HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

MAX MANTELMACHER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Nora Levin
Date: September 26, 1983

Holocaust Oral History Archive
Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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MM- Max Mantelmacher [interviewee]
LM - Leo Mantelmacher [brother]
UI - Unidentified individual[1]
NL - Nora Levin [interviewer]
Date: September 26, 1983

Tape one, side one:

NL: This is September 26, 1983. Nora Levin interviewing Mr. Max Mantelmacher. This is tape one, side one. Now, Mr. Mantelmacher, in view of the fact that we heard in some detail about your parents[2] and your life in Kozienice[3], suppose we start with your own schooling, did you go to the same *cheder* as Leo?

MM: Well, I wouldn't say to the same *cheder* but I went to *cheder* to different Rabbis over there. We used to call them Rabbis, you know.

NL: Private instruction?

MM: Private instructions.

NL: And for how long?

MM: For how long? Until I was 12, something like that.

NL: And did you also go to the public school?

MM: Public school, yeah.

NL: And you experienced the same problems as your brother…

MM: …the same problems, probably even more, we fought, you know, the [unclear] you know.

UI: The *payes* [unclear].

MM: No, no, I didn't have. I, I didn't have *payes*[4] like my brother. Somehow I didn't want to let grow them.

NL: Mmm hmm. But you were also abused and attacked?

MM: Very much so, very much so, yeah.

NL: And did you fight back?

MM: Yes, I was more a fighter than him.

NL: Mmm hmm. You fought back.

MM: Yes, I fought back.

NL: And in particular your brother…

MM: Yes, I was not scared from them.

NL: And how long did you stay in public school?

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[1]This is possibly his brother Leo's wife, who also appears in Leo's interview of the same date.
[2]See interview of Leo Mantelmacher.
[3] Kozienice [Polish], Kozhenitz [Yiddish], a town in the region of Radom, Jewish population was 3,764 (in 1897. (www.jewishgen.org)
[4] Sidelocks

MM: About six years.

NL: Six years, and were you also apprenticed as a tailor or did you have a different trade?

MM: Well, I did learn, you see, my father was a tailor, my brother was a tailor so naturally when I was eight, nine, ten, I start to learn to help out a little bit, yeah.

NL: And were you able to work at this trade after school or did the war catch up with you?

MM: Well, I was able until the [unclear] I sat already, I went for one year apprenticeship, that was after my father died so my mother sent me in to a place, to like a tailor, you know, and I worked over there for a year and he said he was going to give me 50 *zlotys* and he was going to teach me how to, not to be a good tailor but I wouldn't be able to make a pair of pants, which I did. I did work over there for a year.

NL: This would be '39?

MM: Until '39, yeah, and I worked over there for a year and after the year, you know it was not like a year from January to January; it was from Succoth to Succoth or from Pesach to Pesach. That's the way we figured the year. I'm sure you know about it. And after I finished the year over there, so the, the owner he gave me the 50 *zlotys*, I brought home to my mother. I was a young kid, I was only 12, not even 13 and my mother was very happy and after he said he wants to keep me that I should work for him, so they did argue about the money you know how much I should get a week. My mother was asking 6 *zlotys* a week and he wanted to give me 5, so that's the real truth, you know. Yes, it's true.

NL: Yes, it was a big difference.

MM: It was a big different, you know, and he didn't want to give more than 5, so I went to another place. That was shortly before the war already and I worked for 1 *zloty* a day. We had to work six days a week and so I made 6 *zlotys* a week until the war broke out.

NL: And you were drafted-- you were not drafted into the labor brigade?

MM: No, I was too young.

NL: You were too young and so what was your first experience with the Germans?

MM: My first experience was the same. That Friday we ran away, we knew the Germans are coming and we ran from the town Kozienice that I wrote you down over there. It was like a small, a farmer's village, you know, but it was on the side of the main road, you know, and I remember my mother used to say in the First World War they used to hide in the same place because it was far away from the main road.

NL: I see.

MM: So the war was not going on over there. It was woods you know. So and after we stayed over there until we came home, like my brother said, and after like you

said they took in all the men, you know, Poles and Jews didn't make a difference and they took them to the Dorf Place, you know that the church was…

NL: The church.

MM: Yeah. And I was a child I was a fool that time you know I saw they took all the men I figure I'm a man too [unclear], I didn't know, so I wanted to be-- my sister said, "He's so young don't take him." So they didn't take me. I was so big like I am now.

UI: Where did you stay when they came in, when they came in with all the Jews from [unclear]?

MM: No, that comes later. That comes later.

NL: All right, so then you then began to identify yourself as Leo?

MM: Yes, after it came out to *Judenrat*, you know what's mean *Judenrat*?

NL: Yes.

MM: That everyone has to go to work two days a week or four days a week, but in his case was only two days and my brother-in.-law David he had to go two days too so I went to work for him two days and I went to work for my brother-in-law, but for my brother-in-law I worked under his name and they didn't bother me, but under him I was Leo.

NL: You were Leo.

MM: I was Leo, all kinds of work you name it I did it.

NL: And how did you-- you got food through Leo?

MM: Yes, because he was…

NL: …he was trading with the *Volksdeutsche*.

MM: …the provider. Yeah, yeah, yeah, he was providing.

NL: How long were you able to do that, Mr. Mantelmacher?

MM: I was able to do that until 1941, if I am not mistaken.

NL: And then what happened?

MM: Then I received a note from the *Judenrat* that I should report to them, you know the Jewish *Gemeinde*, they called it whatever. And I went over there and they told me they're gonna send me away to a forced labor camp. So and I went over there and they told me go back home and get whatever you can, you know, and that was about 18 kilometers from our town, a town they called it Yellnya[5] [phonetic].

NL: Yellnya.

MM: Yellnya. So they-- I took along whatever I could, you know…

NL: How many other men or boys went with you…?

MM: 52 boys.

NL: 52 boys.

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[5]Yellnya [phonetic], possibly Jeleniów a town located at 51°45' N 21°15' E which is 28.6 km NW of his home town.

MM: 52 boys. I would say me and maybe another guy we were the youngest from all of them. So we came over to this camp, so we worked for a certain [unclear]. I don't remember what I had for breakfast, but 50 years ago I do remember that German term.

NL: A German company?

MM: Yeah, a German company.

NL: And what did they make?

MM: We worked very hard. They were Hoch & Tiefbau and like I said they build skyscrapers and they build [unclear] but we did over there we cut out wood and there was a wood and we digged out those roots and we supposed to build a roof. So we had a limit [quota], every one of us, was two guys, you know, two to each and you know we had to cut down three, four trees a day and we had to cut out the roots, you know, and after straighten it out. It was very hard work, 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, very hard and the work had to be done.

NL: Did you get some food rations?

MM: Yes, we did get a certain amount of food. It was not much. It was about 250 grams bread a day, like a half a pound of bread and a little bit of soup and with this we had to work 12 hours a day.

NL: How did the German overseers treat you?

MM: Very badly, very badly, beating left and right, even if we had a limit to do but even so it was not enough for them, even I did the limit but still the beatings was going on.

NL: You were beaten yourself?

MM: Yes, we had an *Obershachtmeister* they called it, like a foreman, his name was Emil Kladita. He was from *Oberschlesien*[6], he spoke a little bit Polish, you know. He was a very bad person. He didn't kill, none of us, but he was beating us left and right, you know, whenever he could.

NL: Were there any Germans who treated you and the other men half humanely?

MM: In that place, no, we didn't have too many Germans around us, there was only about two or three. That time was not that we had to be under the SS that was still under forced labor.

NL: Were there Polish overseers?

MM: No, was nobody; we had two or three Germans in all the [unclear].

NL: You were a small unit?

MM: A small unit, about 52 boys from my town Kozienice.

NL: And how long did you stay there, Mr. Mantelmacher?

MM: I stayed over there, they took us before Pesach and I stayed over there, I can't-- the date I can't recall exactly, but something until around July, August.

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[6]*Oberschlesien* – Upper Silesia.

NL: Of ‘42?

MM: Ye-- of ‘41.

NL: Forty-one.

MM: Forty-one, yeah ’41.

NL: And then…

MM: And then over there somehow the-- you know this particular company moved away from this particular place and they sent us away to a town, they didn’t send us we had to walk, we had to walk was around, from Yellnya [phonetic] to Radom was about 18 kilometers and then from there, we had to walk about 50 kilometers by the name Kruszyna was the place?

NL: Kruszyna.

MM: Kruszyna, yeah.

NL: This is still in Poland?

MM: This is still in Poland. It was only about 60 kilometers from Kozienice, from my town. So the same 52 boys, we came over there, we walked I think about two days whatever, and over there was very hard work. Over there we had to build a railroad. It was a lot of mountains, you know, and we had to dig you know and we had to work very hard, very hard, same thing seven days a week, twelve hours a day.

NL: Again, under German overseers?

MM: Under German overseers.

NL: And the treatment there?

MM: And the treatment very bad, very bad. We had to go to work we lived in a camp six or seven kilometers away and we had to walk every morning over there. And over there we had to stay from six to six, 12 hours a day.

NL: Again, little food?

MM: Little food, the same, you know sometimes less, sometimes more, 200 grams or 225 grams and a little bit of almost like water, that’s about all.

NL: Did you have any contact with any Poles in the immediate vicinity?

MM: Yes, yes, over there, you see, you could if you had money, Polish *zloty*, you know, you could buy bread, you could buy if you had the money, but contact to talk something about what’s going on or something like that…

NL: Did you have any money to exchange?

MM: I didn’t have no money, but that time my brother, my mother was still home and I-- they did send me once in a while a few packages.

NL: And you could get them?

MM: Yeah through a Polish guy. You remember that, Leo?

LM: Yeah, [unclear].

UI: They smuggled…

MM: They smuggled it…

NL: …smuggled it in, I see, so your family knew where you were of course.

MM: Yes, ma'am, yeah, yeah.

NL: And how long did you stay at Kruszyna?

MM: At Kruszyna I stayed, that was '42, until December 1942.

NL: So you were there quite a long time?

MM: Yeah, 1942, and once we were working you know we used to build the railroad, it came a German policeman, like a *gendarme* you call it, and he said, "*Alles, was der Firma gehoert mitnehmen,"* everything that belongs to the company we should take along with us and we did and we marched over there to the place where they had the headquarters, just a little booth that they called the headquarters and we put away the shovel, that was everything we had the shovel and a pick, you know whatever and we brought it over, over there. So we had the you know-- those German bosses even they were bad to us, you know, but some of them they knew already what's going to happen to us and he said the people from Kozienice was 52, and he told them they were very good workers and the police, you know the *gendarme* told them that *viele von Ihnen* [unclear] a lot from them, you know, are going to be…

NL: Killed.

MM: …killed just like that and we heard it. We heard it. So after they left everything over there and we marched in in the camp where we used to live. When we came in to the camp…

NL: Which-- Yellnya [phonetic]?

MM: No, Kruszyna.

NL: Oh, I see, you went back to Kruszyna**.**

MM: Yeah, that's right. That was Kruszyna, everything was Kruszyna but we worked 6 kilometers away.

NL: I understand.

MM: And over there I had my two sisters, Sara and Gittla, you know they came…

LM: Explain how it happened they came to the…

MM: Yeah. When, you know when they were in ghetto in Kozie--, I have to go back. When they were in ghetto in Kozienice it was everything was a whole confusion so once came a truck…

LM: May I interrupt?

MM: Yes, go ahead.

LM: At the end of the ghetto when they were sent they were trying to send the Jews to Treblinka, the leaders, the *Judenführer* they knew what's happening…

NL: They knew what Treblinka was.

LM: Yes, and they knew what's going to happen to the Jews and everything was chaotic so some firms, German firms they needed workers they came with trucks and…

NL: Took the younger…

LM: …yeah, my sisters, yeah my sisters knew if you go on the train you go to death. If you go to a camp you still have a chance to survive. So they went and a truck came from that firm, Max's work.

MM: I didn't know nothing about it. I was not there.

LM: He did not know.

NL: You didn't know what Treblinka meant.

LM: And then they came home from work and he saw my sisters. Now take it from there.

MM: When I came home from work and I saw my sisters over there I started to cry because it was already bad camp, we were beaten left and right and I know what do, you know, those girls are going to do over there? So anyway, somehow they did stay and they worked and…

NL: They worked?

MM: Yeah, they worked the same hard work and all with the shovel and the pick whatever you know so that's what happened in December like I said before you know this German policeman he came he say everything that belongs to the firm to take along that was left over there and we marched to the camp, the barracks where we lived. When we came to the barracks over there we saw already a lot of Jewish people. Everybody was laying down with the heads so we didn't know if they are dead or not. Was a big place, a huge place, and that time they started beating, they start you know shooting left and right. So they kept us over there maybe a day, not a full day. It was around four or five o'clock and they told us everybody to get up who could and who couldn't they killed them right on the spot and they told us to march. That time we had, you know, the guards with us, was a few German *gendarmes* and we had from French Morocco, Arabs, black hats with S.S.

NL: Oh, that was Waffen S.S.!

MM: Waffen SS but they were not Germans. They couldn't speak even a good German.

NL: Arabs.

MM: Arabs and they brought us in a camp that used to be a Russian camp.

NL: Do you know the name?

MM: Well, no, I don't know the name.

NL: But in Poland?

MM: In Poland was close to Kruszyna about 10 or 12 kilometers. If I would know the name-- no, I don't know the name and soon as we marched in in this camp we saw some *Polaks* with shovels and they were waiting for us. I was young but I had my eyes somehow open and I knew everything you know like I would predict everything and I told to my sisters, "See here are our gravediggers," and [unclear]. They were digging for somebody graves. And they kept us over there overnight and a whole day the next day after the German *gendarmes* they came and they selected. They took us out in the

yard and they say everybody who have been a Jewish policeman should step out. So they did step out, they were thinking maybe they're going to give them something better…

NL: Privileges.

MM: Privileges, but he took them out and he start to shoot them, he start to kill them a little bit further away.

NL: So you could see.

MM: Yeah, some they jumped on them and a few escaped so he saw that he wouldn't be able to handle by himself, he brought them back whichever he killed he killed and the rest he brought them in. In this particular camp we have been about 750 people.

NL: Your sisters were separated?

MM: No, together with me, together with me. So they squeeze us in in a few barracks and the next day he called up Radom and he called, you know, he came one Nazi and the rest Ukraines [Ukrainians], not Germans, Ukraines, black uniforms, with SS on it and that time and they brought two trucks along. They brought two trucks along and they start to count, he's standing by the door over here they count 10, *bzht* [makes sound] machine guns. They killed 10. Ten of the truck. And the head of the one German-- from another company, not from mine company that I worked for-- but he came in every time when he saw you know. He knew which 10 they're going to be killed and which one they're not going to be killed and so he told his Jews that used to work for him wait until you gonna. So I noticed those things and I told my sister we have to watch him. So anyway, we had been 750 people over there and they brought only two trucks, how many can they put on two trucks? 100 people or 80 people? So anyway, I was lucky I came out so my 10 was not killed. A 10 before me, they count out 10, machine gunned. So mine 10…

NL: After you?

MM: After me the same thing. After mine two sisters they came out they did not believe that I am alive. So I was on the truck so they saw a few friends of mine, so they say, "Is Moshe alive?" So I was in the back of the truck they pushed me over there so I had to show them my head that I am alive. Anyway, I kept whatever you know and right away those *Polaks* as they were standing the gravediggers and they you know put in all my friends, you know they pulling them out to the grave.

UI: I thought the Ukrainians did.

MM: They was the shooters, only the Ukraines.

NL: Only the Ukrainians?

MM: Not the Germans.

NL: Ukrainian SS.

MM: SS. Only the Ukrainians. So anyway, they unloaded-- they filled up the two trucks. And the Ukrainians they were sitting a few in the back of the truck they ask whatever in Russian they didn't speak German, "Have you got money? Give me money,

give me that give me that." And the rest that were left in the barracks, what they couldn't get in, what they killed they killed already and a lot of them were left in the barracks but they couldn't get out so they killed them in the barracks.

NL: Only two trucks?

MM: Only two trucks. I wouldn't know exactly how many. We came in to a town by the name Szydlowiec.

NL: Can you spell that? I'll ask you to write it down. Yes, you wanted to speak about the sisters.

LM: My sisters, those who went to my brother Max, it was not easy to go to a camp that time. You had to beg and bribe and do anything to get them on a truck to go to a camp in order to survive, so they begged and fought and somehow one got on this and the second one really couldn't get on but finally they both go on, on the truck. And when they were there on the truck like, it seemed like they would go to in paradise which was when they came in there it was another hell.

UI: It gave them a chance to live.

NL: But it gave them a chance to live.

LM: It gave them a chance to survive.

NL: Now, when you say they begged to get on the truck you mean from Kozienice?

LM: Yes.

NL: From Kozienice. All right.

MM: If they wouldn't come over there they wouldn't be alive.

NL: They wouldn't be alive.

MM: No.

NL: Now, what happened to the sisters? You went to Szydlo--?

MM: Szydlowiec, we all went, all three of us…

NL: …all three, I see….

MM: …but they were in another truck and we came over there like wild. You know, we came in--it was like a ghetto, a open ghetto. You know the Germans they hung up you know signs that wherever a Jew is, he could come in over there in the ghetto that's free and nothing would happen to him.

LM: May I interrupt?

MM: Yeah.

LM: When the Germans had cleaned up almost all of Poland, there were some Jews left hiding in the forests and by farmers and things like that so they put up in the newspapers notices and on the walls in the villages that from now on every Jew that survived they're not going to do anything wrong to them. They created five ghettos in

the General Government[7] of Poland and those five ghettos they're going to stay until the war ends.

NL: Do you remember the names of those ghettos?

LM: Szydlowiec is one and the rest of them, I don't…

NL: Five.

MM: I remember, I remember.

UI: …Constervola [phonetic].

NL: Again.

UI: Constervola.

NL: Constervola.

MM: I remember Novaradomsk…

NL: Novaradomsk.

MM: Not Radom, Novaradomsk.

NL: Yes, and was this sincere or was it just…?

UI: No!

LM: No, no.

NL: Again a deception.

LM: A trick yeah, a trick.

UI: They tricked the people.

NL: The same as usual. All right. So now what happened to you…

MM: …so when I came in…

NL: …in this labor camp?

MM: It was not a labor camp, it was a ghetto. It wasn't a ghetto because there was no houses at all. It was a place where they used to make leather. It was nothing over there. It was cold; it was by the end of December. It was very cold that time in Poland. We didn't have where to sleep and nothing, forget about food, you know. So when I came in I found a lot of people from my town and I told them what it went on in Kruszyna and my sister told and they did not believe that that could happen you know? For they killed all my friends, you know. From 750 people they, they brought just a little bit from the two trucks they brought of them. So even themselves they did not believe. But I saw that particular time Kruszyna, that little ghetto that this is a death camp, I mean just like that just we have to wait now until…

NL: …the end.

MM: not until the end. Finally, it came once a truck from a camp by the name Skarzysko. I'm sure you heard about Skarzysko?

NL: Yes.

MM: Yeah.

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[7]General Government – also *Generalgouvernement* - that part of German-occupied Poland not directly annexed to Germany, attached to German East Prussia, or incorporated into the German-occupied Soviet Union.

UI: [unclear].

MM: I'm telling you the way it was; exactly I go part by part.

NL: Excellent.

MM: So it came a truck from Skarzysko and he was looking for men, for mechanics, carpenters, roofers…

NL: A Pole or German?

MM: A German, a big Nazi by the name Imflink. He was a murderer in Skarzysko but I didn't know to ask. We came over and we talked with him you know and he was friendly you know because he came for people. He came and it came a Jewish policeman with him. And my two sisters they went over to him and they said we have a sister in Skarzysko and we would like to go over there. We are young and we want to work and the Jewish policeman said, "No, no, we don't need, you know we need only mechanics, toolmakers or carpenters." Finally they couldn't get so many toolmakers whatever, they took anybody what they could. So that was an ammunition factory so my two sisters went over there.

NL: And you with them?

MM: No, I didn't want to go. I wanted to join the partisans.

NL: I see. You heard about some groups?

MM: Yes, yes, I did heard about groups.

NL: Jewish groups?

MM: Not Jewish groups.

NL: Polish groups?

MM: Polish groups. I want to join, somehow I had been a…

NL: To gain vengeance.

MM: That's right.

LM: Fighting.

MM: Fight, yeah.

NL: How did you hear about the Polish partisans?

MM: Well, yeah, we heard about it, we heard about you know between-- I don't know, I cannot recall exactly but…

NL: But you knew they existed.

MM: Yes, yes.

NL: And they were anti-Nazi?

MM: That's right, anti-Nazi and maybe anti-Jews too.

NL: Oh, yes, that's the next question. So there were woods, forests or swamps in this area where they fought?

MM: Swamps, forests, woods in this area a lot. And my brother Leo he happened to be in a camp about 35 or 40 kilometers away Wolanów they called it, so I got in touch with him through a boy, a Jewish boy, he was as an Aryan, as a Christian you know and he used to get our letters back and forth…

NL: A courier.

MM: Yeah, a courier, and my sisters in the meantime they went away over there and naturally cried they're going to leave a 17 year old boy alone.

NL: Seventeen?

MM: Yeah, that's about, I was a young boy, you know 17, might be 18 at that time and-- but I was the fighting type, so and they went to Skarzysko and that's the last time when I saw them and I got in touch with them. We said, and I said…

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

NL: This is a continuation of our interview with Mr. Max Mantelmacher, tape one, side two. Yes, please tell me all you can about the Polish partisans.

MM: Well, it's not much, anyway, we got in touch with them, but they…

NL: How did you get in touch with them?

MM: Somehow they were not-- it was woods not too far away from this ghetto Szydlowiec but they would not-- it was some courier you know they, they went back and forth and they would not-- they said, "If you people-- if you boys would have some guns we could--" so they turned us away. So they turned us away. So we came back…

NL: There were others with you?

MM: Yeah, yeah.

NL: Who wanted to join?

MM: Yeah, quite a few guys were with with us. We were young and [unclear] and I got in touch with my brother that time and I say, "No, I don't have no choice I have to run away from that town of Szydlowiec," because I had the smell this is death. So-- because after, after the experience in Kruszyna when they killed all of them in front of my eyes I said, "No, this is it." So I got in touch with my brother and he said, "Moish, only one thing what I worry about, how you gonna get to me?" And that was very bad because you couldn't see the same thing when you look outside you see a line you call the police right away.

LM: At that time.

NL: [to LM] You want to tape it?

LM: Yes. At that time a Jew was outlawed except in a labor camp or in a concentration camp, there was no ghettos any more. A Jew was outlawed altogether and for a Jew walking from one village to another was a purely death sentence without a trial.

NL: The Poles were being paid?

LM: The Poles they got a bottle of-- a liter of vodka for delivering every Jew.

MM: So I got in touch with him and his worry was only how you gonna reach me and he was in a camp too under barbed wire. Finally, they take along, the Ukrains came you know and they…

NL: Surrounded.

MM: …surrounded, you know, and they took the people to the train, but I got out before.

NL: They were taking Jews to Treblinka?

MM: That time, yeah, so I got out and a few other boys…

NL: How? You just…

MM: We got out early in the morning about four o'clock, I remember exactly. Even my brother asked me, when-- "How did you get out yesterday?" I do, I don't know exactly-- I can't remember exactly how I did.

NL: But you escaped?

MM: I escaped, I escaped--

UI: It was from a ghetto.

NL: Not this was from…

MM: It was a ghetto, it was a ghetto, an open ghetto, what they called it and we started-- it was four of us, four boys from my town.

NL: And you escaped in '43?

MM: That was already '43, Leo? The late '42, the beginning of '43, beginning of '43 yeah, because in December from Kruszyna I would say by the end of '43.

NL: Bitter cold?

MM: Bitter, bitter cold, bitter cold, you know that's unbelievable.

NL: You had no warm clothing, nothing?

MM: No, no, anyway, we marched through fields, through woods through--. We were lucky that time you know that the rivers were frozen so…

NL: You walked across.

MM: We walked across. We didn't know where his camp is located. There was friends of mine, one had a brother, he was a policeman in the camp where he was and two other ones was-- and one had a brother Babush and one little boy, not like my age, he was short, he didn't have anybody. Finally, we reached the camp over there.

NL: By luck?

MM: Not by luck. I would say by luck.

LM: Sheer luck.

MM: Sheer luck.

NL: But you didn't even know in which direction?

MM: No.

LM: You were not allowed to ask somebody.

NL: How long did it take to make this terrible trip?

MM: I can't-- I think we made it in one day.

NL: I see.

MM: We made it because we left four o'clock early in the morning and we came to the camp over there and so we knew already approximately, we were close to the camp we saw somebody with a hat you know like a soldier he's coming to the front of us so it happened to be it was a Jewish policeman. So he went in the town [unclear] whatever so we did ask-- no matter how bad they were, but still is a Jew. So we did ask. He said, "Boys, you go straight over there, there's a hole, a piece of barbed wire is ripped open and you're gonna crawl in over that." We did came to the camp.

NL: And you met Leo?

MM: And I met Leo at that time. So I met Leo and they wouldn't register me. He used to get 3 kilo bread for ten days. It was probably-- about 300 grams…

LM: Starvation, but you could live…

NL: You could live…

MM: Yeah, and I didn't get anything and we had to share…

NL: This miserable ration…

MM: This miserable ration for both of us.

NL: Where did you live?

MM: We lived in a barrack, people the most from our town, from Kozienice, was a big barrack and he had like a bridge made from wood, we didn't have what to cover us up. He had a long, blue coat I remember so we lay down. I put my two feet in one sleeve and he put his-- the other two feet in the other sleeve and the lice, excuse me, were so big. It was so unbelievable and I did go to work with him.

NL: And you did heavy work there too?

LM: Sometimes.

MM: Yeah, sometimes, it was not, the work was not too bad.

NL: But again with German overseers?

MM: With German overseers and *Polaks*, any kind by cement buildings, you know, you name it.

NL: And did you have any problem because you weren't legitimately registered there or did the Jewish police…?

MM: The Jewish police they knew. They knew, they knew. Once in a while I stood in the line by the kitchen because I had some woman from my town that they know me. They knew me and I stayed in the line to get some little bit soup so I used to get once in a while and one time I got a beating for that.

LM: A friend of mine.

MM: My brother had a friend, a Jewish policeman. Was a good friend of his and he knew that I ran away from Szydlowiec from the, from the ghetto not to go to Treblinka so he beat me up. He said you don't belong over here and you don't belong to stay in the line over here you know to be for the little bit of soup so that was the time…

LM: [unclear]

MM: Oh yeah.

NL: Can you spell the name of this camp? It ends with a "v"?

MM: It's a "w" by the way.

NL: It's a "w."

LM: Wolanów.

NL: You were there, Leo.

LM: By the way, I want to explain what Wolanów was. It was created for a Russian prisoner of war camp. And they had about 7,000 Russian prisoners of war over there. They started working over there to building barracks for the German *Luftwaffe*, for the Air Force. In the meantime, they didn't feed them so they died out of starvation and those who didn't die they were shot. And when we came-- when I came into that camp before-- my brother came a lot later-- we found two big mass graves…

NL: Mmm. Of Russians.

LM: Very large of Russians killed. And when we came to the barracks, the barracks weren't cleaned yet and we found Russian uniforms, Russian buttons, some even found gold pieces hidden in the bunks over there.

NL: Oh my. But you didn't have any contact with the Russians?

LM: When we came they were gone. They were only buried in that mass grave.

NL: So you were able to survive in Wolanów?

MM: Yes, in Wolanów. One day I went you know to the garbage can and I picked up some rotten potatoes, some peel, and I cooked one time a few peels, rotten ones. Second time he went to organize something, you know. We called it organizing.

NL: Organizing. And you saw each other?

MM: Yeah. I had to cover his long blue coat that I put the two feet in one sleeve and this was the real truth. I'll never forget it. We didn't have no water over there at all.

NL: No water.

MM: No water at all. They brought in if they need some water they brought in for the kitchen in a big barrel with a horse, of water. There was no water in the camp at all. I was surprised, I hadn't been in a lot of camps, but in that particular camp was no water at all.

NL: Were there selections from this camp to, to Treblinka?

LM: They killed them.

NL: Executed.

MM: They killed them in front of us. And I was with my brother over there from January until May…

LM: May I interrupt?

MM: Yeah.

LM: You forgot to tell the story when they liquidated the ghetto in Kozienice you went to your, to our brother…

MM: Wait, it's later, hold it, it's coming.

NL: Okay, go back.

MM: I want to go back. I was in Kruszyna and when they send you know, when they cleaned up you know they made *Judenrein*, you know they cleaned up all the Jews, and a few Jews were left…

LM: …in Kozienice.

MM: In Kozienice and I was at that time in Kruszyna with my sister and my brother-in-law, David Goodman, he was left alone because he was a shoemaker and the *gendarmes* they let him stay. So I somehow I got in touch with him through a *Polak* and I went, I borrowed a bike over there by a German. I knew I won't pay him, he knew that and I am going-- and I went over it was about 36 or 40 kilometers, me and another friend.

The other friend of mine he had a brother over there. We came in the ghetto was only about 50 Jews left in the whole town. They left those Jews, you know, to clean out the city. They sent out everybody to clean out, so I came out over there Saturday and I wanted to go back, I went back Sunday night and I took all kinds of stuff. My brother-in-law he gave it, it was very good shirts and shoes for me and for my sister there and as soon as we left the ghetto, was no more ghetto was open because the ghetto was destroyed and there was no more Jews except the 50, one *gendarme* by the name Sommer, he used to kill every day. He used to kill a Jew…

LM: …for breakfast…

MM: If not he couldn't eat breakfast. He was an Austrian, he was from Austria. So he caught us, we went by bikes at night both of us, my friend and I and he said, "Halt!" It was about ten o'clock at night, it was a Sunday night and he didn't know who, you know-- he saw people riding the bikes, it was against the law so he stopped them, but soon he stopped us he saw that we are Jews and he didn't ask us questions. And the same day he killed a fellow by the name Beyer Kreitzberg, this was the same morning, and I [unclear] riding with my friend.

LM: [unclear]

MM: Yeah. And we had a German foreman, he was drunk he didn't know nothing what to say. Anyway, he left us and we-- I told to my friend, "Dudek," his name was David, I said, "Remember one thing he's gonna kill us." He was a short man. I was strong, my friend was strong, too, and I remember, "You stay here and you stay here." We always kept in the middle. I said, "Doesn't matter what it's ten o'clock at night it's going to be or him or us. If he's going to take us to headquarters, remember, we're both gonna be dead," and this boy agreed with me. Finally, somehow he knew my brother-in-law and he knew his brother. We had some rucksacks they called it…

NL: In English too.

MM: Yeah, rucksacks, so he took out something from my rucksack. I don't remember what he did took out. He took out from him something and he said, "Go!" to both of us. And I couldn't believe it. Should I say he was afraid that we gonna jump him.

NL: Maybe.

MM: I don't know. And he let us go. And I told Dudek that I couldn't' believe it. Anyway…

NL: Miracle.

MM: Miracle, miracle. Anyway, he took the stuff out from our rucksacks and he went over to my brother-in-law and to his brother and he said, "You see, is those the things that you gave it to your brother-in-law?" And my brother-in-law David said, "Yes." "Is those the things that you gave to your brother?" He said, "Yes." "Well, I just killed them, they lay here."

NL: Ohh.

MM: Just like that. Just like that. January-- he didn't kill us, I am here.

NL: Oh my. So now, you left Wolanów in May of '43.

MM: I didn't leave Wolanów. I came to Wolanów yeah, after they came over and they count how many people they had the camp, while shooting around, while all the time was a grave ready.

NL: Mmm.

LM: An open grave.

MM: An open grave that whenever they caught you know a Jew so they brought him to this place...

NL: [unclear].

MM: Yeah, to kill. And one time they came over to count you know the people-- no, I have to go back. We went out to work early in the morning, was dark, and it was one…

LM: A *magister* [phonetic]?

MM: A *magister* [phonetic] from the Jewish camp and he said, "Everybody who came from Szydlowiec should stay by the…

LM: Let, let me tell this correctly…

MM: Okay. Go ahead.

LM: At that time those who were not registered they could not get food like my brother said, so the Germans had always tricks. They said whoever is not registered should remain in camp.

NL: I see.

LM: Not go to work and he's gonna be registered and gonna be legitimized and he's gonna get food. And I at that time worked for a firm, a very small Polish firm which I did some tailoring for them and we had to go to a-- to Radom, 30 kilometers away, we had to go out to work about almost three quarters of an hour early, and I said to my brother and a friend of his-- the friend survived too, he lives in France now-- "Look, if they want to register, they want to register you when you come back. Let's go. Don't stay here, let's go to work." And we went to work.

NL: I see.

LM: When we, we came back, all those people that were left, who stayed that didn't go to work, we came back, they were shot and not buried yet.

NL: Mmm, another miracle.

MM: Another miracle, yeah.

NL: Now, excuse me.

MM: That's what happened all my friends, you know that I-- some of my friends you know they all waiting, they were laying here and here and…

NL: Oh my, oh my.

MM: And the same night I think, it came in the *shoykhet* from Szydlowiec I had been laying with him [with Leo] in bed. I don't know if you recall this, but I do recall.

And he said, "Moishe, you better get up from here if not tomorrow you gonna be killed." This particular camp Wolanów was not under the guards from the Germans, was some *Polaks* but with the…

LM: The *lagerführer* was Buchman was a German.

MM: Yeah, yeah, see the *la*-- see the main real was a German, but you know…

LM: [unclear]

MM: …but the guards you know was Polish.

NL: Polish.

MM: With guns and you know, you know the main bastard was, his name was…

LM: Buchman.

MM: Buchman was it?

LM: Buckman.

MM: Buckman, he was a murderer. He was a horrible person, Pole like he was a hunchback, but he was terrible. He was terrible, but anyway, two men came in, and one was a *shoykhet* from Szydlowiec and another and they told me, "You better get out, if not you're gonna be killed tomorrow." Because they count how many people and the rest what they were not count were killed already you know a day before. So me and my other friend we went over to the wires, you know, it was not electric wires it was barbed wires and we cut it through and we-- they start shooting on us, but we crawled and nothing happened. Finally we went over there to a place that I used to go to work almost every day, was a Jewish policeman from my town, not this one that he beat me up, another one, he used to take me to work over there, his name was Moishe Aker, Moishe Aker…

LM: …the brother of the guy…

MM: …the brother of the guy what I went with him from Kruszyna you know to Kozienice and after from Szydlowiec to…

NL: I see.

MM: So I ask him let me go of the [unclear] because even-- nobody knew what happened that they chased me out you know. He said, "No, I'm not gonna risk my life for you." He didn't let me. So finally both of us we still had a few *zlotys* somehow I don't know they gave it to us you know the *shoykhet* and that. And we found a Polish chauffeur and he took us to Radom, a city by the name Radom.

LM: [unclear].

MM: Huh?

LM: [unclear].

MM: So over there was a ghetto but was very, it was a wooden fence very high, higher than this ceiling. And we were-- you know he [unclear] over there and even a day and to go outside around the ghetto this is it, anybody would see you.

NL: But most of the Jews had been destroyed in Radom.

MM: They had a ghetto from 2,000 Jews. The elite, they were left over. All the rich ones that they could bribe, you know...

NL: Bribe.

MM: [unclear] and finally us too, so we couldn't get in, and finally we got in, you know, we tore apart…

NL: A plank.

MM: A plank or two and we crawled in. So two hungry boys almost barefoot you know and not too much in the dressed. Where does a boy like that-- we went to the kitchen.

NL: Mmm hmm.

MM: We went to the kitchen. So over there was-- the, the chef in the kitchen was named Memflick, I remember he used to have a restaurant before the war in Radom. A very fine person.

NL: A Jew?

MM: A Jew, a Jew. He said, "Boys, I bet you are hungry." Both of us. Those people in the ghetto, the 2,000 but they were there, they had good, they had-- in comparison to other Jews in Poland they had very good.

NL: I see.

MM: They had good. So he said, "Boys, you want to eat something?" We said, "Naturally, we are hungry we want to eat." So all of a sudden, you know this-- a bump, one grabbed me by the back, the other one and he used the [unclear] of a Jewish policeman.

NL: Jewish policeman.

MM: A Jewish police said, "Guys, for you I am looking. I am looking for you two." So, he took us to the Jewish police headquarters and over there they operated in Radom like that in the small ghetto, they called it a small ghetto. If they caught somebody illegal, so they put you know, it was like they had a little room in a prison and they called up the jail man-- the Jewish police they called up the jail man and the next day the Ukraines they came and they shoot whoever it was there. That was a Friday and Saturday, you know me and my other friend, we were staying and we looked out from the…

NL: Window.

MM: From the window was, what is [unclear]?

NL: Bars.

MM: Bars. I cried, just plain like that, I cried.

NL: You thought this was it?

MM: Yeah, this was it.

LM: They intended to give him over to the Germans.

MM: Yeah and the next day-- in one day I would be killed. So and I cried and it went through a girl but she used to be in Kruszyna with us, but she escaped before. Her

name Sarah Freilich from Radom and she was working with the police-- she was working with that policeman. That policeman happened to be the assistant…

LM: To the chief.

MM: Commandant from the ghetto, from the small ghetto. And she sees, "Mantelmacher, what are you doing here?" So I told her the whole story. She came over to the bars with us and I told her the whole story and she says-- and she walked away.

UI: [unclear]

NL: [unclear]

MM: No, no, no was not so. She came in a few hours later and she opened up the cell and she let us out.

NL: Oh my.

MM: And she let us out and we went and we hid in the ghetto there.

NL: Good angel was watching [unclear].

MM: The next morning, was a Monday morning already the Ukraines came in and they didn't care whom they knew they had to shoot two boys, two Jews whatever, so we were not there, so they ran out in the ghetto and they found two and they shot them. And that so happened, and after they registered us, because we was two left already but they killed us so they registered us and we were legal over there and we did go to work over there.

NL: I see and the Jewish policeman didn't recognize you?

MM: He did recognize, but…

LM: He couldn't do any more.

MM: He couldn't do any more nothing, I was legal over there. I was legal and he couldn't do nothing anymore.

NL: So you went to work.

LM: The girl helped.

NL: The girl helped.

MM: Yeah, the girl helped, yeah, the whole key. That's right. So and I stayed in Radom, I stayed in Radom for a while. And after they liquidated the *lager* the camp Wolanów was liquidated where my brother was and they sent them to Radom in the ammunition factory.

LM: [unclear]

MM: They used to make guns. And I didn't have bad in this ghetto. I wouldn't say I had bad. I went to work, we used to dig *Torf*, I don't know how you call *Torf* in English.

NL: Peat.

LM: Peat.

MM: Peat, whatever.

NL: Yes, peat.

LM: Yeah, yeah, peat.

MM: We used to work over there and I used to go around walking around places in the old houses you know to find something you know and…

NL: I managed.

MM: I managed and one time I found, I found a little sack of gold.

UI: I knew that.

NL: [laughs] Oh my word.

UI: [unclear]

LM: Teeth.

NL: Teeth.

LM: Gold teeth.

NL: Oh.

MM: Ask [unclear] that's the truth. I did found that you know and still I didn't-- so I got in touch with my brother.

LM: [unclear]

MM: Yeah, yeah, and he was in, in the camp and they had very bad over there. And I was in this little ghetto between the, those elites from Radom they. So I used to go every Sunday they used to take him you know to take a bath, not him, a whole group of them under the guards from the Ukraine, you know. I have to bring him every week two or four kilo bread and some other things, shoes, he had a big foot and was very hard, usually Jews have small feet.

NL: Laughs.

MM: And I was the organizer and I brought him things like that.

NL: Such a story.

MM: And still I was scared for Radom, even I had not bad over there, but I was scared. It reminds me you know this of Kruszyna and Szydlowiec, I was scared. So one time I was in Radom I don't know exactly, I can't tell maybe three or four or five months. How long?

LM: Five months.

MM: Something like that. About five months I was there and I had the gold already, I felt that I am a rich boy already. When did I see gold in life you know? So a [unclear] or somebody or a local or somebody hid it or some place. It was Jewish gold naturally, it was watches and teeth and rings you know, like a treasure, put it this way. And I was in this camp, I mean in this ghetto, but I wanted to leave this ghetto.

NL: You had a feeling.

MM: I had a feeling. And one time this Moishe Brunstein, you know the...

NL: The [unclear].

MM: No, no, no, Moishe Brunstein, he was the *Judenrat* [unclear]…

NL: *Judenrat*.

MM: He came to Radom. He worked in a, in a factory where they made the gunpowder. He said, "You see Moishe, just because I sent you away to camp, you are still alive."

NL: Mmm hmm.

MM: So, that's the way he told me. So I didn't answer him I walked away because he, he was not a big shot anymore he couldn't do nothing to me over there. But I wanted to go to that camp that he worked because my brother David was over there.

LM: Brother-in-law.

MM: My brother-in-law David was over there. So one time it came a truck from this, from the camp, the name was Pionki. Did you hear there was a camp Pionki?

NL: No.

MM: It's near Radom.

NL: Mmm hmm, mmm hmm.

MM: So it came a truck and they needed some people, so you know, they went to Jewish…

LM: Ghetto.

MM: *Judenrat* and they said we need 50 people. So they had good over there. Naturally they wouldn't go away from the ghetto, so they came over to me and to my friend and said, "Boys, would you like to go to Pionek?" Pionki they called it. I said, "Sure I would like to go to Pionki but for what?" So they said they going to give me fifty thous-- 5,000 *zlotys.*

NL: Oh my gosh.

MM: It was *a lot* of money. [emphasis his] Because that time you figure everything for bread.

NL: Of course.

MM: So 10 *zlotys* was 2 kilo bread.

NL: You could have a mountain of bread.

MM: A mountain of bread. And I told them if you want it so you have to give me a good pay." "Sure." "And a jacket and shirt," cause they had.

NL: This was German overseers?

UI: No. A Jew and his…

MM: Jews.

NL: They were going to take you?

MM: No, no, no, no. They came Germans came from Pionek…

NL: Germans came, okay.

MM: And they said to the Jewish *Judenrat* they need 50 people, but they wouldn't go away, so they were looking for boys like I.

NL: So the Germans came to you or the Jewish council?

MM: No, the Jewish came, the Jews.

LM: The Jews who didn't want to go [unclear].

NL: They approached you.

MM: Yeah. They approached me, a little boy like me you know, so we find our sucker. So they did, they came over and I says, "Okay, give me everything that I want, you know, 5,000 *zlotys* and shoes and shirts, you know. And they gave everything for me.

NL: They did.

MM: They did. They did and for my friend too and in the meantime I had a little the gold and I figure how can I go away without leaving for my brother something, for I knew over there in the ghetto a boy, he was an honest boy you know he [unclear] my town.

LM: [unclear]

MM: And I went, his name was Alter and I told him the whole story. So I left the little bag of gold for him and I left the money too because I knew if I am gonna take the money with me and over there when you came in that particular camp, they undress you and they search you and they will take away. So I left everything for him and I told him, "The gold you gonna send for my brother, he's gonna come over here. It was arranged. In the morning I am going to send somebody from Pionki and that's the way it was.

NL: Mmm hmm.

MM: I don't know how my bro-…

Tape two, side one:

NL: This is tape two, side one, continuing our interview with Mr. Max Mantelmacher. So you arranged to have the gold sent as a gift for your brother.

MM: I went over to this boy named Alter and I gave it to him, the 5,000 *zlotys* and the gold. The gold you're going to give it to my brother and the money I'm going to try to send you a person from Pionki and he's going to bring it for me. So that's the way it was arranged and I sent a person by the name Gutman but not that Gutman another Gutman and I gave him 500-- he used to go from Pionki to Radom all the time he used to bring the food for the camp. So he brought me 4,500 *zlotys* in this particular camp. It was a lot of money at the time, it was unbelievable. And the gold to give to my brother. Okay, I was in Pionki until June. I worked over there in a factory where they made gunpowder.

NL: June of '43?

MM: Yeah, something like that yeah, until the summer, until June 1944.

NL: Oh, '44.

MM: No, no, no. June '43 Pionki until June or July 1944, I don't remember exactly. In '44 when the Russians approached, you know,…

NL: How was your experience in Pionki?

MM: In Pionki I worked very hard. It was, it was not hard physically, but it was danger to my health. I worked in a-- I used to put some paper-- I used to start the gunpowder, I used to put some paper, some chemicals and before the war the *Polaks* who worked over there, they used to work on an hour and four hours rest, but for us Jews we had to work 8 hours straight. It was very danger to your lungs you know…

NL: I see. To inhale.

MM: To inhale, but they didn't care, you know. So looks like I was young it did not affect me.

NL: Did you get some food?

MM: In Pionki yes, first of all I had the money.

NL: Oh, you had the money so you could barter.

MM: Yeah, I could, I had the money, I could organize, you know. If you had the money you could buy from the *Polaks*.

NL: There were Polish workers as well as Germans?

MM: Yes, we worked the same work, but they got paid and we got the beatings.

NL: Same story.

MM: We did the same work, exactly the same work. Where I worked during the war a Jew couldn't even go play, because they wouldn't even let a Jew in, but during the war…

NL: They needed labor.

MM: They needed labor so and the *Polaks,* I worked the same work but the *Polaks* could sit down. As a matter of fact we had to do more work than them.

NL: You didn't have this rest period.

MM: No, no rest period at all. Like I said, it was not a physical work, but it was very dangerous…

NL: Bad for your health.

MM: Bad for my health, yeah. It was very dangerous.

NL: So you were there till June of '44?

MM: Of '44 when the Russians approached and they put us in cattle cars and they sent us to Auschwitz.

NL: The Germans of course.

MM: The Germans, yeah, with the help from the Ukrains.

NL: Again the Ukrainians.

MM: Yeah, the Ukraines. The Ukraines were worse, in my part what I went through, worse than the Germans.

NL: I have heard that.

MM: Worse than the Germans.

LM: They did the actual killing.

MM: They did the killing.

NL: Did you see any of the Russian soldiers or you just heard that they were coming to…?

MM: We heard about it.

NL: But you didn't see them?

MM: No, we didn't see them. If I would see them I was around…

LM: They were in another part.

MM: We had a wall, we called it Bislat [phonetic].

LM: Thirty kilometers away.

MM: Not even 30 kilometers away. So they were on the other side, we were over here. So they took us away to Auschwitz, took us to Birkenau. You heard about Birkenau I'm sure of it. We arrived in Birkenau and it was at night, I remember it was still in the morning about three or five in the morning. Mengele was there, but somehow he didn't make a selection from our transport because we came already from a camp.

NL: Not from a ghetto.

MM: Not from a ghetto and as far as I heard that all of them that they came-- the most from the camps he didn't select them. After soon, soon you went in, in the camp, you didn't go into Birkenau in the camp…

LM: We had stripes.

MM: No, no. But after every Saturday we had a selection so [unclear] difference you know, you had to go you know. When they took away [unclear] whatever it was, you got called up, so I'm sure that you're familiar with that. So I was in Birkenau and

after they sent me away from Birkenau, but not too far that camp by the name Buna. It was Auschwitz, everything was-- you heard about Buna?

NL: Sure.

MM: So I was in Buna over there. I worked very hard over there.

NL: In an aircraft factory.

MM: No, it was not aircraft.

UI: *Chemikal.*

MM: Chemical, we did for the I.G. Farben, I.G. Farben Industry.

LM: I.G. Farben Industry.

MM: I.G. Farben Industry. We worked for them. We built a big factory; as a matter of fact that factory still exists over there.

NL: Is that so?

MM: Yeah, still there. It's the biggest factory in Poland. So I was over there in Auschwitz. I don't have to tell you about Auschwitz, you know what went on in Auschwitz.

LM: Yeah, but you forgot to mention [unclear].

MM: I came to Buna from Birkenau. They gave me my number over there and I came to Buna and we stayed on the *Apellplatz*. You know what is the *Apellplatz*?

NL: Yes. The roll call.

MM: That's right. And the SS Commandant, the doctor he tell us, he told us to undress and he looked at us and he selected who have to go to the coal mines, who have to go to this camp, to this camp and it came over a fellow by the name-- heavy set guy, a big belt, *kapo* here, and he was looking around, you know, and I looked at him and this happened to be a neighbor from my town. They took him away because he stole something, I was…

LM: He was a thief.

MM: He was a thief, he stole something and he needed for people for his Commander, for his group and I looked and everybody was scared and I say, "Avrim, Hopop, they called-- he had a nickname Popo. He looked at me, "Moish." He recognized me.

NL: He recognized you.

MM: He recognized me. So he asked me first of all, he had a mother, a brother and a father. I told him right away his brother died of typhoid fever and the father too and the mother probably she went away to Treblinka. So he took me in his, in his *commando* to work.

NL: Mmm hmm. Well, another miracle…

MM: It was a miracle, it was a miracle because all the rest, a lot of them-- he took me in and another two more boys from my town-- and the rest went away to different places they did not survive. They did not survive.

NL: You had a little bit of protection.

MM: Yeah, a little bit of protection, I would say. He went in to the block elder they called it from the barrack, you know the leaders and that and he told them you give him a job at night, he should be every two hours, they called it *Nachtwache*…

NL: Night watch.

MM: Night watch and after to wash the kettle from the soup, I had a little bit of soup left over. I was not lazy, one thing that helped me. I was not lazy. I worked this way and I worked over there in Auschwitz till January nine-t-- January 18, this date I remember, 1945.

LM: Before you finish. Tell her how you organized in Auschwitz. It's interesting.

MM: Yeah. Would you like to know how I lived in Auschwitz?

NL: Yes.

MM: Well, in Auschwitz to tell you the truth, I had not bad. Isn't that surprising, you ever hear?

UI: He made a connection, that's why.

NL: You made a connection.

MM: Yeah and I risked. This same *kapo* of mine, he approached me. He was well fed, he was a good person. He didn't do no harm to nobody.

NL: He was good to himself.

MM: He was good for himself too, but he asked me would you like to smuggle in like vodka from the factory in the camp and I'm going to give you a kilogram. A kilogram was a lot.

NL: Of course.

MM: I said, "Yes."

NL: [laughs] Why not?

MM: And I did ask him what could happen if they would catch me. Twenty-five on your rear end.

NL: Oh.

MM: For 25 I figured it maybe it's going to be worth it. So I was young and I took a chance. And it worked for me one time, two times, three times, and after I told him, "You know what, can you give me German marks for that or 10 marks for a kilo bread?" After I had the bread and I had a little in the barrack, I had a little bit job, the night watch, and I had the kettle, I had a little soup extra, which was not bad already. And I told him give me 10 marks from now on so and I saw where he buys the stuff from the *Polaks*…

NL: You had a *gesheft*.

MM: So I went in business for myself, you know.

NL: Good for you [laughs].

MM: That's the truth.

NL: That's how you survived.

MM: That's how I survived. I did risk, yes, I did risk. As long as I knew that…

NL: They wouldn't kill you.

MM: They wouldn't kill me. I used to sell the whiskey-- so we had a lot of *Polaks* over there and they used to work in the *Bekleidung* center, you know where they used to give out the clothing and they were not allowed, they were prisoners like us, but they were not allowed to go out from the camp because they used to run away. So they needed us and we needed them. So I used to bring in whiskey like other stuff, like salamis or something so they used to give me shirts, towels, shoes and that's the way I…

NL: …you managed.

MM: I managed. I did manage, yeah. This I couldn't complain.

NL: Well, but you were ingenious, you were brave.

MM: Yeah, I couldn't complain. I was brave. And this went on until January 18, 1945 and they said everybody has to get out from the camp. Anybody who is sick could stay in the barracks or over there they had a hospital, whatever you call it a hospital and usually I didn't trust the Germans, you know, but just happened in Buna there was a lot of left over, sick people that they couldn't march and they did not kill them.

NL: Interesting.

MM: Yeah, they did not-- not in Buna. Anyway, we marched out of Buna. We went into a small *cegielnia* [brickyard, Polish], you know what's a *cegielnia*…

LM: A brick factory.

MM: A brick factory over there. We marched the whole night. It was very cold on the march. Whoever was left behind…

NL: Perished.

MM: Right on the spot, I don't-- we did have a chance to run away that particular night because was not too many guards, was 10,000 of us.

NL: Ten thousand.

MM: Ten thousand, all [unclear], we did have a chance to…

NL: But where?

MM: But where?

LM: Your *kapo* ran away.

MM: Where? My *kapo* he ran away, he survived, yeah he did. And he told me "Come on, Moishe, with me," and I did not want to go. So anyway, we went to this particular brick factory and after they took us to Gleiwitz.

NL: Oh!

MM: We had to go to Gleiwitz. They took us to Gleiwitz. Over there the beatings was going on terrible. They mistreat us, we were only a couple of days over there, but I was thinking nobody is going to survive over there it was terrible the beatings left and right, killing, shooting…

NL: …by the Germans?

MM: Germans. Was no Ukrainians when we were there, but Germans. And after that they put us in cattle cars, open cattle cars in Gleiwitz and they sent us on the road. We didn't know where, 120 people and a car open, cold, no food, nothing. We stopped once in a while to unload the dead and we went 11 days, in open cattle cars, that was in January. It was very cold, it was maybe 25, 30 below zero. We had another time I don't know how do you say in Ame-- but it was very cold. Eleven days they stopped in certain places to unload the dead, you know, and one time they try, you know, we were hungry so the snow used to come down a little bit of snow and one time they threw out a bread so everybody went to try to get the bread so we killed each other even more. So from 11 days until we arrived, to a certain camp, Oranienburg, you heard about Oranienburg?

NL: Yes.

MM: From the 10,000 I don't know if 500 or 400 arrived alive. Everybody was three quarters dead you know, whoever survived. After they kept us over there for a while, that was a place where they used to do aircrafts, Messerschmitt. But it used to be in the big *halle* [hall], how do you say?

LM: In the halls.

MM: Like a big warehouse, so they kept us over there for a while, beatings, you name it and I'm cutting short everything you know, no food, you know. They used to give us about 10 *deca* bread a day a day. We didn't go to work over there because we were waiting they should send us away in some place else. Actually, they didn't have a place where to keep us.

NL: They probably didn't know where to take you.

MM: That's right. So finally…

NL: Excuse me, did you already know that the Germans were losing the war?

MM: Naturally, the Americans they used to come twice, the English used to come twice a day to bombard. Naturally, we knew already, oh sure. I knew that the end was in sight. So from Oranienburg they sent me to a camp by the name Flossenbürg. I don't know if you heard about it. So they sent me to Flossenbürg. Over there it was bad. They put us in quarantine and was nothing to eat. I remember the block was 22. We had a *Stubenälteste*, the guy who took care of the barracks, was a Ukraine. He himself, he was a prisoner too, a tough guy like that, a young man. He killed every single day 7, 8, 10 Jewish boys, just for nothing, just for fun. So they kept us over there, I cannot recall exactly how long they kept us, but it was about two or three weeks, very little food, almost nothing, you couldn't walk anymore. From over there they called us in the *Apellplatz* and they count 600 people and they sent me out from over there in a camp named Obertraubling. That was by Regensburg. I don't think so you heard about this camp because…

NL: Obertraubling.

MM: Obertraubling, I don't think you heard too many because not too many survived from over there.

NL: Near what camp?

MM: Near Flossenbürg, near the bigger city over there was Regensburg. You heard about Regensburg? We came over there; we worked-- they put us in a house, a big house without a roof. We came over there in the beginning of March, something like this. It was cold. Nothing but four walls, no bed, no straw, no blanket, nothing at all, for 600 of us and the first day we marched out to work, we worked in an airfield because the Americans used to come to bombard, so we used to fill in the holes all the time, hard 12 hours a day, they used to give us 10 *deca* if you could get the 10 *deca*, because they passed around the 10 *deca* and if somebody didn't grab out from you the 10 *deca* bread and half a liter soup. Over there they didn't kill anybody, they didn't shoot even one person, but we happened to be over there over 60 days and we went out only 27, 28 people alive, starved to death.

NL: And diseased.

MM: Diseased, you name it. That's about all we went out 27, 28 went out alive you know from--. They didn't shoot even once.

NL: You were liberated by the Russians, the Americans?

MM: By the Americans, yeah, and after when the Americans closed in on that particular camp so they took us away to march. I was so sick I had the diarrhea.

LM: Dysentery.

MM: I had the dysentery because I was skin and bones. Nothing was left of me. And I marched from Regens-- from Obertraubling this camp, they took us to Dachau. We couldn't walk anymore, everything was all, you know, I made do everything. I couldn't you know--. I undressed myself just like that, naked. I find a bra I put on a bra. This is the truth and I came into Dachau, the 27th of April 1945 and I was liberated in 1929. You see I don't give this…

LM: The 29th. Two days later.

NL: Condensed.

MM: Yeah and two days later I was liberated, and I weighed 68 pounds. When the Americans came in and I was in the hospital over there and after I went out little by little I…

NL: Became human again…

MM: Human again. Listen, I didn't-- I cut everything short.

NL: And you stayed in a DP camp for a while?

MM: And after I was liberated in Dachau, so we went in-- I was liberated in Dachau so for some Jewish people they "grindered" like a Jewish Committee. Not too many Jews were liberated in Dachau, a few; I would say maybe 40 or 50 not even that. That was all. And we went in to register, I reregistered myself, you know, and after from over there it went out a list, the American soldiers took a list who survived, you know.

My two sisters happened to survive 7 kilometers-- they were liberated from Dachau and then-- they were liberated by the Americans 7 kilometers from Dachau a camp by the name Allach, so when the list came over there, they read Moishe Mantelmacher born but they did make a mistake the people who wrote the list they were from Radom so they put I was born in Radom, but our name was only one family in whole Poland Mantelmacher, so my sisters knew it had to be me…

NL: So they knew.

MM: So they came over there to look for me and they wouldn't let them in because Dachau was a camp only men, was no woman over there except they had some certain…

LM: Prostitutes for the Germans.

MM: Yeah for the Germans, but not for the Jews and they wouldn't let them in but so the [unclear] so many died after the Americans came in that they died more than like [unclear] because they used to give us food, you know, good food…

NL: Too much.

MM: Too much food and every day we used to take out from the barracks 10, 15, 20, 30, they died.

NL: They didn't realize they have to give food…

MM: They didn't realize, yeah her brother died like that. Yeah they didn't realize. So finally my sisters came and they found me. They were thinking maybe I'm dead already, they couldn't find me, so me and a friend, another friend of mine, was sitting in a corner over there, used to make caps [unclear] so finally they found me and so they registered themselves, so was a few women outside the camp. They gave them a barrack where to live and they helped me to come you know…

NL: To come back.

MM: …to come back little by-- and after we went in a certain DP camp.

NL: Which one?

MM: Used to be…

LM: Freimann[8],

MM: Freimann, SS *Kaserne* [barracks: German] used to be Freimann

LM: München.

MM: Near Munich. Freimann. I'm sure you heard about Freimann yeah.

NL: And you stayed there how long?

MM: And I stayed there-- let me finish, and we stayed over there and we found out that my brother.

LM: Let me tell my own story.[9]

MM: Okay, he wants to tell.

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[8]Freimann – München Neu Freimann, a Displaced Persons camp, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website.

[9]See Leo Mantelmacher's testimony in which he describes how sister found him at Mittenwald DP camp.

NL: [laughs] How long did you stay there?

MM: I don't kno-- how long did I stay in Freimann, a couple of months?

LM: A few months.

MM: A couple of months.

NL: And then?

MM: And then we went to a DP camp Landsberg am Lech.

NL: Ah yes. There was a big Jewish Committee there.

MM: A big Jewish Committee, yeah, yeah.

NL: You know, Leo Schwartz's book called "The Redeemers"?

LM: It just came out?

NL: No, it's an old book.

LM There's a book just came out, three years from '45 to '48…

NL: By an American military man, I think.

LM: No, no.

NL: Well, we'll talk about it in a few minutes when we finish here. So then from Landsberg?

MM: From Landsberg I came to the United States.

NL: Ah, you were able to get in on a…

LM: That's a story by itself.

MM: Oh that's a story, that's a story by itself.

NL: But I mean you had no trouble getting a visa?

UI: Was not a visa.

MM: Not it was not a visa.

LM: They were looking for tailors.

MM: They were looking for tailors.

NL: Ohhh. Under a special law?

MM: Under a special law so from the DP and came we came.

NL: In '49?

MM: Yeah.

NL: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Mantelmacher…

MM: Well, I don't know…

NL: What a story.

MM: I just cut short everything, if I would tell you all the things, the hours, and days…

NL: I wish we could because I'm sure there are some details that are extraordinary…

MM: Oh, it's a lot of details, a lot of details yeah.

NL: But at least we have the main story.

MM: Yeah, you see I forgot to tell them about the [unclear].

LM: I'm gonna tell this. Because I'm gonna go after.

NL: Well thank you again, thank you very much.
MM: I don't know if it's going to mean much to you.
NL: Of course, it will, it's extremely valuable, extremely valuable.

[Tape two, side one ended; interview ended.]