

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

HENRICH HOFMAN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Natalie Packel
Date: July 26, 1994

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HH - Henrich Hofman [interviewee]

LH - Louisa Hofman [his wife]

NP - Natalie Packel [interviewer]

Date: July 26, 1994

Tape one, side one:

NP: Today is Tuesday, July 26 and this is Natalie Packel, interviewing Mr. Henrich Hofman. Mr. Hofman, could you please tell me where you were born, and a little bit about your family?

HH: Okay. I was born¹ in a little town called Lipecka Polyana and it's, the big city near Lipecka Polyana was Chust.² And my family consists from father and mother and grandmother and six children, four sisters.

NP: That's okay. Would you like me to stop, Mr. Hofman?

HH: Four sisters and two bro-, and brother. Otherwise we were six children all together. In 1939, the Hungarian occupied this part of Czechoslovakia where, where I was born. Anyway, in 1940, after Passover, they start to, they start to become already the Holocaust, this harassment. They take away the-- from the Jewish people they take away the stores. We're not allowed to work. I, I worked, this time I worked in the house and I had a little machine. And I used to work for the, for the farmers. And they come and they take away the machine from me and they don't let me to work. And, and it was after Shav-- in March, they come in and they collected all the people in a big square, from the whole town. They collect them all together and everybody had a little bundle with his, with his pillow, with his something to cover himself up. And we couldn't take too much food. We don't know where we're going. And, and they took us to Chust, to the train station. And over there they put us, put us in, in this cattle wagons. And we were there for a whole day, exactly, I remember this was Friday. And people from Chust, they were still home, they didn't take them yet, so they bring food to the train station to feed us. Anyway, they take us to the border. It's called Rachof.

NP: The border was called Rachof?

HH: Rachof.

NP: R-A-...

HH: C-, R-A-C-H-O-F. Rachof.

NP: And that was the border between...

HH: The border *mit* [Ger: with] Czechos-, what do you call this, Carpathian *mit*

¹Mr. Hofman indicates that he was born July 20, 1922 on his personal information sheet.

²Lipecka and Chust were occupied by Hungary in 1938-1939 as part of Hitler's annexation of Czechoslovakia. They became part of Ukraine after the Soviet liberation in 1944. Lipecka also spelled Lipcsemező [Hun], Lypets'ka Polyana [Ukr]. Chust also spelled Khust. (www.jewishgen.org and www.ushmm.org).

Poland. When Poland, or the Ukraines, I think it was the Ukraines border, in Ukraine.

NP: All right, the Ukrainian border.

HH: And they, they did the same thing, the same thing like they did in Auschwitz. They, they put the people out of the train and they start to select you go this side and you go this side. And we didn't know which side to go. Anyway, I wind out in the side where they keepled us there. On the other side, the right hand side, they put back in the train and they sent them back home. Somehow, without our knowledge, somebody intervened in Budapest that they don't allow to take the people, the regular, the regular people from the little towns what they were born there, what, what they were, they were citizens of Hungary or citizens of Czechoslovakia. But they, they cannot take those people.

NP: Do you know who intervened?

HH: I don't know. It's the Jewish community in Budapest. I don't know exactly who intervened this, but I know they was intervened. It went all the way up to the top. And, and with they, because I'm gonna underline because, because they, they took people with excuses that they, that they Polish citizens or something like this. And they don't even ask questions. They took 'em already, before they start to take us, it was already in 1940. This was in 1941 when this happened. And because I-- my, my father, he had six sisters, and one of the sisters, the [unclear], I know she had eight children, and they took her away. We never hear from them. And then another sister, and another sisters, I don't know how many children they had because we didn't hear and we didn't live too close to each other. We lived pretty far away from each other, to the, to the [unclear] what we call far away, that is to say 20, 20 miles or 30 miles for us, this was far away because we didn't have no cars over there. You know what I mean? So...

NP: I understand.

HH: ...to go there you had to go by bus or by train. So we didn't, we wasn't, wasn't too much in contact with those, *mit* the sisters. Once in a while we got contact. Oh, but this particular sister with the seven children, she was living by about 15 kilometers from us. And she and her husband had a brother in, in Polyana. So, so we were more, more, more in contact with them. Otherwise I went to visit them sometime, too. So they were went and they were perished. We never heard from them, from the whole family, and from my, from mine father's side, from sisters, what's happened in 1940 till 1941, they took them all of those people away, just for the excuse that they are, they were not citizens. So, anyway, this, this was happened in 1940, between 1941.

NP: I see.

HH: All right. When they took us to this border, and half of the people they sent back home from the train. And, and we, about 80, 80 people, we was families when we, father, mother and, and children, about 80 of us, was a group of 80 people, and they took us into the barracks over there. And they keep us there overnight in the barracks. In the middle in the night, we couldn't sleep. We were worried about, we didn't know

what's gonna happen to us. I woke up in the middle of the night and I hear screaming. And I-- we're not allowed to open the door, they said, because there was a, a policeman was standing near the door. We couldn't go out. We couldn't see, go out and look what's happen outside. But between this, between the opening, between the, between the wall was openings, was, how do you call this, a, a sheets of wood, you know, the farm, the, the barn, it's a barn.

NP: Yes.

HH: You can see through, anyway.

NP: Yes.

HH: So I saw through. I see this big trucks, big military trucks, and they throwing the people in the truck what they, those people, those people, what I said before, what they collect them before they collect us. And they were already there in there for a few weeks in there. They didn't know-- and they, because this order comes not to take 'em, so they're gonna get rid of them fast. So they, they throw them in the trucks and they take them to the, to the Polish border, to the Ukrainian border, to Kamenesk Podolsk.³ I remember exactly the, the name. Kamenesk Podolsk. And...

NP: This is K-A-M-E-N-E-S-K?

HH: Yeah.

NP: Podolsk.

HH: Yeah.

NP: All right.

HH: And over there was the Dnieper, the water Dnieper. And...

NP: They took these people to Kamenesk...

HH: Podolsk.

NP: Podolsk.

HH: This was a town.

NP: Yes.

HH: A Ukrainian town. And they shot them there. All those people was shot in the Dnieper, in the water.

NP: In the river.

HH: In the river.

NP: The Dnieper River.

HH: In the Dnieper River. They shot them. And people whats, what run away, I had, I had the pleasure to meet a friend of mine. He was from another town, but he had his, his grandmother was living in mine town. He used to come to me. He was a very good friend of mine. And he, somehow, he was a young boy, he was a very strong built guy, and he somehow he run away. He come back. He didn't survive the Holocaust. Let's

³Also spelled Kamenets-Podolski and Kamenets Podilsky (Ukrainian spelling). City in West Ukraine, part of Soviet Union occupied by German forces during the invasion of the Soviet Union, June, 1941. (www.ushmm.org and www.jewishgen.org.)

put it this way. They took him to Auschwitz later. He died anyway. But from this Holocaust, he survived. And he come back and he said, "The Dnieper was red of blood." He said he couldn't see nothing, just bodies and the blood on the Dnieper was red like you see a, a in a movie when, when they showed the Nile, The Ten Commandments, when they showed that the water become red. That's how the Dnieper was.

NP: Like the Red Sea.

HH: The Red Sea. The Dnieper was red from the blood. Anyway, they keep us there all night, and when they, when I looked out from this, between the, between the bricks, and I saw they were taking all the woman what they couldn't go out. One soldier took her by the head and one soldier and just throw it in like you throw in bricks, inside in the, in the truck, and children. They were just throwing in like, like, like you throw in a piece of woods, and they packed them up. And the trucks pulled away, and we never see 'em again. The next morning we woke up. It was *shah*, still, and nobody was there. And it was a camp of us, at least about four, 500 people were there in this camp over there.

NP: Do you know the name of the camp?

HH: This was Rachof.⁴

NP: Okay. Now I, all right, let me go back. You were taken to Rachof in 1941 which...

HH: Yeah.

NP: ...was the border of the Ukraine. And after this Jewish committee in Budapest intervened...

HH: Yeah.

NP: And you were not put on the train. And then you were taken to the barracks...

HH: Yeah.

NP: ...among about 80 people.

HH: Yeah.

NP: And then put-- and in Rachof itself was a camp...

HH: Yeah.

NP: ...of about 400 people.

HH: Yeah. Four or 500 people. I don't know exactly what it was. A matter of fact I find some, my father find some, one of his friends over there, too. They were there too, in this camp. They took, they were taken away. They never come back. We find a lot of people what we know already from the little towns, you know. Not me, my father know them, you know.

NP: In this camp.

⁴Also spelled Rachov, located 3 miles NE of Chust, currently spelled Rakhiv and part of Ukraine. Hungary occupied this town and all of the Transcarpathian area of Czechoslovakia, called Subcarpathian Rus, from March 1939 until 1944. It became part of Ukraine in 1944. (<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/rakhiv> and www.ushmm.org "Czechoslovakia" article)

HH: In this camp. We were, before, before the night time we were talking to them.

NP: Mr. Hofman...

HH: Just call me Henry, yeah.

NP: ...before this happened...

HH: Yeah.

NP: ...and you went and learned a trade...

HH: Yeah.

NP: ...what was it like in your town? What was life like? Did you experience antisemitism at that time?

HH: Before, really we were, we were living with those, with the Russians speaking. They were not Ukraines.

NP: Yes.

HH: They were, we called 'em *Rusnakers* [phonetic] Russian people. They speak, speak the Slavic language. And, and honestly, we lived with them together like, like we were one family. We were very friendly. My father was a carpenter, and he worked for them. And they used to take us to their houses and used to feed us. My father used to go, my father used to go to put up windows for them. They built houses. My father used to make 'em the windows *mit* the doors, and used to go there. I mean, sometime he take me with, with him. I was a little boy 13, 14, 15-year-old, or 11-year-old. I don't remember exactly this, this age. And he used to take me there to help him over there, something to carry over there. And they used to feed us. We were very kosher. So I remember we used to take the eggs and bake it in the, in the sand, in the ashes, just bake the eggs. We didn't even want to cook it in the water what the, it's not religious enough. Bake the eggs, that's what we used to eat.

NP: Was he a part, was your family a part of the Jewish, organized Jewish life? And did you...

HH: We, the organized...

NP: ... belong to any organizations?

HH: I belonged to the Zionist organization when I went already to Chust and when I finished learning the trade I belonged to the *Shomer Hatzair*.⁵ I belonged to the Zionist organization.

NP: Did your father belong, I mean...

HH: No, they...

NP: ... did you go to a synagogue?

HH: Yeah, we belonged to a synagogue. Yeah, we were 80 families in this, in this Lipecka Polyana, 80 families. And the 80 families contains maybe about, you can say about 500 *nefoshes* [Yiddish: souls, people], 500 people. Because every family had five,

⁵*Shomer Hatzair*: *Hashomer Hatzair* - First Zionist youth movement established In Europe, 1913.

six children, grandchildren. It was nothing new to have 10 children over there. Everybody had a lot of children. So we had, had a *shochet* [butcher] over there. He was the Cantor and he was the advisor, the religious advisor, the *shochet*. He used to kill the chickens. He used to pray the high holidays. He was everything over there.

NP: He wore many hats.

HH: Yeah, he wore many hats. He was the *mohel*. He was everything.

NP: Everything.

HH: Yeah, everything, yeah.

NP: Everything.

HH: And he, in that...

NP: And so holidays were nice?

HH: Holidays was very nice. We were, everybody come together. We had a nice synagogue. Matter of fact in 19-, 1938 we built a new synagogue. We had an old little broken up synagogue. Then we put together the money and we built a nice little synagogue over there and maybe, I think the synagogue still exists even today because someone...

NP: Is that so?

HH: Yeah. Somebody was there and the synagogue still exists today. And like I said the...

NP: In Polyana.

HH: In Polyana, yeah. And this was very, very, very, very friendly. Everybody, everybody would hold together. Everybody knew each other. Everybody cooked the same. If you eat in one house you can go to the other house. The food tastes the same. They all, everything tastes the same. No different.

NP: They were good times.

HH: Yeah. And we had poor times.

NP: Yeah.

HH: Very poor times. My father hardly can make a living. Sometime he has to go borrow money Fr-, Thursday night to buy five pounds of flour to bake *challas*. It's a, this was very hard time. I only say this was a, but it was a happy time. It comes the high holidays it was a very happy time. And a pair of shoes you get only once a year. And the shoes was, the sole wore out you take to the shoemaker and he put a half a sole on. And you don't get more than one pair of shoes a year, or a suit. And, and this was a very, very happy life. The antisemitism, we didn't feel it. We didn't feel it. We lived between those people and...

NP: Jews and non-Jews.

HH: ...and non-Jews, and my next door neighbor was, he has children the same age as me. We used to play together. We used to go to school together. We used to go, I, the first, the first six, I think six or five years, semesters, I went to the, to the Russian school. And under Czechoslovakia, and the Czech government opened up a Czech

school.

NP: What government?

HH: The Czech, Czechoslovakian government.

NP: Oh, the Czechs opened up a Czech school.

HH: A Czech school. And mostly the Jewish kids went to the Czech school.

So I finished my next three years, I finished in the Czech school.

NP: I see.

HH: And I, I learned the Czech language. It's more, more fluently. Because we didn't know nothing. And my sisters were very, very active in the school. They were very likeable kids. The teachers used to die for her. A matter of fact, matter of fact, after the war in 19-, 19-, 1945, when I, after I got married, we moved out to Czechoslovakia. We lived in Sudeten *Gebeit*. [Sudeten area].

NP: Oh, okay. Now, this was...

HH: I'm not finished with the Holocaust.

NP: Yes, yes, okay, fine.

HH: I'm not, yeah, all right.

NP: Yeah. I will back...

HH: I'm not finished with it.

NP: ...up to the Munich Pact of September, 1938.

HH: Yeah, when the, yeah, the Munich, 1938, when they start to collect the people. And I said...

NP: Yes.

HH: ... in 1941 that they took us to the border, to...

NP: Yes.

HH: ... to, over there.

NP: Rachof.

HH: To, to Rachof.

NP: Yes. Okay.

HH: And Rachof and another border town was Az.

NP: And do you know how to spell that?

HH: Az. How do you spell Az, Louisa?

LH: A-Z, and with a dot, I don't know, Czechoslovakian. Because you know, we have all kind of, Hungarian, Czechoslo-...

NP: A-Z and...

HH: Az.

LH: A-Z, and this.

NP: Oh, okay. Thank you.

LH: This was Az.

NP: That's another border town.

HH: Yeah.

LH: Yeah.

NP: All right.

HH: And otherwise we were there all night. The next morning, the next morning they come to us, and they put us, lined us up and they serve us coffee and a piece, a piece of bread. And then they said us we should take our belongings and go to the, to the train station. They gonna take us home. So we had to wait all day. Finally the, some cattle train come, and they took us back to Chust. And in Chust, those people what they...

NP: It's okay. I got it.

HH: Yeah, and those, those people what they went the day before home, they find out that we are coming and they, they organize horses and, and wagons. And they come to the train station, and they take us home to, to Polyana. Otherwise we wouldn't have no transportation to go home. But the people they were already home, they know that we coming, so they take, so they, they took us home. So we come home, and then the first time I felt antisemitism between, between the population.

LH: Excuse me before, I, I interrupt it. I said Chust before spell like C-H-, yeah, but the Hungarian occupied and we got only Huszt, only like this.⁶

HH: It's no difference. This makes no...

NP: All right.

LH: Yeah, I just, no, I just...

HH: This makes no...

LH: All there, they, they have two kind of spelling. When they occupy the Russian, they occupy the Czechoslovakian, the Hungarians...

HH: The Russian and the Czechs spelled it like this, C-H.

LH: The Czechs spell like this.

NP: All right.

HH: Yeah.

NP: Very good.

HH: So, the first time we were driving home with the horse and wagon and a, and a old lady, I don't know how old she was, "Why you come back home? Why don't you stay there? Who needs you?" And I was so upset so I jumped out from the wagon and I took a stone and start to throw at her a stone, and she ran away. That's the first time I felt that the population were happy that, that they took us away, that they don't need us over there. And this was in 1941. And then, in 19-, it was, it was in, in July in 1941. Okay?

NP: Yes.

HH: And then in Oc-...

NP: One of my questions here is did you become part of Bohemia Moravia or

⁶Khust – Ukrainian spelling, Chust - Czechoslovakian, Huszt - Hungarian. (www.jewishgen.org)

Slovakia?

HH: Now we beco-, now we're Ukraine.

NP: All right.

HH: Now we Ukraine.

NP: All right.

HH: Now we're Ukraine. Okay. Louisa, come here a minute. Louisa?

LH: Yeah?

HH: Come here a minute. [unclear] I think in 1942 or '43.

LH: '41.

HH: '41?

LH: [unclear]. In July '41 the Hungarian [unclear].

HH: Authorities.

LH: Yeah.

HH: No, this is not the one. This is not the one. This is not the one.⁷

LH: Go way down.

HH: Yeah, in 1943.

LH: In 1943?

HH: Yeah. [unclear] All right.

LH: Yeah that's right. [unclear].

HH: All right. In, in 1943, now we are in 1943, my parents they were living in Polyana quietly. Nobody bothers them. The only thing is the problem was we have to run around and look for citizen papers to have. So I was working, this time I was working home already like self, self-employed. I used to do the, for the farmers, the, the pants and the jackets. And I, I made a living and I helped my father to support his family because he didn't have too much work this time already. So, in, in 1943, I had like they, they go for, they call you into stay before a committee and you become a soldier. All right? So we have to go in and report to become a, like a soldier. But they didn't take us for soldiers. They took us in and they put us in to work, forced labor. This was in 1943, 1943 and, yeah, in 1943 I have to, the, here is the name of the town what we have to go in, to mobilize us. They call it...

NP: Doing the forced labor?

HH: Yeah. Görgenyoroszfalù.⁸

NP: Orosfaldare [phonetic].

HH: This was a town occupied by the Hungarian. It belongs, one time it belongs to Romania. Now it, now it belongs to them. So we were there at least about I would say at least about 10,000 boys, from the whole, from the whole area, from Chust, from Munkác, and from all the whole area we were concentrate on this thing. And they, they divide us to, to regiments. And I belonged to a regiment and they took us, we were,

⁷Mr. Hofman is looking through documents during the interview.

⁸Görgenyoroszfalù-Solovæstru a town 119 miles from Chust in Romania (jewishgen.org).

we were about 150 boys or 200 boys from this regiment. And they took us to Romania. And, let me see-- what's the name of this-- to build, to build an airfield. What's the different, to, to Romania this was occupied territory from the Hungarians. Took us there to build an airfield.

NP: Now 10,000 boys?

HH: Not, in my company was only about 200 boys.

NP: Oh.

HH: Over there everybody were in different, different direction, you know?

NP: I see.

HH: Some boys they, they assigned to the army. They had to go *mit* [Ger.: with] the army, to work for the army. My group, they assigned to go to build this airfield over there in Romania. So, we were working there. It was very hard labor. Just, just with a, a how do you call-- this thing what you push the ground with one wheel?

NP: A hoe? Or a tractor?

HH: No, no, no. By hand. You know with one wheel? You see sometimes that, that they work, work with cement, and they're pushing, they put in cement. It's like...

NP: Oh, I know what you mean.

HH: You know what I mean?

NP: Yeah, yeah. I can't think what...

HH: A little wagon. And we used to carry, we used to carry the ground, dig on one side and carry it on the other side and make straight...

NP: A wheelbarrow.

HH: A wheelbarrow. Make straight the fields. And this was, this, this when I was come there it was already in October. It was already cold, and we were, had to work over there. It's, the ground was frozen. We had to break the ground and take the, take the ground *mit* these barrows and push it from one place around. It was very hard work and they, and the Hungarian soldiers they were, they were our bosses. We had one, one Sergeant, and one regular soldier. And then they had a, this *Feld* [Ger.: part of *Feldherr* – Captain], how do you call this a, a Captain was there, too. They were the bosses, the Hungarian bosses so but they oversee all of us. And an engineer was there who was doing the planning how the airfield should be built. I distinctly remember one time, my shoes got, the sole got worn out. There was a hole in the sole. So, it was, was a system if you show for the, for the Sergeant that the shoes, the shoes are with a hole, you have to give it to the shoemaker. They had a shop for the shoemakers and the shoemaker had to make you a sole over there. Anyway, and I'm allowed to stay home in this day because nobody had only one pair of shoes. So I was staying home. All of a sudden, middle in the day, this, this big *Mahoff*, this, he was a, under the Captain like a lieutenant, comes in and checks the barracks who is here. Somebody's in sick leave, then he has to have a piece of paper, he is sick. And he comes over to me, "Why are you here?" I said, "I'm barefoot. I have no shoes. My shoes in the shoemaker." He said, "I don't give a damn! In five

minutes I want to see you go out to the field and go to work!" I said, "I have no shoes." He said, "You want to be hanged up?" So, luckily, because I'm a tailor, I make myself from thick material like a, like a house slipper. And I put in the house slippers. And this was only cotton only a piece of, you know, and I run out to the field over there. And they didn't, over there in the field the Sergeant, he didn't let me work. He said to stand aside. But my, my feet were frozen. Was already snow in the, in the ground. And I was standing there. And I was talking about, about hanging up. I give you this what's happen over there, how strict the situation was over there. Some boys, they have their families was still home, and they used to go in town and take the addresses from the town people, and, and from the homes they used to sell them packages, send them packages through the town, over there. And the night time, they used to run out and bring in the packages. And God forbid that they catch you. They used to hang you out for a half an hour, *mit* the hand up and the hand up and if you ever saw this picture, I will show you a picture. I have a picture down in the basement, with a hand up over a tree. They used to hang you up and if you fainted they used to take you down and pour a bucket of water and hang you up. And they, they hanged, when they say, the, the Commander said, "You're gonna be hanged 10 minutes," you're not gonna hang nine minutes. You're gonna hang 10 minutes. You hang, you fainted when "You have nine minutes. You have one minutes to go." They take you up and hang you up again for the, for the one minute. And, it was very, very, very dangerous to go out. But sometimes they used to take us out to, to bathe, to, to make a shower over there, to delice. So, when we would come there in this little town, the boys who knows where the packages are, used to run out and then bring it with him. In the night time to go out, or black market like to go out and bring it in, God forbid you, you in trouble. So, we were there till January. In January, I hear a report. A rumor goes around that they're looking for 80 boys. How do you say it? You have to report yourself, I don't know. How do you call a sign up?

NP: To sign up?

HH: To sign up.

NP: To register?

HH: To sign up. Eighty boys, they look for a sign up. I was the first one. I went to sign up. Maybe the second one. I said to myself, "Hell is here. Where I'm going to go can't be any worse than is over here. I'm going." We didn't know where we're going. But I signed up. And the next day they, they took us, the 80 boys and they-- because we signed up they tried to punish us because we sign up. Otherwise, we're not satisfied with them. So they run us. We had to run. We had to, to climb trees, like exercise, something like this, the 80, the 80 boys. Finally, the next day they put us on a train, and they took us near Budapest. And thank God they took us there. And, and this was in January. They took us there.

NP: January, 1943?

HH: This was, yeah, 19-, it was already 1944, '44. Took us there, and in March

of 19-, we were doing all kind of works. We worked in the, in the-- United States bombers used to come to bomb the airfields.

Tape one, side two:

NP: This is side two, July 26. This is Natalie Packel, interviewing Henrich Hofman.

HH: All right.

NP: Yes.

HH: We are, we are now in Rákoshegy [town in Budapest].

NP: You left the town, you left, you had volunteered to work elsewhere.

HH: Yeah.

NP: And you went to...

HH: Rákoshegy.

NP: All right. Now I have to spell that.

HH: Louisa? She will come up, she'll write down. She is better in...

NP: All right.

HH: Anyway, we were working there all kind of work. The bombs were coming, and...

LH: You called me?

HH: Yeah, write down. We were doing all kind of forced labor, whatever they send us to do. And in March the, the Germans come in. They occupied Budapest. 15 of March?

LH: March 15...

HH: Yeah.

LH: 19-...

HH: '44.

LH: '44.

HH: '44.

NP: All right.

HH: Okay. And a regiment of German soldiers come into Rákoshegy, and we have to, our group have to build the barracks for the German soldiers. The Germans occupied the whole town. They took away the Jewish people from-- the Jewish people were still living there, but this was exactly before the Holocaust start to go in big proportion, when they start to empty out everybody.⁹ And, and this was in March, March then come May, June, July, all summer. We were working there to build up the barracks over there. And the Germans really didn't bother us too much, till we do the work. We went there, we were assigned a group of us to help to put up the walls. Have to put, carry the stuff from the train to the place. Just lay there we were working, and they gave us the food from the Hungarian military, this kitchen used to bring us the food and everybody was given their share of food and hungry we were not. And one of us [unclear] the

⁹Mr. Hofman is referring to the situation in Hungary only.

Jewish community there, like Shabbos, we used to go out. They used to invite us to come to Shabbos to eat with them over there, the Jewish community. So you know we did not have it too bad over there because...

NP: It was in Hungary?

HH: This was in Hungary near Budapest, in Rákoshegy. And my sister was in Budapest. She was working there, my two sisters, so I used to go sometime for the weekend when I got leave to go out. I used to get leave to go out to Budapest. I used to go to see my sisters. So really the summer was not too bad over there in Rákoshegy.

NP: Excuse me one moment. I'd like to spell the name of that city. It's R-A-K-O-S H-E-G-Y.

HH: Yes. Rákoshegy is one name and Hadz [phonetic] is another name.

LH: No, Rákoshegy is one name. Rákoshegy is Rákoshegy and Hadz is Hadz.

HH: No, no, Rakos is Rakos and Hegy Hegy.

LH: Yeah, we would be put together. Near Budapest.

HH: It's about 20 miles from Budapest.

NP: Very good.

HH: All right. So, when they, when they empty out the Jewish population from there, they took them away, and the German officers occupied their houses. And this is a funny story what I have to tell you what's happened to me. We went there to, to rake the leaves away from the trees. Was beautiful houses the Jews had. They empty out the, the Jewish people, the, the books, and they make a big pile and they burn the Jewish books. They, they did really hostile things, the Germans over there. And, and I was scraping the leaves over there and because nobody was watching over us, I lay down under a bush over there and I was so, I fall asleep over there. All of a sudden I hear somebody's hollering, "Little Hofman! Little Hofman!" They called me little because I'm not too tall. So I jumped out, and I was full of leaves. I started to clean myself off. I said, "What's the matter?" They said, "The officer wants you, wants you over there in the, in the room." So I went over there, I salute him. And he said to me, "I want you to press my pants." I said to him, "Do you have a press iron?" And so he show me a little press iron. And, and I took this pants, those green pants, I could remember like today. They were faded, so when I pressed the pants, I went in the pants and I turn over on the other side. And I said to him like this, "See these pants? I can make you from these pants a new pair of pants. I turn it over on the other side. I rip it apart, I'll turn it over on the other side, and I make you a new pair of pants." He said to me, "Do you have a machine?" I said, "No, I have no machine. But you have a machine." He said, "Me? I have no machine." I said, "Yeah, we have a shop in town, a German tailor shop. And they have machines over there. And just talk to this *Feldsvabel*."¹⁰ I knew who that was. Somehow I find out who the *Feldsvabel* was in charge of the tailor shop. "And, and tell him to let me go in there."

¹⁰*Feldsvabel* - actual spelling is *Feldsweber* [Ger.: Sargeant]. www.beolingos.com

NP: How do you spell *Feldsvabel*? Do you know?

HH: *Feldsvabel*.

NP: F-E-L-D-...

HH: Yeah. It's a, a officer, a German officer.

NP: S-V-A-B-E-L.

HH: Yeah.

NP: Okay.

HH: It's an officer.

NP: He was a German officer.

HH: Officer, yeah. And he was in charge of the tailor shop.

NP: All right.

HH: So he said to me, "Okay, tomorrow morning you come here, and I will talk to the *Feldsvabel* and I'll let you know what to do." The next morning, they assigned me already to go to his house, to this officer's house. He said, "Okay. You'll go to the shop. I talked to the *Feldsvabel*. He will let you in there and you can fix my pants." So I went in there and I, one day I ripped the pants. The other day I cleaned the pants, and the third day I, I made a pocket, and the fourth day I make another pocket. Anyway, I work with these pants for two weeks. Finally when I finish it I ran over to him. He was excited. He didn't know what to do with me. And the *Felds*-, the, the, the master from the shop, he saw the way I work. He said, "Who is your, who is in charge of you? I want you to come to work for me." And I told him. And they give an order. They give me a piece of paper, an order from mine, from mine superior officer over there. Well Henry Hofman every morning has to go to the German tailor shop to work. I'm assigned to there. I don't have to go any more with the boys. At 9:00 or 8:00, I don't remember exactly what time it was, I have to report to the German tailor shop. So, I was working there all two months over there. And, and I used to-- I was so friendly with the officers, they used to come in. Everybody knowing me already. So I went into the *shtap* [phonetic] where the German officer had the main office. A little Jewish boy walked in between the whole German SS mens over there and everybody asked me, "*Was machts du? Was machts du?*" [Ger.: What are you doing?] And here I said, "I want to see this and this officer." "Oh, he is there in this office." They didn't say, "What you doing here you *Jude*?" "Go there in this office." I went in there and I said, "I would like to go to visit my sister in Budapest. I would like you to give me a pass." He said, "Okay." He sent me in to the office and they give me a pass to stay till Monday morning, 10:00. I'll just show, I can go out. I don't have to go to work. I was [unclear], and this exactly was the time when the, when the Germans start to harass the Jewish people. They put them in the ghettos. That was already late, late May, June, this was in August of 1944. I had a yellow band. But it was the yellow band, the German *Wehrmacht* used to wear it. It used to be *Deutsche Wehrmacht*. I take the yellow band and give it to my sister. And she went to an embroidery place, and they ripped out the *Wehrmacht* and they put in *Deutsche Schneider* [Ger.:

tailor]. And, and I have to go back to the shop. And I...

NP: Which means German tailor.

HH: German tailor. And I have to go back to the shop. I have to be there at 10:00. And this is 9:00 in the morning. And all of a sudden shooting in the streets. They shooting up in a top in a Jewish house, the Germans. They say the Jewish people were shooting down on dem. Nobody was shooting down on dem. Somebody went up and from the Germans and made a shot down, and they were shooting up. And I have to go to the train station. The train station should take me all the way up to the cemetery. From the cemetery I have to walk about, about five miles to that little town. Between the wilderness I have to walk over there. And I had to go to the train station. I couldn't go out because they were shooting over there. So I went out and I put in the yellow band. And the Hungarian was there inside in the house-- there was a big door what the, in Europe every house had a, had a main door from out from the street. You can't get, you can't get in. Used to be, a master used to watch the door. And I want to go out and the Hungarian said, the Hungarian said, "Oh, let the German go. Let him get killed." They thought to me I'm a German. I had a white hat with a, *mit* a feather and the band. I looked like a German boy. And, and I went there and I was talking to the German officer. He was sitting in the car. He said, I said, I said to him, "I have to go to the train!" He said, "Go." He didn't say to me nothing. "Go." Well I speak German and I had the yellow band, *Deutsche Schneider*, and with the hat and a, and a white jacket, a striped jacket. It's a heavy jacket in the picture over here. I show it to you. Anyway, I come to the train station. I was sitting down in the train. It's like a trolley car, not a train, a trolley car [unclear]. And we come to the cemetery. And I heard the people are talking, "Oh! They're killing the Jews and I wish they kill them all and I wish they take them away! We don't need them over here!" Between each other they're talking, the Hungarian. And I sit in the corner, corner and cried, like I don't understand what they're talking. You understand what I mean? But I speak Hungarian so I understood exactly what they were talking. So, finally I come into the shop. Was already 10:00. And I come in and I tell for the officer, for the, for the shop master that I'm a little bit late. He said, "Don't worry. Go sit down and work." And all of a sudden a German officer come in, in the shop. And he looks around all over who is working there. I don't know who the guy was. I never saw him before. This wasn't from the, my friends what we, I knowed before. And he points out to this, to my master, "Who is this?" He said, "This is a *Jude, Er arbeitshier*." [Ger.: This is a Jew. He works here]. He said, "How come he doesn't wear the marker, the yellow mark for this?" He said, the master said, "He works here. He don't have to wear the yellow marker here." "Yes, I want him to wear the yellow marker in here." And I didn't have the regular mark, the regular yellow band. I only have the yellow band *Deutsche Schneider*.

NP: That says *Deutsche Schneider*.

HH: *Deutsche Schneider*.

NP: German tailor.

HH: And I put it on. He said, "You're not a *Deutsche*. You're not a *Deutsche Schneider*. You cannot wear this. You have to wear a regular *Wehrmacht*." He said, "Take it off!" And he took it away from me. "And tomorrow morning I want you to see here, to sit with the yellow band. If not I take you out and I shoot you like a *hund*." [Ger.: dog] He took out the pistol and he said, "I'll shoot you like a *hund*, take you out." I really got scared, so the next morning I come already with the yellow band. I put it in, and I was working. And the master said, "Henry, take it off. Take it off." He don't want me to sit like this over there. "When somebody's coming I will tell you when to put it on." So, and the war goes on, and it was already in October, 1944. We can already hear the Russian shooting. They're coming closer to Budapest. The Russian Army come closer to Budapest. In November, in the beginning of November, 1944, the Germans start to pack. And they, they packed the train and they said, "We gonna go away from over here because the Russian coming already too close." With me in the shop was working over there a German girl. Her name was Ushi.

NP: Ushi?

HH: Ushi.

NP: U-S-H-I?

HH: Yeah, yeah, Ushi. I still now I remember her name was. And we were very friendly. Not like a girlfriend. She wasn't my girlfriend. We were friendly. She had the German-- I used to go to her house. They used to give me to eat. And we were very friendly. And she said to me, "Henry, if you in trouble, come over to my house. I, I--" She lives in the fields.

NP: In the fields.

HH: Out of, out of town, not in the center city. It's only two, three houses over there. "And I will try to hide you out over there till the thing will blow over." Otherwise, till the Russian will come in. When I hear that the Germans are packing, I run over to, to her house and hide myself up over there all day, because in the night time the Germans had to leave, the train was going and the next day I find out, and some other boys, that the Germans were looking for me. They couldn't find me. They want to take me with them. If they would take me with them they would throw me somewhere in Buchenwald. But this was, this was the way that they were going to Germany. Buchenwald is Germany.

NP: Yes.

HH: So they were throwing me somewhere in a concentration camp in Buchenwald. Who knows if I would survive. So I was-- and, and one of my boyfriend, his name was Horowitz, he, he find out where I am, and he come over there, too. And this little girl put us up in top of a attic. On top of the house was an attic. And we had to climb up. And outside we took off some bricks, some covering from the roof. And we climb in there, we were laying there all day. And in the nighttime used to come down and go

down in the basement and sleep in the basement. And then in the morning, we used to climb up again. Somehow, some neighbor find out. She must have saw us climbing up. Even how much we were watching, doing it in the nighttime, in the dark, she, she somehow she find out, and she start to threaten her. "I'm gonna report you to the Gestapo. You're hiding out Jewish boys." So, my friend decided, "You know, Henry, I'm gonna go. I'm not gonna stay with you." I said, "I'm not going nowhere. I'm staying here." So I stayed there. She put me down in the basement. And I worked there. I made a coat for her mother. Every time with my, mine two hands helped me to survive. And, and I was sitting in the basement and she had a German boyfriend. He used to come up and, and sitting in the kitchen, and hang around with her, kissing her and everything, making noises over there on top of, in the kitchen. And I was sitting in the, in the basement. And one day she said to me, "Henry, you can't stay here any longer because that woman is gonna report me." So next door to her was another Slavic family. It wasn't German. They were Slavic. And the Slavic were like the Czechoslovakian people, Slavics. And her husband was a runaway from the Hungarian Army. And he went over to the Russian side. It's only one village, this village is Hungarian and the other village or two villages beside her was already the Russian occupied already there. And, and one night he come home from there. Somehow he smuggled himself through the border. You know, he was, he was a native of the, of this, he...

NP: Smuggled himself.

HH: Yeah, he smuggled himself out and come in and he, he saw me, he talked to me. He said to me, "Henry, I'll tell you exactly how what to do. But, I'll let you know when, when it's quiet. Because when the, when the front goes on, when the, when the shooting goes on, you can't do nothing. You're not allowed, you can't, you can't move. When it's quiet I'll, I send a message to you when you can go." And the story was like this. You go from Rákoshegy, you go to another town right away near the border. You come there, you wait till nighttime. You go in to any Hungarian family and ask them, "How, what time they collect the people to take over the, the front wires?" The wires consist, it's like an X.

NP: An X.

HH: X, on both sides is an X. In the middle is a big *Dorn* [Ger.: thorn], a big, big root of wood. And in the, in the *Dorn* wires was listed around all over there. They put us in the front line.

NP: The what kind of wires?

HH: Sticky wires. You know, *mit* the, *mit* points?

NP: Okay.

HH: You see it sometime in the, yeah.

NP: Oh, oh, the barbed wires.

HH: Barbed wires.

NP: Barbed wires.

HH: Yeah.

NP: Okay.

HH: They put this around, and...

NP: Okay.

HH: ...they take people, one on one side and one on the other side, and they carry us to the front line. So, I was there by this family. They had two young boys. And they start to talking and they, and I said to them, I, somehow I trusted them. I don't know why I trusted them, but I had a feeling that they, they will, they will not do harm to me. And they give me food. They give me to eat. And they put me-- they had a barn of, of straw outside. And they said, "Go in there and sit there, because the, the Hungarian soldiers go around looking around for, for runaways from the army. And they might come to my house to check. And I told you exactly what to do." He said, "In the nighttime as it gets--." In meanwhile I don't, I don't want to leave without a Hungarian soldier. A runaway come over there. And he wants to stick with me. I should stick with him. He wants to stick with me. If he'll be-- I, I am the leader. And we hide out over there till the nighttime. In the night time we went to the school yard. And they, they took about 20 people. Twenty people, that means 10 barbed wires, one on one side and one on the other side and one soldier, were marching to the front line, to take the barbed wire over there. And we put down the barbed wire, one barbed wire we put down over here, like this, or two barbed wires, and the rest barbed wire they took in, they went east to the other end of the front line. When I put down it was dark outside, and we were already have a plan. Soon as we put down the barbed wire we laid down, and lay still, not to move, till they go away. And we lay down on the barbed wire. And, and the soldier said, "Come on, come on, come on, let's go. We have no time to stay here," in a slow voice. And they all start to run, and they run away. All of a sudden, shhhh, it's quiet. Nobody is there. So, we start to pull ourself to our stomach. The plan was like this. We put down the barbed wire like over here. We have to go about 200 feet like this. It's a real...

NP: You put the barbed wire on the ground and you...

HH: The ground.

NP: Went 200 feet.

HH: Two hundred feet, and we had to reach a little road. A farmer, a farmer road. And we reach the farmer road, we should go with the farmer road straight, you run into the Russian soldiers.

NP: Oh.

HH: And, and we run in. We, we can't go. We have to, to climb because we hear the bullets sssst, sssst, all the time the bullets was flying. Wasn't, wasn't was a quiet night. I mean it wasn't fighting.

NP: But there were bullets.

HH: There were bullets flying. And, and I see tanks, tanks were shot out, big bunkers for the soldiers was already beaten. The Hungarian soldiers were beaten out from

over there. They ran away from there and they left it empty. All of a sudden I saw a Russian soldier walking back and forth. And I say, and I said to him, Russian, I speak Russian too. I said to him, "Hello!" And he said, "Who is there?" And I said in Russian, "Svolye." That means, "Your own people." And, and he says, "Lift your hands!" So we lift our hands. We are two, me and my friend. We lift our hands. And he took us in and he sits us down. And they start to question me. The Hungarian, with one question he was finished. He, he said, "I don't want to fight any more against you. I wanna, wanna go home." Me, they start to question. And all of a sudden the Captain, the Russian Captain, he picks up the phone and calls some place. And they ask him, "Ask him who he knows in his, in his town. What town is he?" I said, "I'm from Lipecka Polyana." "Who do you know is in this town?" I said, "I'll know Isaac Moskowitz. I know Moishe Yutkowitz. I know Shayer the Shiester." And I started to mention them. And I heard the Russians said, "Da, da, da, da, da, da." Well, I don't know what's going on over here. Lately, I find out what's going on over here. So, the Russian went, after it was all finished, and I had a watch. I want to see what time it is, what time I survived. The Russian said, "Give me the watch!"

NP: Oh!

HH: Here, take the watch. I don't care. Take the watch. He took away the watch from me.

NP: What time was it?

HH: It was 9:00 in the night.

NP: 9:00 P.M.?

HH: Yeah.

NP: And the date, do you know?

HH: The date, this was, was November the, it can be November the 15th, something like this.

NP: 19-...

HH: 1944.

NP: November the 15th, right?

HH: Yeah.

NP: 1944. Liberation.

HH: Yeah. So, I was sitting there with the Russian for an hour, and all of a sudden they, they take a horse and *Wagen* and they had to go down. This was the frontline. Don't misunderstand.

NP: Yes.

HH: It was the frontline. And they took us in, in town, to the, to the main offices over there and they put me down over there in a little room. And they give me a, a pillow *mit* a little cover, this was winter already, cold, to sleep over there on the floor. How many times I woke up in the middle of the night. I was pinching myself. I said, "Henry, you survived! You here! You alive!" I didn't believe myself that I am alive. I

didn't believe myself. The two hours between, it was between left, right and wrong, between death and life, between the time where I went away...

NP: From the barbed wire.

HH: ...from the barbed wire to the Russian Army, this was only a, it would be an hour, not even an hour. Oh but the, the time, the distance I mean what they took, they took all evening, this time, this was my liberation. And the next day they took me in the Russian officers, and they says to me, "Do you speak Russian?" I said, "Yeah, I speak Russian." "Do you know how to write?" I said, "A little bit. I'm not too, too schooled in Russian but I know how to read Russian." And, and they asked me if I, yeah-- and they give me the telephone to talk to somebody. And I talked to, this was a Jewish boy. He was from, from another town about 15, 20 miles from, from mine town. What he has his, his uncle was living in mine town and he started to talk to me. And he said, asked me, "What's happened over there with the, the people?" I said, "They, they were all taken away." I left out something what I wanna, I wanna come back.

NP: That's okay. That's all right.

HH: Now it's come to my mind. I left out something. Anyway, they give me, give me a pair of shoes. They give me a shirt, a Russian shirt with a jacket, and I become a Russian interpetator [sic].

NP: Oh.

HH: From the Russian, from the Russian to Hungarian, because I speak good Hungarian. And from Russian to German.

NP: All right.

HH: And this was my liberation jacket.

NP: Oh!

HH: And this jacket I had inside in the shoulders where I had my mother's wedding ring, and my mother's engagement rings, two little rings and a little chain. I had sewed them in the shoulder pads. That's what I had in this jacket. And with this jacket I was, I was liberated from the Russian Army.

NP: What a beautiful young man.

HH: Yeah, and then, and this is my picture with the Russian uniform.

NP: Oh. And who is this chap?

HH: This is my Captain.

NP: Your Russian Captain.

HH: He was a Russian. He was a very nice man.

NP: All wonderful pictures.

HH: A very nice man. Yeah. Yeah.

NP: Wonderful.

HH: This is the way I looked in uniform in the Russian Army.

NP: Very fine.

HH: But I want to go back something.

NP: All right.
HH: This is mine shop in, in Czechoslovakia already. This is already in 1945.
NP: Oh.
HH: The people they used to work for me over there. See a, I worked with...
NP: Hofman's.
HH: Yeah. And all the time I was...
NP: And that was your shop.
HH: It was my shop, yeah. I was in Czechoslovakia. It was already in 1945.
NP: Beautiful.
HH: And this is the way I looked when I was 18 year old, or 19.
NP: Handsome! Handsome!
HH: Oh. First coat what I made myself.
NP: Oh! Do you still have the coat?
HH: No.
NP: No.
HH: I don't have it.
NP: Oh, it's a wonderful coat. [To Louisa:] It's a handsome young man that you married.
LH: Thank you.
NP: Beautiful.
HH: So, anyway, I was with the Russian Army for, but I'm gonna go back later to something with the Holocaust.
NP: All right. All right. I have a few questions.
HH: Yeah.
NP: But if you want to continue...
HH: I wanted to continue with the Russian, I want to finish with the Russian Army.
NP: All right.
HH: I was with the Russian Army for 11 months. We were traveling in, till Budapest to Debrecen. Whoever knows what this means, to Debrecen and then, and then we went to the German border, to Austria. And I was in, in Austria *mit* the Ru...
NP: Do you know how to spell Debrecen?
HH: Debrecen? Yeah, it's no, no problem. I'll write it down for you and then you spell it.
NP: All right, and if you could do it on the bottom line. I rewrite my notes later.
HH: Yeah. Debrecen. And then we...
NP: Budapest to Debrecen.
HH: Yeah.
NP: Is that D-?

HH: D-, yeah.

NP: Yeah, okay. All righty. And then?

HH: And then we went to the, to the Austrian border. We went through Vienna. We were traveling from one city to the other city. The front, the front went farther and farther and we were traveling. I was assigned to a, to a, to a regiment where our job was, we used to collect the soldiers while they were behind from their regiment. Otherwise, it was working like this. Let's assume a soldier was, was injured. He was in the hospital. And he don't know where to go.

NP: Yes.

HH: He was traveling around by himself. He don't know where his regiment is. We used to collect them, and put them in a, in a over there is, give him, give him a room to stay, and then we find out where his regiment is. Then we used to, the MP, the Russian ANP used to take him over to his regiment. This was my job.

NP: The ANP?

HH: Yeah, the Russian, like the, like the American has an ANP, the Russian has their...

NP: Oh, MP.

HH: MP, yeah.

NP: Okay, okay.

HH: And, and they used to take him to, to his out-, this was, this was my job. And my job...

NP: Military Police.

HH: Yeah. My job usually was, we finish in this town, the frontline went away another 20 kilometers. We has to go ahead of, ahead of the my group and come to a town and find place where to stay, houses, and find where the, where the officers used to sleep and where the soldiers sleep. This was my job. Used to organize the place where, when they used to come, they already had places where to go. This was my job. Sometimes I used to travel by bicycle from one town to-

Tape two, side one:

NP: This is tape two, July 26, 1994, Natalie Packel interviewing Henrich Hofman.

HH: Okay. Now that was going on like this. It was already, we start this in November. In December, January, February, Budapest was already liberated. We were already in Austria. Vienna was liberated. And I still worked with the Russian soldiers from one town to the other town. Sometime I travel by horse and wagon. Sometimes I travel by a bicycle from one town to the other town, with another soldier. And, and in 1945, when the war was over...

NP: Yes.

HH: ...1945, when we heard the story, we were about, we were in a town they called Cvetel.

NP: Do you know how to spell that?

HH: I think. Cvetel. C-V-E-L-T, I think.

NP: T-V-...

HH: C. C. Cvetel.

NP: Oh, T-V?

HH: Cvetel. That's C.

NP: Well, in English, okay.

HH: I think it's...

NP: If you would please...

HH: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Oh, C-V.

HH: Yeah.

NP: Okay. Very good.

HH: Cvetel.

NP: Now, okay.

HH: Yeah.

NP: This was the town...

HH: In Austria. This was about, about 50 kilometers from Berlin, Berlin, something like this. It wasn't too far away...

NP: All right.

HH: ...from Berlin.

NP: All right.

HH: And, when the time come, they say the war is over, so our job was finish. We were a still-- this time we start to collect the, the German soldiers what they, what they were behind. We collect them and put them in a camp.

NP: In this town, C-V-E-T-...

HH: Yeah.

NP: E-L.

HH: Yeah, we collected ...

NP: Cvetel.

HH: ...German soldiers. Ukraine soldiers what, they were, they were *mit* the German Army. And they were-- the Russian hated those, those Ukraines what they were with the, what they were, they had their own, they had their own regiment they were fighting against the Russians, the Ukraines. So we collect them. And, and in this time I was running in already people what they were coming from Buchenwald, liberated, Jewish woman and children, and young girls what they were going home. And I used to help them out. I used to give them food. And one time, I had a story. They had a horse and wagon and the horse die on them. So I went and I find them a horse and I give them a horse, and I send them off, the way to go home. They were going to Budapest. Matter of fact, one of the ladies, this time I know already my wife. We had gotten engaged. We just knew each other, and I give her the address and she went, she went to see her. And she said to her, "You know you have a angel a boyfriend. He helps us so much."

NP: You were doing social work at that time. You really were.

HH: And, so anyway, the war, the war started to wind up and we start to move home. And, *mit* the Russian, we're going home. We went to Hungary. We went in to, to Romania. And it was already the time that the United States throw down the atomic bomb on the town of Hiroshima, of Hiroshima, the atomic bomb.¹¹ And the, and the Germans thought, the Germans already give up, but the Japanese didn't give up this time. So when the Japanese give up already, so the Captain said, "Henry, now--" The story was like this, that they're going to take me to the Japanese front if the, if the war wouldn't end. We were supposed to travel through all Russia and go to we have another job to do. This was our job. We were about 20 or 40 kilometers from Buda, from Bucharest. And, and when he told me the story, "Pack, pack your things." And he give me a piece of paper. It wasn't bigger than a sheet of paper like this. And he write down. The name is André, they call me André. "André Henrich Hofman, I hereby recommended to him, everybody in the Russian Army when they see him they should help him to get home. He was a big help for, for the Russian Army." And he signed, the Captain, and put a stamp. And this was mine, mine, this was mine...

NP: Passport, really.

HH: ... passport to go home. So, I packed up, packed up mine things and I went in a, in a freight train. You couldn't go in inside in the freight train because I was in uniform. So the, the engineer from the front put me near him where, where they drive the, the train, in the front, in the front *Wagen*. And we come to Chust. And in Chust I took a taxi, a horse and *Wagen*. I don't remember. A taxi or horse and *Wagen*? And somehow I find my sisters in Chust. And we went to Polyana. And I didn't have no money. So for

¹¹The atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, August 6, 1945.

the guy I give a pair of shoes so he, they bring me to Polyana. So, this was already in 1945 in the beginning in 1945, sometime in May in 1945. And then from, from there I went to Budapest, from Polyana. And I met my wife, I met my wife over there this time. And we decided to get married. And we married in October in 1945 we married. And, and I have all the details over here in this paper over here. I think I have everything over here...

NP: All right. That's okay.

HH: [unclear] This I will give you this one.

NP: You have another copy?

HH: Yeah, I have another copy.

NP: Fine.

HH: And, and in 1945 we got married. And then we move up to the Sudeten, we...

NP: Sudetenland?

HH: ...denland. And of course I was in uniform so I got free housing. And I got a shop with a machine. Just a name, a shop, a German shop with a machine. And I sit down and start to work. And this, this was the end of the story from the Holocaust. But I want to go back to something what I didn't, didn't, didn't forget about it but I, I skipped it. In 1944 exactly after Passover, it was about a week, two weeks before *Shavuot*, I get a *Urlaub* [Ger.: leave, furlough]. They call this a pass to go home.

NP: Oh, a pass to go home.

HH: To go home, to visit my parents. Of course I was already over a year in the army, I, I call this army but over a year *mit* the Hungarian soldiers, I had the right to go away for a week to see my...

NP: How do you spell *Urlaub*?

HH: Even a vacation. There's no problem, you know.

NP: A pass to go home, okay.

HH: Yeah, a pass to go home. It's no problem. *Urlaub* is a Hungarian word.¹²

NP: All right.

HH: To go home. And I come home to Chust and I find out that my parents are already in, they are not already home. They're already in, in the ghetto, in another town, in Iza. I show you the picture over here. See where it says [unclear] Iza, see?

NP: Yes.

HH: They were already in there and they were crowded in in a little square of mile. They were living three families in one room, one in one corner and one in the other corner. Three families in one room were living. My father had my two little sisters and a brother with him. The other two sisters were already in Budapest. They weren't, weren't home. Thank God they weren't home. And my little brother was, was nine-year-old. My

¹²*Urlaub* is German. www.beolinguus.com

little sister, one was 15 year old, and one was 11 year old. And, and they were with my parents, and my grandmother was a woman in the 70's. And my father, I never forget, I went, I went to Polyana. From Iza, I went to Polyana, and I organized over there a, a man from, over there he was already a rich man. He was a, how do you call, it the rich man in town. And he had horse and *Wagens*. He had a lot of horses. And he told me to go to this, to this farmer over there, to take a horse and *Wagen* and put in potatoes and, and flours and I collect from the other, from mine farmer, from my next door neighbor from there he give me too, a sack of, of flours. And we packed up a whole *Wagen*. And in the night time we drove over to the, to the ghetto. And we put down, put down the food. They come over there and they take the food away, "Hush, hush," because the Hungarian [unclear] was watching us, and they would see it, they, they would take it away from us. So, when I took care of this, they took away the food and the horse and *Wagen* went back in town to Polyana. I slept over, over there. My father was very religious. The next morning he said to me, "Chaim, put on the *tefillin*. You should pray with them." He said to me, "Do you ever put in the *tefillin*? You should put in every morning the *tefillin*, even for a minute, put it on." He was so religious that he, he, he couldn't believe that I had assimilated because in the army we didn't think of *tefillin*. Whoever think of *tefillin*, he was very religious. A matter of fact the, I, I sold my, I used to sell my bread for a guy, and he used to give me the food, his food, his portion of his food. There was a piece of meat. I rather eat the meat than the piece of bread because I, it was keep me more stronger. But he was very, this guy was very religious. And he didn't eat nothing. He only eat a piece of bread with a, with a cup of tea we used to warm up on...

NP: Because it wasn't kosher.

HH: It wasn't kosher. That's, that's the way he lived, this guy. So, my father come over to me and say, "Chaim, is this true in Chust, the rumors going around they're gonna kill us?" I said, "Oh, no, Daddy, they're not gonna kill you. They're gonna take you for work to Germany." That's the way I want him to believe. And I'll be honest with you, I didn't know myself what's, what's the true story. But, but I saw already pictures in, when I was in Chust in 1940, I saw picture from Majdanek. Remember the story from Majdanek?

NP: Yes, yes.

HH: I saw pictures where the Ger-, where the Hungarian take a child by the feet and they hit it to the telephone pole with the head, and they kill it. That's the way they kill the children. Take a child by the feet and they kill it and throw it in the water. So I saw this picture and I was familiar with this picture. And I know they doing those things. But I didn't believe that, that they're gonna do to the whole, the whole, the whole area. This is, you know how much, how many little town? You can't do that about 20 little towns all around us. And this is just one area. And then you got area, this area of Chust, and then we got the area Szarvas. And then you got the area of Munkács. And then you got the area of Ungvar. And then you got the area Beraszasz. This was all big

cities, and around the big cities are all little towns. This is in the Carpathian, they had almost 2,000,000 Jewish people were living there.

NP: In the Carpathian Mountains?

HH: In the Carpathian Mountains. Was a lot of Jewish population over there, because we lived very quietly over there. Even we weren't, they were poor, but we, like I said, what they, what they cooked over here in Polyana, if you go to Iza, you're gonna eat the same food with the same taste. They all cooked the same thing. So, the next day I said to my father, "Maybe I should take little Libba." She was 11 year old. "Maybe I should take her to Polyana to the farmer. Maybe he can hide her out." He said, "No, I wouldn't do this. I'm afraid they're gonna shoot me over here because they have the names, with how many people I have with me. And I don't want to, they might kill me because I, I don't know, I can't report to him the full amount of people. See I got, I got six people in my name. I got him, and his mother, and the grandmother, and three children." It's seven, five, six, six people he had, he had in his name. So he was afraid to give me the little sister, to take it away some. And maybe she will survive. Because she was already 11, 12 year old. So the next day I went to Chust. And I go to the station. And all of a sudden I hear somebody's hollering, "Chaim! Chaim!" I said, "Who the hell is hollering, 'Chaim! Chaim!'" And I look in, and this is my boss, my master who I learned the trade.

NP: Oh my.

HH: She rec-, somehow she was looking out. And you know like, like I don't know from the sky she saw me walking by, and she call me in. And she gave me a dish of *bundlah* [phonetic]. They were beans.

NP: Beans.

HH: Beans. Cooked beans. That's what the food was over there. I used to eat beans when I was there for three years. Every Monday and Thursday I eat beans. So she didn't have nothing else to give me. "You want a dish of beans?" I said, "Yeah, sure!" Because I was hungry. It was already around 12:00 when I left the house, I left from Polyana, from Iza, from Iza to Chust, it was about 30 kilometers. And I left already around 11:00. So I eat there and I said good-bye to them. I never saw 'em again. After the war I find one of his sons, he survived. And the way I understand, one of his daughters lives in, in Canada. I don't know, I never, never saw him. This is what I heard, that those two children survived. They had, they had 9 or 10 children, this guy. Nine or 10 children, this boss of mine. So, I come back, come back to the, to the barracks, and everybody, everybody was asking me, "What's new? What's new? What's going on over there?" And I said, "Well, it's, it's nothing what to report." So this was the story and that was the last time I saw my parents. And, and then I, this was, in between I told you the story already what's happened in between the Russians. So, after the war we got married. We went to Czechoslovakia in 1945. We lived in Czechoslovakia until 1949. We had a child over there in, in 1948 a little boy was born. In 1949, in, in June, we packed, and went to

Israel. We come to Israel in July the 19, or the, yeah, well 18 or the 19 we come to Israel. And, and in Israel, I lost my child. Our child passed away, the first child. And, so in Israel this, this life was very hard and we were living in a, in tents.

NP: Where? In what area?

HH: Near Tel Aviv.

NP: Near Tel Aviv.

HH: Well we lived in tents. And then we lived, then we, finally they signed us up to a barrack. We live in a barracks over there for, for almost for a year. And finally because I belonged to the *Shomer Hatzair*, to the advanced organization, and they gave me a little room in a little town. They call this Haddar Yosef.

NP: Haddar Yosef.

HH: Haddar Yosef. It's near Tel Aviv. I had to pay, had to pay about 400, 400 Israeli *shekels*. And the rest had to pay three, four *shekels* a month. That was the rent. So, I lived there, I lived there for three, three years I lived there in this house. And I, and then meanwhile I open a shop in Tel Aviv. And, and I, I start to work for the company Gotex. Everybody knows Gotex.

NP: Yes.

HH: Yeah.

NP: Bathing suits, yes.

HH: Yeah. And I made very good money and I bought myself a nice condominium in Tel Aviv. But in 1949, '47, 1957, wait, even before. It was in 1954, my wife's sister come here to the United States. And she said to me I should be signed up to go to the United States. My wife was very lonely after her parents and her brother, with his wife and a child living over here, and the two sisters, twin sisters over here. One lives here in our street. The other, other brother with a, with a sister-in-law, they passed away, and one of the sisters passed away already here in the United States. So, and when, in 1959 then we decided we come here to the United States. And here, I've worked in all kind of work. I work in a shop for a year and then I become foreman, I become manager from the, from the Cabana Beach Chair company, 19th and Allegheny. I was working there for almost for two years or three years. I became foreman and the company closed up and then I went to work for the BX. This is a wholesale company where they used to make a, mail order dresses, big dresses. I used to work for Sears, Lane Bryant.

NP: Lane Bryant.

HH: Yeah, yeah. And, well more company I remember the name already was, they were making the big, big sizes dresses up to size 60. Anyway, the business start to got dead. Then in 1973 I was coming home from work and I saw a store for sale here on Castor Avenue, 7102 Castor Avenue. I didn't even go home. I went in to the barber here on the corner and I said, "I'm gonna use your phone." I call up the Real Estate, and he came over. Sunday I give him a deposit and Monday I bought the house. And I moved in there and I was working there for 18 years. I had my own shop right here on Castor

Avenue. And this is my story. And July the 20, last week, was my 75th birthday.

NP: Well congratulations. I'm wishing you many more years with your family and your wife.

HH: Thank you.

NP: May I ask a couple of questions?

HH: Go ahead.

NP: You have covered so much, and your memory serves you well. You have just gone right down all of my questions. But there's just a few more that remain. Do you have any contact with a group called The Working Group under Rabbi Weissmandel?

HH: No.

NP: No.

HH: No.

NP: Okay. Did you know of a Gisi Fleischmann and her effort to ransom the Jews?

HH: No, no. The only thought, the only thing that I know, I know the story from what's his name, from this Austri-, this Swedish guy, what's the name...

NP: Raoul Wallenberg?

HH: Raoul Wallenberg. I was this time in Budapest, and, and I know people went to, to take papers from there from Wallenberg to become a Swedish citizen.

NP: I see.

HH: But it didn't help him. Well I was in Budapest, matter of fact I was, one time I was staying in line myself to, to get those papers. Was a such a big line and I couldn't wait till the end to get these papers so I left and I went away. But my sisters, they had it, these papers, from Wallenberg, but they didn't use it. They don't use it. They, they my wife had a boyfriend, not her, my wife's sister had a boyfriend. His name was Leslie Weiss. And he somehow he, he get two Hungarian birth certificates, empty birth certificates. And they filled it out with names with the X, with the Russian names from their own, from their old country that they are, that they are from this and this town where they were born. And they go for it, and they went to take this some kind of food stamps they give out. Well when they show this birth certificate that's means they are refugees, so they give them the food stamps.

NP: Okay.

HH: You understand what I mean? And this, and this helped them to survive, with this, with this papers. Somehow some Chri-, some boss where they were working, my wife, now I'll go to a story from my wife, and they were working in the place where the bomb, the museum was bombed down. And they, and they want to, to build up the museum. They didn't want to lose the museum, so they took the Jewish girls to collect the bricks and put together. And they were hiding over there out. And this boss, he said, "If you have good papers I'll give you something." And she said, "We don't have where to sleep." They were sleeping in, there was, in the, in the museum was hanging a World

War I airplane. They were going out in the top and they were sleeping in the airplane over there, overnight. And when he-- she showed him the paper that they have with this birth certificate, so they give him an address. And they went there and they were hiding out over there till, till the war. And then after the war when they, they survived, when I come back like a Russian soldier, I brought them food already. I brought them a sack of potatoes with meat, with, because I was not far away from them. I packed up a whole horse and wagon with the Russian soldiers, with a pistol, with ammunition, and we went there and nobody bothers us. And, oh, a lot of stories. I can tell you little stories what's happened to me during the time when I was a soldier. It was a lot of things happened. This is a, this is a lot of story.

NP: All right. And did you know of anyone in the Czech resistance?

HH: No.

NP: No.

HH: I was so isolated from those...

NP: Removed.

HH: ...from those people, and those people were, I was living in my own little world. I was, tried to, tried to save my own skin. So I wasn't together *mit* those people when they were hiding, they were running. Like people was running to the partisans, you know? I wasn't, I wasn't there. After, after I ran over to the Russian, my war was finished.

NP: Yes, yes.

HH: I didn't have nothing...

NP: Thank God.

HH: To do with the war anymore. I was just helping out, helping out the for the Russian to get job. And...

NP: Before the real truth of Terezin was known, did you, did you know about it? Did you hear about it?

HH: Like what?

NP: Oh, the camps. Auschwitz, Terezin...

HH: No.

NP: No.

HH: No.

NP: You did not know about it.

HH: I didn't even, I had...

NP: In the midst of the war.

HH: In the midst of the war I only heard, I only heard Majdanek and, and Theresienstadt we heard. Theresienstadt we heard that they took the Jewish people from Czechoslovakia to Theresienstadt.

NP: Yes.

HH: This we hear. Oh, but from Auschwitz we didn't hear. The only, we hear

that they took them to Poland.

NP: Oh.

HH: Who Poland, that Poland? We didn't hear. We, we everything was secret.

NP: And about Theresienstadt, what...

HH: Theresienstadt was...

NP: What did they say about it?

HH: They say they accumulate the Czech people and they put them, they keep them in Theresienstadt and they work there.

NP: They took the Czech people to Theresienstadt...

HH: Theresienstadt and...

NP: That it was a work camp.

HH: A work camp. That's it.

NP: And that was all they said.

HH: Yeah, but meanwhile they didn't tell that they took, that from Theresiensdadt, they took them to Auschwitz, from Theresienstadt. I know here a guy, he lives here in Linford Street. He was born in Theresiensdadt. He's a survivor.

NP: Is that...

HH: Yeah.

NP: He was born in...

HH: In Theresienstadt. Yeah.

NP: Incredible stories.

HH: Yeah.

NP: So, I thank you and we are here to preserve your testimony...

HH: Yeah.

NP: ...and to make it accessible to serious scholars and I will send you a copy.

HH: Yeah. Thank you very much.

NP: And you will have it for your children.

HH: Thank you very much.

NP: And if at any time you want to add anything...

HH: Yeah.

NP: The number of the Archive, I will give you.

HH: Yeah.

NP: And I thank you again.

HH: Yeah, okay.

Mr. Hofman gave Natalie Packel a typed composition written by one of his customers. In it she learned that he ran away from home at age 14—which he hadn't related in his taped interview. He gave her permission to include this fact in his transcript.