

NATIONAL

Life stories

**LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH
COMMUNITY**

SOLOMON FREIMAN

Interviewed by Audrie Mundy

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Oral History
British Library Sound Archive
96 Euston Road
NW1 2DB
020 7412 7404
oralhistory@bl.uk

My name is Audrie Mundy, and this is Tape 1, Side 1 of an interview with Mr. Solomon Freiman, on 22nd September, 1989.

Now, I was born in Poland, 1926, the 1st January. Lived in a small place, just outside Warsaw, called Jeziorna-Konstancin, which we were a family of four children, and father and mother, grandma, like grandmother, and uncles, cousins, all lived in the same area, and my parents had a small business of selling "Schuhedaten" which means for shoemaker's, the materials.

Schuhedaten?

Schuhedaten, schuhedaten means, in German, that stuff which shoemakers use, like whatever parts. Like the nails, glue, leather, all the bits and pieces. And we were, I wouldn't say very rich, but middle of the road, normal. Father went to Synagogue on the Saturday, our business was closed on Saturday.

So you were a fairly Orthodox family.

Not Orthodox, but medium of the road, and we lived in, we lived peacefully in that place. I went to school. I finished five classes ordinary school in Poland, and, until the War came on. When the War came on, the first things the Germans did, is, they stopped Jewish children going to school, so I couldn't go to school no more.

So did you then have lessons at home with your brothers and sisters?

Not during the War, no more. Because it was getting, very, it was getting very, everything was pressurised, started getting pressurised, and when the Germans came in, they straightaway came into our little small town, they picked out a few young men, took them out in the woods and shot them.

So, none of yours, your relations?

None of my relatives, but one of the chaps worked for us in the shop, and he was also taken out in the middle of the night and shot. So, to make that everybody should be scared for them, what they can do. And then when the War, just before the War broke out, my parents, for some reason, nearly most of the town's, little townspeople, all went into Warsaw, just before, for what reason I don't know, cos I was a child still. But that made it worse for us, because when we came into Warsaw, all the bombardment and the War went on in Warsaw, over Warsaw, not on the place where we lived, because where we lived, when we came back after the two weeks War, or the three weeks War, there was nothing touched in our places.

Did you, did your parents buy a house, or rent an apartment in Warsaw?

No. No, where we went into Warsaw, I think they stayed with some family, which lived in Warsaw, we stayed with them for those two or three weeks.

You closed up your house in the village?

Closed up the house in the village and came there, and we were in Warsaw, while all the bombardment I was in Warsaw, and there was a terrible time for those three weeks, and that's a fact. A friend of ours, a neighbour of ours, got killed, in Warsaw, in the first few weeks, the first two weeks, just from bombardment, which, shrapnel hit him. And we came back to our place after the bombardment, we lived for a few weeks, or a few months, and we went on our daily life as normal as, as previously, except we knew the Germans are about, and every day they started coming into town and give new orders, new Jewish do this, Jewish do that, they used to come in and take ransom money, or there used to be "Volksdeutschen" living near us, and these Volksdeutschen suddenly came, started coming along saying that the Jews owed them money and,

Threatening?

And so they came in threatening, "If you don't pay the money, we're going to take you out and kill you", you know, that sort of thing. And this went on for a few months until suddenly came out an order that we've got to make a ghetto, in that little place. So they gave orders we should have a ghetto, so they pushed all the Jewish people who lived all around (INTERFERENCE ON TAPE)

... so they pushed all the people from the area, from the village and town, into one of about two or three streets, and they made a ghetto there from all the Jews, and we stayed in the ghetto for a few weeks.

You had to close your business?

No, the business was still, it, our business, though my grandfather's business was not in the ghetto, but our, our shop was in the ghetto, in that street, cos what they done, they took the streets which the majority of Jews lived in. And so our shop was in the ghetto, but my grandfather's and my uncles' shops, they were outside the ghetto, they had to leave their homes, and come into that area.

Was your grandfather's business the same?

No. My grandfather's, my grandfather used to sell seeds for the, for all these farmers in the area, and also used to buy up their produce of fruit and take it to Warsaw continuously, you know. He used to buy up two years of (FORCHEES ??)

And he sold them the corn, and the seeds, and the barley?

The seed, for to grow things. He sold them, he had the seeds, they were in sacks in the shop, and they used to come in and take this and this, and he always used to have them laid out on trays to show them what, how the seeds take.

It must have been a good business?

Yeh, my grandfather was quite well off, better off than my parents were, because, they don't regret it anyway.

Was that your ...

Mother's side.

Mother's parents, yes.

On my father's side they were Rabbis and teachers, so

So it was a good mixture!

But they weren't so well off! The Rabbi in Poland wasn't so well off.

Very honoured.

They were more, yes,

Respected.

Respected.

Yes. And they lived near you as well, your mother's parents?

My mother's parents. My father's parents weren't, my father's father was dead. He died when I must have been a very little boy.

Yes.

I remember them, but he was, and he was a teacher, a cheder teacher, and he also was a Melamed what you say?

Yes, a very wise man.

And he was the, in the Synagogue, you know, these sort of things. And he was married a second time, and he had a younger wife and children, and I think there were three kids from that side, but they also lived in the town, but they were not so well-off.

No.

So in fact they looked after the mikvah (Hebrew = ritual bath) Oh did they, yes.

In other words, his wife, after he died, had the job to look after the MIKVAH where the Mikvah was, see that it's clean, everything, and

Yes, and they had to move into the ghetto as well?

No, this was also in the ghetto, in the ghetto already. But this previously, two of the same kind. Now, after a while we were in the ghetto, suddenly, one morning early in

the morning, I think it was February 1940, about 2 o'clock in the morning, they suddenly drove into the ghetto, German troops, and got us out and started taking all our stuff from these, from our houses onto lorries, and this was at 2 o'clock in the morning, 3 o'clock in the morning, you can imagine the cold, February in Poland. I don't know if you have got any idea what the weather is like.

For a young child too.

For anyone! For the whole family, with the children, with babies, suddenly comes and drives you out of your, can you imagine it! And out of the homes, and onto those lorries, and took us into Warsaw, to the Warsaw, to Warsaw, and put us into some, I think they were, either they were Synagogue, or Synagogue Halls, or whatever they could find empty, and they put a few families into place like this, they would put about four families, yes. Two rooms like this, at least four families, at the most.

You weren't separated from your family?

Not there. Not there. And we were in the Warsaw Ghetto, but within a very very short time, we found ourselves destitute, because whatever you had, you brought with you was very little, you couldn't take much with you.

Yes, you had no time,

Yes, no, nothing, it was ... and so I started going back into, so we were in the War, so then they closed the Warsaw Ghetto. So my parents were becoming, everybody was becoming hungry, the whole family, my grandfather and everybody, and my grandparents still had contact with a lot of Polish farmers which he used to sell seeds, and he used to get these, and he sent me out to these people to see if I can get some food in.

Were you allowed to go out?

No, we weren't allowed to go out!

So you had to sneak out.

Sneak out through the cemetery, the Warsaw Cemetery. I used to sneak out the Warsaw Cemetery, go across a (SAPOR??) that's a (??), got back into the village, and used to bring back, a few times used to go to those Poles and collect it, some potatoes, some, you know, those things which they gave me.

Did you do this in the daytime, or did you have to wait till night time?

No, no, no, no. I went around, I was going around like not Jewish.

Oh yes.

I was a young boy just then, a 12 year, 13 year old boy, 12 year old boy, could pass by.

And how often did you have to go and do this?

Now, how I did this was quite an experience. I used to get it, you, I used to get the stuff, and then get back into Warsaw by any sort of transport I could manage, and once I got in, I got on a tram, there used to be, on one street, which used to be called Yokopova Street, in Warsaw, you could go across from one side to the other, in other words, you came to the ghetto, with the tram, it was a gates, the tram went through the ghetto, went back out on the other side, but didn't stop in the ghetto, so what I used to do, I used to stand on the, I said to my father, "If you wait I'll ..." My father said, "I'll wait here, here and here and as you're passing, throw the parcel out and go on, and then get out on the other side." I done it a few times.

That's clever.

And we were successful a few times to do it in the beginning, but then I went once, and as I was walking along from one of the village, the village around there, some kids which used to go to school with me, were working on the road, with the, cos I was about 13 by then, yes, and they were working on the road, recognised me, and they shouted to the German, "Look, there's a Jew here walking about." So the German came up to me, and he says, "You know you're not allowed to be here. Why are you here?" What could I say? I didn't say nothing. I kept the Fifth Amendment! I didn't say nothing. And so he said, "Okay, well, I'm going to take you to the Police Station." So he took me to the Police Station, local Police Station, then I came into the local Police Station, they put me downstairs into the prison, closed me up, and a few hours later, I met the, the sergeant from the Police Station came in, and he came down, and he suddenly saw, he saw a young Jew, a young boy there in prison, so he straightaway started saying, "What am I going to do with you, with you?" So he asked me who I was, I told him "I am this and this and this, you know the people." Because he used to know, from, know people from before the War, it's a small place, the local policeman, the local sergeant, so when I told him who I am, he says, "I don't know what I do, but I'll have to do something." Because if the Germans come in the morning, into the Police, to check, what's been happening, because they used to check up on the Police, yeh, the Polish Police. "If they find you, they'll shoot you." So he got another policeman, a young policeman, early in the morning, at 5 o'clock in the morning, before, before daylight, and he got me on the, on the, it was a little train running there, and took me back to the ghetto gates, and in I went.

Ah, that was wonderful!

I was saved in that way, he saved me that way, because they wouldn't have, the Germans would have come in the morning, there would have been no more me! And since then I didn't go no more, my parent wouldn't allow me to go any more.

Very wise.

Wise. I don't know if it was wise, but they were scared I go, in case they catch me and shoot me. So I didn't go no more. And after a while, it was getting worse and worse and worse, and everybody started, it was already becoming starvation. Everybody had nothing to eat, and we knew what's going on, we could see what's

happening in the Ghetto, so my parents said to me, "You'd better, you know, a boy of 13, try and do something. So save yourself." So I again got myself into a place where there was a hole in the wall, and out I went.

Through the ghetto wall?

Through the ghetto wall, and I, my father told me, "If you go, as far as we know, there's still an uncle living in a place called Sobyen". That's the other side of the Vistula where we used to live. Also about 30 kilometres away from Warsaw. So I went out from Warsaw, and I got myself, and I got on a river boat on the Vistula, and started going, with a friend, another young lad, and I don't know, one or two stations before, I decided to get off the boat, and my friend said, "No, he's going to go on."

Your friend, did he come from the ghetto as well?

Yes, he was in the ghetto too, but he was also from the same town. He was a child, also a boy from, the baker's son.

Yes. But you left the ghetto together through this hole in the wall?

Yes. Yes. We left together.

You planned it together?

Yeh, we planned it together, to get out.

Yes.

Anyway, he went on and I never seen him again. Apparently, afterwards I heard that some, that they caught him on the way, on the boat. Anyway, I went off the boat, and I walked in, into that little town, where my uncle used to live. This was a uncle, who I would say, my grandfather's or my father's side, a brother. So when I came there, he was still there, but as I came into that little town, two or a few days later, they started driving the Jews out from there. So I said, "They're not going to catch me again into this lark", so I went out into the villages and I started singing, and going round the villages begging, living in, on the fields, tramping, yeh? It's not, the farmers, outhouses, wherever I could, I slept, and wherever I could to get food. But food was already easier to get once you're in the villages, cos you went up to Poles, you sung, you, you do something, sometimes you did something, and they gave you food.

And they were all quite friendly, or not friendly?

Yeh, they saw a young boy walking around, "Poor boy", so they didn't, they didn't make out much, so long, and I used to go round, sing at the doors, like here Christmas Carols, and they used to give me something to eat. It's a fact, I had a letter recently from a woman who said, who said in the letter that she used to beg her father that he should take me in, but she so I should stay with them.

I mean, didn't they say, "What is a young boy like you doing, wandering about?"
Didn't they say, "Where is your home?"

They knew I was Jewish.

Oh, they knew.

They knew I was Jewish, but they didn't, it didn't affect them.

They weren't anti-Semitic.

They were anti-Semitic, some were anti-Semitic, not all were anti-Semitic, not every person anti-Semitic, some were anti-Semitic, some were not, but in the villages they, you must understand that a Polish farmer is a very primitive person.

Yes, and friendly.

He can be friendly, unless he is instigated, yes? And to see a young boy walking around, it didn't affect them. And they were, so they gave me a piece of bread.

(INTERFERENCE ON TAPE)

You were telling me about escaping from the ghetto and,

Yeh, I've already been in Sobyen. I came into Sobyen, and then a few weeks later the, Sobyen was being disbanded and sent, they sent the Jews somewhere else, and I run away again, into the villages, I kept on begging for a living, and so it went on for a while, then I suddenly found myself a job. There was a German woman, Volksdeutsch, who apparently knew my grandparents, so I went up to her, and I spoke to her, so she said, "You can look after the cows for us, and sleep in the barn, and you'll get food." And I stopped there for about a few, it must have about a month, or two months, until the Russian War broke out, with the Russians.

That was

1941.

'41, mmm.

And then suddenly they, their daughter married one of the soldiers, German soldiers, who went, who was on the Russian Front, and he came back on leave, and he found there was a Jew living with them, so he told them, "You'd better send that Jew away otherwise they'll shoot him in front of your window, and you'll be castigated as a Jew lover, so she told me to go, and I went. So I found another Pole which I, in a place called Magnuchev (??), found another farmer, by the way, the other lady, the German, was called Muller.

Muller, the lady who gave you the job to look after

Yeh, the German woman, Müller. And then I went into that farmer, and I started talking to him, and he said, "If you want to help, you can help me in the, on the farm." And I stayed with that farmer for another few months. I was working with him in the fields, I was going out in the fields with him, taking the horses, you know, like a farmer's boy, until he had a brother, which, for some reason, I don't know why, he was shot in the street, he was shot in the village, or outside the village, and he got very scared, he didn't know why, for why his brother was being shot.

The Germans shot him?

Yeh. They shot him, not because of me, but, maybe he said something to the Germans, anyway, they killed him. So he said to me, "You'd better leave." And I left, and I started going in the villages, go round begging, until somebody told me there is a Jewish Group working in a place Mialov. And I went in there, this was a Fire Station, and there were some Jews who were working on, on canals, and I worked with them, on those canals. This was already under German supervision, and it was open.

What sort of work did you do on the canals?

Digging. Digging canals for, for, for, so that water runs through the side of the road, not in the middle of the road, and there I, within a very short time, I organised, with another friend of mine, we have got an order, and we've got to bring in bread, how do we get bread in, make a business of some sort, to bring back bread into the Camp, and we'll get some money out of it. I had some money, so we decided, both of us, I'll go out one night, and we'll go to a bakers, and went out, get bread, bring it in, we will sell it, and the following day he will go and get it. Now, it was our job to go and get bread in for everybody. So they had something else.

Did you live in the Fire Station?

Yeh, everybody lived in that Fire Station, the whole lot. It was a big big big hall, and it was rather I can't remember exactly, but I think there was straw there.

You slept on the floor?

The floor, yes. And one day, I couldn't get up in the morning, I don't know why, whether I was tired or something, because you had to get up that much earlier, before you go to work, to go and get that and come back. So one day, I said, "You go today, and I'll go tomorrow and the other day, two days in a row." Anyway, he went, they caught him on the road and shot him. And it was mine.

Yes, it was your turn.

And to go then, I didn't go.

You felt terrible about that?

I felt terrible about it at the time, but my money went! The money which we had, which we were dealing with, so I had no more money to go anyway. In the end, I stopped doing that. Then I worked there for a while, and within a very short time, we must have finished the canals there. They came, the Germans came, they took the whole lot away, and they took us to Kojignitza a town called Kojignitza. There was a ghetto there still, and from there they organised other transport and they took us to a place called Skarjisko-Karminha - I'll write it down for you.

You were all young boys?

Still, young men,

Or older men?

There were a few but not many, you know, the age wasn't very much different, let's say from about, I would say from 13 to about 19, 20, the people who were there. Occasionally had a father with them, some people had parents with them.

And I suppose you'd all been doing what you'd been doing? Wandering around the countryside?

No, no, most of them, I don't know how they got in, but they were there. And they got us into the Skarjisko-Karmina.

(END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE ONE)

... in to the Camp, came into the Camp Skarjisko-Karminha, this was a big Concentration Camp. There, when we came in, first of all they have told everybody to give anything we had up, any clothing, we had to leave everything in a pile, photographs, the photographs I kept back, they said, will be, will be shot. If you got any diamonds, jewellery, watches, anything valuable, you've got to give it up. If we find it afterwards, you will be shot. Naturally, some took chances, I didn't, I was a child, I was still about 14 years of age by then. I didn't know what to do, I had photographs, but I didn't have much money, but I had a few pennies, which, the few zloties I had wasn't worth anything.

You had pictures of your family?

But I had pictures of my family, and I gave them up, and I'm still ... it hurts me now, that I should have taken that chance, rather be shot and not give up the, I shouldn't have given up my family pictures.

I'm glad you're here though.

Yes, but maybe should have even, they didn't shoot everybody, you understand? Some of them got through. They hid it somewhere. And they gave us paper clothing. In other words, you got a suit, a jacket and a pair of trousers made out of paper. Paper, you know paper sacking, like,

Very tough paper.

Tough paper, you know.

Fibre. I know.

It was in blue.

A jacket and trousers?

A jacket and trousers.

Nothing underneath?

Nothing underneath. We got that, and shoes, they still left us with the old, whatever one was wearing.

Was this winter time, cold time of the year?

It was in Autumn.

Autumn.

And they picked, and there was a man with the Germans, and they picked people to work at different factories, different places. I was picked to work in the "Ferg Behr" (??) B.

In a what? Werk B. A Werk is a factory really, but -an area. In other words, this area was called the "Factory B. "Factory A", "Factory B", "Factory C", and I was picked to work in Factory B, and sent there, and when I came there, there was barracks, we all went in the barracks, and from the barracks they picked different firms, there was firms in each barrack, they had firms, people were making ordinary bullets, people, making anti-aircraft bullets, people who were working for, making food for " latkes" like a corn flakes, from potatoes. Corn potato, from potato flakes. What other factory was there?

Armaments and food.

Oh, it was all armaments, except this was just this

The food.

The place where they were making these things. Anyway, I was picked to do 2cms. anti-aircraft bullets. It wasn't a very good area. You felt if you'd been picked to make the potato ..

You would have been happier.

Those who were picked on this were better off.

Yes.

Anyway, and this, I worked there from one, I was at that place (TELEPHONE CALL).

Start again.

Anyway, I was picked to do this job, and I worked there for a while, and it was terrible. I was getting hidings every two hours, beatings. I couldn't produce, first, I couldn't produce the norm, which they wanted me to produce.

So many an hour?

Yeh, we had to do about 200 bullets an hour. I couldn't do it, and I got, every two hours, I got a hiding, until you get used to it, after a while, but in the beginning I couldn't do it, and the worst part of this job was, there was oil spraying at you all the time, so you got saturated with oil, and wore it on your bodies, and you started getting sores all over your body, and these sores started to fester, and they were hurting, so naturally, not enough food either, you know? Food was half a litre of soup, small piece of bread a day.

Once a day, you had food?

We had bread, we had in the morning, black coffee, half a litre of black coffee, no sweet, no milk, no nothing, then at lunchtime we had a soup, and in the evening we had a slice of bread, and coffee.

You had to, how many hours did you have to work?

We used to work at first 12 hours a day, and naturally, most of the people, within a very very short time, became ill. And when you became ill, every day there was a, every day they used to take people out to be shot, in the woods. Me, personally, I was taken out about four, three or four times to be shot, but I do not know why, there was one German, Master Leidig, every time I was taken out to be shot, he used to come up and he used to, when they took him out at the end, he used to come and check, and every time he said to me, I should go back to the machine.

He liked you?

I don't know why. I don't know why, but other people killed, themselves. But me, I did that, because he picked me into his, into his job, from the beginning, and I must have been the only small, smallest at the time, and every time they were taking me out, he used to call me "Kleiner", you know what "Kleiner" is?

Little one.

Yes. Go back to the machine. And about four times, four or five times he saved me. He took me back to the machine, and I worked in this place for about, must have been about a year.

You know this skin, all your sores and everything on your skin, you didn't get any treatment? They wouldn't give you anything?

No, no treatment, what we used to do, what they used to do, is they used to take us, from time to time, to the "Werk Bauer" (??) to another area, another area of the Camp, which had baths, and we used to go there to bathe. Now, in that Werk, ah! I had two uncles, my mother's brothers, and my mother's sister's husband, they were there, but they came back from Treblinka. In other words, when they were taking the people out, to wherever they lived, yeh? To be gassed, they ran away, I don't know how, and they came back to that Camp, and they were there, and they were shoemakers. Two were shoemakers, my mother's brothers were shoemakers, the other one was a, by profession a baker, but he had a shop in our town, of also groceries. And they were in that Camp. One day I heard, and there's witnesses now here, friend of mine, who were in that Camp, that these two brothers, the Schusters, one was called David, and the other one was called Herschel, and the other, the third one was Meier), there were three, three, they were more, they were older than me, my mother's brothers.

Yes, your uncles.

My uncles, yes. Apparently they cut off, they had a job in that other factory to look after the belts, the machine belts. Being shoemakers, and the belts were made out of

leatherr, they gave them that job to do, to look after that, but you know, if those things go round continuously, they stretch.

Like a fanbelt.

Yes, like a fanbelt. So, from time to time, they had to work the machine, an ordinary machine, you know, you got that belt, and from time to time you've got to pull it together, and reclip it.

Yes, shorten it.

But they took the pieces off, and put them in their, wherever they could hide them, and took them back into the Camps, and they were repairing shoes with it, for themselves and for other people. They were shoemakers by trade, and they caught him, and they hung him in that Camp, both brothers, and there are still here, people who witnessed the execution, in that Camp, and I mean, from our group, who were in that place.

That was two of them?

Two of them.

The third one?

The third one died of starvation apparently, much later he died. I remember seeing him, he told me that the two other, two uncles had been killed, executed and he is by himself still, but it's a fact, when he came to my place, he still brought me something from the other Camp.

Amazing!

Afterwards, I heard, somebody told me that he died of starvation. There was, he died there of starvation. Then I was in that Camp, and after a while in that Camp, it got better for me, I got easier work.

You were taken away from the,

From the,

Armaments?

No, still armaments, but instead of working on machines, let's say four machines which, a machine which was producing a certain hole, I used to be a capstan operator of that, yeh?

Yes.

Instead of doing this, they took me to a little machine which was just making a little hole in the bullet in between, where the gasses go through.

It wasn't so difficult.

It wasn't difficult, you sat.

Yes, more comfortable.

No, if you could sit by a machine and do this all the time, it was easier than standing by a machine, where you completely, all the time, on the, using energy, you see, we weren't getting a lot of energy, and if you were using it, you quicker went to nothing. Anyway, this job was easier, and I also worked on this job, also for about 6-9 months, maybe longer, can't exactly tell how long that is, and that was a terrible time in that Camp, for other people, people they were shooting and killing, and once I remember, they came in, people from Krackow, and there was a young couple, and he was a policeman, a Jewish policeman, from Krackow, when they brought them in, with his young wife, and they all came in, and we were still, at that Camp, man and women were still together. Not in the same barracks, but

Near it.

Actually in the Camp, there were some barracks on this side, and some barracks on this side, were women's barracks and men's barracks, and one day, I believe, that couple tried to escape, and they found they got, and they caught them, and they brought back and executed him, took everybody out.

To watch?

To watch, and they executed him. And I got a jacket from that man.

From the young man.

Yeh, with the blood still on the.

You mean, you went and got it, or somebody gave it to you?

No, no, no, somebody called me, and says, "You can, you can take this jacket."
Because you needed clothes and everything was soaking wet, imagine these paper suits, exaggerating, but they tore, in the end the seams used to go, I remember, I had to find somewhere a piece of wire to wire it up! So,

Then it would scratch your skin.

The skin, it wasn't, it was a terrible time anyway. And it was cold, I remember, there was big snows there, we had those barracks. Anyway, they killed that sergeant, that policeman and his wife, and it's still in front of me now, how that, and I remember that the German, he went out, I can still, that German I see all the time, who went out and shot them.

Did they separate men and women? Married couples?

As I said, they didn't live together, but they were ...

They could visit each other?

Yeh,

So they planned this escape.

Visit in the evening if you worked during the day, used to be able. Anyway, they planned that escape, they tried to escape, and they caught them, they shot them, they killed them, finished. Then we were in this Camp for quite a while, yeh, there's another incident in the same Camp. Now, I was with a friend in that Camp, his name Ishe Wergman, Ishe Wergman, and we were like, we were sleeping on one bunk, one next to the other on the bunk, there we were sleeping like on bunks, you know, one on top of the other.

Bunks.

A bunk, mmm. So one day we were working, he was also working in the same factory with me, the same place, and Polish, there was there, some of the Masters who were above us, were Poles, and he came up to him, and said to him, "Look, if you get me a German uniform, there's two loaves of bread for you tomorrow here." So he knew, you know, the Germans used to come into the factory, used to come in, got their uniform on a hanger, and they were going round looking at everything, and he went and nicked that, that uniform! And he nicked that uniform, but instead of taking it straight to the Pole, he couldn't, so what he done is brought it back, and put it under my straw. You can imagine, we all got back home to the barracks in the evening, the Germans are going mad! A uniform has been stolen by the inmates! And they look everywhere, they got us all out, standing on appel, and they look everywhere, they go round with bayonets to all the beds. They never found it, it was under my straw.

They didn't look under the straw?

I don't, they looked, but they, they couldn't go round the whole, every bunk over, yeh? So they must have looked, just this particular one they left out!

You've got a charmed life!

Yes, anyway, they didn't find it! They were going mad! Cos they knew what it's for, you see. Anyway, the following morning, we gave that uniform to that Polack.

And you got your loaves of bread?

We got the two loaves of bread! But would they have found it under my straw, I wouldn't be here to tell you the tale now, I can assure you.

And why your friend chose your bunk to put it in,

Because, I'll tell you why. If I used to steal something, he used to eat, if he stole something I used to eat.

I see, that was a good arrangement.

So we had, we were like brothers.. You see.

Yes, he was about the same age as you, I suppose?

About a year older. It's a fact that he overlived the War.

He did?

Yeh. Used to get hidings all the day, used to beat him up, but he came to Israel in, now, this is much later, we will come to this. He overlived the War anyway, I saw him a few years ago in Israel.

Oh that was good.

I'll tell you the story about him afterwards, the way he got to Israel, because he was afterwards in Camps, in British Camps in Cyprus, for a long time, the Concentration Camp under the British, after the War.

Well, that would be interesting to hear about later.

So,

You got your loaves in return for the uniform,

Mmm, yeh, we got the loaves, and forgot about it, finished. Then we were in that Camp for quite a while. In 1943 when the Russians started, the end of 1943 the Russians started pushing into Poland, yeh?

Yes.

Didn't know what to do with us, because they had to, we could hear already the artillery going, from the Russians, and they had to get rid of us, they had to do something, they didn't want us to get freed, especially with they, they had workers, so they started taking us on platforms, on these cattle trucks into Germany, and they took me to Buchenwald. Now when we came into Buchenwald, a whole, you can imagine, a whole train load, from all the Werks, not just one Werk, but every, every day taking a train load. We came into Buchenwald, and again, undress, on the outside, leave everything on the outside, you're going in to bath. We thought that is our lot already, because we already knew that they were gassing people.

Yes.

Yeh? And they drove us into these, they started, there were hairdressers there, cutting the hair, you know, and they smeared on some stuff, it was burning like Hell, you know, also, the pubic hair and the, it was burning, a kind of disinfectant, but we came out on the other side, stood after a bath. They didn't gas us!

It was a bath?

It was a bath, was like showers, we went out the other side, and then when we came out the other side, they started issuing us with different clothing. This time we got those clothing with the, with the lines.

Oh, the striped pyjama things.

The striped pyjama things, so we got in Buchenwald, the striped pyjama things. It was clean.

And it was material?

It was a material, yes, a sort of material, it was no more the paper.

It was luxury!

They were luxury! And let me tell you, in Buchenwald we had, four, I was four or six weeks in Buchenwald, it was luxury, because all they kept, we had more bread, we had more, no, soup was the same, but bread, we had double the portion of bread in Buchenwald than what we had in Skarjisko, and it was like a holiday camp! Specially the children, the youngsters, there were already a lot of Communists there who were running the Camp, and they, when they got the kids, we were separated from the older people, into special barracks, 67 Barrack, everybody was in, yeh. And within about 6-8 weeks they sent us out to work camps, and sending us to different places, from Buchenwald. They sent me to a place called Shlieben.

Shlieben? Also in Germany?

Yeh, that's East Germany now. And in that Camp, I wore, they put me to work on Panzerfaust, you know those anti-tank guns.

Yes. Panzer tanks had these guns on them?

No, no, no, no, this was against, against tanks.

Oh, against the Panzer tanks?

Mmmm. It was called the Panzerfaust.

Panzerfaust?

A faust is a

A fist.

A fist, yes. And we started working, but youngsters, we still got the easier jobs. I was put on a job to fill the, fill in the powder into little cartons, this goes into the tube.

Oh, the gunpowder.

The gunpowder, goes into the tube, and then this fires up the ... but there were other people who were making the bombs, the actual bombs. One night, I was on, I was on day shift that time, in the middle of the night, somebody blew up the factory!

You mean one of the workers?

Yes, I think we had some Italian Prisoners of War there, which were against the Germans, and somehow the whole factory went up in the air, and about 140 Jewish people who were working that night shift, in that factory, in that particular night) were all blown to bits. And I was sleeping in the barracks, I mean, I was on during the day, and at night, I was sleeping in the barracks, the whole barracks collapsed on top of us, from the explosion of the factory.

Yes.

And a lot of people got injured.

You didn't?

I didn't. And yeh, a lot of people got injured, and the next few weeks we had to rebuild that factory.

Rebuild it?

They sent for every person that was there working, through assessments, and these were young Latvians, and Estonians, young kids, , and everything had to be, not on the double, on the fourth.

Double double?

Within four weeks, we had the factory back rebuilt. We did trails, you can imagine, because the trains used to come in there to the factory, to take away the, the armaments. Anyway, within about 4 or 6 weeks we had that factory built, but during that time they killed at least half the Jews which were doing it.

Just shot them?

Killed from the, all the time on the, if you, if you turned round, they would do with you as they liked, you were a fly on the, like you swat a fly off. And this was already, this must have been 1944 already, going on to 1945, I mean, the end of 1944 I'm talking.

You were about 16 then, were you?

Yeh, I was about 16 by then. And we worked there, and I worked there still until when they heard the Russians were moving again, against them, yeh. They didn't know what to do with us, they started 'schlepping' us, so they started taking us to Theresienstadt.

To Resendstadt?

You've heard of Theresienstadt? No?

No.

Oh, you don't know nothing! I can see that you're not very familiar with the whole thing.

Tell me about that.

This was the Camp, this was the Jewish, supposed to be the Jewish Model Camp, Theresienstadt, you've heard of the word.

Well, I've heard more of Auschwitz and Buchenwald and Treblinka.

Yeh, yeh, yeh. Anyway, so they took us there. But four weeks, they took us, they took, the whole journey it was about, from Schlieben to Theresienstadt I would say, what, might be about 100 kilometres, it took four weeks to get us there on cattle trucks. Three-quarters of us died in the cattle trucks.

Cos there was no air, I suppose?

No air, no food, no, no nothing. Occasionally they used to give us, let us have some water, or a piece of bread, but, but by the time we came to Theresienstadt, there was about a quarter of us left. But in Theresienstadt, they were taking us to be finished off.

You knew that?

Yeh, they were already taking us to be finished off there. But, events went so fast then, yeh? First of all it took then four weeks to get us there, because they used to bomb the railway lines, the Russians, the British.

And the Americans?

They couldn't, they couldn't put us through, you see. But in the end they got us there, it must have been about two weeks before, three weeks before the end of the War. And they got us into Theresienstadt. When we came into Theresienstadt, the Germans were, could see, so had taken the last, as we were coming, the Germans were already tearing off their eagles from their arm, and putting them on their chest. You know why?

Why?

The difference was that the person who was wearing it here was an SS man. If he was an SS man, he was an ordinary soldier, like, like a Wehrmark Man. And they were changing over the eagles, so that they shouldn't be, cos they knew what, what is coming to them. They knew their crimes, you see. And they started from time to time, they disappeared. Suddenly you could see another Wachman, you know, the people who were guarding us, they were disappearing.

They just deserted?

They just deserted, because they could see what's happening, they could see it's nearly finished. They knew if they're caught with us, that is their lot, you see. But they knew, if they get mixed up among the ordinary population, nobody will know who they are, who they were, and they concealed the crimes, you see, because if they would have been caught with us, by any other troops, the Russians would have shot them straight away, because they knew what they were, yeh? Or, they would have given us the guns and say, "Deal with them as you, as you like." And they wouldn't have, but they disappeared.

(END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE TWO)

Now, as we were saying, all the guards disappeared, and we were left inside the Camp, and we could hear a lot of things going on in the night, this was between the 7 and 8th May, 1945, and we were in the Camp, and for a while it was quiet, they sentt us in Theresienstadt, and within a, there were still guards outside, but suddenly we could see even them disappearing, suddenly we could see only the Czech guards, the Germans were disappearing, and this was in the evening, and over night, I went to sleep as normal, we went to sleep, and about, when I woke up in the morning, and we started looking outside, and we could see Russian tanks appearing.

That must have been an exciting moment.

On the outside of the Camp. We were not let out from the Camp straight away, until the Russian guards came in, and they started saying that they are now, that we are being liberated, and the first thing we, I myself, and other friends of mine, which I was together at the time, tried to get out, but they wouldn't let us out the first day. But the second and third day they did let us out, and we started going on the rampage of going to get food, food. Go out to see the world, and I and two friends of mine, we went to a place called Leitmaritza, and in that place, we went round, and we were looking for, for stores, for shops, what we can

That was a village near Theresienstadt?

A town.

A town. Was that a long way away?

About two to three kilometres, and we got into a magazine, and that magazine, there was lots of conserve.

By magazine, do you mean a shop, it's like the French word, 'magasin'?
Magasin, yeh. Magasin is not a shop it's a store warehouse, and in that warehouse there was all sorts of things, there was conserves, there was clothing, there was clothing, there was, a whole lot, goods.

Wonderful. A wonderland!

Wonderland! We, I don't know, we, each of us got a sack, we filled it up with all sorts of things, these sacks, and we got out. We come out Leimaritz, and we come, we were youngsters, we were only about 14, or 14½ years of age, we couldn't carry, we were weak still, so we couldn't carry the goods back to the Camp! So my friend, his name was Bazsam and his sister, and me. So he suddenly realised, and he could see, there was standing, a motorbike with a sidecar, nearby, but it belonged to a Russian soldier, but he left it, and the ... some was standing, and he left the starting things with it. So he said, "Let's get, let's take that." Anyway, he took it, and we put our sacks then into the sidecar, and the three of us got on that motorbike, and he couldn't drive it! So he nearly killed us, turned it over, with us!

Were you hurt?

No, we were not hurt, we were youngsters, you know, it was a joke, really! Anyway, we, when he turned it over, and I started swearing at him, and he started calling ... "You don't know how to drive it, why did you take it?" Anyway, and we left the motorbike where it was, and we started again, on that road. We couldn't carry the stuff it was too heavy.

Were you a long way still?

Well, we were about three kilometres from the Camp, so we didn't know what to do. Suddenly, a cart with four German officers are driving by. They looked like they were already disarmed, and they were driving somewhere, I don't know where they were driving, but they were driving, and suddenly my friend and me run up to them, and we said, "Runte die scheisse", they should get off the and they went, they like, like "lemeles", four German officers went off for us.

That's extraordinary.

From that cart, and left us the cart with the horse.

Were they frightened of something? I mean, you were in your prison stripes.

We were still in prison uniforms.

Mmm, so they were afraid.

I don't know what they were, but the thing is, to show what people who were previously Gods, suddenly took orders from us, in rags. They went off the cart, and they let us take it away from them, and we took that cart and the horse, and we started going home, going back to the Camp. We put our sacks on it, and we started going back. But going down from Leitmaritz, towards Theresienstadt, there was a bridge, the Elba runs across there. The river Elba.

Ah, the Elba, yes.

And this was going towards the bridge, going down a hill, and as we weren't the best drivers with horses or things, he couldn't hold the horses, there was two horses, he couldn't hold them, and that thing keeping going down, in the end, don't know, something was standing in the way, I think it was a Russian soldier on a horse, and as he couldn't hold it, the whole thing turned over into a ravine.

And you all fell into the ravine?

Yeh, but nothing happened to us. So we stayed, so we left the cart and the horses in the ravine, went back up on the road, and as we go up on the road, there was, you know, the roads, the European roads around a road, then you got two, no, you got like where the water runs, like

The ducts?

The ducts.

Yes, channels.

Suddenly, I looked down, and in one of the ducts I see a Panzerfaust. A Panzerfaust is a 'ein'...., so I tried to show my friend, "Look, this I was making in the other Camp, I was making the Panzerfaust." So I tried to say, "Look," what was this thing I used to call him? (Jabele), this was the.....

An affectionate name?

Nickname, nickname. I said, "Jabele..... look at myhere are the things I used to make". And I made it. And I thought to myself, I went down into that ravine, picked it up, put it on my shoulder, and pressed the button.

You fired it?.

Yes. And when I pressed the button, good job I was in that ravine, cos would I have been, I could have hurt him because he was near me. The only thing it did to me, it deafened me. And that's a great big thing, jumps out and it fires, I don't know where to. I think it hit the ground. The only thing it done to me, at the time, it made me deaf. Couldn't hear.

For quite a long time, I would think.

For a while, until I got back in the Camp, and I had a syringe. I think I went into the, at that time already, the Russians were already getting organised inside the Camp, there was a doctor, and I went in, and he says "The only thing to do for you is to give you a syringe." And a blooming great thing, it nearly blew my head off! But you know, with a pump.

Didn't anybody hear this great explosion when you fired this thing?

It was in the country, it was on a road, it was hardly any people, fields, yeh? Except us three. But anyway, we fired it, I remember it making a bang in the ear, but anyway, the main thing was for us to get back to the Camp.

Yes, with your goods.

With our goods. We're standing on the road and waiting and waiting for about a few hours, suddenly we see a convoy of Russian soldiers with artillery, moving on the road. By the time they came near us, we, we, we picked our hands up, they stopped, so we asked them, "Can we have a lift up the road?" So they said, "Okay, get up on one of the", cos we were walking around at that time, already, with red flags, youngsters, with a red flag, we made ourselves up. Yeh, we made ourselves up a red flag, because we were the freed people. And we asked them they should take us a few miles down the road, as they were going the same way, cos the road weren't, there weren't such a lot of roads, not like here, now, you know, if the road went that way,

we knew it must go near to the Camp. And I begged they take us, we rode on the barrels, we put the stuff up, you know, you know what artillery units look like.

I've never seen them.

You know what they look like, they've got a little, it's like a lorry, and from the lorry there's a, this hang on, and the artillery bit is on two wheels, and they pull it.

Like a trailer.

Trailer, yes. Anyway, we put our stuff on, our sacks on, and we went, and we got into Theresienstadt back. We came into Theresienstadt, everybody started asking about the, they saw what we got, "Where did you get it?" Anyway, "Oh, they didn't getting stuff." In the meantime, we had food, and a lot of the conserves were pig fat.

Pig fat? So you couldn't eat any of that?.

But people were hungry, they'd eat anything. So they started eating, and it upset their stomachs, and we made ourselves ill. I wasn't ill, but some of them were really ill from it, because I gave it to everyone to eat. Because some of them got themselves ill, I didn't get ill, but a friend of mine did, she's now in Brighton, she did get ill. And in the end, we went round, you know, we played football, we tried to get, we got friendly with the Russians,

Yes, it was all much ...

And then the Russians started supplying us with rations to eat, and they cleaned us up. About a week later they came in, a whole lorry full of old clothing, you know, but still in better condition.

Yes, and I suppose medical supplies?

Medical supplies didn't come that much, but some people were ill, and they were laying in the hospitals, in the hospital there. The Russians came in, and they tried, and then suddenly you could see people were coming from other places, find out whose alive, suddenly, everybody started looking after, where to find somebody from their families. They came there, people from us went, went out, some went to Poland, some went here, there was a kind of a movement already. Then the Russians came, and the Russian officers, most of them were Jewish, a lot of them were Jewish officers, in the Russian Army, at that time, and they kept on asking us how we do, how we're going to go, what are we going to do. At first I didn't know, a lot of my friends went back to Poland. I decided not to go at that time.

Why was that? How did you make that decision?

I don't know. I wanted to go to Palestine, and I knew once I get back to Poland, I'll get myself settled back in to my, I go to my own town, you know, and start looking for the properties with everything, and there will be nobody, and I didn't know if I find anything or not. So I decided, "No, I'll stay here. I don't know, and I wait, and

maybe somebody come", and I said, "I've got to eat, I go to Poland I've got to find food for myself straight away. I've got to find somewhere to live." Money we didn't have. So I stayed where I was, and they organised us all sorts of things like we used to play football, we, we started recuperating, food started becoming a bit easier, with the Russians giving us rations.

You started, really, to enjoy, to a certain extent, to enjoy life a bit.

Yes, but it was very very sad, because where I was very saddened, I could see other people finding a sister, brother, somebody coming from, you know, hearing, you know, somebody came, and they said, "Look, I've seen your brother somewhere, there and there." And I couldn't, I couldn't find nobody, so I was very very depressed at the time. And I said to myself, "No, I'll stay here and see what is happening." Then there came from the Russians, they started asking, anybody wants to go to Russia? So I said, "No, I don't want to go to Russia, I'd like to go to Israel", Palestine at the time, so they wrote me down that I want to go to Palestine. The State pay all those things. Then a few weeks later, about a week later or something, also came a delegation from England.

From the Government?

Not from the Government, from the Jewish,

Jewish, Zionists or ...

Pardon? From that time, the Jewish Refugee Committee. they sent Leo Baeck, you know the rabbinical college and they started asking us where we want to go, and we, I myself, I put myself down for going to Palestine, and a whole lot of others did, but then they came, and they said "Look, apparently we can't go to Palestine, because the British Government won't let us into Palestine, but what I can do, if anybody is under 16, or 16, up to 16, can go to England."

So?

So I registered.

You said you were under 16?

I said I was under 16, I wasn't under 16, no, I was already over 16.

You must have been 19 by then?

About 18. So I said, "Okay, I'm under 16." Anyway, the next, I went for a commission, a, like a, where they examined you, and you wrote in and waited.

Where did you have to go?

There was a kind, like a, when they registered you, you had to go to, there was a doctor,

You mean actually in the Camp?

In the camp. Examined everybody, and then put you on the list, yeh?

Yes.

And we didn't hear for a while, and everybody was in the Camps, we were really doing nothing, but walking around there still. We could go, we could go out a bit, and walk, there was a Russian guard on the Camp, but if you tried really hard, you could get out. It wasn't like a strict,

No, but what would you want to get out for? You didn't have any money.

We didn't have any money. We went out to see the local population, and within a few weeks, they said, I think, "All those which have been registered to go to England, we are taking this and this day, are going to Prague." So they took us off to Prague, put us into, I don't know what it was, hotels, or some sort of accommodation.

Quite comfortable?

Mmmm, few to a room, and, it wasn't really comfortable, but it was, and we started going out in Prague, all over the streets, and they gave us cards, little chits, we could go and eat in restaurants, yes, cos money we didn't have.

That was like money, for eating, anyway.

Eating, yes. I think they did give us some sort of a pocket money too. We went out and we were riding round on trams, you know, and in a town, being to be in a town. We were already dressed a little bit better from that old clothes which they gave us. Yeh, I remember, I was walking around in a pair of trousers which were plus fours!

That must have been funny.

It just, people used to wear them, a pair of plus fours! And I had a blazer, not a jacket, but it was quite, I looked like a mountaineering fellow! In a pair of boots! And there was, you know, and we were walking around, enjoying ourselves in Prague, going round, looking at places, you know. And about a few more days, they came, they said, "From now we are going to England." Going to England? Okay. Well, everybody standing there, in the, the places where we slept, and they said, they were sending ten aeroplanes over for us and we're going to Prague airport, you know, and take us to England.

That must have been very exciting?

I've never been in an aeroplane. Anyway, they took us in the groups, made us in the, each few rooms, into a group, 30 in a group, and these 30 people, took us on, I can't remember, on lorry, or however they took us to the airport, or busses, I think, took us to the airport. At the airport there were 10 English, I think they were Lancasters, those, there was no civilian airlines then.

They were bombers.

Bombers! And they put 30 in a plane, and we're sitting on the ribs, you know, they used to have a little bench on the side, and we started, I remember we landed in Holland, or Belgium, can't remember exactly whether it was Holland or Belgium, for refuelling.

This was still 1945?

Oh yes, yes. 1945, no, that's right, 1945, around, this must have been around August, the end of August. Anyway, we landed, I remember, either it was Holland, on the airport, either it was Holland or Belgium, I think it was Belgium, and we went off the planes in Belgium, and we went into a hall, and Belgians brought some food for us, I can remember the first time we saw really lovely white bread. I remember meeting some Poles there..

Who came to the airport?

No, the Poles who were in the Air Force, and we started talking to them, because we couldn't speak English, but we could speak Polish still, and they were telling us "Oh, but the Jews in England are not the same like you Jews, like the Jews in Poland. They're completely, they're different, they're not, they don't walk around with long, they're not that religious."

Paiyes, you mean? (Hebrew word for sidelocks worn by Hassidic Jews).

They're not that religious, they're not so pious, they're a different sort of people." Anyway, we didn't take any, I mean, we took notice of it, but we didn't do nothing about it. And then went back on the planes, they refuelled the planes, we went back on the planes, cos in those days, from Prague to Holland, it was already, they needed to get down, maybe they needed to pick something else up, I don't know, and then over to Scotland from there. We came into Scotland on an airport, I can't remember what airport it was, I can't remember the name of the airport, I think it was Kendal or somewhere, it must be near, near, near Scotland.

Well, there's a Kendal in the Lake District.

Yes, yes. And from there in the middle of, when we came in it was late at night, it was in the evening, and they took us down to a place, Windermere.

Yes, well, that's in the Lake District.

The Lake District. And there there were barracks, it was a whole camp and each one was given, you know, each group was given a different barrack, and there were people already waiting for us with, with food, and they took all our clothing.

They gave you some in exchange?

No, no, no, yeh, they gave you a pair of underwear, no clothing.

Was this.....,

And we went to, and we went to sleep, we knew they were already Jewish people, Madrichim, which were looking after us. Certainly we didn't want to give up our clothing, even food we had, we kept sardines, and all these sort of things, so that we, and we stayed. In the morning I woke up, other people didn't woke, when I woke up in the morning, and I had no, no clothing. I went out, it was still nice, because it was early, it must have been the end of August, beginning of September, it was beautiful, the weather was nice. I got up, I come out, I see there's mountains round us, and it's a nice area.

Its beautiful.

Beautiful area, so I started walking, in my underwear! And so I, I walked up to a house, I could see there's a bicycle there, so I asked them, "Could I, could I", I couldn't speak English, but,

You mimed,

But I would like, I would like to go for a ride on the bike. So they said, "Okay, take it." And I went for a ride, started climbing on that road, up and down, it's hilly there! The roads are, and I was riding around in my underwear!

Well, it was summer!

Couldn't speak a word of English! And then I gave back the bicycle, and I gave back the bicycle, and we were in the Camps in the morning, started giving us clothing, each one. Apparently they didn't give us clothing, they were scared we might,

Run away?

They didn't know what, they didn't know with what they're dealing.

Yes, it was,

We were a rough lot, you see, we were rough. We would steal if it was necessary, you see, they didn't know what they're dealing with. They thought we were children, more children, the girls who were looking after, were younger than us. Can you imagine, they wanted to bathe us and all that sort of thing. It was quite fun! And, and there came

'madrichim' (ie Hebrew word meaning "leaders the people who were coming, who were there already awaiting us. Some of them were younger than us.

The people who had organised the Camp, who organised this,

They, they sent people, helpers.

But were they Jewish people who'd organised ...

Jewish, Jewish, Jewish people there, all from Habonim, from, all Jewish, Jewish Organisations, you see, and they asked who is, they kept on asking who is very religious, who is semi-religious, who is not religious, where we want to go. Anyway, a few weeks we were there, we had quite a good time there, in Windermere, we, we played up the staff a lot, we done lots of things which unconventional. We started going out with girls, the Christian girls there, you know.

That's not unconventional!

No, but, you know, we were trying to, you know, for all sorts of reasons, and we went to cinema, you know? And we, for example, we used to go swimming in the lake, and we used to go down, there used to be boats where people used to hire out. We didn't have that much money, so we said, "The Governor from the Camp will pay." We used to take the boats, go out for hours, or riding. It was, we weren't supposed to, cos who's going to pay? They gave it to us afterwards, they asked the money to the, at that time, it was a Mr. Friedman was Camp Director, you see, we said, "He will pay."

And he probably would!

And he did, I am positive he did. We used to get up to a lot of mischief there.

But did you enjoy all these,

Oh yes, it was quite, it was quite a, it was quite a, you know, mischievous, in other words, kind of amusement, we

(END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE ONE.

Yes, within a few weeks we were still in there, suddenly they started dispersing us to all different types of hostels. They went to, I went to Ascot, and some of them to Manchester, Bedford, Loughton, Stamford Hill, Glasgow, all different places, but I went to Ascot. In Ascot was a Habonim hostel, there we started to learn English, we used to go to families. We used to be invited to families for all sorts of things. We used to go to London, to shows, Yiddish shows, ordinary shows, football matches, riding on boats on Henley, going on bicycle rides, one family in Reading has given us a few bicycles, to the Hostel, so we went on bicycle rides, on trips, on bicycles.

What was a typical day that you would spend, I mean, would you go to school?

No, in the morning we used to have classes. We used to get up in the morning, we had, we used to go praying, or we used to have lessons how to pray, anyway, then we had classes, we had breakfast, and after we had the classes, after classes, we had lunch. In the afternoon, we went out a bit for all sorts of reasons, used to play some football, or used to go riding on bicycles, we used to go into Ascot, the village, and around, visiting people. It was the day, how we used to spend it.

Can I ask you something about this learning to pray, you mean, somebody came round, - a rabbi?

No, no, there was a man, one of the, of the Madrachim (Hebrew = leaders), was a man who was a little bit more religious, and he taught us how to "lay tefillin", (part of Jewish ritual) "davan" (Hebrew = to pray) and how to behave in a Synagogue. I mean, he even taught us how to conduct a Service.

You had a certain room in the house,

In the house, which used to do that, yes. Then we used to go out, we used to enjoy ourselves. And we used to get a half a crown a week, pocket money. There wasn't enough, because at the same time, I think I started smoking, and cigarettes at that time, was about 10 for 20, 10 pence for 20, and we, we used to go out with girls, we used to enjoy what young, what young people do with their time. And after a while, they started dispersing the people, some people went to families, which they had found families in London, and they went to live in London. Me, I went to Ascot, I was staying there for a while. From other hostels people used to come to us, we used to play football, we used to go to the other people, we used to play games of football with them. We used, they used to come from Gateshead, trying to make us more religious, and we wouldn't, we tried to convince them that maybe too religious is also not a very good idea. That's how we spent our time.

And this was all organised by the Jewish Refugee Committee?

The Refugee Committee, yes. And then after a while, they started dispersing the Ascot Hostel, and they were making things small there, in the hostels, in other words, to get some of the hostels back some money, for other things. And we, I went to live in Ascot, in Stamford Hill Hostel. At Stamford Hill Hostel we were doing exactly the same thing what we were doing in the other Hostel, playing cards, going to cinema,

and then we started looking for job, started to disperse us into kind of jobs, learning trades.

And you could speak some English by this time, I suppose?

Yeh, a little bit, yeh. And I started learning a trade, others started learning trades. We used to protest that we didn't get enough money.

What sort of trade did you learn, yourself?

Well, before that, in, while we were in, I'm talking about Ascot, we found a few of our boys that there were races there, and people used to come in with cars, they didn't know where to park, so we took them into our place, to let them park, we used to get 10 shillings for that, for parking the car, so suddenly, we suddenly became rich.

For how long were you allowed to do that?

So we had for cigarettes, only one or two, or three days in the year, it was around June time. Then I went to Stamford Hill, and we enjoyed all the same things what we enjoyed in the other place, then I started to go to learn a trade, and I went, I started to learn to be a furrier.

A furrier? Mmm.

And I joined a firm in Leman Street, for 30 shillings a week.

I mean, this was something that was suggested to you?

Yes.

But you didn't really choose?

I took it up.

Yes, but did you feel, "I must learn about a?"

A trade, yeh, I wanted to learn a trade. I didn't know what, but anyway, I started learning a trade, and when I started learning a trade, I was getting 30 shillings a week, it wasn't enough. I was living in the Hostel, it was like a pocket money.

You managed.

We managed, and they started, then, after a while, I left that job for 30/-, I got a job for £3 a week.

Were you apprenticed to somebody?

Apprenticed, yes.

For a certain length of time?

Time, yes. Then I started earning £3 a week, still as an apprentice in the fur trade, and I lived still in the Hostel, they stopped our, when we used to earn 30/- a week, we used to get another 30/- from the Jewish Committee.

To help you pay your rent,

Yeh, well, more or less, we were allowed, we should pay about £3. And then when I started getting £3 a week, the Jewish Refugee Committee wanted to stop 30/-, so we thought that we should have a little bit more money, maybe they shouldn't, so we used to cheat them. We used to tell them, we used to make pacts with the, with the employers, they should put us down, that we are earning less money.

And they usually agreed to do that?

Some of them did, although I found out afterwards, although they were agreeing with us, they told the others, they told the, the Committee they were paying us more.

Oh, that wasn't very good was it!

Because I've got a file on myself, that they say that we cheated.

This file comes from the Jewish Refugee Committee?

Yes, that they knew that we were getting more money.

Yes, but they allowed that.

They overlooked it.

Yes.

And bit by bit they took it off, and they wouldn't give it to us! If you used to cover something up, they used to say, "Hey, you must take the money back. No more." In the end they stopped paying us, then we, from the Hostels, we started going to landladies to get, to start living on our own. As I was earning £4½ a week already, so I, myself, took a room with a landlady, used to pay them £3 a week for the upkeep, and we used to have 30/- for,

For everything else.

For, it was quite a lot of money those days, 30/-.

Was this room in Stamford Hill?

Stamford Hill, yes.

And you worked, did you work in Stamford Hill?

No, I used to work in the East End. I used to work in the East End for, I was getting £4½ a week, and I spent £3 for the digs, had £1½ over,

Yes, for your fares and your food.

And I was, used to look after myself. I had a routine with everything. I used to go Saturday morning, I used to go, take my old, all my dirty clothes to the Launderette, there used to be Launderettes in those days, with a list.

Laundries you mean.

Launderettes, laundries, yes. That's right, not launderettes, laundries. I used to put down, 2 shirts, 2 pair of underwear, 2 handkerchiefs, undervest, you know, every week I used to have a Saturday morning, this was the job to go

You used to take it to the laundry, and then collect it,

And then collect it there. For the rest of the week, to wear. And I always used to walk around smartly. I'm more now for casuals than those days. Those days we weren't casual that much.

More formal in those days.

Yeh, we used to wear a suit, or we used to wear a blazer, but always neatly dressed. And we used to go in the evenings, I had some friends, we used to go out, we used to pick up girls, used to go dancing.

Where would you go dancing?

Oh we used to go, I used to go to Tottenham Royal, I used to go to the Lyceum, the West End, the Astoria.

Hammersmith Palais?

Hammersmith Palais, what other ones in those days?

They were very popular those places, weren't they.

Yeh, but most was the Lyceum, and the Astoria was the most popular one. Tottenham, the Tottenham Royal,

Tottenham Court Road?

No, the Tottenham Royal,

Oh, Tottenham Royal, in North London,

Yes, North London, yeh, cos we used to live there, so we used to go there. Yeh, then I got a job in Woodstock Street, off Oxford Street, in a, with a furrier, as a cutter, and I worked there for a while, and I was getting £5 a week already. And from there I decided to go, there was a, after the War in the West, there was the War in Israel, I decided I should go and look for my family in Israel maybe, and help out whatever it is they, I worked on a Kibbutz, it's best to say that. And I worked on a Kibbutz, and helped out generally with the, what it was necessary to do there, and I was in Israel for 9 months.

You stayed on the same Kibbutz all the time?

Oh, kibbutz, and I went to private people there, we were walking around, we were, and then after 10 months, I came, 11 months, I came back to England. I went back to a job, was the fur trade, I was getting £7 a week.

This was 1949 by now?

'49, 1950, yeh, and I, again we did all the things what young men do to enjoy yourself. You go dancing, you go to work, you come home, you have a good time. You go on holidays.

And where were you living now?

I was living in Stamford Hill, in a place called, with a lady, in digs, with a lady, Mrs. Marks.

You stayed in Stamford Hill.

Yes. And we used to go out, I used to have friends, Jewish friends, Christians friends, we went out, we went dancing, we went, we went to political parties, we went to all sorts of, we protested for all sorts.

Demonstrated?

Demonstrated.

And did you go to Synagogue, because you were interested

Not that much by that time, fell away, it fell away, the religious, Rosh Hashanah (Hebrew = Jewish New Year) Yom Kippur (Hebrew = Day of Atonement) used to go to Synagogue, but the rest of the year we didn't bother. And after a while I used to go to the Club, we used to have a Club, the Primrose Jewish Youth Club, in, Belsize Park, we went to there, we used to play football, we used to have a team, we used to play football, we did all, most of the things which all young, young people do. We used to go swimming, we used to go on holidays, we used to go bicycle rides, and we used to go dancing, and then I met my wife, Mazibid.

Where did you meet her, at one of these Clubs?

I met her in the Primrose Jewish Youth Club, and we got married, we went out for about a year, we got engaged, then some of my friends started getting married, and I got married.

Where did you get married?

We got married in Bayswater Synagogue, and

Well, did her family, did she have any family?

I had no family myself.

But your wife?

My wife had a mother. And so we got married, we, we started, so we got ourselves a flat in Chelsea, and we lived in Chelsea for a while. I used to go to work, my wife used to go to work.

What sort of work did your wife do?

She used to work in a shop, a hire shop.

Hiring clothes?

Wedding dresses.

Wedding dresses, yes. And I myself, used to work in the fur trade, and then suddenly I went, and there we had our first child, a boy, we had, and we, you know, we lived in Chelsea then, and I got some compensation from the German Government, and I put a deposit down on a house, cost 19/6d a week, for two rooms, a kitchen, a shared bathroom.

That's amazing, isn't it.

19/6d a week. And we both worked, saving, we, until I got that compensation from Germany, and I altered my job, then I stopped going, I stopped being a furrier, and I joined the Organisation, GUS - Great Universal Stores as a traveller.

Was that Wolfson?

Wolfson, yes. I start working there, at Wolfson. And that was a time when I bought my first car, or van, and I started working for Wolfson, and worked for them for about three, three, three years. And I was doing quite well, and then I decided one day, I thought to myself, look I've worked so long, let's see what we can do. I opened up a little shop, in the Caledonian Road, and wasn't very successful.

What sort of things did you sell?

We used to, we used to, we went in for the same thing, hiring out wedding dresses.

Yes, so you were able to work in the shop?

My wife was working in the shop, and, while I was still working in whatever I was doing, but it wasn't very successful, we were hardly making a living out of it, we were hardly making it pay, it was a bad time at that time, unless you had the right position, you couldn't make it. After a while we gave it up, we gave that shop up, and I got my money from the German Government, compensation, so with that money, didn't spend it, I just put it down as a deposit on a house, in Mill Hill. Bought my first house, I had £800 or £900, or £1000 I had there, schemed a bit, but I had a car, and I sold the car, and in the end, I had enough money to put down as a deposit for the house, and I bought a house for £3,000.

In Mill Hill.

In Mill Hill.

And this was in the fifties?

Yes. This was '53 '54, '53, '54.

Still, that was quite a lot of money in those days, I suppose.

Yes, yes it was, I was only earning about, I was earning that time, about £12 a week, £12 a week plus a car, they gave me a car, so I sold mine, and I had enough money to put down a deposit on a house.

This was when you were working for Wolfsons, they gave you a car?

Yes. Then they gave me a car, they wouldn't give me a car at first, I had to work with my car, you see, but once I knew I was good, and I could make money for them, I said, I demanded that I should get a car from them, and use the car for my money, which I had the money from my car which I'd bought previously, to put down a deposit on a house, otherwise I wouldn't have bought the house, I couldn't have bought a house. I bought the house, took a mortgage of £2,000, I put £1,000 down with the money which I had from Germany and from the car, by 1956 it was already. We had a child, and within a very short time, working for Wolfson I also found that it's not 'tachniss'. You know what 'tachniss' is?

Is it Hebrew or Yiddish?

It's a Hebrew word.

Yeh, it's something, I know the word, but I can't translate it.

It means it's not a very good

Arrangement?

Arrangement to work for other people, yes?

Yes.

Cos you don't make, you're too busy working, you can't, can't make money, or you can't ... and I started working on my own in the same business, what I was working for Isaac Wolfson, and I was building myself up a round.

Selling.

Selling goods, yes. And I was working in that for quite a while, then suddenly somebody came along, I had a, I saw an advert in the paper, I should, that somebody is looking for a partner to work on the markets with jewellery, ex-custom jewellery, this sort of jewellery, form a Company and become a partner to him.

You mean to buy,

To work markets, to work markets.

What does "work markets" mean?

The jewellery.

You mean to go to the, and sell,

To markets, yeh,

Sell the jewellery,

In an open market, yes. And I went to visit him, and so I thought it's right, my wife didn't, my mother-in-law thought it might go wrong. Anyway, and we started, I started working with that man, it's the first time I started earning money. I realised what it is to earn big money. And we started earning money, and used to go, sell, oh it went on for a while, then, then a whole group came along, a few of them are friends, and we suddenly decided we're going to open up a, a group of property, buy property. So we bought a few properties, one after the other, for the Group. There was 20 people, each one put in £1,000, we had £20,000, we put it into the bank, we borrowed money from the bank, we built up a property group.

To buy houses.

Yes, to buy houses, we were letting them out and earn money. And this group went on for a while, we already done very very well, suddenly, a bad time came in, and we divided.

You separated? Dissolved the,

We separated, the, we dissolved the Company. When we dissolved the Company I bought one of these houses, from these houses, and naturally, the people who are

living in it, are paying off the house, well, while I borrow the money from the bank, and the house got left with me.

Where was this house?

That was Kew Gardens.

Oh really!

And then I decided I'm going to move to Kew Gardens from Mill Hill, so I sold that house in Mill Hill, and I bought another house in Kew Gardens, and from the two houses I made a hotel.

And it is there to this day, that hotel?

The hotel is there, but I haven't got it! I made a hotel, I built up that hotel for 20 years, it was a good running business, and then I sold it, and bought another house, and that's how I come to be here.

You've done many things in your life, haven't you.

Oh yes, yes, but only because I always was alert that something's got to be done by yourself, you mustn't rely on other people, because if you rely on other people, you will get nowhere.

Well, you had to start, when you were 13, to rely on yourself.

Yes.

Build up a life for yourself.

And from this I built up whatever I have, what I have to now.

(SHORT BREAK IN TAPE)

Now, all that we have done so well, and we still look in good conditions, I think it's got a lot to do that we belong to a Brotherhood, which is called the "'45 Aid Society", which we meet each other every week, sometimes twice a week, and sometimes three times a week. And whenever we meet each other, we like being together.

The '45 Aid Society, is, you all survived?

We're all survivors, from the Camps.

From 1945.

From the Camps.

That's why it's called '45.

Yes, yes. And we are very friendly lot, and we mix a lot together, and we meet each other, and we keep it like a family.

And you can reminisce and talk about

And we can talk about whatever we want to talk from the past, or, we talk a lot about it too, and we, and I found, as far as I can see it, that I have been to this Sternberg Centre and I will listen to some people, older people who came here, and a lot of them have got problems with all sorts of things, that they need this, they need psychiatrists, a psychiatrist, we don't need it, not our lot. Apparently because we have got a very close group together, and we meet each other, and that, it's like a family.

It's comforting.

And it's comforting. We, we like being with each other. We like them to visit us, and we visit them. We have, we have reunions, we have all sorts of things, we go even to give lectures. We go to Poland, we go to wherever we want to go on holidays together.

I would like to hear about your recent trip to Poland.

Yes. And we, from this group, I think that we are keeping more sane. Although we have lost our immediate families, this was a newly-found family, of the Group, and I feel, because of that Group, that maybe I am where I am now, it helped me a lot, to where I am now. And I think most of them have done just as well, maybe, nearly as well, and sometimes more than well than I did.

Well, that's wonderful to hear.

But can you tell me about your recent trip to Poland? I believe you took some young people.

Yes, recently, in the last few months, I was taking a group of 23 students to Poland, and took them round all the places where they very much appreciated, and they can understand more what the Holocaust was all about.

Yes, you took them back to your village?

I went and took them back to my village, I took him to other villages, to see what happened in these towns where they were mostly Jews, and there's none Jews, and there's no Jews there, I took him to Auschwitz, I took him to Birkenau, I took him to Krackow Plaszow, I took him to, I took him to Majdanek, Treblinka, Warsaw, the Warsaw Ghetto, I explained the Warsaw Ghetto, cos I was in it.

He was non-Jewish, the student?

No, the students were Jewish, yes, but University students, and they very much appreciated, they said without me taking them round, they would have never

appreciated the trip, or they wouldn't have known what to see. Yes, I came with them, they very much appreciated my presence with them.

Yes, it must have been a great advantage.

So will you do some more, similar lecture tours?

If it, if it comes along, and somebody asks me, I will do it.

Who organised this one?

The Jewish Students Union.

At London University.

Yeh.

Yes.

No, it was London University, the Jewish Students Union, they've got a Union.

Oh a National,

There's a National, yeh, National Jewish Students Union.

(END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE TWO)

END OF INTERVIEW