Harry Woll, transcript only

Harry Woll
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Interviewed by Lucille Brown

Q. Mr. Woll, would you tell me when you were born.
A. September 28, 1898.

Q. Where?
A. Gomel, Russia.

Q. You were in white Russia, then?
A. Yeah, at that time it was Russia but the suburb was known as white Russia but it was Gomel, Russia.

Q. It was different because the different parts, at one time it was also Poland, wasn't it.
A. No, we were on the border of Poland on the border.

Q. Let's look at the map.
A. It has to be scientific more or less, therefore, you have to be careful.

Q. That's right. It's better now than after it is in print. I'd rather find out now than later but even so rather I hadn't made that mistake if I am incorrect.
A. Bacha(?) was much closer to this town was much closer to Poland than we were.

Q. Your town was Gomel. I've seen it on a map and that section was called white Russia?
A. That was called white Russia.

Q. And it was always Russian?
A. Always Russian. Always Russian.

Q. Did it never go back and forth between the two.
A. It could be at the time of partitions. That could be that but they over
ran and took it over but I wouldn't consider that, they never did when I studied at the high school, the gymnasia and then in the college, they never considered this part of Poland that it belongs to Poland. It was white Russia. However, there were times when they controlled and then you are absolutely right.

Q. That's all I said, that it shifted back and forth.

A. They controlled. 

Q. Now and then

A. We grew up with the idea that white Russia had nothing to do with Poland because Poland was far away. It wasn't so close, but through the history of these European countries they have been capturing one the other then separating again so it's hard to tell. That was all under Chmielnitski. As a matter of fact, we Jews have a good reason to remember that time because during the fight between the Poles and the Ukrainians in the Jewish year of 408 now it is 737 but that was 408, we know it in Hebrew the expression Zana tauch and tauch(?) the well happened the misfortunes of these two years, 408 and 409, because the Poles massacred many Jews at that time. They over ran that's what they caused—but never controlled it. That's it.

Q. So, you were born in Gomel and what was the nearest, you said Minsk was the nearest big city. Minsk was the nearest big city, right?

A. That was the nearest big city, alongside Minsk and the other side, about the same distance Kiev, Ukraine.

Q. Is that right?

A. Yeah. About the same distance.
A. So that would be between north and south almost. Kiev was south of you and Minsk was north of you. That puts you right in the middle of the Orsh and marshes. Right.

A. That was known as Polecky and we were on the border of that. We lived there.

Q. Now was Gomel a shtetl.

A. No, Gomel was by comparison a central city. We had no colleges but we had four high schools and we had a population close to 200,000 at the first World War. Later it changed a great deal. As a matter of fact the communists changed it instead of you know that the Russian districts are named by guberniya. We were administrative veshchey. We belonged to Minsk. You see, That means Minsk guberniya was bordering on Poland and that was the influence of Poland there. Maharaev is closer to central Russia so the Polish had no influence although in each and every town you had a big synagogue built by either a prince of the realm or the government and a Russian church and a Catholic because you had Poles living there too. It was close, but still didn't belong to Poland.

Q. So you had about 200,000 population?

A. About 200,000 variable 160,000 to 200,000 population.

Q. Was there industry in the town I am talking about before the first World War?

A. Yeah, yeah, there was no industry there.

Q. What did most of the people do? How did they make a living?

A. I'll tell you. The Jewish people most of them were connected with trapping wood in the forest, lumber that was their business and some of
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them were classified they were shoemakers, they never had an industry

there, but since Gomel is on the River Sourch that's the name of the river

which comes in as I mentioned before, Kiev was not far, so a number of Jews

occupied themselves with having ship boats heading south from Poland

Ukraine all the way to Eski(?) that was their business.

Q. I never heard that before Jews being engaged in water freight. Now

we heard it. At the time you are speaking of Russia controlled this portion

A. That's right. I was born in white Russia, belonging to Russia.

Q. Now for example, these water freight people, the Jews who were

engaged in water carrying freight by water, did they have to have a special

license from the Russian government?

A. Yes, they had to pay a certain fee for the right of doing this.

Q. And they were permitted to doing that?

A. Yeah, they were permitted.

Q. That was one of the avenues opened to them?

A. That's right you see there was one big factory in Gomel that

belonged to the government to the railroad. They were fixing out whatever

cars and trains that they had to. No Jews would come in there, they wouldn't

accept Jews there.

Q. That was government owned?

A. That's government owned. As a matter of fact, this was the first and

the only group in that neighborhood that was a working element and had

consideration for certain ideals of justice and fair play.

Q. From this factory?

A. From this factory, railroad factory.

Q. Are you saying that it was organized at all, was there some.
The factory was conducted by the government but we had in 1905 the first pogrom in town. That was the first and then there was a second one. During the second one...

Q. When was the second one?

A. If I'm not mistaken it was right after the first World War and groups of partisans occupied this town and ready to destroy a lot of us, so this and they started a fire, they put fire and it was a fire all over. These workers came enmass and chased away this so that was the interesting thing. Labor had some chance although they were with a certain sense of fairness, fair play more or less and another group were the peasants from the villages, they came, there it was a divided group. Some of them came to rob to pay for whatever they could. Others came to help out. As a matter of fact they came with forks with axes, they had no ammunition and they came in to save the city. Not to save the Jews, but to save the city. But this is something that as a child I was very much impressed and that moved most of us young people. We could see it in pre-wartime socialism and labor. They came and they chased away the bandits.

Q. Now where were the bandits from?

A. They were usually deserters from the army, and then it was you know the war ended with the socialist revolution. Not the Bolshevik, the Bolshevik took over about three years later.

Q. No, no we are talking about 1905 now. You are talking about the second pogrom(?). Oh, okay. I'm a little mixed up.

A. The first pogrom it was merely anti-Semitic. You see one has to know way of life for the peasants. The peasants were very poor because
originally they would get so much land and then with the increase in the
family the same parcel of land was divided among them and then after
three generations they didn't have enough land and they were starving. They
were really poor, and the government, the government supplied them with a lot of whiskey. They had these places to go and then they sold
the whiskey. They supplied them, so most of the time, they were drunk and
they didn't have anything, they were almost naked, so it was easy for them to
fall prey to any kind of education, any kind of talk and because of poverty
and because they would go out and hear rough things and then there
was something else, the people having inherited long before it didn't come
with the government, the people having inherited from the time of
Chmielnitsky... you see the Poles controlled at that time part of Russia, so what they did, they
rented out to Jews the control of the church, the control of everything and
the peasants, the Russian peasants, the child died, she had to pay because who
collected the money, the Jew. The fact that the Jew had to pay almost as
much to the Pole that didn't they didn't know, so they developed a certain
hatred towards the Jew. Then the Jew, as you said before, there was no
industry there. There were merchants, store keepers and small business-
men, so the gentile, the peasant, not a city worker, a peasant, they would say
he walks around with his hands clean and makes me work and he gets the
benefit, so that developed it was easy, especially when the government could
baking it. The government was making this program and it was done on
purpose so the peasant wouldn't have time to think about his own faith, so
you had all kinds of people who couldn't find themselves and they would join
these groups and that was the program. And in many places it was a massacre
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rather than justice it not only ruined business but actually killed people.

Q. But where the people in the factory came out and when the villages came out that was already about 19...
A. THAT was 1905. That was the first and the second program both.

Q. Both times they came out?
A. Both times they came, yeah.

Q. Please again would you repeat the date of the second program so
I could...

A. IF I am not mistaken it was in 1914. It was right after the war.

Q. Was it before the Revolution or?
A. That was when the Revolution started. The Revolution gave a push
to these people and formed all kinds of groups, fighting the Bolsheviks and
groups that supported them and they were fighting the Jews were the one
who was neither in the labor ranks, he was a small businessman and that
case, very small store owners, so the peasant was the anti-Semitism. He had to
in the present wanted to get back just as
just you had in here when you had these Negroes, the same thing to get whatever...
and that was the thing. But of course they were also guilty. See the second
one was so pronounced that we never knew who was in control of the
kettle of the city. They changed hands every day, some group would conquer
and kill a number of people and take over and then another group would come
there were all kinds with the idea that they were fighting the Bolsheviks
and that was it, so we suffered and went through all this and don't forget that
when the Bolsheviks took over the country the country didn't produce the
stores were almost empty, for this the stores were almost empty and in order
salt to buy bread, the peasant needed salt, he had bread, he lived in the villages.
but he couldn't get salt, so we all used to take with us bags of salt, go about 30, 40, 50 miles to villages, exchange it for flour and bring it home and have bread.

Q. Now where did you get the salt from?

A. In the cities, we still had salt. We had salt in the cities, so we used to do that and a person couldn't eat without salt because he had to do that and you couldn't eat without salt because he had to do that and... Without salt they used to get a sickness the name of singa. Singa is the Jews or the jaws swell up and you couldn't eat and die of starvation.

Q. You mean from the lack of salt?

A. Lack of salt.

Q. Is that why salt is so important?

A. Oh yes, salt prevents singa. Singa was the name.

Q. What language is that?

A. I really don't know, I think it's a Russian expression. I don't think it's a medical thing.

Q. I didn't realize that it had a natural physiological basis in the body's need for it.

A. Oh singa, it was awful without salt. And then we reached the end of salt, so we used to take whatever jewelry we had and go there and exchange it for salt.

Q. This was in 1917 after the Revolution.

A. That's right yes, that was after the War.

Q. Let's go back a little bit. Now when you were born your father was doing what? What kind of a family were you in?
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A. My father had two jobs, two businesses. One during the summer and the other in the winter. During the summer he was, they call it in
Russia, It means a person who expedited the movement of certain goods from the railroad.

Q. Like a dispatcher?

A. No, not employed as. Not employed. My father was involved, you see Germany needed meat, they didn't have enough meat, so they would buy geese, were in Russia, so the Jews on the borderline with Germany they came...

Q. Geese farmers.

A. Geese farmers and they would go into deep Russia into actually Kursk and all around the cities and buy from the farmers the geese, load them in a carload, 1400 to a carload and send them to Germany. But geese must stop, they cannot go without food or without water for more than a day and a half.

Q. Otherwise they will die on the way.

A. Die on the way, and the worst of it was when a carload of geese would come to Germany it would just enter the borderline, they would find one goose dead they would condemn the whole carload, because they were afraid of some kind of epidemic, so they had to be careful, so when the geese came, my father had a big lot, about a block long that had places to keep carloads of geese with a 1400 places to the fence.

Q. So they would let the geese out of the train.

A. Yes and they water for them, that they would swing, so he was the proprietor, so the geese would come they would unload them and they would
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come about 15/20 carloads a day. They would unload them and set them down to the ground.

Q. That's more than 24,000 geese.
A. Yes, sure. That's right, and feed them and the following day load them again and send them all the way out to the nearest stop which was in Brese-Litovsk.

Breslau. That's where they would stop. So that's the summer job my father was busy with. Winter, he used to buy stones, sell it to the city, wherever they had city government to pave the streets, to fix. So he was supplying them with stones where he would buy them also somewhere away from small towns away from the city. So that was the job.

Q. Was your family comfortable, financially?
A. Yeah.

Q. Would you say you were middle class or lower middle class or upper or what?
A. We were middle class. Don't forget, there were five brothers going to school and three daughters.

Q. You mean of the children?
A. The children and they had to pay for each and every one. At that time it was about 160 rubles a person.

Q. So you had four brothers and three sisters.
A. I had four brothers. There were five brothers and three sisters.

Q. Eight children and your mother and father.
A. Yeah and he had to provide them. The gymnasia cost a lot of money.

Q. And all the children had a gymnasia.
A. All the children had a gymnasia, all of them. Some went to college.
but then the war broke out. That's what stopped it.

Q. Were you the oldest or the youngest
A. I'm the oldest.

Q. In Greek, let's see if I can guess, no Hasidim (??) but your father was a Mithagid?
A. He was an eschenautic Jew, not a Hasid, not a Mithagid. But my grandmother belonged to a rabbi (??) she was ... but it didn't matter.

Q. She did, it didn't matter?
A. It didn't matter because she couldn't influence anybody.

Q. She had no control over anybody.
A. That's right, it didn't matter.

Q. Did you live in your home?
A. Yeah.

Q. It had to be pretty large then.
A. It was a large house.

Q. Can you describe it?
A. It had, I had an extra room for myself.

Q. You didn't, that was very unusual.
A. That was unusual but I am telling you, we built big house, there was a small house next to it which we rented out, couldn't get rent so much, because mostly it was to help out but we lived in a very big house, we had a master bedroom for father and mother, we had three rooms for children and I had used to call it a cabinet, a room of my own.

Q. Like an office.
A. Yes.
Q. Did you sleep there too?
A. Yeah.
Q. So were you the only one that had your own room.
A. The oldest. I had that and dining room and a living room and a
porch with screens on and a kitchen and then we had built in shelves. Then
of course we had the buildings, the outside building of hay and a cow.
Q. Oh, you did. Now your mother had help I am presuming.
A. We had cook, a girl, her job was to cook and a girl to take care of
the house or the building and then to take care of the needs of the yard
chopping wood. Mother was I don't know she may have been spoiled
childhood. She was raised not by her parents but by her mother's brother that
didn't have any children. He was well to do so they spoiled her. She didn't
have do anything and when she married father and mother were cousins, so
when she married she thought that she could marry someone better she was
the frustrated intellectual. So she began to complain about illnesses and every
time she didn't feel so good, they called the doctor. The doctor would come
and make up what she told us. The doctor said leave her in the room, lock
the door and don't mind, she'll be well. In other words, there is nothing
wrong with her, but of course father wouldn't do that and then she developed
an angina, heart condition, so that was quite a job. She couldn't stand noise
the pavement as I mentioned before was rocks, so the cars didn't have tires,
so it would make noise and every time she would be surprised she would get
that feeling of a heart attack, so even though we bought nitroglycerin tablets
in those days, there were none, we used to take a pitcher of hot water with
mustard and put her hands in that. But to avoid these noises father bought
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hay and he got permission from the city and placed hay about a half a block one way and half a block the other. It was a corner, so the wagons would pass by it; wouldn't make any noise. That's how he took care of the princess.

Q. Well then he did try to take care of her.
A. Oh yes, he did.

Q. But don't forget she also had eight children which is a small job.
A. Oh yes, and of course there were cousins and family on father's side, wasn't wealthy, so it was up to father and his brother and his uncle to provide whatever necessary to members of the family especially one sister and grandmother was alive to support her and then to support most of the family of my mother's side. They were his cousins. I told you family, but they would come and stay with us one at a time or two, and help mother for five or six weeks, so he needed room for them too.

Q. So there was always a coming and a going, always a coming and a going, always something. Plus eight children.
A. Right, and then there's something else. I mentioned before the people used to come from the border towns of Germany to buy geese and they would send out people to do the buying, buy ten, twelve, fifteen, eighteen geese from each farmer, and naturally you had to cover a lot of ground and then bring it together, so these people, the peddlers with geese, who were coming, they needed a place so they would eat with us, so that they could see father and other, so our house was like a big shopping center all the time, noise and noise and noise.

Q. So when you look back on it, Mr. Woll, was it pleasant or not?
A. Was it pleasant? It was very pleasant for us, the youngsters to sit and
listen to the conversation. And father used to always send us away to do your homework, go on and read, because he was afraid and it is an interesting thing about our father. I never had a kiss from my father, never a good word, but mother used to tell us that he loved us so much, but he never it was the old time people displayed it never showed it. We on the other hand, the children would never (END OF SIDE ONE)

Q. You were saying when you were sitting at the table, something.
A. We would never sit at the table the children before father sat down. That was a natural thing with us. And father had to sit at the head of the table all the time. Nobody would sit in his chair. That was father's, and while we never saw a display of affection, nevertheless, we respected father very much, thanks to mother. She used to tell us how eager he was to see that we were well and so on. But father was always complaining, 'Why don't you do this, why don't you do that,' and I used to tell him, 'I did my homework. I have no more homework. Sit down and write and I at that time developed a talent for writing people's compositions and it was the case of being when a Jew.

Q. That was already 1913.
A. Approximately and I was about 15 years old. So I wrote an article about attorneys and about the whole thing, and as a youngster I poured out all I could didn't even consider what one may say and what one shouldn't say. And one day father said, 'Why don't you sit down and write, and I had to listen to the things, and he also had a tendency to go into the kitchen and listen to the cook and the stories that they would tell.

Q. Isn't that like children all over?
A. That's right.
Q. Father said it's taboo you stop going to the kitchen. You need something, ball, she'll bring it to you. I don't want you to waste time listening to these stories that they keep on telling, so we had no business in this. So he used to show this composition of mine to some of his friends, and one of them said, you want to go to prison together with your family because should these papers fall into the hands of a policeman or an officer of the police you'll be licked, because at that time the government—so he tore it, but he was proud that I did, but on the same token I used to also write in Hebrew. He would also pick up something I wrote. He wasn't a scholar; he couldn't make much out, but he would listen to me reading it and he would go and if a visitor he would show it to him and that was it.

Q. So instead you're saying, tell me if I am wrong. I hear you saying he was proud of you but you never heard him say I love you.

A. No, never a kiss and never a good word, never.

Q. Did you feel that?

A. I inherited it. I am the same way. Although I know the fault of it but that's how we were brought up.

Q. You know it and you can't do anything about it.

A. Feel father funny if I would all of a sudden, I do now, my daughter I would give her a kiss sometimes, because she would kiss me all the time, I would but I feel...

Q. You couldn't do it to a son. Could you do it to a son. Kiss a son.

A. My son the same thing.

Q. Do you kiss him?

A. Yes.
Q. You could?

A. Sometimes. But we don't display this kind of affection, never.

Q. And we sit down. We missed it, we wanted it and the only thing that mother kept on telling us and assuring how much he loved us.

Q. Was your mother an affectionate woman?

A. Mother, yes, yeah she was.

Q. So even though she was a princess, she was loving.

A. Yeah.

Q. It's very hard on the children not to be told.

A. Definitely. I used to argue with my father, why don't you ever tell me it's good. You always tell me the other thing. He said the good things I don't have to tell you.

Q. But you do have to.

A. I know, but that was their psychology.

Q. I know, I talked to one man who said his father used to beat him every day whether he did something wrong or not and the theory being that if he missed a day...

A. He would be worse. We never, when I was a child, mother would spank me, father never did. And she would never say I'll tell daddy about it. Because she knew that it would hurt him and he wouldn't do anything, so she did it.

Q. That's different.

A. But father would take us to synagogue.

Q. Was he a religious man?

A. He was not, no.

Q. But you say he was a traditional Jew.

A. Traditional Jew, but something happened you see. When his father died
and grandma remained there, not a synagogue, but a gathering of a mazaltov daven. And they kept on doing that for years, until they decided, it's no sense. She lived in a basement, the upper floor was rented out. She had her own house. Decided, let's build a synagogue, and naturally, who did they talk to, but the son, the oldest son of the family, and father agreed. And then they built a synagogue, a big one, a corner one. It's an interesting story now, the way they did it without having money and collecting and selling seats to people, and each and every seat people wanted to build the eastern wall and promise everybody, and you'll get it, give $300 and then when they finished and completed it, it was some synagogue. They all came, now we have two designated seats, so they have only 28 seats in the eastern wall. People, they yelled and yelled, but what else could they do, after all, big shots, but three of them were given certain seats, they were the noisiest ones, so somebody suggested they draw lots and they drew lots. And it came out as luck would have it, they all shut up, no more, even God himself said it was all right.

Q. You mean the three noisiest ones got the seats by the eastern wall.
A. Yes, and not a word, but we didn't have a lot, so father naturally attended there. We didn't have a chance to enjoy it very much because that was the second War broke out. Second World War broke out and the commander of the army, an uncle of the Czar...

Q. No the first World War.
A. That was the first one.

Q. You are thinking of 1905, then the first one was 1914 right.
A. So they chased out all the Jews who lived in the towns on the border line.

Q. That was the first World War.
A. And his father was always at the railroad station, had to do with his
he and a few others when they took to meet these victims of the law the
Czar's uncle and sometimes take them off the train and place them locally
because they were sent all the way into Russia where they wouldn't find a
Jew, some of them, rabbis, and some of them yeshiva pupils. So they would
take them off here, wouldn't let them go further and arrange for them. Where
do you put a trainload of people? The synagogue, so the synagogue was given
over to them. We couldn't use the synagogue any more and they moved in
and they lived there.

Q. So these were people actually from further west. In other words they
were coming from this way towards you. And then your father and a couple
of others took them off the trains, or
of others took them off the train... but wherever they would and
A. But not all of them, that's how I managed to meet the greatest rabbis.
They would come to our house...

Q. And they stayed in the synagogue. How long did they stay there?
A. Some of them stayed a year, some of them a little more and of course
there was a question of supplying them with food and clothing. The younger
that I was, I got hold—the government had certain organizations
that would supply coats and suits and clothing, and the younger
would go to them and they would hand it over together with our rabbi, who
was interested in it and helped me out. I was a young man and I was able to
work my way through and get it for them and so we supplied them with
clothes and winter clothes. They didn't have anything.

Q. But we started this when I asked you whether your father was a
religious man. You said no.
A. He wasn't. He used to go, I'll explain to you why.

Q. You mean in the traditional sense he was not.

A. He had to sign a paper one day and it happened to be on sundown. He didn't mind it, so she said take it in the other room so the children wouldn't see. She was more religious than.

Q. Well, that's not what I mean by religious, but okay. She was more observant of the rules.

A. But we had a home with Jewish a in the center. We observed every holiday faithfully and go to synagogue every Saturday. We had to go to synagogue.

Q. The whole family.

A. The whole family, father with his sons and we lived at a time father was very proud of his children, and especially his first born, me, and when I was about eight years old I began to read the Torah in the synagogue on Saturday evening. Saturday morning they wouldn't let me, I was too young and it was too much, but this I would do. And one day my father bought me a gift, ice skates. So I went out on the sidewalk and skated. We didn't go to a rink. We didn't have such a thing but around the house, and one of the congregants of the synagogue saw me and he said shame on you, you're skating like every non-Jewish boy and then you come to read the Torah. The skates were taken away.

Q. So life was pretty restrictive in that sense, right.

A. Oh yes, it was restrictive and we lived in a certain limit. We were told a number of things that we had to take care of. On the other hand we had also
experiences very pleasant for us because it was customary in Russia especially in the cities, that the poor people, very poor, they would go and beg. They wouldn't beg in the streets but they had their **Bekes** that they knew.

Q. Were these the ones with the chains and the shirts are you talking about Jews or non-Jews?

A. Non-Jews but the beggars were Jewish. But they didn't have any chains.

Q. But the Christian beggars there were some...

A. The Christian beggars were something else, they were starving but I'm talking about the Jewish beggars, they would come to our house every Thursday and mother would send out to them coins, each one they would come about 40/50 and she would hand out coins. When I was eight years old she took me, gave me some of these coins and said, hand them out and at that time I knew the value of a coin because for a penny you could go and buy a piece of cake. So I knew the value of it although we never were permitted to go and buy these things. Mother provided. There was candy in the house that father would send out. Instead of giving me a penny to go out and buy candy, here's a candy, that's all, so she taught us that money has value not only for what you can buy but also what good you can do with it and that I appreciate. Ever since then I have learned that as a child of eight. We were not allowed to play cards, but on Hanakah we would all sit with father and mother and the relatives and all of the children and play cards, and all the **Cents** second game and win a penny. It was just to show to the children the way Hanakah is and we would have Hanakah **yet** so that would be used.
Father noticed that one of my brothers is too eager; he is not just playing but he wants to win, no more. The whole idea of cards out. We didn't play because he was afraid he would become a gambler. That was out. No more. That's how we were restricted, but at the same time, when I grew a little older, I became involved in socialist activities. We had to have meetings, where are we going to have them? So we used our house.

Q. You did.

A. Yes, with father's permission and father would stand outside and he would see that he wouldn't notice, he wouldn't come in. watch if a policeman would come, he would tell us. That's what we had.

Q. Was your father politically oriented in any way.

A. No, no, he had to give you an example; he had a little shop.

Q. Excuse me, if you get tired.

A. No, no, no I'm not tired. You see, I'm getting out of a cold and that's why in addition father wanted to help out a relative and he started with him a shop in our yard, in our building, we had a building. What was the shop? Making powder to sell.

Q. Powder?

A. Face powder.

Q. You mean for women?

A. That's right and would pour in a little perfume in it and two girls were working packing it.

Q. What was it made of?

A. Talc. That's all and a little perfume and sell it to the peasants. The city folks would go the drugstore and buy it, but one day my younger brother, the next one passed away already, he came to father after dinner, you
see we had dinner at home always and lunch at home. With father even in his business he could come home and eat. And he said, father you have to raise the salary of the two girls, otherwise I'll pull a strike. So father jokingly said, okay I can't afford to raise, so instead of giving you tuition fee I'll give it to them as a raise. You want to call a strike but I could see that the way he spoke, with a smile on his face, he enjoyed it that his son had such an attitude towards this thing, and they got the raise, that's besides the point, but he jokingly said, I have no money, I can't afford, but this is how he was.

Q. Did you speak Yiddish at home?
A. Yiddish. You see there too my answer is incorrect. Since we had a nenna...

Q. A Polish nenna?
A. Russian. She would talk Russian to us, so we would also talk Russian. So but among ourselves with our father and our mother it was always only Yiddish.

Q. So you learned Russian easily because you had nenna.
A. Sure. Well I wouldn't call it Russian; it was Russian, white Russian, or what they call hoflausky. A peasant is called ho-ho-So it was hoflausky, a kind of language that is grammatically wrong and it has all kinds of idioms, that was what we learned from the girls.

Q. But there is a Russian dialect
A. That's what we were, that's white Russian.

Q. That's the one we or you learned. We have something in the library I remember one time and people came and asked me if I could translate it
and I said it looks like Russian but there is something wrong because there
were certain combinations of letters that didn't look similar to Russian and
then finally we traced it to white Russian but I didn't know there was a
white Russian language. It was white Russian.

A. As a matter of fact...

Q. What's the university in White Russia? There is a university in
white Russia and what's the big one.

Minsk

A. In Minsk, Grodno has no university. It is already Lithuanian.

Q. Maybe it was Minsk.

A. You see I grew up without knowing the white Russians had a language
of their own. We knew that the peasants speak a language
gramatically
wrong when they use words for instance to given an example. In Russian
sun shtetl
the sen is shtete. You don't pronounce the "l" in there, the word is shtete but
you don't pronounce. In white Russian they don't put the L they say shtete
but you don't pronounce it.
So it's hard to get. The time that we began to realize that and learn about it
was after the Revolution and every small nationality began to put out whatever
they had and that's where I found it out.

Q. So you spoke Yiddish. Now you must have had a Hebrew education.

A. Yes, I went to cheder and then father had a very bad experience in
cheder. The teacher would sit at the head of the table and had a cane in his
hand and he or we were learning about Jacob taking the right arm and
and I was so much engrossed in it that he cheated so I said what did they
cheat and the Rabbi with his cane hit me over my head and I knocked the
live

Q. That's a very upsetting story by the way, that Jacob Esau story, by the way.
when you first read it.

A. Of course our sadists find it difficult to justify, so they cover it up with ideas that first of all the difference with the right of first born, but this is like written with ice and water, doesn't straight. The fact of the matter is that this is what it is and there are many things but you not when you start thinking and seeing when you grow older, so I came home and caused a job with my nose and so on and father decided we used to go to heder from morning until evening and winter time, Russian winters setting at 4:00 and you would have to go in the dark, so he decided no more heder. He engaged a teacher who would come to our house and teach me and my brothers, three hours a day and would get extra pay, and that was when I began to have a different kind of education. Frankly the teachers changed every two or three years. Some of them were doing an excellent job. One of them, I recall, decided rather than to teach me and my brothers the things you were supposed to, he would play chess, so we played chess.

Q. Nobody told your father.

A. No. Then one liked Hebrew composition and he detected that I had ability, so all I did he was my teacher, write compositions and he would read and make corrections and tell me keep on writing. So instead of learning anything I did writing. That's how I got my Jewish education.

Q. Now was this supposed to include religious instruction as well?

A. Yes. There was only one kind. Religious, there was no other kind.

Q. At that time you weren't learning modern Hebrew yet.

A. That was Hebrew that we learned.

Q. Scripture Hebrew what about spoken Hebrew, modern Hebrew.
A. We developed it ourselves.

Q. You did.

A. Sure. We didn't have the vocabulary that later on we developed and we began to read modern literature, but that was it. Don't forget, I've had an experience here with my job with issuing licenses to teachers, Hebrew giving exams and issuing licenses, teachers. To give an example, one day a man from Israel came and I asked him what he had, papers and all this and I told him what he is to do and speaking in Hebrew of course and I see he sits and looks at me, he doesn't budge. I said what are you looking at me. He said I'm listening you are speaking the language of the Bible. It wasn't the language that he was accustomed, it was the Bible, because we have no other source just the Bible and that's all. No literature, we don't use it daily, now we begin to use it daily.

Q. So he was astonished at your speaking to him in Biblical Hebrew.

A. Yes, he said you speak the Tanach. I find it difficult now to accept some of the expressions in Hebrew they use in Israel.

Q. The modern Hebrew you mean.

A. Not modern. It is an illiterate, for instance they will end a sentence on one letter after and then you have sheheh yehel, a sentence.

Q. But that's not a complete sentence.

A. That's how they talk, so I disliked it very much, but they now use a vocabulary that is first of all new terms and creating and they keep on changing, modifying them to be supposed to give it the special Hebrew thing. So and they have a lot of Arabic words now in there and I find it difficult very often even though I became here a professional translator of Hebrew. I get paid for that.
Q. And you still have a problem.
A. Yes.

Q. Now in these, when you had these teachers coming to the house, all five boys were being taught. When the teachers were coming to the house.
A. The oldest two and the youngest two they still went to school. The youngest two and the oldest two had the teacher.

Q. Well there should be three. Weren't there five boys.
A. Five boys but the youngest one was born much later, he was 14 years old when they came to America. He was the younger one. Of five only one remains, four died. Sorry I interrupted you.

Q. In the Hebrew you learned Tanach and to pray, the Talmud and then reading and writing, you did learn Talmud. Now then you had to have a secular education from what you say. You also had a secular education.
A. Oh yes, I went to gymnasium.

Q. In order to get into gymnasium you had to have something else didn't you?
A. At home I learned to read on my own. We used to get a paper, the newspaper a Russian paper. Father subscribed and the paper, the name Brezhnev Vedemost, of the paper, was Brezevich Vademost so I heard the words and I began to read the headings. So this is big, that is how our father and mother and I finally learned the alphabet and I learned to read.

Q. Now would you tell it for me again so I can, what's the name of the paper?
A. Brezevich Vademost, in Russia it is Brezevich, you know they exchange the and we call it Bure.

(END OF TAPE #1).
Q. So it was like a commercial newspaper that your father read.
A. Father used to get.

Q. Was it Russian or white Russian paper.
A. No, that was Russian. White Russian hardly before the revolution they didn't even know there was such a thing and then they used to publish they even do it now, they published literature. No writer writes a book in that language. It is a peasant expression of the Russian language. So I learned to read and then time was to go to gymnasia. Gymnasia was all day and the Hebrew teacher would come in the afternoon.

Q. Did you have trouble getting into gymnasia?
A. That's what I am going to tell you. Now to enter the gymnasia, there was the government controlled gymnasia and there was and we had in a privately owned Jewish gymnasia and with certain restrictions I'll explain to you what they are. So the two of us I and my younger brother, the two of us together we learned Hebrew and together we prepared for the exam to enter the gymnasia. To enter the gymnasia the government but the tuition was very small there was numerous courses only a Jew wanted to enter he had to pay the tuition for fourteen non-Jews so that they could take in the Jew.

Q. 14?
A. 14 non-Jews, pay their tuition make they go and pay together they go so his son would be able... would be admitted.

Q. Is that what that numerous clause meant in action? I thought it just meant that they wouldn't admit any more than a certain number.
A. No, no it meant you were going to get a percentage and the percentage
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was 14 non-Jews to one Jew.

Q. But the Jews had to pay for the 14.
A. Of course, otherwise you couldn't get it. In addition to that you had to have high grades. Well, we took the exam, my brother had high grades and he happened to have the 14 non-Jews without having to pay, they were registered. He was accepted in the government gymnasium. I, who had lower grades than he, I was accepted in the privately owned Jewish gymnasium. Now the difference was that at the end of the fourth year and the sixth and the eighth year we had to have special exams. Teachers of the government gymnasium would be delegated to give us exams and if we passed, we used to call it jsepiski examen, deputatski examen. The teacher is a delegate and they naturally hated Jews and they hated our going to colleges and so on, so they were asking questions not necessarily part of what you studied. You were responsible for everything and tuition fee was much higher there.

Q. At the private school.
A. At the private school, the Jewish owned school. So I had the fourth year exam, the sixth year and then the eighth, which gave me the right to enter college and there again the same story, there you had to what you could so think it was, there, you had a certain percentage of Jews, but the Revolution broke out, I only began to go to medical school and had to cut out.

Q. You wanted to go to medical school.
A. Yeah, I wanted to go to medical school and I cut out and that is where I heard my parents are in trouble, that some of the rebels against the government as I said before, they used to come, banda, so I had to come home.
Q. You weren't home?

A. No in Kharkov in the university.

Q. So you started.

A. Yeah I started and my brother started and he had difficulty but he too had to give up in the middle. He almost got through there. He had to finish when he came here and get his degree as an engineer so he got his degree here and he got immediately a job with the Federal Power Commission in Washington and that was it.

Q. But the gymnasium was in Gomel.

A. The gymnasium was in Gomel.

Q. And you went to the gymnasium until what year.

A. Until the end of the eighth year.

Q. I know but what year was it like 19 what?

A. I don't remember.

Q. Was it during the war?

A. During the war yes, I think it was.

Q. Figure it out, you were born in 1898 and when did you start gymnasium?

A. I think in my eighth year.

Q. So that's about 1906 and how many years is gymansia, eight so it is 1914 so you would finish it just about when the war started. So you were not home.

A. No then I was home and I went to Franklin.

Q. Do you remember being home after the World War started, the first war?

A. After the first World War started I didn't leave home, I was too...
young.

Q. You were still at home so you must have still been in gymnasium then. Do you remember anything about the War itself how it affected Gomel. How the war affected Gomel.

A. Well the first World war had an affect that I wasn't able to remember I was just too young.

Q. I mean in the city itself.

A. Bringing new people to the town, that's all, the population increased.

Q. People fleeing.

A. Not only they but people who lived-Jewish people one or two families in a village, they found safety was with the rest of the Jews but then there was also restrictions on the part of the government in the business of the Jew in the village. Certain things he couldn't do that he used to do before.

For instance, a Jew used to make a living from selling whiskey to the peasants. The government took it away, he wasn't allowed to do it anymore.

Q. During the war?

A. Before the war and during the war, so they had to run, they had no business. Then there were other difficulties made so some of them found— when there were five or six families, it was more or less safer this way, so they come to the city, and then some of them had children they wanted them to grow up Jewishly, so they had to come to the city so the population increased during the, before the second war, that was a different story.

Q. Wait a minute, how late were you in Europe?


Q. I don't want to go past that time. So Gomel itself as far as you
Remember was not affected by the war, wasn't occupied.

A. No it wasn't occupied.

Q. And it wasn't shelled or bombarded but there was a population increase.

A. Population increase and that's about all.

Q. Was there any food shortage or any other kind.

A. No during the first War there was no food shortage, no problem.

Q. Did you have Russian Jews coming into your city.

A. Russian Jews?

Q. Yeah coming from the East.

A. No.

Q. So the war goes on and then comes the collapse of the Russian government and the Czar. Now in your family, was there political awareness of what was going on in Russia?

A. Yeah, I was active and my brother. No.

Q. That's right you were a socialist. Now which party did you belong to?

A. The Jewish party of the Labor Zionist, *Bund*. My brother didn't agree with me and he joined the Socialist Party of the *Bund*. He didn't want to accept the theory that the Zionists have that they will have all the problems solved. He said I want to solve them right here. So we went different ways. Then of course friends influenced a great deal. At that time we acquired a number of friends and we became active each one in his own way.

Q. So he was active in the *Bund* and you were active in the *Zionist*. 
But neither of you were active in the Social Democratic or the Social
Revolutionary Socialist Revolutionary party.

A. Zionists were active, we participated in that definitely.

Q. Were you following what was happening in the whole Socialist
movement at the International congresses and so on.

A. I didn't attend but I followed that.

Q. Now when they split, who was it the Bund left the party, the
Socialist party and that left Lenin in control actually.

A. Lenin was in control that was why he was called Bolshevik. They wanted
the maximum and the Mensheviks wanted at least a minimum for
the time being and he came in Lenin came in and that is when he declared
the Revolution and that's when the army we were still at War with the
Germans and he said go home, and the Army went and you witnessed a
remarkable thing. Soldiers were fighting soldiers, those who were on the
way home were angry with the soldiers who still went and they were fighting
each other in every town, whenever they would meet, Russian soldiers and
chaos set in. There was chaos and they rushed down the war stopped and
the Revolution was declared, we visited in Gomel around the outskirts of
Gomel there was a big estate of a prince of the government and we
weren't allowed, the people weren't allowed to come in. The Revolution
broke so we all went there to see the palace and all this, and after five days,
where not a single soul in Russia worked, there was no work everything
stopped, everything, completely.

Q. When was this?

A. That was when the Revolution broke out.
Q. Do you remember which days it was. It was in October.
A. I would have to look it up, but the first five days, I walked the aisles of the park up to my knees in you know, we have the black seeds in Russia, semke, semochka, that we eat around here.
Q. They are not sunflower seeds.
A. Sunflower seeds, we ate it, there was so much I walked, this is no exaggeration, up to my knees in the shells of the sunflowers, because people walked down of course, that was a week, you wouldn't recognize the palace. Whatever there was they tore it down but they realized that to keep going you have to eat. The bakers didn't bake, you couldn't get anything, nobody worked. It was a holiday, but then they began, the communists began to demand more and more and that's where the trouble began. On one hand you had the communists, the Bolsheviks, taking over, and on the other hand you had bandits, supposedly fighting the communists and in the meantime robbing and fighting the people. It was an unreal life.
Q. Did your family you were witness to these things, you were walking knee deep, that must have been an awful lot of people and an awful lot of days just sitting and eating sunflower seeds.
A. That's right, the whole town, everybody was there walking and eating sunflowers. I'll tell you I'll never forget that picture. There were a number of pictures that my eyes saw in connection with the Revolution.
Q. Like what?
A. I told you the palace, the first day, there were beams with paper walls covered with beautiful things and on the fifth day they tore it down because it seems that somebody said the Russian expression, Grabne, Grablenoi
Rob the things that the others robbed before you, so whatever they couldn't take, destroyed, and began to force people to go to work. There was no other way, you couldn't get food.

Q. Now this was in Gemmel itself.
A. In Gemmel it was everywhere. They had it in their own ways, quite different, because the echoes of the Revolution came there.

Q. Only the echoes, you are saying the Revolution itself came.
A. Yeah, we saw it, we were meeting the trains.

Q. What do you mean you were meeting the trains?
A. To Gemmel and we went to see him and we were Revolutionary.

Q. What did you do as a Revolutionary?
A. Before the Revolution we had meetings and made plans and argued and discussed all kinds of political resolutions that we were going to introduce and we were going to do this. Some questions, some of us thought that the Garden of Eden is coming down to us. That's my sister. (People come in)

Q. You said you experienced the Revolution in Gemmel, right, and I said how, how were you active and so you began telling me you took part in debates and resolutions and so on and some of us thought the Garden of Eden had come.
A. Before the Revolution we kept on thinking and believing that everything will be resolved, but then the Revolution came and we saw a different story. First of all, it didn't happen immediately but during the time there was shortage of food and we had to permit small businessmen to go out and do business in order to bring food and that was the way we used to go with our bags on trains where possible, if one came on time and you all you needed was...
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Q. You did?

A. Yes, I couldn't get a train. I got stuck in a station there no train

and I had no choice, I had to get out and there were a few women people I

knew from home, they saw me let's get out, they are staying there already

three days and I am rushing home because of the report I got about the
dangers to my father and my mother. I also heard something else, that

at the university while I was absent and they knew at the time the Socialists

were against the Bolsheviks, a Bolshevik, they condemned me to death and I was told ahead of time so I fled from there

too because they would have gotten me. In those days, there was such disorder,

that people had guns carrying with them, those who were entitled and those

who were not entitled and anything the saying exchange against

the wall and kill right there and then, there were no two ways about it. So I

was rushing home and then I came into the man in charge of the station of

the railroad and I told him I am running from the Ukraine to the

frontier near Minseh the white Russian frontier, and I had my staff with me

and I must get out as fast as I can, when is thenext train? He said there is

an army train passing by here in about an hour. All right see to it and of course

he thought that I am next to Trotsky, proceed at the time, so lo and behold he cleared a place in a car and I and

these old women and a couple of men, that's my staff, overhead soldiers

saying who in the heck is he taking but anything anymore because you

couldn't get an answer that was correct and I went home like this in a special

train, there was no other way, so all you could do is bluff your way through

otherwise you had no chance.
Q. You had no chance if you couldn't bluff.
A. If you couldn't bluff, you couldn't get food, you couldn't walk, you couldn't get by. You couldn't get from place to place. For traveling, each one had to have a special permit, every time he is traveling. Try and get it, you have to stand in line for days and then they start asking questions, so you travel without.
Q. You take a chance then.
A. You simply appeared as I said, Prokosky. So a lot of nerve, on the basis of your nerve, you were able to get by, and I did that. I had to use it.

The second time, it was different. The second time I was traveling home from Kerch, I came to that station. That station is only one building for the field and the rest of it is filled, and the filled was covered with people, each one, they had a fire and sitting around the fire. It was a cold night, and I also, I traveled instead of normally you travel five hours. I traveled two days already, I was tired and hungry. It was night, so I came near one fire and I sat down there and I think I fell asleep, and all of a sudden somebody hit me, get up. I woke up. What's the matter? A man sitting next to me and said, these are very bad times, you have to keep away from traveling, and don't fall asleep. The rumors here are very bad, ugly. And I didn't wear a army uniform, I wore a coat which meant that I am a civilian. So naturally first to go would be the civilians. So I thanked him and I didn't sleep any more.

Then we got into a freight car. We got in there, dark and there were some people there already from preceding stations and he sat near me. Who he is or what he is I don't know.
Q. You still don't know.
A. No. He is going also to Minsk and I am going to Gomel, it's on the way and in the dark I didn't know what or when. And we were sitting up all night long approaching my home town. I could recognize the lights of the suburban homes and I became very eager to get out of this already. And he held me back. He said take it easy, take it easy.

Q. What language did he speak.

A. Russian. Take it easy and as we approached, we heard from the outside, a man standing there less than about a mile from the depot, so we walk over that mile and be done with it. We heard someone saying Everybody out, and then as they came near, the man standing there with a gun, a rifle and he questioned Jew or not.

Q. Parudsky. Po russki.

A. Parudsky. And there was a couple of Jews ahead of me. No sooner did they say yes, they were hit with the rifle right there and then. I was lost what am I to do, so he held on to me. He followed me, He was next to me, and same question Jew, so he answered No, both are Gentiles. He answered that question go ahead. On the way to the railroad station the depot, that mile we heard noises from there, drunken noises and yells and shouting and crying. We were stopped a number of times and everybody the same question Jew because I wore civilian clothes and he answered I realized that I had to keep quiet, he did the answering. Finally we reached the station, we walked into the room of the I see people sitting, and a number of Jews standing among them, my uncle, I turned, he held out to me, sit down, sit here. And again I sat down, and again people around us were peasants, soldiers, gentiles, a group
of gentiles and there are the Jews. So when I just made a motion to my uncle, he probably wanted to say something and I saw how they hit him right there and then, so I realized I am in danger and I have no choice. So he began to talk to me aloud and addressing me in Russian, you address by name and father's name, addressing me with absolutely no doubt, Russian name my father is Ivan and I'm Stepan Evenovich. I realized he was doing it on purpose and I answered him, and he thought we would travel tomorrow because we could hear shooting there and we stayed until dawn came because it became that way all night long until the rest of the night and I said I will go now. He said all right I will take you to the outside of the house. Promise me you won't travel anymore, it is not the time to travel.

Q. He said? To you?
A. He said to me I should promise. All I want I said is to see my father and my mother and that's all I need. I wouldn't travel, I have had enough of it already. And he said good-bye, we shook hands, I thanked him and not asking his name, not knowing who he is or what he is and in front outside the station house, in front there is a big place a block place about five blocks open it's for taxis to drive in and so on and I joined a group of peasants and I went with them across this big open space.

Q. Like a plague no
A. I was in a dark coat and they wore the regular peasant coats, these sheep skins and as we were walking I heard a shot, and the group spread it was - they were shooting towards me because they saw a black coat walking that's a civilian. In the city we could hear bombs and all kinds of yells.
Finally I reached home. I came into the house and mother said, ‘Hide in the hay because we already had three groups that came looking for money and trying to kill. They see a young man; they'll kill you. So I hid in the hayloft in the hay, and sure enough they came, but they didn't try to look in the hay. They looked around and nobody and they took whatever they could and in the morning a little later when they left, I went down and I said, ‘Let’s get out.' We couldn't travel but let's get out, you couldn't and that's when the peasants came and chased away the bandits; that's how we were saved. The peasants came and chased it was a group of bandits who took advantage—they killed a number of Jews in town and they controlled the town for about two days prior to my coming in. That's when the peasants came and chased them away.

Q. Now what year was that do you remember, was it after the Revolution?
A. That was after the first year of the Revolution.

Q. About 1918 then.
A. Approximately and that was that.

Q. And you never found out the man's name.
A. No but I told mother about it, and she said, ‘It must have been an angel because to go out of his way to protect me and that meant danger for him too, because there were no questions asked, they would kill people without asking any questions.' They did whatever each one wanted.

Q. Do you think the man was a Jew?
A. I have no idea. I have no idea. He told me he is a follower of Tolstoy. We had to talk about something so we are talking things of cultural; it turned out to be a cultural man, quite intelligent, said he was a follower of Tolstoy.
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O. So he could have been either Russian or a Jew?

A. Yeah. I had a lot of experiences.

O. Now when did you leave Germany and how?

(END OF SIDE ONE)

A. I went to visit her and I came and I couldn't go back, stayed there for the few years.

O. Where was she living

A. In a small town I told you.

O. I know, where in White Russia also?

A. White Russia not far from Gemmel just about an hour by train, and then an hour by horse and wagon. And I stayed there a whole year.

O. You couldn't get out?

A. There was no place to go. Couldn't get the Polacks were fighting Russians, the Russians were fighting the Polacks, so we decided to get out and we developed a fear, feeling knowledge of God in the morning you would look at the houses and have the feeling the houses are sad. They are crying, trouble is brewing. Come out and see the houses look bright. Nothing will happen today. We could see that we are exposed in a small town to almost any kind of vandalism. So in the meantime, a niece of my wife, her husband went to America and earned a few dollars and bring over his wife and child. She lived with a niece of hers and he made money and he sent a delegate from there to pick up a few people, also his wife. He couldn't reach us, he couldn't find us. So we had to get out, we were already in a distant town away from us. We got married and hired that Polish soldier and he took us in a wagon and took us all the way to that little station town, that we could board the train.
Q. Where was the station town?
A. That was Capaterish (?) you wouldn't find it.
Q. I know but where was it, was it north of you or...?
A. North.
Q. Was it towards Minsk?
A. Between Weine and Poland. So on the way he was stopped a few times and the answer was I am taking prisoners. Because prisoners they wouldn't drive.
Q. You were lucky he didn't turn you in. He could have turned coat, he could have changed his mind, right?
A. He could have, and we came to that little town there was one house we knocked at the door, it was early in the morning and the owner came out, please get away, the Polish major is sleeping now, and God forbid. And all around us soldiers, the front was getting closer and closer. Polish soldiers. Well there was no place, we couldn't stay there because if you stayed in the open you were open for every soldier to do what he wants.
A freight train came. We got into a car of the freight train, my wife, I, a niece and daughter and two other women of that town, they also brought money from their husbands to take them. We got in there. During the year I spent with them in the small town, the Poles, they controlled the town at that time, the Poles and the other side. There was a major, a Polish major. There was a Jewish doctor and they used to come to the doctor's house, a single man, not married, and play cards to entertain the Polish major. And I don't know what happened but this major told the... someone in the office, I don't know who it was, something or somebody that it was I that helped to put a bomb under a railroad bridge so that the Polish train coming to the border, and accused me of being a leader of a communist...
group. He told it not to me not to my face, but he told it to some of the others as I said upper echelon and as we traveled, just about one or two stations, somebody came over to the car-train and told us to get out and you're so and so, yes, and you are under arrest. And he told me what I am arrested for, and he is taking us all of us to the nearest largest town—

Ludmilla is the largest town. And we heard about Ludmilla that over there there was a police station of the military police that no one ever come out alive from there. We had a friend who was a living communist, who wrote us letters. He was in Moscow, we began to send the letters while traveling by night and throwing them out on the road so they wouldn't find it with us.

He brought us to a stable and put us in the hayloft. There were also two other peasants whose guilt was they had been driving the Polish soldiers from the villages all the way out, until spending days with them and they wanted to give up the whole thing, they wanted to go home, so they were arrested and they were brought here too under accusations. And here is not a soul nobody is coming. Nobody is saying.

Q. Now whose jurisdiction is this, this is Polish jurisdiction?

A. Polish jurisdiction. Now before that I was very active in Pinsk. A big town, there was a committee to help the Jewish people all around and I was active there. So there was a soldier whom my wife knew, who used to be a neighbor of theirs. She asked him to go in Pinsk to these various people, certain names, and tell them that they arrested me, so that they could do something about it. On the walls of that place there was inscription—please notify my wife and children that on that day I was taken out to be shot. There were dozens of these
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inscriptions, people who were there, because a famous police station a military
department, Posternich is in Polish 

a department, denote is denied, that was the army, but we realized where we
are. What do you do? At least to notify our relatives our parents where we
are. So we stayed there all night long, and no bread, no food, no laboratory
no nothing and you hear the women and the men, a hayloft. So the children
began to know, they started to fear, they began to cry, loud. My wife was
sitting and looking out of the small window in the hayloft and the noises of
crying I suppose attracted a woman, so she told her, what is it please we didn't
eat bread, we need water, give us and we don't know where we are and
she wouldn't budge. This went on all night. In the morning the officer of
the military police not of that one, that was our that one went to Spis, further,
closer to Poland and another one came in. The other one didn't know what
this one did. So one of them a young fellow came over I said let my wife go
and buy bread for them. Will she come back? I said, of course, I am here, we're
out here, And I told her you go and see the rabbi and tell him to notify our parents and
also buy bread. They allowed her to go and when the kids when downstairs
out in the yard they actually kissed the earth, that's how they were. I began
to talk with this officer, a young officer. It turns out that we were in the
same class in college in Wipar that we had the same professor so we were
colleagues. Now we can talk friendly.

Q. But he was a Russian, no he was a Pole?
A. Before the war he was just as I was there. What were you arrested
for? I said I don't know. I didn't do a damn thing we don't know why. Come
into the office.

Q. He was not a Jew was he?
A. No. We came into the office and he wrote out specific certificates that they checked and that we are perfect and devoted and dedicated to the interests of Poland and gave it to me. I came, I got it and let's go, everybody he gave it to all of us let's go and as we went actually you met soldiers and by the way we heard already that that doctor in her home town they tied him to the tail of a horse and dragged him until he died. That's what they did.

Q. Who did that, the peasants?

A. The Poles. So we came there and again an army train. We showed our papers, go right ahead because such certificates nobody could prove they were so good and we got into the train and we went on the way to Brest and from Brest to Pinsk and from Pinsk we drove to Warsaw and lo and behold in the station I noticed this officer who used to play cards, who caused the whole trouble. He noticed me too. He began to run around looking for me. Luckily the train moved so we went away. We came to Warsaw, we went to a hotel. There we were treated big city.

Q. This was now what year were you in, 1919?

A. 1919. The fighting was between the Poles and the...

Q. So for them the war was over. So for them it was a new Poland by that time.

A. So we came there and had to get visas to get to America.

Q. That's where you wanted to go.

A. We met the delegate and we had the money already but to get visas you had to stand in line day and night, stood there for a week, couldn't get it
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Came couldn't get a visa. And here we are here in bombarding and the Russians are coming closer. Warsaw was filled with these would-be passengers who are immigrants to America. Women came here. All the delegates were there to collect the money. We felt that the first obligation we had was that her niece, her husband sent money. We bought a visa for her, false visa. Looked like a real one, but it was false. We paid money for it. At least she is safe. And we decided everything cost money. We decided to go to Danzig and we went and there is a long story about our trip there.

Finally we came to Danzig and we looked for visas, Polish passport, but the Polish passport had my occupation as a doctor. I told them I am a student but they put doctor down a doctor. That did us a great deal of good in Danzig and that's how we got out.

Q. At that time Danzig was a free city at that time?
A. It was a free city; it was German and you had to go through the border line.

Q. Danzig was German at that time?
A. That's right.

Q. It was in German territory but a free city is that it?
A. Later, it was a free city. A German city and Germany was about ready to become to have the revolution then.

Q. Their post war revolution, right. I see.
A. Because I became acquainted with two doctors in Danzig, there were about 50,000 immigrants, there was a prison camp and they used that to keep us. There was no room, so people slept on the street there in the open in the rain. It was awful. I having to sign doctor I came and took a
chance I came to the doctor and I said that my wife is not well and another one I would like to put them in the hospital and that was the worst thing to do. That was the rumor if you were in the hospital you are a sick person so why should they let you come to America, but we came in a clean bath and you had your freedom. The next day I became acquainted with the doctors and one of them said why do you go to America why don't you go back. Russia is coming soon. From the history of religion they will be here. Well a nurse comes over to me the following day, they have a patient and the doctors want to sit down and write it. Well I had no choice. I came there, there was a youngster, a son of the immigrant who was lying in bed and almost the doctor didn't know what was wrong with him, a Jewish fellow, so I asked the mother what did he eat. They used to give us there a box of some kind of jam and bread that's all they could have. And this fellow ate a pound of jam, so he didn't eat anything today and he didn't eat anything yesterday but the day before yesterday he had a whole pound it was sweet and he ate it.

I said give him an enema and I walked out.

Q. My husband the doctor.

A. I walked out as fast as I could. Nothing happened. Lo and behold he became well they gave him an enema he became well. Some people who were in the holocaust the only way they could get by and come out alive is to do it that's what otherwise that's why very often when they came and I had experience with them here, they didn't trust anybody. It played havoc especially with the younger ones.

Q. You mean the Jews who had been through that didn't want to trust
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anybody?

A. They wouldn't trust anybody because that is how they managed to get out.

Q. By not trusting anybody.

A. By not trusting by being alert and watchful and not telling the truth to anybody just keep on doing for yourself that's how they managed otherwise couldn't. You couldn't anyhow but this is the only thing that saved them. Not trusting. I had a pupil who came here to New York couldn't make her to trust anybody because she experienced already, she was raped and she wouldn't trust any men anymore, no matter what I tried to tell her to make her feel good and so on and the kids in the class and she probably is now.

That is the story of my coming to America.

Q. Tell me, Mr. Woll, you were a socialist but you were not a Bolshevick.

A. I was a Bolshevick.

Q. So that was part of your problem there.

A. That's right that was why I was condemned by the Bolshevichs. I was a leader among the students in the Bolshevics.

Q. Well I just want to look through here because I've been here a long time partly because of the fact that we did have company. I'll just ask you one more question. When you were living in Comel before the war and even up to the Revolution the non-Jews in Comel were what, were they Russians. They were not Poles and they were not Ukranians.

A. Maybe some of them they were Poles but to us they were all Russians they may have been Poles and Catholics and may have been what they call a Russian Byzoslavnic, Gregorians.
Q. I mean do you know what they were, what they considered themselves to be, not who governed them.
A. Russian.
Q. Did they speak Russian.
A. Yes.
Q. Now before the Revolution, during your early years then, did you feel as a boy--let me put it another way, what was the percentage of Jews in Gomel compared to non-Jews. Was it a third or a half or less?
A. It was less than half. Less than half but quite a community.
Q. Okay so it was a good sized community, close to half. Now would you say that there was, did you experience real anti-Semitism before that time?
A. The mere fact about the gymnasium. We didn't, socially we never met with the Russians.
Q. You did not.
A. Didn't have anything to do with them. Two worlds, two separate different worlds. We had a neighbor, the house, a gentile, and we couldn't make up our minds is he friendly or not? At times he would be friendly.
Q. So who were your friends, mostly family.
A. Only Jews. We had no friends with others.
Q. Now your father's business for example, did he deal with non-Jews too.
A. Yes he did. He dealt with non-Jews too.
Q. Like these geese people that would come. Were they all Jews?
The people who bought up the geese and would come and eat in your house.
A. Jews, only Jews. But you see dealing with a non-Jew it was a priori known you had to take that. So father used to dealing with the railroad people, because you had to have favors about the train, he used to give gifts around them so they were friendly, how friendly were they? I don't know. As a matter of fact across the street from where we lived, there was a gentile woman who used to have quite a garden and we used to buy lettuce from her and things of this sort and we called her friendly but her son was the same way—anti-Semitism.

Q. So it was different than really in the state in a way. You were dealing—correct me if I am wrong, in the city you were dealing, were you dealing with—like your neighbors, were they on a level with you in income or were they like lower?

A. On a level; they were some were as intelligent as we were. Some of them went but the average were lower in culture.

Q. Was the difference as great as it was in the shtetl between the shtetl Jew in the shtetl and the villager.

A. Oh yeah, that was a definite difference.

Q. Was that true in Gomel, no everybody was more urban.

A. That was a different kind of breed because they went to grade school lower they didn't go high but they went to grade school and then they had a newspaper they read. The peasants didn't. The peasants didn't know how to read. These were in town so they knew.

Q. So that already made a difference.

A. But anti-Semitism was prevalent among them too, because you see that was the basis—that a Jew didn't produce anything. He used what somebody else
produced to sell it and make money on that and that was the basis of zionism that we felt as long as we are not producing our own bread we will always be dependent. Here now we have it now here in America about energy, about oil. You never heard so much said about becoming independent, producing your own energy, because otherwise we were dependent. So that was the idea of Zionism.

Q. You cleared something up because I was thinking to myself how could you be a member of policheen and at the same time be a communist because that would be like a contradiction almost.

A. Of course it was. That's why we couldn't and that's why they were persecuted with it.

Q. Right, I understand. Okay, I am going to say thank you very much.

A. You're welcome I am sure.