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Abraham Gutovitz Interview

January 27, 2000

What was your name when you were born?

My name is, when I was born, Avram.

Avram?

Uh-huh. That's in Hebrew.

Avram Gutovitz?

Um-hmm.

And where were you born?

Warka. That's in Poland.

Can you spell that?

Yes. I would like maybe to find my birth certificate. It has, Warka. That's W-A-R-K-A.

Okay. Warka, Poland. And was that a real small town?

The town was maybe about, about 50 families Jewish. But not maybe this, either.

And were you born at home, do you know?

[Non-verbal response.]

[Laughter] Okay. And what were your parents' names?

Leibel.

Okay.

And my mom's name, Passa, P-A-S-S-A.

Okay. Okay. And did you have brothers and sisters?

Right.

What were their names?

I can show you.

Okay.

We made that picture.

Ah!

[Abe seems to walk away to retrieve something then the interview resumes, seemingly mid-conversation.]

Before Esther, you know, my cousin. That's Peggy's, also, cousin.

Okay.

So, say the Gutovitzes, was also Avraham, that was my uncle. He and my father was brothers.

Okay.

So that was before she died here, you know, they was here.

Wow.

Before she died, she gave me the picture. This is the small and we made this lately in a bigger form.

Oh my gosh!

So this is my father. That's my mother. That's my oldest brother. And this is nothing related, that was my best friend to my brother.

Okay.

That was me. That was Jack Gutovitz. Joe Gutovitz, Peggy's...

Um-hmm. Okay.

...father.

I knew that.

Peggy's father.

Yeah.

And this is Esther, my *shvester*. We never had a *shvester*, so my father, finally had twins and this is the brother.

Oh, my! Okay, so you...

That's Benjamin.

Okay. One, two ...

And that was Joe. And that was Solek, is Jack Gutovitz.

Okay.

And that was me, Abe Gutovitz.

Okay.

Because together, five brothers and one sister.

Okay. So, Jack, Joe, Esther...

The first one you should write...

Okay.

...Sam.

Sam.

He's the oldest.

Okay.

I was not, after him, they died from after him. So that was me...

Okay.

...Abe.

Uh huh.

The third one is Jack.

Okay.

The fourth one is, is Joe.

Um-hmm.

The fifth one is Benjamin.

Okay.

And Esther. They was twins.

And they were twins. Wow! That was quite a family.

My father was only 50 years old in that time when they took them away. And my mother was 52 years.

Okay. And so you said that Warka was like a small town and there were 50 Jewish families?

Yeah.

Were there a lot of non-Jewish families?

I'm not sure if it was 50 or 100, but it was a very good, nice town.

Okay.

But, we was not, in that time when I was born, you asked me that but I didn't remember where. When I was born my father was not in home. He was at the Russian war, you know, with Poland. That was 1914 and that time I was about three years old.

Okay.

I was born in 1911.

Okay.

December 14, 1911 I was born.

And did your mother and father kind of do the regular things in the house? Did your mom take care of the house and your dad work outside the house?

At that time, what did I know? I didn't know in that time my father. I was born when my father was not home.

Okay.

He was in the war.

Okay. But later...?

Sure, later. Later we was a whole family. We was living, still then in that time, in Warka for a nice years. And then the last town where we was living, we was living in that town maybe about 20 or 25 years. And later that was where they made the clean-up town from all the Jews, to Treblinka, you know. Our town was going, the whole town, to Treblinka. That was in 1942. That was on *Hoshanah Rabbah*. You know what *Hoshanah Rabbah* is? In *Sukkos*.

Oh, okay.

You know what is *Sukkos*...?

Sure.

The last day of *chol hamoed*, that was the fifth day *chol hamoed*. I remember like today. Was a very hot day. They gave us 15 minutes to go out from the houses. And that was the last time I saw my parents. And my oldest brother had two kids, you know...

Um-hmm.

...with his wife, they all went. Me and Jack, here is Jack...

Uh-huh.

... and Joe, Peggy's father, and me, the *gendarmerie*, this is the SS, picked us up. We was young and strong. And another thing, my two brothers was barbers and they could do their hair, you know?

Um-hmm.

And the *gendarmerie* in our town, that was in Bialobrzegi. So they picked us up, all three, and we stayed in the same town working for them. And then in a few months later, they tooked us, came over to clean up the rest Jews from that town. They left only just what they needed. You know, the young and the pretty ones and the very strong ones. I was young in that time.

Okay. Now when your dad came back [phone rings] from the Russia, from fighting the war with Russia...

Yes?

Do you need to get...? Yeah.

[Interview stops as Abe answers phone.]

Toby [reference to speaking to daughter on the phone], **I don't know, you know.**

Now, when your dad came back from fighting the war with Russia...

Yeah...?

What job did he have?

Shoe repair. Well, sorry, not repair. Shoe, in shoe business.

Oh, okay. And did your mom stay home and cook and clean?

Yes, she was at home. No, my mom didn't work in that time.

Okay. What kind of neighborhood did you live in? Was, you know, were there houses all along the street?

Yeah, it was, it was a Jewish neighborhood that we was living. Mostly Jews of Warka lived in one territory, you know, the main street. And it was beautiful, a beautiful town.

Okay. And what was the inside of your house like?

Inside of the house? We didn't have a too big apartment like here some that like are big. I remember we had about three rooms only. One room, not a room, it was a business store. In the front there my daddy [unclear] with some people. And that was it. And a kitchen and the third room was the, like the bedroom, a few beds.

Did you have any servants that worked for you?

No. Uh-uh.

Did you own land?

No.

Okay. Did you ever take vacations or anything?

At that time we didn't even know about vacation.

Okay [laughing]. Okay. And what kinds of foods did you eat? Did you keep kosher?

Definitely. This I'm very sure. My mom kept kosher. In our town, all the other people, you didn't see Jews go work on Saturdays. But Europe was, it was not nowhere, even Israel don't have this. No where. It was how the times maybe. Maybe times changed. But you didn't see a Jew go to work on Saturday. That was out the question.

Yeah.

In the whole Poland, not just in our town. Jews didn't work on a Saturday in Poland.

So, it was an exception...?

That's was Poland. I don't know from other countries. I was born, I stayed there 'til they took me out from our town.

Okay. Now what were the schools like? Did you go to a Jewish school?

School, school? I went to school like here. I only finished, but our school was different like here. You not finishing school like high school to 18 years, everything in 18 years. In our school was seven classes, I mean to seven grades only. And that was like here high school, or even better than here high school.

Okay, now...

In the first years, they didn't took me. It was not allowed to go the Jews there, in that time. I remember like the, so my mom's sister was staying with us, helping my mom, you know? I had even from my whole mom's family, two cousins in town. Flekier.

Yeah.

You ever heard, Abe Flekier?

Yeah. Abe and Yoheved.

Abe and Yoheved.

That's your cousin?

Their mom and my mom were sisters. That's my first cousins, which I had from my home. They was eight brothers and two sisters. My mom and Chaya, was his mom,

and six broth-, ten children together and no one was living in our town, in Bialobrzegi. So you can imagine what kind of family and hundreds of, of, of kids. It's not... [Phone rings] It's not to describe it.

[Abe answers phone. Interview stops and then resumes.]

So, it was, the town had a school and I didn't...

Oh, a *cheder* we went, we went besides...

Oh, okay...

But in that time I didn't go to a regular school. So my mom's sister, she was, she was very good and she talked a few languages. So she learned me.

Okay.

And then came about another order to take to the schools everybody, you know. So I started, you know, when you studying, in that time I was maybe about eight or nine years. I remember date, oh, at least eight, nine years. So, anyway, either way, they took me in the first grade, you know, like should be.

Yeah.

In the same year, they skipped me from the second grade to the first grade because she was very good in learning.

Yeah. Did your brothers and sis...

In the second year, I went right away to the last grade, the seventh grade, and I finished it. I didn't go to college, you know...

Yeah.

She was the greatest, his mom. Abe Flekier's.

Now did...

I kept saying this to my kids all the time, how she learned me.

Did, did your brothers and sisters do the same thing?

The same thing. That time, I didn't have them. I was, in that time, the second from the oldest. He was not in that time in the family [seems to be referencing the family photograph]. This was the latest years we had that family. I was the second from the oldest. I told you. Not the second, the third, one died before me, a brother.

Okay. Were the teachers nice to the Jewish kids?

Yes.

Were the other kids...?

Yeah. When we started this group, they was not bad.

Were the other kids, did they play with you?

I remember the latest, but they went when we moved from Warka to the other town. Solek, like Joe, they went to regular schools already but I didn't go. I was older, I was already working there. So, anyway, it was seem like they treat us nice like the same.

Okay.

You didn't see any antisemitism in Poland until very lately before Hitler took over. They didn't make the crematoriums, you know, the burning ovens to burn them with the gas chambers. Nowhere, only in Poland, is that one only. The Polish people was not too good to the Jewish, you know. Even when they took over, the Germans, they... for instance, we was standing some in the, in the *reya*. [Question directed to Abe's son Sam] *Wie heißt eine reya noch broit?*

[Abe's son Sam answers] Line.

In a line, you know. Said, "He's a *Jude*. He's a Jew."

Yeah.

You know. And they throwed us out. That was Poland. I remember one thing I don't want even mention ever in this my life, that, that they took us out from our town and the first camp was not a camp. It was a, a Polish ammunition factory. I was a, so the middle work, they start to take us outside, you know. That's was about eleven o'clock, before noon. So the *Skarżysko* come in and the Polish people brought three Jews. They catch them. And then we find out, after the war, they didn't catch them, they was kept them. And they tooked away the all goods from them, the gold and the money and they brought them to the Germans. And we have to go out and see, they hang them all on tree. We have to see. And what they got, the Polish *banditen*? A kilo sugar for each life. That's how the Pole was to the Jews. I wouldn't say the whole Poland, but it was fact.

Okay. And so how... do you remember how old you were when you finished with school?

Yeah. I was about 14 years old. Not, maybe 14.

Okay.

Maybe about 12 years old, 12, 13.

And what did you do after that? Did you start working?

After that I was going in a *cheder*.

Oh, okay. All day you were in *cheder*?

No, not all day. But from 8 to 2 o'clock.

Okay. And what did you do for fun?

We didn't have too much fun, either.

[laughing] Okay.

I don't, I remember the, the, the kids... the things like now, you know, here.

Yeah.

But it was nice. Nobody bothered us. People's very good off, too. I mean the *parnossah*. You know what *parnossah* is?

No.

It's food. It's all kinds of goodies. We had everything, sure. We have, we have some toys. We went out. And most of it, the *jungent*, you know, the young generation, we had some organizations. You know, was there in Poland, all over about *Tzienizm*, you know, Zionism, about Israel, I remember. You know what *Keren Kayemeth* is?

Yes. Uh-huh.

We was giving over the years for *Keren Kayemeth* to Israel. At that time, it was not Israel, Palestine on the England...

So did you...

English.

You went to Zionist meetings?

Oh, yes.

Did your parents?

My parents and everybody belonged to this.

Okay.

I was not a trained, *Tzienizm*... I was a *Revizionist*. You know what a *Revizionist* is?

No.

Our commander from the *Revizionist*, they predicted that we, Jabotinsky was his name, maybe you've heard of him?

Oh, I've heard of Jabotinsky, uh-huh.

He said one thing, and he predicted, years before they came Israel, Jabotinsky predicted that we cannot have a *land*, means country, without a fight, without a war. And he was that fore-looker in knowing what's going happen. He was a smart, a very intelligent, smart man.

Okay.

And then, the end was, they, it came a war and they want their name Israel, that's our land. That's what it was. I don't want talk about all these things together for discussion.

Okay. Did you get along with your parents?

Oh, yes.

Did you argue a lot?

It's not like other countries or like other nations. Our, our family was, we went together, everything together. And you didn't see any, any divorces in our whole town. I don't remember one divorce.

Okay. What values or standards were most important to your parents?

Values was one thing they took care of from the family. *Shabbos* was *Shabbos*. A *yontef* was a *yontef* [alternate spelling: *yontiff*]. Ours was the time when was luncheons or dinners or what, everybody have to sit down by our table. Not like here, to running around. It, it was unbelievable and undescrivable. This you cannot understand that. And you can't see it in another country. This what we had. This cannot be born. Another thing, the rabbis and the, the, the, all intelligent people, or doctors even, it was unbelievable!

Okay.

Which in Poland, most of it, the Jews had all the biggest business we had in Poland. All the biggest and nicest houses, even Warsaw, or Radom or Kielce or Czestochowa or, or, other towns. You didn't see too many Gentiles to own the, the big business or something. Everything was in the hands of the Jews.

Okay. And what did your family do on *Shabbat* and holidays? Did they have other relatives over?

You mean *Shabbat* and the holidays?

Uh huh.

We, when we came from the synagogue like here about [unclear] of us guys in *Beis Medrash*, when we came from there, we had dinner, you know.

Uh huh.

And after that, everybody went his way. For instance, the, the, the young people went to other places where we was going then. They had speeches, all kinds of it, you know, the kids to the organizations, you know.

Okay.

And after that, we went to the streets. We went *shpatsirn*. Do you know what *shpatsirn* is?

No.

Walking. Walking with, somebody have a girlfriend, or a boyfriend.

Ah. Okay.

We was, we was plenty busy all the time.

Did you have a girlfriend?

Not, not yet -- not in that time.

[laughing] Okay.

I mean not in the years what I'm talking about. Not by 11, 12, 14 years. I started dating was by 19 years.

Okay. Did you celebrate any Polish holidays or only Jewish holidays?

Polish holidays, you, you... like, for instance, we have an open store. You could not stay open if uh... So we had to keep it too, you know. Not to working. Now, for instance, here Sunday you work. *Shabbos* nobody worked. That was different there. You didn't see *Shabbos* working, or Sunday. Oh, we could do something if the front door was locked. I mean not locked, closed. You could do anything you want in your own house. You could work. You could do anything. But, for instance, people couldn't go buying or selling, you know. It was the Sunday, was the Sunday like in *Shabbos*.

Okay.

That's it.

Okay. You said that after you graduated school, you went to *cheder*. Did you have any Jewish classes before then? Did you have Sunday school or anything like that?

Oh, yeah. That's – we was going in *Beis Midrash* in our *shul*, you know, we have this.

Okay.

Sure, we had this, as a matter of fact, I was, in the longer years student, I was going in a *Yeshiva*, too, you know.

Um-hmm. Okay.

It was a different life. I don't say that the United States or our America is not a wonderful country. You cannot find this in the whole world what here we have, but the freedom and everything. We didn't know about antisemitism in that years because I was too young for that and I didn't see any. You could walk days and nights, nobody bothers you. In the nights, a whole night, you could go anywhere you want to. Nobody bothered you as a Jew.

Did your family have friends that weren't Jewish?

Oh, sure. We made parties all the time. My mom, and they made parties. We made, we was going to them. They came to us. All the time. Only the family, you know, because it was a big family. Not even the whole family you could invite.

Yeah. [laughing] Were, was your family interested in Polish culture, like art or music or philosophy?

Oh, yes. We lived in the country. We had to, to, do everything what we like it and nobody did you anything or harm or something. No.

Okay. Do you remember, what's your earliest memory of antisemitism?

During the war.

What, not before the war?

Before the war by a few years.

Yeah.

They start, they start to talking about the Jewish business. You see, start to make, making speeches. “Don’t go to Jewish buying.” “Don’t do this.” Just two, three years before that. But, otherwise, you could, it was very, very little, which nobody could recognize it.

Uh huh.

Even it was, you didn’t want to know. You know why? Because you was living between them. Like in our town, the, the, the Christian... I mean the, the *goyim*, how you call it? The Gentiles. They didn’t bother you. They mostly had their business together with the Jews in the small business, in the small towns.

When... Go ahead.

About, about a few years before the war, it started then.

What was your job then? Were you still... were you working at that time? Did you have a job?

Oh, yes, work was going on all the time. Even when the Germans came and tooked over Poland, we still worked in our houses.

Okay.

But, under them, you know, you have to, like, for instance, if you was a tailor, you have to go work in *mundir*... How you call the *mundir*?

[Abe’s son Sam answers] Uniforms.

Uniforms, yeah.

Uniforms. And like we was making boots. You have to, whatever they want. They tooked away all the leather at first, confiscated everything. And what they want you have to do, during the war. But how long was the war? The war breaked out September 1st, 1939. And in 1942, they made a clean up from our town. You couldn’t find any Jews in their homes. They had only one place to be there. One territory. We was about, about 20 people, they tooked us out. Some barbers, some tailors, some shoemakers.

What was your job before, right before the war? Like during the occupation?

I didn't want be a shoemaker in that town.

With your father?

Yeah. So, you know what? About from 15 years to 18 years, about three or four years, you know, I took another partner and we brought orchards. You know what orchards is?

[Abe's son Sam answers] Fruits? Orchards?

Trees?

Is, uh... fruits, you know.

Uh huh.

That was summer time only.

Okay.

And we, like, big *poretz*, not *poretz*. But they didn't call *poretz*, like *pritzem wie mit ot poretz geheissen im Polyn*. You know, what they own thousands and thousands of lands.

[Abe's son Sam answers] Land, landowners?

The name of them, how you call? Rich, rich people.

Uh huh.

They owned the land.

Okay.

So, we bought the orchards and we took, that was the time...

[Abe's son Sam answers] You rented the orchards?

And we took the fruits out. And we took them with a pair wagons and horses and took them to Warsaw, Radom, where we was, and sold it. And this was my earnings. A lot of money sometimes if it was a lot of it.

Mm-hmm. And so you did that during the summer?

Yeah, and then well, and I finished, or I was not even 18 years then. I sat down and made the best pair of boots without any learning from seeing all that years. And that was 'til, 'til the Germans took over. And then when they send us away from there, the young people too, and we lost all the parents, all the families. And still we was working for them after, after that. You didn't ask me that question. I have...

Oh, okay. When you were working as a shoemaker, did you have customers that weren't Jewish also? Jewish customers and not Jewish?

Oh yeah. Whoever, whoever likes the work or whoever wants some, they'll come in. We measured and, sure, we had Jewish customers too.

Um-hmm. Now did you have girlfriends then?

Oh, yes.

Were you married before the war?

I never told them and it's not in my history. You know, in my citizenship papers, I never mentioned it. I had a wife. My son was four and a half years old. I never mentioned it to the German government or to my pension when I take from them or something. I never mentioned my first wife. They told me better not to do it. So, you ask me as a Jewish and my friends?

Yeah.

I had a wife. He was four and a half years old when they took away my wife with my baby boy. All my brothers was married in that time with kids, with families.

It has questions on here about meeting your spouse. Do you want to talk about that? You don't have to.

Meeting...?

Yeah, how you met your wife?

Oh, yes.

Okay.

I met her in the, in my organization, I met her. And I was going with her for seven years, we were, before I married. I was 26 years when I married.

Um-hmm. And, did your parents like her?

Oh, yes. Yes.

Okay.

You cannot have any, any photographs of her though for something. I didn't have this of my wife. They've snapped my family here in the United States.

What was your...

And they took us out from our house. They took us to Buchenwald. I was liberated in Buchenwald. April 11, 1945. How could I have something? They took away even what I had on and they gave me their, their uniforms, you know, with the stripes and a pair wooden shoes and that's all. You couldn't have nothing from the house. You couldn't have any memories from our house. If not my family what we send them. Here I have one picture from my father. I show you an example.

Okay.

[Interview stops as Abe walks away, seemingly to find a photograph, but tape continues. Interviewer asks as an aside to another person in the room: Did you know he had been married?]

See, here is my father.

Oh, my! Um-hmm.

That's it. I got it from them too, from my family. That's when he put on a *Matzeva*. You know what a *Matzeva*?

No.

A stone, after, for his father.

Okay. Yeah.

From his father, that's his stone, you know, with their name in Hebrew. That was my father before...

Yeah, Gutovitz. Esther Gutovitz? It says "Esther."

That was my father's mother.

Okay, yeah. Old picture.

[Interview pauses as Abe seems to walk away again briefly.]

Okay, what else you got?

Okay. Uh, well, do you want to talk about your wedding?

About wedding? Yes.

Yeah. What was your wedding like?

I married, from the other wedding, I don't really know.

Oh.

We married all three brothers in Landsberg am Lech. You heard of Landsberg am Lech in Germany? Where Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*, the book, when he was in prison in Germany?

Uh-huh. Was this your first marriage? The marriage before the war?

I told you nobody knows about my first marriage.

Oh, okay.

Forget about that.

Okay. We'll forget about that. Okay. When did you...?

We three brothers married under one *chuppah*. Jack, Joe, and me in Landsberg am Lech. That was after we was liberated in Germany. I found and I fell in love, love with her, with my wife. She was looking on a train what passed through that town and I was looking all the time when the trains passing through. Maybe we find somebody from our family or they from their family. And I found my wife there and we start talking and my brother, Jack, found, they was two cousins, the two girls. And we was talking and talking and talking. They was looking for somebody. And I was looking.

[Brief side conversation Abe's son Sam excuses himself and leaves.]

That's not the wedding but this was my wife, here, here in later years. You know, she was a beauty.

Yeah.

Anyway I'll tell you one story – that's where we married, in Landsberg am Lech.

[Abe briefly exchanges comments with his son Sam who has been present and is leaving.]

What was your wife's name?

Bena.

Bena? Okay.

B-E-N-A. Bena.

Uh huh.

Here's her father. She got it to from Brazil. You know, Brazil?

Uh-huh.

Her family, her uncle send her a picture from her father here. Come here. [Voices become distant as Abe and interviewer have moved to look at a photograph.] **That was her father.**

Okay.

He was lucky he died in the ghetto, Lodz. You heard about Lodz?

Yeah.

***Litzmannstadt*, the ghetto.**

[Unclear as they are too far removed from microphone.]

You know it says in the Torah *kachalom yaouf*. You know what this mean?

No.

The whole life is like a dream. You live and who would know that I will live through now?

Um-hmm.

It's a dream. Everything passed through.

Yeah.

Nothin' worth anything.

Hmm. Okay. Now I have some questions about when the Nazis came. When did you first become aware of the Nazis? When did you first know that the Nazis...

The whole war took three days that they took over Poland.

Okay. Do you remember the day that they took over?

Sure. September, January, February, like here September. [Seems to direct question to person in another room.] **What is in Poland *gevain* that month?**

[Distant female voice responds.] October.

January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September.

Okay.

Yeah. Like the first September broke out the war and the third they took over the whole Poland.

Do you remember seeing any Nazis?

Sure I see them. I was in my town. We took them out bread and everything to the soldiers, you know, the Germans. That time, that day, you didn't know what they going do with the Jews. Who would know?

Were you afraid of them at that point?

No. It always was the war, and it got over. And then, the minute, in a few days later they start already all kinds of things doing. Bad things.

Um-hmm. Do you remember your parents talking about the Nazis at home?

Well, not... we, we was working for them, for the Germans.

Like making the uniforms and everything, or the shoes?

Not uniforms. We made them boots.

The boots?

Officer boots.

Okay. Did your parents or you see the Nazis as threatening you at the beginning?

Oh, all the time. They took out whoever they want. One time, on Rosh Hashanah, you know, they came in, in the *shul*, took out the whole *shul* where we was working. And then they took out the rabbi, beating him, and we was going help him to do, you know, something what they told them to do. They pushed us and beating us not to help nobody each other. It was terrible. It's not to describe what they did.

Hmm.

The whole town was broke and they took out all the Jews from the main street, you know, in our ghetto. It was not locked up or closed up, the ghetto, because it was a small town. We didn't, we didn't do nothing about it. We had to move and we had to, everybody had what his own houses, leave the houses, and going [unclear] in a side street. Sure. You couldn't, you couldn't have a light in the night to see the light through the windows. Have to be covered everything, not to see any light in from the house out. And the minute, and the minute you heard something, you think, thought that they took you out and killing you. Which they did it all the time somebody else. It's, it's not to describing what they did.

Uh huh. Did they make you wear a star?

Yes. Oh, yeah. When they took us out from houses, from our beautiful livings, they took away everything. They put you on *lampasa*. What is...they called it *lampasa* in Polish.

An armband? [Interviewer seems to be reacting to a non-verbal reference.]

The *Mogen Dovid* [unclear] of us.

Okay. Did any non-Jewish people help you?

The non-Jewish people? Never.

No one helped?

At first, they was scared by themselves to have to do something with you. And after the war, I mean during the war, it was somebody... they took somebody, some Jews from our town had good things but the Polish, they kept them. And some woman, she was a Jewish but she was not, she was taken out from a... from a convent, like here you call it, and she was from a Jewish family. And she married a Gentile in that place. She kept Polish people, Jewish, 'til the last minute of the war. She, she did it because her heart couldn't see. She had to do something, but she was in great danger for a second and she was lucky. I have an uncle and, no, not an uncle, my cousin, Sherman... Peggy's mother's uncle is he. Peggy's mother's uncle in Florida. He survived account that woman.

Really? So you were moved to that...

To that place.

...that place.

It was not a ghetto like in Warsaw...

Yeah.

...like the big towns except you couldn't go out of it. You could walk in the streets, in the places where you lived there, and nobody bothered you a lot except the Germans, you know.

And then did they take you to a concentration camp? What was next?

Next was the first, they tooked us, the rest, about 17 or 18 people like me and my two brothers, they tooked us out to Skarżysko-Kamienna. This was an ammunition factory.

Uh huh.

In that factory, we was working 'til 1944. Then the Russians start to make the offensive. I was working in that ammunition factory in the nighttime, me and my brother, Jack. Not Joe. Joe was working on day shift. They didn't take him out because they didn't have time to take him out from the factory. The bombs was running. They took me because we was sleeping in daytime because we was work-

[Interview cuts off as tape ends. Interview resumes.]

The Russians was bombardiering, the bombs all the way around. They gave each one of us they gave a loaf bread and that's was it. And we was maybe not quite four weeks on that train 'til we came to Buchenwald.

Um-hmm.

More than half people died out and they throw them out little, little by little. Train, couldn't move in the [unclear], and then I came to Buchenwald. I thought that that's the end of it. They tooked us in that basement somewhere there very deep. I thought it's a gas chamber but they didn't, it came an order the 1st of January not to burn the people anymore, in the gas chambers in Buchenwald. That's how I arrived about the 5th of January in Buchenwald and I stayed 'til the 11th of April and I lost all my weight. My weight was after the war and I liberated. I liberated, a week before the liberation, we was laying on the ground, sleeping there in Buchenwald. We heard bombs, bombs, noise, big noise, around and around. And they saw this is the end of it. So they start to evacuate our people. It was over 87,000 in Buchenwald. All kinds of nations, even Germans was there. I remember Léon Blum from Paris was the, also Minister [was the former Prime Minister of France]. You know what a Minister is?

Um-hmm.

Léon Blum, the Jew, in, in France. He was liberated with us in Buchenwald. And another thing, I can tell you a short story about him. When the SS pushed us and

beat us to go near the gates. And after the gates, when you went through the gates, the machine guns was running day and night killing off the people, not to see what they did to the people. So, anyway, I, when he turned in the other end, I laid down on the ground and crawled not to see me, to... that was on the left side they piled dead bodies. So I covered me with the bodies and I laid there for six days and seven nights without a drop of, without nothing. And when I saw the Americans with the tanks running in the streets, was a big camp, you know, that's was a German soldier's camp, that Buchenwald, before the war. When I saw the tanks, my eyes was not covered, and I saw, but I start to move away the bodies from me. I couldn't, my hand was numb, my feet, I couldn't feel nothing in my body. And I kept talking to myself, "*Oy Gottenyu!* I lived through that time and now I have to die!" And I couldn't, and I couldn't, and I worked, and I tried. I couldn't feel a finger, but finally, in the right, like that finger start to wiggle a little. And little by little, this one finger, I start to push my arm. You know, picking up and picking up and God helped me. In a few minutes later, I picked up my hand and I start to wiggling just the finger. That's was my, my miracle that I could do that. And a tank man stopped. He said, "Oh, let's stop because somebody's alive there." And they grabbed me up and put me right away in Weimar, was the first town from Buchenwald. About a few kilometer, you know. And I stayed there for three months. If not, I couldn't be here. I wouldn't, I would be dead.

Who was taking care of you?

Died a lot of people after they liberated us. The soldiers, the American, gave us food and people was with stomachs, not good. They died like flies. A lot of them. I was lucky. And then three days after that I found my brother alive. I told him, Solek, don't ever go near that gate or don't let you take the roads. Do something. So, he was buried underneath the peoples standing in the barrack, you know. He, he covered himself with dirt and that's how he survived. And I, we found each other after the liberation. That's the story from the liberation in Buchenwald. And I don't tell anymore stories to tell you. You don't have to come back anymore. And that's it enough for me.

That's enough?

Sure. What do you need it more?

Well, they were going to...

If you needed some more, I did more stories about there.

Oh, yeah. No, they have some questions about what you did, like right after the war and being in a Displaced Persons Camp.

Like what? We was free.

Were you in a camp?

Yes.

Okay.

In Landsberg am Lech, in a Jewish camp.

In a Jewish, how long were you there?

From 1945 to 1949. And then my uncle brought me over, me and the two brothers, to United States.

Okay.

This I can tell you.

And you got married in what year?

I married in 1946.

'46? Okay.

Next month, the 6th of February, 1946. February 6, 1946, how many years would be today... for the 6th, '44?

54?

Fifty-four, but my wife died two years ago. It's going to be two years next September the 8th. You know my wife got sick of old age. What... the President have that sickness.

Oh, Alzheimer's?

Alzheimer's, my wife had. In 1991, I quit my business. I had my shoe shop on one side. My wife worked the other side, alteration. She was a genius. She made suits and kid's work, men's, women, everything. In, in 1991, I noticed something that she keeps forgetting the measurement, what she took. And she was not so good at the work. You know, I was together with her. So, I said, "Bena, tomorrow I go take you to the doctor." We went to the doctor. That's Morrow and Glazer. He is on Troost. Maybe you heard of him? He was her doctor. And he said to me, "Abe, sorry to tell you she's going get Alzheimer's." When I heard this, next day I closed up my shop. I rent a truck. I couldn't sell it. Nobody want to buy it. And the truck, paid \$300.00 for [unclear as phone ringing.] It packed up, and what they did with it I don't know.

[Break in interview as Abe goes to answer phone.]

Okay.

What did I say?

You were talking about selling the shop.

Yes. And then we took the home. I moved everything. I didn't have in mind anymore. She was more important to me than the business. And we kept her for six and a half years in the house. She was like a princess in the house. The kids they came all the time and helped me. And four or five months from that, she start not to talk nothing. I couldn't give her the medicine. She didn't, so I had to take her to nursing home on 69th and Holmes, you know. And then, they took her from there to the hospital, sometimes every few days [unclear]. In that time, Rabbi Mandl's mother and my wife was there. She died, too, from the same sickness. You know Rabbi Mandl?

Um-hmm.

KI Synagogue?

Yeah.

That's what I belong all my life there. So I tell you again, she didn't like that tube what they put on because they couldn't give her the medicine. Not the food. They gave it in a tube, and I saw it. She didn't like it, you know. Once in a while, without the doctor's permission, we said nothing we sneaked in a little apple juice, sort of a little drink. And I saw her, she takes it so beautiful. But we was afraid goes in, in not in the right spot...

Not in the right spot, yeah.

... and she might die from... Anyway, that was a few days more and so went by the time, and she died later, about after five months. What she hold together was in the nursing and in the hospital, back and forth, back and forth. And she died September the 8th, 1998. And that was that.

Okay. Okay. You said your uncle brought you and your brothers over to the United States? Okay. What was his name?

My name.

Your uncle's name?

My name.

Oh, Abe Gutovitz, okay.

Abe Gutovitz.

Okay, and what, what year was that?

They was from kids, Peggy. Peggy had three or four cousins. The oldest was Sam Gutovitz. David Goodrich, he changed the name for later. He married here, you know. Esther and Rose. Rose, did you hear about Steve Osman, the lawyer?

Oh, yeah. I know I've heard his name.

Steve Osman's mother was born in America and the uncle, mine, brought his wife here. It's a long story. So, one only from my whole family alive here is Steve Osman. Rose's... oh no, and Dave Goodrich have two daughters. One is not married, too... Gloria. She's an old girl. She's a schoolteacher. So, this is my uncle's family what I have here.

And where did you go first in America?

Where I went first?

Yeah, did you come to Kansas City right away?

Kansas City, only Kansas City. They was living here. He had a house and a furniture store on Truman Street, you know. 15 and Truman? So, he gave me an apartment upstairs and my brother, Jack, an apartment. And we didn't like to be there, you know. After three months, we start to working and right away, I came here because my wife. I came... Joe came the first one here, and then Jack after, and then I came. So, I didn't like it there and I, we came a Friday, and Monday we went to work. She went to Fashionbilt. You heard Fashionbilt?

Yeah, I have.

And that business? Government business? On Broadway, 8th and Washington, Broadway?

I've heard the name.

She worked there for 20 years. After 20, I took her out to my store. It was too hot there. No air-conditioning. And *bei mir* [by me or with me], it was pretty in the store and, you know, air-condition, everything. So, she, she, she worked with me in my store lately. All the years, a nice few years.

What kind of store did you have?

Shoe repairs.

And where was it?

5910 Woodson was my last store. That's across the street from Dickinson's offices. That was Dickinson's, you know, property.

Um hmm.

You know, Dickinson's Theatre.

Okay.

Rich guys.

Okay. And what did you think about the United States when you first came?

I think, it's not to describe it. I was happy.

Okay.

You think after all the troubles and all the business, who wouldn't be happy?

Was it hard to get used to being in the United States?

Oh, I couldn't eat, talk English. No one dollar in pocket. My wife had to work. They gave her a job at Fashionbilt. They took them the central room. She was one, her father was a, a genius in, in tailoring. She and her brother, Koppel, next door, here in the corner next house, had big house the corner. That's her brother, also a tailor. He made her to retire pretty soon. His shop was here in the shopping center.

Um -hmm. How did you learn English?

I went three months in the school here. My wife, in that time, couldn't go. She had a baby. When I came from the school, I learned her what I learned. After the time after three months, came a [unclear], or what the... judge tooked, you know, to get the citizenship papers. I showed you mine paper what I went to school. And he said, "Where's your paper for your wife?" So, I asked, I answered, and maybe I shouldn't answered that way so, so gruff, "I was the paper. I was her teacher."

Um-hmm.

"Oh," he said, "You the teacher? I will see what teacher you was." He start to bugging her, bugging her. He didn't, she didn't miss more than two questions.

Hey!

And you know what? When we was through, he went to and give me a kiss on my head. He said, "You know what? I wish all citizens the United States would know, would be so smart like you."

Now, was that your first...

That was my citizenship.

Uh huh.

That's all.

Was that your first baby?

No, that was...

... in the, in the...

That was the second baby, Toby, because she [referring to oldest daughter Patsy] was born in Germany.

Oh, okay.

You know, she, she, we had with her something... not to describe it, either. When my wife, she was in Germany, Landsberg am Lech, in that Jewish camp, we went to, we had a hospital in the Jewish camp. We went and I took my wife there. She didn't feel she, to have the baby. The doctor examined her and he said, "No, it's too early." So, it might take about eight, ten days more. And then we came home. That was a few blocks. We came back home and she start... the water. And she went to the restroom and she lost and she took down [describing that the baby was born and hit the floor]. That easy, you know, she got it. And she went to the school and she was in the first, not in the first, in kindergarten and I was living at the time on Benton Boulevard. You heard?

Uh-huh.

A lot of Jews was living in that neighborhood there from our little [unclear]. And I went, and then, when she went to school, to kindergarten, they didn't noticed it but, in kindergarten, and it came the time to take her to the first grade. The principal called me and said, "Mr. Gutovitz, she cannot stay in the first grade. There is something wrong." "What is wrong?" "Something wrong." Then, I took her right away to Rochester, and went visit to all the doctors, the best doctors. I had a cousin in New York in that time who helped me.

Okay.

Anyway, I tell you a short story. Since then on, she couldn't take any studying and learning. She never could have a job, and that's what you see. I take care of her all my years. What's going be after I die, I don't know. Whatever I own, I made over there for Toby and Sammy to take of for her. She's fine. She's great. That's what you see.

Yeah, so, you have three children, Patsy, Toby and Sam. Okay. Did you ever talk about what had happened to anyone, your family or to other people that you...

I tell you my whole family whatever I had here, they know about us.

Uh-huh.

They talk about my surviving and I don't have to talk. My wife still have here two sisters and a brother. They was four kids. That's unusual. That's you can, you can count on the fingers from all the... stayed alive, you know. It's unusual to have four together. They was lucky. They was in Auschwitz and they picked them out to Germany to work for them because they was very talented and young. She have here the brother what I told you next door? She, her sister was living next block. She sold the house last year. She lives here in the Willow Creek, you know, Apartments and maybe you heard of her? Mania Wajcman [sic – her other sister Mina Nisenkier liked at Willow Creek]?

Yeah, I know the Wajcmans.

David Wajcman?

Yeah.

He married...

Mindy. Yeah.

That's her sister. But Mania's sick, a sick woman, lately. Mindy, Mindy's very nice. I love her. So, David had a brother, Simon, and a sister, Debbie. That's her family, my wife's. And Mina Wajcman [sic – Nisenkier], what she lives here at Willow Creek. They still stay together, a brother and two sisters more. And she's, of course, the oldest between them, and that's what happened. Who knows what happened? That's was a very bad sickness. Alzheimer's is a very bad sickness. Especially from lately, lately in the years. They stop talking. They don't know nothing. We couldn't help nothing. We did, she was like a princess. When she died, you didn't see any dead, deadness on her. Beautiful still. She was kept in the house all the years. I gave my word I would never in my life give her up, but came a time we had to give her up. Not for long. Four or five months, that's it.

Yeah. Okay. Do you remember things about the war every day or do you try and shut it away?

About the war? I didn't know about any war. I was working in the ammunition factories and then I worked, you know, in out of town. After the liberation, I was not much going on to anybody. You was praying from day to day that you alive. And in the camps and in the ammunition factories, we was geniuses. You put in a, a stunk, iron, you know, and came out beautiful like gold -- all kinds. You have to know about the parts and how to operate. Machine, it was bigger than this house during the war. If I and my brothers, we wouldn't be smart in these things and everything, we wouldn't be here. They didn't kept you.

Yeah. Okay.

They took you out and gave you a bullet and that's it.

Um-hmm. Okay. So, you said that you belong to KI now?

Now, the years since I'm here.

Did you believe in God?

If I wouldn't be here... if I wouldn't believe in God, I wouldn't be here.

Okay.

God helped me to be here. Maybe some people don't believe in anything. Maybe they better off. Where was God? He tooked away all my family. I had a mother, that's not to describe it, what she was. [crying] Oh, this, this cannot be anymore. Just hope and pray to God that my kids do not going through what I got through. That's all.

Okay. That's the end of the questions.