

Sam Nussbaum Interview

September 28, 1999

We are sitting in the kitchen of Mr. and Mrs. Nussbaum. Sam Nussbaum is the interviewee. My name is Harold Edelbaum. I am doing the interview. Today is September 28, 1999. Sam, can you tell me what your name was at your birth?

Shmuel, Samuel.

Ok, and when...

Yiddish was Shmuel and English was... Polish Samuel, Samuel, and they called me Samek.

Samek?

Yeah.

Ok. Was that short? Was that like a nickname?

Nickname.

Ok. And when were you born? What's your birthdate?

I was born in 1920. 23rd of March.

March 23, 1920? Okay, where were you born? What city? What country?

City, Przemyśl.

Can you say that again, please?

Przemyśl.

Ok, what...

P-R-Z-E-M-Y-S-L.

And what country was that?

Poland.

Poland, ok. And what is that close to? Is that a major city or is it close to a major city?

Between...

Just for reference?

Between Lvov... Lvov, next to Lvov. 100 kilometers from Lvov. That's the next big city.

So it was like a suburb? I mean like Kansas City and Belton or something like that? Just a suburb, or a small town?

Not a suburb. No. It was a big town. Przemyśl. It was a big town on its own. But the capitol from Przemyśl was Lvov.

Do you know what the circumstances of your birth were? Were you born at home or in a hospital?

Was born in bed, I mean, you know, everybody was born in bed. In a hospital.... I really don't know.

Ok.

I don't know.

That was probably never discussed.

I was born probably at home.

Ok.

They used to have...

Did they have midwives?

They called it *akusherka*. *Akusherka* is women came over for the birth instead of having a doctor....

Like a midwife type. Ok. What were your parents' names?

My father's name was Leibish in Yiddish, and Polish was Leibe. My mother's name was Bertha. Yiddish was Breindel.

Your mom, your mother and father in the household, did they both work?

Yes, my mother helped my father.

What kind of work did they do?

He was a merchant. He had a store...

He owned a store?

...selling flours, buying grain from the farmers...

Grain?

Grain. Wheat, rye, and take it to the mill, that's how he made a living.

So he owned the store?

Yes, he owned the store.

Did he have very many employees? Was it a good-sized operation? Pretty good-sized operation?

It was a pretty nice sized operation. We really didn't need any help. He had one helper.

Did the family pitch in?

Not the family. He was not Jewish. And he was most a pretty strong man to carry the sacks of flours [unclear].

Did your, I mean, did your family help?

My father himself worked. He was also an employee from his own business.

He was an employee in his own business. Yeah.

Yeah.

Ok. Did you ever help out?

Yeah, quite a bit.

You worked quite a bit there? Can you give us the names and ages and relations of the people in your family? Brothers, sisters....

I cannot give you the ages but can give you the names.

Ok.

I was the oldest one.

You were the oldest one. How many, how many boys were there?

Two boys, me and my brother. And four sisters.

All right, six children.

Six children.

What was your brother's name?

Lipa. L-I-P-A.

And your sisters' names?

Tilly, Rachel, Gitty, and Ratzl.

Alright. Did you all get along pretty good?

Yes.

Have a pretty good relationship?

Yes, very good relation...

Typical fighting between brothers and sisters when you were growing up?

Oh, sometimes. I kept, I was the oldest one. I kept them honest.

You kept them in order. What kind of neighborhood did you live in? Were you, it sounds like you were...

We were in the city. It had to be central location in the city. From church.

You had a normal, normal...

We lived, we had an apartment.

Did most people have apartments that lived in the area, rather than a house?

Most people had apartments. They didn't live like here in houses, no. I would say 99 percent Jews lived in apartments.

What kind of furnishings did you have in your apartment? What kind of things did you have for day to day living?

Nothing fancy. Just a nice....

Did you have inside, running water? Or did you have to go to a well?

I didn't, we didn't have, but I put it in. In the later years, I did put in a sink.

Was that your first plumbing experience?

It was the first plumbing in my apartment.

Ok. [laughing]

We had outhouses.

Yeah, yeah. Did you have a well that you got water from? Or, or, how did you do that?

We didn't have a well, we had outside like a fire hydrant with a pump. You could draw water out of it.

Oh, ok. And where did the water come from?

City. City water.

Oh, it was city water.

Yes.

Oh, ok. Ok. That's pretty good. Did you have servants, or...

Did we have service?

Servants. Maids, butlers, anything like that?

Yes, we had maid.

Ok.

I can prove it. We have pictures.

Ok. Did your family take vacations? Did you have time to...

My father didn't take much vacations, except my mother and the kids...

He was busy?

...we used to go to Iwonicz, Zakopane. It was in the month and, and...we did uh...

Resort areas?

Resort areas. And the maid went with us, too.

Oh, so she kept you in line. She kept you all in line? [laughing]

Well, she helped my mother out when we were, you know, little kids.

What kind of foods did you have? What kind of foods did you eat?

Bread, butter, chicken, *chul* [may be a reference to *cholent*]. **Have you ever had *chul*?**

Yep, been a long time. Sure was good. [laughing] Excellent.

We had good food. Meat.

What were some of your favorites?

My favorite?

What did you like?

You know, I didn't have any favorite food. I ate everything. Everything tasted good.

You liked it all, huh?

Yeah. Bread and butter was my favorite food. And I put a lot of butter on it.

And it was real butter.

Real butter.

Not margarine or anything...

Not margarine.

Lowfat, ok. [laughing] Now, you went to school, I suppose.

Sure. We went to school. Public school, then I went also the Jewish school.

The Jewish school. Ok. Can you tell us a little about each school? What they were like or how they were different? Public versus the Jewish school. What did you learn from one and not the other?

Well, what we learned I couldn't tell you. Who remembers that? But I remembered the, the prayer in the morning. We had to listen to the Christian prayers like, *Ojcie nasz, któryś jest w niebie, święć się imię Twoje*. I still remember that. "My father who is in heaven."

Oh. Ok.

See, this is the.... And I still remember the part of the prayer.

Did you all, did the Jewish children say the prayer?

We just, no. We just listened. But we had to, we had to stand up and they'd say the prayer.

Ok. Now, when you went to the Jewish school, you learned what? Hebrew or Yiddish?

Hebrew. *Che-*, First *cheder*, then I went to the *yeshiva*.

Oh, you did?

Yeah.

Ok. In the same town?

Same town.

So they had quite an educational system, sounds like. A very, sounds like very good.

Well, the Jewish people did get education. I mean, of course, high education was expensive. We had a Jewish *gymnasium* that only wealthy Jews could send the kids over there. And the kids had to be bright. If they were not bright, with money, they couldn't get in.

Oh.

It was a *gymnasium*, they called it, that put out doctors. 'Cause they couldn't go to Christian, to Polish school because they wouldn't accept Jews. But we had our own high school and college what you could go in but it was very expensive. Private, it's private. But accepted by the government.

But it wasn't...it was called *gymnasium* but it wasn't....

***Gymnasium*.**

It wasn't a gym, it was an educational....

***Gymnasium* is like college here.**

Ok, all right. What were your teachers like? Were they good, were they strict, were they...?

Well, we didn't have any Jewish teachers. All of them were Polish and also Ukrainian. They were teaching us.

But they all lived in the vicinity? They all lived in the area?

Teachers. This was a big city, 120,000 people.

That is a good sized city.

So, it was a pretty nice city. Przemyśl is a really nice city.

Did you have any favorite subjects in school?

No.

No favorites? Just, you liked them all or you didn't like any of them?

I didn't have a favorite subject because I didn't know about a favorite subject. Mathematics, I mean I had to learn how to multiply. This was something I was really put attention to it. Mathematician and whatever you call it here. Like one second times three fives, what do you call...?

Algebra?

Algebra, I learned that, I remember that. And uh...

Basically, it sounds like maybe you took the courses and probably did well just because you had to, just because you were there.

The main, the subjects because, if they asked me to read a story and tell them what I read, I couldn't, because I didn't concentrate what I'm reading. I didn't care. Some stories it didn't, was not interested. But I was reading the Jewish paper, what's going on in the country. I was very aware, because I was too young. I was aware what's going on in politics. Very much. But to read a story and tell the story what I read, I didn't do so good.

So, ok, when the war broke out, you were probably what? Nineteen or so?

When the war broke out, I was nineteen years old.

Ok. So you graduated high school? You were out of high school?

I didn't, my father took me out of school when I was fifteen years old.

Ok. Why was that?

He told, we didn't have such a good time in Poland, so he want me to go to Israel. *Eretz Israel*.

Ok, so...

And I uh, and he told me to learn a trade. So I picked up plumbing and I became a plumber. And I was fifteen years old I learned. 1939 I was already working as a journeyman. 1939, a few months before the war.

You were in Israel at the time?

No, why...? I wish I would be in Israel.

Yeah, but you said he told...

He want me to go to Israel.

He wanted you to go.

To learn a trade to be able to go to Israel and be able to make a life, a living.

But you didn't go. You just, you left school and started working.

We wanted to go. We wanted to go. But England was in charge. I don't know if you know or not, England was in charge of the state of Israel. Not the state, of Palestine until 1948 until the state was created. England was in charge. You remember the story of Begin, with the... never heard the story, are familiar with it?

Some.

What happened in Israel? Well, England was over there that time. They didn't let the Jews go. They didn't want to appease the Arabs. Oh, yeah. So I became a plumber.

You became a plumber, a journeyman plumber. During your childhood, what did you do for fun? What kind of things did your friends, you and your friends do?

For fun, I played soccer a lot. I played with 'em a bunch of Kraut [probably a reference to *Volksdeutsche*, native Germans living in Poland] and own people.

A bunch of what?

Soccer. A bunch of... It's a Kraut. And we... only sport what I did is soccer. That's only sport. We didn't have the basketball setup like out here and every house got a basketball. We didn't have that.

Ok.

So we didn't play basketball. Boxing I never was interested. And there didn't have no football. And no baseball. They had a game named they named *kitchka* [seems to be a local or regional game], *kitchka*. *Kitchka* here have you ever seen on television they two on a ball and fell with a piece of ball that hit you?

Uh, huh.

Well, what do you call that?

Cricket, cricket.

No, no it's not cricket.

Cricket, I think. English, isn't it?

It's English. Yeah.

Cricket.

Cricket, is it? Well, we had a piece of wood and it was a hole in the ground and the tip was sticking out. Just a tip from the piece. We hit the tip, that thing flew up, and I had to hit it.

Oh!

You understand?

Yeah.

And whoever caught it, he was out. And sometimes you hit it, I mean that piece, we were pretty good at it. Like this is our hole. That thing sticks out. You hit it here, that thing goes up, you understand?

Uh-huh.

And we hit it with the bat.

Flips up, huh?

And we had stations, not around like bases. We had distance. First one was so far, second straight out. And you have to go after it, and throw him in. Just a game of, they call it *kitchka*. [laughing]

I haven't heard of that.

Never heard of that? I already told you that here.

Never heard of that. No. There it is. [laughing] Did you belong to any organizations?

I belonged to the *Agudath Israel* and I was in *yeshiva*. As soon as I start plumbing, I dumped them and I belonged to a *revizionistic* organization - the *Berit Trumpeldor*.

Okay, what is that?

***Berit Trumpeldor* - was a guy, a man that the people what, were organizing for Israel.**

Trying to form a state?

And they got killed, to form a state. And Trumpeldor was a name, he got killed in Israel. The Arabs killed him, but they had a little memory statue for his name, Trumpeldor. The organization was called *Berit*. *Berit* means, like, *Berit*...

Like *B'nai B'rith*?

***B'nai B'rith*, yeah, the children from the, from the *Berit*. *Berit Trumpeldor*. So, that's how I belonged to them, until the war started.**

Now, you didn't finish the *yeshiva*?

No.

You didn't, ok.

Fifteen years, I was out.

You were out of school, then. Ok. That's as far as you went?

That's as far as I went. My father was teaching me quite a bit, but he noticed that I cannot work, like I really worked hard. And he, through effect he got tired too, get up early in the morning 4:00 for go to the business. And he just, he done it for short time.

Long days.

Work that time, work that time, we walked in deep snow to the synagogue, made a fire. Didn't work because I, I was going down, health wise. Because work hard and got up 4:00 in the morning, work hard, come home worn out, you know I just couldn't do it every day.

Sure.

So we cut it down, and cut it down, until we completely cut it out.

Ok. As a teenager, what kind of things did you do? Did you have girlfriends? Did you, you had groups that you, you know, hung around with?

No, like girlfriends most of the time were religious girls from, that I knew. In Poland, the girls, the girls were most of them were from religious families. Most of them.

Um-hmm. Ok. So you knew them like through synagogue...

Like the Reforms, we didn't have a day, a different... They were different group of people.

Oh yeah?

Very little, very small. They also had their own crowd, you know. But the Jewish people were both of them religious. Religious observant. When you go at night time, when you go out later, not on dates. We just run into each other, lot of fun.

Ok, ok. What kind of things did you do, though? You know, did you have movies...?

Told you, I played and even I start work, and I played soccer. I belonged to a team, the name, the name of the team, *Hagibor*. That means strong. *Gibor*, strong. *Hagibor*. And I belonged, and I was one of the players. We had a good team. We played in the B Class against the *goyim*, the *goyim*, you know? Played against them. We had fights, and we had problems and... we, we were afraid to win. We are afraid to win. Here they play the, the Hebrew Academy is playing against somebody, they win, they beat them. But over there, if you win, they had, you had to be prepared to fight a battle after, after the game. We had this kind of peril. But most Polish people, they didn't like the Jews. They cannot help it, that's how they are.

Did you get along with your parents pretty well?

Yes. We were a very close family.

Were they strict?

What?

Were they strict parents or were they permissive?

They were strict, they didn't have to be strict. They didn't want me to play. I tore up my shoes when I played soccer. I started playing barefooted, because I have shoes... my father made money but still didn't want to buy a pair of shoes every day. We didn't have soccer shoes. Take out the good shoes and go out and play. You're ruining them.

They didn't have the athletic type shoes they have now and the fancy...

They did have it but who could get any? They did have it. Sure. The soccer teams, the big teams they had soccer shoes, you know.

What kind of things, what kind of issues within the family created problems? Problems among the kids, with the parents...

Issues?

Yeah, what kinds of things came up that would create problems within the family?

Well, to go to synagogue in the morning. I was not so hot to go in the synagogue. I did go but they really forced me to do it.

Was this every day, or just *Shabbas*, or...?

No. Well, when I worked, when I worked, I... When I left I lay *tefillin*, yeah I had to go every day to *shul* before I went to work.

What kind of values were important to your parents? What kind of values did they, did they present to you?

Value?

Values, yeah, what kind of morals...?

Observing *Shabbat*. And...

Things important to them, you know.

***Shabbat*, Friday night, Friday afternoon. Whoa, you go in the city, all the store are closing. I mean the city, you go here, 109th and Metcalf, Friday afternoon all the stores are closing, and you go up there later, check it is locked up. That's what happened. The main stores were closed. I mean some Jews that kept it open, but didn't amount to much. The Jewish people observed *Shabbat*.**

Because they were Jewish owned, or...

Jewish, all of them, everybody owned their own store. That was not call it a company, what got a president. There wasn't such a thing.

They didn't have that.

The guy what owns it, he was the president, he was the owner. And he locked the door. He might have a few people working for him. Not all of them all ultra-religious, not... not our religion, but he observed *Shabbat*. The Jewish market was closed.

Did you...I'm sure you picked up some of these values, a lot of these values. How are they, how did they affect you? Did they...?

Normal life, nothing special.

Ok. You didn't think any...

When the war started, I was 19 years old. I made some money and any money what I made I gave it to my parents. I lived, I still lived at my parents' house.

Was that expected of you to do that? To help contribute?

They fed me, they clothed me, so I made money, and I gave it to my parents. If I needed some money for some reason, they gave it to me, they bought it for me. We were partners in the mill. Remember the flour mill is? The name of the mill was Nussbaum's Mill.

Oh, it was?

It was some relation to me. We had some stock in it. So he was selling the grain to the mill. And he was made a better living, they paid him better than anybody else.

What does Nussbaum translate to?

Nussbaum, nut tree.

Not tree?

Nut. *Nuss* is a nut. Tree.

Baum.

Is a *baum*.

Not tree. What does that mean?

You don't know what a nut tree is?

Not?

Nut. N-U-T.

Oh, nut tree. Ok, ok. I got you.

N-U-T-T.

All right. A nut tree. All right. That's German, right.

German, yeah.

Your family practiced Judaism?

What was, what's your last name?

Edelbaum.

What does that mean?

Noble tree. Noble tree.

So you should understand when I say *nuss*. Nussbaum.

No, I thought you said "not".

Edelbaum.

N-o-t. I thought it was n-o-t.

Edel, edel, edel means, what edel?

Delicate? Or gentle or something?

Edel.

Like edelweiss, the flower, the white, delicate white flower.

That was the name *edel*, from *edel*. *Edel* is a, yeah, a very soft, soft type person.

Right, that's it.

That's *edel*, Edelbaum. How come, they have a tree like that? That was very... [laughing]

Soft wood? I don't know, I don't know. [laughing] So, your family celebrated *Shabbas*, and you did all the major holidays and like that?

Sure.

They were all celebrated?

Yeah.

Was there a holiday or any holidays that were more important than the others or that you enjoyed more?

Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur was more important. *Sukkos* was all I remember can, holiday this. Pesach we observed. We ate only *matzo*s, we didn't eat anything else. Potatoes, and borscht, like we are doing over here, same thing.

You made all that? Was that all homemade? You didn't buy any of it?

Homemade. *Matzo*s, *matzo*s, we had different areas that made *matzo*s. It's like Manischewitz, except we didn't have that. We had the bakeries and they baked it. But they sell it.

All right, that's interesting. Did you celebrate any of the Gentile holidays at all? Were there any Gentile holidays, Easter, Christmas, I mean there's nothing like that any of the Jewish people celebrated? Just to be...

How would we celebrate a Christian...?

Just to go along with them, you know, is what I mean?

There was no such a thing.

Ok. All right. Well, like even in school, you know, you said the prayer....

We stand up...

I mean, the prayer was said.

To respect them, or we are all get beat up.

You'd get in trouble if you didn't do it.

Yeah. We didn't appreciate the prayer, because we had nothing to do with Jesus. Jesus was a Jew, too, and we kept getting beaten up because we didn't recognize Jesus. Big man.

But you got in trouble for that. Ok, let's see. Your religious education, you said you started the *yeshiva*?

I was learning in the *yeshiva*, yeah.

How long did you go there before you...?

Until about 15 years old.

What grade did you start there?

From cradle. From 3 years old. *Cheder*, *cheder*, then if you get eight, nine years old, you get the *yeshiva*. *Yeshiva* means, uh, it's higher learning.

I didn't understand how that, how that worked. Ok.

Also grade. Different grades. They had the highest grade was the *yeshiva*.

Were your parents ever concerned about fitting in with the Gentiles or anything? Or was that ever a worry to them or concern?

Well, we, they dealt with them quite a bit.

They were probably your customers, weren't they?

There, the brought the customers there they bought grain. Most of the farmers brought from grain. The only place they could sell it to the Jews.

Oh, really?

They didn't have Polish people.

They didn't own...?

They didn't own this kind of stores as far as I remember. So the farmer, he brought some grain to sell to the city. He's got that money from the grain. And the mill bought it. The mill couldn't buy all of it, so they had some different merchants, stores buying, and slowly the mill was absorbing everything.

I see.

We made some, made some money.

I see.

Got to live, we had to live.

Were you, uh, were you and your brothers and sisters encouraged to, encouraged to stay with only Jewish friends or Jewish acquaintances or were you, was it okay to associate with other people?

The only friends which you could have is the Jewish people.

Because...

The Gentile, the *goyim* wouldn't associate with us.

Ok. Alright.

If there was, yeah, they had some families, what they are, were neighbors and that we are getting along fine. It did happen quite a bit. But the children never did, we didn't have any intermarriage, very little. The children was just friends for the Jewish...

Within their own....

With Jewish, with them. But the families, we had neighbors getting along fine. If they left us just alone and not cursing us, not calling us names.

There was anti-...

We were getting along with quite a few neighbors. They were good people. We had good Gentile people. Quite a few of them. But majority were...

Antisemitic?

See, they didn't help us. Why?

Didn't help you...

As a good Christian, why was the ghetto started? Locked us up in the ghetto. The ghetto? How come we couldn't get out the ghetto? The Germans would never know where we are in the city. But the Polish people...

And they didn't step in to help.

They, they, they... just opposite. They turn us in.

Turn you in.

See, if they were hiding Jews, they could have get shot, that's true.

Right.

But they didn't have to hide us. We would find a place where to hide ourselves. Just them to keep their mouths shut.

As long as you had a safe escape.

We had some Gentiles, the *goyim*, but they were, they wanted to hide us. But very little. And those who get paid. They sucked money out, as much as they can out of you. And after you didn't have any money, they told you to leave. They didn't turn you in. And some of them figured you didn't have any money, they called the Gestapo, they said the Jews are hiding here. See? They get rid of you.

Well, let's go to another topic here. Were you married before the war?

No.

We'll go to another topic. When and how did you first become, uh, become aware of the Nazis taking over Poland or what their, what their process was?

The Nazis, they moved into my city 1939.

How soon after the very beginning of the Polish occupation did they move into your city?

After Polish occupation?

Yeah, like September 1, 1939, the Germans came into Poland.

Yeah.

How soon did they, after that time did they come to your city?

They were in the city.

That, that, that very time?

Yeah, 1939.

They occupied...?

See, the Germans made a pact with Russia. Hitler made a pact with Stalin. Stalin wanted part of Poland and the Russians wanted part of Poland. I mean the Germans.

They kind of split...?

Split Poland. My city was the borderline. There was a river named San and the San was the dividing line between Russia and Germany. What the Germans went the first time 1939 they went too far, past it. They went through to Lvov.

They took too much, huh.

Too much.

And that's how you got...

And one day they went that far, the Gestapo came to my city took out 500 youngsters to the cemetery and shot them.

Children?

Just to start out with. Children, young people! Some of them very young, some of them, my boss, he was about, I would say 20, 25 years old. He's the son, they picked him up. They didn't know where they were going. They took them to the cemetery and they shot every one of them. And the Germans went too far. And I, we run away, me and my father. But the Germans caught up with me. And then we walked back to the Russian army, back to my city. The Germans were moving, retreating. Then we found out what the damage that they did in the city. And I stayed there for two years with the Russians.

You stayed in your city in the ghetto?

Two years. No ghetto. Russia. Russia.

Alright.

Russia took over my part. The Germans...

They retreated?

Just across the river, the Germans. I seen them every day. You understand?

So the river was actually the dividing line.

Dividing line.

The one on each side.

Right. And I was on the Russian side until 1941. 1941, the Germans attacked Russia.

Oh, brother.

That's what our problem started.

They came across the river.

They came, they went clear to Stalingrad. You know what happened.

Well, how did you feel about all this? You know, what kind of...?

What was the question is how I felt about it? Is that the question?

Yeah, I mean what were your feelings about the situation?

Well, they start killing us. First, they started creating a ghetto.

The Germans, when they took over.

And they took over the *gymnasium*. You know what the *gymnasium* is? Our Jewish college?

The school, uh-huh.

They took this over. And they made the headquarters and the Gestapo. They asked the Jews... The, the plumbing was broken, frozen, winter time in 1941. Was frozen, all the pipes have broken. But they called the Jewish [unclear] *kommando*. The *Judisch-*, the *Juden*, the *Judenrat*. You know what a *Judenrat* is? Well the girl I talked to she called me told me, tell you what a *Judenrat* is. The Jewish community had the leaders. And they had, we had somebody picked out - intelligent people, like the lawyers, a few lawyers, they were running the Jewish community. And the Gestapo talked to them.

And then told them what to tell you.

What they want.

Tell them what to tell you to do. What they wanted you to do.

They told them “We got to have a plumber. The building. We moved in, we don’t have no water.” I happened to be the one.

You got involved in that, then.

And I start working in the Gestapo fixing the plumbing.

Now was your father involved in that also?

No, he was sitting home.

Ok.

No business, just....

Yeah, by that time, they had destroyed all the livelihood and...

Store closed, war broke out.

Everything was gone. Did your parents take any action to help the family stay together?

We stayed together.

Or, to, you know, for survival, I mean?

We stayed together as long as they could. They moved over to the ghetto. Germans give an order, such and such time to move to the ghetto.

And the ghetto was where? In the city?

They designated an area from my city.

Still in the city.

Yeah. In this Jews were to move, only Jews to the ghetto.

So your whole community's life was changed, of course, by the presence of the Germans. Were you old enough to remember the, you know, the book burnings, and *Kristallnacht* and all that, or do you remember hearing about that?

Well, the *Kristallnacht* happened, I think 1939 [sic – 1938], if I'm not mistaken. I was, I was in Russian at that time. We heard of that.

Ok, you did hear about all that.

Yeah.

What did you think?

That happened in Germany – the *Kristallnacht*.

Was that Germany or Austria?

Germany.

Was it Germany or Austria?

***Kristallnacht*? Berlin!**

Was it Germany? Okay, alright. Do you remember discussing that with your family? Or what they thought of any of that?

We heard of it. Called them bastards. But what could we do? We lived in Russia, nothing we can help.

All you could do was curse.

We didn't have no help from nobody, we couldn't do anything.

All you could do was curse them.

They start, they start creating concentration...Dachau, Buchenwald, it's in Germany. They started it, just the two of them. Later on in Poland they had all the concentration camps in Poland, like Auschwitz, and Belzec, and Treblinka.

Did you have to wear the Star of David before you...?

Right away, right away. 1941. In our apartment.

When the Germans, when the Germans took over.

Right away. That's an order.

The Russians didn't have you doing any of that, right?

The Russians?

Yeah. They didn't do any of that.

They didn't bother the Jews.

Ok.

Is that the question, "The Russians didn't bother you?"

No, I'm asking. So what did it feel like to have to wear the *Mogen* David all the time to identify yourself?

It was, it didn't bother us. If they would just leave us alone, but they, we had it because they wanted to know who was a Jew. Grab him, go to work, to take him on the side and shoot him, kill him. They knew they killing Jews, because that tells you who you are.

You're identified.

Identified.

How did it feel to be prohibited from going places and doing your normal, normal things? I mean, what did you feel like inside?

We were slaves. How do you feel to be a slave?

Did uh...

Hunger, beating up, killing you. Move in the ghetto, no place to stay, to live, no food. You know, people died in ghetto, from hunger? You ask me how I feel about the whole thing? I feel rotten. I felt bad.

[Tape ends and interview resumes]

You want to know how pleasant it was being, going to the ghetto in 1942? The beginning of 1942, the Germans gave us an order to go to a designated area to the ghetto. People, we

had a lot of elderly people that could hardly walk. They couldn't walk. I could see them sitting on the sidewalks. They didn't have no children. They were sitting and crying. They cannot go. The order was to go or being shot. And they did shoot you. They killed you.

Right on the spot?

Some people couldn't walk, they shot him on the spot and gave orders for our Jewish leaders to take and put him...to take him and bury him. See?

Yeah.

Across the street where I lived, Doctor Rinder was his name, and the Doctor Rinder had two parents. He had a factory, toy factory toy, toy factory, and those... wealthy people. And they also couldn't walk. And they lived with their son, right across the street where I lived.

And his parents lived with the son?

And they begged the son to give them cyanide tablets. And he wouldn't do that. To my parents, how could I do it? And that was going on, on. We had so much time to move to the ghetto. They gave us time. Finally, he gave them the tablets.

The cyanide?

And I looked how they carried down the parents down to be buried. And the son walked behind them, and crying. And we Jewish people seen it, and we told, we told the son that the greatest deed he ever could to your parents. Can you imagine that the greatest deed to poison their own parents? Now I'm going to tell you a story. Here in our synagogue, BIAV. You hear from BIAV synagogue?

Yeah.

It was Passover.

This year?

Yeah. Just this Passover.

This last Passover.

This Passover. A doctor came over from Pittsburgh, with his wife, the baby. And he got a job in St. Luke's Hospital. He's a heart doctor, what, what do you call it?

A cardiologist?

Cardiologist. He got a job. It just happened to be they came to our synagogue on Saturday, Passover. And they got acquainted about that Dr. Rosenthal. He's a bone doctor specialist. They talked with each other. The girl is asking Dr. Rosenthal's wife, "How did you call Sabina in Hebrew?" Sabina, you ever heard the name Sabina?

Yeah.

How do you call it in Hebrew?

I don't know.

And Dr. Rosenthal's wife, she knows me, see I talk Yiddish. She comes over to me, saying, "Sam, tell me. How do you call..." That's how the whole story starts. "How do you call Sabina in Hebrew?" I said, "There's no name in Hebrew, but Yiddish is Scheidl." You ever heard the name Scheidl?

Yeah.

Scheidl is Sabina. And not only that, there's a song in Poland. [singing] "Scheidl, they call Sabina. And Rachel, they call Regina." See, it's a song. And I start singing that song. Scheidl, they call Sabina. There you are.

Exactly what they were asking.

But, they hit the jackpot, with that song. And then she said, "Come with me to the, play it to the couple." I came over to the couple, and I'm singing that song. "Scheidl, they say..." So, they start laughing, and they say "Where are you from?" I say "I am from Poland." "Poland, what city?" I say "From Przemyśl." And, see they came from Pittsburgh. I never met them before. Never seen them in my life. If I happen to know a fellow named Rinder?

They asked you that?

They asked me that. This is the Rinder, what the doctor killed the parents!

I'll be darned.

I lost my singing. I quit singing, and I uh, and I said, "If I know Rinder?" And I told them the story. Rinder, the Doctor Rinder, done the greatest thing. He gave cyanide tablets to his own parents so they couldn't walk to the ghetto, they couldn't walk. And they telling me they know it.

They knew that.

They know it, they knew it.

Amazing.

The mother, their mother, her mother, this mother, her mother is from Przemyśl, from my city. Her husband is a brother of the doctor.

Oh, wow.

He died ten years ago, her husband. Can you imagine? And she tells me, “My grandmother is happened to be married to fellow named Rinder, and that Rinder was a brother with doctor.” And their doctor told them that he done it. They knew about the, this brother poisoned his own parents. And they wrote a book, and I got the book here. It says in it the story that told about it and I looked on it, see. For that interested they are. This book replicate. From Pittsburgh got a job over here and asking me, asking me a name, a faded name. And now all of a sudden, if I, if I am from Poland, and if I happened to know a fellow named Rinder.

That’s amazing.

What a coincidence. I got shook up. Everybody got shook up in the synagogue. I was crying, really. I couldn’t talk any more. Because things like that I seen with my own eyes. And they asking me what happened fifty some years ago! And I looked on it.

And it’s so rare to happen like that.

Very rare.

It’s amazing.

This is interesting, isn’t it.

Yeah, it is. It really is. This is kind, I think this is what they want. This kind of stuff. You know? This is good.

Now, moving in the ghetto, locking up the ghetto. People, elderly people dying before they get to the ghetto because they couldn’t walk. They were dying. Old people died. Finally they closed the ghetto 25,000 Jews. They brought some Jews from the whole area, from, from little towns around Przemyśl they brought all the Jews in that ghetto. They increased it to 25,000. Then....

What was the Jewish population before the war? Do you know? Do you know how many Jews were in the city?

About 18,000.

18? Ok.

About 25,000 with the surrounding Jews.

Ok.

But when I walked in the Gestapo, Gestapo Bennewitz comes over to me when I was working on the plumbing. See the question wouldn't be here to ask me that. And another four, five Gestapo standing with him. And I see comes over, "Are you sabotaging us? You don't peek at that water. And if you think that we won't have the water, you won't be around too long to see it."

You were threatened.

Threatened.

You were threatened, huh?

That Bennewitz was such an ugly person. I don't know how Hitler could make a big man out of him. He was the head of the Gestapo. He told me "You'd better get it done." Then I asked him...

Were you the only one working on it or...

I worked on it, my brother. Nobody else.

With your brother?

I am only. Me.

Ok.

And I asked him, "Would you like to see what I already did?" To show it him what I am working. He said, "Yeah, I want to see it." So we walked down the wall lower level in the building from there. *Gymnasium*, I called it the *gymnasium*.

Right, right the school.

And showed him a pile of pipes, what I already changed. And I picked a piece of pipe and I showed him "See that pipe? It's split open. It was frozen. Broken. And I replaced it already. Look on that pile. And I'm only a few days here. Look what I did." He didn't know what to say. So he said, "Just keep the good work. If not I will show you what I can do." Things like that, you know.

Right, more threats.

And they walked away from me. A little bit later, a Gestapo came back. One guy.

His name was Broyer. He told me his name. Broyer. He says to me like that, "I seen what you did. I happen to be a plumber.

[laughing] Uh-huh.

You done a great job." A Gestapo told me that. And, "I will protect you as much as I can," he says. "Don't worry."

That's good.

But that was the Gestapo told me and I fixed up the building and the time is gone. We moved out to the ghetto. The first order was "We need 8,000 Jews in Germany to go to work." Young people to go to Germany, work. And designated place in the ghetto train for the ride next to it. 8,000 people start coming in because we thought we were going to Germany to work. Didn't know anything else. I had my toolbox with me. My father told me, "Samek, you are the only one that got a trade. Why don't you pick up your toolbox and go to Germany? We manage somehow, we do it." So I picked up my toolbox. The name of the place Mickiewiczza, Mickiewiczza Street. They call it Mickiewiczza *Ulica*. *Ulica* in Polish is street. Mickiewiczza Street. People did come out. And they had 8,000 people. A third from the ghetto. People that left to go out someplace else because there no food, the water, we don't....

Thought they might have a better chance...

But in a room like that, we had six families. Everybody had a corner, one guy was sitting right in the middle with the family, there was no place to live. So 8,000 people came over to that place. We sitting in lines, long lines, you know, waiting for the train. One guy changed his mind, he wants to go home. Decided. Forgot something. He walked out a little bit and he got shot.

Oh! Didn't ask for permission?

You said oh, why? The Ukrainians were sitting back behind trees. They have an order. Somebody trying to sneak out from the group, shoot him. All of a sudden, another guy over there got shot.

Things started changing.

We noticed, we noticed something is wrong. We're going to Germany to work, and this is without forcing us, of our own, our own will.

And now they won't let you leave.

Couldn't get out. One guy gets up and says.... He was selling ice cream for the kids. His name was Ente. He gets up and says, "Friend," Yiddish. "My friends, Jews, do you see what's going on? We ain't going to Germany..." He didn't finish his sentence, got a bullet

in his head. See? I was looking on it. So everybody was suspicious that was sitting in line to go to Germany to work. And what happened? That Broyer, that Gestapo, he walked between the lines looking on the people, just looking on them. And he walked by me, he sees me with the toolbox. And he's asking me, in German, "Where do you think you're going?" I said, "Well, they need workers in Germany. I got my toolbox, and I'm going to work." This is after they killed already three people. He says, "Pick up your toolbox and come with me." Just like that. And I walked with him. Nobody shot at me. He walked next to me.

You were protected.

No, he just "Come with me." And I walked with him. They seen me. I walked with the Gestapo. And he came to a certain area out and he said, "Go home." And I came home, and my father said "What are you doing here? I thought you were going to Germany." I told him what's going on over there. He said he heard some shots, but didn't know where. He said "They're killing our people in that group that are going to Germany to work. They couldn't get out any more."

Did you tell him about the Gestapo officer? Helped you out.

Yeah, Gestapo, helped me out. And that Broyer, who told me he was a plumber, took me out. The whole 8,000 people went to gas chambers.

Oh, wow.

8,000 people. None of them survived. Not only that, they had to write letters. They came to Auschwitz. They beat up some people, and told them write a letter, how good we had it over here. We got a nice job, and so and so, and they brought those letters back to the ghetto, and people see those letters. They read those letters. It had to be written like the Germans could read it. In German. And he signed his name. That guy went to die and he had to write this letter. And we thought...

Was that to get more people to come, to volunteer to go?

Four days later, 4,000 people. Another 4,000 people three days later. We thought that until we found out later, the *goyim*, the Polish people told us "Your people are getting killed over there." We didn't know. We found out. People started jumping from the trains. See?

So you were, you were indirectly getting some help from the non-Jews, I mean...?

I want to show you... The Gestapo guy, he took me out, he took me out from the gas chamber. That my first... This is 1942, the beginning of the war. See?

That's, that's something. From the ghetto, where did you go? Where did you go from the ghetto?

I was in the ghetto, all the time until...

You went to a camp....

The ghetto, the ghetto was...1942, all year was under the Gestapo. 1943, they splitted the ghetto, two ghettos. One street was the dividing line. We came in that street from the city and there was a gate over here to the Ghetto A, and here was a Ghetto B. The Ghetto A was taken over by commander Gestapo, his name was Schwammburger.

He's the one that you testified...?

He took it over this ghetto, he was in charge of the Ghetto A. And this ghetto were people, working people. They had clothing from the German soldiers to wash, and repair, so so. That Schwammburger. So I came over, I moved over myself to Ghetto A and my parents were just across the street in Ghetto B. I was able to go and visit them, but we had different stamps. Stamp from A, and stamp.... Everybody had a passport.

Like passports, yeah.

He says to our leader, Schwammburger says "We need, I need a plumber." Need a plumber.

Were there not many plumbers?

No, I'm the only one.

Really. The only one in the whole area.

That's probably, that's why I don't remember. I think that's why they got me over from out of Ghetto B to A because he needed a plumber and they don't have nobody else. 'Cause I didn't know why I was separated from my family. But they needed, he needed, he wanted a plumber.

You were in need. They needed you, yeah.

Yeah, so B was still very close, you know. I told, but they, okay. Schwammburger comes over to me, he says "I want to build a distillery to make vodka." He wants to build a distillery. So I told him I never built a distillery, but I'll build it if he'd make me a drawing, how to do it, I'll do it. And he started making a drawing. And I was building it. So I became a VIP over there with Schwammburger. This is the commander that was killing Jews. He walked in an apartment, walked up, he shot two people. Two people at the same time that traded with the *goyim*. And he happened to come in, bingo. Shot them both. Didn't even turn around. Shot them. And that was, that was Schwammburger. And he came in 1943 and he, me and him, and his wife, and his dog. He had a dog named Prince, walked in the ghetto someplace, I forgot where. And a fellow Jew was laying bleeding to death. We walked right to that guy. Schwammburger walked right next to

him. And guy, the poor fellow was begging for water, he was dying. Water, wasser, wasser. He went and took his gun out, flipped him over, and shot him in the back of his head. I looked at Mrs. Schwamberger would do. She looked down, she didn't want to look. She couldn't look where he shoots his... That was Schwamberger. I was a witness against that guy.

I know. I know. How long ago was that? Several years.

'92.

'92.

In Stuttgart, Germany. They got him from Argentina.

What did they do to him?

He was sentenced for life. He's supposed to be in jail. Is he? I don't know. Maybe the Germans did keep him in jail. He was a murderer, was killing. I seen him shooting about thirty people. Just told 'em to get undressed, he shot every one of them. I looked on it.

Terrible things.

And he told me, caught me one time not doing something, I forgot what it was, he told me, cursed me, he said "The next transport are you go on." He didn't kill me. "You're going to Auschwitz, next transport." And he kept his word.

Oh, and that's how you wound up there.

That was 1943. End of 1943...

You went to Auschwitz?

...I was over there, went to Auschwitz. I got liberated in begin, in May of '45.

You didn't escape? Yeah, you were liberated, you say.

I was liberated...

From there?

... in Austria.

Do you remember any circumstances that led to the liberation of the camp? Or did you have word that the war was coming to an end?

Liberated, I was in Ebensee,

Did you get communications?

I was in Ebensee.

That's a camp, a labor camp?

Labor camp, concentration camp.

And where was that?

It's Austria.

Austria. All right.

We were in the mountains. It's in the mountains. Ebensee means... Ebensee is a lake. Ebensee, big lake over there in the mountains. Rain water accumulated in it and the camp was next to it. And the commander came over and says... we worked in a, in a mine. They built a big hole in the mountain. And they had a factory over there making different parts. We were carrying stones up, lot of guys couldn't make it, died, they shot it. And others... I was going down very fast.

How old were you then? Twenty...

Twenty-four years old. And...

But your health was starting to fail. You were getting weak.

Oh, yeah, I fell like under, very fast, too. He said, but this was right on the end of the war, he says to us, "We found out that the English Air Force is going to bomb this camp." Two channels, they found it out. So...

Like an underground? You had like an underground?

Yeah, tunnel, in the mountain.

I mean, how did you find this out? That they were going to be bombed?

The commander, from the...

Oh, the commander said.

The Nazi commander told us that.

Ok, alright.

So he suggest the whole camp, all the ...should go up and go into the tunnel, because we....

To get underground from the bombing.

...to get away from the bombing. But one Nazi soldier told our leaders from the group that was leading us, prisoners. They were also Germans, German. One Nazi, one from the soldiers told, "If the commander comes over and asks you to go in the tunnel, don't go. It's dynamited, they're going to blow you up."

Wow!

Hear that? That word went around. We had a few Germans, leaders, they were leaders. But they were also Jew-, they were Communists. Also in concentration. They had all the food there, they had all the food they wanted. They were around the kitchens, you know, things like that.

Now, how do you know who to believe? One tells you to go here to be safe. One tells you not to go to be safe.

He was a Nazi, tell us to go. One of our prisoners says to us...

Don't go.

Why not believing him? What, what ... He doesn't want to go! He says, "The commander will give an order to go. And we don't move. Let them kill us right here on that place. Nobody's going to go in there." He told us why, because it's dynamited. And it was dynamited.

You found out for sure, later.

Sure, but the war ended next half a day. We found out it was dynamited and we didn't go up there. He says you don't want to go up, it's fine with me, but I'm just telling you your life is in danger. Nobody moved. And about three hours later, they were gone. The commander with all the soldiers, the Nazis, gone.

Oh, they just left.

Yeah.

They left you and....

The camp was open. The camp was open. And they put up elderly people, could hardly walk, they put them up in the towers. Machine guns. They didn't even know what they do no more.

Oh, wow.

We had to take them down. They didn't know how to shoot even. But they were sitting at the machine gun. We didn't know it there.

Oh, I see.

See.

Just to give them time to get away?

They got them up there, the elderly told them to dress up in the uniform. And they told them to sit there next to the machine gun, and they were sitting over there. We didn't know. We thought they really...

Oh, you thought the guards were still there? So that gave them time to get away.

Yeah. Yeah. We start moving around. Those people are sitting over there looking at us. And they went "Hi."

Started waving to you?

Waving at us.

Oh wow! [laughing]

And about the same day, an American tank broke...

You were liberated?

...broke through the gate. He went through the gate. And the fellow was sitting on the hood, opened up the hood. And they're making films.

Gee wiz. [laughing]

Yeah, he couldn't... Oh, he was stopped. Couldn't then, we were weak. But some of them were healthy. Good Germans, jumping at them. They killed a few... Our people killed a few German *kapos*. They were *kapos*. You know what a *kapo* was?

Yeah, like a leader.

Leader, they were leaders, also prisoners, but they were killing us. They're sitting... with their feet, they hit them and hit them until they died. And I looked on this. He said, "I didn't do it." No, he didn't have a chance to open his mouth even. They were just....

They were mad, angry.

They didn't have enough room to get on him, to kick him, so many of them were kicking him. So he was gone.

Wow. So the Americans liberated you.

Free men.

You were in, into Austria.

They warmed us up then, with wards, tents, made of hospitals, got in.

Was the Red Cross there? Did they get the Red Cross in?

No. And they, they, they gave us goulash. You know what goulash is?

Like a soup, like a stew?

Stew, about a half a dozen youngsters died from that goulash.

Too rich?

Got liberated, free people, and they... I myself I couldn't eat it because the goulash is so heavy, so, it's too rich, and the intestines were poor, gone. The American doctors, didn't know... they were doctors, didn't know what to do with us. A few kids in line with the big stomachs and died. It was the saddest thing what I seen after the war.

So close.

Kids survive. Young kids survive, and they said... They were fully aware, the [unclear] said "We got do die because they don't know what to do with us." And they did die.

How did you feel when you were liberated? What kind of...? I mean, what were your thoughts, do you remember?

Liberated, we walked in the city. The Germans invited us to restaurant, to eat. They gave us soup.

Did you still have prisoner clothes, or...?

Prisoner clothes, yeah. We walked with prisoner clothes in the city. Over here, they gave us bread. We had, I think... I only wish I had to cut my own bread. Nobody cuts it for me. I had one loaf of bread. I looked hard at that, broke off a piece, and ate it. That's the best food, was bread, I got nourished up, I got come back to my normal.

It's good for you.

The best thing happened to me, I got to tell you that. We sitting in the camp, because we had a lot of Russian prisoners. Russian, *goyim*. They walked out and killed Austrians. We had guns laying, they left a lot of guns over there laying. And a lot of our people picked up machine guns. They walked in the city with machine guns, and they killed and they killed...

The Austrians?

...the Austrians, yeah.

Because....

Several people, party people, they killed them.

Because...

Just because, just to revenge, just for revenge, you know.

They got angry?

Yeah. The MP locked us back up. The MP locked us back up, locked the gate. There was food there, but nobody could get out.

I see.

So, we sitting in the camp. What'll you do now?

You're free.

Free Jewish people asking of each other, where are we going now? Do you know we lost the family? We know we lost everybody. I knew that. The other guys, too. Because we seen what the Germans did. Where are you going now? Where... for the month, are you going back to Poland? Go back to Russia? We hated Polish people, can't go back to Russia.

That's a lot of decisions.

We were sitting about two weeks. One guy commit suicide because he was so sick, he couldn't, he couldn't recuperate. He suffered so much, he shot himself. He said that "I don't know, I don't think I can make it. I'm sick, I haven't got nobody to talk to, nowhere to go. I don't want to go back to Poland." A little [unclear] finally found he shot himself. That's what happened to us. Where should we...? We sitting there, a group of Jewish people. Where are we going?

Where did you go?

One day, who shows up? A Jew from the British Brigade, yeah? From the British Brigade.

I'm not sure...

Palestinian Jews was serving in the British Army. The British wouldn't accept them. But finally, Churchill gave an order to accept them. And they were fighting with the British against the Nazis. And one of the Palestinian Jew came, he had a Jeep, came in to our camp.

Through the gate?

It's open. Finally, the gate we got opened again. You know the guns are, they got all of them.

They're safe.

Free men again. He talks Yiddish. "Children, Yiddish, you don't talk Yiddish. Children, Jewish *kinder*, children, where are you? I want the Jewish kids. Come over here. I want to talk to them." The British soldier, the British officer, that had a *menorah* on his hat, 'cause he's with the Jewish Brigade. They had the *menorah*.

Palestinian, yeah.

The British uniform, every man the *menorah* on his head. That guy, had the *menorah* later see everybody had the *menorahs*. And he says, and I had to stay there. He says, "How many Jews are left here, this camp? And what are you going to do?" He told us, asking us what we did. Ask ourselves "Where are you going to go? Back to Poland? Back to Russia?"

He said that like that, probably?

Just like that.

Uh huh.

We asked him, "What should we do?" He says "I am from Isra... *Eretz Israel*... from the Jew...." He didn't say Palestine. "I am from Israel." And he talk Yiddish. "You stay here, and I'll come after you. Don't move."

Just like that?

"Don't move." We heard something, that, oh brother.

It sounded good.

"We are going to go home." That's what he said. What home is, I didn't know, found out later. He meant Israel. "We are going to go home." That was my first time I heard that. Really. Was...we start get organized, the Federation gave us some clothing, and so so, and

we waited one week, two weeks, three weeks, nobody shows up. All of a sudden, twenty American trucks, with the white stars on it, black drivers, drove into the gate, into the camp. Already loaded with Jews from another camp, they were that empty, they hold that. And he told us, the same guy, what told us...

The same person, huh?

There were another seven or eight from the Jewish Brigade with him. See, he wasn't by himself that time, he had a crew, with twenty trucks. All black drivers. I never seen a black man. The first time I seen a black man. And he told...

What did you think of that? I mean, what did you think?

Well, I looked at that, with the white teeth and the red lips, everything black, you know? It's interesting. With white here, and black here, you know.

Oh, his hands?

Anyway, of course, we didn't see too long. "Jump on the trucks. Leave that junk here." So everybody had something they accumulate. "Leave it here and we get you some other ones. Jump on the trucks." We all jumped on the trucks. The whole camp, all the Jews went on those trucks. And we drove over the Alps.

The Alps? Ok.

In Austria, you got the Alps.

Was that a long trip?

And we drive, and drive, and drive. Up, and go down. But they couldn't...they didn't have a straight job. You had to curve.

You had to circle around or you'd fall down.

Circle. About eighty miles an hour. Those trucks were squeaking. When he made a turn, the truck was leaning on this side. All of 'em. We looking down, 8,000 feet. See, scared. We can't do nothing, the drivers are driving. We can't in a different, different, him with the Israeli soldiers sitting there right next to the driver, you know? They were sitting with the drivers. And we finally got out of the mountains. [sigh] They driving a hundred miles an hour. [laughing] We came to Modena. Modena, Italy.

Ok. Italy, wow!

So many Jews already there. They brought the Jews in other camps. I didn't know....

How long did the trip take from the camp to...?

About five hours, six hours.

Oh, you were driving eighty miles an hour, down the mountains, and about a hundred miles, five or six hours.

And we jumped on the trucks. Everybody had to jump down, and that guy what told us to wait, they come after us. And I talked in Yiddish, I said, “You know, we could have get killed in the mountains. The driver dead, I thought, I thought we going to fall down the mountains.” He says to me, “Did anybody got hurt?” I say, “No.” “Well [makes a noise like pffeh], what do you want?” [laughing]

Yeah. What are you complaining about? [laughing].

That doesn't complain why. We went... Now he has to go to the English commanders. About trucks, he says. England doesn't want us to go to Israel. You know what happened. The Cyprus... [unclear]?

Yeah, returning the ship and all that.

Ok, we couldn't get any trucks. We went to the American Army in Munich, and they wouldn't give us trucks either. “We want to take you from there to Modena. From Modena, we going to Israel,” illegally, legally, you know. And here you are. They turn us down. They wouldn't give us any trucks. Finally, we found a Jewish general. Talk to him, we taking Jews out of the camp to Italy to Israel. He's listening with us, says, “Ok, I see what I can do.” He came over to that guy, to those guys, he says, “I'll give you twenty trucks. You got to pick them up four o'clock in the morning. I'll fill them up with gas, and I give you drivers.” That's where he got the black drivers. “Under one condition. I want them back tonight, the same day.”

That's what I figured. I figured they had to be back a certain time.

“I can do it one day, and you got to be back.” That's why the Israeli told me, “You see the trucks?” I not know. They're gone. “They're already on the way to Munich. They have to go back over the mountains and go back there to be back in Munich, back today!” he says. Otherwise, I couldn't get you over here.

That's almost a rescue. You know, that's a rescue.

That's how I got to Italy. In Italy, we went to Israel illegally. I couldn't go, because I got married right away. I only had two choices, get married or get shot, kill myself. Where? Who? I don't have nobody.

You needed something.

Who wants to live, even? So, I found a girl. She... with the war.... She was born in 1927, you know. She was born in 1927. In 1939 when the war broke out, she was only twelve

years old. Didn't get no schooling or nothing. And I didn't look for intelligent. I looked for a wife. I knew she was a good wife. I can tell. Well behavior, you know. And I found that girl, and she was.... We got married. And we had a baby in 1946. And they told me you cannot go illegal because the Jews are caught by the English. They are shipped to Cyprus. I don't know if you know what Cyprus is. The baby ruined it. My son Larry, he would never made it if I would go illegally. So, I'm an American. I'll talk, I'll tell you the story what happened, how I got to America and why. Otherwise I would be in Israel. I wouldn't be here ten minutes.

Were you in a DP camp?

Yeah, in Italy. That was over there from 1945 'til 1948. Was in a DP camp.

Three years. So you had time to get your health?

Finally, finally, finally found a cousin in New York. He found me. Sent me a package. He told me here "If your daddy so and so and your mother so and so, you're my cousin." He sent me a package. "In case you're not my cousin, use the package in good health anyway."

Keep it anyway, yeah. Huh.

So he told me, "Why are you, how long you going to wait?" I said, "What should I do?" He said, "Register to America, also. What comes first we do."

So people signed up for different countries?

Yeah.

And whoever called first....

No different country. Just America or Israel. There was no different country.

That's all....

I wouldn't go back to other country. You couldn't get me over there.

But other countries were available, were taking a quota, weren't they?

Ah, back to Poland. Sure, the country were taking.

[Tape ends and interview resumes]

We'll continue with this tape, side 3. We'll discuss the Displaced Persons Camp and we kind of discussed already how you got there. Now we'll go into what took place there and what you did from there. Can you briefly go over... You got to the DP camp. It was in Israel, was that right?

I got into DP camp in Italy.

Or, Italy, Italy, yes.

Yeah.

And then you signed up to go to Israel from there.

Waited to go, they call it *Aliyah Bet*. Illegal *Aliyah*.

Oh, illegal *Aliyah*.

Sure, England didn't let you in. You know the story about the Exodus?

Yeah, yeah.

Well, you ought to know what happened.

Yeah, ok.

They didn't let the ships go through to Israel.

So, you were involved in that situation?

[Some sort of an alarm rings and there are several female voices. The interview briefly stops then resumes.]

So it was an illegal entry? It would have been an illegal entry into Israel?

Yeah, I want to tell you we waited to go to Israel. Waited there for three years. I couldn't go to Israel because my boy was born. I got married in '45, and my boy was born in '46, and they told me not to go with a baby, because if the English ship would catch you, a lot of them were caught and sent to Cyprus. And Cyprus is, was like a, the desert.

And that would have been too hard for the baby? Too hard for...

The baby wouldn't make it, they said. They go only, only married, married people without children or singles.

Ok.

That's the only people that they take to that voyage. Not babies.

That's good information. Well, in Italy, what kind of conditions were there? Sanitation, were there good sleeping, sleeping arrangements?

We were in camps, yeah, it wasn't too bad.

You had leaders, were there leaders over the groups?

Leaders, well the camp was led by some, most of them English from England officers. Just a commander, you know. They were in charge of the food, the kitchens....

Just disbursing items and control of day to day...

We had kitchens, personal, we lived in some apartments over there, what the Nazis left. In Italy, it had a lot of Nazis over there. They ran away, so we had a chance to live in those apartments.

So you got their quarters.

Yeah.

Was there a chance for educational activities?

No, no education.

There's no schools that they set up or anything?

No. They had Hebrew classes, because now maybe everybody's going to go to Israel. The teacher will talk Hebrew.

What city was this that, in Italy?

City? A few of them.

I mean, where were you though? Oh, you were in several....

I was in Barletta, southern, southern Italy. Close to Sicily. Barletta, the name of the camp. I lived over there. And from there, I came, finally I decided to go....

How long were you there?

From '45 'til '48. Three years.

That's three years? That was your three years. Ok. Just had to ask. So you're married, and had one child, and you met up, you met up with a relative? Or a relative sent you a package.

Yes.

Is that right?

Um hmm. He asked me what to do. I told him, “Why don’t you register?” I went to Naples. We registered in American Embassy in Naples. And I didn’t register as a Russian, Polish, I registered as a Russian from Russia.

Did that make a difference?

Yes, the quota was much more.

Oh, all right.

Instead of having 5,000, I was only 200. That’s why right away, I came to America.

And you had no papers to prove one way or the other...

There were no papers, no.

There was nothing to verify the thing, so...

Never any papers. My wife was also a Russian. She was born in Hungary, but she became a Russian.

Ok.

My passport says born in Russia.

What city did you list? Or did it matter? Did you have to...

In Italy?

No, on your passport, for Russia.

Kharkov.

Kharkov.

I forgot. She is Kiev, and I am Kharkov. Or I am Kiev, and she is Kharkov. I forgot. I have to look, look it up.

You still have them? You were able to keep those?

Yeah. Yeah, they tell me I am born in Russia. I am registered, born in Russia. I lied to them.

Ok, well...

They can send me back, I want to go to Israel.

Yeah, that would work out. So, from Italy, you came to the United States, right? Did you come through New York?

Yes. We lived in New York for three months, in New York.

You came over on a boat?

In a boat.

On a ship?

Ship.

Do you know the name of the ship?

Russia.

Rustia?

Russia. Russian ship. It was a German ship. They called it Russia, because the names on the windows was written German. *Kraft durch Freude*. That's the name of the ship. Power to, uh, Power to Happiness.

Oh, okay.

That's the name of the ship. But they called it Russia. Everyplace you looked on the ship was written German. They took it away from the Germans. Left a beautiful ship.

So they just renamed it, huh?

Yeah.

Okay.

Came to New York. Lived 103rd and, and Broadway, in a hotel.

When you got married, was there a regular wedding? Did you have a traditional wedding?

Yes. Regular in wedding, in Italy. Yes. We were normal people, already.

Alright, good. How did you invite your guests? Who were the guests, and how many people were there? Was it the camp, other camp people?

The camp, maybe 25, 30 people. The camp.

Did you keep it kinda...

Close friends.

...kinda private, or...?

Well, we didn't make parties over there. We didn't have money to make parties.

Was there a black market?

No black market.

No black market.

No.

I mean some of the camps...

We just made it a poor wedding.

I mean some of the camps had black market going and people were making money to buy things, trading.

Yeah, but I was... Selling cigarettes.

Yeah, right, that kind of thing.

I know about that, but... I was, I was manager in the kitchen. Three hundred....That's how I met my wife. Three hundred people ate in my kitchen. Three hundred from the camps. I was in charge of it.

What was your wife doing? What's her first name? What's your wife's first name?

First name? Today it's Elizabeth. And she ate in my kitchen.

Okay. She was working for you?

No. She just came for....

She just came to eat.

...to eat my food.

And you saw her.

Saw her and... You know, she was a young girl. She was almost 17 years old. I asked her if she'd like to date me. She didn't... She was the type, she didn't want to date me.

Because...

She was religi-... She was, from home she was raised up very religious.

But you were, too, weren't you?

Ahhh....

Not as much?

Listen. The last day, when I was sleeping in the bunk bed in, in Ebensee over there... I was religious. And a fellow, we had two in a bed, three stories, bunk beds, all over, and I was on the top. The night before, the guy tells me, "I don't feel good, I don't know what to do." I didn't even realize, in the middle of the night, he died. I was sleeping with a dead man. In the morning, I was oh... After I noticed he's dead, I went through his pockets and see if he got any food left. Wasted my time, he didn't have no food left. But to me, a dead man was laying next to me. How would you like to sleep next to a dead man today? [laughing] See? To me, it was just like, we ate jello made out of blood. Pure blood. The blood came from a rat. Who knows? That's what they gave me. A piece of bread with the jello. I swallowed it, I ate it up. Nothing but dis, dis, demoralized [sic – demoralized].

Was this normal food? I hadn't heard of that before. Was that...

For me, it was.

Huh, okay.

Jello, made of blood. Red, pure blood. But that's what kept me going.

Sure. Let's get back to your wedding. At the wedding, did you have a rabbi?

Yeah we had a rabbi.

Who did the ceremony?

Yeah.

You had food and music, and all that?

I don't think we had music, no. We were dancing and singing, but no, no music. we didn't have no music.

Did you have a *chuppah*?

Chuppah. We made chuppah.

Did you crush the glass?

Sure. A normal, a good wedding. But we didn't have liquor. I don't remember if we had liquor or not.

In Italy, sure you did. [laughing]

We had wine. We had wine. They were giving us wine. But scotch and things like that, we didn't have it, no. We had wine.

I think you would expect the wine. You expect the wine. You would expect to have wine in Italy, wouldn't you?

Well, we had yeah, that's right, in Italy.

So did your wife work after you got married?

No, she never worked.

Did you continue to... be the kitchen, head of the kitchen?

The kitchen, yeah.

Until you left?

Until they closed the kitchen. People start moving away. Got smaller, smaller. So they closed the kitchen. There was a friend of mine who was running the kitchen. And he got, then you know, he had... he wrote down every name. Three hundred times. You know?

Three hundred times?

Then make lines. Sometime [unclear], something like that, soup, they didn't care how much time. You couldn't come twice for like special hot dogs, some special food, because they had only so many per person. And you had to make marks, you can't be eating up this. You got this, and this, and this.

Kind of rationed it. Rationed it out.

Rations, yeah. Not rations, just they had plenty food, except you get one. See, you get one. Bread, you can have two, three, I mean plenty bread. But if you had sardines, let's say. You got three hundred people. They give you three hundred sardines. If you ate two, then one is going to have to get with my share, that wants it. So, I told him, why do you have to write the name down? Have a list of the people and then you put a number. One, two, three, if the sheet is end, make another sheet, one, two, three, four, five. If you want to know who six is, look on your book who six is. You know the name. Are we? Know that? I told him that. He said, "How stupid I was. I've been writing every three days, I write all

the names down. I got the name one time to the number. See? I taught that. And they mark number one, already got. They got this, make a cross out at one. Then make a circle on it.

Sure, a different way of identifying it.

Different way to identify it. So he said I'm a smart man. Well, he got promoted. So the English captain asked him "What are you going to do?" He said, "Well, I got promoted, I got a better job." "Well, who's going to run the kitchen?" I got a guy here. He knows it. He said he's the guy.

I got a smart guy here.

Yeah. So I took over the kitchen. And I, and I'm pretty good. Play soccer, better. Between meals, I played soccer. And that's how I spent... Swim, I used to swim in the Adriatic - oh, did I swim for miles and miles. We had a boat of five people. It was a cove, you know? Me in this camp and he was Gallipoli. I remember the little town, Gallipoli. This was a cove. Hey, land was over here. But there was a big opening. So we... It took us about 5, 6 hours to swim across. We have a boat, we took a boat...

Wow, you really swam that far?

Yeah. We took a boat. And whoever didn't, just for fun. And we were swimming clear across, a bunch of us, not too many but maybe 10, 12. When one didn't feel good, they took him in the boat. And swim, I swim across one time. Clear across.

Amazing!

In Italy. That's what we did, you know. Played soccer. I really built myself up in Italy.

Recreation and exercise.

Yeah. In Italy. I had a bicycle. At market, I bought some clothing from people. It's for the kitchen. I bought some clothing. Like you got two sweaters. I don't get one. Suddenly. I buy it. How much you want? Then, I took all the *shmates* together, on the bicycle, went on a market. And made some money. Then I brought back chickens home. Chickens. Live chickens. On my bicycle, hanging on the legs?

With the money you bought chickens, okay.

Bought some chickens. And people bought chickens. Made, just to get busy, do something. I used to drive them up on the bicycle, me and Michael Rothstein. You know Michael Rothstein? Me and him were riding bicycle in the morning, we'd start at four o'clock in the morning. It took about 4 or 5 hours to get to our market. Little towns in Italy, they had markets, different days. This day was over here, this day be from in this area. We drove bicycles with *shmates* or *shmatasa*.

Yeah, rags, yeah.

Right. Come back with chickens. That's what I did. I even have a picture here, we got friendly with a piece like a table, *shmates* on it. And me and Michael, standing next to it. Made a picture of it.

Ah, great. You came here from Europe on a boat, on the ship. Now you had your wife and baby, is that right?

Yeah.

Okay, your baby was with you. How did you settle in the Kansas City area? You came through New York.

The Federation told me I got to go where they're gonna send me. There are too many Jews in New York. I didn't want to go. I got that cousin that sent me the package. I want to stay. They told me "You can stay in New York, if you want to. We'll let him support you."

You were there three months, you say? Three months in New York?

Yeah. "Let him support you." I fought them, I fought them, I didn't want to go. Finally, they said "You go, or we gonna quit supporting you. You'll be on your own. You be taking your limit." I didn't have a choice. I was supposed to go to Des Moines...

Did you sign up for these places?

Then I was supposed to go to the Sioux City, Iowa, they couldn't find an apartment. Finally, they found a place over here. Kansas City. And they didn't have a place. I went to Montrose Hotel on 40th and Main, used to be a hotel named Montrose. The Federation gave me that hotel, so didn't have an apartment here, either, see. So, but I found an apartment. So I went to synagogue Friday night.

What synagogue did you go to?

Beth Medresh Hagadol. You know where that is?

No.

You, you are too far away from the Jewish people, now. That's why. You know. The synagogue. You don't know the synagogues, even, do you? You never go. You never go to the synagogue?

Yeah, yeah, but...

Which synagogue you go, if you go?

Well, Beth Torah.

Beth Torah, do you? Your wife goes, too?

Yeah, on....

Are you... I don't care, you know.

No, no, we go on and off.

Yeah?

Yeah, we go. But what synagogue is it called?

Beth Medresh Hagadol. Beth Medresh Hagadol. Beth Medresh Hagadol. Big, Hagadol is big. Beth Medresh Hagadol.

But where was that?

It was about Wayne and Linwood. Linwood and Wayne. The Center was across the street. The Jewish Community Center.

Yeah. On Linwood, yeah. I don't remember that.

And Friday night I walked Friday to *shul*, I want to go to *shul*. From 40th and Main to Linwood and Wayne. Long walk. Took me more than an hour. I came to *shul*. And everybody talked to me English. Jews talk to me English. I said I don't want... I couldn't understand. Finally, "What are you talk?" Yiddish! Everybody's talk with me Yiddish. Everybody at that time talked Yiddish. "Why didn't you just say so? We can talk Yiddish." Would you like to *daven*, they want me to be *Ba'al Tefillah*. You know what a *Ba'al Tefillah* is? The cantor. They want me try, try me. I say, "Well, I'll try." And I can sing. I can sing. Like the old country. And I can sing good. And they liked it. "Would you come tomorrow, too?" Just like that. I say, "Why not?" Come to our... I came next day, "Would you do it again?" I done it again. And they liked my singing. And there was a *shoykhet*. Know what *shoykhet* means? Killed a chicken?

Butcher, yeah.

Rabbi Friedmann was name. He said "I like you *daven*, you *daven* so nice. You don't need that here. Really I used to *daven* at home not as a cantor. I was singing with the cantor. I would sit at my place, but he was singing, I was singing almost with him. See? And I normally know how to sing it and he said "You sing that. Where do you live?" I say, "I live at 40th and Main." [gasp] "You walk over here from 40th and Main? I'm so glad." "Boy, I'll tell you something," he says. "You're such a nice guy. See me tonight, after *Shabbat*. Come and see me." And he told me where to go, to 40th and Brooklyn. You know where Brooklyn is, there?

Um-hmm.

34th and Brooklyn. It's another 8, 10 blocks from the synagogue. 34th. Come and see me. And he told me "It's a building, two stores. With between the stores was stairs to go up. You walk up the stairs and I'm on the right hand side." So, I said "Fine!" Walked home. I didn't have a car! Walked clear to his apartment. Come upstairs, and he tells me a story. The O.P.A. You don't know about the O.P.A.

O.P.A.?

Controlled the apartments. After the war, you couldn't get an apartment.

Was that a government...?

Government controlled it. I know people paid \$200 for a key to get an apartment. The apartment was....

Wow. A lot of money.

You couldn't get one.

Yeah, a lot of money then.

Yeah. Because after the war, they didn't build. It was a war. He says to me, "This building is mine. I live here, and my son lives across the hallway. He just moved to Denver. If you can move in here, take all the furniture what you have, you can move in, it's yours. And nobody can kick you out. The rent is \$50. I cannot erase it, that's a law, \$50." At that time, that was in '48. Almost '49. No, '48. "Can't erase it. \$50, you pay me \$50." And the Federation was paying over there \$150 a day, I think. For me. And this \$50 a month, ha, ha. I don't know how much they paid, over there.

So you were saving some money on it.

Maybe \$50 a day, \$50 a day, for the hotel.

A day?

No, might be not that much.

A week?

Maybe a week. And this was \$50 a month. Beautiful apartment. I ran home, and I heard what he says. "I can't find an apartment. Give me this apartment." He said, "Nobody knows that this is empty." So I moved out in the middle of the night and nobody knows about it. And they moved to Denver. I came home and met my wife with the buggy, my boy, and we run. We came over there, pull up the buggy. He gave me the key already. I

opened the door, and got in, "I am here!" He says, "Where's your furniture? Where's your furniture?" I said, "This is my furniture. My wife, my buggy, that's all. I cannot take the things from the hotel, it's not mine. "Oy," he says, "My dear Lord. What should I do with you? Where are you going to sleep?" And he pulled up the mattress from his bed, and gave me a mattress. And his wife gave me linens. [laughing] And I put it down. That's what I need, just a mattress on the floor, a couple pillows. The linen, the blanket, that's what she gave me, from his room. And David and Larry will sleep in the buggy. It was big enough.

Yeah, he could sleep. You really met some good people.

Next day, see what they're going... Next day, Mrs. Jacobson, she was in charge of Federation of my.... My name was... she waited for me at the train, took me to the hotel, so she was my... what do you call, my good, my *bubbi*. And I'd say, "Mrs. Jacobson, I got to have furniture." She said, "Your hotel's got all the furniture." She [sic – I] said, "I have an apartment." "You have an apartment?" Just like that. "Where is it? I'm coming over!" And then take minutes, she came over. Goes upstairs. "My dear Lord. [whisper] My husband was in the war, came home from the war in 1945. Today is 1948, and I still don't have an apartment. I can't find it. You're here one week, got an apartment. How did you do that?" I said, "Does your husband go ever to a synagogue?" She said, "No, he doesn't go." "Well, that's your problem." I told her that, I told her that. "Tell him go to synagogue. How did you expect to get an apartment?" That's exactly what I.... And she gave me furniture. My rent was \$50. They gave me \$18 a week to live on. They paid my apartment, my light bill and everything. And I go find a job. They tell me look around. I couldn't talk English.

You didn't know much English? Or any? A few words?

The cost, that time was a nickel, how much? A dime, a dime just... In New York the traffic was a nickel. Here was a dime.

Oh wow.

We had a train. I don't know if you know that or not. We had a train on Main Street all day, we had a train.

A streetcar?

Streetcar.

I remember.

You remember?

Yeah.

And I was always riding for a nickel. People put in two nickels. I put in one nickel because I didn't know until I got caught. You know the guy who had a little case? And you throw it in? And you see, and I was the first one. I put a nickel in and he seen it. We had no more here, and see it. But he said... and he doesn't understand that I didn't know. He says, "Two. Two." Oh, okay. I give him two nickels. And I was riding the street car at that time. But I walked one time. And I rode the streetcar... the new project where new houses are going. I'm looking like a plumber guy looks like. I done a lot of plumbing in my life. Just looking on it. Take this, and this. Know why this way, this way. And anyway, go through a plumbing shop. I stopped by and says, "I'm a plumber." That's the only thing I could say. Someone told me a plumber is a, means a lot of plumbing. "Plumber?" And he talked a little German. He says to me, "Do I need plumbers! I got job but I got no way to do it."

Ah. Wonderful.

I say, "I'm a plumber."

Did you need a license?

Didn't have nothing. I'm only a week here. I didn't have nothing!

I mean, he didn't ask about that?

Nothing. He just asked me if I'm a plumber. He took me on the job to say, this building. Talked German to me. Broken German. This, I got to do this, and this, and that. And I looked on it. To me, it was a toy. [laughing] One week. Toy. I told him, "You make me an isometric drawing of each pipe in it. Here's a bathroom, a bathroom, size the pipes, and elevation, openings, and everything. This one, then there's another pipe..."

Like a blueprint, or...?

Isometric drawing.

Diagram or something?

Isometric drawing. You know, isometric?

No, I don't know.

The pipe, the main pipe goes up, branches on it, branches, second floor are branches, on the third floor. Size the pipes. And I said to him, "You give me the tools, and you know what kind of material it needs." Because he made the drawings. "You give me the tools, give me the drawings, and I will try to do the job." He was all surprised. And he picked me up in a truck. All the tools, and tools, and the materials on the truck. And we drove to apartment. We unloaded everything, and he just thinks what to do with me. And he was all surprised when I told him "You go home." [laughing]

You don't need him.

Just go home, then. He looked at me. He said, "You..." I got the drawing. I got the tools. I looked over everything. I got everything I wanted. I knew what I needed. "You go home. You come tonight." In German, "*Kommen Sie bei nacht.*" He says "Fine, fine." He picked up his truck and goes. He came, the first day, I remember that first day. I got a part, so much work done. He came over. He kissed me. He said "You do better work than my men would do. And you done so much of it."

In such a short time.

What I did. He didn't expect to have so much done. Without the language or anything. Just a drawing. I need that and I want it. I got the material. That talks to me. The material talks to me. I needed some material. I told him I need this. He says, "Yeah, ok, I bring it tomorrow." But I was there. And I got the job completed. But the scale, the union scale was \$2.37½ at that time. Two dollars and 37 and ½ an hour.

An hour.

That was 1949. Take \$2.37½ and multiply by 40. It's exactly \$95. [laughing] See what I mean? I remember the amount.

Which was good money.

Good money? I used about... It's \$95 a week. I used \$12 for food, and \$12 for rent.

For the month.

I didn't know what to do with that money. I made so good money. You see in that month, fifty bucks. \$12 a week, let's say.

Yeah. Right, right.

And I was making \$95! Downstairs, Norman, Norman Weinstein was the groceryman. Talked Yiddish. He said, "Nussbaum." He gave me, until I start making money, he gave me food on the, he knew I'm going to pay it back. So, I owed him some money. I just came in with the check, \$95 check, you know. "I want to pay you off, what I owe you." And I buy some stuff. He had to give me about \$50 back. [laughing] See, he says, "You made \$95 in the week? Do you know how much I make on a can? I make maybe half a penny on the can. On each can. A half a penny. How many cans I have to sell to make \$95?"

Yeah. You did good. Your dad, your dad was smart, getting you to learn a trade.

I learned a trade to go to Israel. Thanks to my father. Thanks to my father.

How did you learn English? How did you come about...?

English? We went to English school here.

You went to school. Night school?

Little bit. Night school. English.

Did you go to Westport?

No, it was in the Center. We had classes in the Center.

On Linwood?

Linwood. I got even pictures of that yet.

You adjusted fairly well, I take it?

What?

You adjusted pretty well, to American life, it seems like. You adjusted to American life.

Adjusted? Yeah. Very, very much.

Very quick.

Yeah.

Was there antisemitism? Did you run across any of that here in town?

Listen, there was a better company, Tip Top Plumbing. They had about 80 to 100 people working. And I never had any.... One plumber told me one time, "You Jews own the biggest com-... real estate in Kansas City." He told me that. "You Jews own.... You know, Sammy, you Jews own the biggest real estate in Kansas City." Well, I told him "I didn't know that J.C. Nichols and Kroh Brothers are Jews. I didn't know it. Are they Jews?" "No, except them." [laughing]

Except them. [laughing]

Except them. He thinks like that. Otherwise, I didn't....

Didn't run into much.

No.

That's good. What gave you the strength, internal strength to kind of go on and carry your life through? What gave you...

Just I didn't want to think about what happened to me in the war. I been working hard, and kept me busy. I worked about, I would say 10, 12 hours a day. When I came home, I was tired, and I fell asleep. Because, like today, I don't sleep at night, because I think of what happened to me.

Even today, huh?

Yeah. I didn't sleep good at night.

Now you have time, you're retired and you have time to think.

Just, I just, you tell me another Jew got an elbow like I have.

What's that from?

From crawling on my hands when I was working in the crawlspace. See that? Have you seen another Jew have an elbow like me? See I'm not working already for 15 years. This will... I've tried everything.

Looks like calluses.

Cream.

You have calluses.

No, it's healthy, healthy. Just worn out from crawling on my elbows. I don't have it here. I have it here.

Just rubbing, and uh....

Crawling. I worked hard. Let me see your elbow.

Baby, baby skin.

See that? That shows you what I did.

Yeah, okay. Make a note that Sam is showing me his elbows, both arms. The skin is tough and almost callused looking, but you can definitely tell that his arms have taken a beating.

I didn't, I didn't make it just to show you that.

No, I'm just saying.

That's what happened.

It's part of his work life. Toughened his, toughened him up there.

Crawl, crawling in the crawlspaces. You don't see it on my right hand. Because I was laying on this hand and working most of the time with this arm.

Doing the plumbing....

See, this is clear, isn't it?

Yeah, it's better.

See? But it's got also.

Yeah, it's got some. I see it.

See? My hair won't grow any more on this spot. [laughing]

Good thing you didn't lay on your head and do that, huh! You talk about your experiences to people, to groups.

Yes, to schools, I do it.

How long have you been doing this?

For the last couple of years. Since I quit working. I never did talk but finally, I... Since I was a Nazi...

Witness?

I talked in the trial.

Uh-huh. Witness?

Eyewitness. I start studying and remind myself what I did. To be able to tell in court what he did. And then I start talking about the Germans, what they did to the Jewish people. And the Polish people. And the Ukrainian. Those are the worst people that existed on this earth.

Ukrainians?

Murderers. They're the worst. Lithuanians and Ukrainians. I don't know too much... yeah we had Lithuanians in Przemyśl. Przemyśl is way south. Lithuania is way north. They came over in other countries, and served the Germ-, Nazis, that killed Jews.

They volunteered just for that, huh?

Yeah, Ukrainians, Lithuanians.

I'll be darned.

Polish were not so bad, but they, they got a share in it.

You became an American citizen? You became an American citizen?

Five years after I came over here.

Five years, okay.

1955, '54.

How was that experience? Was it good? You feel good about that?

What?

Becoming an American citizen?

Sure. It's a, it's a good country. A fresh country. You can... if you want to work hard, you can... Nobody stops you and you get paid well. You get, you got some people what they don't like the Jews. Why? Some. But normally, it's a great country.

Since the war....

There is racism here, a little bit. But most of it against black people.

Yeah. Since the war years, since the war, is plumbing what you've done for your life occupation? It's pretty much what you've done, isn't it?

Done it for 35 years. Thirty-five, working for yourself. And 7, for 42 years in the United States, working at the trade.

What do you do for recreational pleasures? Your hobbies? What kind of things do you do?

My whole family knows how to water ski. My whole family are mountain skiers. Snow.

Snow, uh-huh.

Yeah.

Good. Good.

And me, myself, I ski in the mountains, wintertime.

You still do that?

I still, this year I go skiing. I got a new hip, and I ski with a new hip.

When was this?

The doctor done such a beautiful job on my hip.

I didn't know you did that.

Yeah, I got a new hip. About 3 years ago. And I'm skiing every year with the new hip.

Great.

Yeah. I'm not too bad. I'm a good parallel skier. All my kids, every one of them. I take my grandchildren with me, teaching them how to ski. I had a boat. Had a boat. Every weekend we went to Ozarks or Prairie Lake, done water skiing. I used to pull four kids behind my boat. Really.

That's neat. Your kids, you have... How many kids have you got?

Four.

Four kids, okay.

I'm protected. I got a son a rabbi. I got a son a doctor. I got a daughter she's a lawyer. And I got a son a plumber, who's fixing my leaks underneath him. [laughing] But I got help.

You got all kinds. [laughing]

My son, the rabbi, is praying, my doctor is healing me, my daughter is saving, don't let nobody hurt me.

What are your children's names?

Larry, the oldest one. Mel's number two. David, the rabbi, is number three. Bonnie is the number four.

And how many are in town, how many out of town?

Two of them in town. The older, the two oldest sons are here. One is in Denver, the rabbi. And the daughter lives in New Rochelle, New York.

Did having your children have an effect on you, as far as having your own family and like that? Did you feel good about that?

I didn't get you, what your question is.

I just wondered, did having your children give you a, a certain feeling of having a family, again?

Yes, well that's the only, that's the only really pleasure what I have in my life. Children, and the children are good children. And it was worth, it was worth surviving, because my life was really worthless right after the war. Thank God I found a good wife. She didn't get too much education schooling, but she raised them up, just accepted that was her job, to raise up the children, and not to have any dopists in my family. I don't have that. Thank God. And every one of them such a well behaved... And I got 19 grandchildren.

Nineteen?

Nineteen grandchildren. David has got 9. One coming, it's going to be 20 in about another few weeks. And every one of them well-behaved.

Wow. Mazel tov.

My daughter's got 4 children. Beautiful. I got a little grandchild that my daughter has named Yankela. You know what Yankela means, you ever heard that name?

I've heard of it, yeah.

This is my, like my eyeballs. The two, the three girls over there, oh, every one of them. And they... oh, I've been called *Zayde*. They calling me *Zayde* and my wife is *Bubbi*. And what else can you ask for?

That's good. That's good. You talked about your experiences with your kids? Grandkids? They know some stories, like that?

Well, my daughter came to the trial, when I was on trial with that four-month-old baby. She came to Stuttgart, Germany to be at the.... They don't want me to be by myself at the trial. And my son, the doctor, came over there, too. They was sitting during the trial. I was talking about, almost six hours.

How many days were you on the stand? Was it one day or two days...?

One day. Nine o'clock in the morning till about four o'clock in the evening.

Oh, you were the main witness.

All day long. They had about a hundred students, Germans, listening to the trial. And they had demonstrations outside for Schwammberger. For Schwammberger.

Are any of your children named after the family members who perished? Are any of your kids named after family members that perished?

Yeah, uh-huh. Yes.

So, you kind of kept that memory alive that way?

Bonnie, Bonnie, Bonnie's my mother's name. The oldest grandson from Denver is my father's name. And Lipa, my brother's name was. My brother's name. One was my sister's name. I got almost all the names transferred from my family. They died in the Holocaust. We got them transferred to the family here. I built a monument. People, I don't know if you ever heard of that. They got a forest, a holy forest in Jerusalem. That forest is dedicated just for the Holocaust. I went and bought a whole, well they call it a forest. I bought 10,000 trees in that holy forest. And I put up, well they call a *matzevah*.

Monument?

Monument for my whole family, and my wife's family on that monument. And we had an opening on it in 1986, and I had that monument, like in a cemetery.

Like an unveiling?

We unveiled it and we got all the names on my, on one side, and other side, all the names on the other side. And it would be like this, to be a cemetery over there and my whole family is buried over there. It's a mirage. You know, it's something you, to make you believe that....

But, it makes you feel good.

Makes me feel I done something. And I don't give a hoot for the big museums they're building in Washington.

Have you been there?

Yeah.

Did you go?

I don't care.

I haven't been.

This is my museum, right there and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. Matter of fact, November 7, there's going to be a big dinner in New York hotel and... what's his name... is going to be honored. Wolf Blitzer. You ever heard the news in CNN?

Oh, he's a CNN newscaster.

Yeah. He's going to be honored. He is a son of a survivor.

Oh, I didn't know that.

And he, he talks a beautiful Hebrew. You didn't know that.

No.

He talks a beautiful Hebrew. And also you hear him in English on the newscasts how good he is.

Yeah, he's very good.

See?

He's a good newscaster.

And he's going to be honored. And I want to be there. I already reserved a table in New York. And my daughter's going to be over there with my son-in-law. So...

That's a big to-do. That's good. Do you know...

I bought the seats.

Do you know him, or you just plan to meet him.

I don't know him, no. I'm going to meet him. I like him on the news, he's very good at the news, newscast. And Elie Weisel's going to be there.

Oh, okay. So big names.

Yeah. I already made reservations.

When your children hear about your stories, your events of your life, you know, related to the war and all this, what are their reactions, what kind of things to they say?

My only, from my four children, my daughter, she's the only one feels like she would be there. That close. Other ones is very, they are, they are... don't take me wrong, they are also, but not as deep as my daughter. But they also, when I talk they are pretty depressed when I talk about it. And they all, all my grandchildren went to that, to Auschwitz. I mean the bigger ones. All of them went to Auschwitz on the living...

March of the Living?

March of the Living, right. And they go to, I bought an apartment in Israel. They all, my son Larry just came back from Israel with the whole family. They staying at my apartment on the Mediterranean.

Oh, you have an apartment there?

Yeah, I bought it in 1973. If I ever next embark, I'm going to Israel. I never go to Florida.

Just take a trip to Israel.

Never. And I'm just waiting maybe one child to go to Israel, maybe. I won't be here ten minutes because I'd like to live in the Holy Land. We would have Israel, and we would have Israel. The things would never happen to us. Never happen to us.

Yeah, I don't think so. You got a place to go. Yeah, that's, that's a sorry thing. So today, the memories of the Holocaust still, still bother you, to some extent.

Very bad, very much.

You think about it.

I used to work out at the club just because I didn't want to think about it. Now, since I talk at the schools, I keep my memory fresh, what happened. And the nighttime I got terrible dreams, and I just can't help it. That's my punishment.

So doing, well....

That's a punishment. It's all bad.

So doing your speaking engagements is actually making things..

Stirs me up quite a bit.

... making it a little worse.

But... that's what I think. It could be, they got the speeches, are partly, because I'm not working. Got more free times, would I be in the same shape anyway? Probably. So I'm punished with this. The good Lord seen it. He did not react, did not help us. I got a big, see, I don't want the Lord to show a miracle in any of it.

You don't expect it?

I don't care for these miracles. I don't want it.

You don't want it?

The thing I want is to bring a plague, that's what I wanted to do. Like the Passover, you got the ten plagues? I wanted to bring one plague to those nations, one only to those nations that did hurt us. If we are Chosen People, he should listen to me and do it. I'm talking now to the Lord. That plague should come, and hurt like the Ukrainians, Polish; plague so they will see they're getting paid for hurting us, if we are really the Chosen People. You know there's a God, there is a God. Take a look on the human being. How

he's built, with a heart that pumps. The liver, one does work and the other one. You not tell me that this is just nature.

Something thrown together.

Something, something created it. We got cars. We got a car. We are putting oil in it, gasoline in it. Nature doesn't know about that stuff, but we, we got to eat. We got to breathe, air. The nature, what the heck did it create about air, why should we breathe air? What for? And eyes, two eyes. The location of the eyes. The location of the nose. Location of the mouth. And you know, take a look at how a human being is built. And take a look a dog wouldn't sleep with a, with a cow.

Yeah. It's just not meant to be that way.

They go to each, just, I'm talking about animals. We got some gays that claim we are sick people. We are...they are sick in the brains. You understand what I'm talking about?

Yeah.

So, there is a Lord. Cannot deny. But he mistreated his people what he picked out.

Are you active in the synagogue now?

Yeah. I'm very active.

Which one do you go to?

BIAV.

BIAV. Do you have a favorite Jewish Holiday? Or are they all, all favorites?

Yom Kippur is a holiday when you have to pray all day long. It's kind of a holiday, you know?

It's a serious holiday.

Yeah, it's like today Sukkot. I built a *sukkah*. Didn't you see it?

I can't see it from here.

Well, I'll show it to you after we get through here, I'll show it to you. Turn the lights on and you can see it.

Have you...as far as the Jewish holidays and traditions, have you continued with your current family, with your family what you did back during the war and pre-war? Have you pretty much continued your religious beliefs and customs from what you had before?

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. I'm talking about David, but I do believe and I'm very proud of my son, he's very religious, in Denver. Very religious. It's better than having somebody on dope. Well behaved, listen, call... my daughter calls my wife every morning, from New York. Every morning. Sometimes twice a day. And I mistreat sometimes my wife and daughter lets me know. She says, "Dad, I heard of something. Let's cut that stuff out." [laughing] She's a lawyer, too.

[laughing] Let's cut that out.

So, she's keeping me right on the ball, see?

She keeps up on things, huh?

Oh, she say, "What's going on? What's going on? How come?" And I got to tell her. She keeps me straight. That's, see, people get out of the way, sometimes.

What does being an American mean to you?

Be an American?

Uh-huh. What does that mean to you?

To be American...

And do you think Americans take their freedom for granted, as a whole?

They don't, American people don't know problems. Only problem that we have the black people that, you know, they have the racism over here. They were slaves, you know. The American people. But I tell you one thing. They're good business people. The majority are good people, majority. You find some guys what they are trying to call themselves the real Christians, you know? And they forget that Jesus was a Jew. They forget that. And the Jewish people, "Communist." A lot of people call the Jews Communists. One thing they forgot. You know, tell you a little politic. Gromyko voted for the Israel because he was thinking, Ben-Gurion is a Russian Jew. Menachem Begin a Russian Jew. Who else would they go if not for our Communistic country? They thought so. We in America, the Marshall... You know the big Marshall Plan, what they built Europe? They told, Marshall told Truman, "Don't you dare ask us to vote for the state of Israel." Called it, in the book, that he already knows it. What's his name, the other Secretary of State, at that time...

Stevenson, Adlai Stevenson?

Huh?

Adlai Stevenson?

No, I'm going back to Truman.

Oh, Truman.

Yeah. I'll tell you in a minute his name. With Marshall, they said not to vote, but the Jews, you know the Jews, the leaders are begging, Menachem Begin, they going to... right away the country's going to be against us? And Truman didn't listen to them. He gave him an order to vote for the state of Israel in the UN. And really, that order helped the creation of the state of Israel. And what happened? The state of Israel was created, and right away, they voted in like a Congress, they called it the *Knesset*. And in the *Knesset*, 120 members were right away in the *Knesset*. 120 members. Do you know how many Communists there were? Three.

Oh really? [laughing]

Marshall, he was all surprised to see the Israeli government, 120 people in the government, only three Communists. Gromyko was crying, "Why did I vote for Israel?" What did they do? They start arming Egypt with MIGs, with tanks, and their army rockets. The only weapons they had was MIGs and those Russian tanks. Syria.

That started the whole region, right?

And they thought they are going to show Israel that, the mistake they made. And they, of course they didn't fight, Russia didn't fight a war, they sent Egypt, they sent and Israel knocked the hell out of them. Knocked the hell out of them. They shot down eighty MIGs without any losses. See, the Jewish people there, they can fight. But we learned that, you know from whom, how to fight? From the good Christians, that's what happened. But who is Europe? You didn't have any Muslims in Europe. Look what they did to the Jewish people. Every one of them. French, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania. They're all Christians. Look what they did. Innocent people that they never had a gun in their hand. They were big heroes to burn them and put them in gas chambers. I didn't know how to hold a knife in my hand. I didn't know it. And they showed how the heroes they are. They can kill six million Jews, men and women, a million and a half children. Israel can fight and knock down so many MIGs without any losses. We can do it. We learned that from the Christians. They can hear that, I don't care. Well, that's the truth. They kicked out England from Palestine [unclear] to create the state of Israel.

Aren't you glad you're here now?

That what bothers me, you see? The Red Cross, I never seen a package in Auschwitz. The Red Cross, never seen a package. What happened? They were... They wanted to appease Hitler? Why didn't they send packages to the poor people? Why didn't the world to scream out what was going on? Why?

There's been some criticism about that here lately. The past few years. A lot of that has come out, you know? So many people did so little. Did nothing or so little.

So, we can fight. We can fight. But look what happened, the Arabs are going and blowing up buses in Tel Aviv, in Jerusalem.

Innocent people.

Those are Muslims. Did you ever see a Jewish terrorist go to... across, I wouldn't say too far... go to the Palestinian side and blow up a market over there and kill fifteen hundred people? You ever see that happen? They are looking only for the murderers. Israel, they couldn't go, they wouldn't go and hurt anybody. But they are looking for the murderers who done...

People who are responsible for....

That are responsible for it. That's the difference between a Jew and non-Jew. Iran and Iraq had a war, they killed a million, between themselves a million people died. And both of them are Muslims. If Iraq was attacked by England, they would be blowing bombs on Tel Aviv. Explain this.

Can't. I can't.

That was there. But, one mistake. The big president Roosevelt. We had 900 Jews sitting in a ship next to Florida. Cuba...

Was that the *St. Louis*?

... turned them down. *St. Louis*. And there were, that ship were begging to let them down. Those are people with money in the banks, they paid off for the ship, they paid for the captain, they had the money do it. And they had enough money with them, they wouldn't need any help. And President Roosevelt won't let them in to Florida. They went back to Europe, and most of them died in the gas chambers. What is the answer? Few years later, when I lived already in America, come to lets in 100,000 Cubans here. Remember that?

Uh-huh. Yeah.

100,000! Criminals are between them.

They were being dumped.

Carter was begging, the big President Carter was begging people, please take them back, they're coming over... 100,000. Nine hundred Jews couldn't come into Florida. Now this is America.

Kind of sad.

I'm speaking up. I'm telling the truth.

I know. Yeah. That will be recorded, I don't know if they're going to use it. I'll let them decide what they're going to do with this, whoever does that.

Well, I'm telling you exactly how it is.

It's interesting. It's interesting.

You told me, asked me what I think about America. America is a great country. There's no question about it. But don't let it get out of hand.

Right. And it wouldn't take much, I don't think.

Buchanan, Patrick Buchanan. Uh, Dershowitz, the lawyer, he already spoke up on television about Buchanan. Told them, told them who he is.

Oh, really.

Yeah.

I didn't hear about that one.

Listen, I'm talking exactly what bothers me, because Israel is, needs... If, not, not... if America wouldn't help Israel. If America would not help Israel, Israel couldn't fight back the war, because with...we got the weapons...

Oh, yeah. Funds.

Thanks to America, to selling us... Israel, I say us. I am now an American. Selling Israel the weapons, and they can protect themselves. Really. And this is the only democratic country we got in the Middle East.

The other nations are afraid to... somewhat afraid to get involved, because too much negative, negative input, you know? Outcome. This will conclude the interview process with Sam Nussbaum on September 28, 1999 at his home in the kitchen area. Sam is wearing a ball cap with a vest and at times, he was very animated. At times, he was very serious. At times, he was quite joyous. Thank you.