

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

MARIAN FILAR

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer:	Edith Millman
Dates:	September 5, 1994
	November 16, 1994
	June 16, 1995

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Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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MF - Marian Filar [interviewee]

EM - Edith Millman [interviewer]

Dates: September 5, 1994

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Tape one, side one:

EM: This is Edith Millman interviewing Professor Marian Filar. Today is September 5, 1994. We are interviewing in Philadelphia. Professor Filar, would you tell me where you were born and when, and a little bit about your family?

MF: Well, I was born in Warsaw, Poland, before the Second World War. My father was a businessman. He actually wanted to be a lawyer, and he made the exam on the university, but he wasn't accepted, but he did get an A, but he wasn't accepted.

EM: Could you tell me how large your family was?

MF: You mean my general, just my immediate family?

EM: Yeah, your immediate family. How many siblings?

MF: We were seven children. I was the youngest. I had four brothers and two sisters. Most of them played an instrument. My oldest brother played a violin, the next to him played the piano. My sister Helen was my first piano teacher. My sister Lucy also played the piano. My brother Yaacov played a violin. So there was a lot of music there.

EM: I just want to interject that Professor Filar is a known pianist. Mr....

MF: Concert pianist.

EM: Concert pianist. Professor Filar, could you tell me what your life was like in Warsaw before the war?

MF: Well, it was fine. I went to school, to the *Gymnasium* and graduated *Gymnasium*. I also went to The Warsaw Conservatory. I played my first concert at The Warsaw Conservatory when I was six years old. I played with the Philharmonic. I was a soloist when I was twelve, two concerts. The conductors were, first was Professor Walerian [unclear] and then Kazimierz Wielkomierski, two very famous names. Then, oh, well I played later in '59. I played in Warsaw, and I played [unclear].

EM: Well, excuse me. We will come to that later. Could you tell me if it was a religious family? Did you...

MF: Oh yes. My father was a religious Jew. I had my *bar mitzvah* when I was 13 and I spoke some Hebrew. And my grandfather was a rabbi.

EM: All right, now, did your mother come from an Orthodox family also?

MF: Yes, yes, her father, her father was a rabbi.

EM: Her father was a rabbi. Now...

MF: I have a picture of him.

EM: Well, later.

MF: Do you want to see it? I'll show you. Hold on.

EM: O.K. [tape off then on]
MF: Am I Jewish?
EM: Do you...[chuckles] yeah, do you remember if your family experienced antisemitism just before the war?
MF: No.
EM: No, they did not.
MF: No, we didn't feel any.
EM: O.K. Now you mentioned your father was in business. What kind of business did he have?
MF: Well, he had a wholesale business and *Manufaktura*, well, I don't know, a man's, not ready made clothes, just materials.
EM: Materials?
MF: Yeah. Yeah, it was a big place.
EM: O.K. Do you remember the name of the street where you lived?
MF: Yes. I know the name. Sienna 72.
EM: And where was his business?
MF: Gesia Osiem. Gesia 8.
EM: Oh, Gesia, on Gesia Street. Now...
MF: It does not exist anymore. It's called Anielewicza today. It's a different street. The whole town is different.
EM: Did you or your family belong to any Zionist organizations?
MF: Oh yeah, my father was a Zionist.
EM: Did you belong to any Zionist...
MF: No.
EM: Organizations?
MF: I had no time for it. I had a *Gymnasium* and I had a conservatory and that was it.
EM: Did any men in your family serve in the army, in the First World War?
MF: No, nobody was in the army. I don't know why, because my...the other grandfather, my father's father—this my mother's father—my father's father when he died he said, "None of my grandchildren will serve in the army." And nobody did, my cousins, nobody. I don't know, it was sort of, that was not *liczbowy* [inducted] if you know what that means.
EM: Yeah.
MF: Or, just they weren't taken.
EM: Right.
MF: And they were all category A.
EM: Did all your brothers and sisters finish high school? You mentioned that you finished high school.

MF: Yeah, yeah, well, my sisters finished *Gymnasium Landauowa* on Czarna Street. And my one brother finished *chinuch*, one brother, Finkel. They all went to school. They all had at least *Gymnasium*.

EM: So they had at least *Gymnasium*. Now, what happened to your family following the German invasion? Were you in Warsaw when, during the invasion?

MF: No. I, well, first I ran away. We ran away and we went to the Bug River, came to Bialystok.

EM: Well, to the Bug River. I have to repeat it. Bug River.

MF: Yeah, the Bug River was the border between the German occupation and the Russian occupation. But when we arrived there, the Russians weren't there yet. We didn't invite them. All of a sudden, they crossed the border on the 17th of September. The war started on the 1st. We left Warsaw by the 6th, the 7th.

EM: Did the whole family leave Warsaw?

MF: Well?

EM: Who left Warsaw?

MF: In 1935 my mother sent one brother, Yaacov, was sent out to Israel, Palestine at that time, because she saw Hitler coming here. So she said, "One of my children has to go now because hell will all of a sudden turn loose here and maybe we'll have a place where to go." So he left in '35. And he, well, he left without a certificate. It was a whole story. He went as a tourist to Syria. From there with a couple of colleagues, they went through a little forest. The English were shooting after them. He fell, and it was at night, so he broke a leg in a little forest. He got into a hole at night. He didn't see it. They put him in a hospital, in a jail hospital. And then the Zionist organization gave him a certificate and that's how he finally made it to Palestine.

EM: To Palestine. Now...

MF: Now he was a great hero in the Second World War.

EM: O.K. We're going to come to that a little later. Tell me, who left Warsaw when the Germans were fighting.

MF: Well, [unclear], who left was my brother Michael and my sister Lucy with her husband, and I. Yeah.

EM: So, were both your sisters, who was married of your siblings at that time?

MF: Oh, who was? Gerald was married, and Isaac was married.

EM: Did they have children?

MF: Yes, Isaac had a little boy. They were murdered.

EM: So you left Warsaw on September 17th?

MF: No, about the...

EM: No?

MF: 6th or 7th.

EM: Oh, 6th or the 7th. O.K., and you went to...

MF: To Bialystok. From there...

EM: To Bialystok. How long did you stay in Bialystok?

MF: Well, just a couple of weeks or so, because then I played a concert there. A colleague came from Lemberg. he said that our Professor Drzewiecki is in Lemberg. So I went to Lemberg, and I became his assistant, and I graduated *summa cum laude*.

EM: You graduated *summa cum laude*...

MF: Yeah.

EM: In Lemberg Conservatory.

MF: Right.

EM: And you stayed in Lemberg how long?

MF: Well, from 1939 till December, 1941, when I went back to Warsaw. I had a chance to run away further deep into Russia, but I didn't want to.

EM: Who was in Warsaw at that time that you went back to?

MF: Well, my father, my mother, my oldest brother and his wife were at home, and my sister.

EM: O.K.

MF: My sister and Isaac was there too. Isaac was with his wife and little boy. So my oldest brother Joe, Isaac with his wife and little boy, and my parents, and my sister Helen. Yaacov was already in Tel Aviv and...

EM: O.K., now, could you tell me if you went directly, in 1941, there was a ghetto already. Did you...

MF: Where?

EM: In Warsaw. But I thought also...

MF: In Warsaw, yeah, not in Lemberg yet.

EM: Yeah, but, but you went back in 1941.

MF: Right.

EM: Did you go...

MF: My parents sent a guide for me, who looked more Jewish than I do. And nobody bugged him, but somebody bugged me, but I made it.

EM: You came back by train?

MF: Yeah. I was all night train and I was, so I'll tell you this. I was sitting on a train. And there was a Polish railroad man who was off duty, and this slob, the railroad man which they used to have, and he looked at me. The way he looked at me, it didn't look good to me. So I went out in the hallway, smoked a cigarette. A minute later he was standing right next to me and his nose next to my nose. "It looks like I got you, you Jew." But I speak Polish better than he did. He didn't know that. So I opened my mouth and I started to talk fast. And in fifteen minute his wrinkles just smoothin' out, and a half he told me how he cheats on his wife. Yeah, but he told me that he smells a Jew a mile away. And I said, "You smell them a mile away? I smell them even *two* miles away!" I was a worse anti-Semite than he was. When we arrived in Warsaw about 6:30 in the morning, we said good-bye to each other and he said to me—well, I cannot speak Polish so I'll say it in

English—he said, “You know, if I wouldn’t have been talking to you all night, I would have been sure you’re a Jew.” I said, “Slow down, Mister, you’re insulting your friend so I might not like it.” And we shook hands and when he left I said, “I hope he breaks a leg.”

EM: You didn’t say it too loud?

MF: Nope.

EM: No? All right. Now, were your parents in the ghetto at that time?

MF: Yeah.

EM: Which one, the big ghetto or the little ghetto?

MF: Well, the little ghetto, on Sienna 72.

EM: They stayed on Sienna. You lived on Sienna and they stayed on Sienna.

MF: Yeah, right, Sienna, right.

EM: Will you tell me a little bit of what you did in the Warsaw Ghetto?

MF: First let me tell you, when I got home, when I got through that hole in the wall, well there was a Polish policeman there and I told him, I gave him twenty *zlotys* and I said, “I’m going to buy furs from the Jews because the German Army just gave out an order the Jews must give their fur coats away because the Germans were freezing in Russia.” So I said, “I’m gonna,” I pretended I’m a Polack and I said, “Here it is, twenty *zlotys*. When I come back with a fur I’ll give you more.” When I got through the hole and a Jewish policeman says to me, “*Schmaltz*.” He wanted money. I said, “I’m a Jew. Get lost.” And I bought a *Magen David*, put on my arm, went home. And it was seven [tape off then on]

EM: All right, you found your family on Sienna.

MF: Yeah. Well, I knocked on the door and my father said, “Who is it?” I said, “Me. Open the door.” So he couldn’t open the door because they had an iron bar on it, and it froze. That’s how cold it was. So I hear how he says to my mother, “Where’s the hammer?” Mother said, “In the bathroom.” So he went and got a hammer and knocked it off. And I’m telling you, [unclear] it was a reunion. It was quite a reunion. And it was about twelve noon and my sister Helen is still in bed. I said, “Why don’t you get up? Are you, do you have a cold or something?” She said, “No, I’ll get up a little later.” And my parents looked away. I see there is some trouble. I didn’t know what it was. I found out. She was paralyzed from the waist down. What happened was, she didn’t look Jewish. She was a blonde, blue-eyed girl, very pretty. And there was a time—it was, must have been in ‘42, whatever, I was, no, it was before, it must have been in 1940 or so, when I was in Lemberg, that the Gestapo was looking for Polish officers. So they found out about it, and they were hiding in the ghetto with their wives. So the Gestapo got wind of it and they got into the ghetto and stopped everybody that didn’t look Jewish. So they stopped my sister. They said, “You Polack, where’s your husband? Is he an officer? What are you doing here?” She says, “No, I’m Jewish.” They slapped her, took her to Gestapo headquarters on Aleja Schucha in Warsaw, beat the hell out of her, scared her like the devil... threatened her with

death, whatever. And she, from that she got paralyzed. And the way she was walking through the room, she was holding onto chairs. That's how she went to her death.

EM: And that was in what year? What year did you come back to Warsaw, in 1941?

MF: '41, December.

EM: In December.

MF: Right.

EM: So that's why it was cold when your father couldn't open the door.

MF: Right.

EM: Right? O.K., how did your father make a living?

MF: Well, who made a living? Whatever money he had left. Well, he sold his business as fast as he could. I remember, I walked into the bathroom and there were fish swimming around in the bathtub. Whatever somebody could get, you know, just to keep himself, whatever. Well, he had some money hidden, I guess, because he was selling out. The war was coming closer. He was selling as fast as he could. It wasn't so hard, it wasn't so easy, you know? Not, it was because they, the first business the Nazis cleaned out was my father's business, by the way. Yeah. And so he was hiding the money which he was selling, he was hiding in a piece of cloth. And one day...the Germans were already there, and the doors were closed. And one of the employees had the keys with him and the Nazis caught him and said, "Where is it?" So they had him open up. They went in there, they chased everybody out and they took the keys. And the next day they came with trucks. And they were catching Jews to take the stuff out. Only one person knew where the money was. My father knew. So he put a raincoat on top of him, and got himself in between the people who were carrying his materials out, took this piece under his raincoat and ran. He was 65 years old. And the Germans were shooting after him. He was running, zigzagging. He was a pretty sporty man. They didn't catch him. He ran away. Otherwise they would have nothing to eat the next day.

EM: That was in 1939, right after they came in or was it...

MF: No, it was 1939.

EM: In '39, that's what I mean. 1939.

MF: Well you said '49.

EM: No, no, well, 1939.

MF: Right.

EM: O.K., now, how long did you stay in the ghetto? What happened next?

MF: Well, I was in the ghetto till the uprising.

EM: Now, on the...

MF: No, first they closed up the small ghetto and we moved, we got, I got a job on, it's called *Placówka*, out of Warsaw West, working, going outside and working there for the German railroad. And we had to get out of the ghetto. They liquidated it, the small ghetto, and so everybody moved to the big ghetto. And then that time, the German railroad

requisitioned, I mean they took over a house, an empty house, on Mila 7. Mila is a famous street. Mila 18 was famous.

EM: I know.

MF: Because the big guys, the tough guys were there. I was in Mila 7, almost across the street from them. And that's where we were. All the people who worked for the railroad lived in that house. So my brother was with me. He also worked there, Joe my oldest brother, and I. And when we went there for the first, started to work there, they beat the hell out of us. They were...

EM: Where was the *Placówka*? Where did you [unclear]?

MF: Warsaw West.

EM: Oh, Warsaw West.

MF: *Warszawa Zachodnia*.

EM: [unclear].

MF: We had to carry rails, and do all kinds of physical work. And they, I guess they wanted money from us. We didn't have anything anyway. And I remember there were open heads, they were beating to kill, always just beating somebody. And all of a sudden, here comes my first help. Excuse me. A German, a Polish railroad man comes over, goes up to a German and he says, "I need one man for work." And he points at me. He says, "He'll be a good one. Can I take him?" He says, "Take him." We walk away. He said, "Don't worry about a thing. You're a colleague of my son," who was a singer, a colleague at the conservatory. His father was working for the railroad, and he had a little house in the middle of the *tot* [track] I mean in English, in other words, he was switching rails when a train went one way or the other.

EM: Right.

MF: He had a little house there. So we went over to that house and there was his son! And I spent the rest of the day. We had a drink. He sang and I played. He saved me because he told me his son went by, he saw the Nazis are killing us. And he recognized me. So, he sent his father out to save me. So, I went over there and then he took me back when the time, when, about six, seven o'clock to go back. He said, "This Jew works very good. I'll take him next day too." He says, "O.K. Come back." Finally we found out what he wanted, and we gave him whatever we had—peanuts—and they stopped beating us. But I was saved because the, I think one was killed.

EM: Were these S.S. men that were beating you?

MF: Oh yeah, sure.

EM: Or were they just *Wehrmacht*?

MF: Yes, S.S. men.

EM: They were S.S. men.

MF: Mmm hmm.

EM: How many people would go out on your *Placówka*?

MF: How many we were?

EM: People.

MF: A group of about 100, 120 people.

EM: And you were going out every day to the same place to work?

MF: Yes, that's right. We went out through the gate. I remember, and so and we were taking things with us. You know, like you could wear on your five, six shirts. Or you could wear a sheet around you, or two sheets. And they were pulling it out, while we walk on the street. We bribed the railroad men who were escorting us, and the Polish fellows were running along on the sidewalk. They said, "What do you have? We'll do business with you." So we gave them the stuff in the morning. It looked funny. Well, you're pulling out something out of your, you know, giving them all the, taking shirts off on the street while you walk. They said, "What do you want for you go back?" I said, "Well, I want butter, I want this, I want bread." And I remember, and I was wearing a raincoat on top of my winter coat, because I got a pound of butter. O.K., so what it was, we made a hole in a raincoat pocket so the butter fell all the way down to the bottom. There was a lining so it won't fall out. Because the S.S. usually, when they checked us they put their arms around you here. They never went that low. But this time I was out of luck. This German went down, and he found it. And he said, "*Butter willst du fressen?*" [You want to eat butter?] And he hit me in the face so I had five fingers on my cheek for about a week. "Put that in the guard house and get the hell out!" So that was already behind the guards. There were five, six of them. So I put in the guard house. I put this packet down and took a bigger one and got home, it was two pounds of butter!

EM: Where did you get the bigger one? It was there?

MF: Right!

EM: [unclear].

MF: Well, everybody had one and when they're caught they had to put it in this little guard house.

EM: Oh, and you...

MF: And that was already, they were behind us already. So I put this down. I said, "He told me to put it down." I saw a bigger package. He didn't see it. I put it under, and walked out. When I got home [unclear] my mother laughed [unclear]...

EM: [laughing] O.K., how long did you work on the *Placówka*?

MF: How? Till the uprising. And the uprising brought out, what was it, the 18th of...

EM: The first one, in January.

MF: No, the third...

EM: On the tenth of...

MF: No, the 18th of January...

EM: That was the...

MF: That was not the uprising yet.

EM: Well, it was the first resistance.

MF: The uprising was in April, Passover.

EM: Could you tell me about resistance in the ghetto before the uprising? Was there any?

MF: Yeah, let me tell you what happened. First of all, we never believed that that nice nation like, of Germans, who created so much in literature and music and so on could be such horrible murderers, the worst in the history of mankind. So, we one day started, when they put out the first announcements that the Jewish population of Warsaw is gonna be resettled further east where they'll get work, and they'll have place where to live and all that. And who comes *freiwillig*, on his own free will, to the train will get a what is it, a, two pounds of...

EM: A...

MF: Two pounds of bread or a pound of bread, two pounds of marmalade, or the other way around. So a lot of people, beggars who were dying on the street, literally dying from hunger. I once stepped on a dead body at night. I was going from my brother's, who was on Sienna 30, to Sienna 72. There were no lights, nothing. It was dark already. It must have been ten in the evening. Then I walked, and all of a sudden I feel I'm step-, I stepped on something soft. And I looked, I'm standing on a belly of a dead man. It was just horrible. So they were going first. They didn't care what will happen next. But how did we found out that they're killing? The first time we found out, I found out, I had a girlfriend. Her name was Krysia Totenberg. Her cousin was a very famous violinist. She was a student of violin at the conservatory. When I went to, she lived not far from us, and I went to see her about something, and there was a cousin who came from Lublin. He was a tall, blonde, blue-eyed fellow, looked like a 100% Pole. He never looked like, not a trace of Jew in him. And he was sitting there, trembling, telling a...horrible story that they're killing people, that all the mass murder was started in Lublin, around there. So he said that they're killing people, they're gassing them. I said, "Are you crazy or something? What is this?" He said he just ran away, he came here to warn. So the word started to spread around. But the way we found out...

EM: Do you remember when that was?

MF: It must have been maybe March, February or March '43, somewhere around there.

EM: No, no, or '42.

MF: In '42 I lost my father. My father went to the Jewish *Gemeinde*, the Jewish community house, for something, and on the way the Nazis came in with trucks from both sides, cut off a block. The Jewish policemen stopped my father. A Jewish policeman. They put him on a truck; we never saw him again. And I was at the *Placówka*. I came home. My mother said, "Father is gone." Just like that.

EM: That was in 1942...?

MF: '42, in the summer, when it started. Anyway...it must have been, it could have been '42 also, or yeah. So we started to, you know see, smell some horrible things.

Because now, the Germans were fooling us very beautiful. One day, we had a group, as I mentioned, about 100, 120 people. Two or three guys, two guys didn't go to work, because they had to buy, there was a black market there. They had to buy some stuff to have, you know, to take it out the next day. So they stayed in the ghetto. And that day then, when we went out to work, a lot of people went out to work, the Germans came in and grabbed the Jews who were there and sent them away to Treblinka. They grabbed them, too. And the next day we are working on the railroad station and these two guys are walking toward us. We said, "Hey! Where'd you come from?" They said, "From hell. Let's go on the side and talk. You won't believe it." They went to Treblinka. They were unloading, they saw the whole, the devil, they saw the whole thing, the Commandant in the white uniform, the...

EM: A white uni-...

MF: He was in a white uniform, near the dig outs, where they, the mass graves, were full of dead bodies.

EM: The mass gr-...

MF: They were burning. There was a light there. It was just like Dante's *Inferno*. That it looked like. And they were unloading the people so they, and they had to undress right there, and they were shot. So they hid. They were smart two kids. And they hid in the clothes. And they put the, the Germans put the clothes back on the train. So they smuggled themselves in somehow on the train, and that train was going back with the stuff to Berlin. So they were passing through Warsaw, and it was only one guard in the front and on the back. So when they saw through the little window where they are, they saw us working, and they jumped out of the train. So they told us what happened, what's going on. "They're killing everybody!" This is no baloney what he's saying. So we said, "That's it. Now we better start organizing. We're not gonna go like sheep to the slaughter." So we started to build the bunker, and we started to buy guns, whoever could. When we bought our guns, and the next day, yeah, how did we get a gun into the ghetto? If you knew some Polish fellows, how many bullets you think you could get. So we were allowed to take in a two-pound bread and some, a pound of...two pounds of potatoes, something like that. So they baked the gun into the bread, with the bullets. That's how I did. So we smuggled it like this. This was allowed, so they didn't check that. The next day, General Stroop I think it was, that man who liquidated the ghetto, pulls on the gate and says, "Cut the bread. The Jews have guns in there." He knew it the very next day. We didn't know how. If they would have caught us the day before, we would have been all shot on the gate. And then we started to build the bunker on Stawki Street, right there next to the, you know, in the ghetto. The first was a big ghetto. Then, when they moved everybody out then, I mean it was a, that big. When they moved out there was a smaller ghetto, a little ghetto here, and the big one here. So they moved everybody here and that was *Niemandsland*. It means nobody lived there, all right?

EM: The wild ghetto.

MF: So, yeah, so we are all in the wild ghetto. So we built our bunker on Stawki Street, which was right to the street which was *Niemandsland*. And we built that tunnel into the house, under the street, under the house, into a kitchen somewhere, in case our bunker is burning or something, we will be able to escape. We'll be on the wild ghetto side and nobody, we had nothing to do with the uprising.

EM: So Stawki was still in the big ghetto? It wasn't in the wild ghetto? [unclear].

MF: It was the border of it. Half of it was in the ghetto and half of it wasn't.

EM: So it wasn't.

MF: So that's on [unclear]. So we were building it for, for...

EM: Oh, excuse me, the half that wasn't in the ghetto, you mean it wasn't in the ghetto or was the wild ghetto?

MF: No, that was in the ghetto.

EM: It was in the ghetto, was in the wild ghetto.

MF: In the ghetto, with a tunnel under the, into the wild ghetto.

EM: O.K.

MF: So, and the women were making *suchary*, you know, all kinds of, what do you call *suchary*?

EM: Biscuits?

MF: Biscuits, those things which could last long. And they were buying flour. You know, we were a group of about, you know, twenty people, maybe more. And some little cots, you know, so you, so maybe we could...

EM: Tell me, was your mother with you at that time?

MF: Yes. My mother was...

EM: Who was with you? Who of your family was with you...

MF: My mother and my sister, and my brother and his wife—Joe, and his wife.

EM: And you...

MF: Isaac was already gone.

EM: You were all, you...

MF: We were all then in one, we all lived in this same house, on Mila 7. We had one little apartment there.

EM: And the bunker? Who was building the bunker?

MF: We were, the guys from the *Placówka*.

EM: And that was prepared for the guys and their families from the *Placówka*?

MF: That's right.

EM: Or just, or...

MF: That's right. No, no...

EM: O.K.

MF: From, for everybody and their family. So we were...

EM: How...

MF: A small group of about twenty, twenty-five people.

EM: How large was the bunker?

MF: Now how large could it be? It had about two or three rooms. What could we put there? We had to keep sacks of flour and the *suchary* and things like this. Whatever we could, we built it. But how do you build a wall? How do you get out? How do you get in? So we, some genius, he had a great idea. There was a wall in the basement, down in the basement. So we took that *cegły*, the...now how do you call *cegły*? Bricks.

EM: Oh, oh, the bricks.

MF: We tore the bricks out. And the bricks which he took out from the wall you, we built here a little rail and a little platform. And we put the bricks on the platform, exactly. So when it goes, it went in, in other words it was inside. [moving away]

EM: Oh. Talk here.

MF: Oh yes. So where you put the bricks on there, the bricks were exactly fitting the wall, the hole in the wall. So we put it back in and when you looked from the outside, then it was closed. Didn't see anything.

EM: That was on the rails?

MF: Yeah.

EM: On the rails.

MF: Yeah, but not here. On the inside it was.

EM: Yeah, uh huh.

MF: We went through the wall and closed, right?

EM: Uh huh.

MF: So that's how we could go in and out.

EM: So you could just push the whole thing.

MF: Yeah. It was on two little rails. It was an ingenious guy to figure that out. Because we were afraid to tell everybody else. Because the idea was, if they're gonna discover one bunker and they'll say, "You wanna live? Tell where the others are."

EM: That's right.

MF: Right? So it was always secret. So when somebody said it was the leader of the uprising, it's not so much of a leader [unclear]. There were groups, several groups. Because one was afraid that the other will say, when they catch him. So I don't know how you can call it a leader. It was just self-defense more than an uprising. And of course we were all waiting for them when they came in, then people were lying on roofs and they started to shoot. And they found out that a bullet kills a Nazi just as well as it kills a Jew, that a Superman gets also killed. And he was dead. And they were running back pretty fast. And then they came with artillery, with tanks, with air force. So how long could you last? Well then we got out. The bunker started to burn, and we got out into the *Niemandsland* there. We were hiding for a while, and then they finally caught us, and we went together with the people who were inside to Majdanek.

EM: So who was caught of your family? Who was in your, in the bunker? It was your mother and your sister or not?

MF: No, my mother was already, my mother was gone already. What am I saying? My mother was gone on Jan-, my mother and my sister, on January 18th. It was a Monday afternoon. They came in, and we were all hiding in our apartment, together with my brother that they [unclear].

EM: That was in 1943?

MF: The 18th

EM: In, the 18th of...

MF: In 1943.

EM: And that was not on Stawki? That was, where was that?

MF: No, that was on Mila 7.

EM: On Mila 7. O.K.

MF: Mila 7, before Stawki. Because we built this later, after January. And there we were hid in that room, were about 30 people. And we put a lot of dirt around and we just put a night stand in front of that hole there. And the Germans were so smart that one was going on the street, the other one's going from window to window. So he said, "Two windows. You went in there." That's what we figured out later. And they discovered us. And they took us to *Umschlagplatz*.

EM: You mean from the outside they saw that there were no windows?

MF: Yeah, and then there were birds also on the sills of the window, because it was warm there, from the people. It was in January. And also there were some [unclear], I don't know, on the windows some. So they saw that and they destroyed it. And they took us to *Umschlagplatz*. So my sister was holding on to my mother. She was limping, holding on to me. And that's how we went to Radom. I was there now. I looked at, in that school. There was a school, they built a public school before the war. It was junior school, and that's where they kept us. And they built a railroad tracks to that school. Then when the railroad people saw that we didn't come to work, and so from the others, too, from, the Air Force had some people working there. So they ran and they said, "We must have these people work, back to work. Otherwise the railroad cannot function." We were in a basement. I remember there was a policeman there—I could see his legs walking along, a Polish policeman—so I called him in Polish. I said, "I want to talk to you." He says, "*Oh zyd siedzisz namydlo?*" [They're gonna make soap out of you.] He didn't want to talk to me. Because my teacher made me a false document as a Pole. And I was waiting for one for my brother.

EM: So where were you at that—I'm not quite clear—where were you at that time when you saw his legs walking back and forth? You were in, on Mila Street?

MF: On Mila 7. Yeah, I was the...

EM: O.K., on Mila 7.

MF: *Ostbahn*. That was, the house was called the *Ostbahn*. That's where we lived. Anyway, so I was...I could have gone out. I had a place.

[End of tape one, side one.]

Tape one, side two:

EM: Side two, tape one, interview with Professor Filar, Edith Millman interviewing. Professor Filar, I want to go back a little bit in time. And you had mentioned before that you played the concert in the ghetto. Could you tell me a little bit about it?

MF: Oh sure. And I think it should be brought out, because hardly anybody mentions that, or maybe people don't know it. I don't know. There was a movie house built in Warsaw just before the war; they finished it, and they were not allowed to open it up because it was one foot I think too close to a church. And it was on Leszno Street...the movie house was in Leszno Róg Solna. And the church was on Leszno Róg Karmelicka, I think it was. And it was just one foot or two feet too close and they never opened it up. In the ghetto nobody came to the church, I guess. So they opened it up and, not as a movie, but as a concert hall. And we, a lot of musicians, some were members of the Warsaw Philharmonic played, and we had a wonderful conductor. His name was Marian Neuteich who was a fine, very fine viol-, eh, cellist. And he was a cellist for the radio symphony. So they created a symphony orchestra.

EM: Where, did you know the conductor before the war? Or did you...

MF: No.

EM: You did not.

MF: No, I didn't know him as a conductor. I heard of him that he was a great cellist. But he was also a conductor. So he conducted the orchestra, and they engaged me, and I played with him the Tchaikovsky Concerto. But we announced that we're playing the Mendelsohn. Because the Germans...

EM: But did you tell me...

MF: Wouldn't let you play anybody but Jewish composers. And by the way, Mendelsohn was, I think his father already became a Christian or something, and so he was already born non-Jew, but he had a Jewish name. So, we announced that playing the Mendelsohn Concerto, and we played the Tchaikovsky. But we didn't have the music. So we smuggled the music from the Polish side, over the wall I think they told me, because the orchestra did that. They had colleagues in the orchestra in the Philharmonic, from the Warsaw Philharmonic. So they got the music and we played the Concerto. I remember my parents and my sister Helen were in the audience. So, there were also chamber music concerts on Orla Street. That was, I remember now, I forgot that name completely, it just came to me. And there was a great young—he was maybe two years younger than I—violinist by the name of David Zaider, blessed memory, a wonderful talent. And we played chamber music together, piano violin sonatas. He was murdered. And there was a great singer, a fantastic talented girl, Marysia Eizenstadt, whose father was a conductor of the Great Synagogue Choir. And I sang in that choir when I was a kid. And my father was a member of that synagogue. So, of course, and Marysia was also murdered, you know. And so all this disappeared. But I think it should be mentioned that in all hell, in this kind of a hell, the Jews still had a symphony orchestra. And it's first, hardly mentioned anywhere.

And I think that's why I want to emphasize it, emphasize it, and emphasize it, because it's unfair not to mention this kind of a great organization, in this kind of a hell.

EM: Could you tell me a little more about who organized it?

MF: This I don't know, because I came to Warsaw in '41. I was away. So when I came back, they were already in existence. So I had no idea who did it.

EM: How often did the concerts take place?

MF: Well I don't remember exactly. There weren't many, because I came in '41, in December. And in '42 in August, August 17th, I think it was, I already lost my father. So it was just a few months, you know. So they had a few concerts...it was not, you know, there wasn't, the freedom wasn't there to move around. It wasn't that easy to [tape off then on]

EM: Could you tell me, how did people know about the concerts?

MF: You got me. I, well they advertised. They advertised.

EM: Tell me how, O.K., well how did they have...

MF: They had a poster in front of the building.

EM: They had a poster.

MF: And the poster lied. The poster said we're playing the Mendelsohn Concerto. And we played the Tchaikovsky, because we're not allowed to play any other but Jewish composers. Funny that I recorded that concerto in Munich, in 1970 or '71 I was there. First I...

EM: And we're going to talk about this a little later.

MF: Yeah.

EM: Let's stick to the war.

MF: But I mean that's the same concerto so...

EM: [unclear].

MF: Funny, I later, here you were not allowed to play it. Now I played it in Germany.

EM: All right. Was Mendelsohn played at all? Or was it because...I know that Beethoven and Mozart was played.

MF: Sure. But they announced somebody else. They announced Meyerbeer or whatever it was, you know. But it was, you went in there and you know what was being played, because the Germans didn't permit.

EM: O.K. Did the *Judenrat* pay for the musicians? Or don't you remember.

MF: I don't remember that. Money doesn't...

EM: You don't remember if you got paid for playing?

MF: No, no, I don't.

EM: I just, I wanted to know if that was under the auspices of the *Judenrat*.

MF: I guess they paid them something. They probably paid them something for it. Who had money then? You know, everybody was impoverished.

EM: All right. I know that there were many musicians even in the streets, street musicians...

MF: Right.

EM: In 1942. All right, so you lost your father in August of 1942?

MF: August 17th, 1942. He went to the Jewish *Gemeinde*, I mean to some, for something. I don't know what, and then he never came back. And we heard that the Nazis came with trucks on both sides of the block, cut the block off, and that was it. Whoever was on the street they grabbed them, put them on a truck and sent them away and killed them.

EM: Now I...

MF: Just like that, like you never had a father. And you couldn't react. You could...I don't know, blow up, that he can't, the impotence! You can not do anything!

EM: And your mother was taken later? You know...

MF: Yeah. My mother...

EM: You told me...

MF: And my sister Helen.

EM: You were at the *Umschlagplatz*.

MF: Right.

EM: You mentioned you were at the *Umschlagplatz*.

MF: That was January 18th, 1943.

EM: And you got out from the *Umschlag*-, away from the *Umschlagplatz*?

MF: Yeah, that's right. But I didn't want to get out. And it was quite a very tragic story for me, because we went there, we stayed overnight. And in the morning—I worked for the railroad station, so the Germans from the railroad station came in—and they said, “We need the workers. Otherwise the railroad won't work.” You know, and they raised hell. So they said, “Today we let out the men. Tomorrow we're letting out the women.” So I said—my oldest brother was there, too, and my mother and my sister, and my oldest brother's wife, the three women and two of us—so he said, “Come on! Let's go. They'll come.” I said, “No, I don't believe it. I don't want to go.” And I was crying, and holding onto my mother. And he grabbed me, and my mother pushed me and says, “Go! You'll be a great pianist. We'll be very proud of you. And we'll come tomorrow. Don't worry about it.” Somehow, my brother pulled me away. And I cried. I didn't want to, I really didn't want to go. And it's eating me all those years. And sometimes I don't even want to say it, because it's my private tragedy. And my mother said, “I bless you.” [pause; tape off then on] “Come on! They'll let them out tomorrow!” So we went to work. Came tomorrow, we went to work, we came back, and there was still a lock on my, on the apartment where I was with my mother and my sister. They never came back. [pause; weeping]

EM: So they went on a transport probably the same day.

MF: And we stayed overnight. I remember in the basement of that, see, I was there now. Just a couple of months ago I went there with my nephew. And I said, “That's

where I saw my mother for the last time, down there in that basement.” The school is still there. It was a public school. They just built it before the war. And the Germans built the railroad tracks...[sighs]

EM: Professor Filar is overcome by emotion, so we will interrupt the interview for a while. [tape off then on]

MF: Yeah, [unclear]. And you saw a picture how beautiful she was. I call her beautiful. [weeping] I never called her mother. I always called her beautiful. My sister would say, “Are you calling me?” I’d say, “Shut up, you know better.” [laughs] And my mother laughed.

EM: Well, your mother was a beautiful woman.

MF: Yeah, she was beautiful inside and outside. [weeping; tape off then on] ...to be such murderers! Who would believe it?

EM: Where did you, so you went back to work, to your *Placówka* from there.

MF: Yeah. And then what happened was, I got in touch with my teacher. And he said, “We have a place for you. You’re gonna be hidden.” Do you have it on? [pause] He, they sent a colonel, a Polish colonel, who was an uncle of a colleague of mine, Levitsky was his name. He came to the railroad station to Warsaw West. And I gave him a picture. And he got me a *Kennkarte*, [identity card] a false *Kennkarte*. And he said, he came in and he said, “It’ll be ready in a day.” I said, “I would like, I cannot go out till I have one, for my brother” that was my oldest brother. He’s alive. He lives near Washington now. He’s alive. He’s 93 years old. We were seven kids and, I was the one that was born, I don’t know how many years later. By the way. I was an accident. And so, and I was supposed to be hidden in a *hrabia potocki*, [count] I mean *dobra*, [estate] you know, in some estate near Lublin somewhere. And there was also hidden somebody else I heard after the war, Prokurator Sawicky, [public prosecutor] who hanged all the Nazis in Majdanek. Have you ever heard that name?

EM: Yeah.

MF: Sawicky. His name was Jerzyk Reisler. His father-in-law was a very famous lawyer in Lemberg by the name of Leib Landau, who defended, that was *Proces Steigera*. [law suit] It was...

EM: But I don’t remember that.

MF: That was a, you remember something like this?

EM: No.

MF: He was a very famous lawyer. So he changed his name, married a Polish Catholic woman, and he was there. Then I heard that they raided the place and they found him or he escaped, something. Well, anyway, so I didn’t go because I waited for the documents for my brother. Meantime the uprising broke out. Now, but we were already building, we had our bunker already. I think I showed you how we got in...

EM: Yes.

MF: And how we got out.

EM: Yeah.

MF: With that little thing on the rails.

EM: Yeah, you...

MF: Yeah, and then we were outside in the wild ghetto, and that's how they caught us. So we said, "We had nothing to do with the uprising." You know, we were, and they took us together with everybody else to Majdanek, to *Block* 16. Now that was a *Feld drei*, mean field number three, and the *Block* was 16. And I was there, in '92 I was there. And I went to see it. I had a student of mine with me and I played with the Philharmonic. After it was done we hired a car, and we went to Majdanek.

EM: Yeah. My, that was in 1992.

MF: Yeah.

EM: Could we go back to your arrival in Majdanek? What was your impression? What did you know about Majdanek?

MF: Oh, we got a special treat, because we were the uprisers from the Warsaw Ghetto. They put us in the *Block* 16. And there were about, I don't know, there were plenty of *Blocks* on each side. There was a *Block* here and a *Block* there. And they put a fence around that *Block*. So, everyone knew who the uprisers are there. And we got special treatment. That means they woke you up in the morning with a baseball bat. And if you're not out of bed after the whistle, a second later they were in the barrack and they were killing people. Just killing. So, we were there, I was there nine weeks. And I was already, I was just about ready for the garbage can.

EM: Did you work at that time?

MF: Yes. When you say work...

EM: What...

MF: We were beaten to death. They were just trying to kill us, that's all. Anyway, so what happened was, I became friendly with a Polish fellow, by the name of Antek. He was a foreman or something. I don't know. He was in the barracks there. Of course there were...

EM: Now was he also a prisoner? An inmate?

MF: Yeah.

EM: He was an inmate.

MF: Sure. He was an inmate. But he knew something was going on, so he saw me how I was, I couldn't get in that barrack. I had to pull myself by the door handle. I was down already, I don't know how many pounds. I was barely alive. And I was a young kid. So he said to me, "You're not gonna live much longer." He said, "I heard that they're coming from labor camps, so you better get out of here. You just report, and they'll take you to a labor camp and there you could survive. But here it's just the end." So, a couple of days later they came, Brown Shirts came, we didn't know from where. I think that they were from Czestochowa. Later on we found out. So I ran to the kitchen where my brother worked. He got himself a job, Julek got himself a job, my oldest brother, who is alive, got

himself a job in the kitchen. He was peeling potatoes. He was eating raw potatoes. And I found out that you can eat them and it won't harm you. I didn't know that. So I ran to him. I said, I knew, I told him what this fellow said. I said, "I'll let you know." So I ran and said, "Let's go." He says, "I'm not going." I says, "What do you mean?" "I don't want to go." I says, "Why not?" "It doesn't rain on me here. I'm eating raw potatoes. Nobody beats me. How long I'll live, I'll live. I'll die anyway, so what's, I don't want to go." So I didn't go either. The next day Antek sees me. He says, "What the hell? Why didn't you go?" So I told him what happened. He says, "He doesn't want to go? So he stays, and you go. Because you're gonna die here. Get out of here! I'll kill you if you don't go with the next one, because they're coming again." So I told him this. The next day, it might be a day or two later, they came. This one was, later on I found out it was from Skarzysko-Kamienna. It was a labor camp there. So I ran to him again, and before he said something I said, "If you're not going, I'm going by myself. Because I'm gonna die. And you're gonna die, too." So he...I finally yelled at him so he threw the apron and said, "Oh what the hell, I'm going." So we went into a group. We were about maybe four or five or, three, four hundred people. I didn't count them, I don't know, a big, big group of people. We stood in a row of five. And I had swollen legs, and the ankles were swollen from hunger. So they were Brown Shirts. So, first they said that you had to run about twenty, thirty meters. Because who fell was too weak. They don't want to take weak people to work. It was supposed to be a labor camp, work on ammunition or something. I didn't fall. I made it. I was, so I figure, I made it. Not so fast. So, they threw these, they didn't kill them, they just threw, they killed them all later. So they threw them out. Then they, these Brown Shirts went again to the front of the group, and I was like in the middle. There were five in a row and I was right in the middle of those five. Two on my left, two on my right. He goes up in the front and said, "*Hosenhoch!*" Pull up your pants. So whoever had swollen legs, "*Raus,*" threw them out. So I said, "That's the end of me." I had swollen ankles. How did I get out? And that was a God's miracle. You won't believe this. I don't believe it myself. He comes to my row just about ready, he had a row, the five in front of me, went forward. They had, nobody had swollen legs, so they made it. He just about opened his mouth and an S.S. man knocks on his shoulder. He wants to talk to him. So he turns around, and they started to talk. So I said to the fellow in front of me, "You don't have swollen legs. Change with me. You'll make it again, and they'll throw me out." So he says, "I don't want to. I'm afraid." So, guys heard it around, so they said, "Change! There's a life to be saved! If you don't change, we'll kill you!" So they scared the hell out of him and we changed in a second. And the moment we changed he, this...Brown Shirt changed around and said, "*Hosenhoch!*" He pulled these pants up again and he got out and I got out. That's how I got out. Wasn't that a miracle?

EM: [unclear]

MF: I'm trembling when I hear it. When I think about it that a few weeks later they machine gunned everybody there. So we got to Skarzysko-Kamienna. There's another chapter. We came in there and well, I was pretty weak. My brother was all right, because

he was in the kitchen. And we, there were three-, *Werker*, that means three branches of *Werk*, A *Werk*, B *Werk*... A, B, and C. I don't know what *Werk* means in English, factories.

EM: Factories.

MF: Factories A, factory B and C. C was a killer, because they made some yellow stuff, the *trotti*, and they would all turn yellow. Their clothes were yellow, their faces were yellow, and they died. Somehow we got into *Werk* A. And we stand there and wait, whatever it is. A group comes from work, and I see a colleague of mine from when I was at Conservatory, Irene, who lives now in New York.

EM: A what? A colleague?

MF: A colleague, a Jewish girl. She was a foreman. She spoke German. She got German, she had German in high school. I had French. She looked at me and said, "Boy, how do you look like? It's horrible!" So she said, "I know somebody who gives, who is giving out a soup. So I'll talk to him and you'll get an extra portion." So I got an extra portion and my brother, he got. Then we, so he said, "Report here. Otherwise you'll be on *Werk* C; they'll kill you." So she told me I have *Werk* A, I mean that factory A. So we were put in there and we made it. So we got to *Werk* A. Then came, and we got a job. I sat in a hall, in a *Halle*, it means in a big...

EM: A big hall.

MF: In a big hall. And I was sitting there and cutting, it's called *Stützringe*. I don't know how it is in English. They were, a double things like this, like if you, those two glasses, and you cut it in the middle, they became two parts, from one.

EM: What was it, metal? Was...

MF: It, yeah, metal. It looked like maybe a part for a machine gun or something. I don't know. But I was, remember when I had to go to the men's room, it must have been like from here almost to the road here, maybe a little closer.

EM: [unclear].

MF: It took me forever to make it. And I saw it, where the guys were walking fast. I said, "Did I used to walk that fast?" I said, "I was walking like them."

EM: Yes.

MF: And they said, "The younger Filar is gonna kick the bucket. It won't take too long." In the meantime another miracle happened. I once got a, an extra portion of marmalade. I don't know, remember how, but I got it. I knew that marmalade doesn't have much nourishment. I wanted to have bread for it. So I wanted to sell it. *Werk* A wasn't, where we worked it were not so, it was called *Automaten*, automatic. We were working on automat-, and the Polacks were also working there because that was a Polish munitions factory before the war. So they still worked there.

EM: This was in Skarzysko-Kamienna?

MF: Yeah. So the Poles went home, and we went to the barracks. So we had contact with the outside world through them. But I didn't think that anybody will do, you know, they were eating their soup. But it was a next barrack, they were *Narzedziownia*

used to be called, and the Polacks were a little richer there. And I heard that they brought their soup from home and they were selling their soup. So I sold my marmalade. I got a whole *zloty* for it. And there was a break, a lunch break. So I went over to *Narzedziownia* and I asked one of the fellows working by, so I said, "Which of the Poles here sells his soup?" So he shows me a, on a corner there's a man there. And he is not eating. He is selling it. So I went up to him and I asked him in Polish, "*Pan te zupe sprzedal?*" So he looks at me and says, "How come you speak so perfect Polish?" That was the first impression. So I said, "Well, how come you do? Did you go to school? So did I. What's the big deal?" "Eat that soup. I don't want your money. Come every day." So, he kind of got to like me. He used to even give me a little piece of black bread once in a while. So he asked me what I was doing, so I told him. But he, we worked one week a day shift, one week night shift. He worked only day shift. So I only saw him one week, and then the second week I didn't till we came back on day shift. So one day he tells me that he is going to Warsaw because he broke his glasses, and they cannot fit his, fill his prescription in Skarzysko. It's a small town. So he got a permit to ride a train to Warsaw. He said, "Give me the address of your teacher, and I'll go over there and tell him where you are. Maybe he could help." So I, you know, tore off a piece of brown paper from the machine and I said, in Polish I said, "*Uczciwy człowiek sam wszystko opowie,*" and I signed my name with a nickname. I had a nickname. They used to call me by a nickname.

EM: And what was your nickname?

MF: No, it's not important. Maybe I will tell you.

EM: [laughs] O.K.

MF: But that was a good sign, you know. And so I signed it. And he went, and then there was a night shift again for me. So I had to wait another week. Finally comes Monday at noontime and I...

EM: Wait, what was the name of the teacher that he went to see?

MF: Zir-, Professor Drzewiecki.

EM: Drzewiecki.

MF: He was the top musician in Poland. He was the President of the Conservatory, President of the Chopin Society, Presi- [tape off then on].

EM: Yes.

MF: Yeah, and he was also the President of the Jury of the International Competition. Now his student would be the President. And I am invited to be there next year as a guest of honor. Things change a little bit.

EM: That's right. We're going to talk about it later.

MF: Yeah, O.K. So, anyway, finally came the Monday so I ran over to him. And he came back, this *Meister*. I don't know his name. I don't think he ever told me his name. But I found out later he was a Police Commissioner of Skarzysko-Kamienna before the war. And I said, "Well? Did you see my teacher?" So he said, "Why are you in a hurry? Eat the soup!" I said, "Never mind the soup! Did you see him?" So he takes out a piece of

white bread. I said, "Hey, you couldn't afford that." Yeah, once in a while a piece of black bread, O.K., but. So he takes out a piece of salami. And I said, "Ay, that's not from you!" I says, "You saw my teacher?" He said, "Yes, I did." "So what happened?" "Well, I went up there..." Now Marszalkowska 17, it's still there. I saw it when I was there a couple of months ago. We were inside the house. It stays. "And I knocked on the door. He opened the door himself on the chain." He said, "I have regards for you from your student, Marian Filar." He said, "I never heard of him." He was afraid. He didn't know who the guy was. Maybe he is a Gestapo agent or something. So he shoved in the little brown paper through the crack in the door. So he looked, "Heh! Is he alive? Come on in!" So he opened the door, he says, "Well, we thought he is already dead." "No, no. He is in Skarzysko-Kamienna working there, you know, as a slave." So he gave him his suit. He gave him a couple of shirts. He gave him his shoes. And I wore, I was wearing those wooden, Dutch shoes, you know?

EM: Yes.

MF: They weigh a ton a shoe. And with the little swollen legs, it was a killer. You had to drag like this to walk. And he gave him, what else he gave him? I know, a lot of things. And he came back. So he said, "I'll bring you the shoes, but I can't bring two at the same time because I'm also searched. So I'll bring you one tomorrow and one the day after." And he gave him some money, too, I think. I said, "Don't bring me the suit. What, I'm gonna dress in a suit? They'll hang me. Sell it, and we'll get some food for it."

EM: Yeah.

MF: So he did that. Then I got a contact, yeah, and some of the Jewish fellows were warning me. They said, "You're dealing with that guy? He's a thief! He is stealing! They sent him to, they got some gold or something and he said he never found it, whatever." I said, "I don't have any problem whatsoever, nothing." Then he contacted some other people, and once I got, through this fellow, he sent 500 *zlotys*. That was a fortune! We count it in bread. And a beautiful letter from a mother of a student of mine, Marisha Sobel was her name. She lives in California now, and her mother is dead. They were Catholics, Polacks. And she sent me 500 *zlotys*. So, and a beautiful letter. So I went to the men's room. My brother was standing in front of the door of that men's room. And I sat down, you know, pretending that I'm sitting. And I read it and I cried and I put it down and pulled the chain. And then we could, so we started to eat better. And all of a sudden the guy that was selling food says, "That younger Filar is looking better. We thought he's gonna kick the bucket. Look! He looks better! He must have some contact from the outside." You know? And I got back on my feet, but it took a while. Anyway, then...

EM: How long were you in Skarzysko-Kamienna?

MF: Oh, that was maybe fourteen months. Wait a minute, well, I was nine weeks in Majdanek. They took us there in '43, in May, I think it was. So May, June, May, let's say June, July, it's in July or August. They took us from Skarzysko to Buchenwald, because the front was getting closer. That was '44 already.

EM: Oh. So you were how many months you said? Several months in Skarzysko-Kamienna?

MF: Oh, about fourteen months.

EM: Fourteen months, yeah.

MF: It was twelve, fourteen, something like that. And we arrived in Buchenwald. First we arrived at the station called Weimar, like the house, the city of Göthe.

EM: Yeah.

MF: And there was a sign. Now we were now about fifty in a car. We didn't have any luggage. We just had our uniform, you know [unclear].

EM: And were the Poles also moved or only the Jews? Did they take only the Jews to Buchenwald? Because the front was...

MF: I know, I was only in company of the Jews. So those who were in the uniform. We used to call that Hitler's tails.

EM: Yeah. What, with the striped uniforms?

MF: Yeah, that's right. So, when we arrived in Buchenwald, and I see a sign saying, "Elf kilometers now to Buchenwald, eleven kilometers now to Buchenwald." I said, "Fellas, let's have a feast. Where is something to eat? That's it. Tomorrow you're gonna be all dead." In the meantime the German, the S.S. comes out to the windows, through that little windows. They knock on the door and said, "Do you have any Polish *zlotys*? We'll buy them from you. We'll give you food. Where you're going..."

EM: Well, where were you, in some barracks?

MF: No, we were still on the train.

EM: Oh, in the train.

MF: At the station in Weimar.

EM: All right.

MF: And he said, "We're going back for, to bring other transports, so we'll take your *zlotys* which you have, if you have any with you, and we'll give you bread for it." They were dealing, doing business with us, the S.S.

EM: They were S.S. men.

MF: Yeah. So, what do you have to do? We gave it, whoever had some got some extra bread. And then we got to Buchenwald, and we saw Buchenwald says, "*Arbeit Macht Frei*." That's a very famous line, "Work Makes You Free." Free to go to hell. Free to get killed. And so we came in there, but they didn't take us into the regular camp. They took us in the so-called *Zeltlager*. That was a, we were in transit. So we were there about ten days. *Zeltlager* means a, a *Zelt* is a, well you know what a...[tape off then on] [unclear].

EM: [unclear], yeah, but...

MF: Yeah, that was that little, little place...

EM: The *Zeltlager* was tents.

MF: With tents, yeah, tents. Because we were already factory workers, ammunition. We were professionals. So we just came there to be *entlaust*, that means take

the lice out if we have any, and steal everything what we accumulated maybe. And by the way when I put my teacher's shoes on, they were ideal. We had the same size shoe. I didn't know it. And all of a sudden, getting out of those Dutch wooden shoes, which weighed a ton each, with my legs, you know, and getting into the regular shoes, and all of a sudden I felt like I'm walking on a cloud. I couldn't believe it. It was just like heaven. By God, I'll never forget it. So, and then we didn't see any S.S. in that *Zeltlager*. Who came in? Well, you know, there were people, members of government. Leon Blum was there. Daladier was there. There were some clergy there from all over Europe. And that *Zeltlager* was run by high political prisoners. You know, people of, from different governments. And they came to us and they said, "You are not gonna stay here. They gonna send you to another camp where you're gonna produce some ammunition, whatever, because you're already considered professional factory workers, munition workers. So if you have any collaborators among you, we'll set up here a democratic court, and they'll be convicted, and you'll go without them because they'll be drinking your blood all over again if you take them along wherever you go." So somebody got up and pointed out to a police chief and another guy—there were two guys—and I was at, I witnessed the court and I knew one, the *Magazinier*, who was the *Magazinier*. [store keeper, warehouseman]

EM: Was it a Jew? Was it...

MF: Jews, yeah.

EM: Jews? Well, because you mean a police chief. Who...

MF: He was a camp, in the camp where the police, Jewish police...

EM: Oh you mean, and was he a *Kapo*?

MF: So there was a tr...

EM: Was it a *Kapo*?

MF: Yeah, something like this. But then the *Magazinier* I remember the winter came and he's still in Skarzysko. And Irene introduced me to him. She knew him. So that started to get very cold. So I went in there, and he had, they had coats and all kinds of things. So I said, "Give me a coat for the winter." So he gave me a three-quarter coat. I said, "How about my brother?" He said, "I don't have anything for your brother. The brother! Every time I send somebody over they say 'Your brother'." I said, "Yeah, he is my brother." So he said, "I don't have any for your brother." I took off the coat, I says, "Keep this one too. The hell with you. I'm gonna walk out with this and he'll freeze to death?" He says, "Come back! Come back!" He gave me a coat for my brother. But he also had shoes and things and they were digging into those clothes because there were, all kinds of, people were hiding their gold and diamonds, whatever. So when we arrived in Buchenwald, I want to tell you this, and we're sitting there waiting to get into the shower, we didn't know if it's gonna be a shower or it's gonna be gas. So, people who were already in camp in the uniforms, in the striped uni-, we were also in striped uniforms but, so they were showing us, "Don't worry. You're gonna have water. We know. Because you're gonna work. You know, so you don't have to worry about it." So we went into this barrack.

We had to undress, completely naked, and there were barbers there. And then it was thousands of people there, lights, you know, and tables. And the S.S. was there. You have to put, so I had my teacher's shoes. I took everything off. I still had the shoes on. Yeah, so before I went to this fellow and I said, "Listen, you must have a lot of stuff on you, because you're the *Magaziner*." I said, "Give me something. I'll risk. I'll, if you have a gold, maybe a gold coin or something and I'll take it through. If I take it through and they kill me, they'll kill me anyway. So what's the difference? And you'll give me something for it, O.K.?" So he gave me a piece of bread with a [unclear] and said, "Inside there is a ten dollar gold, an American eagle, ten dollars." So I go back and we sit down and wait and my brother says to me, "You're crazy! They're gonna kill you! What are you doing?" I said, "What are you going? You think you're going to a spa? They'll kill me anyway. This way maybe if I get through we'll get something." We go in there, so they took our, we took our clothes off. And I still had the shoes on, and there was a big table between us, not this wide, but you know, like this. And the S.S. was behind, so I took everything off and he says, "*Hast schon alles abgegeben?*" [Have you turned in everything?] And I had the piece under my mouth, under my tongue. And I'm gonna get one now.

[End of tape one, side two.]

Tape two, side one:

EM: Continuing with the interview with Professor Filar. This is tape two, side one.

MF: So the Germans said to me, "*Hast du schon alles abgegeben?*" I still had my shoes on. Or no, oh yeah, so I...no, I already, yeah, I did have my shoes on. So he said, "*Hast du schon alles abgegeben?*" So I "nicked" my head. [He seems to mean "nod"] So he asked me again. So I bent down and took my shoe off and spit this ten dollar gold piece on my hand, and kept on the knees so I put the shoe on, "*hab schon alles,*" "I already gave everything." So he went away. I bent down again, put it back into my mouth, took the second shoe off and put it up and went there to the doorway. We went to the shower. And the S.S. man points his finger at my mouth. And I thought he is saying something, and I was scared stiff. But it was so much lights, the fluorescent lights, that he couldn't tell. And I realized in a second that he's pointing to my little mustache. I had a little mustache where the barber forgot to take off. So I stood at attention and I turned around and I went to the, to one of the barbers. There were many of them. There were thousands of people. It was a tremendous hall. And I pointed. I "nicked" him. I didn't know what language he spoke. And I pointed at my mustache. So he took it off. I went back to the same S.S. man, stood at attention real good. He said, "*Right!*" And I passed. I went in and I had the ten-dollar gold piece. The others, they, if they woulda asked me to open my mouth so I would have been shot on the spot. And they did it. They were doing it with every so many. They asked them to open their mouths. It's called a *Stichprobe*. [spot check] So I got in there and we passed into a shower. It wasn't any gas. And then we, when we came into a *Zeltlager*, that was a part of the camp which, where only, what's the word? [tape off then on] There were no barracks there. There were only tents. That was a temporary thing because we were already professional ammunition workers, so we just came there to be *entlaust*. [deloused] I mean, if you have any lice or something, which we, I don't think, I didn't. And then to change uniforms and take everything away from us which maybe we accumulated, and send us to a different labor camp. So the tent camp was run, they said all the camp was run by the inmates. There were people who were members of French government, of Belgian government.

EM: Yes, yes.

MF: Of others, there were, Léon Blum¹ was there. Prime Minister Daladier was there. Clergy were there. There were all kinds of great people in that camp. So they were running the camp. They were just, the S.S. just came in the morning for the roll call and that was it. We never saw them again.

EM: But this camp, this tent camp, it was connected to Buchenwald.

MF: It was Buchenwald.

¹Léon Blum, three-time premier of France, was arrested by Vichy authorities, as was Daladier, and imprisoned by Germany.

EM: But it was part of Buch-...

MF: It was Buchenwald. It was just tent camps.

EM: Part...

MF: And we were never in a barrack, just those. And thank God it didn't rain. We were there about ten days.

EM: How about all these famous people, Blum and so on, were they also in the tents?

MF: Well, I never met them. I don't know.

EM: You did... but, oh, you said they were running that camp.

MF: The, all...yeah, the political...

EM: Oh O.K.

MF: Prisoners were running it.

EM: O.K.

MF: There were two types. There were political prisoners had a triangle, a red triangle. The criminals had a green triangle. And they were trying always to run the camp through the green ones because they could be bribed. The political, high people, they couldn't, but the people with the red ones organized so that they were running the camp. So they said, "If you have any traitors here or collaborators with the S.S., tell us. We'll make here a democratic court. We'll keep them here. They won't go with you because they'll drink your blood all over again." So somebody got up and said this, the chief of the police in camp was one. His name was Krzepicki, I remember.

EM: Oh, that's not the Jewish man?

MF: A Jewish fellow. No, he was Jewish.

EM: Jewish?

MF: And the other was Tepperman. He was the guy...

EM: Tepperman?

MF: Tepperman.

EM: Tepperman.

MF: Tepper-, T-E. Tepperman. And he was the, he was running the *Magazin*...

EM: The storage.

MF: With clothes and all, yeah. Irene introduced me to him.

EM: Yeah, you mentioned.

MF: Then when the winter came, I wanted to have a coat. That was cold. You know what we had, those little things like pajamas.

EM: Yeah.

MF: So, because I knew Irene and she was a pretty decent girl, it had nothing to do with it, so he gave me a three-quarter coat, a heavy coat.

EM: Yeah.

MF: And I said, "How about my brother?"

EM: Yeah, I know. You mentioned...

MF: You have it already?
EM: Yeah, you mentioned that before.
MF: So I got it for him, too, and we were there about 14 months.
EM: Mmm hmm. That was in...
MF: And then all of a sudden they loaded us on trains. But I went back! I'm already in Buchenwald.
EM: Yeah, I know. You were already, O.K.
MF: I'm all messed up.
EM: Well...
MF: So they took us from Buchenwald, they took us to Schlieben.
EM: Schlieben?
MF: On a train, Schlieben.
EM: How...
MF: Near Leipzig, between Leipzig and Halle. That's a little east Germany.
EM: And that was Schlieben. S-C-H-L-I-E-...
MF: S-C-H-L-I-E-B-E-N, Schlieben. And there was a factory of bazookas. And there, when we arrived there, the Germans, yeah, well there were some Germans among us who were prisoners, in camp. They were Democrats, or Social Democrats. They were also in concentration. I remember one was a *Blockältester*. In other words he was the leader of the *Block* over there. But a *Block* could have had a few hundred people. And he would go to the kitchen and order how many people he has on a *Block* and he'll get so much food, so much bread, whatever rations and so on. So he came to us, said the S.S. came to him, because Germans talked to Germans. And he said, "We don't have to be afraid. They are businessmen. They are looking for dollars and gold. And they are going to give us food for it. They're not gonna kill anybody, not to be afraid."
EM: That was in Schlieben?
MF: In Schlieben. And that was in 1944. The Germans already knew they're losing the war. So I had my ten dollar gold piece. So I told the *Blockältester*—he was a decent fellow, I knew him, he was in his 70's then, he was in camp about ten years already—so I said, "I have a ten-dollar gold piece. What can I get?" He said, "Well, I'll try the best for you." So...
EM: Excuse me, do you by any chance remember his name?
MF: No, I never knew his name.
EM: No.
MF: He was just *Blockältester*, period. I know he was from East Germany. Later we, so I'll tell you this later. So I gave him this ten-dollar gold piece and he brought me, we got for three months over there an extra piece of bread, a little bit of marmalade and every other day a little tiny slice of salami, and twenty dollars paper back, change! Would you believe it? They were businessmen! I couldn't believe it! I saw twenty! And my brother kept it.

EM: They wanted the gold, so they wanted the gold...

MF: Get all the gold, yeah.

EM: So they gave you the money.

MF: Yeah, and we, for about three months we had some extra food. Then, the *Lagerkommandant*, a big tall S.S. man, he came out once. We, and he called, he was looking for dentists. "Not to worry. I need dentists because I want to set up a dental office here." And so, we saw that they mean business, whatever it was, so two or three people stood forward. They did it, they opened up a dental...

EM: Clinic?

MF: Room somewhere and they brought a chair and all this. And the Jewish dentists were getting into the Hitler mouths, fixing their teeth for free. Would you believe it? So I sneaked in once in a while and they looked at my teeth. Otherwise I would have had nothing today. That was one thing. Then the *Lagerkommandant* came out and said, "I need a musician." So I started to tremble. The men knew it, so they pointed at me. So I had to step forward. So he says, "I want the group to go to work with singing, and I'll give you the music. You teach them, you pick those who can sing." And I remember some of the songs. We had to go with singing in the morning to the work.

EM: Were they all German songs?

MF: Yeah, yeah. I remember, some of it I remember. Anyway, and there was one "*Voll Mädchen*" and there was one "*Von Schlieben, Auf Schlieben Fluten Fand ich den Tod*", [phonetic] something, something. What the hell, there're so many years.

EM: Yeah.

MF: It was forty some years. But when I think about it I can remember it. So that's all it was. Then I got a job as a *Holzhacker* [wood chopper] across from the kitchen. I had a ball then.

EM: But Schlieben you said was a factory where they made bazookas?

MF: Bazookas, yes, that's right.

EM: But you weren't working with that?

MF: Not yet.

EM: No.

MF: I got a job, I sometimes figured out how, I don't know, and I got a job on a hall across from the kitchen. And we were sawing wood, cutting juice up, I mean wood for the kitchen. And there were maids there. We didn't know who they were. They were pushing out those big canisters and said, "Wash it out." We were giving them wood. And then I heard some of them speak Polish. I said, "Hey! Where you from?" One was from Warsaw. Well, I know how to talk to a Warsaw girl. Before you knew it she became friends with me. So she said, "Bring me your *menaszka*, I mean that little container where you get your soup. Put it into an S.S. container, a big one, and give it to me. I'll bring it. I'll, you give it to me after you've washed it out, and I'll steal S.S. food, bring it in that thing, shove it out, tell you to wash it out. You take it in there and you take you some and you have

good food.” So I had a ball that way. But then they took us away from there and we got a job, oh no, wait a minute. They took us away because we created a sabotage. So we created a sabotage. It was the night shift. I was that time on the day shift. I was sleeping on my bunk bed. And about two o’clock in the morning the wall from our barrack just flew out, the whole wall. You know, there could have been about twenty, thirty beds there. The whole thing just flew. It was a tremendous explosion. There were hundreds of thousands of tons of ammunition. They created a sabotage and the Germans couldn’t produce a bazooka for about three months.

EM: Who took part in that sabotage? Do you...

MF: The night shift. I don’t know who.

EM: The night shift.

MF: Nobody talked. Nobody would say it, in case somebody gets caught and beaten to death to say.

EM: Yeah.

MF: Nobody knew it. It happened, period.

EM: Tell me something. So there were not only Jews working there. There were Poles and other people?

MF: No, no, we were Jews. In that camp we were Jews. Just Jews.

EM: Because you said you met this one Polish girl.

MF: And that was in Majdanek.

EM: Oh, that was in Majdanek.

MF: In Majdanek. There was a Pole in Majdanek. Thanks to him I got out. He gave me the idea to, you know, that I said...

EM: No, no, I mean, here the woman that gave you the S.S. food. That was in...

MF: That was in Schlieben.

EM: Yeah, but...

MF: Yeah.

EM: That was a Jewish girl or...

MF: No, they were Poles. They were in separate barracks.

EM: Oh, they were in separate barracks.

MF: In separate, we never saw them. But we just had contact during, in the kitchen. Like...

EM: Do you know if the sabotage was done by Jews or by Poles?

MF: There were no Poles there. It had to be by Jews.

EM: Because you said, oh.

MF: There were only Polish women there who worked in the kitchen. They went to a different part. We never saw them again.

EM: Oh.

MF: In the camp where we were were only Jews and a few Germans. Our *Lagerältester*, that means the leader of our *Lager*, was a German Democrat. He was a

German, who was in camp as a prisoner, like we were.

EM: Now, so that means that the sabotage was done by the Jews.

MF: Yeah, right.

EM: O.K. Because that's important that we have...

MF: Right. Anyway, so they sent in young S.S., 18-, 19-year-old boys, grew up under Hitler, and they were killers. Every time somebody came from work, you saw white bandaged heads. They were beating you like hell, you know, to rebuild everything fast. Then they took me away from that work and they put me to a *Kommando* of eight people, called *Zundhütchen* [percussion] *Abbau*. [demolition]

EM: To what?

MF: It's in German, *Zundhütchen Abbau*. I'll tell you what it is. A bullet, the *Hülse*, [shell or cartridge case] how is a *Hülse* in German? I don't know the names in English. The bullet has the explosive part...

EM: Right, the container.

MF: And that, the container.

EM: Right.

MF: The container has a red dot there, where the gun when it hits, so it hits that red thing and explodes there, right?

EM: Right.

MF: So that's called a *Zundhütchen*.

EM: *Zundhütchen*?

MF: *Zundhütchen*.

EM: O.K.

MF: So we were supposed to take the machinery from that *Zundhütchen* factory. They didn't want it there, for what reason we don't know. We had to push that to a forest, to a...railroad tracks and put them on the flatbeds there. So we were eight people with *Brechstangen*. [crowbars] I don't know the names in English, you know? With some iron bars...

EM: Bars, right.

MF: To push it like this on wheels. And that's how we got it. So I'm working there one day and comes, it was Christmas, '44. One of our foremen, Lupeg was his name, comes to me. And he says, "Where the hell are you? We were looking for, we thought you ran away! I'm looking for you half a day already!" I said, "What's the big deal?" "They brought a piano from a farmer and our boys..." They emptied one of the holes where the last operation of the bazookas was on table, because they put four bazookas in a container. And the German girls put incendiaries, make sure there's no sabotage, and they closed it. So that that was on tables. So they took the tables out and our men are building a little stage. And they brought a piano from a, *Bauer*, from a farmer. "And I told the chief of the camp that we have a concert pianist here." I said, "Are you crazy? They're gonna kill me! They don't want people with education! What'd you do?" I yelled at him. He said, "Don't

worry. I know the guy. He can only help you. Come on, he's waiting."

EM: And that was a German...

MF: Yeah, sure! He was...

EM: [unclear].

MF: The leader of the camp but he was in civilian clothes. So I come in, he had a *Hakenkreuz* [swastika] here on the lapel. So I come in and stand on attention...and he looks at me and says, "*Spielst du Klavier?*" [Do you play piano?]

EM: Yeah.

MF: I already spoke some German.

EM: Yeah.

MF: I picked it up because... "Do you play the piano?" So I said, "I used to play. But look at my hands, look at the calluses." "Yah, yah, sure." He said, "O.K., where did you study?" Oh, I don't know what Lopeg told him and I'm afraid to lie. So they're gonna kill me anyway, the hell with you. I said, "Yeah, I graduated at Conservatory *summa cum laude*. I started my career and the war broke out." "Do you play *The Moonlight Sonata of Beethoven*?" So I said, "Yeah, sure. I used to play it, you know." "Would you like to play it?" I said, "Of course." What we gonna do? It can only help, I figured. I went up to the stage, I looked at the piano and almost fainted. A beaten up jalopy from a, you know, just [unclear], I mean from a...

EM: Farmer? From...

MF: Yeah, from a farmer, with one pedal. You can't imagine what it was. But the slow mov-, and then I, the slow movement, the first movement is slow. So I played it and he saw that I knew it. So he stopped me after I finished the first movement and he says, "*Spielst Du die Zweite Rhapsodie* from Liszt?" [Will you play *The Second Rhapsody* from Liszt?] So I said, "Now I have a sadist in front of me." With what technique could anybody play *The Second*? But the beginning of it is slow. If you know the beginning of it. It goes, [hums the music]. And so on. It takes a short while, but while I was playing there was another German came up to this guy, and they walked away. So I didn't have to play the fast part. I was safe. I went back to my work. But there were rumors going around that those guys, those eight, we looked a little better than the others. Why? Because some of the machinery was not in the factory grounds yet. They were dispersed among different farmers in the *stodotach*. How do you, *stodota* in...

EM: Barrack?

MF: No, it's not a barrack. A, on a, you know, where they keep their hay and all that?

EM: Yeah, I know. I know.

MF: *Stodota*. O.K. [tape off then on] Piano, coming from a barn or something. It was a little piece of, a real piece of junk. Anyway, but we used to get, some of the machinery was still in barns. They didn't bring them yet into the camp so we had to go there and get them. So we made a 50-50 with the *Magazinier*. [warehouseman] We wore

two or three shirts, and the farmers were buying them from us, was giving us, they were giving us extra food. So we looked a little better because we had some extra food to eat. So the guys in the camp said, "Oh, these two, they're gonna put them to *trote*." They were big containers, because a bazooka has a head. And a head, you know, a head which penetrates the tank when it's being shot, [unclear]. So in the head is *tretil*. That's a chemical, a yellow chemical. And they were boiling it in tremendously big containers like two, three thousand liters or maybe more. I don't know. You had to go up on a ladder, walk around it and it was, and the fumes were coming out of it. Germans worked there with gas masks. They worked a day, had two days off or something, special food. Us they put there where we were. If you survived two, three weeks, you drop dead, they took other guys. So we were afraid they're gonna take us to that work because you know, we looked a little better. And so, and this was gonna finish. We'll take all the machinery out, and then what? So one lunch, after a lunch break one of our guys comes out in a whirr, he says, "Hey! I got a new job!" Because he was worried. He was smart, and he went to the fire department and says, "I became a fireman. After I'm finished here I'll be a fireman." So I said, "He got something. I'm gonna try, too, because that's the end." So one lunch break I'm walking through the grounds of the factory, tremendous grounds, and I see my, the chief, who I played the piano for. He's going this way and I'm going, you know...

EM: Yeah, in...

MF: In the, toward his direction. And I said, "Now or never." And I got up to him and I stood at attention. I, my luck was that I spoke German already. And I said, "*Herr Chef, erinnern Sie sich, ich habe Ihnen Klavier vorgespielt vor zwei Wochen?*" You know, "I played it for you, the piano, two weeks ago?" "*Ja, ja, was willst Du denn?*" "Yeah, what do you want?" I said, "Should I survive the war, I would like to play the piano. I have no other reason to live. My family is already murdered. Could you find me a job where I can save my hands?" And I looked him straight in the eye. So he thought for a moment and he says, "*Wer ist Dein Meister?*" "Who is your chief?" So I told him it was a guy from Leipzig, he was a chemist. "Tell him to come in my office." So I ran to the barrack and I told him. So he went over. He was there for a while. He came back and said, "Now you go to the office." Oh yeah, later I found out he asked him, you know, if I speak German or how I work. He couldn't say anything bad. He tried me out once, because we organized the cigarettes. So the eight of us would take, everybody would take a puff and it'll go around. So one day I had to go with him to pick...

EM: Who was that that was the Commander that time?

MF: That Leip-, that, no, that guy...

EM: [unclear]

MF: Who, my direct boss, the chemist from Leipzig?

EM: Yeah.

MF: So he saw us smoking this one cigarette. So we're going, it was to do some work, whatever it was. He takes out a pack of cigarettes, lights one up, took one puff and

throw it, threw it right in my trajectory. He figured I'll pick it up. So I walk, comes the time when the cigarette there and I stepped on it and I just put it out with my foot. So he looks at me and says, "*Rauchst Du nicht?*" [You don't smoke?] I said, "The crap which you're throwing away, I don't." I says, "You can force me to work. I'm working."

EM: Yeah.

MF: "But this is, I'm not gonna do it. I have my *Stolz*." I, you know, I have my pride." Next day he offered me a cigarette from the pack. Believe that? So I went back to this chief, and he said, "You go to the proving grounds, *Strzelnica*, [shooting range] to the," you know, they were shooting all kinds of ammunition. They're trying out the bazookas, whatever it was. "You report to the chief. His name is Mr. Steller. He has a job for you." So I go over there and I shake. I don't know who the guy is. Is he a Nazi? He can kill. He could do anything he wants with me. I go into the barrack and he shakes hands with me! He says he is an anti-Nazi! I just won my life. And there's a girl, a young, pretty girl, German girl sitting at the typewriter. So I look at him, I look at her, and says, "Is he crazy?" You know, they're denouncing each other all the time. He said, "Don't worry. She thinks the way I do. What can I do for you?" I said, "God! I don't believe it!"

EM: And he was the chief of the...

MF: Of the proving grounds!

EM: Of the proving grounds.

MF: *Strzelnica*. He was in civilian clothes, by the way.

EM: Yeah?

MF: He was not in, he was just a, later on it turned out he was a garage mechanic.

EM: Oh!

MF: I found him after the war. A good looking fellow. So he said, first he asked me to sit down, on the chair. So I sat on the chair, after two years I sat on the floor. So I almost cried. And he said, "What can I do for you?" So I thought fast. I said, "I was working at the kitchen and I knew some girls there. Well if I could get to that, I'll get some extra food, and food means life. Could I...maybe, 'cause there is another group on the east side of that proving grounds and they have ten people there. So, and we get to the gate and there's this S.S. man, a sergeant, a *Raportführer*. So he'll attach me to the tenth. I'll be the eleventh. And the foreman will give me a little bit of soup and that'll be the end of it. Could I go myself to pick it up?" And he said, "Let's go. Let's find out. We'll go to the gate." When the gate, you know, where the barracks, and there was a gate, and there was a factory. And he says, "So I'm going to insult you on the way. Laugh it off. I have to for the other Nazis around here. I'm gonna call you names. Don't worry about it." He says, "*Verfluchter Jude*, [cursed Jew]" blah, blah, and all this. And I said, "Kiss my foot." And we got to the gate, and there was one of ours, Schreiber, who was helping the S.S. man to keep track of all the movements of hundreds of people going in and out. He had a arm band here saying "Schreiber". I knew him. And so he came in and Steller says to him, "Yeah, they sent me this guy here. He is gonna work for us. "*Wie ist das mit der Fresserei?* How is it with the

food.” “Oh,” he said, “there are ten people there. He’ll be eleven, all set.” So Steller says, “It can’t be.” And Steller is a civilian. So he, the sergeant looks at him. He said, “Who the hell are you to tell me what can be and can not be?” He says, “Wait a minute. Not so fast. He’s gonna work us, for the Germans. He is gonna sit in the bunker and do some work which we are doing for us. And we are making lunch once at twelve, once at three, once at eleven, once we don’t make lunch at all if we have a lot of work. Now you want a Jewish prisoner to force us to have lunch when he is eating? Are you crazy?” Like this. And I winked at our guy, the Schreiber. I said, “Come on, say something.” So he says, “So, what do you mean? What do you want me to do? Make a *Kommando* of one person?” He says, “I don’t give a damn.” So I said to Schreiber [mumbling]. So he says, [German]. He says, [German]. He says, “*Kommando von einer Person, gibt es so was.*” [Well a *Kommando* of one person? Is there such a thing?] O.K., so he made me a *Kommando* of one. And I was going alone to work. There were 400 people in a group. Well when I got, in the morning I got up later. I didn’t have to stand for a half hour and wait till they counted 400 people. And I got right to the window where the two S.S. men were standing, and they were making fun of me. They said, “*Bei dem stimmt immer die Vorderrichtung und die Seitenrichtung.*” In other words, “Nobody is missing. The row is always even this way and that way!” He says, “Get the hell out of here!”

EM: So what were you, what kind of work were you doing there?

MF: So I was sitting in a bunker. There was a German, young 18-year-old Gestapo agent sitting there. He didn’t want to sit in the bunker. So I had to go underground. That was the edge of the proving grounds there. And I had to go out about maybe thirty meters, forty, I don’t know, twenty, something like this. There was a little bunker and I had to push out a target. The target was a square like this, or a rectangle, with little wires in here. And there were some screws in here. And I have to push it up above ground. But those thirty meters behind me in a little barrack was sitting Walter, who was shooting single, two centimeter bullets I think, from a machine gun. And he had to sit at this, I mean, hit this target. Now, when he, he was supposed to, I’m supposed to direct him. When I brought it back down, I saw where he broke it. So if he broke it too much to the right—I had a phone—the phone was only to this barrack, to the shooter, that’s all. And I had a heater, electric heater. So I was set in the palace! Well, no S.S. man could see me. Nobody could beat me. I just won my life. So I called up. I said, “*Walter, schiessen Sie mehr nach rechts.*” [Walter, shoot more to the right.] because he said there was too much here. Walter was...

EM: And Walter was a German, right?

MF: Yeah, a civilian.

EM: Mmm hmm.

MF: Now he w-...

EM: Now how come they were in a proving ground and they were using civilians to do the shooting and the testing?

MF: I have no idea. He was in civilian clothes. He had a *Hakenkreuz* [swastika] here, but he was, so we don't, well the chief of the factory was also in civilian clothes, maybe he was an S.S. man, I don't know.

EM: Yeah.

MF: Anyway, so when Walter wasn't shooting I could take a nap. And nobody can catch me. Now, Steller would come in. He asked me what I was doing, so I told him. So he said, "*Diese Schweine*," [these pigs]. "What did they do to you?" He says, "What is the world gonna say when we lose the war?" I said, "I hope so. I hope you lose it." They already probably knew they're losing it. Anyway, so Steller would come in. I heard his steps. See, the only one who could come in there, and he had a beautiful leather coat, opens up his coat, and takes out a three-pound military bread, takes out a pocket knife, cuts it in half. He says, "Half for you, half for me." He was like a brother. He was an anti-Nazi. And it was just like a dream. So, that's the way, then he brought me coupons for cigarettes, for good work. See, you can get a pack of cigarettes for I don't know how many coupons. So, I didn't smoke. So, I kept the cigarettes. And I had cigarettes when there were no cigarettes in camp. And the S.S. were buying it from us! They were giving us extra bread! And I could keep the bread in that little bunker. Where my brother worked in other bunkers, were thousands of tons of ammunition. If the German wants a good math-, my brother was. So he was running the show there. So he also got sometimes something, some extra piece of bread.

EM: But he was what? I didn't get it. There was...

MF: There were ammunition storages, big storages of ammunition.

EM: So...

MF: Somebody had to keep track of it, mathematically. So my brother was doing that.

EM: Oh.

MF: And he came down, also we were stealing *Zuckerrüben*, that means the...

EM: The sugar?

MF: The sugar, no, sugar...how do you say *buraki*? [sugar beets]

EM: What? [tape off then on]

MF: There was, all the guys were stealing sugar beets on the railroad station. So we exchanged with them for cigarettes and we could, or some other stuff. And it had to be cooked. And you're not allowed to cook on a stove in the barrack. But Walter had a stove, and so he cooked for, he was my cook. He was cooking for me! And so my brother came down and had lunch together. Anyway, it was just fantastic. I didn't know what I was doing because I knew when he broke that little wire, some kind of a thing fell down in the office. And I think they figured out the speed of the bullet or something. They wouldn't tell me. I don't know. They were two centimeter anti-aircraft...bullets. I think that's what it was. So, I kept all whatever I had, some extra bread or cigarettes I kept that in...my place of work. Because if I kept it on my pillow in my barrack, they'll steal it. That's obvious. People

were hungry. And that was going on till, must have been, oh yeah, one day, before they took us away from Schlieben. The guard...knew me because that was the end of the proving grounds, so the S.S. guard was walking back and forth there. So one day he calls me and says, "*Du komm mal her, hab keine Angst.*" "Don't worry," he says. "Come, I want to talk to you." I said, "To me?" "Yeah, yeah, don't worry. Come on. The war is over," he says. "Germany lost the war." Listen! An S.S. man talks to me. And now he says, "Yeah, I see you're a smart fellow." He says, "Get another ten guys. We'll walk out of here. We're at the end of it anyway here. I'll escort you to the Americans. I'll save your life. And then you'll tell the Americans that I saved your life and you'll save mine. It's a deal?" I said, "Of course!" What am I supposed to say, no? He'd shoot me. I avoided him like the pest, never saw him again. And when I saw him he says, "Come here." I went the other way around and [unclear]. And then one day they made a roll call and right straight to the trains. Then I had some extra bread there. I had cigarettes. It was all, [unclear]. I left them. And they took us away, because the front was getting near, I guess. So they took us to Bautzen. We were there maybe a day.

EM: Baltsen?

MF: Bautzen. B-A-U-T-Z-E-N. That was a factory of...railroad cars or something, or street cars or railroad cars. We were there maybe a day and they took us now on the *Todesmarsch*, that march, that death march.

EM: Death march.

MF: For about twenty hours walking, two hours resting there, sitting somewhere, whatever. And we were walking. And a colleague of mine, he was with me, yeah, and they had a horse and a buggy behind the group. We were maybe 200 people. I'm dry, I need something to drink.

EM: Some water?

MF: Yeah, thank you.

EM: [unclear], would you like [tape off then on]

MF: So wait a minute, where am I now?

EM: You're...

MF: Oh yeah, so...

EM: You were on *Todesmarsch*.

MF: Yeah, so from Bautzen we had to walk. So they had a horse and buggy behind and who had trouble with his feet or something he said, "Now just sit on the horse..."

EM: On the buggy?

MF: "On the buggy there, and they'll take you." That was a nice little thing. So a fellow, and so they, when the buggy was full, the horse and buggy was full, they took it up, up a little hill. There were hills there. And we heard shooting.

EM: And they shot everybody.

MF: They were killing those people! And all of a sudden, we are walking and a, one fellow comes, way out of breath, stands next to me, in my row. "I just escaped out!" I

said, "What happened?" He said, "They were shooting us! But I saw they were repeating the guns, so I started to run down the hill, zigzagging. They were shooting after me, but they didn't get me." So he's coming back and he's standing next to me. And the Captain, the leader of our group, the S.S. man, is standing and waiting and looking who escaped. So I said, "Oh God, now he'll mistake me for you and I'll get out, and I'll be shot." And he noticed him. He says, "*Kannst du laufen?*" [Can you walk?] He had something in his shoe was rubbing against his leg or something. So he figured, "Why should I walk? I can ride a," but he was O.K. So he looks at him [unclear] and says, "*Kannst du laufen?*" He says, "Ya, everything O.K. I can walk. Nothing happened." He let him go. And we came to...Nicksdorf, in Czech-...

EM: Nicksdorf?

MF: Nicksdorf. It's in Sudetenland, called Mikulasovice, in Czech. [pause] I'm pooped, tired.

EM: Oh. [tape off then on] Today is November 16, 1994. This is Edith Millman, continuing with the interview with Professor Filar. Professor Filar last, when we talked, you were mentioning Nicksdorf, when you got to Nicksdorf. Could you please continue?

MF: Yes, that was toward the end of 1944. It could have been November maybe or October or something like this. We got there after a horrible march, where they were killing people who couldn't make it. We arrived there. That was not a, that place was empty. There were barracks there. There was no any, no *ogrodzenia*. There was no...

EM: No fence? No fencing protection?

MF: No, no fence. There was nothing. It was a private, for private people who they brought from France. You know-

[End of tape one, side two.]

Tape two, side two:

EM: ...two, interview with Professor Filar. We are continuing. O.K.

MF: So when we got to Nicksdorf, we were a group maybe of 150 people, 200, just about this. And then these were private barracks where they kept French civilians which they brought from France to work there. And they were gone already. So there was no fence, nothing. It was just a civilian camp. So the camp was guarded by the S.S. There were plenty of them, you know, standing almost every, next to every door, every window. They kept good eyes on us. And they took us to work and they, we were outside there somewhere. And we had to dig ditches. And they said we're digging ditches against the American tanks. It turned out it wasn't against the American tanks, but the Polish Army came from Russia, from the east. And the mayor of that little town whoever it was, gave us "in appreciation", in parentheses, gave us a little *Mehlsuppe* it was called, some *Suppe Mehl* or flour, whatever it was. But the soup was so horrible that everybody was running to the latrine all night. And I'm still running ever since. That's those years. I don't know what the devil it was. Anyway, when we first started to run at night, and everybody wanted to go across to the latrine, the S.S. put the guns on us. They said we're creating a revolution. So we said, "If you won't let us go to the latrine, the barracks will swim away." They finally realized what we wanted and they let us go. So we were digging there, and over there, the last day of the war already. And then all of a sudden one day we see a little ten-year-old, about ten-year-old German boy walks around there. And there was only one may-, one guard, I think it was there. We were now 200 in a group of us where there could have been twenty or something. So one guard was there, another place there was another guard and so on. So this German little boy walked around, and he had a coat. And inside the coat he was showing me, I saw it...he just came up to me and showed me a paper, a newspaper. He wants to give me a newspaper. So I figured it's some provocation or some...I was afraid. And there were cut woods there, you know, big trees were lying on the ground. So I said, "When the guard goes away, put it between the trees and get lost." So he did and then when the guard didn't see I took it out, put it under my coat, and we got back to the barracks. Guess what it was? It was May 1st, 1945, big headline, "*Berlin Gefallen*." Berlin was taken. Oh God! So we don't understand why would a boy show us this. Well, we found him after liberation and we asked him. He said his father was killed by the Nazis in a concentration camp. He was German. So he wanted to give us some hope, that little boy, so he brought us that paper. He was, so he became our mascot. Anyway, so, but how we were liberated, and so that was going on every day. And it was just a few days. Then one night, it must have been about four in the morning, day break started just coming. And I go over to the latrine and I think, I see different faces. I, you couldn't stand up and look in his face, but I saw they were old men, with guns. So I come back and I was sleeping on a floor with my brother, under a table, so there was protection from the table or something. And I said, "You look here. I think the S.S. is gone. Looks like old guys are there." He says, "Shh, let

me go take a look. Well, let's be careful about it, because some guys, they'll find out that this, they might start jumping for joy or something, could be the *Volkssturm* [military reserve units] and they might get scared and kill us." So he went in there and he...came back. He said, "That's *Volkssturm*. That's it." So it was quiet. We just "shushed," like this, and then, you know, about seven or so, they opened the windows. And they're there and they smile, they were old guys. They said, "Oh, you're gonna be free! You're gonna live!" Oh, then wait a minute. I forgot. Before this happened, the chief of S.S., or the Gestapo, came to our camp just a few days before and they said, he promised us solemnly we will all be killed. He said in German, "*Ihr wird alle erschossen.*" [You will all be shot.] Quite a story about this guy later on. So then they got lost. Only the *Volksstürmer* came in and so on as I told you. Then maybe an hour later the *Volksstürmer* evaporated and there was nobody there. So, among us were a couple of Germans who were prisoners—Social Democrats. So our *Lagerältester*, the leader of our camp, was a German, Mr. Zeider. I have his signature. So he's...

EM: What was his name? Could you spell it?

MF: Zei-, I think, [tape off then on] Yeah, so among us were a few Germans who were Social Democrats. And our *Lagerältester*, that means the leader of our group, was a German Social Democrat. His name was Zeidler. So he says, "Let's do a roll call to see if anybody is missing." So we did a roll call, and one was missing. I look around, my brother is missing! Then we looked, it was a little hilly up there in the Sudetenland. And I see my brother coming toward us on a bicycle. He was already in town and he just kicked a German, something, and took a bike from him. He came down and said, "What are you doing here doing the roll call? We are free! The Polish Army is on Main Street!" So we yelled, "Hurrah;" and we came out there and that's what it was. So I became friendly with the lieutenant who was from Lemberg, about my size, my age at that time. And we went out. They put Germans in that camp and we knocked on doors and asked for a room.

EM: That was the Polish Army that was fighting with the Russians, right?

MF: Yeah. No, but...

EM: Yeah.

MF: They were a separate unit. There were not Russians between them.

EM: Uh huh. But they...

MF: They were just Poles.

EM: Poles, O.K.

MF: Yeah, they came from Russia. Anyway, so we knocked on doors and the Germans first were afraid. Then they begged us to come in. Why? Because we put a sign on the door saying in Polish, "Former Prisoners of War Here. Please Don't Disturb." Because someplace else they didn't see the sign, they'd go in, kick the door in and let the Germans have it. They paid them back a little bit. As a matter of fact, I was together with my brother. There was a widow in that little house. So the Germans came from across the street and they said, "You're uncomfortable. Why don't one of you come stay with us?"

So we said, "Get the hell out of here." You know what they wanted? They wanted a little sign on the door. So one day I'm sitting there, we're eating. She cooked for us. She was a very fine old woman. And she told us that they were afraid because she, they talked with the S.S. Says, "Looks like that's the end of the war. They'll be liberated. They'll kill us." Well, they understood. Normally they, we should have killed them for what they did to us. So the S.S. told her, "Don't worry about it. They'll be finished tonight." They had set up the machine guns. About two in the morning we were supposed to be all shot. But there was a breakthrough in the front. And that's how they had to run about, ten, eleven o'clock at night. And that's why they ran away. So, this Tadek was his name, he was from Lemberg. And he didn't know any German and I did. So he was the leader of that camp and the guardhouse. So he said, "You will be my interpreter." And so, fine. And so one day we're eating the soup, about one o'clock or so. And a sergeant comes on a bike and he says, he was all out of breath and says, "Come on! Come on! Tadek is waiting for you!" I said, "What happened?" He says, "We caught the Chief of the Gestapo." I said, "What? How'd you get him?" He said, "I don't know. Talk to him." So I almost choked on my soup, pushed myself away from the table, and around we go to the guardhouse. Here he is! Now he ain't so splendid, doesn't look so tough, and not so big anymore. He's in civilian clothes, scared stiff, sitting on a chair. He must have been ten feet tall or something. When he was sitting on the chair, and that lieutenant was sitting on the table with a whip in his hand, he was taller than the lieutenant. That's how big he was. I said, "How did you get him?" "Oh," he says, "Germans came in here, and they said, they're great denunciators, and they said, 'You're picking a little fish? Why don't you pick on a big one?'" He says, "Yeah? Like who?" They said, "Like the Chief of Gestapo of Sudetenland." "Well do you know his address? Do you know where he lives?" "Sure!" They gave him the address, so he sent out a couple of jeeps, whatever, with soldiers. They got him and they brought him, and here he's sitting, shaking scared stiff. So Tadek says to me, "O.K., go ahead ask him all the names of Gestapo and S.S., I want, and the addresses." So I did. But he couldn't talk. He was cringing, he was sitting scared. So I said to him, "Don't you see? He's cold. We gotta warm him up. So we went to work on him." And we started to beat the hell out of him. And I said to him, "How do you like your own medicine? That's the way you were beating us and now you're getting a little back of it. Do you like it? Do you find it..." A sergeant came with a...no, a *Kübel*...

EM: A bucket? A bucket.

MF: Yeah, a bucket of water, threw water on him, brought him back to, beat more of him. Finally when he started to talk, he was such a coward. And I couldn't write so fast the way he talked. So I said, "Shut up!" I said, "You talk too fast! I can't write that fast!" Finally we pumped everything out of him, we took him outside, and he was only falling on his knees, holding his hands to a prayer that, "*Lassen sie mich doch bitte leben*. Please let me live." I said, "You pig! You want to live? Why were you born? How many people did you murder? You want to live? You are kidding!" So Tadek gives me his

machine gun, or gun, whatever it was, no I think it was a little machine gun, something. He said, "Go ahead." I said, "I can't do it. I'm not a murderer." He said, "You're a coward?" I said, "No, no, no. Slow down. I'm not a coward. But I cannot kill anybody in cold blood. Let him jump at me. In self-defense I will, but otherwise I can't do it. I'm not a Nazi." And he stood there yelling. I said, "Shut up you pig!" And so the, a soldier was, the sergeant with us, and he killed him. And that was the end of one Nazi, you know?

EM: So that was a Polish sergeant that killed him?

MF: Yeah, sure.

EM: Yeah.

MF: Then I was looking for a piano. I wanted to start playing the piano. So we went to the Mayor or somebody. They gave me a key to a palace what was, a big Nazi lived there, and he, of course, he ran away. And there was a concert grand, a beautiful piano in there. Oh yeah, before I went there, I gotta tell you. I forgot. I took a friend of mine and I said, "I had a cut finger." This finger, it was cut in camp. I was sitting on a [unclear] the finger right in the knife. And it healed up, thank God. So, I said, "I want to find out if I'll be able to play." I knew it I will on a table it didn't hurt. But I wanted to try a piano. So I said, "Let's go to a nice neighborhood. Maybe somebody has a piano there and I'll try." So we went, we knocked on the door. The Germans opened up, scared stiff. We said, "Don't be afraid. We're not murderers. We're not Nazis. You were Nazis. We're not. I see you have a piano there." There was a long hallway. I saw an upright piano. I said, "I'm a concert pianist. I'm no murderer." I was not a murderer. I said, "I had an injured finger. I want to see if I'll be able to play." "Well, come on in. Come on in." So I went in, opened that piano and I tried. I said, "Oh yeah, thank God. Thank God, I'll play." So he says, "*Bleiben Sie doch hier, spielen Sie was.*" He says, "Stay here, play something." I said, "Get lost." And we walked out. Then I got this key to this palace. And there was a concert Bösendorfer, a beautiful piano. And I started to play. And I played five minutes and I couldn't move my arms. It hurt. It was murder. I was doing physical work and this...finger, it was the fine muscles. But I, thank God, I knew what to do. So I played the first eight, ten minutes and I went home, home so to speak, [unclear]. The next day I tried for twenty minutes, thirty minutes, for...

EM: Now where was all that?

MF: In Schlieben.

EM: In Schlieben.

MF: In that place where we were liberated. We were there for a few weeks maybe. Another thing, then came an order...the...

EM: Did you say Schlieben. I think the last...

MF: Not Schlieben, Nicksdorf. I keep mixing it up. I'm sorry.

EM: Nicksdorf, O.K. O.K. When were you in Schlieben? You were in Schlieben...

MF: Before.

EM: Before, right.

MF: Before, from Buchenwald we went to Schlieben.

EM: Yeah, from, to Schlieben, right.

MF: Yes. Because we were longer in Schlieben. That was just a few weeks.

EM: Yeah. So that was all in Nicksdorf.

MF: Yeah, Nicksdorf, Nicksdorf. It's Mikulasovice now in Czech. So, across, on the same street, across another house, a colleague of mine lived there and we used to see each other and talk. And there were two German women from Bautzen. And they said they loved music, could they come, they heard that I'm playing, so where could they... I said, "You want to? O.K." So they came, and they listened a couple of times. Then one day there came an announcement from the army that all the Germans, the war is over, the Germans have to go back home. No refugees anymore. It turned out that they had a...jewelry store in Bautzen, a big one. I didn't know that but this woman, she some kind, felt that I'm a decent human being, so she came up to me and said, "We have to go back. We are afraid, because we have two suitcases full of, you know, jewelry, from our jewelry store. And there are Poles all over and [unclear] Germans. Could you go with us? We'll give you something for this." That was about twenty kilometers or thirty kilometers, somewhere...

EM: So they were originally from Belsen and they found themselves in Nicksdorf?

MF: No, they were from Bautzen.

EM: Yeah, that's what I mean.

MF: Yeah.

EM: From Belsen. And they found themselves...

MF: Bautzen.

EM: Bautzen.

MF: Right.

EM: B-A-U-...

MF: U-T-Z-E-N.

EM: O.K. B-A-U-T-Z-E-N.

MF: That's right.

EM: And they found themselves in Nicksdorf as refugees?

MF: Right.

EM: O.K.

MF: All right.

EM: All right.

MF: And so, I asked my bro-, they say they'll give me something, you know, a coat or this or that, whatever, a watch. Oh, they'll give me a watch for me and for my brother. Who had a watch? We had nothing. So I asked my brother, "What do you think? What should I do?" Oh yeah, they'll give me a bicycle, so I won't have to walk. All right. And they'll walk with that little pushcart, and they'll put their stuff on it. I said, "What

should I do? Do you think I should go?" He said, "Go ahead. You want to go? Go. Nothing's gonna happen." So I went, and we just came out of Nick-, and they put their stuff on that little pushcart and they were going in front and I was riding slowly in the back. We came out about a couple of kilometers outside of that little town. And there comes, out of the forest comes the Polish guard out with a gun and says, "What the hell? What are you doing here?" So I said in Polish to him, you know I just talked him out of it, and he let us go. So we went on, and they got scared. And they saw that, what I talked to him it worked. So they stopped. And they say they want to take those two little suitcases, put it on my bicycle, on the back they had the little, you know, space for luggage with the little spring and all that. So they did it. I could hardly ride when I got over. That must have been maybe forty, fifty pounds. I don't remember. And we were going up and down on hills there. And I thought about, they robbed us clean.

EM: Who?

MF: The Germans. The stuff which, in these two suitcases which I have on my bike now...

EM: Yeah?

MF: Could be all robbed stuff. All I have to do is turn around, go down the hill and, "Nice knowing you."

EM: Yeah.

MF: I said, "But I'm not a thief. I can't do it." I fought with myself. I said, well I didn't have a penny, nothing! And we were robbed! I said, "Here I can get something back." I couldn't do it. And I brought them back to Bautzen. We came at night. We came there at night. I saw the house. I remember the street, *Seminar Strasse dreizehn*, [Seminar Street Number thirteen] thirteen, the entrance was on the corner and there was a big window here and a big window here. It must have been a big place! Well, the neighbors came out, blah, blah. It must have been night, or it was night already. So they said, "You can not go back at night. You stay over. We'll give you a motorcycle in the morning. My husband had a motorcycle." I didn't know how to ride a motorcycle, and on top there was no gas. But I came out there and I saw pictures of the police, German police there. I said, "There must have been some real Nazis." So was I a dope, I didn't make a U-turn and go back.

EM: Yes.

MF: I should have done it. And my colleagues later laughed and said, "She knew who to pick! She picked you! She should have picked me! You should have said, '50-50,' what the hell?"

EM: Yeah. So...

MF: Anyway, so she gave me a raincoat, and what else did she give me, a pin? She said, "That's a pin which, with a little pearl on it." It wasn't pearl. It was baloney. And she gave me two cheap watches and a pair of pants. I think that was it. And I got back.

EM: And you went back...

MF: I went back.

EM: To Nicksdorf.

MF: Yeah. Then we took off after a while and we decided to go to Prague. Well, the trains were free, everything. We could go on a train. So we came to Prague and the Czech government was wonderful to us. They were liberated themselves, so they gave us a hotel where to stay in center city. It was an empty hotel. They cleared it up. I don't know who was there before. I found out later. That was pretty funny, too. It was a whorehouse there in the war for German soldiers.

EM: Oh.

MF: And they cleaned it up. I'll tell you how I found out. You'll laugh. Anyway, so, and they gave us *listki*, those little stamps so we could ride the streetcars for free and go in a restaurant and pay with those stamps. And so...

EM: When you say, "we," is it you and your brother?

MF: No, it was...

EM: Or was there a whole group?

MF: All of us who came there, you know, refugees. And one day I went for a walk with a friend of mine from camp. He was an engineer. And we walked down the street and we see a beautiful building. And it says the *Czeska Philharmonia*, Czech Philharmonic. I said, "Hey! A concert hall! Let's go take a look!" I didn't see one for so many years. So there's a doorman in there in a uniform, a big tall guy. So I said, "Could we go in? We were just liberated." They were very nice to us. "Could we, I'm a pianist," I said. "I didn't see a concert hall for five years. Could we go in and take a look how it looks?" "Oh, you're lucky because the orchestra is having a rehearsal." "Oh yeah?" I said, "Who's conducting?" So he says, "Kubelik." "Kubelik?" I said, "Kubelik is dead. He was a great violinist." [Jan Kubelik, 1880-1940] "That's right, but that's his son Rafael. He is a conductor." And he was a pianist, too. So we walked in there, and sure enough they were rehearsing, they were playing. And we sat down quietly. They were playing that Dvorak *Symphony from the New World*. And my pal after a while says to me, "O.K., let's go." I said, "You go. I'll stay." So he left. And after it was over I went back stage, introduced myself to the conductor, to Kubelik and I told him who I was. "I was just liberated." Now I repeated a symphony in E Minor piano concerto. I said, "Maybe I'll try and play for him." I just got a wild idea.

EM: Yeah.

MF: So he says, "Oh yeah, it'd be," I told him, he knew my teacher. Drzewiecki was known all over Europe. So he said, "I'll tell you what, we, the pianos are now, you know, they are on the side, with...they are without legs. We, they, you know, we were just liberated ourselves. I'm just organizing the orchestra. We didn't have a Philharmonic. Why don't you come Saturday in my home to play for me there?" He gave me his address. "Five o'clock." I said, "Fine." So I went there Saturday, and I found a place where to practice. I went to the Conservatory I think. I came in there. He wasn't home yet, his wife was there. She was very nice, and she said, "My husband is having auditions for new members for the orchestra. Well, he called here, he said he'll be back soon. You can warm up now a little

bit if you want to.” And there was a student of his, his name was Ilya Hurnick, who was studying with him composition. And then she also showed me the study of Variosof, Kubelik’s father, and this music room. And there was hanging like this from a, you know, on a chair, you know, a glass enclosure. That was a Stradivarius. It was a beautiful instrument. So I practiced. He finally came and he was tall and he was, oh, he was a golden human being. I’m telling you, pure gold, that man. I love him. He took his coat off, he said, “Well, I’m sorry.” I said, “You know, we were just liberated ourselves,” blah blah blah, all this. So I sat down and played. So I played an E Minor Concerto from memory. So he looks at me, he can’t believe. He says, “Wait a minute. When did you see the music? Where’s your music?” “Music? It burned in Warsaw, together with my piano.” “You mean you didn’t see this music for five years?” “That’s right.” “You didn’t make one mistake!” “Sorry,” I don’t need to apologize, I apologized. So he says, “That’s unbelievable.” I said, “You’ll play with me.” “Where do you live? Wait a minute! Where do you eat? What is it? I mean, what do you do with yourself? How do you exist?” So I told him, “The city was so nice to us, gave us a hotel where we stay there.” He said, “What’s the name of the hotel?” I told him, and he started to laugh. I said, “Mr. Kubelik, what is so funny?” He said, “What’s so funny? During the war that was a whorehouse for the German soldiers!” So I said, “When I get back there I’ll look under my bed and one was left!” [both laugh] So, and then, one day, and we ate, there was a Jewish Committee there. And so we ate lunch there. So I think I went to practice some. When I came back around twelve or one, whatever it was, my brother wasn’t there yet. So I talked with some friends, and you know, we just talked a little bit. And then a man comes up and kind of interrupts a little bit our conversation, about my age. You know, he just cut, butts in there, you know. And so I step back and I looked at him and I said, “I know that guy.” And I scratch my head. I said, “I know him. Who is he?” I [unclear] it’s my cousin, from Wyszaków. They had a factory. I was there last time when I was ten years old, a good fifteen years ago. So I said, “Wait a minute, is your name Yoskowicz?” He said, “Right.” “From Wyszaków?” “Yeah.” “Bicycle factory?” “Right.” “You don’t recognize me?” So he looked, looked, looked and I fell inside his arms. We didn’t see each other so many years. So he says, “Well, I saw your brother yesterday.” I said, “I know. Julek will be here any minute.” “Julek is alive?” “Who the hell are you talking about?” “I was two days ago in Lodz. I saw Michael. He came back from Siberia.” I said, “Michael is alive! God!” So when Julek came in I told him this. The same night we were on a train, a freight train, no ticket, nothing. We rode all night. About six o’clock we came into Lodz and we, all we had was a little rucksack. You know, we don’t have anything. So my brother he said, six, six thirty, he says, “You stay here. I’ll go look for him.” I said, “I want to go look for him.” He says, “You’re the youngest. I’m the oldest. So you sit and I go.” “O.K.” So he went and left me here. So I sat there half asleep. And all of a sudden a, I see that one of my rucksacks is moving away! It moves away on its own power! I see a Soviet soldier, that thief! Stuck his foot into those...yeah, you know the *rzemie*, those belts. [leather straps]

EM: Yeah.

MF: And he was dragging it away like this! I said, "Hey, you bum! That's mine!" "Oh," he said, "it just got into my foot." I said, "Yeah, sure!" O.K., and so my brother went to the city and found out where the Committee is. It was about seven in the morning. Everything was closed. And so I went in to the *bramy*, [gate] you know, to the hallway there, and it was all white, and so people wrote names where they are. And so we looked, he looked, and he found Michael Filar is at *Zalatska 27* with Dr. Melamed. So here in fifteen to twenty minutes later he was there, knocked on the door. And they were in the partisans, so the old grandmother survived too. And she...

EM: Your grandmother?

MF: Not ours.

EM: No.

MF: Their...Dr. Melamed's mother.

EM: Oh, I see.

MF: Yeah. We didn't know her. And so, but all the people get up early. So she opened the door on the chain. So he says, my brother says, "Does Mr. Filar live here?" "That's right, but he's still asleep. Why don't you come a little later?" I said, "If you don't mind, that's my brother, I didn't see him five years." So she said, "Oh!" And she opened the door and he went in there in the living room. He was sleeping on a sofa, and his foot was sticking out from under the cover. So he was...

EM: Did he tickle it?

MF: Tickling his foot a little bit and Michael opened his eyes, saw his brother. And I sat there half asleep at the railroad station. All of a sudden I see two of them coming at me. [weeping; tape off then on] I am rebuilding my piano, in spite of [tape off then on]

EM: But let's continue now.

MF: Well, so we stayed there for a while. I found a colleague from a... in Lodz, I found a, we stayed there together, squeezed in, you know. So I found a colleague from... I went to the concerts and all that. And I found a colleague, a Polish colleague of mine, a very dear friend. And I met the conductor of the symphony is Zdzisław Gurzynski was the director of the Philharmonic there.

EM: Gurzynski?

MF: Gurzynski. Maybe you know the name. He was pretty famous. And I auditioned for him and he gave me a concert. And I played a E Minor Concerto with Gurzynski. And guess who was at that concert? The director of the Warsaw Conservatory was in Lodz. And he came for a concert, came backstage and invited me for lunch—a great, great man. I have a picture of him. [tape off then on] The name was Professor Eugeniusz Morawski. Well, he was a famous man. He was the director of the Conservatory when I was a student there. So he invited me for lunch. He said to me, "Remember, when you were a young fellow at the Conservatory, I called you into my office? I always liked you, do you remember that?" "I sure do." "What did I tell you then?" "You told me to get out of Poland

and go West, and you believed in me that I'll make a great career." "I'm telling you again the same thing right now. Get out! I believe in you. You have nothing to do here. You beat it, get outside, and you'll make a great career. And I'm encouraging you to go." I said, "Director, I didn't tell anybody. We're already packed. We're leaving tomorrow morning." And we went to Berlin, on the way to Frankfurt. And we stopped in Berlin and my brothers went to a committee, Jewish Committee for something. And I wanted to see the *Reichstag*, which was burned out by the Nazis. They said the Reds burned it down. There was a whole, so a very famous building.

EM: Yeah, yeah.

MF: So we decided to meet about one o'clock for lunch at a... it must have been about eleven in the morning, whatever. And I went in there. And I heard it was, a good part of it was destroyed and there were some stairs left and there were some ugly things which the Russian put there. There was one head of one president or something, and they did something on top of his head.

EM: Oh.

MF: It was right, it was really funny to see it. I went up the stairs and there was an old German who worked there. And there was some officers. I think they were French, Russians, English or Americans probably. But I didn't know any English. But I knew French and I knew some Russian. And I saw the, what the old gentlemen were telling me. That was a very historic building. They didn't understand a word. I could see it. So I said to the French, to the Russians, "I can translate from German into French and Russian." "Oh! A godsend you're here." We, the French said it, not the Russians. The Russians didn't believe in God. So, I was translating for a while and then the Russian, the old German must have been in his eighties, he said, "There's nothing much left here. It's all destroyed. Why don't we go over to the, *Reichskanzlei*, the *Reichs Chancellery* of Hitler? That stands. It's not gone, you know. Everything's intact." So they said, "Fine." But they pointed at me and said, "You must go with us." I said, "I'd be delighted." With a chance that I had a little *D.K.W.* *D.K.W.* today is called an Audi, you know with those four little zeroes in front. And they had a four seater so then we must have been about twenty people. So, the driver...so they went back and forth. It was about a three-minute ride one way. He came back, and the two of us, the German and I, were sitting in the back, and two officers in the front. So that short ride the German says to me, "*Sind Sie ein Russe?*" [Are you Russian?] I said, "Sure, straight from Moscow." I didn't want to talk to him. We arrived there, they're waiting, and there was no entrance for civilians. But it was generals, colonels, I don't know who the American, what rank the Americans and English were, but I knew the French, and the Russian some. So they didn't bother us, the four...guards were there, the Americans, the English, the French, and the Russians. So we walked in and we saw, we walked in and I saw it on TV several times. You walk in there and there was first the Nazi Party room, was, I don't know, maybe forty, fifty meters long, maybe 100 feet, something like this, with a long, long table with chairs on all the side. At the end of it was Hitler's room. And

I walked in, and I'll never forget it. I was shaking to see this. On the left was his desk. On the right was a stand with his *Globus* where he was, looked on, Chaplin played with that *Globus* in a movie [unclear] or so. And that chandelier...a beautiful chandelier hanging, a long one, hanging down to almost, you almost could touch with your head. And one of the Russians looked to me like he would be Jewish. I wanted to tell him that I was Jewish, too, and didn't know how. Finally I got an idea. And there was a moment and I said to him, "Colonel, what'd you think, what, don't you think it's a beautiful Hanukkah lamp?"

EM: [laughs]

MF: So he said, "*Dada konechno*," he says, "*Konechno*!" [Yeah, yeah, sure!] And he smiled. So I knew he was, you know. And then so, and then there was a little room there on the side. And there was a sink, you know, just a little washroom. And also a military bed, I guess, a *prycza*. How do you say *prycza* in English? It was...

EM: A cot?

MF: A cot, which it was hanging out from the wall. You open it up. They say he stayed overnight sometimes. And then a German came out from a garden and he said, "Why don't you go to the bunker? Down there, where he committed suicide." So we went out, and went down about two flights in concrete. And there was no electricity, you know, everything was bombed out. So who smoked had a lighter or matches. I smoked by that time so I had matches and the German pointed to the door. He said, "This is the room where he committed suicide." So we went over. That was a white door. And we could... it was locked. And so the officers, big guys, you know, about six, seven foot or so, and they tried to open up and it was closed. They said, "What do you mean it's closed? Let's open it up." So I squeezed in between them. And the Russian said, "*Davay otkryvay! Roz dwa tri*." We say one, two, three, and the French, you know, *un, deux, trois*, and the English, well, one, two, three, or whatever. I couldn't understand that. And I say, "*Vu!*" And I was pushing, and I said to one of the officers, "You know, when I was in Buchenwald I didn't dream I will break down that door." It was just a, it's unbelievable. And we finally broke it down. We walked in there. There was a mess. There were a lot of people saying, "*Strenggeheim*," [top secret]. Everybody was taking souvenirs. But I knew I have to go to Frankfurt. That means a couple of hundred kilometers or more over the Russian Zone. And if they catch me with something like this, they'll call me a spy, and instead of Frankfurt, the American Zone, I go to Siberia! So I didn't take anything. But we got through and we, I could have taken...and it's still eating my heart when I think about it. And we made it to Frankfurt...

EM: Well what was in this bunker that you could have taken?

MF: It said "*Strenggeheim*." I don't know what he wrote. Who would remember?

EM: Oh, *geheim*, oh, it was *geheim*. It said...

MF: "*Strenggeheim*," yeah, top secret.

EM: Top secret. Top secret things...

MF: It was laying all over the floor. With matches and lighters, you know, we couldn't see much. They took it. I didn't want to look at it. I said, "I know it's poison to

me if I take it.” So, then we got to Frankfurt. There was a DP Camp outside of Frankfurt called Zeilsheim. We went in there.

EM: What was it called, Salzheim?

MF: Pardon me?

EM: What was it called? I need to make...

MF: Zeilsheim.

EM: Zeils-...

MF: Z-E-I-L-...

EM: S-...

MF: S-H-E-I-M.

EM: O.K., Zeilsheim.

MF: Zeilsheim. And they kicked...the Americans kicked the Germans out of a few streets and they gave us the houses to live.

[End of tape two, side two.]

Tape three, side one:

EM: Today is June 16, 1995. We are continuing the interview with Professor Filar. Edith Millman interviewing. This is tape three, side one.

MF: So we are now in the DP camp in Zeilsheim, near Frankfurt.

EM: Speak slowly.

MF: Yeah. Well, they gave me a little upright piano. We had a nice little apartment, and because I was a pianist they gave us two rooms. In the kitchen there was a terrace, and underneath was a garage. I never expected I'll one day have my car in there, that I will have a car.

EM: Was this in a camp itself?

MF: Yes. It was in a camp.

EM: Oh, it was in a camp.

MF: It was the Germans who were kicked out of there, and the American Army gave us. They took a few streets and they put us in there. So, since they found out I was a pianist, somebody gave me an upright piano. And the stove with a pipe going into the... I have pictures from that. And I started to practice. And we started, we found out that there were concerts on the radio station in Frankfurt. So my brothers and I, Michael and Joe, used to go to the concerts. And I remember I repeated the Chopin *E minor Concerto*. I had it in my fingers already. So, I went once to a rehearsal of the orchestra. I could get in there. And when they finished I went up to the conductor. His name was Hans Blümer, B-L-Ü-M-E-R. And I told him, "I'm a pianist. I live just a few miles from here in this DP camp. And I was a graduate of a conservatory in Poland. And I would like to audition for you. Maybe you'll like me. Maybe we'll play a concert together." So he said, "Wait till the musicians leave, when it was over, and then I'll listen to you." So that's what we did. I played about ten minutes. He stopped me and said, "O.K., you're gonna play." And I got my first concert. Now, he was supposed to be not a Nazi, because at that time, anybody who got a job had to be approved by the American authorities. So they checked him out, the CIA or somebody did. Somehow later they discovered that he lied on this paper which he filled out. He said he was not a Nazi, but he was. So they fired him. But after the concert came down the director of the *Kammermusik Abteilung*, which is the chamber music department, and he asked me if I would play some solo work for them. They liked my playing. I got a very beautiful write-up. So I did. We became pretty good friends. He told me he was drafted into the army, into the German Army three weeks before the end of the war. He wasn't physically very fit. He looked it. So I believed him. He was lying. I found out thirty years later. He was here in Philadelphia. And he told me that he didn't play the piano, he was five years in the army. He forgot what he told me twenty years ago, but I remembered. But he was a nice fellow. I don't think he was a bad man. I doubt it very much. So I played and he liked it. And I said to him, "Listen, I have a problem. I am at crossroads. I don't know what to do with myself because I didn't see the piano during the

war; now I'm back, so to speak, not completely, but I feel I'm getting back in form. Should I go on playing the piano or should I quit because I'm also interested in medicine?" Because we had some medical people in our family. And I said, you know, I was in my twenties then, I said, "It's a big hole in a young man's life, five years, at this age. And then to compete with the whole world, it's not such an easy thing." I said, "Who are the great pianists around here? I'd like to audition for somebody, because the review doesn't mean much. I don't know who the critic is, you know." So he said, "Giesecking is in Wiesbaden. Forty minutes on the train and you're there." I said, "Giesecking?" I knew who he was. He was god! You know, I heard him when I was a kid. I heard him in Warsaw. He was one of the greatest pianists in the world. He played plenty in America. Everybody knew that. He died in '56. Actually he didn't die, he was killed, in a way, by doctors who made a mistake...

EM: Yeah, well.

MF: Operating on him.

EM: Now you heard about Giesecking before, and you wanted to play for him.

MF: Yeah. I didn't hear much. I was a kid at that time, but I knew that he was...around. First of all, I couldn't travel every, anywhere I wanted. I also knew that Wilhelm Backhaus was in Switzerland. But I knew that Backhaus was a Nazi. So I wouldn't go anyway.

EM: Backhaus, right.

MF: Yeah. Very important sounding name, Backhaus. It actually means a bakery in English.

EM: Yeah.

MF: *Backhaus*.

EM: *Haus*, right. So how did you get...

MF: Anyway, so he gave me the address. I said, "Do you know him? Could you write me a letter of recommendation?" He said, "No. I know him. He doesn't know me from Adam. I'm not gonna do anything for you. We'll get you the address. And [unclear] you will go on the train. What are you gonna lose?" "You mean just like that?" He says, "So what? If he doesn't take you, so you'll be where you are right now." I didn't want to go, because first of all I worried if he wasn't a Nazi during the war, and if he was, I wouldn't go. I didn't know. I didn't read papers in the concentration camp! They didn't deliver, you know. So, but there was a half-Jewish young lady by the name of Louisa Kahn, Lulu Kahn, we...and she married this lawyer, this Jewish lawyer, who survived in [unclear]. Her father was Jewish. He was murdered. Her mother was not. Somehow she survived. So I asked her, "Lulu, did you hear anything about Giesecking? What was he doing during the war?" So she said, "All I know, he played concerts. As a matter of fact," she says, "I heard him play Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* in a concert." I said, "Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*? I'm going. If he played this, then that tells me something. Whatever. So it's worth giving it a try." So they gave me the address. It was *Wilhelmina Strasse 24*. I

went to Wiesbaden, came out of the train station—ruins, left and right. So I ask her, “Where is *Wilhelmina Strasse*?” They showed me, “Up the hill there, this way.” I go up there, pass some houses, and there was a field. Then I see *Wilhelmina Strasse* 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and a field. And I have 24. So an old lady walks there with a shopping bag, so I stopped her. I spoke pretty good German. And I said, “I have an address here, *Wilhelmina Strasse* 24, and this is 10 and there’s a field. There’s got to be a mistake. There’s no...” “No, no!” She says, “*Da unten am Kriegerdenkmal...*” where the monument for the war, you know, people, is there. “There is a *Wilhelmina Strasse*. It’s beautiful, sort of villas. Go down there. You’ll find it.” I went. Here it was. I saw a beautiful villa, maybe five, six acres of land, a swimming pool, beautiful gate. I walked in, it’s a three-story house, a garden, flowers, trees, just a dream of a place. And there were many doors. I didn’t know, I just saw a button so I pressed it. Guess who opened the door? Mr. Giesekeing himself. He was six foot five. I looked all the way up. And I didn’t have any introduction so I talked fast. But I said, “*Herr Professor*,” I said, “I’m a pianist. I’m a graduate of a conservatory in Warsaw. Maybe you heard...about my teacher, Professor Zbigniew Drzewiecki, the head of the Chopin Society, the Director of the Cons-...” “Oh yeah, yeah, very, very, sure, a very good man. I heard of him.” “Could I, could you give, offer me ten minutes of your precious time? Could I talk to you?” I didn’t go out there to study. I just wanted to know what to do with myself after so many years. I was at the crossroads. So he looked me up, you know, up and down. And I passed. So he says, “*Kommen Sie herein*.” So I went in. We went into the music room. A beautiful house. Two pianos, a big, big room. He sat at his desk. He said, “*Na, was wollen Sie?*” [What do you want?] I said, “Professor, I am Jewish.” First thing I said. I said, he doesn’t like it, good-bye and I’ll walk out. He didn’t react. I said, “I was in seven concentration camps. I lost my entire family except with a brother, and one who survived in Russia, and a sister who survived in Russia. But I lost over a hundred people in Warsaw. There’s nobody left. My parents, my sister Helen, my first piano teacher, my brother Isaac, his wife and a little boy who was about three years old when he was murdered, uncles and aunts and cousins. And we were over a hundred people in Warsaw. There’s nobody left. One cousin in Paris, and one in Chicago, and that’s it.” So I said, “Look, I played now with the orchestra, and I don’t know, the review is very good. It doesn’t mean anything. Could...you offer me ten minutes of your precious time? Could I play for you? And you will tell me what should I do. If you’ll tell me it’s too late, I’m not good enough, whatever, and I’ll quit, and I’ll go into medicine. I’m interested in medicine. Because your...word will mean everything to me, because that review means nothing. I don’t know who wrote it. I have no idea.” “Oh!” he said, “I understand. But you’re not the only one who wants to play for me. Why didn’t you write? Just knocking on a door like coming in there and say, ‘Here I am. I want to play for you.’ You see, you think you’re the only one?” And he opens the drawer out of his desk, pulls out, I don’t know, maybe twenty, thirty letters. “People write to me from all over Europe. Why didn’t you write?” So well, I looked at him and I said, “Professor, did you answer all these letters?” So I got a smile out

of him. He said, "No, it's too much to write." "So I took a chance. You want me to go? I'll leave. I don't demand anything," I said. "I'm just asking you for a chance." "No, no, no, no. I can't. You should have written. They put me on a black list. They said I was a Nazi. It's a damn lie. I had nothing to do with it." I was amazed he talks so! He doesn't know me from Adam and here a few minutes he talks. "No, no, you should have written. You should have written." So I got up, and, of course, I was miserable. And he could see that I was miserable, because there was nobody else. And I didn't know what to do with myself. Money I didn't have. I was poor as a church mouse. A passport I didn't have. I was a stateless person. I was a nobody. So I said to him, "Well, I never had any, I didn't have any luck in the last five years. I'll probably never have it again in my life." And I was ready to go. Somehow he saw it and he was honest and it touched him. So he said, "Well, *Sie sind schon hier. Setzen Sie sich hin und spielen Sie was vor.*" [You're already here; sit down and play something.] Boy, I made it to first base! So he opened the piano. I played some Bach, or Mozart, or Beethoven. I don't remember exactly what it was. But then he says to me, "You're Polish. Why don't you play some Chopin?" So I played a G minor ballad and he flipped. He changed. He was not the same man. He started to smile and he put his arm around me. He said, "*Sie wollen das Klavierspielen aufgeben? Sind Sie wahnsinnig? Sie sind doch ein fertiger Pianist. Wollen Sie bei mir studieren, glauben Sie dass Sie bei mir was lernen können?*" I'm quoting him verbatim. I'll never forget it, and so many years. He said, "You want to give up playing the piano? Are you crazy? You're already a concert pianist! Do you want to study with me? Do you believe I can teach you something?" I said, "God! Would you?" I didn't dare to think that far. "How much will you charge me for a lesson?" And he said, "*Sie haben schon genug bezahlt.*" [You already paid enough.] He taught me five years and didn't take a cent. Why? I can come for a lesson every Thursday at 10:30. The phone doesn't ring. Everything is in ruins. "Just come, that's all." So, yeah, and I stayed for lunch. He invited me for lunch and I met his wife, his two little daughters at that time. And the older one had a boyfriend she married later, a Hungarian pianist, who lived there and Giesecking didn't like him. It's quite a story. So what we ate for lunch was potatoes. So now the Germans didn't have anything. So I figured, we have in our DP camp we have, the provisions came from the American Army. We had it up to here. So I figured, he teaches me for nothing, I'll bring some stuff with me next week. So I did. And I came in and I started to unpack and he got angry at me. He said, "Why did you do this? You had nothing to eat for five years. You must eat to get strength to be able to play the piano. If you bring it again, you won't get a lesson." I said, "Professor, I apologize. I'm sorry. But you know that I meant well." "Yeah, I understand, but don't do it again!" I said, "O.K." I figured, I'll outsmart you! And I came back the next week fifteen minutes earlier, and I brought the stuff with me all over again. But before he came down from upstairs, I planted all those cans all over the music room, under the piano, between the music, on the window sills, wherever I could find a, you know, I'd think this doesn't show, I stuck it in there. And I had my lesson and I went back home. The next week I come in and he looks at me. He

looks at me. He liked that. You know, and it was kind of a funny thing for them. And he liked that sense of humor and he said to me, "You know, this became a funny room." I said, "What do you mean, Professor?" "Well, I go to take some music out of, you know, my bookcase there, and I take out a can of butter. Then I go to the window and see if it's raining, and I see a can of meat. Then I pull the chair up under the piano, a can of something else! What did I tell you!" And he's, you know, he's moving his finger at me. But he smiled. He loved it. It was so, it kind of broke the ice, you know? And then developed later on into a very wonderful, close friendship, I could say. He loved me. He really did.

EM: So how long did you study with him?

MF: Five years. One day I came in w-...

EM: What year was that?

MF: In '45, April of '45, till I went to America in 1950. And then when he was here, he had a piano in his hotel room and I always played for him. I had some other ones.

EM: Now, tell me, so you lived in Zeilsheim all that time?

MF: No, no, I lived in Zeilsheim about two-and-a-half or three years, or two years. I don't remember exactly. We were kicked out of there by the American Army, General Hubner, who later became a friend. He said, "Enough already. We have to go back to a normal life." So we found an apartment in the city of Frankfurt, and I remember we rented a couple of rooms. And it was an apartment, yeah. I only paid some rent. It wasn't much, right next to the radio station.

EM: You say "we," that was you and your two...

MF: And my two brothers.

EM: Brothers, O.K.

MF: Yeah. That was summer, so that was in *Born Wiesenweg 67*, right next to the radio station *Eschenheimer Land Strasse*, was the radio station that time. Today they're on Dornbusch or someplace else. Anyway, so I got my piano in. Oh, yeah, Mr. Gembiki, the Jewish lawyer who came back from Canada, and became Assistant Provost Marshall of the city, he got me a piano, a grand, five foot seven. So, I had the pi-, so I got rid of the upright, and finally got a grand. And then when we moved into Frankfurt, [unclear] then Mr. Offie, Carmel Offie was the right hand of Ambassador William C. Bullitt. Offie was...how would you call it, he was working for the American government in Germany. And he was...

EM: Well how do you spell his name?

MF: O-F-F- like in Frank, I-E. He was with the State Department, and he was a big shot. He loved music. I met him through Judge Leventhal, Louis Leventhal, who was the political advisor to the American government in Germany for Jewish affairs. And I played a lot of concerts, and he came, and we met.

EM: Well, where did you play the concerts in Frankfurt?

MF: I played in the radio station. I played at recitals. I played a lot over the radio.

EM: Did you make any money? Did you get paid?
MF: Yeah.
EM: You made money for that.
MF: Sure, sure.
EM: All right.
MF: Not much, but it was all in old marks, you know, it was peanuts.
EM: And so you played, and so you did have recitals, and you played all the time.
MF: Yes, yeah, I did, with the orchestra and so on.
EM: And you were taking the lessons...
MF: I became quite well-known in Frankfurt.
EM: And you...
MF: And I played outside. I played in Wiesbaden, I played in Kassel, I played in Munich, I played in Hamburg, wherever. And Bad Homburg. I played in a lot of places.
EM: What happened later?
MF: Yeah. Well, so Mr. Offie told me he's going, but that must have been 1948. He's, yeah, the new marks came out then. And everybody could exchange forty new marks for forty old ones, that's it. But all of a sudden, everything which they robbed in Europe was for sale. Before this, before the new marks came out, there was nothing. All of a sudden everything's for sale. They pulled everything out. They were holding it for the new money. So I decided, so Offie wanted me to buy a piano for him, a grand. So I put an ad—he was too busy, he was a very busy man with the government—so I put an ad in the paper, "I'm looking for a beautiful Steinway or a Bechstein." I didn't know anything about a Bechstein yet, because Mrs. Bechstein was one of the great friends of Hitler, which I found out when I was here already. Maybe a couple years, I bought a book, *Who Financed Hitler?* And there it is. Didn't I ever show that to you?
EM: No, no.
MF: You won't believe it. So, well, Offie left, and I couldn't find anything. When they answered the ad, it was a junk piano. I said, "I asked for a good instrument. What are you showing me? I'm not interested." Then I got the idea, I said, "He wanted a piano. That means that the pianos must be very expensive in the States. I won't be able to afford it. Why don't I buy a piano myself and take it to the States?" So I put in again an ad, and it, one, there were junk pianos and all that, but there was one interesting one, a doctor answered. "I have a beautiful, what is it, seven-foot-five Steinway, you know. And if you're a concert pianist, something, you'll love that instrument." So I went there, right near the railroad station, *Bahnhof*, right there. And I came in and the maid opened the door and showed me the piano. I walked in there. It was a beautiful apartment. A gorgeous instrument! Eighty years old, but hardly used! Like a new one! Beautiful! The doctor comes in and he says, "Oh, Herr Filar, *Sie bezahlen jeden Pfennig*." I said, "How do you know my name?" "Oh, I heard you play. I love music. I go to concerts. So I heard you many times. You need that piano. You'll pay every cent for it!" I said, "How much is it?" He

says, "Six thousand marks." The dollar was fifteen marks. That was \$400. I said, "Where am I gonna get you six thousand marks? I got forty marks in the bank." He said, "If you want to buy that piano, you'll get the money." If you have dollars, you could do it. And I had, I played in Lisbon. And I made some money there. And Giesecking got me some concerts, so I made some money, and I had a couple of thousand dollars or so. So I knew a black marketeer. Where you gonna get marks? So you have to talk with a guy. I saw him once on the street walking with a fiddle case. I said, "You're a violinist? Since when?" "Since no. I don't play the violin. I have a lot of marks in there. That's the only way to carry it!" It was funny. So I told him I found a piano I wanted to buy. He said, "On you I won't make a cent. How much do you need?" I said, "Six thousand marks." "Give me \$400. I'll get you 6000 marks." In ten and twenty mark denominations. That's what it was, the whole suitcase, full of marks. And I bought the piano. It was a beautiful instrument. And I remember, I still lived in Zeilsheim at that time, just before we moved out, so I didn't have room where to put that piano. So I knew some people on a few streets away. So I asked the lady if she will rent me some room. I'll pay her for it monthly, whatever it is, and we'll put the piano there. She said, oh, she loves music. Fine. So I put it in there, and I called the piano tuner. He was a Bechstein man. And that was a Steinway. So, he came in and looked at it and says, "Fine." I said, "Let's open it up and let's take a vacuum cleaner and clean out the dust from there." He just told me he couldn't take the keyboard out. So I said, "Let me try." I pulled it out. He couldn't and I did. So he said, "I'm a Bechstein man, not a Steinway." So the old lady who owned the house there, she jumped at him and said, "Shame on you! You are a mechanic, and he pulled it out and you couldn't do it? You're an idiot!" She really let him have it.

EM: O.K.

MF: Anyway, then I took the piano to Frankfurt, and when we moved in it was summer and the windows were open. I wanted to go to the piano and play, so I closed the windows and I started to play. The phone rings. A neighbor from across the street. "Herr Filar, we know who you are. Why did you close the window? We love classic music!" That's the difference. "Keep them open! We heard your concerts! We know who you are. Please unclosethe windows." So, well, I lived there, and I played a lot. And then, of course, the black market was a problem. And I needed a car. Well, who could afford a car? Forget it. But the city of Frankfurt had used cars, some who were left from the war, private cars. And some who were taken away by the police from black marketeers, after it was a trial and whatever and they, because they were smuggling. So you had to have some protection to be able to buy a car like this, because they would sell it for the *Reichsmarks*.

EM: You mean protection, you mean pull, you had.

MF: Pull, yeah. It's called Vitamin...P.

EM: O.K.

MF: Yeah. So, I found out where it is. It belongs to the city. I went to the city hall. I came in there and he looked at me; he knew I am not German. And he said, "Not,

no, not, *nicht*, not today! Come next week.” And I heard, “Come next week,” I don’t know, twenty, thirty times. Mr. Gembiki, who came back from Canada, bought a ruined house, rebuilt it, and created a center of beautiful music. Great people used to come there, the primadonnas from the opera house, American generals, General Hubner was there. He was the head of the First Army. And there were some other officers from the American government. And I was there, I played. And then I told Mr. Giesecking about it, because it was fantastic food and drinks and wine. You name it, it was...like an oasis, you know. So one day they told me, so yeah, so I...when I went there I was told that I should...get a letter. If Mr. Giesecking would write me a letter that I’m a concert pianist and I play, and I am not a black marketeer, and I need a car because the trains were overloaded with black marketeers. A ticket cost fifty cents to go, I don’t know, six, seven, eight hours. So everybody was on that train. And I played once at the University of Marburg, and I stood on one leg for two hours, to get there. So I told Giesecking. He said, “Well, I can do. I can write you a letter to the Minister of Culture,” which was in Wiesbaden. I took it. I went there. The doors opened up in a minute. That was a, you know, a magic letter. That name was...magic. So the Minister said to me, “I have nothing to do with it, but I can, I’ll write you a letter to the Transport Minister. He has something to do with cars.” So I went to him and I got a letter, that I deserved to get one for official price and so on and so forth. When I went there, it didn’t work. Nothing worked. One day, one evening, on a Friday evening or a Saturday, weekend it was, there was a concert in Mr. Gembiki’s home. And there was a Mr. Weber who was also in Buchenwald, a German. And he was an Assistant Provost Marshall or something in the city. He was a big shot in the City Hall. So I said to him, you know, and I played. And he liked that. So we became kind of friendly. So I said to him, “Look, Herr Weber,” I said, “I have this kind of a recommendation, from the Minister. And I can’t get a car. I go there, he tells me nothing. ‘Come next week. Come next week.’” So Mr. Weber started a laugh. And I said, “Herr Weber, what is so funny?” He said, “What’s so funny? I’m the boss of that guy who sends you away! So you go there Monday.” He says, “What is this, Saturday? I’ll go Sunday to a parking lot. I’ll pick out the best car for you. You go to him Monday and he’ll say, ‘No,’ and you tell him to call me. You’ll see he knows my telephone number by memory. He’ll dial it right away.” That’s exactly what I did. I went there. The guy says, “Nothing. Come next week.”

EM: Yeah.

MF: I said, “This time Herr Weber sent me.” He said, “Who?” “So you heard me. Herr Weber.” “Oh yeah?” “He said if something’s unclear you can call him.” Before I said, “Call him,” he was already dialing, without looking at the phone.

EM: So you got the car.

MF: So it was “*Jawohl Herr Weber, schon gut, ja, ja, stimmt.*” [Yes sir, Mr. Weber, very good, yes, yes, agreed.] “Blah, blah, blah. Come Thursday to get the key.” So Mr. Weber picked a car out for you.” It was an old Opel, built in 1938, and that was in 1947. Nine years old, or maybe ten years old.

EM: So then...

MF: I got it for three dollars.

EM: For three dollars.

MF: Yeah. And I had to buy the battery on the black market! That was more than the whole car.

EM: O.K. So...

MF: That's funny. And so, and I rode it till 1950 and I sold it for \$500 before I went to the States. It was the best deal I ever made.

EM: So how did you get to the United States? How did you get papers and come?

MF: Well, there was a registration. Well, there was the Truman Act, about people, DP, displaced persons, who went through camps, were allowed to come to the States.

EM: Tell me, you said something that you went to France for a while.

MF: Yeah.

EM: Could you tell me about that?

MF: Well, yes. I had cousins in France, one cousin, Jeanette, and her brother, both married, had children already born in France. Her, their mother and my mother were sisters. They also survived the Holocaust, but they landed in France, and they stayed there. And the children were born, now they're French. They're French people. I wanted to find them. I wanted to see Paris. So I had all of twenty dollars in my pocket. And I got on a night train. And I went to Paris. I arrived there about six, seven in the morning. And they told me there—I didn't have the address; I didn't know where they were; I was just going to look—so they told me, "There are little hotels around *Gare de l'Est*, the east station, there in Paris. But you better look at a room before you take it, because they might rent rooms there for a short while or something." So I went up to one room. They showed me. I said, "Forget it." And I walked out. And I went to a little café there. I left my luggage at the railroad station. I had a bowl of some breakfast, and I bought a paper and I started to read French. I had six years of it in high school. I said, "Hey! I know that! I know this and I know..." And then I walked there and look around. Then somebody calls me from behind. "Marian!" I said, "Who's that?" "What are you doing in Paris?" He was a former boyfriend of my older sister. He also survived and he was there. I said, "Well, I came to look for my cousins, you know, the Mais." He said, "You're looking for your cousins? Well I know them. I know where they live. Let's go to a phone!" Just like that, and five minutes later I was talking to my cousin. He says, "Come on over!" And they lived on *Boulevard St. Michel*. I speak French, too. So I stayed there for a while. We saw Paris. We went sightseeing. It was a fan-, fascinating, you know, experience after a horrible war. And then I was there again. I think it was in '48, yeah.

EM: But you played there, didn't you?

MF: Not yet. In '4-...

EM: Oh, tell me about when you played.

MF: No, when I first came I didn't. I...well I was just a tourist. I wanted to see Chopin's grave and...

EM: Yeah.

MF: You know, I saw the landmarks in Paris and all that.

EM: Yeah, O.K.

MF: And I revived my French. And I met some very interesting people. And I went back. Then I went again in 1948, and I stayed with them. And my cousin Jeanette said to me, "There's a big manager coming from New York, we heard." They knew some people already. They were already domesticated in Paris. "And he'll be in the Jewish Agency..." and what's the name of that [unclear].

EM: The Joint?

MF: What?

EM: The Joint Distribution?

MF: Yeah, American Joint, that's right. American Joint Distribution. "So we got you a meeting here Friday morning at ten o'clock you gotta be there. His name is Sol Hurok." I had no idea who he was.

EM: Sol Hurok?

MF: Yeah, the biggest manager in the United States, who came to America from Russia without a cent in his pocket, by the way. I read a little book about him.

EM: O.K.

MF: So, I came, so I went there. And the man who introduced me said that I am studying with one of the greatest pianists in the world, with Walter Gieseking. And he jumped at me, Hurok. He said, "You're studying with that Nazi?" "Boy," I said. "I had no idea that he was a Nazi. I inquired before I went to...play for him. And I didn't read any papers in Buchenwald." I said, "They didn't deliver papers there. So, I heard from a half-Jewish lady that he was a decent man, and played Mendelssohn in a recital. And he helped me a great deal. I learned a lot, and he likes me a lot. He doesn't charge me a cent. As a matter of fact," I said, "he is gonna play in January of '49 in Carnegie Hall a recital." And Hurok looks at me and says, "He is not gonna play. I'm telling you this." I see that's...a war between the two. I had no idea. And I'm right in the middle of it. "I want to hear you play." I said, "Well, I have a key to a small hall in *Salle Playel*." That's like Carnegie Hall, but in the basement are three smaller halls, for about three, four hundred people. And I had, through my cousin I got a key there and I could practice. And it was a good piano. "O.K.," he says, "Monday morning at ten o'clock we'll be there." So I got there a little earlier, like nine maybe, get the key and go in there. It's not the same piano. A problem. And so it's a very average instrument. So I went back to the office and said, "What happened? Why this change?" "Oh, we had a concert last night in the big hall. We needed two pianos for the Mozart Concerto for two pianos. So we took the good one out. And it will be back there tonight." I said, "Tonight is too late." Anyway, Hurok came in with a photographer and press people, whatever. He came in with ten, fifteen people and some others he wanted to

hear. I played for him and he liked it. As a matter of fact, I was the only one he took a picture with. So I have this picture. I showed it to you. And he said to me, "I am ready to take you to America. I'll be glad to take you to America. Are you ready to be hungry for the first five years?" I felt like somebody hit me in the face. What I went through, I came out of...maybe I weighed about, I don't know, eighty pounds, something like that. I was half dead. I looked like a living skeleton. And here comes a rich uncle from America, offers me to be hungry again for the next five years. I wish he would try. He'll find out what it is, because I know very well. But I didn't answer. I didn't say anything. But I said to him, "Well, Mr. Hurok, if you liked me on this piano, I just bought a beautiful old instrument, a Steinway, hardly played, in Frankfurt. Maybe you'll be in Frankfurt. So, if you will be, I'll...if you liked me on this piano, I'm sure you'll like me a lot better on a beautiful instrument." "Oh," he said, "as a matter of fact, yes, I'll be in Frankfurt next week. Give me your phone number. I'll call you." And I was supposed to go back. In the meantime, Giesecking, before I met Hurok, Giesecking was in Paris. He was in the American Embassy. He got a visa for the States, for January. He introduced me to some very important musicians in Paris, the top people there. And I met...

[End of tape three, side one.]

Tape three, side two:

EM: This is an interview with Professor Marian Filar, Edith Millman interviewing, tape three, side two.

MF: Yeah, so Mr. Giesecking introduced me to those people. So I told him when he left already, went back, I don't know where he went, but he was not in Paris any more. But I saw those French people. I told them what happened, who I met, and so on. They got really incensed. They said, "The nerve to offer you, after the hell you went through, to be hungry?" I...well, today I realize maybe it was just a matter of speech. Maybe he said, "It won't be so great in the beginning." But what, I took it literally. I couldn't understand it any different. So they said, "No, well you're not going back to Frankfurt. We have an audition for you here with the Symphony Orchestra called *Orchestre Cologne*," a very famous orchestra in France. "And you will play with the Symphony in Paris. You'll get to America without him. You live in the American Zone. There is some law passed by the...President in Congress that you people will be able to go to the States anyway. You need him like a hole in the head." Well, I didn't know who he was. I had no idea that he was such a big manager. So, and I was young, inexperienced, and these were very important people. So I listened to them, and I stayed, and I had the audition, played for the conductor of the orchestra. And I got a concert. I played, for the last concert in Europe before coming here. And I came here on March 3, 1950, just two weeks before. So I played in Paris with the Symphony. I got a great success. So I got back a little later, and my brother Michael said to me, "A man called here. He said his name was Sol Hurok. He asked for you. And I told him you were still in Paris, so he hung up." And I met another man. When I came here, you know, a few months later, I found out who Hurok was. I said, "Boy, did I make a mistake. I had no idea," I said. "What kind of an enticing proposition is to go to the States to be hungry?" I wasn't hungry in Europe. I was doing great. I had a car, I had a beautiful piano, I had a beautiful apartment and a maid. I want to go to America and be hungry? Who needs it? Well, anyway, so I tried to reach him. I tried to call him up and explain what happened. Maybe he'll understand. Uh oh, "Mr. Hurok is in Europe. Oh, what's your name?" I told him. "Mr. Hurok is on the moon. Mr. Hurok is in hell. Mr. Hurok is here and there." He don't want to see me. It was quite obvious. Not only he didn't want to see me, but years later I found out that he actually stopped my career, in a way, if you want to say that. And it was a pretty dirty thing to do. Because I did play. I did play with Ormandy fourteen times and I was with the Philadelphia Orchestra. I had my debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra in Carnegie Hall with Ormandy conducting, played a Chopin F minor Concerto. And I played in Chicago. I played in Washington with the Symphony. I played all over. But how long can you go on playing by yourself, trying to get your connections, some from Europe, so on? You need a manager. You can't do everything by yourself because you have to practice. You don't even have time to sleep. You can't do it. So I started, so somebody wrote a letter, right even at the beginning, when I didn't know

English yet. Somebody from Europe wrote a letter of recommendation to the Vice President of Columbia Concerts the biggest management. He was called André Mertens. It was a Jewish fellow from Berlin. I got an appointment, came in there. He kept me waiting in the waiting room for about an hour. That's the way they were doing it, to soften you up. So you come in and you're already beat before you even open your mouth. So I come in there and I told him in German, and I said, "Mr. Mertens, I came here..."

EM: Mertens? How was...

MF:

M-E-R-T-E-

N-S. I said, "Mr. Mertens, I understand you come from Berlin and you speak German. I am just here a few weeks. I already go to school learning English, but I don't know it yet. Could we speak in German?" So he said something to me in English. And I said, "I told you, I don't know what you're saying." And he said, "You understand. You understand." And I said, "But I don't." And again, he played ping pong with me, going back and forth. He was making an idiot out of me. I got up and I left. And I remember I had tears in my eyes in the elevator. I said, "What a bum! What a crude guy! Why would he do it to me, for what reason?" Then I went to Marx Levine, he was the President of NCAC. That was the second biggest organization in the States. And he greeted me when I walked in. He knew my name, whether it was by pictures in the paper and all that. That was later on. And he says, "Yeah! Well I know all about you! You have all the concerts. You get better concerts what I can get for my artists! You don't need a manager. You're saving money." I said, "Mr. Mar-, Mr. Mer-, Morris, yeah," I said, "I am not saving money. I just know some people from Europe. I had a few auditions. They liked me and I'm playing. But I need management. Why don't you take me? Whatever your fee is, I'll be glad to pay it. Just give me a break." "No, no, no! You don't need a manager!" And wherever I went, "You don't need a manager." It was Hurok's job. That's how he paid me back. I found out years later. Well, how long can you go on, you know, like this? And at the beginning, when you're not known, you're being paid peanuts. What do you think they pay you? So I started to look since I played a lot in Philadelphia with the Philadelphia Orchestra. So I looked around and they offered me a job as the head of the piano department at the Settlement Music School in Philadelphia. It was in 1953, and the pay was good for a refugee from camp. And I started to make good money. And I started to teach there in the piano department. And I was very successful. I had ten kids who won eighteen performances with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Two of them best students from Curtis Institute. One was Charles Birnbaum, the other was Beth Levine. Beth played a Beethoven Third Piano Concerto. Charlie played a Chopin concerto.

EM: A what concerto?

MF: A Chopin, a Chopin E minor.

EM: Oh, Chopin, oh.

MF: And then Temple University opened up in '57. Dr. Stone who was the Dean—I mean the College of Music opened up—invited me to join the faculty. And I

remember I, so I talked to him on the phone and I said, "Well, why don't we meet?" I said, "Wonderful. Where can we meet?" He says, "In front of the Academy of Music." And I said, "Dr. Stone, how do you look like?" He says, "You don't have to know how I look like. I know how you look like. I saw you at the Academy. I heard your concerts." So we met. He turned out to be a wonderful friend. He just had his golden wedding anniversary last Sunday and I was there. And there were a lot of people and we love him. He is a wonderful, honest, dedicated human being. And I adore him. I really do. One of the few people I really love so much. And so...that's how it started. And then I saw that my life settles, and I used to commute. I lived in New York the first ten years. So from '53 to '59 I used to go from New York to Philadelphia. I drove there. We had a car. And I drove once a week. I came here Wednesday around noon-time, and went back Friday night. Oh yeah, that was an interesting story. The director of the school called me once, it was Friday, and he says, "When are you going back to New York?" I said, "Tonight." "Well, I got news for you. But I think you'll stay till tomorrow." I said, "It better be good, because I'm going home." He says, "No, you're not." I said, "Why not?" "Guess who is coming to meet you?" I said, "Who?" Danny Kaye. I said, "Danny Kaye? That great actor? Why does he want to meet me?" "Oh, he was at a dinner with some member from the Philadelphia Orchestra." And they talked about me, about the hell I went through, so he wanted to meet me. "He'll be here tomorrow, at school tomorrow morning at ten o'clock." "O.K., I'm staying." He came in, there was a write-up in the neighborhood. The kids found out...you know, he was a great kid lover, and had movies for kids and all. So it was a riot there when he came in. And I played for him and this and that, and then it was pretty nice and I said, "Mr. Kaye, I have to admit, I apologize, I know who you are, of course. You're a very famous actor. But I never saw you in person on the stage or in the movies. I never had the privilege." He said, "When are you coming back to Philadelphia?" I said, "I'll be back coming Wednesday." "There'll be a ticket for you in the box office, for you, and come back stage." So I did. And I was handing him out his paraphernalia. You know, a hard hat, a cane, whatever it was. And then he did a trick, I'll never—for the public—I'll never forget. He sat, it was after intermission, I think—he sat down on the stage dangling his feet from the stage—and he invited the public in three groups. He said, "From this row to this row. When I give you a sign you all yell out." It was packed, in the Schubert Theater. Two thousand people were there. He said, "You yell out loud, 'Hi!'" So they said, "O.K." He gave them a sign, "Hi!" He said, "Fine, shut up. Now the next group." That's how he was talking. "When I give you a sign, you yell out loud, Fi!" They didn't know what it was going on. I didn't know either, till he finally said the last thing. "So yell out loud, Fi! Say, Fi! O.K., quiet. The next one. When I give you the sign, yell out loud, 'Lar!'" Then he said, he saw them with three lines. They said, "Hi Fi-lar!" Hi, two thousand people are yelling out my name loud! And he turned around and gave me the eye. I was behind the curtain. He said, "Did you ever have two thousand people yelling out your name loud?" They never knew what they were doing! And he says, "That was easy! You should have seen the trouble I had with

Piatigorsky in California!” You know, it was a lot more difficult.

EM: Tell me, did you ever get married?

MF: Yes.

EM: When?

MF: I was married in 1972, I think it was, in 1972 in Brazil, in Sao Paulo. I played there in ‘53. I was on a concert tour and there were some friends of my older brother, a very, very influential people there, very successful people. And the lady told me she was married then, and she fell in love with me when she heard me play. I played a Tchaikovsky Concerto. They gave a big party for me there, and that was it. Then, it was in the ‘50s. In the ‘70s I got a letter from my sister telling me that Simon died. Her husband died. And he was a best friend of my older brother. He was, they were from Warsaw also. So I went to a, I mean a card store, and sent her a sympathy card. I got a call from Paris. “Why don’t we meet? Are you married?” I said, “No.” And so she came to Philadelphia. And I [unclear] married. And I was, she said she would live in Philadelphia. And we had a lot of vacation at Temple, as you know. And first of all I took a leave of absence for one semester, and so I spent oh, about, more than half a year. And I played there before. All right? And I love her children. The children loved me, and we became very great friends and it was beautiful.

EM: She had children?

MF: She had, yeah.

EM: Yeah. So you married her. How long were you married?

MF: We were married about three years. And she didn’t want to, she said she would live in Philadelphia, but then she started to cry. See, I told her she won’t be able to switch that easy. So she said she wanted me to move to Brazil. I said, “No, you said you’re gonna live here. I have my life here, and I don’t want to be kept by anybody else. I don’t need that.” So, we parted as friends. And I visited her many times after the divorce, you know.

EM: Yeah. Now, you also traveled a lot in Europe and other places, too, and you played, right?

MF: Yes.

EM: And so, could you tell me a little bit about where you played?

MF: Well, I played all over. First of all in, I played in France, all over Germany. I played in England, in Holland, and Denmark, and Norway, and Sweden. I played in Portugal. I played in Israel with the Israeli Philharmonic twenty concerts in thirty days. When the war broke out in 1956, the Sinai Campaign, I was there.

EM: In, during the Sinai Campaign.

MF: Yeah. And they, I had two more concerts to play and they released me from the contract. But I didn’t want to leave. I said, “I wasn’t running from Hitler; I’m not going to run from Nasser.” And I finished my concert tour. And I was later invited to be a judge in the Rubinstein Competition.

EM: And tell me, you did win many awards. Could you mention a few?
MF: What?
EM: You won some awards and...
MF: Oh well yeah, I got a silver medal from the Rubinstein Competition.
EM: And...
MF: I was supposed to play, in 1942 in the Chopin competition in Warsaw.
EM: '42?
MF: '42, but there was no competition.
EM: Oh, oh.
MF: The Germans were there. Chopin was forbidden, there was nothing.
EM: O.K.
MF: So I missed my opportunity. Because I was ready.
EM: Could you tell me a little bit of your life now? You, I understand you...
MF: I'm retired. I'm a retired professor enjoying my life, going to competitions here and there, judging.
EM: But, you're judging.
MF: Yeah, I'm judging some competitions, some very fine ones. I was just a couple of months ago in Miami. That was the national Chopin contest, and the winners are gonna go to Warsaw in October. There's an international Chopin contest there and I'm invited by the jury as the guest of honor. So I'll be there in October.
EM: O.K. Now, as you...
MF: I teach privately.
EM: You teach privately.
MF: Yeah, and some very interesting people.
EM: Could you tell me a little bit about your friendship with this General?
MF: Oh, General Twining?
EM: General Twining?
MF: Yeah. Well, that was a fascinating part of my life. I was still living in Europe at that time when I was playing the piano when the phone rang. It was about noontime. Ambassador Bullitt was on the phone. He said, "Mr. Filar, I'm having lunch at Fort Myers, at General Twining's quarters. His son has just graduated, he's gonna graduate college this summer in Oberlin, Ohio. He's a pianist, and the General asked me who he should study with after he graduated Oberlin. And I told him I only know two people; one is Rubinstein and the other one, you. Well, Rubinstein is too busy, so here it is. Nathan wants to talk to you." So he came up to the phone, the son, Nathan, Jr. "Hi, how are..."
EM: Nathan was his name?
MF: Nathan. And the General was also Nathan. So he was Nate. They, the General they called Nate. And he was Nathan. But actually he was Nathan, Jr.

EM: Nate Bullitt?

Nate...

MF: No, Nate Twining!

EM: Nate Twining, Twining, oh.

MF: Yeah. "Hi, hi, how are you? I heard you play." I played at the National Symphony several times in Washington, and he was there. So we made an appointment. He said he'll come to New York and we'll meet. I said, "O.K., you'll fly to LaGuardia," I said, "I will pick you up at the airport and I'll be holding the Schuman Piano Concerto in my hand high, so you'll see me, like that." And he said, "I know what you look like." I said, "Never mind. I'll have the music in my hand." So he came. I liked him and so on. Then I started to commute there, and I met a very great man, became very great friends. I was in his office in the Pentagon. I swam at the Pentagon swimming pool. I was working harder; well, and the guards there knew when I was coming in sometimes by a cab. They already knew me. They saluted. They said, "It's some kind of a General coming in here."

EM: That's great.

MF: It was great fun...

EM: I'm...

MF: He was a great, he was a wonderful man. I have an interview with him on tape.

EM: Mmm hmm, oh, mmm hmm.

MF: With the General. I have it.

EM: Could you tell me a little bit more about your life in the ghetto? I wanted to go back into the ghetto.

MF: Oh God. That was hell on earth. I was away in Lemberg during the war.

EM: Yeah, we have that on tape.

MF: Yeah, then I came back in December of 1941.

EM: I am especially interested in your playing in the ghetto, when you were playing [unclear].

MF: Yeah, O.K. Now, there was a Symphony Orchestra in the ghetto. And very few people mention this. It's really a shame. It was a wonderful orchestra. Many of the members of that orchestra were members of the Warsaw Philharmonic. And the conductor was a very wonderful cellist by the name of Marian Neutajch.

EM: Neutajch?

MF: Neutajch. N-E-U-T-A-J-C-H. And he was a fine conductor, and I played with him in the ghetto the Tchaikovsky Concerto. Well, in the ghetto, my parents were at that concert, and my sister Helen. They all perished. And how did we do it? We announced that the German wouldn't permit us to play anything but Jewish composers. So in front of the hall, actually it was a movie house, which was built just before the war, and the government and the city of Warsaw didn't permit it to be opened because it was one or three feet too close to a church.

There was a law then. Now the church was also in the ghetto, so they made a concert hall out of it, Anatiera. [phonetic] So we announced in front of the hall this, an announcement we're playing Mendelssohn Concerto. And we brought the music from the Polish side, from Polish friends, you know? This music was smuggled in and we played a Tchaikovsky. I also played chamber music with a young violinist—I was young myself at that time—by the name of David Zajdel, Z-A-J-D-E-L, a wonderful, wonderful talent. Unfortunately he was murdered. We played chamber music, publicly, on Orla Street I think it was, in Warsaw, by the side street of Leszno, if I remember correctly.

EM: Do you remember if people had to pay to get to the concerts?

MF: Yeah, some, very little.

EM: Very little.

MF: Whatever it was.

EM: Did you get paid for the...

MF: Pssh, pssh...

EM: You don't remember?

MF: I really don't remember, no. But I remember once when...the atrocities started and then the money was scarce. I mean we were bombed out, you know. They cleaned my father's business out. It was...people were just poor like church mice. So, Marian Neutajch said to me, "You need to make some money?" I said, "Of course!" "I got a job. I'm creating a trio. We'll play in a café, popular music. I have a professional violinist who is a café musician. And it's in a nice, new café opened up. So we're gonna have a rehearsal, the three of us. And they will pay us enough to buy a bread, for the whole evening." That was, bread was life. So we went in to rehearse and this professional violinist was giving us hell!

EM: Why?

MF: It was something! We had a rehearsal, he said, "You're a great musician and you can't play 1-2-3 in time!" Like a waltz or something. I said, "All right." And I had a piano there, an upright piano. I said, "I want to play it so that I'll face the wall. I don't want anybody to see me." And we played one evening, and that was the end of it. The next day started the atrocities. But I came home with a bread.

EM: And so, but, and so you only could play in the evening. During the day you worked at that [unclear]?

MF: No, they, only that one night. Then it was over.

EM: Oh.

MF: They started to...

EM: Oh, oh.

MF: Send people to the concentration camps. It was just one night.

EM: All right.

MF: Just one night, that's all.

EM: All right. Anything else you would like to add?

MF: Yeah, how I lost my father. I came, I don't know why I was in town somewhere and I get through and I came home. My mother said, "Father is gone." I said, "What do you mean?"

EM: Yeah.

MF: He was going to the *Yiddischer Gemeinde*, to the Jewish...

EM: Well...

MF: Did I tell you that before?

EM: Yeah, we have that already. Yeah, you...

MF: And they caught him on the street.

EM: Yeah, we have that...

MF: They closed the street.

EM: On the tape.

MF: Yeah, and then the uprising and the rest you know.

EM: Yeah, so...

MF: And here I am, so many years later. But you know, we had a little villa outside of the city in Warsaw. And there...someone, a Gypsy woman used to walk around yelling that they lay cards, tell you the future and all of that. And I was a little boy at that time. And she said, "Come on, give me your hands." And she, so put some cards on the table. She says, "You're gonna go beyond the big, big water." She kind of predicted I'll be going to the States. It's unbelievable. I never forgot that. Yeah.

EM: All right, Professor Filar, thank you very much.

MF: You're quite welcome.

EM: If there is anything else you want to add, you know, I'll, that's all.

MF: Well, what I want to add, I would like to see in this country a Ministry of Culture. I would like our government to be a little more for culture. They leave it all to private people. And all those civilized societies, France, England, Germany, Italy, all have Ministries of Culture. And they contribute to culture a lot more. Too bad I don't have the cut-out from *The New York Times*. I just saw a couple of weeks ago, I think, how much our government spends on culture, how much France spends, how much England spends, and Germany. I was ashamed to read it. That's all I can say.

EM: O.K. Thank you very much.

MF: Thank you.

[End of tape three, side two. End of interview.]