Spring 5-1974

Moses Sommer, May 1974

Moses Sommer

ORAL HISTORY OF AMERICAN JEWS BORN IN EUROPE PRIOR TO 1914*

Interviewers: Stephen Berk, Assistant Professor, History Department

Lucille W. Brown, Instructor; Assistant Cataloguer, Schaffer Library

Union College
Schenectady, New York

M.S. - Tarnau, Poland (Western Galicia)

* A major portion of this research was performed under a grant from the awards Committee of the Union College Humanities Faculty Development Fund:

Interview with Dr. Moses Sommer, Tarnau, Poland, at his home in Schenectady, New York. Interviewer - Professor Stephen Berk.

Side 1

000-029 Population, size, ethnic and religious composition of Tarnau

030-069 Religious practices, languages and education of parental family

070-116 Fathers business

117-268 Respondents education, secular and religious

269-343 Presence of Hasidim in city; relations between Hasidim and other Jews

343 - end Economic make up of Tarnau; Jews and non-Jews. Relations between the two groups

Side 2

000-113 Continues with his education combined with question of anti-semitism in Tarnau

114-194 Joins Hashomer Hatsayir; describes activities; discusses Zionism in Tarnau

195-249 Returns to problems of Jews in entering professions in Poland

250-289 Zionism, the Bund, Mizrachi, Poale Zion, Revisionists

290-323 Communists, Polish nationalists

324-373 Awareness of anti-semitism elsewhere in Poland and Europe

415-end Discusses Hashomer Hatsayir in more detail

Side 3

000-038 Decides to become physician & stay in Poland despite restrictions on Jews

039-045 Discusses self-identity of Pole vs. Jew

046-173 Goes to medical school in Montpelier, France

174-251 Economic conditions in Poland, 1928. Relationship between depression and anti-semitism

252-306 Feelings about rise of Hitler in Germany. Disbelief in what was to come

307-389 Decides to come to U.S. by '37 due to restricions against Jews practising medicine in Poland

390-end Parents see no urgency and remain in Poland despite possession of visas

Side 4

000-060 Family education, conidtions in Poland generally

061-144 Feelings towards Russia and Russian Revolution

INTERVIEWER S BERK

L.B. Want to talk in there, talk in there and we'll see if it works. What's you name?
M.S. This is record.
L.B. Right.
M.S. Moses Sommer.
L.B. All right, stop.

INTERVIEWER S BERK

(Tape off)

L.B. O.K.
S.B. Could you tell us your name, please.
M.S. Moses Sommer.
S.B. And, could you give us your age.
M.S. 62.
S.B. 62.
L.B. 62. I'm trying to think. He was born before 1914, right.
S.B. So, you were born in the year 1912.
M.S. 1911. I was going to be 63 in October.
S.B. Can you tell us about the place where you were born, the town?
M.S. Well, the town was 400,000 people; 40,000 people, about half of them were Jews; and the Jewish community was very divided, into many segments.
S.B. This is some of the things we are interested in. Can you tell us about them?
L.B. Here it is on the map, Steve.
S.B. The city is (Tarnau.)
M.S. Right.
S.B. In the western province, the western part of the province of Galicia.
M.S. That's right.
S.B. Now, can you tell us something about the Jewish community in Tarnau?
M.S. Well, the way I remember it, there were quite a number of segments of the Jewish community. There was the Orthodox segment. There was a ghetto, a self-imposed ghetto by that time, it was not an official ghetto. Also, the Jews, spoke Yiddish only, practically nothing else. And, there was a group which was educated, a professional group. And, most of the Jews, though, many Jews were merchants. Many were workers.
S.B. So, the community, the Jewish community, was approximately 50% of the city?
M.S. That's right.
S.B. Now, what about the other 50%? What was their nationality?
M.S. They were all Polish.
S.B. All Polish. Now, where, in what segment of the Jewish community, would you place your family?
M.S. Uh, well, my father was, what they called in those days, a dycha, dycha means German, you know. He did not use a razor, but he shaved, he had a goatee, and he shaved himself with clippers. That was uh, uh, not circumventing the ritual; the ritual says you are not supposed to shave, but the way they interpreted it was you could shave with clippers but you couldn't shave with a razor. So, he was in between, uh...
S.B. Now, you say he was in between. In between what?
M.S. In between the Orthodox and the completely emancipated, you know, people who were still, who were, considered themselves part of the Jewish community but primarily because they were Jews, but not necessarily because of the religion.
S.B. Now, why was he called a dycha?
M.S. Well, "dycha" was the expression that I heard several times, I suppose the influence of the Germans, you know, German culture. Dycha means "German".
S.B. Now, did your... but, how did your father manifest this German culture? Did he speak German?
M.S. Well, everybody... he was educated in German schools, he was born during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. And, he was tutored, I guess, his father was a merchant of flour. He, himself, inherited a family business; his brother also was a flour

M.S.cont. merchant. So, he was very fairly well-to-do, and he was tutored in German. He didn't go to school, public school, but he had a tutor who taught him how to read German, how to write German, and also he spoke and wrote Yiddish, and read in Yiddish.
S.B. Now...
M.S. In other words, he, he, when he was born, German was the official language and the Jews learned the German; and they learned to read it, to speak it and to write it. And, also, they learned Hebrew and they learned Yiddish. Yiddish was spoken in the house.
L.B. It was?
M.S. Not in... well...
L.B. Yiddish was spoken in the house?
M.S. Not in our house... only between my mother and ~~her~~ him.
S.B. What did you speak with your father?
M.S. Polish.
S.B. You spoke Polish with your father?
M.S. I spoke Polish to him, and he would an... he would speak to me in either Polish or Yiddish.
S.B. All right. Where did you learn Polish?
M.S. In school. And from, you know...
S.B. From the street.
M.S. From the street.
S.B. And, your father, I assume, learned Polish the same way?
M.S. He learned Ploish just from his business, primarily.
S.B. Two questions related to your father. One, you say your father was in the flour business?
M.S. Baking flour.
S.B. Baking flour. Now, was he a wholesaler?
M.S. Wholesale.
S.B. He was wholesale. So, he would buy the flour...
M.S. From the mills.
S.B. From the mills. And who owned the mills?
M.S. Well, he bought them from various mills, from all over Poland. I guess it would be bought from brokers, through brokers, and he would get shipments of, you know, carloads, railroad carloads, and they would be delivered from the railroad to his... either directly to the bakers, or to the shop for further distribution, in 200 lb. bags.
S.B. Did he have a warehouse?
M.S. Well, he had sort of a warehouse...
S.B. It was a storehouse?
M.S. It was a storehouse, right.
S.B. And then he would sell them both to Jews and to Gentiles.
M.S. Right, primarily, yes, both to Jews and Gentiles, but primarily to the Gentiles, though, because there were more Gentile bakers than there were Jewish bakers.
S.B. And your uncle was in this business, too?
M.S.. My uncle was, several uncles were in the same business.
S.B. And, your grandfather was in this business as well.
M.S. My grandfather, that's right. And, I don't know about his father.
S.B, Now, in terms, you said your father didn't shave with a razor, clipped the beard for religious reasons.
M.S. That's right.
S.B. Now, how religious was your father?
M.S. He was very religious. Sabbath was observed, and we observed all the... well, the business was closed on Friday afternoon, and always, he always went to synagogue, in the evening the candles were lit, and we had Sabbath dinner on

M.S. cont. Friday evening, and he always went to synagogue on Saturday; and, of course, he smoked but he didn't smoke on Saturday, and he couldn't wait, you know, until the stars were out so he could smoke. And, he had...
(Loud dog barking)
...but he wouldn't touch the switch.
L.B. You had electricity, then?
M.S. We had electricity by that time. By the time I was 9, we had electricity.
S.B. You had, when you say you had electricity, electric lights?
M.S. Electric lights.
S.B. What about telephones?
M.S. We had, he had a telephone at his business, a crank telephone. That was about, I told you about, 1920, between '20's and 30's.
S.B. But not at home, no telephone at home. What about automobiles?
M.S. Were no automobiles, I think I remember, one or two taxis; and occasionally one of the nobility would just come, that would be later, in the later 20's. They would dashing through the streets, you know, and everybody would scatter. But, maybe one or two or three, I remember when my uncle from the United States came to visit, in 1927, they hired a taxi, so there was quite a few to here, to take them from town to town.
S.B. Now, what about your education? Describe your early education.
M.S. Well, I went to public school, elementary school,..the system there was that you, at the end of the first four grades, you had to make a choice. You either continued in, for another three grades in a separate channel, or you went to a gymnasium. The general education would end either in the fourth grade or in the seventh grade. There was really no compulsory education, not as far as I know.
S.B. Did you go to a Jewish school, or did you go to a public...
M.S. No, there was a public school. And, after 4 years I entered a gymnasium, which was a high school.
S.B. ANd, how old were you then?
M.S. Right after I started, I suppose I was about 11. At 11 I went to Gymnasium. I also, the same way as here, was attending a cheder for about 6 monthes; and then, after that, I had a Hebrew tutor.
S.B. Now, let me get this straight. You started out in a public school, like a public elementary school, is that right?
M.S. I went to the public schools all the way through.
S.B. Now, the gymnasium, you consider a public school?
M.S. It was also a public school.
S.B. Now, your father did not pay for that education?
M.S. No,
S.B. Can you tell us something about the curriculum in the school? What did you study?
M.S. (Dog barking). Let me... I think maybe I should check...
L.B. O.K. (TAPE OFF)
S.B. Can you tell us something about the curriculum of the school?
M.S. There were 3 gymnasia in Karnau, actually 4 or 5, but 3 gymnasia for boys, and one for girls. They were all slightly different. I went to this, what was known as Classical Gymnasium; which had Latin for 3 years, 5 hours/week, and Greek beginning with the third grade, which meets for 6 years, also about 4 hours a week, A foreign language which in our school was German, several hours/week, and then the others were Polish history, Polish language, Geography, Math, and History. Well, History was several years of Polish history and General history.
L.B. Was the language of instruction Polish?
M.S. Polish, right.
S.B. So, where did you learn your Polish? Did you learn it in the elementary school?
M.S. No, we learned it before we even went to school. It was the same way as you... (Silence, laughter, a visit from the dog?)

INTERVIEWER
S BERK

167. S.B. He came here because of the food (the dog)
M.S. Uh, we learned it the way you learned English here. We spoke it, we spoke it playing with the boys on the street.
S.B. What about any science? Did you study any science in the gymnasium?
M.S. Yes, we had science; biology, physics, chemistry. Curriculum would be similar to the curriculum here, except that, ah, there was study on languages and especially on classical languages. Now, some of my friends would go to the other gymnasiums, and one of them was neo-Classical, they had a little more math and
168. fewer hours of Latin and Greek. And, the third one was called Real Gymnasium, or I think, the old German name was...
L.B. Real Gymnasium?
M.S. Real, Real Gymnasium. And that was, also had some Math, but very little, and concentrated on Math and Physics and Sciences. But basically they were all, they all had Classical languages, Latin and Greek was very important.
S.B. Could anyone go to gymnasium?
M.S. Yes. At that time.
S.B. Oh, at that, at this point in time.
M.S. That time.
L.B. Let me see the map, Steve. Because I never heard this before. Did you?
M.S. By the time, by, in 1934, when, under influence of Hitler the anti-Semitic movement became very strong, they tried, it was, it became unpleasant to go to gymnasia, to gymnasia, and uh, they organized the parochial school, the Hebrew gymnasia.
S.B. This was in 1934?
M.S. 4-5-6, yes, right before... and my brother, my youngest brother, went to that school.
S.B. How many children were in the family?
M.S. Four.
S.B. Were there any that died? Were there any in addition to the four?
M.S. Uh, well, my sister... died in what way?
S.B. I mean, in childbirth, or...
M.S. In childbirth, yes. Well, we had twins, who died... within a few days after birth, so actually there would have been six.
S.B. There would have been 6 children, right.
M.S. At least, there may have been some before I was born, I wouldn't know about that. My sister was older, but what I mean is that there may have been some neo-natal deaths before, but I didn't hear about it.
S.B. What about your Jewish education? Did you receive any?
M.S. Yes. I uh, as I said, when I was still in public school, perhaps around when I was 8 or 9, I went to a regular cheyder for 6 monthes.
S.B. And this was run by the synagogue?
220. M.S. No, that was a private cheder, it was run by a, a sort of a master, you know, a cheder-master, a fellow who was uh, teaching uh, Torah, you know, (nachs), just readings, just plain reading of nachs, in a very primitive way, and just, he opened the book and just says you just read it and then you repeated it, and...
S.B. And, this fellow, I assume, thaught you Hebrew?
M.S. No, he didn't teach me Hebrew. I don't think I learned too much there; it was, as I said, primitive. The first, let's say Genesis, the first few chapters, you'd read, and memorize, and read it again by memorizing, that was the system in cheder. After 6 monthes, uh, uh, I was transferred to a private tutor, who did the same thing, you know. I still read the Torah, but he would explain it and translate it in Polish, sometimes in Gefman, you know. And that, from then on, I took lessons from him, semeral times a week.
S.B. When you were going to cheder, you went after school, to cheder?
M.S. After school, right.
S.B. Every day?

INTERVIEWER S BERK

M.S.I think it was every day, right. My recollection of that, I think it was every day. But it was about an hour or two, it wasn't very long.
S.B. How many people were in the class? Was it a big institution?
M.S. NO, it was a room, and there were, maybe 10, 15, boys, just boys.
S.B. Were there more traditional forms of education? That is, you went to secular institutions, you went to the elementary school, and then from the elementary school to the gymnasium. Was there a Yeshiva, in town?
M.S. There were probably several yeshivas. Uh, there, uh, a segment of population, the Hasidic segment, uh, was a number of Siddichim, you know, the rabbis, who had their followers, who had their own uh, prayer-meet...you know, prayer-rooms, and, uh... I used, I visited some of these on certain occasions, uh, and on Purim, and on uh, some, uh, on some, Pesach sometimes, you know, after our own services you would go in and visit, it was... and not, it was the custom, you might say slumming. You would go in, say on a Purim, and go to one of those, uh, uh, special, their own meetingplaces, and they would put on, let's say on a Purim, a yosefspiel, you know what a ~~special~~ yosefspiel is? Do you know...
S.B. Yes I do.
M.S. You do. That was a story of Joseph, in Egypt, and that was a primitive theater, they would put it on, they would stand, the actors would be maybe just one or two people, talking to each other, and not... certainly there was nothing dramatic about it. They would laugh, and they would tell jokes, and uh, standing up on an ordinary table so they could be seen, everybody was below, that was the stage. So, that was one of the things, and then, on, usually during one of these performances, there would be some dancing, Hasidic dancing, Another occasion when we would go to visit the various, we would go from one place to another, we wouldn't stop at one; and uh, it would be, uh, Simchas Torah. We would follow the hacofus, you know, the rounds, and, one of the traditions of that was that the Tsaddik, himself, would be dancing with the Torah. And, of course, everybody would say,"Look at this kid, how well he dances, look at his movements," as if he was dancing fox-trot, you know.
S.B. Now, in the beginning you said that there was, the most Orthodox community lived in self-imposed ghettoes, in Tarnou. Now, when you talk about these people, is this, are these the Hasidim?
M.S. Well, many of them were, I think, Hasidim. And, many of them were not HAsidim, many of them would just attend regular synagogues of their own, you know, small synagogues. But, many of them would be followers of certain Rabbis, you see, those uh, miracle-makers, Tsaddikim.
S.B. Was the, to the best of your knowledge, was, how would you characterize the relationship between the Hasidim and the other people? Like your father, did your father have anything to say about the Hasidim? Was he indifferent, was he hostile?
M.S. No, he was not hostile. He, uh, he followed his own road and, but he uh, had respect for them. He had respect for those that were studying, for those who followed customs, uh, he was brought up differently, but he was not hostile, he was not degrading them.
S.B. To the best of your knowledge, was there any hostility in the town directed toward the Hasidim?
M.S. No.
S.B. From within the Jewish community?
M.S. No. Well, there was in some respects, and that was on political grounds. Because we had a very strong Zionist movement, and uh, many of these Hasidim were anti-Zionist. And, when it came to elections, uh, many of the uh, the Jewish community usually would field their own candidates, for various offices, even for the Parliament.
S.B. Now, would you talk about...
L.B. You mean the national Parliament?
M.S. National Parliament.
S.B. When you talk about the elections, you're talking... elections in independent Poland?

M.S. Independent Poland.
S.B. After 1919.
M.S. That's right, and this... also, that community, they would be against Zionism, and they would be antagonistic to this independent political movement, and they would vote for the blackest reaction in Poland only. So, in that respect there was hostility, when it came to political life.
S.B. Let's just backtrack for a second. How did people make a living in Tarno? Your father was in the flour business.
M.S. He was in the flour business.
S.B. What about the others?
M.S. Well, they were professionals, they were lawyers, they were doctors. But most people were merchants. There were people who operated mills, who operated uh, uh... and there were many workers. Tarnof was a center, oh what they called at that time, confectia, it was really a, uh, uh, a lot of tailors, there was, it was a center of ready-made clothes; that was a, sort of a, uh, something new, ready-made clothes, most of the clothes were made by tailors, to measure. And, when I wanted a suit, they would take me to a tailor and he would measure me and he would, he would buy cloth from a cloth shop, and you would bring it, you know, he would tell you how much, and you'd bring it and he would make it. But, then also, there were factories, of ready-made clothes, and most of those were operated by Jewish people.
S.B. Owned by Jewish people?
M.S. Owned by Jewish people, and most of the workers were Jewish. You might say they were sort of sweat-shops, I don't know whether they were, I was never inside of one.
S.B. But, is it right to say that there existed a... a working class community?
M.S. There certainly... and that one was, of course, was also a politicized, probably more so than the Orthodox portion.
S.B. All right, we'll talk about that a little later.
L.B. I'd like to ask something, Steve. Just to go back... when you went to visit the Hasidim, you said there was no feeling, but you used the word, you said you went "slumming".
M.S. Well, that probably was a bad expression. What I probably should say, was, that at the time, by that time, I was a Zionist...
L.B. How old were you then, that you were talking about?
M.S. 14-15-16.
L.B. Did you go boys and girls, or just boys?
M.S. Why, uh, to these functions, I would go with my father.
L.B. Ah.
M.S. You see?
L.B. All right.
M.S. He wanted to go, he was interested in it, he was glad that I was interested in it.
S.B. Oh, he was interested in it?
M.S. He was interested in it. And, uh, uh, what I should say, it was an expression of interest in folklore.
L.B. Yes.
M.S. The "slumming" was a bad word, but it was in a way a "slumming", because you were going down to a lower class.
L.B. You did feel that? Then there was that feeling? That's all I wanted to know.
M.S. There was, there was some feeling that there was, it was a lower class, you know, and it was a study of folklore, to a certain extent.
S.B. What did these people do, the Hasidim, in terms of making a living? I assume that they were poor and that's why they were considered lower class.
M.S. Well, I really... many of them were in business, independent businesses, they had little, maybe, grocery stores, herring shops, uh, uh, many of them perhaps worked in those shops, you know, these ready-made clothes shops. Uh, many of them

INTERVIEWER
S BERK

Luftmenschen

4021 M.S.cont. were uh, uh, rufmenschen, you know, the expression, pweople who, you might say, lived from day-to-day. Uh, perhaps they would, uh... be small, uh... I really don't know, in many respects, I don't know.
S.B. What about the Gentile community? Did they make their living in the same way, with the same diversification?
M.S. Our cnntact with the Gentile community was small. We really lived among ourselves. Our contact was in the schools, uh... and, in business; let's say, my father, let's say, would sell hes, would have contact with bakers, and with grocers who would buy the flour, you know, for selling in their stores, and uh, then, on the streets, maybe at some functions. Uh, you were freindly, I would say that, would be, would be similar to what the black people,, contact that the black people have with the whites here.
S.B. All right, what do you mean, "some functions"? What functions? On what occasions would your father, outside of business, would you and your father have any contact with Gentiles?
M.S. Well, we would have contact with the neighbors, who were Jew... who were not Jewish.
S.B. Now, when you mean neighbors, people who lived//...
M.S. In the same house.
S.B. Now, did you live in an apartment house?
M.S. It was sort of an apartment house, it was a, you know, an old converted, rambling house, probably owned by somebody, you know, with a big ~~revenue~~ fortune, and was broken down in several apartments.
S.B. Well, how many families lived there?
M.S. Uh, let's see, there were about... 5...6 with the owner.
S.B. And, how many would not be Jewish?
M.S. None of them, none of them were Jewish. We were the only Jews in the house.
S.B. You mean you were the only Jewish family in the house. Now, you said though, that the Jewish community stuck together, and lived together.
M.S. That's right.
S.B. Now, how, what happened, that you were the only Jewish family in this house?
M.S. Well, we just lived in that apartment house, it's the same thing as uh, uh, you lived in an apartment house down here and you had black neighbors, and uh, you would say "Hello" and perhaps uh, uh... you would meet, perhaps for a ... you would borrow or lend something...
S.B. So, is it better to day, in terms of residence, Jews were intermingled among the Gentiles, but outside of that non... that Orthodox group?
M.S. Right.
S.B. So, there would be other people like your family?
M.S. Yes.
S.B. In a sense, you would live right next to the Gentiles?
M.S. But, there were many housed where there were more Jews, in the apartment house. Maybe, there were some houses where most of the tenants were Jews, but uh...
L.B. But, your community life was strictly among the Jews? Your community was composed of Jews?
M.S. Except for that, that the younger people had in school.
L.B. Yes. But, did you see them after school at their homes?
M.S. No,..
L.B. Did you see them outside after school?
M.S. We saw them outside playing, maybe ball, playing ball.
L.B. All right, I was just wondering, were you old enough to know non-Jewish girls, did it ever occur to you that you might like a girl who was not Jewish, then in that world?
M.S. No. I mean it happened. It did happen, uh, but not in my case.
L.B. Was it considered something very unusual?
M.S. Uh, well, there were some playboys, you know, who would go out, uh...

INTERVIEWER
S BERK

L.B. You mean Jewish playboys?
M.S. Jewish playboys, yes.
L.B. So, then, in that case... } simultaneously
M.S. I would have... the reason...)
L.B. What you're saying, is that anyone was fair game, is that right?
M.S. Right, that's right. I mean, there was mixing, but I have to say this... that, uh... you might say that beginning at the age of 10, I entered an organization, which was, happened to have been one house away, which was, you probably heard of it, was H'a Shamer, H'atsyir, and from that time on all my life was between the school and H'a Shamer H'atsiyir. I would go to school, when I came back, almost after lunch, after supper, I would go, and I practically lived next door where they had classes and group discussions, you were organi...
(Tape ends)

Side 2 000

L.B. Go ahead.
M.S. I decided that I should learn how to sp...read Yiddish, and I made an effort to read Yiddish, and I can... hard, you know, with great effort, I, I know how to read Yiddish.
S.B. Now, in the gymnasium, is it half-and-half, Jews and non-Jews?
M.S. One third, exactly.
S.B. One third were Jewish?
M.S. Right.
S.B. Were there any Ukrainians?
M.S. No, we were too far west. Uh, we were uh, I would say, another hundred miles to the east and you would get Ukrainians.
S.B. Right. So, one third was Jewish. Was this by quota?
M.S. No. There was no limitation. At that time. It was just that about one-third of all the, in that particular, in that particular period, one-third of all the pupils were Jewish.
S.B. Now, in your adolescence, did anti-Sem... was anti-Semitism a factor near you?
L.B. Let's have a year.
S.B. Oh, up until the age of 16 or 17.
M.S. Uh, well yes, you were aware, and uh... I was just, uh, growing, uh, became aware of these thing around 1919, I guess I was 8 or 9, and at that time you heard of this, those soldiers, in Haller's army coming in, you know, and pulling Jews' beards and cutting off...
S.B. Whose armies?
M.S. Haller's. Uh, they had several uh, several Polish armies that were armed by the opposing, you know, the antagonists in the First World War. Pilsudski was uh, armed and organized by the Germans. Haller's were organized in France. So, they couldn't lose, you know. And, that was uh, towards the end of the war that they were organized, and they were organized primarily, from, uh... after Italy was, uh, was kicked, was defeated, you know, by the, by the French and English, uh, they emptied the concentration camps, the prisoner-of-war camps, and all the Polish prisoners-of-war were taken to France and put into Haller's army. General Haller.
S.B. Did you have any...
M.S. (Interrupting). But, they were anti-Semitic, and there was, everybody knew that Hallertritse, which were soldiers from the Haller's army when they finally got to Poland, that they got there after the war was over, I don't think that they did any fighting, they were on a rampage and you know, they molested Jews.
S.B. Did they get to Tarnoff?
M.S. Well, I, I really don't know too much about it, it was just what...
S.B. Well, moving up, you know, say 1927, 1928, up until you were about 16 or 17 years old...
M.S. There wasn't, we were not, there were too many of us in that town, and there-

M.S.cont. fore, uh, I think, uh, there was, everybody knew that we were different, the Poles knew that we were different, each one uh, lived in his own circle and there was no actual government-inspired, up ~~til~~ to that time, anti-Semitism.
S.B. But, I mean, for example, in school, uh, was there any difficulty, with the Gentile boys and girls?
M.S. No. There was no difficulty. The only time you knew that there was a class was when we had catechism classes, see, we had them several times a week, three times, and the Jewish boys were excused, you see, and sometimes, we always knew in advance when those classes were, we left in advance, you know, during the period before the catechism class, but sometimes they changed, switched the period, and we were sitting in the classroom and the priest would come in and at that point we knew, just silently we would gather our books and leave. And, he never... and then, also, the priests would serve as proctor for, you know, keeping quiet during the intermissions, and the corridors, you know, making sure that there were no fights and so on...
L.B. In a public school, the priests did this?
M.S. Well, the teacher, the priests took their turns, they were teachers.
L.B. Of lay subjects?
M.S. No, they were teachers of religion, but they took their turn...
L.B. As proctors.
M.S. As proctors, right. Well, you call it proctors?
L.B. Yes, that's a proctor.
M.S. Uh, keeping, uh...
L.B. Order...
M.S. Order, in the corridors. So, whenever, they would never speak to the Jewish boys.
S.B. The priests?
M.S. The priests would never speak to the Jewish boys, and the Jewish boys would never address the priests. He was a strange thing, you know.
L.B. How did they know a Jewish boy, did you wear a yarmulke?
M.S. Well, they didn't see him in the classes. They knew that somebody who wasn't in the classes was Jewish.
S.B. What, so then you didn't have an experience, there's no violence between Jewish boys and girls, on the one hand, and Gentile, & Polish boys and girls on the other?
M.S. No, not in those days, no. You see, I left Poland to go to school, around 1929, 1930, 1929.
S.B. All right. So, up to 1929, then...
M.S. In our, in our...
S.B. That's right, in your town, in your experience...
L.B. Steve, I don't know whether you did or not, but did you establish the population of Tarnof, the number?
S.B. 40,000.
L.B. It was 40,000; I'm sorry, I didn't hear it.
M.S. I don't, is that correct, I mean that probably would have a...
S.B. That's all right, no, as you remember it is as important...
M.S. As I remember it...
L.B. And the percentage... that would be....
S.B. 20,000. 50%, was Jewish.
L.B. Oh, it was 50... all right, that was before the tape ran.
M.S. The figures there were a little different, so I don't know.
S.B. All right, we can check it.
L.B. I'm sorry, I didn't hear that. O.K.
S.B. What about the teachers? Were the teachers Jewish?
M.S. No, no the teachers were not Jewish, in our school. I think there were some Jewish teachers, in some schools. But I don't remember...the only Jewish teacher

M.S.cont. was the teacher of religion. There was a class of religion, it was part of the curriculum, usually held in the afternoon after classes, once a week, or maybe twice a week, I don't remember.
S.B. And it was a Jew who taught this class.
M.S. It was a Jew who taught it.
S.B. And what did they cover in this class? If you can remember?
M.S. Uh, it was a, uh, similar to the Sunday class you have.
S.B. Was it a class in Judaism?
M.S. A class in Bible, Jewish history, Bible primarily.
S.B. And only Jewish students took this class?
M.S. Only Jewish, yes, right.
S.B. So Catholic students would walk out, or...
M.S. No, no, it was after, you see the catechism was taught during the hours, which were from 8:00 to 2:00, but the Hebrew religion classes were held after hours. We had to come, you know, in the afternoon.
S.B. So, again let me ask you if...
M.S. We were separated.
S.B. So this is a true statement then, Up until 1929, anti-Semitism was not a factor in your life? Were you afraid to walk in certain parts of the town?
M.S. No, no. Well, maybe, you were always afraid because there were always some gangs of boys, you know, you might be attacked, possibly. There was always a possibility, and if you saw a gang of boys, perhaps, uh, too close to you and you didn't know them... you quicken your pace and maybe run away, but it was, happened very seldom.
L.B. Were there Jewish gangs of boys?
M.S. No, no, I mean Gentile.
S.B. Now, was there a question, for example some of the people we interviewed, some people told us, for example, you didn't go, you really didn't walk the streets for example, on Easter or Christmas, or certain Gentile holidays. Was this true in Tarnoff?
M.S. No.
S.B. It was not.
M.S. Not to my recollection.
S.B. And, so, again, up until 1929 then, the relationships were fairly good. They were good, not even fairly, but they were good.
M.S. Yes, they were good, right. At arms' length, I mean they were separated, they were segregated.
L.B. Separate, but equal.
M.S. Separate, but equal, yeah. We were, we didn't have, our cultural life was entirely separate.
S.B. Now, tell me something about this cultural life. You told me, you said the, 1137 at what age did you become a member of [H'a Shamer H'atsyir] ?
M.S. I think it must have been about 11, 12.
S.B. Can you say something about the organization?
M.S. Well, it was originally, when I knew, it was a Zionist organization, which engaged in scouting, some scouting, in other words there were out-door activities, there were hikes and there were summer camps. Uh, the summer camps were primarily for leadership, you didn't go to them until you were about 14, 15 or 16. Uh, the emphasis was on uh, uh, Jewish folklore, on Hebrew, we had Hebrew classes, uh, organized and conducted by people, you know, and, uh, college age. It was all within, you might say, teenage, it was run by teenagers.
L.B. It was run by your peers, actually.
M.S. By your peers, right.
S.B. So, it was a bona-fide youth movement.
M.S. It was a youth movement, right.
S.B. Now, did you enter this organization by yourself, or did your father say to you this would be a good thing for you to join?

M.S. No, that was just by myself. It was next-door, you walked over, and you see other boys, and you say, "Well, can I..."; you hung around really, and then you became a member, says, "Do you want to join this kutsa", and you joined the kutsa, ("kutsa" means "a group".

S.B. The group, right. What about your father, and mother, did they...

M.S. No, they didn't object...

S.B. They did not object to this, even though this was a Zionist organization?

M.S. Yes, my father was a misrachid. Mizrachi.

S.B. Well, how did he look upon someone, like his own son, joining H'a Shamer, which was not particularly religious?

M.S. Well, it was a Zionist organization, that was teaching Hebrew, that was learning history; and he had a lot of respect learning. So, anything, if you learned something about, you know, Jewish subjects, that was O.K. Not only that, but there were some other members of the family, in the past, had, you see. Some cousins, or somebody else's children were there, and it was not anything, uh, that was jumped on. He knew about it, and it was just a thing that happened, that was done by the younger people.

S.B. So, your father was then, an Orthodox Zionist?

M.S. Yes.

S.B. Now, did he ever talk about Zionism to you?

M.S. No, no, he never talked about it. Except that he would, uh, let's say, uh, contribute, uh... of course, we all had Keren Kayemet , and as one of our jobs we had a pushcart, a little pushcart, and then, while we were in our organization, and various other organizations, we took turns sending the pushcarts, you know, our routes, we'd get several streets and go in and collect, open the pushcarts and collect...

S.B. But your father never...

M.S. We had several pushcarts, we had Keren Kayemet , and we had some for Orthodox Jews, you know, and we had some for, uh, uh, some of those orphanages, or organizations in Israel for Orthodox Jews.

S.B. Was Zionism strong in Tarnoff?

M.S. Very strong.

S.B. Now, it would appear that this would be something of a contradiction. You had a community, fairly well-to-do, experiencing very little anti-Semitism, if any, and yet, a community that is moving in the direction of Zionism, which says there is no future for the Jews, either in Tarnoff, or in Poland. Now, how do you explain this?

M.S Well, the explanation was, I think, economic, because as long as uh, Pol... this portion of Galicia, was part of the Austrian Empire, the administration, it had to uh, uh, administer a hundred different nationalities, I don't know how many there were, trying to be sort of even-handed; but, when the Polish state came into being, they favored, they had a, a, economic nationalism, they were favoring, uh, Polish business interests, and they were trying to keep the Jews, or kick them out from various endeavors. Now, as you, as I said before, none of my teachers were Jewish, and, in the public schools and gymnasiums, and uh, later on, you know, uh, of course, it became the official policy of the Polish government to actually, uh, say that, all Poles should compete with the Jews. The Jews had most of the business, and, but at that time, uh, I guess the Jews performed a good function, but the opportunities for careers were very poor. And when it came for me, for instance, by, by the time I was, you know, close to finishing gymnasium and I was thinking of careers, we eliminated a number of careers because we knew there was no future in that for Jews. I had a cousin who, let's say, was an engineer, and he couldn't get a job in industry because most of industry was Gentile, they wouldn't hire Jews.

S.B. Now, when you talk about careers, am I right in saying engineering, medicine, law...

M.S. No, medicine and law were the Jewish occupations. Because, in medicine, you could always practice among your own, and then also spill over...
S.B. But what about entrance into the school?
M.S. That was a question, a thing that became a problem, that's right; that was one of the manifestations of anti-Semitism, of official anti-Semitism, that they established a quota, in medical schools, of 10%. Later, it became, uh, they limited more and more, until they finally eliminated the Jews.
S.B. When you were in the gymnasium, that is in the period before 1929, did you know that there were restrictions?
M.S. Yes.
S.B. You knew that there were restrictions?
M.S. I had several cousins, most of them Jews who wanted to study medicine, unless they happened to have been very brilliant and, in addition, they knew some people that could be bribed, you know, had to go abroad to study
L.B. Where did they go?
M.S. They went to Prague, to Brno in Czechoslovakia, to Italy, to, and then by the time I started, when I was thinking of it, France became fashionable, youknow, you tried to get away from crowds, from people, from the places where most people went, so I went to France, to study medicine. Because I had no, I didn't have a chance of entering a Polish medical school.
S.B. When did you leave?
M.S. Uh, let's see, 1929, I guess. I graduated from gymnasium, and I went to France, and I came back for 4 monthes vacation, then I returned. That was another thing, people who went to Czechoslovakia, that was just a short drive and many of them would come in for smallest holidays, and they were, half the time they were here and half the time they were there, cut down on expenses and also, it was easy to do. But, when you went further away, you sort of knew that you, you had to stay there because it was too expensive to travel. It seems like it's close, you know, but in those days, I mean, every penny counted.
S.B. Were all branches of the Zionist movement present? In Tarnoff?
M.S. Yes, we had the general Zionism.
S.B. You had general Zionism.
M.S. We had Misrachi, we had uh, (Poale Zion Politsiatse) on right, then we had (Poale Zion Politis) on left, which was a peculiar kind of an organization because they were practically, for practical purposes, adopted the Communist ideology, but they delayed all that thing until, you know, the Jewish state was established, because they couldn't start their program until that time. So, that was a peculiar type of an ideology, but they, (Polichi Poale Zion) on left, represented the working class. They were strong, and...
S.B. They were strong among the workers.
M.S. That's right, among workers, they, and there was a completely other organization was the Bund.
S.B. Right, that was what I was going to ask you. So, the Bund was present, then?
M.S. Bund was present, and, of course, it was not Zionist, it was very strong.
S.B. And, again, the Bund would draw its support from the working class.
M.S. Right.
S.B. What about the Revisionists? Any of them floating around?
M.S. Uh, yes, there were revisionists, uh, Trumpeldor, and uh, they, I think, became stronger a little later, towards the late '20's. And, they were pretty, and that was one divisive factor, they were extremely, uh, militant. And, uh, I don't think, they were, not beyond, breaking up some other organizations' meetings, see, like Nazis or Communists. They really adopted some of the communist tactics of disruption.
S.B. So Zionism, is it fair to say, that Zionism was pretty strong in Tarnoff?
M.S. Yes.

S.B. Now, on the other hand, now, there was the Bund drawing some support from the Jewish workers, which was anti-Zionist; then there was the Orthodox community which would have nothing to do with Zionism. Is that right?
M.S. That's right.
S.B. What about the comm...
M.S. Agudat...
S.B. Agudat Israel?
M.S. Agudat Israel.
S.B. Right. What about the communists?
M.S. Well, the communists were strong, among the Jewish people. I,I don't know whether you know, of course historically they tell you that the Polish communist party was two-thirds Jewish, or something like that. But, in Tarnoff there were many Jewish communists, and, uh, one of my, my brother-in-law was a communist, I remember hiding the literature, you know, when he was looked for by the police, uh, at my house, for him. And, uh, a brother of my, of a fellow from my (putsa ? Yerutsa) was a communist, was very strong communist, and he was arrested and, uh, caught, escaped and caught, his father was a, uh, had a winery, you know, a place where they sold wine and where people came in, usually the prison officials, the judges, Polish people, that was, that's where they gathered, you know, his son was arrested and he was kept in a Polish jail so he had a lot of pull and he, he was getting, they were bringing him his food there, and so on, things were not too bad in that respect until the time that he escaped and got caught.
S.B. What about... was there any support among the Jews for Marshal Pilsudski?
M.S. No.
S.B. No support?
M.S. Well, there was official support.
S.B. Right, but I mean there were no, no fervent support?
M.S. No fervor, no.
S.B. Were Jews conscious of the other parties, there were a number of other parties, that is Polish parties, some of whom were anti-Semitic?
M.S. Yes, of course we had... you said there was no anti-Semitism, and that's true, you didn't feel it, I didn't feel it in my personal life and there was no obvious anti-Semitism, but there was an anti-Semitic party, that is the NDec's, the National Democratic, the NDec's. And, uh, of course, the time of elections you would hear quite a bit of anti-Jewish talk, and literature, you know, literature, anti-Jewish literature. But, uh, for some reason, well, you knew, that was one of the reasons why Zionism was strong, because it was talked about, but, in personal life your neighbors didn't practice it.
L.B. But, you know that the Morganthau commission was over there in 1921, I believe. Did you know of that? The United States sent a commission over in about 1921, I think it was called the Morganthau Commission, and I'm not sure just where they went, but they were sent over to investigate charges of anti-Semitism, and they found many, many, many, including, you know, beatings and killings, rapes, robberys, looting...
M.S. Oh, yes, we were aware, we were aware of it, but not in our town...
L.B. That's very interesting.
S.B. You knew then, you were conscious of anti-Semitic excesses in other parts?
M.S. Right, that's right. Of course, uh, you read about it, uh...
S.B. Where did you read about it?
M.S. Well, uh...
S.B. In the newspapers?
M.S. No, we read about it in the Jewish history books.
L.B. Wasn't history yet.
S.B. This would be in the early 20's?
M.S. The early 20's, the Jewish history books, well, there were many, (Tugnoff ?) uh, (Babylon,) uh, of course the...
S.B. Did you read the (Balabong?)
M.S. Yeah. (Balabon ?)
S.B. You read the (Balabong) and (Tugnoff) ? Did other people read them too

INTERVIEWER
S BERK

356? M.S. Yeah, these were standard texts of history... | Graetz Greitz. \
S.B. And Greitz Graetz
M.S. Right. And, uh, but also we had newspapers, Jewish, Polish language Jewish newspapers, which was published in Kracow. And, of course, you had all those news there, and we read all those papers, let's see, since the time I was able to read. So, you were aware of what was going on, of potentials, and of, Kracow was 50 miles away.
L.B. Right.
S.B. Did you ever get to Kracow?
M.S. Oh yes... We used to go off to relatives.
S.B. Did you used to go often?
M.S. Relatives... well, not often. Travelling was not as easy as here, it was an adventure, you know. But, uh, I was in Kracow a number of times, and I had, you know, aunts and uncles and cousins...
L.B. Did you have relatives in Tarnoff?
M.S. Yes...
L.B. You did.
M.S. On my father's side.
L.B. You did.
M.S. Yeah, my father had something like 5 sisters, and 2 brothers.
S.B. And they were all in Tarnoff?
M.S. Uh... one brother was in Tarnoff, and about 4 sisters, I think were in town.
L.B. Were your family ties close?
M.S. Yes.
L.B. They were?
M.S. Yes.
L.B. Was most of your social life, then, within the family?
M.S. No.
L.B. What about your parents, was their, most of their social life in the family?
M.S. Uh...
L.B. Because this is true in a lot, with a lot of people that we talked to, most of their social life was within the family unit?
M.S. Within the family unit, uh...
L.B. Extended family.
M.S. Extended, well, uh... we knew each other, we would meet at uh, let's say, at some of the Bar Mitzvahs, which were held at home, you know, just small affairs, there were none of this, you know, elaborate Bar Mitzvahs that we have here, a Bar Mitzvah was something like this, 2 or 3 uncles and aunts, 12 people, you know, 12-14 people... Uh, well, we were close enough that we knew each other, that we visited each other...
L.B. Did you run from one aunt or uncle to another, you know, just on your own?
M.S. No, no.
L.B. Why not? You know what I'm saying?
M.S. Yeah, I know what you're saying. Why not? Because, probably I was busy with my own life, here, I was going next door...
L.B. O.K. But that was not part of your life? Right, you were going next door.
M.S. I was going next door.
S.B. So, H'a Shamer took up a good chunk of your life, then?
L.B. Yeah, that's right.
M.S. Took, was my life, my whole life, that and school was my whole life.
S.B. And you would go there when, in all of your spare time?
M.S. Right.
S.B. And you would attend lectures... just be with people who were in the organization?
M.S. Lectures, later give lectures...
S.B. What do you mean, give lectures, what, to whom?
M.S. Well, uh, to, you know, it was a youth movement, so after a while, after I was 16, maybe I got my own group.

S.B. In Tarnoff?
M.S. In Tarnoff, in H'a Shamer H'atsyir.
S.B. Were, was it, I assume then it was...
M.S. It was organized, it was a big organization...
S.B. A big organization.
M.S. It was, I don't know, about 100 people or so, and, regular Hebrew classes, I knew quite a bit of Hebrew, so, uh, I don't know as I attended, I attended some Hebrew classes, I didn't give any Hebrew classes. Something was going on at all times, they had choir, they had, uh...
S.B. Social contact, they had girls...?
M.S. Social contact, you played (natsavus) in the yard there...
S.B. What is (natsavos?)
M.S. Sort of a, a, you know, like a, like a bowling game, except that you didn't have any equipment, you put out a stone, and put some other stones, and you were shooting, you know, from the distance. It was a primitve game. A (tsava) meant a monument...
L.B. That's right... it's a, it's a fun... a burial monument, isn't it?
M.S. Yeah, that's right. But that was a game that we had, which was the same thing as a bowling game except that we, instead of pins we used a stone, you hit it with another stone.
L.B. That's like (gnocci)
M.S. Gnocci are balls...
L.B. Yeah, right.
M.S. You ~~the ball~~. jeu de balle.
S.B. Now, I assume that H'a Shamer had a very strong Palestine orientation?
M.S. Yes, and I, somewhere around 1925, uh, 24, I don't know that was that period, by that time a number of them, I guess from the early times, before my time, already went with the second Aliyah, and some of them returned. Some of them returned, sick, you know; some of them returned because they were discouraged, many of them went back to ~~school~~ school, you know, to colleges, the University, but, uh, went they went, they went in after high school...
S.B. They went to Palestine?
M.S. As chalutzim
S.B. As chalutzim
M.S. Right.
S.B. Now, you were 16 years old...
M.S. And, by that time, they had a policy that... that the aim of anybody in H'a Shamer H'atsyir is to become a (chalutz.)
S.B. All right, that was my next question.
L.B. Yeah.
M.S. Right. And, when you finished gymnasium, before you finished, you went to a chalutz, uh, camp, you know, work in the fields for some farmer, this was organized by a chalutz movement which was inter-organizational, (Echalutz...)
S.B. Echalutz, right.
M.S. It was inter-organizational, it took in all the organizations, whether they were youth, all the youth organizations, which, and each branch of Zionism had its own youth organization, including (Poilitse) on right and (Poilitse) on left, (Poilitse) on left was (Yugan,) was the name of that, and they were the ones who, the only ones emphasized Yiddish, all their literature was in Yiddish, all their newspapers were in...
S.B. So, you were 16 years old, you were in H'a Shamer H'atsyir, did you expect to go to Palestine?
M.S. Well, I was thinking about it, but I decided against it, and about, I think the last year of high school, I said, "Well, I'd like to try to go for a career, and there's no urgency, you know, no anti-Semitic excesses or anything." And, both of my cousins want for a career, so I said, "Well, I think I try to go for a, I don't want to ~~let~~ lock myself in, then, to this."

S.B. All right, now...
M.S. So I quit, the last year of high school.
S.B. Now, if you can put yourself back, in 1928 you have, at least for the moment, rejected the idea of going to Palestine, and you're going to pursue a career.
M.S. Right.
S.B. Did you see your future being in Poland?
M.S. Yes.
S.B. You saw your future in Poland?
M.S. Right. As in the selected occupation, which was selected by exclusion, which, as I said, I cannot be an engineer, I cannot be a teacher, I cannot be...
520 (Tape ends)

Side 3 000

L.B. O.K. Go ahead.
S.B. So, but, you, if you could become a physician, you were prepared to stay in Poland?
M.S. Yes, I thought I was going to be a physician in Poland, you could always make a living among your own... it was, you know, a big population, and I knew I couldn't get into a Polish medical school, so, of course I, like a great majority of students who were going to practice medicine, or study medicine, I went abroad.
S.B. Another question that may be difficult, but, I may not be making myself clear, did you consider yourself a Pole?
M.S. No.
S.B. You were a Jew?
M.S. Yes.
L.B. I was going to ask whether you remembered back to the First World War, and how your family felt about that.
M.S. I don't remember anything about the First World War.
L.B. Not because...
M.S. I draw a complete blank, and I don't know why because I, remember, my son remembers things up to 3, 4, when he was 3 and 4 years old, and I don't remember anything before, I guess when I was, 1918, I must have been close to 7 years old. And, I remember just the tail end, the very tail end of the War, the barracks, you know, I was in Novosonch, I was not in Tarnoff at the time, I was with my grandfather...
S.B. Where were you?
M.S. That was in Novosonch, that was south, about 50miles south.
S.B. So, it was right on...
M.S. The Carpathians...
S.B. Right, right on the Czechoslovakian border. It was not Czechoslovakia at the time?
L.B. It was more toward the Hungarian border.
M.S. Well, it was quite a, quite a distance, maybe another 100 miles to the Czechoslovakian border. Tsachpania was on... the border...
S.B. So, again, I don't want to put words into your mouth; you're 16, 17 years old, you've decided on a career, a career in medicine.
M.S. Right.
S.B. Now, you're looking, and you're prepared to stay in...
M.S. I would say, maybe, when I was 17 or 18, yes.
S.B. All right, 17 or 18, and you are prepared, if you can become a physician, to remain in Poland.
M.S. Right.
S.B. All right. Yet, you are also, at the time, conscious of the fact that there are great restrictions placed upon Jews.

M.S. Right.
S.B. And, you were also, were, if asked what you were, you would not reply that you were a Pole, you'd reply that you were a Jew.
M.S. Right.
S.B. At, at the risk of being trite, and I'm not trying to be melodramatic, did you ever sing the Polish National Anthem?
M.S. I think, maybe, that I had to.
S.B. If you had to?
M.S. Right.
S.B. But, no feeling for Poland?
M.S. No, no.
S.B. No feeling for Poland... So, you leave Poland in 1929?
M.S. Yes.
S.B. And, you go to France.
M.S. Yes.
S.B. All right. And you go to medical school in France. And, again, your choice, what motivated you to become a physician? Again, the desire...
M.S. I, I did have a good background in Biology, and I know, when I was 12 or 13, I read about, you know, Darwin's and all those theories, and so I, I was ahead of my class in some of those, uh, theoretical background of Biology. So, I had a background, on the other hand, as I said, my primary motivation was exclusion.
L.B. Right, He said that.
S.B. Right, that's what I just wanted to know. Now...
M.S. But I was, I did not dislike science.
S.B. Could you tell us about the process, if you can remember, of applying to a French medical school?
M.S. It was very simple. There, there was a sort of a form of tourism, in Italy and France, half of the enrollment of, maybe all Universities in France, was foreign, not necessarily Polish, they had from all over, they had, let's say, the school I went to, which was a small, relatively small school, Montpelier, down south, had 1000 students, medical students, about 200 per class, and was, I think, about equally divided between Frenchmen and foreigners. And, the foreigners were from Egypt, from Iran, from Bulgaria, they all formed their own groups; and, I still remember the Egyptians, you know, at that time they were not antagonistic, they were all rich, they had a lot of money, they were all very loud, and so were Bulgarians, Bulgarian was, were poor but they were also very loud, you know. Whenever you saw a group of Bulgarians of Egyptians, and they were talking to each other, you always thought there was a big fight going on. I guess it was just a national characteristic. But, there were, I'm just trying to say, that there were many groups.
S.B. Were there many Jewish boys?
M.S. There were many Jews, right.
S.B. So, did you write a letter to Montpelier, or did you just go?
M.S. You just, no, you just wrote a letter to, by that time there were so many students abroad that the whole thing became ritualized; you knew, you asked somebody, he says, "Well, you write a letter to the admissions office, send them a transcript." They would say, "Send us a transcript." And that's all there was to it, a transcript of your high school, birth certificate, and you were admitted. Ahh... the tuitions were very low, the French tuitions were higher than the Czech tuitions, they, even so they were extremely low. They were State schools...
S.B. All right, were there many...
M.S. ...they were State-supported schools.
S.B. Were there many people, to the best of your rememberance, many young Jewish boys from Tarnoff who did this type of thing?
M.S. Yes, I would say a few dozens, that I knew. Several of my cousins studied medicine, they studied it in... uh... Czechoslovakia. Several others from, who I

M.S.cont. knew from H'a Shamer H'atsyir, whom you knew just from being in a community, were, they were in France...
S.B. Was there any reason that you chose a French medical school over a Czech medical school?
M.S. No particualar reason, I didn't know French and when I decided to go, I bought the Berlitz, you know, and I, that was 2 monthes before I left, I just learned the written French, I learned how to read but I didn't know how to pronounce it. But I had, you know, a language background, I had 8 years of Latin, I had 6 years of Greek, I had 6 years of German, I had learned some Yiddish, and, of course, I knew Hebrew.
L.B. And Polish...
M.S. And Polish. And, therefore, learning a new language was not so difficult, from the point of view of learning how to read and, you know, from a point of view of pronouncing it well, without an accent, I think for me it was always a musical-type, something connected with the ear in music.
S.B. Did your father play any role in this decision?
M.S. No.
S.B. He did not influence you in this direction?
M.S. No, I mean it was understood that I was going to college, and he was glad I was not going to Israel, to Palestine. In that way, he influenced me, you know, because uh, uh...
S.B. But, now, you said he was a member of Misrachi?
M.S. He was a member of Misrachi, but he was not a chalutz, you know, he wanted me to go to University, right. So, he was relieved that I didn't become a, a chalutz.
S.B. And he didn't expect you, for example after you had established a career, had gotten the training, to go to Palestine? He was really relieved that you didn't go to Palestine, is that it?
M.S. Well, as a, there was no, everybody knew, at that time, life in Palestine was very hard. Uh, there was a lot of malaria, some of these people who went with the First Aliyah came back with malaria, you see, they were very sick. And, you know, they were, some of them were in Bet Alpha, which was the first H'a Shamer kibbutz, which was in the town of Gali; and, uh, uh, from the point of view of professions you knew that, there were too many professional Jews, and uh, telling jokes about, you know, uh, bus, let's say someone was in Tel Aviv and, uh, one of the passengers, and the fellow next door, you know, in the next seat, says "I'll take care of him, I'm a doctor", you know, and then the bus driver will come over, he says, "That's my patient, I'm a doctor", and the patient wakes up and says, "I'm a doctor, myself." (Laughter). So, there were all kinds, everybody knew that there was no real future for a professional at that time, you know, as it looked at that time.
S.B. Did you ever meet any of these people who returned from the Second Aliyah?
M.S. Oh yes, yeah, right. I knew them, they were... I have uh... pictures of them, there are some pictures there. And some of them were brothers of my children's friends you know, and they were sort of senior statesmen, walking around, you know, big fellows, and ours, were teenagers... But, uh, they didn't talk much about it, they didn't talk, they didn't say anything, to us, they were outsiders, but except that they were honored guests sometimes, you know.
S.B. How long were you in the medical school, at Montpelier?
M.S. Well, I, uh, the course, you see here you have college and you have 4 years of medical school. There's no intermediate college there, they had a preparatory course in Chemistry, Biology and Physics, called ? Passayenne? in France; they had the same system in all the Latin countries, Italy and Belgium, so, you enrolled in the Faculty of Sciences to take the ? Passayenne?, and then there were 5 years of medical school.
S.B. Did you feel that you...

M.S. So I, I was there, actually in France, from, I graduated in '37, I dropped out for a year because of finances. My younger brother, at that time, because you say, even though there was no anti-Semitic outbreaks and overt anti-Semitism from your neighbors, he knew there was no future for him in '34, by that time Hitler was in Germany.

S.B. Right.

M.S. He left for Israel, Palestine, so he had to be outfitted, and, of course there were restrictions on immigration, he went, he enrolled, it was a kind of subter... subterfuge; he enrolled at the University of Jerusalem as a student, so he had to pay a, matriculation fees, tuition, knowing that he would not attend, it was just a way of getting into Palestine, and, uh, so that was quite a big expense...

S.B. That must be the Hebrew University.

M.S. No, I don't know what University it was. Maybe it was the Hebrew University, I don't know. Maybe it was Hebrew University, that was in '34. And, uh, he had to be outfitted, it was a big journey, by way of railroad to Varna, on the Black Sea, and from there to Palestine. It was a big expense, so, he was outfitted and there was no money left over, you know, for me to go back, so I stayed home for a year.

S.B. When you say home, back in Tarnoff?

M.S. Tarnoff, right.

S.B. Now, what year was that?

M.S. '34-'35.

S.B. '34-'35. Was your father under any pressure, was the business under any pressure, as a result of actions taken by the government

M.S. Well, we had a depression, like everybody, all of Europe had a depression, it started in the United States, you know the saying was "America catches... sneezes, and Europe catches cold", I guess, by that time, it was, had a tremendous influence; Europe, of course, was weakened by the First World War, so we had a depression, times were very hard, starting with about '28.

S.B. Right.

M.S. Not to the point that there was not enough to eat; my father, as I said, was well-off, by that time he operated, I think, two mills and his own, he rented, you know, leased mills, and was milling...

S.B. Ah, so now he, he did this before the depression.

M.S. Before the depression.

S.B. So, he began to, he moved from being a... wholesaler...

M.S. Well, no, both...he would...

S.B. But he started out as a wholesaler, did he not?

M.S. He started out as a wholesaler, continued being a wholesaler...

S.B. But, also began to manufacture... produced his own

M.S. But on the side, he leased mills...

S.B. Yeah, right.

M.S. And, they were small mills, you know...

S.B. Right, right. Did your father ever say or complain about actions of the government?

M.S. Well, by that time the government became, you know, when the times are good things are, uh, uh... and discrimination is not felt the same way as, you know, our Vietnam War, prosperity, as soon as the time becomes bad, then any discriminatory action becomes felt. And that was at the beginning of the government, and Pilsudski came to power in '27, and, uh, in the beginning it was, was prosperity and so on, but by the time the depression started it became very, economically anti-Semitic.

S.B. In what way? Did you experience it, did you, could you see it in the streets?

M.S. Well, in the schools, first of all, you wouldn't get admitted to the schools, to the Universities. Hitler, uh, was in power, and that was a contagion. And, in the University centers you had, uh, beatings...

INTERVIEWER
S BERK

S.B. And you knew of this?
M.S. We knew of this, I didn't experience it but I knew of it.
S.B. Was your father's business hurt in any way, by the Depression, by...
M.S. Depression... yes.
S.B. By the Depression.
M.S. Yeah, you know, people didn't pay, they were... uh... I don't know whether the businesses operated this way here, but, it was a peculiar kind of a business, I guess it was going ~~out and~~ on that way forever, and I, as I, when I stayed home I got acquainted with it, and it was on credit, I mean all the bakers and so on, they would come in and order their, let's say, 100 bags, 100 kilograms, 220 lbs., 100 bags let's say, or 20 bags, and then they wouldn't pay; and then you order for them, they say if you give me, let's say, a month from, later, if you give me another 20 bags then I pay you for what I owe you. In other words, the credit, and that would keep on stretching out. We had the same bad credit condition as we are beginning to have here. And, uh, so, and the competition among the various wholesalers was on that basis. You couldn't say, "Well, I will cut off credit to him"; because somebody, your competitor, will extend credit, so eventually it worked out that they all were switching around, it was sort of a "Jewish business," as they called, and I suppose the profit had to compensate for it, you know...
S.B. Now, if you can...
M.S. But, it was felt, and the times were hard; and when I first went to school, my allowance was $25/month, that included the tuition and so on, and then after I came back after the first year, I see, saw the conditions were poor. They were actually poor before I left, because my mother tried to persuade me, you asked me about my father, my mother tried to persuade me to go and study law, because then you could go next door to Kracow and that wouldn't cost.
S.B. Now, if you can put yourself back... On January 30, 1933, Hitler came to power. You were in Galicia in 1934-35, right?
M.S. Right.
S.B. You took the year off. Now, to put yourself back... were you conscious, and were other people, to the best of your knowledge, in Tarnoff, conscious that there was something bad happening in Germany?
M.S. Oh, everybody knew there was something bad happening in Germany, but there was no urgency, about what, about Poland.
S.B. But you knew... again, to go back, did you know what Hitler stood for?
M.S. Oh, sure.
S.B. You do, you did know that this was a man who really despised Jews?
M.S. Right.
S.B. And, people, you think that...
M.S. Well, we had people like that in Poland, too.
S.B. Right.
M.S. I mean it was not anything new, except that it was on such a massive scale, and he actual... there was, he was the government...
S.B. That's right, and these people were not.
M.S. People, we had, I think around '34, we started having anti-Semitic outbreaks,
2567 pogroms in Poland, '34; and, uh, (Tchaunstahova) Czestochowa was one of them, and, uh, but, they may have been tolerated by the government, they were not incited by the government. Where as in, where as in Germany they were organized by the government.
S.B. Did you follow events in Germany?
M.S. Yes.
S.B. You did follow... So, you're in Tarnoff, 1934-35, and then you go back to Montpelier, right?
M.S. Yes. I... let's see, in 1931, when I went back, let's see...I went back from my first vacation, and I didn't stay, I stayed over for one year, two years, and then I came back. Uh... in 1930, I think '31, Hitler was coming to power... One year I went through Germany, on a German train...

INTERVIEWER
S BERK

S.B. Now, before Hitler or after Hitler?
M.S. After Hitler.
S.B. After.
M.S. It must have been '34, right, in '34. And, when I got on the train, and I don't know why I picked that itinerary, you know, I had a Polish passport and so on, but I was extremely uncomfortable, and I was afraid that something might happen while I was there, I didn't stop, you know, the train just went through, but uh, uh, I really had a sense of fear when I was going through Germany in '34, uh, in '34, uh '35. By that time, of course, many things had happened.
S.B. So you, you went back to medical school.
M.S. Right.
S.B. And you graduate in 1937.
M.S. Right.
S.B. Do you, do you go back to Poland?
M.S. Well, by that time, several things happened. One of the main things that happened was that, beginning in '33, that was after I, you know, started medical school, the process of preventing the Jew...the doctors, Jewish doctors, studying abroad, to come back and to practice in Poland, uh, became, uh, there's a definite attempt to stop the, Ger..., the Pol...the Jewish doctors from coming back to practice. They did it by various ways, the first they said you had to take all your examinations over again, that took about 2 years; then, they said you had to repeat the whole course, not as a medical student but as a doctor, you know, and that of course meant 5 years, the Polish course was 5 years; and then, they stopped it altogether, see that was, those regulations changed from year-to-year, so by that time I knew I couldn't practice in Poland. And my mother had 3 brothers over here, and she wrote to them...
S.B. In the United States?
M.S. In the United States. And, they sent me a visa. Well, I applied for a visa, and it was, when I came to apply for a visa, at the Consulate, of course they laughed at me, Pol... American Consulate in Lyons, he says there is 5-year waiting period, quota, Polish quota, and a 5-year waiting period. People had been waiting for 5,6,7, years; but the party, the reccomendations they took, us they put us ahead of people that were waiting, on the basis of uh... the pull you could, uh, master, you know, on the basis of...the letters you could obtain from politicians...
L.B. Polish politicians?
M.S. American politicians.
L.B. American.
M.S. And, on the basis of the financial status of the sponsors. So, I got my visa. My recollection is I got, I had a letter from Senator Wagner; they didn't know Senator Wag... they knew somebody, who knew somebody who worked in his office, you know. And then, it was bank statements, you know, savings accounts and so on; a letter from the Board of, president of Staten Island, uh, that was actually, you know, somebody they knew because they were active in Democratic politics there. So, it was not easy to come in, especially at that time, at that time there was a big crush; but it, it's just on the basis of uh... the usual basis, which is uh...
L.B. Money and pull.
M.S. Money and pull, right.
S.B. So you left for the United States in 1937?
M.S. No, I went back to ...right... no, I went back to Poland, when I got my visa.
S.B. All right.
M.S. For a two-weeks visit. And, uh, there was no sense of urgency, things were bad in Germany, things were bad in Poland. Uh... my brother was in this parochial school, the Jews were no longer, of course, admitted to Universities, and they were not welcome in gymnasiums; so most of the Jews went, to, I guess that they, this is something I don't know too well, my brother could tell you, probably, more

INTERVIEWER
S BERK

M.S.cont. about it. But, uh, he went to a parochial school, I assume if he went to the gymnasium he would be beaten up, by that time. But, there was no sense of urgency that you had to run, because, when I came to this country, in '38, my uncles sent my father and my mother, uh, visas...
L.B. They wouldn't come.
M.S. They wouldn't come, they wouldn't come because he was making a living, he had a business, he had roots, you know; and my mother had a daughter, they didn't send her, a visa to her, she was married to a dentist who was practicing who was making a living, you know, so they wouldn't come, and he says what is he going to do here, I mean he was a balaboris over there, he was a substantial citizen, you know, he was a rebbe in a synagogue and so on, What would he do if he came here, so they refused to come. That was in '38.
S.B. No feeling that war was imminent?
M.S. When I was there for those 2 weeks, there was no feeling of urgency that anything like that was going to happen. I mean, they knew things were bad in Germany, but they didn't expect that uh... Hitler was going to do what he did.
L.B. You know Anya Azenberg was from Czastachova, and they, she, they were able, they would have been able to get her whole family out, and her whole family refused to come, because they said things were too good, why should they come?
S.B. That's alright.
L.B. No, he's fine.
(Silence)
S.B. So, no sense of urgency, people were ready to stay..... Now eventually, I assume, your brother did leave?
M.S. No.
S.B. He did not leave?
M.S. No.
S.B. So the family was there during the Holocaust, I presume?
M.S. Right.... My brother, my youngest brother, was 9 years younger, he's the only survivor of the family.
S.B. He went through a camp?
M.S. He went through ghetto, and he went to...uh, after they exterminated the Tarnoff ghetto, the Tarnoff ghetto was, way, well you know the process, from the surrounding towns and so on, and it gradually, you know, concentrates and squeezes into smaller and smaller quarters. Then, he was part of this Zergerin comanie, uh Zergerin, I mean they saved a few able-bodies, people to clean up, you know, who catalogued the furniture and things like that, and then they shipped them to the, by that time, shipped them to the concentration camps, the last of it, it was not enough for a, for a transport, there was about 200 people. So he went through concentration camps, uh... and he says, through most of the... by that time, I guess, by '43, the manpower problems overcame Germany, and he was, I guess, very strong and he worked for the, what do you call, organization, which was a, I guess, a construction company. And he says up to that point, while he was with them, he was doing all right because they were, they had lots of shipments, of course, they were under guard, and they were marched off to work, hard labor and so on, but they had supplies and uh, they did well until such a time when they had them in concentration camps.
S.B. When you went back to Poland, in '38, you had, you got your visa and them, you said, you went back for a two week vacation...
M.S. The last two weeks in '37...
S.B. Right. Did uh... were there other young men and women, like yourself, who were leaving?
M.S. I didn't know any.
S.B. Well, you're friends from H'a Shamer, were they still there?
M.S. Uhh, many of them had left in the early '30s, as a matter of fact, I visited them last, a year, a year and a half ago.
S.B. In Israel?

M.S. In Israel, in the kibbutzim, and in Tel Aviv, and so on...
S.B. Was there a...
M.S. Some of my cousins left, also uh... some left, there was one cousin that left around that time. Others came to Israel after the War.
S.B. Was there a flow of people to other places, Canada, the United States, France?
M.S. All the borders were closed, nobody was admitting anybody.
L.B. That was in '37?
M.S. Nobody was admitting anybody.
S.B. Now, you were one of 4 brothers, one of 4 children, excuse me, 3 boys and 1 girl?
M.S. Right.
S.B. And you were second from the oldest, is that right?
M.S. Right.
S.B. Uh... what did your 2... the youngest brother was 9 years younger than you, is that right, so he was still in school?
M.S. Right.
S.B. Now, what about the boy who was between the two of you?
M.S. UH... he is in Is... he went to Israel in '34.
S.B. Oh, he went in '34, that's the boy that went to the Hebrew University. Right.
M.S. Right.
S.B. All right, he went to Israel in '34. Was your father upset about it?
M.S. NO, I mean, that was a family decision, that he should go.
L.B. By '34 he, they decided...
M.S. I mean they, they, they had to outfit him, they had to pay for his, it was quite an expense, you know.
S.B. But, you said that he really, this was a subterfuge, he really had no intention of going to the University?
M.S. No intention, yes, just go there and to roost himself...
S.B. Did your...
509 (Tape ends)

Side 4 000

M.S. ...before I came back from school, so I didn't see him from, uh, all these years, until last year. His daughter came here, was here for awhile...
S.B. Now, you said, I think, earlier, that when you were growing up, you, uh, your father knew, you, it was understood that you would go to a University, if at all possible, is that right?
M.S. Well, it was understood, it was possible, there was no question about it.
S.B. And, this was so for all the children?
M.S. At that time, it was actually only for me.
S.B. Right. But, he, is, do you think...
M.S. That was, at that time, it was assumed that that would happen to everybody.
S.B. It would happen?
M.S. Except that perhaps I was more studious, and my younger brother was not. He was not interested in studies, so, there were two factors, by that time things had gotten worse, and secondly, he was really not a good student.
S.B. What about your sister? The oldest one?
M.S. My sister, got married, in '30, 1930.
S.B. And how old was she, when she got married?
M.S. She was... uh... I guess, 22, or 23. And, she had 2 children.
S.B. Now, what about her education?
M.S. She had 7 grades. The girls, as a rule, there was less urgency to educate the girls. She didn't go to gymnasium, she went, the other route, you know, the 7-grade route.

INTERVIEWER S BERK

S.B. How would you characterize your mother's education? Could she read and write?
M.S. Oh yes, she could read and write, and she uh... wrote very well, in German and Yiddish, and in Polish, but, I don't know, I don't think she went to school. I think it was all, you know, private tutoring.
S.B. Did she ever help out in the business?
M.S. Yes. I guess, sort of, babysitting there, you know, sitting while everybody, father was making rounds.
L.B. Did she have help in the house?
M.S. Uh, help in the house, you normally think about underdeveloped countries, with peasant populations, uh, you know, things being so much nicer in the towns, uh, cities. Uh, anybody could get help in the house, and there were live-in maids, who were paid practically, you know, support, just room and board, the room was not a room it was a corner, probably in the kitchen, you know, a bit of the kitchen, and uh, maybe some allowance, and uh, to uh... I can tell you that down the street there was a family, and Orthodox family, with 10 or 11 children, living in 4 rooms, or 3 rooms, house was, you know, was always smelling of diapers and urine and so on, they had a maid. And, he was a workman, she had no income, my mother used to bring food there, you know, supporting them partially, you know, we brought some, cooked something for them, but they had a maid.
S.B. Did you have a maid, I'm sorry, I didn't...
L.B. Yes.
M.S. We did.
S.B. You did. You had one.
M.S. See I was, they had a maid.
L.B. What you're saying is, it didn't mean...
M.S. They were, they were, people who would be on welfare here, see, and they had a maid, a live-in maid.
L.B. Did your mother do most of the cooking, and so on, or did the girl?
M.S. No, she cooked.
L.B. She cooked.
S.B. I just have one question. Was the name "Sommers" in Poland?
M.S. Sommer.
S.B. "Sommer" in Poland?
M.S. Right.
S.B. Oh, O.K. Now, was that, was that the grandfather's name, too?
M.S. Right.
S.B. Right, so that was not a Polanized name of any sort?
M.S. No...
S.B. This was then ...
M.S. It's a German name.
L.B. It's a German name.
S.B. It's a German name. Do you have any questions?
L.B. Yeah, I was wondering... after the First World War, you were actually, you were an Austrian, nationality, before the War, your family, right? Austro-Hungarian?
M.S. Yes, yes.
L.B And after the War, you were Polish nationality, according to passport. Did you feel, because you said you didn't feel Polish, I was wondering if there was any feeling on the, towards the other side, that you would rather have been left with the Austrians, rather than...
M.S. Well, I think, there was a general feeling among the Jewish population after the War, that they were better off under, uh, the Austrians. Uh, Uh, also, uh, there was a pressure for Polish patriotism, for the Jews, and there were many in the schools, and in Polish literature, of course, they had, uh, characters, Jewish characters, who are intensely patriotic.
L.B. You mean they were trying to indoctrinate you into Poland?
M.S. Well, I don't know, as it, well, they would stress that, but actually, for instande, the major poet of Poland is Mischeditch, and his major peem, his major

M.S.cont. work, which is similar in volume to, maybe, Homer's Odyssey or Iliad, was Pontaderuge, and he has a character in there who, Jewish, uh... Jewish, uh, business assistant to this uh, Count, you know, who is intensely patriotic and that was in times of the first division of Poland, Napolean, and so on. And, when he wrote it, it was long before Poland was, existed as a state, I mean, after the various divisions. So, there were, I'm sure, Polish people who felt for the Poles, or for the Polish nationality, I don't know, I didn't know myself, any, but I'm sure there were, and there were recorded instances of Jewish, uh, regiments, let's say, during Napoleanic Wars, working with the Poles against the Russians.

L.B. Did you yourself, or your, the people in Tarnoff, the Jews in Tarnoff, did they have any feeling about the Russians?

M.S. Uh, we had no contact with the Russians, you mean, uh, with the Bolsheviks?

L.B. No, just a feeling about Russia, Russia and Russians. What did you think of them?

M.S. Well, the Polish, the way we were taught the Polish history, the Russians, of course, were the people who divided Poland, and who oppressed Polish people, so we knew that the Czarist Russia was oppressive. We knew, and then in my studies, I learned abut the revolutionary movement in Poland, I was very familiar with all this history of the Russian revolution, the first Russian revolution in 1905, and in 19-, you know, the Bolshevik revolution, and I was sympathetic to it, of course that was long before Stalin. And, we all, many of people in H'a Shamer H'atsyer were sympathetic to the communist movement, but they said, we are actually, we are, there was a wing, a left-wing, in H'a Shamer H'atsyer, which, like Poilitsia, were, so we are, like communists, but we'll take care of it when we have a state in Palestine, you see. So, there is Mordecai Ornstein, I don't know whether you, in your study of history, but here its unknown, in Israel, because I have spoken to several people who came here for those bond-dinners, and so on, and, as far back as 15 years ago they all knew his, his history. Mordecai Ornstein, uh, was this idealogue, of H'a Shamer, of the left wing of H'a Shamer H'atsyir, and followed carolled, for practical purposes, the Communist line, except he says we'll do it later, uh, at the time of the purges in Czechoslovakia, when they purged (Slutsky) and so on, he was, and of course, Czechoslovakia helped Israel during the War of Independence, and this happened soon after; and I think he may have been an intermediary of some kind even before, but at that time he went to Czechoslovakia, maybe with the idea of promoting immigration or what, and he was thrown into jail, and he spent several years in jail in Czechoslovakia, and I think he came back a very disillusioned man. So, uh...

L.B. You mean, as a leftist, he came back disen...

M.S. As a leftist. I think he's still around, there, you know, and, but, of course he is probably an old man by now, so... but, uh... that's why, as I said, my feeling towards Russians, at that time was sympathetic, to uh, as it existed, but there was a lot of parochialism, and, for instance, Jews... who, who'd wander over from the, what was previously the Polish, the Russian part of Poland, you know, Congressional Poland they called it, Warsaw and so on, even not too far away, but it used to be just beyond the old border; they dressed differently, they had those Russian hats, you know, round hats, silk hats, with the small visor, and they would stand out, you see, and we would always say, well, it's a stranger, beware of the, you know, those Polish Jews, the Polish, from the old Poland.

L.B. They were not dycha? Deutsche

M.S. They were not... that's right... they were not, they were not Galiciana...

L.B. They were not, yeah...

M.S. Of course, this carried over here, but uh... there was a lot, some parochialism there, you know, in that respect, they were strangers... some of those who had that, dropped that way, and who came in an, you know, on business, usually, factory, or small business, traveling business, traveling salesmen...

L.B. That's all I'm going to ask today, it's getting late.

S.B. Thank you very much. I'm sorry if we pressed you too hard.

145 (tape ends)