HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ARTHUR PERLMUTTER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Janet Schwartz
Date: April 3, 1988

Holocaust Oral History Archive
Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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AP - Arthur Perlmutter [interviewee]
JS - Janet Schwartz[1] [daughter/ interviewer]
RP - Ruben Perlmutter [son]
EP - Esther Perlmutter [wife]
CF - Cyrla Farber [mother-in-law]
SS - Steven Schwartz [son-in-law]
Date: April 3, 1988

Tape one, side one:

JS: April 3, 1988. We are here in Fairlawn, New Jersey. Last night was our second *seder* of Passover, and we are here today to tape Dad, Arthur Perlmutter, and his story about the Holocaust. Okay, Dad, why don't you start by telling us when you were born and where you were born and what life was like before the war?

AP: I was born in Lódz, on February 26, 1929.

JS: Even though the records say 1930.

AP: That was later I became 1930. And we lived in Lódz which was in the second largest city in Poland in the western part of Poland. My parents came, both, from Galicia.

JS: Is that south of Lódz?

AP: Southeastern Poland, southeast of Lódz, also.

JS: That makes you a Galicianer?

AP: Not necessarily.

JS: Why?

AP: Because I was born in Lódz so I am a Lódzicaner, that's what it makes me.

JS: But you speak Yiddish like a Galicianer?

AP: Yes, because I learned Yiddish in Galicia during the war.

JS: Okay, we'll get to that later. How was the weather when you were born?

AP: The day I was born, there was who knows how many feet of snow on the ground.

JS: Was Poland a very cold, snowy place?

AP: Yes, Poland is farther to the north of what you know as New York, and this area [meaning, New Jersey], so it's much colder. Once the first snow falls, it stays on the ground until May when it starts melting. Nobody bothers with removing the snow from the sidewalks.

JS: Why, because it's just going to keep falling again?

AP: It just will keep falling and where are you going to put it away, on the street?

JS: It doesn't melt?

[1]Editorial comments are included in hard brackets or footnotes; thank you to Janet Schwartz who researched and added many of the editorial comments, November 23, 2020.

AP: Nothing. So, all the people do is put some sand on it so it's not so slippery and when the next snow falls, they put another little bit of sand on it. That's all that's done. The temperature is in the minus twenties [JS ed.: Celcius].

JS: On what street did you live on, what was your address?

AP: My address was originally known as 13 Sklerova [phonetic] and later it became 27 POW. No equiv-, no meaning of prisoner of war. It means *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa* [Polish Military Organization]. It's an equivalent of ROTC.

JS: You lived in an army district?

AP: No, but that's the, the street was named in honor of this POW which is every high school student had to belong to it. That was in order for the high school students not to have to interrupt university because, at the age exactly of 21, not one day more, not one day less, you were in the army.

JS: I thought 18?

AP: In Poland, 21.

JS: So, it was when you were 21 that you went into the army?

AP: So it means, no, it means that when you were in your third year of university, you would have to interrupt university and go and serve in the army.

JS: That's ridiculous, why not finish school?

AP: That's how the law was.

JS: Stupid [unclear].

AP: So, in order not to interrupt the university, those that wanted to continue, to pursue university studies was created this POW.

RP: …which was a way…

AP: And what we did is, in the high school, we spent three years studying military tactics and all that jazz and we spent two complete summers doing basic training. So, as a result, once a student graduated from high school, he had the equivalent rank to a sergeant, and did not have to go to the army unless he selected the military career, then he went directly to the officer school.

RP: Did you eventually take that course?

AP: Yes, I took them.

RP: In high school.

JS: So, you knew how to shoot a gun and fall flat on your face.

AP: I used to know, I used to know. I used to know how to crawl on all fours, actually with my hands,

RP: …used to be able to….

AP: …how to aim and during the year, we would do all sorts of things and if we upset our officer who was teaching us, he would make us go and crawl right into the biggest puddle of mud no matter how well dressed you were. So, we were very careful not to make him mad.

RP: So, you were living in the same apartment. It was merely renamed, the street?

AP: No, this was before the war.

RP: Before the war.

JS: You moved. How old were you when you moved?

AP: We didn't move, they renamed the street.

JS: Oh.

AP: Because they opened it further to build the college in Lódz. Lódz didn't have a college. In Poland, it happens that the colleges were only in the old cities, and when I say old cities that were [existed] for hundreds and hundreds of years like Krakow, Warsaw, Lvov. These were cities that were there, I don't know, five, six, seven, 800 years in existence. These cities had colleges. Lódz didn't have it. Finally, the government approved or made a law approving the university for Lódz so when they built it, they opened [up] our street an extra block. This is why the number changed and then they decided to change the name of it, too.

RP: This, this wasn't in the ghetto?

AP: This was before the war still.

RP: But it wasn't in the Jewish ghetto of Lódz?

AP: No, no, we didn't-- we lived in neighborhoods that were not part of the ghetto later on.

RP: But they were Jewish neighborhoods.

AP: Pretty, pretty much. Well Lódz, well Lódz had one-third of the population was Jewish so there wasn't really a neighborhood in Lódz that there wouldn't be no Jews in it.

EP: What Ruben is referring to is whether that would have any connection to that what is it? Nalevkes[2] is in Warsaw.

AP: Nalevkes is in Warsaw.

EP: What was it called in Lódz? There was a similar area in Lódz.

AP: In Lódz [there] was the Baluti[3], this was the poor area. This is where the ghetto was.

EP: The ghetto was in the Baluti.

AP: The ghetto was in the Baluti. This was the poor Jewish area. And it was 95% Jewish.

JS: I know that you said that at various points in your lifetime as a child that there were different countries ruling. At one point it was the Russians, at one point it was the Germans and you had to learn their language. When did these things occur?

AP: This occurred during the war. I'm still [talking about] before the war, when I was living in Lódz, and I was going to school to a Hebrew Day school which was an

[2]Nalevkes -a street in the Jewish area of pre-WWII Warsaw.

[3]The Baluti was the poor Jewish quarter which became part of the ghetto. (Jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

elementary school and high school together, everything.

JS: How many grades of that school did you complete?

AP: I completed five grades or I was in fifth grade, no, I completed only four grades I was in 5th grade…

JS: And that's when …

AP: …when the war broke out.

RP: Now before we discuss the war…

JS: Loud. And good diction, everybody!

RP: What did your parents do, what were their occupations?

AP: Okay, my father was in business. He had a wholesale store, fabrics, in Tarnopol in Galicia.

RP: He had a store in Tarnopol?

AP: In Tarnopol, he was a wholesaler.

RP: So, why was he based in Lódz?

AP: Because we lived in Lódz.

JS: So, how, how far a distance is that between Tarnopol and Lódz?

AP: In those days, it was almost 24 hours by train.

JS: Oh, my God. So, would he spend half the week in Lódz and half the week in Tarnopol?

AP: No, he would spend a couple of weeks there and then he would come to Lódz.

RP: Who took care of the store when he was away?

AP: In the store, he had employees and both my grandfathers were in the business.

RP: And they [the grandfathers] lived in Skalat?

AP: They lived in Tarnopol.

RP: They lived in Tarnopol.

AP: And Mincia [a cousin] lived in Tarnopol. And Aunt Anna [Friedman-Hammer] lived in Tarnopol.

JS: What brought your parents to…

AP: When Aunt Anna moved to Isr-- got married with father's accountant or bookkeeper, that's when she went to Israel.

RP: That was Mr. Hammer, he was your father's accountant?

AP: He was my father's chief accountant.

EP: And the grandfathers working, they did not own the business. The business was…

AP: My father's.

JS: So, what brought your father and mother to Lódz if everybody was in Tarnopol?

AP: I'm trying to remember but I'm not 100% sure whether it was because she got a job.

JS: Teaching?

AP: Teaching in Lódz.

JS: What did she teach, history?

AP: She was teaching history, Polish.

JS: The Polish language? High school?

RP: Public high school or Jewish high school?

AP: Public high school. She was one of the few teachers that was still working for the government. But because of that, she was teaching in a Jewish neighborhood.

JS: And that's the place where the principal used to demand that she sing for him?

AP: That was I think another place. And I don't know whether it was the principal by now or it was the inspector for the whole area…

EP: …I think it was the guy who was the equivalent of the Board of Education.

AP: …of the Board of Education.

JS: The superintendent?

AP: The superintendent or the area inspector that used to love to hear her sing and he always said "You have to sing before I will listen to you."

JS: Was she an alto or a soprano?

AP: A soprano. And then when they sent her to teach in a particular school, where she had to-- and I think it was in the Baluti-- that she had to stress and strain her voice a lot that she was almost at the point that she lost her voice completely. That's when he pulled his hairs one day she couldn't sing to him and he said "What did I do by sending you to this school?" He didn't realize. It's a lot.

JS: Okay.

AP: It's is a lateral story. She also played very well the violin and could write as fast the notes, the musical notes, as fast as you could play them.

JS: Oh my God.

AP: She won a prize at the conservatory in Vienna where she learned.

JS: Really? She learned there to play violin or to sing?

AP: To play violin.

EP: She also studied in Vienna, which I wanted you to get the records from there.

JS: Yes, I tried, I really did try. I think we should still write. Thank you for reminding me. I will write.

AP: So did Anna Hammer.

JS: Study at the University of Vienna?

RP: At the university?

JS: Okay, I remember the last time we tried this, you told me [about] signs that you had noticed that the war and things were happening?

AP: I didn't notice. Since you got already a little of a mixed-up preamble to it, I will start now. Shortly before the war started, it was obvious that something was going on with Germany occupying little by little everything that surrounded Poland and demanding the Corridor[4] and demanding this and demanding that. And this was in the last few weeks of the 1939 summer that my father went to a spa, a resort area on the border between Poland and Romania to rest there for a few days and as he was listening to the radio and reading the newspaper, he said "This is it!" and he jumped on the train and rushed to get to Lódz and he came to Lódz and he said, "Let's get out from here, and let's go to the Romanian border so we can cross into Romania and go to Israel and be in the free world." It happens that when he arrived to Lódz, some friends were-- came to visit us-- "Oh you're exaggerating, Germany won't dare to attack Poland, we have treaties with France and with Great Britain. They are going to defend Poland. Germany won't dare to, to start a war." Well, I think it was five days later on September 1, 1939[5], I was at home, dismissed from school because this was going to be the day of the general or simulated bombing attacks on Lódz and so I was at home and I was playing with a girl from our building when suddenly, the alarm sounded and you could hear the anti-aircraft guns start shooting and bombs start falling and we turned on the radio and the President of Poland had been announcing at that particular moment that Poland was attacked that morning by Germany and the German troops crossed into Poland. By that time, it was already impossible to flee because the corrupt government, they were reserving all the gasoline supposedly for the military, so civilians couldn't escape. Because we were trying-- my father was thinking in terms of renting a taxi to drive us out past Warsaw where it would be from there much easier to find ways, but you couldn't get any gasoline because everything was requisitioned for the military. The military would come and try to get for the military purpose, the use of that gasoline and they would be told it's all requisitioned, for civilian use they have to go to the military. The persons that were all in that area being prepared to welcome the Germans because a lot of the population was of German descent, number one, number two, half of the government was sold to the Germans anyhow. So, we couldn't get out from Lódz and one night, in the middle of the night, we were awakened by an incredible shelling match. The Polish withdrawing troops were trying to shell the Germans and the Germans tried to shell the Poles and somehow they were both missing and who was being hit was the city. And during those days, we had shelters built in the basements of the buildings so everybody was-- the whole building was there waiting.

JS: Was that remnants from World War I, those shelters?

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[4]The Danzig/Gdansk Corridor to the Baltic Sea, provided by the Versailles Treaty after WWI, when Poland became independent.

[5]Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Lódz was annexed to Germany and Germans renamed the city Litzmannstadt. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.)

AP: No, no this was just built. I don't know whether it was really a shelter or if that was the only place where you can-- you thought you are safe. The buildings were five, six stories high, so, exposed to the shells. So in the morning, the radio announced that all the men should leave Warsaw and go-- leave Lódz and go and defend Warsaw. Everybody in the building did so including my father.

JS: You're kidding.

AP: He went to defend Warsaw and he was there.

JS: Did he have any military training to do that?

AP: He was never in any army.

JS: What kind of craziness was that from them to request that somebody…

AP: Well, they were doing instead of motors and so on, they were used to move around the cannons from one place to another because they didn't have it in Warsaw any horses, so manpower was used for that and the people in Warsaw, they, they themselves there were not enough of them to do it so they were helping the military defend Warsaw. Warsaw defended itself for as long as it could but when the Germans cut off and poisoned the water, that was it, Warsaw surrendered. And then my father started his trek back to Lódz. On the way, they were being stopped by the Germans, segregated-- Jews, non-Jews. But finally, by a miracle in a couple of instances, he succeeded in going back to Lódz. By that time, we were already for over a month under German occupation. And little by little, the Germans started to show what they are planning against the Jews because every day, they were rounding up Jews on the streets to do hard labor. Some of them, most of them, in those days would come back, sometimes they wouldn't come back. You never knew what will happen.

JS: When was it that you had to start wearing yellow stars on your jackets or sleeves?

AP: I am not sure whether I had to wear a yellow star in Lódz in '39 or it was still too early.[6] I really don't remember. But that was later in Skalat that we had to wear them. And I was in the meantime still going to my Hebrew school but it was only two blocks away now from where we used to live because they converted the girl's school into [a] boy's school because the other two schools-- we had three buildings, three schools, two boy's schools and one girl's school and we had just finished building a brand new building where everything would be together in a beautiful part of Lódz. That building was taken over by the Gestapo, they put there their headquarters.

JS: Lovely.

AP: And I…

JS: What street was the school on, do you remember?

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[6]On November 23, 1939, the Nazis required the yellow star to be worn by Jews over the age of ten in the entire Generalgouvernement (occupied Poland). (Jewish virtual library.org under Holocaust/Chronology)

AP: I think it was Piramowicza [phonetic]. It was about a block or two blocks away from our house. That was the girl's school. The other two buildings, I don't remember what happened.

EP: The brand new school?

AP: The brand new school I said, the, the Gestapo took it over for headquarters.

JS: He said "Piramowicza."

AP: No, the new school, the new school was not far from the-- it was an amusement park and a zoo.

JS: In Lódz?

AP: In Lódz. It was a very nice area out there, beautiful building that they built. We just had at the beginning of the summer, we had a tremendous inauguration ceremony with the mayor of the city and so on. We never used it.

JS: You were obviously a very aware 10-year old or nine-year old to be able to appreciate architecture and beauty at that age.

AP: I don't know. Something must have stuck. So, when my father-- I was going back to school there, but we were always in fear one day the Germans may walk in but still, I and all my friends we were going there and my father in the meantime was trying to see how to get out from Lódz and still tried to get to Romanian border and get out.

JS: Did he try to sell his business?

AP: No, that was too far away. He wasn't there when the Russians got in.

JS: What were your family doing in Tarnopol, what was happening to them, anything?

AP: Nothing. The Russians came in there because Stalin and Hitler, they divided Poland between themselves again.

JS: I thought they were against each other, Russia and …

AP: At that time, at that time, they signed the famous Ribbentrop Molotov Pact[7] that they were cooperating with each other. Germany needed Russian wheat and Russian oil and Russia needed from Germany machinery and equipment.

RP: Also, Germany didn't want to fight Britain and France and fight Russia at the same time.

AP: At the same time.

RP: And Russia wasn't ready to fight Germany yet. So both sides…

AP: They were gaining time and in the meantime, they split Poland and they split other Baltic countries because although it wasn't, it wasn't clearly stated in that treaty but somehow they got in, into part of Romania eventually …

RP: …the Soviets.

AP: …and then into Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

EP: But Tarnopol was under the Russians.

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[7]Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was a non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union made August 23, 1939. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

AP: Tarnopol was under Russians because Poland was practically split in half. Warsaw was in Germany but as soon as you hit the Bug River, it was already Russian.

JS: Well, history is in the books. We want now a little more of your history.

AP: Okay, when the Russians came in to Tarnopol, and this we found out later, they emptied my father's business. I guess he was a *spekuliant* [Russian: speculator] a speculator, a capitalist. And the rest we'll say later so it will be in chronological order. As I said, my father in the meantime, seeing what went on, he was trying to get us out from Lódz and get to…

JS: Romania.

AP: Romania, and somebody had just done it, although not got into Romania but got not far from the border so we knew that there are some ways and it took quite a few months to find a safe way to do it, but finally, in December, 1939, we left Lódz. My mother and I, we went on one truck to Warsaw, he went on another and we met there. Oh and Gusta [Friedman] Berger was with us.

JS: Really?

AP: Yes, in Lódz. 'Cause all these years, my father had different relatives that used to come to Lódz.

JS: Why, did she study?

AP: They would study something. Gusta Wechsler, who is now Gusta Jorisch, she was the first one that came and she studied sewing and dress making, how to make models and all this. She went to school. She was pretty good because she had done very well in drafting so she used to draw very nice models and so on, so she learned but when she came back, Gusta Berger came, but this one didn't want to study.

RP: But Gusta Jorisch wasn't around when the Germans came?

AP: No, Gusta Berger was with us. She crossed with us.

RP: Okay. Gusta Jorisch was from where, was she also from Tarnopol?

AP: She was from Skalat. Gusta Berger was from a small village, 20 some kilometers, miles, kilometers from Skalat.

EP: In those days, she [Gusta Berger] was Gusta Friedman.

AP: Gusta Friedman, that's right, excuse me I am talking about Mincia's sister. [Gusta Friedman Berger]

RP: They were nieces of our grandmother?

AP: Gusta Wechsler [Jorisch] was my father's niece.

RP: Right, but…

AP: Gusta and Mina Friedman, they were my mother's nieces.

EP: So they were cousins among themselves because their grandmothers were …

AP: Yah. Both their grandmothers were sisters.

RP: Who were cousins?

EP: Gusta-- the two Gustas. Because Daddy's father and mother were first cousins.

JS: Right. So you got to Warsaw?

AP: We got to Warsaw and from Warsaw, we got already with my father joined with the rest of the group, we got to some village, a Polish village on the Bug River where we were going to cross at night the river. That crossing on a boat was pretty uneventful. We stayed there during the day. At night, they woke us up and put us on the boats and we all crossed the river, no sweat. But now, once we were on the other side of the river, we had still to cross the Polish-- the German-Russian border-- to go to Bialystok because this is where we were aiming to go to the railroad station, which was not far from there.

RP: So, you had to go back into Germany, you're saying?

AP: No, no, no, no, we crossed the river. The river was in Germany now. Now, right after the river, about two, three miles was the border.

RP: Oh, okay. I thought that the river…

AP: …we had to cross…

RP: …was the border.

AP: …no, we had to cross that border from Germany into Russia. It was still on Polish territory.

JS: I thought you wanted to go to Israel?

AP: Yeah, but we had to cross-- Poland was divided at that time and we had to cross into the Russian part of Poland to go to the Romanian border.

JS: Okay, I got ya.

EP: Excuse me, Warsaw is what, west of Lódz?

AP: Northeast.

RP: Northeast.

AP: Mostly east. Further northeast, but this was the closest in that area so once we, once we started to walk towards the border, everybody naturally had luggage with them so they provided carriers. We realized suddenly that some of the carriers disappeared, one of them carried our luggage and in that luggage, there was some jewelry, some money.

JS: That's dumb, who puts jewelry and money in luggage?

AP: You had to distribute, you couldn't keep it on you because you didn't know who was going to catch you and search you. This wasn't just in the luggage. For example, this was very well hidden in things in that luggage. But-- and it was distributed so not everything was lost but when we realized that the carriers disappeared, the others, we were a group of about 20-25 people, and we realized that we are going nowheres and they were telling stories about this and that and a couple of guys in the group, one was carrying a gun, they finally-- at one point, I realized that we were already in that place that we were walking in circles. What they were trying to do is walk us that long until it would be daylight and the Germans would catch us and it wouldn't be their fault but we realized that and eventually, they crossed us the border correctly and we got to the railroad station.

RP: But you had no luggage?

AP: Well, some of it we lost. And then, at that station, we…

EP: That was Bialystok?

AP: Yes. No, actually it wasn't Bialystok, I'm wrong. It was some other place because from there, we had to go in open cars, cargo cars. That from there, we went to Bialystok. It was somewhere out…

EP: Maybe Grodno?

AP: No, no, no, to Grodno is a distance. By the time we caught that train, it was already daytime and we got to Bialystok and in Bialystok, we took a passenger train already down to Lvov and then to Tarnopol. It was quite a trip, an eventful trip.

JS: Let me just set it straight. From Lódz, what direction were you going, northeast or southwest?

AP: Originally east, northeast or east, whatever to Warsaw and then to cross the border and then to get…

JS: To Romania

RP: No, Romania is southeast.

JS: That's what I am saying, why were you going northeast?

RP: Because that was the only way to go. The Germans were all around towards the Romanian border so you had to go…

AP: We had to cross, we had to get the shortest possible way into the Russian part of Poland, the part of Poland that was taken by the Russians because over there, you could move safer.

JS: But I thought you said the south was where the Russians took over?

AP: They took over half of Poland, the eastern half of Poland.

JS: Oh, the east.

AP: And the Germans took the western part of Poland.

JS: Oh, okay.

AP: From north to south.

EP: So, they went east to Warsaw, northeast to Bialystok, and then they went to [unclear].

JS: They went around and back down.

AP: We had to cross into the Russian occupied portion of Poland and that's what we did.

EP: And there were no railroad stations all around like here. Certain places had railroads.

AP: They had rails and the rest, everything else was done with wagons.

JS: Okay.

AP: Like in the good old west days, how the west was won with caravans of wagons. And so we got to Bialystok by hook or by crook in that open train that was cold already in December in Poland but we were lucky it didn't snow, it didn't rain. So, we

made that trip, a couple of hours and we finally got to Bialystok. We had to wait in the station until the train came but already to Lvov we went on a passenger train, the normal way and then we got to Tarnopol. In Tarnopol, we found Mina with...

RP: Did you go with Gusta Berger on this?

AP: Yes, sure, Gusta was with us. We had to bring her to her parents. We got to Tarnopol. By the time we got to Tarnopol, we found out already that the Russians had sealed off the border with Romania so we couldn't get out, so we decided to make the best out of that. My father found out that Mina and her-- was she married already to Scharf or not yet?

JS: Scharf was his last name? I know someone named Mark Scharf. I wonder if they're related?

AP: How old is he?

JS: He's my age, Mark Scharf, and his parents are, probably about 20 years older than him.

AP: No.

JS: His parents are from Israel.

EP: No. Scharf came here to the U.S. and he died already.

AP: But this could be his son's child, grandchildren.

JS: That's what I'm saying.

EP: His first son is not normal. I think he was a deaf-mute.

AP: Something was wrong with him, yes, but he would be older than Regina by a year or two.

EP: Like 40 years old.

JS: That's about how old Mark's are-- not that young. His parents [unclear].

AP: No, no. She married-- Mina married my father's other accountant, the junior accountant. They had hidden some of the stuff but very little because they were afraid. They had sold a little bit of merchandise but so, but when the Russians came in and confiscated the rest, they got the most of it. So, they told my father what happened with the business and with this and with that and he recovered some of the fabric that was hidden and sold it on the black market, but it was already too late anyhow to get out from Poland so we were sort of stuck there. Well, within two-three months, because the Soviet bureaucracy moves very slowly, one nice day he was called and told that he owed them-- I don't know, 50,000, 100,000 rubles in taxes.

JS: Was that true?

AP: That's what they wanted. He didn't owe them any taxes because his business was confiscated so he went and told them. The govern-- "I gave"-- he didn't say the government confiscated, God forbid. He said "I gave the government all the merchandise. I don't have money." They told him we couldn't care less. You still owed us, owe us taxes. So, a friend told my father if you go away from Tarnopol, it will take them years if they will ever find you. So, we decided to, that we are going to go to Skalat.

First, went my mother. She got immediately a job there and she was now, had to learn other things because to teach Polish history or Polish language were not the most important things right now but she was fluent from before in Ukrainian so the language was no problem anymore except that she had to learn a little bit of Russian history and this [and that] and they were offering courses to train the teachers.

JS: Is Skalat in Poland or is it in Ukraine?

AP: Skalat is in Poland.

RP: It's in the Ukraine. Galicia is the Ukraine.

JS: So that's why she had to learn Ukrainian…

AP: Eastern, eastern part of Poland…

RP: Western part of Ukraine.

AP: …eastern part of Poland consisted of three regions, four regions: the Carpathian region, the Ukrainian region, the White Russian region and the Lithuanian region. That was somehow when they carved out the borders based on history and this and that, it encompassed from the north part of Lithuania, going down south it was part of White Russia, going further south was part of Ukrainia and then it was Carpathia.

JS: So what language did they speak in Skalat?

AP: In Skalat, they spoke Polish and Ukrainian.

JS: So, that's why she had to know Ukrainian?

AP: In all Galicia, they spoke Ukrainian except I think in Carpathia. Over there, they may have been talking Hungarian or Romanian, I'm not too sure what was there.

JS: And did your father get a job?

AP: My father was sitting in the house because whenever he went out to the street, we would have to go and pick him up from the *NKVD*[8].

JS: What's that, the police?

RP: KGB predecessor.

AP: No, *NKVD*…

RP: It's the KGB predecessor.

AP: No, there were both of them. *NKVD* was the police and the *NKGB* which is KGB known here, was the political or secret police. They were in uniforms too but different. We would have to pick him up from the regular police.

JS: Why?

AP: Because always somebody from the local Communists would point him out and say "Hey, there goes a capitalist, there goes a rich man, get him." And he would spend the rest of the day in there. By the time we would g-- my mother and I, we would get home from school, we would have to go and get him out.

EP: I don't know whether you told them--you said something about you went to Skalat because that's the town where your parents were born.

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[8]NKVD - *Narodny Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del* (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) was the Soviet secret police. (*The Holocaust*, Nora Levin, 1973, Schocken Books, New York.)

AP: This is why they didn't want to go to an unknown-- we couldn't stay in Tarnopol so they went, they went to the, to my father's home town, not my mother's. My mother's was to the south in Mikulince.

RP: That was the town 20 miles south of Skalat or near Skalat?

AP: No, my mother came from a town that was, from Skalat it was about 40-50 miles, maybe more. And Tarnopol was the province capital and Skalat was the county se-- seat. There were some smaller towns surrounding it.

JS: Tell us what street you lived on in Skalat?

AP: Ooh.

JS: If you can remember. I remember you told me there was a market place.

AP: It was on the market. I don't remember whether it had a name or what.

JS: The market was in the center of…

AP: The center of the town. The market was a big market in the center of the town and we were living a little bit off the market towards the church, which also had the big free area in front of it.

JS: How many stories was your building that you lived in?

AP: A single story.

JS: Single story. Was it a house?

AP: Yes. I had a house there.

JS: You had a house in Skalat?

AP: In Skalat, that my grandfather…

JS: How did you get the money?

AP: I didn't have the money. This was my, my inheritance. It was, belongs-- it my grandmother's and when my grandmother passed away, she had in her will given it to my father. Because of tax laws and also my father was always saying that he was very sick, he won't live long, so he immediately registered it in my name. That was one of the tallest buildings in Skalat. It was a three story building.

JS: But you said you lived in a one story house?

AP: My grandfather [Mordechai Perlmutter] lived with Gusta Wechsler's parents, lived there with her. [And with Gusta].

JS: These are not the same grandparents-- you say two of your grandfathers worked in Tarnopol?

AP: They worked in Tarnopol but later on, eventually, my father had to chase his father [Mordechai Perlmutter] out from the business because he was costing him money.

JS: Did he move back to Skalat?

AP: Whenever a Jew with a beard and *peyes* [Yiddish: sidelocks] came in and started to cry how bad it is, my grandfather would give him credit and that was it. You would never see it. And my father used to say thanks to him, I don't know how many marriages and *brises* and *bar mitzvahs* I have paid for. So eventually, it got to the point,

"If you don't know how to say no, I'm sorry I will send you the money every month but stay home because it will be much cheaper for me if I send you the money." You don't have to…

JS: So, they went home back to Skalat…

AP: And my mother's grandfather, [Arthur meant to say "and my maternal grandfather" – Tobias Mecies] he didn't involve himself too much with sales, he wasn't a salesman so-- nor [was he] anxious to do any business so he was there, I don't know, his official title was cashier.

JS: But the other one who was sent home, your paternal grandfather, he was sent home to Skalat?

AP: To Skalat, yes.

RP: And they were still alive at that time, both of them?

AP: When we came? Sure.

JS: So, you knew your grandparents?

AP: I knew him from before because he came one day to Lódz after my grandmother died.

JS: Did you ever know that grandmother?

AP: Supposedly, the last time I saw her, I was 16 months old.

JS: Oh, okay.

AP: So.

JS: And the other grandmother?

AP: Both my grandmothers saw me when I was a baby, a little baby but I never, I never knew them. Well, maybe my paternal grandmother I did know her but I don't remember because she passed away in '37. So, I was already about eight years old. I might have seen her. I can't remember…

JS: What was her name?

AP: Her name was Basya [Friedman-Perlmutter].

JS: Basya.

AP: And the other one was Bella [Friedman-Mecies]. Bella [Hammer-Vidan] from Israel is named after her grandmother.

RP: After Anna's [Anna Friedman Hammer's] mother.

AP: Anna's mother, yes.

JS: And your grandfathers, it was Bella and who, what was your grandfather's name?

AP: Bella was married to Toivy, Tobias.

JS: Toivy Friedman.

AP: Friedman. No, he was Mecies, really.

EP: He was not Friedman.

AP: He was Mecies but since the Jews never got married legally the children had the mother's name. My father married his parents otherwise I would have been Friedman and Friedman.

RP: Your father…

AP: He married his parents.

JS: But he is not a rabbi?

AP: No, but he-- they were married by the Jewish religion, they weren't legally married by the lay authorities. That's what he did, he married them.

EP: See, in Europe [unclear], the Rabbinates did not have the authority to marry you.

AP: The priest didn't have the authority, the rabbi didn't have the authority. Here they have.

CF: No, you can be married here with three witnesses. You put the ring on [unclear]…

AP: You had to go to the courthouse or...

RP: Jews didn't do that?

AP: No, Jews never recognized the legal authorities.

JS: So, there was Bella and Tobias [Mecies] and Baysa and…

AP: Mordechai.

JS: Mordechai Perlmutter. And Baysa and Mordechai [Perlmutter] stayed in Tarnopol.

AP: No, Skalat. [Skalat was the Perlmutter ancestral town].

JS: They were in Skalat, Bella and…

AP: Basya and Mordechai. Basya and Mordechai were in Skalat.

JS: Bella and Tobias were in Tarnopol.

AP: Bella and Tobias I think they went to Skalat after the war also. [World War I]

EP: After the war, no, just before the war.

AP: After the war, World War I when they came back from Mikulince. No. When they came back from Vienna. Actually, I'm sorry, my grandfather [Tobias Mecies] never got to Vienna. He was in Czechoslovakia. Only the girls went to Vienna.

RP: That's the grandfather Tobias.

AP: Yes. Toivy.

JS: Now Bella and Basya were sisters?

AP: Bella and Basya were sisters.

JS: And they were Friedmans?

AP: They were Friedmans.

JS: And Tobias was…

AP: Was Mecies.

JS: Okay. But your grandmother-- your mother, Regina, was a Friedman but she was really a Mecies?

AP: That's correct.

EP: And if Daddy's father wouldn't have married his parents, he would be a Friedman, too.

RP: What do you mean he married them?

AP: He went to the appropriate authority's office in the county and married them, filled out the necessary papers.

RP: Thirty years after the fact.

JS: Why would he have been a Friedman?

AP: Twenty years, 30 years, I don't know.

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

AP: My mother… [long pause on the tape] That's fine. Let them do what they want. I'm not going to fight with them.

JS: Why does a child take his mother's name when he's-- quote unquote-- illegitimate, rather than his father's name?

RP: Because no one knows who the father is.

JS: Who the father is, okay, alright. Theoretically.

AP: You know who the mother is, right? Because the child is born in a hospital of a mother.

JS: So even on a birth certificate, you can't say "Give this child this other person's last name"?

AP: You could if there was a document that says that they are married.

JS: Oh, only if they got legally married.

AP: That's right, otherwise, he is a bastard.

JS: We're way off the track here now.

RP: Alright, I want to go back to the store in Tarnopol so I can go visit the Soviet Union and reclaim our property [laughing]. What was the address, do you remember the address, the street where this…

AP: The business in Tarnopol was also on the market. I don't know, it sounds something like Rynek[9] *desiat* [Russian: ten] which is Rynek number 10. I don't know whether this was my father's business address or not because this was the place to have a business. In those days, the whole business was held at the marketplace.

EP: [Cousin] Mincia knows the address.

JS: Mincia knows the address.

AP: Yes, she was, she was pretty grown up by that time.

EP: She was there.

AP: She spent quite a few years there.

RP: And she married the junior accountant?

AP: Yes.

RP: Did she work at the store?

AP: She was cooking for my grandfather and my father.

JS: Okay, so in Skalat, how long were you in total in Skalat? And tell me when the *Aktion*[10] started.

AP: Okay, let's do a little bit first. In Skalat, I was…

JS: We have three tapes.

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[9]*rynek* – Polish for "market." The street was probably called "Market Street."

[10]*Aktion* - "action" referred to a violent operation against Jewish (or other) civilians by German security forces and was part of Nazi parlance to obscure the reality of what they were doing. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.)

AP: In Skalat, eventually as I said, my mother was teaching. She had to take all sorts of courses so that she would be a good Soviet teacher and teach history as before and geography now, because she was qualified to teach geography before that. This was the way the specialties were in humanities that she could teach there. Mainly, it was the language and history but geography, too. So, now this is what she was teaching and I was going to school and we had in those days, we had three schools in Skalat. There was a Polish school, a Ukrainian school and a Jewish school. Skalat was a town, oh I don't know, 10-12,000 people and roughly again, one-third were Jews, 3500.

JS: It was pretty small.

AP: It was a small town.

JS: Was it a horse and buggy type place?

AP: That's correct, but it had the rail station.

JS: Had Lódz had a lot of horse and buggy or were there cars there?

AP: In Lódz you saw some cars. In Lódz you saw trolley cars, electric trolley cars, that was very good transportation system and you saw plenty of horse and buggies, carriages like the ones you rent in Central Park in New York. You have to realize this was a) in the 1930s, b) it wasn't in the United States or in Western Europe, it was in Poland. There were taxis, there were people that had cars but the car was not, the car was not a very popular item. It was beginning to be introduced in Poland.

JS: Okay.

AP: Not long before that, all you had is trucks, as far as the combustion engine is concerned.

JS: So, Skalat was a small town and you lived near the market in a house, you also-- you were the legal owner of that house at age 10?

AP: No, where I lived, we rented the house.

JS: You rented the house, but you owned a building.

AP: My house, my building that my grandfather lived in-- I was-- I had no income from that house.

JS: Why?

AP: I don't know. My father wouldn't collect any rent from his father.

JS: Oh, okay. But legally, it was your building from your other grandfather?

AP: No, from that grandfather that lived in it. [Mordechai Perlmutter.]

JS: His wife gave it to you?

AP: His wife gave it to me.

RP: For tax reasons.

AP: Yes. For tax reasons and for my father's fear always that he was going to die young so he willed it to me.

JS: Why did he think he was going to die young?

AP: Because he had imaginary sicknesses, too, in that time. You know what.

EP: He did die young.

JS: He did. I mean it's pretty funny.

AP: Fine, but at that time, he didn't have anything of what happened later.

RP: He was a hypochondriac.

JS: Who knows maybe he actually had something wrong.

AP: No, he had a little stomach problem and he exaggerated.

JS: Oh, don't tell me about stomach problems, I don't want to hear it.

AP: So he exaggerated.

JS: I don't want to think that that's what I [unclear].

AP: And he was going to have a heart attack.

EP: Did he *ever* complain!

RP: [laughing] Now let's put this on tape for the great grandkids.

JS: That's it. A little louder please.

AP: Yeah. So.

EP: Okay. Continue.

JS: Did he ever complain about [unclear].

AP: So, my mother was working, I was going to school initially for a while, my father was hiding until they sent a new assistant principal for the school where my mother was teaching.

JS: Was this a Jewish school?

AP: No, she was teaching in the Ukrainian school, which everything was consolidated into that school eventually.

JS: Okay.

AP: And this woman became very friendly and she was on the County Politburo of the Communist party and she eventually obtained for my father permission to work and found him a job. He was working as a, an accountant for the outfit that was buying up straw for the paper industry and the two guys that were running in the county, that outfit, they were Jewish guys. So, they were very happy that they got my father who is a Jewish guy and they said now we are going to do business. What means in Russia to do business, you have to steal from the state. Otherwise, you can't live on your salary. And my father refused to take any money for himself because he was afraid but he had to cover for them. What did he have to do? Create imaginary names of people that they were working bailing that straw and loading it on trucks.

JS: That's not good, he was guilty of conspiracy.

AP: Sure he was guilty but he wanted the job very badly so he had to do it. And there was working for him a young fellow as a bookkeeper and he was showing him how to do it, too, and he was very much afraid a young fellow may talk but that young fellow wanted the job also, and he knew already by that time that this is the Russian reality and in Russia everybody is stealing because otherwise, you cannot survive and these guys had now an opportunity so they were stealing.

JS: Meanwhile they were …

AP: And once he was working already, they stopped harass, this harassment and he could walk on the street and do whatever he wanted and that was it. He was cleared already and the *NKVD* knew that he was cleared by the party committee to work, he had a job and if anybody tried to harass him, they wouldn't follow it. Still, it was a small community, so-- the kids-- they were no kids--they were grownup men that could not forget that my father was involved in Zionist activities and this is what they had against him that he was involved in Zionist activities.

RP: Which kids, Jewish kids?

AP: They were Jews, mostly Jews.

RP: They didn't want--they were anti-Zionists?

AP: Naturally, being Communists, they were anti-Zionist. They remembered my father helped hundreds of Russian Jews escape from Russia early after the Revolution. So, and he was from the wealthy people in the town because my, my grandfather was a wealthy person before and through World War I. All this they remembered.

RP: How was he a wealthy person? This was not the grandfather who used to…

AP: They were both wealthy.

RP: Both grandfathers? How…?

AP: My maternal grandfather owned forests. He lost them during World War I.

JS: How can you get rich owning forests?

RP: You chop down trees and sell wood.

AP: This was a big, this was a big business in Poland. The wood was used for burning in the stoves and the wood was used for construction timber and so you were selling parts, this part of wood would be cut and then it was reseeded and new young trees were grown in. It was a big business.

RP: Okay, so this was the maternal grandfather? [Tobias Mecies]

AP: This was the maternal [grandfather] and the other...

RP: …the one who was a bad salesman?

AP: That's right.

RP: That was your father…

JS: That one is Tobias.

EP: No, no, no not the one that used to give away for credit…

JS: [unclear]

AP: That was Perlmutter. [Mordechai]

RP: And how was he a wealthy man?

AP: He was in business, he was in businesses before the war. I don't know. I think it was in the fabric and other things and he used to travel to the, to the markets.

JS: How did he get rich if he gave everything away?

AP: Oh, that's a curious story. My fraternal [Arthur means "paternal"] grandfather was a great believer.

EP: Paternal.

JS: Paternal.

RP: Fraternal is your brother's [unclear].

AP: Oh, my paternal grandfather, he was a great believer in both, the Czar Nicholai and what's his-- Kaiser Franz Joseph.

RP: Franz Joseph [unclear].

AP: Russia and Austria, their emper-- their two emperors—at the time, he was Emperor, but he was Kaiser, that was his title. That he will last forever so all the money that he [Mordechai Perlmutter] made, he would convert into these two currencies and his…

EP: *Balagole*[11]--

AP: *Balagole*--how do you translate-- wagon driver, he did not believe in any of that, he changed everything [all his currency] because he would always say, "Mutya, will you let me do a little bit on the side?" "Sure." So he would do a little bit of handling on his own and he would put away his money only in dollars, U.S. dollars.

JS: He was smart.

AP: So, when the war was over and the Russian Revolution took place, there was no more Austrian Empire, there was no more Czarist Russia so I had 10 monstrous bags full with money to play with and my grandfather didn't have money and his *balagole,* he bought the largest, he became the largest landowner, he bought 2,000 acres of the choicest land there and he was the landowner. So,-- oops [tape off then on]

JS: Okay. After knocking down the tape recorder …

AP: So this is why my grandfather from a very wealthy man was not wealthy at all [laughs].

RP: So he proved his business acumen by losing all this money?

AP: So, later on, he continued to be such a good businessman in my father's business so finally, my father gave up on this because he could not afford any more these losses.

JS: Those coins that are in Mommy's gold bracelet, are those any of the coins from Russia or are those different coins?

AP: These are-- my father had a huge collection that somewhere exists in Lutomiersk if somebody didn't find it.

RP: In where?

AP: In Lutomiersk, outside of Lódz. That was buried if it's still there, a fortune in silverware and in gold coins.

JS: Buried? In a couch, buried in couch.

AP: No, buried underground.

EP: In the ice…

AP: In the old ice cellar.

JS: In an old ice cellar?

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[11]*balagole* – is wagon in Yiddish. (Yiddish dictionary) *Balagole* could mean the one in charge of the wagon.

AP: Of a very good friend of ours. He buried it there and ours is buried there.

JS: We have to go back and find these things.

AP: And those famous-- they were made out of copper where seltzer was made because they had a soda factory.

JS: What's the address?

AP: So they made sweet sodas in Lutomiersk. I don't remember the address.

RP: They are probably dug up.

EP: What's the name of the family?

AP: Glicensztain was the family name.

EP: The factory of Glicensztain

JS: And they manufactured…

AP: They manufactured soda.

EP: Seltzer.

AP: Soda and seltzer. This was the big cylinders in which they kept the seltzer because in those days, it wasn't that you had a cylinder with gas and a cylinder with water and the machine, the dispensing machine would mix it and create bubbly water. No, in those days, it was a horse that was driving and a rung which was providing the rotating motion through wooden gears [laughs]. And this is how they mixed that water with CO_2 to make seltzer water and then they were filling up the cylinders, copper cylinders and they opened the copper cylinders and there is silverware…

EP: [unclear]

AP: That each spoon and each fork was weighing a half a pound, pure silver.

JS: Wow. Okay, we got sidetracked again.

AP: Okay, going back…

JS: So, you were in Skalat, and your dad started working.

AP: …so we were in Skalat and my father is working and things started to be livable when the rumors started about that the Germans, that there will be a Russian German war and when-- as soon as the war started on June 21, '41, the two Jewish Russian fellows that my father worked for that were in charge of that straw buying business, they told him to please run away with us into Russia and they had room in the truck that both their families were going into Russia because they were among the prominent and powerful Russians in the area and following, I don't know, a family council or whatever it was, the decision was the Russian army was surrendering so quickly to the Germans that what's the use to run to Russia. Within six weeks, Russia will stop existing, it will be all occupied by the Germans and then, to be a Jew and be caught in, even deep in Ukrainia…

JS: No way to get out.

AP: …or among some of the Moslem countries in Russia, we will be killed there, so let's be here among everybody and what will happen with everybody else will happen with us.

JS: In the meantime, there were no bomb shells in Skalat all this time?

AP: No, they never bombed Skalat, Skalat wasn't that important to bomb it even. Because even the railroad station, the railroad didn't go to any important place. From there, it went to Grimajlov, then to a few other towns but that was it, that was the end. It was the point where they used to bring the railcars, collect the corn, the wheat and whatever else that was growing and go further. This was already pretty close to the former pre-1939 border between Poland and Russia. So, the decision was not to, not to run away from there but [to] stay. And it was about two weeks after the war started, the Germans marched in, into Skalat. Me as a curious kid as usual, I had to see whether the Germans looked different now than they looked in '39, two years before that in Lódz. And I was standing on the main street. All those towns were no different than a village here, you had a main street and everything is along that main street and if it's a larger town, a little bit larger town or a village, there are a few side streets and that's about it. So everybody was on the main street watching the Germans come in and I was standing then already, the men were hiding, and when I saw that the Germans stopped, they got off their vehicles and the first thing they do, they started to round up Jews with beards and cut off their beards and grab those Jews. So, I ran between everybody, ran back to the home and I told [them] the Germans are starting to cut beards and this is how my father then, with the other men, even went deeper into hiding. There was an old cellar from who knows how many years before that was running under the house that we were living [in] and it could be blocked off in a way that it would be very difficult to determine that there was something. So, they were hidden there.

JS: Kind of like Anne Frank's?

AP: Well, something like this, yes. And they were hiding, all the men were there and I was with my mother and the other women. In those days, they still didn't bother women and children and we were there waiting when they came. The men weren't there, they continued running and this was the first pogrom in Skalat. They rounded up 400 and plus Jews[12], they took them into an old fortress where there were ruins, a medieval fortress in Skalat, and they slaughtered them, just killed them.

JS: Any of the people you knew who were slaughtered there?

AP: There were some people that we knew, some of my parents' acquaintances. I think there was a grandfather of one of my friends from school.

JS: What was the reaction of the people of the town after this?

AP: Nothing, everybody started realizing what we have to expect.

JS: I mean, was the town in mourning or was it more fear than mourning.

AP: There was no time really to mourn. The families were in mourning, the friends of the people that were caught and that tried to help them as much as possible but everybody just started to think what to do now. And two days later, it was still everything in a stage of chaos. Came a Ukrainian delegation. These were the people who occupied

[12]On July 6, 1941, 600 Jews are murdered in Skalat. (Holocaust Chronicle, pg. 245)

in the meantime the county seat and they became the county employees and chiefs and whatever and they came to our house to look up for my father because they wanted him to become the head of the *Judenrat*[13].

JS: What is that?

AP: *Judenrat* was the Jewish community governing body.

JS: Oh like these policemen that you were telling me about?

AP: Well, yes, the policemen, the Jewish policemen worked for them but this was a community, Jewish community board, let's call it, and my father refused. He didn't want to do it because he knew what, what eventually will come and he was not ready to do it. So, but he didn't-- he said well, he doesn't want to be it, he feels he doesn't know enough and you know, tried to invent all sorts of things and even well-- so, they asked him, "Well don't give us an answer immediately," and so on and so forth so they went to a veterinarian in the town and they told him that they asked my father and that my father was considering and that they would like him to join with my father to be the second in command and so on.

EP: That was Yanka's father, isn't it?

AP: No, not Yanka's father. So, he sent his kid to check with my father. We were friends, we went to school together. The boy came in and said they wanted my father and my father wouldn't do anything without what your father is doing so we let know my father and my father said, "I'm not going to be, I don't know yet how I will completely tell them no, and in the meantime, I didn't give them a no or yes," and the kid went back to that fellow and he told him this and that fellow said, "If Jacob Perlmutter won't be, I certainly won't be either." The two of them refused so then they started to look around and as usual in these cases, they find always-- let's not call them among the scum but it's not the top people that get involved in that.

JS: And who was going around asking people to be in the *Judenrat,* the Gestapo?

AP: The Ukrainians, the Ukrainians, no, the Ukrainians because they were the civilian power now and so it was-- they received from the Gestapo the task of organizing the Jewish community. Also so that they would have through whom to go. Well, eventually, within a couple of weeks, a *Judenrat* was organized and…

JS: How did your dad know what, that that was not going to be a good thing to be?

AP: Janet, I don't want to sound immodest or whatever but my father was a very, very smart man. He analyzed very quickly things and he saw the consequences and he knew that for Jews, it means absolutely nothing good.

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[13]*Judenrat* - "During World War II, the Germans established Jewish councils, usually called *Judenraete* (sg., *Judenrat*). These Jewish municipal administrations were required to ensure that Nazi orders and regulations were implemented. Jewish council members also sought to provide basic community services for ghettoized Jewish populations." (*Holocaust Encyclopedia*, www.ushmm.org.)

JS: Okay.

RP: He was a *Piniak*.[14]

AP: And he would not, he would not, he would never do anything that would mean to do harm to any other Jew and he knew one way or another there will be tasks asked of the *Judenrat* that would involve doing harm to others. That's the only reason why they wanted him. He would never participate in it no matter what, so he refused. They eventually organized a *Judenrat* and within a few weeks after the Germans occupied Skalat, there was the first order from the Gestapo that they require, I don't know, 600 people for resettlement[15] or whatever they called it. They wanted only the elderly at that time. Everybody knew what means that, that this is not to resettle but that this is to kill them. And the *Judenrat* at that time already was organized and they had officers, the different officers that the Gestapo gave the list because the Gestapo had a blueprint of what a *Judenrat* is. There was a treasurer, there was a labor commissioner, there was a this, there was a that and there was the president and they demanded so many men and the *Judenrat* started to round up those men because first of all, they told that the *Judenrat* should have a census of the population and they made it and then that they should know elderly men, men in good health condition that could be used for heavy labor and women and children. And it was more than anything at that point that they wanted to know whom they have or whom they have already to kill immediately so that they wouldn't be just a burden and require to be fed and people than can do heavy labor, they will use them in the meantime to build highways and whatever they want before they kill them. This was the only differentiation, whom they can work to death before they kill them and whom they kill immediately. And they started to-- so the *Judenrat* had these lists and then they told them, we want the 600 elderly men, because at the same time they had to submit it to the Gestapo.

JS: Why didn't they take elderly women as well?

AP: I don't know. It started always with men. And they started to look for those men, and my grandfather was hidden. So, the *Judenrat* sent the police to pick up my father so that my father would disclose where my grandfather is and then they would exchange him but my father said, "I don't know, I don't know, I don't live in the same building, I don't know where he is, I don't know where he's hiding or whether he is hiding." "Oh, then, we will keep you here." He said "Fine, keep me here." But after a short while, he looked around, he saw nobody was guarding him so my father just took a walk out from there [simply walked out] and went to my uncle's [Mendel Perlmutter's] place and he hid there.

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[14]A term invented by the Perlmutter family to indicate that someone is extremely smart. It came from Bobe Pinie, in the early 1800s, who was a very bright and scholarly female ancestor – unusual acclaim for a female at that time.

[15]"Resettlement" – "resettlement to the East (*Umsiedlung nach dem Osten*) a Nazi euphemism for deportation and murder, refer[ing] to the forced deportation of Jewish civilians to killing centers in German-occupied Poland." (*Holocaust Encyclopedia*, www.ushmm.org.)

JS: Your dad hid?

AP: My dad hid with my uncle because...

RP: Which uncle? Not Sol.

AP: Mendel. Sol was in the United States.

JS: Why did he hide with your uncle rather than go back home because they would come back after him again?

AP: I don't know why he went there but that's where he went and…

EP: Maybe because they had gone there to look for them.

AP: First, they went there and my uncle and his sons were in hiding.

JS: So, it was your great uncle maybe?

AP: No, my father's brother.

JS: He was old enough to be considered an elderly man?

AP: No.

JS: So why was he in hiding?

AP: Because first of all, he was older than my father and second of all, he knew if they don't find my grandfather, they will go and look for him.

JS: Okay. See, I don't have the war mentality.

AP: Yeah, I understand. That's good that you ask questions. So, they went to him to look for him. When they didn't find there anybody then they went to look for my father and my father in the meantime, it happened that he walked out and he was in the house available because he had to do something, otherwise he wouldn't have been as easily available. So, they got him but he walked out and he went into hiding, too, and then my aunt came and told that he is in hiding and that my mother and I should go in hiding, so we went into hiding, too.

JS: And where did you hide?

AP: Either in the basement that was in our house or with my uncle, that the whole family would be there. I really don't remember exactly but I know we were all in hiding.

JS: Where did your uncle [Mendel Perlmutter] live, also in Skalat?

AP: Also in Skalat and also on the *rynek* [market], a few blocks away but I told you, the *rynek* was a huge place in Skalat because it was the county seat. I think that it's possible even that the *rynek* in Skalat was much larger than the market in Tarnopol although Tarnopol was the, the capitol of the province. And…

JS: Okay, so you went into hiding.

AP: Well, later on when the Germans came and they picked up all the elderly men, my grandfather wasn't on it but this was the first time that we saw already how the *Judenrat* is going to operate and this is what was one of the things that my father said he's not going to do it.

EP: When was the ghetto in Skalat started?

AP: After that. After that, the Germans decided that there will be no more Jews in the surrounding villages, in the surrounding towns, that everybody will have to move

into the ghetto and they lined out where the ghetto will be and the part where we lived was within the borders of the first ghetto. It was like the main street was going around like this and then there was another main, main road and another main road because Skalat was a kind of a center of roads. From there it went to different directions so whatever was on this side of the road, south, let's say, of this road became the ghetto, everything else on the north, this was-- would not be the ghetto. And it happened there was only one thing in this part of the city which was the old castle and the Ukrainian church.

RP: Was it this part of the city being the ghetto or the other side? The other side had the castle and the Ukrainian church?

AP: No, it was on this side of the road.

RP: The south side.

AP: The south side of the road. Here was the market and then there was this big place with the church and then was the old castle.

RP: And that was part of the ghetto?

AP: No, this would be outside of the ghetto. The line would go there but from the houses in that part, they were the ghetto-- they were part of the ghetto. The ghetto wasn't behind any walls, behind anything, not even wires, in Skalat.

EP: Arthur, excuse me, something to go over, all those little towns were like-- we can talk about them like in quadrants because they all had crosses.

AP: No, this one didn't have a cross. This is what I am saying, this one had a road that curved and then it had one road continued this way, one road came out here and one road came out straight. No, one was say, straight north, one was northeast and one was to the south.

RP: Because we can't say this, this, this.

AP: This is what I said, this is why I put it like this [laughs].

RP: Curving to the northeast?

AP: No, the road was curving to the south.

RP: To the south.

AP: And off it like a couple of rays, came one to the north and one northeast. And the ghetto was to the south of that road that curved from west to south.

JS: And you don't know the names of any of the roads?

AP: We can find it probably here in the book [Abraham Weissbrod's *Death of a Shtetl*]. There is a chance that we can find the names. And when the first ghetto was organized, they brought in thousands of Jews from the surrounding villages and surrounding towns and the people didn't even have a good chance to settle yet when in the middle of the night, the Germans came down on the town. And this was the, the first pogrom organized by the Germans. They came with the Ukrainian police.

RP: You had mentioned another pogrom where 400 had died.

JS: That was the first one.

AP: That was the first one. This was the, this was really the third one because the second one the *Judenrat* rounded up the people.

JS: The 600 older people.

AP: The 600 older people.

JS: That was the second one. Now this is the third.

AP: Now this is the third one that the Germans themselves did all the dirty work with Ukrainians.

JS: How did you feel when you heard all these bombs and things going off?

AP: Well, Janet, you didn't have time to feel. You were, you were scared to death and you were thinking, can I hide?, will I survive?, will they find me or will they not find me? And in the meantime, since the first pogrom, we had much modified that cellar. We built a wall out of clay that looked exactly like it would be part of-- this is how far they did the digging and that's where they stopped. There was nothing else going on and there was always some water in it and so we had prepared boards there in such a way that when we run in and go into hiding, we then from the back, shove in a block of that clay that looked the same as the rest and it seems that this is as if it's completely sealed off and you can't even see in the wet soil, the marks of shoes. And I don't know, that night, either there was a premonition that something was coming because things felt-- you felt in the air or somebody knew something and told something my father, these are the kind of details that I can't tell you exactly, but we went all into hiding. All the people that participated of building of that cellar, we went into hiding. There was nobody upstairs and there was a little vent that came up to the street that we could know already when there is light and that this is how we got the air into that cellar. We were two stories under the ground because that particular cellar was under the normal basement of the house and it was not under our house, it was under our neighbor's house where it was and it was part of the net of cellars that were running to and from the castle that they had all sorts of escape routes.

JS: This was from the castle?

AP: Part of something very old and we made it look like it caved in when they built the street and that was it and we were further away hidden and we knew we had a very good hiding place and we were sitting there, the Weinsachs, us, the Migdens and that was it.

JS: The Migdens, too?

AP: That was his, the Migdens from Philadelphia, it was his cousin that lived in the back of us.

CF: What about food?

AP: We had some food with us but who cared and we had water with us, too, but this was, this was not the main concern and we were there and spent 48 hours which is how long it took that pogrom and during that time, we heard Germans run back and forth yelling, they would break doors into our houses and so on and we stayed calm like nothing would have happened down there. And we had a little child with us so the only thing was

the preoccupation of the mother to keep the child from crying so nobody could hear a voice because we knew we had that vent coming out there. It was well hidden but still, if they're hearing a voice, then they would start digging until they dig us up. And after 48 hours, we heard again some Jewish voices. They were banging on the doors trying to-- knowing that if somebody hid somewhere that they would know that it's all over. So, we heard people say it's all over but then, you never were ready to believe. Do you believe the Jewish police or don't believe, because maybe they fell short of the number that the Germans wanted and so they are just telling people, so we sat another day until it was at night and at night, finally, we ventured out into our house. One woman went out and she looked and she saw there was no, no problem, nobody was-- no Germans, nobody in any place, so we went out, closed back our doors and spent the night already in our apartment. By the next day, we knew that they had rounded up, I don't know, 3 - 4,000 people.

JS: Oh, my God. How do you take a count like that?

AP: We didn't have an exact count but we knew that about 3 – 4,000 people were brought in from the villages and other towns and in Skalat before the Germans came in, there were about 3,000, 3,500 Jews and people knew each other in these small towns and they knew who was killed in the first action, who was rounded up by the *Judenrat*.

JS: So, from word of mouth, you could calculate?

AP: So, you could figure out and the *Judenrat* eventually gave the numbers or if you knew the *Judenrat* had to prepare immediately new lists. So, there was an idea that thousands of people were rounded up, townspeople, some of the people that were brought in from the villages.

JS: What was the quota this time, elderly or male?

AP: Everybody. Already this was everybody, this was it.

JS: And did they just kill them on the spot or did they take them away?

AP: No, they took them away. This is where already the, the death camps were operating and established. And this started…

RP: Those people, were they taken to Auschwitz or…

AP: …this started-- no, to Belzec, not far from a town that's famous in Jewish literature, Belz, "*Mein Shteitele Belz*," there are books and songs about it.

JS: How far away was that from Skalat?

AP: From Skalat to Tarnopol were I believe 40 kilometers, from Tarnopol to Lemberg to Lwów were 170 - 200 kilometers and this was the north, going from Lwów, I don't know 100 - 150 kilometers.

JS: So about 350.

AP: So, you're talking 300 - 400 kilometers.

RP: From Skalat.

AP: From Skalat, yeah.

RP: So about 200 - 250 miles.

AP: About 300 miles, closer to 300 miles.

JS: A long ride.

AP: Oh yeah. And they were, they were…

JS: Where did they put them all, in trains?

AP: They were put first into the synagogue. That's where they rounded up and from the synagogue, then by trucks, they took them to Tarnopol and in Tarnopol, they loaded them on trains.

JS: You had a central synagogue in Skalat?

AP: As, as, as in every town of that size, there was a big synagogue. And they were *shtiblach* [small synagogues].

RP: Okay.

JS: Was it near the church or the castle?

AP: No, this was this was-- it was in that ghetto. This was always-- that part was predominantly Jewish. And that's where the synagogue was, that's where the *mikveh* [Hebrew: ritual bath] was.

JS: The *mikveh* and everything, did your mother used to go to the *mikveh*?

AP: No. Don't forget, there was a *mikveh*. This was a very Jewish town.

JS: I wonder how they felt about the Conservative, the Reformed…

AP: They didn't find.

EP: There was no Conservative or Reform.

JS: [unclear].

AP: When my uncle Sol, when my uncle Sol went to the United States, my grandfather *Od Gerissen Kriah*[16], because he died for him. He went to that *treyf* [Hebrew: impure] United States.

JS: How did they feel about your parents who didn't probably wear *tzitzit* [Hebrew: ritual fringes worn by observant men] and didn't go to the *mikveh* and didn't have *peyes* [Yiddish: sidelocks of hair worn by observant men] and how did they feel about that?

AP: But still, in spite of all that, my grandfather knew that my father in heart was a *Husiatyner khosid* [follower of the *Husiatyner rebbe*[17], rabbi].

JS: What's that?

AP: Because when all the doctors said that I should have my appendix removed, before he finally agreed to have the operation done, he went to the *Husiatyner rebbe* [rabbi] to hear what he would say and when you went to the *rebbe*, you, you went with a nice bundle of money and he took it there and *Husiatyner rebbe* gave one of those answers, "Everything will be fine, God will help, do whatever is necessary to do and God will help."

JS: So because your dad did that, his dad knew that he was…

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[16]*Od Gerissen Kriah* - Yiddish: act of tearing one's clothes as an expression of grief for the loss of a loved one; Gerissen - German, means "tear/torn."

[17]The *Husiatyn Rebbe* would come through Skalat on the way to his father's grave for his father's Yahrzeit. This was an important event for the Jews of Skalat; source: the second Skalat *Yizkor* Book. Thank you to Janet Schwartz who alerted us to these details.

AP: My, my grandfather knew he is not maybe practicing the way he is, he doesn't have a beard, he doesn't have long *peyes*, he didn't finish a yeshiva and didn't have *smichot* [ordination] for a rabbi but like my grandpa-- both my grandfathers had, but that he knew and he didn't eat *treyf* [non-kosher food]. We had a very kosher home in our home. My grandfather, when he came to Lódz, he ate in our house.

RP: So, so, so how did you get to this ham and cheese sandwich in Skalat?

JS: Ham and butter.

AP: Ham and butter. And that was-- my doctor. In those days, it was that ham is very good and I was, I don't know, in those days, they invent it all, I was a sick child, you know, I had a couple of colds a year. Big deal.

RP: This was before the war?

AP: This was before the war. So the doctors had prescribed that I should have, that I should eat ham and I should get sun lamps.

JS: Sun lamps?

AP: Yeah.

JS: They had them in those days?

AP: Yes, they had them in those days. They didn't know that UV light causes cancer.

JS: Oh, God.

AP: But they had sun lamps. I don't know, did I have a Vitamin A deficiency?

EP: No, D, D.

AP: Or D deficiency, whichever, the sun, whatever.

CF: The doctor was Jewish or…

AP: Yeah. So, after a long argument and discussion, consultation with the rabbi, my father agreed yes, I can eat ham, but I couldn't eat it at the table so I had a little separate table where I would eat my ham sandwich and it was on paper and this would touch nothing and would be thrown out. But in the meantime, I learned how to eat ham and I liked the ham.

EP: In Cuba, ham was also very therapeutic.

AP: When my father after the war was very sick and in Cuba, the doctor ordered him ham sandwiches, he just couldn't eat it.

[Tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

EP, JS, RP: Conversation [unclear]

AP: I would try to prepare it for him with onions and this and that. But he would give a bite and see his dead mother in front of his eyes telling him, "How can you eat ham?" And in desperation, after talking it over with Tío José [Arthur's wife's maternal uncle, who also lived in Cuba] we brought in the rabbi. And he sat down and held a *Bikia*[18] with your grandfather for two hours.[19] Well, finally, after this big round-up, which if I'm correct, took place during summer of 1942, new limitations were imposed on the ghetto. Now, the ghetto shrank tremendously.

JS: It shrank because all the people were taken away?

AP: Well, because of all the people that were taken away and the Germans now wanted to have all the Jews more, more together so it's easier for them to round them up. And the part where we were living was already outside of the ghetto limits, the whole market was outside of the ghetto limits, only the south part of the market…

JS: How could you go to get food in the market?

AP: … and the east part. They didn't care how we got food.

JS: Oh, that's lovely.

AP: It was only the east side of the market and the south side of the market that were part of the ghetto but the rest of the city was outside. They really squeezed in.

JS: Did they build walls and all or…?

AP: No, you just knew you were not supposed to venture. We didn't have even wires, barbed wires around the ghetto. There wasn't enough room to put it up. And this time now, we moved to the same building and to the same apartment where my grandfather lived. We were now with the whole family and until that particular moment, the whole family, everybody survived. By this I mean my grandfather, Gusta [Wechsler Jorisch] and her family which is her sister, her brother and her parents.

RP: Gusta [Wechsler] Jorisch?

AP: Gusta Jorisch, and my uncle, Mendel [Perlmutter], his wife [Rose], his two sons [Dudzio & Siggy].

RP: Where was Mincha and Gusta [Friedman Berger]?

AP: Mincha and Gusta, they were in Tarnopol. They stayed in Tarnopol.

JS: Did everybody get along in this house together?

AP: Yeah.

JS: No fights?

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[18]*Baki* – (Hebrew) a person possessing expertise in a particular field of ritual law. (https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/baki)

[19]This beginning segment of testimony on tape two was on an original tape. It may not be included on all copies of the tape.

AP: No. It was at night that we were, you know, crammed into a few rooms, the whole three families really and they put in other people with us so not only that the family occupied that apartment but they put somebody else with us.

JS: What was the general atmosphere at that time, was it somber or did you ever have fun with all these people?

AP: Somber. What could you do? It was very somber. You knew already that sooner or later, they will catch you, where could you go?

JS: I would have been scared out of my pants, I would have had chronic stomachaches out of fear.

AP: Janet, you put it away and you said the following "If I do something and I'm successful, we'll survive till the next time," and then you started to think it again. If you do absolutely nothing, you will be dead. So, you didn't have too much of a choice. Then, one night, and it was just before Hanukkah, right? That's when my *Yahrzeit*[20] is--Hanukkah?

EP: Yes.

JS: Your *Yahrzeit*?

AP: It was in November, '42, that we heard the German trucks arrive and already where my grandfather lived, this was a big building especially for a town like Skalat and it was going from one street to another street with a big gate closing on both sides and a lot of people lived there. By the time we all started to run down to the hiding places, the Germans were in the building and they followed some people and they caught us all. I was hidden under--we had-- again, these were parts of some old tunnels and who knows what but these were immense, under the building two flights down, under the building, and there they had-- we had constructed sort of like, you know, it's not really beds but something that people could lay down and there was plenty of hay because there was nothing else you could keep there and I was hiding under that, under the hay and when the German went down and they started to yell out, out, out. A young German and he all by himself, one officer, went down the ladder and he by himself chased out all the Jews. You would say how come there was so many people in there, they didn't go on top of him.

JS: Did he have a gun?

AP: What the hell, if the others start throwing grenades, fine, they still can't get into there and there were quite a number of people like sheep. Like sheep, everybody was walking out so-- and he started to shoot and so my parents told me to get out and asked him to stop and so he didn't shoot; he let me get out from where I was hidden and we all went and we were, then we were-- walked out to the street and then there were plenty of Jewish policemen around it and one of them was the veterinarian that I mentioned and when he saw us, he said to my father, "What can I do?" and my father told him, "Forget about it, don't risk yourself, your life. What will be, will be." There was nothing he could

[20] *Yahrzeit* – anniversary of a death. Mr. Perlmutter is considering the possibility that this would be the day of his own death.

do. And we were taken to the synagogue and then I don't know, we were 24 hours, 36 hours, who knows how long we were there.

JS: Were you able…?

AP: During one moment, we succeeded in hiding in a given place and the Germans were walking and looking and they had a Jewish policeman look first. And the Jewish policeman who looked there was the young fellow that was my father's accountant in the straw business that worked for my father. When he saw us, he said, "Nobody is there," thinking the German was till now very lazy he didn't bend down, he won't bend down. The German bent down and he saw us and he gave a horrendous beating to the Jewish policeman that he said that, "Nobody was there," and naturally we had to get out so we were back in the synagogue, back with the whole family. There was Gusta's mother, [Pearl Perlmutter Wechsler], Gusta's father [Joseph Wechsler].

JS: Her blind mother?

AP: Her blind mother. Her brother and her sister and she [Gusta], they were hidden somewhere else. They didn't run with us. They hid somewhere else and my grandfather was there, [Mordechai Perlmutter], my uncle, [Mendel Perlmutter], my aunt [Rose, Mendel's wife] and my parents and myself. Then, a lot of other people that we knew there and as we were waiting, my grandfather [Mordechai "Marcus" Perlmutter] decided to conduct a service and was leading in prayers and eventually, when they started to take away on trucks to Tarnopol, suddenly they started to separate men from women and children and elderly people. My father and my mother told me to stand up on the tips of my…

JS: Toes.

AP: …toes and say that I'm older than I was and at that time I had already three different documents with three different ages.

JS: Why?

AP: Why, because one day it was good to be younger, one, it was good to be older so I had them both. That much, this was because my father knew people so that much he succeeded in getting all sorts of documents for me. And I passed to be as an older and they took us…

JS: How old were you really?

AP: I was 12 years old.

RP: No you were already 13 years.

AP: No, I was after *bar mitzvah*, so I was 13 years old, going on 14.

RP: And this was in November of…?

AP: November '42.

JS: You were *bar mitzvah'd* in Skalat?

AP: Yeah.

JS: In that synagogue.

AP: No, no synagogue. Because of my different ages, nobody knew I was *bar mitzvah,* only the person that taught me and prepared me. On the day I was supposed to be *bar mitzvah,* he listened to me, how I did everything that I was supposed to do in a synagogue if I would be doing. I did it at home and only he and my parents assisted, nobody else, because at that time, one day I was older, one day I was younger.

JS: Who was that person who taught you, do you remember his name?

AP: No.

JS: What else was I going to ask you? The veterinarian and that young accountant, did you ever meet up with them ever again?

AP: They didn't survive.

JS: Really.

AP: And then they from the syn-- so they took me with my father from the synagogue with both my uncles, Gusta's [Wechsler Jorisch] father and my other uncle [Mendel]. They took us…

JS: What did you say to your mother?

AP: They separated us. They took us to a small concentration camp, a labor camp, 20 miles-- no, 8 miles west of Tarnopol. And my mother, my grandfather, my two aunts, [blind Pearl Perlmutter Wechsler and Rose Perlmutter] they went to the train.

JS: And did you know that that was the last time you were going to see them?

AP: No, because my mother had promised that she's going to jump from the train. She had tools with her so that somebody could open the train and the train was open and people jumped and people told us that she didn't want to jump. But she decided she will go there and she will sacrifice herself for us.

EP: She had the premonition that if she does that, the child [Arthur] would be saved.

AP: She had money on her, she had everything. In case she jumped, or to buy her life out. But she didn't. And we, the rest of us, went to Hluboczek[21], not far from Tarnopol.

RP: Which camp did…

AP: … was a small local camp…

RP: No, your mother, where did she…

AP: …to Belzec.

RP: To Belzec.

AP: To Belzec. When we got to Hluboczek, we didn't get off, well, yet, off the truck and already, they started to beat us and to shout at us and to tell that everybody should give all the jewelry and while the Germans were saying that, the Jewish helpers were saying in Hebrew, don't do it. Some people got scared and gave the money, gave everything that

[21]Hluboczek - a labor camp near Tarnopol. (https://www.holocausthistoricalsociety.org.uk/contents/ghettoss-z/tarnopol.html.)

they had and one man could not get off the truck and they shot him right in front of everybody. Now we were already in a bad place. And we were taken in there.

JS: How far was this from Skalat?

AP: From Skalat to Tarnopol was 20 some miles and this was 8 miles so this was about 30 miles from Skalat, but we had already nobody in Skalat except later on, we found out Gusta [Wechsler] Jorisch and her sister and brother.

JS: And Martin?

AP: Martin.

JS: He was in the *Judenrat*, wasn't he?

AP: He was a policeman. But I don't know whether he was already at that time a policeman or he became-- no, at that time, he was still a sanitarian because this was his profession, he was a sanitarian.

JS: What is that?

AP: A sanitarian was the one that, that went into the houses and disinfected the houses if there was somebody sick. I'm not so sure, in the hospital he would clean out and so on. This was what he did.

JS: When was it that your father got mad at Martin for not hiding you?

AP: That's later.

JS: Okay.

AP: And then…

EP: Did you explain that this was a small concentration camp?

AP: Yes, I said it was a small local concentration camp.

EP: And they didn't put numbers, nothing.

AP: No, we didn't get any numbers on our hands, nothing.

JS: Do you know what it was called, this first one?

AP: Hluboczek.

JS: Hluboczek?

AP: Hluboczek, that was the name the, the Ukrainian-- this was a Ukrainian village and the name of the camp was the same as the village. There was a quarry and that's where we were going to work. It was already winter when this happened, snow, and every day, they woke us up, I don't know, four in the morning so that we would have few minutes to go the outhouses. And they'd stay on line and get that jar of hot dirty water with a potato in it. Once in a blue moon, there was a piece of dead horse's meat in it. Usually, it was hot water with a potato in it. That's all, with the peels with everything, dirty water.

JS: That was breakfast or that was your whole day's meal?

AP: That was breakfast and lunch supposedly. And then, we would march, I don't know how many miles to the quarry and then we would work there all day long. God forbid you stood up and straighten up your back. There was an old, 80 years old Ukrainian, he used to walk around with a…

EP: Stick.

AP: No.

JS: Whip?

AP: …with a whip and boy, as he was 80 years old, he was strong like a mule and he gave whippings. The Germans didn't have to do anything. They had a couple of Germans staying up there on guard with rifles in case somebody tried to run away but the Ukrainians were the ones that were killing the people with whips. And in the afternoon, when it got dark, they would march us back to the camp and we would get again some dirty water as a soup and go to sleep.

JS: No food?

AP: Yeah, I told you, some dirty soup.

JS: Dirty soup.

AP: That was the food we got there. And depending on his mood, either when we came back, there was-- in German, they call it *Appell*, that's something like in the military that the troops are standing up in formation in front and the officers come and hold a speech and so on. That's how we would have to be there and usually, it was in the morning just before going on [a] march, there would be a count.

RP: A roll call?

AP: This was a roll call and at the same time, if he had something to say, he would have a speech and if he was that, that day in a bad mood, they would bring in some sick people from the infirmary and either hang them in front of everybody or his dogs would tear them apart.

JS: And you saw this?

AP: Everybody had to see. You better look straight, look at it, because if you didn't, he was able to go himself and shoot you right there and they warned you that you better look straight forward and observe the whole thing because it was to scare people. Sometimes when we would come back, he would have something like this but usually, always it was in the morning before going. And in the meantime, my father had a very good friend in Skalat who was at that time already in the *Judenrat,* he was a later addition, and he started to work on getting us out from there. And he eventually really bought out us, and both Gusta's father [Joseph Wechsler] and my father's brother [Mendel].

JS: How was it that he wasn't in the camp himself?

AP: Because they still at that time, the Germans did not kill or do anything to the Jewish police nor to the members of the *Judenrat* because they knew they still did not eliminate completely. We spent about a month in that camp. My father came back, he was sick with the typhus and after that started complications and this is when he was sick and sick and sick, bedridden.

RP: That's after he got out of the camp?

AP: After he got out from there. By that time already, Mina and Gusta [Friedman] were sending food to us from Tarnopol as soon as they found out we were in Hluboczek because everybody knew what a place Hluboczek was.

JS: They sent you food in the camp?

AP: Yes.

JS: They would allow that?

AP: Yes.

JS: Would you share it with other people?

AP: We shared it with my both uncles because otherwise, they wouldn't have survived.

RP: Both uncles, Mendel and...

AP: Mendel and Gusta's father [Joseph Wechsler].

JS: So how did? Oh okay. What was it like in the concentration camp? Were you sleeping with 100 other people in a room?

AP: We had 30 centimeters space so when one turned, everybody had to turn because you didn't have room to turnaround. These were those barrack-like build and there were no beds, this was one big elevated--one elevation yea high and the other elevation like bunks. Just that this was one continuous bunk…

RP: But no mattresses, wood...

AP: …no mattresses, hay. Hay. The whole camp was, it was infested with lice and this is how my father got the typhus. I, as soon as we came in, they were, they were giving immunization shots. I took the immunization shot so I didn't get the typhus.

JS: How come he didn't take the shot?

AP: I don't know. He was afraid and I decided I will suffer the pain of the immunization but I don't want the typhus so I took it. Or maybe they only-- they didn't offer it to him, they offered it to me. This kind of details, I can't-- I remember that I took an immunization shot.

JS: What-- had you or your father ever been whipped by that man?

AP: I was whipped, he was whipped more times because each time the Ukrainian would come to whip me, my father would run up and say, "Whip me, leave him alone." As long as his desire to whip somebody was satisfied, he didn't care whom he whipped.

JS: How many times were you whipped before you left there?

AP: I don't know. I think everybody got a whipping about every day.

JS: Did you have big scars on your back?

AP: No, because it was winter time so we were warmly dressed. It hurt like hell but no scars, only if they hit you over the head. I was hit by the German a couple of times with a fist smack in my face.

JS: For doing what?

AP: It didn't matter whether you did or you didn't do it. This was no matter what you did, whichever way, it was no good. So, after about four weeks, we were out from there. My father and I first, then my two uncles came within a few days each from the other.

RP: And who was this man…?

AP: And we were, we were coming out separately. The first one, I was out, then my father, then my one uncle, then the other uncle.

CF: Where you are going?

AP: Huh?

CF: Where you are going after the camp?

AP: Back to Skalat.

EP: So you were bought out?

AP: I was bought out. And my father, too, everybody was brought out.

RP: And what was the name of the man who bought you out?

AP: Zimmer. [Yishaye/Isaiah Zimmer]

RP: Zimmer?

EP: It was a man that your father had given money after the crash, no? What was the story behind Zimmer?

AP: My father had helped him. They were very good friends from little kids.

EP: But something from the crash of 1929? I remember.

AP: My father had helped him out, yes.

EP: I remember this.

AP: Because my father after the crash of 1929 had paid off to the last penny his entire debt. He didn't have money but he had a name so he had open credit. He would go and ask and they would tell him, "Even if you wanted three times as much," they had no-- because he paid when nobody paid. So, therefore, he had a credit and this is why he was so soon after the crash, he was back in business as a wholesaler because he had all the credit he wanted.

EP: I remember him telling a story about that Zimmer.

AP: It's possible because a cousin of that Zimmer was in Cuba and is here [in the U.S.] that we were at the *bar mitzvah*. Menschler [phonetic]. But he had stolen the money that he-- that he was supposed to…

JS: Pay back?

AP: To hold it until my father will be back and just as a collateral and my father will sell it and so on and he said that he used it all up to buy us out. Everybody took advantage of everything in that time.

EP: He's the one that also left his wife and his kid.

AP: That's correct.

JS: You were in this camp for four weeks, then?

AP: I was in that camp for four weeks and we came back to Skalat and the ghetto still was not any further reduced and there was the *Schutzpolizei*.

JS: What's that?

AP: Which is regular police, protective police. "*Schutz"* means to protect which means regular police, the local police in Skalat which was German gendarmes. There was one guy who was against all these things. Schneider was his name.

JS: Against buying out?

AP: No, against killing people, against that whole thing but what could he do?

CF: He was a German?

AP: Yeah, and he came up one day and he saw us there.

JS: At this first camp?

AP: No, this was in the, back in Skalat after we came back from camp and he said, "Oh, good that you all survived, one way or another, that you survived. I wish I could do something for you people but there isn't too much that I can do." A few days later, he came back because at the same time, he liked Gusta. Gusta was a good looking woman.

JS: Gusta [Wechsler] Jorisch?

AP: Jorisch, yes. And he said that he found that he found, that there is a way he could send us all safely to Switzerland.

JS: Which was [unclear].

AP: It would, it would it would cost some money, whether we could put together that money because he didn't have money but everybody was afraid to trust a German. Plus we had to go through all Poland, part of Germany and part of Austria.

JS: Austria first?

AP: Well, and would he, would he really-- or through Austria, whichever way to get to Switzerland, we couldn't-- it was a long trip, how is he going to protect us from that? Nobody wanted to believe it. So, now we don't want to be separated whatever, who remembers what story was told to him.

CF: "We have no money now."

AP: Or "We don't have money." Nobody went for that [for Schneider's idea]. But I mentioned it because later on I will talk again about Schneider. And after a few weeks, there was another pogrom. This time, we found out what was the hiding place that Gusta [Wechsler -Jorisch] used to hide out. We found that hiding place and another hiding place and when this time the pogrom came, we didn't run anymore into the cellars which the Germans knew of them, but we went directly to go in there and Gusta and her present husband [Martin Jorisch] tried to block the entrance and my father as sick as he was at that time, he found strength in him that he pushed the two of them away, punched them and we got in there. And we hid in there…

RP: Why were they trying to block it?

AP: Because they wanted to keep it for their friends. It wasn't for the family…

JS: That's why Daddy doesn't like Gusta. [Wechsler -Jorisch]

AP: …but the family, the family was-- the only family that at that time existed was Gusta's sister [Betka Wechsler], brother [Binyamin Wechsler], [Uncle] Mendel, and his son because one of the sons was already killed. No, he was in a concentration camp.

RP: Whose son?

AP: Mendel's and the other one was a Jewish policeman they made him. So, it was really just Mendel, my father and I, the three of us, and they wouldn't let him in.

Mendel, they didn't let him in so Mendel went and hid in another place, but we hid here and this was a very good place because this was on the roof of the building, these old buildings, if you know, they have always something triangular…

RP: Triangular like the attic.

AP: No, the attic was under the big roof and this was on top, exactly like a little triangle that looked like there was no access but it was big enough that almost 20 people fit there. And the last two to get in there was my father and I.

RP: Mendel never made it?

JS: There were 18 people in there?

AP: Mendel never made it but he had a chance to run to the next place. And he survived.

JS: How did he survive?

CF: He survived?

AP: He survived also.

EP: He survived up to a point.

AP: Yeah. And after that is was that my father and I, we never spoke again to her because she didn't let us in. [They reconciled years later].

JS: Who were the 18 other people in that place? The two of them.

AP: Some other-- the two-- no, he [Martin] was already at that time in the Jewish police. She, I think, she well, she went in there or he had dressed her also as a Jewish policewoman, I'm not too sure because she wasn't there. It was only me, my father, her sister, her brother and the Nirlers which were the family of the president of the *Judenrat*, some distant relatives and somebody else and these were the people, these were all of us that we spent there the whole day because now this was already a short one. Whomever they caught during the period of the day, that was it. By the time it was night we came out from hiding and that was it. After that, the Germans further reduced the size of the ghetto. This was already the second-- this was already in '43.

RP: Were you wearing yellow arm bands at this time or…

AP: In that ghetto already we had to year a yellow…

RP: About when did that start?

AP: I think it started already with the first ghetto, but I'm not too sure. But here positively, we had to wear arm bands with a Star of David. In the meantime, the *Judenrat* people to protect themselves, they had organized in Skalat itself a labor camp. This was a German officer that he was in charge of three labor camps. One was where Jews were and Russian prisoner of war and the other one was strictly for Jews and there was another one strictly for Jews.

JS: Didn't you once tell me that it's better to…

AP: So, they became very friendly with him by buying him up and they talked him into opening in Skalat another camp because in Skalat, there was a big building, the military barracks, that the Germans did not use and he said, "Fine," and they paid him for

that. And all of the people from the *Judenrat* now became the chiefs in that camp and at night, this was a very loosely watched camp really. Only at night would come in the S*chutzpolizei* would put somebody to guard.

JS: Didn't you tell me that it was better to go into the camp than to stay in Skalat?

AP: That was at that, that, I'm getting to that moment. When they shrank for the third time the ghetto, that now it was really very small and this time, they put already some barbed wires with gates. At this time, Zimmer again, my father's friend, told my father, "Don't stay in the ghetto, stay better in the concentration camp." "I am still sick, I need medication, I can get a doctor easier here and this." [Jacob Perlmutter said to Zimmer.] But we had already the yellow patches with numbers and so on, the same as the people in the concentration camp had. This we had. We had the ghetto, we had the ghetto arm bands with the Star of David and we had already the yellow stars for the camp and we had them with safety pins so we could put them on any minute.

JS: Right.

AP: And at that time, my cousin, Mendel's son, the only one that was with us that was already-- they made him a Jewish policeman and they made-- since all the former leaders of the *Judenrat* now became members of the bureaucracy in the concentration camp so there was no *Judenrat*.

JS: What do you mean?

RP: Everyone that was in the *Judenrat* became…

AP: Became in the concentration camp because…

RP: …there was no *Judenrat.*

AP: …they thought there was more chance to survive in the concentration camps.

JS: So you became part of the *Judenrat*?

AP: No, my uncle Mendel became a member of the *Judenrat*. He did absolutely nothing. He was at that point, he was so that he didn't give a damn about anything. They asked him to be a member of the *Judenrat*, so he was a member of the *Judenrat*. They did absolutely nothing. They had no power at that time, the *Judenrat*.

EP: Maybe he gave up on life already.

AP: Oh yeah. He gave up on life.

JS: And that's why he joined?

AP: No, he didn't join. It was nothing, they asked him be it, be it and it didn't mean at that point absolutely nothing because even the *Judenrat* already, the local *Judenrat*, had no, no power, no say, no nothing because the Germans knew at that moment, nobody believed that the *Judenrat* was good or knew anything. It was to the extent they did not believe anymore the Skalat Jewish police, they brought in the Jewish police from Tarnopol, 15 young guys, because they had promised them, don't look what will happen to anybody else, you will be the ones that will survive and they believed in this and they

served the Germans. Whether they really believed or they didn't believe, it's a question. They never confided in us-- in me to tell me, "Yeah, we don't believe." But it was pushing away the final moment. Now, they are still being told by the Germans, "Don't worry, you will help us as you did till now and whatever we are going to do in Skalat, you will live." So, in order to postpone the moment of truth, they were ready to do anything.

JS: I understand.

AP: So, my uncle, he was in *Judenrat.* He was in *Judenrat*. You know what it meant? That he could walk out from the ghetto.

JS: What about….

AP: One day when I needed to get a medicine for my father and I had to go to the pharmacy, I went. I didn't know whether I will come back. If a German or even one of my former classmates can see me on the street because naturally I stripped my arm band, my nothing, I looked like anybody else walking and on the way back, I was that scared but then, in front of me was walking Binka Rosenblatt. Moishe Rosenblatt from Philadephia, his brother's daughter. And I grabbed her by the hand and I said I'm walking with you back to the ghetto.

JS: Why was she out?

AP: She was a policeman. She was a Jewish policeman at that moment so she could walk. She said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Forget about it, I needed to get for my father a medicine and I came to the drugstore. Now, you are walking, I feel safer walking with you than alone." She says, "Who knows," but she walked with me, she brought me back into the camp.

EP: She is in Israel now?

AP: No, she did not survive.

JS: Why didn't she survive?

AP: That's another one, also Binka, but no.

RP: She didn't survive.

AP: It's another one.

JS: How did she die?

AP: I don't know. Do you think that I know everybody, how and when they died?

EP: They all died more or less the same way.

AP: That's right.

EP: [unclear]

AP: A few days after that, it was a summer day. We went-- again, there was this air that something is imminent to happen. So, we went to the camp and we spent already the night in the camp and Zimmer, my father's friend, said "Finally you decided to come, I'm glad that you did." And he said, "This is your bunk and this is your this and this is where you will stay," and my father said, "You know I am sick." He said, "Don't worry,

we'll find you something to do in camp in case comes a German inspection that you do something."

EP: Because if they see that he's sick they kill him right away.

AP: Sure, the Germans, you cannot be sick in a camp. They put you in an infirmary and from the infirmary, they draw the victims for their hangings and all the other things to satisfy their bloody desires because as long as you can walk, they want you to do their labor. So, the next day in the morning, nothing had happened, so pretty early in the morning, my father told Zimmer, "We are going back to the camp to pick up a few of our belongings" because the night before we came in, you know, just from the field. He said, "Fine." We went to the camp [he meant ghetto] to pick up our belongings and we felt very uneasy, very uneasy. We grabbed a couple of things and we started to go back to the camp and my father…

EP: [unclear]

AP: From the ghetto. I said that we spent the night in the camp and in the morning, we went back to the ghetto to pick up a few of our things.

RP: You said actually "back to the camp."

AP: And we were going now back to camp. We felt so uneasy, the air felt so bad, you know those premonitions that you have and my father said, "Let's go back, let's go back," and try talking to my uncle to come with him and my uncle said, "No, I don't want to go, my son is sick here," and it was true, he was with typhus, he couldn't move and he said, "I'm not going any place," and we started to walk.

RP: Who was his son, what was your cousin's name?

AP: David, Dudzio they called him.

JS: David is a Perlmutter?

AP: Mmm hmm [affirmative]. By the time we got to the camp, the Germans were already in the camp and in the town and the guard, the Jewish guard at the door told us, "Go to that gang road-- road gang, that was right there working and stay with them as you are working." So we joined that road gang and these were whoever was coming in from the city, they specially put it out there and they had enough tools so we were holding shovels and this and that, and suddenly came an officer from the Gestapo and he said, "I need you all to do some work for us and I give you my officer's word that nothing will happen to you, that you will come back and work again in the camp." And as he starts leading away that whole group that was there…

JS: With you and your father.

AP: With me and my father, my father pushed me into a ditch because he didn't trust him and he went with them and I laid in that ditch and in a few minutes, I went through the back and got into the camp and they let me in into the camp and they put me to work in the latrine, to clean the latrine. Once I cleaned the latrine, there was nothing else to do so I looked out and somebody that I knew walked by. I said, "What do I do? I cleaned out the latrine, I cannot clean the clean one." He said, "I would stay here a few minutes, take

out from the latrine and spread it so you have for the next few two hours what to clean. So, while I was taking it out to make it dirty to create work, he was watching. When he saw finally a German go, he said, "Stop, start cleaning." So, then I was cleaning and it looked like all this I cleaned already and here there is still things to clean. And I spent there like this until, I don't know, afternoon, early afternoon. They called me in into the kitchen to do something.

JS: From the latrine to the kitchen?

AP: Look, wherever they put me, I had to be out of the sight.

JS: Talk about sanitary…

AP: Look, nobody cared in those days about those things. And then I worked in the kitchen until at night and late at night, my father came back and that's when I found out that what they took that road gang, that whole group was taken out of town to dig a big, common grave.

JS: And then they brought people from Skalat?

AP: And they brought in people from Skalat when they realized that that group alone was not able to dig the size of the grave and do all that work so they brought healthier men from Skalat, from the town, from the ghetto. Among them was my uncle and among them was a friend. So, my father begged my uncle to put on the *gele lates*[22] from the concentration camp. He didn't want. He said, "I have had it, I don't care, what will happen will happen." And the friend that was there, he listened to my father and my father gave--and in one of those moments that they were digging and shoveling that nobody could see, he pinned him with one and with another and they really didn't count that well so by the time they finished digging the grave, and the people already came from the city because they walked them even to that place, through that entire city, so that the Ukrainians could enjoy, see all the Jews being taken to the slaughter. And they laid them flat on the dirt, the whole group that was digging the graves and the Ukrainian police stood above them with guns and they were told to lay down like this [tape on then off]

RP: Wait a second. The tape is ending.

JS: Yeah.

AP: So they were told to lay flat on their bellies with their hands in front of their heads and their heads down and practically every second guy there was standing, a Ukrainian police with a rifle trained on their heads, if they would move their heads, shoot them. And they spent, I don't know, two, three, four hours, whatever the shooting lasted until they killed everybody. My father came back there, from there, that for a few days you couldn't talk to him. He was completely "out" from that, and he didn't see [it]. [It was] just from hearing the screaming of the people when they were told to undress, stand on the edge and the Germans shot them in the back of the head and kicked them and pushed them into the ditch.

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[22]*gele lates* - yellow patches (Yiddish). (Source: Alexander Botwinick, professor of Yiddish at University of Pennsylvania.)

EP: And Mendel was there?

AP: Mendel was there.

JS: Mendel was killed?

AP: Yes, afterwards.

JS: Mendel dug and then he was shot?

AP: Yeah, when afterwards when he helped already to cover up [the mass grave]. He was among the last.

RP: So, so Mend-- okay.

JS: Did your father see Mendel being killed?

AP: No. Because he [Mendel] didn't want to put on the *gele lates.* My father's friend, who listened to him, he survived.

[Tape two, side one ended.]

Tape two, side two:

EP: Janet is asking whether your father saw Mendel being killed.

AP: No, no not that I know. I never asked him.

RP: Was Mendel's son…

AP: Mendel's son was killed that day, yes, he was sick with the typhus. They brought him there on a stretcher and they shot him and dumped him. After the killing, after the killing was finished, then they sent all this, this entire group back into the grave to move the bodies so that it would be easier to cover it, it wouldn't be built up on one side and flatter on the other side and then they had to shovel back the dirt on.

EP: Arthur, that was actually the liquidation of the Skalat Ghetto.

AP: That was the liquidation of the Skalat Ghetto.

JS: Nobody was left after that?

EP: No.

AP: In the Skalat Ghetto, nobody.

EP: That was the liquidation of the Skalat Ghetto.

AP: Whoever somehow was successful in hiding and surviving that night, they came over to the concentration camp because there was no more ghetto.

RP: Okay, how about the *Judenrat*?

AP: This was the summer of '43.

RP: How about the *Judenrat*?

AP: They didn't exist anymore. They were already the leaders of the concentration camp.

RP: So where were Martin and Gusta?

JS: Yeah, where were Martin and Gusta [Wechsler-Jorisch]? They didn't go into the camp with you?

AP: No, I think they were already in hiding.

JS: Where did they hide? In the same place?

AP: No, they went already to the woods.

JS: How did you…?

AP: Or maybe they were in the camp, I really don't remember at that point because this was already a moment that we didn't give a damn about them, but in that thing is when they killed Gusta's brother and sister.

JS: Really?

RP: They were killed in the mass grave?

AP: In the mass grave, yes. They [Gusta and Martin] may have come to the camp or they may have run away at that time into the woods. I'm not too sure. The camp didn't last that long afterwards.

EP: In the liquidation of the Skalat Ghetto, Mendel and his sons died? And Gusta [Wechsler-Jorisch's] siblings died.

AP: Gusta's siblings died.

JS: How did you get those pin-on numbers, from where, from the first time you were in the camp?

AP: From the first time that-- no before we were even in the camp already. This was the thing that Zimmer did for my father, that he did that he said, "I don't want you in the ghetto," but my father still had-- I don't know why he wanted to stay because he was afraid in the camp that they'd see him, he couldn't do anything, that they would shoot him. In the ghetto, as long as the ghetto existed, nobody cared whether he was sick, walking, working or what. So, this was, this was the reason. And as we were in the camp, not long afterwards, pretty soon after that, I had to go and work in the quarry which was always what the slave labor, the Jewish slave labor was used for, to work in the quarry.

RP: Was this back in the same quarry you had worked in before?

AP: No, no, this was now a quarry in Skalat.

JS: What, what did you do in the quarry?

AP: What's his name, they were in the camp with us, Gusta and Munke, because I used to go with Wechsler, with Gusta's father, to the quarry.

RP: That's your uncle?

AP: My uncle.

JS: So, then they [Gusta and Martin] <u>were</u> in the camp with you.

AP: They were in the camp, yes.

RP: He was a Wechsler, who was he a brother to?

AP: He was married to my father's sister, the blind one [Pearl Perlmutter Wechsler], Gusta's mother, this was my father's youngest sister. [Arthur meant to say "older sister." She was the first born and the only girl.]

JS: Steve says we're going to run out of tape before you finish the story. We have a whole other tape.

AP: And so, I was working in the quarry.

JS: What did you do in the quarry?

AP: Whatever they told me to do.

JS: A quarry with stones?

AP: With a hammer, I was breaking the bigger stones after they blew them with dynamite, I would break them into smaller or shovel them into the wagons and they would take them away to the-- no, here was to take the stones as they were broken up by the blasts and put them on the wagons because this then went to the crushers where they were crushed.

JS: Do you remember feeling very hungry when you were in the camps?

AP: No, because at that camp we were getting-- the food wasn't the worst one and we still had our own food that we were getting. Peasants were living around the camp, they would sell food to everybody.

JS: How did you have money?

AP: That wasn't, that wasn't a real concentration camp. This was a labor camp [The Skalat Labor Camp] that only at night we were really watched by the Germans. Day time, there weren't even Germans there because this was, this was all bought for money. I wasn't there that long, Janet, to know what would happen if we would run out of money because I don't know, I was working a week or so in the…

EP: Quarry.

AP: Quarry, when the Russian partisans came and they took over the whole area.

RP: This was what time of year?

AP: This was the summer of '43.

RP: And the partisans already were there?

AP: Oh yeah, they came down. This was-- they were going toward the Carpathian Mountains. This was a big group. These were…

RP: When was Stalingrad though?

AP: This was, this was after, this was after the defeat in Stalingrad.

RP: So was winter of '42-'43.

AP: Stalingrad was the winter of '43.

RP: So, one of the reasons that they liquidated the Jews of Skalat was because they were retreating.

AP: That was already, there was already liquidation of Jews all over because they were already starting to retreat in Russia.

RP: Did you know that?

AP: I. no, at that point we didn't know because once the first original ghetto was dismantled, we lost the radio facilities. Till that point, there was somebody who had a short wave radio and we could listen and my father would go every night to listen to BBC of London. That was the news that we had.

RP: You didn't understand English?

AP: That was a Polish transmission. This was the BBC in London, a Polish transmission. After that, we didn't get any more news. To read the local newspapers was a waste of time.

EP: Arthur, when was the story of that German that made-- that told you, "I'm going to hit you?"

AP: Just listen, we are getting there.

RP: Schneider was mentioned.

AP: Schneider was already mentioned, now we are coming to it.

JS: Schneider, now he's the guy…

RP: Who was trying to offer them to go to Switzerland.

AP: To go to Switzerland once.

JS: Right.

AP: The Russian partisans came down and we were caught in the middle in the shooting. They were coming down from the hills, the quarry was on the edge of the forest

and of a hill and we couldn't go back to town and here were the Germans and the Gestapo, the *Schutzpolizei*, they came in from Tarnopol trying to, to fight off the partisans but they didn't know that the partisans were a monstrous group, they were 4,000 men under the direction of the general, General Pavlov. And they came down and the fighting went on for a few days. We hid in the meantime because the Germans sent planes to bomb them and we were in an open quarry, a plain target. As we were running, Gusta's father and myself, we, we came to a road crossing and there was a concrete culvert.

JS: What's that?

AP: A concrete pipe that's under the road crossing so you know the ditches, the water drains and go[es] under the road so we got in [laughter] into that to be protected. And when it calmed down a little bit, we continued running and we went into hiding in a peasant's stables and somewheres there, we waited that through.

JS: Did the peasant know you were in his stable?

AP: Yeah, he knew, because, we met him in the fields and he said, "Go to my house and stay in the stable, whatever." That night, we heard that the main body of the Russian partisans was going through that and that part so we went after them to try to join them, we wanted to join them. I was already separated from my father and I didn't know whether he is alive or what and this was a moment of-- we went on our own, whoever was there, and we went with the-- we followed the partisans and we got to meet with them and started to talk to them and there was no way that they wanted any Jews.

JS: Really?

AP: "We don't need you, we need healthy people, you are all sick, broken people, we don't want you, we don't need you." And those few that offered resistance, they hit them and so eventually, everybody fell back and we went back.

JS: Back to the quarry?

AP: We went back to towards the quarry from that particular forest.

RP: So you were still with your uncle?

AP: I was still with my uncle.

JS: Wait, which uncle is this?

AP: Wechsler, Gusta's father.

JS: Did he survive the war?

AP: Yes.

JS: He did?

AP: And we tried to make back our way to the concentration camp, to the labor camp. So that particular night we then hid in the fields somewheres among-- they started already to cut the hay or whatever and they were putting it into some sort of structures that once they…

RP: Haystacks.

AP: Haystacks, once they clean up everything, then they come with their wagons. So, we hid inside a haystack, when some Ukrainian kids they found us. So, we

started to run, my uncle in one direction, I in the other direction. I was running faster than those kids or they all concentrated on him, they caught him but I continued running until I was caught by, by a peasant. That peasant started to make himself my greatest friend and this and that.

RP: But he caught you?

AP: He caught me but he didn't do no harm to me, he didn't take me to the village. Those kids took my uncle to the village.

RP: To Skalat?

AP: To Skala [with an "a" at the end, different from the town of Skalat, with a "t" at the end] – happens to be what the village was called.

JS: Oh, a different…

AP: No, this was not a village-- I mean this is not a town like Skalat. This is a village, a real peasant village. There is one main street with houses on both sides, period, nothing else.

JS: Why did they take him there?

AP: So, to turn him over to the Germans and get, get money for that. Yes, they turned him over to the Germans but the Germans didn't give them any money and the Germans took him back to the concentration camp, to the camp which is…

RP: Where you were trying to get to anyway.

AP: Which is where we were trying to get anyway, but it took him a couple of days before he came back. I came back sooner. That peasant that caught me, he said, "I don't want to do you any harm, to the contrary, I want to, to help you out. I will go with you and take you to the camp. We'll go around the safe route and if it's safe, you will come in and more," he says, "If you ever have to escape from the camp, my house is your house and you can escape." And I said, being suspicious, I said, "I really appreciate that you're doing this but why do you do it?" He said, "Who knows what will happen after the war, I may need your help and that you will be there for me," and in the meantime, he was asking me and I told him I had relatives in the United States. He said, "And at that time, after the war, you will write to your relatives in the United States, they will send me money. I am a poor peasant so this money will help me," but this is why he is going to do it. And as we are walking and talking, he says that he would like me to give him my-- that I would give him my pants and he will give me his pants because I had good pants and his pants were worn out so I told him fine and in the meantime, I had in the, under the belt hidden money, dollars.

EP: And that's what he wanted?

AP: Oh, he didn't know that I have it. He didn't have any idea. I said, "Okay, let me go and take off my pants, I don't like to do it in public or whatever." He was smarter than I was but anyhow, he gave me enough time that I could-- anyhow he would see it because I had to rip out the, what's the name, *futeh* [phonetic].

EP: Fur.

JS: The stitches?

AP: Not fur, no.

JS: Lining, lining?

AP: Lining. I had to rip the lining to get to it and pull them out but I did it and I had with me a kind of-- how do you say, a bag with me that was hanging off it where I still had some food and I hid the money between that food.

JS: And he didn't see you doing this?

AP: I don't know whether he saw or didn't see me, he didn't ask me for it. He said, "Whatever, if you have something that you want to hide in your pants, hide it in this," because he did everything that he could to entice me that if we ever escape that we should go and hide with him. He gave me his name and told me where he was.

JS: What was his name?

AP: I don't remember, Janet. But when we went back to the camp…

EP: You did exchange pants?

AP: We exchanged the pants and then he walked me around really through the safe-- excuse me-- through the safe fields and I was noticing the fields so that I would know because this would be my escape route if I ever need to escape, which way he took me.

JS: …good thing you had a good sense of direction.

AP: …he took me all around-- in those days, yes, I detected direction by the stars.

JS: You're kidding me.

AP: I could do it in those days. By that time, I was already a little bit used to the small town, to, to look at the stars, to look at where the bark was different on the trees to know where is north. The Boy Scouts stuff. And he walked me back to the camp, he hid me somewheres in the bushes outside of the town, he walked himself to the camp and he came back and he told me, "There are people in the camp and that the peasant told me that there are Jews in the camp," he says, "I don't know whether your father is there, I couldn't find him," and he walked with me all the way to the camp until I walked in through the gate and then he waited, he said goodbye to me and he saw when my father saw me, how he ran over to me because he didn't know whether I survived all that, he had no idea. So, I told him the whole story, my father, and somehow I don't know, we mentioned to somebody and somebody said, "I don't know whether he is the right person because he has heard that he had hidden somebody just to turn him over to the Germans."

JS: For money?

AP: For money. So, you know, you are suspicious but anyhow in the meantime, the camp is the camp and two days later, they bring my Uncle Wechsler, we are back in the camp. Some people go back to work in the quarry and one particular day, they send me to go and work at the *Schutzpolizei*, the German *Polizei* in town.

JS: What's the *Polizei*?

AP: Police, at the police station. I didn't know what I had to do but I'm walking with my two *gele lates*[23] through the center of the town all the way all by myself, nobody else, nothing in writing, nothing. I walked to the police station, I come there, I told them I was sent from the camp to work here. Oh yes, clean the latrine, do this, do that. They put me to do some work and in one moment, I'm walking-- I'm in the middle of the, the backyard or whatever it was that this policeman, Schneider, sees me and he comes over to me and he says, "I'm going to hit you, that it will look stronger than it is but you yell like I would be killing you," and he starts hitting and I'm yelling and he makes me to clean his boots and while I'm cleaning his boots, he curses me and he beats me that I don't do a good job and between his yellings and this, he tells me, "Tonight, get away from the camp because this is it, there will be no more camp."

EP: They will exterminate the camp like they did in the ghetto.

RP: Do you know this man's first name?

AP: No, all I knew is Schneider.

JS: Was he an older man?

AP: An older man, he's dead by now.

JS: Do you think they called you to clean the latrine because he wanted you to be there?

AP: No.

JS: Just your fortune.

AP: If it would have been somebody else that would have cleaned, as soon as he knew that that night is the end, he would have told the other guy because he had apparently on other occasions told people to-- that this is-- to run away that something is happening. Some people paid attention to it and others didn't, but whoever listened to him they escaped at that time. What happened the next time, I don't know. But anyhow, he told me to get away and after I finished shining his boots, he continued yelling and beating me but took me in the kitchen and told them in the kitchen to give me food because I did a good job shining his boots and he said, "That's okay, you can go back to the camp." And they gave me a loaf of bread and some meat and some other things and I took it with me and I got to the camp and I told my father. But it was early in the afternoon. You couldn't get out so we went to sleep. And my father in the meantime mentioned this to a couple of people. He couldn't find Zimmer, and nobody paid any attention. "No, no, they need us, we still have to rebuild the bridges that the Russian partisans blew up." Jews always looking for excuses. In the meantime, they had brought in after the partisans blew up the bridges they had brought in German engineering corps to rebuild the bridges.

JS: So, they weren't really needed, the Jews, then?

AP: So, the Jews didn't do that kind of work. This is specialized work, they had the engineering corps people do it. And I don't know if I was tired so I went to sleep and

[23]See footnote 22 on page 46.

early at night, I woke up-- again, this, this heavy air was felt all over, nobody was sleeping and we see people walk aimlessly back and forth and I tell to my father, "Let's get into the fields." The gate at the camp is open so we walk up and we walk up on the street and there stands one of these soldiers from the engineering corps with a Ukrainian woman talking and he says, "I can't let you go through."

RP: To you?

AP: Yes, in German. We are staying out here, I can't let you through. And then he said quickly in German, "Try some other ways." So, we went back into the camp and we see people are running aimlessly and in that we see Mrs. Zimmer and her son and she's walking there and this aimlessly. Her husband and her daughter with her husband, they disappeared, she doesn't know where they are, they left her with the boy. She knows nothing, she doesn't know where her husband is, she knows-- she thinks he escaped. My father tells her, "Come with us." "No," she says, "I don't know, maybe he will come back for me." She wanted to stay there so she stayed with the boy there. We realized that the only way we can escape is through the back fence of the camp.

JS: Climb it?

AP: We have to climb it. I couldn't climb it so my father pushed me, helped me to climb, I jumped on the other side, somebody helped him and when he was up there, he helped that person to go up and we jumped across the fence. There were no wires on it, nothing.

JS: Nobody guarding it?

AP: No. And we were walking along the river. In the meantime, the German, the Germans from the engineering corps, in the meantime, they sent them along the street, along the camp, and this was parallel and they saw us escape from the camp but they did absolutely nothing, they were shooting into, in the air. And they let us-- as many that we succeeded-- escape.

JS: Who were they, Germans?

AP: The Germans corps of engineers, Sappers.[24]

JS: Sappers.

AP: That's how they call them, in the Polish army and the German army, the corps of engineers, engineering corps. So, we started to walk along that river further and further away from the road. We didn't dare approach the road, and this was more or less through the part that that peasant took me back to the camp so I knew where I was and I knew where which road is. And I told my father this is where the main road is, this is where the Germans will be coming in but this is also a road through the fields that we have to find, walk in the middle of the fields without leaving any marks that we were walking and hid in the middle of a field that's not-- that's a big flat field.

RP: Time out. Where-- were you with your Uncle Wechsler?

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[24]Sappers – definition: 1 **:** a military specialist in field fortification work (such as sapping); 2 **:** a military demolitions specialist (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sapper)

AP: My Uncle Wechsler, I didn't know where he was. He came back two days later from the, from the-- the, the Germans brought him back to the concentration camp, the labor camp.

JS: So he didn't escape with you?

AP: He didn't escape with us. I didn't know where they were.

JS: Who was the other man who escaped with you? Some man.

AP: He didn't follow us. Everybody was running on his own, everybody was thinking he has a better idea and you couldn't talk in anybody because you didn't know is your idea better than his. And I knew where I want to go, I knew exactly where I am going to go but I needed to get away from the camp and in the meantime, as soon as the daylight hit that that it started to come out, I told my father we better hide and we figured out where there was a big flat field with very, with very little access so we, from the trail-- because we were all this time walking on a trail where they couldn't detect whether somebody walked or not because the peasants were walking-- and we got between two fields, one let's say of corn, one of wheat and one of corn, so there is little sort of a divider that we could walk, you know, sideways, without leaving any trail, and when we were quite a distance in, we separated very carefully the stalks and tried to walk without breaking anything until we got X feet away from this edge, from that edge and we then sat for all practical purposes without moving an inch during the rest of the day so that the hole that we created would be as minimal as possible. And we barely did this when we heard already the trucks coming down the highway. We were a couple kilometers from the highway but at night and in clear air, you hear the noise and we knew what was coming. During the day, we heard shooting. During the day, we heard yelling but we didn't move.

JS: Didn't you get sunburn or cold?

AP: Who cared what happened? So we got sunburned, what could I do? Whatever I could, we covered ourselves. You didn't care about that, you cared how to survive that day.

JS: How did you camouflage yourself inside?

AP: We didn't camouflage ourself. It was high stalks, this was-- this is why we were lucky, it was July already, the fields were as high as they will be, so it's…

CF: Tall, very tall.

AP: So it's very tall, the corn grows, I don't know, two and a half meters high.

JS: What did you do when you had to go to the bathroom?

AP: We didn't do, you did it right there. You didn't move, you held in it too you because you didn't want to make the, the mark any bigger so as little as possible that they would see from distance if somebody could see in. But we were lucky this was a big flat area so they couldn't see us.

JS: Weren't you hungry?

AP: So we were hungry, so what? You don't, you don't feel hunger when you are in that condition. And when the night came and the noises faded away and so on, we started to walk towards those villages where…

JS: Like Skala? [The village of Skala is different from the town of Skalat.]

AP: Like Skala, towards those villages because one, we knew a peasant in one of them that he had a lot of our things that my father gave him, clothing and this and that, and he was going to keep it and bring us food, but he never had a chance to bring us food because the ghetto was shrinking, shrinking, shrinking and he couldn't get in anymore. At the beginning, yes, but he had those things so we decided we'll go to him because he said, "When the time comes, I'm going to hide you," but we couldn't find him so when we came to that village, we knocked on one door or another door and people knew there are Jews looking for somebody and we would ask different names to confuse but still, by the time-- and at night we would hide, daytime we would hide until finally we got to his house one night. So, by that time he says, "I can't hold you here because of all the uproar you people caused-- the whole village knows that there are some Jews looking for somebody."

CF: How many days was this happening over?

AP: Two or three days. We spent two-three nights looking for him until we came across him.

JS: You didn't remember where he lived?

AP: I never was in his house.

JS: What about your dad, though?

AP: Also, he never was. He [the peasant] used to come to town. He described it to my father somehow so we tried but go in a village that's very similar [laughs]. Well, after we found him, he told us where are his fields and that next to his fields there is a forest and that we should stay in that forest and when we will see him in the fields, he will bring food with him. So, because he wanted for things to calm down. We did this for a few days and then he said he is afraid to hide us because we caused up too much of a stir up and he doesn't know when somebody would, can squeal on him so we never got to hide in his house but we hid in that particular forest. This was in Horovitza [phonetic].

EP: Wasn't he the one that when he gave you back the things, he didn't give you your mother's fur coat?

AP: No, that was another one. The fur coat was somewhere else.

JS: Will we get to that later?

AP: Yeah. And we were there and every day we would come out, he would bring some food for us at the field and we would take it in and hide in the forest. He had an orchard there also so he said, "You're welcome to the apples," and this but, you know, we didn't feel the-- at home in a forest, we didn't know what to do and this was already harvest time so pretty soon comes the fall, what do you do for winter? So, one day walking there, we, we hear somebody talk. We hide, we are scared and we hear whoever talks approaching us and they talk Yiddish so we came out, they were from a village, from there,

two Jews that they survived, they were two brothers. Oh, they met with us, they were very happy, now there is somebody else, they were hidden in the village but the peasant got afraid and they had to leave. They have heard that there are some other Jews there but they don't know really whether there are or there aren't. A few days later, we met with some other Jews.

JS: In the forest again?

AP: In the forest. These were already-- the first two that we met, they were from a village. The other group that we met, they were from Skalat, from the city, but they were hiding in, with some peasants and the peasants got afraid and told them to go and hide in the woods. So, we were now a little bit bigger group but still only the two fellows from the village and I think one or somebody else, whether they ever knew what it is to be in the fields, we still don't know too much what to do for winter and so on until one night and I don't remember all, all the circumstances, my father and I, we are walking into the fields at night to collect some potatoes and beets and a few corn cobs so that we would have what to eat when we see suddenly running, two shadows. We got scared and he yelled in Yiddish, "Stop, stop, stop," and he talks in Yiddish so we stopped not knowing whether we did the right thing or wrong thing but they saw us already so what the heck. They come by and it's another father with his son, and the son is Dr. Siegel today.

JS: Oh, really, the man in Moorestown, New Jersey?

AP: Uh-huh. [affirmative.]

JS: Who married a Korean woman?

AP: That's right. So, now we are talking with real peasant Jews because they grew up in-- and he was all the time in the fields and so on and so he joined our group, too. And he starts telling us that what we have to find in that forest where we were hiding, one part where there are plenty of young plantings because then we take the young plantings and bend them and create some sort of a shelter from those thin trees, the seeds, they're very close to it so you have every few inches a tree and you take from this side and this side and cut out in between and you create a shack.

EP: A dome?

AP: A dome.

JS: Wouldn't they notice that?

AP: No, you do it away from the road again. Then, you cover it with the leaves as they are falling down in the fall and you build up and you build a leaf, kind of igloo.

EP: It's called a bunker.

AP: No, the bunker is underground. This is a shelter. The more leaves you put, the less water will leak through it and so on. What you really create is a mountain of leaves but this is the supporting structure, those trees, and that young trees are pretty flexible and so on and how to do it.

JS: His father was the one who thought of all this stuff, Dr. Siegel's?

AP: Dr. Siegel's father and the other two fellows from the village, between the three, they put together how to do it. And we started to look for that part of the forest and we found it so we were, we were beginning to-- how we are going to build those shelters but more important was to prepare for winter food. So, we had to go and at night, steal potatoes and beets and other things and cover them now with leaves so they are protected from frost otherwise they are no good. So, again, Siegel, Dr. Siegel, actually his father, taught all of us how to steal the potatoes that we still leave the plant as a living plant and some potatoes there you don't take out, how you dig up a couple of potatoes and it was in order that the peasants wouldn't see suddenly some of their fields damaged, large chunks of it. So, we started to collect the potatoes to prepare for the winter when one nice day we are sitting there in the group, daytime. Daytime, we didn't move too much.

JS: In that hut, inside?

AP: No, we didn't have yet those huts completed. At that point, we only had something temporary you know like a few branches with some leaves on it in case it rains because it started to rain already, where to hide during the rain, not to get soaking wet, when suddenly, we hear people running and we don't have where to hide and there we are, we are all seen and as we try to run away, and here is a whole bunch of Ukrainians running away and eventually, I believe a Ukrainian policeman saw us, too. These were the Ukrainian policemen that were chasing other Ukrainians that they wanted to take them to Germany to work and these young men didn't want to go to Germany, so they were hiding also some places and this time they escaped all into the forest and the Ukrainian police were chasing them and they came across us.

JS: Oy, oy, oy.

AP: Well, now the Ukrainians have seen us, the Ukrainian police have seen us and even if the police did not see us, the Ukrainians saw us so in order maybe one of them or all of them, in order to avoid being taken to Germany, they will buy their freedom by betraying us, squealing on us. So what do we do? And the people that were Siegel's father and the other two guys, they say, "Well, we'll go over to the other forest," and this was the forest in the-- no, I don't remember the name of that one, that one was a huge forest, acres and acres of forest.

RP: In what direction relative to Skalat?

AP: I believe it was northeast, but don't bank on this. And we were now northwest of Skalat where we ran away. Well, we walked that night through that, from one forest to the other forest and from this forest, we had to walk through fields then we would walk through the forest where the quarry was, then again through fields and then again to that forest that we wanted to get. It was a big walk and we realized we won't be able to do it in one night so we knew we will have to stay overnight, over day in that forest where the quarry was and that we better cook the food ahead of time because we won't be able to make a fire there because it's a small forest and we would be very close to the quarry. At this point, if I remember correctly, I think Siegel's father decided that he doesn't want to

go there because it's going out of the area that he knows and that he is going to take his chances between this forest and the quarry forest and the peasants in between and we went with that group…

RP: How many people?

AP: …to the other forest. About 15 people we were.

JS: Now, how did you collect 15 people if there's brothers you met…

AP: Two brothers and Siegel-- I think once he got to the quarry part, he stayed back. That's when he decided not to follow with us. [coughing, sneezing]

EP: Janet, give him a tissue.

AP: No, I need something to drink. But the others, they didn't have where to hide.

JS: How did you meet up with the others?

AP: I told you they-- by chance, we, we met because they had to go away from the *goyim* and they told-- one *goy* told the other *goy*, the peasants, there are Jews in the woods. So, they were looking for us. We walked over to that, eventually to that other forest and as we were there, somebody remembered that if we go and find the forest ranger, he will direct us where to find some [other] Jews there. Well, somehow, we couldn't find him.

JS: How would the forest ranger know that there were Jews?

AP: Because…

JS: And to keep it quiet?

AP: It was to his own good not to say anything. He knows nothing what goes on. He just walks around the day because otherwise, they would have send him to find out where they are. And he didn't know whether the Jews are armed or not. We couldn't find him but we came across a big tree that, at that point, a lot of Jews knew already that this was a tree that somebody built a bunker, that you walked into that bunker through that tree. Some of these old big trees have pretty sizable holes in them that the squirrels and other animals little by little they dig out where this was one of those holes but later on, that whole tree, a big chunk in its center was chewed up so you walked in a certain height through that hole and down and they dug up a huge bunker underneath.

JS: Underneath the tree.

AP: And this was the entry to that tree. Somehow, the Germans found it. And they threw grenades inside and they killed the people and whoever they didn't kill, they got out from there and that was the end of it, so everybody knew of that tree because the Germans spread the news specially, don't try to hide in the woods, we'll catch you.

[Tape two, side two ended.]

Tape three, side one:

JS: So, you came across that tree?

AP: We came across that tree and somebody somehow knew there was supposedly in that area there are hiding some Jews. I can't again promise that I remember all the details, but we were walking around at night and looking and either we came across somebody or we found a little bit of a trail, I know we got there and we found some Jews that we know. So we decided all we are going to settle there. They were there already, they had already these shacks built and so on and they oriented us which way there are the fields. This was a pretty big young forest, so why not? And we are there beginning to build those shelters and beginning to accumulate potatoes for the winter when-- and there were two young fellows who were Jewish policemen before that with two girls that were sisters that their mother and my mother were very good friends and they somehow they escaped together and they were hiding together. They were very happy to see us, somebody that they knew, and there was another elderly couple that we knew very well, they were hiding, so these were the six people that were there and they were, so they were very happy.

EP: I'm lost, these six people…

AP: We went there and we met them in the forest that we walked over, in the new forest.

JS: But not in the tree?

AP: Not in the tree, no, but not far from that tree. We came somehow across them and I don't remember exactly but we found them.

EP: People like you that escaped.

AP: Yeah. We built already our shelter, we are accumulating more and more leaves and we started to accumulate our potatoes when suddenly another small group, four people come that they escaped, that they were chased out by a peasant. The peasant got worried and again chased them out and told them, "Go to the woods, there are other Jews in the woods." We were preparing for the winter when one day, I don't remember exactly what I was doing but I was a few feet away from my-- from our shelter-- when I see a Gentile with a rifle. He looks at me and I see him and I run out in the opposite direction from all the shelters because I don't want him to know where the shelters are.

JS: Wow, that's smart.

AP: And I start running around. I know where I am and I ran around through the back and I ran to the other people and I tell them, there is a *goy* with a, with a rifle there. So, one of the recent newcomers, he was a boxer, a tall, big fellow. He said, "Where is he? Where is he?" He went after him, he grabbed the guy, took away from him the rifle and beat him up.

CF: To death?

AP: No, not to death. So we knew already, this area is uncovered, we better go away. And we-- some of the people that-- no, and the couple, that elderly people that we

met there, that were there, we went in one direction, the people that we came with from the first forest, they went back to that forest and…

RP: You went with, you and [unclear] went with the elderly people?

AP: With the elderly people.

RP: Not with the people that you knew from Skalat?

AP: The two girls and the two boys, they went with that fellow, with the boxer that took away the rifle. They went to another *goy* that they had heard that he said that if somebody brings him a rifle, he is going to, to hide them. He was very anxious to get a rifle. So, when they heard of this *goy*, so they went to him and gave him the rifle. He eventually at a later date betrayed them all and they were all killed by the Germans.

RP: So the Germans are still there?

AP: Oh the Germ-- this was still under the Germans.

RP: I realize that. So, the partisans were just an advance group.

AP: Oh this was long gone. They went through. They continued to the Carpathian Mountains where they created their base.

JS: So wait, now, who wanted the gun from this man?

AP: A peasant.

JS: Wanted that *goy* to give him the gun?

AP: No, no, no, there was a peasant. You see, a peasant wandered into the woods, he wanted to become a hero, he wanted to grab a Jew and take to the Germans. Well, this was the one that I saw and I escaped and I told the others. They set an ambush, they ambushed him, took away the rifle from him and beat him up.

JS: So, now you guys had a rifle?

AP: Now we had to abandon that part.

JS: But you had a rifle?

AP: *We* didn't have the rifle…

RP: …the boxer.

AP: …the guy that took it away from him, the boxer, he had the rifle.

RP: The Ukrainian wasn't killed, they let him go.

JS: Right, but, but the boxer had the rifle, and the boxer was with you.

RP: No, he went in a different direction to a peasant who later betrayed them.

AP: Yes, the boxer with the two of his people and they were a small group…

RP: …and the girls and the boys that Daddy knew.

AP: And the other people that they befriended, the eight of them, went to a peasant that said that for a rifle, he would hide them. So they went to him and some weeks later, he betrayed them and delivered them to the Germans.

JS: They were all killed?

AP: Yes. The people that we came from the first forest, they all went back to their original forest because they, they were moving further away from some area that they knew somebody. We didn't know anybody in no place so we-- it didn't matter for us to go

here or here. Plus, that where we were going, we had heard there were a lot of people that we know, not only a lot of people that we know but there was a larger number of Jews hiding, so this elderly couple, they decided in the last minute they are not going but they told us how to go and find these people. So only my father and I, we went, we continued further on ahead but we were walking along a road in the forest, and we got to this part and with a little bit of moving around we found those people that were hiding there. Oh they were-- everybody there knew my father and this, "But we are already a group," the Sass brothers that live in Lakewood. They had already their bunker, the whole family was there with this guy and with that guy and that one was here but these were alone and they were all looking to form a larger group to so that there will be more people to dig the bunker, so we joined with that group. And there was hiding the fellow that my father gave him the *gele lates*[25] in the last minute at the grave.

JS: Oh boy.

AP: Oh when he saw my father, how happy that we escaped and this, that we have to stick together and this and that, fine, so we got ourselves also into a group and in the meantime, everybody is going down at night to buy some food from a peasant. I go down with my father to that peasant and the peasant looks at him and he says, "I think I know you." So, he asked my father who he is and my father tries to describe him, you know, the normal way that you would describe, he couldn't do, so my father says, "Well, my father was living in this and this building and my brother-in-law had a luncheonette and he sold beer." This was Gusta [Wechsler -Jorisch]'s father. I didn't know whether he had liquor too or only food and beer. I don't know, I don't know the exact story. So, he looks for a few minutes and says, "Oh, I know you, you're the son of the *ślubnoy*[26]."

JS: What's a *ślubnoy*?

AP: The wedding one, the one that makes weddings.

CF: A caterer, like a caterer?

AP: No!

SS: A match maker?

CF: No, no.

AP: What happens, so my father said yes.

JS: Which is not true.

AP: Oh, no, it was true but he had forgotten that name, that this is how the *goy* used to call my grandfather. They called him *ślubnoy* which is something related to weddings. Why? Because when he was selling the merchandise, he used to say that you could wear it to a wedding.

JS: Oh. [laughs] That's why your father used to say, "I'm paying for everybody's wedding."

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[25]*gele lates* - See footnote on page 46.

[26]*ślubnoy – ślub* is a marriage or wedding ceremony in Polish. (Polish dictionary)

AP: [laughs] So, he would tell the *goy*, "Ah, you could wear it to the wedding, it's so good, you can wear it to a wedding or it will last to your wedding, you know, it was very good fabric so it will last long," these kinds of stories and they gave him a name *ślubnoy* because it will last through the wedding so it was something-- I can't translate it into English, "weddingly" or whatever but his nickname was *ślubnoy*. Oh, he got so happy, how good my grandfather was to them and he always helped them out when they didn't have money.

JS: It's a good thing you had such a nice grandfather, after all!

AP: Oh he is happy and he gives us food, he doesn't want any money and what he can do, so my father tells him he would like to dig, here comes the winter and it's already miserable. His son will go up and will dig us the bunker, and we have to cut the wood and he prepared one part quickly so that we would be protected from rain right away, which was not too deep. Say we dug from the surface that much like to here or a little bit deeper and we put a lot of wood on top of it and leaves and this way, what's the name, we were already protected from the snow. He would bring us some hay so we put the hay first, then the leaves on top of it. It worked, it didn't leak. So, we had our first protection, and then his son would continue digging deeper, now completely underground and this we would have to pay, so okay, my father is the rich one and there is one fellow that goes constantly back and forth to Skalat where somebody has a *goy.* So my father sent him to a teacher that was my mother's friend, a Gentile, that fur coat, my mother's fur coat was left with her. That she knew that if somebody ever comes, she should give him the fur coat so he could sell it.

JS: That was smart.

AP: So, he went there but he at the same time, cheated us with the price that he got for it. I don't remember-- your mother by now probably remembers better the details than I do because she reminded me about it.

EP: I thought that when they came, I remember that the fur coat wasn't there.

AP: No, because she had to give it to him. The only thing that he said that she said that she didn't, she didn't know him, she didn't want to give it. Something, there was a story that she gave him some money, that he came and told us and it wasn't true. He took the fur coat and sold it and gave us much less money, saying that she sent us some money.

EP: I know that you were cheated…

AP: But anyhow, we got the money that we needed to give the, the peasant for digging the bunker and some wood with it.

CF: So how many people you build it then?

AP: In that bunker, we were-- the *shochet*'s[27] *kinder* [the ritual slaughterer's child], I don't know, we were 18 people in this bunker.

SS: You lasted the whole winter there?

[27]*shochet* – kosher butcher, ritual slaughterer.

AP: Yeah. And by that time, we had already where to hide and deep and it was pretty warm. We had a little fireplace.

CF: Was this '43 or '44?

AP: I think '43, beginning '44?

JS: You had a fireplace underground?

AP: Yes, we had a little something built there with a chimney so that we could have a fire inside and you wouldn't see the fire at night and we could cook at night.

JS: This was all underground? Were the walls made of mud or did you have…

AP: The walls were the dirt that was left there.

JS: What kept worms from crawling through and …

AP: Nothing.

JS: Oh and bugs …

AP: And we had a little hay that we slept on it and we slept dressed. And the lice and other of this kind of creatures, they were walking from one to another. What, we didn't wash our faces, our teeth, our bodies for who knows how long. Once, once the winter came down, there was no place to do anything like that.

JS: How about going to the bathroom? You don't have to be so graphic but…

AP: Out in the forest.

EP: No toilet paper either.

AP: No toilet paper, leaves.

EP: And the peasant gave you food?

AP: The peasant used to sell us food and he would bring it with his sled into the forest, he would dump it and we would pick it up. We would know when he would be coming and we would be waiting for him when he dumped the food. We would pick it up, because by that time it was too late to go to the fields to collect any potatoes.

EP: No tell them what happened with that.

AP: What?

EP: When the man went at night…

AP: Oh, well, wait, wait, wait. It's coming to an end. We were there for I don't know, a few weeks, a few months, a couple of months maybe. Things were calm, stable. We didn't have too much to eat. We didn't have anything but nobody was looking for us. During the summer when we used to go out and look for water at night, go to a well and so on, we were so weak that we always held sticks so once you were coming back with the bottles of water, you had the stick hanging usually with a piece of string so it looked many times like a rifle, so if somebody saw us, they would think and we certainly spread the news that we are all armed, that the partisans left us weapons and that we are all armed. So, the guard left us alone, the *Schutzpolizei* from the town wasn't ready to go, they would be asked what's going on in the woods, the *Schutzpolizei* normally would answer there are only wild animals, there is nobody there. Well, one day, that fellow that my father gave

the *gele lates*, his last name was Rothstein.[28] He was staying outside. He was de-licing himself. When you had already so much lice that you couldn't take it, you could come out and shake into the cold weather, shake out, grab the bugs and kill them with your fingers and he was doing this when suddenly somebody yelled at him something in German, he starts running, they shoot him.

CF: Oh, my God.

JS: Now who was this?

AP: And they come and they start looking and I don't remember exactly as they came running that they saw the hole to our bunker, that he started running, that they went after him and they shot him and that moment, we escaped. We ran in another direction. We ran, we met with somebody else, one from the Saslach [phonetic], we even didn't know where we were running, because you could hear German voices all over around and we ran and that one guy from the Saslach, he ran and suddenly we run into something and we were among very young trees and he was behind us. He grabbed something and you know, covered up whatever there was on the snow and somehow and we are standing there in, in a line, not moving, not breathing almost because when you breathe in cold weather, you see the vapor and we stood there like for hours until the night fell down, was completely dark and little by little, we started to go out and didn't know where to go so we went back to where the Saslach were and they said, "We were at the other place and everybody, all the Germans are gone." They don't know if anybody was caught or not. We went back to our place, the other people they were already back and we started to look for this Rothstein and we found him and he was shot.

EP: Dead?

AP: He wasn't dead yet, but he was badly injured so we took him down into the bunker and to keep him warm and we left him some food but he could not walk, there was no way that he could walk.

CF: He talked?

AP: He talked but he was badly shot, we didn't know what to do with him, we didn't know how to help him even and he said, "Leave me and go." We left him some food and so on.

CF: In the bunker?

AP: In the bunker and we left him there, as warm as we could with everything that we could.

RP: He died.

AP: We came out now and that night, we found out that these were *Volksdeutschen* [ethnic Germans living outside of Germany] from Russia and they were retreating with the German troops but they were retreating before the German troops and they, they had nothing to lose. They weren't really troops but they were all armed and they

[28]Arthur himself edited the first print out of this testimony to say that this last name *might* have been Rosenstein. He was unsure. We wanted to include this information for research purposes.

were going through the forests looking for partisans and for Jews and for whomever they could find.

JS: What [unclear] were these?

RP: The *Volksdeutschen* are ethnic Germans who lived in Russia who were going back to Germany with the retreating German army.

AP: That's right.

JS: Mmm hmm.

AP: And these guys-- so, they were the ones that ran through the forest, they were not afraid, they didn't live a kind of relaxed life as the *Schutzpolizei* lived so they didn't want to go and hide us and find us. These guys went into the forest because they were trying to get brownie points from the Germans because the Germans didn't, didn't consider them real Germans anyhow. They lived in Russia for so many years under the Communist regime so they didn't trust them completely. At the same time, they were after all, ethnic Germans so they had to take them back with them and these guys that were trying to…

JS: Get in their good favor.

AP: Yeah, get it on the good side of the Germans so they were looking for partisans in Russia in the forests as they were retreating, for partisans and Jews already here and we got-- so, they were the ones who found us. Now…

CF: You didn't go to see the peasant?

JS: The what?

AP: No, because we didn't know where these Germans stayed.

JS: To see what?

CF: The peasant.

AP: So, some of the people, some of the people in our group knew-- no, at this same moment, it coincided that from the other end of this forest, we came when we met with all those people say on the western end of the forest, we were now in the middle of the forest because it was a big forest and there were some people who used to stay in a village on the eastern end of the forest and they had just come, that the peasants chased them out and this was Mrs. Bernhaut with the two kids…

EP: Two babies.

AP: …and somebody else, two babies really.

RP: Mrs. Bernhaut?

AP: Yeah.

EP: They went to Cuba and they are now in Miami.

JS: The two babies survived?

AP: Yeah.

JS: Amazing.

AP: She was only there with the babies. Her husband ran away to Russia because her husband was an old Communist in Poland. He was incarcerated still in Poland

for being a Communist. So, he escaped to Russia because Communist and a Jew that he would be killed immediately but she with the children, what is she going to *shlep* [Yiddish: take with difficulty, drag] them?

RP: Was she from Skalat, too?

AP: Yes.

JS: How did she survive all the winter?

AP: Well, she survived, she went to a peasant until the peasant was afraid and so she told us that not far from where she was hiding, there was an abandoned stable with a lot of hay and we could spend the day there because now we were afraid where to-- the night we would sleep and cook and do things in our bunker because the Germans were afraid of being at night in the forest but daytime they could come back any minute, so we went there. A few times we did this until one day, some dogs were smelling around there. I don't remember exactly how it was, anyhow we couldn't go back there anymore and it was quite a *shlep* every day. Before the sun would go up, we would have to be already hiding in that place and when the night fell, we would have to start going back to the forest in order to cook and so on. It was every day and we are after all, pretty weak, from eating just potatoes and nothing else. So, the decision was we don't go back there anymore because it was-- I don't remember whether it was on one of our stays there, she joined us or she was already with us. Somehow, I think that we met her there, that she was just chased out and the *goy* sent her to the same stable that we were hiding and we met her there and since that time, she was with us in the forest.

JS: Where's the hole with 20 people?

AP: Still on the eastern…

RP: Eastern or Western?

AP: On the western end of the forest.

JS: Did you think you were going to make it through this tape?

AP: Yes. So we go back one night and the decision is we are not going to that stable on the eastern end of the forest because it's dangerous and we may have been uncovered here. Nobody is here, we don't know where all the other people ran away, maybe to some further forest, who knows, or maybe to a *goy.* We are going to go then to the forest on the west end that we had come from there because the *goy* with the rifle incident. Nobody was there for who knows how long, we can go there. So, our group, we are about 14-15 people, we go there and we found the entrance to that bunker through that tree and we will sit there. We have enough-- we have some potatoes with us, there is plenty of snow so we can melt the snow, make the water, we'll eat the potatoes. But after two-three days, we ran out of the potatoes and we are still afraid to go back. We spend there 12 days just living on water.

JS: Oh, my God. Did you get really skinny during this time?

AP: Oh, yeah. When we were getting to the point that we were really starving, and at this point, my father said, "Well, we either go back to our woods and whatever will

happen will happen or we die here from hunger." The decision was we go back to our woods; as we come out, there is this big fire because the Germans were cutting forest, preparing trenches to fight. The front was already apparently not that far and they were trying to create some line of resistance there so they were chopping trees down for the trenches and they had those big fires where the workers were keeping warm and their meal there in the forest so we warmed up in that forest. We found some potatoes that they have thrown. We cooked them and we made a little bit of a meal. Everybody had a bite of something and we started to walk back to our forest. We walked back to our forest, to our bunker and we found there a couple of people that were before with us that separated themselves from us. They were looking somewhere else, they were back there.

JS: What happened to the Rothstein?

AP: Rothstein was laying down there dead. Now we buried him.

JS: In the bunker?

AP: No, outside of the bunker.

CF: In the forest.

AP: In the forest somewheres. We didn't know whether the Germans found him and shot him to death or he just died.

CF: From the original wound?

AP: From the original wound or from starvation or from what?

SS: Probably from cold, he died.

AP: Well, we were away only 12 days or two weeks.

RP: Oh, because you were coming back every day?

AP: That time that we were coming back.

JS: When you were coming back, you were coming back to the bunker where he was, and he was still living?

AP: The first two days, yes. We didn't go that many times, two-three days only that we went to that stable.

JS: So, it was a total of about two weeks?

AP: Yes, so this was a little bit-- at that time he was still alive but we don't know-- well, no, I think or maybe one day when we came back, he was dead but I don't know, I don't remember, really there are certain details that I just don't remember. And when we came back from the western end of the forest, we found some people who used to be with us, they were back in the, the bunker, they said nobody bothered them so we stayed there and…

JS: How did they find the bunker, was it obvious when you look at it that it's a bunker?

AP: We used to hide in that bunker, we knew how to get to that bunker.

JS: How did they find it?

AP: They lived there, too.

RP: They split.

AP: We split. Not every-- you know, this was as I said before, one time you thought you know better where to hide than the other people and everybody who had his idea.

JS: But I thought it was just you and your dad and Rothstein.

AP: No, no, 18 people, we were 18 people.

JS: I missed that somewhere along the line.

SS: [unclear].

JS: Alright, don't get so upset at me.

AP: We were 18 people in that bunker and we, and we went back to that western forest, we went there about 10 - 14-- I don't know, not everybody went.

JS: So, your dad's money was paying for food for all these 18 people?

AP: No, we didn't have any money anymore.

JS: But at the time of his buying food from the peasant, was it all 18 people?

AP: No, for us. The only thing that he paid with his money was for bunker digging. The others, they were, they were trading and this-- everybody still had something that they were trading with the peasant and getting the food. It was to survive this winter because we lost in the meantime all our supplies. When we got out from the tree after that, after that fire, we walked over to where we started to prepare our supplies but everything was frozen so we couldn't find anything there either to eat.

JS: So, what happened when you went back to the bunker? All [unclear]…

AP: When we went back to the bunker, we found the other people that were with us. They were back there. They didn't have where to hide and so they came back and said they, they have been there already for a few days. It was quiet, nobody came there so we decided we will be there. After all, we still had some food there so we had from what to live. I don't remember exactly how it happened but a few days after that, we started to have trouble with a peasant, a Polish peasant, who used to call himself that he is the king of the forest.

JS: Oy oy oy. Somebody insane…

AP: That he receives orders from the Polish government in exile in London and that we have to do what he tells us to do and he used to come and chase and this and what-- but mainly, he used to try to find and get the, the Sass brothers because they were there in the forest with a sister and also, somehow within a short period of time, a woman joined their group and she was the mistress of that Zimmer.

RP: [Unclear] Zimmer or Nussman?

AP: Zimmer. I don't remember how she came there but he saw her one day and he took a liking to her and he wanted to sleep with her. And it started to create a problem so they also used to have to hide and when we came back, they were gone. The whole group, I don't know where they went.

RP: That was the Sasses?

AP: The Sasses with their group, they went to another forest. I think they went to the forest where Dasya's uncle and aunt were hiding and where Gusta was hiding.

RP: Which Gusta?

AP: Wechsler-Jorisch, she was hiding in another forest that wasn't the western end of this one but one further east. I mean not the eastern end of the forest we were hiding but another one further east, there was an interruption in between. That was an area with a lot of forests. Somehow, I don't remember how exactly it happened, one-- somebody from our bunker or from another group that was already back-- because we were a few groups and each one was sitting in a different section of young forest but it was everybody was within half a mile from each other. Anyhow, they came back. That forest ranger in our part of the forest, he cooks a lot of food and he is willing to give it away. What he did, he cooked potatoes in its skin for their pigs and they cooked a little bit more and they used to give it to us.

CF: …[Unclear]

JS: …[Unclear]

AP: Free, without money, he, he was willing to help. I don't know, maybe because it was already-- he heard on the radio that things are coming to an end and he wanted to have some friends or what, but one group of, group of people went and they ate there, warmed up there, drank there and came back and brought some potatoes for the rest of the people. The next day, some other people, the next day, some other people. Finally, it was the night that me and my father had to go there. We went there and they were very nice, we warmed up, they gave us warm potatoes that we could eat there and we took a whole bucket full of potatoes back…

CF: To the bunker.

AP: To the bunker.

JS: And they didn't mind that you were dirty and covered with lice?

AP: No, no, they were keeping us with the pigs. It was warm there, too. They didn't mind. And one night, some people went there and they came back, they brought the potatoes but immediately got sick and we didn't understand what it was. A short time, two-three days, no, two days later, it was my father's and my turn to go and pick up-- they didn't prepare us-- when we are getting near the ranger's house, somebody suddenly yelled "*Stall*," in Russian.

JS: Which means?

AP: "Stop."

JS: Great.

AP: We got panicked that we became petrified and he starts yelling in Russian, "Who is this?" And I say, "We are people living in the forest." So, he says, "Who are you, the Jews?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "We were waiting for you yesterday, how come you didn't come yesterday?" Now, they came up from their hiding places, they invited us, come with us, we are now walking in, into the forest ranger's house and there they are these

Russian soldiers. They give us food to eat, food that we haven't seen, hams and this and that, and we eat up. He said, "We sent already food for you two days ago, with the other people." This is…

JS: …that's why they're sick.

AP: …why the others got sick. They ate everything…

JS: Serves them right.

AP: They only brought the potatoes! And they didn't say anything that the Russians were already in the forest.

JS: You should have killed them.

AP: You don't kill people for that. So, we took the food with us to the bunker and we told everybody the Russians are there so the next night, the whole group almost goes there and we eat and we celebrate and somehow we go back and that night starts a shelling between the Russians and the Germans. The front is going right over our area and it was already end of March or beginning of April…

JS: …what year?

AP: …sometime in '44, which means the earth gets softer, plowing away and from that shaking of that battle, the bunker caved in

EP: …Oh my God.

AP: …over my father and another girl and they had both either badly hurt or broken bones, I will never know.

JS: What do you mean, you'll never know.

AP: I never found out and my father never asked for x-rays.

RP: They didn't have doctors.

JS: I mean I would think a few years later, you would find out. Why is everyone picking at me like I'm stupid?

AP: No, you are not stupid, but he never was interested after that he could walk without any pain, without anything, he forgot even about it. He had other *tzores* [troubles] to worry about.

EP: Maybe nothing was broken.

AP: Maybe nothing was broken, it was just trauma but he couldn't walk for quite a while. He couldn't walk and she couldn't walk for quite a while. Well, we dragged them out quickly from the falling bunker, we kept them in the part that was just, you know, a little digging with the wood above it because that didn't cave in.

CF: Where were you and the other people?

AP: The brother of that girl.

CF: No, where were you?

AP: In the bunker and it caved in. I was at the wall and I jumped and it started to cave in and pulled my father and he pulled his[29] sister. I was sleeping at the wall, my

[29]Arthur himself edited the first print out of this testimony to say that he meant to say "the sister" here.

father here, his sister here, he here that particular night and it caved in right above my father and his sister,

RP: Right in the middle.

AP: Right on the two of them, and they were the ones badly hurt and we started to run out, dragging them out in the meantime because we didn't know how far it will cave in the whole thing. And we put them up there in the part that was safer and then, her brother and me, we started to walk towards the Russians to look for help and we had to hide because the German Messerschmidts started to bomb the forest and shoot at the forest indiscriminately so we could-- we had to hide from the bullets. We pulled them out from that place and we put them from the bunker now, we took them out completely above ground, covered them with a few, with a little bit of hay and whatever we could find and the brother's-- the girl's brother, he was the *shochet*'s son, and me, we went down into the town, into the villages. Not to the peasant that helped us with-- that used to bring food, but now into the town because the Russian's headquarters were there. We are walking there you know, with our ripped around clothing and asking questions. We are looking for the headquarters and they grab us and they bring us before an *NKGB*[30] colonel. "Who are you?" I said, "We are Jews. We are hiding in the woods." And this, I explained everything and what it was and he believed me because they were thinking first maybe we are spies and he said what are you doing here. I said, "We came down here to look for help. We have two very badly hurt people, we need them to be taken to see a doctor." "Well, we are right now in the middle of a battle, we can't help you but try to bring them to that forest ranger, we will have there a soup kitchen comes there from here twice to the avant-garde people that are stationed in the forest so at least they can get some warm food but I can give you nothing else, and here, so that you can cook something for you," he gives me a big ham, raw ham. What the hell do I do with it? And he says, "Right now, there are two wagons going up the, the forest, so you don't have to walk all the way up the mountain and it's quite a walk, you are weak," and he fed us, we ate and we go up there, and I'm holding that ham. In the meantime, you know the food didn't last too long to make me hungry and I'm on that wagon sitting and I start biting into that ham. I'm hungry.

JS: Raw?

AP: Raw food, whatever, who the hell cares. It was big, don't worry, I wasn't going to eat everything. I was going to bring for everybody food. And the *shochet*'s son he is looking at me, and I said, "Give a bite." He said, "How can I bite ham?" I said, "At this time if it would be snake, I would be biting into it as long as would be dead, and I could eat it." [laughs] Well, we…

RP: The *shochet*'s son is the brother of the girl?

AP: Of the girl that was hurt. They are in Israel. And they bring us up the mountain to the forest and we get off and we walk over to where his sister and my father

[30]Arthur himself edited the first print out of this testimony to say that he meant to say "NKVD" here.

were and he had a younger sister, I think, that survived also that was with them and we are all there sitting and what we are going to do? And we had them a little further out and we decided well we'll put them back into the bunker, you know, the part that survived. You know how the Indians used to move people, something like this, we rigged up and moved them around on the snow. And we take them back to the bunker, we are ready to put them down, what will we do with these two? Everybody else escaped. No, there was still a woman with a daughter and somebody else. The other people, they left us. Here is the group of the sick and broken, badly hurt, what do we do? Suddenly, we hear wagons coming, Russians yelling "*Evrei* [Russian: Jews]*, Evrei*, Jews, Jews, where are you?" We walk out and there are three wagons with soldiers that came to pick us up.

JS: To go where?

EP: From those headquarters where they went.

AP: No, we had-- they, they were sent by a major, not by the colonel, but by a major, so and so, he sent the three wagons to pick up the Jews that were hurt here and hungry here. We fit very well on those three wagons, comfortable, they take us down; they bring us to his headquarters. We don't know what it is but we don't ask questions. We are with Russians, we are safe. We go to him. What happens, the major is a Jew and his captain that's with him is a Jew and they have heard that in the headquarters there were some Jews looking for help and when they heard that we didn't get any help, they inquired a little bit more and they found out in which forest we were and he said, "After all, we Jews have to look out for other Jews," and he didn't know a word [of] Yiddish. But he had the Jewish feeling. That they never took away from him, the Russians, so he sent his soldiers, he picked us up and he said, "Now you are going to eat as you haven't eaten for a long time and he poured us vodka and gave us ham and pork and you name it, and everybody ate suddenly.

JS: Why is vodka going to help?

AP: Because it's alcohol. It, it acts on the fat, that was the only thing that could make us sick. We still weren't too, too fine. The next day in the morning, we slept over, he said, he told us, "We are going to send you now to Yampol." It's a city already in Russia, with respect to the pre-1939 Polish-Russian border. That's a city in Russia where he was sending us to a hospital for recovery. And he sent three wagons with his soldiers to take us there. We traveled one night, we slept in-- because this was about 70 miles away and it was wagons on roads that are filled with troops going backward and forward you know you don't move too fast. Plus still these are wagons driven by horses, how much do you cover? The next night, the next day we were already on the border.

[Tape three, side one ended.]

Tape three, side two:

[Long pause before interview resumes]

AP: …Russia and Poland before the war but much higher from the border that would be not far from Skalat because the border was pretty close to Skalat, from Skalat too, but to go to Yampol, we had to go north and where we were supposed to cross, he had sent couriers to tell the drivers that they had to change their orders, that they should go with-- that the courier came with orders to the-- not mayor-- how do you call in a village, maybe here it's still a mayor.

CF: *Starosta, starosta.*[31]

AP: No, *starosta* is for a county. This was a *wójt of the starosta*. Anyhow, he was the leader of the village with orders to give us quarters and feed us until such time that we can be transported to Yampol but in the meantime, he needs his wagons to be loaded with ammunition and come back quickly to where they were. What happened? The Russians were advancing at a nice pace against Tarnopol and these troops eventually even retook Skalat but they were stuck at Tarnopol because when the Russ-- the Germans let the Russian troops go in into Tarnopol. They left a brewery full of beer and they left a hell of a lot of liquor there. The Russians, like pigs, they drank that beer and they drank the liquor, they were dead drunk and at night, the Germans came back and slaughtered them-- 12,000 Russian soldiers-- like pigs!

JS: What fools, what fools.

AP: Reoccupied the town and now, the Russians had spent six weeks after that to retake Tarnopol and move forward. The whole front stopped because of those idiots. Because they went up to the brewery.

CF: Were you there?

AP: We were far away. We were not in any danger but they needed the ammunition now to try to fight off-- they thought they will be able to displace the Germans quickly but they were not. The whole front stopped there.

JS: I don't mean to rush you but…

AP: So we were stuck, we were stuck in that village. The local people didn't want to do too much. They gave us an empty house and for the first couple of days, they gave us some food and after that, they did absolutely nothing. So, we had to start going from house to house and beg for food.

JS: Oy, oy, oy.

AP: And we were now in an unknown village with unknown people that owed us nothing and we had just to beg. So, and everybody now was on his own, you know, so I had to go one side of the town, the other one, the other and the other, the other.

JS: Did you know any Russian?

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[31]Slavic term denoting a community elder whose role was to administer assets of a clan. (https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/lida-District/starost.htm)

AP: Yes, I knew Russian but we were still on, on the Polish side but I was in a Ukrainian village, a rich village. So, we would go to enough houses, I would come, I would come back with enough food, milk, bread, cheese, sometimes a piece of meat, whatever. So, I would have…

CF: They were willing to give food?

AP: Not too willing but you begged and you cried and eventually they gave it. They were rich peasants; they missed it? Just they were *goyim*, Ukrainians, who didn't really like Jews. That's why their leader did absolutely nothing for us. And after about a couple of weeks of that situation, Russian troops from Tarnopol, those that till that moment took the brunt of the fight, they were sent back to rest for a few weeks while new troops are being sent, and now they were going to displace us and we had to vacate the house. We went to them, we told them the story. He didn't know a thing about it. He says, "This is where we are supposed to stay, we can't." I said, "You have so many houses in this village that you can stay with, why do we have to vacate the house and we look for where to stay." Well, they didn't want to, to talk to us, they said, "You have to vacate it one way or another." And in the meantime, weeks went by already and till that moment, really that girl or my father didn't try to walk, although they could stand up already, go on their own to the bathroom, to the outhouse. But little by little, first the lady with her daughter that they were not hurt, they went and they left us. Then he with his sister left us. I think the last one was my father and myself.

RP: The *shochet*?

AP: The *shochet*'s son.

RP: Where was the *shochet*?

AP: He was killed.

JS: What was his last name?

AP: Don't remember.

RP: He was not killed in the bunker, he was killed…

AP: No, before that, yes. And we were the last one, my father and myself. But everybody told us, we stood on the main road and we were stopping Russian trucks with troops, where they were going. As long as they were going towards us towards Skalat, we would take it.

JS: You wanted to go back to Skalat?

AP: Where else would we go? We didn't know anything, anybody.

JS: But it seemed like you were in a safer territory than Skalat.

AP: But what will I do here?

EP: Skalat was liberated already.

AP: Skalat was liberated already. This, we knew that much, because we found out already about the story. Skalat was taken, they were now fighting back to retake Tarnopol and continue the advance because the, the offensive was stopped at that point.

RP: Skalat, Skalat was east, southeast of Tarnopol?

AP: Skalat was I think.

JS: Not east, west.

AP: East north.

RP: Northeast.

AP: Not really northeast, it was slightly to the north of a real eastern direction. It was noreast east, whatever they call it.

RP: East northeast.

AP: East northeast, okay. And so we took a truck in the morning. He took us to about halfway between where we were and Skalat. We couldn't get a connection from there to Skalat immediately that day so somehow, they helped us in that place to spend the night and the next day, we got on a truck that took us from there to Skalat and we arrived into Skalat. And the Skalat was already liberated and there were some people that we knew and one was helping the other at that time, whoever came out sooner under better conditions, was helping himself. My father, as soon as he was able, he got in touch with that peasant that we knew that had our things and that guy brought him eggs and these things that we could trade and get money for it and some money and for a while, he was bringing a few other things so we didn't starve and my father got his first few dol-- rubles that he could make business. In the meantime, a neighbor from where we lived at the market, do you remember the house that we lived that we had a hiding place, through that backyard, we were adjoined to some other family that they had a, a restaurant and a bar on the main street and his two sons had survived. They were hidden by, by a peasant and now they were among the first ones to come back and one of them was in charge of a-- let's call it like the equivalent of a hot soup kitchen. So naturally all the refu-- Jews that started to come back together, this was the meeting place where we would get a free meal and we were talking, one helping the other, so this is how little by little, we went back into shape.

JS: You said that *Zayde* [Yiddish: grandfather] had a little money to go back into business?

AP: From whatever that, that peasant gave him.

JS: What business was he in?

AP: Business, he was trading with whatever was needed. At that time, the two big items that every *goy*, every peasant needed, were flint stones for lighters and needles to do sewing, so originally, he would get them locally from a so-called wholesaler and resell them to peasants for eggs-- he would do trading and he would do buy-- he would sell their produce and so on. Later on, he became a wholesaler. What does it mean? He established already a…

CF: When was this?

AP: Eh?

EP: What is the year?

RP: '44.

AP: This is already in '44, he established already good relationships with the [someone sneezes]

CF: God bless you.

AP: God bless you. With the head of the *NKVD* in Skalat, the captain of *NKVD*. He established good relationships with the captain of KGB[32] and he established good relationships with the major who was head of *Voenkomat*[33] which is like the draft board. The *Voenkomat* was the first one that you bribed so they wouldn't be taken to the army. So, that was finished. Now, [it] was to have good relationships, that means he paid them off. Why did he pay off the guy from *NKVD* and from KGB? Because in Russia, you cannot move from here to here without documents that allow you to travel. Those documents, you can't get them for six months back and forth. Each time you travel, you need it. So, what better traveling papers is, you travel on KGB business or on *NKVD* business. So, he said if I travel on the best papers and this is why he had bribed them and they, each time he needed it, they would give him a paper to go to Tarnopol, I mean to Lemberg. Each time he went into Lemberg, each time he would go to…

RP: Lemberg was already…

AP: The big city 200 miles…

RP: That was already after it was free?

AP: After it was free, this is I'm talking about months after that, after he stopped being a local little this, he had even a open store, a front already a little store, that he would sell there…

JS: Was Lemberg? You said Lódz was the second biggest city, what was the third?

AP: Lemberg was one of the cities.

RP: …Lemberg was Lwów.

JS: Lwów? The same thing?

AP: Yeah, Lemberg was Lwów.

RP: Lwów was the capital of…

AP: Galicia.

RP: …Galicia.

JS: Mmm.

AP: I don't remember how well what was it as far among the big cities, it was, I don't know, a city of 300,000 people.

RP: I think in the next tape we should discuss getting out of Russia and getting to Cuba the next time and also…

AP: We'll listen to this to see whether I missed something. We could always, we can always try to find out here things.

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[32]Arthur himself edited the first print out of this testimony to say that he meant to say "NKVD" here.

[33]*Voenkomat* (Военкомат) - Russian acronym for *Voenny komissariat* (Военный комиссариат), military registration and enlistment office.

JS: I just have a few quick questions, please.

AP: Sure.

CF: Arthur, do you came back to Skalat and your father opened the store, you didn't have to run anymore. You were there till '45 and it was all liberated.

AP: Yes, we left early in '45 and we went to Poland.

RP: You're basically, the family was-- Wechsler, your Uncle Wechsler….

AP: We didn't know where they were until Gusta's wedding to Jorisch.

RP: Oh, they hadn't been married?

AP: No.

RP: When did they get married?

AP: Summer of '44, after we came back.

RP: Where did they get married?

AP: In Skalat.

RP: Oh, they came back to Skalat?

AP: They came back. Gusta and Martin and her father and then there was a wedding there.

JS: What happened to her father finally?

RP: He survived.

AP: He survived. He died in Canada. He remarried and he died in Canada.

EP: Let me ask you another question.

RP: Can we shut this off? [tape off, then on]

JS: I want to ask you more questions.

AP: Okay, go ahead.

JS: Just for the record. You learned to speak Yiddish when you were in that hole under the ground with those people?

AP: No, I started to learn to speak Yiddish when we were in Hluboczek.

JS: Hluboczek?

RP: But that's the camp, the [unclear] camp...

AP: The concentration camp that, that we were-- this is where I started to learn and I learned very quickly. I was already by that time surrounded by people speaking Yiddish but I didn't speak it. In that camp, I had no choice.

RP: So, you were speaking Polish?

AP: I was before that speaking Polish.

RP: Did you know Ukrainian?

AP: Yes, and Russian. I was fluent in all three languages. At that point, I spoke Russian like a born Muscovite.

JS: Okay, Dr. Siegel, was he your age, older or younger?

AP: He's a little bit older than I am.

JS: A little bit older. Didn't you tell me once at one time that you were in some, some youth group that you're not proud of that you said, I don't know, either German or Russian that you had to be in? Did you ever have to say "*Heil Hitler*" to anybody?

AP: No, I was in *Komsomol*[34].

RP: Oh, this is afterwards, once you...

AP: After the war.

CF: The young Communist.

AP: After the war, I was in the young Communist group.

RP: Oh, lucky that McCarthy never got to you.

AP: That's right.

RP: [Unclear] once you came from Cuba.

JS: Well, you had no choice. [unclear]

AP: This was, at the same time, it was very helpful to my father because then later on, I used to travel for my father to do business and if they stopped me, I would show my Communist I.D. And that was it.

RP: So, if anyone ever asked you have you been or have you ever been a member of the Communist party?

AP: I say no. [laughs]

JS: How about Dasya? Wasn't she…?

AP: Dasya went to school [with] me in Skalat.

RP: This is Dasya who lives in Israel?

JS: Oh. Who has vision problems.

AP: In Israel. So when before we had to hide in the woods, before the ghettos, Dasya and Yanka.

JS: Leslaw [Giermanski] was after the war?

AP: Leslaw was strictly after the war in Poland already.

RP: Okay, before, before the ghetto when you had to hide in the woods, that's when you met Dasya?

AP: No, before that in school, under the Russians, the first time under the Russians in 1940.

RP: Got it, got it, got it.

AP: Dasya, Yanka, the whole group, they were my classmates.

JS: In Skalat, before the first pogrom?

AP: That's right. But they were in school when the Russians were still in Skalat.

JS: What was to stop you from going to another town, like you went in that village looking for that peasant that your father knew and pretending you were a *goy* and

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[34]*Komsomol* - Russian abbreviation of ***Kom****munistichesky* ***So****yuz* ***Mol****odyozhi*, the All-Union Communist League of Youth was an organization for young people aged 14 to 28 that was primarily a political organ. for spreading Communist teachings and preparing future members of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

trying to find work? Was it so obvious that you were Jewish?

AP: The Polish and the Ukrainian peasants, they smell the Jew. In, in Lódz, when the Germans entered Lódz they could not recognize a Jew except those that wore *peyes* and beards, or the-- they were not Hasidic…

CF: *Kippah*. [Hebrew: head covering that Jewish males wear.]

AP: No, it's not a *kippah* it was a particular kind of a hat that the Jews, the orthodox Hasidic Jews wore in Lódz. These were the only ones they could recognize. The westernized, dressed like we, like everybody else, they could not recognize. The Poles were the ones that always pointed out to them and that you didn't have to have the Jewish nose that they show in the caricatures. The Poles smelled a Jew a mile away. The Germans could never find them. The Poles pointed them out. There you have a Jew. The Ukrainians, also.

JS: Did you ever think the war would end? Did you ever-- could you ever imagine an end to it or did you think that this is going to be the way the world was going to be for the rest of your life?

AP: Janet, I didn't know. I had hopes that the war will end. I knew, we knew eventually that all the Allies and everybody else was against Germany but they had to fight in Japan too. We didn't know how strong they are, how strong they are not. We only remembered one thing that the Russians retreated from half Poland till the former Polish-Russian border which was oh, I don't know, quite east of Lwów to-- I mean quite west of Lwów to-- the border was from Skalat 20 some miles. We are talking here, I don't know, 250 miles. A fighting army, that knew that there will be a five day retreat in less than two weeks, they surrendered at the beginning in the hundreds of thousands. This was why my father didn't want to run into Russia because the way you saw the Russians surrender, they didn't want to fight for Stalin. On the river that divided Poland from Russia before, it was a small river but it was a natural obstacle. On one side were standing two crack divisions of Ukrainian troops under General Vlasov[35]. Their orders were to blow up the bridges, protect the retreat of the main body of the Soviet Army, blow up the bridges and prevent the Germans from advancing. They didn't protect the retreat, they didn't blow up the bridges, they were waiting for the Germans. When the Germans came in, they embraced them together, together they went to fight against the Russians because the Ukrainians hated the Russians, hated Stalin.

JS: Do you want to mention anything about those two books on this tape or next tape?

AP: I can mention-- this ended already but I can mention it. Right after the war, there was a book written by Abraham Weissbrod. He is-- if he's still alive, he lives in Lakewood, New Jersey and the book…

RP: With the Sass brothers.

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[35]General Vlasov – General Andrei Vlasov was a Russian General and collaborator with the Germans. (http://www.holocaustchronicle.org)

AP: Yeah. And he wrote a book called "*Es shtarbt a shtetl*"[36] which means a *shtetl,* "A small town dies," and it was strictly about the Jews of Skalat and very, very large amount of material in this book was given to him by my father, the rest by him because he was also in hiding.

RP: Where did he write this, when?

AP: He wrote it still when we were in Germany after the war because it was edited by the commission-- no, in '48. He may have still been in Germany or may have or not, I don't know. Probably he was still in Germany.

JS: And your father was in Germany?

AP: No, and this is when we arrived to Cuba. We were a few months in Germany after the war, yes. And when we arrived to Cuba, after we went through-- which was what, in, in April, just before Passover, '47.[37] We got to Cuba. They were already preparing it so they asked the Skalater organizations here they were preparing a *Yizkor* journal and they asked my father to write and there are two articles written here, one by my father and one by again by Abraham Weissbrod.

JS: What's a *Yizkor* journal?

AP: In memory of the …

CF: Killed people.

JS: So, what did they mention the killed people, all the names?

AP: Yes, they mention, because this is when they had a *Yizkor* service at the grave.

JS: That's that grave that you were talking about?

AP: Yes, that is today a mound. But this is where they joined right after the war.

RP: After the war, they joined at the mass grave?

AP: Yes, well, my father was the principal witness for the Russian authorities. He was the only one that survived. So, he was making declarations. The Russians did absolutely nothing, just filled out a paper. They did nothing. The Sass brothers, they, they wanted that peasant that was calling himself the king of the forest, they wanted him arrested or something. The Russians didn't do nothing. We used to come, more, declarations, more declarations, nothing happened.

JS: Okay.

AP: Okay, you have enough?

[Tape three, side two ended. End of interview.]

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[36]The Yizkor book by Abraham Weissbrod is called "Death of a Shtetl." An online translation of this work exists at www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Skalat1/skalat.html#contents.

[37]Mr. Perlmutter's personal history sheet includes these details that are not discussed in the interview: after returning to Skalat after liberation, he spent time in these Displaced Persons camps (summer 1946) Ebensee (Austria) and Cham (Germany), and then in Wetzlar Am Lahmi Displaced Persons camp (Germany, Fall 1946.), Paris 1946-47; He emigrated to the United States in October 1960.