

Sam P. Walters Interview

December 10, 1999

This is Dec. 10, 1999, and this is an interview with Sam P. Walters.

Right.

Okay, let's begin. So, we're going to talk pre-war? What was your name at birth?

At birth it was Shlama Wolf Posmantier.

Do you want to spell Posmantier?

P-O-S-M-A-N-T-I-E-R.

How'd you come to have a change of names?

Well, I put, well, because of business and I changed it so it'd be easier for the customers in my company to, to say instead of Posmantier, put the P to Posmantier, and I never, never discarded it. It's on my legal papers. So it's Sam for Shlama or Shlamik and Wolf, which was Walters, is Walters, and Posmantier is in the middle, so you have Sam W. Posmantier, which is now Sam P. Walters.

So when you came to this country, did you have that, Sam?

Sam P. Walters.

So you changed it before you even came to the United States?

Oh, no. I changed it when I in the United States after my citizenship.

Okay. And where were you born?

I was in born in Będzin, Będzin, Poland. That's about 5, 6 kilometers from Germany.

Is it still part of Poland?

Oh yes. It's *Schlesia* [Silesia], actually. It's *Schlesia*, near Katowice.

I don't know what you're saying. What is that?

Schlesia. It's, it was a very industrial nice city. It was not, it was not a, a... county or something like that.

It wasn't a urban, a rural area?

A rural area. There's about 30,000 Jewish people.

Really?

Very, very nice community, as a child, of course, I remember.

Are there Jews now?

I don't know. I was there after the war in 1945, looking for my mother. And then I discovered that she was, they saw her in Auschwitz and they killed her. They burned her to death.

You haven't been back there since?

No.

What do you know about the circumstances of your birth. Were you, were you, were you born in a hospital?

I don't think I was born in a hospital. I probably they had a, a woman.

A midwife?

A midwife that came probably. I was born in 1929, so it was, it's a long time ago.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

I had, we were three brothers. I had two brothers, two brothers.

Older, younger?

Older, I was the baby.

And what were their names?

His present name is...

So he survived?

The oldest, oldest is Harry. And his Jewish name was Chanoch, Chanoch. And my middle brother, which was extraordinary young man. He just passed away. He lived in Paris till he died two years ago. His name was Isaac.

But you all three survived?

All three survived. We didn't know that we were going to survive or we didn't know who was living and who was dead after the war.

What were your parents' names?

My mother's name was Gitla, Gitla. A very charming woman, a strong, I mean, I mean she gave me the courage to appreciate what a woman is in life. Lovely, lovely woman. My father's name was Chaim David.

When they were, when you were growing up, what did your father, what did your father do for, in business?

Well, my father was, was a, he had a kosher butcher shop, because there were non-kosher butcher shops, and you had to be a distinguished man to have a butcher shop because I remember this I was five years old. Because when the war started I was only ten, so. He had also export that he sold his non-kosher meat to the non-Jewish people, I mean, to send it out, out of town or Germany or whatever it was.

Really, so he had a kosher and non-kosher. And did your mother work?

No, my mother just helped him out, you know, psychologically, what it was.

Did, did you father help around the house?

My father was not a helper around the house. We had a, a woman, a nanny for me, to take care of me. And I spoke Polish only in the house, not Yiddish, but they spoke Yiddish. So we had a woman that cleaned the house and stayed in our house.

She lived with you. And did you have any other people who helped around the house?

My mother, and then she had a sister coming in and she came from a village. My mother was born in a village in a very small town. There were only 12 Jews there. But I was glad to go there because I had to take a train and to see my grandfather because my mother was the oldest of seven children, and she took care of everybody else.

And they still lived in the village?

They lived at the time village, but they were dispensed in different cities, you know, as they got...

And your father, did he, where was his family from?

He was from Będzin. By the way Isak Federman's wife, Ann, is from Będzin. She knew my family.

Really?

Yes. There is another man by the name of Sander - Abe Sander.

Yeah.

He knew me as a child of five years old, and they thought I was very cute at that time.

[laughing] You're still cute. Did you live in a... So there was 300,000 Jews there...

30,000.

I mean, 30,000 Jews there, so did you live in a Jewish neighborhood.

Oh yes. Most of the Jews lived there. They lived in the city. The gentiles, the non-Jewish people, lived around the city. And some of them lived of course...

So it was a very Jewish city?

It was a very Jewish city. Very nice people, young people. I mean, as a child I can only tell you as a child...

Right, we want your perceptions.

... because, as I told, 1939 I was I just turned nine, ten years old that I learned something about it.

So what was your house like? What was the neighborhood like?

We had a very nice, it was a nice home. It was an apartment house. We lived on the second floor with a beautiful balcony and nice neighbors.

Did you share a room with your brothers?

No, I had my own bed.

They shared a room...

They shared, they shared... They were by themselves, and I was with my parents. They had a bed. You know, just to make sure that I'm okay.

Were you... Were there, were there homes around your apartment or was this an apartment?

Those were apartment buildings. Most of them lived in apartment buildings with the exception of some people that my mother knew that they had villas or house, and we used to go out and visit with them. I used to go around as a child, they took me around every place they went.

How well off was your family?

My family, before the war, was very well off.

So your father did very well?

He did very well, and my brother, my younger brother, my middle brother, he helped them out psychologically and physically and mentally and, and they, they, they loaned money to people. They did very well.

Did you take vacations and travel?

I went on vacation with my mother when she went back to the village. It was extraordinary. It was beautiful. Absolutely beautiful, the country.

Did you go by train?

By train. And this was an exciting thing because they gave you sandwiches. My mother prepared sandwiches, and then I could inhale the smoke from the chimney, you know, from the train and then it was so exciting. It was all you saw is farmers. There was no water. If there was a rain, I mean the water came up.

Did you have a car? Did your family have a car?

Mm... My father used to go on vacation. They insisted he should go on vacation. My father looked like a senator. It was, it was... There's my picture of my father and my mother. This was done before the war.

Oh, I'll look closer at that. So he took vacations, but you didn't?

We wanted him to go away. He was under so much stress. He was a very religious man.

So he went away by himself?

He went away by himself to a, to a spa and really enjoyed it. Came back and it was, it was wonderful. We missed him you know.

It's not like he went to Paris or something?

No, but he had family in Paris. We had family all over.

Did your mom... Was your mom a good cook? Did she cook?

Excellent. It was excellent. My father was not a big eater. He wanted a little, but good, and that's what he got.

Did you have certain things you liked, certain things that your mom made?

What I liked was, I was not, we were three brothers in three different categories that we ate. I mean, we really liked to eat. I ate, for example, I liked dark bread with tomatoes and pickles and herring. This was my, my love. My middle brother was a meat eater, bread and meat and potatoes. My oldest brother was a *nosher*. Do you know what a *nosher* is?

Yes.

He would just like sweets. Sweets in his pockets and everything else, eat anything. Whenever we had some relationship with a, with a bakery, a very good bakery, we were friends too with them, and as soon he could smell that there is going to be some new bakery, he was right there and he had to taste the best thing. So, interesting.

That's cute. Did your family have, were they politically aware? Were they... Did they have political affiliations?

Well my father was, he was very well read. He liked to read. And of course he studied the Torah. Every Saturday he got up early in the morning and of course he had his newspapers. As a matter of fact, he took me on his...

Knee?

... on his knee and he was trying to tell me what was going on with 1936 with Tojo. He showed me pictures. And I was opened... I was a bright young boy, bright young boy. It was nobody's fault at that time. But see things happen. Look at me now.

You're a bright big boy. So, but were they activists at all?

Activists for Jewish causes. For, for Palestine.

They were Zionists?

Yes, well, I don't know exactly whether they were Zionists, but it was important, I was not prepared for those things to know what it is. But if anything happens with the World Congress of this it was discussed at the table.

Did you go to synagogue? Did your father...?

My father had three places. He had a seat in the synagogue in the front, which I had to go with him on certain occasions because I had to carry his *tallis*. He wouldn't carry the *tallis*. It was about 15 minutes walk.

15?

15. It was a synagogue of 5,000 families. Upstairs, mother was sitting upstairs. My father was sitting downstairs.

So your whole family went?

Well, my father and I and my mother, we went to the synagogue. [coughing] Excuse me. We would go. Brothers too, I mean they went to different synagogues, because, and then my father of course he supported two rabbis. One was a *gerrer* rabbi and one was another rabbi. And so he went during the week, a Friday or something like this, if it's cold or whatever it is, he went to this rabbi and he was supported him during the wintertime, he donated a carload of coke so can have warm in his house?

Coal?

He was very, very... Coal. He was very generous, very generous.

Did he go to synagogue during the week or he just did that?

No this he *davened* at home at about 5 o'clock in the morning, because, you know. He was a very generous man. You talking about the synagogue, see, whenever you walked out and there was a man that didn't have a place to go and eat, he used to take him home Friday night or Saturday. And my mother never refused anything 'cause there was always, you know, she cooked and she was so beautiful, and she did this with love.

That's very generous. So you attended school, you attended school?

Oh yes.

Up until you were ten years old?

Absolutely, up through ten years old - till 1939.

What school, did you go to a Jewish school?

I went to *cheder*.

Did everybody go to...?

Everybody had to go to a Jewish school, which a *cheder* is, which is like a Hebrew Academy deal. And then I went to the public school, which was also a Jewish school. All the Jewish children used to go there. The boys used to go in a different school, and the girls used to go in a different, we didn't go together.

What do you mean you went to a public school?

Well, it was a public school, but under Jewish supervision.

No, but I know you said, but you said you went to *cheder*, and...?

***Cheder*... First of all I went to my regular public school, and then when I came home I had to go to *cheder*.**

Oh, I see. Like an afternoon school, okay, to learn Hebrew.

Uh-huh.

You did that when you were just, before?

When I started... I started actually, I went to kindergarten, and I went to pre-school.

You went to pre-school? Before kindergarten you went to school?

Uh-huh. Uh-huh. So... You know my father said one thing. Son, he mentioned. It doesn't belong here in this conversation, but I'll just throw it in, and I didn't do certain things that he was not happy the way I studied. He said, "Son, the only thing I can leave you in my life is education. Nobody can take this away from you." Remember that. So it really gave me a thought, of love for education.

Did you have favorite subjects in school?

Under those circumstances, at that time it was mostly play and...

So when you went to, you went to school, did you, at the public school, did you have Jewish teachers?

We had Jewish teachers and non-Jewish teachers.

Did you experience any, any antisemitism?

Not in my school.

Was *everybody* there Jewish?

Yes. All the kids were Jewish.

What did you do for fun as a child? Did you have a bike?

No, I didn't have a bike, I was too young, but my friends, some of my friends had bikes. And we went out and going to the lake. We had a nice lake that came around Poland, beautiful country. And we talked and we discussed and we ran and...

Did you play sports?

Yes. Soccer, and I went to soccer games as a child.

Did you have, did you have any particular hobbies, collect anything? Did you go to organizations?

No, not that age, not till ten, but when the war started then I went secretly to meetings. And I belonged to a group of children that were preparing, to read Hebrew, and to talk Hebrew, and to sing songs. We had a library, and we could read because it was forbidden, 1939, when the war started, a Jewish child could not have any education - under no circumstance. When you find a child that has an education, it was almost like you committed a crime and you could be dead. But my father, he knew that it's going to be very critical for me, so he hired a previous teacher from the school in privacy, in secrecy and paid them excellent money to come and teach me because, as I mentioned to you he said, "Education nobody can take away from you."

Right. So when you, you stopped going to formal, formal school, public school at age ten in 1939, and after that your father hired this tutor?

This tutor, and then he also hired a rabbi to teach me Hebrew. I mean, this is the only thing that he felt that he can leave.

Did you do that... Did you go... How long did you have that tutoring with the rabbi?

From 1939 till '40, for about a year or two years.

Was it like a full day of school?

Well, it was two, three hours and was about two hours in our house. It was about four or five hours.

Did you get along well with your parents?

Very well.

Were they strict?

My father was discipline man, very clean, exceptionally clean. My mother was extraordinary which I told you. She was uh... If you would meet her today, you would love her, just like I loved her because I grew up, I saw how she makes the fish for *Shabbas* and how she makes the *challahs*, and she had ruby-red cheeks, it was just... She needed powder to cover it up, so it wouldn't... But a very, very nice person. I got along with them very well.

Did you get along well with your brothers?

Oh yes, I was child. I was ten years younger than everybody else, so I had to look up to them.

They were ten years older than you?

Yeah. One was ten, one was five.

So you already talked about how important education was to your family, and you learned that from your parents, and was religion also an important thing or did you learn more by example?

Well, my middle brother for example he was the disciplinarian. He told our maid in the house, our nanny, in case I don't *daven* in the morning I should not get anything to eat. And before I went to bed, he made sure that I take my clothes and put it on a chair, in a square, so I'll know what I'm going to wear tomorrow the morning, not to look for the sock here or the shoe here. Very, very nice.

Your brother did that?

My brother. My middle brother.

Very cute. So obviously you've been, that's had an effect on you for your whole life, so you're extremely neat and disciplined. Have you been religious or observant your whole life?

Well, the education that I got that I went to *cheder*, which is the Jewish school, if it wouldn't... I got the initiation from my father. It got deep in my heart and my thought during the war that to stay that way and it stayed with me because in case I wouldn't have that believe in it, I probably wouldn't have been a Jew today.

Really?

It was so easy to convert yourself and forget about it because I didn't have anybody. But this stayed with me. And I had love for children. I had love for children because I was a child myself. How can you judge a child if you don't know yourself?

So was this, was your whole community an observant community?

Not necessarily. We had a lot of progressive people. A lot of people assimilated, and it was 1939 we had the very, we had the most wonderful good-looking young men in our town, and you could see beautiful women and beautiful girls. You don't see pictures like they were in a small town or anything like this. It was very progressive. People who... A lot of people were well off. A lot of people were not. I was not around those people, but I was shown where people live and how poorly they live. So, I knew the difference a little bit, of course, and I was associated with some very good friends and they were well to do and I was, so I had privilege to be with those guys.

Did your, when you would celebrate, you obviously celebrated all the Jewish holidays and *Shabbat*, you had *Shabbat*, did you ever do that with your parents', your parents' parents or brothers, sisters, anybody?

Oh, yes. I had a grandmother on my father's side, and I went down as a child to bring... She lived someplace else. She lived in her home, her own house, and I brought out our, our place for *Shabbat* to eat with us.

Every *Shabbat*?

Every *Shabbat*.

And what about, like, *Pesach*, and...?

The same way. We had usually company. We had people

Did you have, were there secular holidays that you celebrated? Did they have secular holidays?

No. They did have secular holidays, but Jewish people did not celebrate.

Really? Not...

It was very scary because the hate in Poland was so tremendous toward Jews it was unbelievable.

So the, there was a lot of it, before the war, before '39, there was a lot of antisemitism? Your whole life you experienced antisemitism?

Well, since I was about five...

Since you were old enough to know?

...five, six years old. If I walked home from school, you didn't go take the path you walked fifteen, twenty minutes from school to school, and you had to carry your books. Sometimes, some children or other people could recognize you're Jewish or not, they would call your dirty Jew for no reason at all. It was a scary thing. You were scared. And those people were not educated. They didn't know there was hatred given to them, so they could say, you know, if they're Jew... if you're not going to be good, that Jew going to get you, you know, things like this. So it's hatred. And across the street where we lived, not very far, near the store where my business, father's business was, was a very nice store that had flower and sugar and all of...everybody came around. So in 1938 or '39, I remember I was seven, eight years old, there were Polish trouble makers stayed in the street and gave around leaflets to, not to buy at this Jewish place. Fortunately, a very good captain of the police, the commissar from the police, he was very tall, and he tried to protect if there was a pogrom or something like this, got on his horse and he said, "You're not going to touch any Jewish people." But the Jewish people could protect themselves, but at the same time you know how it was.

Did you have any friends who were not Jewish?

Personally, no, not before the war.

Do you know why there was...

I was too young at that time.

Do you know why there was so much antisemitism?

It was brought up for generation, [unclear]. You know Poland, Jewish people, a thousand, a thousand five hundred years ago, when they were dispersed all over the world, they came in, they brought a lot of, a lot of good things to Poland. They brought in commerce, ingenuity and smartness, but they couldn't have too much land either. They couldn't buy any land. So, they owned business, and they were...whatever they could, but they were not farmers, not much.

Did your family have any connection with any Jewish, maybe in business, but otherwise socially did your parents have any Jewish friends?

Jewish friends? Yes.

I mean, I'm sorry. I mean non-Jewish friends?

Not friends, but acquaintances. They were very nice. They were nice people. I mean you're nice, you're nice to everybody. That's not to be anybody, whether it's Greek or German or whatever it is.

Did your family have any interest in cultural events? Did they go to plays, concerts?

Yes. My father and my mother they used to go to movies. Very progressive people. I remember when I was maybe 3 or 4 years old, my father tried to take me to a movie, and I was scared of course the first time I saw the screen, and I had to go home. It was the *dybbuk*. Did you ever hear of the *dybbuk*?

Oh, the *dybbuk*. Yeah.

And I was scared. They went, but my mother got sick. She was sick for about four or five days.

What about... She was sick from the movie?

From the movie. It was you know, this seeing the scene how somebody dies and then this and...

But I'm talking about other than Jewish cultural events. Did they go to secular cultural events?

I think I they did, but not to all my knowledge at that time. You must realize you're talking to a child seven to ten years old.

Yes, yes. I know. And that's what we want is to know what you, as a child, knew or what you were aware of.

I was very well informed. I was very well informed. As I mentioned to you my father read the paper, and it was the *Zeit* or whatever it was, I don't remember whatever it was, it was the colors, in Yiddish and Polish too. He got it every week.

For the most part do you think your family, the Jewish people in Poland, I know you said you experienced some antisemitism like hooligans in the street and things like that, but do think it was mostly, you think you were fairly antisemitism-free or did you experience it a lot?

Well, I experienced it less than a lot of people, but there was, there was every holiday, every Christian holiday, there was something going on to hate the Jews. They were brought up that way, unfortunately. Some of them are nice people, they didn't know. They were not educated. They didn't know. They were only taught, the church didn't help any. The church was terrible. By dealing, everything was of course in Latin, and those people didn't understand Latin, not only this, but now it's in Polish.

Yeah. Didn't even know what they were talking about, just that it was part of their religion.

Right.

Okay, what happened that you first became of the Nazis, or maybe wasn't the Nazis, maybe it was the Polish people prior to the war, as the war was just beginning?

You see before the war there were a lot, you know, I was living on a border between Germany and Poland. We had a lot of Polish people that they were actually half-German and half-Polish. And this was the Fifth Colony [Fifth Column], and Hitler had a very nice situation at that time because...

This was the what colony?

Fifth Colony in Poland. You know, there was German-Polish people, and they, and they, the Polish government trusted them, but they didn't know what was going on. It was a situation that they didn't like Jews. They hated Jews. Brought up a lot of hatred, a lot of propaganda, and that was a catastrophe for Poland, too.

Were the people in your community talking about war, talking about what's going to happen? What are we going to do? Anything like that?

Well, frankly speaking, unfortunately, a lot of people wanted to emigrate, and a lot of people did [unclear]. As a matter of fact, my oldest brother in 1939, he left for Paris, but he was caught in Germany and was brought back. But a lot of young people wanted to leave for *hachshara* to Israel and to work on *kibbutzim*, they also had places where they taught young children or young men or women to prepare themselves to leave Poland for different life. They did, they did.

So what...

So it was very well organized when you really think about it.

So what happened that you first, that you were aware of something happening other than growing antisemitism? Did you see, did you see Nazis in the street? What happened when you knew about occupation?

Occupation was something else. In 1939 before the war started, when we heard the speeches out of Hitler and Mussolini and all those other, including Stalin, that was a lot of Jews, the people got together like in our house. We got together and they talked. Of course I could only listen because I'm nine, nine years old, ten years old. And they, they saw the situation it's going to be pretty bad, pretty bad, what do we do, where do we go? And it was before the war, before the war. And they tried to analyze, what could we do, what can be done about it? A lot of religious Jews didn't want to hear to leave to go to Israel. [Unclear] this, "God will come and he'll take care of us." Well you know, God says, "What you do for yourself, I will help you. I cannot come down and reach for you," if you believe in that. I was brought up to believe the whole Torah, and I'm not going to change it. I don't believe in

everything. I can't, because it was written by a human being. Human beings I should say. So at that time, it was an obstacle too. It was obstacle, otherwise a lot of people would have left. If they could leave, they went to England, they went to Germany, they went to Belgium, and you know what happened when Hitler attacked the world.

So, okay, so let's go back to what happened when things start coming fruition. It wasn't just talk. You saw something.

Well, in 1939, I was in the street. First of all they attacked us in 1939, in September, with bombers and we had industrial city that made cable, all those cable cars all over the world they used to make, not very far from us, and they attacked this. There was a Fürstenburg's factory from chemicals, they attacked this. As I was walking up to the house, I heard a bomb falling, and I just fell over it was so shocking. They threw a lot of bombs. And this was the beginning of, of a situation that we knew something was going to happen pretty soon, and as I walked up the street I saw the tanks and the Germans coming in. We were scared to death.

So what did you do? Did your parents think, ever think about leaving?

I never asked him specifically because when everybody evacuated they wanted to leave the Germans, my father said, "No we're not going to go anywhere," because a lot of people died...

Trying to leave?

... trying to leave. There was no place to go. The Germans, as a matter of fact as a child in 1939 when they threw out the German Jews on the street and sent them to Poland, I was at that time a volunteer to go down to the station, which was not very far from us, and help those refugees, Jewish refugees, to come to Będzin and start a new life. My father was very generous. He supported this. And I carried those baggages and made sure that they had food and everything, and also very nice people.

Did you ever take any of the people into your own home, or did you...?

We invited them into our home, but they had a place to live. They had their own dignity.

They had their own...

Yes.

Did you ever have... Did your parents have discussion about the Nazis? Did they say things about the Nazis?

Didn't specifically say anything about the Nazis, but the neighbors, they got together every night and talked about it, what is going to happen to us, so it was a conversation. Again I was not participating in it because I was too young.

Once you saw the Nazis, you saw them in the town, how did that change your life?

My life, it was scary because you couldn't, first of all they took the Jewish community, the leadership, and they killed them. [unclear].

And you knew some of the people that were killed?

I knew some of the people. Especially then they took the bakers, and they killed the bakers. So there wouldn't be any bread and dependent on this if you don't have any food, then it's very bad. It's so sad. I never talked about this. It was very sad.

So you see them kill the bakers, you think they're soon going to kill the butchers?

This goes on.

Yeah. So they, your father was able to stay in business?

Not for very long. He was because he had, because everything was rationed, rationed. And if you wanted to buy something you had to have a coupon and get certain thing, very little. But he was one of the people that was selected to have the place open and to sell to Polish people and Jewish people, and he had a concession to, to get those coupons. Also, he charged [unclear].

And he was still able to get kosher food, kosher meat?

No, this was not, it was not kosher food.

So did your family eat non-kosher meat?

We did not eat any non-kosher food.

Did some Jewish people?

Probably. Even before the war some people, because the food was much less, a lot less.

Do you remember any prior to that, prior to '39, do you remember anything that went, or were, did your father talk, well I guess you said he talked about, but you were maybe to young might not know about *Kristallnacht* and all that?

Oh this I knew because it was very well known. We were a very close, you know, the news... That news goes on so fast.

Did you ever have to wear a Star of David?

Yes.

Did the people throughout Poland have to or just because you were so close to Germany?

No, all over, all over, they had to wear the Star of David.

So how old were you when you got a Star of David?

Probably about ten years old. But I was, I was very tricky. I was not a child to sit around. I met the *gauleiter*, which is the, you know the *gauleiters*? This is the man in the brown suit, Hitler's number one people. He was the director of the district, and he took the people to concentration camps and everything else. I met his son. His name was Klaus, and he began to be my friend, and I said, "You know I'm Jewish." He said, "Where are your horns and where's your tail?" I said, "I don't have any horns." So after that I took him into my house, and he was wearing that German uniform, *Hitler Jugend* and this like that. He was not my friend you know, but acquaintance, and then I walked into stores with, you know the store it said specifically "No Jews are, no Jews are entitled to come into this store. We will not sell to Jews." Well, I used to go in, and I [unclear but seems to refer to taking it off] the Star of David, and I could get whatever I wanted.

You didn't have it?

No I didn't. I didn't wear it at that time, so I bought candies or whatever it was, you know, five cents.

Did your parents ever not wear it?

No, they had to wear it.

But you were a kid and you could get away with it? So, because you couldn't go into those stores, did they have stores and places where you could shop?

All Jewish stores, all you have to have coupons so you could have bread.

Did they have certain time limits when you can go shop?

That's right. Not shop. You know, you have to go buy bread, I mean necessities, potatoes.

So then what happened? So, that went on for how long that you were just walking around?

I was, you know, in 1939 as the war started and I saw the Germans coming in the troops, they picked up young people in the street on, on buses and God only knows what, and they took in the rest of them, and they found me as a Jewish boy, and they hit me over, I mean, they hit me with my hat. And they...

You were just walking in the street?

Walking in the street, and they made me, and on every corner there were Germans with machine guns and everything else. It was awful. It was scary. It was so scary. We thought that the British are going to come to help us and the French, but they never did show up. It was only on paper. And they made me come to work, to work for a factory that made cradles for bombs, and I had to work there.

Now was this in your town?

In my town.

So you're walking on the street, they hit you on the head, and...

Made me, made me go to work.

Put you on the truck.

Not on a truck. They took me to that a place.

That moment.

That moment. I mean it just was so easy for them to get some people.

Did you go home at night?

Yes, yes.

And what if you didn't show up the next day?

They knew who I am because they had to give an account who's coming, who's not coming. It was very well controlled.

Did they come get you or did you just go?

No, I had to go by myself.

And so what happened when you went home and told your parents?

They were pleased that I was alive. It was very scary.

But you walked... Up to this time you walked the streets by yourself.

Oh yes.

Were you not worried that something just like this might happen?

No.

You were a kid and you didn't think about it?

Didn't think about it. You had to watch out for yourself. You had to be very aware of what was going on, what can happen to you.

So did this happen to your middle brother?

No. No. They, they worked. My oldest brother, Harry, he worked too. They worked, but he at that time, 1939, right when the Germans came in they wanted to have a certain amount of young men to go to a German working place in Germany, and that will protect the parents, and the brothers or sisters who stay in Będzin. So my brother was taken to Germany, so we could stay home. So in 1939, he went to Germany to work in a concentration camp.

So that's why you weren't really bothered?

Not bothered for the time being, but...

So how long did you work in this factory.

Not for a very long time and then they took all the Jewish people and they put them out to a ghetto outside in the country.

So, did your, your folks had to move?

Everybody had to move. But my middle brother was taken to, to Germany too. He had to... My father wanted to give away gold and silver, and he tried to bribe people to make him, but they couldn't and they took him away too in 1940.

Do you know where he was?

He was in about six, seven camps.

How did you know that?

Because we knew he where he was going to go, and then at first they let him write a note, but later on we didn't hear anything from him. But then I was taken, I had to

go work in a factory to make toys for Germany, for German children, and I worked in nights, all night long. I was ten years old, eleven years old.

And that was, that was when you were in that ghetto?

Uh-huh.

And they would come get you and take you someplace?

No. I had to go by myself. I worked for the SA, it's also the German people that were protecting Hitler, and they were these... robbers. As a matter of fact, I still have a needle here. [seems to be gesturing to his body] I was worked on a machine it almost cut off my...

Oh I see. Awful reminder. So the factory was close to this ghetto that they put you in?

Oh I had to walk about fifteen, twenty or thirty minutes.

And were there lots of children from the ghetto doing that?

Some of them. I could not stay home. I couldn't go to school. The only schooling I had as I told you...

No, I mean, yeah, but I mean did they take other children from the ghetto to go with you or why didn't they all go to this factory.

They couldn't. They only could use so many people.

Okay, just who they took. So how long did you work in there?

About a year.

And your folks are still living okay in this ghetto?

My father had to close the business. They made him close the business. The work for distribution to help people eat.

Distribution?

Yeah. He gave away bread for people, for hungry people. And I took the initiative at ten, eleven years old, and I tried to get security for my mother where we worked at security. And I got her a job as a seamstress in a German factory where they make uniforms for the German Army, and that pleased me very, very much. So I knew I had security for this and security of my father. My brothers were in Germany already. So I thought I did very well.

So how secure did you feel?

I felt better because I had my mother and father.

So, okay, so you worked in the factory for about a year and all... Do you hear about things that are going on? What's going on in the concentration camps? Do you hear anything about it?

We heard, we heard, you see we were not very, we were only thirty kilometers, thirty miles from Auschwitz. Thirty miles, you could hear what's going on. Then my mother's brother, he was taken from that village, [unclear] in Poland. He was taken away, and then we got a note about six months later, that he, very healthy man, that he died on a heart attack. And we knew that he was killed. So it was, it was, it was tragic. I mean, I don't, there's no words. There's no paper we can put down. People, you have to live in it. Every one of the survivors, especially children, that's a different story, every one individual, we didn't go through the same thing. Even if you were in camp, everyone had a different, I was lucky. I had one lesson from my mother... that people should like you and you should have a nice smile on your face and get along with people. And that helped me a little bit, it helped me.

Did they ever take people out of that camp, out of the, that thing that you were in, the ghetto, kind of, that you were in and just take them away?

Well, in 1943 they took all the Jewish people to one place, to a football game place, where I used to go see, you know, when I was a child, soccer.

A stadium?

Stadium. A big stadium. And at that time, that Mengele, the doctor you know that and they came in and they separated the people.

And that's after you'd worked in the toy factory for a while?

The factory. Now also had a document that I'm working, so I was very in good shape. And at that time, it's the first time I saw it, they came in to the left or to the right, to the left or to the right. My mother went to the right, and my father went to the right, and I went to the right, but my grandmother went to the left. She was 73 years old. So we knew we never saw them. Then I followed through when they closed off that, that meeting. It was horrible. It was 4 o'clock in the morning. I saw they took them to the train. And they took cattle cars and shoved those people in. I saw it with my own eyes the way they took them away.

Now, you...

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

So you said that they took these people away, were you....?

At that time when they took the people to the left and to the right.

Now you're part of those people?

To the right, right and I was with my parents, but my grandmother...

Went to the left.

...was turned to the left. We knew that the left people eventually be [unclear]. How they looked, they took them to the railroad station, they sent them to Auschwitz.

I see, those are the people that you saw?

And I saw, I went to the train station as a child to observe it, because I could see it, nobody paid that much attention. It was a beautiful station, and they shoved those people in, in those cars, in those cars, cattle cars, and they took them to, to Auschwitz. Now as I mentioned to you there is only fifty kilometers from Będzin to Auschwitz. And that's where they took them.

So just one day they decided, let's go get all the Jews in this ghetto and you didn't go to... so you, instead of going to work you got, they took you to that...?

And then you had to go back to your regular deals.

So then you went back, they took you back home and...

Back to work.

They just brought you all there to separate the old and the sick, take them away and leave?

The rest of them had to go to their duties, like my mother went back to work, my father did the work.

And how long did that last?

Until 1943. In '43 they took all the Jewish people to one place. It was very warm in September... August or July I don't remember... and they did the same thing separation, but the different separation. There were SS men with guns, with machine guns. Everybody was, had to sit, kneel and with their hands high for about three, four hours. No food or anything like this. But before they took me, I took my mother and I hid her in a basement with some other friends, with some relatives and my aunt that was living with us, I put, this was in the ghetto. I hid her in a, in a, in a closet where we lived, and my father and I went to that place. It was very, very

pitiful. And then the dogs and the hollering, and everything else, they came around and, and they started to separate. They took my father to the right and they took me to the left. You know lefties. But as this SS was turning around, I ran over to my father and he caught me and started to beat me. When he turned around again I ran over to my father again, and we stayed there. And these people that stayed there were taken to, were taken at that time to the trains. My father and I and all the people, everybody was liquidated at that time. The whole ghetto was liquidated in 1943.

Where did the people on the left go?

To Auschwitz.

Why would they put you? You were thirteen years old?

Yeah, they didn't feel I'm big enough, or strong enough to go to, to, to work.

I would think by fourteen they would think you were.

I was thirteen years old. Thirteen years old. Twelve, thirteen years old.

Before we go on, 'cause I want to hear more about this, but before we go on there, go back for a second. When you lived, when they put you in the ghetto, where did you live, how did you live?

We lived in one room. Five, six people.

So it was you and your mom and dad...

My aunt...

... 'cause your brothers were already gone.

My Aunt and some other people stayed in the house with us.

And your grandmother?

My grandmother was already in Auschwitz.

But this was after... But before your grandmother. Before you were, that first time they took you to the train, uh, they took you to a stadium. Before that you were in the ghetto, right? Your grandmother was still living at that time?

No, before... yeah. Yes.

So did she ever live with you in the ghetto?

She did not. No, they took my grandmother way at the time before.

Before. So it was your family – you, your mother and father and your aunt...

And then some other person at the time.

You lived in one room...

One room, it was one room and that was it.

Did you have cooking facilities?

Not really, because it was very, maybe a little stove or something at that.

So what was life like in that...?

Very bad. Very sad. It was demoralizing people.

Did you get up in the morning, go to work and come home and go to sleep?

That was the only thing that was good. And of course we met socially with people discussing what's going to happen with us. There was some very intelligent people. We were not people from any, from Hawaii or anything like that any... the people were smart and the people that survived were smart too... not everybody was intelligent, not everybody was a good person. The good people did not survive. You know that, you're too kind and the strong person that was not that intelligent was bad, he had the better chance to survive take away his ration or anything like this... I mean and frankly speaking that's what it really was. A lot of for example, a lot Jewish people were policeman for the Germans and they were terrible.

Anybody you know?

I didn't pay any attention to those people, who they were.

No, but it was nobody you had known before the war?

No, no, no, I wouldn't.

They were much hated by the Jews?

Still hated, listen, those people, the Germans gave them a quota to deliver 5,000 people today and that was a job to go. Just like my brother went to Germany, my middle brother. My father wanted to give him a lot of gold, in gold pieces, American gold pieces he had boxes full, because he... And he promised him everything, whatever they wanted, they took the money, some of it, but they never could deliver and he had to go to Germany anyway, and so not very nice people.

They did survive?

Some of them survived.

Do you know any of them today?

I don't know. You know there is one thing I would learned, you know, goes back to, to the story of, of, of the woman turned to be salt, now what was her name?

Lot's wife?

Lot's wife, he said don't turn around. I never turned around. Because when my father died in concentration camp, he said "Son, one thing, go forward, don't look back. Get yourself a bright future. It's going to be hard for you, but don't look back any." Another thing he said to me, "Say *Kaddish* after me." And he died that moment when he said that.

Well... okay, so in the ghetto when you were there and you lived in one room, and you went to work, and everybody went to work, did you, was there ever time to play?

No.

Just go to work and come home?

Come home, because it was...tired and exhausted and [unclear].

How many hours a day did you work?

I used to be there at seven o'clock in the morning, come back about six o'clock at night. I worked at night. So during the day I had to do a lot of chores and things like that. Sometime I work day and night.

Did you have food?

Very little.

Did you have clothing?

Only clothing you had from before the war.

And they let you bring some things with you?

Not to, you mean where in the ghetto? Just what you brought to the ghetto what we had from, from...

Did you pack bags with you?

We lived there. We lived there. We had this clothes and... we did the best we possibly could.

Okay, what happened to your possessions, to your house, when you left.

We left everything what we had to Polish people to get over.

Do you know people, did you ever go back to see who's living in the house now?

No. I was, as I mentioned to you in the beginning, that I went to look for my mother. I thought maybe she's alive. I went by to look at a house where I lived and as soon as I looked at it, I left, never went back.

Okay so then they came, they came one day and this was in 1944 you said?

1943.

'43 that they came and got you and you went to the...?

First concentration camp.

And they, and they took... So the people on the left went to Auschwitz and the people on the right....?

Went to work, to, to, to concentration camps.

So what concentration camp did you go to first?

I went, they send us, it was a night train, we had to be there till night. Twelve o'clock the train left, and they took us to Czechoslovakia. Karviná. And we were traveling all that evening, all that night and we arrived in that concentration camp. And across the street from us there was a Russian concentration camp for all soldiers.

So when they took you at that time, and they took everybody and they take you in trucks or did you walk?

No. They took us, they took us to the station.

No, I mean, when they took you from the ghetto did they take you also to that stadium again?

Right.

Did they take you in trucks, did you have to walk?

No, we had to walk.

So you had to walk...

Because the Germans came into every little house, every little corner whoever they found they shot him. So you had more chance to be there or hide, which I hid my mother in the basement and I said goodbye to her.

Okay, so you... You went to the stadium and the people on the left they just went right from there to the train?

As soon as they took the people to go to the concentration camp then we left, we didn't know what happened, but we knew... No they took them to the conc, to Auschwitz and we went to the concentration camp.

Immediately, so you didn't have anything with you what you had on?

Only what you had on.

So you don't have anything there?

Nothing, absolutely nothing.

Okay.

The only thing, I carry pictures with me.

And how did you get those?

When I took from home, just to carry a few.

Oh you just carried them with you, just carry them with you all the time, and... Okay. So we're not going to go through your time in the concentration camp. We're going to go to liberation. What led up to your liberation? What were the circumstances leading to liberation?

It was 1945, and then I was in Waldenburg, Germany.

You were where?

Waldenburg, a concentration, a new concentration camp, I build there and I worked for I.G. Farben industry which is building a new factory for them, gasoline, and God only knows what.

Zyklon-B.

Yes. Yes. I was very fortunate, you know, that I was associated, I tried to associate myself with nice people. Like in that camp I was working with a man of 70 years old, he was engineer and he was a builder, so I helped him. Any, anything that was, any intelligent I tried to associate because I knew I had to go ahead in life eventually, and I had a tremendous determination to live because I promised my father... I'm going to live. And I tried to take care of myself. Ration my food. Don't forget you got at night the small piece of bread and you had to live for it a whole day long. It was not easy. Especially for a child, I was only sixty kilos... bones. And we talked about it. We heard, we heard through the Germans somehow, some news came through that they are in bad shape. So we prepared ourself, we didn't know who's going to come around. And we heard that Hitler died in April. His successor was the Chief of the Navy of Germany.

You heard this from?

From the people that told us, everybody heard something and they put it together and we knew what's going on. And we were waiting for maybe we'll survive, but at the same time the Germans prepared all themselves with machine guns and everything else to kill us. But the Russians came through so fast that they left the camps. They run away.

The Germans?

The Germans, the soldiers, SS, and we knew we were going to be there by ourselves and then we heard that the, that the Russians are coming in. At that time it was tragedy to leave, you know, that camp because I saw the people were so sick and they were eating anything they could get their hands on. They were eating raw potatoes and anything they were starving and I begged them not to eat those, those raw potatoes because they will die. I don't why, it was common sense, I mean, to do... I had more common sense than I realized. I was taught those things. I was taught by my parents. And then you saw the Russians coming, and then, what do we do? I had some there friends living with me in that camp, in that concentration camp, and my, the only thing my possession, in that camp when I came in - you asked me before about the photographs. When I came into this, no, it's another camp...to this camp, they got us all naked, they took all our clothes, and they looked in every place they could, took away my pictures. I didn't have any pictures any more. I didn't have anything. And that was Liberation Day, May the 8th, 1945. And the only thing I asked, I said, "Who do belong, who belongs to me and who do I belong to? Where do I go? What do I do?" And there was a group of people that I associated myself and I followed with them to go out and look. And I heard that I had an aunt that was in a camp, and I was looking for her. And I went to those camps after the liberation. What I saw was something...Hell. Hell, the way those women laid on the floor, bones. The only thing you could see is the eyes. Well, she was not there, and I got scared. And I looked around again, and I couldn't find anybody.

Now this was at the camp that you were at, you just...?

No. That was, that was a distance away. I walked to another place. We couldn't, there was no transportation to go anyplace.

So, the Russians came in?

The Russians came in. They liberated us.

Liberated you, and by that they just said "Well, you can go"?

You can go. You could go.

So, you just walked away?

Walked away. Walked away.

There was nothing organized to take you somewhere? To feed you?

No. They only thing they brought in some food. People ate so much food they died from it because there was nothing to hold it back. And this group of people about, for one, two, three, four, that we started to go back maybe to Poland.

Just walk?

To walk. Take any transportation that was going to be available. And the reason I wanted to go there because I thought maybe my mother is alive. My father was buried in Lands-, in Breslau, Germany. Wroclaw. And I thought maybe she's alive. That was the only thing. I didn't know that my brother was alive or anybody's alive. So whenever I heard that somebody was going to be alive, I went to make contact with them. Because I needed morale support, psychological support and everything else.

So you went to that camp thinking an aunt was alive? Was she...

She was not.

Was she on the way to Poland?

My aunt?

No, no. I mean was the concentration camp that you went to looking for her on your way to Poland?

Right. The way from this, from, from Waldenburg to, they call Waldenburg today is Walbrzych. It's Poland. They took over this from the Germans. And I couldn't find

anything. I just continued to go to Będzin. To Katowice, actually, we stayed in Katowice, which was a big city. I mean, it was Będzin, Sosnowiec, and Katowice. Schlesia. Industrial...

How long did it take you to get back there?

About maybe five days. Six days.

Where did you sleep? Where did you eat?

We, those people they got a place that knew some friends, so we stayed in their apartment, and slept there.

Not Jewish?

They were Jewish.

That still had their apartment?

They were Jewish. I think they came back with the military from, from Russia. Jewish people that were fighting the war on the Russian side as Polish people. One was a captain or something like this. I don't remember exactly what his name was, and he, they accommodated us. And of course, I took the street car, and I went to Będzin because you could take a street car to go to Będzin, and I wanted to see, and I tried to get a hold of the Red Cross to advertise whether my mother is alive. And I came into Będzin, and I saw it, and I just, and I was still wearing my uniform, you have seen those uniforms, those, those striped uniforms, no hair, with the [unclear]. Child also, fourteen years old, fifteen years old. [unclear] And then I, I got away from that and I didn't want...

How did you find out that your mom was not alive?

Because some people saw her in Auschwitz, and they, took them at the same time.

Oh, that's right, you said they... When you went back to Poland, did you see people that you knew?

No. You see the thing is, like this, you have to realize that I was a child. And not too many children, I'm one of the youngest children that survived from my city. People know my family, but I never knew them and they never knew me. With the exception of one, as I mentioned, Abe, Abe Sanders he was working for somebody, and he knew me as a child five years old.

When you went back, what was your reaction to seeing...?

It was not a very appetizing situation. We were not welcomed. “How come you alive?” They knew that they were going to kill all the Jews because the property was taken over by the Polish government and the Polish people, too.

So where did you... Okay, so you couldn't find your mom and...?

No. No. Nobody. And I went back. I looked around how it looked. As a matter of fact I met a friend of mine that was that was my age. We used to play together. My age exactly. He just passed away about two years ago. I met him in Będzin, and he went his way, and I went my way. And that was it.

So then what did you do?

Then I went back to Katowice with those friends, and there was some people that I had a cousin that they had a factory of, of vinegar. Near, near Częstochowa. Did you ever hear of Częstochowa? This is the Black Madonna that is the holiest place in Poland.

No. No.

It's the holiest place that every Polish...

And what is it again?

Częstochowa. The Pope, she was the Madonna that wasn't black and people go and pray there. That was not very far from there, and I stayed for a little while with intention eventually to go to Germany to look for people, if somebody's alive. So I was there in 1945. In 1945 in September, October, I tried to travel going through to, to Germany. I tried to, it was taken. It was occupation. I tried to hitchhike. Tried to hijack. Tried to, people tried to hijack you, you know. You never know. But I was identified. At least I knew where I'm coming from. And then, and then I went to work for the government as Stanislaw Posnanski. I gave a new name. And I was director of a... already in occupied Poland, of a committee or something like this. A very big position. I had police around me, and they took care of me. They thought I was eighteen or twenty-five, twenty years old. I was the director...

So you went in there and...?

I applied for the job, and I got it. Not as a Jew, but as Stanislaw Posnanski, which gave me a wonderful opportunity convert myself to Christianity, which was my heart not. And then I heard that people leaving, and I left this place and tried to walk myself to Germany, to Germany. And on the way I heard that my brothers are alive.

Let me ask you. Why would you want to go back, why would you want to Germany?

To immigrate to Israel or to the United States.

You had to start?

I had to start from there. That was a place to start with, not from Poland. You couldn't immigrate anyplace.

I want to hear about how you found your brothers, but I do want to ask you, I want to go back for just a second. When the Russians came through, about the moment of liberation, when the Russians came through and they said, "You're free," what did you think?

They were not very friendly. We tried to give them all of our love, but they were just Germans, they, I mean the Russians. If you had a watch, they took it over, and they used to carry all the watches around their neck and everything else. They were not friendly. If you said that you are a Jew, you [unclear]. They were not there, with the exception if there was a Jewish man, which here didn't identify himself because he was a Communist, he was more friendly, but otherwise, they were too ignorant. They were not intelligent enough soldiers.

So were you reluctant to... Was there, was there fighting? Was there... You saw the Germans fleeing, but was there any kind of fighting? Was there a commotion at all?

No. When they took over it was, everything was bombed already at that time anytime. Some of the cities that they didn't have to take over, they captured it.

No, I mean, I mean the Russians when they entered the gates?

When they came to us in that part of the country, everything they took it all without a shot.

Oh, I see.

Without a shot.

And they took over the camp without a shot?

They came over. The doors were open. We went out to see the parade that they walked. We liked maybe get some food.

Did you leave that day?

Oh yes. Absolutely.

Did you meet anybody? Do you have any... Did you connect with any of the Russians at all?

With the Russ... No. Not the Russians. I had nothing to connect to with the Russians.

And they weren't very nice to you?

They were not friendly. Let me put it this way. They were not like Americans who came into Dachau and places like this. They tried to help. They tried to feel it. The Russians were a little...

Okay. So we're in Germany. You're making your way to Germany, and how did you hear about your brothers?

Somebody told them that I'm alive or something like this, and they tried to get communication all over.

Who knew you that knew them?

Well, there was somebody there that my brothers... They was traveling around all over, and evidently they heard my brothers sent out notes to people to go out, "find my brother, the youngest brother, he's fourteen or fourteen and half years old, and he looks like this." And they heard that I am alive, so they sent somebody out to, to find me. Well, during the time from Germany when I came into from Poland I continued to go to Czechoslovakia to Prague. I was in Prague, and I stayed in Prague overnight, and then I found a friend that is alive. Today he is a friend of mine. His name is Sam Blumenfeld, and we went through, we started together to go through the forest to go into Germany from Czechoslovakia. And we got through the forest, we got into Germany.

And you're walking all this time?

We're walking or taking a train or...

How do you afford to take a train?

I don't know. We could go on a train. That was not, they didn't ask for ticket. And we arrived in a small city, and there was a man waiting for me. In the meantime, I befriended my Sam Blumenfeld, my friend, and we are friends still today since 1945.

Where does he live?

He lives right now in Florida. As a matter of fact he talked with me last week, and he wanted to know how I'm getting along. We are very in good contact. And when I arrived there, and then I heard that my brothers are alive, and I had a card from them that come and see them, and I went from that train and continued to go to Landsberg. Landsberg in Germany, it was where Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*. There was a very big camp there, and I arrived, and my brother, the two brothers were

living there. One brother at that time was, my oldest brother, I came up to his house. It was early, very early in the morning. He didn't recognize me because he didn't see me for so long. And then my other brother came from, he was away, and he came and he didn't recognize me. And that's how we got together.

So how did they find each other?

They, they were close by. They found each other after the war. They was very sick. My middle brother was already very sick, and they found him, because they were in Bavaria. This was all in Bavaria, near Munich. And I came in there, and that's how we started.

So, it just was a fluke that the people, a lucky miracle that somebody was traveling around, heard of you, heard of them?

Right. Communication was tremendous. Just if you go here, look for this, or look for this, and look for this. And some people were very lucky. I was very, very fortunate, but not unheard of.

So, the person that you first encountered that said, told you that your brothers were alive, and then they sent somebody to...?

To meet me. To, to, to see me. To find me, and he had a card from, I still have the card, "Come immediately to Landsberg. We are waiting for you."

And they didn't know when you would be there?

Oh no. Of course not.

Just whenever you would get there. What were they doing in Landsberg?

In Landsberg, my oldest brother was a organizer to help people, to get work and work in that camp. And my middle brother was also a, a man that tried to get accommodation for people to live in those barracks and in those houses. So, um...

So after you were liberated and you're... What was your physical condition?

It was, a... It's not only physical, it's psychological. Psychologically, I was very strong, very strong, bright, and I knew where I want to go. Physically, it was hard. It was hard. I weighed not very much... And I had plans to, I had so much to do. Not only this, but education, people to meet, friends to make, start a new life.

When you were in the camps, did they do, did they... Did you have anything you know, physically that aside from being extremely hungry and thin and weak, do you have anything that you know made it difficult for you to move around, to get from place to place, you know?

You mean in camp? You talking about in camp?

No. After the camp. The effects of the camps?

Well, I tell you, just before it was wintertime, this was already May, they made us come out from the barracks every morning to be counted. And that German officer, that captain, a miserable man, very miserable, vicious. And he had a dog, who was ten feet tall I would say, I mean that's they way he looked to you, ferocious. And whoever didn't go first, and it was snowing, and we had to be out in a minute, and that dog start to bite me and bit me on my butt and both feet, and I was suffering from it. And the only thing there was a French doctor, they had little room. They didn't have any medication for it, so I was suffering from that.

When you left, at liberation, when you left, where did you go get food?

Wherever we could find it.

Okay. What does that mean?

There were always places for, for some food, and then we, at the camp as we were liberated... The Germans, I mean the Russians, they brought in some food because they confiscated from Germans, and gave it to the Jews.

Well when you were traveling around, when you were walking back to Poland, and then you were traveling in Germany, getting to Germany, how did you eat?

The same way. The same way. I was not, I was not looking for food or luxuries. I was looking for survival to find somebody.

Right, survival.

So just food enough to sustain myself.

Did people help you?

I didn't have any contact with people especially. I mean, but people that were liberated, they helped one another.

That's what I mean.

Yeah. They did.

So, were there, did you go, you know, gardens and find, pick food out of gardens?

This I did in the concentration camps. That's a different story.

Are there people who, uh, that you met, that helped you, in liberating you? You said you didn't have too much contact with people, but after, you know, you said you made your friend Blumen-, Mr. Blumenfeld, are there other people that helped you in any way?

I was very lucky. I helped myself in many ways. I had initiatives what to do, and how to go about it, and I was accomplishing because the most important thing that I had by helping is to get my education, to be able to survive and go forward in my life, because without education, you can't do anything, no matter what you have.

So what did you do, you got to your brothers. So how did you put your life together, what did you do after that?

Well, the first thing what I did, was I, I went to study and I went to learn. They had a place to stay and I stayed there, and I ate there, and they gave me food - the camp, DP camp. Displaced person camp.

Now where was that . . .

That was in Landsberg, in Germany.

And were your brothers were living in this displaced persons camp? Okay, that's what it was. Okay . . .

And I went to, and I started to, and I said not only education but [unclear] what in case you emigrate so I went to, to ORT. You heard of ORT? It's marvelous. They never talk enough about it. And I started to learn plumbing and I started to learn welding, because I said, if I get to the United States, or I go to Israel, at least immediately I will be able to work with my hands. And study at the same time. Then I had a professor and I got a package from the United States, from UNRRA or something like that. You heard of those places? They give away DP packages in the camps.

No, uh-uh. . .

So I took the cigarettes and I took the chocolate and I gave it to German professor. And he taught me algebra, he taught me mathematics, he taught me even Esperanto he said of course at that time, the time, you heard of Esperanto?

Uh-huh

That the world would speak one language. I said, "take it up, you never know." So I gave him cigarettes, and chocolate and everything else, and with the package there was very little left, and whatever else I had left I sold.

And was he, was he nice? Were the... those German people that you came in contact with very nice?

This man was very nice to me, of course in his own selfish way, but what I got out of it was education. Because I was going to go to University. I was too young. I was going to go to the university and study. Perhaps I would have been a doctor, or a lawyer or whatever it is. But I am what I am right now. That's the important thing.

Did you come in contact with any German people that were decent to you?

The people that I dealt were, I mean, was in a business like manner. I mean I didn't...

But they weren't, you didn't experience gross antisemitism.

No, they had to hide, they had to hide of course. They were scared, after the war what you going to do to them. And I was not the type to go after, I said, let them go their own way.

So, did people just sort of, like you did, you found your brothers, they just like trickle in to the displaced persons camp? They just sort of walk in?

That's right.

And that's...

They found a lot of young people in those displaced camps. Young people, they were recruited by Israelis and other people they took them on *Aliyah*, which was a, but [unclear] *Aliyah* which means an non, anunofficial way, which they took little boats from Italy and they went to, to, to Israel. But I tell you one thing, one thing I saw after the war, was the brigade of Jewish people that live in Israel they were volunteers from Ben-Gurion, you know, thirty thousand of them. And the first time I saw a soldier with the Star of David on his side, and a, and an English uniform, this was probably the most exciting thing I had at that time in my life. And at that time I made up my mind I'm going to go to Israel. I thought. In the meantime, I met a judge, lawyer, his name was Simcha Goldstein, he was one of the three top lawyers and judges in Israel. Two or three years ago that he passed away. He adopted me as his son. We ate and he gave me all the education what's going on, we listened to radios and we discuss certain things. I mean I try to get to more intellectual way, because the other stuff you pickup, whatever you want you get it. So this was good and he immigrated to Israel, and my brother immigrated to Israel, and my middle brother, he was going be the, well, the pioneer. And then my brother meet and got married and he and his wife and a child went also to Israel. And I was still in Germany. I was still studying.

Were you, were you still with your older brother?

No, he went to Israel too.

They both went to Israel?

Both went to Israel and I didn't, at that time I had a feeling. I remember as a child, we talked about the United States. And I had been longing to go to the United States and see it, and explore my life in the United States. And that judge that was in Israel that died, Simcha Goldstein, he wanted me to go to the United States.

He went to Israel and he wanted you to go to the United States?

To the United States. I had my feeling. He knew how I had felt about it. And then I asked, there was a bus coming, a truck and [unclear] was going to go to Israel. And as I went on the truck, my heart said don't, and I went down. And as the truck left, two weeks later those children came in my age, about 15 years old, they were all killed. This group, that arrived, they went to the front, they sent them to the front in 1947, 1948, 1945, 1947. Before the, you know, they attack the Israel at that time, the Arabs. And all those children died.

Wait, you mean they sent them to the front?

They send them to recruit them and soon they got in they gave them a gun, and go, and protect Israel, because...

Oh my gosh!

My brother in Israel, the middle brother, he was a very, he was doing the time before, before Israel was born, he was in private, he was in *Haganah*, he was a leader and he had a big position. I didn't even realize what kind of position. As soon as you came to Israel he assigned you where to go.

So how long were you in the displaced persons camp?

From 1945 'til, 'til 1949 - four years.

[TAPE PAUSES]

That's why I came back and asked the questions. I was going ask you about the camp, the displaced persons camp and what that was like.

Displaced person camp was each on its own, you know. As an observer coming I seen all the people. There were no, no people my age. But I made some very good friends. I have very close friends, for talking, socially and also going to concert. I love music. We use to go to concerts and . . .

Then they had these concerts

The Germans had!

The Germans did? So it wasn't really in the camp? But it was . . .

It was outside, but in, the only thing, one thing I remember is, is the composer and the director. He passed away...what was his name? He wrote Gershwin's . . . not Gershwin but, what was it . . . I can't think of it. You know, he just passed away not long ago and he had, he wrote, he wrote the [unclear] for the Pope.

Elmer Bernstein?

Elmer Bernstein came too.

Really?

Came to this camp and he conducted a group of people that knew how to play, had twelve people he had a concert for them.

Wow. . . Did they have that concert, was he touring?

He was touring.

And so you just, it was in a concert hall and you just. . .

It was not a concert hall. It was just a little hall and everybody wanted to come, not everybody wanted to come to listen to . . .

But it was for the Germans?

No, this was for the Jewish people.

Oh for the Jewish people?

Jewish, only for the Jewish people.

I see. . .

Yes. He was very young man, he was twenty years old.

Really? Wow, he had a long career. Also want to know what the conditions were like. Was there food, was it clean . . .

Well we got, you know for example, when I enrolled in the ORT, then I went to school every morning, and then I did my physical work so there was a kitchen for children, for youngsters and I was able to go and have breakfast there. And one day Ben-Gurion, you heard of Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister and he came to talk with us, with the children, the youngsters. And he was sitting next to me, like I was sitting right here, and he was sitting with me, and I talk with him. Was quite, I went

through some momentous, that come through my mind right now I never thought about. And it, life was, you know, it's what you want to make it. I was not the one to associate myself with bad people. And I try to look for education, society, good things.

And they offered those education and cultural things. . .

Whoever would look for it. . .

But they had a school that you went to. . .

I went to school there and there was some places and then I went outside, that I had to get on my own.

That's where you found the algebra teacher?

Right, right, where I sold my fruit and my luxury things that I got. So I had money to go to haircut, get a haircut, get a shower and get. . .

Could you not have done that in the camps?

No, you couldn't, you had to have some money and I did not work, I mean, to get money for. Didn't get any money.

Was it clean?

It's how clean you want it. Yes it was decent. It was decent, it was decent.

You have to be a part of that. Okay, so you, so instead of going to Israel, you decided you were going to go to America.

I applied to go to the United States.

So how did you get there?

How I got there? I applied to go to the United States, and I was sponsored by the government, because I was a teenager at that time. And they assigned me to Kansas City.

Did you know anybody here?

Not anyone, not even the air. But I found I went to the library and I found out that's the middle west. And it's developing and there a lot of Indians there.

Indians?

Indians, sure!

Did you see any when you got here?

Oh, the first one I saw on the train. I was looking for it. And you know they say in America, I mean, when I looked out, when I came to New York March 7, 1949 it was St. Patrick's Day. Took me two weeks to leave from Hamburg, Germany, and as soon as I get on the ship, as soon as I got I volunteered to work in the kitchen. I said I got to do something, I can not sit around wait and I didn't even see when I left Germany. And I worked, and I got up early in the morning at five o'clock and we were on SS [sic: USS] General Haan ship, a transport ship. There were no beds, you know just had those little things. . .

Hammocks?

Hammocks. And some people didn't work. And they were sick because there was not a stabilizing deal. And...

And how long were you on the ship?

Two weeks. . .

Two weeks?

Two weeks. Long trip.

Was that like steerage, kinda, or better than steerage? Toss up?

Toss up. It was bad. I was very lucky. Again, people like me, I gave out food. I was not the taker, I was the giver and I had something else. First time I was introduced to shrimps. And I had food, like I had food and those people didn't have any food, so it was very easy for me to digest and be occupied from morning to late at night, so the time would pass by. But it was very funny, when I arrived in the United States, we couldn't land. I saw the Statue of Liberty and I saw the lights. And I saw the glimmer and I saw all of those hopes and I said, "Who do I belong, and who belongs, nobody's waiting for me." So when I didn't know, and I was thinking through it, went through customs. I had books and books. And overalls.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

When you were going, I'm going to ask this question before we go on, when you were going to come to the United States, did they, where did you leave from?

From Landsberg, the DP camp.

Right, but I mean what, what port did you leave from?

Hamburg.

Did they take you? Did you go by bus or truck?

Well, at that time, you see, the government took over at that time, and I had to be...

The German government?

... in Augsburg, I had to go through CIA, and they took me into a camp for two days, and to make sure that I am healthy, that I am intelligent. To come to the United States was not that easy. And they, and they took me to Hamburg to that place, to the port.

Was anybody, you know, going also, people you met in the camps or anything?

Well I knew some people. They went in one directions, and I went in my own direction.

So nobody that you know went to...?

Not really. As a matter of fact when I left for Kansas City, for the United States, there were some people in Landsberg that I knew that I should give regards to people in the United States in Kansas City, and I didn't know where to go, but I arrived on a Friday. I left for 14 days as I mentioned. I arrived in New York, and from New York they took me to, about 9 o'clock to the station, and there was St. Patrick's parade, every year, 17 of March is St. Patrick's Day, can't forget that. It was very cold, and they sent me to St. Louis, and from St. Louis I supposed transfer. So I got a letter to accommodate, because I didn't speak very well English. I did take up a little bit of English in Germany to make sure not to, thank you, and this and that. And I took a train all night long. And they gave me \$10 to be able to sustain myself on the train. Well, I was very hungry, so I saw a person who was not, to going to the dining room for sandwiches, so I bought a sandwich. And every time I bought something, I gave them \$10, and they gave me change, of which I trusted them, and, and my food. So when I was hungry again, I gave, every time I bought sometime, I gave them a dollar. And I didn't know whether it was 25 cents or 75 cents. Two bits. Two bits I didn't know it's a quarter. But when I came to Kansas City I had, no I came to St. Louis and I got off St. Louis, and I showed the conductor the letter, I mean the person that took care of the trains at that time that somebody, and he say "you have to go here and here, and this is the train." And I didn't have very much as I mentioned to you. My luggage was primarily books.

Now did you buy clothes? Did they give you clothes?

No, no, no, no, no, no, no. There was no clothes when I came to the train. And I arrived in Kansas City, was a woman from the Jewish Federation. She was not Jewish. I didn't know that. Her name was, I forget whatever her name is, she was

very nice lady. She waited for me, and she said, "Are you Mr. Posmantier?" I said, "Yes. I am." The first thing I wanted know, she started to tell me "We're going to go here and there." I said, "Are you Jewish?" She said, "No." That was different, but she was very kind. She took me from there to get taxi and took me to 30, 33 on Prospect and something, and there was a home for people coming in. And that's how I arrived in Kansas City.

So what did you do? There was a home to live in?

Well that was a home for, to, to be there over the weekend. Of course it was Friday. I arrived on Friday. And I had a first time at a white bed, and there was a lady from Czechoslovakia with a daughter, and she cooked something to eat. But I was not, I did not, and then they say "You have to go to the Federation to what you want to do." Well they wanted to send me to the university, but I didn't have enough money to go to college or go to where. And I wanted to look for a job. I heard there was a job in North Kansas City by the name of Koch Butchers. Maybe you've heard of it?

I've heard, I know Koch Refrigeration?

That's the one. That was two days later.

What did you think of Kansas City when you got here? There were no Indians.

I found one on the train from St. Louis to Kansas City, and he told me he was Indian.

Was he wearing a headdress and...?

No. No. I could see he was [unclear]. And also it was a funny thing the train. Some people came over. I was sitting on one side, and somebody came over and said, "Is this taken?" I said, "No." He said, "Let me..." Whatever he asked, I didn't know. But he could sit, "May I sit down?" And I said, "No." So nobody was sitting with me. It is unbelievable when you look back and see those things. You can laugh at it.

So what did you think of Kansas City when you got here?

I found it, exploring city, it's an interesting city, and I thought opportunities.

Is it what you thought it was going to be?

Actually, I was going to be in New York. Sam Blumenfeld was going to wait for me, but he missed the boat. Maybe I would have stayed in New York, but I was glad to go where I went.

So did you think it was, is it what you expected from what you saw in the library?

I expected, I found it very interesting, very warm to me. They were very nice to me, very nice. I had nothing to complain about it. And then I went to North Kansas City on my own, on my own to Koch.

How'd you get there?

Took a bus. And I went down to see for an employment. And I came in that Friday and I met, and I went into the, to the reception place, and I said, "I'd like to see the boss." I heard of a boss in two days, you know. And she struggled with me back and forth, and she didn't know I, she said "The bus is outside." So I went out to look for it, and there was no bus, boss. Bus and boss may be the same thing. And I was struggling with this receptionist, and then two gentlemen came by, and he said, "Can I help you?" And I said, "I'm looking for the boss." He said, "Do you speak German?" And I said, "Yes." And I spoke German very, very well. I speak German today. Not *today*. He said, "I'd like to invite you for lunch." I said, "I don't want any lunch. I just want a job." He said, "Don't worry. Just come with us." And I didn't realize that those was the Raymond Star. There was...

That was what?

Mildred Mayer and Raymond Star were the two partners that Koch Refrigeration, which is the place, those were the owners. And the second man with them, with Raymond Star, a brilliant man, was a lawyer evidently, their lawyer, a corporate lawyer, and he had a limousine waiting, and I should come along. And I said, "I would like to come along with you, but I want the job." He said, "Don't worry. You'll get the job. We'll see what we can do for you." In German. And he took me to Weiss's on Broadway for lunch. He had a big menu. I couldn't, look at this, what is a hamburger. And then we had a nice conversation, and he said that I should go back and he gave me the directions how to go to take a, a streetcar or bus. And I got into Troost. That was Linwood and Troost that I lived there, nearby... It'll come to me in a minute. And I got there, and I couldn't find a place. So I took a trip, the Prospect bus, and I went all the way, and at that time, and I, I realized that I am in trouble. There was a university student, I tried to speak with him, and he said, "This is the wrong direction." Still I remember, I had \$10 at that time. I had some change from those that I got. And then I took a taxi that was around the corner where I lived. I had to go, just blank. And I came in a half an hour later. I had a telephone call from a Mr. Chester Lipman. He was the president of the Jewish Community Center. A very nice man. And he talked to me slowly that I have an appointment for Saturday to come down for interview to North Kansas City. I was lucky. I mean, lucky, anyway, I had the blessing that I had from my mother and father. And he said at what time should I be there, and he didn't speak any German. He didn't speak any Yiddish. He came from Boston. His father was a tailor, but he married into the Mayer family, and he was vice president of the company. He said 8 o'clock. You know what time I would be there. I was there at 7 o'clock, waiting for him. And he took me up and explain to me what it is, and I, remember I told you that I learned in Germany not only engineering but I also learned how to weld and how to

be a plumber. So, I, I had diplomas. I still have them - graduated. And he said, "You have a job." To come on Monday morning at start at seven o'clock or eight o'clock, I don't remember, and I had a job. He gave me a job to work with him.

So what did you do?

I did plumbing. Not plumbing, but welding. And I did condensers and everything else I put together. And at that time they had a contract with the Navy, and they made refrigerators for the Navy. Well, and I had a very good foreman, who showed me what to do. And at night I prepared my work, and Mr. Lipman and Mr. Raymond Star used to go by four times a day to make sure that I'm alive. But I did my work, and the foreman was happy with me.

So how did you learn English?

English. That man at the time, Mr. Lipman, he said that... I had to go to work – I had to go to school every night, no matter what I did. But he said, "I know a lady by the name of Anna Wilson. She is a retired teacher, high school teacher, and she will help out on your studies."

But at this time they didn't have classes set up for people coming in?

They did have classes, but the classes were so slow. [Unclear] was my teacher. But if you want to advance in your life, you have to go, and he gave me their name, that I should go over and talk with her and arrange to study, and she gave me a book to read, which I didn't know yet how to read well, but she gave me a book to read. [Unclear], and I fell in love with poetry, and I fell in love with language. She taught me. And I had to write compositions, and slowly, one by one, and then I went to this book, and I went to this school, and I studied with her. And they watched me because he said to me "This is not the place that you are going to be. You have more to offer to life than to work as a plumber." I had ideas [unclear] were very nice, exceptionally nice.

So, where were you living at this time?

At that time I lived in, at that time I lived in 3310 Tracy. I went to the Jewish Community Center, and I looked for a place where to live because I had a job. And it was Mary Wilman. Did you know Mary Wilman, she worked in the bakery. A very dear lady, and she looked me over. She asked me to come in to, to go out. She lived in thirty, no, that was Tracy, and I was in the middle of Troost, where the Center was. You don't remember this, or do you.

Yeah. My father's store was at 31st and Troost.

But this is Troost, this was Linwood.

It was not Linwood. It was a little bit farther east than Troost. Linwood and Paseo.

Right. Right. Linwood and Paseo, right. And she asked me to come over, so I went over. And the first thing she gave me an orange. And I remember, somebody gives you something sweet, she must be a good woman. She was an elderly woman. She had one room, no air conditioning, no fans, no nothing, but was clean. The first thing I looked for cleanness. And I told her what I'm going to do, and I could stay. She wanted I should stay there. And I, I never gave up this room. She never rented this place since I stayed there.

Really. Did you have any problems with discrimination when you first came here?

Here? I didn't have any discrimination, I think that's from, with, I'm a Jewish boy working among gentiles, which was, and I didn't feel that way, because there were black people, I worked, black people unloaded car loads of trees, of wood, for Koch Butchers, or whatever we needed, and also especially they had to unload the insulation for refrigerators. It's glass. It gets under the skin.

What do you, what do you think your biggest challenges were when you very first came here? You got the job, and you're learning English. What were your challenges?

I had aspirations of challenges, what do you mean by challenges directly?

Well, what did you have to overcome?

I had to overcome any fear that was there. And I knew I'm going to succeed because I like people, and people like me. So if anything came along, I had no problem to get it. I was ready.

Do you think you faced any antisemitism here?

No. As I mentioned to you in the factory, they, I had tools. I bought tools, and they put some grease on it. I mean this was, I don't know what it was, but it was a challenge then to meet a Jewish boy working in a factory. They probably never met any.

What do you mean they put some grease on it?

Well, they tried to play tricks.

Oh. I see. Grease on the handle and things.

I mean this was, but I did not complain about it.

But it probably wasn't because you were Jewish. It was probably...

It was, they knew the first time maybe that some of them the first time they saw a Jewish boy.

Or maybe the first time they saw an immigrant, you know?

An immigrant, whoever comes in, and I did my job because I prepared my work, not what he was going to give me, but I knew what I'm going to do tomorrow morning.

They didn't talk about, they didn't call you dirty Jew or anything?

Not in the front. No. No. They did make a trick on me. They were eating lunch, and I was eating lunch with them. I brought lunch from house. I made my own sandwiches, because I couldn't go to restaurant. I couldn't afford it at that time, and, yet, I made a lot of money. They gave me a, they ate peppers, and I didn't know what it was. I never ate this in my life. They opened up the jar and they, ya gotta have pepper, and I wanted to be one of those. I'm not going to be chicken, and I get pepper and it was hell.

[laughing] Head through the roof.

But I learned. It was learning. It was learning.

What do you think, what do you think you have in your makeup that made you strong enough to overcome all the things you had to overcome?

I had a will to survive. I wanted to help people that people could not help me. I have a desire to do things, especially children, if they have no education, to help them. I, I wanted to be active. I was very active in *B'nai B'rith*. I was active, and anything Jewish at that time was not a lot, but I was involved in it.

So did you belong to it at that age, at 20?

I belonged to *B'nai B'rith* and I belonged to the Zionist organization.

How did you get involved in that?

I was recruited. I knew Harry Scheskin. He was the president of the Zionist organization. I knew, he was in insurance business, what was his name? He passed away not long ago. He was with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. His wife passed away too. You would know him if I would mention his name. I was not prepared to say his name.

That's okay.

I was involved. You know, when you get involved in one thing and then you drive off.

Did you go to synagogue? Were you involved in synagogue?

Immediately to Beth Shalom Synagogue, and I enjoyed Rabbi Margolies, Rabbi Hadas. And I could learn English there, too, because English was spoken. And I was involved with the Youth Committee with Inga Silverman at that time. You heard of her? She knows me pretty well.

Still, she's still involved with CAJE. Did you talk with, did you meet, were your friends mostly survivors, émigrés?

Well I had some survivors, but mostly it was associated with English people with American people. In the beginning when I came the first few days, I met some of the people.

Did you talk about your experiences with people?

I did not discuss this. I did not discuss.

Did people ask?

I had one friend, Leo Mnookin, Ethel Mnookin, maybe you heard of their profession. And I knew the family, and he adopted me because he felt this his brother passed away, and I looked like his brother. Very nice to me, very nice. The Bodkers, you know, Harvey Bodker the first and his father and his mother before she passed away, and his grandfather, and then Leo Mnookin's mother I met. I met all, I was more associated with those people.

And they didn't ask you about...?

They asked me, but I didn't want to talk about it. I didn't way to talk. I think the time is coming now at my age that I should talk a little bit about it.

Did you talk about this with your children?

I've only one daughter.

Well, yeah, but what did you do?

I don't know. You try to tell children, but sometimes children don't want to listen. Maybe they know more about it than I do.

So you don't feel like there's more connection with survivors than there would be with...?

I have connection. I respect it. I went to any meeting they had. I know Isak Federman very well because I met him when I came to Kansas City that Saturday morning. I came Friday. I met him Saturday morning with his wife. They were living on Paseo and Linwood. And I met some nice people.

So are your closest friends, would you say throughout the years, not specifically survivors?

Not specifically survivors, although I was in contact with them. I met Jack Mandelbaum. I met, they know me very well.

They all came around, did you all come around the same time?

They came before I came. They came in '46 and I came '49. '45, '46.

Did you ever go to school beyond, you know, what, the tutor that you had?

The studying. Oh yes. I studied right here. I studied. I study till today. And the more I know, I realize how little I know.

So when did you, when did you get married?

I got married in 1957.

So we're not there yet? So you've been working, and how long did you work for Koch?

For Koch I worked for a year. Then I had the desire once, when I was a child, I had an uncle. He sold watches, and I fell in love with the pocket watch. And gave me an idea I should, I should look around. Maybe I should go work as a butcher, or work as a carpenter, or work as this. And I decided to, I heard that there was a company by the name of Stiffelman. There was a Gershon company. You heard of the Gershon Company? You heard of Lester Stiffelman?

Yeah.

And he interviewed me, but before I went for interview I talk with my master, Mr. Lipman, the president of Koch Butchers Supply, because I had ears for export and this and that. And I asked him to find out who that Lester Stiffelman is. So he called [unclear] Mnooken. He wanted to find out who they are. I didn't know what kind of company they had, but I felt I should start someplace. And I came over and interviewed, and he asked me who I am, they'll teach me, and I went to work for a jewelry company to learn what it is. It was not costume jewelry. It was gold and silver, and I started to work for them. Lorraine Stiffelman, she was the president of the Temple, first Jewish president woman. We are close, yes. Still close today. And I worked for them for a year. And we were very close. I did very well for them. I heard that there was some people in Chicago that know me from Będzin, and they

would like that I should be associated with them. So I got in touch with them, and they wanted me to come to Chicago. And I worked for Lester for about a year. And they heard that I am very good. And I started to represent, I left Lester, and they cried. Unfortunately, but there was no dislike. And I started to work for a service called [Unclear] Jewelry Company, and I was going to be a partner with them. I took over the area, and I traveled. And I did very well, but I got tired of what I was doing, and I was going to see, make a tour around the world.

You were going to make a tour around the world?

Uh, huh. In '57.

Now you worked from this company from here?

From where?

From Kansas City.

I worked for them in the area of Kansas City. Kansas City, Kansas, Missouri.

So you were like a salesman for them?

Sales representative. Uh-huh. And I bought with them, and I went buying with them. I was quite a... I learned the business. I had imagination. I got along with people very well. They liked me. They liked me. The customers liked me very much. And I liked them, so it was reciprocal.

That's good! So, you got tired of doing that and you were going to take a trip around the world?

And I worked for them, and then I worked for Service Wholesale, and I didn't see my brothers for so long, for 10 years. So I decided I'm going to make a trip to France, and to Israel, and to... I had a whole itinerary. Everything was planned out, and I went to Israel. I went to France first. My brother in France after 10 years, he didn't recognize me – said I looked different. I'll show you some pictures sometime. And then I left for Israel. I met my brother in Israel. He did very well. He had a very big company in Israel. He had a plumbing company. And the country was growing, so he did very well. But he wanted to leave because his wife didn't feel good or whatever it is. I met my wife in Israel. And after ten days...

Is she a survivor?

She survived by hiding. You know my wife, sure, former wife. And we... and for some reason or other we got together and we decided to get married. And I did after ten days, but I had to be there for three months to be able to get married because I had to prove that I am, I am Jewish and this, and they wanted to find out. I had to

go through a court and everything else. It was a nice wedding. Got married in 1957, late in '57. She came to the United States.

Did you become a United States citizen?

Oh yes. After four or five years I was citizen.

Since?

'50.

Since '50...

That's when I changed my name.

That's... you changed your name when you became a citizen. That's what you said. Was that a significant thing for you to become a citizen?

Yes. It was. It was. You know people that are born in the United States didn't realize to be a citizen in the United States is a very important thing. A country that you love and you treasure, and you can do more from this country than any other country in the world.

Do you feel like an American?

Oh yes. Absolutely. I am Jewish first.

That's what everybody says, Jewish first, and then American. Do you have any, did you develop or have any hobbies or recreational activities that you got involved in?

As I mentioned to you recreation, as far as recreation I go to conferences. I'm involved in humanity. I'm involved in many things, Jewish, non-Jewish. I love music.

You go to concerts.

Any concert. I had seasonal tickets for Philharmonic for years. As a matter of fact I'm going this Sunday, I had a choice to see Rabbi Warshauer, to go to his lectures, which are very intellectual or to go to see the Tiberius Klausner. And I promised Tiberius, we are friends. We go to *shul* together. I'm going to be at his concert this Sunday. On Saturday go to *shul*.

Have there been any post-war events that have had great significance to you, like the Cold War, Vietnam, Civil Rights, the 60s, the craziness and assassinations? I know that you're, with Israel...

Well, when I came to the United States at that time, they tried to take me to Korea. But I didn't speak the language.

Thank God!

And there was a Polish captain at the time that was American, but he was Polish or whatever it is. He was very sympathetic because I didn't, didn't know the language, and I went through so much hell, and I would've got lost. And I did not go because it was quite a thing. Of course then I lived through, conversations, lectures, as far as Korea is concerned, as far as Vietnam is concerned, so I was involved in all those things. [Unclear] after the war.

When was your daughter born?

In 1959.

And so she was born in Kansas City? You came back from Israel in '57, back to Kansas City?

In '57. In '57.

And did your wife want to come here?

Yeah. She wanted to come to the United States.

Okay. Who wouldn't want to come? And for the recording, what's your daughter's name?

Her name is, in Hebrew, Tovah Chaya Walters, but she is now Dr. Giselle Wildman. She has a son that is nine and a half years old. His name is Alex Wildman.

In light of your past experience, how did having your daughter, how did having children affect you?

What?

You know, considering what you went through, the experiences that you went through, how do you feel about having a child?

I tell you I was very happy and very excited. First of all, I never had a sister. And I always wanted to have a daughter. She's a lovely, lovely lady right now. And I was thrilled. I was, it was a God-given thing that I had a daughter, and I was a good father.

I'm sure. Is she named after any...?

She is named after my mother, Gitel, Gitel Tovah. Tovah means good.

And you say you haven't really talked very much about this with her?

I tried, but there was a time when the children didn't want to listen to it.

Yeah. That has to mesh. When they're ready to listen at the same time.

But she heard a lot of it. I tried to send her to a very good school. She went to Brandeis. She graduated the first, first classes in the Hebrew Academy.

Oh really?

[Unclear]. And she went to school when she was 16 years old, in college. Bright, very bright.

Does she ask you questions about them at all sometimes?

We don't go into too many questions. When the time will come maybe it'll be too late, but if there's any conversation, I'll answer. But I don't want to push myself.

Well, maybe she'll want to hear your tape?

Maybe. I wish she would and tell this to her son. And it would be very important for her to know this. And she herself, she should know what parents go through and how they survived. It'll help her. It'll give her more knowledge. That all of this life, that I lived through 'til now was not just given to me. I had to go for it. I had to make my place. I made my mistakes, but I cannot live my mistakes, I got to go forward and live.

That's something you definitely want to pass on.

But to listen to it, it would good for her.

How do you think that your memories of the Holocaust affect your life today?

I feel pity what the Jewish people had to go through. I feel pity what the Jewish people did upon themselves. But I have seen a lot of strength coming out, a lot of people take for example, Elie Wiesel, not that I agree with them on everything, but he's an individual, and so am I. He's writing, and I did other things. I would study to be what he did as a journalist, maybe I'd feel the same way. But in my opinion, I think he did a good job, but so did other people too. And if I got to judge every one individually. He cannot talk for everybody. There is a man, a man by the name of, that I'm very impressed, very involved his contribution, is Bronfman.

Edgar Bronfman?

Edgar Bronfman. And he sent me a picture of himself. My name is on it. It's interesting.

He's a rare man.

When he was nominated for the medal of congressional honor. I will show you before you leave. I'm involved in a lot of things right now. I have, my contribution as far as this, I made up my mind that I want to contribute something, and I made up a fund for children, and wherever they come from, Russia or anyplace, which I have at the synagogue. And the first book, kindergarten book, is given by me to those children. And every year we have about forty or fifty children from the Hebrew Academy from the synagogue and I'm involved in this.

That's great. Do you think that the things of the war affected your, your Judaism, your attitude of religion, and you say you had an opportunity to convert and you didn't have it in your heart?

Right. It proved to me the education that you give a child eventually stands fast for you, and it is strength that I got from the, from my Jewish education at home.

Do you have a favorite Jewish holiday?

All the holidays are favorite. You know for Jewish people, the only holiday they really enjoy is when you have festivities. You have Hanukkah or you have *Pesach*. When you eat and drink and you're with family, that's very important.

That's true. Are there, are there things that you did with your family, ways of celebrating the holidays, observing that you share with your family, special things that you did that you share with your family, you still do today with your family to celebrate the holidays?

I think that Yom Kippur is a very important holiday, not only for prayer, which is the only time that, you pray in your own way. It reminds of a story. There was a man that lived in a small town, and he couldn't read and he couldn't write. There were no teacher, only family, so his father taught him the alphabet in Hebrew, *aleph, bet, gimel, dalet*, and said, "When I die son, go to a big city. Go to a synagogue, and make sure you say *Kaddish* after me." His father eventually died, and the child of this young man did not learn how to read Hebrew. So he went to synagogue. And, you know, it's quiet usually in a synagogue when they say the *Shema*. And he started to say aloud when everybody was quiet, he said, *Aleph! Bet! Gimel! Dalet!* After the service the rabbi called him over, and he said, "Why did you make such noises? I mean it's supposed to be quiet." He said, "Rabbi, the only thing I was taught is *aleph bet* in Hebrew. And when I say this from deep of my heart, God puts those words together, and he knows how I feel about it."

That's sweet. That's what it's all about. That's what makes it important to you. You're... what keeps you connected. Okay. I think that's it. Do you have any last statements?

It was very nice to give me the opportunity to, if it'll help get the Jewish people together, and study, and was especially nice to be with you.

Thank you so much.

I'd like to add an important facet of this conversation in appreciation to Jean Zeldin. What a wonderful job she has done till now, and she's going to need to do. And I appreciate this very much.

You're not alone there.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]