. I had no -- A-And part of it may have been my fault, I don't know, maybe I kept myself at arm's length, but that's the -- that's the fact.

Q: Mm-hm. D-Did you feel that -- well, I guess one -- one thing that just occurred to me was -- I mean, did anybody know what you had been through in any sense? Did you talk about it at all?

A: I -- I didn't make a secret of it, but I also didn't advertise it. But I was -- I said I was busy with the future, not the past. I think people knew, more or less, but you know, it wasn't that unusual. I mean, New York was full of refugees in 1949, and people weren't interested in what we went through. I think now people are interested, but in those days, people weren't interested.

Q: And why is that?

A: I don't know. I -- I think the mood has changed. I think that, you know, again, when something is very prevalent -- now, you know, I'm one of the youngest of the so-called survivors. The people are, you know, leaving this world and passing on and th -- becoming less frequent, so everyone's trying to get the story down on tape and so on. But when everyone is -- around you is somehow connected with it, it's not that unusual.

Q: [indecipherable] yeah.

A: And -- And so, i-it wasn't, you know, it wasn't -- as I said, I -- I never tried to hide it, but at the same I never made an issue of it. My purpose was to move forward. It's only as you get older that you begin to look back. When you're young, it's full steam ahead and you got to build a future and you've got to -- you know, you've got things to do.

Q: I wonder also, if there was something at the time, and I re-recall -- I can't remember who in Israel has written about this, it might be this fellow Tom Segev --

A: Uh-huh.

Q: -- who wrote a book called, "The Seventh Million."

A: Seventh Million

Q: I was interviewing him awhile ago, and I d -- but I don't recall if it's him or someone else that talked about th-th-the shift in Israeli society of talking about -- was the Eichmann trial, in terms of publicly acknowledging and -- and -- and to some commentators minds, it was sort of an end of shame about it, also. Now, I don't know -- do you think that there were elements like this going on in the -- in the --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: -- in the subculture of what you were part of in New York, or -- or -- or not.

A: I think there may have been, but -- but I think in Israel, the issue was more complicated, because in Israel, they had their existence to fight for. They needed heroes, they desperately needed heroes. And -- And the people who survived the second World War were not looked upon as heroes, they were looked upon as cowards, and as sheep who went to slaughter, this was the public image. And -- And that's not what they wanted to transmit to their youth. They needed power. I mean, that's why they transformed this whole thing of Masada, for instance, which when you think about it, Masada is as antithetical to Jewish history as anything ever has been. The hero of Jewish history was Rabbi Yochanen Ben Zacki, who, when the Romans surrounded Jerusalem and were about to destroy the temple and the nation, had himself snuck out in a coffin, the story has it, with his students following as the mourners, because they would allow coffins and funerals to go outside of Jerusalem, and he went and formed the Yeshiva and basically saved the Judaism, through his academy in Yavna. That was the hero. The idea that Jews would lock themselves up in a rock fortress and commit suicide, is a very un-Jewish idea. The Jewish idea is to sneak out and continue the line. It's not to commit suicide. But Israel needed that at that time. And people -- we build monuments not to commemorate what occurred, but in order to fulfill the need that we have at that moment. And Israel needed their paratroopers to go up on Masada. So, in the same way, Israel needed heroes to fight wars, they didn't want people who were going to slaughter. The other thing is that we have, you know, on my observation also, is that there is in -- in survivorship, and

I don't particularly care for that word at all, but we'll use it, there is a hierarchy of suffering. And -- And in general, my story, which is fascinating to you, is of no consequence to most quote, unquote survivors [indecipherable] talk to.

Q: Because?

A: Because, number one, I wasn't in a concentration camp, and that's the highest, particularly if you were in Auschwitz. And -- And number two, I was a child and what does a child know? A child has no feelings, a child doesn't know anything, a child doesn't observe the world.

Q: Have you ever encountered this in conversations, etcetera?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Ta-Talk about that.

A: Oh yes, absolutely, there's a -- in fact, I am not generally, perhaps that's the way I look upon myself, too, but I'm not generally considered a survivor. I know, for instance, when they are making up committees for Holocaust commemoration, I'm not included on those committees. My English is unaccented, my -- my attitude is -- is different, perhaps, because I -- my education was here. I don't -- I don't fit the mold.

Q: You don't seem -- you -- you do evoke bitterness in this?

A: Oh no, heavens, no, no, no.

Q: But -- But -- And yet, you have a kind of wry -- wry awareness of this.

A: Well, it's almost amusing to me. And it's -- it's -- it's an observation of the way life is, there's no bitterness about it, it doesn't do anything to me -- for me, one way or the other,

but -- but there is this -- this hierarchy, so, in general, you know, people have very little interest in -- in -- it's only recently that people had a fa -- interest in the children. That's a very recent phenomenon and I suspect it's because the older generation is dying out and -- and also because the quote, unquote, those of us who were children are now getting into an age where we can be taken seriously.

Q: This is very interesting, the whole -- this sort of internal levels of -- I wouldn't necessarily quite say politics, but sort of the social structures of remembrance and all --

A: Oh absolutely, there's a definite social strata.

Q: Wow, that's so interesting. Well now, so, you -- Let me ask you also, and being in New York, I don't suppose you would have been exposed to the kind of anti-Semitism that -- that other immigrant Holocaust survivors, going to other parts of the country might have been. Or is that --

A: No, no, no, no, no, no --

Q: Th-That wasn't a phenomenon in New York, I'm sure.

A: -- and in particularly, don't forget, I went to Yeshiva University, I was -- I was in a Jewish environment, but no, I have experienced no anti-Semitism and I have since then, in -- in medicine, worked with people from many cultures and I have -- I have experienced only the highest respect. I never had any -- any feelings at all of anti-Semitism that I have detected.

Q: In -- In America?

A: In America, absolutely.

Q: That's quite a statement. Well, can you then take us from it -- when you're at Yeshiva University, at what point did you start getting a sense of -- of what you wanted to be in life, or what professional direction you wanted to take?

A: Well, I -- I'm not sure I know that, in fact, except that, again the -- the common wisdom among us -- and when I say us, among us immigrants, was A, that the one thing they can't take away from you is wisdom, or knowledge, so you got to get that. And number two, that there were certain professions that you cannot transport across geographic boundaries and there are other professions that you can. I met, as I mentioned previously, a lot of lawyers who were doormen and janitors. I didn't meet any physicians who were doormen and janitors. A physician, not only highly respected, but you can take the job with you wherever you happen to have to go. And I think in those days, that was an important reason for choosing a profession. And so -- And maybe my previous experience, my very brief experience at the end of the war, maybe that had something to do with it, I don't know, but at any rate, I decided that I wanted to become a physician. Now, it wasn't a rational decision, because I had in fact, never had a doctor. Only went to one if I was deathly ill. I never had any care to -- so to speak, didn't know any physicians and to tell the truth, had very little idea as to what they did. But it sounded good, it was safe, seemed like a reasonable thing to do.

Q: So you --

A: So I finished YU, and -- and luckily for me, the Einstein College of Medicine was starting in 1955 and I graduated in 1955, and so I applied to the first class of the Albert

Einstein College of Medicine, and was very fortunate in having been accepted there. And so I went there from ‘55 to ‘59, for four years and then decided to go into pediatrics. I always liked children, liked the things that I learned in pediatrics in medical school. And then, after looking around, decided to take my internship and residency at the University of Rochester Medical Center. And this was very fortunate, both because it gave me a wonderful grounding in -- in medicine and also because I met my wife there, Jean. She was a secretary in the Department of Pediatrics a-and we met shortly after I came there, and we were married in 1961.

Q: And -- And during this time, all throughout your schooling, your Mother was [indecipherable] was -- what was she doing?

A: Well, she worked as a baby nurse, as I mentioned and then when that became a little too much for her in terms of the number of hours, she went to a bank and worked as a bookkeeper in a bank. During my sophomore year in college, she met a Mr. Stark, Mr. Edward Stark, who had been a lawyer in Europe, came to -- and had been a prisoner of war in the pol -- in the Polish army, and came to the United States and went to -- back to school and got a Master’s in social work and worked as a social worker. And they married in -- when I was a sophomore in -- in college. So that’s --

Q: That would be ‘54?

A: -- ‘54, yes. ‘53 -- ‘53. And, so they married, and -- and so I felt more comfortable in terms of leaving for Rochester. I wanted to get out of New York very much, but I am not

sure I would have done that had Mother not had companionship, but I felt more comfortable about it.

Q: Yeah. And -- But you stayed quite close after she [indecipherable]

A: Oh yes, yes, we -- we -- we remained very close, always remained very close and, you know, I would come back frequently from Rochester and call and so on.

Q: And this is where the Einstein -- when you say Rochester --

A: No, this -- Einstein is in the Bronx.

Q: Oh, Einstein is the Bronx.

A: But -- But I graduated Einstein in ‘59 and then went to -- and then went to Rochester afterwards for my internship and residency.

Q: Ah, I see, okay. So -- And then how long did you stay there?

A: In Rochester?

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, I was there for two years, from ‘59 to ‘61.

Q: And that’s when you met your wife, in sixt --

A: We married in ‘61.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And then we went to Boston, I was in Boston Children’s for a year. I wanted to take a year of pathology at Boston Children’s, which I did. And then in 1962, I owed Uncle Sam two years and I was inducted into the public health service as a Lieutenant

Commander in the Coast Guard and we were stationed in Columbus, Ohio, and that's where our first son was born, was in Columbus, Ohio.

Q: But you were with the Coast Guard then?

A: Well, the -- I was with the public health service, but the public health service is a branch, technically speaking, of the Coast Guard.

Q: Oh, I never knew that. Is that right?

A: Yeah, the -- the ranking is the Coast Guard ranking, I don't know why.

Q: Oh, oh, in terms of the military service.

A: Right, right.

Q: I understand.

A: Right.

Q: So -- And you were in Columbus then, from what?

A: '62 to '64.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And then, by that time I decided that I wanted to specialize in pediatric cardiology and so I went back to Rochester -- we went back to Rochester now, with our first child and while there, our s -- daughter was born and we were in Rochester from '64 to '67, and then in '67, came to Hartford to become -- to develop pediatric cardiology, really, at Hartford Hospital, in the University of Connecticut, when they arrived a year later and most recently at the Children's Hospital, Connecticut Children's Hospital.

Q: Mm-hm, so that's been a good deal of your life's work is -- in the last 30 years.

A: Has been in -- in Hartford.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Yeah.

Q: And so you've been developing, really developing this field, that it sounds like.

A: Yes, I -- I -- I was very, very fortunate, I -- I was fortunate because I got a chance to -- something very few people get, I -- I got a chance to come into a community that didn't have a service, to develop it, to bring others in and to provide a -- a service, really, for northern Connecticut and western Massachusetts. During this time also, I was fortunate in -- in being able to work for the Heart Association as a volunteer and I did a lot of committee work for them, chairing a lot of committees. And it was my committee that developed the standards and the courses for c -- child -- children's CPR. And these have become standard throughout the country and throughout the world, as a matter of fact. And -- And that has brought us a large number of invitations to speak all over the world, and that's why I was in China, when I mentioned -- when I met my brother. But we were also -- traveled very extensively throughout the world and lecturing and so it -- I've had a -- a wonderful, wonderful career, been very pleased with and proud that I've been able to make a contribution to the welfare of children and to the welfare of our community. And at the same time, both Jean and I have been very active in the Jewish community here. Our three children went to the Hebrew academy -- the day school here and we both have been very active on the board and as officers of the school, and continue to do so. I've been on the board of the Jewish Federation. I was chairman of the commission on Jewish

education. I was president of the historical society and a member of many, many committees within the community.

Q: I wa -- I want to back up a little bit to ask you when -- when you were married and -- and you and Jean had your -- your son was born first, right?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: '60 --

A: '64.

Q: '64. In Columbus?

A: In Columbus.

Q: I mean -- I -- I guess this -- this may be a hard question to answer, because the joy of any parent is probably so immeasurable, but I wonder, given your experiences and what you ha -- th-the life that you emerged from and -- and what you took from that experience, how it -- how it perhaps magnified or -- or added or -- or affected somehow, the experience of becoming a father.

A: Well, you know, the full effect of it did not hit me until I had grandchildren. And -- Which is very strange, but that's the fact. When I had children, I was still building a career. I was very, very busy and probably had not fully understood the implications of what occurred. For instance, my -- our children are not named after anyone who died. And I can't tell you why. But all of our grandchildren are. So, it's an interesting phenomenon, and it was my children who chose to do that, not we, of course. The biggest effect on me, in terms of becoming a father and the biggest difficulty that I had is -- is in

being able to identify with what my children were going through. I had no one, remember -- one learns how to become a parent, primarily, I think by the things that your parents did, and you either emulate them or react against them. But one way or another, you learn from them. And I didn't have that memory and that was a very difficult thing for me. I didn't have memory of going to second grade or going to fourth grade. I never went to those grades. I couldn't identify with them going to a ball game or -- or any of the things that -- you know, so I really didn't -- I wasn't sure how to do this business. But --

Q: It's like you didn't have a childhood.

A: Right, right. I really never -- had to grow up fast and didn't have any of that, so I think that was the most difficult part of it, and -- but they all turned out to be wonderful kids and wonderful adults today, so I guess we did something right, mu-muddled through it. But I think that was the biggest -- biggest problem.

Q: Do you think that there are any -- I mean in -- in raising kids, given what happened to you, and -- and the -- the fear that you had to live with, did you ever feel like there were -- and again, this is the kind of thing that's probably hard to separate, cause every parent is protective --

A: Mm.

Q: -- but did you ever feel like you remembered certain things and you -- a-and there's no way that you would ever allow your child to be exposed to anything dangerous, that sort of thing?

A: No, no, no. I -- I was always a risk taker and -- and I don't believe that I ever -- at least -- in fact, I would say this, that I bent over backwards -- I worked very hard and very consciously, not to allow my experience to spoil their childhood. And -- And I probably didn't tell them as much about things until they were adults, really. Until they were -- And so, I -- I felt a tremendous sense that, you know, somehow we had this train going on the tracks and the train got derailed and it was my job to put it back on the tracks. And -- And so I worked very hard with that. You asked me a question that evoked -- that evoked some thought about I think, certain things or something. For reasons that I'm sure would come out on a -- on a couch if I ever went to a psychiatrist, but which are probably not that deep, there are certain things today, which I cannot -- I cannot tolerate. Sudden, loud sounds, flashing lights. I have gone way out of my way, in an almost pathological fashion, if I hear a balloon being blown up with helium. That sound, that whistling sound is like the bombs. And so -- And the same things goes with flashing lights, I have a great deal of trouble with that and I usually try to avoid it. In fact, I go to a play, even today, and I see a gun coming out of a holster, even on a comedy, I walk out. I become very tense and then my wife usually says, "Please, let's go." And it's totally irrational, but there it is. So, my kids never had balloons. Never had balloons at a party. My wife would always see to it that there were no balloons. So, stupid thing like this, there would be a little thing that would evoke something.

Q: Sirens?

A: No, sirens don't bother me. No, sirens don't bother me. But it's primarily that, I was once -- we went to Disney World, I was lecturing and we went to a very fancy restaurant and afterwards they had a light and sound show and everyone was going, so we went along with it. And it started and I thought I'd never get out of there. And then I was so grateful when I got out of there. And -- So I could never take them, for instance, to the Fourth of July fireworks display. I'd have my wife take them. So they wouldn't miss it, but I just could not go to a fireworks display. So these are the kinds of things that deep down, there is still some fear left.

Q: Are there conscious -- I mean, obviously this is conscious, what you're saying, but I'm wondering are there other kinds of -- say when you -- when you dream, do you -- are there certain things that you really remember? Things that recur?

A: No, no, I never had any -- no, I never had any dreams that I remember th -- the -- particularly, no, no.

Q: So these are -- more of these are things that are like ordinary or -- or yo -- parts of life that will evoke a reaction --

A: Right.

Q: -- less than a conscious kind of --

A: Right.

Q: -- thing with you, but you know that it's just -- it's reminding you in some deep way, of something.

A: Right.

Q: Better change the tape [indecipherable] time.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: Okay, this is tape three. I wanted to ask you if you've ever been back to Poland?

A: Yes, we went back, I believe it was in 1991. But before I tell you that, let me tell you another episode which you just reminded me of. When I was at Univ, there were two other Jewish children, and I mentioned one of them before, his name today is Oded and I could not remember the name of the other one. I have a picture of all three of us. I knew that the -- one of the boys, his name -- I knew his last name was Amirand. I don't know why that stuck in my mind, but I knew it was. And over the years, I always wondered what ever happened to those two youngsters. I would give anything to be able to connect with them. And every country I would go to, one of my rituals was to go to the phone book and look at the name of Amirand, and it's an unusual name, and I never found it. A few years ago, I was in Tel Aviv, and I had previously looked in the Jerusalem book, but I had not looked in the Tel Aviv book. And I was in Tel Aviv, and I looked in the book and I found an Adolph Amirand. So I called the number and an old gentleman answered, and I told him my story. I told him why I was looking for someone and he said to me, "As you can hear, I'm an old man, I'm 89 years old, but the person you are looking for is my nephew. He lives in Tel Aviv, he has an unpublished number, but I will give it to you, because I know he wants to hear from you." So, I called him immediately and he was very excited to hear from me. Did not, as it turned out, have that picture at all. In fact, he was younger than I and had -- his memory was extremely vague, but he did remember me, and we had a wonderful reunion. We made up to go to dinner the following evening

and came to his apartment in north Tel Aviv. And his wife, while I was there, said to him, "You know, I've tried your Uncle Adolph several times today and there's no answer and I'm worried about him." So he said, "Well, let's go out to dinner, we have reservations and after dinner, I will go and I will check up on him, make sure he's all right." And I said to him, "You know, Oded, I don't feel comfortable in going out to dinner, eating, if he is an old man. Maybe you and I should go over there now." He said, "Okay." Got in the car, we went over there. We come to the apartments, an apartment building on stilts, and as we go towards the apartment door, I don't know what made me do it, I said to Oded, "Do you have a key?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Why don't you give me the key and let me go in first? I don't have a good feeling about this." And I opened the door and no one in, we went to a back room, on a porch and he was lying on a couch, in rigor mortis, had been dead for about eight hours or so. So, we sat down, we had to call the -- the mortuary and so on and we were sitting there and saying, gee, you know, if I had come one day later, I couldn't have found him at all, because it was unpublished, so, weird event. Now, Oded and I, after we had dinner and we talked about things and so on, we were both trying to remember the name of the third young man. Both of us remembered him, because we had his picture, but we couldn't remember his name. We asked a number of people we thought might know, they did not. About two months later, on Israeli television, they were showing the movie, I think it's called, "Les enfants ont peride." French movie about Jewish children who perished in the monastery. And afterwards they had a panel and they asked Oded to be on the panel, since he had that

experience of being in a monastery, they asked him to be a panelist, to react to the film. And, as part of his reaction, he told the story of our meeting and he showed the picture that I had brought him, and he said, “We know this boy is Jewish, we don’t remember his name, we’d love to be able to find him.” Well, in Haifa, a man is sitting and watching television and listens to this and next day he’s going on business to Poland. He goes to Warsaw and he goes to the Yiddish theater in Warsaw. And afterwards, is invited to meet the manager, whose name I forgot. And as part of the conversation, he says to the manager, “Before I came here, I heard this story on Israeli television. Do you know anyone who would fit that?” And he said, “Of course, that’s Daniel Rottfeld, he lives two blocks down, in Warsaw.” Well, Daniel Adam Rottfeld was in fact the third boy. He was, at that time, afraid to write me, because Poland was still Communist, so he got in touch with an uncle in Italy and suddenly I got a letter from Italy, telling me about him and the fact that he very much would like to be in touch with me, but that he can’t, and the reason he can’t is that he works -- worked at that time for the foreign ministry. Now, eventually, when the Iron Curtain fell and so on, and we could exchange letters, it turned out that Daniel was left in the monastery, no one claimed him. He was young, his parents had been killed, no one knew he was there. And when Russia and Poland made their pact, Poland took all of it’s orphans and -- and moved them to the western parts, so he was moved to an orphanage in Kraków. He ran away several times from the orphanage, eventually found a sister and went to the university in Warsaw, received a degree in journalism and a degree in international relations. And became one of Poland’s fine-

finest workers in the foreign ministry, despite his name of Rottfeld. He didn't hide the fact that he was Jewish. And he led almost every Polish peace delegation. He was one of the authors of the Helsinki accords. He brokered the peace treaty and -- for Gorbachov and Muldova, and has written some 300 papers, books and so on, on international relations, particularly relations with Germany, of which he is an expert. Today he's the director of a peace institute in Sweden, in Stockholm. And so -- so I thought I'd bring you up to date on how strange the world is.

Q: What a -- You know, I was just thinking what a incredible program it would be to weave -- to take this picture and then just weave the lives together, you know?

A: Tremendous, yeah.

Q: Incredible, remarkable lives that you have all lived.

A: Mm-hm. But you asked me whether we went back. Well, I think it was nine -- it was either 1990 or '91, I can't remember exactly. I received a letter telling me that the memorial would be placed on the -- in Katowice, on the square where the synagogue used to stand. And that a number of people of the former community of Katowice were going back to Katowice for this memorial thing. I got it and I tossed it aside. I had no interest in going back to Poland, I really wasn't sure I wanted to go there. But my wife, who has very good instincts and a lot of wisdom, picked it up and said to me, "I think you should go." And I said, "Why? What do I need them for?" And she said, "For two reasons. One is that, since this is being placed in the place where the synagogue was, and your father was the rabbi of the synagogue, it would be very important for the people

coming back, to have the son of their rabbi be present. And the second thing is that this is one of the few times you're going to get an opportunity to meet people who knew your family and might be able to tell you things." And as usually, she is very wise person. So we went and we offered our children the opportunity to go with us. Our boys refused. Our oldest said, "I don't ever want to step on the soil of Poland." Our youngest was too busy with something, but our daughter and son-in-law went with us. They had just been married. And it was a very moving ceremony, at which I sang the prayer for the dead. It was televised on Polish television and radio, was in all the newspapers. I did indeed get an opportunity to speak with -- with many members of the congregation who had come back, who were now elderly. We had had an opportunity to go to the cemetery and then -- which is intact, interestingly enough and visited the graves of my great-grandparents and I'm named after my great-grandfather, so I was able to reconnect with that. Did some research in some of the libraries in -- in Katowice. And, on the day I was signing out of the hotel, I'm standing in line to sign out and an elderly lady, 76 years old, all dressed in black, comes up to me and says to me in Polish, "Bat Chameides?" I look at her and I answer her yes. And she says to me, "Happy Birthday." And I looked at her, and she said, "Your birthday was three days ago." And I said, "Yes." And she said, "Your brother's birthday is September the 16th." And I said, "Yes," I said, "my goodness." So I said, "You must be Agnes." And she said, "Yes, I am." And Agnes worked for our family as -- taking care of the children, for seven years. She was a young woman in her 20's. Now, she was an old lady, and she was very helpful, she told me a lot and she also brought me

two pictures that she had, one of her and me and one of her and my brother, little pictures that she had kept for 50 years and that she gave to me. So -- So it was a very good trip from that point of view. We also went to Warsaw. Several years later, my oldest son came to me and said, “You know, I made a terrible mistake that I didn’t go with you to Katowice. Someday, I would really like to be there.” And I said, “Well, my wife and I -- your mother and I are going to Prague. If you’d like to come with us to Prague, we’ll be glad to take you and we’ll take a train ride from Prague to Katowice,” which we did. So I was able to show him. Our youngest son has not been there.

Q: Wow.

A: Now, to Lvov we have not been back, although I have been trying to make arrangements to go back, I would very much like to go back to Lvov.

Q: Is it possible to describe the -- the range -- I-I mean, you actually described it beautifully, but I mean, in terms of the range of -- of -- of emotions that you had when you went to Katowice. I mean, th-the -- the amount of terrible memories, mixed with the beautiful memories that you have.

A: Well, you know, it was interesting. I didn’t have that many emotions when I went to Katowice, because I left Katowice in 1939, I was four years old. So, I have no memories of Katowice. So, my interest in Katowice was primarily, almost academic in terms of trying to understand a community and so on, but I -- I don’t have any memories, as such, of the town itself. It was emotional for me to -- you know, to go to the cemetery and to know that my father had officiated at that ceremon -- at that cemetery so many times. But

-- But that's about it, because you know, the synagogue isn't standing. I did go to our former home, but I didn't go up to the apartment, I just looked at the entrance, which didn't mean anything to me. The apartment might have evoked other memories, but a number of the people who had tried to go to their former apartments, who were in the -- in the group, were so horribly received by the current tenants, who were terribly afraid that they were coming back to claim them, and all they wanted to do was to see them. So, they were so horribly treated that I didn't want to put myself in that position, so I never even tried to go upstairs. So, I -- I didn't have deep emotions, I think, but --

Q: If it -- In -- In looking back at this whole period, if you -- I'm trying to ask this without having it sound so overly simplistic, but I guess what I'm trying to get at is -- is sort of the overall lessons that you've taken from it and that -- that's something that we could spend hours and hours talking about, but I mean, in terms of both good and evil, I guess is what I'm -- what I'm asking about.

A: It -- It -- It's -- You know, I'm too close to it to have any type of objectivity and I -- I -- I wouldn't dream of doing it. All I can say is that I think that -- I don't think there's been a day since -- since the war, that in one way or another, I hadn't thought about it. So it -- it's something which -- it's rare for people to have an event in their lives, which in many ways so totally dominates their lives. So, it obviously has had an influence, but I don't think -- I don't think it has had an evil influence, except for the evil which was done, but in terms of an -- an influence on my life, I -- I would like to think that it's all been for the good. I would like to think that I am a more tolerant individual because of it,

that I've more understanding, that I have a deeper understanding of human nature, that I can see the humor in some German activity, that I try not to generalize about people. I think I have a -- a deeper understanding of my religion, but I don't in fact know that that's why I have it, cause I don't know what I would have been otherwise.

Q: Right, right. When I said evil, I -- I didn't really mean that it would be a way that you -- something that you were carrying, but in terms of -- I guess maybe by way of explanation, I have a very close friend who's a photographer, who spent -- do you know who the filmmaker Errol Morris is? He's -- He's a documentary filmmaker --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- anyway, he's doing a -- a film about the Holocaust and my friend is a still photographer and he went over -- he works with Errol, and he went to Birkenau, this last year. And of course, it was a profoundly moving and -- and troubling for him. And one of the things that he was saying -- he -- he's Armenian and his whole -- his, you know, two or three generations past had their own genocide --

A: Sure.

Q: -- to -- to come to terms with and -- and his understanding of -- of his experience was that what happened was a universal lesson of what human beings can do to each other. Obviously there's -- there's many na-narratives one could take, based on experience and -- and just how you interpret the world. And I guess that's part of what I was getting at and asking you about, this piece of it that -- that -- that -- that represents evil, which is

whether you see this as a kind of a universal cautionary tale, or what -- what happened obviously to so many Jews as well.

A: Well, I -- I -- I see it in two lights. There's no question that there is a universality to it, in that it shows us the capacity for evil in human beings and the depths to which people can fall. And I think this is even stronger because the people who did that, were such a cultured people. They had everything going for them. We wouldn't have been surprised if it had been done by people we admire less, or who had achieved less. But somehow we believed that great music, that Bach and Beethoven and Schiller and Gerta. The myth of western civilization is that these are the things that -- that conquer the beast in us and that civilize a human being and the shock is, they don't. That deep down, this is what we can -- so there is a universal lesson that we all, unfortunately, have the capacity for that. At the same time, I think this was completely unique. And whereas the Armenians had a -- a major genocide against them, the uniqueness of the -- of the Holocaust was that this was planned as the -- as a decimation of genetic material. In almost every other instance that you can name, the enemy would come in, would kill off adults, they would take children and babies and raise them as their own. But here was a determination by a so-called civilized people, to -- to totally eradicate -- it was a pathological hatred to eradicate any sign of genetic material. For three generations, you were tainted. So if you were Christian and your parents were Christian, but you had a grandfather who was Jewish -- that's unheard of in any other genocide. And -- So there is a universal lesson, but I think there is something which is so totally unique, which we cannot quite comprehend, about this

particular one. And of course, I read somewhere, I forget where, but I read that Hitler made the mistake of picking on the wrong people, because had he picked a less literal -- l-less literary people, people wouldn't have heard about the Holocaust. But he happened to pick on a people who write a great deal, who study a great deal, who introspect a great deal. And therefore, every other book -- you can't -- you can't pass a day without someone making a film or -- and you don't hear about -- that about the Armenians, or -- and -- and I wish we would, because if we had, maybe people would be more cognizant, at least about that element in the human capacity.

Q: I wanted to ask you one other thing along those lines, which is sort of another strain of -- of meaning, which is the resilience, that -- that your life exemplifies, I mean, th-the incredible resilience that you're sitting here and us sitting here talking represents, it's remarkable.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And which is perhaps both universal and particular.

A: Well, you know, no one -- I didn't arise in a vacuum. You know, I'm the product of many, many generations of very learned Jews, who had a philosophy of life and -- and -- and that philosophy of life was passed down from generation to generation. And -- And every prayer that we utter and every aspect of our lives, reinforces the strength of the human character and the human spirit. The fact that we are indeed created in the image of God. Our freedom, our ability and the need for us to strive to achieve the highest that

humanity can -- can have. So I'm heir to that tradition and -- and -- so if there is a resilience, it's -- it's because, I think, of that tradition.

Q: Is there anything that you'd like to -- need to add to our conversation of any particular aspects of what's happened and what -- what, you know, different events in your life that you'd like to add?

A: No, not really, you know, I -- I don't know. I don't think so. I -- I had a -- When I go on planes, I always like to talk to people. I strike up conversations with people, find out what makes them tick and so on, and I was on a plane some years ago, going from Asunción, Paraguay, to Sao Paolo, Brazil. And I was sitting next to a couple who were speaking German. So I -- about my age, so I started speaking German to them. And the man who was sitting next to me wanted -- he wanted to know how it -- "Where did you learn such good German? Where did you learn to speak German?" And I told him that was my mother tongue and told him that I was born in -- in Poland and so on. And he said to me, "You know," he said, "I was in Poland once." I said, "Really? When were you in Poland?" He said, "When I was only about seven or eight years old. But my father was an officer in the German army and I was stati -- and he was stationed in Kraków." He said to me, "But," he said, "I want you to know, my father had no role in this at all. But I do remember," he said, "once, we were going down a street and I looked and I think I saw some Jews, and he made me turn the other way. And I asked him, 'Who are these people?' And he said, 'nevermind.'" And he said, "And that's the only time I heard." And we talked a little bit more, and he turned to me and he said, "You know, I can't go

anywhere in this world, and we have traveled so much, and I can't go anywhere in this world, without meeting someone who has gone through this and I feel such incredible guilt about what we did. What can I do?" And I turned to him, I said, "My friend," I said, "you were seven years old and I was seven years old. I wasn't responsible for my victimhood and you weren't responsible for what your people did." I said, "But we each have an obligation. Your obligation is to teach your children and grandchildren and their friends what happened and why it must never happen again. That's your personal obligation. And it's my obligation to teach my children and my grandchildren." And with that, we parted in Sao Paolo.

Q: [inaudible]

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: -- makes -- what you just said, makes me want to ask about -- you're talking about the teaching, and this German man teaching his children, you teaching yours. What -- What is -- is -- is -- I guess one of the things I want to ask you about is -- related to this is, is safety one of the crucial lessons or th -- t -- ensuring safety? Is that -- Is that part of it? Or is it -- is it much broader?

A: Well, what do you mean by ensuring safety?

Q: Well, you were -- I mean, th-the Holocaust perhaps represents the ultimate in -- in -- in not being safe and -- and I know from you know, my trips to -- to Israel, as a journalist

and -- and -- and [indecipherable] and many Jewish friends, that the need for safety is something that people talk about a lot, and I just wondered, in terms of lessons --

A: Oh, there's no question, you know, the creation of Israel is -- was an incredible event in our lives, even as young as I was, I was 13 at the time, th -- it remains one of the high points of my life and I feel so privileged to have been put on this earth, both at a time of great sorrow and of great joy. There is no century, I don't think, in which the events that have unfolded in Jewish history, have been as great as this century, and to have lived through those, that's just an incredible privilege. And Israel is -- is -- is obviously terribly, terribly important. It's -- But beyond that, I don't know what else to say on the issue of -- of safety, but it is -- it is important and it is one of the problems, I think, also, that Israel has. I think Amas Alon, in his book, "The Israelis," has one quote which is just always -- I've always thought was incredible. He says, "The Israelis fight the Arabs by day and the Nazis at night." And -- And there's no question that there's a lot to that. And it's shaping foreign policy and -- and -- and it's understandable that it should.

Q: Okay. That's -- I can't think of anything else I want to ask you.

A: Okay, good.

Q: I want to thank you very much for your time.

A: No, not at all. Glad to have done it.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Conclusion of Interview