

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ARI FUHRMAN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Josey G. Fisher
Date: October 26, 1981

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AF - Ari Fuhrman [interviewee]

JF - Josey Fisher [interviewer]

Date: October 26,

Tape one, side one:

JF: This is an interview with Mr. Ari Fuhrman, on October 26, 1981, with Josey Fisher. Can you tell me, Mr. Fuhrman, where and when you were born, and a little bit about your family?

AF: Yes, I was born in the town of Czernowitz, that's in the Bukovina, that was, at that time, in 1924, when I was born it was part of Romania. In later years, in '40, the Russians took it over, as usual, and claimed that it's their territory. What really even now is their territory, and it's part of the Ukraine, in that part of the world. Like I said, I was born. The first years I was living in the town of Czernowitz, you know how to spell it if you need. Later years, my father was a tailor, and he tried to better himself, so he decided, in other words, he wants to move to Vienna, because Bukovina was years ago when my father and mother was born, was part of Austria, the Empirium [Empire] of Austria-Hungary. The Kaiser Franz Joseph that was the first king, he was an emperor of that part then, and they were having the Bukovina part of that Empirium. So they were speaking in that part of town, it was like a part of Austria. So he felt that we could move to Austria, and to Vienna, more specific, and he'd be able to make a living there. But it seems that at that time, it was impossible to get an authorization for work, or whatever name it was--a license, that's the right name, a license to work. So, after he spent a lot of money, put together the store with everything set up, and then he went to obtain a license, they wouldn't give it to him. So, he had, we had to move after two years, I think or a year and a half. I was then a little boy, I think I was 4 or 6, 6, 7 years old, because I even made the first grade of my education I made in Vienna.

JF: You moved to Vienna, then, when you were about 4?

AF: No, I think I was 6.

JF: About 6?

AF: Yes.

JF: Do you have memories of Czernowitz?

AF: Yes, I'll come to that. Yes. I just want to bring this point up. So like I said, so my first memory, the reason why I'm saying this episode before any others is in 1931, when we were living there, I had my first experience with actually the Hitlerism. Because, it was already starting that you could see already the swastikas there, and the first glance of Hitlerism already in Vienna, you could see that there. In 1931, '32 already, was the first, I'm not sure if Hitler was already then at his--let's not call it Hitlerism but Nazism--was already in the picture at that time. As a boy, I could already like--my father--I was going around--we had to avoid this thing. It was like the first nucleus of that particular situation.

JF: You remember, you said, the swastikas?

AF: Yes.

JF: And what other memories do you have?

AF: Of the burning--I'm not, it's like--it looks in my memory just very faint. It was so many years, since then, but I still remember that kind of people were talking about it, the Jewish in the synagogue, we were going, and I remember it was Simchas Torah, the Rabbi something-- it's very vague in my memory, but that was my first encounter with it. I really didn't understand what it was all about, but at this point, thinking back about the situation then, it just flashes back what really happened at that period of time.

JF: Did you have any experiences in Vienna at that time that were antisemitic?

AF: Not really. I was a boy of 6, 7. So I really didn't relate to it that way. But it really was just a flashback of my memory while I was talking about it. So, the first grade, like I said, I made there, but my father did not succeed to get his license although he had spent a lot of money, and we returned back to Czernowitz.

JF: The school that you had been attending in Vienna, was this a public school?

AF: It was a public school, and funny enough, I remember certain flashes about it, like they would give us, in the middle of the day, I don't know what time of the day, they would give us milk, hot milk. It was like a practice there. And, funny, the only thing I remember about this milk, that it was the first time in my life I got, how you call it, a straw. That was the first time in my life, and I'll always remember that. And I think the way I remembered it was because the straw, it was not plastic, like now, because plastic wasn't the thing. Thinking now, plastic then in the beginning of the '30s, there were no plastics available, because plastics came in the '40's. So, you know, what really happened, is that you really had a straw, and that was always in my memory. Look it was a straw.

So, as I said, due to the fact, I could say it was, the reason I think was antisemitic, my father's license. I think he didn't get it because he was Jewish, he was a Jew, and we had at that--my father had bought even a quarter of a house. In other words, you could buy in partnership with other people, a house, and I'm not even sure we sold it, because this I was too little to understand. But I know in later years, after the war, I visited Vienna, and I still seen that house standing, and funny, it was supposed to be a condemned, it was a building, a big building. It was about I think, six stories high, and a big courtyard in the middle, like they have it in Vienna, and it was supported by pieces of wood, probably from the war, but the people were still living there. I walked in, I tried to see if somebody there remembered anything, but it seemed like nothing. I was a visitor in that year, the school I was going. And also, we were living near the North Railroad Station, what was nearby. And that station was already a condemned building, and still people know about the *Nord Bahnhof*, it means the North Railroad Station, and that I couldn't even go in because it was closed. But the school I still seen, the school is still a school, and probably the children are just getting their milk, probably now like I did then. I was walking in there, and there was

nobody in the school. It was a period when the school was closed, but that was one of my things that I had later seen when I visited Vienna.

JF: Did you father talk at this time of the possibility of leaving Europe, or going somewhere else, because of what was happening with the Nazis?

AF: Let me tell you here an episode, and the roots, the ties, let me put it this way, of families were so strong at that point, that you would give up everything. We could have. We had a choice from Vienna, at that point, I remember my father or my mother told me later, in later years, we had the choice, all go back to Czernowitz or go to Palestine at that time, in the '30's. Because we had that choice, it was costing just the same probably to get here or there, or whatever. But my mother was so longing--longing, you say?--to her family. She never had a mother and father, she don't remember them, but she has an aunt, a sister of her mother's who actually she was raised by. So, she was, I mean screaming, she wants to go back. I mean, she was crying, she wants to go not to Palestine but back to Romania, to Bukovina, to Czernowitz, it was Romania then, yes. But the episode I want to mention is we had a--my father had a cousin. And now I'm jumping from the '30's to the end of '30's, from beginning to end. And this uncle, we called him Uncle, but he was actually a cousin of my father's. Not even she, his wife, their children--So at that point, at the end of the '30's, when the whole thing was already going on, we had this aunt, we called her. They moved to Chile, South America. In the '40's, they came back to Czernowitz, because she was so lonesome, so missing her family, that she came back from Chile to Czernowitz. She was deported to the concentration camp together with us. We lived through three and a half years concentration camp. She came back with all of us to Czernowitz, and then he applied again, and they moved back then to Chile, in later years, to Brazil. And they lived in Brazil, and to show you how the destiny of a family or of a person can be, because, you see here, it was meant to be, or whatever made this fatalistic, I don't know how to really--to come, to be there, to know the fire and the thing going what's going on here in Eastern Europe, to come back because you wanted to go to family, to see family, and go through the hell of concentration camp, and survive, all four of them survived. There were two children, one survived in Russia, and the daughter with them was together with us in concentration camp, all these years...

JF: They knew what was happening in Europe?

AF: I imagine that they knew, at that time you heard, nobody could imagine, they couldn't figure out that such a horrible thing could really happen. But being that, they didn't really care. They wanted to see family, it was the mother, and cousins and brothers and everything--they want to be here. So they came back, and they had to go through all the hell, and then go back. And luckily, all of them survived. So, to come back to my original story, because this was like an interlude. What do you call it? So, we have stayed in Vienna I think a year and a half, and then we came back to Czernowitz. And funny enough, that all the family, my father, not all of them, but some of the family, moved with us to Vienna, like a brother of my father, and also a sister, with her husband with her

children, of my mother, who also came. And they were, I think, in partnership, I remember, with that house. But later on was, I think so, but I'm not sure even, maybe they didn't even, weren't even able to sell it. OK, so now we are back in Czernowitz.

JF: Were you an only child?

AF: No, we are three. I am the youngest. I am, as they say in Yiddish, the *mezinik*.¹ It means, the last born. So...

JF: You had what, a brother...

AF: Two sisters, two older sisters. One was difference of two years, and one of five years, the way I remember. I think, yeah. One is 22 and one--Yeah, exactly. From the first sister I am five years, and from the second I am two years. So, then, when I came back to Romania, I went to school normally.

JF: Again, was this a public school?

AF: Yes. All was public schools. As was Romania, where you used to learn Romanian, you used to learn in that schools in Romania at that time, you had to learn French. French was the second language of the country. Even the capital of Romania, even up to now, Bucharest, is called a small Paris. Although, it has changed now. You don't learn so much French, most of them learn English, some learn Russian, and so on. But being that our town was all these changes, like, you had Germany, I mean Austria there, and you had Russia take it over, and Romania being there, you automatically had--your background was three languages, besides the Yiddish language, which you spoke at home, so, with your grandparents mostly. But, German, Russian, Romanian, not Russian, let's say Ukrainian, Romanian and Yiddish, you have four languages. You didn't have to have any struggle to do it, not like here, you're lucky with one of them. But there, being that it was the surroundings of the different people, sections of Ukrainians and sections of Germans who were living there, and Jews, because our town was a town of, I think it was 65% of the town was Jewish. I'm not sure, but it was a big population of Jewish. I mean, if you hear Czernowitz, I think the first Yiddish conference, I don't remember which year it was, was in Czernowitz, when they established the Yiddish language. With all the big writers coming together in Czernowitz. It was even called the *Czernowitzer Konferenz*, [C2 Yiddish Language Conference Aug/Sept 1908] when it was established that Yiddish was a language, you know, with the grammar and everything.

Now, going back to that period, so I went to school, OK? But my father didn't believe in school. He felt that you have to have a trade. OK? He says, learning is fine, but you have to have how to make a living out of it. So he, after I finished the first like five grades, and then I went to *Gymnasium*, he decided that I was already old enough to learn a trade. That was at 14. This was in 1938.

JF: Before we get to that period of time, can you describe Czernowitz in those years before the war, in terms of the community that you lived in, the participation the family might have had with religious organizations?

¹*Mezinik* is youngest son; *mezinke* is youngest daughter

AF: Now, my father wasn't a religious person, to put it this way. He didn't even know how to write, I mean, Latin. The only education he had was Yiddish. He was reading Yiddish, and writing Yiddish, and the newspaper, I remember, he used to read for us children all kinds of little storybooks, like he would read it and we would listen to it, and we were getting involved. It was like little pamphlets, like continuation stories in Yiddish. Why? Because he was a very big family. My father was about six brothers and two sisters, something-- A few died, but most of them survived. And at that period, only the oldest got to go to have education. I don't know if you know it. But like the other ones had to be on their own. They were sent to *yeshiva*, they were sent to *cheder* to learn Hebrew, the way you call it, but it's like *davening*, it's like praying Hebrew. They were educated in that, all of them. But really, what do you call it, the modern education, schooling, the way we know it, only the older one was entitled to it, especially in the family where my father grew up, his father had died very young because he was an exporter of chickens, something the way my mother was telling us, and he was exporting somewhere to out in the country chickens, and it came an epidemic, and all the chickens died. And then he was bankrupt, and from aggravation he died. So my grandmother actually raised all the children by selling, I remember, eggs on the market, like the peasants would do it, they would go buy these eggs, and then sit and sell them. And this way she could bring up her children. And she couldn't even afford to send more than one son to go to school. And I'm really not sure which of the sons, because there were so many that I remember only four, I think, and two sisters. The rest is like vague, because they might have died at a young age, and so, I know it was a very big family. And my grandmother got married at 14, so, I mean from my father's side. So this is how it came to be that he did not know. But in Yiddish he was very good and he was reading. Do you remember why I brought back this?

JF: Yes, I was asking you about the religious atmosphere.

AF: Ah, yes, so like I said. Like even here, it was the same kind, like Rosh Hashone and Yom Kippur was the only time when everybody was going to synagogue, and Pesach, we used to make a Seder, and that was about it. I had a very religious *zeyde*, grandfather, who I used to go with him. That was on my mother's side. Wait, he was an uncle of my mother's, because she grew, like I told you before, without parents. But, he was very religious, I remember, and with a beard, white beard, and I used to go with him every Saturday when I was a child. Go to synagogue, go to *shólesh sídes*. [third meal on Sabbath afternoon] You know what *shólesh sídes* means? It means the Saturday before down, before sundown, you get there, you pray, and you get herring or fish, and for me it was something, you know. This guy gave this time herring, and this guy--you see, somebody donates it. And it was a kind of being a child, I remember that.

JF: Did you go to *cheder* as well?

AF: Yes. And as a matter of fact, we had a *cheder* in the house where we were living. When we came back from Vienna, we moved in on the street, and in that courtyard

we had the *cheder*. And I went there to that *cheder* a few years until my Bar Mitzvah, how to say.

JF: Was your family observant at home?

AF: My mother was very observant. She was very religious, up to the last days. Even now, in our home, everything is still the way she left it. She was with us till she died three years ago, and she kept it very, very kosher, everything. So we still keep it the way she left it. We try to keep the memory this way at least, and keep our home as really kosher. My mother stayed with us, because with one of the sisters she would always say, "I could never stay with her, because she never kept her kosher things." She would never even eat there. When we used to visit her, she would bring her own things, you know, on the platter, and eat it because it was-- The other sister, the middle sister, she is already like my mother. She keeps kosher and everything in the house, so there she would go and eat.

JF: Did you have any experiences during those early years with any antisemitism?

AF: OK, so the cultural, before we go into your question about antisemitism and everything else, the cultural activities were like, in my house, being that I had two sisters, especially--let me put it this way, the way youngsters were, just like now, there were two big currents what were absorbing the youth at that time. One was the Zionist, and one was the Communist. So, because they were both, one was maybe also, the Zionist at that time was also--how do you say it in English?--not Communist, also an advanced tide, we called it an advanced tide. [Does he mean Socialism?] It was actually a, the Communists, you know what they actually were. But even the Zionists were work-inclined. In other words, like we have now in Israel the working party, at that time, that was even more. Like in Israel, you have like *Hashomer Hatzair*, what's actually Communism, but, still with nationalism combined. It was very funny to really combine these two things. How can you be a Communist and at the same time a Nationalist? But then and even now, you see that this is possible because they were, they felt that they want to be Jews also, because if you are a Communist, you are a nobody, have no religion, you have no-- Now they are trying to separate, like Russians and Ukrainians, and give them culture separate, and give them hope, I don't know. This is what people say. But at that time, the Zionists were like the *Hashomer Hatzair*, is really a left wing of the Zionism. OK. There were also Zionists, Right Wings and Middle Wings, and Revisionists, in other words, like *Betar*, like Begin's party at that time, and even now. So there were many factions of that. But there were also these who would be Zionists and at the same time, Leftists. And would go there and be like walking free, and trying to make up, and they were really the pioneers of Israel, of Palestine to that time, because all of them were workers, worker-type of Zionists. There were many, and in my town, they were in a small amount. There were an overwhelming majority of youngsters went actually for the left part of Zionism. Before the war, like many others, like I said, were Right Wings, and Middle Wings, and all kinds.

JF: Were you involved in one of these groups?

AF: I was involved at that point, I think it was, I don't recall the name of it. What was it? Yes, I was involved, very little because I was small at that time, and then the war broke out. But I was involved for a while, not really understanding what I'm doing, because in all of them first you start, and then you really know what you are really at. But I know it was not a Communist, it was like a kind of middle-class type. I don't know exactly. But the funny thing is, that all the rich boys and girls, they wanted to make *Gerechtigkeit*, [justice] how do you say in English, *Gerechtigkeit* means to better the world. Just like now, they want to make the world better. OK, try it, you'll like it. So all of them, they were running away from homes, from very rich homes. I mean, just like here, they do the same thing. They run away, and then they come back. But, until they really know exactly what's going on, they just go away, and I pulled with a stream of these different types of organizations, how to call them, what really bring them in that direction, until they really know what it is. Just like we have now, the Moonies and the Shmoonies, and we have the Lefties and we have the Righties, and oh, and the Jews for Jesus. These are all these youngsters who are like floating. They are not sure what direction they really want to go. And if something's nice, they give them a meal, or they give them something, they are attracted and they are caught in on the wrong track.

JF: Did this kind of association cause any kind of conflict with your family?

AF: You mean with the Zionism?

JF: Yes.

AF: No. To the contrary, it was like modern. Everybody should do something. Many of my family, from my cousins, they were all Lefties. I mean, I had even a cousin, I'm jumping again, who was from my father's sister's side, his name was Avrom, Abraham. And he was really involved in Communism at that time, like really a fighter for it. And he was arrested, and he was in a town called Doftana, [phonetic] maybe it was like salt mines. All the Communists, when they were arrested, were sent there. He, in 1940, when the Russians occupied my town in Czernowitz, there was a kind of exchange of officers, or whatever, you give me this, and I'll get these Communists what you are holding and now you give them back to me. And they brought him back, but they never let him out. The Russians just kept him, and we have never heard from this cousin. I was told he was a fighter for Communism. Because, the Russians have a saying, and at that time I remember, "We don't need Communists in our country. We need Communists somewhere else where we are not. So we can spread the cancer,"--I mean this is what I say now, "So we can spread the cancer all over. We don't need this." They were probably afraid that there might be, between all the others, a change could be sneaked in, also some who was really against Russia. So all the good people were actually dragged down with those, and we never heard of him. We knew only one time, in 1940, that Avrom is in Czernowitz, in prison, in the exchange, and they still kept him here as a prisoner in the-- And then, that was the last time we ever seen. All the other brothers and sisters, my cousins, live in Israel. We were all

together, most of them, in concentration camp. But he, we never heard from him. And that's his fight for Communism...

Tape one, side two:

JF: This is tape 1, side 2, of an interview with Mr. Ari Fuhrman, on October 26, 1981, with Josey Fisher.

AF: Yes, now the culture, like I said, Czernowitz was a very Jewish town. Cultural activities and everything were very, very advanced. You could get involved in simple things like just Yiddish Theater. It was like all over, they could be in the same time in our town, and my father and mother used to take us to the theater. Not like now, where you just leave the kids home and you go alone. Years ago, all the children were in the theater, listening to the show, enjoying it, whatever they could enjoy and understand. And so Yiddish Theater was like all over.

JF: What kind of productions did you see?

AF: Oh, I seen like very modern productions, like, I mean, it's not modern, it's classic. I could see, I seen classic things, like from Peretz [I.L. Peretz (1852-1915) Yiddish and Hebrew poet and author] I seen *Bontsche Schweig* [also transliterated as Boutzie Schvaig]. It was a very famous. *Bontsche Schweig* is actually a story of a young man who was going through life without doing anything, any harm to anybody. I mean, he was, nothing would really do him anything to get angry. So he was like running through life, like nothing, no harm to anybody, he died and it comes to the war, and they say, "Oh, Bontsche," and the whole thing is actually in heavens, the whole thing is in heavens. And this *Bontsche Schweig*, means *Bontsche* is a name, and *Schweig* mean he is quiet. You can hit him, you can do to him whatever, and he would never answer. So he came to heavens, and he was supposed to be somebody great, yes, so you know how it is in heaven, you have the good guys and the bad guys. So the bad guys try to convince the jury that he did one time something wrong, he killed a fly or something, you know. But anyway, that's not important. But he finally, the judgment is that he is a great guy, who's supposed to get a wish. What is his biggest wish, what he would want, and that's the only way you could remember this guy who had the part of Bontsche. He was asked then, "Now you can ask. What is your wish? What would you like?" And he answers, "*A bulke mit pitter*." It means, *bulke* means bread, a little white bread with a little butter on it. That was his greatest wish. So that was one of the modern, not modern, classics. And then I seen all the great shows there, which was very little at that time, but still I seen a lot of different productions, there were productions coming from Poland was the Vilna Troupe, who came through Czernowitz. Buloff, the actor Buloff is a part of that big company, the Vilna Troupe from Vilna. And then we seen everything. I mean, it's really hard for me to give you a background of what I seen. There used to be shows in the, it's called a *Shnayders Saal*. It means the hall of the tailors. And my father used to be a member. And at Rosh Hashone and Yom Kippur, that hall was for *davening*, for praying for the holidays. In a whole year, they were renting it out to the theater. And they were calling this theater the *Knepl Theatre*. Why *Knepl*? *Knepl* means a button; they said a theater that you could go in even with a

button. That was the synonym for this, how cheap you could go in to see a show. But, being that my father used to be a member of this here, I could go in the balcony for free. So whenever a show was there, I was somewhere in the balcony. In the balcony you could see backstage also. That was really my first encounter with theater. Like, I would be able to sit in balcony, watch the show, and then, open a door also on the balcony, because the balcony was going from the other side. When they built the stage, part of the balcony was going onto the stage. There was a door I used to go in, sneak in and look down what are they were working with, the scenery and the curtains and the drapes and everything. So that was my actual first experience. So there I see many, many-- In later years, I met those people, and I remember, wait a minute, all these people I remember when I was a kid and I was watching them, because they were much older than I. They are gone most of them that I seen, but, still, as a young man, I could still, later on, when I was part of the theater, I could talk to them and they was still-- One single, I remember, actress is still alive in Romania who I remember from that time, her name is Sevilla Pastore. [phonetic].

JF: She's still in Romania?

AF: Yes, she lives there. She is very old. Occasionally when we go to Romania I see her. I just seen her now recently. In August, I seen her.

JF: Is there any theater left there?

AF: Yeah. The state theater is still in Romania. It was what I was a part of, actually. OK, but we are jumping. We already are about, what, 40 years later. So that was culture, that was theater. And then was all kinds of lectures, like Monger [phonetic] used to come and lecture, and, I mean, recitals and all kinds. You have such a broad possibility because it was a big, big Jewish town I could say, because like it was such a big population of Jewish people, I think it was, in Romania, I could say, beside Jassy, I am not sure about Jassy and the other town, but Czernowitz was a cultured city. Everybody was like on a higher level of culture. I think there might have been towns where they had proportionately more Jews, but from the cultural standpoint, Czernowitz was on a higher pedestal than any other town. In the Jewish town, the difference is that everybody was speaking Yiddish. In Bucharest, for example, maybe they have more Jews in Bucharest, but they were more assimilated. They were more like a higher class of the [unclear]. They felt ashamed maybe to talk Yiddish. Even some of them wouldn't recognize that they were Jews, because the antisemitism at that point was already starting to show its, its *grabyes*, how you say?

JF: Claws?

AF: No, how you say when you hold your fingers and you have these long nails, you know. I don't know the English word for it, but they start to show their ugliness.

JF: In what way?

AF: Like I remember, first of all nationalism. You were not allowed to talk your language. All over there were signs saying you will talk only Romanian.

JF: About when did these signs first appear?

AF: I think in the upper 30's, in '37, '38, '39, around that time. Because I, there was already at that point, Kuza. There was, I remember, the leader, who was very nationalistic, and that's it. When you are nationalistic, you are automatically against anything else. That's what national socialism was actually, you know, because socialism and national socialism is that big difference, big gap between these two. But when we had, in my father's store, he was a tailor, he had a store, and a few guys working there and women. My sister was part of it, and we had to--my father never knew Romanian. My father and mother, they were speaking only Yiddish and German. They were the only two languages that they knew. But the sign had to be in his store saying "[unclear] *Romanischke*". This is in Romanian--"You will speak only Romanian."

JF: What happened then with your parents? In terms of not being able to speak Romanian?

AF: They weren't the only ones who didn't know it. There were thousands and thousands, but this was a kind of way of trying to force you on something that you never could accomplish anyway. They never could really pinpoint, or really harm people with that thing, but it was there and it started all kinds, like in the villages, the antisemitism was very big. The luck of what we had in Romania more than in other, like in Germany, Romania, at that time, was maybe, even now, I don't know, they were big on taking bribes. You could pay one, they were calling them gypsies, let's put it this way. So they were really, you could really buy with a bribe, or they would harm you, they would close up places or do things. You could always go and pay somebody and they would let you continue. And in Romania, in Germany, you couldn't do that, you know. They did what they did. There was no way out, you know. Here, we had this kind of, the peasant and in general at that time, they were very simple people, and they were doing actually what they were pushed to do, by the government at that time.

JF: You don't feel that the people themselves had antisemitic feelings?

AF: No. They had, because of the Church, you know, what they were taught, certain things that Jews had to do this and do that, and they killed Jesus, and they did that. They weren't so advanced in their religion to really understand, their priest, or the *popa*, to Romanians the *popa*, not pope, *popa* means the priest, if he would tell them whatever, they believed in it. He said so, that before Passover they have to kill a child, and all this nonsense what was going around, and it was imprinted in their soul and mind. So, we automatically were in this mess. They had an expression. They would say, a Jew in Romanian is called *Evreul* [plural is *evreilor*] in a normal term, a nice way. But if you want to be antisemitic, he was called a Jew, *Jidan*. What is actually in Polish is *Zyd*. *Jidan* was a similar. But in Polish, *Zyd* is a Jew, and here it was like a slang word for a bad word to call a Jew. It was called *Jidan to Palestina*.² It means they were screaming "Why are you living here? You better go to Palestine." They were trying to do these kind of remarks and trying to get rid of you even verbally if they couldn't do it physically.

²The correct Romanian would be *Jidan a Palestina*.

JF: Did you run into any kind of experiences in your schooling with the children?

AF: No, no. I was very little then, and children, to tell you, they're children. And basically, I think in my class where I went to school, I don't even recall very few non-Jewish children in the school. I was going in a school what was basically, most of the parents were sending their children there, I mean Jewish parents. They were like, it was *licéu*. In Romanian, a gymnasium is called, lyceum, *licéu*. So they had, I remember they were like *Licéu* No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3. In No. 1, I think was only non-Jews, very few Jews. It was just like here--you have certain schools where if you have two black children, it is a big thing. That was the same thing there. You had like only Christian and very few Jews. And the L No. 2, *Licéu* No. 2, you had already a bigger mixture. And *Licéu* No. 3, where I was going, there was probably 99% Jews, and maybe 1% non-Jews. So I didn't have that encounter with them. I know when we used to play soccer with the other *licéu*, they were always teasing us, and things like that, you know, screaming out. Somebody would hit and shoot a goal, and they would after him, and beat him up, and things like that. It was like indirectly antisemitism in that period with school children.

JF: Was your father's clientele in his shop primarily Jewish, or did he have a mixed population there?

AF: I think he had a mixture, very small. Mainly were Jewish. But he had also, I remember when I was a boy, maybe I was 12, there was a time when you used to take home, like here, the groceries. Like when you used to finish a job, you would send somebody, one of the apprentices, and would send them to take it to a rich lady or something, because he was a women's tailor. You would go there and take it to her, and she would give you a tip, you know. So, sometimes when the other apprentice was very busy, my father used to send me to take one of this, and I used to get a tip. It was a big thing for me. It was like a [unclear] But, basically, I remember even here, I met one lady here in Philadelphia, and she says, "You know, I know your father." I said, "How do you know him?" She said, "Oh, he made for me a costume [i.e. suit] years ago, and I am very angry at him." I said, "Why? Didn't he do it right?" She says, "Yes, he did it so good that I am already 25 years after that, and I cannot tear it up. It's so good." Because, you know, there, you were putting in everything at that time. Really, when you were making a piece of work there, the tailoring for this was high quality. So...

JF: You started telling me about when you went into your trade training, when you were 14 years old.

AF: Yeah, ok. So, my father, like I said before, wanted me to have a trade, OK? And that was true, you know, because at that time, if you didn't have a trade, even now, if you don't have a trade, you have, you are nothing. But then, was even more so. So he wanted me to become a dental mechanic. So, to be an apprentice a dental mechanic, you didn't go in and they pay you--it was just the opposite. My father had to pay, every three months, he had to pay 3,000 lei. 3,000 lei was a nice amount of money at that time. In

'38, 3,000 lei was a lot of money. Even now, I know, 3,000 lei now in Romania, I don't even think a worker makes now 3,000 lei a month. So it was a lot of money back in '38. But he had arranged with this dentist who was having a laboratory and he was also fixing teeth, and he has an office also. There were two of them--one was a mechanic dentist, and one was a doctor of dentistry. If you want a straight definition, a separation between those two--a dentist was one who had been first a master of making teeth, a master mechanic of teeth, and then he started in continuation to become a dentist, because a doctor in dentistry who had to go to regular college first, and a regular medical school, not like here, they have dentistry school. No there was different. If you wanted to become then a doctor in dentistry, how you call it, you had to go first to be a regular doctor, just like any other, go to all the four years of regular university or medical school. And then, you could choose what direction you want to take. If you want to be an internist, you want to be a surgeon, you want to be a dentist, you want to be whatever. After you had those years of practice, you could go in then and become a dentist, how we call it here, but he would be a higher qualification of dentistry. He would be a doctor who was able to make operations. Also, a dentist was allowed to pull teeth, and make plates, and make bridges and everything. So, usually what used to happen, you got associated, a doctor who knew nothing, and a dentist who knew everything. Because a doctor just out of school, without experience, out of college, you know, out of medical school, and then getting a course of a kind, you know, practice a little bit.

I remember, when I went there, they engaged me, and my father used to pay this money every three months or six months, every six months, 3,000 lei. So, when this dentist, the one who, they were partners, OK, the dentist with this doctor who came out from medical school, a dentist after going through the whole thing, he didn't know nothing about dentistry, because he had four years. He had regular medicine, and then he became a dentist, a doctor in dentistry. For one year he had to make some course and he became a dentist. He had no practice whatsoever. And this other one, his name was Faust, just like the opera *Faust*, he is Samuel Faust, he was Jewish, and the other was also. It was a German name, like Henrich Brandmarker [phonetic], it's kind of real fancy name. They got in partnership, and Faust was working, and Brandmarker was sitting and collecting the money. That's all what he was, sitting at the desk-- I remember like today he had an asthma. And at that time you didn't have these sprays, so whenever you used to come in that hall in the office, he had like a little room where when he start coughing, he went in and lit a kind of weed or something, and he used to breathe in that weed, and he was getting better and go back into there. So that whole place was smelling like about weed. So you know Dr. Brandmarker, and I was a boy of 14 then, 14, 15, so when it used to happen that Faust, once a year he had a cold. For the three years I worked for them, every year he had a cold. So, what do you do, you have so many patients. So he didn't know nothing. And I was assisting, like you were learning the trade, but you were assisting. Also Saturday, when you had the biggest bulk of patients, you had to assist him. Then we had this, you didn't

have mortars--you turned with a paddle, you know, the machine, and so I was paddling for this, and making like fillings and things like this, for him. So I knew what was going on there for this year and a half I was there. So one day, Faust is sick, and this Brandmarker is supposed to see patients. First of all, if they heard that Faust isn't there, they wouldn't show up, because they knew he doesn't know nothing. But some of the newer ones what didn't know, they came in, and I, being a boy of 14, knew more already about what to do then.

He didn't even know how to clean out a tooth to put in a filling. And I used to know it already how to do it. And I used to tell him, and it was funny. He didn't mind because he knew. The only thing what he knew is theory. So the good thing about it was that like once in a while we would sit down, we were three boys, apprenticed at that place. They were like the first year apprentice, the second year apprentice, and the one who is finishing. You had to go three years through it. So, he would sit down with all of us and teach us theory. With a book, and I still remember to now, I bought a book, you had to bring it from Vienna. It was in German, because he went to German schools, you know. And this is how I remember this guy. In later years I met him, after the war I met him already. I think they are now living in Israel, if I remember.

JF: So both of these men were Jewish?

AF: Yeah. Yeah. They were Jewish, both of them. One was a doctor in medicine, and the other one was a dentist.

JF: Now, in 1938, when you started on this course, what kind of news were you getting from Germany. What was your understanding of what was happening in the rest of Europe?

AF: Nobody really understood too much, to tell you. I mean, being that I was only 14, for me it was really hard to understand what's going on to begin with. Later, when I became 16, I understood a little more, but just before I go into that, I just want to put an interlude into it about the dentistry. While I was going during the day to work as a dental apprentice, nighttime I was going to night school. And this was a law. You had to further your education. In other words, during the day you were working, and at nighttime, you had to go every night, you were going to school.

JF: For what subjects were you going to school?

AF: Just like a regular school. But, what I did then, I registered in a school, a night school where you were learning also Yiddish. It was called the ORT school [organization for training of Jews in skilled trades and agriculture]. It was probably related to the ORT now, somehow. Where during the day, that ORT school, you could learn a trade. Going to school and learning a trade, like seamstress and all kind of other trades. But the same school had also a night course, where we were learning regular public school subjects. OK, being that I was already advanced because I had already was in *Gymnasium*, it was very easy. I remember at that time I was the best student in the class, because I knew everything that was going on there. The only two languages what I really learned at that

time, thoroughly I would say, is Yiddish. I knew to speak Yiddish, but I had no background in writing or reading or literature or anything else. And then, in that school, I learned Yiddish really. I met in New York, who is still a teacher who I met, and his name is Giddinger [phonetic], there is another one whose name is Schwartz, who calls himself now Kotter [phonetic]. Kotter means in Russian, black. Schwartz is also black. So he is now dead, because there were three brothers, and they had to give themselves different names. One was Schwartz, and one was Kotter, and another one was another Schwartz. He was in Argentina, or something, somewhere there. But, I met this Giddinger, I met here recently in New York, he lives somewhere. And then another one was in Romania who died recently. As a matter of fact, we got a whole bunch of books today, yesterday I think, last Monday, no, on Friday, a bunch of books from Romania from this guy I'm telling you, who was my teacher, who we met later on. He is now a writer there in Romania. He writes Yiddish books.

JF: Was it the State of Romania that required you to go to school at the same time?

AF: Yes.

JF: Was it that you had to go to school until a certain age?

AF: No, no, no. You could not, the law was you could not finish an apprenticeship until you didn't have at least four grades. OK? But those who have more even than that had to still go to that school, because there were there who came in and didn't know how to write and read. It didn't happen to Jewish people usually, because Jewish people always advanced in learning and in writing and in everything. But there were many of them who would go to this night school and wouldn't even know how to read, so it was like, they wouldn't take you even you didn't have four classes, they wouldn't take you to learn a trade. There was a must to have the four grades.

JF: You had to go through it whether or not you had had previous education?

AF: Yes. But you should have at least four grades at that point. So, there where I learned thoroughly Yiddish in Yiddish classics, Yiddish literature and everything, and also learned German, because we had a German class and you attended, and I learned German also. I knew pretty good, but there was like an addition to what I knew up to that point. And funny enough, when I met this guy, at that point I was a boy of 14. I remember those two--the German teacher and the Yiddish teacher, Giddinger, were somehow looking one to another with loving eyes. They were like this. And I forgot, Fruchter [phonetic], her name was Fruchter, I remember, or something. And when I met the guy, it was last year, I said, "Are you, have you heard about the German teacher what he had, Fruchter?" He says, "She is my wife!" It was so, and I was always remembering it, you know, like you see these things without even knowing what you see. But it was funny to ask and he said, "Yes, she's my wife." In later years they got married. So that was what I wanted to bring in. You asked before something and I said--what was it really you were asking?

JF: We were talking about the antisemitic experience.

AF: So, again here, the ORT school was a particular Yiddish school; in other words, only Jews went to ORT school. No Christians. Jewish teachers and everything was Yiddish and Jewish, so, the Yiddish language and the Jewish teachers. But, so, we couldn't--[unclear] straight in the night school. And being just like here the Cubans, in Florida, Miami. If you didn't know that you were in the United States, you could think that you are in some Latin country. Because wherever you go in Miami, you hear only Spanish, with the Cubans. Well, it was the same thing. We were surrounded. And I'm asking, you see I have patients--You probably don't know why I'm talking about patients...

Tape two, side one:

AF: I can talk to you for three days and not finish my story.

JF: This is tape 2, side 1, of an interview with Mr. Ari Fuhrman. October 26, 1981, with Josey Fisher.

AF: I was mentioning a patient before, I don't know if it is on the other tape; probably it will be a repeat of what I said before. Just this first. Why I don't know all of a sudden about patients, we are talking about when I was a child. But we'll come to that later, if we still have time and you still have enough tapes. [laughter] But, I have a bunch of them. I just bought some. The reason why I am saying a patient, it was a Cuban patient, and she spoke so bad English, I mean impossible. I am like king. She knows a little bit, and I asked her, "How come Cuban people don't want to learn English? Maybe their children, but like our age, or even younger than I am, they don't want to speak it." She says, "We have no need. We have our own community, go to our own affairs, we go to our own places, our own stores, and you know, it's one of these things. We don't need it." So it's just like my parents. They never needed the Romanian. German was good enough there, and Yiddish, especially, because many spoke it.

JF: Let me ask you something, Mr. Fuhrman. Did any man in your family enter the national army during your growing up years, before the Second World War?

AF: Yes. They had. Not--close family, you mean? I was the only son, so I was too little to go to the army.

JF: Your father, or any of...

AF: My father was not, I think, in the army. But there were some cousins who went to the army. They had to go to certain--Jews were afraid to ever go to the army, because there was antisemitic outbursts in the army and everything. So, usually, what would be, would pay their way to go to the army in an easier place, how to say, where they could eventually not have to go to the whole spiel of what's going on, because it wasn't-- In other words, I am saying something here, maybe I am not 100% sure, or because I was so small then, I was so little, to really know exactly how the whole thing with the army would be at that point. But I know it was very hard for Jews to be in the army. Very few were really, at that end of the thirties, really in the army.

JF: Can you tell me what your experience was when the war started?

AF: Yes. OK. When the war started, actually started, the way I remember, in 1939, when Hitler, I mean, they started, it wasn't really a war at first, because he just marched in, in all the places without any resistance. The first resistance, light resistance really, I don't know how much resistance there was at that point, was in Poland. At that time, all the, a lot of Polish people were running from there and they were--Czernowitz was very close to, in distance, very close to Poland. OK, so about-- What was the question?

JF: You were talking about the Polish people who came to Czernowitz.

AF: So, the closest place they could run was only Romania. Why, because west of them were the Germans. It was the border with Germany. East of them was Russia, where they wouldn't even dare go there, not that they wouldn't want to go, but Russia wouldn't let them in. So the only way they could go would be south, where was Romania, where was actually Czernowitz, Bukovina, Czernowitz.

JF: What kind of experience did you have with the Poles who were coming into the town?

AF: I really didn't have too much experience. I know there were a lot of Jews who were inquiring about the family of ours. We had family in Lvov, Lemberg, and there was, my father's brother. And we were really not sure what happened. Till nowadays, we never heard--they like faded out of this world. Without us. We just heard rumor they were here, they were there, and this, but we have never found them, and they probably must be between all the 6 millions who had perished.

JF: Where did these Poles live who came to your town?

AF: They were all over. I mean, you could find places, and then they wouldn't stop-- the Polish Jews, for them it was like running, going further on. And for me, it was not that kind of a big experience really. I knew only that the war started, and they started marching. There was a little fight there with the Poles, and then they just came down to Romania, and probably went further down and just spread around. There were not so many, but many enough to really have aroused a little bit of the curiosity of the people there. And I really don't know how the rest was really, where they were placed, or where they went. It's not like here, you know. They make shelters and they put them in, and this and that. It was like a private thing. They ran away from something that [unclear]. My imagination couldn't be brought up too much about it, because being that I was only 16--what was I, 16, 15. It was '39. I was 15, so I had my own thing then. I was a good gymnast at my gym. I used to run and play soccer, and you know, a boy of 15, besides going to night school and besides learning the trade.

JF: Was there fear on the part of your family that the Nazis would also come into Romania?

AF: I would like to tell you something here about-- At that point, nobody was really sure what was going on 100%. It was not known his intentions. We knew about antisemitism. But Jews were used to this kind of thing all their lives. They were brought up with it, from generation to generation, from the Crusades, from way back--it's a thing--the Spanish Inquisition and this. It was something what the Jews lived all through their lives in that manner. So for us, it was just one another thing like then. It was like everybody was thinking the same way probably, like, if it's somewhere, it's not here. And until it doesn't come to your door, it knocks on the door, you really don't realize that it really could happen to you. So it was really something what didn't really touch somehow, so you could really make out something out of it that it could really happen at that point, in '39.

JF: What happened after that point?

AF: After that, in 1940, the Russians occupied, occupied our town.

JF: And what was that like?

AF: It was like completely, I mean, insulation of the rest of the world, actually. When in '40, 1940, like nothing happens in the world. Nobody was talking about anything; everything was the normal way. The difference was only that we started to go to Ukrainian school at that point, and they started a mass emigration of Germans from Czernowitz. That was an experience for me, because they were selling everything out. There was a suburb of Czernowitz, it was Schwapps [phonetic]. It was a special section of Germans were living, and they were selling everything. You know, when you emigrate you cannot get it with you. So my experience was that I seen them, and I couldn't figure out why are these people going, why are they going away, and it was this kind of exchange, probably what the Russians had with Germany, that they would give us our people or something, and they were just running away from there. They probably knew that something will probably later happen. I didn't really know. But a lot of them, hundreds and hundreds, I could say thousands of families left, the Germans, who fled to Germany. More like an exchange of a kind. The only thing what really happened in 1940 what really was an earthquake, which, it was for me, like in the middle of the night, we bought, the experience that we had, we bought there on the market, that they were selling, we bought a clock, one of these clocks what was sounding like the English tower--blink, blonk, blink, blonk (makes sound of chimes)--something like this. And we had it on the closet. There we didn't have closets like here. But we had really a wooden closet, you know. So we put that up, and then we had parrots, we bought parrots, green parrots. Little ones, like this size, and in the middle of the night, at four in the morning, I hear this clock. It was not an hour at it was supposed to do this song, but blink, blonk, blonk, (again makes sound of chimes) something, and before that, the parrots woke me up, they were making so much noise. And really, at that point, it was the earthquake. I didn't even realize it was an earthquake in Romania, in Bucharest. And there, one of the big hotels fell and killed everybody in that hotel. The only place what was before that was a preview to what happened now, because all the shattered houses, at that point in 1940, fell apart in this recent earthquake in Romania. This is the reason why this time was so many, because they patched the top a little bit there, you know, the crack was still there and everything. And now when this thing hit again, all those houses what had cracks and everything from before fell apart. The new houses didn't, because they were already built different. A very bad experience for everybody there. But all those houses in the center of the city, they all, the old city, basically from years ago, were with cracks and everything, all those houses fell in this earthquake, what was such a bad experience for the Romanian people at this time.

JF: Was your home affected in any way?

AF: No. It was just, we were so far way, the nucleus of the earthquake was about maybe, what, 5, 600 kilometers or more. We just could feel the impact of it. Everybody ran out, and this and that. But for us, it was just an experience as a boy what really

happened. So, when the Russians-- Yeah, and I also bought then two pairs of skis. My dream was to go skiing. When the Russians came, everything seemed all of a sudden rosy. You know how it is. You thought that the antisemitism will go away, and this and that, you know? All these dreams of these guys who were Lefties and this, they thought when they came in, the parades with red flags they came and you know? OK, later on they experienced, and I experienced a funny thing, it's a joke, but it seemed to me so funny at that point. It was summertime, and I was, how you call it, to take sunbath. And here are these officers walking, you know. And we knew Ukrainian, Russian, so I asked a question and it's not a joke. It became then eventually a joke, and maybe was already a joke then. We asked him, "Do you have in Russia this?" He says, "Yes, in Russia, we have a factory." "Do you have in Russia this?" Everything they were asked, they said, "Yes, we have a factory." And then they asked him, "Do you have lemons?" He says, "Yes, we have a factory." You know? So it was one of these jokes what was going around there that they have everything in a factory.

JF: You had mentioned before that the schooling changed? You were still in the ORT program when the Russians came in?

AF: No. When the Russians came, I started to go again to school, to public school for that year. I was still working as a dental mechanic.

JF: But you went to public school?

AF: Yes.

JF: The Jewish schools were closed?

AF: No. The Jewish school was, I don't even know, no, I think the Jewish schools were definitely--you see, it was, these schools were very progressive schools, in other words progressive in a sense they were Left-inclined. So, at first, there was such a short time, you really didn't know what's going on. The ORT school was probably still on. There was another that was called *Morgenrot*. It means "tomorrow will be red", you know? Tomorrow red. That was really a Left Wing-- I don't recall really what happened. I know only that the building what was belonging to the community, let's say how to the Federation how it's here, it was, that building was taken over, and it was made to the Palace of the Pioneers. It became in other words, the Federation House. It was a big building where all the Jewish activities were going on for the town and everything. That was taken away, I remember, and it was made into a palace. They used to call it the Palace of the Pioneers. You know, the children were the Pioneers, [Russian Communist Youth Organization] like here, you have Pioneers? What do you have here? Also pioneers? Yeah, they have a similar youth program there. And they took away that building and made it into this youth thing, you know.

JF: Was the Jewish community organization still permitted to function under the Russians?

AF: Oh, I don't think so, no. Why? They wouldn't, no.

JF: Were the synagogues affected?

AF: The synagogue, it was too short a time, you know? We still went, like I remember, to synagogue. It was such a short time. They came in the war, in less than a year, I think like they came, I think, June the 28 of 1940,³ and the war broke out June 22 of '41, with the Russians and Germans. I might have mixed up the dates, but it was like, oh, this was the war. This, I don't know exactly.

JF: Was there any anti-Nazi propaganda that was given out during that year, when you were under Russian control?

AF: No, nothing that I recall. There, you all of a sudden were cut off from everything that was going on in the world, you know. Unless you had a short-wave radio and could hear a little bit news from London and this, we were really cut off. And to tell you, being that I was going to school and to public school and everything, as a youngster, you were just grabbed into these activities and sports and all kind of a new culture--learn the language and this and that. We knew, I know my father used to always listen to the Voice of BBC, I remember, and like, hidden, you know, listen to it. Nobody can hear it, but they had to listen to it because everybody was afraid, and now you were not allowed. It's a kind of break in what you had before to what you had now.

JF: Was there anything particular about the treatment of the Russians towards the people of Czernowitz that you might want to remark on?

AF: No, no I don't think so. You see, they came in as an occupier, and they didn't want to make probably, show their bad sides already, you know. It was like, it wasn't yet the whole thing with the killing the doctors, and the writers and this. It was still at that period when everything was still, how to say, "rosy".

JF: What happened then in June of 1941?

AF: OK. In 1941, when started the war-- Just one thing what I would interlude here about the situation--all of a sudden, everything became so different, you know, at that point. I am just trying to reminisce a few, I think this was after the war or before the war. No, no, no. OK, forget it. I thought that this--I had a flashback of a kind, but the thing chronologically didn't happen then. OK, Yiddish theater came from Russia. At that point, it was blooming. They had shows that brought the big stars, all those stars what were, I remember from way back, got organized and formed a theater in Czernowitz. It came from Kiev, came a Yiddish theater there, I remember. It was a change, and everybody, how to say, at that point was pretty happy. In the sense that they finally thought they were free, how to say.

JF: Did you notice any ideological difference between the Yiddish theater from Russia and the Yiddish theater that you had experienced in Romania?

AF: Yes. Here, we have to give credit where credit is due. Due to the fact that all of a sudden all of the theater, the plays were of a higher quality, classic-type plays.

JF: The plays that were brought in by the Russian troupes?

³Russia delivered an ultimatum to Romania demanding Bessarabia and Bukovina on the night of June 26, 1940.

AF: Yes. In other words, their program, they were playing of the different plays, it was based on a higher culture, how to say, like it appeared in '38, and it was first of all a state theater. In other words, it was already supported by the state, and everything was done the way it was directed by what you were allowed by censorship, what you could play and what you couldn't. But classics were--you couldn't play a play what was written in the United States. And you had to go by whatever the line of the party, the Communist party, will lead you into what direction to go, and at that point, they had like classics, like Sholem Aleichem and Peretz and all the other classics, and what were actually all those classics, you believe it or not, were all, most of them, like socialistic-directed, without having even to do with, like, to better the life of the poor. Basically, if you look back to the classics, there was always something what had to do with the social being of that individual.

JF: So these plays did not have to be changed then. The basic story was already...

AF: Yes. But they still, there was something that was a little better to one direction; what they didn't like, they just changed it. It happened to me later in years that I realized--at that point, I was too young to understand it but later on, when I was already a member of the State Theatre in Romania, in the '50s--I realized really what had happened there. At that point, for me it really was not that, it didn't strike my mind too much about the whole situation. So this is more or less what happened. OK, you can understand everything changed all of a sudden. You are told that you are free, and you are taught how you will be out of worries, and this and that, you know, and sport was on a high, and this is again a part of what the Russians are very good at. Of course, all of a sudden, you have to do all kinds of sport activities, and cultural activities--their basis of propaganda, the plays what they did. The theater, for example, is supported by the State, so they didn't care how much money you really made by coming to this. So they could afford to give small prices to people. Because this is actually a way of educating their people into the direction they want. I'm not talking about the Yiddish theater alone. The Ukrainian theater, the Russian theater, and other things what I used to go also.

JF: In other words, as high as the cultural level was in Czernowitz before, you feel that the Russian influence made it even more so?

AF: No, no, no. We are not just talking about culture. You see, here we have all of a sudden the culture what is aimed to propaganda.

JF: It changed, in other words?

AF: Yes, it changed. In other words, it was different than it was before, but not on a much higher level, how to say. They like, brought in, like in Yiddish, they brought that in all the Hebrew words from the Yiddish are eliminated, and they are written phonetically in Yiddish. It was like, you have these hundreds of Hebrew words what became a part of the Yiddish language, all of a sudden were thrown out. Like you would say "*simcha*". It's a word what was always simply spelled *simcha* in Hebrew. When they came, "*simcha*", they started to spell, and the books what came with it was the same thing,

they modernized it, and all the Hebrew words were spelled phonetically in Yiddish the way you hear it. "*Simcha*", they would spell samech-yud-mem-chet and an "a", or whatever, I'm just giving you. So it was not the word anymore in Hebrew. It was the same Hebrew word, but it was spelled different, because this is a way what they tried to eliminate. So all the Russian books, the Yiddish books at that time, they were spelling it, not anymore the way we were used to see that word. This is more or less a thing, I think we covered enough of that.

JF: OK. So what happened...

AF: So now the war started. War started, the first thing you could see is soldiers retracting, in other words, running away from the fronts. At that point, you had a choice. You had a choice or to get on a train and go back into Russia far away, or you could stay behind. The war--so, everybody started, you had this choice what I just mentioned. Now, you had very few days for that purpose, because the Germans were going so fast, that if you didn't make it fast enough, you were caught on the way anyway. So I remember that my father and my family decided to leave, to go to Russia. And we were informed that we should go to the train station, and pick up a certain train, and we will be gone. That was about, I think, 24 hours before the last possibility. They were telling you about this, but I don't know, because I was too little to know it, but I see it, the way it is, my father later on in years we were talking about it. What really happened is, we came there, we packed with our things, everything what you could grab, I mean you couldn't take too much, but whatever. We went, and we were already in the train, in the wagon, we were in it, and all of a sudden some officers came and said, "You have to get out of this train. This train is not going to Russia. This train goes to the front. It has to pick up wounded soldiers." So everybody got off the train, and they said at a later hour, there'd be another train going to the direction where you are supposed to Russia. So we went down. My father says, "OK. We cannot sit on the train station and wait," and he went like across from the station on the hill, because Czernowitz was on many hills, and found a place, like a Christian woman there who had a spare place to put us in to sleep overnight there. And we went there, and meanwhile the train formed down there, all the people who were in the station really got into the train and went that direction, to Russia, and we were left behind.

JF: Your father didn't think that they were telling you the truth?

AF: No, he was thinking, "OK. We'll go tomorrow." You know, it's a kind of--he didn't want us to be sitting on the station. He was the kind of guy who was very, I don't know how to explain, but he had his own way. So that's how it really happened that we didn't go to Russia, but we stayed behind and had to go--then all the hell. And then, so when we realized the next morning that the train is gone, he said, "OK. Let's go back home." So we went back home, and all the neighbors who didn't go said, "Ah-ha, you see, you didn't..." In Yiddish they have a saying, "If you didn't say good-bye..."

Tape two, side two:

JF: This is tape 2, side 2, of an interview with Mr. Ari Fuhrman, on October 26, 1981, with Josey Fisher.

AF: Yes, I just have to repeat what we had a half a tape there. Like, the sayings was like, "If you didn't say good-bye good enough, you have to return to repeat it." So really this what happened to us. We came back into our home. OK? I think about 24 hours later, they occupied back our town, and the Russians were gone.

JF: The Germans occupied your town?

AF: Yes. And it was not really the Germans only alone, but I remember they were already with the Romanians, partners, like allies. And actually, the Romanians came back...

JF: The Romanian army?

AF: The Romanian army, what was already in Antonescu [Ion Antonescu came to power Sept. 6, 1940] that was the leader of the government there. But mainly... also Germans, it was normal that the Germans. But the biggest influence was the Romanian, and they were running so fast, the Russians and the Germans after them, that in no time, they were already occupying half of the Ukraine. And what really happened, the Germans gave to the Romanians Romania – Bukovina was always Romania, so this was like handed back to them, plus they gave them also a part of the Ukraine. But they named it Transnistria. "Trans" means on the other side.

JF: So the part of the Ukraine that was given to Romania was called...

AF: Was called Transnistria. In other words, what is "Transnistria"? It's like trans-Atlantic, if you say it, he is from the other side of the Atlantic. So Transnistria, because the border, the Romanian border originally was at the Dneister River. When they occupied it, they occupied Bukovina and Bessarabia. So they gave it back, Bessarabia, to the Romanians and Bukovina, and also a portion of the Ukraine, but it was Transnistria. It was a portion between the River Dneister and Bug, B-U-G. That's another river what is on the other side of that, it's like a long piece of territory. On the other side of Bug was the Germans. And really, in the Transnistria, there were all the people who were deported by the Romanians, were actually placed at.

So, I told you more geographically. I just was going to mention another thing. All the Jews... Transylvania, you know Transylvania is a part of Romania, who belonged years ago, just like Bukovina, belonged to Austria-Hungary, Transylvania Banat was part of Hungary, but was also part of the Empirium of Austria-Hungary. But this was the Hungarian part, it was the German--speaking part of that same Empirium, because they were like a kind of, I don't know, why it was Austria and Hungary, I don't know. But they were interconnected. So that part of what was years ago part of Hungary, the Hungarians took it back. All the Jews what were in Transylvania, in Banat, were deported by the Hungarians and Austrians to Auschwitz. Therefore, there are a lot of Romanian Jews who

were actually Hungarian Jews what were part of, because the Romanian Hungarian Jews were from Transylvania and from Banat – that's two provinces that were part of Hungary. All those were deported to Auschwitz, not by the Romanians, but by the Germans, and by the Hungarians. But, our section what I said, especially those from the occupied Russian territories like Bessarabia and Bukovina, all those were deported to Transnistria.

JF: So you and your family were part of that group?

AF: Yes. Like the ones who were really from the Romanian Romania, like Bucharest is, like Montagne, and also Moldova, not Moldavia, Moldova, that's a part of Romania, because now they have provinces, and one of them, that was really Romanian part of Romania, those parts was a little bit leniency about deporting, because they had ties, even they were under Antonescu, and even like I told you before of that way the Romanians, you could bribe them, and with some bribes a lot of Jews saved themselves staying in Romania. All the bad things what they did, but Romania was still a little bit better than to be in Germany or be in Poland, and or being in Hungary. But, I always say, it makes no difference how you die. If you are dead, you are gone. So, if you are gassed, or you are just left to be die, you still are dead. Now, let me go back now to when the war started, and the Romanians occupied our territory. When they occupied back in Czernowitz, the Romanians, the first thing that they did, they took out the rabbi and the cantors and everybody, and they were killing people and this, I mean, the Germans, you know, it was really like a massacre...

JF: So they killed the rabbi and the cantor?

AF: Yes. I think two rabbis. It was a whole--you see, I don't even know, it's just flashing back. I know only that there was shooting and killing and running by the Germans and they occupied, as far as they had their house there. And there where the Russians built a kind of palace, I don't know what it was, the Germans occupied that place, and then everything changed all of a sudden. Back to the way it was back, plus the German Nazis there, and plus everything, and the Antonescu's troops, and everything.

JF: Were the Romanian troops also doing the killing, or was it...

AF: No, it was, probably also--you see, they had that saying, you are just as guilty if you do it, or you watch doing it, you know? And we was always saying, the difference between a good German and a bad German is actually no difference, because the good German, no, the bad German, the Nazi, was killing the Jews. But the "good German", in quotations, was the one who was watching them do it. So they are just as guilty.

JF: When you say that there were massacres, were these organized massacres?

AF: Yeah, they were lined up. They were brought in, arrested, brought in, and it was shooting and this, and deporting and killing and everything. I mean, it was like the first stamp when they came in, how to say? Later on, it started to become, you had to put in work, a kind of forced work, working in different places, working at the railroad station to fix up things. You didn't get paid for it. It was like a forced labor already like, it was

like the beginning of a kind of trying to put you to work for nothing, because you were already somebody who they don't want or don't need, or supposed to be killed maybe at a later date.

JF: Who organized that?

AF: That was already, let me just remember. I know, it's so far away, it just flashes a little bit. So, you asked me a question. I know that they used to come and pick you up. The Romanians, I think it was, Romanian soldiers would pick you up and take you down to these different places where you had to put in work for them for free. And I remember I worked a few times at the railroad station. Not really on the station, but in somewhere else, in a place where we had to put together, clean the place, and carry things, and do all kinds of involuntary, voluntary work, you know. And you weren't paid for it. The only thing what you got is a bread, and that was already a big thing to get then. That was like the pre-concentration camp situation.

JF: Was food rationed then?

AF: Yeh. I mean, you couldn't get too much, it was war, and this. Bread was one of the biggest things to get, you know, you got a little bread, I remember, and already at that time, you already felt starved. Now, normally with wars, I didn't go into the details of bombing things, or how they really bombed this and that, not really in town, but like you could hear bombs exploding and airplanes flying, and this, and hiding in the basements and shelters, some things like that. And it was so fast, the whole thing passed through so fast that you didn't even have time to really realize what was going on. Before you knew it, everything was gone. You know, everything was--they were already on the other side of our town.

JF: From June until the time when you were doing this work at the railroad station, about how much time had passed?

AF: It was from June when the war started, about September, I think it was, when they made a ghetto. Czernowitz became like part of the town. In the propaganda then, about, no, in the ghetto was not yet. In the ghetto, we got the kind of propaganda what I'll bring up later. All of a sudden, a part of Czernowitz where the bulk of the Jewish people was living, was concentrated in one group, closed up with some wires around, and it formed a ghetto. Like our family, most of our family, who were out of that, because some of our family was living really in that part what became the ghetto, but some of us who were out of it, we came into this family to live with them, including my grandfather. I called him Grandfather, *Zayde*, my mother's uncle actually what brought them up. They never had children. So, the two sisters, my mother and her sister, who is 95 and lives in Israel, he was also with us. I remember he was an old man, he must have been 84, maybe more. I remember it was the first time in my life I seen him cry and talk to God. "What are you doing, God? What are you doing to us?", like a protest. He was left behind, actually, in Czernowitz. We didn't take him with us to the concentration camp. And he died in one of these old people's homes, you know, one of these asylums, they called it,

azil [phonetic]. It's not asylum. Here asylum is when you are crazy. *Azil* [Romanian for asylum] there was like a, how do you call these homes, the old age homes? There where he died. We don't even know exactly what happened. I know that when we came back, he was gone already for many years. In Czernowitz, a lot of Jews had been able to buy themselves out, and not go into concentration camps from there. With money and all kinds of--you see, you became all of a sudden, some of the people became all of a sudden needed Jews, *Wertvolle Juden* in other words, Jews what they could not be without, because they were professionals, they were doctors and lawyers, not lawyers, I don't know, but doctors and maybe merchants, all kind what had money. They became all of a sudden somebody what they need.

JF: Were these people still living in the ghetto?

AF: Yes, at that point, because the ghetto was then, after they deported everybody, they opened the ghetto, in other words, there was no more ghetto, because they deported so many thousands. And whatever is left was so few left, that they didn't need anymore ghetto, and they just opened the city, and everybody who was there went back to their own place. So when we came there, all of us were there. The propaganda of that, and all of a sudden this downtown, no, not downtown, the lower part of town, I said downtown, there it doesn't exist a downtown like here, with all the businesses. In Czernowitz, in general in Europe, you don't have this kind of situation downtown where all the businesses are and everything. The town is town. It can mean the middle of town, or the outskirts of town. But it's still town. It makes no difference. OK, maybe you would say because here is the City Hall and it would be the center of the town. So, we were there in that lower part of town, and all of a sudden it became so crowded, and all of a sudden became we got rumors that the Germans, we are going to go to Transnistria; there they prepared for us so we would be able to work, and it came a kind of, that everybody was already inclined to believe it, that such a thing could really happen. The propaganda that was so great that you went almost alone because they tell you it's so good. They are actually telling you they are sending you out of this misery here where you are to a nicer place, where everything will be fine, you will be able to work, and be able to do things, and this and that. Even people, I remember, from my family, who were able to stay because, like one of my cousins was a doctor, and he had an authorization to remain in Czernowitz. He could arrange it for his father and mother and sisters and brothers to also remain. But my uncle, his father, my father's brother, they decided they want to go. Wherever the whole family goes, we want to be together. So, this kind of propaganda that it will be better than being here in a ghetto, there you will be free, and this and that, and the territory's nice, so people started to believe in it. It was so maneuvered somehow, and we were really stupid, to tell you. I didn't understand too much about it. I was 17 at that point. And, not even 17, yeh 17. OK, you go where your parents go, or where everybody-- So, let's go. So, all of us, we were at that point about eighty of us, eighty of the family, cousins, brothers and sisters and everything and children, we went. The only one family who stayed in Czernowitz, funny enough, I

don't know how they really, their father was a carpenter, maybe he worked or something. I really can't figure it out. I think they stayed, for no reason. I'm not sure really what was going on. But basically...

JF: When was this?

AF: That was in '41.

JF: In what month?

AF: In October.

JF: The ghetto was formed?

AF: No, the ghetto, I think was formed in September, I'm not sure 100%, the ghetto was somewhere in a different month. I know only that we went in October. We were deported.

JF: In October of 1941. And where in Transnistria?

AF: OK, let me just explain to you the way to Transnistria. What really happened, you went voluntary. They came, like, three soldiers, three gendarmes, with this, not a gun, how's this? with the rifle, they came. You knew that today goes this street, tomorrow goes this street. Some people who were smart enough, they were hiding, those were staying there. But everybody else, we go. So my father packed a sewing machine, and we had, we had packs. Our family alone, my one sister was in Russia. She ran away. But the other sister and I, and my father and mother, we had so much, [unclear] my sister's, we had like a typewriter and materials my father bought, pieces of material for to make suits and make this and that. We filled up a whole wagon, like with a horse, and we went to the station. All of us. The other ones had things. We left everything, and all of us went in one wagon, in one, how you call it, not wagon, what is the train? A car, one of these cars, the trains. And it was trains for what you transport grain. With just a little window, it was like a door, a sliding door, and a little window from one side of the wagon, of the car, and one on the other side, like a little window like this.

JF: You were able to take all of these possessions with you?

AF: Yeah, you put them all on the train. Everything. And it was, I know it was fall. And there fall is pretty cool and pretty nasty. This weather is beautiful now. But it was raining and miserable and kind of nasty, and here we are all on the train. OK? We going to a better thing, we thought so. Then, all of a sudden, I think it took, I don't know how many hours. We are locked in, they locked us up in. We couldn't go out, the outside locked, and we had one stop, where they would open the door and let us go down to go to the bathroom. Because food everybody had taken with them. And then again, and the ride, we arrived there in the evening. OK. They say to open the door, and this was only the Romanians. There was nothing to do with the Germans. They opened the door, "Everybody off!", so everybody comes down. Now, luckily, my father was smart enough to--I had like three shirts on, it was cold enough I could bear it. Three shirts, three underwears, one over another. It was like everybody was like, if you would hit, it would

be like a pillow. And my father the same, and everybody-- Now, we arrived in a town called Otachi. [also spelled Ataki, or Otaci]

JF: How do you spell it?

AF: O-T-A-C-H-I.

JF: And these are Romanian guards who were taking you off the train?

AF: Yes. We arrived there, they were there. They open the door, "Down!"

Now, we are like on the border of the Dneister [also spelled Dnestr], of the River Dneister, and there is no bridge to get over the bridge, because the bridge wasn't present, because it was like... On the other side was really Russia, was the Ukraine, and we was still in the Romanian territory. Otachi was part of, on the other side was Mogilëv. You heard about it--you know how to spell it. So, we were on this side, and supposed to be shipped over to Transnistria, on the other side of the Dneister. It was evening, and there was no bridge, and you just got with a pontoon thing, and you would have like, on one side of the river would be like a little thing where you can get off, and a wire stretched over the river, with two boats, and they make a kind of platform, and then I don't know how it was working, pulling it or something, pulling us over to the other side, because there was no bridge. Later they built a bridge. So, we arrived in town, in this Otachi, they say, "Go down, everybody go down, and take down all your possessions." So everything was here. Now the train stopped on the rail here, and here was like a hill up. The train was maybe about 5, 6, 7 yards up. It's a kind of a slight hill. And now, all of a sudden, the soldiers there, with sticks, started to beat everybody, and raced us up this hill. OK? Up there were other soldiers with sticks to beat us from there that we should run down. And this was about 10, 15 times we had to run up and down this hill. Everybody.

JF: Still Romanians?

AF: Yes. It was still Romanian soldiers, it was the Romanian army. It was already in a war. With all the population looking into, because there were no Jews anymore in Otachi. The little towns were immediately--they was the first to be shipped away. Only from the big towns because they have to deal with thousands. Here there were a handful. How big Otachi, it was a little town, it maybe had 20 Jews. It was a little hamlet. So all these peasants and all the people there, they were watching the soldiers do that. There was a reason for it. So we are up and down, up and down, and my father was always a sick man. He had, at that point, he had a hernia, I remember, a double hernia, and he was afraid to operate it. So he was going with this thing what you hold it, you know, I remember when I was a boy I seen him wear this. You know, at that time, people were really afraid of operations. He was a weak man. So he couldn't go up so this guy started to beat him up, really beat him up. So what was his luck, that he was full of these clothes, so when he hit him, and I started to laugh, because he was hitting him over the back, and that would make a noise like you hit a pillow, and a lot of dust was coming out of there. There was humor in that situation. So, the reason why they did this, I learned it later why, to get you tired. So, when you were tired, you couldn't carry anything. So everything what he brought

with us, he had to leave there. My father could never carry. He had just a rucksack on his back. My mother had a breadsack because she was very weak always she couldn't carry. I was the hero--I was the athletic type and my sister, she was also always so weak, but I was carrying two valises, and she was carrying something else, and now they say, "Let's go!" And everybody walks. And instead of taking us through the street normally, they started to take us through the street, and then they led us down to the river. And there was in 1941 was a flood. The river overflowed the whole town, Mogilëv and Otachi. So there was mud all over, and they pushed us down to go through the mud. But until we reached the mud, I already dropped one valise, and the other valise, and the only thing what I was left with was the rucksack, and the other things what I had on me. And so everybody. And until you reached the point where they took us to sleep overnight in a burned-up synagogue there, with all the windows burned and everything, it was like blowing the wind through the middle, you know, excuse the expression, everything you were doing there, you know? No bathrooms, no nothing. So everybody was smelling, you can imagine, and it was awful. And in that thing, a woman gave birth, in those surroundings. You know, you could hear screams and this, and a child all of a sudden was born, and everything. Can you imagine, somebody born in that. So, when we had--we dropped everything. I remember my father, this I will never forget. He comes up to this guy standing there, to this peasant watching. You know, they were like, you were the weirdos, and it was like a parade, and at the side are standing peasants and looking, what can they grab, you know? And as soon as you dropped something, somebody grabbed it and ran away with it if a soldier wouldn't see it, because they were collecting it for them. So my father comes to this guy and says, "Do you want a piece of material for a suit?" He says, "Yes." So he took out, because it was too heavy for him to carry, and gave it away. He almost emptied out his whole thing, because it was too heavy for him to carry. So, now we are in this synagogue, we slept over the whole night...

JF: About how many people do you think were on the transport with you?

AF: Oh, it must have been about 40, 50 cars. And we came evening, in that evening they couldn't ship us all to the other side. So this is why we had to stay here overnight in this hell, you know? Windy, tried to cover each other, one was in the corner, on the ground, just to rest through all that. And the next morning they came again, and we had to go to a, it's called in Romanian it's called a *deparisitate* [phonetic]. What means, parasites, you know, to check if you are clean enough, you don't have parasites, you could be very clean after sleeping over in one of these places like I said. So, here we are, now they come out, and they say, "Let's go to this place, so they can check you if you are clean enough." So, when you walked in, you had to put everything on a, you know, all your belongings, you had to put there, and you went in and a doctor looked here and looked here at your collar to see if you are clean enough, and then they could go out from the other side. Now whatever you had gold, pieces or whatever...

Tape three, side one:

JF: This is tape 3, side 1, of an interview with Mr. Ari Fuhrman, on October 26, 1981, with Josey Fisher.

AF: October, that's exactly the month when I--And funny enough that I came to the United States, it was also in October. So here we are, the gold taken away, everything taken away, and we came out on the other side, who was lucky could find his baggage, who was not lucky he was left without it. And now we are all led again through the river, to that mud, where you would go in like you go in, like sinking in, in that mud, to go. They couldn't take us straight on the road, they had to take us through the mud. So you dropped some more, or you fall down maybe alone and remain there. I remember a cousin of mine, and whenever I am in Israel, they live in Israel, were part of this group of our family, he was, he always reminds me. They had a baby then and they came with a carriage. And I was very athletic. So we went--so, "How can you carry, go with wheels, with a carriage through the mud?" So they called me, and I was so strong that I took the whole carriage and I took it to that place where we were shipped over to the other side. He always reminds me about it: "Do you remember you did this in '41, when we went together over from Otachi to Mogilëv?"

JF: And that family survived that?

AF: Yeah, yeah, all of them survived that. But from the 85 or 80 how many were there, around 80, 80-something, I think we were left--my family, thank God, came, my father, mother, sister and I, came back in one piece how to say, and then a few cousins; most of them live in Israel but the rest is--I think we came back about maybe twelve from the whole amount. And they didn't die, none of them died from any like poisons or how you call it, killed actually. They just died. From hunger, from disease, from dirt, from--name it, you know? So, here we are, they took us over to the other side, and here comes, now we are already in Mogilëv. There again, gendarmes waiting for us. It's about--they took all, probably we were about 50 people, maybe less, in this thing to be able to go over with that wire, and how they moved it, some people were turning something, and it moved forth and back on that one wire what holds it from the--you know to go, not go with the stream of the Dneister. On the other side, again gendarmes, about four, I think, with these rifles, and we formed in a group, and now we have to walk to town. They were supposed to take us to a place where they have to sort us, where we should go and what to do. And these four, now, if you didn't have any luggage, you could run away, and just stay in Mogilëv. If you had luggage, they recognized you that you are a newcomer, and they would grab you. We didn't know that, OK? So, while we were walking, people were Jews, a lot of Jews that were there from before, they came up and told us what is happening now. Now, everyone of our family somehow did a kind of crazy thing. One of my aunts, all of a sudden, made believe she fainted in the middle of the street, and start to scream, and the soldiers see her lie, "Ah, go to hell", and she left there. And then she got up and ran away.

And a young man is coming to me, my age, and says, "You know, what you can do, I can help you to run away from here, at least to stay here in Mogilëv." Because, we learned later that all the people were going there in that sorting place, like it was a burned-down *Kasern* [barracks], where soldiers used to be years ago. All those people are sent on the other side of the brook to the Germans, and from there there was no return. That was the end. If you were caught to be in that *Kasern*, and then they ship you over, and then you never come back. So this guy came, and he says, "You want to run away?" I said, "How, I have this thing?" "Look, I'll grab--you'll give me this, your rucksack, I'll run away and you run after me, and it will be fine." OK. He maybe thought that he'll be, outrun me, and he would run away with my things--because you became an animal actually, very fast, you know, in the situation like that. So he was running, and I after him, and I caught him. OK. He wasn't really--he was very nice, how to say it. He said, I should give him something, and I gave him two shirts, and he was very thankful. He was a Jewish boy, but he came who they wouldn't let, they wouldn't bring with them anything. They were there also, but they came just as they were, with no baggage, with no nothing. He was already there he says for a month, and he didn't even have anything to change, a shirt, so this was for him--I never met the guy later on. It was like a one-time encounter. And everybody in my family, my mother, my father, my sister and her fiancé, in some other place, was able to get out before. And my mother was the last to get out. And she says, to her it was like, she was very religious, you know, and she says it was a miracle. And she told us how it was. She felt that some angels came and saved her. It was her way of interpret. Some three men came after her and says, "Follow us," and somehow she followed them. It was about maybe 100 yards before, it was like the last moment, and somehow she was saved. And the next day, there was like a marketplace, and every one was in the market looking for each other, and then we somehow met there. Now, the whole town of Mogilëv, at that time, the lower part, near the Dneister, was, has been for three, four days, under water. But under water like to the half of this house. So all the houses we were being in were wet. The walls, you touched the wall, your hand would just go into the wetness, and we had to stay in these kind of houses to run away, not to be deported further on.

JF: There was no checking in the town of people who had run away from the line?

AF: It was impossible, because there were so many there. They really didn't care. They knew that we are in their hands anyway. Sooner or later they'll get us. And really what happened, in later months, was that they formed a kind of police, a kind of Jewish police, that had to deliver so many Jews each day to be sent to Vaknyarka [phonetic] that was on the other side of the Bug. And those people, they never came back. Once out--so they knew that they had us. Unless you had an authorization from the mayor, not the mayor, the major of the town, the Romanian mayor, because they were Germans also. But the Germans didn't have to do with us anything, only the Romanians. We were just under the jurisdiction of the Romanian army. So, when we had--the only thing what you could

stay was if you had an authorization that you are a useful Jew, and they need you in this town, they could not pick you up. So the other ones who did not have that were slowly, slowly deported. I was a youngster, and I wasn't--I liked to do things, to work in this. Being that I had this background of dentistry, and all this what I learned, I got somehow--it's a whole story how I got in to work for the sanitary service of the city. I became a disinfecter. In other words, I was baking lice. And I was somehow, it's a whole story. And then I became sick. I started to work, and I was lucky enough I had typhus.

JF: When you say you boiled lice, you mean you were cleaning the clothes of the people?

AF: Yes. In other words, if you would, you imagine the situation, living one with another in these places, the lice were like crawling all over.

JF: If you were working, that means that you were, your name was on a list. You were known to be in this town?

AF: Yeah.

JF: Was it considered a ghetto?

AF: Yes.

JF: They made a ghetto of Mogilëv.

AF: Yes.

JF: And this is where this occurred then.

AF: Yes. And there were hundreds and hundreds died, every day, hundreds of them. And the clothes had to be disinfected.

JF: You're talking about from the people who had died?

AF: Yes. And this is what I was doing, baking lice, until I got sick also, myself.

JF: You said you got typhus at that point?

AF: Yes. And somehow, being that I was that strong and young and with whole energy, I survived it, almost with no medicine. I remember an episode in that hospital, when I was delirious and this, and there were other kids and youngsters and people, there was a young girl nearby saying, screaming to her mother that she had a *si shtecht mir*, how you say in English? She has a kind of pinching sensation on her body, and she was screaming all the time, it pinches, it hurts, or somewhere. So I said, "Take a knife and pinch back!" So later, her mother came, she tells her mother, "Mother, give me a knife." She said, "Why do you want it?" "I want to pinch back." She was already almost, you know, it was like a delirium type of-- She died later on, this young girl.

JF: Mogilëv became a ghetto when? After you arrived?

AF: Yes, after we arrived. A little bit later. They made it smaller, because they had to have the Ukrainian part. So they made like a concentration in the town.

JF: And the Romanians were in charge of the ghetto?

AF: Yes. We had to build, by voluntary work, how to say, we had to build that kind of, you couldn't go over to the other side. Because, at the checkpoint you had to show

if you are allowed to go out. If you are needed there, then you could get out. But at night you were never allowed to be out of there. You had to be inside.

JF: You were working within the walls of the ghetto?

AF: At first. Later on they sent me to a Ukrainian hospital to work there. And I was working, I was everything there. You name it and I was there. Now, in the, like when we found ourselves, there were already a lot of our family who died. In the first month--don't forget, people who had no desire of living, people who no--they thought that that was the end anyway, they gave up hope. Those people were the first to die. And who were those people? Mainly intellectuals. The simple people survived more than the intellectuals because they weren't thinking that far. They were struggling for survival. That was their aim. We have to survive, there is no other way. Those who didn't have that drive of wanting to survive died the first few months.

JF: You and your immediate family were then able to live together in the ghetto?

AF: Yes. And I was actually, being I was then what? 18, 17, 18, I was the one who had this authorization obtained that I'm a useful Jew, and they shouldn't touch me. And in that way it was for the family also, automatically. Now we immediately then tried to form all kind of cultural activities to help out the morale. And I remember, he's still alive, there was an actor, his name was Publicker [phonetic]. He's still in Romania. He was an actor from way back, and he organized a theater. And I, OK, I didn't mention that I was, in the '40s, when the Russians came, I used to play an instrument before, like a mandolin and violin, and then I started to play the flute in 1940. I went to school especially for it. And in concentration camp, I was a part of this group by playing the flute.

JF: You're talking now about the ghetto in Mogilëv?

AF: Yes.

JF: They formed an orchestra?

AF: No, they formed a theater. And they needed a part where I, of a peasant playing the flute. And I had been a part of that. OK, we have never been able to really perform because it came then an ordinance that we were not allowed to do it, because all these things were actually for bringing up the morale of the people, you know, giving them hope, giving them what to live for in the future. And, basically, like I said before, if you die by being gassed, or you die just because you have no food. Sometimes you would prefer to die just--and that's the end, instead of going through this whole hell of dying slowly. By hunger, there were hundreds and hundreds who died, just fell in the street, blown up like a balloon, from no food. There were, if you imagine, the lice, where you could see lice walking on the streets, let's put it this way. And the typhus eczematous, what was called an eczema, in other words, it was enough that one louse was biting a sick person, and then somehow walk over to a healthy person, and he'll bite him also, the person will get sick. And this was millions. Only those who became then later, if they had the sickness, they were immune already, so they could not get it again. You can have it once in your

lifetime. So those are actually really the survivors, who had it. All these other ones, who did not become immune, they really died. There was no way of return. There was no medicine, very little. Later on, I remember, like in '43, the Joint [American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, an aid organization] came already, and clothes and things, like, it was already like everybody already knew that something is happening. The armies were advancing, and this and that. It started to become a little easier, how to say, because you had already a kind of little light somewhere what you see in the darkness. But until that point, the misery was enormous.

JF: You said that you were not permitted to put on the play that you had practiced?

AF: Yes. We practiced a long time. Everything was set. The day of the performance came an ordinance, you know, like a thing from the major of the City. Major, is major, I think. Yes, it's like before colonel, is major, yes? He was the leader of the town, the military leader. And an ordinance came, they locked up, and they wouldn't let us perform.

JF: Was there also some effort towards education for any of the children in the ghetto?

AF: I don't really know, because they didn't have any at that point. I know that there were no schools, let's put it this way. You observed all the holidays. Funny enough is, that you didn't have what to eat, but when it came Yom Kippur, you didn't really eat, and you really kept all. When we had this Passover, usually Passover you are not allowed to eat cornmeal. So you can imagine, there were rabbis, and everything you had in the camp, because you had doctors, Jewish doctors, and there were plenty of them deported. So they gave out a decree that you were allowed to eat cornmeal, because we didn't have any--all the breads and everything was mixed with cornmeal. You didn't get wheat or this. The bread was like, if you put a finger, it didn't bounce back. It would go in, and it stayed in. So, because it was mixed with all kinds of other meals, so he gave a decree that you were allowed at Passover to eat this, so you can, actually it is *pikuach nefesh*, in other words, in order to survive. I just remembered, I'm going back now into '41, before we were deported. OK, when the whole thing it happened, it fell exactly when we had the High Holidays, in Czernowitz before we were deported. So, we didn't have any more synagogues. It was already the German and Romanian Nazis there. So what happened? We had it in houses. But you were not allowed to concentrate big amounts of people, you know, it was one of the ordinances that came out. So we had to take our heart in our hands to form all kinds of little places where you could concentrate 40, 50 people and pray, and have like little synagogues. So remember, my uncle, one of the uncles who actually died in concentration camp, the husband of my aunt what is 95 now in Israel. In their home we formed a synagogue. And it was Yom Kippur, and my dear grandfather was there, the *Zayde*, was there, and all the family. It was only for close people. It wasn't for outsiders. So we were praying, and it comes to *Neilah* when you have to blow the shofar, and the guy

who was supposed to blow the shofar never, wasn't able to blow it. And if you don't blow the shofar, you cannot go eat. And he was struggling, trying to blow that shofar, and he couldn't. So I said, "Give me, I'll try it." And I blew the shofar, because I knew a little bit about playing the flute. So I was able to--And this was, how to say, the last happiness actually, the last joy of my *Zayde*, who later on, I told you before, died, and we never seen him-- This is another. There are flashbacks of all kinds of episodes that I remember, and it's probably already so many tapes you have here. OK, so, where have we been now. I was talking about Passover. So this is what happened. There were all kind of ways of trying to survive. I forgot, another episode what was really the main, how you say it, the strong, how is that, the basis, the backstone? No, no. There's a word what you say. The backbone. Ah, the backbone, the backbone of our being able to really start to stay there. You had no money, there was like *Marks*, but it was like these *Marks* you couldn't use anywhere else. It was made especially for Transnistria, they had special money for that. And to be able to survive, you had to do something at first, until you really started to know where you are. So, my mother, she had always to take care of food. That was her-- So what was she carrying? Now gold, you are not allowed to have because I told you they took it away already in Otachi--you had to drop it into that bucket, and they took off with it. If you didn't take it off, they found it. So now she has this side sack, like a sack, what did she carry in there? She carries marmalades and bread and things to have to nourish her family so to be able to survive. So the guy there looks in at what she has, and, "Oh, fine." But when we arrived in Mogilëv, and we started to sell from us everything. I mean, you had all these peasants from the surroundings used to come and buy. So you take off a shirt and you sell it to buy food. And in all other things, you start slowly, slowly, until you are almost naked. But my mother had, in this jar of marmalade, she had a big gold watch with a chain hidden. She really took her-- She had really courage. She didn't say--if my father would have known, he was always so afraid of everything, if he would have known that she has that, he would have taken it out and give it away. But she was smart enough not to tell anybody about it. And when we arrived there, that was really the lifesaver. Because we immediately could get a big amount of money for that, and we could find a place where we could stay for awhile where to live there, and the first thing that we started out to do was to sell latkes, potato latkes. With the money what we had here, my mother ran out and bought potatoes on the market, and rubbed them [makes grating sound] and this and we had a niece of ours who was with us, who, and I, we were going out and sell the latkes for this, and then we started to make already, and people were hungry all the time. So this was how we really started to be able to survive in that. Later on, was already being that I was able to obtain this kind of--nobody wanted this kind of job, because they were afraid if you got caught by one of those lice, that would be the end of it. But I didn't care, I mean I watched out, but at a certain point I became immune, being that I was already sick anyway. So for me it was nothing, and it was for me like a lifesaver, how to say, because on this basis, we were able all of us to survive when nobody-- You know, they have this saying, if

you have enough years to live, you survive. This is really how it-- Later in years, like I said, we were there for 3 ½ years. We started in October '41, and we were there until March '44. And then we were freed by the Russian army.

JF: How did that happen?

AF: Now that's an episode for itself. Now we knew, you know, we had, some people had radios or they heard, there was the Underground, the partisans and everything. So rumors, we knew exactly about what is happening. We knew about, I'm talking about now general happenings, that the Russian army is advancing, that they invaded Europe, that the American army landed, and this. And you already heard that it was going to better, OK? The difference only between those who were in a station like we were, in a camp like that, there were two types--there were *Vernichtungslager* and the *Konzentrationslager*. It means, *Vernichtung* means "destruction, extermination", and that was just you would die alone. The only chance what we had was that we had at least a chance to survive, and the other ones who were really, didn't have no chance.

JF: You had a fairly clear idea then of what was happening in the extermination camps?

AF: Yes.

JF: When you were in the...

AF: No, no. In later years. We still did not realize exactly what was going on. Because it was so, the secret of it was so kept so strongly, I mean they really kept it so that they could convince the people to go even, not to-- Everybody thought they were going somewhere that would be better for him.

JF: The contact that some of the people had with the underground and the partisans, as you pointed out before, did this mean that anybody from your group try to escape, or...?

AF: At the certain moment, when the Joint came in already, like in '43, I think, there were already in *Unterhandlung*, you know how you say *Unterhandlung*, there were already talks between the leaders of the Jewish people, because immediately they formed the Federation and this, you know, always like that, where the Jews are, they immediately form. And they already had a kind of connection somehow.

Tape three, side two:

JF: This is tape 3, side 2, of an interview with Mr. Ari Fuhrman, on October 26, 1981, with Josey Fisher.

AF: So, when the episode of being freed, I was talking about the children, about the things that were going on. They already tried, at that point, they started to try, and all the children what were left, *yesoymin* without parents, the orphans, they should be somehow taken out from there. There were some doing, and I don't recall 100%, but I think a group had been--Because I told you, with the Romanians we had at least that one choice, that you could bribe them.

JF: Who was trying to get the orphans out of the ghetto?

AF: The Jews from Romania got in touch with the Jews from here, and even the delegates, a guy from Bucharest came to see the situation in Transnistria, because they were also kept in the dark. They didn't know what was really going on even here. So, they came, and it was a kind of discussion occurred with the government and this, and they seen already, you know, at that point, it is already like *tse nileh* [end approaching ; last service on Yom Kippur] like the last card that they play, the Romanians, and the Germans for that matter, also, because it was already, it was after Stalingrad, it was after the Moscow siege, and it was already the Normandy thing, and already they could see that there will be no more, no too long. Now, it was only a question of survival.

JF: Who from Bucharest was able to come?

AF: From the Federation, from the Jewish Federation.

JF: How did they do that?

AF: With bribes. How did they permit to let in the Joint bring clothes?

JF: Again it was through bribes?

AF: Of course, how else? I remember they had, in Mogilëv, they had, how you say, like piles of things that were just thrown in there, in these big storage places, and whoever knew somebody, whoever this they would bring them in there, and clothe them from the top to the bottom, with shoes and things, because I am sure that here in the United States they collected things and this, and to get it it there wasn't that easy, it was meant to be given really to everybody, but you know, until it really comes to the needy, half of it is lost some on the way, and even then, when it comes to wherever you were in the camp that you could get something, you have to know somebody who gave you a kind of idea how to get in there and get something.

JF: Was there a Jewish Council in the...

AF: It wasn't a council, it was a Jewish group, yes, a kind of type of Federation.

JF: And they were responsible for making these connections with the Jews outside of the ghetto?

AF: More or less. First of all was the police, what I told you before, who was put there to put together people. And even they, it's not good to tell you about your own

people that they were bad, but they were. Because they were able to maneuver whoever, you would bribe them also. But they had to give the number. You see, you couldn't get away.

JF: There were transports, regular transports, then, that were picked?

AF: Yes. So you had to, I mean the first years. Later on it eased up. But at first it was like permanent, permanent transporting groups. And they had to give so many a day. And what they used to give, the sick ones and who couldn't walk and who couldn't talk, and everyone who couldn't resist, couldn't put any resistance. Like, my cousin here, what he lives here, his family, his father, mother, sister and brother died. Now, the father and mother died immediately, but the sister and the older brother, both were older than him, they had typhus, and they were already almost out of it, like they were still convalescing in the home, because it was like the end of it. So they needed people, so they walked in there, picked him up, his name was Philip Feku [phonetic], and his sister Betty, who was also there, and the only sister, the smaller sister, Sedie [phonetic] was with us already, living with us, because she didn't have parents, and she was 16 years old, 15 years, a little girl yet, a youngster, so those two were picked up as a part of a group to be deported. So, he, when they came in, they say they are taking him for a checkup to a hospital. So he says yes; he didn't even put on his shoes. He went in, how you say it, his slippers, winter. And she also, and the only thing you heard later on, because he had, I remember, he used to have a very heavy coat, and somebody has then told us that they took away this coat from him, and that was the end. He never returned, he went away, actually, and that was the end of him. There was horrible stories about different things what even Jewish people used to do. I mean, your own people sometimes, all these *Kapos*, *Kapos* they are called, were similar. OK. That was more horrifying than ours, but even here you send innocent people because you needed, and maybe you cannot blame even these people doing it because they knew that if you don't give the amount, you'll be taken. It's like a knife with two ends will pinch you both sides. So you had to work hard to be able to put together that-- Now, with freeing us, it was very funny. We knew already now that the Russian army was very close. We didn't know exactly how close, but we knew that they are close. So really what happened is, all of a sudden, we get this shooting. Being that we were on the border of the Dneister, the Dneister was actually a point where they can hold back. So, on this side is Otachi, where the town we are in, and here is Mogilëv. In the middle is the Dneister. We heard that night they break the bridge. When you break up a bridge, a railroad bridge, it means that it's very close something. So the first thing what they did was cut that bridge in half. And we were very close. The whole house almost fell apart from that. We were about maybe 300 yards from that bridge. Now, all of a sudden, the main what we really understood that really something is going on, that there were columns and columns of motorized soldiers and tanks and everything going to that one bridge left, that was not a railroad bridge, but a regular bridge, what we built actually, the Jews there for them. So, they were tracking there, and they were coming from three or four directions,

from north, from south and from east, going all the way to this bridge. And this bridge could take just so much. So what really happened is, one tank, and they told us later on what really happened, these partisans, captured the German tank, got into German clothes, and went in this column with all the people, you know, going towards the bridge. And then when they came to the bridge, they all stopped, and they ran out, and screamed out, "The Ivan is here." [Russian pronunciation]. Ivan there was a synonym for the Russian. Ivan, you know, Ivan is another, [English pronunciation] Ivan, Ivan is here. So they heard Ivan is here, they started to fight, like the Germans would fight with the Romanians that they should be first to cross, and not the Romanians. And can you imagine, here you have a tank, and this has a--and they started shooting, and when we heard shooting, the people who had the bridge, to blow up the bridge in the last second, thought that the people already fighting there, that they really are dead. So they blew up the bridge, and everything was left on this side. And everybody jumped, all these officers and everything, changed clothes into civilians, and they run into the water and swim over the Dneister. It was a whole [unclear]. And for 24 hours, there was nobody in the town. There was no Germans, and no Russians, because it was still far away. The only law in town was like one tank of partisans. And I was then, what, 20, I think or so. So I was interested to see how a partisan looks. I had never seen it. So I decided to walk out to see the partisan. And we knew where it is. Saw some torn-up clothes. You know how a partisan can look. You think he is a hero. He is a human being, and has nothing to eat just like you don't have, or anything like that. And here we see him with a rifle in the hand, with a tank, with a red flag on it, and they are, nobody's there. No Romanians, no Germans, no Russians. Can you imagine, everybody was already hungry, and this, so everybody ran, from these cars, on all sides cars, but nobody there, the cars alone. So you opened them and went into the cars and grabbed blankets what you didn't have, and food and chocolate. I hadn't seen chocolate for 3 ½ years. And Germans had, when they wanted to bribe you with something, like be nice to you, they would give you a piece of chocolate. So when we came to these cars, the first thing what I was looking for chocolate. Because I knew that everybody had in these cars chocolate. So I picked up chocolate, I picked up a few blankets. And people were really, I mean, they found cars of sugar, because they were trying to get away. And everybody took whatever he could, to just make a little bit easier their life, because they never had it. The only thing what I picked up, there was a factory, an oil factory, not too far from us, and I always wanted, we didn't have enough wood, you know, wintertime. And it was nasty and cold, and we didn't have what to really burn. So what we did, the house where we were living in was half broken. So if it would held on a long war, the whole house would have collapsed over us, because every day I was going out and pull a piece of wood from somewhere. So my dream was to have enough of that. So when you make oil, they leave, when they press out the oil it's called *makuha* in Russian, [to grind, mill] it's kind of a brick, big round brick, what they press out from the machine, and that is good for burning. So what I did, I went in there and brought about five sacks of that oil in the house to have

some combustible thing to be able to heat up the house. And like I said, for 24 hours, nobody was there. The only thing what was going on, the Russians even didn't know that. There was still shooting going on over us. They were shooting from the other side, was Otachi, they were shooting the other side over to them, and they from up there, from the Ukrainian side, the Russians were shooting there. And then, finally, we see a little airplane coming down there, and somebody looking up really was going on, and later on the army marched in, and they freed really the town up. At that point we knew that really we are finally free.

JF: Where did you go once the Russians came?

AF: OK, once the Russians came, it took awhile. Most of them were concentrated to the army. In other words, not concentrated, mobilized to the Russian army. And were sent to fight. And a lot of them really were killed after concentration camp. Like my sister's fiancé had come to the army, and the day of the 9th of May, I think was the last day of war, if I remember, he was killed the 9th of May.

JF: You were not taken for the army?

AF: No, I was lucky in a sense that one day, one night, I had this habit to play flute. So one night I was playing the flute in the middle of the night, when I used to come. I was still working in that hospital, because now the war, you can imagine, was a little different already. They were giving us already things, because before when I worked in the hospital I didn't get anything.

JF: Then your family was still living in Mogilëv. You were working now in the Ukrainian hospital?

AF: Now, just a few days. Being that I was working in that hospital, they wouldn't pay us. Money no question. But what they were giving me there, bread, a little piece of soap, because soap was one of the hardest things to get. Because soap, my God, like gold, to clean yourself. Because like, without soap--here you were cleaning your clothes, you didn't have boiling water, so you just washed them the way you could, and the next day you were full with lice again, because they had nests of the eggs of the lice that were forming from the warm body. They immediately would form. You had to burn, really to get rid of everything you had to burn everything. And even then, you had to shave really to get rid of it, all the hair had to be shaven, even from all the parts of the body, because there were nests there, and as soon as you put on new clothes, they were there. But coming back to how I went out of there--so it was night, I was sitting home, and practicing the flute. So one night I hear a knock on the window, and he walks in, this officer, a captain, a Russian captain, with another guy, and starts talking to me, and he says, "Oh, you play the flute?" And I say, "Yes." He says, "Oh, I'm a leader of a band, of a military band. And we don't have a flutist. Do you want to come?" I said, "Wait a minute, we just are freed." And he says, "Look, you'll have it very good with us, don't worry about anything. We need you." So my father, he convinced me I should go, and I went with them. And we crossed immediately, and we were following, what we were really doing,

we were following the military. Whoever occupied a town, we were after them, we were marching with the marching band, you know. We were marching until we came to a town, a Romanian town, I forgot the name of it, Mogosan, [phonetic], I think, yeah. And there we stopped, and I was there a short while, because then came a kind of decree that all the people from concentration camps should go first to their home where they were from. They had no right really to take us immediately. But at first we were housed in this, you know, and then they gave me a piece of paper that I should go home, and then go to the place where you register as a military service, ready to go to service, how you call that?

JF: That you were drafted?

AF: To the drafting place. There was a place to go to, the drafting place, and they would register you and then decide if they need you or not. So, this how I got out of there.

JF: This is under the Russians?

AF: Yes, that's right. Under the Russians. And they sent me back to Czernowitz. And I came to Czernowitz, my parents were already in Czernowitz. My sister, who was in Russia, was the first to march in. She marched in, she wasn't the military, but she marched in together, she was in Russia and she was looking for us. So she marched in with the first column of when they freed Czernowitz, she came in with them. She was the first one there. And then finally, she met on the street a friend of ours who knew already that we were there. Now, I was very slow in going to the draft. I had enough already. So what I did, I found this guy, a friend of mine, he is now in Israel. He is a drummer. And I meet him on the street, and I say, "Look, I have this and this, what can I do, I don't want to go." He said, "I didn't want to go either. Come, I show you what you'll do." He was working for the fire department as a drummer. He says, "We just formed an orchestra. We found one of the commanders of the, how you call it, of the fire department, who is a lover of music. And he formed an orchestra, and we need one more guy, and we somehow will be kept here, because the fire departments in Russia is military, actually, so it's like being in the military, but in the town to go after fires." So, we went there, and for two months I was a musician there, and I was singing also, Russian songs. Now, but, what really happened, he didn't have no jurisdiction to really keep us there as musicians. I mean, it was his own. Everybody was on his own at that point, because nobody was really, there were heroes that marched in, and he is the captain of the fire department and he wants an orchestra. So we had to become, all of us had to become first firemen. So, I was for two months I was a fire fighter. And later on, they needed drivers. So where did we get drivers? We had one machine, one car. The whole town of 200,000, had one car, really a fire car, and the rest was we found an old fashioned pump somewhere in the fire department that was left over from the beginning of the '30s probably, one of these what you see like in the movies, a pump, like in the middle like a balloon, like a thing, and on the sides a handle, and you go up and down like you see in the movies sometimes way back. We found one of these. So we fixed that up and we put it on a truck, with hoses, and we had a hose attached to the

hydrant, and then the water would go in the balloon, and then we would pump it and go. They had one time a fire, I remember, in a building, in a tall building, it was about six stories or seven stories high. It was a movie, it was the German movie, and I used to live years ago across from there. It was called the, I forgot the name of it. But it was a German movie. So there was a fire on the roof, and it start burning, and now we are starting to pump here, and there was a guy up there on the sixth floor, and the thing was like on the steps. And we are pumping, pumping, no, we didn't pump. They brought prisoners to pump. There were about eight German prisoners. They were putting them to pump there, and they pumped and pumped, and the hydrant doesn't work. So they rigged big buckets, very big, and now they had a pipe going from that bucket and this pumper that has to go from the hydrant. It was such a joke, the whole thing. And they are pumping, and the water doesn't come. And the guy, the chief, he is up there, and he screams, "*Vater*", and *vater* means water. And here's the fire, and he holds this, and the water doesn't come up. Can you imagine, with a pump like this, to go up on the sixth floor? But we were lucky at that point that there was a fire department at the railroad station, who had a car. They had really a regular fire car, and they came and helped us in that fire. The whole building was a movie house, and it was burning, the roof was burning. So, at that point, we had to, they needed drivers, because we had to get cars. So I said I want to become a driver. And there in '44 I became a driver for the fire department. And I was a driver for two years. It was a little easier, because as a driver, almost two years, it was easier because you could sleep at night, at least. When you worked nights, you had to be rested as a driver. The other ones they really don't care. So I used to sleep. Only when there was an alarm, then we had to get up and run. So you be alert to drive a car. And, then, came this exchange of--the orchestra was still--we still were playing music. I mean, there was a musician Halm, a Max Halm, [phonetic], I know there were two brothers. One was playing the saxophone, and one was playing the violin. And this was a drummer, and I played the flute. We had a nice little orchestra. And we had a pianist, very good, he was a concert pianist, Wagner, his name was Wagner. So, but he was no relation. I met him here, I think, in Philadelphia, one time. He came to look for me, years and years ago. I don't know what happened to him now. So, we were still doing that, and then came a kind of agreement between Romania and Russia, that all the ones who were born in Romania can be exchanged, get an authorization, you have to give up the citizen--the Russian citizenship, and go back to Romania. Now, somehow, my parents were, I don't know what they did, by bribing or whatever, they get papers that they are from Poland. And there was also an exchange from Russia to Poland. So they went to Poland, and I went to Romania. And, it probably had to do also with my sister, my oldest sister, had a husband who was from Poland. So he somehow connected the whole thing. But that's not really important. And then they came out of there, and Poland was at that point, in '44, I think it was, a kind of antisemitic thing there going on...

JF: They went to Poland in 1944?

AF: Yes.

JF: And you were still, at that point...

AF: Yes, I was going at that point to, in '46, to Romania. They came in '44 back, and they left in '45, actually. And I left a few months later. Like they left end of '45, and I left beginning of '46. So they then, from Poland, being that it was some pogroms there, and this, they went to Austria. And they were in Austria in a DP camp until they came to the United States.

JF: And where did you go?

AF: And I went to Romania, and I was still 13 years in Romania because they wouldn't let me out.

JF: Where were you in Romania?

AF: In Timi?oar--Timi?oara.

JF: Can you spell that for me?

AF: T-I-M-I-?-O-A-R-A. And do you remember I told you, at first, an episode of my father's cousin who came back from Chile to Romania, and then they went through the hell, and then they went back? Now, one of their sons was in Russia. So he came back to Czernowitz, and from Czernowitz he went to Romania, his parents used to live in Timi?oara, and this is why I went, to Timi?oara.

JF: You elected to go there, to that town?

AF: Yes. Because his parents were living there. We didn't have anybody in Romania, because when he came back, he was completely--you could see lice running over his--So my father took him, took all his clothes, dropped it into fire, burned it up, shaved everything off of him, gave him a whole good bath, and put new clothes on.

JF: So you and the cousin went together?

AF: Yes. He was a part, and there was another cousin, we were together. I wasn't alone there. I stayed with this cousin because he was a dentist, and I used to, after the war, I started working. Besides being a fireman, I worked in dentistry with him, a dental mechanic. And this is the reason why my parents would accept for me to stay, because I was with him very close because he was a doctor in dentistry, and I was working with him together. And then, when we came to Romania, we had this cousin also, the one what came from Russia what has his parents in Timi?oara, who were waiting for him to leave to go to South America, because he was, they were already here after concentration camp, and the son wasn't there.

JF: So you left for Timi?oara in 1946?

AF: Yes. And there I stayed until '51, and registered to go to Israel. I didn't know about my parents, where they were or whatever.

JF: You had no idea where your parents were?

AF: No. In '49, after three years, they found me. They were in Austria. They were in Salzburg. And they found me somehow, I don't know how. And they started to send me gifts and money to be able to survive, because I was just like ...

JF: What kind of work were you doing in Timișoara?

AF: Dentistry. And now, I also, at that point, in Timișoara, I started to go to a college there, to learn to become a dentist. I didn't need, to become a dentist you didn't need to go four years to school. I told you the difference between a dentist and a doctor. So after one year, I got approval that I can become a dentist, if I work under a doctor. Like, the way I was at first when I learned the profession. So you had to have only a name there that...

Tape four, side one:

JF: This is tape 4, side 1, of an interview with Mr. Ari Fuhrman, on October 26, 1981, with Josey Fisher.

AF: So, here I was a dentist, and I was ready to leave for Israel. Now...

JF: You finished then your training as a dentist?

AF: Yes. I was working with him as a dental mechanic. Meanwhile, I went to this course for dentistry in the college, in Timișoara there, and I became a dentist, with the right to work only for the next eight years, to work only in villages, under a dentist. So, this is what I used to do. I used to travel, I had three little villages, and bring back work, and then make the work, and go back. We were partners, how to say, he used to get 60%, and I used to get 40%. Anyway, but that's not important. But then, what the nice thing about it, that I developed a method of making artificial eyes.

JF: How did that come about?

AF: Dentistry had the same materials. Dentistry had materials what are used in making artificial eyes. So, by coincidence, somebody had broken an eye, a glass eye, and gave me these pieces to glue together and fix it up. So that was my first eye. I took dental material, white material, and embedded the glass color into that, and that was my first eye. And then later on, I developed, you know that is what I do now here, most of my time is devoted to artificial eye making.

JF: This was still in Timișoara, when you did this?

AF: Yes. In the same time, in '46, I was registered to go to Israel, it was Palestine yet, it wasn't Israel, and I became a member of the Zionist organization, *Hashomer Hatzair*. And it became actually, I couldn't be *Hashomer Hatzair* it was *Mishmar*, it's an organization. The adults of *Hashomer Hatzair* were *Mishmar*. And, I was very active there, how, because I became an amateur of Yiddish theater. All of a sudden it burst out somehow. I don't know why, because before that, I had very little besides music, and being that I had the background of music and I was writing music for that group, and I became to act, I became one of the leaders here.

JF: This is in what year?

AF: That was in '46, '47, '48, '49, around that.

JF: As soon as you got back into Romania?

AF: Yeah, to Timișoara. I met a few friends there who we started to talk about it, at the organization. The first thing what I really did there, I formed a choir. I had that background. I formed a choir in the organization, and we used to make concerts for the people from the *Mishmar*. And then slowly from that, we started to make skits and musical parts and this, and then we became a kind of amateur theater, and we used to play in big theaters, really. Twice we played even in the opera hall. I was leading. Funny enough. I had about one, two, three, and I was with the flute, and leading. I had about a five piece orchestra there, I used to like come down, lead the orchestra, and after I do this, then I had

to go through the thing and come up there to perform. And when it was really important, then again, I went down, because these people didn't know too good Yiddish to really know when to start. They were Jewish, but they were Hungarian Jews, and Hungarian Jews again, they were just so assimilated with, Hungarian was for them tops. Other things wasn't important. Just like the Romanian Jews in Bucharest. They knew very little. Some knew, but basically everybody tried to get assimilated. Same was with the Hungarian Jews. The same is here with American Jews. More and more, less and less--More and more get assimilated and less and less know Yiddish, and you lose that, and you become just like anybody else. You become not a Jew anymore at a certain point. It seems very similar to what happened in Germany. They were thinking that they are first Germans, and then Jews. And then Hitler came and told them, wait a minute, it's not so. It's just the opposite. And I'm repeating myself, I think what everybody knows, but it's worthwhile to repeat that it was enough that you were Jewish, even those who had become non-Jews have gone over to, Hitler fished out that his grand-grand-grandfather was Jewish. He wasn't not any more clean enough for the race, for the clean German race. So, it was not enough, you cannot hide. If you are born that way, sooner or later he got you. So if somebody thinks that by just getting over to another religion will really help him get assimilated, that they will not know and change even the name, change whatever, you have always that thing that you are a Jew, and they will always find out. Somebody thinks otherwise, he is probably not smart enough.

JF: During this time, then, you were on the list to emigrate to I--to Palestine? You had your name on the list early?

AF: Yeah. Until '48, when Israel was formed, '48 it was, I think, emigration was clandestine, and at that point, Romania was yet like shaky, you didn't really know what direction they were going to go. You knew more or less, but it was not established everything. There was not declared any independence or whatever, it was nothing yet. So you could still emigrate through a Zionist organization. At that point, everybody was registered. My lot was that being, the same story, I was a useful Jew now at this situation, because we had these shows going on, and I was leading the choir and this, so they had time for me; first, let's send the other ones. And as a matter of fact, I don't know if you remember, I think you do, when I had told you when we were going up the side in the dirt by the Dneister, and I picked up one of these little things with a baby and tried--this cousin was also a part of our group. His name is Itzak. He lives in Israel as a matter of fact, due to the fact that he was a member of this Zionist organization, the *Mishmar*, and he was lucky enough to be on a list to emigrate to Israel before anybody else. And he really was, in the first years, even before Israel was established, he was already in Israel. So he had even the choice being there, to go to Israel, and he was lucky. Other ones were not. So later on, he had to register at the police. This was already a completely different situation, because here he was sent by the Zionist organization, and they would send you the way they felt when they had the possibility to do. But now, when you were registered at the

police, you had to register who you are, what you are, what you are doing, and so on. And here came my misfortune. I mean, it was fortunate and unfortunate. I was a dentist, and also eye maker, and at this point, when you registered, you had to give your profession. And they pointed out, professionals they wouldn't let go. So, at a certain point, I had to give up dentistry and everything else, and I started to work in a hat factory. At a work I have never known, or never--what did I do there? I think it's unbelievable what you do for a certain belief that you want to do something. I was--hats are made out of wool. Now, when you make that wool, when you form the wool, it has impurities. Those impurities are threads of cotton. And cotton should not be in the wool, to have a good hat, to have a good quality hat. So, how do you take out those little threads what are in? You put it in sulfuric acid, to burn. It will not burn, I think it's sulfuric acid, OK, but anyway, a kind of acid what burns out the cotton, but doesn't burn the wool. So they have big buckets, not buckets, how you call, as big as this table here.

JF: Like a vat?

AF: Yes, big. And they were in a certain percentage, I think about 4% concentration of that acid with water mixed, and they would stay there for so many hours, until that burns out, and then you had to put it on a centrifuge to draw out the water. And here I found myself again like in a concentration camp that you do this kind of dirty work. Like you would take after, first of all, you couldn't work with your hands, because it burns your hands, so we worked with gloves. But the gloves were so inconvenient to work with, you couldn't work--they were heavy and this. So you had to burn your hands. I was working with the hands free, and then putting them in this centrifuge, a lot of hats. You had to know how to, just like a washing machine, you know, what spins, you had to really know how to rinse so it wouldn't start shaking the whole room. And after that was spinning, can you imagine what kind of air, and the air was full of vapors of this acid. And at the point when that was really spinning strong, we had to go out, there were two of us, had to go out there and wait until this settles, and then go in, start the machine, and run out again until the vapor will be pulled out by the fan.

JF: How long were you doing this kind of work?

AF: I think I was there about a year and a half.

JF: This is in 19... ?

AF: That was let's say in 1948. Till '48 I was there, and then, it was after '48. It was when the Zionists could not, it was already Israel, and in '48 they declared independence of Romania, I think, the 23rd of August, I think, was, or 30th of December, something. I can't remember the date. I think when it became a republic, Romania became a republic, a socialist, kind of socialist republic, whatever. And then, everything was already taken on. Until then, you couldn't even go away without--if you were smart enough, or knew your way, you could have just come to, I saw a lot of people, a lot of actors, big actors, pass by our town. You were still able to go to Hungary, and then from Hungary to Austria, and just go away. Like a big Mansdorf, [phonetic], a big actor, I

remember, passed by Romania. A lot of them passed by, but him I remember because he gave a play. He played in a play. It was *I Live, Ich leb*, and he was, I remember there, in the town, he played, and we seen this show at that point. So, then, you couldn't go, just walk over there, because it was borders already established and everything. It was hard. So you went here. And when I registered there, and they found out, like I said, so they wouldn't let me go. And how did I know? Because like, we registered the whole group, the whole theater group registered. We were very close, all of us. We registered in the same time, the choir, and the group and everything. Like, I was in the middle of two of my friends. The top and the bottom went to Israel. They got approval to get out. And I was not, you know? So, I knew something is wrong, and then I understood what was going on. But this didn't help me too much, because for the next three years, until '51, I still could not get out.

JF: And you were working in this hat factory all that time?

AF: Yes. I worked in the factory. In the same time I was working also in dentistry, but clandestine. And also in eye making, also clandestine, because officially nobody should know. I worked with this cousin of mine, and I had to work also hoping that I would be getting out. But then, seeing that I could not get out, and my cousin moved to Bucharest, so I decided to become an actor in the Yiddish theater. They were after me already a long time, in the Bucharest State Theater. So, one day, they visited the theater, they visited our town, they had a play there, and so I approached the chief, the director of the theater, the manager, actually. The director means the manager, and *Regisseur* means the one who directs the show. It was another word we used. And he was the manager, the leader of the theater, and I told him I was willing to come, and he said, "Why not? Oh come on." So I went to Bucharest and gave an exam for the theater, and became a member of the State Theater. They gave me immediately a house to stay, but my aim was still, even in Bucharest, I thought maybe I'll be able easier to get out. So when I registered, I was a few years there, I tried to register first, nobody knew, but then they found out when there was registration. That was already after I was 12 years haven't seen my parents or sisters. They had again a registration, and I registered. At that point, all of us who registered then had to quit the theater. They said, "You cannot be with us if you want to leave."

JF: Can you tell me a little bit about what the theater was like at that point in Bucharest?

AF: You know, we were very fortunate in a regime who is paying for everything, and it costs you nothing. In other words, the theater is supported 100% by the government. It's a, how to say, propaganda instrument. In other words, to show the world that it's really better here than anywhere else, like in the other satellites, the other Communist countries, and people come, it is really so now better than in my time, let's put it this way. But, there was never a question of getting costumes or plays or scenery or whatever. You are a State Theater, you get your salary, as big or small it is, you couldn't live on it at that time. I still used to work dentistry and in eye-making, but this was like a cover for my other activities,

because I could not work officially there. I didn't want them to even know about it. So, I used to work nights. I used to have a little room upstairs where I used to get in and do the work. Then, in 1948, I think it was, I registered there again.

JF: 1948?

AF: '58, yeah.

JF: What kind of plays were you putting on during those years? A different kind of repertoire before the war?

AF: Yeah. It was similar to what I told you before, about the Russians. OK, the Russians later on, everything was like in Russia, the theater was closed, and Mikhoels was killed, and the whole thing what was going on, I don't want to make a history of what was going on in Russia. You know what was going on. And writers, the Yiddish writers, I mean, it was just ridiculous what was going on there. The plays were similar to those from the '40s. They had modern translations, they had from folklore, we had from classics, not only Yiddish classics, not only Jewish classics. We had Gogol, we had modern writers now, we had Yiddish, Jewish writers now, after we had a guy, we had two plays about concentration camp. One was about Auschwitz. They showed the broad of the whole horror what was going on in Auschwitz. And this guy who wrote it was actually a survivor of Auschwitz. All kinds, I mean, they used to bring in, even now I think, from Poland there used to come a director to direct some plays, like from Romanian repertoire they had translations. The thing is, the audience became less and less an amount, and now, for example, the theater is still there, it's supported by the government. It's still some colleagues there what I visit occasionally. The thing is, what they really have different from other places is what they have it like in the UN. They have it like you can hear the play Yiddish from stage, and translated into Romanian in an earphone, earset. You have certain chairs, certain rows have that set, and you can get it. When you walk into the theater and you want that, I don't know if you pay, I don't think that you even pay for it. Maybe a few pennies. But you use it, you hear there is an actor who knows Romanian very good, they are in a certain booth, and while the thing is progressing, he is translating it simultaneously into Romanian.

JF: How big was this troop that you were working with in the '50s?

AF: Ah, that was a tremendous, I mean, it was really, I have somewhere a picture of it in a magazine what appeared years much later, where I am in one picture where I seen myself. I think at that point, actors only and musicians, and this was very big, about 40, 50 people, besides backstage people and all kinds, there was a whole administration of the theater. I think now it's a little less, because not many left, and it's not so easy to get somebody in now, because there is very little audience left. The only audience they have is a few there what are still coming, and then mainly it is the tourists what come from the United States or from Israel, and they convince them to go.

JF: At the time, what kind of audiences?

AF: At the time rose was blooming. I mean, we used to make tours of two, three months all over Romania. And I remember the first time there, it was in '51, the first few months when I came to Bucharest, and that was a tour, a very long tour. We were in little and big towns like, but later on this became lesser and lesser amount of Jews, because they were leaving, more and more, and the tours what they have now, I understand, are very short, because there are only big hamlets where they go now, big towns where they have bigger amount of people. And, that's about it, how it looks now. Of course, they still have, you come into the theater and see sitting 20 people to watch a show is really heartbreaking. But still the Romanian government somehow keeps it up, and like I say, it's to show the world that they have something else that anybody else has.

JF: How was it living in Romania during those years, other than the theater itself?

AF: Living, for me, you see, the differences between me and somebody else is that I had the possibility to make an extra buck, as they say here, because I had all those other things what I was doing. I am always like that, but at that time, I really did many things, and I was better off than other people. Everybody was envious and this, but, you know how it is. You make the best of it in a way, until finally, after 13 years, I got my approval.

JF: That was what year?

AF: In '59.

JF: And where did you go?

AF: In '59 I went to, you see, there, at that time, it was no good to have family in the United States. It was still the other leader, not Ceaușescu, it was still Gheorghiu-Dej, his name, and he was like a Stalinist type. I think so. And it was not kosher to have relatives, in Israel, yes, but not in the United States. And I used to get my letters from my parents and sister who lived already here for many years. I used to get them through Israel. We were corresponding, they were writing to Israel, and I was getting it. So everybody there knew I have parents and a sister in Israel. So when I was--there, when I went out, I had to send everything to Israel. So I went from there to Israel, and then was waiting for me already an affidavit. And I was there for a year something, until everything was cleared. In Israel, I think, I was a year and three, four months, and then I came to the United States in 1960. There, when I came to Israel, it was the same thing. Until I really started to work on my field, because now I already started to work only on eyes, artificial eyes, and nothing anymore in dentistry. And, I have started to work in the theater, the first, to make the first money was made in the theater, until I prepared myself for my artificial eyes. So I went, this theater was called the Theater of the Newcomers, *Teatron Ha-olim*.

JF: This was in Israel?

AF: Yeah.

JF: In what town?

AF: Tel Aviv. Everything was in Tel Aviv. There, if you go on a tour, you are back, you come always back to Tel Aviv. It wasn't Tel Aviv, it was Bat Yam, but that's actually a part of Tel Aviv. But we were going from Tel Aviv every day. And I was always the last, I was in the *maabara*, [temporary immigrant camp in Israel] you know, one of these pre-settling things, until I got a bigger place. I mean, a place, not a bigger place, a place to begin with. So, then I played the theater, and then I came to the United States, and then, like I said, you probably have the rest...

JF: You married your wife here?⁴

AF: Yes. And we seen there was no theater; she came here after a tour, and no theater, so we started, she gave you already probably the background of that.

JF: You can tell me a little bit about it.

AF: It was very, you've seen there was nothing going on with Yiddish theater in Philadelphia, especially at that period. Even now there is nothing besides us. We organized this group with my cousin, and the pianist, and then we slowly, slowly built up a reputation, and now people know us and call us, and it's just like a side job, how to say, of spreading actually culture. The main aim is the old generation to remind in the new generation, to introduce to our heritage of Yiddish culture in theater. This is more or less-- There are so many things what can be spoken about, discussed, reminiscing, but I think I have....

JF: Mr. Fuhrman, I thank you very much for all you have told us.

AF: Thank you, and I hope you'll send me a tape.

⁴Chayale Ash Fuhrman, whose testimony is included in the Gratz College Holocaust Oral History Archive Collection.