

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

OZIAS LAZAROVICI

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Josey G. Fisher
Dates: November 8, 1981

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Melrose Park, PA 19027

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OL - Ozias Lazarovici [interviewee]

JF - Josey G. Fisher [interviewer]

Date: November 8, 1981

Tape one, side one:

JF: Can you tell me where and when you were born, and a little bit about your childhood there?

OL: I'm born in Romania, May 15, '21.

JF: Where in Romania? What town?

OL: It's...

JF: Do you want to spell it for me? Okay. C-A-I-V-T.

OL: Yeah, Caivt [sounds like Kai-yut].

JF: This is a "V".

OL: It's a small town, yeah, no "U".

JF: Oh, I'm sorry. It's C-A-I-U-T¹.

OL: Yeah.

JF: Okay. It's a small town near where?

OL: Small town, near Moldavia, Moldavia and some place. We are several, we'd been seven brother and one sister.

JF: Where were you in the family?

OL: Second in the family.

JF: Second from the oldest.

OL: Second from the oldest.

JF: Can you tell me a little bit about your family? About your parents?

OL: My parents, they been, my father, he did have a bakery to support the family. We were a poor family, you know, no chance to make a living because they don't let you make a living over there. The, was the Nazi party, the Romanians, they call them different, but in the Cuza Goga² party, and in a small town, and we been only 20 families, 25 family of Jews, the...

JF: Out of how many families in the town, or how many people in the town?

OL: There were maybe 10,000.

JF: And there were only 25 Jewish families.

OL: Twenty – five Jewish families. And they start to persecute us from '36, since Hitler is come in Germany, to persecute us, that, the Romanian people, you know...

JF: Do you remember what it was like in the '20s? Was there interference on the part of the Romanian government in the '20s, or persecution?

OL: In the '20s?

¹Caiuti: according to *Where Once we Walked*.

²Cuza-Goga: Alexandru Cuza, professor of economics and Octavian Goga, poet and one of the leaders of the antisemitic movement in Romania, joined in forming the National Christian Party, an outspokenly antisemitic political party in 1935.

- JF: Yeah.
- OL: I don't remember, because I'm born in '21.
- JF: As a young child?
- OL: As a young child, till I, till I been 10 years old, always was in Romania the persecution against the Jews, and a feeling against the Jews like the, call him every name in the book.
- JF: Your family was living in what kind of area? There were only 25 families you said.
- OL: No, just like, um, the 20, the 25 family, Jewish family, they live almost together in this little town. I mean not together, but on one street. And they are always been in business and [unclear].
- JF: Was their business open to the whole population?
- OL: All to the public, to the population, yeah, to the public.
- JF: And, was it a problem selling to the non-Jews?
- OL: Always a problem.
- JF: In what way?
- OL: Because they come and they always call you a Jew. I mean, "Jew" in the sense, to offend you, not to, because you are a Jew, to offend you, to, to, "dirty Jew" they tell you anything to, to make you like you are nothing, always, you know, even in school.
- JF: What kind of school was this that you went to?
- OL: Public school.
- JF: And what kind of experience did you have there, at school.
- OL: At school I got a bad experience. I did have an experience, because we been in that class, we been about four, five, or six children. And all the classes were 75 children, and they are all against us, and beat us, beating us and everything else. Do they anything, everything what it can be the worst.
- JF: The other children would beat you up.
- OL: Yes.
- JF: Was this also the attitude of the teachers?
- OL: The attitude of the teachers, they, they, no, not directly. Not directly, but, with us, but indirectly I think, yes.
- JF: How indirectly did it show itself?
- OL: Indirectly, because they never, they, when they somebody beat me and it's a five kids against me, how can I defend myself? They never punish the other children, never. Like it's nothing that's happened.
- JF: Did you have any positive experience with the non-Jews? Did you have any friends?
- OL: Very few. Very few. Because in the, in mine generation [unclear] when the Nazi come to Romania, about this, oh about six, seven, eight years was the Nazi party in Romania, Goga Cuza they call him over there, Goga Cuza was the Nazi party, and they made such a propaganda against the Jews, since Hitler took over, start to be in Germany, the same thing in Romania. They start a party like in Germany.
- JF: How early was this?

- OL: I think this was in the '30s. Then, I think they start in '33.
- JF: And it started that early then in Romania as well.
- OL: Started in Romania, yeah.
- JF: You stayed in public school for how long?
- OL: Stayed in public school till they evacuate us on the -- when the war start, there were, the Romanian police and the Romanian gen-, the regular police, they took us, the 25 families and they put us in a train and they sent us in a bigger city, in a ghetto.
- JF: So, you finished your schooling?
- OL: No, I don't finish the school.
- JF: You didn't finish your schooling.
- OL: No, no.
- JF: This was what year that you were evacuated.
- OL: In '39.
- JF: You were 17.
- OL: Seventeen.
- JF: And, what, you had gone through public school and a gymnasium? Or...
- OL: No, public school.
- JF: Public school all of that time.
- OL: All of that time. But, not really I can't even finish the school, the public school, because they don't let you. They didn't give you a chance.
- JF: Because of the evacuation they didn't give you a chance?
- OL: No, because of the hatred what they have, give the Jews in this small town.
- JF: They didn't want you to finish your schooling?
- OL: No, they don't even know take care of, eh, no they don't want me, but they don't give me a chance to learn.
- JF: In what way?
- OL: Made your hard, eh, give you hard time. "Everything what you did is not good, do it again." Or, that, "Go sweep the sidewalk with a sweeper, the garden or from the teacher," and the time with the other kids, they learn.
- JF: They would have you do other tasks like that...
- OL: Yes other task [unclear]...
- JF: ...during school hours.
- OL: ...during the school hours, yeah. Instead to learn they put me to do something else, the teachers.
- JF: Was this common practice for all of these Jewish kids who were in this school?
- OL: For all. In my town where I was born, for all.
- JF: Was your family a very religious family?
- OL: Very, my father was very religious. My father, yeah.
- JF: Was there a synagogue? A small synagogue?
- OL: There was a small synagogue, yeah. A close, a small synagogue, yeah.
- JF: And with this small network of 25 families, was there a Jewish organization in the town? Like a *kehillah*, or...
- OL: Yeah, they come together on Saturday whatever, on Yom Kippur, on Rosh

Hashanah, one day before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, before the war, you can hear and the, the window was stuffed with wood and stone and everything else they throw in the windows, the *goyim*, you know, I mean, the Romanians.

JF: They would throw stones?

OL: Stones and bricks and everything else.

JF: At the windows of the synagogue.

OL: Of the windows on the synagogue, yeah.

JF: For all of the High, for the High Holidays?

OL: For the whole, Saturday, holidays, during the week, all the time. No person to take, I mean, to defend us over there, nobody.

JF: The police did not defend you in any way.

OL: No, no.

JF: Did the Jews themselves attempt to defend themselves?

OL: They can't, they can't over there.

JF: There was nothing that they could do.

OL: No, no. Not over there.

JF: Was, were people hurt? Were people attacked?

OL: Yeah, yeah, there's a lot of people been attacked, yeah, they're hurt. I was hurt personally. One...

JF: Can you...

OL: Yeah.

JF: Can you tell me about it?

OL: One day, was a river, a small river where there in the summertime I go to swim, with my brothers, with a bigger brother. And about 10, 15 other people, Romanian guys, they come with stone and with sticks, like baseball sticks, and beat us to death. Yeah. I don't know, I don't know who bring us home. I don't know how we can get, how we can get home from this river, from the small river [unclear] take, you know, for the summer. They beat us with stones and everything else. Yeah. It's true.

JF: Was there anyone in your family who was in the Romanian army?

OL: No, nobody. Only my father, before, in peacetime, he was, he's been in the Romanian army.

JF: Your father had been in the Romanian army.

OL: Yeah, yeah. Before, in the, '14.

JF: In the First World War?

OL: Yeah, yeah.

JF: Did he ever tell you any of his experiences as a Jew in the Romanian army?

OL: He did not have these experiences then, so, so bad experiences like the Jews then.

JF: He was accepted more in the army?

OL: Yeah, yeah, yeah, then, yes. Because it wasn't so much the hatred. When the Nazi infiltrated, I mean, they made so much propaganda and with Romania, because in Romania they are not cul-, they don't have no culture. They are, like simple persons.

JF: But you s...

OL: On a, I mean not all. I did [unclear], and they ha-, they -- everything what is wrong with Romania is the Jewish, the Jewish, the Jews' fault.

JF: Was this...

OL: They complained that, because of the Jews they don't have nothing, I mean, you, everything what is going wrong in Romania, food or the, everything else, whatever.

JF: This was before Hitler, as well?

OL: Before, before Hitler, yeah. I mean at the time when Hitler was coming in Germany, this time when it's...

JF: But also when you were talking about your early childhood...

OL: Yeah.

JF: In the '20s.

OL: Yeah.

JF: Was this also so?

OL: No, in '20 I am born.

JF: No, in the, during your early years.

OL: During the, yeah, early years, the same, yeah.

JF: The same kind of feeling.

OL: The same kind of feeling, yeah.

JF: Was your family involved in any kind of other Jewish group? Any Zionistic kind of activity, or...

OL: No, because it, no, because they didn't have no chance in that small town. It wasn't nothing to do, and, even I think if there's something to do, they can't do, because they had been afraid.

JF: So the synagogue was really the focus of the Jewish life.

OL: That's it, that's it, that's it.

JF: Were, and were most of these families also very observant Jews like your family?

OL: Not all of them, but they come together on Saturday and because there's a synagogue. My father, he was very religious, but a lot of them also were very religious, but not all of them, not all of them, no.

JF: So starting in '33, at this point you were 12 years old.

OL: Twelve years old, yeah.

JF: You were still in school?

OL: I am still in school.

JF: And you say that things began to change in Romania when Hitler came to power.

OL: Yeah, before Hi-, I mean, when he started in Germany...

JF: Yes?

OL: His propaganda, the Nazi propaganda, and Romania started the same time.

JF: And what kind of propaganda was it? Can you remember?

OL: Everything, yeah, everything that's against the Jews. Everything that's wrong with them is the Jews' fault.

JF: How did the propaganda take form?

OL: The propaganda, even in their, even in their churches also, the priests, on his, he make up speech in the church and they say it's because of them.

JF: This started in the early '30s?

OL: Thirties, yeah.

JF: The priests were not preaching against the Jews before that, or...

OL: I don't, I can't tell you that because I don't remember, but after that I'm sure...

JF: Uh huh, you're sure that was happening.

OL: And, I'm sure they did. Because I did know the priest what he was over there in this community or whatever. I did know him.

JF: You knew him?

OL: Yeah. I mean, not personally to talk, but I see him.

JF: Yes. And, what other kinds of things were done? What other kind of propaganda?

OL: Oh, it was, been a propaganda, what can I say? Anything is possible against the Jews, to somebody to hate somebody, to reinvent the history against the Jews. They invented it. Christ, because of Christ, Christ was killed because of the Jews, and we don't have anything what we want because of the Jews, because they steal everything, whether they do business and they take our money, anything what is possible to imagine in your head. They, they did.

JF: How did they do it? Were there public speeches? Were there signs?

OL: Public speeches, yeah, no, public speeches. They make a, together they join in a small place over there and they, one of them, the leaders, they start to, just to speak, to make speeches and everything, and it's against.

JF: Did you notice, then, a change or an increase in the number of attacks of the people of the town toward the Jews?

OL: The old people of the town it wasn't so bad, they, wasn't so bad. The old people.

JF: The old people weren't so bad.

OL: No, wasn't so bad, like the young people, like, the generation in this time when they're grown up with me together or the others older than me, five, ten years older, they are, they been worst.

JF: So the people, say, in their teens and in their 20s.

OL: Twenties and 25, 30 years old.

JF: These were the people who really...

OL: Who beat...

JF: ...were the angriest and the most antisemitic?

OL: Yeah, right. Right, antisemitic, right.

JF: And they were more stirred up by these speeches.

OL: Exactly.

JF: Can you tell me more about, then, as the '30s progressed, what changes you saw?

OL: Under, we, when Hitler came in power, the part in Romania, they changed hands between '36 and '40, till after the war it's, the, changed hands more than 10 times. One

time the Nazi party come, after the general come, and, but I remember and I think it was in '39 when some colleague from school, no, not colleague, some teacher in school, from our school, he was in the Nazi party. I can't say Nazi party, I don't know exactly. I can't say, explain else. He come with a revolver in our home, where several people, eight children, my father and my mother. They come, they come three people with a gun, and in night time, 12 [o'clock], he said, "You have to pack everything." We had to move.

JF: This was at what point?

OL: In '39.

JF: In '39.

OL: '39.

JF: And this was a Romanian?

OL: Romanian, yeah.

JF: A Romanian Nazi.

OL: Romanian, no, no, there's no Germans this time over there.

JF: Okay.

OL: A Romanian.

JF: A Romanian Nazi came...

OL: But, 11 [o'clock], 12 [o'clock] at night, with other two guys, with arms, and they give us order to pack, what you can, I mean. To leave, not to, to pa-, don't give us time to pack nothing, and to go in a bigger city.

JF: Now, had anybody been taken from the city before this time?

OL: No, this night, the whole city they been evacuated.

JF: They took all 25 families.

OL: All 25 families.

JF: Did you have any warning...

OL: No.

JF: ...that this would happen?

OL: No, no.

JF: Had you heard of it happening in another town, for instance?

OL: No, I don't, we don't, we don't.

JF: Did you, before this night, did you think that what was happening with the Nazi party would affect you personally?

OL: Oh yeah, I do. I did.

JF: Was there any thought, or any talk within your family of leaving? Was there any possibility of leaving?

OL: Yeah, we wanted leaving over there, but if you leave, you are, you're still in Romania. And we won't leave because it's going be all, we think this way, "It's going be all over the same way."

JF: Mmm hmm.

OL: And it's been the same. In the big city not so, not so bad, because was more, more Jewish people and everything else, and we-- and this night when they come with a gun, they come with a gun in our home and they give us six hours to move, to put on the train and to leave for Bacau. Bacau it's a bigger city in the same area, about six hours from train.

JF: How do you spell that town? [pause while writing] B-A-C-A-U.
OL: Bacau, yeah.
JF: So all of the families were put on this same train, at the same time...
OL: I, I...
JF: ...to leave?
OL: ...can't remember exactly that, but I know that, I see a lot of people from Jewish faith, they put on the same train and evacuated to this, to this city, Bacau.
JF: And this is, this town was six hours away, still in Ro-...
OL: Six hours away, yes.
JF: Still in Moldavia?
OL: Yeah, still in Moldavia.
JF: And where did you go, what kind of train was it, before you continue?
OL: Ah, train was, what is, they carry, they carry not for the people train, but what they carry the [unclear], the, how you call it? The...
JF: Livestock? Cattle?
OL: Yeah, cattle, yeah. Cattle, yeah.
JF: A cattle car.
OL: Cattle train, yeah.
JF: And, how were you treated in the train? How was the train trip?
OL: Nobody see you, nobody talk to you. It's just like on, like on, well, if you see a movie, the Romanians they don't know to talk too much. You go there, or go there, and that's it. And they put us, I mean, when we came in Bacau. They put all together in a synagogue. Around it with the police, Romanian police, and they give us the yellow...
JF: The yellow armband?
OL: Armband, to identify the, you are all Jews.
JF: Yes, and what happened then?
OL: We stay over there about, from the synagogue they keep us about three weeks. Three weeks or four weeks.
JF: How many people do you think were with you in that synagogue?
OL: In the synagogue, about, the synagogue was not a little synagogue, it was about 300 meeting there.
JF: About 300 people.
OL: Three hundred people, children and old people all together.
JF: From all over? From all over different parts of Romania?
OL: [unclear] yeah.
JF: What did you think during that time was going to happen to you?
OL: I, we didn't, and from this time and I, we think we're going die, they going shoot us every one. We're going die. They going shoot us and everything else.
JF: Was there any one at that time in the synagogue who helped keep the spirits up?
OL: The spirits, yeah. Yeah.
JF: In what way?
OL: They, they tell us, "Don't lose courage, it's going, it's--" They keep you, they

want to keep us, you know, not so down, a little more morale. A little more morale in the synagogue we are. What I, why everybody when I, like I remember now I was already 18 years old almost. And everybody was down, I mean, nobody, nobody knows what is going be or what is going happen, like.

JF: Did any kind of religious observance help during that time?

OL: No, they, not officially. Was just...

JF: Did people find themselves praying, or...

OL: Praying, yeah, praying a lot, yeah. And the synagogue was surrounded by the police, Romanian, the army, not the police, the Romanian army, was surrounded. And they keep us over there three, three to four weeks.

JF: How was food handled?

OL: Food? I don't know if we had food.

JF: They didn't give you?

OL: Yeah, only water and bread, some bread, dark bread what they have over there.

JF: Were some of the people able to bring food with them?

OL: Some people, yes. Some people, yes. Yeah.

JF: And were the guards only outside? Or were they inside as well?

OL: No, no, inside and out, yeah, on both, inside and outside.

JF: And outside.

OL: Yeah.

JF: Did anyone try to escape from that synagogue?

OL: No, because they, I think I, I don't think so because they are afraid to be killed. They were afraid to be killed, to be shot, because someone there was to shoot if somebody wants to escape. And after the three weeks they took the young people and separate them from the old people. I mean the...

JF: How was that done?

OL: They do like with their hands, like that. "You stay on this side. You stay in one side." And they separated me and my brother, yeah, because an old, because the other brother what I had is small.

JF: So they separated you and your older brother?

OL: Yeah, older brother. They don't separate the other, because the other one they had been...

JF: They were smaller children.

OL: Smaller children, yeah. And they put in our, they put us, all our young people in other room.

JF: In another room?

OL: In another room.

JF: In the synagogue.

OL: In the synagogue, another, yeah.

JF: This was after three or four weeks.

OL: After three or four weeks.

JF: And then what happened to the other older people and the younger children?

OL: After the older people, the other children, I, I think they, I don't know what is

happened. I think they repatriated them and, eh, the army was there, and the German, before the German come in Romania, the Romanians they make some barracks, barracks, how you call, barracks? Yeah, like, they put them there.

JF: The German army had made barracks?

OL: No, the Romanians from, the Romanians, they made for the German army before they came in Romania.

JF: I see. And the, so the Romanian guards put these people...

OL: Barracks, these people in the barracks.

JF: In the barracks that they had built for the Germans.

OL: Yeah, for the Germans, yeah.

JF: And then what happened?

OL: Then I know, myself and the other people, about 49 persons or 50 persons, I don't know, I don't know exactly how many person in mine age-- I mean, between 18, 20, 22, or 25 maybe.

JF: Were these both men and women, by the way?

OL: No, only men they separate.

JF: Only men.

OL: They separated only men, not women.

JF: So the young women were kept with this other group.

OL: With the fam-, yeah, with the family.

JF: Okay. And what happened...

OL: This happened they took...

JF: ...with you?

OL: They took me, and they took me to work in a railroad station to put the sand and stones and then to work every day from six o'clock in the morning to six o'clock in the night, to work with the army behind us and everything else. Now the, after this they, after they finished all they took us back in the synagogue again.

JF: You were laying the tracks?

OL: Yeah, everything, yeah...

JF: The sand and the stone...

OL: The railroad, yeah.

JF: ...for the railroad tracks.

OL: Yeah, this...

JF: And this was under the control of the Romanian guards.

OL: Of Romanian, yeah.

JF: And what was their treatment of you like?

OL: They treat me like this, if you don't move faster now, every Jewish boy's got a, they call them gendarme, gendarme it's a police, eh, special police in Romania, with a stick in your back, and if you don't move fast enough to put the, fill up fast enough the wagon with the sand and everything else, you get beat. You got to move faster and you got to move very fast. You can't, you can't do no, nothing wrong. I remember I got beat couple times because I can't do it anymore. I was so tired, and without food how can I do it? Yeah.

JF: Well, did you, during this time have any contact with the rest of your family?

OL: No.
JF: You didn't know what happened to them.
OL: No, I didn't know what is happened to them, no. No.
JF: And how long did they have you working?
OL: They keep me this on the train, railroad train, how you, I don't know how you exactly...
JF: The railroad station?
OL: Station, yeah.
JF: The tracks.
OL: The tracks. About three months. After three months...
JF: Yeah?
OL: After the three months they find a other job for us, and they took us to a city called Focsani.
JF: F-O-C-S...
OL: Yeah, Focsani.
JF: F-O-C...
OL: F-O-C-S-A-...
JF: A-N-...
OL: N. Right. Focsani.
JF: F-O-C-S-A-N-I?
OL: Yeah.
JF: Yes. F-O-C-S-A-N-I.
OL: Close to the city they make the, they start to build against the Russian, to the Russian don't come, and to build the, how you call, the bunkers, or something what from cement and *beton* [Hebrew for concrete] and wire, to build fortifications or the...
JF: Yes, against...
OL: To protect against the Russians.
JF: Against the Russians, yes.
OL: Yeah. And here, was about 2500 people, young people here in this area here around Focsani to build the fortification because was a big river over there, and they say they fortify and the Russians can't come over. And we stay over there about, I stay over there myself was six months.
JF: By the time you left Focsani, you had had no contact...
OL: No contact...
JF: ...with your family at all?
OL: ...with my family, no. No.
JF: You were still with your brother?
OL: No, alone. My brother was, I don't know even from him, I don't know if he was.
JF: Your brother was not taken?
OL: Was taken, but someplace else.
JF: Ah, so you were with him for that three months initially, and then you were separated from him as well.

OL: Yeah, we were separated. He, they want to separate each, I mean, no cousin, no family, to be separated each from another.

JF: There seemed to be an effort to divide the families?

OL: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

JF: Tell me about your experience in Focsani.

OL: Here they keep us in a, like, in Romania where they keep the horses, they keep, put all us over there, but not like here, because when they keep the horses here, it's nice and clean. And...

JF: You mean like a stable?

OL: Like a stable, yeah. They put us to sleep over there in winter and [unclear]. Finally I got sick.

JF: With what?

OL: I got sick from the, I think I got some lung problem. I don't know what I have. And I feel bad. And I made the decision to run away. I did run away, and my, in Bacau, to see if I can't find the family. And I find the family.

JF: You had no problem in running away?

OL: I ran away and, when I ran away nobody called me, and nobody say nothing and, because I was sick and I want to see the family before I die, because I...

JF: You thought you were going to die.

OL: Yeah, yeah.

JF: How did you escape? Was it at night? Was it during the...

OL: The night, the night.

JF: In the night. You snuck out?

OL: I snuck out by myself, and I, I ran to a train station and I, and the top of the...

JF: Train?

OL: The train, I, I traveled about 12 hours. Changing the train a couple times, till I go in the city. I remember it like today.

JF: How long had you been in Focsani? Six months?

OL: Six, approximately six months.

JF: And then you ran away.

OL: I ran away myself.

JF: What happened when you got back to Bacau?

OL: I got up, got to Bacau and the Germans, already they are in the town, in the city, and I see the whole city was about 80,000 people, Jewish people was closed. I was the only Jew on the street. And the police picked me up. After I see the family, they picked me up.

JF: You did see the family?

OL: I did see the family. And they picked me up and asked me what is happened with me. And they find out. I don't have to tell them. They find out, and they send me to a prison because I ran away from the, from this camp.

JF: This is the Romanian police who came?

OL: The Romanian police. They send me to Ploesti.

JF: This is the name of the prison where you were sent?

OL: Of the prison, yeah, Ploesti. I was sent here.
JF: P-...
OL: The name...
JF: P-LO-E-S-T-I.
OL: Yeah, I been sent here with the hands tied up and like a criminal here or like...
JF: Your arms were tied behind your back.
OL: Tied behind my back. And they sent me in this prison in Ploesti. In Ploesti I get sick again, and they put me in the, in this prison I see some couple doctors also in the prison, Jewish doctor, and they take care of me because I got some, how you call, malaria?
JF: Malaria?
OL: Malaria, yeah, some. I mean, yeah.
JF: When you went into the prison, where were you put? Into a cell?
OL: No...
JF: Into a room?
OL: No, they put me in a room, with about 15, 20 people.
JF: Were these primarily Jewish people?
OL: Only Jewish.
JF: And how...
OL: No, in this prison was also the Romanian people also. Yeah.
JF: How were you treated in the prison?
OL: In the prison I'd been a little treated better, because it was Romanian also prisoner like me, and they don't, don't make so much because you are a Jew and they're not. Because the other ones, they're criminals and killers and you know. They know that the Jews that come here, they come for something else. They doesn't come from the criminal. I mean, not from the authority I was treated good. From the people around me, they treat me better. They treat me better.
JF: You mean...
OL: The inmates.
JF: The people themselves, the inmates treated...
OL: The inmates, yeah, treat...
JF: Treated you better?
OL: Treat me better, though, yes.

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

JF: ...You were telling me about the prison and what it was like?

OL: Yeah, after five weeks they took me like a, I desert from the army, like I desert from the, not from the army, like from, when they took, it was about 29 people like me ran away from this, from this work what we have to do. You, our Jewish people and they put us in a front row what there, and the, court, martial court. How you call it?

JF: Court martial?

OL: Court martial, and they give us 25 years pri-, eh, life in prison.

JF: Twenty-five years?

OL: Twenty-five years.

JF: To life?

OL: To life.

JF: All 29 of you had run away from this kind of work.

OL: All 29, yeah, yeah.

JF: When you ran away from...

OL: Even I remember the magistrate that he was been an army colonel, Monya, is his name. I remember how he say, 20-, you know, when he, 25 years.

JF: What was your feeling?

OL: I didn't know if I got feeling this time. I don't know what to say. I didn't know any more nothing what was happen, what is going on with me, because I was so, I don't feel like I am myself. I, not only me, everybody else.

JF: Did you still have malaria, or had this been treated?

OL: No, I got, yeah, they treat me, some, two Jewish doctors from the infirmary, from the prison, they treated me, and I got, you know, I...

JF: Did they have some medicine that they could give you?

OL: They did have medicine for their, for their inmates and they got to treat the other inmates. They treat me also.

JF: Oh. When you ran away, you ran by yourself.

OL: By myself.

JF: But 29 other people, or 28 other people had also run away from a similar...

OL: Also from the similar concen-, camps.

JF: Work camps.

OL: Work camps, yeah.

JF: What happened after you were sentenced?

OL: After I sentenced they send me to, they keep me here about, in this prison here about two weeks.

JF: Yeah?

OL: And they send me to a more secure prison like Alcatraz here, they call them Aiud.

JF: Like Alcatraz here?

OL: Yeah, yeah.

JF: This is spelled A-I-U-D.

OL: Yeah. This was more a, where they keep the Communist or whatever, they keep the people 25 years to life, or they keep more secure place. And they keep me here about six, seven months.

JF: And what was it like there?

OL: It wasn't like, what can I say? It was like hell.

JF: Can you describe it to me? Is it possible?

OL: Here was [pause] what can I say? It's impossible even to think or to, to, think or what, it was like, em, it wasn't so bad in this prison Aiud, like was in the camps in the working camps. Was better here, better treatment I have here what I have in the Focsani camps.

JF: So as bad as the prison was, it was still better.

OL: Better for me, because I wasn't persecuted from the inmates, because there has been Communist, Communist people over there and criminals and everybody else, but they, they don't...

JF: They let you alone.

OL: They are, they don't, but I was in a separate cell by myself, for seven months.

JF: Did you have to work or anything inside the prison?

OL: No, this is, on this side of prison they don't put us to work, no.

JF: So you were just in the cell.

OL: That's it.

JF: And, you were fed?

OL: Yeah, bring food three times a day. They food bring, they bring for everybody else and everything else. After six, seven months, they took me from here. They got the impression that this is not so much secure, this prison. And they took me to a other prison. They put me on a train for two weeks, on a [pause]...

JF: They took you on a train for two weeks to another prison?

OL: This is the name.

JF: That is spelled O-C-N-I-L-E, and the next word is M-A-R-I.

OL: Yes. The, the, Mari.

JF: And, was this still in the same area?

OL: Still in the same area.

JF: Still in Moldavia?

OL: No, Transylvania, no, Transylvania.

JF: Oh, this is in Transylvania.

OL: Transylvania. Both the prison there in Transylvania.

JF: Both the first one...

OL: Both in Transylvania.

JF: A-I-U-D, and this one. Now, why were you on the train for two weeks?

OL: I don't, this I can't answer because I don't know. They keep me two weeks whether, I, maybe for 14, 15 days on train, till I go to, from one place to another. And usually you can make this in five hours. But they put us like the animals on the train and they took us all over. And that's all, no.

JF: The train was moving.

OL: Moving. All the time.

JF: How many prisoners were they transferring at that time? A lot?

OL: I don't know, and this wa-, no, on this wagon we are, we been about 40 I think. Something like 40.

JF: About 40.

OL: About 40, yes.

JF: They fed you?

OL: On the train? No, only water.

JF: Only water. No bread at all?

OL: No.

JF: In two weeks.

OL: Two weeks. Two weeks!

JF: Did you all survive that trip?

OL: I survived, I don't know how.

JF: Did you...

OL: No, I don't, no, not all survived, no.

JF: Not all survived.

OL: No, no, oh, no. It's when, I think about four or five or six they die, I'm sure they died. Because they can't, I was so weak I can't even see with my eyes. Not all survived. Two weeks, yeah. They don't give, no, they don't give to nobody food.

JF: Did you have any idea where you were going?

OL: I, no, I didn't know. Two weeks I didn't know where I am.

JF: And you had no idea how long you were going to be on the train?

OL: No, I don't never, never I got, I don't, I didn't.

JF: During any point up until this time, had you had any contact at all with your family?

OL: No, never, never. No. I write them letters from the prison here and here, but I don't get an answer. Maybe they, they don't let it go, the mail, for the Jewish people like this. I'm sure.

JF: What happened in this prison? What was this one like?

OL: In this prison we, they don't keep me long here also. I don't know why. They give me, took me from one place to a other. They took me...

JF: How long were you there?

OL: Here I been also about, I been about, not exactly six months, less than six months, less than six months, about four, five months.

JF: Mmm hmm. And then?

OL: But, like my father he been a sergeant in the army in the '14, the First World War. He make, he write a letter to the Queen-- the King of Romania. Because in this time when they have a Queen, a King or whatever, I don't, yeah, Michael, he is my age. Or to his father, Carol, and to King Carol, to see what they're doing, because he is our veteran hero, and everything, and, but...

JF: You found this out later?

OL: Later, yeah.

JF: That your father had written to the King.

OL: Yeah, yeah, yeah. When the king don't answer but the Defense Department, they answer me, they can't do nothing about me, anything else, excuses, excuses. And from here...

JF: Was the life in this prison similar to the first one? You were kept in a solitary cell?

OL: Cell, no, this, in this cell, no. They put us in a dormitor-, in a big room with 45, 50 people together.

JF: I see.

OL: And from here, they took me all over again, put me in a other train with the other people or whatever and they go around or the, about three weeks now, to come to Bucharest.

JF: This is still another prison.

OL: Other prison, in the capital of Romania.

JF: Ah.

OL: Bucharest.

JF: This is, eh, V-A-C-A-R-E-S-T-I.

OL: Yeah, right.

JF: And this is the capital?

OL: Capital of, eh, no, this is the prison, but the prison is in the capital of Romania, Bucharest.

JF: Oh, and this was in Bucharest.

OL: In Bucharest.

JF: Okay. And what was that experience like?

OL: This experience, they put me there in a room over there with, from three weeks, and nobody come. Nobody is known from me. Nobody give me food. Nobody give me nothing. Only the prisoner helped me out to live. The other prisoners, the Romanian prisoners, they give me a little piece of bread, a little piece of that, because they see what is ha-, what, nobody know what is happened with me.

JF: How did the Romanian prisoners have bread?

OL: They have bread because they are not Jewish.

JF: Ah, so they were feeding the...

OL: Yeah, feeding the...

JF: Romanians...

OL: Inmates, feeding the inmates, and feed...

JF: But they were not feeding the Jewish inmates.

OL: No, they feed most of the Jewish inmates, but here in this prison, they, they, I think they forget for me, or they don't know if I'm here or there or they don't know if, if I can say nothing. They, and they keep me here about three weeks only.

JF: Mmm hmm? And then what happened?

OL: Three weeks from here, I been now friendly with couple Romanian guys. I make friendship and they feed me. They talk to me, I don't know why. And I [unclear] and they start to talking about run away from the prison.

JF: You ran away from this prison?

OL: And they make, I don't know how they make what they, they assisted to the guards over there, because they work in outside of the prison some garden, I don't, some vegetable place like that. And they convinced the guard to let me also go over there to work with them. But the guard, he didn't know I'm Jewish. Maybe he knows, I don't know, but he, they convinced the guard to, because one guy, I remember one Romanian guy. He was from mine small town. And they know the, the prison, but in prison he do-, he wasn't so, no more nice maybe before, but in prison he make, he feels sorry for me or he feel so, he wants to help me to survive. Well, about three of them or four, they take me with them to work in the field. Because I wasn't a criminal like to, I just ran away from the war. I wasn't so big, to have to be afraid am I going to kill people or some like that. And from there we ran away.

JF: The three of you ran away?

OL: Four.

JF: Four...

OL: Five, five of us, we ran away.

JF: Five of you ran away. Now you were the only Jew in that group?

OL: The only Jew in mine group.

JF: And how did, you ran away from the work itself.

OL: I ran from the work, yeah.

JF: Was that hard to do?

OL: It was easy to do. It wasn't hard to do, because it wasn't so, it wasn't so too many guards were watching the, the side I would appear, this guy from, because they are, I think they are, they've been three or four years or five years and they have, they're not so many years like I did. But for me was more harder to take, if the guard let me, because he didn't know I have 25 years. Even the guard he didn't know I, 25 years to life. If they knew they don't let me go. And I ran away. Ran away, I, I been in Bucharest, and I, I don't have no courage to go and, on the back, in this city to find my, to find my family, order to talk to them, order to see if they are alive. I didn't have no courage to go. I, but in this time, in Romania, the Nazi they'd been there. And I, I read the paper and they slaughtered people in the, abattoir, abattoir, I mean, in the slaughter house, where they, for the cattle, they, they kill people in the, this area, and they kill people in Bucharest and everything else.

JF: This was in the newspaper in Bucharest?

OL: Yes.

JF: That the Nazis were slaughtering Jews...

OL: New-, it was a newspaper. It was a new-, they don't say that. The Romanian paper they say they took a bunch of Jewish people and they put them there, but they don't say they kill them or not...

JF: I see.

OL: But we, you understood...

JF: I see.

OL: And they, they finished them, yeah.

JF: I see.

OL: See, they start to slaughter Jews in Is-, in Bucharest. [pause] And after this, I stay about three, four weeks, and with this Romanian guy, and...

JF: Where were you for that three or four weeks?
OL: With them.
JF: Where? Were you in hiding?
OL: Hiding, yeah, hiding.
JF: In the city?
OL: In the city. Hiding in the city with them. But they are Romanian. Nobody say nothing to them, even they are a little [unclear].
JF: Where did you stay?
OL: I think we stayed in some cellar, some, cellar, how you call?
JF: Mmm hmm.
OL: I stayed mostly in a cellar. I didn't want to go out.
JF: No.
OL: They go out for food, and maybe they rob, they do, they bring food or they bring our water. They bring, I don't know how they do it, but they bring me to eat, to eat. They feel sorry for me. And finally one night, they, we stayed with them about three or four, I don't know exactly how long, and all four of them, they tell me they, "Jano," that is how they called me. I didn't forget how they called me, said, "I goin', we goin' leave you. You have to do it on yourself, because we can't stay any longer any more here." And they leave me over there. And they leave me over there. What I goin' do myself now?
JF: They left you because they thought it was too dangerous...
OL: Too dangerous for...
JF: ...for you to be with them.
OL: ...them, for them. Too dangerous to be with them, and for them also to get caught.
JF: What then happened to you?
OL: Then happened, I didn't have no papers at all with me, no papers, no I can, but my face in Romania is so Jewish, because everybody wants to see my face in Romania, they know what, eh, freckles, how you say?
JF: Freckles.
OL: They see, they know you are Jewish. Not like here you are Irish with freckles, but over there in Romania, if you have freckles, you are a Jew.
JF: Oh.
OL: You are Jewish, 100%. You don't, they don't have to ask nobody. And I walk in the street one day, I don't know, I, to look for something to eat or something to take, so the police got me, caught me. And I give them other name, and they took me to the police over there -- I remember like today. And they send me, they didn't know I'm, I have 25 years life, to life, if they knew they took me to the prison again. And they keep me over there to the police ba-, seven days I think. And some other bunch of young Jewish people, they send us to work behind the front line in Ukraine.
JF: Mmm.
OL: In Ukraine.
JF: Where was this, in the Ukraine?
OL: [Unclear], [pause; writing]. It's a long name, Wapniarca.

JF: Okay, and that's spelled W-A-P-N-I-A-R-...

OL: I'm not sure it's a W or the [unclear].

JF: C-A. [Wapniarka]

OL: I'm not sure if it's W but I can't remember exactly.

JF: Okay.

OL: It's in the Ukraine.

JF: It's in the Ukraine.

OL: Yeah.

JF: And this was a work camp?

OL: Work camp, yeah. This was the concen-, this was, all, concentration camp or work camp, like...

JF: Combination?

OL: Combination, like working behind the lines, the Romanian lines, and the German lines, to help them against the Russian. Here, here they keep us-- they don't keep me. I ran away again.

JF: How long were you there before you ran away?

OL: I, I, we ran, here I been here about, not too long, I think about 60 days or 70 days, something like that. I see, here I go, I see here in this camp here I goin' die.

JF: Why? What did you see?

OL: Wasn't no food. Wasn't no treatment. They treat us like anim-, worse than animals, like, no place to sleep, and the winter time, no clothing, no nothing. You can be frozen because the weather was so cold. I see before this come there I got, I put this in my mind...

JF: That if you stay in this camp you'll die.

OL: I'll die. Before I die here, better I try to, to do something, to run away.

JF: What kind of work were you to do in this camp?

OL: This camp was to, also to help the, fortify the behind lines for the, against the Russian. Also, and to help the Romanian and the Germans on the front line. To, I mean, not to help them with their arms. To make the work for them. Make the work for them.

JF: What happened? How did you run away?

OL: Finally I ran away, but I don't, I don't have no place to go. I know I'm in Ukraine and I don't know how to go, how to go back in Romania, because I didn't know to speak Russian. I didn't know nothing. And I find also two Jewish boys, another three, eh, three Romanian guy was so, no, not Romanian guy, the Russian guy. The Russians. Yeah, Russians. They are, they'd been prisoners over there also. Three Russian guy working over there with us. A Russian Jewish guy, I think. Yeah, Russian Jews! Yeah, Russian Jews!

JF: Three Russian Jews, and...

OL: And about two or three Romanian Jews or so.

JF: Three Romanian Jews.

OL: One of them, they speak Jewish, we speak Jewish, I speak Jewish very well then and now I speak also Jewish. And I speak to them when he say, "Don't worry. We going save you from here." Well he took us, I can't remember where he took us now, after, after, because they ran away. They know the area, because they, the Ukraine Jews who were there from the area were there, and they took us in hiding or some places that were there in Ukraine.

JF: Who hid you?
OL: They hide me near.
JF: Who hid you?
OL: The, the, I think the, not Jewish people. I think the Russian people or some thing like that.
JF: These were Russian, or Ukrainians?
OL: Yeah, Russian Ukrainians, yeah.
JF: And they were willing to hide you.
OL: Yeah, to hide, to hide all of us.
JF: All of you.
OL: To help, not to hide for a long time, just to help us, to give us a chance to go away, and to feed us and to give something to, clothes, and to, to go away. To not stay there, because the area has been German, it's occupied by the Germans.
JF: Did they know you were Jewish?
OL: The...
JF: The people who were hiding you?
OL: No, they didn't know. They didn't know. I don't think they know. Really, we don't tell them, no. But they, the other guy speaking Russian very well. And the Ukrainian, they help him out and to go. They hiding out over there so long and the Russians they say that now we have each one his way, because if you can, save, save yourself if you can. I save myself if I can, and...
JF: How long were you six together, hiding like this?
OL: No, not too long, about three days.
JF: I see.
OL: No, not too long, because the family or whatever, they don't want to keep us over there so long, because they'd been afraid. I don't think they are, I don't know if they had been Jewish. I think they had been Russian, I think.
JF: Mmm hmm.
OL: And...
JF: Did the Russian Jews that you escaped with tell you anything about what was happening to the Jews in Russia during that time?
OL: Ah yeah, we know, we know, yeah. We did know.
JF: What did you know?
OL: No, they told us...
JF: Yeah.
OL: They told us one he lost his father. One he lost his mother. One he lost the family. He doesn't know from the family. They so the whole Ukraine, Jews from Ukraine almost 90% the Germans and the Ukrainian, the Nazi Ukrainian, they took them and they kill them and they, they, they...
JF: The *Einsatzgruppen*?
OL: Yeah.
JF: Did they describe this to you?
OL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JF: Did they witness the mass murders themselves, these people that you saw?

OL: I can't remember if they were witness. Maybe they witness, I don't know, but I'm not exactly sure.

JF: But they lost family.

OL: They lost family. Not in the war, because they...

JF: No, this was before...

OL: Yeah, because they kill them, the, the, because the Ukraine in this area would not [unclear] were occupied by the Romanian and the German, the Nazi army.

JF: Who did the killing, according to these people? The Germans?

OL: According, the Germans together with the Ukrainians.

JF: Together.

OL: Together. Together, yeah, it's true.

JF: Mmm hmm.

OL: And the Ukrainians, they are very antisemitic.

JF: Mmm hmm.

OL: They are very, very antisemitic.

JF: So what happened once you were on your own again, in, now that you're in the Ukraine without speaking Russian?

OL: In the Ukraine without speaking, without nothing. I'm in Ukraine and I start to, I tried to go back to Bessarabia, to come to, close to Romania, to Moldavia. And I don't know how I do it till I came to the, close to the border. Romania and the Ukraine. But this border was open for Germans and for Romanians, but not for me. And somebody whether from the guard, they caught me. I don't know they see me or doing nothing, what I'm looking for something, but they call me. "Who you are? Where's your paper? What's you doing?" I started to, I don't know what to say any more.

JF: Oh.

OL: And they check me. They check, they keep me over there about two weeks to check my, they tell me if I don't tell them the truth they going to kill me, or whether they gonna shoot me or whether they will do something. And they check me...

JF: These were Romanians.

OL: Romanians. They find out, they got the impression I'm a spy.

JF: What kind of spy?

OL: Against the Germans. Against the Romanians, in the Russians' favor.

JF: Ah.

OL: Because I'm a Jew.

JF: I see. They knew you were Jewish.

OL: I tell them.

JF: You told you were Jewish.

OL: I'm afraid, I was afraid not to tell them.

JF: Oh.

OL: And, I tell them where I come from and what I did, and what I did. And they find me, they come, and, "Who, who you are? You are 25 years to life in prison. How come you no [unclear] make the --"

JF: You told them the truth, of you ...

OL: I tell them the truth, because I was afraid. And I was, I was, I worried, I was so afraid, I want them to send me back to the prison, because it's more safe. I'd be more safe in the prison like I was in there, in these things what I did.

JF: Yeah.

OL: And they keep me whatever, I don't know, for three weeks. And after this they give me a police officer and [unclear] me again and they sent me to the prison back where I came from.

JF: They put your arms behind your back.

OL: Yeah.

JF: They tied you up again.

OL: They tied me again, and they, they say in the wagon over there, with the people in Romania people, "Don't stay here, don't stay here because he is very dangerous, 25 years to life in prison, and very dangerous Jew and everything else." Yeah, it's true.

JF: So they sent you back to this last prison that you were in?

OL: No, they sent me in different prison now.

JF: A different prison!

OL: Different. I'd been in five prison already.

JF: This time they sent you, this is in Romania.

OL: In Romania. This is the last prison what they sent me, in Galati.

JF: G-A-L-A-T-I.

OL: Yeah, this in...

JF: This was the last, [pause] and what happened in Galati?

OL: In Galati I stayed till I be liberated, and I, in Galati, close to the prison, a big airfield, a Romanian airfield, a German airfield for the planes, you know, for the war planes. In Galati, what happened was more, I see more Jews and more, eh, I been, I'm a little more come to life a little bit more, because I see more Jews my age, and it was more others and more food and the Romanian guys, they've been in prison over there, criminals and everything else. And one of them killed seven people, and they, they don't have nothing with the Jews. They don't want to bother. They help the Jews or whatever to, they know they suffer. In Galati, till the start was almost the last, yeah, the last prison. I'd been liberated from here.

JF: So how long were you there? Do you have any idea of what year it was that you were in prison there?

OL: I was in '42. It was in '41, '42, '42 to '43 I think. The war, it's, it finished in '44?

JF: In that area?

OL: I'd been through '41 to '43, something like that, till to the '42 I think, no, not '41. '41 I been in the Ukraine. From '42 to till they liberate to do, I be liberated. I been in this prison.

JF: And were you doing any work there?

OL: Yeah, we do work in the prison. They put us to work to do some, I can't remember exactly what kind of work, but we do work. Till the...

JF: And there were, you were with more Jewish people in this...

OL: More Jewish people there. More Jewish people.
JF: ...in this prison. And the food was better you said.
OL: Much better. It would have been better.
JF: Was there any discussion among the Jews, eh...
OL: There was, yeah, I think it was reasonably better, because this prison here was close to the Russian camp war, and the, and this city here, the Galati, was not far away from the border. They been afraid the Russians going to win the war and they going do damage to them and they coming back here. I'm not sure, but, was a little better, the food here.
JF: They were afraid that the Russians were going to...
OL: Cross.
JF: Cross the border.
OL: Cross the bor-, I mean, they going win the war. They going come in this city and they going kill all the guards if they don't treat us good.
JF: I see. So the guards were afraid of the Russians...
OL: Yeah.
JF: ...punishing them.
OL: Yeah, because was almost to, almost the finish the war...
JF: I see.
OL: '43 or '44, '42 to '43? Yeah. '42 to '43. I been liberate in '44? Yeah, that's right.
JF: Was there any religious observance...
OL: No.
JF: ...in the, eh...
OL: No.
JF: ...prison?
OL: No.
JF: Was there any attempt to escape...
OL: No.
JF: ...from this prison?
OL: Yeah, I escaped from this prison also about at the end of the war, how, and why, becau-, but I escape for good now when I escape.
JF: So you were not liberated from this prison?
OL: No. I...
JF: You escaped from this prison?
OL: I escaped from the prison, but I tell you why.
JF: Okay.
OL: Because when the, before, three months the war, it's six months before the war is start to, the Russians to gain power, more power and more to come close to Germany, they have to pass Romania. They have to pass this and this and this. And the American helped them out. And one night, like it's three months before the American, the American they pass over the prison to make, let, bomb the airfield over there, the airfield from the, close to the prison. But instead a lot of bombs instead to fall, to fell in the, in the airfield, they fall on the prison. And I remember one day, the people are so scared, was about 3,500 people. It's a

gate, a big gate, a wide, to the door. And, I remember like today, when one bomb fell over there and hit all these people because they want to, sc-, they were scared to run away from the prison because of the bombs, and they kill a lot of them. But not because they want to, because the bombs instead to fell on the right place, they...

- JF: They fall on...
- OL: Because here was the airfield and here was the prison, was close.
- JF: Most of the people that were in this prison, were Jewish? Or it was a mixture?
- OL: No, no, no was, Jewish was only 15% Jewish.
- JF: Fifteen percent?
- OL: Only, 85% was...
- JF: Was Romanian.
- OL: Was, eh...
- JF: Or Russian?
- OL: No, no, Romanian.
- JF: Romanian.
- OL: Romanian.
- JF: And...
- OL: But they'd been over there for crimes for other things.
- JF: The Romanians were there for crimes?
- OL: Yeah.
- JF: And the Jews, the other Jews who were in the prison, why were they there, other than your history? The same kind of reasons?
- OL: The same kind, the same kind of reasons, because they are Jews.
- JF: Why do you think they sent you to a prison, instead of to a concentration camp?
- OL: Because, because of the martial law, when they give me 25 years, the Romanians, when they give me 25 years to life, they think I should still be in prison. It was in my favor!
- JF: So you were protected from the concentration camp by that sentence.
- OL: Protected.
- JF: Did you ever have any contact at all with your family during any of this time?
- OL: Yeah, I did. I have contact after I been here, in this last prison here. And I have contact with my family, yeah. No, I didn't have no contact, but one, one, one person, they come, one person sent them here. I mean, was something wrong. A person, not a Jewish guy, a Romanian guy, my mother and father knows him from this city and they say, "You go over there. You going see my son over there. He is there." Like this I got information.
- JF: They knew where you were?
- OL: Yeah they knew.
- JF: How did they know?
- OL: I think I write them or somebody else or some other Romanian guy go out from prison in that city, and I tell him to go over there or there and tell him something like that.
- JF: Now where were your parents during all of this time? Still in the same place?
- OL: In the same place, in Bacau.
- JF: They were, was that a ghett-, did that become a ghetto? Or...

OL: A ghetto, a ghetto.
JF: And they were in the ghetto...
OL: In the ghetto.
JF: For the duration of the war?
OL: For the duration of the war. With the...
JF: With the armband?
OL: Yeah. And my father, he worked for the Germans, also, for the Germans in Bacau. We got lucky, they got lucky they don't took them nowhere.
JF: So he was doing a job, in the ghetto...
OL: In the ghetto for, yeah, but, out of the ghetto, in the German camp they did the job for the Germans.
JF: He worked outside the ghetto?
OL: Outside the ghetto.

[Tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

JF: This is tape two, side one with Mr. Ozias Lazarovici on November 8, 1981 with Josey Fisher. You had told me before that you had been able to send out some mail from some of these prisons, and there's a story involved in that.

OL: Yes, right.

JF: Could you tell me?

OL: This postcard I been in Israel in, in '76, to see the family, because the whole family migrated to Israel. And one brother of mine, he come to me. He shows, shows me the postcard. Do I remember this postcard? I said, "I don't remember nothing." And he said, "This is you, you write this postcard in '41, for the help, for help to the family." And I, he give it to me. I put it away and I bring it here and I show it to my wife and said, "I did this postcard while I been in prison." This postcard, in the prison this postcard.

JF: What did you say in the postcard?

OL: I say how I feel, or what I do, but I can't tell nothing else. I tell them to help me with money if they can or whether with food, with cigarettes are special too, because with cigarettes I buy bread from the other people what they don't eat, and only smoke.

JF: Sure.

OL: My, anything in order to help. I'll maybe translate for one day.

JF: Okay. Were you ever able to receive any packages from your family during those years?

OL: Yeah, I did. I did. I did. I don't know how, but I did.

JF: Many times?

OL: Not too many times. No. Was special cigarettes.

JF: The cigarettes were the most valuable thing to have.

OL: For me, not to smoke myself...

JF: To trade.

OL: But just to exchange, to trade for bread, because the other people they want a cigarette, they want no bread. And this is the reason I survived.

JF: So you fairly much knew that your family was still in this town.

OL: Yeah.

JF: Were you also getting any information about how the war was going, or what was happening...

OL: Yes. Yes.

JF: ...in other parts?

OL: The lately, lately in this last prison we got only permission what we need. I don't know how they come in. I don't know. I think they got, been there about six political prisoners or eight Jewish political. Politicals, I mean Communist. And they'd been there also. And they tell us, "Don't worry. The Russian they are close here and we know and we see." But the one in the, the last three weeks, we hear the fire from the Russian and from the German close to the prison. They fight not far away from here, with the tanks and everything else. And one week before the Russians come in in this prison, one was the whole prison ran away

because the bombs, after the American they miss the bombs after that the Russian they start to let bombs in the airfield to finish the airfield. And the, a lot of bombs they fell in the prison. And we ran away because we are afraid to don't die there. And we stay in a...

JF: How many of you were running away?

OL: The whole prison ran away this time.

JF: How many men are you talking about?

OL: Maybe, maybe about 1,000.

JF: Mmm.

OL: Yeah, but I ran away with couple Jews. And we go in a, we did go in a garden and we stay in the trench for one week.

JF: You went where?

OL: We went in a, how you call, to protect ourself from, eh...

JF: A trench?

OL: Trench, yeah.

JF: A military trench?

OL: Military trench, yeah. Was empty over there. We stay over there till some, till we hear a, I don't know what they hear or whether we realize is the Russians they are already in town. Once the Russians had been in town, then we, we, eh, we come out.

JF: And this, was this the name of the town? Galati?

OL: Galati.

JF: That was also the name of the town.

OL: The name of the town.

JF: So, at that point, you went into the town where the Russians had already occupied.

OL: Yeah, but we didn't know exactly when the Russians they occupied the town, but we still waited one week to make sure that it's not Germans and no more Romanian there to get us again, to, to put there. And after we see we, some, I think a friend of mine, he walk out and [unclear]. He see Russian tanks. So he told me, "Zigazi [phonetic], the Russian tanks is around here!" Then, we embrace each other. We, we don't know what to do anymore, just [unclear] this, this was almost three-and-a-half years since all that, I passed through this whole thing in my life.

JF: What happened when you went to Galati? When the Russians were there?

OL: When the Russian directed what has happened. I want to see my family. Not far from this town I got some uncle and an aunt, about, maybe about, with the train about four, five hours. But no trains this time. When I see a column from tanks, from Russian tanks go to the main, main highway, go, go to direction Germany direction...

JF: Right.

OL: And I make them like that and I stop them and I, and I, I didn't, I didn't know how to go, to go home, because no way to go. No trains, the trains there, doesn't work and the cars, nobody-- when I see I look to a man over there I see the, with a, like a colonel or like a big officer in the army, the Russian army. I look at him, he must be Jewish. And I go close to him with the soldiers, the Russians, they don't let me go close to him to, even though I wanted-- I did know a couple words in Russian. I said, "I want to speak to the Commandant." The

Commandant, I don't make no mistake. He is, he's been Jewish. He was Jewish. And I speak to him in Jewish. But he wants to test me to see if I'm Jewish. He put me to read some, to speak in Jewish and to, if I can't read a couple words from the, from the Jewish, eh, you know. And I tell him everything what I know in Jewish. And then he say, "Where you want to go?" He's ask me in Jewish. "You know we can't go. That's a military, eh, you can't, we can't put you here. We have to fight the Germans." "But, but put me in the, anyplace." And then he take the courage-- I don't know maybe courage, because he is a, he put me in a, in his tank. And we go, I don't know how far. We go so far with the column of tanks, and I don't have no shoes. I got two shoes. One, the both shoes was the left side. I didn't have no shoes.

JF: You were wearing them like this?

OL: No, I, after I threw them out. I can't leave them, but, I think I got in prison I find some shoes on the streets, I put them, I didn't know. I don't have no shoes. And he say about, we, we, he, they drive couple hours. And after this he say, he come to me and says, "You have to go out. You have to go." I said, "Why?" "Because over there, you see the, all of the mountain over there? It's the German. I got to fight them."

JF: Mmm.

OL: Then I don't have no choice. I go, what I go, I go, I go. And what I find? I find a horse! I find a horse! How, how I going to go this, to see the aunt and mine uncle, because they don't have no children. And I, I'm sure, I was sure they are alive. If I go there I going be, have a little help.

JF: Why were you sure they were alive?

OL: I was, I don't know. I was...

JF: You just had a feeling?

OL: I got a feeling they are alive.

JF: Did, before you left Galati, were you there for any amount of time that you could sense how the Russians were treating the Jews?

OL: Yeah, I got...

JF: That the...

OL: Everybody wants the Russians to come to take over, because only choice, only way to be liberated only from the Russian. Because who's going liberate us? Because American is too far and the plane, American plane can't liberated you, only the troo-, if they come to, you know, they liberated really, the...

JF: They gave them food?

OL: They give them food, they give them everything, you know, the help, and the medical help and everything else. Now it's different with the Russians, but...

JF: At that time...

OL: At that time...

JF: ...it was a positive...

OL: Yeah, yeah.

JF: ... kind thing.

OL: Yeah, yeah.

JF: So now you're on the road with the horse.

OL: On the road, with a horse. But the horse was so skinny, I mean, I can, I cannot

go no more even with this horse. I leave the horse, and about four Russian soldier with two horses and a carriage, how you call? Carriage? Yeah, and I stop them. And I, they see me, they want to shoot. First they want to shoot me. And I say, I, I, I fall on my knees, "Please don't shoot me! I don't do nothing wrong!" I say, "I'm Jewish." But how can I tell them that I am Jewish? They don't know Jewish. So finally they put me in their-- because they been, late from the, their unit from front. They because I don't know, they lost. They got...

JF: They were separated from their unit?

OL: Separated from their unit, and they lost. And then one of the Russ-, I remember now, they say, "We take him. Because he speak Romanian like this we know how to find our, how to," and I go with them.

JF: You would translate for them.

OL: Translate for them. Because he told me, he stopped in Romanian houses like that, and he give me, they trust me so much they give me an automatic gun and when they sleep to, nobody to come to them and kill them. And when I sleep I sleep. If I die, then who knows? And when they...

JF: What do you mean by that?

OL: No, I mean if, I mean, if they don't take care of me, what can I do? I don't have no choice.

JF: So either you would sleep or you would die.

OL: Yeah, yeah. I don't have no choice.

JF: Okay.

OL: What can I say? Yeah, I don't mean because they want to kill me, but what they care about the, in the war, what they care about one person and they, when I see the, the highway, in July when I was being liberated, thousand of thousands of bodies were swollen. Swollen. Germans, Russians, Romanians. All, any kind. Any kind. And I walk, I go with this horses and with their carriage about four days, or five days.

JF: Were you still travelling westward?

OL: Yeah, I travel to go to see my family...

JF: Yes.

OL: My father and mother and my, no, first to see mine uncle.

JF: Yes.

OL: And they, they put me question on how would my aunt looks and how she walks she is, I remember like today all about girls, but in my mind I got something else. If I go close to the city, I leave them when I go. When they sleep I leave them and they don't find me anymore.

JF: Oh.

OL: This I did.

JF: So you ran away from...

OL: For that, I, I, my, because they want to go over there, and, to have fun.

JF: Oh, meaning what?

OL: Meaning to have sex with a, they have with sisters and brother and cousins and, eh, well, you know how [unclear] is. When I, it's true, when I come close to the city today, and I see the city, I say this is the city what I live, I got, I remember about this in mine, my

memory. When they see me, they don't believe it. They see me. They don't believe it. They know...

JF: Your aunt and your uncle...

OL: Yeah, they don't...

JF: ...were there.

OL: Yeah, they don't believe it. They hid me and they feed me and they don't know what to do any more. And the Russian, the Russian also came there in the city already, but everybody was hiding, because somewhere they look for everyone.

JF: What was the name of this town where your aunt and uncle were living?

OL: Tecuci.

JF: T-E-C-U-...

OL: Tecuci.

JF: C-I.

OL: Yeah. And they came over there about, I stayed with them about one week and they forced a little bit to eat something or to be a little bit more stronger. And after I eat I go home to look for my family. I can't describe what it, the family see me home without knowing if I come or not, because they don't know what if, if I don't come, whether I'm die, whether I'm alive, whether I'm, eh. When my father see me he didn't know, he didn't do nothing.

JF: Did he think it was you?

OL: I can't talk [tape off then on; weeping]. He raised, he prayed by the Torah because he was very religious and very good with the Torah and everything else. So he even translated it in Romanian. He prayed so badly he don't believe it.

JF: He had a Torah in your home.

OL: Yeah. He bring the Torah because he was-- from the synagogue and from the small town, he, I don't know he did it, but he said even, what has happened to, I don't care what has happened with me, I going to bring the Torah to stay with us.

JF: So he took the Torah from the little synagogue in your hometown...

OL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JF: ...to this bigger town [tape off then on].

OL: Open up the Torah and start praying. One hour praying, I don't believe it. When he's praying, and my mother can talk, see me there.

JF: Your, all of the younger brothers and sister that were in your family were still with them?

OL: They been there. I don't know how but they been there.

JF: In the same place?

OL: In the same place. In the same place there. My mother still lives. She is in Israel. 86 years old.

JF: What happened with your brother? Your older brother?

OL: My older brother, nothing happened to him. He ran away and they never caught him.

JF: Where was he then during the war?

OL: He ran in Bucharest, in the capital.

JF: And he hid in Bucharest?

OL: That's what the, whole, all the time.
JF: The entire war?
OL: The entire war.
JF: And then he came home also?
OL: He came home also.
JF: Did your parents have any idea that he was alive?
OL: He was, they know he is alive.
JF: They knew he was alive.
OL: They knew.
JF: But they had no idea that you were still alive?
OL: No, they didn't know from me nothing, or, the last two years, no.
JF: It's an unbelievable story.
OL: Exactly.
JF: Did you stay in that town?
OL: I stay in the town when I came home. Yeah, they don't go, they don't move back any more in the little town after, em, after I, no after the Russian took over, I came, I stayed home with my family. I don't know how long. And, it wasn't so easy, because, you know, a big family and it's not that, you know *parnoseh*³, *parnoseh*? It wasn't so ba-, *parnoseh* not. They, I don't know how they do it. They survived, but it wasn't so good.
JF: Now the, were the Russians occupying...
OL: Yeah.
JF: ...this town?
OL: Occupying this town, yeah.
JF: Okay, so this was, this was after the war.
OL: After the war.
JF: This was still, this part of Romania was still under Russian control.
OL: Yeah, it was hard to make a living even after when Russia together after the Russia occupied.
JF: Was your father able to have a bakery again? Or his...
OL: No, no, no. They can't have nothing on their own any more after the Russian occupied, because the Communists, they took over the city and everything else and, everything what it's private owned, you got to give it back to the party, whether to. They worked for some, for the party, whatever, for, till they give the papers for Israel and they [unclear] the paper to the city, to immigrate to Israel. And they, all of them, they immigrated to Israel.
JF: Now, how long were you there? Did all of you apply to go to Israel at the same time?
OL: They all moved there, because myself, before, before them I applied to go to Israel. I tell my mother and my father, "Look, I'm glad to see everybody alive, brothers, and everything else, but I don't want to stay in this country anymore." "Where are you going?" "I don't know where I'm going, but I don't want to stay here anymore." Then, I stayed with them about three months and I make a, some, some money. I don't know what I do it. And I

³Yiddish - livelihood

take the train and I cross the border and I cross the border Hungaria, Austria, and I, Germany, and I stop in France, in Paris.

JF: Did you have trouble doing that?

OL: No. Why, we don't need no visa this time, after the war. Everybody walked the border like a, and the, and when I came in Paris in '46, I think, yeah, I-- the police, they make us paper, new paper and everything else. And that's all.

JF: So your parents and the other brothers and sisters applied to go to Israel?

OL: Applied to go to Israel, yes.

JF: And had your brother returned home before you left?

OL: Yeah, he returned home also. Yeah.

JF: And he was also applying...

OL: Also.

JF: ...to go to Israel.

OL: Yeah, yeah.

JF: Did you have any idea where you wanted to go?

OL: I, yeah, I know. I want to go in France, in Paris.

JF: You wanted to go, France was your destination.

OL: Yes.

JF: Why did you choose France?

OL: I don't know why. I, I got some friends they all, they all say, "France." I go in France, in Paris.

JF: So you got to Paris, you got, you paid for new papers?

OL: Yes. And I been in Paris almost I'm a Frenchman already, start the war in '48, in Israel. And a manifestation of friends in Paris from the Jewish people, to help Israel to create a State. And about six of us, we registrated to go volunteer for, to fight in Israel, in '48.

JF: When you were in Paris for those couple of years, were you living with Jewish people?

OL: Yeah. No, I lived by myself. I did work.

JF: What kind of work were you doing?

OL: I, what I do, I [unclear] do. I worked for the Jewish people. I been in a clothing fir-, clothing, eh, clothing factory, not factory, yeah, factory. I work, do these things, and, to build...

JF: Making clo-, shirts, and clothes?

OL: Making clothes, yeah, shirts. But never I, it wasn't mine profession, because they don't give me a chance and, they don't give me a lot of chance in Romania to learn a profession. And I survived in Paris, wasn't so bad.

JF: Now in the meantime, had your parents and family, the rest of your family, gone to Israel?

OL: Yes. They, no, they came in Israel about in '52.

JF: So they were still in Romania at that time.

OL: In Romania till '52, waiting for the papers.

JF: So in '48, you and some friends decided to...

OL: Decided to go to...

JF: ...enlist.

OL: ...fight for Israel to enlist for Israel because I was, I been 27 years old. And nobody was younger, and they make so much advertise, the propaganda, to go Israel. I feel like Jewish, I, I mean, I been in Israel fighting, fighting the war against the Arabs.

JF: So you went.

OL: Yeah.

JF: Can you tell me about what that was like?

OL: In Israel, when I, just when I came in Israel in '48 the war was started. The war was started, was already started with the Arabs. And I came from France. Directly from the ship they took us in the barracks to train us for the fight.

JF: You fought for the Israeli army.

OL: Yeah. Yeah. The Israeli army.

JF: And what, can you tell me about that experience?

OL: Well, you fight, and I got like, I survive. I stay in Israel. I see it's very hard life, and I, I got married in Israel. In fact during the war I get married in Israel, and I, eh...

JF: Was she from Israel? Or was she...

OL: No, she was from Romania.

JF: Uh huh. Had you known her at all?

OL: No, no. I met her in Israel.

JF: Mmm hmm. You, as a soldier.

OL: As a soldier, yeah. We stay in Israel like until '52. [pause]

JF: Mmm hmm?

OL: And we decided to go, we decided to go, was so much to do in this time when Israel was very hard time in '48 and '50, '51, '52, very hard time when it's, is a war, even war it was in there, not like today.

JF: When you say a hard time, you mean with the Arabs?

OL: Hard, no, with war, to fight.

JF: With the war.

OL: To fight war. [Unclear] with the Arabs, you get used to.

JF: But you couldn't find work?

OL: I, yeah, but not really, the work like I like to do, whether to do some, it was very hard time, just, it was between '48 and '52 was very hard time in Israel. And we decide me and my wife to go to Brazil.

JF: Mmm hmm?

OL: In Brazil we live 22 years, 20 years.

JF: Why did you pick Brazil?

OL: Because I hear Brazil is a nice country, and it's true. It was a nice country, and a lovely country. And I feel sorry what I came today here.

JF: Aw. Did you have any trouble at all getting settled in Brazil?

OL: No. No.

JF: Where were you living there?

OL: We live in Porto Alegre. [pause]

JF: P-O-R-T-O...

OL: Yes.

JF: And then the second word is A-L-E-G-R-E.

OL: Porto Alegre.

JF: And what kind of work did you do there?

OL: My profession, my dream since I lived is I want to work in gold and diamonds and everything else. And since I was three years old I liked diamonds and gold and everything that I work, I work in this bra-, in this field, diamonds and gold.

JF: Mmm. Was it hard to find work in that area?

OL: No. I was in my own, I did in my own business. I did have.

JF: You traded? Or you sold?

OL: Yeah, I was, first I been a salesman for a couple years, and after I opened up my business, my wholesale business of gold and diamonds in Brazil.

JF: Did you find any difficulty being a Jew in Brazil?

OL: No. Not at all.

JF: Did you find a community of Jews...

OL: Yeah, sure.

JF: ...of European Jews...

OL: Sure.

JF: ...who had all...

OL: Yeah, yeah.

JF: ...migrated there?

OL: Yeah, yeah.

JF: You lived there for 22 years.

OL: Twenty years, 20, almost 22.

JF: Almost 22 years. Why did you leave?

OL: I have a brother in California, in Los Angeles, the bigger brother.

JF: The older brother?

OL: The older, well, older brother, yeah.

JF: Yes.

OL: And, I tell you the truth, I did, being in Brazil I got [unclear] not so good like in America. America's got much, in Brazil is good, American market has to be better. And I came in America. And here I am. I'm not even in Los Angeles, I'm here.

JF: When you were dealing with these gold and diamonds in Brazil, you were making a fairly good living?

OL: Very good, yeah. I was a rich, I've been a rich man.

JF: You were a rich man.

OL: I've been a rich man. I, I don't want to tell on this tape what has happened.

JF: But you were willing to come here because you thought that perhaps America would be better.

OL: Better.

JF: Did you go to Los Angeles first?

OL: I schlepped. I come in Los Angeles, yeah.

JF: And then?

OL: Three months I stay in Los Angeles. I come, we differed from our point of view, my, me and my brother, and my, my wife and his wife. And...

JF: So you decided to move east?

OL: We decided to move east, yeah.

JF: And, you've been here since...

OL: Since I came here, almost since I came in the United States I am here.

JF: Which was in...

OL: Eleven years.

JF: Eleven years now.

OL: Eleven years.

JF: As you look back over all of these times, especially the times when you were in the prisons and escaping, and not knowing from day to day what would happen to you...

OL: What is going happen, yeah.

JF: What do you think sustained you? What kept you going?

OL: Mine, what's keep me going was my, I have a s-, I do have a strong mind. I tell it by myself. I going do everything to tell me to survive.

JF: You were determined to survive.

OL: Determined to survive. It doesn't matter how, but I, I was determined to survive.

JF: Did you have any feeling about your family as part of the survival?

OL: Sure. I didn't know exactly what is going happen with them, but what it's, for myself, I mean, because I didn't know what is, what is going on with them, I put in my mind, no, I have to survive. I have to go through with all this, because I was sure, 100%, the Russians going win. I don't know how. I don't know why. And I don't know how. But I got in my mind this, so, I don't know, who put in my mind this, but I was, you know, the Russians going to occupy Romania, I'm going be safe.

JF: Did your religious background have any, serve any purpose during these years? Did you draw on it in any way?

OL: I don't say I'm religious but I don't say I'm not religious. I believe in God, but I, I'm really not so religious like my father was. I mean all the, all the seven brother that I have, I mean I don't have seven left, I got only five, because we are six and a sister-- they are not, no one is religious. I mean we are, we, I, we are not anti-religion. We believe in God, but not like my father was, very, very, very religious man.

JF: So your survival had more to do with your determination to survive.

OL: Yeah, I think yes.

JF: Is there anything else about these years that you want to tell us, that you can think of that we haven't touched on?

OL: This here when I, I mean between this here over there? In Romania in the time of, Hitler time? There's a lot of things I think, but I, [pause] so many things I can't remember exactly what. I remember, but...

JF: Okay.

OL: I need, I think I need, I need 24 hours to explain it, I mean, to tell somebody everything else.

JF: Okay.

OL: Some time my daughter, my daughter asks me things, “What has happened to you in the war?” She’s 14. “What has happened to you there, and how would, like, like a saga?” Yes?

JF: No, no, keep going.

OL: Well, she ask me, I tell her this and this and this and she see I don’t want to tell her too much, she don’t ask me anymore.

JF: Did you tell your children about your experiences from the time they were little?

OL: Yeah, they know.

JF: They know.

OL: They know.

JF: Thank you very much for talking to us today.

OL: My pleasure. [tape off then on]

JF: This is some additional information given by Mr. Lazarovici after the conclusion of our taping. First of all, his leg was broken after being beaten by guards when he was kept in the synagogue in Bacau, referred to in the early part of the tape. Secondly, when he was in the various prisons in Romania, the Romanian non-Jewish prisoners supplied him with books to read, so that he was able to study during those years. These books were given to the Romanian prisoners, but not to the Jewish prisoners. Thirdly, the Torah that he refers to, that his father had taken from their hometown in Caiut, C-A-I-U-T, was dedicated to a synagogue in a moshav in Israel. It was approximately 250 years old, and had always been in the synagogue in his native town. [tape off]

[Tape two, side one ended. Interview ended.]