Sholom Traub, transcript only

Sholom Traub
Interviewed by Lucille Brown

Q. If you would have told me in advance what you wanted, I could have made, you know, a little outline, you know, a could follow it.

A. I already have an outline.

Q. Oh, are you going to ask me a question?

A. I'll ask you. We'll start. You'll see and then if you don't wish to answer the questions, you don't have to.

Q. What I soon is... It may not be of interest to you. People take off in different directions, you know, depending upon what suddenly they remember. They start off by saying they have nothing to say and then suddenly they remember something.

A. I know I left Europe when I was 17 years old and that was just after the war. That was in 1923.

Q. Now you understand that these tapes will go into the Union College Library.

A. I don't care. I'll just have them out later.

Q. Let's start with your name for the tape recorder.

A. Sholem Tevsh.

Q. Sholem Tevsh and you were born where?

A. Oh, I was born in a small town. I don't know if you will be able to pronounce it correctly... Ryazhezh. It's on the map. I saw it on the European map. It's amazing. It was a small village town.
Q. Was it in the Ukranin?
A. In the Ukranin.
Q. And what was the nearest big town?
A. The nearest big town maybe Lutsk, a larger city then ours. No, from one side and Lutsk from the other side.
Q. We have three maps and I'm going to ask you, if...I have more than three. I don't think...This...It's not here. I need a better map of the Ukranin.
A. Wait a minute. I may have a map...Canada.
Q. No.
A. Of course right after the first world war, it became part Poland...I think 1919 or 1920.
Q. You mean White Russia did.
A. No, part of the Ukranin where we lived.
Q. Oh, they went back to Poland.
A. Several hundred years back it did belong to Poland. It was a part of Poland even as far as Kiev(?). Kiev belonged to Poland at that time, too.
Q. Ok. Now what was the border the Dniper?
A. No, they didn't...the Styr. I think the river divided our city. It was called Styr, S-t-i-r...I suppose. I don't know how to spell it.
Q. My eyeglasses are too bad.
A. The Dniester is further up. It's near Kiev. The Dnieper is near Kiev somewhere.

C. But the Pripyat is in White Russia.

A. And the Pripyat is right there. You're right. The Dnieper is right there. You're right. The Dnieper is near Kiev somewhere.

C. But the Pripyat Harlech is in White Russia.

A. And the Pripyat is in White Russia. That's near Minsk.

C. We'll have to find a map. I have a book that tells where the border ended.

A. They ended... At that time, you see, where... After Poland took a part of the Ukraine the border was about 50-60 miles from Rovno. That means 90 and 60... about 150 miles from Rovno. After, you know, my father died, I moved to Rovno and I studied a little.

Q. If you don't mind, I'll hold the map here for a little bit.

A. Go ahead.

Q. Now, here's Rovno. So you were born in Rynzhesh in the Ukraine in what year please.

A. 1904.

Q. 1904. You are a very young man compared to some we have interviewed. That's right. In 1904... And Rynzhesh was what? Was it a selitce, or was it a village?

A. A selitce. It had a few factories.

Q. A selitce with factories?

A. Yes, in fact across the street from us there was a selitce factory where most of the people who lived around there...
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worked.

Q. Jews?
A. Most of them were Jews.

Q. Did they employ non-Jews?
A. Sure. There were very few non-Jews. You know it's amazing. Certain places the Jews lived...They actually had autonomy. They could do whatever they pleased. Of course, you know, they had a police force, but I don't want to report this, you know, police force in Russia...You could always buy.

Q. No, everybody knows that. Everybody has said it.
A. Saturday was Saturday. The non-Jews never came to town on Saturday, even when there was a fair. You know what a fair was?

Q. Fair.
A. Yea, a fair. On Sunday, yes, but not on Saturday.

Q. Because they knew nothing was going on.
A. And they knew they couldn't buy anything. The same thing on holidays...It was a very, beautiful town.

Q. Now tell us about it, but one thing...How many people lived in it?
A. This I couldn't tell you, because we lived in the suburb. You see, there was a river and divided the city in two parts.

Q. And that was the Stir?
A. The Stir, and we lived in the suburb. The houses were
surrounded with trees. In the back of the houses there were fields because there were German...German people lived there and they were farmers. For us kids, it was a ball, especially in the summertime. You didn't feel like going to cheder, but you had to go whether you like it or you didn't. Even on Saturday we had to go. Can you imagine on a Saturday around 3:00 summertime? It's so beautiful outside and you want to run around and play with the kids, but you had to go to town where my rebbe lived, and study Pirke Avot, the ethics of the fathers. And I couldn't say no because my...

Q. Did you write on Shabbos?
A. No, we walked...ride.

Q. Not ride, write. Did you do handwriting?
A. No, not on Saturday.

Q. Just studied...
A. Pirke Avot, you know, that's a verbal study and we couldn't say no because my father did the same thing because he studied...He told me you have to go, too. When I was around four they wrapped me up in a tallis and they brought me to cheder. Of course, you know, you graduate from one cheder, you go to another cheder. First, you know, it's an elementary cheder where they teach you the aleph, beth, and to read and you go out. When you're through with this rebbe, with this cheder, you didn't stay there. You hire a different rebbe, teacher. He teaches Chumash and the Bible, Tanach, and
when you get through with that...You never get through with it...the Bible and the Chumash. Then, you graduate to a higher school, where you study Talmud, but the last couple of years before the war broke out, we had private teachers. We were six kids...

Q. In the family?
A. Not in the family, from different five different families, and we studied from 9:00 in the morning till 6:00 in the evening...the afternoon.

Q. And they hired a private tutor.
A. Three, not one. We had three.

Q. Three.
A. The rebbe came, you know, who taught us Bible, Chumash, Rashi, Bible and Talmud. I was 11 years old when I began to study Talmud. Here, you know, when you graduate you become Bar Mitzvah and, you know how to read or do daven. It's a big to-do. Over there when you're seven years old, you know, already low to daven.

Q. Now, did this tutor or these three tutors...Did any of them teach you anything but religious subjects? Did you ever have any secular education?
A. Sure. From 9:00 till 12:00 we had Chumash, Rashi, Bible and Talmud.

Q. 9:00 to 12:00 in the morning.
A. In the morning. We went home to lunch for an hour. We
came back at 2:00 and from 2:00 till 4:00 we had a Hebrew teacher. Then we had another hour of rest and a Russian teacher came in.

Q. And what did he teach you...Russian language?
A. Russian language, grammar, reading, writing.

Q. Now did you...When you were studying Hebrew what did you learn in Hebrew? Did you learn the grammar or did you do reading?
A. Grammar, writing, speaking. When I came over here I spoke five languages.

Q. What languages did you speak?
A. Russian, Polish, Hebrew, German and Yiddish.

Q. And where did you pick up your Polish?
A. We were under Polish domination for three years. Well, you see, now let me...Let's continue in order, you know, not just jump. Then, in 1914 the war broke out...about eight months later we got a taste of the war. Then we lost everything...no cheder, no teachers, no going to school. We were free birds, but kids like it, but the parents don't like it. The Germans came in and they occupied our town in 1915. They stayed about nine months and they opened a school...the end of the...in the spring.

Q. They stayed about three months there?
A. No, nine months. And in the spring they opened up a school and it was obligatory. You were forced to go to school,
but it didn't last too long. They were driven out by the Russians. Then when the Russians came in, you know, you're in a war area and the front...They established a front about 15 miles, 14 miles from our town.

Q. West of you?

A. Yea, west of us. They destroyed half of the town. Most of the people left the town.

Q. Where did they go?

A. Some of them left with the Germans. A lot of young people didn't want to get into the Russian army and left with the Germans. After, you know, they burned the town when they left. The Germans burned the town.

Q. The Germans did.

A. Sure. Of course, people didn't have anything to deal with that. They had to leave. They had to find something to do. They had to make a living. We all became peddlers. We were selling cigarettes to the soldiers and bread and whatnot, but, you know, Jewish parents don't like their kids to do such work. They want them to become scholars. Then my father died.

Q. In what year was that?

A. 1917. The Russian revolution broke out a month later. Jews received...became equal citizens. I stayed in that town until May, and I left to Rovno. We had relatives. My mother had sisters over there.

Q. In Rovno ?
A. In **Rovno**. I came to **Rovno**. Somebody helped me to prepare to enter a secular school. Over there, you know, when you get into a school, you have to take an examination and it's according to your age, if you're 10 to 13... You can get into the first class... 13 to 14, the second until, you know, into higher classes. You can skip. You don't have to take an examination. If you pass and get into the last class... You get your degree. Somebody helped me and they prepared me and I entered into that secular school. Then the Ukrainians became an independent state through the occupation of German troops. See, the revolution broke out at that time, and there was chaos all over. There was no order... and everybody felt, you know... Russia consisted of nationalities, different nationalities. Each nationality wanted to become an independent state. Then the Ukrainians established an independent state with the help of the German army. They invited the German army because the front... during the revolution... the Russian-German front fell apart. After... And they remained in the Ukraine for about a year... the German army remained...

Q. After when?
A. After the Ukraine became an independent state.
Q. Do you remember what year that was that the Ukraine became...

A. That must have been in 1918.
Q. It was already after the end of the war?
A. It was not... There was still... The war was still going on except...
Q. But Russia had already signed the peace treaty with Germany.
A. That's right because the... Trotsky... Maybe you remember, you know, Trotsky... The Bolsheviks signed a peace treaty with the Germans because the Germans helped Lenin and Trotsky to conquer Russia, you see, and to... First, you know, they had an election, a general election and the Bolsheviks were the losers. Well, they always... They used force and they abolished the Duma which was the...
Q. That's ok. We know.
A. You know what the Duma is? And they established themselves in a certain... in Russia, but in the Ukraine the hetman. He was called...
Q. Petlura?
A. No, Petlura came later after...
Q. Oh, he did. Alright. So you'd better... Tell me... The...
A. The Hetman... He established the first Ukrainian state. When the revolution broke out in Germany and when the German troops left the Ukraine, Petlura took over.
Q. And that was already 1919. Wasn't it?
A. That's right. That was in 1919. I lived through all the pogroms and, of course, we lived through the revolution
first and then the Ukrainian pogroms.

Q. I'd like to hear more about the Ukrainian independence... the days of Ukrainian independence, right now. This is not the order in which we usually do things, but that's ok because you've set up a kind of a story thread and I want to take it along with that. Now you say the Hetman... Did he have... Was... The Hetman is a title. That's not his name.

A. It was. I... You know as... I was a young man. I couldn't grasp the whole... You must have been about 14 then.

A. 14 years old. How much, you know, does a 14 year old boy know about politics? Although, you face the situation daily over there, but young fella, a 14 year old boy, is more interested in his own private affairs or what have you... having a good time.

Q. So, we'll have to look up the name of the Hetman. Now you're saying the Hetman first declared the Ukraine to be a separate republic. Now, if I remember correctly, it was Lenin's stated principle at the very beginning that any socialist republic could secede from...

A. Yea, but that was not yet under Lenin. Lenin didn't... They didn't have enough power...

Q. To prevent it.

A. To grab the Ukraine. Maybe... They had to make some kind of a deal with Germany because Germany helped the Bolsheviks
at that time, to let the Ukraine alone. They needed to occupy the Ukraine because the German... You know in Germany they starved to death for the last three or four years and here they had an opportunity to clean out a new place and they actually transferred everything they got a hold of, to Germany... food, even factories; they took out and they moved it to Germany.

Q. During this period of independence.
A. During that period... Until the revolution in Germany broke out and the German army was disintegrated and had to leave. Then Hitler took over.

Q. Then Hitler took over.
A. That's right. And it wasn't only Hitler...

Q. Were there pogroms before Hitler?
A. Well, you see, the Ukraine is known as a pogrom area, but not at the scale when... after Hitler took over. It was not only Hitler. It was Hitler and Himmler. I don't know how many more gangsters ruled in that area because I know in our town...

Q. Which town now?
A. Rovno. There were many days when we didn't have any government. I have currency which today it was worth 50 rubles. The next day it was worthless because there was no government to guarantee the money. Somebody else...

Q. You mean there was no Russian government, no German
government or Ukrainian government?
A. Nothing.
Q. It was up for grabs.
A. That's right. That's why we have pogrom in Rovno.

I'll never forget this. It was the day after school closed.
The government moved out, left the town.

Q. Which government?
A. I don't know who they were. I don't know which government it was. They left town. Tomorrow morning, a group of gangsters came in, Ukrainian gangsters, and they made a pogrom. Killed about 20 people. We were lucky. Why? They could have done... They would have killed more. The reason they couldn't kill any more because somebody managed to leave town and bring in a regiment which was loyal to a certain government over there, and they left.

Q. You don't know what regiment...
A. I don't know. In fact, you know, those gangsters were...

On our porch, over there, there were a number of girls in our house what we lived... in our apartment... and they were discussing certain things and they said that where they came from and when they mentioned where they came from, we knew already who they were, but you know what he said before they left? Don't worry. Your house will not be touched and they didn't touch our house.

Q. Where did they come from?
A. They came from other cities, where they made pogroms.

Q. Now why did they say your house would not be touched?

A. I don't know because, you know, they liked the girls. I don't know what happened. They gave them tea and something to eat. I don't know why and they didn't touch our house. They robbed the next house on the right and the house on the left... our house... across the street from us.

Q. Sounds like the story of Rahav and Jericho.

A. I don't know... about 5:00 they disappeared because another regiment moved in and they disappeared.

Q. Now according to some of the other Jews we've spoken to, including my parents, who lived through, you know, really bad they lived there from one band, one day after another. It would be one band, then another band, then another band and then another band and several of these people have said the only units that saved any Jews at all were units of the Bolshevik army.

A. Right.

Q. Now, the army, not the Red Partisans.

A. That's right. It's true because there were a great number of Jews in the army... and not only... They were not only soldiers, they were the leaders. They were the officers. In and with them, you know, they didn't monkey around with them. If one didn't... disobey orders... They just shot them in the middle of the street in front of all the soldiers. It's true. I
think two days later the Bolsheviks came into our house...into our town.

Q.  Now it would be a Bolshevik military unit.
A.  That's right and that's why maybe they disappeared because the *letura* was already in disintegrated. We lost most of the Ukraine and he was on the run. In fact I saw it with my own eyes.

Q.  You did. Where did you?
A.  In Rovno, their headquarters.

Q.  The headquarters were where?
A.  In Rovno. And they were retreating, you know, from the Ukraine.

Q.  Now, did they not also invade Poland?
A.  Not the Ukrainians, but in 1920 the Poles declared war. The Bolsheviks and they advanced as far as Kiev.

Q.  You're saying it was the Poles who declared war on the Bolsheviks?
A.  Yea, in 1920. Poland, you see...We knew that Poland established itself already as an independent state, but we were out of its jurisdiction. When you are under the Ukrainians, yes. Later the Bolsheviks came. Then, yes...The Poles...Then the Bolsheviks came in. They stayed for three months and the Poles drove them out. You see that's the way it was. A zigzag...

Q.  The Poles drove them out of where? Out of your town?
A. From our town and they drove them as far…No, they stopped about 60 miles from Rowno and they established a border over there.

Q. East of Rowno then.
A. Yes, east of Rowno.
Q. On the Russian side.
A. And they remained there for about a year. It was nice and quiet. Now, you see, the Poles established themselves in our town and everything went back to normal. It was a real government.

Q. So then you were at that time, then you were Polish.
A. We became Polish. Then the Poles got a desire to conquer the rest of the territory that belonged to Poland 150 years back.

Q. Now what year are you talking about?
A. 1920.
Q. Ok.
A. And they started and they declared war against the Bolsheviks at that time and they went as far as Kiev. Then the Bolsheviks gave them such a kick in the pants, so they ran as far as Warsaw.

Q. The Bolsheviks went west to Warsaw. That I know.
A. As far as Warsaw. If it wouldn’t have been for the French, they would have conquered Warsaw and they would have united with this Spartacus in Germany.
Q. The Spartacus movement
A. Yes, Spartacus in Germany. What was her name? Rose...
Q. Rosa Luxemburg.
A. Rosa of Luxembourg and what was his name? They were both Jews, you see, and...
Q. Karl?
A. Karl Liebknecht, I think.
Q. They were both murdered.
A. Yes, both of them were murdered by the German Nazis later.
Q. No. Was it?
A. Yes, she was... Anyway whatever it was they murdered them. Then, thanks to the French...
Q. Now, what do you mean... Thanks to the French?
A. They sent in a general and I think some kind of support. I don't know what they...
Q. To support the Poles?
A. The Poles because, you know, after all the European countries, the allies, helped to create the Polish state because under Kasdski, you see, the Poles fought against the Austrians and the Germans during the first world war, and when the Austrians and the Germans, you know, were defeated Poland became an independent state with the help of the...
Q. The allies.
A. The allies, and they pushed it back to the old borders...
60 miles from Rovno.

Q. Now which side... Russian or Polish side? Were you then Polish or Russian?
A. We were first Russians for three months again and I remember on Yom Kippur we became Poles. The Polish army walked into Rovno on Yom Kippur.

Q. Yom Kippur... what year?
A. Must have been 1920 or 1921. This I can't remember.

Q. So all this took place within the space of a year.
A. Yes, within one year. I saw Trotsky in our town.

Q. In your town.
A. Yes.

Q. So Rovno was actually fairly important town.
A. No, it was not... because, you know, it was a... What shall I say? A cross town, a town, you know, which had cross-roads to the... to white Russia, to Minsk, Pinsk, to Poland and Galicia, to Galicia. You see?

Q. It's the location. That's what it is.
A. It was a very important location. See from Lutsk, Galicia, you're not far from Galicia, Austria. Take a look in Rovno and there is another line, a railroad line, which goes up, which goes to Shepetovka, goes right to white Russia. Take it to the right over here from Rovno on this side and you'll find it goes into white Russia, to Pinsk, to

Minsk, going up towards Poland, towards the west. And,
of course, from Rovno you go straight to Warsaw. You can go to Warsaw, Kyazhesh, Kowno, Brest-Litovsk, straight right into Warsaw.

Q. It's dotted line. It was a railway center?

A. Railway center, not only a railway center, the roads, you know. It was a crossroad from...I saw Trotsky.

Q. Was he in a military train?

A. No, he was...He spoke to the soldiers, you know. I don't know. This man actually...You know he was responsible for organizing the Russian army. I don't know where he learned military strategy, but the guy must have been a genius. When he spoke to them...At that time they didn't even have any microphones. He actually electrified. I heard him speak to a regiment before going up the front.

Q. Now this is to a Bolshevik regiment?

A. A Bolshevik regiment,—a bunch of hoodlums.

Q. And where were they going to Poland?

A. To Poland, you see, because at that time, you know, they actually sliced, you know, they sliced the Polish army to ribbons. I never saw such a thing like it. They had to move out from our town for two days in order to let a Polish army of a quarter of a million soldier pass by, because they couldn't swallow them up.

Q. I don't understand.

A. They surrounded them.

Q. The Poles surrounded the...
A. No, the Bolsheviks surrounded the Poles with all their ammunition, artillery and everything. They had to move out for a day in order to let them go through, because they couldn't do anything.

Q. In other words you're saying that with all the support that the Poles got from the French and all the...

A. That was later... until they reached Warsaw. They saw that they were lost.

Q. Alright. So then what happened then... I want to understand because this part of the history is vague to me.

A. This part of history you can read anyway.

Q. But I want to hear your... what you're saying because I heard some other stories, for example, my mother says, and she's not an historian, she said that the Ukrainians decided that they wanted to invade Poland and that's why they went. This is an entirely different story from what you're saying.

A. Petlura didn't have the power to do it. Petlura had only enough power to kill 100,000 Jews.

Q. That's right.

A. 100,000 Jews and maybe more. Our city was lucky. We only lost about 20 or 22 people. In some cities, they murdered 50,000 people... 10,000 Jews.

Q. So now what you're saying then... The Bolsheviks were so well-organized...

A. The way my 14 year old head understood at that time...
They didn't attack then, you see... They never made a frontal attack. They always attacked in the rear.

Q. Now you're talking about the Bolsheviks.

A. The Bolsheviks attacked in the rear and they cut them off, whole armies. Can you imagine an army of 250,000 people, fully equipped? When the Polish army began to move through our town, Rovno, for three days they moved, fully equipped and they couldn't do anything to them. I mean the Polish army couldn't do anything to the Bolsheviks. Well, they...

Q. So they got as far as Kiev...

A. No, they went as far as Warsaw when they...

Q. No, no. I mean the Poles...

A. The Poles went as far as Kiev. Then they gave them such a kick in the pants that they began to run. They didn't stop for a moment.

Q. Ok. So the Poles left.

A. Well, the Poles also tried to make a pogrom in Rovno, and then but they didn't succeed. It was amazing. We had an elderly man by the name, Walter. It's funny now I can't remember what I ate for breakfast but I remember his name.
Q. Ok. Now do you remember where you were?
A. Yes.
Q. Ok. Go ahead.
A. Mr. Haller found out, you see, government. The Polish government moved out, the civil government moved out and they left about...a regiment of soldiers over there, Polish soldiers, and then all the soldiers also loved Jews. They tried, but they did not succeed at that, he went to the colonel and he tell him...
Q. The Polish colonel?
A. To Polish colonel, colonel of that regiment, and he says...Is that nice for Polish people to try to make a pogrom? Somehow, you see, it must have been a Pole in the heart. Most of them have no hearts. I can tell you what happened later when they actually established themselves in Rovno. He called in the officers and they rode off on their horses and they pulled out their revolvers and they told the soldiers to get off the streets and those who are not going to obey the orders, they're going to shoot them right over there...right in the street and they disappeared when they disobeyed. (?)
Q. Now tell us something about...if there is anything more...you started to tell us that you saw Trotsky and you heard him address the Bolshevik troops and you say he electrified them. He electrified and then...every regiment of that area...I also saw Budenny. He started as a corporal and he became a
marshall under Stalin and...Before they left for the front, he gave them a talk, what they have to do and believe me he knew they were going to do what he asked them to do.

Q. Now you were just a boy and you were standing around and listening.

A. Standing outside as a boy. You see I was a schoolboy. We wore uniforms and we were privileged characters, in fact. Kids were... Student with uniforms could get a job... they wanted from these because they didn't have too many educated people.

Q. From the Bolsheviks...

A. That's right. What else shall I tell you about? They stayed with us for three months and believe me we are grateful that we got rid of them.

Q. The Poles now?

A. No, the Bolsheviks.

Q. The Bolsheviks... You were grateful they got rid of the Bolsheviks? You preferred having the Poles?

A. Yes.

Q. Why?

A. Why? Because you were not secured for your life. In the middle of the night, unlocking the door, they took you away and you never knew where the husband or the son disappeared.

Q. Are you talking about what happened then or what you
found out later.
A. No, then. If you were a merchant or somebody had a grudge against you and he became a Bolshevik, a communist...
Q. Yes, you said I want to be...I want to join the party.
A. Then...And if he had a grudge against you, your life wasn't worth 2¢. You disappeared over night and that's what they always did. In the middle of the night they took you off.
Q. That was going on even then.
A. There was a Cheka. From the first day they took over they began to murder.
Q. Is that right?
A. They murdered.
Q. Now here you're saying on the one hand when the Bolshevik units came in, the Jews were safe...On the other hand you're saying when the...
A. It was not only a matter of Jews at that time...who weren't safe. The Christians weren't safe either, if he was a merchant or he was an official in the czar's service or even rabbis. Rabbis became reactionary/ES.
Q. Well, priests then, too.
A. Priests and rabbis.
Q. How about schoolteachers?
A. Schoolteachers...They needed them for a while. They needed their service. For instance, later they prohibited the
Hebrew language and when the Rav Tsar from Moscow.

Q. Rav Tsar?
A. Yes, that he was called. That was his name. I can't remember. In fact I can look up what his name was.

Q. Rav Tsar. What would that mean?
A. A young rabbi.

(Tape off)

Q. His name was Jacob...
A. Jacob Masse. He was the chief rabbi in Moscow.

Q. Chief rabbi in Moscow?
A. Yes.

Q. Now what about him? 
A. Lunacharsky.

Q. When he came to a who was at that time, he was the head of the...

Q. Arts.
A. Of the arts, culture...Commissar of Culture...and he asked him why do you declare the Hebrew language as a reactionary language. He says I never said so. I never did it. The Jewish communists interfere and they impressed upon him to prohibit the Hebrew language. You see that's why we had just as much trouble from the Jewish communists, even more. The Jews seemed to have more trouble from them than we had from the 90/1 because the rest of them were...Most of the Jews were the leaders at that time. If you look over the list of the higher-ups, you'll see. I wouldn't say the
majority, but at least 40% or 50% occupied very important positions in the national...Bolsheviks government.

Q. Now, Lunacharsky was not a Jew.
A. He was a Pole.
Q. He was a Pole.
A. Yes, so was the head of the Cheka. What was his name? Also a Pole. It's not important.
Q. That we can look up. Alright. Now I want to take you back just a little bit. Ok? Because we've covered a lot of territory and I also want you to remember that what happened in Russia after the Poles took over. So we'll talk about that, but first I want to ask you something.
A. Excuse me. If you would have let me...If you would have notified me in advance what you wanted, I would have made an outline. We could have done it in order, not, you see, just jumping. After all I jumped maybe three or two years during Petlura's regime.
Q. Then it would have been a speech. I don't want a speech.
A. Ok.
Q. I want to hear you...have a conversation.
A. Ok.
Q. Alright?
A. Now what else do you want...when the Poles came in...
Q. When the Germans came in in 1915 that was the first
sign you had of war in Rovno. Right? And they were there for nine months.

A. That's right.

Q. How did they behave?

A. Well, how they behaved... Some of them behaved already like Hitlerites. They suffer from an inferiority complex and they think that they have a superiority complex and that's very bad. You see? We had the Austrians and we had the Germans.

Q. You had both.

A. Both.

Q. At the same time or...

A. At the same time, but most of the time, you know, we only had a token of the German army, but the Austrians were the rulers at that time. The Austrians... The German... The officer of the German soldier had no regard for the Austrian soldier, for the Austrian officer. I saw many German soldiers not even saluting an Austrian officer. If that would have happened just in reverse, the Austrian would have been punished.

Q. But that really doesn't make a Hitler group.

A. They did... Doesn't make a Hitler group, but you saw already what type of people they are.

Q. But let's not talk... Let's... If you can...

A. A people of culture... They were supposed to be.

Q. No, no, no. That's not what I want to know. I want to
know... I want you, if possible and it's very hard to do, to keep from going from the '30's back. If you can erase that which is impossible, but to the best of your ability, if you can remember what was the feeling about the Germans in 1915 in Kovno.

A. When they came in...The Austrians came in first. They occupied the town first. That was about a month before Rosh Hashana. It was a relief.

Q. When the Germans came...

A. When the Austrians came in. First of all we saw a great number of Jewish officers in the Austrian army which was actually a surprise to Russian-Jews. Secondly, in fact I remember the Jews claimed that the Messiah had come. The Austrians didn't trust the Russian-Ukrainian population. That means the police or Jews. The police force was... immobilized from the Jewish people. The head of the police was a Jew. The mayor became a Jew of our town.

Q. This was all appointed by the Austrian occupying force. Ok.

A. Then when the Russians came in nine months later all those people had to run because if they wouldn't have run, they would have shot.

Q. Now, you're talking about Austrians. You're not talking about Germans.

A. About a month later they advanced about 50-60 miles
from our town, Kyazhek, and they got stuck in the mud, in white and the White Russian.

Q. You're talking about the Austrians now. And they had to be saved by the Germans.

A. Over there they have mud which...

Q. The Prijet Marshes, you're talking about.

A. That's right. They were known, you see, all over Russia. They got stuck over there for the winter and they thought maybe in the summer, when summer would come, they'll be able to do something, but it turned out to be just the opposite. The Russian front... The way we understood at that time... Later I learned, you know, from history that they started an offensive and they had to withdraw certain regiments from over here, and the Russians also, simultaneously, again started an offensive, but until the nine months... A month later the Russians drove them back to Kyazhek, drove the Austrians back to Kyazhek.

Q. From the Prijet...

A. From the marshes over there. It was just on Yom Kippur that we had to run. On Kippur morning we had to leave. We crossed the Stir, and over there the Germans established their line of defense. Then...

Q. Now, the Germans you're saying...

A. No, the Austrians and then German-regiments came into to help them.

Q. To help them. That's what I understood.
Sholom Troub

A. German regiments came in to help them and they...After eight days, in fact, for Simchas Torah we were back in our own home.

Q. For Simchas Torah.

A. Yes, they pushed them back to their old positions and they stayed there for another seven months or eight months and that was the end of the Germans.

Q. Well, actually you didn't really see too much of the Germans. You saw more of the Austrians.

A. More of the Austrians, but we saw a token of the German army and I could see the difference between the Austrians and the Germans. Under Hitler the Austrians were worse than the Germans, just the opposite. They were worse Nazis than the Germans and at that time the Germans were worse than the Austrians.

Q. What do you mean by worse? Did they kill anybody? Did they shoot Jews? Did they beat anybody?

A. No, they didn't.

Q. How were they worse?

A. It was a military government, you see. You were under an occupied, military government and they treated us very nicely. I mean politically they didn't have anything against us because they saw that the Jews actually were their friends. In fact, do you know that the German army issued a powerful declaration, you know, about Israel? That, after the war that Israel...The Jews can have...I have it written,
if you want to see it. I will find it for you.

Q. I would love to see it.
A. Not called Balfour, though. You see?

Q. In other words they issued a proclamation to the Jewish population...
A. Because they needed their help.

Q. Now most of the people that we have spoken to who were in that area, along the front, like in Galicia or in White Russia said that the Germans were severe and strict, but correct.
A. At least we were safe from pogroms. We were not afraid of pogroms. They wouldn't dare to do that. After all they were supposed to be the folk of culture, you know. That's why the people never believed that Hitler will do what he did.

Q. That's absolutely true. Ok. So now you answered me.

Now...
A. Then when the Russians came in after... It was in May,
they stayed there for about a month and we left...

No, for a year.

Q. You said the Russians came in on Yom Kippur.
A. No, that was between the Poles and the Russians. Oh, you mean during the war?

Q. Right.
A. During the first world war... Yes, they drove them back.

We didn't see any Russians, because we left with the German army.
Q. Where did you go?
A. Across the river where they established their positions.
Q. And how long did you stay there?
A. For eight days.
Q. Until when?
A. Until...from between Yom Kippur and Simchas Torah. We went back. They drove them back and we...
Q. The Germans drove the Russians back...
A. To their old positions and we came back to our own homes.
Q. Alright. Now what year was that?
A. That must have been in 1916.
Q. Oh, I see. It was right in the middle of the war. How did the war...
A. No, that was still in 1915 because they...In 1916...
In May, they left us completely. Then the Russian occupied.
We stayed with the Russians.
Q. And how was it under the Russians?
A. Wasn't bad. At least we ate. We had something to eat, you know, we starved to death during the German occupation.
Q. You did.
A. We didn't have any sugar. I remember...It's 1915. Yes, today is 1976. My mother cooked potato soup without salt because we couldn't get any salt. I still have that taste in my mouth. You know it's peculiar. I still taste it. You
didn't see a piece of meat for months. For Passover we didn't know whether we were going to have matzoh or not. There was no flour available for such thing.

Q. Now why was it better when the Russians came? They already had the Bolsheviks in control.

A. No, not in 1917. The Bolsheviks didn't come into power...didn't take over...until the end of 1917, in October 1917. The revolution broke out in February 1917. Actually Russia enjoyed six months of actual democracy and freedom during the Kerensky time.

Q. Were you...In your family were you aware of the changes that were taking place in Russia?

A. Certainly. You know my school? You couldn't get in over there. Jews couldn't get in...Only about 10%...And then, you know, they had a formula, a 10% quota and when I was in school, out of the 48 students in my class there were 46 Jews and two non-Jews.

Q. Now I'm a little confused and I think we better go back. First of all, there are a few questions that you haven't...We haven't even touched on. How many people were in your family?

A. In my family...My father and my mother and myself.

Q. You were the only child.

A. Only child.

Q. Did you have relatives around in the area?

A. Sure. I had a sister and she had three daughters.
Q. You had a sister?
A. Yes.
Q. Then you weren't the only child... You were the only child living with the family.
A. That's right.
Q. Your sister was already married. She must have been a lot older than you.
A. I have nieces who are older than I am.
Q. Oh, I see.
A. You can explain that.
A. It was a second marriage.
A. His father was married twice.
Q. Well, that's alright. It happens even if you're not married twice. It can happen, too.
A. He was really the only child by his mother.
Q. Oh, I see. Ok. Now what did your father do for a living?
A. He was a real estate man and during that period you couldn't sell...
Q. No, you couldn't sell anything. The Jews couldn't own land under the Russians.
A. Well, we didn't own any land. You know... with landowners.
A. He was a broker.
A. You see? That's right... a real estate broker.
Q. So he arranged the deals.
A. That's right. During the war you couldn't enter any deals, bought land.

Q. No, but I'm talking about before the war now. What kind of a house did you live in?
A. Well, you know, how...like the average house in Europe. We had a big, a large room and that room was divided, one third was a bedroom with, you know, a curtain, and the rest was a living room and a dining room and a kitchen.

Q. So it was actually one room divided into...
A. Into four...A living room, a dining room...
Q. But you didn't have curtains dividing it.
A. No.
Q. It was used for all those purposes. And was your father...Was he middle...Would you call him a middle class man?
A. Certainly, if he was a real estate broker, I supposed to be...
Q. Was he considered comfortably situated economically?
A. No.
Q. No. Alright.
A. Very few people were prosperous economically. Most of them, you know...Now, for instance, in that factory they were all...
Q. Was that factory owned by a Jew by the way?
A. Yes, the family. It was a...three families...two
brothers and a brother-in-law. The people worked there
for four rubles a week. That means $2 at that time, a week.
They worked from 6:00 in the morning and 8:00 they went home
because they lived in that area. They went home for breakfast.
It must have been a half an hour. I don't know. Then at
12:00 they went home for breakfast again and they worked till
8:00.
Q. At night.
A. From 6:00 till 8:00.
Q. From 6:00 in the morning till 8:00 at night.
A. On Shabbos, on Friday in the wintertime they used
Lechaim (Chalmond?)
to get 2:00 or 3:00 clock, they didn't work. That was their
vacation.
Q. Chalmond. You mean like Kalah [word]
A. No, not Kalah maid. Chalmond!
Q. You mean like [word]?
A. You know the four days be-
tween Shabbos would be the first two days of Pesach and the
last two days of Pesach was is half a holiday. You see?
You see, in America you don't know. You don't even know what
Pesach is over here.
Q. Yes, we do.
A. The only thing you know,
Yom Tov was, and, in fact, some people didn't even put on frillen, because
those who didn't work, didn't do physical work, didn't put on
frillen, because it was considered half a holiday.
C. And on holidays you don’t lay shellen?
A. No, not on Shabbos, not on holidays.
C. Is that right?
A. Sure.
C. I didn’t know that.
A. Sure.
C. Why is that?
A. This is only for the whole week. You’re supposed to lay shellen. On Shabbos you don’t. On Shabbos it’s different than the rest. Shabbos is a holy day. It’s a holiday. You become a holy man, too. For that shellen, the whole week, you know, it’s a...
Q. It’s an everyday occurrence. Must be. I never heard this.
A. On Shabbos it’s different. You have to differentiate between on every day and Saturday. That’s what... When you make havdalah, you say differentiate between the holiday Shabbos and the weekly day.
Q. Now was your father a very observant man?
A. Sure.
Q. Did he wear a beard?
A. Certainly.
Q. Was he a beard?
A. No.
Q. What was he?
A. He was not a ..., and he was not a ..., but he was a very pious man. He didn't walk between ... women.

Q. He did not.

A. No. When he saw... When the women knew already, you know, we had eight families live in that apartment where we lived in that house, and, of course, you know, the women in the summertime, they were sitting outside and he came. They knew they had to move away... one side, otherwise he wouldn't go through, wouldn't walk through. I have a picture if you want to see it.

Q. I'd love to. Let's... If you want to bring it now, let's turn off the tape. 

(Tape off)

A. 2:00 in the morning.

Q. He sat down and studied.

A. This is my mother. That's from the old country.

Q. She worked hard.

A. She worked hard. Everybody worked hard.

Q. Is this you?

A. No, this is my cousins. He is my cousin, and she is my cousin. That's her husband(?). They lived in ... .

Q. Beautiful girls and your father's a sweet-looking man.

A. That's why he wanted his son also to be an educated man and if I didn't want to study, he used to tell me... What do you want to be, a ...? A ... was the prototype
the Russian ignoramus. Well, you see who wanted to be a Ivan?
Q. Listen. Do you think I could borrow this and make a copy of it?
A. You can make a copy, but, you know...I'll tell you something. Those things are very dear to me. I have books...
Q. I understand.
A. I have books that they are not in print anymore.
Q. You know that Mr. Keesen gave us his Yiddish library?
A. Yes, but...
Q. To the Union College Library. Yes. Now, may I copy this thing?
A. Sure.
Q. Because I can't read...What is this?
A. I'll read it to you.
Q. Iz viln vissen...
A. This was me... This was me... when I was a student at that time.
Q. Well, you haven't changed that much...just don't have a mustache.
A. That's what people tell me.
Q. What is this picture?
A. We were boy scouts, Jewish boy scouts.
Q. In Poland that was.
A. That's right.
Q. Alright. You'll have to tell us about that. This I
want to take a picture... I would like to make a copy of and I promise I'll return it. Now, come and sit down, Mr. Traub, because you have a lot to tell us. So you lived in this house. You were the only child there. Your father was a real estate broker and he was a pious, traditional Jew.

Q. Was he learned?
A. Very learned.

Q. Did he know any language... Did you speak Yiddish in the home?
A. Certainly. Although you see, most of Jewish Jews do not allow their children, you know, to study other languages. He wanted me to study other languages. In fact he bought me some books, German books. When I was a younger I spoke German better than the Germans. Because I lived among the Germans, and when the German army came in... the Austrians came in... they mistook me for a German kid.

Q. So he was learned as well as pious. Now, how about your mother?
A. If my father was pious, my mother was pious, too.

Q. Could your mother read, too?
A. Yes, she could read. She could daven. She could write.

Q. She could daven in Hebrew or Yiddish?
A. In Hebrew.
Q. In Hebrew. That was unusual. Most of the women in Yiddish.

A. She came from a family where they taught them how to

Q. They did.

A. That's what was the extent of the education, you know, for the Jewish women at that time.

Q. That's right.

A. I remember my mother telling me that her grandfather was married when he was eight and the girl was nine or seven and they played like kids, not just because, you know, they wanted to marry them off so young.

Q. That was the time of the Khapera.

A. Oh, I see you know what you're talking about. Once they were married they couldn't Khap them.

Q. That's what they thought, but it turned out different.

A. No. Most of them didn't Khap him. They couldn't Khap him. It was against the law.

Q. Alright. Now let's explain for the tape. In 1825 Nicholas I...It was 1827 already.

A. Well, the date is not important.

Q. Well, some idea. This is century.

A. It was in the 19th century, in the beginning of the 19th century.

Q. He wanted...He really hated the Jews and he wanted to
do something about actually getting rid of the Jewish population and one way to do it was by conversion. So he issued a...

A. Edict, an order...

Q. Right, an order which took Jewish boys into the army from the age of about eight on.

A. They had to serve 25 years

Q. Out of their homes and they had to serve their regular 25 years plus whatever year it was between eight and 18.

A. And they sent them to the peasants. They hand them over to peasants where they worked for them in order they should forget... I have poems... They call them "abhottim" in Hebrew and the way that...

Q. But "Kappers" we use... Explain what the "Kappers" were.

See what happened? In order to avoid this the Jewish boys began to run away, but the Jewish council was responsible to the Russian government for turning over a certain number of Jewish boys every so often. So they would...

A. And whom did they catch?

Q. The poor ones.

A. The rich ones bought themselves out. They didn't go.

Q. So to "Khap" in Yiddish means to catch, to grab.

A. And this is in Hebrew...

Q. So the Jews ran around catching other Jews, turn them over to the Russian army.
A. Where did the marriage come in? If you were married, you were safe?

Q. They felt that if ... The Jews thought, according to Dubnow, who I happen to be reading now.

A. Jewish historian.

Q. The rumor spread...

A. Whom the Nazis murdered by the way. The Nazis murdered him. He was in Riga at that time when he was arrested. Simon Dubnow.

Q. According to Dubnow the rumor spread that if you were married, they would not take the husband into the army. So they started marrying their sons off at the age of eight and nine and ten and eleven. Now, I did not understand that exactly. It seemed to me as if you had to be married before the case was actually issued.

A. That didn't matter, as long as he ... Before they came to your town to catch you. You see?

A. How long was this in force?

Q. That I don't remember.

A. As long as Alexander was alive ... Later I think they abolished it.

Q. You mean as long as Nicholas was alive?

A. Yes.

Q. And then Alexander...

A. He abolished it, you know. Alexander was the one who also freed the peasants, you know, from slavery.
Q. Wait a minute.
A. He made some reforms or whatever and they abolished it.
Q. They were called *Nikolaevski Soldaten*.
A. I met a one in Albany over here who served in the army for 25 years.
Q. You did.
A. Sure, Meyerhoff. He was as strong as an ox and he was...
Q. Is he still living?
A. No. He was an old man when he died. I think it was 80. He was strong as an ox, you know. He was in the cavalry. And during that period the Jewish kids forgot, you know, their Jewishness, but here, you know, I don't remember whether it's a poem...just a story...the way some of the kids who studied...This is my Hebrew book which I studied when I studied Hebrew.
Q. *LaShen*?
A. Yes, but it's language(?) And during that period they tried, you know, every...They knew...They felt that the kids who worked for the other peasants or also Jews. They used to congregate and they used to help each other to remember that they are still Jews. They used to repeat the prayers, what they learned in *cheder* by heart. Some of them can still came out and they were pretty good Jews.
Q. You know something? This is interesting because he lahsn.
   In Yiddish you say mama lahsn.
A. But if you what do you think? Where does it come from?
Interviewed by Lucille Brown

Tape 2 - Side 1

Q. I'm going back to your family because I had a reason. You went to shelter until...from the age of four when you were taken there wrapped in your tallis, until what age?
A. 11...11 years, you see, I studied the Talmud. I was supposed to be a big guy, a big shot.

Q. Alright. What I want to know is...After the Poles took over Rovno which was 1921...
A. Must have been 1920 or 1921. We had them twice, once they came in and they stayed a while. Then the Bolsheviks drove them out, you see, because they got a notion that they can conquer the rest of their country which belonged to them 200, you know, 200 years back.

Q. I understand, but we're talking about...Once Poland became...Once the borders were settled and things settled down a while you were Polish.
A. And it became a stable...We had a...They established a stable government in Poland.

Q. Now, were then schools set up in Rovno?
A. Yes, all our schools converted...the Russian language...the Ukrainian language...When I went to school I had to learn three languages...First was Russian in 1917, when I entered school...the language...and this was Russian.

Q. Now that's what I don't understand. Where did you enter school?
A. In Rovno.
Q. You want to a secular school?
A. Yea, a secular school.
Q. Did you go to... Oh, that's when you took the exam.
A. That's right.
Q. Was that a Gymnasium?
A. No, that was a commercial school.
Q. It was a commercial school.
A. Our school trained... bookkeepers, accountants
Q. Oh, so you actually learned a skill.
A. Yes, and ... I didn't go through the whole eight classes. You had to go through for eight years.
Q. But that was the intent.
A. Yea. Then, you see... Uh, the Gymnasium [In our school we didn't have any Latin. The Gymnasium prepared Ultras, Latin. I studied Latin. The Kombischf] trained... an engineering and architectural school.
Q. What was the name of your school?
A. My school was Kommercheski [Klassnaja Kommercheski] school.
Q. No, no, no, no. Let's... Let's go on.
A. Rozenskiy Vosem Klassnaja Kommercheski [Rozenskiy Vosem Klassnaja] eight classes... a commercial school.
Q. Alright. Now, when the Poles took over, they set up a school system.
A. The system remained the way it was because they were private schools. They were not government schools. You had to pay tuition.

Q. Ok. What kind of schooling did you get under the new Polish state?

A. They're the same classes what...You had to have Polish, the Polish language.

Q. So you continued in this commercial school.

A. Only for one year because I later, you know, we couldn't afford to pay tuition and I dropped out after four years and drop out and then we began to make preparations to come to this country.

Q. I see. Now what happened in Poland in your life experience between 1921 and the time you left, which was 1923? That's two years. What did you observe? Now 1921 you were 17 years old. You knew enough to see something.

A. Politically it became a stable government, with a parliament. In fact, you know, Poland had a great number of minorities. They were permitted to send their representatives to the parliament. Jews were represented over there, but Poles, by nature, were always anti-Semites and they will remain anti-Semites regardless under which type of government or which type or which system, political system, they'll live. You can see what's happening in Poland today under the communists. What they did in 1968... Russian... to the Jewish
communists who were better communists than the Poles over there, which is an accepted fact, you know. People know about it. When Jews do something they do it full heartedly better than the goyim. And people were business people.

Q. You're talking about Jews now.

A. Yes, the Jewish people were... Most of them were business people. They opened up stores and they were making a living, more or less, but you could see already... You could not only see, you feel the hatred from the Poles toward the Jews. For instance, they had a certain segment in the army called the Hitlerchiks... under Heller, the General Heller. When they used to get... got a hold of a Jew, they used to cut off his beard, not only his beard, but a part of his face. They used to throw Jews out of running trains.

Q. Are these stories true because I've heard the same stories from different people.

A. This is not a fantasy. It's the truth. We saw it.

Q. You saw it.

A. Yes. Until, you know, it reached a point it was impossible.

Q. Now what was Heller's army's function? It was a very peculiar army.

A. Most of them came from Poznan[?], from the... You know from the German part that's Polish occupied and they were called Poznanchiks, Posenchiks, and he was called Heller, he was known as the Hitlerchiks or the Poznanchiks.
If you would both of them could have known what I mean.

Q. Yes. I'll translate. (These words were crossed)

A. Until the war, you know, the Jewish world couldn't stand it any longer.

Q. Was he running around during...

A. Not him... He didn't have to run around. His henchmen did the job.

Q. Were they at given full-rein during the time of the Polish government itself?

A. You didn't have anybody to complain to, but you see. You were the blame, not he.

Q. How did he finally disappear from the scene, because...

A. I don't know. I'll be frank with you. Somebody must have interfered from the outside because it was impossible.

If 'cause what happened to the Jewish, to the Jewish people later, when I left... I don't have to tell you. The whole world knows. That they actually destroyed the Jewish people. During my time already... Now, for instance, the greatest, the largest cigarette manufacturer in Poland was a Jew by the name, Cherehensky.

Q. Cherehensky? A Pole?

A. No, a Jew... Jewish.

Q. A Pole, a Jewish Pole. I mean a Polish Jew.

A. A Polish Jew. It reached a point that he had to throw
half of his Jewish workers out and take in Polish and eventually, you see, the government took it away altogether and threw the Jewish workers out altogether.

Q. And they took it away from him.
A. Yea. I have a report from the VIIV in New York which happened to the Jews during...before...in the '20's...between the '20's, the late '20's...after Pilsudski died and Poland actually became a dictatorship and...until the second world war. It's, you know...If you want to get a heart attack, if you want to take it seriously, you have to read this and you can get one...what they did to the Jews. Jews paid more taxes than anybody else...whether you could afford it or not...whether you did business or you didn't do business. You had to pay your taxes and if you didn't pay the taxes, they used to call it the Shefoka hagola. You know what hagola means.

Hagola is a wagon which carries...in Russia it was called...a hearse, was called a hagola. The Shefoka hagola used to come and collect everything, what you had, and then you remained with nothing. I was actually lucky. I left in 1923, even before I...If I would have stayed there one more year...It took me three years to get here.

Q. Yea, if you would have stayed one more year....
A. One more year I would have to get into the army.
Q. That's right. I was going to ask you that.
A. So happen-d...It took me three years to get here. Every
time, you know, my number came up to get a visa, the visa was...
No more visas for Polish Jews in Poland.

Q. Why did you want to leave?
A. What did I have over there? That I would want to stay.

Q. There were many Polish Jews that didn't want to leave.
A. If you would have told me before the first world war, that I will ever go to America, I would think there's something wrong with you mentally. You know...Who left for America at that time? You have to read the history of American Jews at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. People were to run away from the army. People...starved to death... The feeling was once you leave...any Jew left for America...He's lost to the Jewish people because they come over here and become [grum]. That's right and another group came over here...revolutionaries, because they had to run away. A great number of them, you know, if you are familiar with them...Trotsky was in America, too. Why? He ran away from Siberia. He was in Siberia...the Siberian Jews. They had a chance...run away and they came to America. Some of them went to Switzerland.

Q. Some went to England.
A. To England. That's right. In fact, you know the Jewish labor movement...All their leaders who came to America...You know later who came to America...Jews...would learn the labor movement philosophy in England.
Q. Now, there were... As I said, there were many Jews in Poland who refused to leave as late as the early '30's when the handwriting was already on the wall.
A. Well, you know, it's not easy...
Q. What influenced you to leave?
A. What influenced me? Because I didn't have anything to do over there. It was a question whether I should go to Israel as a Chalutz or come over here.
Q. Were you a Zionist at that time?
A. I was Shomer HaTzair, but at that time the Shomer HaTzair was not what it is today. We were not communists. Today they are communists over there.
Q. Oh, are they?
A. We were not. We were like a boy scout organization.
Q. Now, what made you decide to come to the states rather than go to Israel?
A. I don't know. I think it was an accident. It wasn't easy to get a permit to go from Poland to Palestine at that time. It... And it was easier... My mother had sisters and I had sisters in New York, you know, step-sisters and we decided there's nothing for me to do over there. I wouldn't lose anything if I leave Poland... great paradise for the Jewish people. It was only an accident... for most of us who live over here and we survived this holocaust. You know we should be grateful. We should realize what we owe
ourself and what we owe to the Jewish people. If...When they like for instance now Israel...Jewish people is in distress. A lot of people don't realize that. They don't.

You know if it wouldn't have been for the Joint in Poland, the economy of the Polish Jews would have been destroyed...from the beginning, even later when they tried...and they put all kinds of obstacles to destroy the Jewish economy, the Joint came and opened certain factories for them.

Q. With American money would that be?

A. American, yes...the Joint...the Jewish distribution committee.

Q. It was Jewish distribution committee, but I didn't know if that is entirely financed by America.

A. You know there was a time...There was a time, if it wouldn't have been for the Joint I wouldn't have a pair of shoes. We wouldn't have matzoh for Pesach. They came. They opened up groceries, cooperatives.

Q. In Poland.

A. In Poland, and they opened up clothing and shoe stores for the poor people. We were all poor.

Q. So, actually, after the state of Poland was established you were worse off than you were before the war under the Russians. Is that correct?

A. For a while, at least, you know, before the war, people did something. They didn't make much, but at least most of the
people worked somewhere. I can only tell you from my town...
I was a kid. I know that most of the people who lived in our
area over there, either they were small business people... They
had grocery stores or shoe stores, or they were tailors, shoe-
makers, bricklayers, glaziers, or they worked in a factory, but
after... When Poland came in you had to start from scratch.
After all it's a new government, a new system, a new... And not
only this, the war actually ruined the Jewish people... more than
anybody else.
Q. Yes. Ok.
A. We were always under fire.
Q. That area was particularly vulnerable. You were never
than a Polish Nationalist at that time.
A. I?
Q. Yes... none of these...
A. I loved them. I fell in love with them the first day I saw them.
Q. Well, you didn't love your much better.
A. Well, I don't know. You want to know something? The
Russian people are not bad people. If they would have
instigators to incite them, all the pogroms, you know, were
made by outsiders, not by inside. You have to read Sholom Aleichem.
There is a scene where the goyim came to his inn and
they tell him, Tzygra, we have to make a little pogrom on
you. Did you ever read it?
Q. No. I haven't read it, but... Fiddler on the Roof.
A. Yes, we have to make a little pogrom. *Tanya* says...

Q. How come? He says...We don't want to do it, but, you know, the higher-ups will pass by and they'll see that we didn't do anything. Then, you're really gonna get a pogrom. They'll send in somebody else. Then they broke a few windows and after they broke a few windows he says...Well, *Tanya*, put up a sign and give us a few...Let's have a *chaim*. You see? And let's forget the whole story. The Russian people were not bad.

Q. Now, when *Rovno* was...

A. If they wouldn't have been incited by demagogues.

Q. Now, what you're saying then is...You're saying a few things. I've heard a few things tonight. One is that when *Rovno* was under Russian control, you lived at peace pretty much with your Russian neighbors until the Civil War.

A. Well, I didn't live in *Rovno* until after the revolution.

Q. Well, alright. Then when you lived in your *shtetl*?

A. Didn't have any trouble with them.

Q. No trouble at all.

A. In fact, you know, they misbehaved themselves...There were enough Jewish boys that could beat them up...that you wouldn't do it again.

Q. Alright. So...That it was a fairly comfortable life then in that respect.
A. If they could only make a living... if they could only earn enough, you know, that on Thursday they were able to go to the grocery and buy enough groceries for a week, it wouldn't have been bad.

Q. Are you talking about the...
A. The Jewish people before the war in 1914.

Q. Ok. Now, actually, you were surrounded, not by Russians, but by Ukranians.

A. Ukranians... peasants... most of them peasants.

Q. You knew also Germans there?
A. Yea.

Q. And then there must have been Poles there, too.
A. Yea, but the Poles behaved themselves over there under the Russians.

Q. Under the Russians.
A. In fact, you know...

Q. So, you're saying that... If... Because there were many Jews, for example, in Galicia... When... Or in the Galician area... When the war started, the second war, and they had a choice of fleeing to the Soviet Union, they had a choice of going east or staying where they were and meeting the Germans coming, they chose to stay and meet the Germans because they felt that the Russians were such pigs...

A. No, during the second world war... or during the first world...
Q. The second...
A. During the second world war most of them left. They felt, you know, they have nothing to lose. In the beginning, you see, when the... the exodus from Poland started into the eastern part, into Russia...
Q. You're talking about during the war now.
A. During the war... The Russians didn't receive them with... 
Q. silk gloves... but they felt, maybe, they'll survive and a great number of them did survive. Of course, you know, they sent them into Siberia, into what they call... into the woods where there were the white bears and hundreds of thousands died over there, you know, from typhus and from... hundreds of thousands perished.
Q. You're saying that many Jews did go to the Soviet Union.
A. Most of them, right.
Q. Most of them? Because the only stories I've heard is the Jews refused to go.
A. Those who could run away.
Q. No, these people assimilated and they could have run and they refused.
A. Then they were stupid, because nobody believed that Hitler will open crematoriums and do to people what they did. After all, they're cultural people. They gave us Beethoven and Bach. They'll do such thing? Some people remember them from the first world war.
Q. That's what I'm saying.
A. And when we came to the allies...When we came to Roosevelt, our beloved President, they told him, he didn't believe it either and when he found out what he did...What did he do? Nothing. Do you remember the story? What is it?
With the ship of St. Louis. A thousand people...What are a thousand people to 180 million people? And, in fact, the Jewish leaders in America were willing to take the responsibility. You see? Nobody cared. Nobody believed. Later when Jewish leaders came to Roosevelt and they told him, he said, Speak to Eden, in England.
Q. Well, that's true. Now, let me ask you one more question because I think...Robin, go through this thing and see if we've covered just about everything. There's one thing that kind of interests me. A lot of the people that I spoke to, who lived in the Ukraine, found that their towns were mentioned in the campaign of Chmelnytsky as he came through the Ukraine through it, to Poland.
A. Well, that goes back to 1748.
Q. 1648.
A. 1648.
Q. Now, what I want to know is whether there was any tradition in your town of Chmelnytsky or his men having....
A. I don't know whether...I don't even know that Lomon existed or not at that time.
Q. Oh, I see.
A. The only way to do is to look in the Dubnow's. I have three volumes of the Dubnow's history of the Polish Jews.

To be frank with you, it never occurred to me. At that time, you know, Jews also lost what up to several hundred thousand Jews.

Q. Yes, but so did everybody.

A. Hundred thousand Jews...Several hundred thousand Jews.

Q. Well, I'm going to turn off the tape just for a minute now... I'll say thank you and I'll turn off the tape...

Q. Now, you say your father went to shul, he went to what kind of a shul? Now, let's talk before the first world war when things were normal.

A. We had an ordinary shul.

Q. What was it called?

A. A regular shul. They didn't have any names. In a town like Rovno, for instance, a...I think...I'm not sure, but I think... . It was a town of about a hundred thousand...60% were Jews. I cannot even begin to count how many shuls and shireblach... You know what shireblach were?

Q. Yes, but the shireblach were Hasidic.

A. Yes, but not only shireblach...Schneiders have their own shireblach. Carpenters have their own shireblach. They felt at home over there. Then they had a big shul.

Where I lived... That was in 1917... In Lyszkow. I remember every Saturday we used class across the street in a the...
house of those two brothers, you know, who owned the factory. They used to have a mayan over there, but we had a shul.

On this side of the river, Yom Kippur...Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur we used to go over there. In the city...I don't know.

We had a big shul.

Q. In Ligezhef, you mean.
A. In Ligezhef, and I don't know how many shtieblach.

Q. You had one shul?
A. No, there were a number of shuls, but that was a greater shul, the large synagogue, you know, the main synagogue. That was the biggest synagogue. It was cold over there.

Q. That was the Kolle shul.
A. That was...You know why? Because the rich people were there. That's why it was Kolle.

Q. You mean Kolle from the heart, not from...
A. That's right...spiritually Kolle, too. I remember...

Q. So there were shuls then based on class and...
A. Yes, more or less, on class. They were called shtieblach...

Q. That's what it was for the poor.
A. It's not like over here, you see. You have reformed. Of course, in the big cities they had...reformed...They had, for instance, in Boston they have...I think the Haimatsky shul...

Q. What shul?
A. Haimatsky shul. I think, you know. I can't remember.
That was a reformed synagogue. Those Jews were called Poles of the Mosaic Persuasion. Not talking about... from the small towns... You didn't find such things. Shul is a shul. Does it matter what kind of a shul? In Rovno it was the same thing. In Rovno, but you have hundred shuls. I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

Q. A shul was a shul, but different people went to different shuls.

A. That's right. First of all, they were members over there. You had to pay something. You had to pay dues. I imagine. I don't know. I was a kid. I didn't pay. I didn't know. I know I attended in the shul, that 6:00 in the morning you can get a minyan and 12:00 in the afternoon they were still learning, still had minyanim. Then at 1:00 they began to daven mincha and it lasted until dark. I was going to school then and I had to say Kaddish. I had to be in school at 8:00.

Q. In the morning.

A. In the morning. Then I went to shul at 6:00, but sometimes, you know...

Q. Went to school at 6:00 in the morning?

A. 6:00 in the morning.

Q. To say Kaddish?

A. To say Kaddish. I had a minyan, but sometimes I only had three periods. That means I could be home at 11:00. I
came home at 11:00. I went to shul.

Q. You were still what?
A. I still had a minyan.
Q. Oh, I see.
A. You see? Over there the religious life was entirely different than over here. People took religion seriously. It's not like over here.
Q. In other words what you're saying...The shul was full almost all day long.
A. All day long.
Q. There was one group or another praying in the shul.
A. All the time. They didn't have to look for minyan the way they look over here.
Q. So it was an integral part of everyday life.
A. That's right...Jewish life over there...would have been so beautiful and so happy and so enjoyable, if they could have made a living.
Q. If they could have made a living.
A. That was most important part over there. They could never make a living. On Mitzvah Wednesday there were times...On Wednesday...that people didn't know how they'll buy their groceries on Thursday, but Friday night, the Jew was converted into a king. You think Heinrich Heine was wrong when he wrote this poem...The Shabbos Queen. You know Heinrich Heine converted. He became a goy. He knew very little about Judaism. One
Friday he passed by a *shul* and he walked in. He looked at the Jews and he says... *lakinus shul olam*. Are those the same Jews that I see every day? The whole week they're like dogs. Tonight they look like kings, like princes.

Q. I'm sure he didn't say *lakinus shul olam* first.

A. He regret it the rest of his life because he got nothing out of his conversion. That's why... Friday night you walked in, even into the poorest house, the candles on the table, the table was set, covered with a white tablecloth, the *shalem* on the table. Somebody had white *shalem*, and somebody didn't have such a white *shalem*. The Jew actually felt like a prince. The same thing... on a yom Tov. People look forward on a yom Tov. The whole week they look forward for *Shabbos*. *Shabbos* was the greatest event in Jewish life. Of course, later after the first world war, it began to fade.

Q. So, actually, the first... It wasn't only making a living, it was also the first world war that changed everything.

A. Of course, any war, you see, changes the people's mentality and behavior. You can see right over here. What happened over here after the first world war? We thought, you know, that we reached the peak of misbehavior. Right? You remember the '20's? The prohibition... Look at what happened after the second world war. Look at what happened after Vietnam war. You see? People are taught to kill. To them, those who come back don't care... To some of them whether he
killed Vietnamese or he kills American or whether he kills even his own father or his own mother or if wants something.

Q. Well, do you think we've covered just about every-
thing, Robin?

A. I think we've covered some things that aren't even on
here.

Q. Right. Do you have anything you want to say or ask
or add?

A. Not particularly. I do want to say thank you, though.
I was really fascinated.

A. Well, I'm glad you like...

Q. I want to say thank you, too... to both of you.

A. But it would have been better...

Tape off

Q. Ok, now, go ahead.

A. You know you think that like, for instance, in New
York today when it gets dark, or

you live in an apartment. You

lock yourself up with 15 locks. I'm not kidding. You ever

see the locks they have in New York apartment?

Q. No, I know. I've seen my parents apartment.

A. Do they live in New York?

A. We experienced this procedure, or whatever you want to
call it, in 1919. The minute it got dark you had to lock
yourself up because you weren't sure what's going
to happen, because one day I came to shul and they tell me
across the street there was a respectable family living, you know, father, mother and two elderly sons. They were...They had big business before. I don't know what kind of business they had, and they employed a number of people in their business. One night...Two people came in and they killed the two sons. Why? In the night...in the middle...in the evening. They had a grudge against them.

Q. This was in 1918?
A. 1918.

Q. Who was controlling the town then?
A. At that time we had chaos. We had the Pselvra. We had Pselvra.

Tonight Pselvra, tomorrow somebody else, but it was chaos. Going to school...We didn't ride to school. You know, you people, the American kids, you know they don't know what they have. We used to walk to school. My school was maybe...

In Kozao. I lived on one side of the city and my school was on the other side of the city. We had to cross railroad tracks every morning in the winter. I remember this happened usually in the winter time, because we got a lot of snow over there. Every winter you'll find shot people right next the tracks. Can you imagine what kind of an impression these things make? On young kids like us. Of course, you know you get used to it and you don't mind...just the same. I remember...I remember when the Germans first bombarded our little town.

It was on a Friday...
Tape 2 - Side 2

Q. I think it's probably ok.

A. Our town was the town where all the provisions were brought up in order to supply the front. We had bakeries and ammunition dumps and whatnot and the Germans found out about it. It was only 14 miles from the front. Well, the beautiful Friday summer afternoon and I... We just got into the water and we had some soldiers, you know, around us and I saw the soldiers began to point to a certain direction and then we saw little black birds coming up, and I saw... They picked up their feet and they began to run. I picked up my feet and I ran, too. I came into the house and I said to my father and mother. Let's run. He says... They said to me... Where are you gonna run? Where? I was so excited that I didn't even know what I was doing. I ran out the house. Ran together with the soldiers into the fields. The first time I was scared. The 10th time I wasn't scared. They came. We looked. We watched them and they didn't bother us. That was the same thing, you see, during the chaos in 1917-1918, you know...in Rovno when I was a student. People were afraid to walk out after 6:00, especially in wintertime when it was dark. They used to lock...board up the windows and the doors and lock themselves up and nobody showed their noses out. I don't know. I was a student...I was a kid. I walked in the streets all by myself because I came from a friend of mine where we...prepare, you know, we made our license. Didn't
bother me. You get used to those things. You get hardened up. Nothing bothers you. You heard somebody got killed.

That's it. So what? That's why when I say...When people come back from the front...When they were taught for years to kill... doesn't make any difference to them.

What's the difference? They kill...But what did he have against, for instance, a German soldier that he killed. The same thing that he has against you, but if he wants something, and if he can't get it peacefully, he kills.

Q. I see.

A. Why do we have so much trouble today? I remember I went to school in New York. I came on...I only had a chance to go out on a Saturday night...come home 3:00 in the morning, riding the subways, getting off the subways at 3:00 in the morning, not only...young girls.

Q. I know.

A. Getting off...Nobody was afraid...nobody was afraid. Today I wouldn't even ride the subway in the afternoon...at any time, not only in the evening.

Q. OK. I think we'll call it a night. We've talked for two hours and I think it's...It'll take us an hour to get home. Thank you very much.