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Boris Wundt, June 1974

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S.B. Has Mrs. Brown told you what we are doing? We are interviewing people who have an experience in Europe either before the first W.W. or between the wars. And the purpose is to reconstruct a an era that no longer exists, that is Jewish communities in Europe ~~(xx)~~ the Holocaust. And the ultimate purpose of this is to put these tapes before

and transcriptions in a library, in the College library for students of Jewish history and students of Russian history to use. Do you understand what we're saying?

B.W. Yes.

S.B. Now, there may in the future be some sort of publication, this we are, this is in the very bvery distant future and we ~~xxx~~ ~~and~~ have no idea of this at this instant in time. The main thing we really want to do is to reconstruct for students who this era

have no knowledge of it at all. So, for students. Primarily, for students.

B.W. Not for expert historians?

S.B. No. Primarily for students. Althought of course, if the book if we would publish a book at some time of course anybody could read it. So, can we begin?

B.W. Yes.

S.B. Can you give me your full name?

B.W. Now, my full name is Boris Michael Wundt. Originally the name was not Wundt, but was Wundtheiler.

S.B. And Where was the name changed?

020 B.W. ~~and~~ In Lancaster (?) in the United States. We dropped the heiler.

S.B. Can you tell me Mr. Wundt where you were born?

B.W. Oh I was born in 1900 in the city of Warsaw in Poland.

S.B. Can you tell me something about the area in Warsaw in which you lived?

B.W. Well, the area where we lived was a part of the ghetto, what they called ghetto. Not when I lived there. They didn't call it ghetto. They didn't know what ghetto was. It was just a Jewish district. Where mostly Jewish people lived but not altogether Jewish. They lived in large buildings, four stories was large. Most of them, they were merchants. They had stores. Every building practically had a store in that.

S.B. Can you tell us something about the building that you lived in?

039 B.W. Yah. Well that building was pretty large. And, I'll tell you about the building where we lived before I left, not when I was born. Because I don't remember it. That building had by our definition five flights. And it had an inside, two inside courts, European style, (with) a garden inside, the court, ~~xx~~ with a janitor living in the first passage into the building and on each floor ~~thxxx~~ they might have then, each floor, there were families on each side of the corridor. So on four floors would be eight families. They were spread all around the courts. You may imagine that they would be probably something like 64 families living in that house.

S.B. Were all of them Jewish?

B.W. Not necessarily, but probably 90 percent were Jewish. The janitor of course was not Jewish.

S.B. The janitor.

B.W. Yes.

S.B. Did you have hot and cold running water in the building?

B.W. No, we just, cold water, yes. Toilets. But we had no hot water. That had to be prepared.

S.B. How was that?

B.W. Just boiled, just warmed up. And poured into a large dish and that's how we washed. Otherwise we only had cold water, for washing.

S.B. And what about bathroom facilities?

B.W. Yes, there was bathroom facilities, with running water (on style?)

S.B. Would you characterize this building and the street or area in which you lived as a middle class area? working class? well to do?

B.W. No. That's by no means well to do. It was lower middle class. It was the very poor area where the Jewish people lived, there were some other areas, where the very poor Jews lived. But it was a lower middle class, mostly people *there*

who had small businesses, stores, small stores. They lived... I didn't know the man who owned that building, never knew, never met him, ~~xxxxxxx~~ I didn't know who it was. But I know one family which... There was a Hasidic family lived in our flight of houses, Hasidic family. A typical family ~~and~~ with everything () and they lived in a big house like that.

S.B. Was the landlord... You say you didn't know the landlord?

B.W. I didn't know the landlord?

S.B. But did you know if he was Jewish?

B.W. I don't know for sure, but I'm pretty sure that he was. / I'm not Absolutely sure of it, but very probably he was Jewish. There were some very rich Jews there, who owned all these places.

S.B. Now at what time, approximately/time did you live in this house?
what

B.W. In this house? I lived there during the first W.W.

S.B. Did you live in the house before the war?

B.W. In some other house, in some other street. Not maybe two, three streets away from this one... where we lived in that... when we were little boys, there were two brothers, we lived on some other street which doesn't exist now.

S.B. Can you tell us something about your family? What did your father do?

B.W. Oh yes. My father was a pretty successful businessman up to the first W.W. He came... he came from a rather religious orthodox family, my grandfather had a long beard and wore the ~~xxx~~ capota. You know the capota. And my grandmother was a typical orthodox Jewess with ~~x~~ everything goes with. You observed Saturday you know, special way. But my father was more or less emancipated. He didn't wear a beard. He didn't wear a moustache(?). He didn't wear a hat all the time like my grandfather did. And his business, from my very early years I don't remember, but during the W.W. I he had an establishment where he was, it was like a woodworking facilities, now what is, what do we call this in the United States? He had... he was selling panels, and to carpenters. So he electrical machinery there at that time.

S.B. Did he have a factory?

B.W. Yes. It was...

L.B. Was it a lumber yard?

B.W. Yes, it was a lumber yard. It was some kind of a lumber yard where he bought raw wood and by means of this electrical machinery ~~sawed~~ sawed it ~~in~~ wooden beams and...

S.B. Was this in the city of Warsaw?

B.W. Right.

S.B. The lumber yard was right in the city?

B.W. Yes, right in the city. I think it was in the back yard of one of the houses. In the front people lived. In the back, the whole back yard was just this factory.

S.B. Now did he rent that or did he own it?

B.W. No. He rented it. He rented it. But when the war started the Russian German war started after a year or so, the Germans came in Warsaw, I think they came in August 1915, a year after the war started, and they confiscated all the wood he had. I guess some of the machinery he had. And from there on he was a luftmensch. You know ~~xxx~~ what I mean?

S.B. Yes, I know. But why don't you say what a luftmensch is?

B.W. Yes. It means he tried to... attempted to do the kind of a business which he could manage to have. That means, for instance, I think that sometime he was making belts, cutting belts for men and women. And on other occasions he worked had a partner with his brother in law and they were selling all kinds of clothing to the stores. Buying it wholesale and selling it to the retailers.

S.B. Can you tell us something about your education?

B.W. O.K. My father in spite of the fact that during the first W.W. he lost his capital and so on, he was able to put us through school, three brothers. And I'm the oldest and the middle brother, who ... and the youngest brother. Now, we all went to gymnasium, you know, which is like a high school and those are private ones. He had to pay tuition.

S.B. Now, before you went to the gymnasium, where did you go?

B.W. Before, we studied Hebrew with Hebrew teachers in some kind of a cheder.

S.B. You went to the cheder?
 B.W. Yes. Only for a very short time. Learned some Hebrew.
 S.B. Now what language did you speak at home?
 B.W. Polish.
 S.B. You spoke Polish?
 B.W. Yeah. Not Yiddish, but Polish. My parents spoke Yiddish to each other, but to us they spoke Polish. Polish is my mother language, not Yiddish.
 S.B. What about the rest of the people in the apartment house? Did they speak Yiddish?
 B.W. Mostly.
 S.B. They spoke Yiddish. Now ~~xxx~~ how do you attribute the fact that you spoke Polish?
 B.W. Oh, because we went to the Polish school.
 L.B. You went to the Polish public school before the gymnasium?
 B.W. There were no public schools.
 L.B. No? Where did you go to school before the gymnasium?
 B.W. Oh they start, they start these gymnasium from practically elementary education.
 S.B. So the first formal schooling that you had really was in a Polish gymnasium where Polish was spoken.
 B.W. Polish was spoken and Russian.
 S.B. And Russian.
 B.W. Yes.
 S.B. Who owned, or who ran the gymnasium?
 B.W. Those were run by people who had some degrees in education I imagine.
 S.B. Were they Jews?
 B.W. No.
 S.B. They were not Jews.
 B.W. No. The schools we went to, my brother and myself, we went to a Polish school. There were no Jewish gymnasiums, at that time. Later on, I think that were. But not at that time when we were educated.
 S.B. Now there must have been boys and girls in these...
 B.W. ~~In the apartment houses~~ No...
 S.B. In the apartment houses...
 B.W. Oh, yes. In the apartment houses. Not in the schools.
 S.B. Not in the schools. In the apartment houses.
 B.W. Yes.
 S.B. Now they spoke Yiddish?
 B.W. Many of them, yes. But also Polish. Polish was a widely spread language between the Jews. Every Jew had to learn Polish.
 S.B. Why?
 B.W. Because he sold things to the Poles. And his contacts were not necessarily Jewish. There were contacts with the Polish workers. And they were selling them goods and they ~~xxx~~ met them and they spoke Polish and the children also learned Polish that way. But at home they spoke Yiddish. Now our family was some kind of an assimilated family.
 S.B. Where were your mother and father from?
 B.W. My father was born in Warsaw, so was my grandfather. But my mother, I understand was born in Russia but came to Poland at a very early age and absorbed the Polish language. She spoke Polish perfectly. So my father did.
 S.B. Did your father and mother read Polish?
 B.W. Oh yes.
 S.B. Do you remember getting any newspapers or magazines in the house?
 B.W. Well. There were no magazines. Newspapers.
 S.B. What language?
 B.W. Polish. Also there were a number of Yiddish papers, there were Der Heint, Der Moment, I don't know if you know these names. But we didn't absorb enough to read these Yiddish papers fast. We had to read very slowly because we didn't learn Yiddish. We... I understand Yiddish. But I never spoke it.
 S.B. Well, you spoke it to your parents didn't you?
 B.W. No, I just said I spoke Polish.
 S.B. Always Polish.
 B.W. But I understood Yiddish. Right now, I understand Yiddish. I don't understand

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 stopped
 11:30 p.m.
 started
 4:30
 9:41

everything. But I couldn't speak it.

S.B. Now, was this...were you fairly unique in the building?

B.W. In this building where we lived, uh, I would say that we were about maybe in the minority. We had some friends who had the same situation with the families that they were somewhat assimilated. In the same building, another three, four families.

L.B. Would you say that the difference between those Jews who spoke Polish and whose children spoke Polish and those who spoke only Yiddish was one of class?

B.W. Well, I don't know. I wouldn't say "class". But it's a different upbringing and different outlook on life.

L.B. Well, what was the difference?

B.W. The difference was the tendency on my family was to absorb the Polish culture and to become part of the Polish life and that's the way they brought us up. The others, didn't have this concept of absorbing Polish culture and assimilating

don't, with the Poles. They ~~xxx~~ wanted to be Jewish, Yiddish, mostly Yiddish rather than Hebrew. Hebrew was not spoken only Yiddish. And they were religious, they were quite religious. They didn't speak Polish. They spoke Yiddish. My family was not very religious.

L.B. They were not?

B.W. As I said my father was quite emancipated. My father smoked cigarettes on Saturday.

S.B. Did he work on Saturday?

B.W. Yes. No! Excuse me, no, he didn't work on Saturday. But he smoked cigarettes. My maternal grandfather smoked cigarettes on Saturday. And that was many years ago, that was around 1910, 1912.

S.B. Did you go to the synagogue?

B.W. Yeah. To the central synagogue. We were going to the real central synagogue in Warsaw which was destroyed. Where the rabbi was Dr. Poznanski. You know the name? And that synagogue was an Orthodox synagogue. But it had an organ and women were separated from men but then occasionally on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashona we would go to a real shul, for the Holy Day of Yom Kippur from very early for the whole day. And Rosh Hashona we did. When we were little. But when we grew up we didn't go. We attended occasionally but not all the time.

S.B. How often did the family attend the synagogue?

B.W. They hardly attended on Saturday.

S.B. Jus on Rosh Hashona?

B.W. Just on Rosh Hashona and other high holy days. Although my grandparents did.

S.B. Where did your grandparents live?

B.W. Oh, they lived also in the same area, not very far from us. In one of the buildings there too, probably on the second floor there.

S.B. What about your maternal grandparents?

B.W. My maternal grandparents. My grandparents came from Russia

S.B. And they continued to live in Russia?

B.W. No, no. They came to Poland early when my mother was quite young and they established themselves in Poland and my grandfather, my maternal grandfather, was quite emancipated who

by that time, he was educated. He knew Russian language very well. And he was writing letters and filled out papers for people when they wanted to write Russian government, he could do that. So he was pretty well educated from that point of view.

L.B. I want to know what the difference is between the central synagogue and the real shul?

B.W. The central synagogue was, it was somewhat...it was in the center of the city, a big building, with quite large synagogue, very well...with a number of...with balconies and with almost up to date arrangements which I have seen in other synagogues here and people who belonged to that synagogue had to pay some money to the...yearly dues.. Not...And only those who could afford belonged to that synagogues. Otherwise they attended these small shuls who were on many streets and those consisted maybe of three rooms or so where they prayed, which was not very large rooms, like an apartment, and that was the synagogue.

S.B. So by and large then, it would be the more well to do people who belonged to the

central synagogue?

B.W. To the central synagogue, yes. Yes, my middle brother was a great friend of Dr. Poznanski's son, you know, the rabbi. And he was a doctor. He had a doctorate degree and he was...and he preached in Polish.

S.B. The sermon was then in Polish.

B.W. In Polish, yes. He preached in Hebrew of course, but ~~the~~ the sermon was in Polish.

S.B. Preached in Hebrew?

B.W. Yes.

L.B. Well, no, he did the liturgy probably in Hebrew.

B.W. Yes.

S.B. In other words the praying was in Hebrew.

B.W. In Hebrew, but the sermon would be Polish.

S.B. No Yiddish.

B.W. No Yiddish.

S.B. Was there any Yiddish in the service at all?

B.W. I don't remember. In the central synagogue?

S.B. In the central synagogue.

B.W. I don't remember. Probably not. It was Hebrew and Polish. But in the shuls of course they...Hebrew exclusively.

E.B. There was no Polish?

B.W. No. Oh, no! No, No. These were completely different. Completely different. That's like Sholom Aleichem describes those.

L.B. I wondered why you called it a "real shul"?

B.W. Ah, because it is a real shul and a shul like this I think I have seen in Boston. I've seen...when I came to the United States I lived near Boston so I think I've seen one, very similar.

S.B. So, can you describe again the curriculum of the gymnasium?

B.W. Yes. All you had to do is to know how to read and write to get into the gymnasium. You had to have a private tutor somehow to learn how to read and write.

S.B. And (In?) Polish?

B.W. Polish, yes.

S.B. And what age now, eight or nine?

B.W. We started like this eight or nine, yes. Beginning with the first year well there was expounding (?) and reading and so on, and arithmetic and then it went on pretty seriously and we learned, what, arithmetic, algebra, history, geography,

S.B. Polish history?

B.W. ... () ~~explication~~ No international...Oh, there's a complication because when I went to gymnasium the Russians were in power and they imposed on these Polish schools certain rules. The rules were that history was taught in Russian.

S.B. In the Russian language.

B.W. Language. And we had to learn Russian then. And they taught us Russian. Languages, we learned German, French, French was favorite. Most educated Poles speak French. German was last.

Many of them, at least in my time they did. And then there was algebra, arithmetic, history, Russian history; mostly of Russian history, very little Polish history. That was suppressed.

S.B. Were your teachers Polish or Russian?

B.W. Some Polish, some Russian.

S.B. Jewish teachers?

B.W. No, not in these schools. I don't think I even remember Jewish teachers, but now I remember something. There must have been some schools where, which were, where only Jewish boys and girls went. Because my girlfriend was going to one of these schools which was run by Jewish people and she had Jewish teachers. She learned practically everything in Polish, not in Yiddish but in Polish, but it was mostly for Jewish people. We went to a school which was for mixed people, Poles and Jews.

S.B. How many people were in the school?

B.W. How many? There were...well now there were seven classes and there were probably around 14 pupils in each class so it would be around 300.

S.B. Three hundred people in each class, uh, in the school.

B.W.. About 40 in each class. And after we graduated from their school then we had to pass, get a matura examination. You know what matura was, that's ~~xxxxxx~~ like here a ?Regents, before you could apply to the University.

S.B. Now did you take an exam, an examination?

B.W. A very strict examination which lasted quite a long time.

S.B. How long?

B.W. It would last probably for something like three, four days and each day might be four hours.

S.B. And which subjects were covered?

B.W. There were covered mathematics, history language.

S.B. Now, about how many of the 300 people ~~xxxx~~ were Jewish in the school?

B.W. Hah! Probably some 10 %.

S.B. Was it a coeducational school?

B.W. No. All boys. And there were similar schools for girls.

S.B. B.W. Now, do you remember having any difficulties in the school? Because you were Jewish?

B.W. Uh, there was no outright anti-semitism.

S.B. We're talking about before 1914.

B.W. Now, you see that was, well no, 1914, 1915, 1916 from seven years before that, from 1910, 1911 to 1916 or so, and I had many friends who were not necessarily Jewish and we didn't suffer from ~~practical~~ anti-semitism.

particular

S.B. Now, when you say you didn't suffer from particular anti-semitism or outright anti-semitism...

B.W. Well, we have not been molested.

S.B. You were not molested. What about anybody calling you names?

B.W. I don't remember this definitely, but O.K. well they'll say, well, you Jew, or something like that. You Jew, Christ-killer, occasionally, but that came from some boys who had this kind of a outlook on Jews imposed by their families and they came from different families so occasionally there was something. But the teachers were not.

S.B. You don't remember any anti-semitism...

B.W. No. No. No. On the whole I don't remember any feeling about being in some way exposed to anti-semitism, not in school.

S.B. Well, let me ask you this question. In the period up to 1916, that is into your adolescence, was anti-semitism a factor in your life?

B.W. Yes...

S.B. How?

B.W. Because you see I was in engineering school...

S.B. This is after the gymnasium?

B.W. Yes.

S.B. But before that.

B.W. Before that...

S.B. Were you afraid to walk on the streets?

B.W. Well, there was something like it. Now when they had a Catholic procession which is called Corpus Christi, I don't know if you know this, Jewish boys, girls would clear the streets. They wouldn't stay there and watch the procession.

S.B. When you were a young boy?

B.W. The procession would leave the Church, the Catholic church which was in our neighborhood was the Catholic church, a large church, when the procession leave with the priests, the population walking along, uh, we would, well parents told us to stay home. Don't be on the streets. Now if we were on the streets, what would have happened I don't know.

S.B. Now, the next question I want to ask you is a very difficult one. It's difficult for me to phrase and I would imagine because it is difficult for me to phrase it would be difficult for you to answer. You spoke ~~in~~ about a way of looking at life, your family looked at it a little bit differently than the more unassimilated ~~groups~~

B.W. Yes. groups.

S.B. Do you remember your father speaking to you about what we are, what our future will be, what type of behaviour we should practise?

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B.W. Well, now the father said, now remember he was in business, but he wanted his sons to be educated and be professional people. So he knew that I wanted to go to engineering, he knew that my middle brother wanted to be a mathematician, he didn't know what my youngest brother wanted to do. So having this, he knew that he had to direct us to go to certain schools, learn certain things and educate ourselves that way. Now many Jewish families didn't have that ambition. They wanted their children to be business men, to do the small business, the small store and housekeepers and storekeepers and let's say small artisans, like Jews were like tailors, you know, well, cobblers, very many tailors, Jewish tailors. Poor people. Cobblers, very poor. They worked the whole day, all night. And even these people wanted some of their children to be ...

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S.B. So your father wanted you to get a good education and to move if possible into the professions. Now, but what about...did your father consider himself a Pole?

B.W. No. My father considered himself one hundred percent Jewish. A Jew, with all the problems which go with being a Jew.

S.B. Did he speak to you about the Poles? I mean ~~after~~ after all you were in a family that was sent to a Polish speaking, Polish operated gymnasium. You read Polish newspapers. Evidently your father must have believed that it was possible for his children to become professional people. Was he optimistic about the future?

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B.W. Yes. He was. He was...he didn't have many contacts with Poles. His contacts were mostly with Jews. Practically exclusively with Jewish people. But we, as children, we had contact with and played with Polish children even in our neighborhood there. And when we went to gymnasium and so on we were surrounded by the Poles & and we were, we accommodated ourselves that way. And there was no particular problem. Although there was an anti-semitism, if you ask me was there anti-semitism in Poland at that time, I say yes. In respect to the merchants, in respect to the Jewish business, in respect to the Jewish doctors...

S.B. Did your father tell you, did he complain about anti-semitism?

B.W. Yes.

S.B. What did he say?

B.W. Hah!

S.B. I mean, did he say for example, that there were laws...? Restricting him...?

B.W. You see...No, no. I don't think that he was restricted by any particular laws in his business. But he knew that the Poles like the Jews. It's like dogs don't like cats. That's the way, they just don't get along. And the Poles called Jews Christ-killers and they have not been permitted to enter for instance Russian Universities in Russian gymnasiums. You know they were gymnasiums there, strictly Russian. The children of Russian government officials. There were Russian universities in Warsaw. The Jews had numerus clausus, they were only five per cent, Jews permitted in these Russian schools. And so there was no numerus clausus in the Polish schools, not obvious. There were some Polish schools, when they wouldn't admit a Jew, a single Jew. To those we didn't go. Some exceptional schools to which Polish upper classes have sent their children, there we didn't go. And we knew what schools those were.

S.B. Now, do you remember having any political conversations with your father? For example did he say anything to you about Polish nationalism, were there any sympathy, or lack of sympathy...

B.W. Yeah. There was...there, I think that, it's so many years now as you probably can figure out, I think that my father was more sympathetic to the Russians than to the Poles.

S.B. He was more sympathetic to the Russians than to the Poles? Now was that because of Polish anti-semitism?

B.W. Of Polish anti-semitism, yes. Of course, Poland was part of Tsarist Russia. The Russian Tsar was king of Poland. So, and the police was Russian, and he could get along with the Russian police by bringing them and so I guess he was pretty well satisfied with the Russians. However, I who went to the Polish schools, had a feeling which came from the school against the Russians. Poles, Catholic Poles never liked the Russians. They called them oppressors and there was a war going on there, a revolutionary war, in that time.

S.B. Now did you know, before ~~th~~ getting into this, so am I right in saying that because you went to the Polish schools and studied Polish history and were with Polish boys, you began to feel some sympathy for the Poles vis a vis the Russians. That is correct?

B.W. Correct.

S.B.. All right, now. Were you conscious, were you and your father conscious of what was happening in other parts of the Russian empire?

B.W. Well, yes, there was the Beilis trial.

S.B. Now, did you know about the...

B.W. Oh yes.

S.B. You knew...

B.W. Even my age. I remember the year when the Beilis trial was.

S.B. It was 1911.

B.W. I was eleven years old. But I remember very definitely that at ^{that} time I was completely knowledgeable about that trial from the newspapers, I even remember the names of that liberal Russian lawyers who defended Beilis.

L.B. I wish you would tell them to us, because we had an argument over who they were. Do you remember the names now?

B.W. I'll try to remember but my memory is poor. I remember that at time, I knew them. Knew all these things, and we were all excited and you know, the Poles, the Catholics, if they didn't like a Jew they called him Beilis. They called him a name and the name was Beilis. But so I was called Beilis sometimes. Yeah, but that disappeared after a while because Beilis' trial ended and Beilis left Russia and went to Israel, to Palestine.

S.B. - He went here.

B.W.. He went to United States?

S.B. He went to Saratoga.

B.W. Oh really? I thought he went to...

S.B. No., sorry and then he went down to Brooklyn.

B.W. So this trial of Beilis in Russia indicated () and then they all knew about the Russian problems there the Chernyia Syutnya, the Black Hundred. They knew about all these. They knew about pogroms.

S.B. Did your father ever discuss this with you?

B.W. Yes.

S.B. So you knew about the pogroms? You knew about Beilis? You knew about the Black Hundred?

B.W. Yes, oh sure, sure.

S.B. What about the various revolutionary groups?

B.W. No! We, I did not know. But there might have been others who did know. But we went to the 1905 revolution, in the city of Warsaw.

S.B. But you were too young...

B.W. I was only five years, but I remember.

S.B. Did you know about Pilsudski?

B.W. Oh yes.

S.B. Before. Not later on. Before 1914 out

B.W. Before I didn't know much about him. I found/about him later after when he became the head of the legions, Austrian legions.

S.B. What about the Polish boys in the school, in the gymnasium, was there any talk about an independent Poland? Was there any strong anti-Russian feeling there?

B.W. Now this I cannot definitely tell if they felt about independent Poland. I don't know. I cannot answer that question. However, I think there were groups I did not know, not in schools, but outside of schools...

S.B. Did you belong to any... Again, we're in this period up to 1916, did you belong to any Jewish organization?

B.W. No, I didn't. No. Excuse me, I belonged to the Jewish Scouts, Boy Scouts.

S.B. Jewish Boy Scouts.

B.W. Yes, which were Zionists. Which were inclined towards Zionism. I was a Boy Scout. But I didn't belong to outright... oh yes, I remember now singing Hatikvah.

S.B.. You remember singing Hatikvah.

S.B. In the Jewish Boy Scouts.

B.W. Yes.

S.B. Did Zionism mean anything to you, in this period, up to 1916?

B.W. No. Not to me.

S.B. To your father?

B.W. I d..my father...I can't tell you. Nothing particularly obvious, so I don't know.
S Not at that time, but later on it was.

S.B. Now, the war begins, summer of 1914. How did the war affect you? The beginning of the war affect you?

B.W. Well, we were pleased to see the Germans come in.

S.B. Pleased?

B.W. In August 1915 the year after the war broke out the Germans took Warsaw.

S.B. Why?

B.W. We were pleased because we thought that they ~~were~~ would protect the Jews against the Polish anti-semitism.

S.B. So you looked to the Germans for support, to protect the Jews against Polish anti-semitism.

127 B.W. There were groups of Poles who were hooligans, you know. And they were (axing?) Jews you see.

L.B. Was this especially true during the war?

B.W. No...

L.B. This you remember all through your childhood.

B.W. Yes, I remember. And the Jews had actually formed a militia without, they didn't have any firearms, but a militia which consisted of this very strong Jewish man who carry bundles, what are they called...?

S.B. ~~xxxxxx~~ Carters?

B.W. What?

S.B.. Carters.

B.W.. Well, they carried us...

S.B. They're carters and haulers.

B.W. They carried...

L.B. You mean the yokes on the shoulders?

B.W. On the shoulders, yes. If you wanted to mover packages from one place to another they had men...they formed the militia using these haulers. And when they would, and when the hooligans would come into the Jewish areas there and try to beat up people and break some stores, they were right there and they fought them.

S.B. When the war broke out, who did you want to win?

B.W. Who did you want to win? Now this is...we were pro-Germans.

S.B. And, you were pro-German now...

B.W. The Germans treated the Jews very well. No comparison with the Nazis.

S.B. All right. Now, did you know this before? Let's say the war breaks out, the summer of 1914, you knew that the Germans were decent in their relations to Jews before this?

B.W.. We knew that there were no pogroms, in Germany, but there were pogroms in Russian Ukraine, in Kishinev. We knew that the Russian government was anti-semitic and we knew that there was no particular anti-semitism at that time in Germany and we thought the Germans were much more educated and intelligent than the Russians and Jews spoke Yiddish which was in slang you know the German.

S.B. What about the boys in the gymnasium? ~~Did~~ Did they feel the same way? ~~xxxx~~

B.W. I don't know. But we were under German occupation from August 1915 until 1918 sometime.

S.B. Can you tell us something about that occupation?

1727 B.W. Yes. Again, there was hunger. Ther Germans took the food away from the peasants and so on for their own use but they were quite strict but just. They were 7. lines for bread, you know the bread was erzatz, which had wood shavings in it.

L.B. Sawdust.

B.W. Sawdust. The doffee was not coffee but it was burned barley, eratz cafe erzatz. Honey was not honey, but it was some kind of a modification of something I don't know and the Germansoldiers ate that. There was no butter. Some kind of a peculiar sugar. Well, all these were distributed to the civil population but we all had to have a card, you know, a ~~xxx~~ provision card. A card for provisions. and we stood in line..
11.45

B.W. But the Germans also stood there in the same line and made sure that the line is going properly and the food is distributed properly.

L.B. And Poles and Jews?

B.W. Stood in the same line.

L.B. And got the same rations?

B.W. And got the same rations. There was no difference whatsoever. As a matter of fact one of the German officers was visiting my aunt (laughs) and he wanted to be taught Polish, so...

S.B. Was he Jewish?

B.W. No. I didn't see any German Jews in that army. That was the Bavarian army which occupied Poland under King Leopold von (?) with a long beard. And I saw him and we didn't... I don't remember if we did hate, after a while, if we did hate the Germans, but they had, they didn't kill people, they didn't ... they were quite strict as I say, but maintained order, military order, but they were quite strict. They however were after some Poles who were trying to organize Polish guerrillas. Because you see the Russians were beaten, the Germans are occupying Poles, so there was a possibility that Poland would rise, that already they were forming units of this type. Now they, these they were looking for.

L.B. I was going to ask you whether the Polish boys felt any differently toward the Germans than say Jewish Poles?

B.W. Well, this is, this question can be answered that way. There was always a hatred between the Poles and the Germans.

L.B. So they hated them both? They hated everybody then?

B.W. The Poles had a hatred against the Russians and the Poles had a hatred against the Germans.

L.B. And the Jews.

B.W. And they're both historical. Because of the history. Especially the Germans because the Germans Germanized the Poles in all these areas which were originally Polish and were occupied by the Germans, they changed their names, they eliminated the Polish languages and these people didn't even know that they were Poles anymore. They were Germans with Polish names. So they knew about all of that. So there was always a hatred goes back to the Middle Ages.

S.B. Now, can you tell us anything else about the German occupation?

B.W. Oh, not much more except that they were as I say strict and there was, the occupation lasted from August 1915 until like November or September 1918. What I'd seen was a revolt in the German army.

S.B. You saw a revolt?

B.W. Yes. At the end of the war. You know what happened? The German soldiers who were from Alsace Lorraine put on the French cockades ~~and~~ on their lapels, you know, and tore off their German insignia. ~~Fais~~

S.B. This was in September of 1918?

B.W. Yes, when the Armistice was signed I guess. Officers, German officers, well, there was an interesting thing there. The German soldiers wanted to give their arms to Polish labor.

S.B. To the Polish laborers, to the Labor parties?

B.W. Yah. And they were I think prevented, some way or other from doing this. They just wanted to create I guess a revolt by the Polish labor.

S.B. Did you and your father or you and anybody in your family have any contact with the occupying German army?

B.W. Very little. No, hardly any. We spoke German. I knew some German.

S.B. Where did you learn the German?

B.W. In school.

S.B. Now, how was the school affected? Obviously they must have begun to teach German?

B.W. Oh, I think the schools shut down.

S.B. For how long?

B.W. During the German occupation. For some time, shut down. I don't remember exactly if they did shut down or not. I think they did and we had no particular contact with the German army, with the German police. They had their own police you know.

S.B. Is it fair to say, would I be right in saying that this was not a harsh occupation?

B.W. Right. That's what I would say. It was not a harsh occupation except for hunger.

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B.W.. Which was there anyway. You know the peasants did not produce, whatever they produced the Germans took and (divide it) it.

S.B. Did you see people starving?

B.W. No.

S.B. There was no starvation. Not to the best of your knowledge.

B.W. No, No, No starvation. No, no, not in the city. Maybe some in the villages, but not in the city. No starvation. I would praise the German occupation, that it was an occupation which did not create animosity on the part of the ordinary person.

S.B.. Now you said that when the war broke out you were rather pro German and you were pro German because you felt that perhaps Germans took over the area they if

would put an end to the anti-semitic excesses of the Polish hooligans? ~~Did~~ Did they? Yes they would. They did not countenance any anti Jewish or any kind of demonstrations of this type at all. They didn't even understand them. I don't think they understood those demonstrations. They just kept everything quiet. They had patrols over the city you know, riding on bicycles, bicycles not motorcycles even, bicycles. And foot soldiers and cavalry and what was an interesting fact which I remember, the first German soldiers entered the city of Warsaw and they came into our area there, the Jewish population, some Jews came out with bread and salt, which is a greeting. Is it a Jewish greeting? Bread and salt? Or is it a Polish greeting?

S.B. It's a Polish and Ukrainian greeting.

B.W. With bread and salt. The Germans didn't understand what they were doing but they came over and offered it...

S.B. And used it?

B.W. And used it. I've seen this, yes.

S.B. Can you remember...I assume then that there was no evidence, no manifestation of anti-semitism by the Germans.

B.W. I would say No. No. No. Not to the population, discrimination or anything like that at all.

S.B. Now you were born in 1900.

B.W. 1900, yes.

S.B. Now, this is 1916, 1917, 1918. Did you have a problem with conscription? You were coming on military age.

B.W. Well now that worked a little different. In 1918 of course the Armistice was signed and Poland became an independent country. So Poland immediately set up to build their army and there was a Polish army there under Pilsudski but they were they fought with the Austrians against the Russians. And this, they were called Legionnaires, these legions became a nucleus for the Polish army now under Pilsudski. But the Germans did not care much for Pilsudski so they put him in jail in the Maréburg fortress.. They arrested him. And another general took over command.. Now at that time they, the Polish army was formed. Now it was a volunteer army. At first. There was no recruits, and the first volunteers were students. And I by that time was a student already.

S.B. Let's deal with that one. You were a student where?

B.W. In the Government Institute for Machine Design and ~~Mechanics~~ Electrical Engineering.

L.B. But you said the schools were closed.

B.W. Yeah, but the schools apparently opened later on. And I entered that school and then Poland became independent the schools closed again because all the students went into the army. So I was not conscripted but I was a volunteer.

S.B.. You were a volunteer then in the new Polish army?

B.W. In the new Polish army.

S.B. What year please?

B.W. That was 1919.

S.B. 1919. So you interrupted your schooling in this government institute...

B.W..for Machine Design and Electrical Engineering.

S.B. for Machine Design and Electrical Engineering. Now, this was a, what type of program, three years, four years?

B.W. A four year program of engineering. This was a Polish school now.

S.B. A Polish school?

B.W. A newly formed Polish school.

S.B. And you entered this school when?

B.W. It must have been 1918.

S.B. Before the end of the war?

B.W. Before the end of the war, yes. The Polish school, yes. And then the school closed and we went in the army.

S.B. Were there anybother Jewish boys in the school?

B.W. Oh yes. And they split. Some entered the army and others did not go.

S.B. Why did you enter the army?

B.W. Because I felt that was the proper thing to do.

S.B. You were then an advocate of Polish independence?

B.W. Polish independence, yes. The others were also advocates of Polish independence, I think. But they just didn't want to go into the armed forces.

S.B. Were you happy about the creation of an independent Poland? If you can remember back, at that point in time?

B.W. Uh, Uh. I didn't think I had enough political acumen to decide if I was happy at that time or not. It just happened that way.

S.B. If you can put yourself back now, were you aware of what was happening at Versailles?

B.W. Yes.

S.B. Were you aware of the discussions of minority rights?

B.W. Not very well.

S.B. Were you aware that there were any dicussions?

B.W.. Uh, no. I wasn't ~~xx~~ aware about minority problems, rights. I was aware about the political problems which the Versailles treaty encountered, like the problem between Poland and Lithuania, the problems between Poland and Ukraine in the southern part of Poland, I was aware about that part.

S.B. How long were you in the service?

B.W. Well, from 1919 until after the war with Russia.

S.B. Did you see combat?

B.W.. Yeah.

S.B. Where?

B.W. Well, the first combat I saw in, the regiment I was in was the regiment which was called Academic Regiment, Legion. And that was the 36th infantry regiment. And we were sent south, to the south of Poland, to conquer the city of Lvov, you know which is called Lemberg in German. Because that city was occupeid by the Ukrainians who were part of the old ~~xxx~~ Austrian army. You know, Ukrainians had an idea that can unite the Russian Ukraine with the Polish Ukraine right up to the border which is Czechoslovakia and Hungary and they have been a part of the Austrian army so they were organized. And they had Austrian uniforms. The Austrians gave, permitted them to form these units. You know Austrians were very liberal you know. The minorities had their own divisions and army units. So the Ukrainians had their own divisions and the Poles had their own divisions like the legions, Polish legion, and Czechs had their own. And well these Ukrainians occupied Lemberg. So our division who the army trained, was sent south on trains to expel the Ukrainians from Lvov. And that was in January 1919. And I was wounded there. In combat. Right outside the city of Lemberg

S.B. Did you experience any anti-Jewish incidents?

B.W. Well, now when we came, when our regiment came to the city of Lemberg we found out that not long time before we came there was a pogrom in Lemberg, by the Polish army.

S.B. By the Polish army?

B.W. Yeah. And that really disturbed me and a few other of the Jews very much.

S.B. When you say it disturbed you, could you remember...

B.W. Because I didn't expect the Poles, the Polish army to attack the civil, you know to make a regular pogrom there. There were many Jews living there and I was very resentful about that and I told this to the other soldiers and so I know I went through a rather unpleasant time because I was going into combat right now and I was wondering if it's worth while.

L.B. I was going to ask that. If you said you weren't happy, you weren't sure if you were happy about an independent Poland why did you join the Polish legion?

B.W. But that was the Polish army.

L.B. All right the Polish army. I'm sorry.

B.W. They called the regiment a legion regiment but it was ~~the~~ Polish army. Why? Because I thought ...

L.B. You were young...

B.W. Yes, because I thought this was the right thing to do. And others thought that they would not, they shouldn't join and I think we split about half and half.

L.B. So, am I right, would it be right to say that it was not reasoned, it was almost like a...

B.W. No, it was more particularly, looking back now. It was not a reason at all. It was just...all my friends went and so on. And so we all go.

L.B. So this was more of a shock then?

B.W. It was. It was quite a shock to us, to me. And then I, they got me in a field hospital and so forth. And then, after that, well of course the Poles conquered, the southern Poland and relieved southern Poland of the Ukrainians so the ? was not very correct because the whole place was ~~just~~ just, the whole countryside was just Ukrainians peasants and the Poles only lived in the cities. But the League of Nations, or rather Treaty of Versailles, excuses me, felt that that part should go to Poland.

S.B. Now, just to go back a little bit. Were you aware of what happened in October ~~October 1939~~

8:30

Tape ends

4 1/2 - 5 hrs typing

1 hour tape