

# Joseph Greenbaum Interview

## November 2, 1999

My name is Harold Edelbaum. I will be interviewing Joseph Greenbaum in Kansas City, Missouri. Today is November 2nd, 1999. We're at Mr. Greenbaum's home at 909 East 84th Street, Kansas City, Missouri. Mr. Greenbaum is wearing a nice pair of tennis shoes, nice pair of slacks, nice shirt. He's sitting in a rocking chair, very relaxed and awaiting the start of this interview.

Mr. Greenbaum, what was your given name at birth?

**Joseph. Joseph.**

Joseph?

**Yeah.**

Did you have a middle name?

**No.**

No middle name?

**No.**

Okay. Your last name ...

**Greenbaum.**

... was Greenbaum at birth? Was that changed any from what it is now?

**No.**

All right. When were you born and where were you born?

**Piotrków, Poland. 19... June 15th, 1921.**

1921?

**Yeah.**

All right. And how old are you now?

**I'm 78.**

78 years old. All right. What city, what major town is your hometown near?

**Piotrków. In German it was called Petrikau. That...**

Was that near a larger town or is that a large town in itself?

**Well, there was about 25,000.**

Population about 25,000?

**Population, yeah.**

Okay. That's pretty good. Okay. What do you know, what were you told, or what do you remember about your birth? Were you born at home, in a hospital?

**I was born at home.**

At home? Okay. Do you know who delivered you?

**Dr. Greenberg.**

Dr. Greenberg? Okay. All right. Was that a normal practice? Was that standard practice?

**Yeah, there was a midwife that was there and a doctor.**

Oh. Very good. So you had pretty good care sounds like?

**Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.**

Okay. About your family, what were your parents' names?

**Chaim Yakov Greenbaum, my father. Chava, Chava Eva Greenbaum was my mother.**

Okay. Did you have brothers and sisters?

**Yes, I had eight. There were eight children in our family.**

Including yourself?

**Including myself. There was four boys and four girls. And, I have one brother here in Kansas City, Frank Greenbaum.**

Okay. How many, how many of your brothers and sisters survived?

**Just one brother.**

Just you and your brother?

**Just one brother.**

Okay. All right. What, what kind of occupations, or what did your mother and father do?

**My father was a butcher and my mother was also working in the butcher shop.**

Okay. Was it a family-owned butcher shop?

**Yeah.**

You had your own business? Your family had your own business?

**Yeah. And uh...**

All right. Did you have... Did they have a lot of people working for them?

**No, just the two of them.**

Okay. But they're...

**It was a small business but...**

I bet they were busy.

**Yeah. [laughing]**

Was it a kosher...

**No, not kosher.**

Not kosher, all right. So you had four brothers, or three brothers and four sisters?

**Four sisters, yeah.**

Okay. Are you able to... you know the names and approximate ages?

**Yeah. My sister Hannah Feige, which is Fella. And then there was my brother, Frank, which is alive today. And then Oosher was another boy and Miriam Gittel was another sister and then there were twins, a boy and a girl, Rachel and Simon. Simon was a boy and Rachel was the girl. And I had a small young sister. Her name was Gella.**

Okay. Now were you the oldest?

**I was the oldest.**

Okay. All right. What kind of neighborhood did you live in? Can you describe your neighborhood? Describe your...

**A nice neighborhood.**

...the street, you know, what kind of buildings you had?

**Well, we didn't have a large apartment to live in. There was just one bedroom.**

One bedroom for...

**We all slept in the same room with eight beds.**

Oh, but it was large, very large room, right?

**Yeah.**

Okay. Wow. Did you parents have a separate room then?

**Yeah.**

And the kids had one room?

**Yeah.**

Wow! Were there like bunk beds or was everybody flat, you know, laid out?

**Slept two in a bed.**

Two in a bed?

**Yeah.**

All right. So, you kept warm...

**That's right. [laughing]**

...through the winter? Okay.

**That's right.**

Can you describe your house a little bit for us? What's your house was like? Did you have a fire...

**We lived in an apartment building and we had a nice backyard. And...**

Were there trees? Trees in the backyard? Was it a...

**There were trees in the backyard and there, there was a garage. We didn't own the building. It was a gentleman by the name of Moishe. He had a car, the owner. He had a car which he used as a taxi.**

So he hired himself out as a taxi?

**He had a chauffeur. He had a chauffeur.**

Okay. Did you have a swing set or was your yard fenced or was it...

**No, it was just, just fenced.**

It was fenced in?

**Yeah, it was fenced.**

Okay. What kind of buildings did you have on your streets? You had theatres and...

**No.**

...grocery stores and like that?

**There was some grocery stores in the neighborhood, and bakeries.**

Okay. And your butcher shop? Your butcher shop?

**Bakery and a butcher shop, yeah.**

Okay. All right. Would you say your family was well off? You know, doing okay?

**Well, we got by. We weren't too well off. We had a lot of kids but that's about it.**

Okay. Did you have any servants? Did you have servants, butler?

**Yeah, my mother had a girl come in to help her out with washing and things like that because it was too much for one person to take care of.**

How was the washing done? What kind of job was...

**In a tub with a washboard.**

Oh, okay.

**And...**

What kind of soap did they use?

**Just regular soap, clean soap.**

Okay. Like a bar?

**Yeah, bar soap.**

Okay. Did your family own land?

**No.**

Did you have... Did you take vacations anywhere from time to time? Like a resort?

**No, just... we went into the woods in summertime. We went out for a picnic like.**

Oh. Okay, like camping out type thing?

**Yeah, we just went into the woods, which was customary for our people, Jewish people to go out to the woods.**

And what did you do out in the woods? What did you all do?

**Played ball, soccer.**

Oh, okay. So it was an open area, I guess?

**Yeah.**

Okay.

**Oh, yeah.**

Like a big field or something?

**That's right.**

All right. Okay. Was that close to the house or did you have to travel far?

**No, it was about a few miles from the house.**

Okay. So it was like a vacation?

**Yeah.**

You had to go away somewhere?

**Yeah, that's it, that's it.**

Okay. All right. What kind of food did you eat? What kind of food was eaten during that time?

**Meat and potatoes, soups...**

And all that was got at the grocery stores? Or did you have a garden?

**No, we had to buy everything.**

Uh-huh. Okay. What kind of things did you like? What were some favorite foods of yours?

**Potato soup with meat in it. And uh...**

What kind of meat did you usually have?

**Veal and beef.**

Did you spice it up? Did you add a lot of spice?

**Yeah, my mother was a very good cook.**

I think all mothers were very good cooks in Europe.

**Yeah, that's right.**

That's right.

**But my mother was exceptionally good.**

Good.

**She could make a meal out of anything. Just threw it together and no recipe.**

No measuring?

**No measurements. Just a little bit of this and a little bit of that.**

Yeah. I know what you're saying.

**Yeah.**

Okay. Did your family have any political ties? Were they, you know, did they believe in a certain form or government or anything?

**No, no. We didn't have no politics.**

Okay. They didn't favor one form of government over another?

**Yeah, that's right.**

All right. Now when you're... you went to school?

**I went to school to grade school.**

How far before the wars broke out? How far did you get?

**I went through six classes.**

Like six grades?

**Sixth grade, yeah.**

Okay. Your brothers and sisters went to school also...

**Yeah.**

...as far as that time?

**Yeah.**

Okay. All right. What were your teachers like and what were, what were some of your favorite subjects? What kind of things did you like?

**Well, we had teachers for history, for geography, for uh... we had some nice teachers for art. I was very good in art myself.**

Uh-huh. Are you still... do you still keep it up?

**I painted these pictures here.**

Oh. Make a note that Mr. Greenbaum pointed to some pictures hanging on his wall in his house that he painted himself. There's some landscapes, scenics, and still-life flower, flower paintings.

**There's one over here, too.**

And there's another one of ocean with flying, flying birds...

**Geese.**

...geese and ocean waves and rocks. Done very well. Okay. Now you didn't graduate, you didn't graduate, then? You were still in grade school or ...

**I graduated.**

You did? From sixth grade?

**Sixth grade and then I went to... for three years to *gymnasium*.**

Okay. And this is still before the war broke out?

**Yeah. It was just like high school.**

Okay. So it was above the grade school level?

**Yeah.**

Okay. All right. You went for two years you say? You went two years?

**Two years.**

Was that like a four-year school?

**Yeah, it was a four-year school and I went for two years.**

And then the war came?

**The war broke out.**

Okay. All right. What kind of things did you do for fun when you were younger?

**Movies. Went to the movies a lot.**

Okay.

**Played soccer.**

Were there, like, American movies in the theatre?

**Yeah, American movies. Cow - Western movies. We saw a lot...**

What did you think of those? What did you think of those kind of movies? The Westerns?

**We enjoyed them very much, yeah.**

You didn't have cowboys and Indians in Poland, I guess?

**Cowboys and Indians, not in Poland.**

Not in Poland, no. [laughing]

**No, but we saw it in the pictures, in the movies.**

Right. So some of your hobbies or some of your sports were soccer?

**Soccer. I played soccer a lot, yeah.**

Okay.

**Basketball.**

Oh, basketball?

**Uh-huh.**

Did you belong to organizations? Any organizations, you know, groups?

**The... can't think of the name now.**

Was it a Jewish organization?

**Yeah.**

Like A.Z.A.?

**I'm trying to think. *Hashomer Hatzair. Hashomer Hatzair.* It was a...**

Okay. What does that mean? What does that translate?

**It was a Hebrew name.**

Okay. What kind of things did the group do, the organization do?

**We got together. We played all kinds of games. We went on picnics and outings just like the Boys Scouts.**

Oh, okay.

**The Hashomer Hatzair was, we had little uniforms that we wore with a little tie.**

Sounds like Boy Scouts, doesn't it?

**Yeah, like Boy Scouts. Uh huh.**

Yeah. Okay. What did you do in your spare time? You were playing soccer, in the organizations and school. Were there other things... Went to the movies. Were there other things that you did?

**I read some books.**

Okay. Did you have a lot of chores - like work around the house or anything?

**Yeah, I helped my mother out a lot. I would scrub the floors and clean the windows and did a lot of house chores to help my mother out.**

Did you brothers and sisters help also?

**No, they were too young, most of them.**

How much older are you than your, than the next brother or sister?

**Well, we were about two years apart. My brother...**

All, clear down the line, about two years apart? Clear...

**My brother Frank is four years younger than I am because there was a sister that was two years younger than me.**

Okay. So Frank was like the third child?

**Yeah, the third child, yeah.**

All right. Okay. Did you have a girlfriend or, or friends...

**Oh, yeah. We associated with girls.**

Okay. What all did you do? Did you go out on dates? What kind of things did you do on dates or just getting together?

**Went to the park. We had a very beautiful park.**

What, was it, like, in the city? Like down inside the city?

**In the city, yeah. Then we went to watch soccer ball, professional soccer ball. We had a team in Piotrków.**

They played other area soccer teams, then? Like tournaments?

**No, they just played games and there was another team, there was another that played against the *Hapoel*. *Hapoel* was the name of our team.**

Oh, okay. What does that mean?

***Hapoel* in, in Hebrew, it has a meaning in Hebrew.**

Okay. What was the name of your city again?

**Piotrków.**

Piotrków. Okay. And was that close to like Warsaw or...

**It was 240 mi-, 240 kilometers from Warsaw... Tomaszow, Warsaw...**

Okay. Which direction from Warsaw?

**East.**

You were east of Warsaw about 240 kilometers?

**Yeah.**

Okay. I'm just trying to get a reference point, you know...

**Sure.**

...what you were close to.

**Sure.**

Okay. Let's see. Your religion... Of course, you are Jewish?

**I went to *cheder*.**

Uh-huh. Your brothers and sisters, were they old enough to do that also?

**No, I was the only one that went to *cheder*. My brother didn't go to *cheder*. He was...**

That was like the Hebrew school? *Cheder* was like academy?

**It was a rabbi teacher that was taking care of about twenty kids, twenty boys.**

Were you very religious? Were you quite religious, your family? Or just so-so, or...

**Very... Liberals, just liberal I would say. My father had his shop open on the Sabbath, too, because he didn't sell kosher meat.**

Oh, I see. So it didn't really affect him in that way?

**That's right. That's right.**

Okay. All right. What values do you think you learned from your parents? What kind of values, you know, that you grew up to honor?

**Well, to be respectful to other people. To keep yourself clean, neat. And honor your father and mother and brothers and sisters. And...**

Those are important things, aren't they?

**Yeah.**

Sure. And you still have these values today, I imagine?

**Yes, I do.**

Okay. What was the religious life like in your community?

**We had a synagogue, a beautiful synagogue. And we went to the synagogue. I, I was *bar mitzvahed* in the synagogue.**

Do you know what year that was? Do you remember what year?

**No.**

Well, you were born in 1921...

**'21.**

... so it would be 1934? Is that about right?

**It was about that... '34.**

'34. Okay. All right. Were the other boys old enough to have *bar mitzvahs* before the war?

**No. No.**

Okay. Not even Frank? Frank didn't have one either?

**No.**

All right. So you celebrated the *Shabbas* pretty much and then the holidays?

**My mother lit candles for the Sabbath and we had a kosher meal for dinner. We had our main meal usually during the day and in the evening just a snack, like herring and tomatoes and...**

Just a kind of a lighter meal?

**Yeah, something like that. And tea.**

Sounds good, though. So you celebrated Passover and Hanukkah and all of that?

**We celebrated Passover, yeah. We bought *matzahs* and we got something new for the holidays to wear.**

Oh. Did your family, did you make clothes or did you buy them or...

**We bought them. But I, I started... when I was 14 I started doing tailoring for my uncle.**

He was in the same town?

**Same town, yeah.**

Did you have a large family overall?

**Oh, yeah.**

Overall you had...

**Yeah, my mother, my mother had sisters and brothers. My father had several brothers and one sister.**

You have a lot of cousins?

**Cousins.**

They had sons and daughters?

**Yeah.**

Do you know if very many of them survived the war? Or how many?

**No, there was one cousin that survived. He's in New York.**

Okay. Did your family or did the children celebrate, like, Christmas or, you know, anything like that at all...

**No Christmas, no.**

...to try and fit in or anything like that with the other kids?

**No.**

Okay. Did you get involved with... did you participate in activities with non-Jewish children? Or were they very many...

**I had some non-Jewish friends but I didn't participate on a, on a social level with Christian children.**

At what time would you have contact with them? When did you see them?

**When I was playing soccer. We usually played soccer together.**

Were your parents concerned about fitting in with the community or, you know, versus keeping their Jewish identity? Was that a problem for them? Did they have any feelings about that?

**No, I couldn't, I wouldn't say that. My parents knew non-Jewish people. My dad used to go to the villagers and buy cattle and bring it to the slaughterhouse and...**

So he did, your parents did the whole operation for the butcher shop?

**Oh, yeah. Yeah.**

It was completely... from start to finish, huh?

**Uh-huh.**

Okay. Were the Jews accepted? The Jewish people accepted in the community, or, by the non-Jewish citizens?

**Yeah. Well, when we went to the soccer games, there used to be a system that we used to run away from the *boisko*.**

What's that?

**From the, from the field of soccer play. We have to run away because the Polish boys would attack us with rocks and throw rocks at us and things like that. We'd just run away as fast as we could to get back in to the city.**

I see. But they did that because you were...

**Because we were Jews.**

Because you were Jewish? Okay.

**Yeah.**

Not because they wanted the soccer field or...

**Oh, no. No, no.**

Okay. Was there any retaliation? Did you all try to get back at them or anything...

**No.**

...for doing that?

**We just minded our own business.**

Okay. So I guess that was a form of antisemitism...

**That's right.**

...right there, wasn't it?

**That's right.**

Okay. You weren't ... I don't think you were old enough to be married before the war, right?

**No, no.**

Okay. How old were you when the war broke out? What, 1939?

**I was about...**

18?

**...17...**

17, 18?

**17 or 18 years.**

Okay. Did you have an idea what was going on? Did you listen to the radio? Did you have an idea of, you know, the politics involved?

**No, we just read the newspaper. The newspapers... that's the only thing we had for communications because we didn't have a radio or any other luxuries like that.**

Right. Okay. When the Nazis came to power, how were you first aware of that? What made you first aware, or your family first aware, of what was happening?

**Well, I run away with a boy from my neighborhood, a non-Jew, and we ran as far as Radom on foot.**

How far was that?

**Oh, it was quite a distance. It was a terrible... We...**

This was when the Nazis came to your town?

**Yeah.**

You ran away? Okay. So that was the very first...

**When they, when they, when they bombed the cities... when the first bomb fell was on a Saturday afternoon and this young man from... that lived there, a non-Jew, and, and myself we just left and ran away. In fact, my parents didn't know whether I was living or I was dead.**

They didn't know where you went?

**No, they never know anything about it.**

How long were you gone? How long did you stay away?

**Oh, several days.**

And then...

**And then I came back.**

With your friend?

**Yeah.**

You both came back?

**Yeah.**

What did you do in Radom? What did you do while you were in Radom for a few the days?

**I think we just stayed in a, in a... convent, a Catholic convent.**

Oh, so they hid you?

**They gave us some food and we slept there and then we just went home.**

You explained to them what was going on or they already knew probably?

**They knew about it.**

Still aware of it?

**Everybody knew.**

I see. So you went back home and you met up with your family again.

**Yeah.**

What, what were their feelings? What was going on there while you were gone?

**They were gone... they went over to my grandfather's farm and stayed there during the time of occupation.**

How long was that? How long did that last?

**Several days...**

Okay.

**...because the war didn't last very long at all. They went there and I went a different direction so...**

You said the war didn't last very long? What time was this? What year was this?

**1939.**

1939? Okay.

**Yeah.**

So after the family stayed at your relatives, what did you do then? What happened?

**They came back to... we lived in a Polish neighborhood at that time. And then, of course, after a year or so, they started putting Jews in the ghetto.**

Okay.

**And then we had to move again to a neighborhood, to a Jewish neighborhood.**

So you were able to maintain somewhat normal life for the first year?

**Somewhat, yeah.**

With maybe a few restrictions, but...

**But then, then it started out that my father couldn't operate his butcher shop. And uh...**

Was that immediate? Was that right off from the start?

**No, not right, not right in the beginning but a little while later, about a year or so later. 1940.**

Okay. Was everyone feeling a little uneasy at that time then?

**Oh, yeah.**

Quite nervous?

**They took me for work to shovel snow on highway in wintertime.**

Did you come back home at the end of the day or evening?

**Yeah.**

So every day you went out and then you came back?

**I went out and I came back home, yeah.**

I see. And your brothers and sisters, were they affected?

**No, they were too small.**

They were still too young for this?

**Most of them were too small.**

I see. So they were able to stay home?

**They stayed home with my mother.**

Okay. Did your parents talk about the Nazis? Did you remember them talking or what they...

**No, we talked about it.**

...were they worried about what might happen?

**Yeah, they were very concerned.**

Were they afraid of being taken anywhere or...?

**My dad was taken to the Russian border by the Germans to take care of some cattle.**

Oh, since he had, he was familiar with this already?

**Yeah.**

This kind of work so?

**Yeah, because he was a butcher.**

Okay. Did he come back?

**Yeah. He went for maybe a week, then he came back home.**

Did he have any comments about that? Do you remember what he said or any stories?

**No, but I think everybody kept it... they didn't mistreat him but he had to work hard. You know.**

Well, I guess he was pretty much a prisoner of sorts, right? At that...

**Well, no, he wasn't a prisoner. He was just a... it was a whole group that went. And... They slept on freight trains.**

Okay. Did your family try to leave Poland or think of, or talk about leaving Poland because of...

**No, where would we go?**

Okay. Did your other family members - your cousins, aunts, and uncles, did they stay also?

**They stayed also. Yeah.**

Nobody tried to leave, huh?

**Yeah.**

Okay. So they finally closed your butcher shop? Took your butcher shop away, right?

**Yeah.**

Do you remember ... did you hear about *Kristallnacht*? Any of that going on?

**No, no.**

What kind of newspapers did you have? What kind of... What was your way of getting information?

**There was a Jewish newspaper.**

And they got their information from other newspapers or...

**Other newspapers and radio.**

Okay. It was still too early for television, I guess, right?

**Oh, yeah. I used to say there will come a time when you will be able to sit at home and watch pictures like television and you wouldn't have to go to the movies.**

You said that back then huh?

**Yeah.**

Before it came out?

**Yeah.**

Pretty good.

**Well...**

Did you have to wear... Did they turn your hometown into a ghetto or were you transferred to a ghetto?

**They moved us into a certain area of town where most Jewish people had to live.**

Were you required to wear a Star of David, *Mogen Dovid*?

**No, this I did not do.**

Okay. Because?

**I defied it.**

But they wanted, they wanted you to?

**They wanted to, yeah.**

They wanted you to but you didn't?

**Yeah.**

Did you get in trouble?

**No. I just didn't wear it.**

Were there other people that refused to wear it?

**Yeah.**

A lot?

**Quite a few.**

Okay. Now, at that time, you were, you were put in a certain area in the city. Were you fenced in or did they have some kind of a wall built up?

**Well, you only go so far. It wasn't a fenced-in ghetto.**

They had boundaries, though?

**We knew we can only go so far, to a certain place, and then you can not go out.**

Okay. What would happen if you went out? Would you get in trouble?

**Oh, they would shoot you.**

Okay. So they... did they have guards around?

**No, no guards, no.**

How would they know if you left the area?

**They didn't know. I left the area anyway.**

Well, you didn't have your Star on.

**No, I didn't have the Star.**

So maybe they couldn't identify you that way?

**I just, I just left on my own. Just took a chance.**

Okay. At that point, did your... Was your apartment taken away from you, and all everything you had or...

**No, they just, we just had to take things with us, like furniture and everything.**

You were able to take that with you?

**Yeah, we took it with us.**

You had room for it where you went?

**Yeah, yeah.**

Okay. So your family still slept, I mean, that was still somewhat normal?

**Somewhat normal.**

Even though you were moved...

**Yeah.**

...that was still...

**We had to be inconvenienced, but somehow we made it - the hard way.**

Yeah. Okay. Were there any non-Jewish people that helped you out, besides the convent, I mean, like your neighbors? I mean, were they helpful to you even with what was going on?

**I worked for a period of time in a glass factory with Gentile people together.**

What did you do? What kind of work did you there?

**I was shoveling coals which was coming out of the ovens where they were melting the glass and then we shoveled this coal and carried...**

Buckets?

**...boxes of glass, finished glass. Bottles.**

Bottles and, what, like glasses and things or...

**Yeah.**

What did they do with those? What was done with them?

**We were shipping them out.**

Where did they go? Do you know?

**To different parts of the country.**

For soldiers, or...

**No, no, no.**

...they're for sale?

**It was civilian.**

To be... so they were to be sold in the markets and like that? I see.

**Yeah.**

Okay. So I see. Okay. But the glass factory was operated by the Nazis then at that time?

**Well, there was one Nazi that was the president of the factory. And other than this, there were just non-Jewish, Polish people that worked in the plant just like everybody else.**

Okay. From this ghetto situation, where did, what happened then? How long were you there? Where did you go from there? And was your whole family...

**I was taken to a camp, to a labor camp, on the Russian border.**

Do you remember the name of the camp?

**No. The camp didn't have a name. Just... we were digging trenches for the German military.**

What were they used for? How did the Germans use them?

**Well, were just against the, against the onslaught of Russians.**

Oh, the trenches were for the infantry?

**Yeah.**

For the soldiers to get into?

**Yeah.**

I see, okay. Were there a lot of people that died doing this? A lot of prisoners?

**Yeah, we didn't have no, no food to speak of.**

They didn't feed you very well while you were doing this hard work? Was there a lot of sickness at this time?

**Well, there was... we could receive a package from home in this particular camp.**

Did they go through the packages to see what was in them before you got them?

**No, no. And then I told you about the glass factory and then, after they took my parents and everybody else, all the Jewish people out to Treblinka ...**

From the ghetto to Treblinka?

**Yeah.**

Uh-huh. Did you go also?

**I didn't go. My brother and I were working. I worked in the glass factory and while I was at work one day, they took my parents and the rest of the family out and took them on freight trains and took them to Treblinka.**

And you say your brother didn't go? Was that Frank?

**No, Frank did not go.**

Okay. Was he working also?

**He was working also.**

In the glass factory or somewhere else?

**He was taken away to Czechoslovakia.**

Frank was?

**Yeah. And I was taken afterwards to another camp. That was after they took my parents away and everybody else and I was taken to Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski in Poland, which was an ironworks factory.**

I see. And that was operated by the Nazis?

**It was operated by the Nazis.**

Okay. And how long were you here?

**I was there about a couple of years and then they took us... Auschwitz. From Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, they took us to Auschwitz. We Ohrdruf, Dachau, Oranienburg, Sachsenhausen.**

You, yourself, you were in these different places?

**Yeah.**

Now were you taken with other family members or just by yourself?

**Just myself.**

As far as you know?

**Just myself.**

Okay. Did you ever escape or try to escape from one of these...

**From one camp I escaped. It was in the mountains of Poland.**

Which camp was that? Do you remember?

**It didn't have a name.**

Okay. It was a work camp?

**A work camp. A labor camp. And I, one Sunday morning... but that was, it was when my parents were still at home when I went to, when I run away from... because where would I run? My parents were still living in Piotrków...**

In the ghetto?

**...and I got on a bus on a Sunday morning and I went to Kraków. In Kraków there was a representative in the Jewish, Jewish community that took us home to our hometown.**

Took you back home?

**Yeah, on a train. And that's how I got away.**

I'm going to stop the tape. This is side one. We are going to turn the tape over for side two and start the next section.

This is side two. Interview with Joseph Greenbaum, Kansas City, Missouri. We'll start the section after the war, okay? We're through, through all the terrible...

**I was liberated in Germany on a march that we went out about 18..., 18,000. We went out on the highway on the march. It was a death march.**

Where were you from...Where were you marching from?

**From uh...**

What camp?

**A camp in Germany... from Buchenwald.**

You are on a death march from Buchenwald?

**From Buchenwald and we went on foot to Bavaria.**

How far was this?

**It was quite a ways. By the time we were liberated, there was 8,000 left.**

8,000 out of ...

**Out of 18,000.**

18,000.

**Whoever cannot walk, they just shot them and pushed them into the ravine.**

How were you holding up at this point? Were you still physically able to, you know, go on? Were you in pretty good shape?

**Oh, yeah. I was in good shape. That's what saved me. I was always in good shape.**

And you were not with your family members at this time, that you know of?

**No. No.**

Can you tell us how, or, when you realized that you were free, you know when you ... the moment you were liberated, how that came about?

**I was liberated with a friend of mine from Piotrków. We tried to stick together and we were liberated together.**

Who liberated you?

**The Third Army.**

U.S. Army?

**U.S. Army. That was the happiest day of my life.**

Yeah. So, were you still on this march? Is that when you were liberated or is this after the march?

**I was liberated on the march.**

On the march?

**Yeah.**

Did you just encounter the U.S. troops or...

**They came from behind as we were marching on the highway. The Germans, guards run into the woods, to run away, and they left us free. And the German [sic - American] Army came. In fact, this friend of mine that was with me, I turned around and I saw those big Sherman tanks and I said, "Nathan, those are not German tanks." And he says, "Well, what kind of tanks do you think they are?" I say, "They are American tanks." That's what they really were.**

You knew that for sure? You could tell?

**Yeah, sure. They started throwing out boxes of cigarettes, conserves, chocolate.**

As they are driving the Russians into the woods, or whatever... or not Russians, Germans...

**The Germans.**

... into the woods, in the meantime, they're throwing all this food for the survivors?

**That's right. That's right. And we stayed there for about a week in that small town called Pasing.**

Pasing?

**Pasing. A German village.**

Okay. Now you were in Germany or Poland at this time?

**Germany.**

You're in Germany? Okay.

**Yeah. Bavaria, Germany.**

Okay. So you're in the mountains? You're up high?

**Well, they had mountains in Bavaria.**

What time of year was this?

**It was in March.**

Okay. '45... 1945?

**'45, March '45.**

Okay. And that was the happiest day of your life?

**Yes, it was.**

From this little town, where did you go?

**Went to Rutting, it was a small town in Bavaria and we had Yiddish *gemeinde* that we formed and moved it in to German homes that the Germans occupied themselves, civilians.**

They moved you? They moved survivors in to these homes?

**Yeah.**

Okay. Did they move these civilians out?

**No, they lived in there too. They had extra room.**

Oh, I see.

**So we occupied them.**

How did that get set up? Through the military or...

**No.**

...did they just volunteered to let you in?

**No, they just volunteered.**

I see.

**We were on our own. We were on our own. We didn't have nobody to tell us yes or no.**

So the Army just let you go? I mean, they didn't have any control?

**They didn't watch us. The Army didn't watch us and we could go any place we wanted to go.**

I see. Were you treated pretty well?

**Oh, yes. They respected us.**

Because...?

**Because we, they couldn't say no. They were, they were guilty of the atrocities. Of course, most of them said, "We didn't know that was going on. We didn't know nothing about it." But they knew.**

You think they knew?

**Oh, yes. They knew.**

Yeah. What kind of condition were you in? What kind of physical condition, mental condition?

**I was in pretty good spirits. I was just hungry starved.**

What was your weight? Do you remember how much you weighed?

**Oh...**

You were about, what, 20 years old then?

**Yeah.**

Okay.

**I was...**

Do you remember about how much you weighed?

**I must have weighed about a hundred, a hundred pounds.**

About a hundred pounds. So you were pretty thin?

**Yeah.**

Okay.

**I'm supposed to weigh 145, 140 pounds. And then the German, the American Army occupied the area where I was, where we were, and they had a kitchen and I went to work for them in the kitchen and I, I got excellent food. And I just...**

Kind of helped yourself, huh?

**Yeah. Oh, it was, we really had a ball.**

Were you, were you a cook? Were you cooking?

**No, I was a helping with preparing, peeling potatoes and things like that.**

Oh, okay. Yeah, I bet that was pretty important back then. I mean, not having, not having the availability of good food. I bet you felt pretty good.

**Yeah.**

Okay. Where did you go from this location? From this Bavarian...

**This, uh, I lived there for four years.**

Oh, wow!

**...and then...**

Did you try, did you try... I'm sorry. Did you try to locate your family during this time?

**No.**

Was there any way to do that? Red Cross or anything like that?

**No.**

Anybody try to help you?

**I found my brother in Germany where I was. He was in England. The English Army liberated them in Czechoslovakia and they...**

How did he get there, though?

**They took him because he so small. They took children up to 14 years of age. And he gave them the age of 14 and they accepted it and they took him to England.**

I see.

**Scotland.**

He went with the troops?

**And one, one day I went to Munich, Germany by train and I went into the Red Cross and I asked the lady at the counter, “Do you have anybody listed by the name of Frank Greenbaum?” And she says, “Wait a minute. I’ll check.” So she checked and she pulled out a card and she said, “I have a Frank Greenbaum but he’s in [unclear], Scotland.” And I, I didn’t know that my brother went to Scotland.**

Uh, huh. That would be kind of unusual, wouldn’t it?

**Somebody out there looking for your car and trying to put something on your windshield.**

Oh, that’s my sister. What is she doing? [laughing]

**That’s your sister?**

That’s my sister, Estelle, yes. I told her I was coming over here.

**She left a note on your car.**

Yeah, I’ll read it later. Okay. Sorry about that. [laughing]

**I didn’t know that my brother was liberated by the English and that they took him to England, Scotland. And so she says, “Why don’t you write him a card, postcard and see if this is your brother?” And so I did. I sat down right away and I wrote a postcard and about a month later I received a letter from him with a picture and it was my brother, Frank.**

I’ll be darned. Great. That’s great. How, how... So you set up, you contacted him then and made arrangements...

**Yes, in fact, I brought him to Germany from Scotland to visit with me. So we took, together, a vacation and we went to Munich on a little excursion.**

So he came, he came back to Europe?

**He came to Germany, no, to Germany... to Bavaria.**

Well, yeah, he came back from England...

**From Scotland.**

I mean Scotland, to Europe... back to Europe.

**Yeah.**

Okay. At that point, did you try to locate other family members or...

**I tried. I asked the same girl at the counter if she knows anybody by the name of my father or mother, brothers or sisters... nothing.**

No cards?

**Nothing.**

Okay. Did you, did you apply for citizenship or did you apply for entry to any countries or anything?

**No. I corresponded with my uncle. I had an uncle here in Kansas City and I corresponded with him. And they sent me some packages from the United States to Germany.**

Like care packages, or...?

**They, they sent me some chicken fat and chocolates and conserves, canned meat.**

And you got all those things?

**Yeah.**

It actually arrived and you got it?

**Oh, yeah.**

Okay. That's good. Were you in a DP camp? Were you ever...

**No, no.**

You were never in a DP camp?

**No. I lived in a private home, a private German home.**

With these citizens that took you in?

**Yeah. The old lady that had a small house and she let me have one room and that's where I stayed.**

And that was for four years?

**And then I moved in to the Jewish *Gemeinde*, *Judische Gemeinde* building, and that's where I stayed till 1949.**

Can you explain what that was? What was that building?

**It was a...**

What kind of situation was that?

**It was a Jewish community building where they, where we met and we stayed there and had meetings and things like that.**

Okay.

**And I lived upstairs on the third floor.**

Was it like a, like a boarding house?

**No. It was just a plain house near a restaurant, a German *gastwirtschaft*.**

Okay.

**And from there, in 1949, I immigrated to the United States.**

Okay. You were married...

**I was married in Kansas City, here.**

Kansas City.

**After five months living here I, I married.**

Okay. You met your wife in Kansas City?

**Yeah.**

Okay. Can you tell us how you met your wife? What happened?

**I met her on a blind date.**

Ah hah. So you were set up by a friend?

**I lived with my uncle and there was a cousin of mine that came to visit and she knew my wife and she called her and made a date for her with me. And that's where I met my wife. And I fell in love with her at moment I saw her.**

And I suppose she fell in love with you?

**Yeah.**

Right off? [laughing]

**Yeah.**

Now was she a survivor?

**No. My wife was born in the States here. She was born in Chicago.**

What attracted you to each other, to one another?

**Oh, she was kind. She was patient - because I couldn't speak no English. And uh...**

That would take some patience, wouldn't it?

**Yes, it took a lot of patience. And she was the type of a person that was very helpful. She helped me.**

What, what, what's her name?

**Sylvia.**

Sylvia? Okay. What was her maiden name?

**That's my wife right here.** [gesturing to a photograph]

Oh, okay.

**And then the picture over there is also her, on the counter, table here.**

Okay. I recognize her now. I'm going to ask, is your wife still...

**My wife passed away.**

Okay. How long...?

**My wife passed away three years ago.**

Three years? Okay. I didn't know that.

**Yeah.**

Okay, I'm sorry. Do you have any children?

**I have two children, a boy and a girl.**

Okay. Are they in town? They live in Kansas City?

**Yeah. My son's name is Bruce and my daughter's name is Evelyn.**

Okay. So you were married in Kansas City?

**Married in Kansas City.**

In 1949?

**1950.**

1950? Okay. Traditional wedding, with a *chuppah*, synagogue, and all that?

**Yeah, yeah.**

Okay. Where was it? What synagogue?

**Beth Shalom.**

On 34th and Paseo?

**34th and Paseo, yeah.**

Okay I had my *bar mitzvah* there. Do you remember how many people you had, how many guests?

**There wasn't too many people. There was just a handful of people. We didn't have a big wedding. We just had a small wedding and the reception in my sister-in-law's house.**

Do you remember who, who the rabbi was?

**Rabbi Hadas.**

Okay. Gershon Hadas?

**Gershon Hadas.**

Okay. So you had food. Did you have music?

**No, no.**

You just had a good time?

**We had a good time.**

Okay. What did Sylvia... did Sylvia have a job? Did she get a job?

**My wife worked for the Eisen Mercantile Company downtown for many years and then she went to work for Sears, Sears Roebuck.**

What did she do at the Mercantile Company?

**She was in charge of a store, a country store, where they had clothes and gloves and shoes and things like that, and she was managing for them this store. They had several stores.**

Okay. So she was over all the stores?

**No, just one.**

Just one?

**Just the one.**

Like a manager?

**Yeah.**

Very good. Two children, boy and a girl? How old are they now?

**45...**

Is that the...

**...and 40...**

...your daughter or son is 45?

**My son is 45. My daughter is 42...**

Okay.

**...yeah.**

Do you have grandchildren?

**No.**

Okay.

**My son is not married. My daughter is married but she cannot have any children.**

All right.

**She works with Sprint.**

I see. Very good deal. They are going through some changes, aren't they?

**Yeah.**

Yeah. Okay, let's see. So, you came to the United States and... did you apply for any other countries besides the United States or just...

**Just the United States.**

Okay. And you got here through the help of, what, a cousin or uncle or something?

**My uncle brought me over.**

Your uncle?

**Right.**

And you came directly to... well, you went through, what, New York?

**No, I came through Boston.**

Oh, Boston?

**Yeah. Came with a ship... on a ship.**

You docked on, like, the east coast?

**I docked in Boston.**

In Boston and then flew to...

**No, and came to Kansas City by train.**

Okay. All right. Was it hard to get out of Europe? Was there any problems, major problems with paperwork or anything?

**No, no.**

I don't know what kind of records you would have had but...

**I waited four years in Germany for to be, to immigrate to the United States, but it opened up in 1949. They called me from the C.I.A. for an interview and they interviewed me and then...**

The Intelligence Agency?

**Yeah.**

Oh, for clearance?

**Yeah, just to check me out.**

Background and all that?

**Background, everything, yeah.**

Okay. Oh, I didn't know they did that. What did you think when you first got here, got to the United States?

**Well, I was overwhelmed with the cars. As many cars as I saw parked in the streets. I said to my cousin after I came in to live with him, "Who has all these cars?" She says, "People who live here. Park it in front of the house."**

Bet that was a shocker. [laughing]

**Yeah.**

Have you moved anywhere else besides Kansas City or have you lived here all your life?

**I lived in Kansas City most of my life. We traveled a little bit, my wife and I. We went to Denver, Colorado.**

To move or just visit?

**Just for vacation, to visit. And went to Chicago, to...**

What did you think of Kansas City when you got here? What were your impressions of Kansas City?

**I was very impressed with Kansas City. It was a clean city.**

How was your English at this time? Still...

**Very bad, very bad. My wife is the one that really got me in to the English language because she couldn't speak no Yiddish and...**

How did you go about learning English?

**She bought me a dictionary and I... and bought me the newspaper and I learned to read the newspaper, and the words that I didn't know I looked up and that's how I learned. Little by little. I went to work in Kansas City for the Kansas City Custom Garment Company.**

Downtown?

**Downtown. And it was owned by Jewish people.**

Is that Staloff or...

**Staloff. He didn't own it at the time. He was the supervisor. Then later on he bought 'em out.**

What kind of work did you do there?

**Sewing, hand-sewing primarily was my job. Basting garments.**

Did you do repair work or new work?

**No, just new garments, new garments.**

New, okay. And how long were you there?

**About two years, maybe three. Then I went into business for myself.**

And what did you do there? What kind of work?

**Tailor shop.**

Oh, okay. Since you were now familiar with this line of work?

**Yeah.**

Uh-huh. Very good. So you had a shop in Kansas City?

**On 37 and Troost.**

What was the name of the shop?

**Joe the Tailor.**

Joe the Tailor? Okay. [laughing] Was there any, any uh... what were your biggest challenges when you came over here? What, what was... There was a language barrier.

**The English barrier, that was the biggest hurdle. Other than this, I, I managed okay.**

Sounds like you, you speak very well now.

**Oh, yeah.**

You've done very well. Did you notice any or face any discrimination? Anything major?

**In Kansas City? No.**

In the area?

**No.**

Any of your customers ever give you a problem about, because you were Jewish or anything?

**No, no, didn't have no problem whatsoever.**

Okay, that's good. How did you find the inner strength to overcome all these new challenges and things that came up?

**I had a...**

What kept you going?

**I had an outlook on life. I was a survivor.**

You figured you'd been through the worst thing ever possible?

**Yeah. If I could get through what I went through in Germany and Poland...**

Anything else was...

**Everything else was, was gold.**

Yeah. Okay. Do you ever talk about your experiences with people or your kids? Have you talked to your children about it?

**I used to, yeah. They asked me all kind of questions and I was a speaker at the church at one time when my kids were small. I had a customer that was a minister in the church and he invited me, with my family, to talk about the Holocaust.**

Was this a long time ago?

**Oh, yeah. That was many years ago.**

Have you done any public speaking here?

**No, not, not particularly. No.**

Okay. Would you do it if someone asked you to or do you just prefer not to do it now?

**I prefer not to talk about it.**

I see. Because...

**It gets me all worked up.**

Okay. I can understand that. Okay. Was it easy for you to make new friends when you came, when you came to Kansas City?

**No. It was very easy to make friends. I didn't have any trouble with that.**

Did you stay close to the Jewish community? I mean, I guess there are other survivors, other survivors and...

**Yeah. I joined the Center, I joined the Center and I went there every week on Sundays and played aerial tennis.**

That was on Linwood Boulevard?

**On Linwood, on Linwood I started out, yeah. And, of course, then they moved out here I... that's why we moved over here because the kids would have it close to go to the Center.**

Did they go to the Center High School?

**No. We were on the wrong side of the fence, so to speak, with Center School.**

Oh, the boundaries? Oh, where did they go?

**Went to...**

Southwest?

**Southwest and...**

Bingham?

**Was it Bingham? Yeah, I think so.**

Bingham Junior High?

**Yeah.**

Bingham Junior High. That's where I went, too. Yeah.

**How old are you?**

50.

**50. Well my son, my son is getting there.**

Yeah. God willing, he'll make that.

**Yeah. Well, I think that should be enough.**

Well, we're just about there. We got a little bit more. Is that okay? Or do you want to quit? We're just about done. Okay. Did you go to school, night school or anything?

**Yeah, I went to night school in Kansas City.**

Where did you go? Like Westport or something like that?

**No. We went to... On Linwood right across from the Jewish Community Center there was a building that the, that the Temple B'nai Jehudah used to have services over there and I went... the school was upstairs and they rented out the Temple for the holidays. I went there with my wife.**

And they had classes?

**Yeah, they had classes.**

Very good. You're an American citizen now?

**Oh, yeah.**

When did that happen? When did you become one?

**I became a citizen after a couple of years I was here because of my wife. I married, I married an American girl so that speeded it up a little bit.**

Oh, that was helpful?

**Yeah.**

I see. Was that important for you to become a citizen?

**Sure. You bet your life.**

Why was that, why was that important?

**Well, because I was proud of it. I was proud to become a citizen.**

Okay. You're retired now? Are you retired?

**I'm retired, yeah.**

And you're retired from your tailor shop?

**Oh, yeah.**

Okay. Have you done any other work after that?

**Oh, yeah. I sold my shop out and I went to work for Kansas City Fashionbilt Garment Company. I worked with for 17 years as a supervisor.**

Oh, excellent. Okay.

**Yeah.**

Do you have any hobbies or anything you do now for recreation, for fun?

**I go to Health Plus three times a week to work out.**

Okay. That's Overland Park, isn't it?

**Yeah, on Roe...**

107<sup>th</sup>, 107th and Roe?

**107th and Roe, yeah.**

Okay. I knew where that was. Okay. You enjoy that?

**Yeah.**

Okay. It's good for you.

**Yeah.**

Okay. When you had your childr- ... about five more minutes, we're done. When you had your children, you know, what did you think? What were your thoughts when your children were born? As it relates to pre-war, your family and all that?

**It was a different life altogether. My son was born in '51.**

Here in town? In Kansas City?

**Yeah, in Menorah Hospital. And we lived on 49th Terrace off Paseo for several years before we moved over here.**

That was a, that was a nice neighborhood.

**That was 1963.**

That was a very nice neighborhood. Are your children named after family members that perished?

**Yeah.**

Okay.

**My son is named after my father and my wife's father. Harold Bruce Greenbaum.**

Okay. And your daughter?

**My daughter was named after my mother.**

Okay.

**And after my sister.**

You know about how old your children were when you first talked about the war and all that with them?

**How old my children were?**

Uh-huh. When they first asked you questions or...

**Oh, that was when...**

Did they understand what you were telling them? Were they shocked or did they not understand?

**They were impressed with my stamina, that I survived.**

Was it...I'm sorry.

**I guess they're... the kids when they were about 13-years-old, Bruce, when he was about 13, he was asking me questions about the Holocaust. And my daughter also about the same time.**

Okay. Does the Holocaust memories bother you today?

**I have still nightmares occasionally at night. Not too often, but I do.**

Okay. There's certain things that you might see that remind you or something?

**Yeah.**

From time to time?

**Yeah.**

Yeah.

**Something comes on television that reminds me of... I uh, I watch the Discover station and they had things about the Holocaust, about the German armies when they invaded Poland and things like that.**

Like it was all over again, huh? Do you still have belief in God? Do you still have a strong belief in God?

**Oh, yeah. I never stopped believing in God.**

You never lost that?

**No.**

Okay. And you belong to the synagogue or Temple right now?

**Temple B'nai Jehudah.**

B'nai Jehudah, okay. Do you have a favorite Jewish holiday? Do you have one that like more than another?

**No, not particularly. I like Passover.**

Okay. Why do you like that best? Or better?

**I made *matzah* flour pancakes myself. I had a special gift to make them about this thick.**

Really, about an inch thick? Like that?

**Yeah.**

Wow! I bet they're good. Okay. Have you brought any traditions from your pre-war life to your, your family lifestyle now? Anything that you brought over that you carry on?

**I didn't care to.**

Okay. Just kind of start new, huh?

**That's right.**

Okay. And do you think you've adjusted fairly normally, normal?

**I think so.**

After what you've gone through?

**Yeah.**

Yeah. Okay. And one more. Do you think most Americans take their freedom for granted?

**Not most. I think a lot of them do but not most. If most of them would take things for granted, it would be a bad, a bad situation.**

What is being an American mean to you?

**Being an American?**

Uh-huh. What does that mean to you?

**It means you have freedom to express yourself and live in freedom - do what you want to do.**

Okay.

**Just freedom ... period.**

Just freedom in general?

**Yeah.**

Do what you want when you want?

**That's right.**

Okay. Thank you. This concludes side two of tape one interview by Harold Edelbaum with Mr. Joseph Greenbaum of Kansas City, Missouri, November 2nd, 1999. Thank you.

**Thank you.**