HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

HARVEY SHREIBMAN

Transcript of Audiotaped Translation of Interview

Interviewer: Phyllis Richman
Date: May 3, 1982

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HS - Harvey Shreibman [interviewee]
PR - Phyllis Richman [interviewer]
Date: May 3, 1982

Tape one, side one:

PR: This is Phyllis Richman. It is May 3, 1982. Tonight I am interviewing Harvey Shreibman at his home and we are going to begin our interview. As I told you, Mr. Shreibman, Nora Levin prepared some questions so that we can have a little bit of structure for the interview. Let me ask you the first one: If you lived in Eastern Poland, which you told me you did, in September 1939, and came under Soviet rule, please tell me how your life changed. What was the name of your city or town, describe the changes you observed of other Jews.[1]

HS: Well, the changes took place were very noticeable immediately when-- as directions came in. First of all as it is well-known mostly the Jewish people were small merchants and since in Russia there isn't such a thing as private, even small private enterprise, this affected most of the Jewish population immediately. Second of all, all Jewish institutions were immediately closed down. The propaganda started immediately against the Jewish religion. Most of the people in Eastern Europe were religious. They were observant and this took away the freedom of religion. They couldn't worship, they couldn't observe the holidays or the *Shabbat.* This affected my immediate family because my father was extremely religious. He, in order for, he wanted to get a job he would have to work on Saturday, on the Jewish holidays, and to him it was a matter of life and death. He would rather not eat and not work on the Sabbath or the Jewish holidays and this immediately affected us very much. At the same time the Russian, members of the Russian KGB used to come into the house and call my father all kinds of names like, "You are a parasite, you are eating, you are not working." And life was very miserable.

PR: How old were you?

HS: I was 14 years old at the time in 1939 when the Russians came in.

PR: And with-- your brother was living with you at the time?

HS: My brother was living with us. He finished *gymnasium* under the Polish government and he managed to get-- they had-- Russians had set up six months courses for young people's education and to train them to become teachers. He became a teacher in school and he managed to get a salary and somehow he helped us out. We managed to survive. That's all I can say to survive. Life was very miserable. It was also-- since my father had a small business before and in Russia everybody has to have a passport on him at all times they also put in a special number in his passport they mark it like he was a

[1]Mr. Shreibman was born in Pruzana, Poland in 1925 according to his personal history sheet.

former businessman even if he barely made a living from his business. And this was already like against him. Any place he came then they looked at his passport and this was like-- I would-- a third class citizen. If he would register even for a job he would get the worse job. [unclear].

PR: What kind of business was your father in?

HS: He had a leather business, we used to sell leather to shoemakers. Most of the people would come to the shoemaker and he would take the measurements and make shoes that were made to order for them. There weren't too many. Poland was a backward country and there weren't too many factories that produced shoes like here in the United States.

PR: Do you remember helping him?

HS: I helped him a little bit, yes. I used to help him and my father would attend services three times a day and my mother would stay in the store when father was going to the synagogue.

PR: Was the store close to your home?

HS: This one [unclear] when I am talking about the store, I mean only this was under the Polish government not under the Russian. Under the Russians, there was no more store. Everything was taken away, was nationalized. I used to go to the store once in a while. I didn't have too much time because I went to a *Yeshiva*. And we used to go to the *Yeshiva* almost all day and then we used to come home to eat something and then we go back for the prayers, for the nightly prayers, for *Maariv* prayers and this is how life was. I can only say from my personal experience under the Russians that the *Yeshiva* also was closed and I started to attend a regular school, the Russian school. And the school that we had to attend, they wanted us we should attend the schools also on Saturdays and I really didn't want to do it but even my father told me I should do it. But I used to go to school but I wouldn't use a pencil, I wouldn't write I would just listen or answer questions. And after a while they started to indoctrinate us in communism and atheism and try to tell us to prove to us there isn't such a thing as a God, it's all hypocrisy, this is a tool of the capitalist system. In order to-- that the working people shouldn't think about the, about new ideas to better their life then that's why the religion always served the capitalist system.

PR: Did anything happen to you in this school that was antisemitic…

HS: …the school…

PR: …did you give [unclear].

HS: …the school at that time-- there wasn't that much antisemitism, before the war I am talking about, before Germany attacked Russia. The only thing I say, I do remember one time they-- we had-- they were trying to teach us about the Russian Constitution, about the equality of all nationalities of all people and one time I remember when the teacher asked anybody would like to have something to say about the life of all nationalities in the Soviet Union. I raised my hand and I started to talk about the

Constitution, really the truth of the matter, the Constitution the way it read was terrific, it meant really equality for all the people. Then I said, "In comparison," I said, "can you compare any other country, a capitalist country where the people don't have equal rights?" The only country that I knew more or less a little bit about was Germany. We heard already-- and I said, "In Germany there is a Fascist government, there is no equality, that the Jewish people are being oppressed" and he said, "Wait, wait, we won't talk about Germany," he said "like the United States where the Negroes are oppressed and there is lynching and so many different things" they start telling us. Because at that time the Russians and the Germans they were friends, they were allies. They had a-- there was a Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 that in my opinion triggered the Second World War. From the area where I came from the poverty was tremendous. But there was enough. There were-- we had no factories, there was, there was hardly anything for young people to do. But there was plenty of farming, as for grain, food was more than enough, the only thing you had to have money to buy it. When the Russians came in we had to stand in line already for food also because they were shipping the food to Germany, to the German Army. Their own people didn't have enough.

PR: Did you consider leaving the Soviet area and going westward?

HS: There was no way…

PR: …no way to leave?

HS: …no way to get out. There's a lot of Jewish people that left Poland, like Warsaw and different places and they ran to our part, to Russia, and after a while they were all arrested and sent away to Siberia.

PR: Living in Eastern Poland, did you meet any Soviet writers or visitors…

HS: …after all we met…

PR: …between '39 and 41?

HS: …my mother had a cousin that during the first World War, after the first World War, she was from our area but she left for Russia after the first World War. She lived in Moscow. She was a member of the Communist party; she was a dentist. All the years we were cut off from each other we didn't know anything that went on there and they didn't know what's going on in Poland or any other place. Finally when the Russians came into our part she came for a visit from Moscow. She stayed with us. She was a member of the Communist party, which I mentioned before, she was--whenever she would say something she would look around. And she told us how many people, prominent Communists, were killed by Stalin's engines. Life there was extremely miserable, it's frightening, it's just terrible. 'Cause when the Russians came in, we asked them questions and whatever we asked of everything they answered in a positive way. "We have everything, there's no shortages, life is tremendous," and there was, there was a joke going around although it was true: We asked them. "Do you have chocolate?" "Yes." "How about oranges?" "Oh we have plenty factories of oranges, factories of oranges." And they grabbed every little thing and when they left their suitcases were

bloated, if anybody had an old watch [that] wasn't even running they just grabbed in and paid for it. This was a sign that they had nothing, they had very little.

PR: What else can you tell me about that period of time in your life, what feelings do you remember of how…

HS: I remember also the feeling of one time, like I mentioned before, when my father didn't have a job, he personally was a little sick and we would never-- he would never take a job or not to work on the holidays or *Shabbos* and one time when I came back from school I saw there was a-- our house was surrounded by police, the KGB and they took my father out of the house and they took him away-- and we also had some food. When the war broke out and everybody put a little extra food and all the food was taken out of the house. And…

PR: When was this?

HS: This was in 1940 and I was crying and he was taken away. I asked my mother what happened, she said [that] they came in and they said that my father is not working and is a parasite. And they were digging in our yard to see if maybe he has some stuff-- is like black market selling and buying maybe as a guarantee-- and we had nothing. Then they took him away and they took him away, and they took away the food, the extra food we had for ourselves. This was to show like he's a black marketeer to make up a story. My mother, the same evening, my mother went there to find out about him and they warned her that if she will continue coming they will have her arrested too. My father was very sick, he had stomach trouble, he couldn't eat, hardly eat and she asked them maybe she could bring something for him, food or something and they said, "Nothing." It was very cold at the time and extra warm clothes, they took it, but later on when he was-- they let him go, of course, he never got anything. And the reason he was let go is, I had a cousin, he was a lawyer. He finished law school under the Polish regime and there it was-- he had suffered an awful lot under the Polish regime because they tried as hard as they could not to let any Jewish people to get in on these professions. And he was very brilliant, he was a genius. To him, he was a little sympathetic with the Russian regime because what he knew about it was what you read in books, everything sounded so great. When the Russians came in, since he was like a victim of the Polish government, it was like the *intelligentsia,* then they immediately grabbed him, they wanted him he should practice law. And he did practice law and he knew all the people, the District Attorney and everybody else and he finally, through him, my father, they let my father out.

PR: How long had your father been in custody?

HS: He was there but a few weeks but he didn't hardly, he didn't eat anything, because when he came back he was almost dead, swollen. He would have been there another week, he wouldn't have lasted. And they also, while he was inside there already they called him all kinds of names pertaining to Jews, insulting names. "You Jews are all speculators, you Jews never wanted to work," everything about the-- to denigrate the

Jewish people. And: "Your day is coming, we will take care of you." But at the same time, naturally, if my father would make a complaint about it, and like he would deny it and the next one would maybe beat him up or something else. He had to keep quiet about it. Also when they let him out he had to sign a paper that he'll never expound anything that he saw. Accidentally, he met somebody who was not Jewish, was a White Russian we were very friendly with. And this man was also arrested because he was considered a *kulak*, maybe if you read Russian book. A *kulak* meant one that owned let's say 100 acres of land, he was already like also a capitalist they call them in Russian *kulak.* And this man disappeared and nobody ever heard from him. Because we knew the family, too, the children and his wife. He was brought in after my father and my father saw him.

PR: What else did your father tell you about those couple of weeks?

HS: Well, what else, a couple of weeks-- I want you to know that at that time the people that were in charge of running the system in these occupied-- they didn't call it occupied areas, I say occupied areas, they called it something, af-- after they came in they marched in, a few weeks later they called meetings, small meetings in houses and one of the commu-- a member of the Communist party came in and they used to tell everybody say: "We want you to know, we know how much you suffered under this Fascist government." It's true that the Polish government was a fascist government to a degree, but it's not because of the way they understood fascism, it's the way we understood it, it's entirely different, and "We know that you wanted us to come here to liberate you and that's why we came." And everybody signed the paper that we were liberated.

PR: Can you give me any more details about that time in your life? What was Abraham doing then, your brother?

HS: My brother was a teacher in a small town about 15 miles away and whatever pay he got he tried to help us out like I mentioned this before. Also Jewish life stopped completely when the Russians came in. Before, there were two Yiddish newspapers. One was a Zionist-oriented paper and one was like a socialist paper. They were immediately cut off. There used to be a Jewish orphan home, an old age home-- everything stopped.

PR: What happened to the people?

HS: Well, the people had to go with other, with other-- Jewish people took them in to live with them. But there wasn't such a thing as anything that's Jewish that existed. The rabbi-- we had a rabbi in town, he was almost hidden. After a few months passed the Russians managed to find the list of the Zionist leaders and even some socialist leaders-- they call themselves socialists too but it's a diff-- you know, the real socialists are enemies, are supposed to be enemies of communism. And they had them-- when we used to get up in the morning we used to find out real quietly, one would tell each other, "Do you know what happened last night so and so was taken away, so and so was taken away." This used to go on for quite a while. There were Jews and non-Jews that were constantly being taken away, some away to Siberia, and in most cases was

never heard of them. My-- I had a cousin that lives in Warsaw, he was a Zionist leader and the war broke out he had all his family in our town, he came back and he stayed there for a while and suddenly he was married, he had a wife and he had a child, a one year old child and they had him arrested and sent him away to Siberia. He managed to survive. During the war after Germany attacked Russia, and the Russians became our allies, they let him out from Siberia and he had a big family in Is-- in Palestine, at that time it was Palestine, he had his mother was there and two sisters and he had to-- many difficulties in Turkey so he ran to get to Palestine. His family they were, they were all very sick and on the way his wife and child passed away. My cousin just passed away two years ago in Israel. He was here the last year quite a few times and he was also a victim of the Russians, he tried to run away from the Russians, from the Germans and the Russians got him.

PR: What did he do in Israel, did he have any…

HS: Yeah, he was the head of the Jewish agency in Tel Aviv but he had a big job in Warsaw before the war also with the Zionist movement.

PR: Let's go back to the time when they took your father.

HS: Yes.

PR: What happened when he came home, what were the events afterwards?

HS: When he came home he was quite sick, he was in bed for a long time and he was very sick. He didn't say too much, he spoke very little. He was frightened and said very, very little.

PR: Then what happened?

HS: Then what happened af-- in 1941 we all know that Germany, the Germans attacked Russia. At that time I was attending school and in school they had like different organizations for youngsters. Like they had an organization like they have here, the Boy Scouts, they had like the Pioneer, the Pioneers for young kids. And they were, after Pioneers there was a *Komsomol*[2], this was all preparations for the Communist Party eventually. Not everybody made it but I wanted also since I was young and I was going to school I wanted to become a member of the Pioneer but they wouldn't let me in because of my background. They always asked you what your family and what your father did. At that time we found out already it was not advisable even to mention, when they used to ask, if you have relatives in the United States. I couldn't make it, some people from my class they made it, I didn't and to a degree, I felt bad about it because I knew I felt this is going to be my future, this is where I am going to live the rest of my life and I will have to make something of myself. But at one time they formed like a little

[2]Russian syllabic abbreviation of Vsesoyuzny Leninsky Kommunistichesky Soyuz Molodyozhi, (English: All-Union Leninist Communist League of Youth),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. Closely associated with this organization were the Pioneers for ages 9 to 14, and the Little Octobrists for children under nine years of age). (Encyclopedia Britannica, www.britannica.com)

organization but we were so young they said they would teach us how to hold arms and to use arms and I went a few times and one time the one in charge was like also a member of the Communist Party but the main thing that they used to do is indoctrinate their phil-, philosophy and one time they mentioned to us that they would-- that there was Saturday night, the coming Saturday night, we would have-- they would give us some arms to carry without bullets and we would go outside the city and we would lie down on the grass and stay there 'til about 12 o'clock. We would be considered like we are the enemy, we came down with parachutes. We were supposed to be hidden some place, bu-, so they always bragged, but this-- their strength lies because their people, all the people, the plain people, workers, engineers, lawyers, doctors, are behind them, behind the motherland. And we will be hiding but the people will come out and they will find us. It was like a game. You know I was scared, I was a young kid, to me it was a big deal, you know. I believe they gave us uniforms, too, to wear. And while we were lying on the fields suddenly we noticed airplanes coming down very low and with lightening. When we asked him, "What is it?" he says, "That is nothing, this is our planes, they have some kind of-- you know, like they're having training. They're training, it's nothing." Ten minutes later, you know, not too far from where we were, because we were-- our town was very close to the border, where it was that Poland was divided I would say about 20 miles from the border, and they had small airfields with airplanes around not too far from where we were, suddenly we see these planes are coming going down low and they are on fire, the airplanes, the Russian airplanes are all on fire they set them on fire. This was on a Saturday night, usually the Russians get drunk, and they had a good time and they came down, every airplane got finished up. And we said to him, "What is this?" and he says, "Oh, that's nothing." See, he was afraid to say because if it falls he can get in trouble because we are supposed to be friends and as we well know that Stalin himself at that time was warned by his generals that the Germans are preparing for war, but what he did he killed all the generals, he shot all, well, he shoot all these generals. He said they are spies, they want to make trouble between him and the Germans. But after a while already they kept coming back and back we all just ran away. I went home and I woke up my family and I told them it looks like there is a war or something. Four or five hours later or six hours later, they announced there is a war. The Germans got restless and attacked our country. The same Saturday, during the day, the Russians were constantly sending…

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

HS: …the Russians. And the empty cars would come back. We found out later that day, the cars were came back with German soldiers because they were--that front was sold, there was a lot of Russians who despised their government and they felt that even to the Germans they can be liberated and freed. This was Saturday night, Monday morning, 5 o'clock, the German army marched in. My mother's cousin was still with us from Moscow. She wanted to go back naturally and there was no way for everybody to go back. But since she was a member of the Communist Party she went to the headquarters and she showed them her papers and they managed to get her transportation, by trucks with everything else. We had a small railroad 12 miles away from us, it was all bombed. She got on a truck whether she made it I doubt it, for the simple reason the Germans were bombing all the highways and they kept on marching. Monday morning the German army was in our town and they were going without any opposition. They had prisoners of war by the tens of thousands, this was during the summer. It was extremely hot. They put them in a place-- there was a market place and the hot was-- the sun was baking and they wouldn't give them any water. And they were dying from starvation and thirst, they treated them like worse than animals. And the fact is that within a short time they got, they got very close to Moscow. The Germans were very close to Moscow. And without, with very little fighting because Stalin got rid of the best generals. He got rid of-- and there was also I believe there were a lot of spies. The fact is even later during the war there were a lot of Ukrainians and White Russians that collaborated with the Germans against their own country. Those were the people also that volunteered to be SS to do all the killings of the Jews. They did it even with more fervor than the Germans. They volunteered for it. It was unbelievable what went on. I also forgot to mention when the German army was marching to Russia, White Russians, Ukrainians but right behind them there was a special, special units already trained that when they started. And they started killing all the Jews in all those towns immediately. They used to get them and in certain areas outside of town there would be beaches and then they would bring all the people out on the beaches with machine guns. Some of them were buried alive or half alive. And the reason I say it-- because the place where we-- where I came from it was like-- I don't know how they figured but this became like part of the Third Reich, certain areas, small area. And the Germans after a few weeks gave orders that we should immediately-- they wanted to have a list of 24 people, Jewish people, and these people should be responsible for all the Jews and the orders they would give would come to these people. Nobody--this was for the *Judenrat*-- no one wanted to volunteer for such a job. But the Germans also said: "Within 24 hours if such a list wouldn't be forthcoming, they would take the matter into their own hands." So we understood very well what it meant. And how many people from the town went to the rabbi and the rabbi made up a list and told them, "It's a must. They should be the ones to go to the Gestapo and tell

them that they are the representatives of the Jewish community. They are the members of the *Judenrat*." And after the Germans, when they came up to the Germans-- the reason I know a little bit about it because my cousin, [unclear], he was one of those. I'm sure there are a lot of books written about people like that. I don't want to get into it, but somehow some of them did dirty work, too. I mean, it's not all over the same. But they came to the Gestapo. The Gestapo for a while played around with them. They told them turn around with their hands up and they put machine guns against them, around with the guns right close to their necks and they called them all kinds of names, all kinds of abusive names, and finally they were told to turn around and immediately gave the first order, was that Jewish people will be responsible for erecting a fence. They gave them a map of a few streets of the town and in these few streets all the Jewish people had to get in and they are responsible for erecting the fence and for the material and everything else. And the Jewish people had no more [unclear] than a day, didn't have any material. Because whatever it was people had, the Russians took away too, plundered already. But somehow with sweat and other things, the people gave up their engagement rings, marriage rings and what they were able to sell to gentile Christians and they managed to get some material and to the right-- to the time it was ready, whenever the Germans wanted it to be ready. And the people-- what the majority of people lived outside this designated area, they had to move in within a short period of time, it was 24 hours they had to be in. Most of their belongings they had to leave behind and also it meant like maybe 8, 10 people in a room.

PR: What happened to your family?

HS: My family, the house where we lived in was part of the ghetto but we had a lot of people moving in with us. This was later-- there were two gates that people could get out and come in to the ghetto. There was a sign outside said, "The Ghetto, *Stadt Pruzana.*" This is the ghetto, Pruzana Ghetto. After a while the Germans and also the people of this *Judenrat* felt this was important that we've got to prove to the Germans that the Jewish people are useful. They organized like all the shoemakers, all tailors, because a lot of Jewish people in Eastern Europe they were shoemakers, tailors, also make saddles for horses, blacksmiths, these trades were mostly Jewish trades and they were set up places and they told the Gestapo they would be willing to do the work, they can make boots for the army or for things for them and the Gestapo liked the idea. And there was a tannery, let's say. I, I am very familiar a little bit with shoemaking because my father was in the leather business and I knew a lot of shoemakers. And they set up a place for a lot of shoemakers and there was a cavalry outside the ghetto, and the cavalry had better leather than me, was brought in and measured out exactly how many boots, and at the same time-- like they are making for the army, but a lot of stuff was made for the Gestapo, for private, for themselves, for their families in Germany, for their children, for their friends, and this here, you know, they liked that idea. And some leather was brought in from other places from other towns where there was some tanneries there.

The pay was also the same way for work for the Germans and everything and the Gestapo said: "Well, it looks like you Jews here in this town are trying, you are useful and we will see to it that you will not be evacuated." They didn't say-- there were several ways to get killed, but evacuated. In meantime there were small towns not too far away from us and some of them were set up like part of like Russia or other whatever, it was small communities, even the community where the railroad station was, 12, about 12 kilometers, eight miles from us. We had some family there [unclear] there were over 500 Jewish families. One day my brother with a group of people went to work on the railroad and they noticed all the Jewish people were loaded up on trucks and maybe 500 yards, a 1,000 yards away, there were pits and they shot them all. And my brother was off in the distance he was wor-- hearing the people, and when we came home he was very shaky. I believe that one person managed, managed, was-- [unclear] over the pits immediately and that person was not shot and it got dark-- a girl, she got out and after wandering a day or so she managed to get into our ghetto and she told us more, in more detail about this. Such things took place in a lot of the small towns surrounding our area. Once in a while from the ghetto every day, the Germans would give new orders. First of all the new orders how many people should come out a certain, to do certain type of work and also that they, they would give an order that within 24 hours they expect let's say 10 pounds of gold, so many pounds of silver, and in Europe even though the poverty was great but let's say silver the majority of people the candle, the candle lights were made out of silver. The candle…

PR: Candelabras.

HS: …labras yes. Everybody gave up whatever he had like I said before, every jewelry, whatever anybody had and it was given. And they also gave out orders the Jewish people are not allowed to have any cows. In small towns people had cows, from the cows they managed to have milk and butter and everything else. Jewish people are not allowed to have anything made out of fur. And aside saying it, it's that anybody will be caught touching it will be shot. Every day was different things now giving up this and that. The people just gave up whatever they had. And as far going from-- later they used to get people, let's say a group of 200 people went out to work and while they were at work they used to beat them up and make fun of them and do all kinds of things. Very seldom the 200 came back. In most cases you had to carry some of them; they were dead. Sometimes some of the people who were working outside managed, what do you call it-- stealing or organizing maybe in a place they would find a little-- a few potatoes or something and they would try to smuggle it into the ghetto and if they were lucky they didn't catch them, they got away with it but if they would catch them they would get shot for it.

PR: There must have been a lot of hysteria going on.

HS: A lot of hysteria going on. The young people were running around saying "What can we do, you know, something has to be done." At the same time we were cut

off from the outside world. It mattered that our neighbors were so friendly to us. They were not friendly before [unclear] more friendly during the German occupation. This was the life more or less in the ghetto. There was, there was a lot of sicknesses. There was no nourishing food for babies, no medicine, after a while they brought in a lot of Jews from a large city, Bialystok. It was a larger Jewish community than ours. And before the war in our town we were less than 10,000 Jewish people. They brought them from Bialystok 15,000 Jews.

PR: To the ghetto.

HS: Yes.

PR: Oh my.

HS: Then they brought in some Jews from a few other cities. The ones they didn't kill right on the spot. And conditions got worse. There was typhus and all kinds of sicknesses. People got swollen and it was very, very bad. At times the *Judenrat* used to write the Gestapo in certain cases they would maybe, once in a while, they would let in some extra, let's say, extra potatoes or other things. They did everything possible to make life a little easier. And then a few hundred-- some young people got organized and they decided to go-- to get out of the ghetto if possible, to get to the woods. We were not too far from the woods, like the partisans. In the woods was not easy for Jewish people. There were a lot of undergr-- partisans there, Russians and other nationalities. They were fighting the German enemy but to them it still was in them antisemitism. They still had a hatred for Jews. And there are some cases where they came across these people-- the Jewish people had very little arms with them because it was hard to get a hold of it and they would finish them up. Then one time-- sometimes these same people a few of them that went to the woods would manage to come back to the ghetto and maybe get certain things from the ghetto yet that they were hiding before they left. And it was hard to get out because they were-- the Germans were all the way around. It was very risky to get in and to get out. One time two of these-- from our town two young fellows went to the office of the *Judenrat*. And they told the head of the *Judenrat* that they wanted it-- that the *Judenrat* should get for them certain things. The *Judenrat* was falling apart, because if the Gestapo would find out that the *Judenrat* has anything to do with the partisans, that's it. But nevertheless, they tried to help them as much as possible while they were there; they carried arms too. The Gestapo came in and the Gestapo came in they started shooting each other and a there was a man-- a Jewish man got killed. And the Gestapo immediately surrounded the ghetto. The ghetto was surrounded before but they got reinforcements, more, more SS. And they said "Tomorrow morning," this was at night, but in the morning, they will make a decision what's going to be. In the meantime, the Jewish-- the young people in the ghetto then already there was always-- see these two partisans from-- came to the *Judenrat* they managed before the reinforcements came they managed to run away. The Gestapo immediately gave orders to the *Judenrat* they should find them, but they couldn't, they weren't there. In the meantime, the young people

organized and they said, "If the Gestapo will give orders to evacuate the ghetto we will set the entire ghetto on fire." That's all we could do, there was nothing, there was no arms to fight them. And maybe while everything will be on fire people should run. The majority will be dead anyway but maybe some will manage. The Germans somehow smelled something who knows, maybe they had-- I, I cannot say, maybe they had an informer, maybe not. The next morning they came back, they said, "Well, we will send a report to Berlin saying that you are useful people Jews, useful Jews and we will let you go on as before. In a few days there's going to be a commission coming to inspect the ghetto from Berlin." This was really to fool the people. In meantime the ghetto was surrounded just the same. They didn't take away the-- you know, the extra reinforcement of the SS. Three months later, suddenly, they came at night and they gave orders that the ghetto is going to be evacuated to a, a labor camp. And this will take place four days. Every day the different streets evacuated. And there's nothing to worry. You should take along with you such and such things, like food for a couple of days, and this and that. And at the time already we knew all the surrounding areas were *judenrein*, there were no Jews left. We were actually at first the longest island of Jews still-- in all the ghettos was still-- in that area was still around. Like I told my wife even today, you know there is such a thing as an optimist, a pessimist and a realist. I said-- my wife always calls me a pessimist, I said, "I am not exactly a pessimist, I am a realist." But I'll tell you that even a pessimist, a pessimist is not a person that gives up a 100%, he still has, has some hope. You think maybe we are different. See some people figure-- I mean after all if you knew all those Jews around the surrounding areas were killed why would you be different? But somehow you think you "Maybe, maybe." Then they gave the orders. Our street was not supposed to be evacuated the first day. When my brother-- my brother left the house, he went someplace. Suddenly what happened? The streets were, were supposed to be evacuated, the people run away to the other streets and the Germans had a certain quota of how many they need. Suddenly they came into our house and grabbed us the first day. And they mobilized the farmers, the Christians from all the way around, sleds-- now this was in January in 1943 and we were supposed to put all the stuff that we took with us on the sleds and they are supposed to take us to the railroad station about eight miles away. And we were already next to a sled and suddenly my brother ran over. He heard that that street was taken and he said, he told my parents and I, he decided to try to get to [unclear] he's going to hide in the bunker under our house 'til it's over. And my mother says to me: "What do you want to do? I believe you should go, too." I was much younger than him, and I said, "Well," [be]cause in my mind I felt somehow, my father was sick, both my parents were in bad shape and I felt if we do go to a place maybe for labor maybe I can help a little bit. I just didn't want to leave them by themselves. This was the only reason I didn't try that I thought that I should go along. And we went. On the way-- we weren't sitting on the sled, we were marched next to it. Finally we got to the place, what is it-- I have to mention it although this has, doesn't have too much to do with the Germans. And

while we were marching the Christians were standing outside and watching and one of them, he owned a [unclear] mill, you know what a [unclear] mill is for grain and I saw him, he was making a cross and he said in Polish, "Thank you God that you cleaned up the dirt." Then I realized these were the people that we lived so many generations [with]. Actually the people, the Jewish people were invited a thousand years before to come to Poland by the, by a king. [Unclear] was his name, and as the country was so poor and so undeveloped he wanted the Jewish people to come and help develop the country. At that time there were a lot of them in Germany and in Germany at this time there was tremendous antisemitism and he invited them, to give them all the freedom that they should come to live there. [Unclear] people, our neighbors for all the years. Finally when we got to the station, we waited for quite a while. I did notice there was a woman doctor, a Jewish woman in our town, she was-- slowly [unclear] there was a fancy sled with nuns came and she managed to get out and she went with the nuns. They took her away. And she remained alive after the war. She was as a nun in the monastery. But they loaded us up, finally they did load us on these cattle cars. Men and women were separated immediately.

PR: And that was the first time you were separated from your parents?

HS: That's right.

PR: Were you with your father?

HS: I was with my father. I also was with my aunt, [appears the speaker meant uncle] my father's older brother, and it started moving. The people, some were older, they knew more the area and more about the places. It was dark, except you could see little light looking down between the wood some…

PR: …and you were all standing?

HS: Standing, pushed in like more than sardines and the people were looking out. It was an hour passed the time, we say well, we already passed Borda Gora [phonetic] this was a place where a lot of Jewish people were born there in the woods and [unclear]. We say, well it's more hope now. And we were going like this for three days and three nights.

PR: No food, no water?

HS: No food, no water. There was a place, not too far from Auschwitz already [unclear] I never in my life heard of such a place, I didn't know such a place existed. The train stopped and they did open up the door and one of the SS said, "*Wasser!*" there was some water there and I put my hand in to get it and I jumped out and I got a little water. And I had something with me and I brought it back in. I noticed this was a railroad station. I noticed a lot of Jewish people were working there. And then they told us "Oh, you are going to Auschwitz."

[Tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

HS: The vibrations started Thursday morning. This was January 28, 1943. Friday night we were on our way. We didn't know where our destination was. I remember my father, my uncle, a few other people, quite a few other people. Somebody had a candle, they lit the candle and they started the Friday night services. Friday night services starts *Lekhu Neranena*, beginning *Shabbos*. And my uncle who was older than my father who was a type like you see it, like a sage with beard. He also was like on the High Holy Days or during the year he was like a *khazn* [cantor] I doubt you're used to. They used to be like a messenger of the people to God and he started with his sweet voice beginning the *Shabbos* like nothing is happening everything is normal.

PR: Where were you at this time?

HS: We are inside these cattle cars. People were already dead on the floors. And they are singing [unclear] the dark skies. I was sitting, I was, remember I was against the wall, it was a little easier with something to lean against. I had my eyes closed. I was-- I had a religious upbringing. So religious that if I would accidentally on a Saturday find a penny a metal money in my pocket I would grab my hands like this-- like I would electrocute myself. I truly believed in everything, every little detail. And I start thinking to myself already, "God, are we the chosen people? For getting killed, for sufferings, for infants to get torn apart, for all these things that's why you choose us? Why don't you choose the others?" And everything was over, it was quiet, except some people were mumbling and crying. Next day, the night passed, Saturday morning [unclear], Saturday night, it was dark. Suddenly it stopped, the train stopped. They opened up the doors and we see in front of the doors there are SS with clubs. We see light, we see, we see fences, wire fences. We didn't know that they were electric wired fences. We see guards, we also see people in striped uniforms with the Star of David and numbers. We wanted to believe, "Well, this is truly a work camp. Well, that the Germans really did not lie to us, maybe we are different." But suddenly, the Germans gave orders [unclear], to get out, leave everything behind. The rabbi of our town was a very fine man. He wore-- he was more distinction. The Germans could tell immediately that he was a rabbi. His clothes, he wore a *yarmulke* [skullcap], coat, his looks, hat. One of them, when we got out, and one of them hollered, "This is the *Rabbiner* [rabbi]." And immediately like, like [unclear] vultures they got next to him and they were beating him and beating him and he fell dead right on the spot. Then, we started getting out and they were just blindly hitting, hitting and hitting everybody. They were hollering, here there pushing. You could see from a distance the women also the same way. And I managed, I noticed my mother in the distance and I ran over to her. She was with my aunt and my cousin. I said, "Ma, I hope to see you. [unclear] see you later." And she started to cry and she says, "You don't have to see me. I hope you will be alive, because you are young, you didn't live, you have no life," and the Germans were hollering what am I doing and I have to

run the other way next to my father. And also a cousin of mine [unclear] well he was married to my cousin [unclear]. And more people crowded in, they put us like five in a row. And the Germans started-- it was like an officer and [unclear] SS and he was going and [unclear] and he would put his finger and they would pull somebody out and put him in a different, in a different place. And they passed by the lane I was and he did not go near. And he pulled out this man, this man my cousin and they pulled him out. And they didn't-- and I remained there. They pulled out other people and I could tell-- I just, "Nah," I said, you know, I looked in there that I could see something, something is-- I don't know what it is. It doesn't look too good. Then evidently what we found out later they-- every time they used make a decision, let's says for transport of 3,000 people arrives, sometimes they would want 500 people, sometimes 200 people and sometimes 300 people. They did not examine everybody, see, sometimes the healthier people remained, the younger people remained and went to the gas chamber, you know. Well, evidently they were short, they came again and then the second time they pulled me out, they took me there. And after a while the rest of them that remained-- so later on they put them on trucks, pushed them on trucks and the trucks went away.

PR: And that is when you were separated from your father?

HS: …separated yes.

PR: How old were you then?

HS: I was 17 years old. Then they marched us for a while, we came to a place many of them knew which was Birkenau. When we came to Birkenau it was getting dark already. It was dark. And we were standing at attention, they told us to wait 'til we are called, that then they are going in to take a bath, shower. While we were waiting quite a while, a long time, I see there are some people with the striped uniforms walking around and I said to one of them, I said-- my mind was that we are younger, we are stronger, we will work and the other people maybe will be in a different camp or they will work a different work. Maybe once a week we will see them. I said to him, "When can we see our families?" And he stood for a while and then he says to me, "Do you see this smoke, the chimneys, that's where they [your families] are coming out." And that was it. And then after a while, we had to-- in there they gave us orders to get undressed, and when we got undressed, they pushed us-- and this was a very, very bitter cold January terribly [unclear] in Auschwitz. It was extremely cold and the showers, the water was coming out, it was bitter cold, you know, when you go under you would shiver, you would run back and then were standing behind, you didn't watch behind and [unclear] they would give it to you. You name it they [unclear]. And we got under waters through there, to the shower, and after that somehow we had to stand in line and they were throwing with their hands like this and then if a person, let's say was twice my size, he could have gotten a little size. And I could have gotten-- a big size is not so bad. But it didn't help. I was very lucky because I was small, I was slim and I was small and I had no trouble with my clothes but I see people, they were big people and they had problems. And then when it

came to shoes, these wooden shoes the wooden soles, what do you call these kind of shoes?

PR: Clogs?

HS: Clogs, yeah, clogs. They ran out of them and they told us to go back over to our clothes and get our own shoes. This was a little-- this was a certificate of life for me. I went and found my own shoes. After, they brought us to a barrack, cleaned the barrack. Oh yeah, they also they shaved us, shaved our hair, our everything, our body and hair. They also put some burning stuff it was supposed to be against lice for sanitary reasons. It burned like hell especially after the shave they gave you, you know, it was really [unclear]. It was very dull. They then took us to a barrack and when came into the barrack, inside the barrack there were prisoners in charge of everything. Those prisoners were Russians. And I felt maybe the Russians-- I could speak a little Russian you know something, but they were pretty bad, pretty bad. They didn't have to be bad but they were the worst. Then you lie down and in the middle of the night they turn on the lights and they found out that some people had their leather shoes, their own shoes-- as bad as they were they were better than the clogs and they started taking them off. And they walked over to my cousin first and he started to fight with them and he took, he say, you know he is home or something. And they gave him a good beating. When I heard what it was-- what took place I immediately-- I don't know it was lucky I started to think what can I do they shouldn't take it. And I looked there and there was no floor. It was dirt and I found a little piece of metal, a little [unclear] sharp and I just cut them all over. I cut them and I made them dirtier than they were and when they came over and they looked at them and I heard them say in Russian, "Aah, that's nothing," because later on-- we were in this particular-- in that barrack at that camp [unclear]. The next day they took us to a place which was later called the gypsy camp, *Zigeunerlager*. And they brought us there the next day when it got dark already. When we got there, the barracks was same way, it was dark, you couldn't see anything and they were standing on both sides and just hitting and hitting and everybody started running faster and people fell on the ground and people on top of them and they were choked. It was just, it's a different world, it's, it's, it's unbelievable. Worse than animals, I mean. And finally [we] got into the place it was dark. Suddenly I remembered the barracks, in the middle of the barrack was like a long chimney on the floor made out of bricks. This was like horse bags or something. A man comes in and introduces himself and he starts speaking in Yiddish and German. He says, "My name is *Zhulti*"--*zhulti* means in Polish "red," a red-head. And he says, "I am going to be your *Shtubdienst* [caretaker]." He will be in charge of us. He was not the main boss there was somebody above him, too. "And I want you to know you better behave and listen whatever we tell you otherwise you will be dead in a short time like the ones before you. Because I will not hesitate to kill every one of you." And then he starts suddenly for nothing calling names, the worst, the worst. This was a Jew. Later on he proved himself

he meant what he said, too, believe me. Then everybody went on a-- how's it-- on the three story…

PR: Probably bunks.

HS: Bunks and in the barrack actually maybe 150 people to 200, they pushed a thousand people. Then later on we found out the water there was very bad. If you drank that water you got [unclear], diarrhea, your lips got black. In most cases you never made it after that. Especially with the beatings, plus the beatings. This camp they kept us there for six weeks this was like for-- they called it quarantine. My wife knows the story, she is helping me out. You are going away?

Wife: Yeah.

HS: You coming back?

Wife: Yeah.

HS: Come back you will remind me.

Wife: Okay, I will.

HS: And first off, people have to run to the bathroom, well you know it was like a pail and there was also a man in charge and that man as soon as you came in he greeted you too with a couple of little beatings. And then, before you had a chance to do something, you had to go. It was just unbearable. In the middle of the night they used to wake us up and suddenly everybody had to be out and the second we were, somebody started beating us. It was awful. At 3 o'clock in the morning they would wake us up. We had to go outside in the cold, get undressed, naked. There was no water to get washed up. You could not wash. You got very filthy. And they pulled us up closer. "We're going to have to clean out your lice." And we have to stay like this for God knows how long. Then 5 o'clock, they tell us to get dressed and a German would come in and we would stand at attention and he would look everybody in the face and whoever he didn't like the face he would pull them out. This was what a selections from camp made every day a selection to take people out. Every day and some people used to lie against the barracks they were dead from overnight from the beatings, too. Then suddenly they would tell us, a group, let's say they would tell us to march across to another barrack. While you were there they would give us such indoctrinations with name callings and the worst of the worst. One time they pulled me out for no reason and they-- and I had to lie down over that chimney and with wood or something they hit me in the back, I felt that all my-- I was bones, Saturday, my bones and my skin was off already completely. I couldn't breathe anymore. [unclear] and then they started. I-- little later I left. I couldn't walk. I could never forget that beating. [unclear]. This was six weeks everybody went through the six weeks and he made it, had a chance of survival. So many people, my family, my cousins, grandparents, neighbors. Most of them made it a few days, a week, two weeks, three weeks. Very few remained alive after the six weeks. During the day we also had to march out and the sun was strong and everything melted and when you put your foot in you could barely get it out. It was all mud, mud. And it was just awful. We didn't do any work they just used to

torture us. Then they decided a new game. We had to turn our jackets around, with the buttons in the back and pick up there a little bit. We walked--they would tell you to run for a little distance, like 500 feet, 1,000 feet, then they would put in a little sand in this and they would show all the sand and we had to run the disk back and just put it back. It was just nothing, nothing useful, just plain torture. After the six weeks they took us to the main camp of Auschwitz. Birkenau was also Auschwitz but this was the main camp. The main camp already looked like, how should I say? It's like Miami in comparison. We came there. There gave us also that and they shaved us again and put the stuff on us. This is when they cleaned us up. They gave us different clothes the clothes we had was terrible. You were dirty, filthy.

PR: Were you fed?

HS: We were fed very little, very little, very little there. And then we were assigned for diff-, for work, for different groups [unclear]. At the time when we came to Auschwitz they asked us when we came, who is a shoemaker, who is a tailor, who is all kinds of different trades. I did not have a trade. Like I mentioned before my father was in the leather business. In the ghetto I worked in, where they used to make, the shoemakers used to make the boots for the Germans. I used to carry the leather, be in charge of the [unclear] and so forth. I had little idea about leather. I used to watch the shoemakers do the work and I had an idea how it is put together but I never did it. Then you figured to yourself, if you could work at a trade naturally you'd be much better off. And it came out I said, "I am a shoemaker." Then finally-- so they knew all these tricks and the time came to come before the experts he says, "I want you to know whoever is not what he says we will find out." You know what they are going to do. And I got scared. I said, you know "I am not a shoemaker, I am a helper." I said, "My father was a shoemaker. I used to help him." And they took us in and a few-- a friend of mine about my age and a couple of others and myself and they told us we should make-- when a shoe is made it's not like here, by hand by a shoemaker. So usually the sole is put together with wooden nails. I remember when my father used to sell it, it was made in a factory. There they used to make it by hand in a certain way. They said they will show us how to do it. I was glad about that. But we came, we came to a certain place and the foreman came over and he started right away, he says "Where are you, Poland?" No, he started in Polish, he was a *Polak*. And he started immediately to show us that he's a stupid Jew. He started to make fun. "Aah," he says, "you came from your places, you think you are going to have your chicken and your *challah* [braided bread eaten on the Sabbath] here Friday night." They knew about it. He said, "I'll show you what you are going to carry off," and he used to beat us up. It was awful. He was horrible, terrible. Then we also noted that some Jewish people were working not too far away, shoemakers from before. They were from France. And we asked them. They said, "This man is a murderer. Every few weeks he needs new people because he kills the ones he gets in." Then we had this news so I mean, it was terrific thing. [unclear] new people he brought in. And there was one guy was from

before, Russian, Christian. He was a nice guy, but like-- I don't know a few days passed and we-- every after work the first day he says in Polish to us, "Now you worked all day and now your pay is coming now." He told us to lie down and he beat, he gave us a beating. After a few days a few got very sick and they couldn't come anymore. And then suddenly my fri-, one of my friends and I, he start talking to us a little different. And he says to me "What did you do, what school did you go?" I told him I went to a religious school. He says, "Oh you wanted to be a rabbi, huh?" And this and that-- I don't know what happened really. It was miracle. And he started to act a little humane. And then he got-- a new transport came. The others he got rid of, he got other people, but we were there already. I must say I was there over a year and believe me this was a big thing. First of all I worked under a roof. And somehow we managed to get along with him. I managed to get along with him, with the others he was still rough. And later on he even tried to get me a little extra food.

PR: How did you do that?

HS: I talked to him and he took an interest. I don't know what it was. There was another man, two people working under him too, they did different work. Each to have to make-- I don't know if you are familiar. In order to make a shoe, there's inside made out of wood. It's a form like. They made the forms for the shoes. One of them was a very fine man from Warsaw, a Christian. And he used to tell me quietly he says "Try to hold out, his day will come." The other one was an engineer from Poland. He was a little-- a hidden Jew hater, but he wouldn't go as far as beating up, he wouldn't -- that…

[Tape two, side one ended.]

Tape two, side two:

PR: You were telling me. I was asking you how did you get this guy to treat-- to take an interest in you.

HS: It seems to me maybe he came to the conclusion that some work has to be done. If he keeps on doing it every week, work will never get done. He has to have some people that know that keep on doing the work. And after a year I was suddenly picked and sent away to a camp, also it's a branch of Auschwitz. It's called Buna[3]. This was a place where. I.G. Farben Industries owned it. It used to-- these old factories they used to put in a certain gas that-- it was a very rough place. When I first came there we had to unload. We had very little time they gave us and they meant was to unload freight cars, coal and cement. The cement was not in bags. It was loose cement and that caused coughing and--it was extremely hard labor.

PR: How were you physically at this time?

HS: At the time in Auschwitz when I did the other work, I wasn't good I wasn't too bad because most of the-- like I said I had a roof over my head. When I to, when, when I came there already after a few weeks I feel that, I felt that was it. I couldn't go on. We had a foreman who was a German, also a prisoner. They let the prisoners-- the criminals, Germans out of the jails they should be in charge of us. And there were some Christian, there were Christian inmates too in Auschwitz. They had special shovels for Jews and special for Christians.

PR: Special what?

HS: Shovels.

PR: Oh.

HS: For us they had shovels that wide. I couldn't, I didn't have the strength just to pick up the shovel by itself. It was very rough-- but like I said before my cousin the one who was married to my cousin, he was sent away from Auschwitz someplace. I didn't know where he was and when I came to Buna I found out he was there. He was there for a very great while. He worked as a painter. He was never a painter in his life but the painting he had to do was like storage tanks like we have for gasoline. There were storage tanks of gas. They were tremendous in size. First we had to scrape with wire brushes to get rid of the rust and then put a base paint and then another coat. That's where he worked. This was better than doing what I did. I couldn't leave the place where I worked and go away somewhere else. For that you got lashes.

PR: You worked constantly.

HS: Pardon?

PR: You worked con-- you worked seven days all day?

HS: Absolutely.

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[3]Auschwitz III (Monowitz-Buna) was a sub-camp of Auschwitz, named for the town near by and the name for rubber which I.G. Farben Industries wanted to produce. (www.holocaustchronicle.org)

PR: How long were the days?

HS: How long were the days? First of all we used to get up about 4 o'clock in the morning, and we didn't go immediately to work. We used to get ready, they used to count us. It was called an *Appell*, made sure nobody is missing. If somebody was missing even if it was a mistake you could stay for four hours like, you couldn't move. Then we'd go to work. After-- most of the time it was everything just so. And we'd come home late at night.

PR: How many?

HS: How many went out? It was *Kommandos*. Some *Kommandos* consisted of let's say 20 people, 50, 100. When I was in Auschwitz, the place I worked, this *Kommando* consisted of about 8- or 900. And we didn't all do the same work. You see where I worked-- at that time when I made these wooden nails there were shoemakers there, tailors, people who were-- there was also a tannery, even horses there. A friend of mine remained alive. He happens to be in Philadelphia, he used to take care of the horses. A lot of things, a lot of different types of work, so according. In Buna, later on the work was unbearable. I felt I wouldn't make it another week. Then the place where we slept, the barracks, it was, there was a *Blockältester*, it means he was in charge of the entire barrack and there was a *Stubenältester* [unclear] with the barrack. Each *Stubenältester* had a certain portion. Then the *Stubenältester* that I was under, he saw my number and by the number you could tell what transfer, where you came from, if you were there a long time. At that time I worked there quite a while already. He says to me, "Are you from that town?" and I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you know somebody by that name?" I said, "Yes." He said, "He is the *Stubenschreiber*, [unclear] he's the, like the books." He is in charge of the books of a certain block. That's already a title. And I said to him, "What block he is in?" He tells me. The first chance I had I ran over to see him. Oh, when I saw him, I said, "Oh my God, today you don't know who is alive, who is dead." He says, he says to me, "Is there anything I can do for you?" I said, "Yes." I told him what *Kommando* I worked and the *Kapo*-- besides it's hard work, the *Kapo* was very bad. If I would leave by myself not to come to work he would report me and they could get to my number and the number they had a name and I would get lashes. They would just kill you there. But in order for you to change places he had to give you permission and the other guy had to say he wants you there. And my cousin, when I found out about him too he said he spoke to his *Kapo* and the *Kapo* said he would take me in to work for the painters. Now is the question if this guy should let me go. I said, "Maybe you can speak to the *Stubenältester,* the one that told me about you and knows you. He is closer to the *Kapo*. He is also-- he really ought to know each other maybe he would let me go." And that's what happened. They let me go and I went to them. This saved me. This saved me and later on also no one was left of that, that block we used to run in the kitchen in the morning to pick up coffee-- supposedly coffee. This was coffee? This was some dirty water with something, I don't know. And we had to get up a little earlier yet and drink it

in the main kitchen. And then we had to rinse it out and bring it back. And also the soup at night, they gave us out soup, [unclear] from [unclear]. And the soup, thicker part-- it got what used to be around it. This was a barrel out of wood used to scrape it and eat it, this was a little help.

PR: …and that helped save you.

HS: That what helped out.

PR: Was that all they gave you, just soup?

HS: Soup, they gave us a portion bread that was 90% sawdust. A small portion.

PR: And what was in the soup?

HS: The soup. I don't know what it was. It was mostly green stuff and who the heck knows grass, something was there. Whatever, it was just to fill up a little bit. And that's-- and also in Buna the head of the barrack he was also the head of the-- you know they had an orchestra at each camp. He was a Polish he was a fine man. He had two jobs, head of the orchestra and he also was the head of our barracks. He was a fairly decent person. He tried everything possible to make it better if he could. Whenever we marched to work he used to play-- we had to march just to, just so, and the SS has to watch. If you didn't march exactly, they would pull you out and let you have it. And then we came back also the same way. I know when I first came over to this country[4] and I lived with my family, my aunt and uncle, cousins and I could see at the time they wanted to ask me questions, but they just didn't know how to start and how I would react. At that time I didn't trust anybody, even my own family.

PR: How long had you been in the camps total?

HS: You mean between the camps and the ghetto?

PR: Just the camps.

HS: I was in Auschwitz alone over two years. Then I was a few months maybe in three or four different camps. This was at the end. They kept on dragging us from one place to the next. I, I didn't know, I just lost trust in humanity. I didn't trust anybody. I wasn't ready to talk. I just felt at the time that I have to keep quiet. I was in my-- I always thought about not so much what I went through, I thought about my family that I lost, about my friends, about the entire Jewish community. I come from a small town, I came, I knew almost everybody and I used to think about certain streets. The people who used to live in this house, and that house, and most of the houses, not even one of the family made it. And I just was not-- it was too painful to talk to say anything. The wound was too fresh, it was not healed. It will never heal, I will never forget, but today I feel I want to talk, I want to tell because it's already so many years past and we always, we always had-- the Jewish people always had enemies. They are still around and they will be around. And now after so many years some of them already are managing to write books

[4]He lived in Bavaria, Germany post-war. Mr. Shreibman was married in New York in 1953.

to make money out of a lie, to tell that such a thing never happened. It's the Jews, the no-good Jews are making it up. They just want to spoil the good name of the Germans and other people. And I feel now we are getting older and we don't know how long we will be around, especially the survivors that are the witnesses that saw all these things taking place. And after a while there will be nobody to tell what took place and especially it started by a country that was extremely, supposedly civilized. It was not a backward country and I don't believe when people say Hitler he was crazy. I don't believe he was crazy, neither was he crazy, and all the others, the tens of thousands that were trained special how to liquidate the Jews, you know. It was all planned ahead of time. They took their time and the people that participated in it were not just morons, they were professional people. They were doctors, lawyers, professors, from all walks of life. They were not crazy. This was just, this was not done just on the spur of the moment. This took a lot of planning and a lot of time. And if we are not aware what took place then this thing-- and some people feel that why should we talk about it? It is such a long time ago. This will not happen in any other place. This cannot happen in the United States. I say to them, "They better find out what took place." All the details, and more, they know, the less chance there will be that such a thing should happen again. You know, I also had people ask, "Why didn't the Jewish people fight back?" Although there is no facts about fights, let's say in the Warsaw Ghetto, in other ghettos, but I can only tell these people that resistance took place all over, every minute, every second. And I remember we were in the ghetto there was an order from the Germans that any time they find more than two Jews congregating together they'll be shot. That meant the Jewish people could never get together and pray because they needed a *Minyan* of 10 people and I remember when my father used to get up in the middle of the night and he used to go into a place in the basement and have a *Minyan* and a couple of Jews would go outside and watch for the Gestapo. And they risked their lives three times a day to pray. This was a question of life and death. To me this is resistance, too. To me also when people went outside to work outside the ghetto to work and they have guards guarding them all the time and somehow you ran inside the house where the Germans were and you grabbed a piece of bread. And this was a crime according to the Germans that they would shoot you for it. To me this is also resistance. Sure the Jewish people couldn't go and fight because we had no arms. Most of the East European countries, before the war, before the Germans came in, for possession of a gun, just for possessing a gun the penalty was higher than for killing someone in the United States. That's one thing. Furthermore, how could we get guns in the ghetto? We were not allowed to have it. The Germans used to come in the houses and search constantly. Let's say if you managed to go outside for work and once in a while you had occasions to see, or maybe for a second to see a person, a Christian that you knew, he wouldn't give you any help. We couldn't expect any help from them. For that matter, in most cases when Jewish people were hiding and they would know, they would find out about it, they would report it to the Gestapo because the Gestapo would give

them an extra pound of sugar for reporting a Jew in hiding. I mean, under such circumstances the little resistance and even actual fighting that took place, it's something that's-- it never in the history of mankind took place. The Jewish people, the people in the Warsaw Ghetto, they fought under the worst circumstances with no help from nobody. I know even in Auschwitz they used to select people that had to work in the crematoriums and the gas chambers. They called it the *Sonderkommando*. Those people never came back. They used to keep them there for a few months, used to feed them good, their job consisted pulling out the bodies from the gas chambers, then pulling out their teeth, if they had gold teeth or other things, shave them because the Germans also made use of the hair, of human hair and then they had to put them in, in the crematoriums. These people were dehumanized immediately, and the Germans for sure didn't want there should be witnesses. People that saw exactly what took place. Every three months they used to get rid of them and get new ones. A cousin of mine was selected for that job. The *Sonderkommando* one time decided that they are going to revolt and the German *Obersturmführer* came in, the rest of the SS, Gestapo. They got a hold of a few of them and took away their arms and they threw them in the ovens alive, they burned them alive. Unfortunately, it didn't last too long because they sounded an alarm and because they were, they were isolated from the rest of the camp. They were surrounded and all of them, unfortunately, ended up dead. But nobody has a right to judge. I can understand people asking the question. I can understand very well, but nobody that wasn't there would know the circumstances, the way things were. I also know an incident. Mussolini was an ally, Italy was an ally of Germany and Mussolini although he was a Fascist, but he was not anti-Jewish, he was not antisemitic. And when the Germans started to lose the war and they wanted to let it out more and more on the Jews, and they demanded from Mussolini they [unclear] him and they asked him he should let the Italian Jews out. That they need them for work and Mussolini with all his strength, with everything possible tried not to, not to let the Italian Jews go to Germany. Until finally when Mussolini started to lose the war in Africa and he started getting weak, he had no more power but the Germans just sent in a group, Gestapo, SS to Rome and they said they must have the Jews. And they fooled them so much that they told, they tell them that they are going to Germany to work, they need people to work. They put them in regular passenger trains and eventually they end up in Auschwitz. One of those people was a woman, a very famous actress. She was Jewish. The reason I know about this incident, when I worked in Auschwitz in the place where the shoemakers worked there was also a group of people under the same roof where I worked that used to take the shoes, the shoes from the gassed people used to be sent there. They would take them apart. Because some people used to hide, they found out, gold pieces in the heels and so forth. They used to tear them apart. One day all the shoes came full of blood. And this never happened before because people are gassed, there is no blood. Later on there was one of the guards, he was a decent person, you know he got friendly with one of the guys

at work, well he told him this story. That is how I happened to know it. While they were marching, they were marching the people to the gas chambers, gas chambers. And the Gestapo was very polite, the Gestapo, the SS. And one of the officers was talking to that woman to the actress. She was very beautiful. He spoke to her like a human being. They had a conversation about everything. Finally they came to the place and they told them to get undressed and like the usual routine everyone should remember where he put his clothes. They are going to have a-- to take a shower and most of the people got undressed and that woman did not get undressed. This *Obersturmführer* walked over to her and said, "Why don't you get undressed?" She says, "Well I don't want to get undressed in front of you." And he says, "Well, you better get undressed." And she says to him, "If he'll get undressed, I'll get undressed." And before you know it, he hit her and she grabbed his gun and shot him. After she shot him there was also an alarm was sounded and that transport of Jews was not gassed. They killed them all. There was a lot of resistance in different ways going on all the time. Let's put it this way, the Polish people were also oppressed or [unclear] by the Germans, they were occupiers. They weren't friends. Nobody fought against them actually in a battle except the few Jews that were left in the Warsaw Ghetto and also in different places, in Bialystok Ghetto, in different ghettos took place a lot of things a lot of resistance took place every day, every so often.

PR: It looks like we have very little tape left. Is there anything else you want to say?

HS: Now, the next thing I want to say is this when the war was over I was liberated in Hungary by the Americans army. It was a terrible feeling at the time, now you are-- here you are free and you have no place to go. You st-, you really start to take an account of yourself, and your family and you have nobody. It was a terrible feeling but at the same time I felt after what took place, after what was done to our people and to a degree it's not just by the Germans, by others that helped or the ones that just watched and didn't do anything about it, they just, they are guilty too. This is going to be the last time where the Jewish people will have problems again. And I was sure, I was sure 100% at least that in my lifetime, if some day I will have children they will have peace, but this is not the case. Israel was born after the Holocaust. It's a part of the Holocaust to a degree, but I don't want to get into it.

[Tape two, side two ended; end of interview.]