

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

NATHAN SNYDER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Nora Levin
Dates: October 11 and 15, 1984

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NS - Nathan Snyder¹ [interviewee]

NL - Nora Levin [interviewer]

Dates: October 11 and 15, 1984

Tape one, side one:

NL: This is an interview with Mr. Nathan Snyder, Nora Levin interviewing, on October 11, 1984. Now, Mr. Snyder, if you will be good enough to tell us a little about your early childhood, your place of birth, and a little about your family?

NS: I was born in Unter Stanestie, a small little town located in north Bukovina, which at that time of my birth, it was Romania, and presently, it is Russia. The year of my birth is May 21, 1926. Our town consists of approximately 250 Jewish people, which means families. Altogether, there were almost 60 to 70 families. The total population was 250.

NL: Out of how many?

NS: Well, the town itself, in the center of town, 99% were living Jews, but in the surrounding area, were all Ukrainians, some Poles, some *Schwaben*, we call them German, *Volksdeutsche* [ethnic Germans], and that was the surrounding.

NL: But the little town was largely Jewish, then?

NS: The town was largely Jewish from one end to the next.

NL: How did the Jews make their living?

NS: Every Jew--there were professional Jews like pharmacists and a couple of doctors and engineers and lawyers and bookkeepers and dentists, and the majority were merchants with stores. Some were not professional people but different handicrafts like shoemakers, and furniture makers and cabinet makers and *schochets*, which means ritual slaughterers of the animals, and there were two rabbis. There were a horse *shmit*, [blacksmith] and there were what we call them *balególes*, today carriage drivers; and woodchoppers and woodworkers in the forest. And all kinds of professions which were not considered actually professional people, but they were making a living.

NL: Was it a fairly prosperous town, would you say?

NS: That town was prosperous. Everybody was making a living. There were also some very small minority of poor people, but the Jewish community or the Jewish *kehillah* [community] were always helping out the poor people through the *Kultusgemeinde*, which is called the Jewish community in that town.

NL: And what was your father's occupation?

NS: My father's occupation was that we had a store, a manufacturing store of goods like wool and clothing and hats and all kinds of materials, shoes, and so on.

NL: I see, very varied manufacturing.

NS: Yes.

¹Formerly Schneider.

NL: Was it a large establishment?

NS: It was a large establishment because in our town, everybody owned their own house and the houses were also differing from your wealth or your actual income. Some had small houses, and some had elaborate houses. And there was even a next door to us lived a Jew by the name Ostra [phonetic] who was considered as of today, as a *graf*. And how you would translate it today? In English I would say a...

NL: A lord, a baron...

NS: A baron. He had a lot of land and forests and so he was considered a *graf*. He had a big mansion next door to us, on the left hand side. On the right hand side lived our rabbi, the *Rabbiner*, who was the main principal rabbi in town. So as you can see, our house was located in the prime section of the town. Our house was a very large house. It consisted of over 12, 13 rooms. We had a summerhouse in the back, with a large flower garden in the front, and guest rooms. And we also had some domestic animals like a cow, a horse, we had like chickens, and geese and ducks and a big vegetable garden. We had fruit trees, and we also had a patch of a couple, two or three acres of land there for our own use. We used like for corn or potatoes or for feed for the animals. We had a servant for as long as I can remember, and this goes back before my birth. They always had a servant, that you called a *magd*, maid who was a live-in. She had her own quarters and she was paid very well.

NL: A German girl?

NS: No, Ukrainian, Ukrainian girl. Most of the people who were over the average middle-class could afford to have a live-in maid.

NL: Did Father establish this business himself?

NS: No, that house was originally my grandfather's, and his name was Ephraim Yosef Binenfield, and he established that store way back in the 19th century. The exact date I do not have. And my father married my mother. And my father was in a town which is 80 to 90 miles away, also in Bukovina. And they married, I think, 1922 or 1923, the time they married. And then my father came over and moved over to our town and took over that store. The background of my father was that he had a very good educational background because his parents from Sucaveni were also barons and they owned a lot of land.

NL: Excuse me, was this title a formal one that was given by the Austro-Hungarian empire?

NS: That's exactly.

NL: Uh, huh.

NS: Yes, but my father had two more brothers. And my grandfather on my father's side had three sons, and he owned a lot of land, I would say, land and forest. In that little town there were only eight Jewish families. There was never enough for a *minyan*. For a *minyan*, they had to always ask for a neighborhood the Jews to come in for a *minyan*, or they used to go to a bigger town to say for the holidays, *yizkor* [memorial

prayer] or *kaddish*, for prayers and so on. So my grandfather from my father's side could afford to send my father to a better education, and he studied in Vienna, and he finished the university. That's before the First World War, he finished the university, and he enlisted in a medical school. His aim was to become a doctor.

NL: I see.

NS: But because the war broke out, he did not have a chance to continue study, and by Bukovina being under Austro-Hungarian rule at that time, my father was enlisted in the army. And because of his medical background, I am not sure, but I think my father went to the first year of medical school. But it wasn't enough to qualify him as a doctor, but because of his medical background, he was enlisted in an officer's school and became a first lieutenant in the Austro-Hungarian army.

NL: That was quite remarkable for a Jew, wasn't it?

NS: Yes. I remember that when I was pretty young, like six or seven, I used to always go and browse in my father's study room, and there were always medical books with pictures, anatomy. My father was very organized and very neat, and he did not want me to browse through those books so I shouldn't upset anything, and I used to always like to look through those books. And I remember in the closet he had a saber. I don't remember, it was a brass or, nice brass saber which was given to him as a decoration from the war and he kept it nicely in the corner, and also a couple of medals. I was too young to understand at that time what it means, but he didn't let me--he was against me to play with that saber because it was...

NL: Something special.

NS: Special, and I could hurt myself.

NL: And also dangerous.

NS: Dangerous because it was pointed.

NL: Did you get the impression that he was a patriot of the empire?

NS: I don't think so. I don't think so. He did his duty as a citizen, but my father had always had Zionist tendencies. By being in Austria with Theodor Herzl, actually originally he was from Budapest, but he lived in Vienna. And apparently by going to meetings, the Zionist movement took roots in that area from Vienna, Vienna, Switzerland, Hungary, and so on, Central Europe.

NL: Do you have some memories from going to any of those meetings or discussing...?

NS: I personally, later, yes. As a matter of fact, I, when I started to go to *cheder*, [one room school in eastern Europe for religious education] before going into the public school. But a young age, naturally every Jewish boy in town wasn't forced to go, but it was an honor to go to *cheder*. So, in our town we had Orthodox Jews and we had Conservative Jews. The majority of the Jews in town, I would say 65% - 70% were Orthodox, and the rest were Conservative, and that's the reason that we had two rabbis.

The rabbi who lived next to us was an Orthodox Jew, and there was another rabbi, who was a second rabbi, who was Conservative.

NL: And your parents belonged?

NS: My grandfather was a very, very Orthodox Jew. As a matter of fact, my grandfather was what we call today, not a rabbi, because he had the diploma or--there is a name for that in Hebrew.

NL: *Smicha*. [ordination]

NS: *Smicha* to become a rabbi, but he was more like a *Zsadek* [pious-saintly]. He was always studying Talmud, and this is the way, I was his protégé up till the war, up till my grandfather passed away. Naturally he was very Orthodox and he was a *Hasid*, belonging to the Vischnitzer Rabbi [also Vishniets] He was a Vischnitzer *Hasid*. [pious religious follower] Vischnitz is a town in east, near the Polish border known as today--they have Novoseller Rabbi and other rabbis, and I think there are some followers of the Vischnitzer Rabbi in Israel, who are very, very ultra-Orthodox.

NL: And your parents--Why don't you have a drink since you are the one that is doing so much talking? No? Your parents were, their orientation was Orthodox?

NS: My mother was very Orthodox. My father was a modern Orthodox, considered between Conservative and Orthodox. My grandfather had a long beard and *peyes*, [side locks] and I wore *peyes* up till age 13, to the bar mitzvah. My father did not have *peyes* or a beard, but he was very Conservative but also...

NL: Observant.

NS: Yes, very observant.

NL: And, you were talking earlier about your interest in Zionism. Do you remember some early experiences?

NS: Yes, the Zionist movement started in our town prior to me being born because there was a movement throughout Eastern Europe. Because of the pogroms and the misery and the killing and the suffering of Jews, and, as a matter of fact, the founders of Israel come from eastern Europe, Poland, Russia, Romania, and from that section. There were a lot of organizations which have, their aim was to become *chalutzim* [pioneers, settlers] and to go to Palestine at that time to build the land, prepare the land. And [unclear] there were Jabotinsky and Trumpeldor, which were actually the idols of the *Betar* organization, which is today *Herut*, and today they call them Revisionists.

NL: And, is this the movement that you were attracted to?

NS: I was attracted to that movement. Yes, in my town there were general Zionists. There were *Hashomer Hatzair*, more to the Labor, to the left, to the right, to the middle and so on, and *Betar*, or *Herut* was more a little bit to the right extreme, but it wasn't a rightist. It was more a nationalistic party or organization. Their aim was Israel, according to the Bible, belongs on both part of the Jordan. And there was a strong movement of Jabotinsky and Trumpeldor at that time in Bukovina, because he even came and held speeches in Czernowitz, which is a big city in Bukovina. My father was *allgemein*, general

Zionist, but from *cheder* with my friends I joined the *Betar* organization in our little town. I was too young to understand exactly what Palestine means to the Jews at that time, but I like that organization with their songs and their stories. And it gave me a feeling of patriotism with the Israel flag which we displayed, at that time was blue and white with a Jewish star, which we never knew that because I was too young to understand that we are living under persecuted regime in Romania or whatever. In Diaspora, the Jews were not actually in command.

NL: You were talking before, Mr. Snyder, about pogroms. Did your community have any direct experience of violence, violent persecution against Jews?

NS: Yes, my community, according to my mother's stories, pogrom was taking place in the First World War when it was a war of Austria-Hungaria with Russia. Czernowitz-Bukovina [unclear] in my town was under Austria-Hungaria. In the First World War in one of those offensive the Russian occupied the town for a half a year. Naturally, the Cossacks, they were the first to come into the town, and they raped, plundered, killed, robbed, maimed, and naturally, this is what is called a pogrom, mostly Jews. After six months they were thrown out by the Austro-Hungarians so, my town experienced that pogrom already, and I don't know exactly it was 1915 or 1916. There is a history of pogroms, not only my town but in the entire region.

NL: What about persecution from the Romanian side?

NS: Well, antisemitism was always, but we as Jews, unfortunately, we always lived, we always were used to be bent down with the head down, not up, submitting, submission. We knew that we are second-grade, second class. That is not our country, so, we felt antisemitism and prejudice in school, on the streets. Many times we had fights, the young boys in groups, together fighting with others who called us "Dirty Jew" or other derogatory names.

NL: Did your father have some unfortunate experiences in connection with his business, too?

NS: No, because, mostly our customers were Ukrainians and we had a very good relationship, because my father was very humble man so, most of them, I would say 99% of our customers never paid cash, C.O.D. up front, they always have credit with us. They used to come in, like to fill out a dowry for their daughters or whatever, and it was big sum of money, so we always have creditors. I'm sorry, I don't mean creditors, I mean debtors. They always took money from us and paid us in installments, so we had a good relationship with all the Ukrainian customers.

NL: Now, can you tell us a little about your experiences in *cheder*. You went as a very young child, I guess.

NS: I was, yes, I was I think I was age five or six when I started to go to *cheder*. And we had different classes, age group, and the rabbis or the teachers from that *cheder* were not local. They were professionals, mostly came from Hungary, or Transylvania, which is called in German *Siebenbürgen*, [state in Germany] which was actually at that

time Austria and Hungary was together, so Transylvania was part of Romania. And they were hired for a year or two contract, the teachers, and they were good. They were supervised actually by the local *kehillah*, [community] the teaching. They give us a good value of Judaism or Talmud or preparing us for bar mitzvah and so on. My years in *cheder* were very fruitful. Naturally, as young boys we had different mischiefs and adventures and so, like all the young boys had. And I was prepared for my bar mitzvah and my grandfather had a big influence on me. He wanted me to become a *Hasid* [follower of Baal Shem-Tov - Pious one] like he is. I remember that he used to travel once a year to Vischnitzer, where there was like a reunion, or better to say, what do you call that, assembly, and I went once to his assembly, and it took three days. They used to bring different fruits, and chicken, and flowers and so on, and he took me to that rabbi, to the Vischnitzer Rabbi, for one reason, that I should be blessed, and the rabbi did bless me.

NL: Were you impressed with that or frightened?

NS: I will never forget. I remember that he was sitting with a white caftan on a high stool. And my grandfather came in and he said, "I want you to bless my grandson because he is not good." "Not good," means that he is mischievous. "I want him to be more settled," and he gave me a *shmirah*, [amulet] a *shmire*. [amulet] It was made from lead, and also another *shmirah* made from silver, or something like that. And we should put it on a little string on my neck, and he put his hand on me, naturally I had a *yarmulke* [skullcap] on, and said a *broche* [blessing] and he blessed me. And then this was my adventure which I can recall, the *Hasidim* with the dancers, with the prayers and all that. It was like a festival, and this town was a very religious town. Friday night was the ritual to go to the *mikveh* [ritual bath] and at three or four o'clock everyone was preparing themselves for the big Shabbat day. Every woman on Thursday started to clean and scrub and prepare and change, and bake and cook, and it was all Thursday night preparing for the day of Shabbat, and my mother was one of those that used to prepare all kinds of meats and dishes and so on. Then came Friday at five o'clock, and the town was still because everybody used to go to the synagogue and there was *erev shabbos* [before sabbath] for *mincha* [late afternoon prayer service] and *ma'ariv*, [evening prayer] and so on, and shabbat all day, we used to be half a day in *shul*, [synagogue] with *shaharis* [morning] and *musaf*, additional sabbath and holiday service; all special parts of the service and so on. It was a holy day, and naturally no one smoked, and no one went traveling, because cars didn't exist, but people had horses and carriages. No work was done, even not lit a fire because we had the *shabbos-goy*. Some had *cholent* [sabbath stew] already from Friday that you don't have to lit nothing in the oven, and we had a *cholent* every Friday, so we didn't even have that.

NL: You had mentioned your sister Miriam before. Did she have a Jewish education? Did girls have a Jewish education, in general?

NS: The Jewish girls, unfortunately, is not like in the modern time today, in the present time, because for some reason, Jewish girls, their education was more home, but their mothers has to go in public.

NL: She went to public school, of course?

NS: Oh sure, but I remember in the synagogue, women and men did not sit together. The women had upstairs a balcony, separated. So the girls did not go to *cheder*. My sister did not get the Hebrew school education, but she got it at home, with prayers with my mother, with the *broches*, [blessings] and so on.

NL: Now, when did you start going to public school? How old were you, Mr. Snyder?

NS: I don't recall exactly but it must have been age six or seven that I went to public school.

NL: You went to *cheder* and public school simultaneously.

NS: Together, yes. *Cheder* on Sunday, we had all day *cheder*, and then during the day from Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday we had--Thursday was examining day, that was the test day--we had after school. We used to come home and have a bit and then go to *cheder* which was not too far away. And I remember that Thursday was--why I remember Thursday was examining day, because if you did not know the *pusik* [Hebrew: *p'suk* – verse] from that week, we used to get a little willow over your hands, so many. You have to know, you have to actually learn and pay attention the *pusik* from that week. *Pusik*, it means “segment”. He was a very tough rabbi, I understand, he did for our interest, but as kids we didn't pay attention at that time.

NL: It's a very typical story.

NS: But we did learn a lot.

NL: And your experience in public school? Can you say a few words about that?

NS: We went to public school, and the teachers in public school naturally were all non-Jews and...

NL: No Jewish teachers.

NS: No Jewish teachers. No way.

NL: They simply were not accepted.

NS: Not accepted, exactly, because that was a class where Jews were not admitted to that. We have learned prejudice and antisemitism in school day out and day in. As an example, every day we had prayers in school where we were all standing up, and we had to stand up, and they were kneeling and we were forced to kneel, too, except they made the cross and we did not, but they were always bringing up in that prayers. And this is the way the indoctrinated the Jew-hating into children of my age, about how Jesus Christ was crucified by the Jews, and then used to go out. “Our Lord was killed by the Jews.” That's simple. It happened 2000 years ago, but kids my age did not understand that. And when we had recess, we used to go out in the courtyard, and we used to get beaten up by them, because they said, “You killed our Lord, Jesus Christ,” and I said, “I didn't.” What

did I do? I am innocent. I don't know nothing about this." So then we started defending ourselves, and then we used to have fights. Some time the fight was followed after school, home, and most of the time we were victorious.

NL: You were?

NS: Yes, because I was known as a bully, and I used to beat up a lot of them. This is what I am saying. I had a nationalistic feeling at the time. You have to take defense in your own hands, because no one would defend you. But I was too young to understand and never dreamed what would follow later, but we always had fights.

NL: Did you have any friends among the non-Jewish boys, Mr. Snyder, anyone you could really call a friend?

NS: Well, there was a girl, who was the daughter of a judge. There was one judge in town. He was called "The Hanging Judge". That judge, most of his friends were Jews. He used to come together with the Jews, with the doctors and with my father, and with the pharmacists, with the intellectuals in town, playing rummy, bridge, coffee *klatches* [get together] and so on. Beneath his surface, he was a Jew-hater but...

NL: He liked the company?

NS: Yes, and he used to get a lot of gifts and bribes, and then they built him a nice villa there, and he was the judge. There weren't too many criminal cases in that town. We didn't have any rapes and murders in that town. Maybe a dispute over land, or a dispute over business or debts, those were actually the trials there. But he lived not too far from us, and he had a daughter my age, must have been seven or eight years old, and we were good friends. As a matter of fact, I used to come to their home, and she used to come to my home. As a matter of fact, she liked me and I liked her, and we never discussed about who is Jew and who is not and who is Christian and who is not--and...

NL: That was an exception?

NS: That was an exception. Maybe yeah. That's one, and then I had another friend, who was non-Jew, from school, but one day he told me that his father told him that he's not allowed to be friends with me, and I said, "Why? I didn't do nothing to you," and he said, "Well, my father told me that you are a "Stinking Jew", and that you killed our Lord."

NL: This was when you were eleven or twelve.

NS: No, this was younger, like eight or nine. I came home to my father, and I told him that, and I said, "Why? I didn't do nothing," so, Jews learned to absorb like a sponge. That is how it is supposed to be, and it goes on for generations. You live with that, but the brain-washing and the poisoning of the mind was going on for years. No wonder what happened later, during the Holocaust. I learned from experiences always that--I remember that I used to play soccer, there it used to be called football, and we had in our group mostly Jews. We had our own club and I was already eleven or twelve years old. Naturally, we played not in a field, we had just grass and barefoot without shoes. That is called village playing. We used to always play against another group who were non-

Jews. We always used to win, and after the game was over, we had fights. They used to attack us.

NL: For winning?

NS: For winning. So then we used to [unclear] them, because we used to beat them up. So the next time it used to come in school, it used to be beaten up by others, because he beat them up, and this was going on all the time. It wasn't something that was frightful, because this was the life. This is it. There isn't something else. In the meantime, I got my education in Zionism. And I knew that there was a homeland which has to built, and is now Palestine. And the aim is for all the Jews to live there, like they used to say in all the prayers, "*Leshanah ha-ba'ah b'Yerushalayim.*" [Next year in Jerusalem] So it was like a dream for us at that time.

NL: But, your parents didn't think about going there?

NS: No one thought.

NL: No one.

NS: There were some very young ones, like in the twenties, who had more understanding...

Tape one, side two:

NS: They took off. We heard that they went as *chalutzim* [pioneers] to work for six months or a year. And then they wound up in Israel, *Eretz* [Land] Israel, we used to call it at that time, as *chalutzim*, pioneers, and so on. We heard that, but the majority of the Jews never talked about going there because the Zionist movement wasn't a daily obsession. Everyone was interested in making a living, and living peacefully in a house and surviving. That's what everybody care.

NL: Now, you had, or course, many reactionary regimes in Romania in the early to middle thirties?

NS: When I reached the age of eleven or twelve, then we had, yes, we had the regimes from the king, there were parties like the Iron Cross, and the anti-Jewish movements started at that time. They hate of, they call them Cuzars [from Alexandrer Cuza (1857-1946), leader of antisemitic policies and parties] like the Nazi brown shirts in Germany, demonstrating, parading with the flags.

NL: Even in your little town?

NS: Yes, in the little town.

NL: This would be in the middle thirties or so?

NS: That was in '37 or '38 when Hitler started to kick in Germany, that disease has spread all over Europe. Naturally, not all the population took place. Mostly there were some rough guys. Intelligentsia were the leaders, but they had to be educated, like the postmaster, or the clerk that worked in the city hall. They were the leaders, and the peasants followed. Not too many, but we saw them.

NL: In the Iron Cross movement?

NS: In the Iron Cross movement, yes, because, after the First World War, when Romania joined the Allies, it was given to them Bukovina, so, they were not the Romanian population there, but Romania occupied by authorities. So, naturally, the influence came from Romania, and so some of the Christians joined that movement. They even used to walk by and break windows, throw bricks or stones into the windows, and this was like a rash for two or three hours, and the next day it was forgotten. But then the Jews were worried about it. Why did they do this to us? Because here we shake hands with them and don't do anything to them which is bad or destructive, and they hate us so much. But I was too young to understand it at that time, why, but I had a feeling, that I couldn't understand--Why, it was not my fault that I was born a Jew. I am a human being the same as them, and suddenly they hate me. It was a fear like on holidays, or New Year's. They had a whole ritual of *Coza*, which means they used to dress like a goat and walk around. That ritual goes back a couple of hundred years. That ritual was the dressing of the goat, a head of a goat, and it was to disperse the devil, which actually isn't a Jew, but it had something to do with a Jewish devil, which was to be dispersed, and the coming of the New Year.

NL: This was an annual...?

NS: That is a Ukrainian annual ritual, yes.

NL: What time of the year?

NS: Exactly on the 31st of December.

NL: I've never heard of that.

NS: Then they used to go and...

NL: And a large part of the population participated?

NS: Oh, yes, they used to go around, and that goat had two horns was representing the Jews, the Devil, and there was always one other one in the back dressed in a national costume with a long whip and he used to whip him symbolically. And he used to then jump up like suffering pain and he used to say, "Curse you, Jew, curse you, Jew!"

NL: A real scapegoat.

NS: Yes, a scapegoat. Not, that exactly. At that time the Jews were always closing their doors. They didn't let us out from the house because of violence, but I used to watch from the windows all of the time. They used to go by and say their prayers and the church bells used to ring and so on. It was like a festivity until late night and the next day was New Year's Day. I remember that.

NL: And then you would have a period of quiet?

NS: Then quiet, and then the other period which was unrest was Easter, naturally, Resurrection. I am sorry, not Resurrection, it was when Jesus was crucified.

NL: Good Friday.

NS: Good Friday was a very, very solemn day for them, and a very frightful day for us, because at that time the hate was more outspoken. Jesus was crucified, and so, I remember, that even in school they used to teach in front of us, and we were also punished in school many times, standing I remember for nothing. Like we used to be punished, the punishment was to stand in a corner, and hot, dry corn, was thrown on the floor, and we had to stay on our naked knees on the corn with our hands up. And now you know what's happening. It wasn't a lot of corn, it was like ten different pieces.

NL: Kernels.

NS: Kernels, and it used to dig in you, and to stay there because of disrespect or whatever it was. Mostly Jews got punished in that corner.

NL: How long were you able to stay in school?

NS: I stayed in school until 1940, when the Russians marched into our town.

NL: This was *Gymnasium* [high school]?

NS: No, no, no, no, I'm sorry. In 1938 my father had me transferred to Czernowitz, a big city, to go to *Gymnasium*.

NL: Czernowitz?

NS: Czernowitz. I left the high school, what we called elementary school, the public school. The public school consists of, if I am not mistaken, eight or ten classes, but I only did four or five, and then I was transferred. It cost money. That was...

NL: Tuition?

NS: Tuition. Yes, to the *Gymnasium*. I don't know how you call it here, but *Gymnasium* was more a private. You had to pay money, and there were all kinds. There were business and technical and all kinds for professional later life.

NL: And where did you live?

NS: When I was in Czernowitz, I lived with my aunt, my mother's sister. I lived there and studied in the *Gymnasium*. You had a special uniform, and I liked it there. We had more friends. There was a lot of girls and fellows, we used to go to the movies. For the first time in my life I saw a movie. We lived in a big town with a tramway, which we called street cars, and there were more cars and buses, and it was more like city life. There were parks and so on, and there we did not feel so much antisemitism, because in that school, I used to go, and I will never forget the name, it was called "*Gymnasium of Commerce, Julia Valeor*". Julia Valeor was our main hero and it was named after him, and 90% were Jews and, 90% of the professors were Jewish.

NL: How do you account for that?

NS: In the big cities, yes, Czernowitz was a city of 100,000 Jews, and predominately the entire city was not controlled, but lived in, and I would say, 90% were Jews.

NL: And you were in the commercial courses?

NS: I was in the commercial *Gymnasium*. If I would have graduated from the *Gymnasium*, I would have gone on to be an accountant or a financial advisor, whatever you want to call it, it's like a commercial--specialized...

NL: But you had to leave by 1940?

NS: That happened in 1938 or '39. In 1939 the war started between Germany, no, Germany occupied half of Poland. I'm not sure if it's '39 or '40. No, in '39 they were busy in Austria, Czechoslovakia and all of the rest, but in 1940² exactly, when Stalin made a pact with Hitler: "Let's divide Poland in half." The Germans marched into Poland, and they had a war with Poland. You know, they took half of Poland, so the Russian said, "We will take the other half." Naturally, we were in their path, so they took us, too. They occupied Bukovina, Bessarabia, which is on the east side of Romania. It used to belong many, many years to the Czars, so he claimed it, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. So, those five provinces Russia occupied without asking the United Nations, well, they didn't exist, without asking the Allies. They just walked in and took it. Like Hitler took the rest of Europe, and it made a nice pact between them. So, now we lived under a different regime, and it was called the Russian, the Communists, the Soviets.

NL: How did that affect your lives?

²Germany invaded Poland in September 1939. The German-Soviet pact was signed in August 1939. The Nazi-Soviet pact, also known as the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was signed on August 23, 1939 (*Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, vol. 3).

NS: Well, it affected it a lot because, there were a lot of Jews, because of the repression and the prejudice, many Jews joined the Communist party. It wasn't actually the Communist party at that time, it was a movement which considers everybody equal. According to Marx and Lenin's teaching, which is not today, and it's only a bluff, but that goes that everybody is equal. There is no religion, there is no nothing, everybody that is a human being is equal against the rich and so on, *proktar*. [unclear] So, many Jews had no choice, but it was better to be with the light-headed devil than the dark devil. Between the two devils you choose the best one. Naturally, they welcomed the Russian. I remember before the Russian came in, we had already came back to our town, because we knew that something, is going back across the border. Nobody opposed them. The Romanians went back to Romania, and I came back to town, and they came back. They marched in with a couple of tanks, and troops came in, and they threw flowers and candies to the kids, and everybody welcomed them.

NL: Your father wasn't too worried?

NS: No one was worried. Actually we welcomed them. At least the Iron Cross and the Jew-haters are not going to hurt us, because in that time in the Russian army there were a lot of Jewish officers, a lot of Jewish commissars, a lot of Jews in Russia at that time held a high position, and so on. Stalin's brother-in-law was Jewish--Kaganovich [Lazar Moiseyevich Kaganovich]

NL: How was father's business affected? Did the Russian take over?

NS: Well, that is a chapter by itself. As soon as the Russian walked in, after a week, if not sooner, they nationalized everyone, including your house. You did not own nothing. Everything that you have belongs to us.

NL: You had no idea...?

NS: And, whatever you had belongs to us. So we actually became suddenly owned by the state, belonged to the state. But they didn't throw you out from your house, but the house that you live in is not yours. Naturally, they closed all the shops. What they did is, they came over and they nationalized. They took inventory and they took over the store. We couldn't have a store anymore. They dispersed the stores, because they had one department store for everybody.

NL: And, what sort of work was Father given?

NS: My father had to work, because if you didn't work, you were a parasite, a germ, a parasite, a vagabond. So, my father got a job to work in a, not a taproom but it was like a *Schenke*. It's a big, big beer hall, and mostly peasants used to come in there, and my father was the manager over there, he and another one. One was the manager, and one was the financial bookkeeper and so on. It was owned by the state. They used to get the beer and disperse it, so he worked over there.

NL: And he was given a salary?

NS: Yes, he was given a salary and free beer.

NL: Do you want to rest for a minute?

NS: No, no. I went to school, naturally. Everybody had to go to the Russian school, and Russian school has changed, different now, but me being already in the *Gymnasium*, in higher education, and there I joined the Russian but the equivalent so I wind up like being in the 10th grade as far as the Russian were concerned. Now, the teachers have changed, too. A couple of teachers remained, they changed their, their...

NL: Philosophy?

NS: No, their clothing. Superficial. They no longer made any remarks about Jews, about Jesus Christ, about Jews being the Christ-killers. They had to teach according to the Russian philosophy and...

NL: Was it more comfortable? Did you feel more secure?

NS: Yes, we felt more secure.

NL: Were there any Jewish teachers in...?

NS: Yes.

NL: There were?

NS: Yes. Not from town, but some [unclear] Jewish teachers from outside.

NL: Were you now back in Czernowitz, or did you stay in your little town?

NS: No, I stayed in the little town. Life was going on, and it was different. The Jews felt more equal, not their superior, but more equal, because there was somebody in Moscow who was protecting everybody, the citizens.

NL: No antisemitism?

NS: Well, still antisemitism.

NL: But not official?

NS: Not official, exactly. Because you must understand that those who became authorities from the Russian, there were also some Jews, which we didn't know in the beginning. They said, "Look, I am a Jew born, but I'm a Russian first. I am a Communist, so I don't make any difference between you and him, so they were actually brainwashed already from the Communist Party. We didn't realize what would happen eleven months later. You know, that's happened a year later. So that was going on...

NL: What did you study? Were you still in a commercial course?

NS: No, what happened is...

NL: Under the Russian?

NS: What happened is, we knew that when you reached the age of seventeen, you will have to go to the army. If I am not mistaken, there was a war between Finland and Russia at that time.

NL: 1940.

NS: Yes.

NL: The Russian were losing.

NS: The Russian were losing yes, and some of the local Jews that were age twenty-one, twenty-two, I won't say teenagers, but the young people, they were recruited in the army and went to fight in Finland, and they came back with decorations and so on.

They were integrated in the Russian army. But in May of 1941, life was going on, as they say. We knew one thing: that the Russian relocate people, because they did it in the Ukraine and all over when they come in, they used to take the rich people, the *bourgeoisie*, and deport them. They used to call it relocation, not deportation. But, in May, they started to deport Jews from our town, We were on the list, we know that.

NL: As *bourgeoisie*?

NS: Oh yes, they deported every night like three families. They come in a big black truck with the pajamas. They say, "Go in," and the next morning you find out that the house is sealed and they are gone. Where, we don't know. We found out later that they put them in a cattle train and back to Siberia.

NL: By the way, did you have many people now living in your house after it was nationalized?

NS: No.

NL: Just your own family?

NS: And, no more maid. The maid had to go.

NL: And, just a word about your schooling. Did you feel that you were getting a lot of Communist propaganda in school?

NS: Yes. A lot of propaganda. And anti-religious.

NL: Anti-religious.

NS: Take a look and ask and pray, "Does God come? No, he doesn't." Now you say: It started, "Our Father, our provider," And the door opens and the sandwiches come in. Those things, that's how they brain-wash you. It had an effect on the little babies who were only five or six years old. On us, we knew that it was only a comedy. But those were the propaganda.

NL: What were you learning? What were you preparing for? Not commerce, obviously.

NS: General education: Russian, algebra, mathematics, history, naturally, Russian history, Communist. I actually wanted to do something for the future, and by my father being a businessman, a merchant, there was a spot, a bad spot in my biography.

NL: Sure.

NS: So, I wanted to become a train locomotive engineer, and actually there was a question for volunteers, for young kids to go to school in Kharkov which is in Russia, and they used to go there for two to three years and be trained. To me that was adventurous, to travel on a choo-choo train all over Russia, thousands and thousands of miles.

NL: And some Jewish boys were doing that?

NS: Yes, a couple left, and they had to take tests, physically and mentally, and so on, and I remember that there were two Ukrainian boys and two Jews, there were four of us, we went to Czernowitz to make a test, and we were all together and we had nice uniforms and food, and travel, and they will train us. That's it and actually I registered for

it, but my mother was very much against it and my father, too, but I figured that, that it's an adventure, and sometimes you don't think about your consequences in the future.

NL: By the way, did the boys who went for a few years come back, or did they stay in Russia?

NS: I never knew, to this day, what happened to them.

NL: They may have been caught up in the war, of course.

NS: I remember that we came back from the test, and we had approval. Well, three weeks later the war started. Why I mentioned two Christians and two Jews went, because we were all friends, and we were going to be together, to sleep tighter in one room together and so forth. During the massacre, one of those Christians was one of the guards at the house where those Jews were kept.

NL: I am not clear about that.

NS: One of those young Christian so-called friends, who was supposed to go with me to that special school, became, during the massacre of the Jews, three weeks later he became, one of the guards, involved outside. He had a machete or knife or a rifle, I don't remember; and I approached him before we went in, before they wheeled us into the [unclear], I said, "Why is it, why is everybody armed? We didn't do nothing." He said, "I am sorry, we were friends, but I can't do nothing. That is the law. I have to listen to others." But I said, "We are friends. Remember we were supposed to go together." He said, "I know but I cannot help you. I am sorry." I will never forget that.

NL: We'll come back to that in a moment, Mr. Snyder. Tell me a little more about the deportations. You said that three families or so every night were taken, and these were those labeled as *bourgeoisie*.

NS: Yes. They took away--like one had a forest, a rich Jew by the name of Karpel, which is mentioned in his book. Another one was Meltzer, rich. What I mean by rich, they had assets in forest and fields, and they were the first ones. They took away the whole family, and the next morning we found out they disappeared, they're gone, relocated. But somebody told us that they come with big black trucks at night time, and they come in and take you out in pajamas, the way you are, and load you up and good-bye, and you can take nothing with you.

NL: And they were destined to go to Siberia?

NS: We were also. We were on the list. Why we were on the list, because somebody was [unclear] worked in the City Hall, and he was Jewish, and somehow he leaked it out, which families, he didn't know when, but are destined, are going to be deported. We would be better off at that time. Those who were deported to Siberia survived. Those who didn't die from starvation or from cold survived: after the war they came back. Maybe it would have been better.

NL: But you didn't know that, of course.

NS: Yes, we were on the list, because we had a store and a beautiful home and so on. I think they deported all together no more than seven or eight Jewish families. Also

non-Jewish families, rich Ukrainians, too. who owned land, who had ten cows. They considered them, “*Kulak*,” they called them. You know, “exploiters”. They deported them, too; it was not only Jews. But we were on the list; if on the 22nd of June 1941 the war wouldn’t have started, we would have been deported maybe two or three days later. We were prepared, as a matter of fact. We knew that we couldn’t take anything with us, but every night we were waiting for the truck to come, and knock on the door that we should get deported.

NL: These people that came were...?

NS: Can you stop it for a minute, please? [Pause] That was the episode with the deportation.

NL: Now, what happened on June 22, 1941?

NS: I remember another incident which related back to 1940 [1939] when Germany attacked Poland and the Polish army fell apart, a lot of them run away to the border, because we were only 25 miles from the Polish border, Galicia. They came through Romania. Naturally, they wind up later in Constanta [Port city in Romania] which is a port, on ships and went to England, where the Free Polish Army fought with the Allies. Mostly Polish officers and very rich Poles, and they came with their entourage, their big dogs and their families and their jewels, and they came in their army trucks, and they run to our town. We as Jews were very humble and we wanted to help them, with food, and we felt sorry for them. For the first time in my life I saw refugees. We knew that the Germans have invaded their country, so, we were helping them, trying to help them, and I remember that personally we walked out and said, “Would you like to have water, juice, or anything?” So, they used to say in Polish “From a Jew we don’t take nothing”, used to say “a Polish phrase,” which means--excuse me for saying it-- “I better make in my pants before I give up to a Jew or before I accept from a Jew.” And I said, “Why?” The Germans, we didn’t know at that time, the Nazis, are beating them, and they come to us through our town, and we want to help them, and they don't accept nothing from us. So, the Polish aristocracy already were infected with Jew-hating, so that is another incident which relates back.

NL: By the way, before we go on, Mr. Snyder, were you in your little town at all aware of what was happening to German Jews under Hitler?

NS: No. No.

NL: Nothing. You knew nothing?

NS: No. I know only one thing, that we had an uncle who lived in Vienna in Austria, who was a step-brother of my mother, and his name was [unclear]. And in 1939, before Hitler invaded Austria, Vienna, in 1938, he was smart enough to emigrate to America, to the United States, and the reason why was because he knew there’s going to be *Anschluss*. [political union of Nazi Germany and Austria - 1938]. That Hitler already started making waves, so he knew, and then he found out that they had to go away because

they didn't want to live under Hitler, because from all of his speeches he knew that Hitler was not a friend of the Jews.

NL: Did you know what was happening to Polish Jews?

NS: No.

NL: You didn't even know that.

NS: No, nothing, because those Poles who were retreating were mostly officers and aristocrats.

NL: No news?

NS: No, because the Jews from Poland who succeeded to escape from the onslaught of the Germans in 1940 didn't come to us. They went to Russia, toward the Russian border.

NL: But you didn't hear anything in the newspapers?

NS: Nothing.

NL: Your Jewish leaders in the *kehillah* didn't inform you?

NS: They knew that there was a war going on, and the Russian took half Poland and Germans took half Poland.

NL: Those in Vienna knew, of course.

NS: We didn't know that.

NL: All right, so now on June 22.

NS: On June 22 at four o'clock in the morning, we had radios, all, in our town there was no electricity, and we had petroleum lamps, nice chandeliers with petroleum lamps all over the house. We didn't have any sanitation facilities, we had outhouses, which were very nice and elegant outside the house. We didn't have gas because we used to heat with wood. It was old-fashioned. The radios were operated by batteries. So, we heard that the war started, that the Germans bombed and attacked Russia. It was June the 22nd, 1941, and by eight o'clock we knew in town that something is going on. We didn't know that the outcome, but we saw Russian, our town wasn't strategic, really, Czernov was the most strategic. But it was not too far, we saw Russian trucks going back and forth, back and forth, and traveling through, and you couldn't ask them, because they wouldn't have told you. A couple of tanks went through, planes overhead, German planes, Russian planes, but we didn't know what the outcome is. Had we known that the outcome was going to be the massacres, we would have picked up at that time, with nothing, just like we are, and just run to Russia. Well, some of them did that, some who were actually in the Communist Party, some who were active, really didn't do that.

NL: Followed the army?

NS: No, before even the army ran. They knew that when the Germans came in, they were going to be in trouble so they took off. Some succeeded, some were caught, because there was a *Blitzkrieg*. [Fast-like lightening warfare]. We call *Blitzkrieg* fast. The Russian caught them, and they were shot, or they ended up in concentration camps, or whatever it is.

NS's wife: The Germans caught them, not the Russian.

NS: But some Jews from our town, very few, I would say, maybe five or six families, were smart enough to leave Stanestie and go to Czernowitz, because it is a big city. They had some intuition, some gut feeling that it is not good to stay here, and they went to Czernowitz. We never thought about that. We had friendly Ukrainian neighbors for years. My father had in that town two Ukrainians who he was together in the Austrian-Hungarian army in the First World War. The one was a sergeant, and the other was also some title in the army, and they were all together in the same outfit. So he figured, "I have nothing to fear, I didn't do nothing," and no one feared. So, the war started on June 22nd, and on the 23rd and the 24th, those who were working, there was a commissar or like the militia, or police-a couple of them who were working with the authorities, they all took off. In the morning we woke up and they were gone. So, the town was left like open.

NL: Leaderless?

NS: Leaderless. And, if I'm not mistaken, it was the 22nd, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. By Thursday Jews couldn't get out from the house, because what happened is, Ukrainians appointed themselves juror and judge. They were patrolling the street and say, "It is wartime. No one can go out from this house. It has to be curfew."

NL: This was before the Germans came?

NS: Oh, the Germans were not even there. So everyone starts to prepare food. You know, whatever you have, corn, prepared food, and fruit and vegetables, because we used to keep vegetables from the winter in our cellar. And made preparation for food and such, because you don't know what will happen, and we didn't know how long the war was going to last. But, then we have the news that the Germans are already over the Russian border and they are advancing, and somebody says, "More up north." Friday the Jews start to go to synagogue and they couldn't, or the *mikveh*, [ritual bath] and they couldn't.

NL: They were blocked?

NS: Blocked.

NL: By the Ukrainians.

NS: By the Ukrainians. They were not letting any Jew out of the house.

NL: And in this blockage were some people that you knew?

NS: Oh yes, they were all Jews in the same...

NL: I mean the Ukrainians that you knew, neighbors.

NS: Right. They didn't even let us out of the house, to go to the next door Jewish neighbors, to ask what was going on. So everybody was locked in their own house. So was my mother, my father and my sister and I.

NL: And these were self-appointed?

NS: Self-appointed.

Tape two, side one:

NL: Yes.

NS: We looked out the Venetian blinds and this was Friday afternoon, I understand, I remember that my mother made the regular *shabbos*. [Sabbath] She made *challah* [sabbath bread] and *cholent* [sabbath meal] and *gefilte fish*, [variety of fishes ground together and cooked] not *gefilte* fish--what we call carpfish--regular fish--and soup and chicken and so on, and *Braten*, [roast] and all that. Everything was prepared in the house. We didn't have a maid at that time; everything was done by mother. But I looked out, adventuresome I was a boy, and in 1941 I was exactly thirteen years old. I looked out, and I see the Ukrainians going back and forth. They didn't have cars or jeeps, but they were running back and forth and everyone was armed with a rifle, or if they didn't have a rifle, they had a tool, a machete, a long knife, a spike or anything. And back and forth and back and forth, and I did not know, no one dreamed what would happen, but we were in fear. And this is Friday night. We didn't sleep all night, we were all watching the windows, off and on, maybe we fell asleep for a couple of minutes or so. Saturday morning we couldn't go to the synagogue, we couldn't communicate with anybody, because the houses were single houses, not like here row houses. And Saturday around eleven o'clock or twelve o'clock in the afternoon, we looked out the window, and we saw Jewish families marching, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters and so on, and behind were two Ukrainians. We saw other families going with two Ukrainians, and we saw others; everybody had an escort. We wondered where they are going, and my father says "[unclear], I don't think anybody will come after us because I didn't do nothing wrong." And then when he looks out and sees one of his friends who was his buddy in the army, and I will never forget his name--his name is Chuvick.³ He was going, and he said, "He, escorting!" Well, four o'clock in the afternoon he came to our house.

NL: This very same man?

NS: This same man who was my father's friend from the army, and he apologized in a nice way. He says, "I am sorry, but I have orders."

NL: Where did he get his orders from? He was just making this up?

NS: Yes. He says, "We have a new regime now. We have a city hall. Every Jew has to register. Any anybody who wasn't a Communist, I know you were not a Communist, doesn't have to be afraid. Who was a Communist, is going to be punished by the tribunal, and you don't have to be afraid, but there has to be registration. Everybody has to register." So my father says, "Look, why do you have to take us? You know that..." He says, "I'm sorry, but this is the way it is supposed to be. I have an order. I must do it.

³The Ukrainian guard who came to our house to escort us on that infamous Saturday, his name was Michael Chuvik. He is the one who came after my father in the court house and he massacred my father according to the plan. According to the survivor of the massacre and after the war we found out the truth. – Note to Josey Fisher from Nathan Snyder on January 18, 1990.

I feel bad, very bad, but I must do that.” Going back to that, in the morning, Saturday morning, when we knew something was wrong, my mother took all the jewelry from the house. Today I think it would be very valuable, because she had good jewelry many years ago, and she put it in a bag. We didn’t have plastic at that time. She put it in a bag, and then a box and she went outside in our garden in the back, and dug a hole with her hands and just threw it inside. Then my father had a couple of fur coats, my mother had fur coats, minks and so on, because men used to wear mink coats, and they put them in our summer house, in the top of the attic. Well it was goodbye, we never saw it again.

Going back to that Saturday, we came out, and we wanted to take some clothes with us, and food, and he said, “Nothing. You will be back in five minutes or ten minutes, registering, and come back. You don’t have to worry about it. Don’t take nothing with you.” So we left as we were, shirts and pants, my mother’s, my father’s, my sister and I, and I will never forget that walk. As we were walking, we saw from every side, the *shtetl* [village] had no side streets, from every side street, from everywhere, families are going. No one talks to each other. They were sad, scared, and frightened, pale in their face. They are going, no one knows. They have to register. The assembly was in a big, big solid concrete brick building, strong building which was actually *das Richthaus*, the courthouse. It was the only big solid building, because the City Hall was a smaller building, which was about a quarter of a mile further down, and wasn’t so solid. We found out later that about ten or fifteen percent of the Jewish were taken there, and about eighty to eighty-five were taken to this building. The reason why they took the others over there, because this was overfilled already.

NL: They must have been bringing them in from other communities too.

NS: No. No. Just from this community. Other communities, another fate happened. Other communities that there were only like twenty or thirty families. They massacred the whole family, wife, children, the whole thing, everything. There were only thirty or forty Jews, so they took them to a mass grave, and they massacred. No one escaped in the small communities. But us, we were like 250 people, a bigger community. They assembled us, and I remember there was not room enough in one big room. The room was maybe the size of this--how could they put in 250 people so they made two rooms and all around us we were surrounded by Ukrainians with arms.

NL: No Germans?

NS: No Germans, no Romanians, no nothing. No Russian, naturally. Some had First World War arms, hunting rifles, machetes, any weapons. They even had what you call--what you turn over the earth.

NL: Spades? Shovels?

NS: Spades. No, where you grab hay with those forks, [pitchforks?] hatchets they had on their shoulder. So we knew that something is, they don't have to watch us with hatchets, but no one thought that there could be such inhuman cruelty, human against human. But, anyway, we were assembled there in that room, and we waited there. It was

five, six, seven o'clock, eight o'clock, and outside we saw, because each window had bars, heavy bars, and they were low, so we could look out, and we saw them going around with activities, coming and going, in two and three. They own our lives, and we didn't know what would happen, but we knew something was not kosher. They said, "Later on everybody is going to be taken to the City Hall to be registered." So, at twelve o'clock midnight, the heavy door opened, and one Ukrainian followed by two in the back came in with a list and started reading the list. "Chaim Feldman and his two sons, Moishe and Yankel, registration, male." It doesn't matter if he was three or four years old, male--They went. Another group came in. "Shutzman, Moishe and his son." No females. And this is the way it went. But they never came back. My mother, like I said, it was my destiny to live and tell this story, my mother had some intuition that something was not kosher, so she threw me on the floor in a position of doggie style, like this.

NL: On your hands and knees.

NS: Like this. She took off her big shawl, she had a big shawl, like women used to wear. And she threw it on me, and she sat down on me like a bench, and asked also two other ladies. Unfortunately those two ladies, their husbands went to be massacred. They all three sat on the bench, and I didn't want to, but she pushed my head down and said, "Sit."

NL: Your father didn't have this feeling?

NS: Nothing. No. This happened in the last ten minutes, and we looked around, and it was like two or three o'clock in the morning, and when we looked around, there was no men anymore. Only women. Some were crying and so on. Here and there a couple of men. Unfortunately, my father was the last man, so you can see how much he was not wanted, because when they stopped, they said, "That's it." The last one was my father. The man who came to pick him up was named Subkov. I think he lives now in some place in Canada or South America, or maybe he lives in Philadelphia, a good citizen protected by the United States Constitution. That bandit, that murderer! He came in, "Schneider, Yaacov, and Nathan" and my mother says that I went already.

NL: Aha. How clever! How clever!

NS: So he says, "All right, and my father took off his wedding ring and gave it to my mother, and he kissed my mother and my sister, and he couldn't kiss me because I was under the blanket, and he left. He says, "Don't worry. He says in German, he says: "I have nothing to fear; I am innocent and I will be back very soon, with the papers, with the registration papers." That was the last time we saw my father.

NL: They were taken to a field and shot? Is that what you think?

NS: No one remained from that group. From that group I was the one survivor. One man hid himself between a chimney and the wall. He crawled in, a very thin man. Another one crawled in behind a partition. There were three survivors in this room. Outside there were a couple more survivors. What happened to them, it passed an hour or

so, and we heard terrible screaming and yelling, like hyenas, howling, “aoooo,” it was actually the cries from the massacred, and we didn’t realize that.

NL: You didn’t realize it?

NS: No, but the windows were open. It was in June. You could hear from far away. It was a mile away, so we could hear it. I could hear it and I will never forget it. I was out from the blanket already, because they stopped already the taking out.

NL: They went out...

NS: We heard the crying, “*gevalt!*,” [raise a cry] the pain, the massacre, and then it quieted down. About four o’clock the sun came out, one guy came in, I went in the blanket again and says, “As soon as it, tomorrow, we will take the women for registration, and the wives, the women and the girls, the females, to registration, and you will join your husbands.” What happened that night is they didn’t take all the men together, they herded them like cattle. They took them individual. It was all organized by the Ukrainian intelligentsia, the educated men, the postmaster and so on, like I mentioned before, the son of the...

NL: White-collar--The elite.

NS: White-collar--the elite. By the way, the priest was the biggest organizer. What they did with them is, they were taken individually to about a half a mile away to a big, big barn. There they were stripped completely of everything, their jewelry, whatever they had, their clothing, completely naked, and then individually they were escorted by two Ukrainians, this is what was told later, two maybe one, or three Ukrainians, it depended, to the place of the massacre, and imagine they already knew when they were stripped naked, where they were going, and that place was, there was already a ditch that was prepared, in those days they prepared a ditch in the bottom of a mountain, which I know exactly where the location is. It’s called, a *kever* [grave] and there they said to those henchmen, “Here is yours. Do whatever you want to do.” The fate of the Jews over there, very few were shot because they had no bullets. Most of them were hacked to death, like they say about the story about the rabbi, they cut his head off, and they spiked it up on a big, big stick. They were dancing around like wild Indians over there. Some of them they put in sacks, in cotton sacks, and tied the sacks, and as you know, years ago when they used to, grain, wheat, and so on, they used to have two sticks together, they used to hit the grain until the corn fell out. This is the way they used to beat that in the sack, until he was massacred. What kind of my father died, I will never know, but naturally he had a very bitter fate. The Jews were hacked to death, and they were left over there. One was a survivor from there, who has seen all of that. That’s the way we know. Apparently, he was hit by somebody who felt sorry for him, or...

NL: By a Ukrainian?

NS: Yes. He hit him and he says, “Make believe you are dead,” and he fell down in the ditch, with dead bodies on top of him, with blood running all over the place, and when everything quieted down, he ran away naked. He was wounded, with blood. He ran

away in a cornfield to another town and another town, they caught him over there, and they beat him up, and they gave him to the main authorities, and he wound up being in a concentration camp and survived, and he told the whole story.

NL: Do you know his name?

NS: His name was--I'm sorry there were two, one was Lauffer, and the other one was Hecht. Hecht survived. He was in Israel; Lauffer survived, and he ran about two or three miles to a peasant family, and they said, "Sure, sure, sure." What they did is put you in a wagon with straw, and take you to the next town, and while they were taking him to the town, they killed him on the way. What happened is that eye-witnesses told us after the war, and during the war we had also, that they assembled the entire town, all women, children, and everybody had to come like to a festival to watch that massacre. Some of them were crying, weeping, crossing themselves, because some of them were God-fearing, some of them had some humanity in them. I would say some of them. Most not.

NL: And this was going on in other towns?

NS: In other towns was going on, yes, completely, massacres. Lucky here they took all the men and the women the next time because there were too many. In other towns where there were only ten or twenty families, they massacred them the first night. Saturday was the massacre night. [Pause - Mrs. Snyder offered some information here.]

NL: But, he gave testimony?

NS: Oh, yes. So, the eye-witnesses told us that when they left, like four, five o'clock and the sun started coming up, they left there that bloody mess, and dogs were ripping to pieces, and running around with hands and pieces of flesh all over the place. What happened is Sunday morning the Romanian troops marched in. There were no Germans, by the way. No German uniforms, no Nazis, nothing. The Romanians were allies to the Germans. So they marched into our town, and they stopped the massacre.

NL: They stopped it.

NS: They stopped them from killing women and children. This is the reason that we are alive today. I understand that the Romanian troops, when they watched that, when they came to the massacre and seen the bloody mess, as a soldier, you know, you have to shoot and get killed or kill--even the Germans used to shoot machine guns rather than...

NL: Hack...

NS: Hack. That is a bestial murder, hacking to death. The Germans [Mr. Snyder may mean Romanians here.] stopped it because it wasn't a nice thing, from a human point of view. They didn't arrest them but they stopped it. So Sunday, I remember around eleven or twelve o'clock, the high officer, a colonel or major, came into the prison where we were.

NL: Excuse me for just a moment, that terrible night, about two or three in the morning, did Mother then take you out of the blanket and take you back to the home?

NS: No, we couldn't leave there, but in the morning we felt safe when the Romanians came in.

NL: I see. [Mrs. Snyder made a comment here.]

NS: The first question was, when we asked the Ukrainians who were watching us, "Where are our husbands?" "Oh, they are fine; they are all being registered and you will follow them." So we said, "They're supposed to be registered. So why can't we seem them?" We said, "What was this hollering and screaming?" and they said, "Oh, dogs." They didn't tell us the truth. But when the Romanians came in, they said, "You are all Jews, and you are all going to be relocated in a labor camp; you are going to live in hygiene, and you are going to live and work for our country to victory to smash the Communists," and so on. They didn't say nothing to us about what happened, and they said, "Now we have to have a list of all of you who are here." And then a couple of Romanian soldiers came in, and that day, a Sunday afternoon, they allowed all of the women, everybody in that imprisonment, to go to their homes. The reason why is, "Gather your belongings because tomorrow morning, Monday morning, you all have to assemble and march--all of us because we don't have no train or trucks. We have to march to a little town called [unclear] which is close by, and there you will meet the other Jews and we will all take you to the relocation camp, so you will have to be deported." So, that particular Sunday they let us out. So, when we came home, we found the home completely empty. While we were locked up all day Saturday before the massacre, the Ukrainians had ransacked and plundered everything single Jewish home, to the nail on the wall. We came in and we could not find nothing in the house. Nothing, empty walls. They even ripped out the plates from the stove, the cast iron plates. My mother went first to look for the box of jewelry. Gone. Looked in the attic for the fur coats, gone. So she found a couple of *shmattes*. [rags]. What we found is *tefillin* [phylacteries worn on the forehead and left arm by observant Jews] which they were not interested. I have the *tefillin* with me, upstairs. The leather is getting already a little warped. We gathered together a couple of *shmattes*--that means a couple of rags, that we had there for our journey, our unknown journey, and we found some *challah* still, and we took the *challah*. Next door at that Ostra, the Jewish baron, at his mansion, the Romanian *Kommandatur*, the Romanian commanders, had set up their main headquarters there, next to us. The house didn't belong to us. There were other Jews who had connections. Romanians like bribes, so a lot of Jewish women still had left jewelry, and for jewelry they promised that they would give us an escort, and maybe they would give you two wagons with two horses for the very sick and old and little children, because it is a long journey of hundreds of miles. They didn't tell us that we were being deported to Russia or to Ukrainia or Transnistria, but one thing, we were safe, that no more killing would happen. We had never seen Germans. Now in our walk, we couldn't walk too much, just in town, and asked, "Where are husbands?" And the answer was, "They took them away for labor. They have to work for the Fatherland to help beat the Russians. They took to them to a labor camp." So, when we asked the Ukrainians, "What happened?" no one talked. There was like a silence, and the Romanians did us not tell us either.

NL: Did Mother have some intuition about that, too?

NS: My mother and most of the women say, "We will never see them again." But we never thought that they would massacre them in such a beastly way. We thought that they were deported someplace. And they were in a labor camp, and working because they needed them for reconstructing bridges because they were bombed or something, and maybe one day they will come back. But we never, I will say that for the next two years we thought they were going to come back. We never realized...

NL: You didn't know that they were massacred?

NS: No. After the war, we knew exactly what was going on.

NL: You didn't know for the next few years?

NS: That's right.

NL: You started to walk then...

NS: The next day we started to walk. I remember there was one wagon with one horse which they provided, and they gave us an escort of two or three soldiers, Romanian soldiers. They were just regular soldiers walking with us. We bribed them so much that if we wanted to stop, they stopped with us.

NL: Did they give you any food?

NS: No. That is the reason we assembled to get the food that is left in the homes, eggs and vegetables, *challah* and jars with water and so forth, and then we marched on foot.

NL: How many were you?

NS: Altogether--the whole town, what was left, I would say no more than 75.

NL: All women and children, girls?

NS: Yes, and a couple of men. I was one of them. Yes, and by the way, one man hid himself in a cornfield. He was not brought into the assembly, and he survived. And I would say there were no more than five men left in this town alive. And they marched us to a big town called--*Washkautz Vischnitz*.

NL: Could you spell that, Mr. Snyder?

NS: Yes. W-A-S-H-K-A-U-T-Z. That is the first time that we saw a camp. It wasn't actually a ghetto, but it was a camp which is closed in with barbed wire, and there were Jewish survivors from other localities, towns, which were left alive.

NL: In Bukovina?

NS: Not in Bukovina, not in that section.

NL: From various parts of Romania?

NS: No, from various parts of our little region. Not too many were left, because, like I said, in the small places whole families, everything was wiped out. We found out later.

NL: This was going toward the Russian border?

NS: No, towards the Polish border, but the aim was to drive us like cattle into Czernowitz, into the ghetto, in Czernowitz ghetto. What they did is they assembled all the

Jews that remained. When they assembled all the Jews in Czernowitz, there were no other Jews left in Bukovina. All survivors were in Czernowitz. In Czernowitz, they didn't have a pogrom. In Czernowitz, the Germans came in so they did their own thing over there, they did executions. Took them out, like couple hundred and shoot them here, and a couple of hundred there and so on. Not Ukrainians. They wouldn't dare to into a town with a couple hundred thousand Jews. The Germans came in because that was a strategic city. It's a big city. So they brought us all to Czernowitz, and brought us in to the big ghetto which was prepared. The journey took about three, four, five days. Some got sick, some died on the road, and we made some stopover. We bribed the soldiers, and we joined up with other groups coming from other areas, and in the meantime we were stoned by peasants. We had to go through villages on the country roads. We were stoned by them. They felt bad that we were still alive. Then we came in Czernowitz. This was where my mother's sister lived, and they herded us into a ghetto, and in that ghetto we thought that this is it, we are going to survive. And in the meantime, the war, the Russian are already not too far from Moscow, [unclear] *Blitzkrieg*.

NL: You mean the Germans.

NS: The Germans are already advancing very much into the Russian territory. Then they had, they gave us all documents, and we all had to wear first of all stars. Everybody had to wear stars, on here and here. They give us certain documents that are stamped "Jew", yellow stamp.

NL: The Romanians did this?

NS: The Romanian authorities. The Germans were like supervisors there. They were the SS and Gestapo and so on, and we didn't have too much contact with the peasants there, because the town was mostly blue-collar workers, in Czernowitz. It was a big town like Allentown, I would say, not like Philadelphia. Then they start to organize deportation with cattle boxes, trains, to Transnistria, which is across the border in Ukraine. They said, "Relocation to a new land, a promised land". And the way it was going, I would never find it out, because in Czernowitz you also have a Jewish community, which they were wheeling and dealing with authorities to leave the sick and the wounded. And people tried to bribe not to be first on the list, and it was all really wheeling and dealing all right. It's the fate of every one. Every single day one thousand to two thousand is to leave.

NL: Who drew up the lists?

NS: I think the Jewish community. You had to give them the list of the Jews, and they selected whoever they wanted to. They only left behind those who got a temporary, is called a temporary, but a permanent stay, somebody who was needed for defense. My uncle, my mother's sister's husband was a textile designer. They needed uniforms for the war, and he worked in a textile factory. They have him what we call an exemption, a stay, and he took us in as his dependents, my mother and me and my sister.

NL: I see. So then you were exempted.

NS: Because we lived together in his household.

NL: His house was in the ghetto?

NS: Yeah. His house was. In one room we lived ten families. We had a little corner, and this corner was our room and we were exempt, so called, temporary only, naturally. Every day they had transports, of a thousand, five hundred Jews going to Transnistria, to the concentration camp. We were staying in ghetto. There was barbed wire all around, with Romanian soldiers watching, watch towers, the same like the ghetto. You couldn't get out from there. Food was scarce, but like I said, Jews always know how to survive. They used to sell their pants and their shirts, and their gold and...

NL: Were some of them able to work in the ghetto?

NS: Yes. No, some could work outside, because they needed them for defense, like doctors or dentists, or textile workers or mechanics, or those who were specialized in the electric company.

NL: Some skill.

NS: Skilled people. They used to be escorted outside with the soldiers, and then escorted back in. They could not go free outside the ghetto.

NL: But everyday, the ghetto was being diminished by the transports?

NS: Yes. Yes, the ghetto was diminished every single day, and we had diseases there, and typhus and dysentery and fleas and bed bugs and all kinds of *makkos*. [Yiddish: plagues, trouble]

NL: Did you hear of any word at all about a possible underground resistance? Was there a Zionist underground?

NS: Yes, we did have, we did have partisans outside in the woods.

NL: Jewish?

NS: Jewish partisans, Russian partisans mixed together, which are fighting the Russians [?] but we didn't know where, and it wasn't near Czernowitz. It could have been a couple of hundred miles from Czernowitz, in the forest because only there could you survive, fighting the Nazis, the Hitlers.

NL: And you could not, the Czernowitz Jews in the ghetto could not possibly join them?

NS: I understand that a couple escaped from there under the barbed wire, and joined the partisans. While we were there, if I am not mistaken, the Jewish community made contact with a Palestine paratrooper, a parachutist to Eastern Europe, in Romania, and somehow he wound up in Czernowitz making contact not with me, but with some of them. They were also in Hungaria.

Tape two, side two:

NL: You were saying that you did hear about a parachutist through some Zionist organization.

NS: Yes--Zionist organization--No one talked about resistance. You couldn't fight the German army, but somehow a way to escape, or a way of putting up resistance, not fighting but putting up resistance, but that was too late. So, in the meantime, the ghetto was diminishing. Some of them were taken out for forced labor, by the Germans. The Germans took our men, select, for forced labor. They never came back. We found out the next day that they were taken to the bridge that was bombed by the Russian. A big bridge over a big river like the Delaware, which is called the Prut, [river in Romania] and they had to work there, and after the work was over, the Germans took them out and machine-gunned them. They just felt like it, so they never came back to the ghetto. They took me to work one day. They selected me, because we were registered there.

NL: You were then thirteen or fourteen.

NS: I was then--'41, '42--14 1/2. They took me to work, and put me with some other friends of mine, and they took us to the same place.

NL: To the Prut?

NS: Yes. We didn't realized what had happened. Later how lucky we were to escape. They had us working in that water, and even though it was in the summer, we were without shirts, and the water was up to our necks. We had to lift those heavy iron bars and so on, tied with ropes. They tried to reconstruct the bridge when it was bombed. The Germans were watching us, not the Romanian. If I am not mistaken, they were the Germans in black uniforms.

NL: SS.

NS: And I saw there personally, eyewitnessed an execution.

NL: Shootings?

NS: A shooting of an elderly man who could not lift, was incapable, they took him out, made him kneel down, and they shot him in the back of his head because he did not put out production. But, we still took life not seriously at that time, because we didn't care. It was like, "So what? So they shoot you." Life didn't have any meaning at all, so we were used to that, danger and adventure, day by day.

NL: And death?

NS: And death. The next time they took us to forced labor to clean, what do you call, pig sties and B.M. and other places, and Russian army camps who were left behind. Romanians took them and moved in. They took us now to snow shoveling. This was a daily routine. We had to go in the winter shoveling snow every single day, and I liked it because an adventure, you could feel free, breathe the fresh air and shovel snow.

NL: Were you getting any food?

NS: From them, no.

NL: How did you provide your food?

NS: We used to come back and eat. We had dried bread. Some of them they smuggled food in there, and we ate potato peels, and whatever remnants were left. We used to trade our clothes and whatever we could, and a little business was going on in the ghetto--Jews know how to survive.

NL: And your mother, how was she managing with your sister?

NS: My mother and my sister was there in the ghetto and...

NL: You saw them every day?

NS: Yes, and I was at that time very adventurous. I had a couple of friends, and we adventured us outside the ghetto, under the barbed wire. It was very stupid at that time, because our life was in danger, but as a young boy you never think the danger is close to you. So you figure, "What the heck!" I remember that we used to go out of the ghetto, and we met on a place on a little hill with trees outside the city, and we used to play cards there. And...

NL: This would be after work or when you were not on forced labor?

NS: When I was not in forced labor. There was one friend who was not Jewish. He was half-Jewish actually. His father was a colonel in the Romanian army, and his mother was Jewish, and he was very pro-Jewish. He came from Romania and settled there, his father. He was very much against what was happening. His mother was not in the ghetto, because she passed as a non-Jew, because she was the wife of a Romanian officer, but he had some Jewish feeling. I will never forget to this day, he was a very nice guy, and we became good friends. We used to meet every single day, his name was Osiah [phonetic] and he used to say, "I am a Jew, too, but my father is a Romanian officer, so who cares? I hate the Germans. He wants me to become an officer and fight in the war. I don't want to die." He was more like my age, but he knew that one day that he has to go into the army. He actually talked me into going to a movie! That is very funny, and it's tragicomic, to go in a movie with him...

NL: And you had your stars on?

NS: No, we used to under the barbed wire and we took off the stars, and we didn't have any papers or documents in case we got caught. So one day he says to me, "Do you want to go in a movie with me?" It was a movie playing, it was called propaganda movie called "Jud Suss" and I did not understand until I came into the movie, and I said: "But how am I going to go in? You know they have *razzias*." *Razzias* mean they close up the places, streets, and they check the papers. "If they catch me they will kill me." He said, "Don't worry, I am going to give you a silver swastika. You'll put it on here, and if you get stopped by the SS or the Gestapo, you just say 'Heil Hitler' and then you go through." My mother didn't know all of the stupid things that I did. I went with him to the movie, and it happened that the movie was a very repugnant against Jews. I remember when we went to the movie, it was very repugnant to us. It showed how the Jew with a long nose tried to cheat and rape a German blue-eyed, blond-haired girl, Aryan, and so on.

After they show the movie, I remember that the people were so instigated by the movie that they stood up and said, “*Heil* Hitler! Kill the Jews! Kill the Jews!” So antisemitic propaganda was that movie. When the movie ended, we walked out. As we walked out...

NL: This young friend didn’t realize what this movie was about?

NS: No. No.

NL: He meant to entertain you.

NS: To entertain. What kind of movies did they show at that time? They didn’t show no cowboy movies. Those were the kind of movies they showed. I like movies, and when I was in Czernowitz, in *Gymnasium*, I like to go to movies all the time. I was a movie buff. When we walked out from the movie, naturally, by the door there is a *Razzia*, Gestapo, asking for papers. I didn’t have any papers, but right away my friend said to me. “He had papers,” but I didn’t. But I had this. He said, “When they stop you, what you do is [unclear] ‘*Heil* Hitler’ and you say you forgot the papers. You are a *Volksdeutsche*.” Because you speak German. As a matter of fact, I used to go with short pants and I had very short hair, crew cut. I looked like a *Volksdeutsche*, and exactly this is what happened. My heart actually stood still, and I did say that, and they were suspicious, and my friend said, showed his papers, and they figured we were together, and he is Christian, so why will I be a Jew?, so they let us go. I came home and I told my mother and my aunt, and they all said, “You are not normal. You are out of your mind. How could you do something like that? You are taking your life in your own hands. You are risking your life.” And I said, “That’s is what life is all about. I’m an adventurer.” There were other episodes. The other time I got caught.

NL: You didn’t go back to the movie?

NS: No, I got caught in the street.

NL: Outside the ghetto?

NS: I used to go walking on the Herrengasse. It was like Chestnut Street or Wall Street.

NL: Outside the ghetto?

NS: Walking, looking, seeing nice girls walking by. I was young boy, and here they closed up the street, and started asking for papers. I didn’t have that little. That was my security. He had it, I didn’t.

NL: You kept it.

NS: Yes, No. He had it. Every time I used to go with him, I wouldn’t know if I would get it.

NL: He had it for you.

NS: They stopped us and asked us for papers, and there was also another friend of mine, also Jewish, and this time it didn’t work. This time, papers. I did not have papers, and they arrested us both. They brought us to the Gestapo headquarters.

NL: They arrested you both?

NS: Both my friend and me. I claimed that I am not Jewish. I don't have any papers. I have white socks and black short pants and a crew cut, and I spoke German and I am not Jewish. As a proof I went with our friend that was not Jewish. How dare I come out from the ghetto being a Jew? And they claimed that we are spies.

NL: Russian spies?

NS: Russian spies, naturally. So, they said that you know that we make you talk, so they put us in a cell together and they later--just as a joke--they made us clean a clogged up washroom with our bare hands. With a bucket, we had to do that. We did it with our hands, and they were standing there with a machine gun, that German SS soldier.

NL: This was a German?

NS: Yes. This was a Gestapo headquarters. But they had German soldiers inside. I said, "This is the end of it. They aren't even going to deport us. They are going to shoot us. They are going to take us in the yard and shoot us because we are spies." Then came the interrogation. They called us in and he said, "Tell me the truth. If you tell me the truth, and then we will forgive you." They thought we're young and they could brainwash us. "Who sent you? From where are you? You are spies. You are not *Volkdeutsche*. You are Russian or Jews, but you are spies." And we claimed that we are not. We are not, and not, and not. We are *Volkdeutsches*. "Where are your parents?" and I said, "We lost our parents in the war because they got deported by the Russian. We just left and traveled. We have no home, and we just live with friends, back and forth." We gave them what we call *bubba meisas*. [old grandmother tales]

NL: And they believed it?

NS: No, they didn't

NL: They didn't?

NS: No. In the meantime, our friend, the non-Christian [perhaps Mr. Snyder means "Christian"] I didn't have a father, went in the ghetto, cause Christians could go into the ghetto. Jews couldn't get out, but Christians could go into the ghetto. He went into the ghetto to my friend's father. My other friend, the Jewish friend had a father, who was a good businessman. He used to deal with dollars, in gold, and this is what you do during the war. Bribe, and the black market, and he told them what happened. He said, "Natan and Bubi was my other friend. They are both locked up in the *Gestapo*. They caught them over there, and something has to be done." So, he said, "You know, Germans don't take bribes. Romanians we can bribe; they would sell their own mothers, but not Germans. So, I will try." He tried a Romanian connection, but I found out later that it did not work, but my friend, the non-Christian, influenced his father, who was a colonel in the Romanian army, and he says, "Here are my two buddies," if he called us Jews or non-Jews I have no idea. "Two friends of mine are accused," --we would go to this house sometimes, he says, "My buddies are accused of being spies. Can you put your influence?" and so on. All we know is that they came into the cell, and they opened the door, and he says "*Raus*. Out!" and we were scared because we know that the Germans used to have a trick. They say,

“Go” and they shoot you in the back, so we came out slowly, not running, and as we came around the corner, we run like we never run in my life. We run for our life, and we never stopped until we couldn’t breathe anymore. Later we met with our friend, and he told us that he asked his father how he did, where he did--See, the Romanians were actually running the country. The Germans were only there like supervising, or guests. So apparently he had some influence and so on. I think I was near to death many, many times, and I escaped and I said, “This is my destiny.” So that was life in ghetto, and it was going on day by day. I’ve seen people die, I’ve seen people getting beaten, I’ve seen people getting shot...

NL: Were the Romanians in charge of the ghetto, Mr. Snyder?

NS: Romanians, but there were also some Germans used to walk through patrols. Another incident was another one, which I will never forget. They took us out for forced labor. Outside the city, we had to clear a road, a dam was built there, or a road was built there. It was big boulders and stones, and there were big trucks, and we had to pick up the big stones and throw them by hand into the trucks, and there were Germans who were supervising that project, and we were working there, and, if I am not mistaken, they gave us one piece of bread, and some [unclear] from grass, some soup like a [unclear] because we don’t have no food, and without nourishment you cannot work, and they needed us as slaves, and that afternoon--we were marched there by the Romanians--but the Germans took us over. Then the Romanians were supposed to bring us back to the ghetto. They was working in combination. A German jeep came with two officers, and they stopped, and we didn’t pay attention too much and suddenly they said, “Line up, all of you, in one line!” and he walked by and pulled out every fifth or sixth or seventh.

NL: And shot them?

NS: Now, when he start to count, you know sometimes he can go one side like “*fier, funf*,” and then he goes “*funf*,” and then he can say “seven” --he starts to gamble, like playing the casino in Atlantic City, and we were looking who was the fifth or was it the sixth? I don’t remember because our heart was down in our pants. Again, we didn’t think too much about life or death, because we were all stupid or we didn’t care about life, so it was not in panic. If it would happen today, I will have a heart attack, and they took them out, and they took them away for a special *Sonderkommando*,⁴ what we heard is later, trrrr, we heard the machine gun fire, and we did not see them killed but we know that they killed them. Why? Because it was a sport like people go hunting in here, killing animals. That was a sport. He feels like killing a couple of Jews. Nobody is going to punish him for that. When we came back to the ghetto, I remember the daughters, the mothers, the girlfriends--they used to wait at the gate and they saw how many less came back, and we told them we don’t know where they are. Some of them said, “Yeah, maybe.” But they knew, and they started crying and there was mourning. “How come you went out with fifty and you came

⁴Special command in charge of dead bodies.

back only forty or thirty-eight?" So those are the adventures. Again, I said life has played a joke, actually in my advantage.

NL: Were people still being taken for Transnistria?

NS: Daily.

NL: This continued for what, a year or...?

NS: It wasn't every day, it was every other day or maybe twice a week, but constantly they were taking people. It was a norm that the Romanians had to fill, to take out so many Jews. It was according to how many cattle wagons were on the train, because you must understand that the train was used for transporting troops to the front, bringing back wounded or material, so they couldn't just take all the trains just for the Jews. When they had available one train, Jews are coming up.

NL: Did you hear anything from people in Transnistria? Did you get any information?

NS: Yes, we got information back from soldiers who came back from the front line who passed through there.

NL: Romanian soldiers?

NS: Yes, for bribes they would do anything.

NL: And what did they say?

NS: They said what misery they lived there, that there some are living, some are dying. We even could send postal packages, packages with a lot of--Now someone came on leave from Stalingrad, and he passed through. He had to pass through Transnistria. Transnistria was like New Jersey, a whole section.

NL: Southern Ukraine?

NS: Southern Ukraine, Russia. And they would say, "Look..." You wanted to get gold or money, they would pay you. You go to China with "Just look up there in the ghetto my sister," and sometimes some of the packages were given to them, plus the money and jewelry--never arrived, but many of them received. See because there was some good humanity as far as the soldiers are concerned. Maybe they're tired of war. Maybe they see too much killing, and when they went back, they gave those packages, because then we were notified that they did receive that, medication and so on. You see we could have money freely because we had contact with the civilized world, but they were there more like in a concentration camp in the wilderness. Some were Germans. Some were Romanians, but not in poverty. This is what happened. They were not in ghettos. The whole area was a concentration camp. In the ghetto you could bribe, and you could breathe. There was even a couple of weddings in the ghetto. We had a Hebrew school in the ghetto, we taught the kids how to read and to say *broches* [blessings] and learn *aleph-bet*. [Hebrew alphabet] A lot of things were going on in the ghetto. Weddings, and girls used to go with guys and get engaged, fall in love. There was life and death in ghetto. We didn't realize what happened in Auschwitz. We didn't know what happened in the gas chambers.

NL: Did you hear the word?

NS: Nothing. Absolutely, you never knew what was happening past that border, what was happening in Poland, in Czechoslovakia. We were cut off. We didn't hear nothing. As a matter of fact, we knew that the Hungarian Jews were the most happiest, luckiest Jews, because they were not occupied. They were still free. So many Jews who could escape, escaped to Hungaria.

NL: Some did.

NS: Yes, you know why? Because we were not too far from the Transylvanian border. Transylvania belonged at that time to Hungaria. You just had to cross Transylvania and you were there, Szeged, Kolozsvár, Temesvár.

NL: And some Jews from Czernovitz went into Transylvania?

NS: To escape the terror and live a little bit, and not under much freedom but...

NL: But relatively. So they knew that Hungary was still safe?

NS: Until 1944. This was in 1942 when they escaped, so for two years they had more liberty. Then the fate of Hungarians was worse than anybody else, but we didn't know what happened in Poland and Austria. We knew that there was ghettos all over, but we didn't know that they were massacring and burning by the millions. We didn't know that. Now one thing that we always wished was that we would like to see American planes come and paratroopers and save us. We would like to see the American planes bomb; we would like to see some help from the other side.

NL: Did you know that America was in the war?

NS: Oh, sure.

NL: You did know that?

NS: Yes, America joined the war in 1941. We knew that right away.

NL: Was anybody listening to BBC, do you know?

NS: Yes, but if you got caught, you got shot. We had little radios with BBC from England, and it was in the German language, so some that couldn't understand English could listen. We knew about the American landing in Africa. We knew about that but it was a long way from Africa to us.

NL: But you had some hope?

NS: We knew about Ploesti, Bucharest was bombed, when the Americans flew over that.

NL: You did know?

NS: Oh yes, see the Romania-Jews had a different fate. They were more like in Hungaria, and other Romanian Jews survived, others got killed.

NL: From what I understand, the Jews in the occupied or annexed territories, as they were called, Bessarabia, Bukovina, they had it much worse than the people from so-called Old Romania, the basic nucleus of the country. Most of those Jews were saved.

NS: Yes, they were taken to forced labor, but at night-time they used to go home to their homes. They used to be beaten and spit and sometime abused, but killed--some of

them were taken out and killed. I saw in the beginning, but they were not herded into ghettos like we. We were considered Commies, because of the Bolsheviks.

NL: Or even foreign because you were not part of the Old Romania?

NS: Right, we were considered foreign, too, because we were occupied by Russia for a year. We were traitors, because the Romanians, when they came in on June 22, they all had, every soldier had it here. I remember that, I will never forget, armbands with a ring of black, with a big cross, and it said, "The War of the Christian Liberation," or something like that, "In the name of Jesus, Christian Liberation," something like that. They want to liberate the world from Bolshevism. So now, we are there the tool of Bolshevism. The Jews are always blamed. That is the reason that they had so many massacres.

NL: Did you know the name of Antonescu?

NS: Oh, yes. He was the butcher. He was the prime minister of Romania while we were in ghetto, because Bukovina now belonged to Romania. Romania took back Bukovina. The reason why they took back Bukovina, Bessarabia because they joined Germany fighting Russia so the Germans as a gift give us back your territory. Antonescu was the prime minister or the commander-in-chief of the Romanian army.

NL: How about the name of Filderman? Filderman was the head of the old Romanian Jewish community...

NS: I never heard of his.

NL: Who intervened to a great extent on behalf of the Jews in Transnistria. He was a high school chum of Antonescu and used that connection. Also he threatened economic sabotage of the Romanian economy if Antonescu wouldn't give certain concessions to Romania. You didn't hear that name? Filderman?

NS: No.

NL: He eventually was taken to Transnistria, but survived the war.

NS: You shouldn't misunderstand. They took some Jews from Romania also to Transnistria, but not from Southern Romania, more like from Moldavia, like from Jassy [also Iasi] and from the southern part of Bukovina, closer to Bukovina, like the northern part of Old Romania. In some of the locations they had massacres, pogroms, and they took the Jews into concentration camps to Transnistria. But from Bucharest, from deep Romania, never. The Jews over there lived; they were more assimilated there, they were more assimilated there in the south. They didn't speak Yiddish, they all spoke the Romanian language. You see in Moldavia, between Bessarabia and Bukovina, they had the influence from Eastern Europe. Zionism was there, more Hassidim. You didn't find too many Hassidim, Orthodox Jews, in the south of Romania.

NL: Also, I think Antonescu, toward the end of 1942, began to worry about a possible Russian occupation.

NS: A Russian occupation and a Russian revenge. Yes, but it was too late. I think he was tried and hung.

NL: So how long did you stay then in Czernowitz, then, Mr. Snyder.

NS: We stayed in Czernowitz until March of 1944, when the war took a turn for the good, and the Russian advanced on all the fronts and beat the Germans back, and the beginning of March, the first or second week of March, the Russian entered Czernowitz.

NL: Were you able to get more food? I understand that in some ghettos people just starved right and left. How did Mother and you as children survived? Did she still have things to sell, or were you earning something?

NS: No, my mother was a very capable woman in business, in surviving, in wheeling and dealing. She made commissions from selling this and that, and from nothing she was making a living and supporting us.

NL: So in March, then, there was this turn...?

NS: There were a lot of more adventures in the ghetto that I need maybe ten more tapes to go over that. I would say, starting in March when the Russian came in Czernowitz, as a matter of fact, before the Russian in 1944, at the end of '43, when Stalingrad fell, the entire attitude of the Romanians took a different turn. They were scared. I am talking about the Romanian occupation and even the local people, if the Russian would come back and they want to massacre them. So what they did is, in certain occasion, they have opened the ghetto for people who are working steady for defense. My uncle was one. They let him go back to his own place. That was the end of '43, in November of '43, to his home, but it wasn't the same home any more. We only had one room to live, all of us.

NL: But you were out of the ghetto?

NS: Yes, but you could not live there too long, because it was like scattered, so they herded us into another home about a block away from the ghetto. But it was called also the ghetto. Because my uncle worked in the textile mill, day and night manufacturing blankets and uniforms for the army, and there we survived also by wheeling and dealing with my mother, selling whatever we can and so on.

NL: And your uncle was making some income?

NS: Income, yes, and now we knew that the war already was coming to an end, because the Russian were very close, and a week before the Russian came in, all the Romanian authorities took off. The Germans stayed, but the Romanians took off. The Germans took over the city. Then started another chapter of terror. What they did, they killed a lot in the ghetto. They did their own deed. Those who lived in scattered houses like we were--they didn't have any lists or addresses--they just went by what non-Jews were telling them. There is a living a Jewish family, there is living a Jewish family, and so on. But we were prepared for the day that we were liberated by the Russian. Then we saw some American planes flying over, and we knew that the war was very close to the end, and we were waiting for the victory day, Liberation Day, and this happened in March when the Russian came in. I remember two days before that...

Tape three, side one:

NL: Now, Mr. Snyder, do you recall any other episodes or events, or developments in the ghetto, before the Russian came that you might want to record?

NS: Yes, I do. Going back to the ghetto life, in the city of Czernowitz from the year 1941 until 1943, I'm sorry 1944, when the Russian liberated us, when all of the Jews were driven from the surroundings--Czernowitz was the main city in North Bukovina--and when the Jews were driven from all the surrounding little towns and villages, those who survived, on their way to the concentration camps in Transnistria, they were first deposited or gathered together in the ghetto, those Jews that came from surrounding, they came absolutely with nothing as far as money or clothing. They were just escaped with their bare life, but the Jews who were right from Czernowitz, from the city which I mentioned before--there were a big Jewish population there, they had a chance to take some of their belongings like jewelry or clothing which they later exchanged with the non-Jews, with the Christians.

NL: Excuse me, and also gold?

NS: Gold, naturally, and clothing and furs and so on, so they could survive that horrible times in the ghetto, because the authorities never supplied any food. The Romanians, forget about the Germans, but the Romanian authorities never supplied any food, so the only food which was in exchange for goods with the non-Jewish, with the Christians from outside the ghetto, and the exchange was done that in a way illegal, at night time through the barbed wires or the certain days the certain hours that the non-Jewish were permitted to get into the ghetto.

NL: Oh, I see.

NS: Yes, they could get into the ghetto.

NL: For purposes of trading?

NS: Trading or just to visit and see how the Jews--it was a tragic comedy to see how the Jews lived.

NL: The Germans set this up, or the Romanians?

NS: I'm not sure, but I think the Romania authorities. They ruled actually, the Romanian authorities ruled.

NL: And these visitors came really to mock, or did some show some sympathy?

NS: Very few but some showed sympathy, that's true, but mostly they came to mock you, yes. The Jews, how they lived together, herded together in the ghetto. They knew the destiny. We didn't. They knew exactly what will happen to the Jews because apparently, in their speeches or in their propaganda their aim was the destruction of the Jews, but we were not aware of that, our fate.

NL: Excuse me, what did the Romanians exchange for the gold and clothing?

NS: Flour, dried fat, eggs, milk for the children. Very few I know that got meat, chicken, sometimes, fruit, dried fruit, and fresh vegetables. After all, people had to survive, they couldn't survive just on air.

NL: And now the question is, did only the wealthy Jews who had the jewelry and gold benefit, or was this produce distributed among other people?

NS: In some cases it was distributed among the other Jews but some of the Jews who really received that didn't have a chance to really enjoy it, because you never knew when is your day that you will be deported. Like, the lists were prepared and the next day the lists were issued, and Jews had to report to a certain gathering place where they were driven to the main railroad station which was outside the ghetto, and they were herded into cattle cars and away they went. [inaudible – Mrs. Snyder talking]

NL: Were there any soup kitchens, for instance, for the poorer Jews in the ghetto?

NS: Yes, there were soup kitchens.

NL: Who organized those?

NS: The Jewish community.

NL: In the ghetto?

NS: Yes, the Jewish community. It was called in Yiddish the Jewish *kehillah*, *Yiddishe kehillah*, which organized--also prepared food packages like dried bread and some sugar and some other provisions for those who were deported to the long journey.

NL: To Transnistria.

NS: To Transnistria.

NL: Were you getting any organized help from so-called Old Romania? Was the ghetto getting any?

NS: Nothing. Nothing. The connection with the Jews in Old Romania was completely cut. We didn't have any connection whatsoever.

NL: How about with Bessarabia? Any connections?

NS: Absolutely not. The Jews from Bessarabia, I understand they were deported direct from Bessarabia and most of them were massacred and the rest were transported to Transnistria before. [Mrs. Snyder requested that we stop for a pause.] The Jews from Bessarabia were all deported to Transnistria before the Jews from Bukovina.

NL: And you had no contact?

NS: No contact whatsoever. As a matter of fact, we had no contact with any Jews from other parts of Europe.

NL: Mr. Snyder, do you recall your mother or any other adult speaking about the *kehillah* either negatively or positively? In some ghettos, you of course, know that there was a lot of criticism. [unclear]

NS: That is true, and the criticism was valid because...

NL: In Czernowitz?

NS: Yes, the Jewish *Kultusgemeinde* [Jewish Community Organization] was actually formed with approval of Romanian authorities and there was prominent Jews and Jews who had the insight to the authorities or connections and so on, and supposedly they were the ones who were preparing the lists of the Jews who supposed to be deported.

NL: To Transnistria?

NS: To Transnistria. The Romanian authorities did not go by the lists only those supplied by the community. In other words, they were demanding, they want 1500 Jews by Monday morning at 10 o'clock to be ready, so the list was prepared with the names of whole families or singles or so on.

NL: On what basis?

NS: On what basis I do not know, but they were preparing that.

NL: But you also, I think, you also said that non-Jews would point to Jews and Jews were picked up that way?

NS: No, there was no sense of pointing because Jews would gather together in the ghetto anyway. They were all together in the ghetto. It was before the ghetto they were pointing where the Jews are so they could be gathered together.

NL: But once in the ghetto?

NS: Once in the ghetto they were under one umbrella.

NL: There the *kehillah* drew up lists for deportation?

NS: For deportation. Those were essential for the government, like I said professionals, like doctors or engineers or skilled workers, they were left for a later date.

NL: So, your feeling is that the *kehillah* members protected themselves?

NS: Oh sure, as a matter of fact, I understand there were instances that by having money, what we call today, bribe, which is an ugly word--you could survive another six or three months or so on. Actually that bribe was supposed to go to the Romanian authorities, because the Romanians are known through history for *bakshish* [a gift or gratuity] which comes from the Turkish language because Turks ruled not only in Romania, but in the part of southern Europe for centuries, so that word--*bakshish* was very common. In Romania not that you had to offer, but sometimes it was requested, *bakshish*. A lot of Jews actually survived on that word *bakshish*, by bribing authorities and by sheer luck they survived.

NL: Were there any non-official groups, for instance, Zionist groups or socialist groups in the ghetto that opposed the policies of the *kehillah* and/or organized programs of their own, soup kitchens and such?

NS: I was too young and I was not aware of it. It could be that there was some opposition, but in the ghetto you had all kinds of organizations. You had Zionist movements, you also had Communist movements.

NL: In the ghetto?

NS: In the ghetto, and because in desperation people are apt to cling on anything. There were all kinds of movements.

NL: And, they held meetings, these groups?

NS: Yes, they had meetings and they were trying to encourage people to just have faith and so on. There were even rumors that outside Czernowitz, in the woods, there are Russian partisans organized with Jewish partisans together fighting the Nazis.

NL: But you weren't aware of any youths within the ghetto who were trying to escape to the woods?

NS: No. No. There were even later, there were rumors that there were some illegal from Palestine, underground, illegal emissaries dropped with parachutes who were trying to help Jews escape, but where are you going to escape? All the doors and gates were locked from Europe, so escape was an Utopia.

NL: You had mentioned before some secret radio listening. Could you speak about that?

NS: Yes. Yes, most of the Jews had short-wave radio.

NL: Most?

NS: Not most, I am sorry, but...

NL: A goodly number.

NS: If they had a radio, a short wave radios were used.

NL: Those radios were not confiscated?

NS: Well, if you were caught with a short-wave radio, the sentence was death.

NL: By the Romanians?

NS: By the Germans or the Romanians, so there was a big risk to it, but everybody took the risk on their own and used that radio with the outside world, which they usually listened to B.B.C., which was also transmitted in German language from England, from London.

NL: I see. So you had some news.

NS: So, they knew exactly what was going on the Russian front or on the Western front.

NL: Were there any newspapers in the ghetto, as far as you know? How was this news spread?

NS: I think there were some bulletins--but not newspapers.

NL: Were the Communists agitating for a Russian victory as far as you recall?

NS: Yes, naturally, the Communists were agitating for Russian victory.

NL: Can you remember approximately when you had the sense that the Romanian government was shifting to a pro-Allied or anti-German orientation, or sensed that they were worried about Allied bombing?

NS: That didn't happen until six months before the Russian actually entered our region. That shift happened after the Stalingrad affair.

NL: February, 1943?

NS: In 1943, when they were defeated and so many hundred of thousands of Romanians fell prisoners to the Russian and the Germans and they were defeated--the

entire world knew that--and we knew it too by radio. At that time the Romanians got scared.

NL: Was this reflected in the behavior of the Romanians in Czernowitz?

NS: A little bit, not too much. At that time I was out of the ghetto.

NL: Where were you?

NS: Like I mentioned in the previous conversation, interview, that my uncle was essential for the government as engineer, textile, so he was allowed to leave the ghetto, not too far, just a block and a half in a place where we lived there.

NL: But Mother was still in the ghetto?

NS: No, no, no.

NL: She came with you?

NS: It was my uncle and his brother and his wife, and naturally, my aunt took her sister as a dependent, with me and two orphans, because we were, my sister and myself, and we lived under one roof. We had one room, with a small kitchen the size of a telephone booth, and we lived there, which was not too far from the ghetto and with the permission of the, with a permit of the Romanian government which kept an eye on us, and with restrictions, a curfew. You couldn't walk outside the house except from eight o'clock in the morning until about five and after that it was curfew, and you couldn't shop in certain--shopping was done only after the non-Jews finished their shopping: the Jews could go in and shop. Certain stores you couldn't go in. You couldn't walk on the pavement. You had to walk in the middle of the street. Naturally, if you were caught wearing, not wearing the Jewish star, which was very visible, you could be shot on the spot, so no one took the risk of not wearing it. The Jewish star was worn on the left lapel and also on the arm band so it's very obvious that an individual walking in the middle of the road with horses and carriages which only used that middle of the road, usually human beings walking on the pavement, the only walking in the middle of the road together with the horses and carriages were the Jews. Those few, not too many.

NL: I was going to ask if there was a considerable number who were allowed to live outside the ghetto?

NS: Yes, those who were essential for the government, professional or skilled workers, like special mechanics, engineers, and architects, doctors, pharmacists.

NL: And what was your sister doing at this time?

NS: My sister was much younger, like me, and we lived together.

NL: She wasn't in school, I suppose?

NS: No. No.

NL: She just stayed at home with your aunt?

NS: Yes, we stayed together and waited for the day of victory which occurred later in 1944, but in the meantime we heard horror stories coming back from Transnistria because, like I mentioned before, there were some Romanian soldiers who came back from the front, from the battlefield, the Russian battlefield, which I would say succeeded only

in 30% out of a hundred because sometimes a package sent to the loved ones or to families never arrived, but sometimes they did arrive.

NL: Did any of the soldiers that you know of or knew of speak about the German defeat?

NS: Never.

NL: Or, did you know that...

NS: They never spoke. As a matter of fact, I think that some of the soldiers found themselves in glory that they will be joining those glorious German troops who ruled the entire world.

NL: But after Stalingrad?

NS: After Stalingrad they were actually bowed with their head down because of fear, not else, of fear because the reprisals of the Allies, mostly the Russian, what will they do when they come in.

NL: So, after Stalingrad, you perceive...

NS: The wind has shifted. Then we knew that victory is close. We didn't know when, but we were also afraid that not too many will survive that day of victory, of liberation because in the ghetto, in the meantime, in 1943, end of '43, the ghetto almost emptied, was empty.

NL: All had been deported?

NS: Deported. The ghetto in the end of 1943, the ghetto was dissolved. The barbed wire and all the gates and so on were taken down. What remained from that section I do not know, but those few hundreds of Jews who succeeded in staying, in living outside the ghetto were under constant fear and under constant pressure and under control. They had to produce, like my uncle, who was a textile engineer, and made a meager living from day to day and with constant fear. There was some also--my mother was very productive and she did some exchange of produce and things with the non-Jewish population.

NL: Which helped you survive.

NS: Yes, it helped us survive.

NL: I understand that toward the end of '43, early '44, there were contacts between the Romanian government and an American representative named Ira Hirschmann. Does that name mean anything to you?

NS: Maybe the Romanian government in the deep south.

NL: Old Romania?

NS: Old Romania, yes.

NL: And, as a consequence, Antonescu permitted some of the inmates in Transnistria to return to Romania, but this didn't happen in Czernowitz apparently and you didn't know what happened to the last groups?

NS: No, maybe it happened to the Jews from Old Romania because like I mentioned before, there were some Jews in some cities or villages from the Old Romania who were also deported, not all of them. So it could be those from Old Romania. You

must understand that we from North Bukovina--who were under Russian occupation for one year, from 1940 to '41, were considered Bolsheviks, enemies of civilization, spies, undesirables, and destined for extermination because we did not invite the Russian in 1940.

NL: But you were tagged with that label.

NS: We were tagged as Bolsheviks. The Romanian Jews from the Old Romania, they are not under the same umbrella.

NL: It's an important point.

NS: Very important point. That's the reason so many survived from them and...

NL: Not from Bukovina.

NS: That's right. Bukovina, Bessarabia were destined to be exterminated, to the last.

NL: Now, when did the first Russian troops first come into Czernovitz.

NS: Getting back to the ghetto, excuse me.

NL: Sure.

NS: I remember instances that people were trying during the night or sometimes during the day, if they had courage, to crawl under the barbed wire by digging into the ground, into the earth, and they were shot right there and then because they got caught. The Romanian used to patrol around the barbed wire, which was miles and miles and miles, a whole quarter of the city, but they didn't have posted, stationed sentries. But if they got caught or by the Germans, they got shot because that was the order of the day. They took the risk in their own hand and you know for instances that they were brought back, the bodies were brought back and said they were shot by the barbed wires. They got caught, so there was a risk, but with all this risk I adventured many times. I and my friends my age and we used to crawl, we had a special spot under the barbed wire near a tree where we used to crawl out on the other side.

NS: At night.

NS: Yes, like from the dark side to the light side,--no, during the day.

NL: And there were no guards.

NS: We watched for the guards because we had lookouts, and we used to walk out on the other side, take off our red, I'm sorry, our yellow star and posing as non-Jews and sometime mingling with the population on the street. I even have a picture today with a friend of mine parading in one of the biggest, nicest boulevards, like we say here Chestnut Street, or Walnut Street, where I am parading with him on the street taking a stroll out of the ghetto. And one danger was that they would close up the streets and ask for the papers and if they did, I wouldn't have any.

NL: And you did this many times.

NS: Many times, not only me but a couple, we were daring young boys, we didn't realize that so close death was or what danger is because you understand we went through so much in our lives that maybe life didn't have any meaning or it was stupidity, too.

NL: Besides that one time that you were stopped at the movie, were there any other times when you were stopped when the Romanians or Germans checked your papers?

NS: Several times.

NL: And how did you?

NS: As a matter of fact most of the stopping, the *razzias* were done by the Germans with the help of the Romanians. The Germans were the masters, even where the Romanian authorities ruled and the Germans didn't have too many troops there so they, the Romanians were assisting them. Many times I was stopped, but I could wiggle myself out by speaking German language, by lying to them or smiling to them straight to their face.

NL: Or bribing.

NS: No bribing, God forbid, bribe was, you sentenced yourself to die, their pride would not allow them to take any bribe even if they want to.

NL: I see.

NS: Just by bluffing.

NL: Where did you learn such expert German?

NS: From the little town that I come from, Unter Stanestie we spoke German. The Jews spoke German, 90% of the Jews.

NL: Not Yiddish.

NS: Only 10% Yiddish. In *cheder* we spoke Yiddish, but at home my mother language is German. As a matter of fact, I spoke German with my mother and sister 'till three months ago when my mother passed away. All my correspondence, all the letters I have is in German. Today when I converse with my sister on the telephone it is in German. German language was our mother language. Also when I was very young in pre-school I went to kindergarten in a German *Schwabendorf* and we learned Gothic language. It means Old German, straight up and down.

NL: So this came in handy.

NS: Yes, I used to go to the German *Schwäbische* [kindergarten] and I learned German with Old Gothic [Gothic] alphabet and German was spoken in our home so I was speaking German very fluently which I speak today, today maybe I have a little accent but I could always smart myself out or fool them out with my German, insisting that I am a *Volksdeutsche*, because any German who lived outside Germany was considered a *Volksdeutsche* and there were many Germans who lived in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungaria, Romania, even in Russia they had *Volksdeutsche*, all over the world. So they were considered *Volkdeutsche*.

NL: Besides these strolls along this street and occasionally going to a movie do you remember any other adventures that you had? Did you go into cafes or coffee houses for a snack or was it just to walk and feel free?

NS: To walk and feel free and feel freedom which was a forbidden freedom. Naturally when we used to meet with our friends, like I mentioned we had a non-Jewish

friend whose father was an officer and his mother was Jewish and he was our best friend. We swore friendships between us and we trusted him. He never betrayed us, and he was telling us that the Germans and the Romanians are getting slowly defeated on the Russian front because he knew about the wounded troops that are coming back from there with all those horror stories. He also told us about a lot of Jews who were destroyed in Russia on their way; the troops with heroic stories telling the folks back home what happened to the Jews in Russia on their way on their goal through Moscow advancing in Russian territory. In other words, they were telling the cowardly heroic stories show Jews were massacred.

NL: Where was his father do you know, Mr. Snyder?

NS: His father was stationed in Chernovitz.

NL: But, he obviously got news from the eastern front or there were radio reports.

NS: His father knew that he had Jewish friends.

NL: But I mean the stories of the Romania and German defeat, his father certainly knew about that.

NS: Naturally, yes. There are many other episodes which I do not recall now in ghetto but life was going on and...

NL: But the ghetto was being reduced until it was finally...

NS: It was being reduced because the faces that you see today you haven't seen the next day and you ask what happened to him and they say oh, he's on his way to the concentration camp.

NL: And so...

Tape three, side two:

NL: So, do you recall the approximate date when the Russian came into Chernovitz?

NS: I have another episode which I remember.

NL: Okay.

NS: As far as immigration to Israel.

NL: Okay.

NS: In 1943, in fall of 1943, there was a movement organized, I think, from outside, from overseas. It could be from governments, from Zionist movements in the world--with a lot of money to bribe the Romanian government to let, especially youngsters, young people out. We called it *Aliyat ha-Noar*⁵, and together also families even during the war, '43 was in the middle of the war--The payment was very high and not too many families could afford it, and it was a movement which first of all, people didn't trust but then later they got news that some did arrive to destination. The rule is as follows: You had to get permission from the government and you were on a special list and you got special traveling papers and you traveled to Constanta which was a port on the Black Sea and there were ships provided by the movement organizations--I'm sorry by Zionist organizations, which was illegal because the British did not allow the Jews to get into Israel and one of those unfortunate ships was the *Struma*, it sunk.

NL: You knew about that, or you heard about it later?

NS: I heard it later, we didn't know nothing about what happened to the *Struma*, but we knew that some of the ships went through and the *Struma* was one of them who was sunk. And I understand that we even tried to formalize and arrange our departure from there but it was impossible because...

NL: Too costly?

NS: Too costly and we didn't have direct contact with the Zionist organization.

NL: Did you know any young people who did succeed in making the contact?

NS: I know people who left at that time and it was mostly young people actually.

NL: I think this is all described in a book that you know about called *The Last Escape*.

NS: No, I did not read that book. I don't know if the Germans knew about it or the Romanians did it on their own or whatever it was but it wasn't advertised in the radio or newspaper but it was like a secret movement which was on the side streets. Money had to be paid to different middlemen, and you were on a special list and sometimes you gave the money and you never succeeded because you were swindled out of that, but there was an aim to escape. You don't care where but just escape. We had a relative in Switzerland; my mother had a step-brother who lived in Switzerland, a step-brother or a cousin, I am sorry, a cousin. Switzerland was neutral so we tried to communicate through the Red Cross

⁵Immigration of young people to Israel.

for help so that maybe we can get some packages of food or clothing, and we did succeed to send the Red Cross a letter, and we got from them on many occasions, we got from them, from Switzerland sent through the Red Cross some packages of food and clothing.

NL: Interesting. That's the first I've heard of something like that.

NS: Yes, from Switzerland. But, we even tried, which was an idea, also an Utopia, maybe we could leave for Switzerland, but it was impossible. In our dream, we thought that any escape would do good to us. That is the episode I remember.

NL: Yes. I am glad you mentioned it because there was an official negotiation with Antonescu about departure for Palestine, and some Jews did succeed. I will mention the book a little later. Now, would you like to come to the Russian segment? Of course if you think of anything else in the past we can always incorporate that. So, it was when, early '44 that the Russian first came in?

NS: Before the Russian came in, the Romanian troops were on edge. The Romanian authorities and whatever Romanian troops were left, but they retreated; we knew that the reason why they retreated because there was fear of the Russian.

NL: Would this be late '43 or early '44?

NS: That was early '44. So more Romanians left. Their place was taken by Germans and that was our biggest fear, because when the Germans take over, we knew that comes the total destruction. Naturally, under the Romanian we were more safer than under the Germans, but the Germans took the place of the Romanian which left, and not only they left the troops, but there were a lot of families who came officers of state and government officials who lived with their families and they just evacuated to the Old Romania; didn't want to stay there while the Russian were advancing.

NL: And the Germans, these were army units or SS?

NS: SS and Gestapo and they start to patrol the streets more frequently and you see more Germans like Romanians. Now, like I mentioned before, there were some Jews who were living in different sections of the city, but they were not known to the Germans. The Romanian authorities were aware of that, but I don't think the Romanian authorities gave them exactly the addresses which was a risk too. So the Germans were not sure how many are outside left and how many are living in hiding. So that was a risk, that is fate, destiny. So in the beginning of 1944, more and more Germans appeared on the streets. Stores and government buildings and offices were closed, and we actually dared using our radio to the BBC, and even we caught a couple times the "Voice of America" in the Romanian or in German language.

NL: Was your uncle still working for the Germans?

NS: Yes, he was working for the same factory. That factory had to put output for the troops.

NL: So, you were getting news.

NS: We knew about Stalingrad, that was defeated, and the Russian were advancing closer and closer; we knew exactly. My uncle was a strategist or a military buff

because in the First World War when he was in the Austrian-Hungarian army, he was a prisoner. He was three and a half to four years a prisoner in Russia so he knew the whole sections, from Kiev and Kharkov, and so on. We followed exactly the map, where the Russian are advancing and where the German are retreating and where the battles are taking place and some of the cities were taken two or three times, occupied back and forth, back and forth but we knew that the Russian are retreating slowly and we knew by their retreat, they will destroy all the evidence behind them. The Germans, I mean, so we were in constant fear.

NL: Did the German police, the SS, actually seize some Jews during this time? Did they take them?

NS: Yes, when they found out where any Jews were living, they were taken away. Where they were taken away or how they disappeared, no one knows because I don't think anybody had the courage to go to investigate. I think that even some of the members from the Jewish community were deported, and that fell apart. So, he became a stateless no-man's land, the city of Czernowitz, which is a big city and that was our luck. In a small town we could not hide out and survive. We had all the non-Jewish living there. Some of the non-Jewish knew that we are Jews and that we are living there. As a matter of fact, in the same house that we lived, it was an apartment house there was what we called the administrator of that apartment house, was a non-Jewish young lady who was the *house-meister*, what you call that *house-meister*, house administrator, was taking care of the apartment. She blackmailed us that if we don't give her certain things, she is going to denounce us, so we used to always give her and more we gave, more she demanded, and she had a boyfriend who was a Romanian officer who used to come back and forth from the front to visit her, and one day we had a confrontation that he personally came in and demanded that we should give him a couple fur coats which my uncle had personally hidden, and money and some jewelry, whatever is left. If not he will denounce us to the German government. So, we gave him but he never actually brought the Germans. It was more like a blackmail, and he didn't do that because of good conscious. He was scared too and she was scared because if the Russian will come in, what would happen to her.

NL: You could then denounce them.

NS: That's exactly. In a friendly way, yes. The existence was very poor. We were living from scraps; food was not available and we used to live from dried bread, which was cut in small pieces and then baked in the oven as hot biscuits which could stay for a long time, preserve for a long time and we used to have ration. We used to have so many pieces a day.

NL: That was your total.

NS: We used to eat beans and bread and onions and garlic and we lived from that; we didn't have any other, no meat, no eggs, no milk. We just survived from day to day from the poor food we got scrapped together from back and forth. In March of 1944,

the Russians came in. I don't recall the date but it must have been the 15th or the 16th of March. A big part of the city became a ghost town.

NL: The Germans left, too?

NS: The German troops left but not the SS. The SS took over the whole city, and I remember why they were the SS. They were in black uniforms and they had that skull on their heads and they were patrolling in those small jeeps and armored trucks throughout the city. In the apartment house where I lived, we lived, there was a big courtyard and one day three armored trucks and a jeep came into our yard. They parked in our yard; we looked up from the window and in our house we also had a basement. Most of the basements there were also protection during the war against bombs so it was like a shelter and you had a small little window just for a lookout and we were hidden all in the basement and we looked out, and here they are parked in our yard. We figured it doesn't make sense to stay there; we have to make contact, so I walked out and I start a conversation with them and they did not know that I am Jewish.

NL: What did you say to them?

NS: Nothing. I just came out and I said, "We would like to say we are *Volksdeutsche*." I remember they had biscuits and chocolates and they were looking for *schnapps* which was very scarce. My mother had some regular rubbing alcohol, which we knew that this is a scarce product. During the war, any troops, you can exchange that for food.

NL: Plain alcohol?

NS: Plain alcohol, which we had it several bottles in the house and we mixed that with *kimmel*. *Kimmel* is what would you call that? Caraway seeds, and we made from one bottle of 100-proof alcohol, we made like four or five bottles of *schnapps*, and so I went out to the soldiers who were lingering around, and I told them would they like to have a bottle of *schnapps* for some food. Also, the electricity didn't exist because electricity was cut off so the only way of lighting, we used petroleum naphtha. They also had those half tanks. They had diesel motors and they had naphtha. So we tried to get a couple liter of naphtha for lighting the candles, so, I made an exchange with them.

NL: They agreed.

NS: And, I made a conversation with a young German, and I didn't realize that he was an Austrian and he was telling me that he wasn't SS, but he was telling me that he knows the war is coming to an end but he is innocent. He said, "I didn't want that war. I am from Austria, I have a wife and two kids and I don't want to fight in this war, but they forced me to get into it. He didn't know I am Jewish. I had a conversation with him like on a side. It wasn't an obvious conversation, just privately, as a young boy I was discussing with him; he didn't know that I am Jewish and we made that exchange. As a matter of fact, we have a couple laughs and a couple jokes, and I took the things necessary for us. That we had the biscuits and the chocolate and that naphtha or petroleum for the alcohol, the *schnapps*. Because *schnapps* they didn't have.

NL: Your mother didn't try to hold you back, Mr. Snyder?

NS: Oh yes. I was very adventurous like I said.

NL: She must have been terrified.

NS: Yes, but she was very glad when I came in with that what I obtained from them.

NL: They didn't enter the apartment then.

NS: No. No, because it doesn't a direct entrance. I had to go like over a fence and then backtrack myself so they didn't know exactly from where I am coming. They didn't know I was from the same house.

NL: Were there other Jewish families in that complex?

NS: No. Us but there were some others about three or four houses away. We knew about that.

NL: These men were no longer interested in seizing Jews.

NS: They were interested in saving their own hide. He told me that, "Hitler is *kaput*; the war is *kaput*. The Bolsheviks are coming, and they are going to pay back what we did to them, they are going to pay back to us." He was concerned for his family in Austria. So, he was telling me, "You can run, don't stay here because you know what will happen to you." And I told him, "I only have a sick mother and I don't have my family." I said that my father is some place in the war, and I told him I am a *Volksdeutsche* and he was taken away to the war and I don't even know where he is, and he said, "You better take off as soon as possible." As a matter of fact he even offered me a ride with him. If I want to come with him. I says, "Oh yes we won't stay here; in the next 24 hours, we will also go we will leave." So, a nice conversation with him, and after about two days they left. While they were there, no one dared come out from the house. I was the only one which I came out for like I said, sidetracked myself. That helped us a lot-those biscuits and chocolates and they also gave us some cans. If I can remember with some, it looked like dog food, but it was rations in cans.

NL: K rations.

NS: K rations. It was a mixture of rice and meat and something like that. That helped us a lot because we haven't have that for a long time. In a way, I felt bad for them because they were scared; they were very, very scared and two days later, they just took off and left. But the funniest thing is, the irony of that is that he apologized to me that he didn't want that war, that he was forced into the war because he is an Austrian. The name Austrian means you are not so guilty like the Germans; it means that you are more innocent.

NL: A *bubba meise*. They were looking for rationalization.

NS: Yes, rationalization, had a guilty conscience. No one forced them to go to the SS; but I understand that to the SS you had to volunteer. No one forced them on gunpoint to join the SS. I never asked him about his adventures, but naturally he came through from Stalingrad. Who knows how many Jews and how many non-Jews were killed by the SS; how much he has on his conscious, but that is another story. Our only aim was

to survive, so as it came near, we didn't know when but we actually heard already the battle not too far, the noise of the battle, the artillery close in. We were not too far from a big river which is called the Prut and by rumors we found out that the Russian were on the other side, and the Germans were defending in their retreat on this side and there were two large bridges. One was a railroad bridge and one was a regular bridge. Twenty four hours before that the Russian entering, we heard a loud explosion. The Germans blew up both bridges and then we heard the artillery in a rapid motion. Actually we didn't realize that they were the *Katyushas*. We called the "Rocket". It was like a boom, boom, boom, boom. It was not just the regular artillery. The Russian had their own forces and they were pumping them.

The Germans were in full retreat, so about twenty four hours prior to that, the city was totally deserted. You haven't seen a soul on the street. Every one was locked in, even the non-Jews were locked into their houses and the only one who you could see on the streets when you looked out, we saw were the German SS patrolling in their jeeps in two or four or in those half-trucks back and forth throughout the city. A day or twelve hours prior to the Russian entering, it was the last day of the German occupation and they moved around with loud speakers and we hear the loudspeakers and we were curious to know what they are saying. They were saying in German: "Population, we are going to blow up the warehouse which is located by the railroad." [The railroad was a mile from the footbridge to the river]. "We don't want to leave the Bolsheviks absolutely nothing. So it's open, if you want to plunder, take anything you want, come the warehouses is open, take as much as you can. The more you take, the less there is for the Russian. For the Bolsheviks." And this was going on for hours with loud speakers throughout the whole neighborhood and all along the streets. So when I heard that I figured this is the best occasion to do that. My mother objected to that. And my uncle objected to that. He said, "You are foolish, stupid for doing that."

NL: They thought it was a trick?

NS: No.

NL: They just knew that you would be in danger.

NS: In danger to go and I said, "I must go because I have a friend." As a matter of fact, no, I don't have a friend, I'm sorry, that friend which was I lost contact with and because of the curfew, I didn't know exactly where his is; he lived in the other part of the city. So, I did go, and I said, "I must because even the Russian come in, we won't have any food, the war still goes on." So, I went out. I snuck out from the house. Naturally I was dressed in white socks and black short pants, and a crew cut and I spoke good German so I was a *Volksdeutsche*, and as I was going down, there was a hill down to the, from where I lived I would say about a mile and a half going, or two miles to that railroad main station which all the warehouses are located. And as I was going down, I seen population, non-Jews, women and men and youngsters from each corners they are coming to get whatever they can. The Germans said, "It is free, come and take it, come and get it."

Naturally I went down. So, in that commotion I came down and I seen the SS troops standing over there opening all of the warehouses. And they say, "Take it, don't leave for the Bolsheviks, take what you can." And in that commotion I did not know, I was like too much confused.

So some people went in and had taken like say whole bales of linen like for suits, or linen for sheets or for clothing, valuable leather and some other things. I don't think there was any food left; the food the Germans needed. There was mostly produce – not produce goods. And I, that warehouse I walked in. There were shoes for the shoe department, shoes, shoes. I grabbed two big bags [the Germans supplied you bags, big bags like army duffel bags] but big ones. The bag was bigger like me, and I start stuffing in. I didn't realize I was stuffing in shoes almost lefts, from each shoe. I was in such commotion. The people were coming in, it was like a circus. They were grabbing and I took about a dozen shoes that were all lefts. It is funny but tragic. And the hats I took from boxes and stuffed them in. Then the most valuable which I actually took was yarn for shoemakers, waxed yarn. We lived on that after that for six months. I stuffed in as much as I could. Also, in olden times they used for heavy boots and for heavy shoes, they used horseshoe, metal horseshoe to protect the heels, so I grabbed. It was heavy. I grabbed a couple boxes and emptied it in my bag. Also, I took some bales of linen. It wasn't linen, I'm sorry, it was silk. I didn't realize silk, and because it was so clumsy in that long roll, so I unrolled it and stuffed it in, as much as I could, and I figured I only can get two. Near me was another guy who was a non-Jew, who was Ukrainian, but a local from Czernowitz. He was doing the same thing, so we were both taking nonsense but we were stuffing. And I looked outside and I see that people are going. And it is unbelievable, people are mad, dragging things. And then came the loudspeaker that says "You have one more hour because we are going to blow them up; that's it. You don't have too much time, we will blow them up one hour." The dynamite was already put under those warehouses; they just have to lit a fuse. I said, More, more, more, more." So finally, I and that unknown stranger who was my age, I the Jew and he the non-Jew became friends. And in our walking together out from there he said, "You are Jewish" and I said, "Yes, I am Jewish." He says "Well, in short while we will both be liberated." This is what he was telling me.

NL: What made him say that?

NS: I don't know. I trusted him because I figured he is in the same boat with me and through stupidity I said, "Yes, I am." I had some trust because he was my age and I figured we had the same destiny. And then I had my two bags. I think each bag weighed at least 75 to 80 pounds, so I had them both.

NL: And, you had to walk a mile and a half.

NS: After walking out from that, I see that there is nobody walking; we were the only ones because we were late, and we walked about 1/2 mile into the main road, then we heard the explosion. The Germans blew up the warehouses. You could see smoke and everything was shaking. And as we walked into the main road and this was March and the

day is short and it must have been five o'clock and the day became getting, not dark, but close to the night and as we are walking the first thing we saw is SS patrols. And it was such mishmash, such a confusion, they were not aware those troops who were patrolling were not aware from where we are coming. Maybe they are not communicating, who knows, but anyway, as we were walking with those two bags they suddenly...

Tape four, side one:

NL: Yes, what happened when you encountered the SS.

NS: The first thing they say naturally is "Halt", and when he said "Halt", he said, "Hands up", we had to drop the two bags, and the bags when they fall to the floor with all those iron horseshoes and it was making a terrible noise and then they were suspicious that we had ammunition there. We dropped them and they said, "Where are you coming?" and we told them we just came. "Your friends told us to go and plunder and take," and they said, "Don't you know it's curfew? The time is over." I don't remember the time, but they said, "It was five o'clock was the last and you can't walk on the streets. What are you doing here?" So they said, "Who are you? Jews?" and I said, "*Heil* Hitler, I am a *Volksdeutsche*", and my friend was near me and he did not.

NL: He didn't denounce it.

NS: He did not denounce it. That is one good fate in a human being, and a friend, it wasn't a friend to me before. I just met him.

NL: Just luck.

NS: Just luck. He could have said, "He's a Jew, but he didn't." So he says, "*Los*," Run. Then we begged him and we said, "Look, we are *Volksdeutsches* and we don't have any parents. We are going to run also but we have nothing. This is all of our belongings we have. Will you let us take the bags?" So he opened the bags and he saw this inside *shmatkes*, all those shoes and all that, so he says, "Go ahead and take it, but run." We know the old trick of the Germans: they say "Run", and they shoot you in the back, so we were running zig-zag.

NL: The Ukrainian also was somewhat careful?

NS: Yes, oh yes, and then we came to a crossroad, and he lived on a different section and he said to me, "Good luck, good bye," and he took off left and I went right. I went to my street. I will never forget the street. The street was called "Yeremea Unesco". Was the street which I supposed to go, where our house was.

NL: Which means?

NS: That street was called "Yeremea Unesco", that street which is apparently changed today in Romania. That is the street where we lived. And as I was going around the corner, here is a jeep passing by with four SS and they stop right away and all of them with their automatic machine guns stop, and here, single, I was more suspicious. "Hand up! Stop! Who are you? You are a Russian spy? You're a Jew" and I said, "No, I am a *Volksdeutsche*," and I made a salute. The awful salute which actually saved my life. And I told them in a half-crying, not actually crying, but I made believe that a young boy, I have a sick mother and my father is fighting in the front someplace. And we are ready to leave, too, but in case we cannot we have to survive, so that is why I should take it home. One says, "Take it." The other one says, "No leave it." So finally, they decide to let me go and he says, "Take it." And I encountered one more, exactly 400 yards from my house.

NL: Another unit?

NS: Another unit. Okay. My uncle, my mother, my aunt were looking out from the basement. They were hidden in the cellar looking out from this little tiny window.

NL: Waiting for you?

NS: Waiting for me. You could hear artillery shots. The sky is lighting. The Russian at that point, the Russian were trying to cross the river. There was a big battle was going on. So you could see it when it gets dark, you could see the flashes of the light in the sky. I didn't realize the danger, but I would not let those bags go. Those are my bags. Somebody else would leave the bags and run for your life, but I had to have those bags. So it was about 300 or 400 yards I would say from my house. I could not show him where I live because they might follow me and find everybody there. So I figured I have to out-manuever them and the same story. You know, "I was late coming because it's heavy bags" and they said, "Curfew. You know you can be shot. You can be shot right now because you are not allowed to be on the streets." I begged him and again I did the salute, that awful salute which I despise it but it saved my life. And I told him, I said, "Please, please, let me take this. This is my only belongings that I have. I am an orphan..." This time I changed my story.

"I am an orphan, I have nobody." "Where do you go? Where do you live?", they say. "I live someplace. I don't have nowhere under a door step or someplace." I gave them some foolish story so they said, "Fine, all right. Can you run?" And I knew that old saying, when the Germans say, "Can you run?", they shoot you in the back. That's a pleasure for them to do that, so I figured I'd take that risk and I grabbed the two bags. And I was tired already from lifting those bags, so I dragging them actually on the floor and I was running all in zig-zag but running for my life. And that street bends, so in the meantime, I looked back and the jeep disappeared. So what I did as I was passing in front of our courtyard, I threw the two bags in. I threw one bag in and the second, so I was free. As soon as I threw them in the courtyard, I was personally free but I could not enter the yard for fear that maybe...

NL: They followed you?

NS: They follow me and then they would discover everybody. So I was running around the bend to the corner, into a courtyard. And from there, I climbed two different fences and from under fences and under the tree and I landed into the yard where I live. And it became darker and when I walked in, the reception I had there was unbelievable. My mother almost had a heart attack; my uncle was speechless and my aunt says, "You are out of your mind; you lost your mind. You know you could be shot; you could have brought the Germans to us. What did you do? I said, "I brought you in here so we can survive for six months." And when they opened the bags they said, "What did you bring in here? You brought a dozen left shoes? We cannot sell. We don't have to have a one-legged man!" I says, "In the commotion I grabbed whatever I could."

NL: Then they saw the silk...

NS: The silk and the yarn, because this was very important for shoemakers. And from this yarn was big rolls. And we lived actually six, seven months, trading when the Russian came in, we lived on that and this was our income.

NL: That is some story, Mr. Snyder, do you want to rest for a minute?

NS: No, I can continue. And we stood there waiting actually for the Russian to enter and naturally we didn't sleep. It was twelve o'clock midnight and suddenly everything became still. Quiet down, like from a nightmare, there became a peaceful vision. Not a light, not a sound, quiet.

NL: But no sign of troops?

NS: No sign of troops, no sign of trucks no jeeps, not nothing. I think those were the last troops who retreated. So, we knew that--you could hear a fly buzz. Something will happen, but we knew that the Germans have tricks. Don't go out from the houses. They wait for you to go out so that they can kill you, shoot you, or find out your hideout. So we waited.

NL: For days?

NS: No, no, no, no. At one o'clock, no one slept and I understand later in conversation with other Jews, and even non-Jews, no one slept. One o'clock, two, three, four,--at five o'clock in the morning we heard a noise like rumbling trucks or tank treads from far away and that was going on for hours. What happened actually is the Russian had broken through with pontoon bridges over the big river and were advancing to the city. So, again, I was adventurous and I walked out from the house into the streets. The streets were deserted but here and there somebody else came out from the house because they didn't see no Germans. We didn't see no Russian. We didn't see no Germans. We heard the noise from the rumbling trucks. So, around seven o'clock in the morning, we seen the first liberators, the Russian troops. And they were going under cover alongside the houses and to me they were not the same Russian like in 1940. They were Mongols, Siberian troops, they were the Mongols, with slanted eyes which I had not seen in 1940.

NL: Were you frightened?

NS: No, I wasn't. I was very happy. They were all battle-ready with full automatic, ready, combat-ready, going alongside from both sides from the houses. And when they saw us, the first thing they said in Russian [In Russian], "Where are the Nazis? Where are the Fascists?" And we told them, "We are Jews. We are Jews."

NL: Did they know that word?

NS: *Evrei*, In Russian, Jew mean *Evrei*--We are *Evrei* yes, they knew. They said, "Where are the Germans?" And we said, "The Germans must be left on the main highway." So then came the trucks and tanks and then later came more troops.

NL: Some European troops?

NS: European troops, mixed, but all first were those Mongolian shock troops. Naturally they came not as occupiers like they entered the Austro-Hungaria or other countries. They came as liberators because this is their territory. So they brought food,

they threw food from their trucks and they threw flowers; they threw chocolates and they threw bread. They had ready-baked bread. And all of the population came outside, and some jumped on the trucks and the tanks. And suddenly a couple flags came out from hiding--Russian flags, and they put it up and it was the day of liberation. And most of the forward troops--they were chasing the Germans back into deep Romania. I understand that the Romanian troops at that time turned coat and joined the allies. The king made a pact or somehow with the Russian to fight against the Germans. Those Germans actually, I understand, those Germans who left, who retreated from Czernowitz were all captured because the Russian entered through Bessarabia, through south Romania from near the Black Sea. And those Germans who retreated from the north to deep Romania, to Old Romania, they were all captured by the Russian. The Romanian actually joined. We had a letter that the Romanian joined together to fight with the allies against the Germans. But this wasn't our concern. We were under Russian occupation.

The Russian did not administer the city. The troops, they came and went through the city. Because Czernowitz was a strategic city. There were a couple commissars, civilians coming over there. They urged that in Czernowitz they should form a civilian guard until the authorities will come and establish a mayor, police for law and order, form a civilian guard. There was a Zionist movement, a Communist movement, mostly youth, youngsters from age 14 to age 25, and the Russian left a lot of weapons. They gave us the Russian automatic machine guns.

NL: Really!

NS: Yes, because mostly there were Jews. There was 99.9% were Jews in the city who were survivors.

NL: Did you meet any Jewish soldiers in the army?

NS: Yes, we met some Jewish soldiers and they said, they told us horrible stories about massacres and at that time we found out about Kiev and we found out in every city they massacred thousands and thousands of families.

NL: Who?

NS: The Germans.

NL: And the Jewish soldiers told you these stories?

NS: Yes, they said, "You don't know what kind of horrors we went through, what horrors we seen, chasing the Germans" and they said, "Now the Jews from Transnistria are on their way back", but this not a priority for us. They are coming back. They are free to go. But are they coming back with transports? How they can come? Some of the trucks and some of the troops, slowly, slowly some of the survivors came back. But, in the meantime, the first order of the day was to form a civilian militia to protect the city for vandalism or for law and order and the Russian organizers left a lot of weapons there. Now I found out that some of my friends from school even are there already, they survived. And I remember that they came to my house and they had--automatic Russian weapons, and said, "Natan, take it and come with us." And my mother right away took a white

handkerchief and wetted it and put it on my head and says, "I have a terrible headache." She said I cannot go because I have a terrible headache. Years ago when you had a headache you put around a white handkerchief, a cold compress around your forehead. And I said, "No don't do that. I am not a coward, I will go." And she says, "You will get killed" and I says, "I have to take revenge to what happened to our people, to my father. We want to find the Nazis and not only Germans, but Nazis, criminals, murderers. We have to find them. We have to protect. This is our city," and out we went, and we joined I would say with 60 or 70 or 80 and we went in the center of the city.

NL: All Jewish youths?

NS: All Jewish youths went in the center of the city. And this is where one account said, and I understand that he was in touch with the underground, Russian partisans, so he became the chief of it and he told us, "Now, we are going to patrol. I want two and three together patrolling the city. Take sections. You take this section, you take that section," and we start patrolling. We went through the synagogues. And all the synagogues were all destroyed and some of them were burned and houses were boarded up. There wasn't damage done as far as war in Czernowitz, because the war was outside the city, but the destruction which the Romanian and the Germans did while they were in the city...

NL: Did you find any Jews in hiding?

NS: No, the Jews that were in hiding all came out, who were left, and it was more or less adventure for me to go around. And I remember day and night we had to patrol. And we had like, eight to eight was your shift, and you, from eight o'clock to the next morning. And for two days we patrolled the city and then they organized a search and destroy or, better to say, search and capture of Nazi, Germans who were hiding and couldn't escape. SS who were hiding between the Ukrainian population outside the city.

NL: There were some?

NS: Oh yes, and this was very dangerous because when the Russian entered, they had bands formed, anti-Communist bands, or anti-Russian bands. They were fascist bands. They were deserters from the German army, those who couldn't escape from the German army, those who were in hiding. Ukrainians who were afraid because they murdered the Jews and they couldn't escape. Those who couldn't escape, or Polish or any undesirable Nazis, fascists, band together in the hills and into the forest and they called themselves *Banderovtsi*. They took the name after a General Bandera. In the first World War they had Petliura. They were named after a General Petliura [Petliura - Last Premier of Independent Ukraine (Jewish Holocaust Encycl.)] was his name. And so this Bandera was a Ukrainian general who surrounded, no I am sorry, who actually betrayed the Russian. When the Germans advanced to Russia, he being the general of the Ukrainian army of their troops, he surrendered to the Germans with a whole division. He went with the Germans to fight the Bolsheviks, to so-called to liberate the Ukrainian nationalists. They promised them that they would have a Ukrainian state by themselves and his name was Bandera.

[Stefan Bandera, leader of the extremist Ukrainian Nationalists, who was actually imprisoned by the Germans in 1941 in Sachsenhausen, after Eastern Galicia was annexed to the Government-General in Poland - an event which was bitterly disappointing to those Ukrainians who had expected the Germans to help them establish an independent state.] So, actually, those remnants of bandits called themselves *Banderovtsis*, which is in plural. I understand that Bandera succeeded to run away to Germany and he lived there until the late 50s in Germany, and I think that the Russian KGB got him. Yah, they got him there. Actually he also was participating in the "Voice of America" in Germany, a propaganda against Russia because he was anti-Communist, no matter what kind of criminal he was.

Those Ukrainians, who actually those Ukrainians volunteers, the volunteers who went to fight with the Germans against the Russian, I understand they were the biggest killers of the Jews. They helped the Germans killing Jews. They were the tool of killers, the tools of killings. The Germans liked that. Why should they do the dirty work? So, those who couldn't escape organized under bands in the woods. And it was dangerous to go outside the city. And it happened incidents that the Jews went back to see the little towns where they belonged and so on, and they were massacred and killed--many of them and, as a matter of fact, it happened to two cousins of mine. They went back in a town, not in my town, but two towns away...

NL: By Ukrainians?

NS: By the so-called *Banderovtsi*. They killed them and the Russian troops found them. The Russian did not have enough troops to go and wipe them out because most of the troops were fighting the Germans on the battle-front. So it was 1944, it was even before the landing in June 4th, in Normandy, so the Russian were busy chasing and fighting the Germans. I understand at that time we did go out. In the meantime, a lot of Germans were found hidden in basements and attics by non-Jews who were hiding them, and they were all assembled. Naturally the Russian troops there, too. We were not under our own control. They did not say "The city is yours and you rule it now", but we were like helping them. Naturally, for us it was like revenge. So, they gathered a lot of them. They even brought them back, some of the Russian who captured them, in conflicts they couldn't escape. They brought them back into the city and they assembled them right in the middle. Czernowitz had a big center, it's called the *Ringplatz*, which means a round circle. It's like here in Philadelphia, in City Hall, we do not have a plaza, but it's a big, big plaza, it's called the *Ringplatz*. It's like in the center where the city hall was, and the big government buildings. And they assembled them over there and the Russian were actually kept them there as prisoners.

But our aim was to go out and find not so much the Germans but Ukrainian murderers who run away from the small towns. We figured that in small towns they obvious can be discovered, but in a big town, in a big city like Czernowitz they can get lost. So some of them run away to the big city, not knowing that most of them run with the German troops as they retreated back to Hungaria-Austria into Germany who later

claimed to the American troops that they were anti-Communist, poor slave labors deported by the Germans to work in the mines and in slave labor camps. They don't want to go back to Russia because they are anti-Communist, so they would like to live in the West. And they fooled the English, the American. They even got help, some of them, from the Joint Distribution. From the so-called UNRRA, they got blankets and chocolates and food, and stayed in the DP camps in Germany. And later two years or a year later, they emigrated to Canada, Australia, South America and all over the world, fooling them, giving false names and false ages and so on. Everybody was born in Kiev and Moscow; nobody was born in small little towns. But everybody was born in Moscow or in Kiev and they fooled the authorities and we know from now, we discovered that there is one [name - unclear] living here that was a murderer, and there is thousands of them that we don't even know about them or we don't want to go after them, not we, but the authorities. So, to get away from that subject, our aim is to find those murderers. So we went into towns and they succeeded in bringing back, but not too far. Just, in fact, six miles out of the city...

NL: You did find some?

NS: Oh yes, we brought them back and had them assembled together with those--Also, we found Romanian cowards, Romanian soldiers, who could not retreat or did not have time to retreat. And they were hiding, or did not want to fight anymore the Germans or didn't want to fight in the war, so they were hiding as villagers, as peasants, and they were discovered by the Russian troops and brought back as prisoners. Some in uniform and some without.

NL: So you must have enjoyed that.

NS: Yes. The one thing which I didn't enjoy, but I was too young to understand, that the Romanians who were assembled in that *Ringplatz*, a day later, they were kept over there as prisoners. And I remember that there was a whole group, and as my memory dictates, the Romanians were released. The Russian didn't consider the Romanians too much as fighters.

NL: Well, they were now allies.

NS: Now only that, but when they were captured they were still not allies, they were not fighting now the Russian, they were still remnants of the old army. They were making fun of them. They were taking off their shoes, took their weapons, ripped off their epaulets, kicked them in behind and says, "Go home to your family, you coward." In a joke, no respect from them, they kicked them in the behind and they didn't want to take them as prisoners and they said, "Go home." But this didn't affect the Germans because those Germans who were captured--the Russian killed them, right in the same place. They put up machine guns because most of the Germans who were caught were actually SS. The Russian had a code. I think it was from Stalin who issued it in 1943; "Any SS or Gestapo should not be taken prisoner alive." They were not regular army. They were all in black uniforms. They couldn't hide because they also had that tattoo under the arm but the Russian had them all killed and I understand some of the bodies were hanging around for

24 hours right there in the square. It wasn't for us a pleasure to see that because we had never--in a way we felt sorry even though they were our tormentors. We felt sorry because we figured maybe one of them is innocent, and maybe he does have a wife and children home and maybe he was forced into that. But that is war, that is the fate of war, that is the destiny. I--That patrolling was for a short-live because after three, four days the Russian brought in their own authorities. And there came the chief of the militia and a couple judges and a couple authorities in government and so on; they eliminated all that so-called self-appointed civilian guard. We had to surrender all of arms, all the weapons and so on. And then they opened recruitment...

NL: To their army?

NS: Their army, and every youngster from age 16 had to be registered to be inducted into the army.

NL: You were then how old?

NS: In 1944--I was born in '26, I was 18 years old. Yes. Every youngster has to report for indoctrination, registration. Naturally, it was an order to go and fight the fascists to the end. To victory. Everybody was going to register and I registered too. At the same time we went to school, because it doesn't mean if you go in and register, they took you right away. So...

NL: You and your sister?

NS: I don't remember my sister. My sister was much younger but I went to school. It wasn't a school, it wasn't a *Gymnasium*, or it wasn't a high school or an elementary school. It was one school called the Russian school. And they taught Russian, you talked in Russian, you learned Russian, the language, and...

NL: No other language?

NS: No other language, and you learned there mathematics and chemistry and history and propaganda and the language in the school.

NL: By the way, what language did you use when you spoke to the Russian soldiers?

NS: Russian.

NL: You knew a little?

NS: Yes, Russian because I knew Ukrainian because a lot of Ukrainians lived there. Just the accent is a little different.

NL: I see, so how was life in school?

NS: Well, we enjoyed it in school because most our professors were--some of them Russian and some of them Jewish and we learned there. We didn't know it would be short-lived our studies because eventually we would have to go to the army, but we learned there and it was very interesting and very enjoyable but...

NL: And your uncle, was he required to work for the Russian?

NS: Yes, my uncle got a job back in the same factory that was owned by the government. Everybody was nationalized. There was no more private homes, nothing

belongs to you, everything belongs to the government and you are an object of the government, but people had the liberty and freedom and...

Tape four, side two:

NL: Was there enough food now?

NS: Yes, the food we brought out from the peasants. All around was an exchange. The Russian brought in, it was more organized. There was some stores opened and, I like I mentioned before, my mother, we had no income, so a lot of exchange because a lot of the items were scarce. You couldn't find no leather your shoes, your clothing, wool...

NL: This is when the yarn came in handy and the silk.

NS: That's right [Mrs. S. makes a comment.]. There were rubles.

NL: Romanian money wasn't...

NS: Nothing. But rubles. People were living, making a living. And most the others came back from concentration camps, people we seen and were lucky to seen. People came back sick and then we found out--the war was still going on. This is 1944. Then we heard about the horrors of the concentration camps.

NL: The first time?

NS: We heard about the horrors in Auschwitz. First time.

NL: Who told you?

NS: The Russian, the Jewish were in the Russian army, Russian themselves--News--the order of Stalin...

NL: The Russian supplied some of this news?

NS: Yes, they were telling us and mostly Jews that were in the Russian army who had traveled around, because you could travel in all the occupied territories where the Russian occupied and look for your loved ones or for relatives. It was, like, disorganized. It wasn't an organized police state at that time. Their aim was to destroy, to crush fascism, so everybody could join. It wasn't so much I would say dictatorship.

NL: You felt free?

NS: Yes. Totalitarian regime, we know as of now it didn't exist at that time because it was like wartime.

NL: Did you have any interest in going back to your old town?

NS: Oh sure, but we were told not, because our town was heavily overtaken by the *Banderovtsi* because two of my cousins they were killed about ten miles away and the Russian were against it. They themselves, instances, they killed Russian troops. The Russian trucks and jeeps that went in adventured themselves to go into the back country, the villages, never came back. So the Russian did not have the mobilization to fight them, so they were ruling over the mountains and forests, and that was a problem. So the Jews, they never went back and they said, "One day we will go back." I wanted to go back for one reason, to see my home where I was born and to see the grave of my father, where he is buried. We were told they buried all in a mass grave. But where, the location? Maybe they take them out and put them on the cemetery. The Jewish cemetery was desecrated. I

mean there was nothing left from it. I understand they took out the stones for pavement, for buildings and so on. But, I never went back; my mother never went back to our town to this day. My only wish is one time in life to go back to that town.

NL: So, you were relatively free in the first weeks of the Russian occupation, and you were enjoying school?

NS: Right. Then started the mobilization. At the school. About three months later it was April, May, June--In July we didn't finish the school, they said, "You come back from war, then you finish school. You have to go and fight". So they took everybody, got their induction, a letter home and was asked to join the Red army, and more and more and more went and so on. There was no way that you could avoid it because that is an impossibility. And I wanted to go because I want to take revenge for my father and for all the rest of the Jews who were massacred to fight the fascists. My mother was very scared because she lost her husband, my father, so she want me alive. And she knew that going as cannon into the war, we didn't mean nothing to the Russian, to sacrifice 100,000 soldiers for their aim and their victory. People don't mean nothing to them, numbers, I mean. So, many went and never came back. Then, I was taken into for induction into that army camp, which I went very proudly. What actually happened is...

NL: Was the camp close to Czernowitz? Or, did you go East?

NS: It was in Czernowitz. It was an old Romanian military camp. It was the headquarters for recruitment. What happened is that those that had some education were taken into special schools. And most of them were Jewish, and even some non-Jewish who had education, even some of the peasants who had a little bit education and were able to read and understand a little bit mathematics, and physics and so on. They were taken into a school, a special course. Not sending us infantry. Just cannon for front line which were integrated into the Russian army. There was no separate. In special school. You had to bribe to get to that special school. Why you had to bribe to get to that special school? Because there they were serving good food and you had good conditions. For us to--good living quarters and for ninety days, for three months you were there, safe from the massacre on the front line. And we never know what would happen because the biggest battle in this time was going on in Konigsberg, the whole line at the front in Konigsberg in Hochprussia. Budapest in Hungaria, Warsaw in Poland, and Konigsberg--these were the three major battles going on at that time between the Russian and the Germans. They were pushing into the German border.

NL: When you say bribe, how was that accomplished? What did you do?

NS: In other words, the Russian are known for taking bribes. With a couple thousand *rubles*, you could bribe an officer to admit you in that school. So this is what happened, my mother did bribe. It was middleman, not direct. Somebody who knew also an officer knew that friend and so on and that is I got into that school. We did not realize that school belonged to the polytechnic division. It was nothing else like a school for living mines which is called demolition squad. You're trying to escape from a window and you

fall into a hole into the other side. In the meantime, we got news from friends, that fell--a very good friend of mine. His parents got a letter. The letters used to come from the authorities with a black rim. He fell to the Fatherland at Konigsberg. He died there, so we knew that life doesn't mean nothing. So you go and you have a chance of coming back and maybe not. The battles were very crucial battles. Crushing the main German offensive. So, we went to that school. We were assigned to that school, and we were a group of, I would say, 30 to 35 youngsters. I would say that half of them were Jews and half were non-Jews. And we had a commander who was a Cossack, tall, dark hair, dressed as a Cossack, with those knives on the side, on the pockets, knives sticking out, with a big fur hat, just like a Cossack. And he was a commander. He was the captain. His name was Vassily Vanovich, so we knew that he is a Cossack. And then he had officers under him, lieutenants and sergeants and so on, and the sergeant happened to be a Ukrainian who was a Jew-hater. He was antisemitic. We were there in the school, and we had half a day classes and half day of practice. What we were learning is demolition, how to take out all kinds of mines, Russian mines and American mines, English mines, and German mines and Hungarian and Finland which were allies to the German. Naturally, the German mines which was the most important. And then we had practice, and we were learning also the technical part of it, how it's constructed, how it functions, and so on. Then we moved from there closer to the front line and we were integrated to a division which was called at that time Demolition Squad. I forgot in Russian. We were attached to the military police because our job was to remove the mines from the fields before the troops advanced, and remove the mines from the territory that was occupied, the remaining mines. The Germans had mines all over the place. At the same time, help combat the military police or the army--those *Banderovtsis*. If we had nothing to do, they used to take us into the woods to fight and capture those *Banderovtsis*. Any available troops, they sent in to fight them and to destroy them which was impossible at that time. Then they took us out actually in the real war which was that in terror and in danger.

NL: This was now west, toward Konigsberg.

NS: No, that was in Poland, Galicia in Poland--in that section. We were attached to the army. I don't remember if it was Fourth Ukrainian or the Second Russian or whatever it is. But we had our group, our company, and that captain was outnumbered and we were dressed as soldiers but we also had the emblem of the military police. It was red and blue on our epaulets, which means that we could also assist, not assist, but when they had German prisoners-of-war, help transport them, watch them, participate in watching prisoners-of-wars. When they used to take them in cattle trains back to Russia, we had to take them from this point to that point and other groups would take them over and further down or watch them prisoner of camps. So actually, we were work, miscellaneous--not really combat, fighting on the front. So that was a good point in that. One day they took us to the real war which was actually taking out a mine field, which was not too far from

the battle because we heard the artillery and the fights going on, and so on, and a lot of them died there over there.

NL: A lot of your friends?

NS: Yes, for me it was at that time, I didn't realize what death is...

NL: It was still an adventure?

NS: Yes, for me it was a big adventure at that time. But in one way I wanted to go and revenge the death of our brothers and my father and so on, and the same time, I had no fear. To me it was an adventure and I remember we were stationed, we arrived actually in a small town, and in the outskirts of the town was a strategic passway where the German were defeated and the whole town is mined, deserted. The reason why we knew was because there were cows blown up and dogs blown up, trees and houses and everything was mined, the trees, the houses, the roads, the fields. The troops could not pass, but they were not the first troops who were fighting. The other troops of occupation they could not go through, they send us. We are the specialists, so...

NL: How long did you serve there?

NS: Under that I served--I would say about until September or October.

NL: And you cleared the area.

NS: Oh yes, we cleared enough because we were specialized. First of all we had mine detectors, and some of them were plastic mines and we had to use our bayonets and just find them. We were specialized, we were trained for that. There were the "S" mines which were wired with thin green hair wires and they exploded like ten together. Then we have tank mines. We were taking out a day, our group, at least a couple thousand mines and soon as you take the mines out, the capsules taken out, the mines were not in danger anymore. I remember we used to have hills, mountains of those mines that were not dangerous because the capsules were out. The capsules, they looked like a bullet, and they were dangerous.

NL: How did you defuse them?

NS: How do you defuse them: There is a little spring and you grab that spring. Each mine has a different mechanism, some are more dangerous but the capsule itself the explosive. And I collected a lot of souvenirs and being as a soldier, we had a satchel, like and I filled it up day by day I filled it up full of those capsules, and didn't realize that I'm sitting on a time bomb. But for me it was an adventure, and even we used to take some of the mines and put them up for target shooting and so on, and we lived there and every single day we had casualties. And as the people were dwindling down they brought in more reinforcement, Russian, not from our group, just Russian who were assigned to that. In the same occupation, so the group had to be the number of 35, and I remember that sergeant. He was blown up and I felt so bad for him because he went into the field and they brought him out on a stretcher and the guts were hanging down. And I looked to him and it wasn't horrified to me. That's what happened. I didn't realize that that could happen to me too. Once we were going into the field in different pattern, it was like a plan because

we had no map. Russian maps we had for Russian mines, but not from the Germans, so we had to go by puzzle. I remember that suddenly in the back to the left, boom, an explosion and all that remained was pieces of flesh or clothing on the trees and there was nothing to collect, but it didn't scare us or me personally because--what happened and it was dumb. I was a little bit afraid but it didn't scare me or others too. This was going on for months. One day they sent us into the woods, what we call "search and destroy" to get those *Banderovtsis*. Because what happened is a couple of trucks of soldiers went into one of the major holdouts where they were stationed and they never came back. They were all killed, so they figured they had to send in more. They sent in troops and they sent us to help them, and that I was scared, that I was scared because I figured you are fighting against the unknown. It's partisans. It is like fighting the Viet Cong in Viet Nam. You don't know whom you are fighting. So, we went to two missions, to two missions we went and both missions--what they did actually, they didn't capture anybody because, in the meantime, the Russian had brought more troops from the front back to combat those guerrillas. They had more pieces of artillery and what they were doing was they were surrounding the entire forest, from all around with *ketyushas* and artillery. They decimated the whole forest, so it was a victory for us because we didn't have to go combat to combat. They were willing to take just prisoners. I understand they had bunkers under the ground but they eliminated everything, destroyed it. They are know for that; they don't play around. There is no civilization, or in civilized manner. They just massacred everybody and destroyed everything. But, I went for two of those missions. One time we went at night time for a mission and they did capture three Germans who were in civilian clothes and a couple Ukrainians. They were hiding out in a big farm like and they found them in a barn and they were taken away and I am sure they were executed. There was no trials, they just took them aside and they were executed.

NL: And then you went back to demolition work?

NS: I went back to demolition work and then we realized between us, our fellow friends and so on, that we are in danger because they were talking about sending us to the front line. And that is the biggest danger, because if you went to the front line it was a suicide squad. It means "No man's land." The Russian are on the one side and the Germans on the other side, and between them is called a "no man's land"--a stretch of two, three miles. This is where they are sending the demolition squad to clear that particular area before the troops can advance. So, we knew that that was like signing your own death sentence. And for some reason, we had in our group a guy who was like 26 or 27, he was much older and he said that he can make a deal with the captain. But we didn't have any money, so we all gave our watches because they love watches, so I had a watch at that time...

NL: What kind of deal?

NS: We give him the watches and he is going to keep us longer there.

NL: I see

NS: Not sending us to the front lines. We were ready to give our watches and we were told one day that in the evening that he was going to meet with us as a group--At that time we had 15 to 18 Jewish guys. He's going to meet with us. And he met with us. And I remember, it was like outside, in a village, outside the house under a tree we were sitting down, it was leisure time and he sat down and he said, "Let me tell you something." And we had a lot of respect for the guy and we knew that, you know, Cossacks are fearless. "My name is Vassily Ivanovich [Gregorovich]. And you know that I am a Cossack, but I am not, I am a Jew. My name is Abraham Schwartzman. I am from Kiev. I am an Israelite. I am part of the Israeli folk, the Yiddishe folk. The reason I am dressed that way, you will ask the question Why? My wife and my children, my in-laws, my entire family, a family of forty were massacred in Babi Yar in Kiev. I was in the army; I was lucky. When I came back to Kiev, they were all massacred. At that time, I figured, if I get captured into the Russian or the German hands as a Jew, naturally they will kill me. As a Cossack I had better chance of survival." So, he dressed himself, because he was very tall, with black hair, he fit in to be a Cossack. He assumed the name of Vasily Gregorovich Ivanovich. As a Cossack, the Germans will never suspect he was a Jew.

NL: And, neither did you?

NS: He says, "Let me tell you something. It's good to fight the Nazis. We should fight them to the end and take revenge for the blood they spilled, but after the war, he says, "I go to Jerusalem. This is where I belong."

NL: That is some story!

NS: That's right. He said, "I am a Jew, oh yes." He says, "Look, I am trying to protect you guys as much as I can. There is antisemitism in the Russian army. They don't like the Jews in here. They hate the Jews. They hate the Germans first, but the Jews second. Don't think that they are your friends. I have learned on my own skin, but this has to remain very discreet because if you uncover me then I am undone." Because in case he goes into war, he is finished. It was a relief to us that we could find a Jewish officer who is...

NL: A friend.

NS: A friend. He said, "As soon as I come over closer to the western countries like Austria, I will go to Italy and from there I am going to go to Palestine, at that it wasn't Israel, to Palestine because this is where I belong."

NL: Did he ever explain what his background was?

NS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. He says...

NL: Did he come from a religious family?

NS: His father, himself. He wasn't religious, but he said they belonged to the *Hashomer Hatzair*...

NL: His father?

NS: Their family and so on. He was a Zionist, and they had a big movement in Kiev. He said he has a lot of cousins who live in Israel, in Palestine, who left 30 years ago

and who are living there at least they are alive. It is a very hard life but at least they are alive.

NL: So you stayed in this unit for awhile?

NS: Yes, that watch business was only a bluff. A maneuver to get us together.

NL: So he returned them to you.

NS: He didn't even take them. We were supposed to send him our watches.

NL: He just wanted to meet with you?

NS: Exactly. He didn't know in what way to do that, so he says, "I will protect you as much as I can, but my lieutenant is a Jew-hater. He doesn't know that I am Jewish, and even if you say he's nice and so on, he is not your friend." So, he did everything in his power to keep us there and late in September it was beyond his power, and they attached us to the main division. And for some reason, I, we lost contact with him. Apparently he was reassigned or whatever it is. I'm sure that he today is living in Israel because if his aim was to escape, he will.

NL: I hope he did. And what happened to you, Mr. Snyder?

NS: Then what happened is they attached us to the main division. They gave us rations, shaved our heads because of disease, lice and so on, and we knew that we were going to the front line and they gave us rations, brown sugar, dry bread and cans. We saw for the first time, written in Russian imported from America, it was pork stew. It was like silver cans, so we knew--oh, yes, and we knew the landing is taking place, that the American, the English and the French are advancing there, the Germans are crushed from both sides and victory will be very soon. But still there were battles going on. There was the Battle of the Bulge, and American planes came overhead and we even saw Americans or English or French officers who were mixed, with the attaches or whatever, delegations, liaison, and so on. They prepared us to march down to [unclear]. For some reason, I did not want to be a statistic of Konigsberg because we knew how much they were aiming for one victory. That's true. The victory was to crush the Germans. But as the months went on, I was always aiming for survival, and that is a human instinct. So they marched us down to the railroad. It was supposed to be embarkation, taking place, going to the front line and that happened. We were told that we were going to Budapest. That was the biggest battle at that time, it was a crucial battle, for Budapest. So, they integrated us. You see every regiment, in Russian they called us *sapior*, which means mine sweeper, or demolition squad, and every regiment had like a dozen or two of those attached, but for some reason my friends and I were in the same group. Some were taken away and attached to others, so we lost contact, but I still remained with eight or nine friends of mine into that group and we were taken down. But one thing that I don't understand, as we were going to that camp--about two or three miles march down to the railroad station, where the embarkation took place, why did they have to have guards with bayonets?

NL: Guarding you?

NS: Guarding us, because we found out later, we didn't know at that time, that there was a lot of desertion was going on. Even original Russian, I understand that after the war they were telling stories about Russian--I don't call them cowards--but guys who were smart and survived the war. They were traveling for four years back and forth on trains from east to west and from west to east and from east to west and whenever they got caught they were saying that they went to the bathroom a leak. And they lost their train and they put them on another train and the train was going in the opposite direction and they were looking for the units. And not too many, we found out after the war how they survived. Because in a war like that, with such a big region all most all over Europe on a front from Finland to the Black Sea, naturally, it was a disorganized situation, so some of them will slip through. That is the reason that they had us guarded. The Russians had one single goal or method. If a commander, let's say a lieutenant, had 150 soldiers that he has to bring them this point, from point A to point B, and when he comes close to point B and he sees that from 150 there is now 145, his head is rolling. He gets executed if five are missing, so he will capture five people, kidnap, he doesn't care if they are cripples, one-legged men. This happened they took a one-legged man who were invalids and he says, "Why are you taking me? I only have one foot." And he says, "You don't have to run. You can sit on a truck and shoot." So, they were taking people who are exempt from army because you are working in the electric company, the telephone company, and the gas company, and other kinds of factory. Very important. They don't care, they grab you. You could have papers...

Tape five, side one:

NS: As I was saying, we had those side troops, the sentries alongside from the left side and the right side, guarding us with the rifles with the bayonets up and that I rejected. Not only I. We all resented that and rejected that. How come we are going to fight the Nazis, we are going into the battle, going down to the embarkation point, to go to the front line and we have to be guarded, and we resented that very very much. We felt like we were prisoners, forced to go, sacrificed for the war, and my aim was to escape.

NL: Is that so?

NS: Yes, and I figured, I want to fight the Nazis, I want to take revenge, but not that way. Not this way. I did perform my duty under different circumstances, but they didn't have any trust because too many were deserting, so they have no choice. They had to make sure that no one escapes from that group. So, as we came to the railroad, and I remember that we were going and the irony of that is that as we were marching down, because it was like a hill going down, and we were singing patriotic marches, patriotic songs, like Stalin, fighting the Nazis, and so on--but we have guards, so we shouldn't escape. So that is the irony of that. When we arrived there, here the commotion started. Disorganized commotion. Trains coming back with prisoners of war, some wounded Russian soldiers, and tanks and supplies and trucks and troops going to the front, and we were there stationed in one place, and then, finally, that train came with cattle cars and so on. And naturally they had attached us to each 20 or 30. I remember into each car of the train and they gave us supplies and so on, but my aim was to escape, and I, from that day on, I lost contact with my friends, with my Jewish friends.

NL: They were in other groups?

NS: Other groups attached and they apparently went ahead and I was the one who dipped, they call. When I entered from the front and I exit from the back, I made believe I was going to the bathroom, naturally, to relieve myself. If somebody asked me, I was relieving myself not only for only for five minutes or two minutes but I relieved myself for a half hour waiting for the train to leave. So in case they see me I says, "Look, I am doing my duty." And, finally the train took off, and I am here stationed.

NL: What is the city now?

NS: Czernowitz. The train took off and I said, "Fine, at least I am away from that group," but this is no way of saying that they wouldn't attach me to another group.

NL: But you are surrounded by Red Army people.

NS: Oh sure, there are troops all over the place. And they have those armies what do you call? Railroad M.P.'s they call them militia, NKVD, the army KGB, which, you know, so, finally, I went to the, I had to report, because I was in uniform and I just couldn't walk away. I went to the *Kommandatur*, and I reported and said, "I lost my train." So, he said, "What was your group?" I don't recall but I gave him the name of the group. And he says, "No problem. On the next train you join them, or we attach you to somebody

else.” So, he said to me, “Wait here.” So, I waited in his office and I was sitting down, and I waited. And as I was waiting there, I figured well, “That is my destiny, there is nothing I can do.” And he said, “Aren’t you deserting?” And I said, “No, I went to relieve myself, the train took off and I was whistling and screaming and hollering but it was too late.” I said, but so many trains coming to us. He said, “Those trains which are coming through are supply trains. You are not allowed to go on those trains, you have to go on a troop train.” And for awhile he was writing and making telephone calls and people were coming in and coming out and after about a half hour he walked out from there. He left me alone in there, and another officer came in, I don’t remember if it was a higher officer or a lower officer, whatever it is. He came in, in a very good mood, smoking his cigar cigarette made from newspapers usually with cut tobacco, which we naturally all smoked at that time, and whistling and he says, “What are you doing here?” And I said, “I am waiting to go back. I am going on furlough.”

NL: Furlough! Another story!

NS: And he says, “You cannot go on furlough on an army train which goes back, that’s going back hinterland. He says No. Army secrets. You cannot go on a train like that.” I say, “But I was promised,” and he says, “I am sorry, you just have to go on your own, leave and go on your own.” I said thank you very much.

NL: Oh, my word!

NS: So, I walked out--and I went out.

NL: You didn’t need a pass, or a paper or something?

NS: It was a very big confusion. I walked out from there. From that station, the office was near the main road like and there was a guardrail there and there was so much commotion. There were trains going and trains going, and at that time a train with prisoners came, and they had to give them water and bread and so on, and guard them and so on, I just walked from there. I was not running, just walking slowly through town, but I had a paper with me that I am a soldier, but if somebody stops me I figured I am going to say that I lost my train and I am lost, I am lost.

I remember another thing going back to that. While we were actually under, this is prior like a month or two months prior to that, and we were asked to escort a train of German prisoners, and we went about 40 or 50 miles into--close to the Polish border, which was in Galicia, because when escorts--they did not go the whole way. The trains, originate let’s say, in Budapest or in Warsaw, or whatever. They escorts. They didn’t go from there up to the *Donbas* to the *kolkhoz* [Soviet collective farm]. They went 50 miles and another escort took over, and another escort and so on and this is the way it worked. So we took over a train to escort it over, actually fresh troops to the front, and, in a way, I felt bad because they were mostly young guys. So after about seven or eight hours traveling, they stopped at a small station, a small town, like a railroad station, where from the humanity point of view, they had to supply them with food and water. And there was population standing over there, some women and some children, and I don’t think they were Jews,

because there were no Jews living in those little towns. But to show them the sympathy--the Russian against the Germans--they were against Germans now. This is the way Ukrainians are.

So, the train stopped and they had over there big buckets of water. Big buckets like for horses and they had heavy bread which was half sawdust and half bread, brown, and it was like long. And in each car, they were throwing like they were packed, they were throwing ten breads and two buckets of water, like they don't deserve better. So what happened, they opened the doors, they were like sliding doors, and they opened the doors first of all for fresh air and they had two bars in front of it. Two bars, horizontal bars, this is where they were standing over there and I, being as a Russian soldier, looked there and facing them here they were all young 15, 16, 17 years old. They came fresh from the front because some even had mud on their hands and feet and faces and they were bandaged and they were, naturally, prisoners. A lot were in black uniforms. They were mixed black and gray uniforms. The population that were standing on the outside were cursing them: "You Nazis, you murderers! You Nazis, you murderers. And I will never forget: That here are German prisoners I am taking about SS, youngsters, brainwashed were standing there on a Russian train who's going to their destiny, which they didn't know where it's going, but it's going back east. They are prisoners. They give them bread and water. The population here's against them and they stood up, all of them especially in that train, I will never forget the picture what fanaticism can do to a human being stood up with a hand raised and says, "Long live the *Fuhrer!* Heil Hitler!"

NL: Oh, my! Unbelievable.

NS: Yes. Yes. So brainwashed were those Germans. No wonder they fought to the last day, to the last man and no wonder they were killing by order. "Long live the *Fuhrer!* Heil Hitler!" in German.

NL: On their way to their deaths, because all prisoners were shot.

NS: Yes, because I understand when they went back into Russian territory, those in gray uniforms were taken away. They were actually separated from the SS. The SS were all killed, machined gunned. They used to bring the cattle trains into the *Donbas kolkhoz* into the mountains and they didn't even kill them. They used to dump them down into the ravines. Revenge is revenge, you know, and I don't mean that they deserved better, because they were all killers, but, anyway. That picture I will never forget. What fanaticism fanaticism is! And I was at that time 18, they were maybe 17 or 18. But if you are a prisoner and you lost a battle, at least say I am sorry. Now the Russian soldiers didn't do nothing. Because they were used to it. Apparently when they captured them. They were used to that, but the population was outraged, so they started throwing stones and everything at them, and they closed right away the doors. Then we escorted them for about 20 or 30 miles to the next and then another group took them over. I personally never had animosity. I felt in a way, I felt--I had a human side to me. I felt bad because they were young and they were doomed, but I would not say I would take revenge and go and kill

half of them, but I felt bad for them in a way, which is stupid. Wasted lives. I was satisfied with one thing that they won't do anymore what they were supposed to do because they were already incapacitated. At least they are in good hands, because if they had fallen in to American hands, I am sure they would have given them chewing gum and chocolates and blankets and denazification and in maybe two years they would have been out in the street, but not with the Russians. So, it's a shame that not all of the German prisoners, Nazis I am talking about, criminals, SS, did not fall in their hands. Then they would have not been today no Nazis organization all over the world. This is one episode as I remember, but getting back to that--when I left and this was the last time I had the uniforms on...

NL: You went to your home?

NS: I went A.W.O.L., because I figured, I am not saying that it was the last time I had my uniform on. I am sorry. But it was the last time that I every went--I wasn't volunteering but not under escort going to fight. So I took a chance and I went back. I couldn't go home. I was afraid to jeopardize my uncle and my mother and aunt.

NL: Were you afraid that you would be searched?

NS: No, I was afraid that in a couple of days--I didn't know how organized they are. But I figured, they were not organized. If it's organized then they have a list and they know where they are going to look for me, but it wasn't so.

NL: So, what did you do, then?

NS: I went to a cousin.

NL: In Czernowitz?

NS: Yes, and naturally, right away I took the uniform off and burned it and he said, "You know that you cannot be here because if they catch us they shall kill us too." And he says "Why did you run away?" And I told him the whole story. That nonsense. In the meantime more news was coming back from friends which we knew, from neighbors. Their sons fell, father and sons fell, you know, together. I mean there was a massacre going on in the front line. We know the battles over there. So, "I was there for a--and then I went to another place and I was a couple of weeks there, and one day I was going to Zonio [phonetic] who was a dentist. He was aged at that time and he was like 45 years old. They needed dentists because he was also working for officers for the soldiers. So I hide in his place and I was going on the road I got stopped.

NL: You were in civilian clothes, then?

NS: Sure. I was stopped. No questions. They didn't even ask me for documents. They just herded me together with another group of guys and they took me to the same place that I started in the beginning. Like I mentioned before, if five are missing, five are going to capture. I was.

NL: What story did you give them this time?

NS: Nothing. What can you do? They took me. First of all, he says, "Where are you going?" and I told him, "I am going nowhere." and he said, "Why aren't you in the army?" and I said, "Well, I am going to the army." You know, I was young. He said,

“Why aren’t you fighting?” because you didn’t see any men in the street. The only men you saw were 80 year old men and mostly women. There were no men in the streets. Youngsters, or children nine or ten years old. No males--naturally it was obvious. There were patrols, not the NKVD, not the KGB, they were regular military police. They were rounding up men for the front, so they took me in and where they took me? To the same place where I started from the beginning.

Here, starts a new chapter completely because, when I came in there, I found over there guys told me that they ran away two or three time and they capture again. Ukrainian, Jews, Poles, all kinds and even Russian soldiers that told me they went as far as Kharkov and they were brought back and forth and back and forth. So, here starts another chapter of my story and that is a very interesting chapter because I will never forget this chapter. And maybe this is the reason that I am alive today. Coming in there, naturally, you have to register. My name was Snyder, so my name was Natan. You always had a middle name there, your father’s name is a middle name. There, so they gave me the name and naturally, Natsha Yakobovitch Schneiderov. Yakobovitch was my middle name. And they attached me to a regular infantry group. That means carrying by foot. There were older guys in their 40's and 50's, 20's, 18, 30's and all kinds of groups, and they gave me another uniform there and another provision over there and we were not under guard because it was a free big army camp.

That army camp was an old Romanian army camp, like I mentioned before. *Kaserne*, they call in German. It was built in such a way, in the middle of the city. It used to be from the First World War. It used to be for the cavalry. They had under low, low level they had stables for horses, for the Austrian-Hungarian War, and the First World War. It was formed in a U, one wall, two walls, three walls, and the front was the entrance with a big gate, and it was huge. Inside was housing and housing and second floor and third floor and forth floor up to the basement and the lower sub-basement, this was where the stables were. There were there I would say at least 2000, and they used to bring in more, and some would depart and then more. And, they assembled us there and they assigned us to a group and that group was housed in those three sections over there. They gave us provisions and we were sitting, I remember it was a big room, with no benches, no beds, no nothing, and I was in a lousy uniform with some felt boots, shaved in the head, with a fur hat on my head, with a little satchel of provisions. And naturally I had my; no, they didn’t give us the weapon at that time because the weapon they would give us as we come to the train, when we were attached to the regiment, they would give us weapons. We had no weapons. We were only recruits, and I was sitting there on the floor and it was nighttime and there was one little bulb in the ceiling, a very depressing scene. We were there about 30 in the room and I was the only one Jew. They were all Ukrainians and Poles and Russian and so on, and, as we were sitting, they knew that I am Jewish, by my accent or by my name or by my face, but they knew I am Jewish. And they were talking and they said,” Oh, yeah, we are going in there and who knows if we are coming back? And it’s bad.” And

someone says, "Oh, I like to go and fight," and all kinds of stories like men have stories to say. And one guy sitting across from me says to me. "You know, you 'stinking Jew'" and a smile, he says, "You know, when I come to the front line the first bullet, I will be behind you," he says," and instead of shooting the Germans, I will shoot you first. I will be behind you and I will give you the first bullet your head in the back."

NL: And he is somebody in the Russian army now?

NS: Right, and I said, "Why would you do that?" and he said, "Because you are a Jew. You are a 'stinking Jew'." In Ukrainian it's called *zhid porkhaty* or *zhid voniuchy*, which means "stinking Jew". And I resented him that a lot because I see here is a guy who is going to fight with me and he's supposed to be my comrade. Comradery in war. He's going to shoot me in the back. Instead of shooting the Germans he will shoot me. I don't understand that. So, I made an excuse to go out, like, to the bathroom and I went and reported it to one of the officers outside and I salute and I said to him, "Somebody made a remark and called me a 'stinking Jew', and he said forget it. "Disregard it." He was a Jew-hater too, so I figured there was no sense going to somebody higher. I think he wasn't a lieutenant, he was a sergeant or sergeant-major or whatever. It doesn't make sense to go up higher because you go to up higher somebody maybe the same way. They don't care. He needs bodies. So I let it go with his way, but I took one aim, my goal-to stay, again, and that was my aim. Now, you must understand that when I was an active graduate from that mine school, demolition squad, we all had, they gave us grades, ranks, automatically, because we had educational course. And I became a sergeant-major or whatever you want to call that, which we had three epaulets in here. This is original.

NL: But you threw those away?

NS: Oh, yes, and here I was only a soldier. No epaulets at all. But I had three epaulets in here. So I figured; escape. This was like four or five o'clock in the morning. We were told that around eight o'clock they were going to march the whole band, empty, that because they were getting more recruits. [unclear] I say, "Good". When I walked into here I saw that they had a sentry in front. This is the building here, and I figured there is no way you can walk out from there and, going from the train again. Maybe somebody would recognize me, so I had to find an escape route from here. So what I did is, I start going out. There were three or four floors--people were sitting there and some were playing balalaika, the guitar, and there were singing groups, and so on, all kinds singing together, and everybody knew that tomorrow morning at eight they would be all gone. So what I did was, I start going around looking for an escape. I wanted to assess the building. I wanted to investigate where I am. I am free to go. No one stops you, not realizing that I walked out from there, another dozen were after me, Ukrainian, not the Ukrainian who made the remark to me.

NL: Just because you were a Jew?

NS: Just walking after me. Why am I going? So they walk after me. Or somebody that had a sense of whatever it is and there must have been eight or ten walking

after me. It didn't bother me that they were walking after me because you were free to walk around. After all you're not in a concentration camp, and I was walking down. I was going down. I figured that up was impossible, go down, down basement and then sub-basement, and there were stalls for horses but there were no horses but you could still smell the horses left from so many years. There was no straw or anything but there were the stalls, where the horses were supposed to be with partitions like. And I am going over there and it is ancient it must be about 200 years old, at that camp. So, I am going around and looking around and I see that every window which you look, tiny little windows, you look out is very low. If somebody is walking you will see only his heels. So we are walking around and I see those guys behind me and I says, "Where are you going guys?" And they say, "Where are you going?" And I said, "Well, I am just walking around," And they said, "Well, when you walk around, we will walk with you."

NL: They wanted to escape, too. Now you had nine.

NS: They were all young guys. So I said, "I don't know you guys." And they said, "You don't have to know us. What do you think we are stupid, we go there and die like flies?" So, for some reason, we had some confidence in each other. I figure we are together in it. So, as we go, it goes around this way and that way and it was like catacombs, in and out. So, finally, we came to a big big grand door with three or four steps going up to that door. It was a big old iron door, and the door must have been about two tons weight, but rusty. And across the door was a big heavy, that alone weighed about 1,000 pounds, big bar. And, at the end of the bar was a big old fashioned, must of been from the Kaiser Franz Joseph from the Austrian-Hungarian, was a big lock the size of this tape recorder, old fashioned. So I looked in it and they looked in it and I said, "I wonder what is behind that door." So I figured why should I use my muscles? I says, "Guys, do you want to start ripping that lock?" And they ripped and ripped and twisted and twisted and that lock was snapping off. And then they took that heavy bar--two people had to lift that bar aside. And here I am facing there were two doors, big iron doors and there were cobwebs over there.

Now, you must understand, this is early in the morning. It is like five in the morning, and I am looking out. And finally, I open I would say like like half an inch, and I see the sunlight, I mean the daylight, coming in. In summer at 5:30 in the morning, there is sun out, well, daylight, and I look out and I see pavement and a side street and I say, "This is it!" But, I look inside and I see a sentry going, so what happens is, this is the entrance. We were in the opposite of the army camp. There are two sentries going. One starts on this side and one starts on this corner and they meet together and they turn around and they go back. They turn around like the palace guards. They coming back, they meet each other, turn around and go back. I observed that and I said, "No people in the street." That's dangerous. You walk out. They said eight o'clock, could be nine or ten. They are going to look for us. We have to assemble there and march out, going toward war. So I am waiting until we see people coming up on the street. We want to see more people walking in the street. So I said to the guys. "Look, we have one chance to leave if you listen to me.

Organize. Anybody who is not going to listen to me, you know you get shot on the spot, so be organized and listen very carefully. We have to wait until the day is going to be more public. More traffic.” So, we waited maybe about an hour and a half or so on to about seven or seven thirty in the morning. We saw traffic, women going to work and men and whatever. Children going to school. Those sentries are going the same. We didn’t know when they changed the sentries, but I opened again. We could hear the sentries going by. I knew they are away. It must have been the center of that wall, I said to myself, “Why should I be the first? I’ll get shot and, besides, if I go out first, they will be disorganized in the back and they will run out like rabbits behind me and we will all get shot.” So there are two points which made me be the last one: I will organize them in a quiet way and they should go out one by one, and I will be the last one and then I will know that no one is behind me rushing, and this is what I did.

NL: And they agreed?

NS: They agreed, and I said, “Good luck,” and we shook hands. They were all from different towns. Ukrainians, from different towns, and I didn’t care what happened, if they participated in murders, or their parents. They were all youngsters on, but we had the same fate, we had the same destiny at that time. All the sentries were parting and going to their post to their quarters, and I opened the door and said, “You go. Don’t run, just go to the middle of the street and walk.” This took a good half hour. One left, one right, one left, one right. I was the last one. The same thing, open. And I remember when I walked out from there, the two doors you see, when I was in the inside I could hold the doors back, the doors...

Tape five, side two:

NL: So, how did you get through?

NS: Okay, as you walked out from there, you must understand my head was shaved and I was in a shabby uniform. And I was walking very quietly with the fear that at any time I will hear the word, "Stop!" But, that sound did not come. It didn't happen. Maybe there was, whatever.

NL: You got lost in traffic?

NS: I was lost in traffic. Yes, and I walked straight to my aunt who was the mother of my cousin the dentist. And I walked in and she said, "You know, your mother is trying to give somebody a thousand rubles to take you out of there, and I think she already gave the deposit or something, and she did. The money was lost. Somebody who knows somebody, an officer who likes to drink and so on, but anyway, you are out, thank God. But, now what? You cannot stay here."

NL: You were still in uniform?

NS: Yes, take off your uniform and we will give you some shorts or whatever.

NL: But your head is shaved?

NS: That's it. That was the one mark which I had. Put a hat on, a sport hat on my head, but "You can not stay here. I will notify your mother." She ran to my mother and my mother was very thrilled, and the family knew it, I'm alive and I'm out. Don't tell. The rubles are gone. For good. Now, we had to find a place that we could hide out. This was in October and we tried, but one members of the family were afraid to take us, because they'd get shot, but finally they found a woman. Actually I was over a cousin, an elderly cousin, but she was afraid too, because she used to have some commissars coming over there, because her brother worked in a forest. He was like a manager of a forest and the commissars used to come to dinners. So she was afraid. So, finally, they found a woman whose husband and son was on the battlefield. They were taken into the army and she had a daughter fourteen or fifteen year old daughter and she is in need. She can use the money. So my mother told her that she would pay her, I don't remember how much, so much for a day and supplies and food to keep me in hiding. And there I was in hiding end of October, November, December, January and February. For four months I was hiding there.

NL: You didn't dare go out?

NS: Oh, no. There I was in hiding and she lived on the first floor and on the front, there was a clinic, a regular clinic where a lot of Russian, not army but Russian officials, they used to come to the clinic. They used to park their jeeps and army cars and so on in the courtyard, so I was in hiding in a room, a dark room. Nobody used to come into the house. Sometime it became so dangerous because somebody wanted to come in and drink water or need water for their radiator, so it became dangerous later, about six or seven weeks later. She used to send me up to the second floor where a woman lived over there. Her husband worked in the railroad, like I said. He wasn't taken into the army, he

was a railroad specialist. They needed him for the railroad, and he was all day away and she used to hide me on the second floor. Night time I used to come sleep downstairs, until they made my preparation to get me out of there to Romania, across the border.

NL: Oh, this is still Bukovina?

NS: Czernowitz.

NL: This is now Russia.

NS: Yes, Russia, and they will get me over to Romania. Now in the meantime, Warsaw fell, Budapest fell--The Germans were almost crushed. The Russian are already on the outskirts of Berlin, the Allies were closer in. Remember, it's a month before victory and a lot of troops came back, and in the meantime they decimated all those bandits. They cleaned them up. They deported their wives and children all to Russia. Relocated whole villages. You know that they are specialists in deporting. They relocated Russian families to here and took out three-quarters, half of the Ukrainian population and deported them back to Russia, because they didn't trust them anymore.

So, we knew that the victory was going to come any day, but I had to get out of there. In that tumult in that confusion, I crossed the border. This is where my mother negotiated. And, in the meantime, more refugees came back from concentration camps, and as far as from Auschwitz and Buchenwald, and from Transnistria. And people were wandering around looking like skeletons and looking for families from the leftovers. And it was coming and going, coming and going, and my mother. You know, you must understand there were a lot of guys doing the false documents, collections. They were forging documents, working with Zionist organizations or individuals.

NL: What was her contact?

NS: Her contact was with somebody who forged my documents, made me under the name Ruby Weissberg, a youngster who was born in Suceava, was South Bukovina.

NL: Old Romania.

NS: Yes, across the border.

NL: What about herself?

NS: Nothing. She stayed there. She wasn't in danger. I was in danger, if the NKVD, the KGB had caught me they would have shot me on sight. So she made the papers like I was Ruby Weissberg and I was born in Suceava, the same age. Ruby Weissberg really lived in Suceava and he died in a concentration camp with his entire family, but I was the Ruby Weissberg who actually survived. My family all perished and I am going back to Suceava. I am coming from a concentration camp, I was a skeleton, you know, a survivor. But even that was dangerous because they still can capture you and put you in the army. So I was given this document, and with a contact through a peasant and taken to another town. And in that town I had my cousin who also worked as a manager of big big farms over there and he kept me there. It was about five miles from the border and I stayed with him there as his assistant there.

NL: How did you get there? You walked?

NS: No, no, no, no, no. I went with the train, there very simple under Ruby Weissberg the other name.

NL: Your hair was already grown?

NS: Yes, Nathan Snyder doesn't exist any more. I was stopped many times. And when I was stopped I showed my papers and I go through. And I lived there for a couple of weeks, and there arrangements were made with the peasants. A whole organization...

NL: Which your mother worked out?

NS: Yes worked out. I was sitting there on the straw, not under it but on it, and we came to the border and showed my papers that I am Ruby Weissberg and am going home. I am coming from the concentration camp. And I crossed over the border to Romania, and that was a hassle by itself because they had to stop us for hours. And they had to search the wagon and they searched us, and there were a lot of refugees from Romania who came back from Transnistria going back into Old Romania. Who don't live in Bukovina under the Russians. They claimed they're Romanian citizens. There were a whole group of people over there. I lived as Ruby Weissberg.

NL: With whom, did you stay with someone?

NS: Oh, no. I crossed the border and I did not stay in Suceava. Oh, no because in Suceava somebody from the town says that Ruby Weissberg didn't look like you, so, I was registered there but I had to move on because his name was there. So, from there I went straight down to Bucharest. I took the train and this was already, in the meantime, peace came. It was after May, I came straight down to the train officially, and took the train down to Bucharest. And in Bucharest was the main Zionist nucleus organization with preparation for Israel...

NL: And that is what you intended to do? Did you work this out with mother, too? And she would then re-unite with you?

NS: Yes, I wanted to go. Yes. My aim was to get out from there because we knew that even the king abdicated from Romania. And then Romania became a socialist, not a communist government, it was a socialist government and the Prime Minister was a Jewish woman, I forgot her name.

NL: Anna somebody. She was killed later.

NS: Yes, it was like this. It was very bad for the rich. It was better for the poor. It was more equal. It was a socialism not communism, there was equality...

NL: Was it Anna Pauker?

NS: Anna Pauker. They were hunting down Nazis back and forth and those criminals Romanians and prisoners came back from Russia. Two years later it became a really communist government, a satellite, but it wasn't a satellite in that year. So Zionism was open, free, I would say 1945, '46, up till '47 Zionist flourished all over. They were from Palestine *shlichim* [Emissary] coming over organized. *Hashomer Hatzair* and *Gordonia* [other names] and *Mizrachi*. They were organizing. [tape off, then on] Now

Israel was not born at that time because Israel was born in '48, but the movements and transports. They were trying to get Jews out, as much as the survivors left over from the Holocaust, from concentration camps, from Hungaria, [Hungary] from Czechoslovakia, from wherever they can, get from Romania out. Illegally, naturally, into Palestine. The English didn't allow this into Palestine. And I was in Bucharest and I went to live with one of my cousins which is, her father and my father were brothers. My father had two brothers. I'm sorry, her mother was a sister to my father. My father had two brothers and they were deported with their wives and children to the concentration camp Transnistria. But they were very neat and very obvious clean and they couldn't take the lice and the diphtheria and the dysentery and all the sickness and they committed suicide. They threw themselves in a well. I was told later. In a big well they threw themselves, those old fashioned wells where you bring up the water on a chain. They committed suicide because they could not take that life. So nobody was left on my father's side except that my father had an older sister and this was her daughter who lived in Bucharest. She lived there all her life.

NL: She wasn't hurt?

NS: No, she wasn't hurt. Her husband was a stock broker with a beautiful home there and they had a son who lives now in Israel. He was at that time, studying to be an engineer and I lived there. It was my first freedom. Do whatever you want to, we don't care, and go to movies and enjoy life. What are you going to do with yourself? Do you want to go to college and study and become something? I said, "No. I want to go to Israel. I want to go to Palestine and fight." Now we don't have the Nazis, but let's fight the English because the English don't give us the land. And I was influenced from before, so I joined some organizations. And naturally, *Betar* organization was at that time the choice, toss up between *Betar* and Ben Gurion's party, which was *Gordonia*, *Mapai*, so I joined a group which was *Betar*, not realizing at that time that it was part of the *Irgun Zvi Leumi*, which Begin was the leader. We heard stories, about blowing up, the war is going on, and so on. They took us to a special camp to train us to fight and I told them I had been in the demolition squad and that they could use me for that.

NL: Perfect.

NS: So, they took us up in Transylvania, because Transylvania belonged to Romania now. They took it away from Hungaria, [Hungary] because Romania joined the Allies they gave them back everything except northern Bukovina and Bessarabia. So I went to Transylvania, someplace in the mountains we had a camp. It was like a summer camp, in a top of a mountain. And there they trained us and they called us *madrichim*, teachers who helped to teach others. And they taught us judo, knives, demolition, small arms, sharp-shooting, rope-climbing, all kinds of hand-to-hand fighting and our personal *madriach* was a man by the name of Yehuda Avriel. Yehuda Avriel plays a big chapter in the Israeli history. Yehuda Avriel was born in Austria. He was a solid guy, husky guy, with blond hair, reddish hair, who came as a child to Israel and, naturally, he joined with

an underground organization. Later, I understand that he was an emissary of Ben Gurion. You read it in the books. Ben Gurion sent him to buy weapons.

NL: To Czechoslovakia.

NS: Czechoslovakia, to buy weapons and, while he was there, he also came to be our *madriach*, not day by day but every other day he was there. And he personally gave us judo lessons and I remember that I had to combat fight with him. He was a husky guy.

NL: My, oh my, what a story!

NS: Yehuda Avriel saved me, not saved me, but helped me a lot eight years later.

NL: In Israel?

NS: In Israel yes, when I had to come to the United States with the American Embassy because of my two names, Weissberg, Ruby and Natan Snyder. He is the one that helped me. At that time he was Secretary of State, at that time for a short while, in Jerusalem.

NL: Wasn't he an Ambassador to...?

NS: He was an ambassador later when Israel became a State, he was the first ambassador to Romania, because he was stationed there. But we were there having a good time, we were trained, really, I remember we had all kinds of exercises with the hands tied together. Our heads was trained to open doors, in case your prisoners tried to escape, and knife-throwing, I mean we were the best knife throwers. I had callouses all over my muscles. I mean that they made us fighting machines. And we were two girls and about 18 guys, 20 of us, and we said we will become *madrichim* when we come to Israel. When we come to Israel before, when Israel will become a state, our aim was to come there to get the English before Israel became a state. We would automatically become officers in the Israeli army and we would train others. We would organize the illegal *aliyah* [emigration] throughout Europe, and they would send us to Italy, to Czechoslovakia to organize how to get illegals to trains and ships and so on.

NL: How long did you stay in Transylvania?

NS: We stayed there for about four or five months. There was good food and we ate and we had a nice stream there on top of the mountains. And we could shoot and nobody could come there because it was on top of the mountain, and if somebody did come through there, we said it was a summer camp. Only a hunter could come there. When we were on top of the peak, we could look down. The rest of the mountains look valleys, and it was very, very top. You had to climb for four or five hours to get to the top, that plateau and it was not too far from Kolozsvar [Clug], Klausenberg. And it was very very high, but from there we had to travel on a mountain train. I remember a small mountain train and from there we took another little transportation and then we walked for a day and then another four hours climbing, so it was out of civilization. And this is where we had our camp. And actually for the government it was illegal because we trained to be terrorists, soldiers, but we helped a lot--I was selected because of that experience in demolition and so on. And this is where we stayed over there and after we were finished with the course

they sent us to a different towns. I went to [unclear] to organize a group, and some went to Bucharest, back and some went to Jassy, and all kinds of cities, Satmar...

NL: To organize Zionist groups?

NS: Yes. In the meantime, *Betar* itself did not have *chalutzim*, *hachshara*. Mostly they were from *Mapai*, *Mapam*, *Agudat Israel*. They have the *hachsharas* which means for the future *chalutzim* pioneers of Israel, and this '46. My mother came in '46 over the border illegally, but they let all of the Jews who wanted to leave for some reason. You had to pay some money there, but most of the Jews left Czernowitz. They let anybody go, anybody that wants to to. So, my mother, and my sister and my uncle they all came and they settled in Kolozsvar until they came to Israel. So I was not too far from my mother. I lived there as Ruby Weissberg, not as Natan Snyder, so I came there as a cousin. I wasn't their son. No one from the neighbors knew that because I was afraid. Slowly slowly the government became more communistic, more taken over by the Russian, more controlled by the Russian. And Anna Pauker left and [unclear] somebody else came there and it became a terror. It became a totalitarian regime and I was participating, taking part in different groups of *aliyah*, and, as a matter of fact, we escorted a couple of groups to Constanta, but we didn't go because our aim was...

NL: That was illegal by this time, I suppose, wasn't it?

NS: It was legal for the Romanian government but illegal for the English. They didn't want the English to find out, but we used to transport them and to show them how quiet they had to be. Those boats were not actually in the main port, they were outside, with little barges, and some were going to Yugoslavia, Belgrade, to Italy, to Trieste. Some were going to Budapest, Hungaria [Hungary], Vienna, and then Italy, so every point leads to Jerusalem, let me say, a lot of *aliyahs* and I said, "When are we going to go?" and they said, "You are the main guys, you have to organize so that the others should go." Thousands went. This was when Cyprus was filled up, with all the Jews mostly from Romania who were caught illegally. And, I would say, not all of them, but maybe a quarter of the Cyprus Jews were the ones which I escorted and my heart was breaking. I had to take them and then come back. They were going and I said, "Good bye, good luck," and I had to go back because more others had to go. And this was going on until the government started clamping down and one day they made Zionist organization, Zionist movement, illegal. This happened in 1947.

It became a real communistic authoritarian dictatorship. They declared illegal. Naturally, it won't disappear overnight--Zionism or the Zionist organization, so they went underground. And, at that time, I joined a *hachshara* group and I was afraid to go to my mother now too much. I used to come as a visitor there and there were a lot of Romanian Jews from Czernowitz who lived in Kolozsvar, and they were waiting to come to Israel. You had to have a passport and you had to pay so much money to get authorization, legally, to leave Romania to go to Pale--to Israel.

Israel was not born at that time. This is 1948, but in the meantime it became illegal to be a Zionist, so I had to join a *hachshara* group and I joined in Bucharest. I figured it was better for me to be in a big city because we had lessons during the war. In a big city, you get lost in the crowd and this was supported by the Zionist organization from Palestine and we had help from the Joint Distribution. We got a lot of help, packages came from the United States. Most of the food was from the United States, and we had to go and work. We lived in a nice, nice mansion outside the city and we had our own songs and dances, and we learned Hebrew and we had all kinds of lecturers. *Madrichim* used to come there from different *kibbutzim*, from Degania Alef from Degania Bet and from all kinds of places, and they were telling us some of the stories, learning about history and so on. And it became worse and worse and worse for the Zionist organization because they really clamped down and tightened up and then they made restrictions of quotas of leaving the country. And--Israel became a state in 1948 and Avriel became the first Ambassador from Israel. He didn't have to go too far. He just stayed there and took over the Embassy.

NL: Change your clothes.

NS: Yes, and he became the first Ambassador. And naturally it was celebrated and that was in May, 1948, and we all celebrated and so on, and the Zionist organization became illegal, underground.

NL: Even though Romania recognized the State, the Zionist movement was illegal?

NS: It was "decadent". It was pressure from Russia so, naturally, we had to go underground. Dissolved that place completely and some of our group members did leave because so many places were there. Now, we were supposed to go on a train, one transport four o'clock it wasn't illegal. It was legal. There was a train I remember and we were supposed to meet in a small little--ten kilometers outside the city. We will board a train which goes actually, from there it goes to Timisoara and from Timisoara we would illegally cross the border to Yugoslavia. We had already people waiting there for us to cross the border--and from there we would go through Yugoslavia to Italy. And at that border we would go straight and there was a ship waiting for us and, if we get caught, we get caught. And four o'clock we were supposed to leave and at 12 o'clock one of our chiefs came in and, "Sorry, you are not going to go." And I said, "Why? I mean, we did our duty," and he said, "Your places were sold." I said, "What do you mean 'were sold'," and he said, "We sold your places for many thousands of dollars because we need money. That money we need. I don't know for what reasons, for ships, for weapons but for that reason we sold your places. Remember, as a good patriot we did not do it to put in our pockets. Your place is, If a very rich Jew wants to go, he pays \$10,000." "Let me go." So that was the reason our places were sold and we were very upset. He told us, we were waiting so long. We helped others and now we cannot get out. I had to run because my name was in danger. And I knew from experience, that as soon as it became more totalitarian, they will have the KGB here and maybe Nathan Snyder is a deserter and they are looking for him, and how

long can I survive under Ruby Weissberg. I was in danger so I had to run. So I had no place to go. My mother used to say, "Don't come anymore here. You are endangering us." So I used to go there and stay for a couple of hours and come back. And did some black-market in the meantime with one of my cousins the professor, which is now in Israel, with Salamis and [unclear] from Kolozsvár and back. We traveled around the country, but then I was told that it tightened up so much that you couldn't walk on the street without having a labor pass. You had to work some place. And if you didn't work, you were called, "hooligan," a "parasite" and they take you to a labor camp, which was on the [unclear]. They used to build big dams over there, and all the "parasites" worked there. I didn't have a job. I couldn't work some place. So finally a friend of mine and I--Robert Lable, he was one of the top *madrichim* in the Zionist organization and he got a job in Bucharest in the Ministry of Agriculture and he took me in there to work. Somehow he took me in there to work and we started both off as clerks in the stationery department, to give us stationery. By the time we disappeared from there, I was head of a department and he was head of a department. I was under Weissberg, Ruby and he was under Robert Lable. That bluff that he played there was unbelievable. First of all, you know when you get a job there with the government, you have to have an autobiography.

NL: I don't think we'll have time for that and I want to get the end.

NS: My father was a shoemaker and my mother used to go home to home washing clothes. I was very, very poor and I come from Suceava, and it so happened that the Weissberg's were very poor people. I was in concentration camps. They made me a [unclear]. They want to send me up to the Komsomol, and he made another story, too.

NL: All fabricated.

NS: All fabricated and I bluffed him so much that we came to meetings and I had to tell him my life story and I was a double-agent, like. I was a...

NL: Dual personality.

NS: I lived with him in the apartment and he said, "How many times can you bluff them? One day you will make a mistake." I have a picture now, I look like a proletariat. My name was every week on the workers' employees' bulletin.

NL: Oh, my word.

NS: I have my name there, the Man of the Year, the Man of the Month, of the Day...

NL: Proletarian Hero!

NS: Right! And I bluffed them so much. Then I got the word that you are taking chances in your own hand. Disappear. Disappear, from the job.

NL: Who warned you?

NS: The Zionist organization. Disappear. Both of us. Take off. Just one day don't go into work. We both ended up in the Israeli Consulate.

NL: The Israeli Consulate.

NS: We took refuge.

NL: You took refuge and you got immunity.

NS: No, they didn't know we were there. We walked in and we never walked out till the day I left.

NL: Which was when?

NS: 1951.

NL: So you had to stay in Romania, then, another three years.

NS: No, I was in the Consulate off and on. I left and out, no, this wasn't four years. I'm sorry. The Israeli government was recognized in 1948. I was there about one year in hiding. Who was the ambassador? Yehuda Avriel. I was in the basement with all the machineries, all of the communications and so on, I was trusted...

[recording stops for several movements]

NL: I'm afraid we're coming to the end of the tape, Mr. Snyder, and so I have to say we have to finish now. Thank you very, very much for this exceedingly interesting and valuable testimony.