

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

GABRIEL DRIMER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Sue Rosenthal
Date: April 21, 1985

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Melrose Park, PA 19027

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GD - Gabriel Drimer [interviewee]

SR - Sue Rosenthal [interviewer]

Date: April 21, 1985¹

Tape one, side one:

SR: This is an interview with Gabriel Drimer, taped at the Philadelphia Gathering of Survivors, on April 21st, 1985, by Sue Rosenthal. Mr. Drimer...

GD: Yes.

SR: I wonder if you could tell me something about where you lived before the war started.

GD: Before the war started I lived in a town which was called Dubova. And I also lived and went to school to a--in a city which was called Pressburg, [German], Bratislava [Czech].

SR: Where is this?

GD: In Czechoslovakia.

SR: In Czechoslovakia.

GD: Yeah.

SR: And you went away from your home to go to the school?

GD: Yes.

SR: That's interesting. Was that usual? Was it a boarding school, or...

GD: No, no, it was like a *yeshivah*. It was a *yeshivah*.

SR: Oh, I see. So did you go to like the younger grades in your own...

GD: Right. The younger grades I went in my own, then when I was 14 years old I went away to Bratislava, and I went to school for a while. Then I became a singer in the choir of the biggest synagogue in Bratislava. So, I used to get paid like 60 Czechoslovakian Krone in a month. And I didn't like school so much, so I was looking for a trade. I was looking to do something. So I went in to learn a trade to become a barber, because I saw that the barbers, the people who come to the barbers give a lot of tips. And that made an impression on me, so I'll have plenty of pocket money.

SR: O.K.

GD: But, after two, three weeks, I didn't like that profession. And I was still singing in the choir in the synagogue. And my mother sent me money, because she was very happy that I'm still in the Jewish tradition, going to *shul* and singing in the choir. So she sent me money every month. And I was looking around to get some kind of a trade, to learn some kind of a trade. Then I went into fashion. I went into tailoring and designing. And I have learned that in the city of Bratislava.

SR: Oh, I see. I see. Did you live by yourself, or did you live with a group, or...

¹ Recorded at the 1985 American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Philadelphia, PA.

GD: No, I lived by myself. I took a small apartment, one room. And I lived by myself. And my mother helped me to support myself. And I ate by some of the people that they knew me. They gave me food. I had, like a few days a week I went to certain people where I ate, for the first year. Then, when I started to learn the trade, my boss liked me so much, he gave me food; he gave me board. He gave me everything. He also gave me pocket money. And I was doing very well, as a young man.

SR: Even though you were an--just an apprentice.

GD: Right.

SR: He--they gave you all this...

GD: Right, right...

SR: Even though...

GD: No, they didn't pay me for my work, but he gave me--he gave me food; he gave me living space; he gave me a room; and he also gave me every week pocket money.

SR: Can I ask you something...

GD: Yes.

SR: About--you say that you had other people who gave you food, and you would go to--dinner.

GD: Right.

SR: Dinner the year around.

GD: Right.

SR: How did you find those people? Was that something people did?

GD: Those people I--right.

SR: Oh.

GD: That city was the biggest city, like New York.²

SR: I see.

GD: That most of the Jewish people lived in that city Czechoslovakia. And some of those people were salesmen, where they used to come to my town. And they recognized me in the *shul*. And right away one of the salesmen knew who I am, knew that I'm not very poor from home.

SR: Right.

GD: And I want to do something for myself, because my father didn't live already. I was an orphan, and so this gentleman, he knew me as a salesman. We had a store next to our bakery. We at home have a bakery, had a bakery. My father was a baker. My brother was a baker.

SR: I see.

GD: We owned our bakery. So this gentleman used to come there and sell chocolate. He was from the Orient Chocolate Factory, a representative. And he recognized me. And he asked me what I want to do there. First he invited me to his

²Bratislava was biggest city in Slovakia; Prague was biggest city in Czechoslovakia.

house for a few days, and he found out what I want to do. He liked it. He liked that I want to learn a trade, and I was singing in the choir in that same *shul* that he was going to. So he liked me very much, and he went over to a few friends of his, and he made appointments to eat there every day, like three different places to eat a day or two during the week.

SR: I see.

GD: The first year.

SR: Can I back up a little bit...

GD: Yes.

SR: And ask you about you family at home?

GD: Right.

SR: Tell me, tell me about, tell me about--you say your father was a baker?

GD: Right.

SR: And your mother was there, and you had other brothers and sisters?

GD: Right. I had four brothers and one sister. My sister was 12 years old when they took her away in the--in--to Auschwitz. My one brother was in a working camp, which they sent him on the Russian front. And he died on the Russian front. He stepped on a mine, and he was blown away. My younger brother--this was an older brother from me--my younger brother was in the guerilla movement. He was hiding in the hills, and two weeks before liberation they caught him.

SR: Oh my. Oh my.

GD: And they killed him.

SR: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm. This all happened, though, some years after your going and beco--and learning...

GD: Well, this happened during the war.

SR: Yeah.

GD: This happened during the war.

SR: Right. When was it that you were learning the trade, the tailoring and...

GD: That was before the war, in 1936.

SR: I see.

GD: 1935.

SR: Right.

GD: '37, and '38.

SR: So you were three boys and a girl...

GD: Before the Nazis came in. No, we were four boys...

SR: Oh, four boys.

GD: And me, that's five boys.

SR: Five boys.

GD: And a girl.

SR: And a girl. I have three boys and a girl, so I know what...

GD: Yeah.

SR: Is the girl the youngest?

GD: Yes.

SR: My girl is the youngest also.

GD: Yes.

SR: And your--so they--did they all stay? While you were in the city, did they all work in the--in this other town, in your hometown?

GD: My whole family worked in the bakery.

SR: Ah.

GD: Everybody was helping my mother, because my father died before the war. And everybody, my older brother was in charge of the bakery. And my mother was a business lady. And she took care of the bakery, and she didn't want to get married. She was very young when my father died. She didn't want to get married, because she didn't want to have another man ever hit the kids or abuse the kids from her marriage. So, she sacrificed herself, and she didn't want to get married.

SR: How old were you when your father died?

GD: I was nine years old.

SR: You were nine. And then you went to the city when you were 14?

GD: Right.

SR: I see. I see. Did you, did you or your family belong to any synagogue in town?

GD: Yeah, oh sure.

SR: And you were...

GD: We were religious. We were Orthodox Jews.

SR: The reason that I ask is because you made the comment that your mother was so happy that you had stayed...

GD: Yes.

SR: Connected to the synagogue.

GD: Yes.

SR: That she was a...

GD: Yes.

SR: Was it, you--did it frequently happen, that people were coming to the city who would just kind of forget their Jewish roots, and...

GD: Oh yeah, there were some kids going to the city. They, I loosened up a little bit on religion too, but a lot of kids loosened up completely. They, they forgot about that they're Jewish, or they're going to synagogue, things like that. But I kept on going and kept on learning, and I never abandoned my Jewishness.

SR: Just as a matter of curiosity, before the war, in your village, was there talk about going to Palestine or being in Palestine or making...

GD: Yes.

SR: Palestine a homeland?

GD: Yes. There was talk about going to Palestine. There were some young boys that went to Palestine. Then I met them later on in Palestine after the war.

SR: Oh really?

GD: Yes.

SR: And they were from your hometown...

GD: Right. Yes.

SR: Did, how did people feel about trying to make Palestine a homeland?

GD: Well, there was a problem. You couldn't go to Palestine so easy. You have to get a permission from the English. And, that wasn't so easy. You didn't get just a few visas a year, and not everybody got their chance to go.

SR: Did anybody in your...

GD: I belonged to a...

SR: That's what I was gonna ask you. Did you belong to...

GD: I belonged to an organization, *B'nai Akiva*.

SR: *B'nai Akiva*.

GD: Yeah. *B'nai Akiva*. A Zionist organization. There was also, it was a Orthodox organization, and we used to get together Friday nights and Saturday, and we used to have a lot of fun.

SR: What did you use to do?

GD: Oh, we used to sing and dance, and teach us things that when we ever get to Israel, we should know what's all about.

SR: I see. The people in your community, in your hometown, who were not Jewish, what was the relationship between the Jews and the non-Jews?

GD: My father's relationship with the Catholics was very, very good. We didn't have that many antisemites. My father also dealt with fruits, wholesale. He would buy from the farms, the whole produce that they had. He would buy the fa-, the whole farm of fruit before they even bloomed.

SR: Oh, O.K.

GD: And then, after the farm was producing, then he'd hire people and they would pick the apples, the pears. He concentrated them in places, then he'd sell them to wholesalers, to Prague, and to Bratislava. This was a business besides the bakery.

SR: It sounds like it was a good-sized kind of operation...

GD: Yes, yes.

SR: That he ran there.

GD: Yes.

SR: Yeah. He was kind of a middle man between the farmer and the...

GD: He was not a middle man. He was the buyer, from the farmer, straight. These Catholics and non-Jews, they would deal with him year by year, just on word. He didn't have to give a deposit, or if the farmer needed money, he knew where to come. He

came to my father. He asked for a loan, he asked his daughter is getting married, he needs two, three thousand dollars. My father would give it to him with no signing, with no anything, just by knowing each other, on word.

SR: So there was a good relationship.

GD: So that, a very good relationship. My father had a very good friend, which was a bishop, Catholic bishop, where I remember as a kid I used to go there with him. We used to play cards every week. He also had, the head doctor of the town was his best friend. The owner of a drug store, who was not Jewish, was his best friend. They would go together fishing. They would go together once a week bowling, on Sundays. And they had very good relationships.

SR: And that was gen-, it was generally true that there were pretty good relationships between the Jewish community and the non-Jewish community?

GD: Right. Was not bad.

SR: Not bad.

GD: Czechoslovakia was not like some other communities in Poland or in Ukraine, in Russia, where they were very big antisemites, where they made pogroms, pogroms, and all kind of things. This didn't happen by us, thank God. We didn't have these problems. And my father, especially, was very much liked by everybody, because he did well, and he was a very generous man, who would help the poor, poor people who didn't have enough, have enough, they came to the bakery. They would get enough bread. They would also get other support, money.

SR: The Jewish community in general, was it a charitable kind of thing, and people helped each other...

GD: Yes.

SR: Supported each other?

GD: Yes.

SR: How many people were in your hometown? How big was it?

GD: Oh, maybe 250 Jewish families.

SR: That was not a large community.

GD: No, that was not a large community. But, when I lived in Bratislava, that was a big city. There were about 70, 60, 70,000 Jewish families.

SR: That was...

GD: That was the biggest...

SR: Good size.

GD: A good size.

SR: You say that was the biggest city as far as Jewish community?

GD: Bratislava Jewish community, right.

SR: In other words, Prague was not...

GD: Prague was not as big...

SR: Did not have as big...

GD: No.
SR: No.
GD: Prague was bigger in size, but not as much Jewish people.
SR: Between 1933 and 1939, that was before Hitler marched in Poland...
GD: Right, to Czechoslovakia.
SR: Czechoslovakia. Well that, that conference took place, right, right before 1939...
GD: Right.
SR: Then they went in there. Did Nazi power over Europe affect your life in any way?
GD: Yes. Yes. Yes.
SR: How did it affect it?
GD: Well, I had a lot of friends that we went to school, German boys, girls, and when Czechoslovakia was not yet taken over by Hitler, these friends volunteered to become *Hitlerjugend*. And they started to shy away from us, and they started to, not to be friendly to us. And they volunteered, and they also left Czechoslovakia. They went to Germany to become...
SR: They went to Germany.
GD: *Hitlerjugend*. Right.
SR: Were you, was your town in the part of Czechoslovakia, was it the Sudetenland?
GD: No.
SR: It's not.
GD: The part that I was born was the Carpathian, was near the Polish border.
SR: Oh, O.K.
GD: The part that I lived in Bratislava was Slovakia, which was also bordering partially with Poland, a different section.
SR: When Hitler had his conference with England...
GD: Yes.
SR: That, then, it wasn't your part of Czechoslovakia that he was talking about...
GD: No.
SR: When he said he...
GD: He was talking about Sudeten.
SR: Right. O.K. But even so, there were still many Germans living in...
GD: Oh, yeah, were still Germans in my town.
SR: In your area.
GD: In my, in my town.
SR: I see. I see. Did you have any close friends who began to shy away from you, or were these casual friends that you, that you knew?

GD: I would say I have close friends. We were playing together football and everything, but they start to shy away.

SR: When did the war begin to affect you and your family? When Hitler came in...

GD: The war begin to affect us in 1940. In that part where I was born, the Hungarian army came in. Not the Na-, not the German army.

SR: Right.

GD: And the Hungarians a half a year later, as they came in, in 1939, 1940, they took away the bakery. The first thing they did, they took away bakeries and restaurants from Jewish people.

SR: So your mother's bakery then was...

GD: Was taken away.

SR: Taken away.

GD: Putting out, put it out on the street. We were lucky we had another house.

SR: Were you home, back home at that time? Or were you...

GD: Yes, I was back home at that time. I came home at that time.

SR: Did you come home because of the war, or...

GD: I came home, I had finished my schooling, my learning about tailoring and designing. So I came home and I was helping by the bakery. And I also took a job for the company where I was working. Later on, when they took away my, our bakery...

SR: Right.

GD: I opened up my own store without a license, because Jewish people would not get licensed. They would take away all their license. And because I was very good at my work, and I worked for all those big shots, the police, the head of the police, for their wives, their daughters, and for themselves, they allowed me to work in the middle of the city without a license and without anything. And I took in a friend of mine as a partner, who lives today in Los Angeles. His name is Emanuel Adler. We both ran a very nice store, and tailoring, designing together.

SR: This was under the Hungarian army?

GD: This was under the Hungarian regime.

SR: Were there other restrictions on Jews, besides not giving them licenses and taking away the bakeries and...

GD: Even those who had license to work, later on they took away all the licenses from Jewish people. This was the first step, to take away bakeries and restaurants.

SR: I see.

GD: A half a year, a year later they took away everybody's license who was Jewish, even my wife's father, who was a tailor, and he worked in the same town that I did--although I worked without a license and I had all the privileges that I would have a license, even more so...

SR: Because you sewed for the right people.

GD: Because I sewed for the right people. I sewed for the mayor of the city, and for all the big shots. So they, nobody would bother me.

SR: Right.

GD: So, I was not married then. I knew my wife just because she lived not far from my business. And her mother would come and cry to me, "Please, Gabe, do something for me. Help me get the machines back. The police took away the machines, and my husband cannot make a living. So, if you can, if you could do something to help my, my husband, to get the machines back, he would appreciate very much. We'll never forget you." So at night, I would get back the machines from the head of the police, and give it back to them, and they would work another few days. Then the police would confiscate them again. Finally, the police realized that they have connection, and they're getting all the time the machines back, so they stopped bothering them.

SR: So he was able to keep them. And, what fin-, what happened as the war progressed?

GD: As the war progressed, in 1943, no, first I want to tell you about 1941.

SR: What happened?

GD: In 1941 they took a lot of Jewish people to try out how to mass murder Jews. In 1941, in May, they took a lot of people, including my grandfather, who lived five miles away, who was a farmer all his life, with my grandmother, and her daughter--two daughters, with their husbands and children. And they took them away to Galicia. I couldn't do much. I was trying to help them, and I couldn't do a thing, because the police wouldn't help me. So they took away thousands of people, and they took them to a city which was called Kamenets-Podolski. [city in the Ukraine where mass killings of Jews took place Aug. 27 and 28, 1941.] On the outskirts of the city, they were digging their own graves, but not graves. They dig big, I don't know what you call that, you know, big...

SR: Trenches?

GD: Trenches. And they told the people that the trenches they are digging is against the Russian army, as they come with tanks, they shouldn't be able to go through there. But, they didn't know that they are digging their own graves. And after a few, two weeks, all the Nazi soldiers surrounded the area, that land where they were concentrated, on fields, all around the hills were Nazi soldiers. And one day they started to shoot and they killed about 80,000 people...

SR: In one day?

GD: In one time. And that, there, [pause]...

SR: It's something that is very hard to understand, [unclear].

GD: There was my grandfather.

SR: Right. Your grandmother.

GD: Grandmother.

SR: And other people, too.
GD: And uncles.
SR: They had no idea what was gonna happen.
GD: [pause]
SR: By this time...
GD: One boy, a friend of my younger brother, survived. He threw himself in, in the grave.
SR: Mmm hmm.
GD: Alive.
SR: Mmm hmm.
GD: [pause; weeping] And he came back to our town a few weeks later, and he told the story. And nobody would believe him.
SR: I was gonna say, I bet nobody believed what he said.
GD: But we later found out that it was true. He cra--he got out of that hole, got out of that trench at night, because they thought everybody is dead. And all dead people were on top of him, and under him, and blood was all over the place. And he was going through hills. He never went through the towns or through cities. He went through hills, and at the side of the hills. He spoke Russian, he spoke Polish a little bit--Czechoslovakian is similar to Polish--and he got some food on his way. And he walked hundreds and hundreds of miles till he got back home. When he came back home, he told his story, and we started to believe what happened.
SR: This was the first...
GD: In 1941.
SR: And he...
GD: This is, was Eichmann was trying to...
SR: Oh.
GD: Find out a way how to mass murder all the Jews, before they started to take all these people to Auschwitz.
SR: I'd never realized something you just told me, that this started with Czechoslovakian Jews. I'd always thought that it was Polish Jews. I didn't realize that something like this...
GD: No, they took...
SR: Had happened in Czechoslovakia.
GD: Czechoslovakian Jews, and they took them to Poland.
SR: Oh.
GD: They took them with the trains to Poland. They took them to certain places, where they, where they murdered them.
SR: So by now the Nazis were there, then, by 1941. The Nazis were...
GD: By 1941, the Hungarian Nazis with the German Nazis worked together.
SR: I see.

GD: The Hungarians would take us away from home, and give us--put us into the trains. Also my family was supposed to go in 1941.

SR: Right.

GD: Because the Nazi baker, who took over our bakery in 1940, he asked the chief of police to take away my family, because they wanted to take away the other house. He wanted to have peo--his people who work in the bakery, to have a house where to live. Because he took over our house and bakery. We had another house, which we bought from a Catholic bishop. And we were lucky that we had that house, otherwise we wouldn't have where to live. So he was trying to send us away with other people, with other Jewish people. And we were not on the list. They had lists which people to take away. My family was not on the list, but they added to the list, because...

SR: He asked...

GD: He was a Nazi, he asked the police chief to take my family away.

SR: What happened?

GD: It just so happened that on lunchtime, I used to come home to eat lunch. We don't have big suppers. We have big lunches. And I saw what was going on in town. And I had my business, and I worked for all these policemen, chief of police, and I was in good relations with them. And they didn't know exactly that my family, because my family didn't live where I had the business. They lived far, far away. So two policemen were in the house, and I come home for lunch. And those policemen knew me, because all the policemen knew me. When they saw I come home for lunch, they ask me, "What are you doing here? Gabe, what are you doing here?" So I said, "This is my family. I came home for lunch." And I see that they are packing already. So, the two policemen had a little conference. And one of them ran right away to the head of the police, to find out what to do. So, when he ran to the police chief, and I saw what's happening, so I wanted to go with my family. So, the policeman said, "We don't want to take you. We only want to take your family." And, this policeman who went away to talk to the chief of police, and the chief of police started to walk towards, towards our home. In the meantime, I walked out of the house, and I was going to buy things to take on the, to store things, like luggage [blowing his nose. "Excuse me."] to put things like shoulder bags...

SR: Yeah.

GD: To carry stuff for us. And I said, "And I'm not gonna stay away. If my family goes, I go." I walked towards the city, towards the shopping center, and towards me walks the chief of police. And he stops me. And he says, "Gabe, you don't have to go. We have to take your family." I says, "My family was not on the list!" "How do you know?" "Well, I have an idea that my family was not on the list, and I don't think you should take my family." He says, "I'm sorry, I cannot do nothing about your family, but you don't have to go." And I said to the police chief, "Wherever my family goes, I go." And we part, and I went to buy the things that I had in mind to buy, and I really wanted to

go with my family. And I knew already where they're going. I knew they were not going for a picnic.

SR: Yes.

GD: But, I love my family.

Tape one, side two:

GD: To put things in, and to take it with me. And I went, by the time I went home, my family was already taken to the biggest *shul*, a concentration place where they concentrated all the Jewish people. So I came home. Nobody would tell me nothing. I walked into the house. The house was empty. Everything was there. They couldn't take, just a little clothing and a little food. And I packed my stuff, and I went to the same place where my family was, because I wanted to go with them. I figured if they can't do nothing for me, I worked for them already so much, and I didn't charge them much for these policemen. They didn't pay much. I knew that someday I'll need help from them, so I didn't charge them too much. When I walked into the biggest *shul* in our town, and there was a--officers, police officers, their assistant chief of police, and he sat by a table. And I walked in, and he saw me. He got up from the table, he came over to me, "Gabe! What are you doing here?" So I said, "My family is here, [weeping] so I'm going." I says, "I'm going with my family." [crying] So he looked up the list, and he saw that my family was put on the list. Yeah.

SR: Yeah.

GD: So he said, he said, "Gabe, sit down here in my office." And he went up to the chief of police, and he said to me, "You're not gonna go." And I said, "I'm not gonna go if my family is?" [crying]

SR: Right.

GD: [pause] So I was there from 8 o'clock at night till 3 o'clock in the morning. And they had a plan to lea-, to take all the people at 5 o'clock to the railroad station and take them away to that place where they massacred 80,000 people. This assistant chief of police, he liked me very much. His wife liked me. And he didn't let me go, and he worked it out with the chief of police to let my whole family go back home--one out of 80,000. When we went back home, in 1941, they wouldn't touch us. They wouldn't bother us, till 1984, till 1944.

SR: You mean '44.

GD: Till 1944.

SR: So you were able to live and work...

GD: Right. Right. So I had my whole family home. And everybody was O.K.

SR: Right.

GD: Also, we had a next door neighbor who was a Nazi. And my mother lived with them very friendly, very nice. And she helped him a lot before the Nazis were in charge, when it was Czechoslovakia.

SR: Right.

GD: So, he put a lot of people in jail, and he helped kill a lot of Jewish people. But my family he tried to save. He also, in 1944, he suggested to my mother to let my sister hide in his house, in his attic. But my sister wouldn't go...

SR: Oh.
GD: Wouldn't stay away from the family.
SR: Oh.
GD: And also my friend, my father's friends, the bishop and the farmers, were trying to help my family [crying].
SR: So that they were good to you when they wanted to...
GD: [crying] And my mother wouldn't go, because she didn't want to jeopardize their lives.
SR: She wouldn't leave them either, then.
GD: She didn't, no. She didn't want to put them in trouble, because if they ever find us...
SR: Oh.
GD: They would...
SR: The people who wanted to hide you...
GD: Yes.
SR: She didn't want to put into trouble.
GD: Right.
SR: She must have been quite a woman.
GD: She didn't want them to do that. [crying] And that's why she is not here today.
SR: She did what she had to do.
GD: To beg her to come and stay with them. And she said, "If they ever catch me, you will be in the same trouble that I am." And she didn't want to.
SR: So she wouldn't let them hide any of you.
GD: She, she didn't...
SR: Because...
GD: No, well, she wanted to leave my sister should stay...
SR: Right.
GD: By the neighbor, but she wouldn't.
SR: Your sister went with your mother?
GD: Yeah. She went to Auschwitz.
SR: Auschwitz. What happened? Everybody was told to go? How did they...
GD: They, the, well, in 1944, when Eichmann took over Hungary, he didn't leave nobody there. He took everybody. And because we were not in Budapest--in Budapest some people were saved--but we didn't live in Budapest. And he didn't want to leave nobody there. So he took all those people to, who lived in, not Hungarian country like it was before Czechoslovakia, he took them all to Auschwitz. By that time Auschwitz was working already.
SR: Yeah.

GD: So in 1944, in May, 1944, he took all the rest of the people who were left at, from 1941, the few Jewish families, and he took them to a ghetto, which was called Taitch [phonetic]. And then from the ghetto, they took them straight to Auschwitz. And I was in a working camp. And because in the working camp I was very good with my officers, I got permission a few times to go back home. I went in to my working camp in 1943, October. And I had the, four times permission to go home, which none of the Jewish boys who were with me ever got home, ever got permission to leave.

SR: Your family was still at home in 1943?

GD: My family was still at home, and I visited them, and I was making a little money in the camp. The officer, the head officer, allowed me to do some work for some boys, and they had to pay me--not a big amount, small amounts...

SR: Right.

GD: Fixing jackets, pants, or anything. And I was working for the officers, most of the time without any money.

SR: Right.

GD: But because he was a very nice guy--he was a teacher in a university where there was a lot of Jewish students--so he was not, he was not an S.S. He was not. He was in the regular army. He was very nice to me. He was like a father to me. And, to some of the boys, and even to the rest of the boys he was nice. He was not mean. So he, I made for his wife a few suits, coats, and he took me with his own car to the railroad station to go home and visit my parents--for five, six days at a time! The last time I visited them was in the ghetto. That was the last time that I saw them. And I, from the ghetto I went back to my working camp, and later on I found out that they were all taken to Auschwitz, and they were all killed.

SR: Was your brothers and your sister?

GD: All my, my brother was hiding in the guerillas, the ol-, the younger brother from me was hiding in the hills. And he was only caught two weeks before liberation, before the Russians came into that part of the country. And he was still taken away to Auschwitz, and he was put in the gas chambers. And, the rest of my younger brothers and sister were all taken to Auschwitz, and they were all killed in the same time. I was left one person out of fifty, sixty people from a family.

SR: Oh my...

GD: And...

SR: And you were in the work camp?

GD: And I was then in that working camp. I was in very good relations with the officer. He would never bother me. He knew what happened. He always had a nice few words for me. And, I was in really good shape as far as food was concerned, and treatment. I was never treated badly, because of my trade, and because of my profession. But, because the officer was so good to me, I ran away from the camp about eight, nine times. Anybody else who would run away, more than 500 yards from a camp, there was

a law that they could shoot him on the spot. I was never touched, because I knew my officer, my head officer, who was a captain, he would never let anybody touch me. So I had courage, and I did go around, I left the camp a few times, about eight times. And I always came back, because, and that was bad situations.

SR: You came back on your own?

GD: I was trying to hide. I was trying to hide with Christians, or in some towns where I would stay over till the Russians come, because we knew that the Russians already coming. So I was trying to run away, and wait for the Russians. But then I saw that a lot of German soldiers are concentrating in that part, so I sneaked out and ran back to my own group, to my own military place where we were working. All the Jewish boys were working there, so I went back. And the officer would never bother me. He wouldn't tell me nothing. Finally, at the last moment, his city was also taken over by the Russians, which was in deep Hungary, near the Yugoslavian border. So he told me, he doesn't want to go to Germany himself. He doesn't want to go to the--to Germany. He wants to hide himself, and he wants to wait till the Russians will free us. And that's what he did. He kept all the 220 people. He didn't want to put us on the train. He kept us walking so the Russians could catch up with us. And the Russians did. And we were hiding for three, four days in a spot, on a farmland. The city was called Bereksaz. [phonetic] That was in the Karpathen. And when the Russian army freed that city, we were all freed--and him too, the officers. And nobody bothered him. Nobody did anything to him. But, the second day, when the Russians occupied that city, one officer, he was drunk a little bit. He was a lieutenant in the Russian army. And I speak a little bit Russian. And because I was dressed good, and because I was Jewish--he was an Ukraine--he was an antisemite, he wanted to kill me. So I was waiting six years under the Nazis to be freed, and in the day when I was freed, half a day later, a Russian officer wanted to kill me. He took away my watch, my money, everything I had. And he took me with a gun and he wanted to, wanted me to go in in the city in a special between houses, where it was a closed-in place, so nobody sees. He didn't want to kill me on the street because there were a lot of Russian officers. And one of my friends who was with me, in the same camp that I was, my best friend, he ran over to those officers and he start to cry that this is a Jewish boy, and this soldier, this lieutenant wants to kill him. And when I saw he ran over to the officers, I ran away from this guy. He told me to go into this place. At that point I made a right turn and started to run away. And he turned around and wanted to shoot me. He saw the officers, and he stopped, and he put away his gun.

SR: Oh my God.

GD: So, the officers blew a whistle. There were about six, seven officers--high ranking officers. Because they just occupied one day this city. And they had a little conference on the street, in the middle of the city. And my friend was crying there, and he spoke better Russian than me. And he told them what happened. So one Russian

officer says to both of us, "You just stay here on the side." First they called over that officer, that officer who wanted to shoot me. And he came over, shivering, put away his gun, saluted--because these were very high ranking officers--saluted the officer. And the officer asked him, "What do you want to do?" He says, "Nothing! Nothing! I didn't want to do nothing!" So one officer told him, "Get lost from me or otherwise I'll blow your brains out." And he ran away, he went away. And the officer told both of us, my friend and me, to wait here a few minutes. So they finish the conference. And between those five, six officers were two Jewish officers.

SR: Oh my.

GD: When they finish the conference, one of the officers comes over, asks us in Jewish, "Are you Jewish?" We said, "Yes!" He told him already we are Jewish. So he says, "All right. Wait here. You gonna come with me." So we waited a few minutes. He took us, he was in charge of delivering all the food to the front. He took us to his concentration where he concentrated the food, where he had kitchens, and they cooked for the army as they were progressing against the Nazis. He gave us lunch. He gave us beautiful treatment. And he said, "You wait here. And my trucks are going back to a certain city which is called Sighet. And over there they're going to bring more food and delivering it here. So you go back from the front. Because the front could turn around tomorrow, and the Nazis could come after us. We don't know, so you go back at least forty, fifty miles backwards, in that direction." So we said, "We are from that direction. We want to go home, and that's that direction." So he put us with his, one of the officers who was going with the trucks back to Sighet. And my friend, who spoke very good Russian, the officer took him in the cabin in the front near the, near the driver. So they were sitting in the front. And they put me in the back of the truck, and I was standing on the truck, and watching all the Russian army all over the places. When we were outside the city, going towards Sighet, just a mile or so outside the city, one Russian soldier was very drunk, and he opened up a--fire on the truck, and on us. He almost killed the officer. He almost killed everybody in the truck. He just was very drunk. He didn't held good the machine gun. Otherwise we would have been all killed. The truck at that moment stopped right away, and two soldiers were in the back of the truck with me--they didn't watch me, they were just going, they were watching, they were doing their duty--and the officer in the front with a sergeant. So these soldiers jumped down with their machine guns, against that one soldier. When he saw them coming, he laid, he sat on his knees and he begged the officer shouldn't do nothing for him, he made a mistake. And the officer said to these guys, "Put him away." And one of these soldiers took his machine gun, and machine-gunned the guy on the side of the street right away and took away his gun and brought it back on the truck. And I thought to myself, *what the hell is going on? What kinda army, what kinda discipline, what kinda thing?* But on the other hand, I know that the soldier could have killed us all. So there was judgment right on the spot. And I was very frightened, and scared, and I didn't know where I'm going or what's

gonna be. But, they didn't bother us. They took us back like thirty, forty miles. And then they took us, let us get off the truck when we asked to get off. And we took the direction where we're supposed to go, towards home. And we did. And we came home, and we found about eight Jewish boys and about two, three girls who were hiding in the hills, who were guerillas. And they were looking for my brother, because he was in a different group.

SR: Right.

GD: And they could never find him.

SR: They never could, because he...

GD: So he was caught two weeks before, and he was executed. I don't know if he was executed, or he was taken to Auschwitz. Some people told me he was taken to Auschwitz, some people told me he was executed. But, he wasn't alive when I came back. And when I came back, I volunteered right away to the police, and I was working with the police from October, 1944 to, through the end of war.

SR: Mmm hmm.

GD: And, by the order of the Russians, we gathered all those people who were Nazis, who worked with the Nazis, from fourteen years to fifty-two years old, and we marched them towards Russia. And the Russians took them over, and they took them for work, for hard work, hard labor.

SR: Right.

GD: And after the war, I went back to my city where I used to live. In my town I couldn't live, because I couldn't take the pain...

SR: Sure.

GD: To see our houses without anybody. So I went back to the city where I learned the trade, and where I worked before. And I went back in, and I worked for a while with the Russian military secret police, with the, with the Russian *Kommandatura*. That means like, like over here, the military secret police. And I was trying to do a little bit work on the Nazis what they did to us, pay them back a little, and I did. I did it as a policeman, and I did after the war as working with the Russians together. And then finally...

SR: Did you help find Nazis?

GD: Oh yeah, we had, we found plenty of them. And we sent them back...

SR: What, did you...

GD: One of the Nazis' father, who was in my town a businessman, when I was in the policeman, police force, he was, I would say maybe the richest German in our town. My father was a very good friend of his, but in the last few weeks, when I came on vacation for a few days, from the camp where I was, where I was, and I saw what this man did, I was surprised. Because this man didn't have to do nothing against the Jews, because he was rich himself. He wasn't poor. I can understand if somebody is very poor and he goes for some, some things that the Jewish people had. But this man didn't need

nothing. He only wanted to get rid of the Jews, so it showed that even those people that you thought they were nice, they were not so nice, those Germans. And he took over the biggest stores that the Jewish people had, and he helped the police, which was a surprise to me, that he helped the Nazis to get rid of the Jews. And I saw that. When I came back, and I was, after the war, when I was liberated, the war was still on, in 1944. I was liberated in October, '44. And I was in November at home, at the police. One of his sons was in the army. I don't know if he lives or not. He was a teacher, and he was an officer in the German army. His son was only 14 years old, the youngest son. And his father came to me, and he trusted me, because he knew that I know that his fa-, my father and him were good friends. So he said to me, "Gabe, I want you to do me a favor. Please don't take away my youngest son. I have nobody else, just this one son. My other son is in the..." And I said, "Victor, why did you go after the Jewish people, in the last few weeks, when they took away every Jew from there? Why did you go to help the Nazis? Was that a nice thing from you? You didn't need it! Why did you go?" "Oh, I'm sorry. I made a big mistake!" And he says to me, "Gabe, I'll give you gold. I'll give you silver. I'll give you dollars. I'll give you anything you want. Just please don't take my son away." And I was so mad that he did, next morning we took away his son, and we sent him with the rest of the people.

SR: I understand.

GD: And, later on, I didn't live in that town no more, after the war was over, I went to my city, to Bratislava, and I lived there. So I really don't know what happened to his son. But I know what happened to a lot of these Nazis, who were very bad through the time of the war. And when I was in the police force, there was a few friends of mine, and all those boys who were hidden in the hills, they were all in the police force. And we did some work on some of those Nazis, that they were bad.

SR: Mmm hmm.

GD: We paid them back. Some of them were begging on their knees we shouldn't take them, they were sick, they couldn't walk, they couldn't do things. I didn't give a damn. Just the way they did with us, that's exactly that we did with them, except we didn't kill them. We just took them for work, that the Russians needed them to fix bridges, to fix highways, to fix things. And we gave them over to the Russian army. And that's what I did.

SR: Let me ask you this. If I can just back up a little bit. When your brothers and your sister went to Auschwitz, your mother went with them?

GD: Right.

SR: They all went together...

GD: They all went together.

SR: Except your brother who had hidden...

GD: Who was hidden in the hills.

SR: And then at the end of the war...

GD: Yes.

SR: When you were walking, when your officer was marching you, had he been told to put you into trains and send you, but he decided to walk you? I...

GD: He, not us. He had to go, too.

SR: He went too.

GD: No, no, the officer had to go with us to Germany.

SR: And he didn't want to go.

GD: He didn't want to go, and we didn't want to go.

SR: Right.

GD: So we slowed down on the road. We walked miles, slow, so the Russians could catch up with us.

SR: Right. He wasn't rushing you.

GD: We, we were, he didn't rush us. But we still made like 25, 30 miles every day. We couldn't stay in one place. Because there was like a, the Germans were running away from the front, and anybody who stood in their way, they would kill them.

SR: I see.

GD: They were afraid for the Russians. They were running like crazy.

SR: I'm sure.

GD: And, we were on their way. We were walking. So, if we would stay somewhere, if we did stay somewhere, we were hiding. We were...

SR: Right.

GD: We would go to a...

SR: [unclear].

GD: To a farm, where we would not be on the highway so they could see us or whatever. And we did that a lot. Every night we did that. We went like four o'clock we went to a farm place, and we slept in the places from the cows and everything. We didn't care, just to slow down.

SR: Sure.

GD: To catch up with the Russians, to wait till the Russians free us. And that's what happened.

SR: How about after? Where did you stay afterward? In the city there when you moved you stayed until you came to this country?

GD: After I was freed through the Russians, and I almost got killed from the Russians, I went back to my town where I was born.

SR: But you weren't happy there you said.

GD: I wasn't happy there, no. I wasn't happy there. I didn't even live in my house. I lived in one of my friends' house, close to the police station. And we were at the police, and we were even afraid that some, because we took away so many Christians, who were working with the Nazis, so we were not sure from, for ourselves. Some, somewhere somebody could kill us.

SR: Sure.

GD: So we were all going around with guns and all that, but we still were a little bit afraid. And there was, at night no civilians were allowed to walk. There was a curfew. So no civilians after six thirty were allowed to walk. If we would catch somebody, we took them in right away to the police station and we beat him up and we put him in jail. No civilians were allowed to walk, except police or military, soldiers, officers.

SR: You weren't ma-, how old were you, when the war was over?

GD: 18.

SR: When the war was over you were?

GD: Let me see, I was born in '22.

SR: Oh, O.K.

GD: And the war was over in '45.

SR: Right.

GD: '22, '45. I was 21.

SR: You were 21.

GD: Yes.

SR: So you weren't married yet?

GD: No, no, no, no. I wasn't married.

SR: And ve-, there were very, very few Jews who came back to your hometown?

GD: Very few.

SR: So you eventually left there.

GD: What we did, when I was in the police force, I opened up my store what I had my store before.

SR: Oh.

GD: And I put in those tailors to work. And we kept all those people, we made a kitchen for all those people who came back from the camps, I paid from my money, and my friend who lives today in Los Angeles, we both worked, and we made sure that people who knew this business worked. And we had a lot of customers right away. Business was good, though we didn't take money from the work, or for our selling goods. We took food--cows, calves, chickens, bread, or flour, milk, butter, everything that we can accumulate. So all the people who came, started to come from concentration camps, who were liberated, they came to that part of the country, they were all greeted and given food for a few days--as long as they had to stay till they found themselves a spot where to work or whatever. Because the war was still on. The people didn't have where to go and what to eat. And we couldn't get in touch with anybody from Joint Distribution. We were too far away, and we didn't, we didn't need it. We did it ourselves--me and my best friend, who lives today in Los Angeles. We paid like for six, seven months, for all the food to give the people, whoever came back from a concentration camp, or a working

camp. It didn't matter. So long as they were Jewish and they were from that surrounding towns.

SR: And you finally left there, though.

GD: Finally I left...

SR: Because you were so uncomfortable.

GD: After the war was, the war was over, I left right away, and I went to the city where I was living before the war--but not in the town where my mother lived, where my grandfather close there had his farms and everything, because I couldn't stay there.

SR: Right.

GD: Not because they didn't let me, then later on the Russians took over that part of Czechoslovakia. It's today...

Tape two, side one:

SR: This is a continuation of the interview with Gabriel Drimer, by Sue Rosenthal, on April 21st, 1985, in Philadelphia. Now tell me how, what happened, how you came to this country.

GD: O.K. First of all, after the war I lived, I worked for a while in Bratislava, and I went into business. I went into the business that I knew, the manufacture of ladies' coats, suits, and men's. And it was very easy to do, because in Czechoslovakia after the war, the Germans, three million Germans, there were about two-and-a-half million Germans, were deported to Germany. So, because I was a survivor, because I was in the camps, I had a special right. I applied for a license to get a store. So they told me in City Hall, go and take any store that you like from a German person, and we'll give you the permission to do it. We'll give you the papers for it. So I went, and I took over one store, in Karlsbad. And they gave me right away permission and I took it over, and I ran that store. Then I went to another city later, and I took another store. And I got permission for that, and I ran that store. Then I went out, took over another store. So I had three stores taken over from Germans, and I took people to work, and started to do business. I started to do very good business. Later on I went into the leather business. And I started to build my own life. In the meantime I got married with a girl who I knew from home.

SR: How did you find her?

GD: And she came, she came home after the war, and before I left to Bratislava, she came home right after, May 9, '45. And I met her, and we got engaged, and we got married soon. And I was starting to build my life, build, and I knew already that my family was all wiped out, and I needed somebody. That's why I got engaged so fast. I got married to have somebody, to have a little family, and to start to build a little family. And I built a very good business. I had a lot of connections. I was born there, I speak the language, I had those three stores, and I also took out, took a villa in a city which is called Ashvchekov [phonetic], near the German border. And I took over a villa where the commander from the S.S. lived. And, the mother was still there. I found a very beautiful home, with everything in it. And the mother was about 75, 80 years old. And she was very unhappy. She begged me I shouldn't take over the house. She argued with me. When I walked into the house, I saw Hitler's picture was still on the wall. So I got very mad. I took the picture and I stepped on it on the floor, broke everything, and I had a big argument with the woman who lived there, with her mother. And she knew what is gonna happen. She knew that if I go to the City Hall, I get the house right away. And she was very ill. I think she had a heart attack, and the next day she was dead. So I told her that the next day she had to be out of the house. The next day they carried her out of the house, and I took over the house. And I found in the attic I found gold. I found a briefcase with thousands of marks. I found the, for beds, sheets and all that, brand new, that they never were touched. I found a lot of stuff, and, naturally, a beautiful

home with everything in it, with all the furnitures. I took it over. I was so naive. I was just engaged. I wasn't even married then. I took the gold and gave everybody, my friends, a piece, because I figured gold doesn't mean nothing. The money, I put away in a, in one of the shelves in the house. And I figured what is German marks aren't worth nothing. I need Czechoslovakian money. I was so young, I didn't know. Later a few months I found out that the marks are good, in Germany, and they'll be even good in Czechoslovakia, I can exchange it. I went to look for the marks, I didn't find them no where else.

SR: Somebody else had found them.

GD: So somebody else from my friends already, because I had no enemies coming to the house. And whatever happened, let them have fun. So they found the marks before me. And they knew probably that they were good, so they took them. And I built a very good business. I had a very, very good business. But in 1948, everything was working very good, making a lot of money, and making a good living, and the few Jewish people that they survived they were already gathered together. Wasn't too many of us. Finally we found out that there is a need for Israel, to get ammunition and to get soldiers and to get, go fight for Israel, because Israel is becoming a State. I was between the first one to volunteer to the *Haganah*. And we were the first ones to go out, from Czechoslovakia, with a ship, ammunition, and come to Israel to fight.

SR: So you went to Israel, then, and you fought...

GD: Yes, in 1948...

SR: Oh my.

GD: I went to Israel, voluntarily left all the stores.

SR: You left everything?

GD: Everything, except I took some money, converted to dollars. I took all the furniture that I liked, and put it in in a big car, carload, like a train carload I built it, and I shipped it with a ship to Israel.

SR: To Israel.

GD: All the electric appliances, gas appliances, and some of the most sophisticated machines that I can get for my factory, and I got permission from the government of Czechoslovakia, which...

SR: Before the Russians...

GD: Before, no, no, 'cause this was after the war, and after the war it was, that part where I lived...

SR: Right.

GD: Already now it was already Czechoslovakia. It was Czechoslovakia. The part where I was born, the Russians took over. But this part was Czechoslovakia, but was under control of the Russians. So the Czechoslovakian government was about eight or nine Jewish ministers. Between the twelve ministers were about eight, nine Jewish ministers. Was, this was in Stalin's time. And the minister of finance, and tourism and

all that, was Fisher, a Jewish minister which I knew personally. And when I applied for my visa, and a permission to take out stuff from Czechoslovakia, to my surprise, they allowed me everything.

SR: I am, I'm surprised too.

GD: And I took whatever I could. I didn't, I couldn't take so much, because I didn't think they would allow me that much to take out. But whatever I asked...

SR: They did allow.

GD: They did allow me. So I did take everything whatever I could, and I went to Israel. And I lived in Israel for seven years.

SR: With your family and...

GD: With my, then I had my wife already, and we had a child, a son. And we moved to Israel. I volunteered. I left everything in Czechoslovakia, because in 1948 the Communists took over. I knew already what's gonna happen. They asked me to give up my stores, to become a manager for all the corpor-, to be the head of the corporation, of all the clothing industry. And I said, "O.K., I'll consider it." In the meantime, they didn't know that I'm working on papers to leave the country. And I did everything legally, and I volunteered for the *Haganah*. We were trained two months in Czechoslovakia for the *Haganah*, and I became a sergeant in the training course. And we moved to Israel. We left Czechoslovakia voluntarily, legally, and we moved to Israel. And in Israel, I was first in the army. Then I found out that if I join the police force, it would be counted like being in the army, but I'm get-, I'll get more pay and I'll be closer to home. So finally I applied to become a policeman. I also had papers from Czechoslovakia that I was in the police force there during the war, and I was a sergeant in the police force. I had all those papers, and I applied in Israel. When I came to an interview with the officer who hires all these young policemen, I didn't speak good Hebrew. I hardly spoke Hebrew. So he told me, "I'm sorry, we cannot take you. The only problem is that you don't speak Hebrew, and you don't write Hebrew good." Well, I couldn't do nothing against that, so, I was dismissed. But I didn't give up, because I knew that I want to be a policeman, because the money that I brought to Israel, if I go to the army for two years, and I stay in the army, my wife will use up all the money, and I'll have nobody in Israel. I have nobody from my family who is gonna help me. I'll be a poor man forever, and I'll be a worker. This way I have some money left if I go to the police, and I'll be able to survive easier, and build my family. I applied again to the police department a few months later. Like, I made believe like nothing happened before. They didn't know. And, the same thing happened again. I was not, I was rejected because of not speaking Hebrew. In the meantime I went to school and I read Hebrew newspapers, trying to learn Hebrew. Naturally, I spoke a little better Hebrew, and I knew already the questions what he is asking. And I thought the next time he's gonna ask the same questions. I knew the answers good in Hebrew. But it doesn't work that way.

SR: No, new questions.

GD: He asked different questions. The third time--I applied three times--the third time I applied I was rejected, too. I went out from that office. Every time I was applying, we were going for a hearing, they were hiring about 100 police officers, out of three, four hundred boys. So I wasn't the only one who was rejected. There was hundreds of them. But I still knew that if I don't go to the police department, I'll be in the army for two years and it's gonna be the end of my money, because my wife will use up every penny. She cannot survive on \$25 a month. So, that's what the army paid. In the police force I would have gotten \$65 a month. At that time, that was easier, because that was...

SR: You could live on...

GD: Three dollars, no, a pound. It's not \$65. It's £ 65.

SR: Oh, that's right, pounds.

GD: Twenty-five pounds or sixty-five pounds. So, I walked out from that office the third time. I said, "This is it. I mean, I can't do it no more. And I'm through with the police department." As I was walking in the hall, a police officer walks towards me, and he sees me, he looks at me. And I look at him. And this is one of my older brother's friend.

SR: Oh my. You couldn't believe it, I bet.

GD: No. And he was an officer, he was an officer in the police force. And he was an officer in the English police force, because the *Haganah* sent him from the Kibbutz Masaryk. He was a member in Kibbutz Masaryk. And they probably picked out some young boys to send them in to the police department, under the English, that they could know things what's going on. And this guy was one of those. He was a very devoted Zionist. And he was a very smart boy when he left our town. And he met me, and he said, "Aren't you the baker's son?" So I said, "Yes." He says, "What are you doing here?" So I told him. But I told him the truth.

SR: Yeah. Yes.

GD: I told him why I want to be a policeman. And, when luck works, it works. So he said, "Don't worry. You want to be a policeman? Come with me." He says, "You will go over here. And I'll go into the office and I'll talk to them." So he went in to the office, and he spoke to the officer, and five minutes later I was called in, and I was sworn in.

SR: How amazing.

GD: And I was two years in the police force, almost two years. And at that time, because of publicity in the papers and all over the place, they were looking for young men to go in *kibbutzim* to try to do farm work. They had to import everything and all that. And I saw that my business, *shmattes* ["rags", clothing] is not that good. Heh, in Israel.

SR: Right.

GD: Because I brought my machinery and everything. And I was working like three, four months designing and making things for Haifa, for the biggest stores, for Dan Gabrielli and Rosenblum, who are very big stores. And they gave me the goods, and I made styles for them. They liked it very much. And they were very satisfied. And they told me they're gonna give me work all year. But after three months this was, in 1949, '48, December, 1949, January, February, March. Those four months I also organized a shop. I had people working. And I was trying to develop something, while I was in the army--so nothing goes wasted. After four months there was no more work, because I worked on jackets and coats, and they don't need any because it's too warm. So the thing that he promised me while I was starting with him was because I had nice styles and I did a good job, so he wanted to have me work for him. He told me I'm gonna get work all year, but he couldn't give me work all year. He only could give me three, four months' work. And I said, "Well they were talking by us that Israel is bad. I don't see it's so bad. I mean, you can work. You can get work. You can organize yourself." I was very happy. Well, I didn't have an apartment yet. My wife was in a special place where they took all the new people, in a concentration, *olim* center. But I was looking around, and I said, "I'm not gonna spend three, four thousand dollars for an apartment, then I wouldn't have money for a business. I'll keep the money to get first a business. Then I'll buy apartment." So, that's what I did. I didn't buy an apartment. I took an Arab house that they started to build, they only had the walls, and the, the roof. And they, it had no windows, no floors, no electric, no, no water, no heating, no nothing, no. So I made a deal with the city that I'll take that house and I'll fix it for my own money. They just have to give me the permission. So in Israel it doesn't go so easy. They didn't give me the permission so easy. It took a long time, but finally I got it. I got the permission, I fixed up the house, and we had where to live. And I was working. But after four months that I worked in the *shmatka* business, I saw that that's no deal, is no, nothing. I cannot make a living working four months, and eight months with, we'll starve. So, that's when I started to go after the police, to get me into the police department.

SR: Right.

GD: Finally I got into the police department through a dear friend of mine, who knew me, who spoke to the officer. They took me in, and I was, I even became a sergeant right away, because I had all the papers. And I was in charge of twelve officers, which they were all surprised. How can they give me a rank and a char-, and a responsibility to be in charge of other people when I don't speak good the language? But I promised to the officer that's what he, when he swore me in, he says, "You have to promise me that you're gonna learn every day Hebrew. You have to know Hebrew in another few months, otherwise you'll be out of the police force." So I did. I learned, and I was almost two years in the police force. While I was in the police force, I was trying to go in, in farm business. And they were advertising all kind of ways to go in in the farm. They wanted young people to go in *kibbutzim*. In the kibbutz I didn't want to go. I

wanted to make a farm, but it should be my own. And I started to organize farms. At that time, Golda Meir was just a representative in the *Histadrut*. And there was not enough food in Israel for, before Pesach. And I got to know Golda Meir through the party. I got to know Golda Meir with her very good friend, I don't remember exactly her name. She was a blond woman. They were always going around together. They were from the *Histadrut*. That was in 1949. So, somehow, in the town where I lived, near Haifa, somebody suggested, they wanted to give out potatoes for Passover for the people in the town. And the town was called Tirat HaCarmel. So, somebody suggested my name, that I will be the sincere guy, the honest guy, who will not make some tricks or steal the, the tar, the potatoes that it belongs to the people. And they gave me like a lot, a lot of potatoes for each family, for a person to give let's say six pound per person in the family. And I did that, and that's when I got in touch the first time, I got to know Mrs. Golda Meir. Then later on she became the Prime Minister of Israel. And I lived in Israel for seven years, and I organized 45 farms.

SR: Private farms?

GD: Private farms, around Haifa. We took over the land. I took over 40 acres land that was Arab land. All the land was Arab land. Their *Hushanatush* [phonetic] gave us leases for a year. Every year we renewed the lease. And I had three, four cows myself. I had chickens. I saw that with my *shmatte* [clothing] business I cannot make a living in Israel. I was also in the police force already, and I started to build farms. Because I didn't, police force is not my cup of tea. This was just till I get something better.

SR: Yeah, right.

GD: In the meantime, while I was in the police force, and I was in charge of twelve other policemen in the *Takhanah Mizrakhit* [Eastern station]; I looked around and I saw that the government is helping a lot to become farmers. They lent money. They have a special bank who lends money for farmers. And I got in touch with all these big people, and I became the president from all these farmers. And I got to work with the government once a month in Tel Aviv. We had to, whatever the farmers produced, we had to give up a certain stations where they sold it for, under government-controlled prices. Naturally some of the things the farmers sold on their own, which they made some extra money. And they were growing very rapidly. If a farmer wanted a loan in the bank, I had to O.K. it. Not to be the sponsor, just to, the bank would know that this person or these people are really gonna build a farm. So they made me like a, I don't know what, what do you call that, trustee or whatever. I had to put my initials on it...

SR: I see.

GD: On the application for a loan. And if I did, they got the loan, which was with very low interest. And so, if they brought in horses for the farmers, and they gave it to all the farmers around the country, I would go to that place, and I would get for my farmers my share.

SR: You would distribute.

GD: I would dis-, I would go with my farmers, and they would give me three horses. Then we'll, we would work it out between the rest of the farmers who gets the horses. Same thing with cows. The same thing with a tractor or whatever, whatever. I was their representative, and I worked with them. And I worked it out very good. They were very successful for four or five years. And I never thought to leave the country, because I had a good business.

SR: Yeah, I want to know, I'm interested in why you left.

GD: I sold to all these farmers the feed for the cows, horses, and chickens. And it wasn't easy to get the license, but I got it. And, but, the land was not our land. The land was Arab land. We applied, I applied for all these farmers, for all the land that we were paying rent every year, we applied for permanent, to buy the land. And, the City of Haifa applied for the land. The same land that we applied for, they applied. They want to build housing for the new people that are coming to the country. And we wanted to stay on the farms. So the government offered us land far away from the cities, like in the Negev.

SR: Yeah, that's where they wanted everybody to...

GD: All right. I could understand that.

SR: Yeah.

GD: But my people...

SR: But you didn't want to go there.

GD: My people who are, who already built those farms, who already were successful, they were starting to look somewhere else. I was the first one to find out. A commission of a few people came to the town, Tirat Hakarmel where I lived, and we had the land there. They came down, and they sat down with me, and we spoke. And they told me the first time that, "The city applied--Haifa--the City applied for the land, and you farmers applied for the land. Now, you haven't got a chance." So, my business, my connections, and everything, was starting to go downhill. They didn't allow us, they didn't give us no more leases for the land. They told us we'll have to get off the land. Now, then I figured I'm gonna, I had a lot of connections in the world. I said to my wife, she had a sister in New York. And I said to my wife, "Now, we have to start new again, because this business is gonna be out in another year or so, because the commission told me that we don't have a chance." So I knew we're not gonna get the land, that the City is gonna get it. And, so I said to my wife, "I have connections here. I can get any license I want. And I'm buying you the nicest, in the Carmel, in Haifa, I'm buying you a condominium, and let's stay here, because the, the connections with people that I know here, in this country, I can never know anywhere else. Because I know, and because I came early, and I got to know them through my work and all that." So she came to the Har HaCarmel, and we looked up a beautiful apartment. She liked it, but she still wanted to go to her sister in New York. And I said, and I said, "The government offered me to

open up like an A&P, a *Kol-Bo* store, ["everything in it"] a Ko-, supermarket, which was called *Kol-Bo*. And all the, the wholesalers where I delivered the farm products before, they were behind this thing, because a lot of little stores were selling, you know, for high prices. And they wanted to have more big stores to compete with the little stores, so they keep the prices down. So they wanted me to open up a store like that. They would give me right away the license and everything. And I wanted to do it. Then all of a sudden the people in town found out, the fish store found out, the milk store found out, the vegetable store found out, that I'm gonna open up in this neighborhood a store like that, I'm gonna kill all these little stores. And they were some of these my very good friends. All of a sudden they were enemies of mine. So, my wife says, "I still want to go to America." So I applied, I made the papers to go to America, because to make that store I would have made a lot of enemies.

SR: Sure.

GD: So I gave up to make the store. I had all the connections. I had all the resources to make it, but I still have a good trade. I have a good, if I come to America, I'll do something else. So I start to work on my papers. I put in my papers to the Consul of the United States in Tel Aviv, and I started to liquidate my businesses, sell my apartment. They allowed me to sell the apartment even though it wasn't mine, that I built it up.

SR: Right.

GD: I invested money, so they don't care how much I paid for it. But whatever I get for it is mine. And I sold my businesses, which was a milk station from the farmers what I took in. And the guy who bought the milk station, he said he's gonna make there a butcher store. He's gonna take out the tanks there because the farm's gonna be...

SR: No more.

GD: Dismantled.

SR: Right.

GD: No, it, yeah, it went slowly. And the government gave everybody who had a farm, gave him an apartment, a condominium for nothing, just to get him off...

SR: Get him off the farm.

GD: To get him off the farm. And they, some of them had houses already there, you know.

SR: Sure.

GD: Not expensive ones, but...

SR: But still.

GD: It helped. But the government made deals with them. But I left, and I went to the United States so...

SR: So you came to New York then.

GD: I came to New York.

SR: Yeah.

GD: So I came to New York, but before I went to New York, I applied for my visa, and one of the butchers who had a butcher store, he knew that I sold my milk station, and the guy who bought that was a big farmer--he had about forty cows--and he knew that the guy wants to make a butcher store there. And it was right next to his butcher store. So the guy sent in an anonymous letter to the Consul that I'm a Communist.

SR: Oh!

GD: And the United States Consul would not give me the visa. They would not tell me for what reason. And I didn't get it for a year. And I liquidated everything. I sold everything, but with a point, with a agreement that as long as I don't get the visa, I'm not getting out from the apartment or business. Well, the business I did give up because the, slowly the farmers had to liquidate, so there was no more business.

SR: So you...

GD: Right. So I gave up the business and I kept the apartment. One day, I went, well, I didn't know what is happening. Everybody who applied with me for visas got it. And they are already in the United States, and I'm not. I have no idea. So I went down to the Consul at least I think three or four months later. And I met a young fellow. He was a Greek. He was not Jewish. He was a Greek. But he worked in the Consulate. And we became a little bit friendly. And I said, "What happened? What happened to my papers that I got, that I'm not getting? I'm not refused, but I'm not just getting. You know, they're keeping me on hold. They're not telling me what's what, why, how long it's going to take, or what. I feel just like I'm swimming around on top of the ocean." So this guy says to me, "Now, confidentially, somebody sent me in a letter about you. And this will take a little while till they check it out. And if everything is all right, you'll get your visa." Finally I got my visa, and I came to the United States. And that's where I am today.

SR: What are you doing here?

GD: I came, and I started to work.

SR: When did you come? What year did you come?

GD: 1955.

SR: '55.

GD: Yes.

SR: You've been here a long time.

GD: Yeah, 1955. This year it will be thirty years.

SR: Thirty years.

GD: Right. So I started to work. Now I'm going back to my profession, to my...

SR: To your designing?

GD: Designing. First I worked in a few stores, like the Stern Brothers, a few weeks only. They didn't pay much, so I left.

SR: Right.

GD: Then I worked somewhere else for a manufacturer. They didn't pay much. I didn't speak the language. I didn't know the system. But slowly I got to know the system. I got to know the whole thing. And wherever I worked, they didn't want to let me go. So I worked on two jobs--seven years on one and seven years on another--as a designer. I got good pay, treated like a king.

SR: In New York City?

GD: In New York City. I worked for Fair Group, which makes ladies' coats and suits. And I worked for a Herman Kay [phonetic] company another seven years. And then I asked this, these gentlemen from Fair Group, the owners, the father and son, that I would like to go on myself in business, if they ever get across a good salesman that wants to be on business, they should keep me in their mind, because they were very happy with the way I worked for them. And they didn't want to let me go, but it's a long story, that day that I left the job, because I took a much bigger job, for much more money, and more responsibility. And they would have given me the money that I got from the other job, but I didn't want to push out the head man who was there before. And he was a Catholic. He was a good friend of mine. And I don't go for something like that, that for \$50 or \$100 I should lose a friend and push him out of the job. I don't do that, so I didn't want to do it. So I took a job with somebody else, and this man was still on the job. Otherwise he would have lost the job, because I would have taken over, instead of being an assistant, to be the head. And that's a true story. That happened here. So these people liked me so much--one of them is Milton Solomon, and Jerry Solomon, father and son--a half a year later that I asked them to do me a favor if they ever come across somebody, or a year later, they called me up and says, "Gabe, are you still interested to go in business?" I said, "Yes!" So they gave me a phone number from a gentleman, who was a buyer at Bloomingdale's. And he was interested to go in business. "And you get together and see what you can work out." So we got together. And this is a long story how it worked out. But we formed a corporation. We went into business. Until today's day, my business is called Drindle [phonetic] Inc. And we were very successful. And we have a very good business.

SR: You make wonderful, you make women's clothing.

GD: Women's coats, women's clothes, yes.

SR: Oh, that's wonderful. And it's in New York.

GD: It's in New York, 512-7th Avenue, New York. And I'm selling it right now to my partner, my share of the business, because my partner is not that nice of a guy. I didn't know that in the beginning, which in this business happens a lot. And we don't get along too good, because there's a lot of money involved, and he is a very, very hungry man. He's a very greedy guy.

SR: And you're very ethical.

GD: And, yes. Yes. And I didn't like that. I know he's stealing me blind. So, I decided instead of getting sick or having problems, that who knows what may happen.

We were first three partners in this business. This gentleman, Jack Litman, who was a buyer at Bloomingdale's, he took in another partner that he has somebody with him that he is going to be the strong, those two are going to be the stronger ones against me. If ever it comes to a good business, two against one. And my lawyer told me--it was written in my contract, in my agreement, two out of three--and my lawyer told me, "Two out of three could mean nothing, and two out of three could mean a lot of trouble for you. Because if those two people know each other from before, and when business is going to start to go, they're going to give you the business." And that's exactly what's happening.

SR: So you're selling out to them.

GD: So, no, no. It's a long story. So, we were partners, three of us, close to nine years. In the nine years they gave me a lot of trouble. And I saw that these two people, these two guys, are especially, they were trying to push me out, as little money as possible. But it wasn't easy because I'm not that stupid.

SR: And you're also *strong*!

GD: And I'm very strong. Because whatever I went through, this is all a last minute, it's all experience. So, this, one of his friends--one of the two partners is a friend from Jack Litman; they know each other twenty years--they were working together against me all the time. So finally I figured out I have to break out these two guys. We have to stay two out of two, not two out of three, because it doesn't work. It works good for them but not for me. So, this third partner was Jerry Small. He was putting me up to have fights with this Jerry, Jack Litman because they worked together, and he told me that he's going to stay with me and we'll buy out Jack Litman. So I agreed to buy out the third partner. When it came to the buyout, the real thing, this guy stabbed me in the back and he went back with his friends. This was all worked out between themselves. So, I didn't trust him no more and I was figuring what to do with these two guys. I gave him a high price because I didn't want to get out from the business. The business was good, and I built it. I did all the production, all the styles I made, everything, I got the factories, I got all the work done, but they did the selling. If you have a good product, anybody could sell it.

SR: You can sell it, sure.

GD: Yeah, so anyway, we were good. It was good, except that they weren't honest guys. And they were trying to screw me, but they didn't have the, they had their own guy. So finally, then about another year or two, they didn't want to pay the price what I wanted, so I said, "There is nothing to do." They didn't want to let me see the books. They didn't want to let me check things. And they were threatening me all kind of different ways. They were playing like big *mafiosos*. So finally I figured out the other guy, Jerry Small, a year or two later he says he doesn't want to stay with the other guy, that he wants to stay with me. Again the same story. I says, "You did that already to me once, and I don't trust you, and you're playing games with me. You have the wrong guy," I says.

So he says to me, "You know what? Let me have a meeting by my son's house and he'll be a witness, and I'm telling you this time I'm really wanting," because the guy's stealing away from him, too. So he got mad. So he says, "This time I want to do it with you, and I don't want to stay with the other guy. The other guy is a crook."

I says, "O.K. We'll have a meeting at your son's house, because I don't trust you no more." We had a meeting at his son's house, and we agreed that we're going to buy the other guy out. The next day, and his, the other guy's wife worked there, and his wife worked there. So we both agreed, two out of three, that we're going to fire his wife. And this way we don't stop to get, buy him out. This guy stabbed me in the back again. It came lunch time. I says, "I'm going to go fire his wife."

She said, "No, no, no, don't fire her yet. Let's wait a little."

"Oh, I says," again with the, with the game? O.K."

He comes at night, so he talks to me, he says, "Gabe, I can't do it. I can't do it. I have to stay with the other guy."

"Oh? All right. Stay with the other guy. Fine. You want to buy me out? Give me just what I am asking." So naturally they didn't want to pay. They wanted to give me the business so I go out, and they have the business for nothing, almost for nothing. But then, I figured this time, this guy stabbed me twice in the back. It's time to pay him back. So I went over next day to the other guy, to Jack Litman, who I was doing the fighting with, and I said, "Jack, we both can work together." He didn't think we could work together. "And we don't need the third guy, Jerry Small. We can buy him out. We'll work together. I'll take care," I says, "on the production. You take care of the selling."

"Fine." In two months the guy was out. We bought him out. He gave his best friend the business. He couldn't take it. He couldn't take it not even two months. He wanted, he begged, he wanted to get out, but I didn't. So he went on. And this guy is a crook. And a crook cannot stay too long honest. So he stayed two, two-and-a-half years honest with me. And nicely, we worked beautifully. Then he went into his old business, grabbing, stealing, and this. And that's why I'm selling it out now. Because I don't want to have fights, and it doesn't pay. What I went through, all my life, it doesn't pay to go through with that. No. If I was--not Jewish, with a guy like this. I would be the biggest antisemite in the whole world. Because that's the way this person is. I didn't check him under his fingers, I didn't check him for \$5,000, for \$10,000. It's a \$6,000,000 business. But he wasn't, he, that wasn't enough. Five, ten thousand dollars more for him wasn't enough. He needs hundreds of thousands of dollars. And he lives high.

SR: [unclear]

GD: Oh yeah. He lives high. He gambles. He gambles so. He gambles for more money. He gambles. And if he has to pay his debts, he sells my goods, and he pays his debts.

SR: You have what, one child?

GD: Two.

SR: Oh, you have two.

GD: I have a daughter and a son.

SR: And where was the daughter born?

GD: The daughter was born in Israel.

SR: In Israel. All right. The son was born in Europe.

GD: In Czechoslovakia. And the daughter was born in Israel.

SR: In Israel. And are they both here, in this country?

GD: Yes, they're both here. With my son I have a lot of problems. With my son I have a lot of problems. He was a genius. He graduated Yeshivah Flatbush with scholarships, with highest marks. He went to Brooklyn College. And this was in the '68, '69, the Vietnam War, and he experimented with some LSD, and he ruined his mind. Yeah. And my daughter, thank God, is all right. She has a family. She's married. She has a beautiful...

SR: Oh, so you're a grandfather.

GD: Yeah. Yeah, so I have two beautiful grandchildren. And my daughter is, thank God, everything's all right. And I have a beautiful son-in-law. And at least one side is all right. The other side...

SR: It's a shame.

GD: Yeah. He ruined himself. And I'm trying to help him in any way I can. And he, he doesn't, he doesn't want no help.

SR: Then you can't help him.

GD: He doesn't want to help himself, and he doesn't want to accept help. And this goes on already for the last ten, twelve years. I can't do nothing about it.

SR: No, you can't.

GD: I went to hospitals, I went to doctors, I went to psychiatrists. I went all over the place you can imagine. You'd better turn this off.

SR: Yeah, O.K.