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Boris Wexler, transcript only

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LB Now, for the machine. Oh, incidentally, there's one thing I forgot to do. I forgot to bring the release that I ask everybody to sign, so the cassettes can go into the library. And what we do afterwards, we type a transcript so that...I should have brought some copies...all the people I interviewed two years ago, I got their tapes transcribed and I brought it back with me and gave it to them so they'd have a rough copy of the conversation that took place.

BW Yes, yes. In print.

LB Well, typed.

BW Well for that matter you got to have machine it should be able to show. I haven't got it anyway so I'll

But I want to ask you, is this strictly educational?

LB Oh, yes.

BW It's not going into...the point is, I'm not, to some explain you explained it. Because there's some professor that history in Yiddish?

LB No, in English.

BW In English. Jewish history?

LB Right. And Russian.

BW And Russian history. And this to gain of a certain subject, material?

LB That's right. You see, the students are really very far removed from this history. They don't understand what a shtetel really is, even though they read it in a book. But, if they hear somebody tell what happened to them, let's say during the civil war or when they came over on the boat on steerage, or what kind of life was like under the Czar or during the revolution...

BW Or after the revolution.

LB Or after the revolution, then it becomes a personal matter. ~~But~~ what happens
Or

during the first World War.

BW I hope you don't mind if I'm asking you questions.

LB I hope you understand me. You see a lot of Jews did not participate.

BW I think my mind is still working. I hope.

LB Now, let's start. You tell the tape your name.

BW My name is Benjamin Wexler. I was born July the 12, 1894 in Odessa, Russia.

LB Now at time, let's see, Odessa's in the Ukraine. At that time, can you estimate what you feel was the total population? Of Odessa?

BW Yes, approximately, at that time I was told, they didn't take what you call the census. I was told the population in Odessa was approximately close to 600,000 to 700,000 people.

LB 600,000 to 700,00 people.

BW So, I was told.

LB And of that number, how many were Jews?

BW There were, especially the population just in the city, in a certain part that we called the Moldavanka in Odessa.

LB What's that?

BW It's called, a borough like, ...

LB I'm writing it down so I can spell it. Later ~~it~~ on when it comes to hearing it... Moldavanka. Was that the Jewish section?

BW That was the very big, populated poverty stricken Jewish section.

LB That was the poor section?

BW Poor section.

LB Now is that the section that you came from?

BW No, I was raised and I was born in the city of Odessa, which was, there were plenty poor Jewish people too, nevertheless by the same token there were very, very rich people also. Jewish people.

LB Now could you tell me something about your family? For example, how many people were in your parental family?

BW My family, my parents had ten children. My father was a pharmacist, my mother was a pharmacist. My father got paralyzed when he was forty years of age and he committed suicide when he was fifty six years of age. My mother raised the family, took care on the paralyzed husband, in which he was sixteen years was paralyzed, and attend to the drug store.

LB She had some job.

BW Yes, she had a full time job. She didn't have no
was no unemployment as far as she was concerned.

There

LB Right. Right.

BW And she never asked for a raise and she never got ~~xxxx~~ paid for it.

LB This, everything gets on the tape?

LB Yes. O.K.

BW So I should put off my sense of ~~my~~ humor.

LB No, ~~that's~~ all right. No, because ~~if~~ the student listens to it, it would be dull without the persons personality coming through. Right? Sometimes we make jokes too. Both your parents were pharmacists. Did they own their own pharmacy?

BW They owned a drug store. You know, there is two kinds of drug stores, like here is also. There is drug store with precisely, those days, that were making prescriptions.

LB So that was the apteka.

BW Apteka. And this is aptekaskii magazin. But you also, we had pharmacies, which is a graduate pharmacy, he is allowed to make prescription, to fill prescription.

LB Now, that's now an aptekaskii magazin?

BW Apteka is a pharmacy. Aptekaskii magazin, they're selling, they're not selling anything ~~it~~ out of, like for instance like today, you have a drug store that you have everything in there. But our drug store was so small that there was nothing in it. You know when we were poor there were times that we didn't have enough money to buy ~~condoms~~ and to light the lamps. But it was times that we had,

kerosene

enough because my mother also used to make capsules, like glycerine, or castor oil capsules and she used to have a few girls that helped her out in a certain season of the year, she could employ, and that helped us ~~through~~ to live on it.

LB So she made and sold these ...therefore your mother made these glycerine and castor oil capsules,...

BW To be sold to the drug store.

LB So that was an additional...

BW That was an additional income.

LB Where did she make these, in the home, or where?

BW In the back of the store.

LB Because I remember my father making...

BW Oh, your father was the way I understand Mr. Kaufman told me that he was a phar...proviso.

LB Yes, and in the early days, I remember he had a little wooden press and he put things on it and he would put the presser over it and little pills would come through. Then he would make hand rolled suppositories and wrap them in in silver paper. I remember that.

BW Yes, yes. I forgot already the name of it. I used to know. But I had to go to work when I was about thirteen years of age.

LB So, your father was a pharmacist. They owned their own aptheka.

BW Yes, aptekaskii magazin.

LB And it was in the city of Odessa?

BW In Odessa.

LB Was it in the Jewish district?

BW Well, it was...you know...Odessawas so that almost, of the city, is almost eighty percent of the residential was occupied by the Jewish people. The Gentile population was on the outskirts of Odessa. Although Moldavanka was on the outskirts of Odessa, but nevertheless there was like a ghetto. A real ghetto. Like for instance in Harlem, here, or in New York a ghetto.

LB It was separate from the regular residential part of Odessa.

BW That's right. It was Odessa, people living there. No it was not separate. It was a continuation. You go down from Park Ave. you go down in your car to ...you reach a certain street...

LB It becomes a ghetto.

BW It becomes a ghetto. Fifth Ave. you have the...all the luxury of the world and after all you go into a jungle.

LB Now, tell me was the store part of the building in which you lived or was it separate?

BW It was a rented...it was part of the building that we lived.

LB ~~It~~ In other words, your living quarters, you rented your living quarters and in the same building you rented...

BW In front was a store with a door to go outside on the street and in the back of it we had a few rooms.

LB In which you lived.

BW In which we lived.

LB How many children were you? Ten you said?

BW Ten, but I don't remember ten. I do remember, two, three, four, five, six.

LB Six children.

BW One sister, she died when she was six years of age. She died from You understabd Russian?

LB Some.

BW

LB

BW Meningitis/~~it~~

LB Oh!

BW Yes. Very, very bright child. ~~My~~ My older brother was supposed to go and be examined when he reached twenty one years of age, so he was examined to go into the army, he was exempted and she was very very worried about him. Really. And we thought that's the reason she had the meningitis.

LB Oh, you thought that her anxiety about his going into the army...

BW His going away...

LB Caused her meningitis.

BW We thought that. We don't know. It's a question of interpretation, especially with people, they attribute a lot of misfortune situations to tragic events.

LB Now was your brother conscripted?

LB No, he wasn't. He didn't serve in the army. But she was very much worried way before. You know, it may be even foolish but it is a question of emotion. Her name was Belochka. Bela, and so she would tell ~~it~~ it to my, to her mother, Mama ya umirayu. Mama, I'm dying. So she said, Belochka, don't say that. You know, you never wanted anybody should curse you because ~~xxxx~~ you used to say all the time, don't curse me, I want to live. So she said, but what can you do if you had to die? You can't help it. And she died, a couple of days later.

LB Now what year was this that your brother was conscripted, do you remember?

BW He was not conscripted.

LB I know, but that he went in for the examination.

BW I think it was about 1911. I think so, I'm not positive.

LB 1911?

BW I think three years before, or 1910, something like that.

LB And how come he was exempted?

BW He was exempted becasue he, on the claim because the father was paralyzed and we were all small children and he was the older one...

LB So he was the support of the family.

BW The support of the family.

LB O,K, Now let's go back. There were six children that you remember. There were two sisters?

BW Two sisters, two brothers, that little girl Bela that died, and myself.

LB One, two, three, oh, all right. There remained two boys and three girls. Now in what year was it that your father became paralyzed, do you remember?

BW I don't know and I don't remember the year but I remember an episode that I remember my father going on his own power. That was approximately, I was about four years of age.

LB And your were born in 1894

BW So it was most likely in 1898. He was paralyzed then and I remember, maybe they

were talking so often, so I visualized like children usually do, I, plush pants with patent leather boots and the pants were over the boots, with the shirt

So that's how I remember my father being healthy. But then after when he was, when I grew up and lived there and he used to have his paralysis, his fists,

so I used to grab his hand and ~~hold~~

holding him and you could imagine what I was living through. I still remember that.
LB Yes. Yes. Did he have an illness? Was it a particular illness that he had?

BW From paralysis. Maybe it was a Parkinson too. I don't know what. He used to get into a convulsion, the foam used to come out from his mouth. His eyes used to roll back, and I was holding his ~~hand~~ and fearing that he will die and looking and

LB Oh! It must have been terrifying. So that meant then, as you said, that your mother had to support the family. You had how many rooms for all of you? About three or four did you say?

BW Two rooms. ~~It~~ And the store was ~~it~~ a little away from the wall so there was a space there to put a bed also. I was the watch dog.

LB You were the watch dog?

BW I was sleeping in the hallway which was going to a yard. I was sleeping on the floor. Wintertime I used to get up sometimes in the morning, see that I have neighbors, snow.

LB So, in other words, you didn't have what was called an affluent childhood?

BW I don't think so. I don't think so. (Laughs) And I was stronger than a rock.

LB That's a good thing. That's a good thing. Now, in 1894, Nicholas II was already on the throne, right? Oh, gosh. Remember who was Czar when you were born?

BW When I was born? You know, I'll tell you something. (Laughs and decides not to tell me) No, I don't remember. I don't remember anything. I don't remember even Nicholas II was the last one.

LB That's right. It had to be. It had to be that he was still there because if he was deposed in 1914 that's already twenty years. I think he was already on the throne but we'll have to check that. You don't remember who was the Czar? You don't remember who was the Czar all the time that you were growing up?

BW Well, I really don't. I don't remember.

LB ~~ik~~ You were nineteen then, when you left. What was it that you do remember about those years?

BW What do you mean, if you ask me, a lot of misery I remember and I also remember a lot of pleasant things. I was a very happy go lucky boy. ~~WE~~, never think that my background is such a miserable background as I'm portraying to you. I'm not giving you all the tittle of misery that we went through. You know what I mean. But I think is that what little that I told you, is enough to visualize, realize that I didn't I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth. But I was all the time happy go lucky, singing and dancing.

LB Is that the kind of activity that you engaged in, outside of work? Were you interested in singing and dancing?

BW Professionally?

LB ~~Professionally~~ Not professionally. But after hours.

BW Yes. Even now, when I'm in a dump, I'm going in a subway or a bus or the street and I sing, so people look at me. So if they enjoy my voice the pleasure is theirs. Not I have pleasure out of it and I throw off a lot of misery. It's a outlet. A hobby.

LB Now, tell me something about your schooling. When did you start and how did you start?

BW Well, I was going to a cheder. I was going to a cheder a very short time.

LB ~~How~~ How short?

BW I think I 've been going to a cheder about a year's time. And my language is Russian. I spoke very very poor ~~Yiddish~~, very very little Yiddish. I learned the Yiddish in this country.

LB What did your parents speak at home?

BW Russian.

LB You did not come from a Yiddish speaking home?

BW Well, yes. I, I, I understood everything in Yiddish but we were not a religious home.

LB You were not?

BW Not a religious home.

LB Oh, very interesting.

BW But we were not, my father, I was told when he was a young man, he was from that Golden Youth, but when he got paralyzed so he grew a beard, you want to see the picture?

LB Not right now, but later I would like to.

BW He grew a beard and he wore a yarmalka. But my mother was not ~~akrably~~ religious. He has to remind her, Sarele, go ahead. It's time to light the candles and even my grandparents were not religious/ people. I mean religious people as far as being ...it's a broad understanding, religion. It could be Orthodox. And it could be religious, you could be a lot of religious with ham and eggs.

LB Right. Right.

BW I'm a religious man, but I'm not going to a synagogue.

LB What you're saying is that your parents were not religious in a traditional, observant manner.

BW That's right, yes.

LB But that they were basically religious/ people.

BW Oh, they believed in God. I have my belief.

LB Did they consider that they were Jews.

BW Of course!

LB Now, if they spoke Russian in the home, were they maskilim?

BW Pardon?

LB Were they called maskilim? You know, were they members of any political party for one thing?

BW No. No. You mean did they believe socialist or something?

LB Well, there was the Social Democratic party, the Populist party...

BW Yes. Yes. Well, I'll tell you something. I don't know, I really don't know. I think they were clear minded people and now as I reminiscing about my parents and my home I think that yes, when my mother came here, she was here in this country. She died here. So, she told me that Lenin was killed...

when

LB No, when he died.

BW When he died, so she drank it out a pail, valerian drops, I mean exaggerating, you know what I mean. Valerian drops. Valeriami kopi

You know what I mean. To quiet down her nerves. Now this is certainly, as I start to dig into my roots, this you could ~~be~~ interpret from two points of view. First of all, she was afraid what the change will bring about it and she was worried and she wanted to quiet down her nerves, or, she was sorry that a great man like Lenin died, from a political point of view. This, I don't know, what is her reaction were. But here I took her to a meeting, progressive meeting, and she enjoyed very much.

LB What is a progressive meeting?

BW Don't you know what a progressive meeting is? There is among Jewish people, there are progressive people, reactionary...

LB I know, but what progressive meeting?

BW I mean politically.

LB I know, but what was the name of the party?

BW On the party? Was not, you know there is a ~~Stim~~ "Freiheit" Jewish newspaper, what it is the Freiheit stands for?

LB ?Freedom.

BW Freedom! No.

He was the organizer of the "Freiheit", originally.

LB What was his name?

BW Moishe Olgin, O-l-g-i-n.

LB He was the editor, you say, of the "Freiheit".

BW And so I took her to Madison Square Garden and she had a lot of joy being present.

LB Now she was then actually visiting you from the Soviet Union?

BW No, she was not. She came over to stay here. She did stay here.

LB In what year?

BW I think it was in 1924.

LB So, that was the year Lenin died. Lenin died in 1924.

BW It was either then, or a year later.

LB So, she stayed on after you, in Odessa. She stayed in the Soviet Union after you. Now, during the years that you were growing up, you say to went to cheder for a year and you only spoke Russian.

BW Though my mother language was Russian, I knew Yiddish. But I didn't speak much Yiddish because all my friends were Russian speaking people. You know what I mean.

LB Were your friends Jews or...

BW Mostly was Jews. Although we lived a short time, we lived in a neighborhood where there was all Gentile people lived. That section is where armor is, you know, soldier's armor...

LB The armory.

BW So there, I spent my very young days, like up till about twelve, thirteen years of age. And then after, we moved into the city. But we spoke with mybfriends, most of them, they were Jewish people. I mean, there was a lot of Gentiles. In the city I had already a lot of Jewish friends and I went to school all, to a Jewish school, but not Jewish speaking. It was a Jewish school, financed by the philanthropy...

LB Which philanthropy?

BW Jewish philanthropy. I imagine so. They had to have means. They used to even give clothes to the children. But they were, and they ~~taught~~ taught Jewish history in the Russian language, I couldn't read, when I came to this country, I couldn't read "jargon". You know what means "jargon"?

LB Well, that's uh...

BW Jewish, Yiddish...

LB Oh, you call Jewish "Jargon"?

BW Well, this is Yiddish. Yes, I call it "jargon".

LB Oh, you do?

BW But, Hebrew, Hebrew, I knew, I knew how to read Hebrew. I didn't know what I'm reading, but I knew how to read Hebrew. But I was about a year's time in cheder. And then it was also in the school where I went, we learned how to read Hebrew. Sowhen I came to this country, and I got into a Jewish environment among the friends, and they laughted at me the way I was talking They were Litvakers, you know what that means? And then I started to read a Yiddish, a Jewish Newspaper. So at the beginning I was reading the Forwards, because ~~Existed~~ no difference and after they didn't have "Freiheit" came in existence, it's fifty four years old now, to read the Freiheit.

LB Now, let's go back to Russia for a minute.

BW I think I go. (Laughs)

LB Well, you can always buy a ticket.

BW We were just there, two and a half, three years ago. And I was just, last July and August I was there.

LB Now, you studied in a Jewish school in the Russian language, up through what grade?

BW Till I graduated the school, four classes.

LB Four classes. And that took you to what age?

BW Thirteen.

LB To the age of thirteen. By any chance, were you Bar Mitzvoh?

BW Yes.

LB You were? Even though your parents were progressive?

BW You know what we had for Bar Mitzvoh? Like my grandchildren were Bar Mitzoh here.

LB What does that mean?

BW It's not that you make a Bar Mitzvoh like you make it...

End Side 1

Side 2. 000

LB As far as I understood it, most of the Bar Mitzvoh ceremonies in Russia were very

simple. There was nothing...especially if you didn't have any money, they were of necessity...

BW ~~He~~ give you a pair of tfillin, and you take the and good-
They
bye Charlie.

LB But you were Bar Mitzvoh?

BW Yes! I realize that my father told me, Now you are on your own. You're a
Now you're a Jew.

LB That's right. All right, now you said you started working when you were thirteen.

BW That's right.

LB Can you tell me something about that? What kind of work did you do?

BW I...I wanted to be a mechanic. But I didn't have any background and somehow I was working in an office. I was...I wasn't...I always could help myself, you know what I mean. I used to be partly a salesman, partly a collector for money ~~for~~ for a con--
~~cern~~ cern, for the people that I worked for and most of that time I didn't work because I couldn't find no work.

LB Even in Odessa?

BW Even in Odessa. You were thirteen, that would make it 1907. That was 1907. There was no work to be had there?

BW 1907? Why 1907?

LB Well, because if you were born in 1894, 1894, right, at the age of thirteen that was the year 1907.

BW 1907...No. Something is wrong.

LB Something is wrong? O.K.

BW Most likely I...I... thirteen years...no, I think I was...in fact when I was Bar Mitzvoh, and the principal asked me, Are you going further to school? He wanted to put me in trade school, so I said, No, I can't. I must go to work, and help my parents. I used to make about three rubles a month. Yes, and I helped them out. And all kinds of work I could get.

LB You didn't really have a skill?

BW I didn't.

LB No. It was difficult then to find work.

BW Of course it's difficult. That's what I'm trying to tell you. And before going away I completely didn't work for a long time. Couldn't get anything and that was in 1913, 1912. In 1914, in April, I left to America.

LB And the reason for your leaving was just...

BW The reason for my leaving is...it was a few things in my mind working, like most young people working. A little political.

LB Like what?

BW Like, ...I...depression in Russia as far as, in general speaking, as far as Jews are concerned. And also, just to see life of a different country. And to better myself.

LB So, it was economic and adventure.

BW That's right. (Two cats are heard fighting.)

LB We'll have that on the tape too.

Bw (Laughs) A little soprano. You're going to have this too?

LB Yes, it will probably come through. Were you active in ~~politic~~ politics at all during those years?

BW Where, in Russia? No.

LB You were not.

BW No. I was...psychologically. But not actively.

Lb Where would you say your sympathies lay?

BW What?

LB Where did your sympathies lie?

BW Where my ~~own~~ my sympathy lie, at that time, with poor people, with labor.

LB Well, would you say, let's see now, in 1914, I can't remember when the second international was. 1905 was a revolution.

BW Yes. The so-called revolution. Was pogrom.

LB Were you aware of those?

BW Of course I was aware of it.

LB I'm trying to remember...you were about ten years old then. Not quite, you were nine years old.

BW Sure I was aware of those.

LB You were aware of them.

BW I remember even the Russian Japanese war.

LB You do? What do you remember about those two things?

BW I was a young kid and I went into the military quarters and I wanted to volunteer. To go into the army, they should send me to the Far East.

LB Were you a patriotic Russian?

BW I was not a patriotic Russian, but I was...

LB Oh, I see. You were full of, what we call here, beans. You ~~wanted~~ wanted to do something exciting. And there was nothing...What kind of a city was Odessa? For Jews?

BW It was a beautiful city. One of the most beautiful cities...you know, they have a saying, Who didn't see Odessa didn't see the world.

LB Is that right?

BW Yes. And this is the southern...the beauty of south...Odessa has all the...everything what one could desire and hope for to see in a city. It had the Black Sea. It had the country. It had the beautiful ~~plains~~ of plains, European square city and the people, and above everything else, is the people ~~like~~ lively people, good people.

LB Now, are you talking about Jews? Did you associate mostly with Jews?

BW The Jews, the Jews, the Jews.

LB You know, there was something I never understood and I don't know...I'm sure I could find it in a history book...

BW And then, if you'll excuse me, there was a Metropolitan. From all over Russia, people used to...here's Mr. Wax...he was in Odessa also. He was six miles, ten miles, fifteen miles away from there, so he says he's from Odessa. You know what it means?

LB He didn't tell me he was from Odessa.

BW No, he was in Odessa. He was in Odessa.

LB He visited. He said it was quite a project to get there.

BW Well, it was because, of course today is not a problem, today, first of all they have all the paved roads all over, wherever you want to go, any part you want to go in Ukraine you could go from Odessa with the highways and beautiful highways.

LB Now let's see. The question that I wanted to ask you was, ...did the Jews at time were not permitted to live in Moscow or Leningrad without a permit. They could only live in the Pale. They also could live in certain villages in the Ukraine or provided they had a job, or they could live in their shtetlach, but still, in Odessa, they were allowed to live. There was a huge Jewish population.. Are you able to explain that? This is something I never have understood.

BW Why?

LB Yes. How that came about?

BW How it came about...I don't know what it was, if he wanted to come over you don't have to have a permit, to come into the city.

LB I understand that.

BW You come into the city and if you have somebody to stay with and if he starts to look for a job, he finds a job, he has it, and if he has what to eat, he eats and if he hasn't got it, he suffered. It's open for everybody.

LB Yes, but most of Russia was closed to Jews.

BW Well I know there were only certain places, what you called

I forgot already

You were allowed, a tradesman, if you had a trade or you're a merchant, a big merchant a rich man. And the pervi gild kopetski, they called them, the first class merchant. The rest of it, there's certain places, certain areas, and besides that Kiev, Moscow Leningrad, Volgograd or Stalingrad, it used to be, or Kharkov, all those cities were prohibited and Jewish people couldn't just come in and stay there. The only thing they could get in provided they fill out their specifications and requirements. Specifications as far as trade is concerned, as I said before, or or you're a rich man. A rich

A rich man is all over better off.

LB It seems to be true. But Odessa seems to be an "exception".

BW That's right, in Odessa you could...

LB But you don't know why, historically why?

BW No. Odessa belonged to Turkey. You know that?

LB No, I didn't know that.

BW Sure it was... it was not far from Dardanelle, not far from Middle East... you know in Crimea in certain places people couldn't live. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

Jewish

And there was a big population in Georgia, in Crimea. You find a lot of Jewish people, those the natives. But nevertheless, you couldn't go in in Baku, Tiflis. Or Yalta, there was, the Czar's palaces were there. So the Jewish people couldn't go in there... not unless they fill out the requirements.

LB Now you say your father and your mother, therefore you didn't go to synagogue. You didn't go to shul.

BW I did go. I think I did go a couple of times to the shul.

LB But I mean as a rule?

BW No, as a rule, "o, "o, "o. I'm not going here

LB You see, usually, if a Jew, it seems to me, I could be wrong, if a Jew didn't go to shul in Russia, especially in Czarist Russia there were usually either political reasons, or there were ideological, more ideological reasons, why he didn't go.

BW Well, that's political.

LB "o, "o. It doesn't have to be political. It could be that they were taken up with the secular side of life and they felt that the way to freedom for the Jew or the way to liberation for the Jew was not through Yiddishkeit, you understand me?...

BW I understand you, very well.

LB And it was not through Hebrew...

BW No, but this was not the case. I don't want to pretend, because I like to be truthful to all situations, even if it's embarrassing as far as I'm concerned.

LB Well, then nothing ~~could~~ be ~~embarrassing~~ embarrassed...
to

BW There was nothing, no inclination, no any special inclination, in fact, when I was very young I went into the synagogue and I thought I'll be singing in a chorus. And I went in there and my voice was accepted and I was accepted, but, but (laughs) there was the working with me and instead of singing I was fighting with the boys. So they kicked me out of there. So here you are.

LB Oh, I see. So it was purely personal.

BW Personal. There was nothing ideological, political or material or other way. Just the same as here, I'm not going to synagogue it's not because I deny that I'm a Jew or I don't like, in fact I love the Jewish language. I cannot express my inner feelings when I speak Yiddish. I love it. But I don't like to go into... I'm not going into... because... I hope that I will not touch something in you, because I see a lot of hypocrisy.

LB O.K. Fine. That's absolutely true.

BW I don't like those pairs and I don't like those that come only Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashonah and the conniving how to figure how to manoeuvre somebody. How to go about it, a competitor You know what I mean? I don't like double faces. I don't like double bookkeeping. I don't like it.

LB Yes.

BW And I see it on every step. Unfortunately.

And unfortunately among the Jewish people. Because with the Jewish people here in Miami. I've been in business here and I've been in good business and I did my business clean.

LB And yet when you referred to Yiddish, you called it "jargon".

BW Well, that's what they... because it is a jargon. What is a jargon?

LB Well, Jargon is a French word.

BW Yes, but what does it mean?

LB It means, a mish-mash.

BW A mishmash. Because you'll find the Russian Jews speak Yiddish, half Yiddish and half Russian. And a Frenchman, you have it, there is a chop suey in the entire Jewish language. You have a chop suey, that's why they call it a jargon.

LB Yes. But usually when people refer to it as a jargon, it implies a negative feeling.

BW Well, I'll tell you something. I know that a lot of... You know who applies specially now, the Yiddishistin. You know what it means the Yiddishistin? Those that, to them, the pintelev Yid.

LB Bintelev?

BW Pintelev.

The Jews are the chosen people, you know. And they are now, specially with the Soviet Union, everything will be recorded?...

LB Yes, say it.

BW You see with the Soviet Union, they claim that the Soviet Union they deprive the Jewish people from going to cheder, from having their prayers, from having their theaters, and so on and so forth. This is a farce. A farce. Here you got all the freedom in the United States for the Jewish people to, to... in New York there are more Jewish people than in the entire Soviet Union. And in New York you haven't got a Jewish theater. But they want to have a Jewish theater in Moscow. Here, is your daughter going to Hebrew?

LB No.

BW Here, their children, they're spending ten thousand dollars, fifteen thousand dollars, twenty thousand dollars for a Bar Mitzvah, yes? The boy doesn't know the next day the difference between the black, he plays on the floor with the block, or the block he puts on his forehead. He doesn't know the very first thing about the Jewish but there they want to have the Jewish culture. How many of them having Jewish culture that it's everything free? And the cradle of ~~the~~ richness among the Jewish people, millions and millions and millions of dollars, millions and millions and millions of dollars, they're spending on the propaganda against the Soviet Union, to continue the cold war but here they don't spend that money to give the children the education. Why?

LB I don't know the answer to that question.

BW No, I'm just bringing out... You know what I mean... We were talking about, like Jewish language... we're talking as far as the Jewish language is concerned. So I just wanted to bring this out as an example. Here they demand the Jewish culture. You know they have the Jewish culture translated in Russian language. There's Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Asch, they have Peretz. They have all the classics, translated...

LB Did you read those books? Have you read and Peretz and Sholem Aleichem and Sholem Asch...

BW Well, to some extent, yes.

LB To some extent. Do you remember which ones you read?

BW Well, Tevye der Milcher (Tevye the Milkman).

LB No, I mean which authors?

BW Oh, Sholem Aleichem. A lot of Sholem Aleichem. Very, very great classics.

LB What kind of reading did you do?

BW Well, The Russians.

LB Whom did you read?

BW Turgenev, Gogol, Tolstoi

Tolstoi the man, very fascina-

ting.

LB So you read all the Russian...

BW Not all. Not all. A little. Not too much. I should have read more.

LB Well, we all should have.

BW But, I go by. I live among people/ I like. I had a choice, choose from bad to worse. But I always like to have the better.

LB Now were you exposed to (interrupts to speak to daughter about another tape)

Were you exposed to any anti-Jew Semitism at all, that you can remember?

BW Yes, I was exposed to anti-Semitism in Russia, I was exposed to anti-Semitism more in America.

LB Well, I'm not interested really in what happened in America, right now, I'd like to know what, if anything, happened in Russia.

BW Well, first of all, when I say I was exposed to the anti-Semitism, it was not a question of me personally, as a member of a race, of the Jewish race. For instance, in 19....after the revolution, I don't remember I think it was 1910, or what...

LB Which revolution? You mean the 1905 revolution?

BW Yes, after, after. There was the Black Hundred. And when they used to go out somewhere in a certain street there they're asking me, "Zhyd ili Russki?" It means, you know what it means, Zhyd? (Jew or Russian?) I was never afraid to say that I'm not a Zhyd but an Ivrei. And I was going into tough places and I was never afraid. I was one of the boys that were not afraid.

I was never a hoodlum. Never insulted anybody. I never abused anybody. I never took advantage of anybody. But I was a revolutionary in this respect.

LB You mean as an individual?

BW That's right. Not as a group.

LB Now could you describe to me what you felt? ~~Was~~ was evidence of anti-Semitism in Russia? In Odessa, where you...

BW Well, as far as I am concerned I understood that the Russian people, basically, were not anti-Semites. It was all a political...all the pogroms in Russia was a political result of propoganda against the Jewish people for an escape and the fear, not of the Jewish people, the fear of the Jewish intelligentsia which wanted to make a change in the social life of Russia. They knew, that the Jewish people...

LB Who, they?

BW The power, the Czarists, the gendarmes, the capitalists of Russia, those that have all the possessions and they want to have it and they lost it eventually. So their fear was not an empty one. It was proved that the fear was a realistic one on their part. Because they knew sooner or later the people will revolt against them. So that's why when they made pogroms, they made pogroms, they didn't make pogroms against the rich Jewish people. The Jewish people in Odessa, they used to put in Cossacks in the to protect them. But in the ghetto,...

LB Oh, is that right?

BW Yes, absolutely. I know it. But in the ghetto they used to cut ~~the~~ people's bellies. Pregnant women. They used to throw them out from the third floor, with pianos, those that happened to have it...they used to but in Odessa they

had ~~some~~ defense group. They didn't take it laying down. a self

LB Now, when did this happen?

BW In, the pogrom. In 1905, 1906.

LB There was a big pogrom...

BW In Odessa. Of course.

LB So what you're saying is that during the 1905 Odessa pogrom...

BW Now don't quote the date, because I don't remember.

LB All right. But it was after the Decembrist uprising. So what's you're saying is that the rich were protected by the Cossacks...

BW Some of them, yes.

LB But that in the poor quarters, in the ~~the~~ Moldavanka...

BW In the Moldavanka they slaughtered them. Or in Odessa. For instance, all right there was all kinds. All right, I'll tell you an example. For instance, in the that we lived, a Gentile neighbor. But in this particular building was a lot of Jewish people, tenants there. We among them, we were living there too. It was a Reserve

General, a little fellow in the Reserve, with a white beard that was side beard. And his wife and they came out to the gate and they were staying there for two days and two nights with the ikons. And they swore there isn't one Jewish family in the building.

LB Now this is when the Cossacks were coming through?

BW Not... pogroms. It's not only Cossacks. The population was there. And they brought them out, they brought them out from villages. From the suburbs. They said, Kill the Jews and save Russia.

LB Right. We just heard that saying the other day.

BW Yes. Bezh zhidai, spassai Rossia. (Kill the Jews and save Russia.)

LB The Russian people, basically, they're hospitable people, they're good people.

LB All right, this is what happened in your building, but your'e saying in other sections something else happened.

BW Well, I don't know of many different sections. But I know that they were...

LB But you said that the women were having their bellies cut open and being thrown out of...

BW Oh, this was a pogrom.

LB This was in Odessa also?

BW Yes, sure. Sure. You enrage the masses. And especially if they could rob something and they haven't got anything, why wouldn't they do it? Especially with slogans like this and they believe it!

LB Right.

BW Could be even a priest could come out and say it. Or a sergeant from the police department. And the police is there to protect them. You could imagine what would happen here if all of a sudden, this kind of a type takes it over, the government. And they want to get rid of a certain element. Despite all this, that we live in America, after all, people have an education. They know how to read and write. I don't know if they have high... I'm not talking about very educated people, but average person... now you can imagine what it would be. What could be in this country. Especially, there people, you ~~don't~~ dealt that time with ignorant people. Today you wouldn't find a Russian person that doesn't know how to read and write. Or he doesn't know even

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LB Well, I can't think of anything else that I have to cover here. I think we've covered just about everything. Because most of your... Let's see, you left in 1914. Did you leave Russia as a, as a... um... runaway, in a sense or did you go as a...

BW Runaway. Runaway.

LB You ran away.

BW I stole the. (unintelligible)

LB You stole the what?

BW The boundary, between Russia and a foreign country, I didn't have no passport.

LB You didn't have a passport.

BW You know, at this age, you got to have a passport. And the government would not give me a passport because I would have to serve in the army.

LB Ah, so this was just before... this was April and war broke out in August. Right? You left in April and war broke out in August and you were just... just about ready to go into the army.

BW That's right.

LB Is that why you left?

BW Well, this is not right because I never thought there was going to be a war. Who in the world would know... (laughs)

LB Oh, that's true, in April...

BW I'll tell you something, if Hitler would have my intuition, he would never go into Russia. (laughs) So we would have Hitlerism here.

LB (laughs) Right. Now where did you go? To Bessarabia?

BW No, I went ~~next~~ into Austria, ~~But~~ Galicia. From Galicia I went into Berlin. And Berlin is another example, I'll tell you, if you're interested. I don't know whether this should go on a ~~xx~~ tape because when they'll hear my tape, they'll say, ~~Well~~ Well, he's brainwashed. So, I went in and I worked for people in Odessa the woman, the boss's wife, the brother, he was a manager in a big bank in Berlin. And I got in there and I was afraid to take it along with me, the papers, the steam tickets, you know what I mean. Because if I would be caught they would take it away from me. So I send it ~~away~~ there I should pick it up over there...

(Tape ends at 489)

Side 3

LB Now if you would like briefly just to repeat, what you said.

BW But we're talking about the Soviet Union why do you have to.

LB No, because this is part of what we're talking about. What you said about the Austrian Hungarian empire...

BW Being you're asking about certain rights of the Jewish people in Aus...Hungary under Franz Josef, which was the Emperor of Austria, Hungary and Galicia and Serbia, the Jewish people had all the rights, of owning land, being in the army, as officers, generals and so forth and so on. That's the only country that was really very much free of prejudices against the Jews.

LB And you're contrasting that with Russia.

BW Well, I'm not con...then you'll ask me a question.

LB Well, you did before. You said, in Russia, if someone, if a Jew owned land...

BW Oh yes. In Russia, if a Jew owned land, he couldn't own land under his name. You had to put in a dummy partner or whatever it is, it shouldn't be in his name, because ~~it~~ couldn't be a landowner.

he

LB All right. Now, Mr. Wexler, if you would be kind enough, since I really do not know what questions to ask you, I'll give a brief introduction, because this is a follow up of the tape we did yesterday, and I understood you, after the tape was concluded, to say, that you studied mechanics, to be a mechanic of some sort. Or perhaps engineering. I'm not exactly sure, here in the United States when you arrived here. I believe you said you arrived here about ...

BW 1914.

LB 1914. All right. And then,...I'm assuming that you must have been a socialist also in your sympathies, as your wife was. Now I could be absolutely incorrect in that. Is that a correct assumption?

BW The last statement that you're making is uncorrect.

LB You were not a socialist.

BW No.

LB Not.

BW No.

LB Were you sympathetic to or a member of any political party?

BW Yes, I was sympathetic, not to a political party,...philosophy.

LB O.K. And what philosophy was that?

BW Socialist.

LB Socialist. All right. Now then, it transpired, it happened, in the course of the conversation, that you did go back to the Soviet Union to work in 1931. And I find that very interesting because I had interviewed another man who had gone back there to work. And he described his living conditions and so on and he eventually, he came back to the United States for certain reasons, and I wondered if you would tell me ~~if~~ of your experiences there; how long you stayed there; what kind of work you did there; what kind of living conditions you had and what city you lived in. Those are some of the things. Otherwise I'm not sure of just how to phrase the questions.

BW I ~~understand~~ understand your question very well. It is put very well. I'm very glad to have an inquirer who interviews me with such intelligence. Now, first, ~~x~~, just a minute, I wanted to say something, it slipped my mind. Um, I came to this country in 1914, as I mentioned, before. I learned a trade here and fortunately for me, I accomplished, I learned the trade thoroughly with some schooling, technical

schooling. I was considered one of the most outstanding tool and die makers in this country, and the fact is when I, I'm jumping a little bit the gun, I left the United States, I had a wonderful job, I wasn't unemployed. That was time of unemployment, in 1931 was the biggest unemployment in the United States history of the United States. I was on a contract from the Soviet government...from the ~~company~~ AMTORG, this is a corporation which did business between Soviet Union and America. And I was under contract for a year's time to go there and I extended my contract for another half year and I was there a year and a half working as an instructor and as a worker. Because I didn't want to be an office man..I didn't want to be a draftsman or sitting by the desk. I was working in the tool room, in the Soviet Union I also had a few people that I instructed them how to work, this is as far as work is concerned.

LB What city were you in?

BW That was in Kharkhov. Kharkhov...

LB That's in Russia proper isn't it?

BW That's Ukraine.

LB It's in the Ukrainé.

BW Kharkhov is the cradle of education of Ukraine. The biggest universities are in Kharkhov. But the plant, was the name Kharkhov Tractor Plant, and this was in the suburbs, a new area completely, a new area built, not only for this plant, but also for some more, because there was plenty of land in Ukraine. Now, you ask me what the ~~condition~~ condition was that time, what the living quarters. Now. First of all, when we arrived there, my family, I had a daughter and a wife...

LB You brought your family with you?

BW That's right. They took sick and before we turned around a doctor, a woman, of course most of the doctors in the Soviet Union are female, came over and she see what it is and she went away. In about half an hour, about three quarters of an hour, she came with all the medications that was necessary and for a moment I forgot where I am, in what part of the world I am, I asked her, How much I owe you? She said, Don't forget, you're in the Soviet Union. You don't pay anything for doctors, you don't pay anything ~~for medication~~...medication, you pay, but being I brought it to you, you don't have to pay for it. Then, the living quarters, I have three rooms, beautiful rooms, with the exposure to my desire, southeastern exposure, with a bathroom, with a kitchen and a closet that I could go in with a tractor inside. The economic condition, in general speaking was miserable, was very, very bad. This is the worst time that Soviet Union went through, in those days when family went to sleep at night time they had a little hard piece of bread. They cut it in half and give a half of them so it would remain for the child in the morning so it would have tea with the piece of bread. I was there as an American on the condition of American. We didn't miss anything. We had lamb chops and sweet cream and all the meat that we wanted to and all the vegetables in the season. We have it. Otherwise, this was not a problem. The problem is to see how somebody else is starving. How somebody else is going through a misery that he hasn't got it and working hard. Then, what do you want to know... this is as far as the living quarters is concerned. As far as general conditions is concerned. And now, I don't know, what else would you want to know? Would you want to know, for instance, for an argument, you say, you don't know what to question me. Now would you like to know the spirit of the people?

LB No, not yet.

BW How did they work?

LB No, not yet. I have a question to ask you. You see, you had for example, lamb chops, sweet cream, vegetables in season and a beautiful place to live, free medicine and so on. And did you have the freedom to come and go anywhere, at will?

BW I lived in the vicinity of, like for instance the Ford, in the United States, has living quarters around the factory, we lived around it. We worked...six days and the Saturday...they called it vikhodnoi, in other words, a day of rest.

LB Vihodnoi.

BW Vikhodnoi. They called it a vikhodnoi, in other words you go out. You're free. (from the Russian verb to go out) You understand what it means? I happened to know

a little bit Russian. I wish I speak English like that. So,...

LB What did you do on the seventh day?

BW On the seventh day, seven days, I'll tell you. The life there, especially those days when I was there were so interesting and so volcanic that you couldn't have a minute of, of, a minute of boredom. You wouldn't have a minute of boredom. You know what I mean. Always discussions, and always...meetings, and always attending and always, there was a Lenin's corner, you know what that means. They had all the literature. They show you Kino, moving pictures, they show you. All kind of classes if you want to participate and believe now, they're not dumb.

LB Oh no. Never. Never would I say that. Now, was this just for the foreigners? Were there only Americans where you were or were there other foreign workers?

BW There were three groups. There were German group, Czechoslovakian group and an American group.

LB Was there a Russian group?

BW This was the Russian people.

LB Were the foreigners, were they the Americans, the Czechs and the Germans allowed to mingle freely with the Russian workers?

BW Oh, of course! My best friends were Russian there. I invited them for dinner. I've been going there for dinner. We associate with them, in fact, I'll tell you an incident.

LB Wait, wait, I want to ask you something.

BW No, no. It's very important. I'll forget about it.

LB Oh, all right.

BW There, it says what do you do with your time? There they're working seven hours a day. An hour you're having for lunch. While you're having your lunch time, meanwhile you have a certain report, that brought to the people there. So there was a group of people there, say, well, Vanka, Vanka. You know what means Vanka. Vanka that means Ivan. Ivan. So he says, Go ahead Vanka, read that. He says, I don't want it. He says, read that. None of them. Well, maybe the Americans, our American comrade will read that. He says, Come on, Davai. (Give it to me.) And I start to read the report, you know. He says, Look at him. He's a foreigner. He reads better than we do. You understand. I just want to say an incident. You say, What you do? If you're interested, every minute if you're awake, you're interested in those days specially. I don't know how is it now. You understand what I mean? But we'll come to it, if you have the time.

LB We won't, but I'm more than satisfied. It will click. We have thirty minutes.

BW All right. Now what else?

LB Because at that time, there was a feeling of building something.

BW That's right! Absolutely. Then you're building, That's the reason I went there. Building a socialism, a nation. In those years, they built up 516 giants. Giants of these that I didn't see with equipments, I didn't see in the United States. And I've been working in big plants, I didn't see such plants, such machinery and such eh, eh, conditions, living conditions in the factory anywheres here in the United States. It was there. With all openskies, with all sunshine coming in and everything. And flowers and grass all around the factory.

LB Now may I ask you the question that I wanted to before you described your incident. To go back to what you said about your living conditions. There were also Russian workers there. Did they have the same food to eat?

BW Food, no! I told you.

LB Bread you were telling me about.

BW That's right. They had different..Because the Soviet Union knew if they would take a foreign worker and bring him over there and put him on the diet, of the condition of the Soviet Union, he will not be able to last too long. They were broken into it, already. They built up a resistance, you know, and they were a powerful people. They're powerful, powerful, strong people.. Powerful people despite all the hardship. That an American would not be able to exist there for six months. He would not be able to. Because going away the condition was much, much, much improved. Now the next question.

- LB Well, you're going to have to help me, because the only thing that I have in mind is a book that I read by a man called John Scott, I believe his name was. He wrote a book called Behind the Urals. And he participated in some such enterprise as this, where they built a giant industry...it was Magnitogorsk...
- BW That's right. Yes. Yes. Yes.
- LB And he described the working conditions and the living conditions there, I don't know if you read the book, and...so, I want to know from you...
- BW In short, he portrayed the condition.
- LB What was it like?
- BW I'm telling you. The condition was miserable. But...
- LB For the Russians.
- BW For the Russians. Of course for the Russians. That was the people. What percentage was the foreigners? In comparison with the population of the Soviet Union? Insignificant, so what, you know, believe me, they could do without it because, of course there were great men, Cooper for instance, built Dneiperstroï, you know what I mean. He was a great man. There were very few. But in average, in average, Americans that went to build socialism in the Soviet Union, they could do, they would be able to survive without that help. Political, it means something.
- LB I'm not sure I understand what you're saying. An average American, you say, could survive...
- BW Not an Am...Soviet Union would survive without the few Americans that went there to help to build the Soviet Union. They would survive without them. But political, it meant something. It shows the world that people, from all the countries, are concerned of progress and accomplishment of the Soviet Union as a state. You follow me now?
- LB Now I understand.
- BW Now you understand me. But, as far, I don't know what his name, I forgot the name that you mentioned, the one from...
- LB I think his name was Scott.
- BW Scott, whatever it is, and he portrayed a miserable condition...
- LB No, he did not.
- BW Oh no. Then it's all right. I thought that he ~~was~~ portrayed a hardship, the hardship...
- LB Well, it was hard. He says, I think they worked maybe seven days a week. But ~~the~~ ~~was~~ said the feeling, if I remember the book correctly, was one of enormous enthusiasm.
- BW Enthusiasm, otherwise they would not be able to survive. They would not be able to build up in such a short period such giants.
- LB That's right. That's what he describes.
- BW Now, talking, see, that was in 1931, '32. In the beginning of 1933 I left. And up till '33 they had a rationing on bread. In the beginning of 1933, they took off the rationing and they give all the bread anybody wants to buy. You understand what I mean? Now, by the same token, there was a lot of, I'm talking of, in a situation of the Soviet citizen. For instance, there was a lot of drunkenness that time.
- LB Yes.
- BW There was a lot of laziness among the people. ~~They didn't come~~ You didn't come in to certain things. Now, when I was in 1972? When was I,
- MW 1970.
- BW No. No. This was before. In 1972, I was in Soviet Union then, 1972. It's a change like...Of course, time, it also plays a great part, but all approach, the whole eh, eh, phase, of the Soviet Union changed to such an extent that it became a country, a nation of intelligent, educated, fine people. You wouldn't see a drunkard...I was there for three weeks time, that time...
- LB Where?
- BW I was in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Volgograd. Last year we were Moscow, Leningrad, ~~in~~ Kiev, Odessa, my city where I was born and Volgograd and then back in ~~the~~ Moscow. Peculiar thing happened. We got into our hotel, it's called Chernaya

Mor the Black ~~xx~~ Sea, it's on the street where my parents had the drug store. I told you, the aptekaska magazin. A block away from there, you know, and I grew up on that street, and I didn't know where I am.

LB It was so different.

BW Some different.

LB Now I want to take you back to 1933. Because that's the period that we're investigating. All right. Did you consider/in the Soviet Union and becoming a citizen?
remaining

BW Uh. I must tell you a little story.

LB Yes. Let me see if you have time (on the tape). I don't want to cut you short.

BW Well, I don't want...

LB Well, let's say you've got about ten minutes.

BW Ten minutes. You see, I'll tell you. You know, first I'll have to introduce myself in order to really understand who you're talking to and the situation. I'd like to introduce myself. Not in name only, but in character. I'm a very responsible person and I'm a very much concerned person, especially for my family. If I would be single that time, if I would decide I would just pack in, I say, Mrs. throw down my collar and tie and I'm going. But I had a child. So, I had plenty, plenty sleepless nights before, I had nightmares before going to the Soviet Union. I was going somewhere that I wanted to go and I was afraid God knows what it will be. You understand what I mean?

LB Taking your child there?

BW That's right. And the wife. Of course, the wife is a grown up person, she wants to go it's my headache and her headache, if you know what I mean. If we understand each other and cooperate and live, we want to be together...WE got there and it was about to decide either to go back or became a Soviet Union. So, I asked my wife, Well, Minny, what do you say? Are we going there or not? She says, I don't know. Whatever you say, it'll be. So I asked my Lilly, my darling, we called her Lakele, even now...

LB Lakele?

BW Yes. I says, Lakele, what do you say, we should go? Zugt er, Papa, you should advise me. (Laughs)

LB (Laughs) She's right. How old was she?

BW She was eight or nine years old.

LB She was smart.

BW Oh, she's a brilliant person.

LB So, what did you advise her?

BW Well, she says, No papa. You gotta advise me whatever you'll advise, that's what I'll have to do it. So we decided to go back.

LB Why?

BW (Pause) To be honest, I was not made, and even my wife despite the fact she was a very conscientious person and she was a party member. I was never in my life a Party member, but I was very close to the movement and I sympathized and right now I sympathized because I hope that this is the salvation for the whole human race.

LB All right. But why did you go back?

BW Now, all right. I had to inject that thought.

LB I'm afraid it will end, that's why...

BW The reason why is because I was not made from that material to sacrifice and take upon myself the responsibility of child. If she'll later on, ~~xxxxxx~~ to go the Soviet Union, it's her problem. Right now, I should deprive her of going back to the States, where she was born and the condition was much easier. Don't forget it was miserable condition in 1932. Miserable condition in 1932. So it's a selfish, it's a very selfish act. And I'm not sorry I left. You know, because of the again selfish. Because God knows we went through such a war where twenty million Russian people were killed, slaughtered out, you understand what I mean, in typhus, in all kinds

of disease and sickness and everything else. So I'm not sorry that...Now do you understand, I'm talking as an honest person.

LB That's very clear. That's really very clear. Very clear.

BW The next question.

LB No, I think unless...No, it just sums it up and it's very clear, I wish I knew more so that I could ask...

BW Well, why don't you ask about the Jews?

LB At that time? Did you know any Jews?

BW In general.

LB No, I will not ask about the Jews in general.

BW No, I'll tell you. I'll tell you.

LB You told me already yesterday.

BW No, no. I didn't spoke of the Soviet Union of the Jews.

LB Yes, you did.

BW Oh, no.

LB You did.

BW You bet? You bet?

LB Yes. It's going to click off with this bet. If you want to tell me about the Jews in 1931 I'm happy to hear ...

BW I'm telling you. In 1931 the Jews occupied the biggest positions in the plant. I'm not talking about in general. The rest of the story that I'm sure that you were interested and that you read about it.

LB I was a little young at that time.

BW Well, I know you were. Oh yeah, that's right.

LB (Laughs) But I read about it later.

BW Yes. Yes. In the Soviet Union for instance, from the very top, from the director of the factory till the chairman of the party, you understand what I mean, and everything, was all Jewish people.

LB In Kharkov?

BW In Kharkov. And this is one of the biggest ~~max~~ plants in the name of Imini Sergei of ~~Wexnitz~~ Jernikizow. You heard about that?

LB No. Imini?

BW The factory had the name, Sergei or ~~Jernikidze~~ Dzemikidze.

LB Oh-h-h. I know his name! He was a friend of Stalin's, wasn't he? He was his teacher.

BW Well, I don't know who's teacher, one or the other.

LB All right.

BW He was a Georgian and Staling was a Georgian too. Now...

LB And the factory was named after him?

BW Yes, in his name. Yes. In Moscow they have ballbearing factory in the name of Stalin. Maybe now they changed the name of Stalin. But they have different names of different

...

LB Like Kennedy airport.

BW Yes, Lenin's name maybe somewhere appears. I don't know. On every Marx and Lenin and Engels. So, anyway, the Jews...there was a great number of Jewish workers. I'm talking about workers, now. They used to bring there a Jewish paper, the name Temp (slaps the table as he talks) Temp, that means, speed. The way that bundle was brought there, that's the way they used to take it back.

LB I don't understand that.

BW They used to bring, every day, a bundle of newspaper by the name of Temp. And that newspaper was, first of all they portrayed the condition and the life of the immediate vicinity of the factory. Because after all they were working thirteen thousand people around the clock. And beside that, in general, give news, the Soviets from the country as a whole and life of very important events was going on. The way they brought that bundle tied up, you know what I mean, that's the way he was taking it back.

LB Why? That means that nobody would read it.

BW Because the Jewish people didn't want to read.

LB The Jews... Was this written in Yiddish, this paper?

BW Of course! The Temp. It was in Yiddish, in Yiddish, jargon what I call it.

LB It was specifically for the Jewish people?

BW For the Jewish people. You understand me, they had a different nationalities there.

So,...I'll tell you another thing. You know the, here they're claiming they're prohibiting the Jewish newspapers, Jewish magazines, Jewish schools, theatres, so on so forth. And it's a lot...because your daughter, what I will say that, but I will say it's a lot of humbug. I was in, we were together in National Hotel ~~in~~ is just along the ~~in~~ Kremlin Square. There's a kiosk. You know what a kiosk is, wherethey're selling newspapers. They have a magazine there, uñ, uh, Heimland.

That means Homeland. And there, by the way, around the hotel there's a big Jewish population living around there, in M_oscow. The way they bring that paper that's the way they're taking off. It's a magazine, you know what I mean. A monthly.

They don't read it.

LB So, what you're saying is that nobody reads the Yiddish press.

BW That's right. I'll tell you another thing. Not only they don't read. They don't know even how to talk Yiddish, most of them. As I told you, remember, I came to this country, I learned how to speak Yiddish here? There, and I'll tell you another incident, I think, I told you about the fellow, the fellow in Volgograd he weared medals, he's from Odessa...

LB No, you didn't.

BW I didn't. Aw! You know, our group, Americans, they hardly could speak Yiddish.

A lot of them. But they used to speak it.

LB Were there many Jews among those Americans?

BW We had twenty three people? (to his wife) Thirty two? How many among thirty two, How many Gentiles were there?

MW No Gentiles.

BW What are you talking about? In our group we had four, five Gentiles, the rest of them were Jewish.

LB This is in 1931?

BW No. No. I'm talking about now.

LB No, I'm talking about in 1931.

BW Oh, in 1931, no. In 1931, at that time, the Jewish people maybe knew how to speak Jewish.

LB Oh, sure.

BW Maybe! I was in before 1932. I was born in 1894 and I didn't know how to speak...

LB In the group that went over with you was there ...

BW I went alone.

LB You went alone.

~~LB~~ BW I didn't go with a group.

LB Were there other Americans there?

BW Oh sure!

LB O.K.

BW Most of them were Gentile.

LB ~~By~~ O.K. That's what I wanted to know.

BW Most of them were Gentile. A lot of them from Detroit, you know what I mean? From automobile...

LB Yes, because those were the specialists they needed.

BW The specialists, they were specialists like ~~you~~ you're a specialist on a lathe or something. A lot of them, believe me, didn't deserve the piece of bread that they were getting. A lot of them were unemployed.

LB And that's why they went to the Soviet Union?

BW And I wouldn't be surprised. And a lot of them remained because, they remained. You know, well, you don't know. You're a tsutsik (diminutive, small one) you don't remember Gasonia strike. You heard about it?

LB Oh yes. That was in North Carolina.

BW Yes.

LB South Carolina.

BW You know there was one fellow, Fred Bill, that ran away to the Soviet Union.

He was supposed to go in jail. He ran away to the Soviet Union and there they put him on a pedestal, you know what I mean. And he know so much socialism, Marxism like I know what's going on right now on the moon. Some other times I have connections there, but not now. Right this moment, I haven't got it. Now, he, he felt that he was a fifth roll to a carriage. You know, to a wagon. And he finally went back to the United States. And what do you think he did in the United States? He started to write for Hearst newspaper, New York American, and all the dirt and the filth and everything about the Soviet Union and he got very good price for it. He sold himself to the god of gold. Yousee, and there was a lot there, Americans, that, there was some...

(Tape ends suddenly)