

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

NORMAN ROSEN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Josey G. Fisher
Date: February 17, 1983

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NR - Norman Rosen [interviewee]

JF - Josey G. Fisher [interviewer]

Date: February 17, 1983

Tape one, side one:

JF: ...This is tape one, side one of an interview with Mr. Norman Rosen, on February 17, 1983. This is Josey Fisher interviewing. Mr. Rosen, can you tell me please where and when you were born and a little bit about your childhood?

NR: I was born in a little town in Poland called Nowe Miasto.

JF: Do you have any idea how that's spelled?

NR: [unclear]

JF: That's spelled N-O-V-E W-I-A-S-T-O and what year were you born?

NR: 19--1922.

JF: 1922. Can you tell me a little bit about your family?

NR: Well we were seven children in the house, four brothers and three sisters, and the parents and a grandma.

JF: Where were you in the family?

NR: Which...

JF: Where were you in the seven children?

NR: I was the, before the last one, the sixth.

JF: The sixth.

NR: There was the sixth and the seventh, and my father had a business, he provided as much as he can. Not too bad.

JF: What kind of a business did he have?

NR: He had a--like he had provide--like he had called himself a distributor, a salesman, you know, like for some percentage to get, distribute merchandise to the storekeepers and he got a certain percentage from them.

JF: Like a middleman between those people...

NR: Really not a middleman, it's like I go out and I have some 20 clients and I supply for them the merchandise they need this week that, this week that, cause here the credit of the manufacturers in Warsaw, so he had to go once a week, sometimes twice a week and provide the merchandise for them. So he had a certain percentage. What percentage I don't know.

JF: To merchants?

NR: To merchants.

JF: In Warsaw?

NR: No, from Warsaw to...

JF: From Warsaw to the town.

NR: To that town, yeah.

JF: Did he deal primarily with Jews or with non-Jews as well?

NR: Non-Jews, yeah too.

JF: With non-Jews.

NR: Yes, as a matter of fact, we had just what I remember very close friends who was a druggist, he also was a client of my father's, he was a very close friend with him, not friend, really close, you know anything we need a big favor from them or they from us wasn't quite to hesitate to do the favor, if it's possible.

JF: This was a non-Jew?

NR: Non-Jew, yeah. There were quite a few non-Jews there which were also in business and we supplied for them merchandise or, whatever in business all kinds of deals going on you know.

JF: Did you also live in an area where there were non-Jewish people...

NR: Yeah, sure...

JF: ...in the homes?

NR: ...sure, a lot of non-Jewish people.

JF: And what was...?

NR: Mostly, mostly were non-Jewish in that town.

JF: Mostly were non-Jewish.

NR: Yeah, at least maybe one third of them were Jewish but you know center city usually the Jewish were in the center city, but not all we can say, but a bigger percentage of Jews in the city. Out of the city, in the outskirts, wasn't such a big city like Philadelphia, a small town maybe the whole city was maybe 20,000, I don't know exactly. There was only about a 1,000 families, [unclear] 4,000 Jewish people in the town. But we had problems you know with the Poles, a lot of problems especially the last couple years I'd say.

JF: Can you describe anything that happened to you in particular? What kind of problems you were having?

NR: I didn't have any problems, personally.

JF: Or your family?

NR: My family neither, we had a lot of, we deal with a lot of people and we were liked in there, we were liked in the business because my father was a very honest man. He never tried to go around and cheat or something. He was straight with the people. A lot of Poles, they didn't have any words for my father. He was a very good man. This is the reason we are, as a matter of fact, I personally, myself and all my brothers, you know have Polish friends, very good friends.

JF: Did you go to the Polish public school?

NR: We learned like--me, I myself didn't go to the public school. I was going to a school like in here, comparable like Beth Jacob, a half a day Hebrew, a half a day Polish whatever, history whatever, language, it was working the same way.

JF: Like a Hebrew Day School here?

NR: Like a Hebrew Day School, yeah, complete, it was a *cheder*.

JF: So this was--it was...

NR: But we had a teacher, taught us a half a day Polish, not Polish I mean, literature I remember and math and all that, whatever we needed.

JF: Was this provided by the Jewish community, this school?

NR: The Jewish community, yeah. We had to pay for it.

JF: You had to pay.

NR: I didn't know how much but a little bit, maybe the community supplied some money too, but every child had to pay.

JF: Did most of your...?

NR: I guess according to the earnings from the parents or something. I don't know exactly because I was too small to know about it.

JF: Did all the kids in your family then go to this kind of school?

NR: Mostly, yeah. The girls went to--I know the girls went to regular school, to public school but a couple hours a week or a day they went to like a Beth Jacob school for the girls.

JF: Did you go to a special *cheder* also or was it the Hebrew *cheder*...?

NR: No, this was the *cheder*...

JF: The Hebrew *cheder*...

NR: This was the *cheder*, we called a *cheder*; a *cheder* is a school.

JF: Yes, right.

NR: So we went to the *cheder* and this was the *cheder*, half a day Hebrew, half a day school...

JF: Regular school.

NR: Regular school, yeah, and that's it. Up to about Bar Mitzvah, then I didn't continue no further because to go to a high school it costs--I don't know if it was on account of the money or what, I don't remember that, maybe I didn't want to go, maybe I what--I don't know I can't tell you that, but then I started to help out in the business, you know. When you get 13 years old you start to help in the business, you work.

JF: Was your family a very religious family, a very observant...?

NR: My father was--in here he was extremely religious, in Europe he was a *Misnaged*, not a *Hasid*.

JF: Ok.

NR: Do you know what a *Misnaged* is?

JF: Yes.

NR: Like a conservative man...

JF: Yeah.

NR: ...but in there, here he would be extremely *Hasid*. He didn't miss one day to go to *Shul* [synagogue] *davenen* [to pray]. If wasn't home, but he was home in the

morning he went *davenen*. Saturday morning, 5 o'clock he went to a *Khevra Tehilim* you know, a group would say *Tehilim* [Psalms] in the morning, Saturday morning, then he came home and he *shlepped* us to after *Shul*. You have to go to *Shul*, of course there was no such thing not to go to the synagogue Saturday. He was a very extremely religious man and he never failed to *davenen* or something.

JF: So you were raised in an atmosphere of...

NR: Yeah, yeah...

JF: ...a home that was quite religious then.

NR: ...yeah.

JF: Was your father ever in the army in Poland or any other family member?

NR: I don't think so, I don't think so, maybe, maybe he was in the army for-- before I was born, maybe he was--no, that time was Russia there. Because when the war broke, after the war broke, I was born a year or two after the war, the First World War.

JF: So it would have been the Russian Army, if he had been in the army.

NR: So, yeah, but I don't think so he was in the Russian Army, they would talk about it. Maybe, I can't give you an answer to that...

JF: Okay.

NR: He was, I know one thing he was born in 1880 he would be now over a 100 years if he were alive, but why they, the Germans killed him in 19, 194-, end of '42, beginning of '43 when the whole situation started.

JF: When, when were you aware of things changing in Poland?

NR: What? Just Poland or with the war you mean?

JF: Well...

NR: Well it changed in Poland, Poland changed a lot, the atmosphere with the antisemitism in the middle 30's which I wasn't at the, understandable, I understood everything, I was a teenager and I understand.

JF: Right.

NR: But as I said, you know, personally me and my family had pretty--we had no problems with the Poles.

JF: Even when things changed in the mid-30's...

NR: Yes, we had no problems to the last day. As a matter of fact, during the war thanks to that, to this situation to which we were acquainted and like friendly with a lot of Poles, farmers and business people--which I know used to come in, you know, the farmers in the city and sell stuff, you know. And so we were very friends and on account of that I was alive. I am here now. Because a lot of the Poles in the beginning, when they started to liquidate the ghetto 1942, end of '42, I ran away.

JF: Wait, before we get to that, because I know we want to spend some time on that. At what point in your town did things change? What happened in '39 for instance?

NR: Well, a lot of they start to come in the front of stores, not to buy by Jews.

JF: The Pol--this is under the Polish government?

NR: Polish government, yes.

JF: Yes.

NR: And a lot of ...

JF: About what year do you think that happened?

NR: This was in '37, '38...

JF: In the mid-30's. Did they put a sign like that on your...?

NR: No, they didn't put signs, but they walked around and not to buy by Jews maybe they have some, I don't know maybe they have some--and, but it's hard to explain, because a lot of times--as a matter of fact, one fact which I was a little boy, I used to belong to the *Betar*. My oldest brother, he's not alive now, is--he died in Israel. He was a very close friend of Menachem Begin in Europe yet. So there once was a gathering in another town, in the town where Ben Gurion was born, just about 20 kilometers from our town. I was going there for a gathering, it was 1937, or '38; going back there was a bus or truck stopped in our town to have a drink, a coffee, whatever it is, came in a couple of hooligans and they started to shoot and they shot a guy in the bus then they blamed the Jews and started shooting them. See this already was a tricky business.

JF: This is how the Jews were then attacked, because they said the Jews had shot originally?

NR: They shot, they shot, see it wasn't a man from our town, he was passing by, passing by the city, and he stopped in a luncheonette or some type of coffee or tea or whatever it was, there were a couple of guys. As a matter of fact, the guy who did it, I knew him very well. He was very friendly with me, with us. He said he didn't do it, another guy did it. You know, we talked with him about it. "What the hell you go ahead and shoot a guy? You know, you're not a bad guy." You know a Pole, a Polack.

JF: And he blamed--this man that you knew blamed the Jews...

NR: He didn't blame the Jews, he said that he didn't do it, but we know he did it, but between me and you he was friendly with me. Maybe they went to another guy and he was bad to other guys, you know I'm talking about it? I can't say he was friends with everybody. There's a saying in Europe, a saying "I'll take--I'll take your Jew and you take my Jew. You beat my Jew and I'll beat your Jew."

JF: Oh.

NR: There was a saying like that, and it was--that's what I'm saying, they send over from one town to another one, then they, that was going on up to the war was going on, that situation was a couple years.

JF: So among the boys, the non-Jewish boys that you were friends with when you were a teenager...

NR: Yeah.

JF: ...there was no change in their attitudes towards you?

NR: Very little. Not in my...

JF: Or their parents?

NR: In mine, in mine group what I knew a couple of guys.

JF: Yeah.

NR: And they wasn't friendly with everybody but the people I was friendly I didn't have no feeling--maybe they had a little feeling, but they didn't show it to me.

JF: Did their parents show it?

NR: [unclear]

JF: Were you still allowed in their homes?

NR: They did show it maybe but--I personally couldn't, couldn't say that they, I had a feeling they show it in mine, in front of me, they didn't show it.

JF: Did you then not feel uncomfortable with what was happening?

NR: Oh, sure it was uncomfortable.

JF: You were worried even though...

NR: What a question, what a question...

JF: ...it wasn't happening to you?

NR: ...it was uncomfortable--I was very, very uncomfortable, because he was friend with me, he wouldn't hurt me, but with another friend, my friend, he'll hurt him.

JF: Was there any time when you thought you might leave?

NR: Oh, as a matter of fact, yeah. We had everybody in--not, I wouldn't say everybody--but a big, big percentage of our people, in mine age and a couple years older, we were waiting to run away to Israel and, because--Palestine at that time--we were going to run away. As a matter of fact, one my brothers, an older brother of me--between the oldest which he died, is still in Israel now. He was gone with the *Aliyah Bet*. Do you know what the *Aliyah Bet* means?

JF: Mmm hmm [affirmative].

NR: Illegal, illegal *aliyah* to Israel so he was stranded--when the war broke out in '39 he was stranded on the border by the Black Sea in Romania. It was there, the whole group, some of, I went to Warsaw a couple of weeks before to say goodbye to him there were about a couple a thousand. One of the leaders was in the group. Oh I forgot his name, a very famous--I forgot also from the [unclear]--from Jabotinsky's¹ party.

JF: Somebody from Jabotinsky's party.

NR: Yeah and he had, they had--I forgot his name, so many years ago--and he was stranded when the war broke out, everything stopped, he had to come back during the war. The war is going on and he came all of the sudden Yankel's back; another couple of boys from the city, which they went with that group, another couple of thousand, 3,000, with one shot at that time, and they--so everybody had that feeling to go out, to run out, but you didn't have the money, you could go, you had the money to put

¹Jabotinsky, Vladimir (Ze'ev) 1880-1940: Zionist activist and founder of *Betar* movement.

down, I don't know, 3,000 dollars for each person go as a...

JF: When your brother was stopped at the Black Sea, were any of those people hurt in anyway or were they...

NR: No, no...

JF: They just had to go home then?

NR: ...no, the government of Romania, the Romanian government didn't supply anymore boat to go to Israel, some wants to go to Israel, to Turkey, something I didn't know the arrangement, how it was but...

JF: I see.

NR: But they stop because everything stopped. They needed the boats for the war and that...

JF: So the boys just had to return home then?

NR: They had to return, not because they hurt them or something, no. Hitler wasn't there yet. They returned the first week or something, four weeks the whole thing.

JF: What can you tell me about 1939 and the invasion? Did you have any idea that it was going to occur?

NR: I, we knew already it's coming. We knew it was coming, but we didn't believe it. Like everybody knew--you never know, you feel the atmosphere is bad. We could feel it. As a matter of fact, I wasn't home at that time with my oldest brother, he was buying something, he did some business, I went with him for a business trip to help him out, my oldest brother--he died just in Israel a couple years ago. We went away, away from the city, about like you know 10 miles, all the sudden you hear the bombs falling all over and because [unclear] the German border is only about 30-40 miles, the northern border to Prussia which it was, and I could hear...

JF: So you were quite close to the original invasion?

NR: Very close, as a matter of fact this was Friday morning the first of September, was it? So Friday morning, Friday night, Saturday morning, everybody was running already. The army was crawling all over so...

JF: What did your family do? Did you run?

NR: I run.

JF: Mmm hmm.

NR: I run to, I run, we were running, where we didn't even know, but let's run to Russia we said. Everyone was running towards Russia.

JF: The whole family?

NR: No, I was running with a group of boys, my family was old, my brothers running and my family was home.

JF: Your parents stayed at home?

NR: Stayed at home, then they ran to Warsaw.

JF: They went to Warsaw?

NR: Yeah.

JF: And you went with your friends?

NR: I went with my friends but I came back to Warsaw. They weren't in Warsaw. They were home.

JF: I'm sorry, your parents didn't...

NR: Didn't run in the beginning, no.

JF: Okay.

NR: They didn't run. Then when I came back after the, after the invasion, they said we want to run further out but we got caught by the German army, but they caught us not far from Minsk Mazowiecki, we used to call the city and the Germans they were there, so we had to go only one way to Warsaw back. We were running the whole night, just running, plain running. I think it was about 40--40 miles, 35 miles².

JF: So you...?

NR: We were running with the army, the army were running. We asked them if there was a way to go, the only road that was open to Warsaw. So we were running to Warsaw the whole night, plain running. Running, you fell down, you run again. Because...

JF: How many boys were in this group?

NR: Oh I don't remember, a lot. Maybe, there were thousands and thousands of people, tens of thousands of people in wagons, and on feet, I was running, I didn't have no wagon so I got a wagon, I hitchhike on a wagon a little and the army wagons.

JF: So you, you ended up in Warsaw?

NR: Ended up at Warsaw, yeah, the first--after the second the--after two weeks and then Warsaw was bombed. I was laying in the cellars, you know.

JF: You were hiding in somebody's cellar?

NR: No, I was--I had relatives there, so I went to them and they, I must, I was with them for the two weeks till the war stopped and then I went home, because I wasn't going to sit in Warsaw alone.

JF: As soon as Warsaw fell you went home?

NR: Yeah, when Warsaw fell, I went home. It wasn't easy but I didn't know--not, not, I didn't know what to do; I was, I can't remember how Warsaw the time we walked. It was about 40 miles to Warsaw from us--not far. I came home. I was hiding in the house. I didn't go out in the street, because [unclear] I didn't recognize nobody.

JF: Who...?

NR: The people...

JF: Who is...?

NR: The people working in the street with their brooms and with that, everybody. I came into the house and my mother says to me, "You know this man?" through the window. I didn't know who he is.

²Minsk Mazowiecki is 24.4 miles from Warsaw.

JF: Who were they?

NR: Jewish people working with the brooms.

JF: They were up...?

NR: In the streets, cleaning the streets, clean, clean, not the necessary. Just going on with brooms to make them ashamed, make them low. So one man I said, "This is Pinchus Elya the *shochet*." [ritual slaughterer of meat] Pinchus Elya, do you understand Yiddish?

JF: A little bit...

NR: A little. Well, Pinchus Elya the *shochet* is a *shochet*.

JF: A *shochet*, yes.

NR: The *shochet* yeah. He had that big beard like that, all of the sudden there's no beard with a short jacket, and I didn't recognize it, this is Pinchus Elya. Oh my G-d. This is going to be the way?

JF: So in other words, the people that you saw in the streets were people that you knew, it's just that you didn't...

NR: Everybody I knew, I knew everybody...

JF: It's just their...

NR: ...but I couldn't recognize them...

JF: ...their beards had been shaved or...

NR: ...and they dress differently, used to wear a [unclear] or somewhere they hat like that you see but...

JF: You mean the fur brimmed hat...?

NR: The fur-brimmed hats and a beard, a long...?

JF: A long *kapote*? [long black coat]

NR: A long *kapote*. Here was wearing a short little jacket...

JF: I see.

NR: ...and you know and torn in pieces from the beating from the *hocking* you know.

JF: So the German...?

NR: [unclear]

JF: ...the German soldiers were in the streets making these people...

NR: Work.

JF: ...clean and work?

NR: Yeah, yeah, yeah...

JF: Now you and your family were safe then in the house?

NR: Yeah, we were safe, we were safe up to that time, in the house and then after...

JF: The Germans didn't approach your store or your house and come...

NR: No, we had no store, we had no store.

JF: Or the house?

NR: The store right away, robbed by the Poles, and the Germans they liquidated all the stores. Right away, the first day they came in, they heard about it.

JF: As soon as the invasion started?

NR: Yeah, they liquidated the Jewish stores right away, by robbing, not they robbed, they opened the stores that the people from the city robbed, not the Jewish people because they were afraid to go out in the street.

JF: Now, why were certain people, why were certain Jews picked up for these labor details and not your family, for instance?

NR: They also went out to work. My father wasn't home when I came. I did not recognize my father neither.

JF: Oh, your father was working?

NR: Yeah.

JF: Okay.

NR: I didn't recognize him either. Everybody had to go out in the morning to work, period, everybody. I didn't go out because I was hiding in the house. They didn't know I am home.

JF: Now why didn't you recognize your father? Had they also shaved...

NR: Also shaved his beard.

JF: ...his beard.

NR: Shaved his beard and he was wearing a long *kapote* and here he was wearing a little jacket that turned. They came into the house, they were crying and hugging, you know, but I saw what's happening. That's the fear that came into my heart...

JF: Now when they...

NR: ...the big fear.

JF: Now when these men who had wor--who had worn the long *kapotes* were wearing the short jackets, did the Germans take off their long...

NR: This I don't know.

JF: ...coats?

NR: I don't know. I wasn't there. They figured they take them off, they took them off or because they were afraid to go out like that, you know...

JF: Oh.

NR: ...they fear this. They were extremely religious people so the first they--as a matter of fact, they came and I wasn't there, I was away, they told me, they shot a few people in the street. One, there was--his brother is alive, he was with me all together the whole, a lot of times during the war, and they shot him just like that in the street. They took a machine gun and shot about 10 people. They mentioned the names and walking to work, they felt like to shoot, they shoot a couple of guys, just like that.

JF: And these were Germans?

NR: The Germans, this was Germans, yes.

JF: Was there any cooperation that you were aware of during that early time of the Polish population with the German army troops?

NR: I don't know, I don't know. In the beginning I don't think so. You see later they, I don't know how the cooperation was, because I did run away after about a year, I went--the whole family went to Warsaw because they said Warsaw is going to be saved.

JF: So...

NR: They said, Warsaw, they're not going to harm the Jewish people.

JF: In other words, for a year you lived in your own town?

NR: Yeah.

JF: Now did they ever find you and put you to work also?

NR: I never went to work.

JF: You hid in the house?

NR: I never went to work. I went out from the house, I went out to the farmers and I never did--they didn't know I exist.

JF: How did you get away with that?

NR: I got away, I couldn't, I couldn't go out and see, I should go out with a broom and the whole day with a broom in the street.

JF: But they never questioned you, you...?

NR: They didn't know I'm existing. They didn't, they didn't have the, I don't know what they knew or what they didn't know but I know one thing, I never worked, I never worked for them until the ghetto.

JF: They never stopped you on the street or...

NR: I never went, they should see me.

JF: Ah ha, what you would go at night or...?

NR: I would go night out, I'd come back at night, or sit in the house the whole day and they, they had a certain amount of people to work and a certain amount of people went to work everyday. They didn't notice who came back or who didn't come back from their...

JF: I see.

NR: ...during the war, running away. There was a lot of it like that.

JF: Now were you on rat--special rations during that time, the family and the rest of the Jewish community?

NR: I don't--no, I know there were still some stores that were open, you could buy something I guess, I don't know.

JF: Jewish stores, you mean or...?

NR: No, no...

JF: ...or any Polish stores?

NR: No, mostly Polish store, the Polish stores, they just some Jewish stores, they give it away to the Poles to run it.

JF: They would sell to Jews though?

NR: Yeah, you could buy it. It was, it was not like that, you walk in the store you buy it. You had to maneuver around to buy something, you know.

JF: Like what, can you give me an example?

NR: Like, like, I would call it black market. You know walking in the night, you walking in so nobody would see it, he sells you something, you give him a few cents more for the product and he sells it to you. Some...

JF: So a lot of you...

NR: Some Jewish people had hidden their merchandise, you know and they sell this and they sell it or later.

JF: So a lot of the transactions then were not really done in the stores, they were done...

NR: Yeah...

JF: ...outside or...

NR: Outside mostly, behind the backs of the Germans, let's put it that way. That's the way it was, and then after...

JF: Then after this year...

NR: In 1940 after a year, then 1940 we went to Warsaw, took the family.

JF: Now when you say you went to Warsaw, was the entire Jewish community sent out of the town?

NR: No, no, nobody was sent out.

JF: No one was sent out?

NR: No one was sent. Everybody went on his own because we said it wasn't easy to go to Warsaw, we had to smuggle out the border because like here, Warsaw, Warsaw state was, was like they had like a government there *protectora*. It wasn't completely German. Our section of the country was under, was considered Germany because the Germans had it and they--I don't know the situation but they considered this part--this up to a certain river, River, the Bug considered that to Germany. So they made it Germany right away, where we were. There was still Poland under, under it was called *protectora* would be like the government, like a government in a government. They had Polish police in Warsaw, they had here in our section of the country there was no Polish police.

JF: The Polish government had left your town, and police had left your town?

NR: The police didn't leave, they just liquidate them. There's no police, no Polish police there.

JF: Was there any functioning left of the Jewish community organization at all?

NR: No, no, no...

JF: There's nothing left that could function?

NR: Nothing functioning, they took right away the synagogue, they, they

made, like a warehouse, there's no Jewish life at all, no, no.

JF: Could any of the Jewish children go to school?

NR: There's no school, what kind of school, school? There's no school...

JF: Were their schools for the Polish children?

NR: The schools for Polish children I think were open. I don't, I don't remember the [unclear]. I think, there was a war going on, there was a war, there is no such thing as a schools or the activities. There's nothing there. Then after a year, I took my family to Warsaw. I took! We went to Warsaw, but I had--we smuggled them into Warsaw, it was I think in 19--1940.

JF: You thought Warsaw would be safer?

NR: Yeah, that's what the talk of the town was, the situation was that Warsaw would be safer.

JF: How did you smuggle your way?

NR: [unclear] smuggle...

JF: Did you pay people...?

NR: We walked, we walked with my horse and wagon at night, and somehow we made it--the details, the details...

JF: Did you have to, did you have to pay off people in order to get in or...?

NR: No, no, we didn't have to pay off; we didn't to pay nobody at that time. It was still a, some people had horses and wagons, and we pay for the sale I'd say, for the wagon...

JF: Right.

NR: Then if they didn't, we couldn't--then in Warsaw we was until they made the ghetto.

JF: Until they made the ghetto?

NR: Yeah. They made a ghetto then we said this was very bad in Warsaw. I used to go to our town once a week and import some food, like butter and sugar and other stuff...

JF: You snuck out of the ghetto to do that?

NR: Yeah, from the Warsaw Ghetto.

JF: Before the ghetto was declared in Warsaw what was it like living there?

NR: Same as any other town, you had to struggle but I don't know...

JF: Was it better than in your hometown?

NR: It was a little easier, yes. It was easier because there was still some business there and you could buy something but that was...

JF: You lived with your family?

NR: With my family, not for a long time, only were there, only maybe, oh, not even a year and it started to go bad, bad.

JF: Was there much control by the Germans that you felt during that time or was there, was the control Polish?

NR: Everything was German.

JF: The Germans were right there and they were calling the shots?

NR: They had the only police, they had police, they had some Polish police there. I don't know how much they had to say, but they were--they helped plenty with the Germans.

JF: The Polish police helped the Germans?

NR: Yes, sure, sure, as a matter of fact, once I had, I smuggled into the ghetto some food, I smuggled in once a week anyway.

JF: How did you do that? Can you, can you...

NR: We were going to, we took...

JF: Can you describe to me how you got out of that ghetto and got back?

NR: We took, we took let's say from Warsaw Ghetto there was a streetcar going from the ghetto through the station... [pause] What's the matter? [in answer to Mrs. Rosen's question--identification verified by interviewer] [unclear]

JF: Okay.

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

JF: This is tape one, side two of an interview with Mr. Norman Rosen. You were talking about how you got out of the ghetto in order to smuggle some food...

NR: How I got out, I had arrangement with a conductor.

JF: On a street car?

NR: On a street car because the street car passed by from the train station through the ghetto, through the Jewish ghetto towards the Polish section.

JF: This was a non-Jewish...?

NR: A non-Jewish conductor.

JF: And how did you arrange it with him?

NR: I had somehow got acquainted with him, through somebody, I don't remember exactly, and I paid him each time a certain amount of money, for he took a big risk too.

JF: Sure he did.

NR: As a matter of fact, sometimes I went to his house, wait for a couple hours till he has his shift. So and, then smuggled in--like I mentioned before, one time I jumped off the streetcar by a turn, he slowed down special, I should jump off.

JF: This is in the Polish...?

NR: From the Jewish section already. I jumped in the Jewish section.

JF: This is when he's bringing you home, yeah?

NR: He was bringing me to the ghetto. I jumped off with a package of mine, you know, on my shoulders there was maybe 50, 60 pounds of food, and he, and two guys caught me, Polish police.

JF: Polish police caught you?

NR: Yeah, and they caught me, it was at night, and I said to them, come in here and decide, my brother lives here--my oldest brother used to at that time live in the ghetto, and I said to him, "We'll pay you something, we'll pay up something," they didn't want to listen to nothing. Anyway they knew I'll take him into the, to that hallway where we lived there, they knew they wouldn't take me out because they wouldn't take me out there anymore, because right away when men there, they wouldn't allow that, the Jewish people.

JF: If they took you into your home area, they wouldn't come out again?

NR: They wouldn't come out. They would come out without me. They wouldn't, the Jewish peo--the Jewish men...

JF: ...would protect you?

NR: Would protect me, yeah.

JF: I see.

NR: It was like a little organized, not organized, organized, but privately everybody was organized a little bit, and they didn't want to budge and they took me to

the Gestapo.

JF: You had the food still on you?

NR: I had the--yeah, I had...

JF: Stuffed in your clothes and...

NR: I said I was tired, I was lying, I lying to them. I said I didn't jump. They made a mistake.

JF: What did you say?

NR: I said, they, I said I was just walking in the street.

JF: Oh.

NR: Because I was going without, without a Jewish star here. I had it in my pocket only and when I jumped always I put it on, like a little band with a Jewish star on it.

JF: So when, so when...

NR: So when I jumped...

JF: So when they got you, you...

NR: ...they caught me with this in my hand so, so I said, I, you made a mistake. I had to lie to them.

JF: When they caught you, you didn't have your star on?

NR: I had it, I had it, I had it in my hand. I put it on when I go out to the steps, I put it on and I jumped.

JF: So you had it on?

NR: So I had it on already. So they, they, so they, and they said we saw you. I said, "You made a mistake," and I also insisted that they made a mistake. So I was in the ghetto, I was walking from one place to another one with some food. I bought it here, I bought it there, it doesn't matter. It didn't help anyway. They took me to the ghet--to the Gestapo, the Gestapo section. Anyway, somehow I let know my brother that I'm there.

JF: How did you do that?

NR: I don't know exactly how, but to somebody on the street, I said let know my brother--I don't remember exactly how it happened. And then he, he is right away, as always for money you could do a lot of things. We paid I think, you know \$500, we paid up the guy there the Gestapo, or the Polish officer something. Whom I paid off, whom he paid off, I don't know.

JF: You don't know whether they paid off a German or a Polish?

NR: I don't know that.

JF: But your brother worked it out?

NR: My brother arranged it through a Polish guy or somebody. He arranged it with somebody, after two days in the Gestapo they let me go.

JF: Were you questioned by the Gestapo while you were there?

NR: I was questioned, yeah. I was questioned. I said I was walking in the street.

JF: Did they search you?

NR: I had nothing on me, what would they say? I had package food, I had the food, that's...

JF: You had the food?

NR: I had the food, that the where it was and we...

JF: Did they keep you in a jail cell or in a room?

NR: It just was a, it was a police station, I don't know, it wasn't special like a regular jail but just temporary, it was a station there. They have a, they have, they may call it a jail, they may call it an interviewing room, whatever it is, and I was two days they hold me and after two days time, came in one of the Gestapo and he said, "Rosen, *sie gehen heim.*" [you go home] "Alright," I was happy naturally and at that time this was the last time I was going there.

JF: This was the last time...

NR: No, I was going after that again.

JF: You still did it afterwards.

NR: Yeah, we did it, we did it, we had to, we had to live.

JF: This was the only way your family was able to get a lot of food...

NR: Yeah we got more food than anybody else, yeah.

JF: Did you sell some of that food then...

NR: Some of it, yes.

JF: ...to other people?

NR: Some of it, yes. We didn't need all that food, so much food. And second, you eat something like that, you sell this, you bought something else. It's that, you know, you sell one item you buy some other items, so, in exchange, whatever it was.

JF: You said that you were not living with your family after a while. Did you find a room somewhere?

NR: No, we lived in Warsaw in a room, in a small little room we rented it there, and after I don't know how long it was, maybe a year, it got very bad, so we went back home to our town.

JF: This is after the ghetto had been sealed, you left Warsaw?

NR: Yeah, yeah, when we left Warsaw...

JF: How did you get out?

NR: We smuggled them out and...

JF: How did you smuggle out so many people?

NR: Well, there was a way, there was a way...

JF: Can you tell me?

NR: Lots of ways, like I said with the streetcars and sometimes we pulled up a cart, you walked there, we sneaked out here. There was ways, not many, not a lot of ways.

JF: No...

NR: A lot of people got caught like everything.
JF: That's what I'm--that's why I want to know what...
NR: Yeah, it was hard.
JF: It helped then to pay off a guard at this exit or a streetcar conductor there...
NR: Yeah, yeah, somehow it was arranged...
JF: Were there any, were there any Poles in Warsaw who were helpful to you, not for money?
NR: I had no contact in Warsaw with Poles.
JF: At all?
NR: We were in the ghetto.
JF: But then, but you--but then all...
NR: This man, this man I was in contact with him and...
JF: The streetcar conductor?
NR: The streetcar conductor.
JF: Before the conduct--before the ghetto however, were there any Poles that...
NR: I had nothing in common with them because I could--I could go in, like that, as long as I pulled through the border, like I said, from this section, from Warsaw section to our section, we had to go about seven kilometers. We marched in the woods, you know, they went in, the Germans went with their dogs and so we somehow we managed. If you got caught, you got caught.
JF: When you were in Warsaw, I imagine there were many Jews there from other areas of Poland...
NR: Oh sure, from the whole, all over the, all over the country.
JF: What was the interaction between the Jews in the ghetto? What kind of life did they have?
NR: I don't, to be honest with you I wasn't active so much in Warsaw with people. I was, one thing was on my mind, I was going, I came there, I slept there for a whole day, I relaxed for two days, I went back.
JF: For food?
NR: For food again. So I didn't have much time to, to...
JF: You were not involved with the Jewish community then, there?
NR: No, no, no.
JF: You didn't have to work then either when you were in Warsaw?
NR: I didn't, I wasn't registered to do. I was nobody. I was nobody.
JF: What about your father? Did you father have to work?
NR: No, he was already old, they didn't work in Warsaw. The young kids, they took them out to work, the young people only.
JF: So you, what about your brothers, were they taken?

NR: My brothers was, also, my brothers--as a matter of fact my brothers, two brothers were in Poland, in our town. They wasn't in the Warsaw Ghetto. My father and mother, my older brother was there...

JF: Your parents, and your older brother, and you, and who else?

NR: And my grandma.

JF: And your grandmother?

NR: Yeah.

JF: This was your father's mother or your mother's mother?

NR: Father's mother.

JF: Your father's mother.

NR: Yes, as a matter of fact she died there.

JF: She died in Warsaw?

NR: In Warsaw, yeah.

JF: Oh, she died of?

NR: She died, she was an old woman.

JF: She was an old woman.

NR: She was 80 some odd years old and...

JF: Were you able to bury her in a Jew...

NR: Yeah.

JF: In a Jewish cemetery?

NR: Yeah, yeah.

JF: Was there any problem in doing that?

NR: I don't remember if there was a problem or not, but I know she got buried and that was it.

JF: But you did bury her in a Jewish cemetery?

NR: We buried her in Warsaw, yeah.

JF: Were any of your other brothers or sisters with you? Just one brother?

NR: The oldest brother, the youngest--the two sisters was in our town. They didn't leave to Warsaw.

JF: They didn't leave.

NR: Just took the parents to Warsaw, but the older brother, he was, a new [unclear] so...

JF: And were the sisters married or did they stay with other families?

NR: And one was married, two were married.

JF: They were the ones who stayed in your town?

NR: Who stayed right in our town, yeah. After, then in 1941 when they made a ghetto in our town.

JF: Now you left Warsaw when? You were?

NR: By the end of '40.

JF: The end of '40? So you were there for about a year?

NR: Approximately.
JF: And you went back to your town?
NR: Then I took all my family back to my town.
JF: Did you, could you go back to your house?
NR: Yeah, my sister was living there.
JF: Your sister was there?
NR: Two sisters went to the same house, they lived there, and then they made the ghetto.
JF: How much time after you came back did they make a ghetto of your town?
NR: They made, they make it, it was early, approximately maybe in two or three months time.
JF: So that became a ghetto?
NR: Yeah, became a ghetto made a gate all around, about ten blocks or something like that, they made a ghetto and that's it. And from that ghetto then and again...
JF: Wait, can you describe what the ghetto in your town was like compared to Warsaw for instance? You were in two very different...
NR: Warsaw was a different story. Warsaw they just, just houses, the bord-- the gates, the, the...
JF: Walls...
NR: Walls...
JF: ...were the houses...
NR: In the way there was no wall, where there was an entrance, they made a gate in a few different places and so on. In our town there was only one gate and boarded around it, how do you call it? All around there, not a gate, a...
JF: A fence?
NR: Fence.
JF: ...like a wooden fence?
NR: Wooden fence, wood, yeah. A wooden fence all around about 20 square blocks or something...
JF: Like a solid fence where you couldn't...?
NR: Not solid, we could see through it, not high, not high.
JF: Only maybe five feet high or...?
NR: About four feet high...
JF: ...four feet high...?
NR: ...five feet high, yeah, and then it was a guard walking around every couple of blocks there was a guard, that's all it was and...
JF: And you could see through the slats in the fence?
NR: Yeah we saw everything, we saw everything. [unclear] Sometimes we *kibits* with the guards and say, "Give me a cigarette," you know.

JF: Did he?

NR: Some of them, yeah, some of them it wasn't too bad. Some soldiers--as a matter of fact, I have to tell you one fact. My older brother when he came back, you know like I said, we have to eat, so I smuggled to the farmers in another city--I was never really sitting idle. So he got acquainted with a German captain in the army. I don't know if he was SS or not and he was, he was very acquainted with him, he came to our house once in a while, special Friday night to eat some Jewish food. When he came in nobody should see him. He was from the Schleifer [phonetic] family. The Schleifer family was killed by Hitler, the whole family. They were killed because they were against the Nazis.

JF: But this one boy was...?

NR: This one boy was alive, for the one reason he was in Italy studying, so he was alive. Then when the war came he went to the army, he went into the army he was 22 years old, 23, I don't know.

JF: Schleifer is the name?

NR: Schleifer or Schleicher with an F or a CH, Schleifer or Schleicher I don't know which one exactly. He helped us a lot.

JF: How?

NR: With what? We had to, we had to bring in let's say from another town a couple sacks of sugar in a wagon. So we said to him, whatever his name is, "When can I bring it in?" He says, "Let's say five o'clock, Thursday."

JF: He would have been on guard then?

NR: He would be on guard. So he walked there, he let through here, see? There were some people who were still good, but very few only.

JF: But it helped, it helped.

NR: It helped a lot. No questions, to bring in five sacks of sugar to the ghetto, there was a lot of other people have food and we sold it to them, we had to pay for it too naturally.

JF: Yeah.

NR: Yeah it was...

JF: So he came to your home for *Shabbat* dinner?

NR: Quite a few times.

JF: And was with you for a religious meal, for...?

NR: With us, yeah, meal, whether it was fish or meat or chicken, whatever else I was eating, he had a piece of *challah*.

JF: Did he share any of this feeling with you about...?

NR: Oh he shared a lot of his feelings.

JF: Yeah.

NR: He says, "I can't help it," I mean...

JF: What do you mean? What--can you elaborate on it a little?

NR: I mean he was, he was against the whole, the whole, the whole Nazi

regime, there was no question about it, but the reason maybe because they killed his family or what reason but he was positively against the Nazi.

JF: How did he, how was it that he had to be in the army? He was studying in Italy...

NR: He was studying in Italy. When the war broke out he was called home.

JF: He was called home by the government to go to the army?

NR: Sure, to go to the army.

JF: And if he had resisted then he could have been in trouble?

NR: Oh, resisted natural, nobody resisted Hitler. Nobody resisted him, you said you'd come, you'd come, if not, they going to take you and they kill you.

JF: Do you have any idea what happened to this man after the war, during the war?

NR: I don't know, we were even for sure he was only what three or four months then they took him another place. He wasn't too long in our town. But during that time he got acquainted with my brother, very close.

JF: And he helped your family a great deal...

NR: Yeah.

JF: ...it sounds like.

NR: A great deal, yes, yes. I had another German family which were Polish-Germans, German-Polish they used to live with farmers...

JF: In your town?

NR: Yeah, not far from our town, and I knew them well, my parents knew them well. Each time I sneaked out for food they always gave me a basket of food and bring it in, always. Sometimes they brought it to a certain spot and said you go there the next week, Wednesday, there was on the way there a basket.

JF: Go take it at that time.

NR: Go take it, oh yes.

JF: Now were these people that you had known before the war?

NR: Oh yes, yeah. My parents grew up with them together, you know they were my parent's age and the children were mine age let's say, very good people...

JF: Were there any other people that you could tell me about?

NR: [dog barking] Oh quiet. There were some more Poles which--'cause some other people did the same thing what I did, some other boys you know so I guess they must have had help of some Poles, because without help you couldn't do anything. Nobody give you a hand, you can walk around for hours and days and what you going to accomplish? You have to have somebody to get in contact with them or for food, or for something, even they served you food, they helped, even for money, because they took a risk.

JF: That's right.

NR: If they catch me in their house, buying food from them, they would get the

same punishment, maybe better, more than me.

JF: So the Jews who survived those ghettos had to have been helped by Poles in some way? Had to have had some dealings...?

NR: Yes, yes...

JF: There would be no other way that they could have lived through that time.

NR: No, no...[buzzer sounded] Good, most they did for money, let's put it that way.

JF: Were there also instances that you know of where Poles turned in Jews...

NR: Yes.

JF: ...to the Nazis?

NR: Oh yes.

JF: Can you give me any examples of that?

NR: For example, in the ghetto, after the ghetto, before the ghetto was liquidated, our ghetto...

JF: This is your town, you're talking about?

NR: Our town, yeah. I said to my father, because I knew a lot of farmers, me and my cousins had been to run away. It was in the morning...

JF: But you knew the ghetto was going to be liquidated?

NR: Yeah, we knew already, we knew already. About two weeks before we knew, 10 days, and so I said I'm going to run away. Somehow I had a feeling to run away. After an hour or two my oldest brother says--Heshey his name is, Tzvi, I want to go with you. Good, we're three, and third brother the older from me, he's in Israel now, not the youngest, the youngest went to Auschwitz, he didn't want to go. And he says, I'm going too, so we are four, three brothers and a cousin. Me and my cousin were the first who initiated that situation. Then my brother says to me, "I have a friend and he is quite a little money." Cause we knew we needed money, we didn't have much money, we weren't so rich--I'll tell you another instance a woman came over, she know we run away, she took off her gold chain which weighed about a pound, gold chain, she said, "Here Noyach." My name was Noyach. She was living in the ghetto in a bus.

JF: This is your Hebrew name, your, your...

NR: Yeah, Noyach, yeah.

JF: Your Jewish name?

NR: She said, Noyach [unclear], take it, you'll need it. God [break in voice; machine off and then on.] She said to me, "You'll need it." So I took it, that's all. My brother [unclear]. "Maybe money is a lot of money." Found out he didn't have any money or he didn't want to give it to us, I don't know, not important.

JF: Did you know this woman well, who gave you the chains?

NR: No, just know from seeing in the streets.

JF: But she knew...

NR: She wasn't even from our town because they brought in from other cities

to our town in the ghetto. From Czekanów city, from Drobnin a city they brought in people to make the ghetto fuller.

JF: I see.

NR: So she gave me that and then I said--that was about four o'clock--"I have another boy also says he wants to go, you know a neighbor of ours." He's in Israel now too. He says, "There'll be six", so what the heck!" I didn't know when we go out, we'd have to break the gates, the gates of the ghetto at night and we jumped into the water and through the water we ran out.

JF: What you broke through the gate?

NR: Yeah.

JF: Or you didn't smuggle through, you broke through?

NR: I had to break the, no, no, we had to break a couple of...

JF: You broke the fence?

NR: The fence, at night. But anyway before we went...

JF: There was no question I assume of your parents going with you?

NR: No, you couldn't go with your par...

JF: There was no...

NR: I said, as a matter of fact it was about five o'clock before it was dark it was in, it was what in November was it?

JF: This was November of...?

NR: November of '43.

JF: November of forty...?

NR: November of '42. November of '42, I was--I said to my father, "You know what? Where I'm going to go? What's the difference? I've got a feeling that I'm--that I was going to be with 10,000 Jews there and with me too, where I'm going to run, where am I going to go? I did not know no place to go. Just run out in the fields and that's it like an animal." So he said to me, we were standing here and he said, "You know if you're not going to run away, I'm going to commit suicide right now." [pause] To that, and I say if your father drives you, he wouldn't drive you to a bad thing for--so I figure let's go. Till one o'clock midnight, we went out, four of us through the water, through here with...

JF: Above your knees the water?

NR: Above my knees; there was not no problem the waters. So we froze a little [unclear] and at night we went in there and the first place we went was to a farmer which I knew him. He was anti-Semite³ was very smar--a very smart farmer.

JF: He was...

NR: He was not anti-Semite.

JF: He was not an anti-Semite?

³It is clear from the discussion that Mr. Rosen meant to say he was *not* an anti-Semite.

NR: We were talking politics with him all the time with him. He says, "Dumb farmers they don't know nothing. They're dumb, they just know hate the Jews, for what reason they don't know from nothing."

JF: This is what he said to you?

NR: What he said to us. Many times before so we know we can go. His name was Motec.

JF: Motec?

NR: Motec but he didn't we there. We went into that big, where they kept the, where they kept the straw and the hay for the cows, whatever it is.

JF: A barn, a stable?

NR: A barn, a barn, yeah. We put them into the barn at night and we lay there, we slept there the whole day, and during the day he comes in, he walks around, he talks to himself, something was fishy, oh that's a feeling.

JF: He knew someone was there.

NR: He say it, you walk out on the top, you see like a trail you know, straw on the floor, it was clean before. He said something, somebody was here, he talked to himself, "Who was here? Somebody was here!" So we went out, one of us went out and he says Pani Motec, Mr. Motec, "Oh my G-d!" he says, "shhh, shhh just lay there, just lay there," so he gave us food. We were by him about 10 days and he said, "How long can you stay here?" He says--we heard story when the farmers came in there, they were talking about the Jews. They said, "Good for the Jews, they killed us, they'd throw this so called crap for so many years."

JF: So you were still in the barn at this point?

NR: Yeah, we heard, we heard ...

JF: But you could overhear these conversations?

NR: We hear these conversations with him and he came in later, he talked to us about it. He says, "They're dumb, what do they know? They're dumb." Then he arranged with one of his brothers, he talked just like other guys were talking.

JF: What, he...?

NR: He arranged to his brother to go...

JF: When they were in there, he talked like they talked to cover up?

NR: No he didn't talk, they just, they didn't--he just, he just, he didn't...

JF: He just listened?

NR: Listened and he only--but then after two weeks there, he arranged to go to his brother in the cellar.

JF: He arranged for you to go to his brother?

NR: Right, to his brother but a mile away, two miles away, I don't remember. We were there for 27 months.

JF: 27 months!

NR: Yeah, see I wanted to go by myself. I wanted to go by myself. I had

another one I want to go. One of, one of the farmers which I met during one of these nights which I went out to them, he want to give me, made me a--I look like a *sheygets* [a non-Jewish boy]. He said, I'll make you a passport, not a passport, like a registration, we'll know, send you away, you know like 20 miles away to his family, on a farm, "You're going to work there during the war." So I said, "I can't go myself, I'll go with one of my brothers," because he looked very Jewish, the oldest, he died.

JF: This was already still back in the ghetto?

NR: No, no, this out of the ghetto already.

JF: This was after you escaped?

NR: After we escaped already. Then we were trying to find a place how to-- first of all we had a mind to go, we were out, we had to get in contact with the Partisans.

JF: Are you now in the cellar, you're now in...?

NR: Not in the cellar yet.

JF: You're not in the cellar yet. You're still with Motec?

NR: With Motec but we had the mind during the time with Motec I went to other farms at night and give a--you know feel them out. So one guy told me if you want it I'll make you, send you away there...

JF: But you didn't because you didn't want to leave the family.

NR: I couldn't go because I didn't want to leave my--one brother could go alone. He looked like a *sheygets* and he knew a lot of people but oldest brother was mostly in the city and I figured he would not survive. So I said to them I have to make it for two, with two we can do it. It was also no deal and then we settled in that cellar without Motec but with Motec's brother.

JF: Was Motec's...

NR: All six of us.

JF: ...brother like Motec?

NR: He wasn't, no, no, no. Just the opposite way.

JF: In what way?

NR: He did everything for money, he was hungry for money. We paid him I don't know \$20 a month or something. We had some money yet. In the beginning we gave him that, the chain what I told you...

JF: Oh.

NR: We gave him another piece of jewelry, then we promised him a lot of things, we wrote him notes, the war will finish, we'll pay you off. We paid him off after the war, something, we paid him off. As a matter of fact, we gave him one of our houses which we had in the town. This was after the war so...

JF: This is after the war you paid him...

NR: I paid him off, yeah. He was, he was scared after the war...

JF: Yeah.

NR: ...to say that he helped the Jews. He said, "Don't you ever mention to

nobody,” because the Poles would kill him, but he helped Jews. So he got involved, let’s put it that way.

JF: Now...

NR: He thought it would take three months till the summer, the war’s going to be over and he got stuck for over two years with us.

JF: So that 27 months brought you to the end of the war?

NR: Almost...

JF: Almost to the end of the war?

NR: Almost, six months before the war.

JF: Now he brought you food?

NR: Yeah.

JF: Or did you have to sneak out to...?

NR: He brought us, he brought us food.

JF: Were you able to leave the cellar or did you stay there?

NR: At night. So what cellar, we made, we had to come in through his kitchen, under his bed, open like little board...

JF: Wait, under his bed. His bed was in the kitchen?

NR: In the kitchen was a bed, not his, a child’s bed.

JF: Yeah, so there was a board that lifted up?

NR: He opened the board and they gave us down food in the morning, a soup and or something with a piece of bread and we ate in the day.

JF: What was the cellar like?

NR: The cellar...

JF: Was it a dirt cellar?

NR: No, it was a, it was a cellar from they kept it there for fruits and vegetables and potatoes for the winter.

JF: Like a cold cellar?

NR: Like a cold cellar. But we done, we did, what we did, the entry was in the hallway and we made a wall, halfway like here is the entry and here a wall, regular wall nobody would know and then the potatoes are here and from here to here they made here in the kitchen that hole down to the...

JF: I see.

NR: We couldn’t go out through regular entry, whatever it was before.

JF: So if someone searched...

NR: We had to come up...

JF: ...they wouldn’t see anything...

NR: They would have searched and searched and nobody would see it.

JF: I see.

NR: They came in through the cellar they see potatoes with a wall, and we dirtied the wall.

JF: Did people come to search the house?

NR: Oh yeah, sometimes, they didn't search specially. As a matter of fact he had a mother in the other half of the house with a sister and they didn't know it.

JF: They never knew?

NR: They never knew.

JF: Who knew? Just the man or his wife...

NR: The man, his wife and the children.

JF: How old were the children?

NR: From three to 15.

JF: And they kept their mouths shut?

NR: Yeah, yeah, somehow, I don't know what kept us, like a miracle, let's put it that way.

JF: How do you think? Did he threaten them or just explain to them that the lives were in danger?

NR: No, he explain, he explained he knew there's danger but he was greedy he figured it was going to be three months, it was in the winter, January '43, December '42 but then I think '43 in the beginning of the summer, May, June was all these leaflets, May, June the Russians made an offensive and...

JF: That will be it.

NR: Then it will be over.

JF: Yeah.

NR: But it happened just the opposite way, it took a year, then they said to us-- we talked to him, he said, "What can we do?" He says--he gave us to let us feeling that [unclear] six months we was scared he was going to poison us, because he was involved too much, he couldn't let us go out. They'll catch us, maybe I won't talk, the next guy will talk. They'll say, where you've been all these years and we'll say with this guy. So they would hang him right away, before us.

JF: And his children in the meantime were going to school or playing with their playmates or whatever and never said anything.

NR: There was no school, there was no school.

JF: No school for them either?

NR: Maybe a private schools, I don't know, there was no schools.

JF: But they never spoke about you hiding there?

NR: It looks that way.

JF: That is a miracle.

NR: Yeah, yeah, and then after they, when they...

JF: Let me ask you a question. When you were there, were you able to get any news...

NR: Yeah.

JF: ...through this man of what was going on with the war?

NR: Yeah we got news every week, every two weeks, so we got news even from the underground Polish party like the Nazis--half a page was from the wartime, half a page politics, another half a page was from the Jews.

JF: This was...

NR: Not good things, bad things.

JF: This was a newspaper?

NR: A little underground newspaper.

JF: An underground newspaper for the Poles?

NR: For the Poles, yeah. Polish party we used to A. K.⁴ The *Armja Krajowa*.

JF: This was a Polish underground but it was an antisemitic Polish underground?

NR: Antisemitic, yeah.

JF: Okay.

NR: 100--positively 101% antisemitic, so even in a place like that they already--he brought us in this here, we knew the news, we got news from the German newspaper, he brought us once in a while. So we knew the situation that was going on all over the world everyday. We politic there, we used to politic, they're going to be here tomorrow, maybe they broke--they break through here the front, you know things like that, we had nothing to do, we'd play chess.

JF: You had what a can--candles or oil lights or...?

NR: We had no candles, we didn't light nothing. During the day we had--only was a little window, it was this big about a foot.

JF: About a foot?

NR: A foot square.

JF: A foot square.

NR: And this was the daylight and at night we couldn't light anything. We light a little candle once in a while so we had to make a little curtain there.

JF: And this, the...

NR: The whole thing was we had a double bed made, three of us sleep on the bottom and three on the top.

JF: Like a bunk bed?

NR: Like a bunk bed, we made it from wood.

[Tape one, side two ended.]

⁴*Armja Krajowa* was the underground military organization in occupied Poland, *The Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, p.88.

Tape two, side one:

JF: This is tape two, side one of an interview with Mr. Norman Rosen, on February 17 with Josey Fisher. You were describing the inside of the cellar.

NR: The whole cellar was like a double bunk bed, another half with the same amount of room like the double bunk bed in which we had a little table, the whole table, made the table with a piece of wood, and a little bench to sit at and we played chess most of the time.

JF: So was that your main activity, the chess?

NR: That's all, that's all, and talking politics, fighting a little between each other, you know.

JF: I would imagine that you got on each others nerves quite a bit during that time.

NR: Oh are you kidding, plenty of times, plenty of times, and we had to go, you know, to the men's room. We had a bucket there, excuse me the expression but I have to say it to you...

JF: Yeah.

NR: With a solid cover close it shouldn't smell, and at night, once a night, we took it out and through that little...

JF: Through the kitchen floor.

NR: Through the kitchen floor at 12, 1 o'clock at night...

JF: And then you would empty it yourselves.

NR: Empty it out and wash it out and put a little disinfection and...

JF: Yeah.

NR: Many times we had people who got sick, temperature, you know, what could you do? There was nothing you could do about it so...

JF: Was it, was it cold down there?

NR: No, no, it was not cold. It was a brick house and it was deep in the ground. It wasn't warm in the winter, you couldn't say it was warm, but we didn't freeze.

JF: Were the walls of the cellar part of the walls of the house?

NR: Yeah, it's the house.

JF: It was the...

NR: It's under the house. It was in the bottom, like it...

JF: And was there a floor, a dirt floor or a...?

NR: No, it was a wooden floor.

JF: A wooden floor?

NR: A wooden floor, maybe dirt too. No, it was a wooden floor in the kitchen.

JF: But there was no fire, you didn't have a fireplace or area for a heating in the cellar?

NR: No, no, absolutely not.

JF: So whatever heat you had was from the house itself?

NR: From the house itself, the heat in the house, it wasn't, it wasn't really cold, I wouldn't say, we didn't freeze, let's put it that way. It wasn't pleasant, it wasn't a pleasure but that's it...

JF: Did you ever feel itchy enough to leave the cellar and run away from this place?

NR: Many times, many times, many times, but we couldn't go in a group, that's the whole thing. One or two people go just, they would just go that's all. We--there was no, see as long as we were in a group with us we figured as long as we can hold on together, we'll hold on. As a matter of fact, in 1944 when the Russian army came into Poland, it was in July I think, and we heard the cannons, it was only about 20 miles away. We heard the shooting and all of us figured that's it, we're already free, the Russian--then they came into Warsaw, near Warsaw then some politicking going on there then they stopped. They stopped the whole Russian--German army was retreating. So they took up in our house as a whole group of this, of SS. SS in the house for three days, we didn't eat for three days.

JF: You knew they were there I assume?

NR: Oh yeah, we knew. As a matter of fact, the one was always up the whole night in case somebody gets a cough, you know, to knock his face down.

JF: One of your group would stay up all night?

NR: One of our group would stay up all night in this, in this two weeks. Two weeks, 10 days and then one day...

JF: Wait, they were there for two weeks?

NR: They were there, they were retreating, they took up quarters, quarters.

JF: Quarters.

NR: Quarters they took up there and they retreating and then another group came and they left so between when they left they took maybe a couple hours or something so the guy came there, Paul, [unclear] the farmer came down and said, "Boys," he called us boys, "Boys, out, out [unclear]. So at night we went into his--another, how you call it? Horses when they are in the stalls?

JF: Stables?

NR: Stable, we went in there until the morning. In the morning we see nobody is there yet, so we were talking between us and we said what you going to do? So we decided everyone is going to go on his own. Wherever his eyes will carry him.

JF: This was at what point? What month?

NR: This was in '44 August was it?

JF: August of '44. Now let me...

NR: August or something like that, I don't know it wasn't the summer yet.

JF: Was this house in a town or was it...?

NR: A village.
JF: A village.
NR: A farmer's village. What's in that village could be 20 farmers you know but apart. Let's say half a mile away from each other. They were farmers.
JF: What was the name of the-- the name of this village was?
NR: Wulka [phonetic].
JF: Wulka, and how do you think that's spelled?
NR: W-U-L-K-A.
JF: And let me ask you one other question before you talk about this part of your story. Did you have any idea what had happened to your family, what was left of your family?
NR: Oh yeah, we knew, we knew.
JF: You knew as soon as the ghetto was liquidated?
NR: As a matter of fact, about 10 days later all the farmers had been ordered to come to town with their wagons to take all the Jews out from the ghetto to the concen--to the transportat--to the transportation to Plonsk, where Ben-Gurion was born and they were there, the men...
JF: They gathered them together in Plonsk?
NR: And they took them, and they took them in these wagons and the wagons, the trains, the covered trains.
JF: The farmers gathered the people from the ghetto in the wagons...
NR: Not the farmers, the farmers had an order from the Gestapo...
JF: Yeah.
NR: ...to come into town and they took 10 people in each wagon, 20 people, 15 people and when they came back they told us.
JF: They, the--who drove the wagons to the train?
NR: The Poles.
JF: The Poles themselves?
NR: They had an order, they had an order from the--they had to do it. Not that it was [unclear]
JF: So the train was...
NR: Maybe somebody was glad to do it but the majority they felt a little soft at that point. They knew, they knew everything what was happening because we had the...
JF: You knew about Auschwitz?
NR: Auschwitz, we didn't know about Auschwitz, we knew about Treblinka.
JF: Treblinka?
NR: Yeah, we knew about Treblinka but now, because we had that guy who ran away from Treblinka. He came back to our ghetto before they liquidated him. Nobody believed him even, but then we believed him, a Jewish man.
JF: So you knew about the liquidating ghetto?

NR: We knew it already, we knew it, we knew it, yes, we knew it, that's why we--we knew this is the end of the Jews in Poland. Poland, in all of Europe, let's put it that way.

JF: So 10 days after you left, the ghetto was liquidated?

NR: 10, maybe 12 days, I don't know exactly.

JF: Did you ever...

NR: The 13th, the 13th of January, the 13th of November I think it was, if I'm not mistaken, if I'm not sure of the date exactly. I think it was approximately.

JF: Did you know where these people were taken?

NR: No, we didn't know where but we knew they were taken to a place where they were going to be liquidated. We didn't know exactly what camp, we didn't know but then we found out in later years this one--one fact I want to tell you which was a very grim fact, during the stay when was it about 1944 the farmer, the same farmer came into us and said to us, we have a full week before we--when we came out from there we thought we tried to, we discussed what we're going to do after we left the cellar. How we...

JF: Right, this was when you were in the barn after you left the cellar?

NR: In the barn, yeah. We're we going to go? And we said we're going to go, everyone is going to go his own way. So my brother, my older brother, not the oldest, with the oldest I said I'll stay with him. I was very close with him.

JF: You decided to stay with your oldest brother?

NR: I would go with him and I said wherever I go, he goes, 'cause I can go out for food during the day. He can lay in the hole somewheres in the ground and I'll bring him some food and that was the way it was and--a cousin in a different place, that boy in a different place, that boy [unclear] the *shochet* seen was a different place, but then after I went into one of the farmers, an old guy, a poor guy, I knew him well, he was a good man, really a good man. He wasn't antisemitic, a poor man but a very good man, a heart--a good-hearted man. So I went in, so then we separated, I went with my brother and the other went their own way, where I didn't know, nobody knew where he was going to go. Anyway, we made--I didn't know where to go so I made a, in the fields there used to be a stack with hay...

JF: Wait, this is the story about this farmer that you were going to tell me?

NR: No, no we're going out of the farmer already.

JF: No, no, this other farmer?

NR: The other farmer, yeah, but he didn't know it yet. We went in the day and I digged a little hole down the bottom.

JF: This is on the farmer's property?

NR: On nobody's property. I don't know whose property it was. It was fields and fields, you know. We digged a hole like a dog, and we went in there, me and my brother, and we were laying there for a day, at night I went into the farmer, to that old

man, that good guy and I said, I told him the story. I said, "Listen," he was crying. And when he saw us, he said, "Where did you come from? From where and what?" So I told him, we laying there in the cellar, eh, in that stack of hay, I want you to give us a little food every night. I will come to your house, a little soup, or whatever you can, alright.

JF: This was another farmer...

NR: Another farmer...

JF: ...that you had known from...

NR: Before.

JF: ...before the war?

NR: Yeah, I know him yeah, I know him from during the war, from before the war, and he said, "Just lay there I'll do what I can." Then he says--then the next day, my other brother he went to another guy which he knew also and he says he would help but he couldn't help. He was, he was too much known in that little town, so he went away from there and they treat him good, they gave him some food, they gave him some clothes. He came, he knew that farmer too, the third brother. He came to there, we said if G-d's willing, you came back to us, we're going to stay together.

JF: Your third brother went to this...

NR: Another place, also to, also to wait and try to survive so...

JF: So he ended up at the second farm or...?

NR: He ended up at the second farmer when we were already a day there. So we digged a bigger hole we lay there for three days, four days...

JF: That's wonderful.

NR: And it was going through a, you know--so then we were together again three, we were laying there about two weeks, it was very cold.

JF: About two weeks?

NR: So cold and we had to make some--we digged a hole in the ground, then we took some dirt and made it higher, everything inside in that stack of hay.

JF: This was in August you said.

NR: No, no, this was later.

JF: This was later already.

NR: No, this was later already, was going in to maybe November.

JF: Alright, so now several months have passed?

NR: A month, I don't know maybe this it was only a month later, but [unclear].

JF: Yeah.

NR: But anyway, so we came in and there were three and each night I went into his house, and we made some soup and I brought it out to the other two brothers and each time I came in, he said, "You still alright. There are some people that are worst off than you." Something, I had a feeling he was telling me something but I didn't know what, and after when it was so very cold, we going to freeze to death. I told him, we're going to freeze to death. It's impossible to hold on 40 below zero, 30 below zero, so he

said to us [Mrs. Rosen's voice in the background⁵--Unbelievable you have nothing else to do?] Okay. She doesn't like me to tell the stories about it. Anyway, so we did the--he says so I will take you in. [Mrs. Rosen's voice again in the background, tape interrupted--Norman?] We went up there to his house, we meet another boy which I didn't know. I knew he was a runaway but he was also running away and he ended up in his house too.

JF: Was this one of the people you run away with?

NR: No, no, no.

JF: This was another boy from the ghetto?

NR: Yeah, he's in New York now, he lives in New York. And then from there on there was the...

JF: You said you had a feeling that he knew something.

NR: This was the feeling, he knew somebody's there, somebody, maybe another one, I didn't know it was in his house.

JF: So he was hiding in his house, this other boy.

NR: Yeah, also for a couple of months only, he also has another place how he told our story, where, we didn't know where he was.

JF: Now you asked him if you could come into the house then during this cold weather?

NR: I told him we're going to freeze there. So he says, "So we will take you in."

JF: Where did you stay in his house?

NR: In the attic.

JF: In the attic?

NR: Attic, yeah.

JF: With this other boy?

NR: Yeah and for--then after a couple of months--it was about, this was in early December, in January...

JF: January of '45 now?

NR: January 16 of '45 they start offensive, the Russians start offensive. The next day they were here.

JF: The Russians were there right away?

NR: The next day, day after the offensive, so--we heard the cannons shooting and everything, so and--and they came and that's it.

JF: When they came, what happened, to you?

NR: We went out from the farmer.

JF: You just left the farmer?

NR: We left the farmer and was going, wherever God is going to take us. Went to our town, there was nobody there...

⁵Identification of speaker verified by interviewer.

JF: The Germans had run?
NR: The Germans run.
JF: ...run, and you went back to your town?
NR: Yeah.
JF: And no one was there?
NR: Even the Poles looked at us like we came from the skies, another world.
Where you coming from? And that's it.
JF: Now, did you stay in your town?
NR: We stayed there for a couple of months, yeah. And then we were threatening from the Poles. At night they used to come in they going to shoot us, so we ran out into Germany, and that's it.
JF: You ran to Germany at that point. Did you find out where your parents had been taken?
NR: Oh yeah, we found out.
JF: Later, at this point?
NR: My youngest brother went to Auschwitz with the parents.
JF: With your parents?
NR: Yeah, he came...
JF: He survived.
NR: He survived, yeah.
JF: And when did you meet up with him?
NR: I meet up with him at the end of '45, the middle of '45. You know, people came and there were some survivors that said, oh I saw him in Czechoslovakia, I saw them in Germany, I saw him there.
JF: Was this, did he come back to your home?
NR: Yeah.
JF: So this was before you went to Germany?
NR: He found out, he found out that we are alive.
JF: He came back to your home?
NR: He came back to our home and...
JF: You were in your house then? You went back to your house?
NR: Yes, yes.
JF: And your youngest brother found you there?
NR: He found us there and we were there for a couple of months and then we went to Germany.
JF: Now when you went to Germany...
NR: Yeah, he came to our house. Went to Germany, we went there and were in a DP camp for a couple years now...
JF: Which DP camp were you in?
NR: First I was, in the beginning I was in, near Frankfurt am Main, Zeilsheim.

JF: Could you spell that for me?
NR: I don't know how to spell it in German.
JF: Well approximately.
NR: Be Z-A-T-Z-H-E-I-M. [Zeilsheim]
JF: H-E-I-M.
NR: I think so that's the way it's spelled...
JF: That's the first camp?
NR: The first, this is near Frankfurt am Main.
JF: And you were there from?
NR: We were there about a year.
JF: From what month in 1945?
NR: The end of the year.
JF: The end of '45.
NR: December, December yeah.
JF: Until the end of '46?
NR: Until about a year, to the end of '46 approximately. Then we went there to another camp, they opened a new camp, it was very crowded there. They opened a camp near Stuttgart, what was the name, *fargesn* [I forget]. Forgot the name--near Stuttgart.
JF: Near Stuttgart, and how long were you at that camp?
NR: We were there about three years.
JF: Three years? During that...
NR: After there, we came to the United States.
JF: When you say we, who came?
NR: Oh we, I figured we, I came by myself at that time because the other two brothers went to Israel in '48.
JF: I see.
NR: You know and as a matter of fact, the oldest brother, he was, he came to Israel direct from Poland. He lived there another couple years in Poland, till 1950.
JF: Why did you come here instead of going to Israel?
NR: I, I don't know, it just happened, no special, no special why I didn't want to go to Israel yet, your family...
JF: Now wait, you were married...
NR: In Germany.
JF: In Germany, you met your wife in one of the DP camps then?
NR: I met her in our town, she came from the camp...
JF: Oh.
NR: ...through our town and she, I met her there. We didn't get married in Poland, but after three years, two years...
JF: So she went with you to Germany then. To the camps.

NR: Yeah, yeah.
JF: And then you married in Germany?
NR: In Germany in the camp, yeah.
JF: In what, in the first camp?
NR: Its name is Banknag.
JF: Oh this is the name of the second camp?
NR: The camp, yeah, Banknag. [Backnang]
JF: Near Stuttgart.
NR: Near Stuttgart, B-A-N-K-N-A-G.
JF: B-A-N-K-N-A-G?
NR: Yeah, I think that's it. I'm not sure of the spelling but ...
JF: And you, you married Mrs. Rosen in Zeilsheim?
NR: No.
JF: In Bank--in Banknag? [Backnang]
NR: In Banknag. [Backnang]
JF: And then you came here in 1949?
NR: Yeah.
JF: Okay.
NR: We didn't do too bad here.
JF: Well you have your very successful shop here.
NR: I was, I was the first 10 years I was in New York. Then we came here, something happened, we came here and we established our business and that's it. I became a grandpa two weeks ago.
JF: *Mazel tov.*
NR: Thank you and that's it.
JF: Can you tell me about your children? You have?
NR: Two sons.
JF: You have two sons?
NR: Yeah, my oldest son is married.
JF: Was he born in Europe or was he born here?
NR: No, in the States, both in the United States.
JF: Okay, and you're a grandfather for the first time.
NR: Yeah.
JF: *Mazel tov.* Is there anything else about the war years that you want to share with us especially...
NR: No, not especially, it was plain hell. Let's put it that way, plain hell.
JF: Do you think, can you attribute your survival during that time to anything in particular?
NR: The only thing, I had guts, that's all, nothing else. I had no fear. I didn't know what fear means, that's all. That's all I can tell you.

JF: Okay, thank you very much Mr. Rosen. [long pause]

JF: Before we stop Mr. Rosen, there was one more story that you wanted to tell me.

NR: Yeah.

JF: Do you want to tell me now?

NR: Yeah, during, it was around the end of '44 we--one of the farmer's came to us and when we got in contact with him he told us a story that they found two Jews in the lake. A husband--a man and a woman, elderly people, and the farmers there buried them near the lake. So we understood right away that this is one of our friends, we weren't together anymore, we were separate Menachem [unclear] and...

JF: This is the *shochet*?

NR: The *shochet*, yeah. His parents, it must be his parents because we didn't know nobody who run away or hid somewhere. They knew that they the people they tried to do it once and then there was quiet and after the war finished and he came back to the city and he told us the story. He knew that this was his parents there. They're calling, he knew what farm he was so he told me to go with him and we rented a pair of horses and a wagon.

JF: He had a pretty good idea his parents were dead?

NR: Oh yeah, he knew already because he was there before, before he came to us. He needed help, so I went with him and we went and it took us almost an hour to go there by horse and wagon, maybe took an hour and a half, and we dig them up from the ground and made two boards you know in Jewish way to bury them. We bury them in our town to the cemetery and we buried them in the Jewish way so--it was tragic but, and that's it.

JF: You were able to help in whatever way you could?

NR: Yeah, we did it, I did it, I went with him and that's, we, and we, like I said we leased or rented, whatever it is, a pair of horses and the wagon. There was no cars at that time. It was a Friday if I'm not mistaken. It took us about a half a day, to go there and back.

JF: Thank you for adding that story Mr. Rosen.

NR: Okay.

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