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Victor Mintz, 5/05/1984

Interview conducted by Jane Katz, for the Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-Defamation League of Minnesota and the Dakotas

Q: This is an interview with Victor Mintz for the JCRC-ADL Oral History Project; interviewer Jane Katz; May 5, 1984. Please tell me your complete name and your Jewish name.

A: Victor Chaim Mintz. The Jewish name? The same thing, Victor Chaim. Q: In what year were you born?

A: In 1909.

Q: And in what town and what country?

A: Warsaw, Poland.

Q: Can you tell me the names of your parents, your grandparents, perhaps even as far back as your great-grandparents, if you like?

A: My father was David. My mother's name was Sarah. My grandparents' name from my father's side, was Lazer. For my mother's side, his name was Moshe Engelman.

Q: And were they all from Warsaw?

A: They were all from Warsaw. My grandfather Engelman was living in Warsaw the last years, but he was born in a town, Glaskov. This was actually a big mansion. And he was one of the most known Jewish families in Poland. Glaskov was actually not far from Kutno. But Glaskov was a little mansion, for what my grandfather was the "baron." And his father, about half of Poland's woods was belonging to him, so he was cutting the lumber and exporting this to Germany and Poland. This was my grandfather, but Glaskov belonged to his father.

Q: And were other members of the family involved in this trade?

A: My grandfather's grandfather, he was involved. I find it here in the book from my grandfather's grandfather is stories. He was one of the nicest families in Poland. Was scholars, and rich, both together.

Q: Your mother, I assume, was a homemaker? Traditional Jewish?

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A: Traditional homemaker, yeah. And my father passed away when I was very young, two years old, and actually I was raised by my grandfather. Moshe Sander Engelman.

Q: Now tell me about his religious practice, if you will.

A: He was a religious Jew, Orthodox, but he was also very scholarly, in general. And being a businessman, he used to travel to Germany, to France, and to other countries. So he was a well-known Jew. In Jewish culture and general culture.

Q: There was a synagogue, I assume, in your area?

A: Oh yeah. Was a lot of synagogues. In Warsaw was about every building had a synagogue.

Q: Was your family in the Jewish quarter in Warsaw?

A: Yeah. In Warsaw was two ghettos. A large ghetto and a small ghetto. But I was living and my family was belonging to the small ghetto.

Q: Was this known by any particular name, the small ghetto?

A: No, just a ghetto – "small" and a "large." They were connected something by a bridge. But I wasn't there, just heard about it.

Q: Was your grandfather very active in the synagogue?

A: He was active in synagogue. He was active in Jewish life in general in Warsaw.

Q: Did they have any Zionist connections?

A: My grandfather was not a Zionist, but he got to know Herzl, used to know Nachum Sokolow – he was his friend. Sokolow was his friend. Sokolow was at one time president of the Zionist movement. He was a journalist. He was a writer for a big paper. He was living not far from my grandfather, and they were good friends. Being Orthodox Jews, still, he knows all the people –

because he was a businessman – knows all the movements in Poland, the Zionist movement, and general cultural movements. He was involved with that.

Q: Now you, of course, had an education in Hebrew. And Yiddish, I assume, was spoken in the home?

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A: In Hebrew. Of course I was going to a Yeshiva. After, I graduated high school, and two years college. I was an accountant in a bank.

Q: What was the name of your college?

A: Business General College. In Warsaw.

Q: And you graduated as an accountant?

A: Yeah.

Q: And did you have a chance to practice at all? What year did you graduate?

A: I graduated in 1928. I was 19.

Q: And then what happened?

A: And then I started to work – in 1929 I started to work in a bank. Until started the war. I was their main accountant in the bank – till the war.

Q: Now we move to the early '30's.

A: You want me to tell you about the pogroms in Russia? This was in 1919.

Q: How did you get involved in that?

A: When the 1914 war started, my grandfather went to Ukraine – a town by the name Proskurow – because his son-in-law was living there, and they were afraid in Warsaw for bombardments. So he went there. And I, being raised by my grandfather, with my mother and my brother and my sister went also there. This was about 1914. And in 1919, we were living in Proskurow, and there came the Ukrainians, with Petlura. Petlura was the head of the Ukrainian government.

And this was a Sabbath afternoon. They went to the city and they killed out 5,000 Jews. This was done in three hours – from 2 till 5 o'clock. And I saw through the window, they were running, they weren't coming to our house, why I don't know. And after, in our house, they made a hospital for the wounded people. Was over 100 injured people in our house.

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Q: Did you say that you watched the slaughter from the window?

A: From the window I saw running, with the open swords, the Ukrainians. Why they didn't come into our house, is a question. I don't know. Miracles! And in this was my grandfather, also. He worked with a special committee from the United States, came and saw everything. Also recorded for the history! And after, I was there till 1920. The governments were changing in and out there. The Bolsheviks came in after the Mensheviks. The White Russians came in after the Red Ukrainians, till the Bolsheviks. And then I smuggled a border – my comrades and me, together – smuggled the border back to Poland.

Q: Well now, the transition, as I recall, wasn't it in 1917? Or was that the beginning of it?

A: Nineteen-seventeen started fights, there's different groups. There was the Nicketeses; there was the Cluroffses; there was Bolsheviks. The city was taken over, one by the other. Even the Polacks were there also in 1919. But after 1920, when there was already Russia, and I was from Poland, we smuggled the border to Poland, and I came back to Warsaw.

Q: Very glad, I guess, to be out of there with your life! And you were quite young.

A: I was then about nine years old.

Q: What an impression you must have had of the human race at the age of nine. You must have lived in fear!

A: History repeats history. This is Jewish history.

Q: So you returned to Warsaw in 1920. And you had your education, and you began working as an accountant. So now we come to the early '30s. At what point do you recall hearing the tremors? Getting the sense that the Nazis were beginning to build their movement?

A: In '33 they took over. Hitler took over and right away they were against Poland. They want back a part of Poland. But in Poland was also the big anti-Semitism, and was 1938, the Germans evacuated – threw out from the country – all Jews who used to be Polish citizens. This was in 1938, and a lot of refugees came to Warsaw.

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Q: Before we discuss that, may I ask you to go back a little and tell me what your experience was with anti-Semitism in Poland?

A: The experience with anti-Semitism in Poland was that sometimes you go into a park, some young Poles could beat you up. And this was competition. They used to stay by stores, the Jewish stores, not to buy, because it was a Jewish store. And university was the fight, because they want Jewish students to be on the left side of the room – not to be mixed – and they on the right.

And the Jewish students didn't accept this. So they were staying in the middle, in the hall, because they didn't want to sit on the left side. I remember once was a big demonstration of this. On one side was going a Jewish demonstration of students – I was with this demonstration – the other side was going the "Indecks," this was the Polish Democratic – kind of like a Nazi Party – what was the anti-Semitic party. And they were walking. Placards. And the police was in the middle, protecting us from one another. But there was a lot of anti-Semitism, I remember. All the time. After the big pogrom, in a little town, Przytik. Before 1939. Was, I suppose, in '37 or '38. I heard only. I was not there.

Q: I suppose there were Jewish newspapers, and so you got all this information.

A: Jewish newspapers, yeah. Was also Polish newspapers. Was even one Jewish newspaper in Polish language. But was a lot of Jewish newspapers written in Jewish.

Q: Now, as Nazism began to build elsewhere in Europe, you began to feel some of the tension and some of the pressure.

A: Oh, sure, there was tension and pressure. The Jewish businessmen, starts in '37 to boycott German products.

Q: The Jewish businessmen began to boycott German products. And your father was involved in that?

A: My father was passed away. My grandfather was already retired.

Q: At this point you were a practicing accountant. Can you describe a little of the climate of those times. The atmosphere?

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A: The atmosphere was very harsh. It was a very crucial time. You got a lot of Jewish writers – was a Jewish writers union in Warsaw – and about every day you got a lecture on different themes. You got there a lot of Yeshivot, Talmudic schools. You got a couple Hebrew schools – not religious, but in Hebrew language – what you call it, like a regular school. Not a Talmudic school. A secular school in Hebrew language. And we got a lot of the secular schools. This was already from the Bund. This was a Jewish socialist organization. What they've got a lot of secular schools in Yiddish.

Q: The influence of the socialists was quite prominent at that time.

A: No, I figure the Zionist movement was more prominent than the socialist movement. Was a lot of Jewish involved. Was like a rainbow! You got all movements. And everybody was fighting something, but not too much. In Warsaw was a Jewish Kehilla. This is a Jewish community what was ruling by itself. They got schools, and they got welfare departments and this was accepted by the government. As a matter of fact, they could tax all the Jewish people. And if somebody didn't pay the taxes, they gave all of it to, like here the I R S, and the I R S was collecting for them the taxes.

Q: Now you're talking about the Polish government doing the taxing or the Jewish government?

A: Both. Was Jewish, like here the Jewish Federation. But Jewish Federation is only if you want to give, and if you don't want you don't give, and they don't have schools. This was like a Jewish government, they had there. It was elections – official elections – all the Jewish people could vote, like you're going to a regular election. This was like a regular election, checked by the government, it was done correct, not cheated. And what I want to tell you is it was a Jewish life, a complete Jewish, a very high standard Jewish life.

Q: I get the picture. Social, cultural and economic. Did any of your relatives live outside the Jewish community?

A: Was not there a ghetto. Before 1939, you could live wherever you want. Was some places they didn't let some Jews in to live. This is happening right here in America also. Was a Jewish neighborhood mostly, but people was living all over the town.

Q: Did you ever serve in the military?

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A: No.

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Q: Now, when the war actually broke out, before the outbreak of the war, are there any specific events that you would like to record?

A: No especially.

Q: Do you remember what it was like to be there at the outbreak of the war?

A: Oh yeah, I remember. This was 1939, September 1st, Friday morning.

Q: How did you get the news of what was happening?

A: From the radio and people talking about this all over! And second or third day, was already bombardments. Seems to me that Thursday was all over the bombardments already. And the government was taking the people to army, drafting people to the army.

Q: I suppose some Jews were drafted, right?

A: Oh yeah. They called me Sunday morning to make trenches in the heart of the city, what was very bad[ly] organized – from the bombs. We came there and there was not shovels, nobody knew what to do. Was sitting there a few hours, and after, we came home. And there was advertised on the radio to leave the city; to join up with the army. So Monday morning, this was the 4th of September, I went out with my two cousins. We walked out of the city going east. And then on the highways was already bombardments. And the airplanes were going down—very down – with machine guns there was shooting, and the people died. To the left and the right, people were killed. And all of us, we used to run away into the woods when we saw the panes coming. And we were going, this was from Warsaw, to Brest.

Q: What was your purpose in going there?

A: We were going east. When I come to the city Brest, the Russians came from the other side. And I found the Russian army already. The Germans was bombarding the highways, and with machine guns was shooting, but their army was still far away, because they were held up a long time by Warsaw.

Q: Had you joined the draft at this point? Were you drafted?

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A: I was not drafted. Everybody was running. The government was already in a turmoil.

Q: So, you were fleeing.

A: Yeah, fleeing from Warsaw. And we went on Sunday, and this was next Friday. Five, six days we were walking and running on the highway.

Q: Is this all your family members?

A: No, only I and two cousins. The other ones, they couldn't. I got a sister, she got a little child, she couldn't go. Some were going. Some were staying. And then when I came to the Russian side – let's see, from there I went to Bialystok, and this was already the Russian side – and I was there till the end of December, and then I smuggled the border of Lithuania, because Lithuania was still a free country.

Q: During that time, did you have any news of other family members?

A: Yeah, I got news. Some people came smuggling the border from one side to the other.

Q: They smuggled news of your mother and your grandparents?

A: Yeah, they bring in a few letters. Even a coat for winter, somebody brought me over. It helped, because was September, it started to be cold, so they brought me a coat over.

Q: So you knew that your mother was okay at this point?

A: Yeah, I knew it. There was still not a ghetto. But I got news, and a few letters I got. When we smuggled the border of Lithuania, I was a few times caught by the Lithuanian soldiers, and they took away from me everything what I got – money and everything they took away. They caught me with the other few youngsters was with me, young people, they caught me, in a village. They took me to the police station. I was asleep uncovered there in the police station. In the morning he said he wanted to send me back to the Russian border. If I would go to Russia, I right away would go to Siberia for smuggled the border. Anyway, was in the morning – Saturday morning – and the soldiers took me and the other two young boys to the border. And we were going out, was still dark, we saw a Jew going with a tallis

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to a synagogue. I went to him and we told him what is going on. The soldiers told him to let us leave. The soldiers want only money; this is all what they wanted. But I didn't have already nothing. They told the soldiers to come with them to the synagogue. And when they come to the synagogue, I said: "Let me out though another door." And they paid 'em already, the soldiers.

And they took me, some, to a house, and I was there over Shabbos. And in the middle of the night, they took our whole group by horse and buggy to Vilna. This was subsidized by the Joint Distribution Committee. The committee subsidized the money to help to save the refugees that were coming out. I came to Vilna. I was there in the Committee a few days. They gave some of us a house there to stay.

Vilna was a fight before the war between Poland and Lithuania. Actually, Poland got, but after the Russians came in, they gave away Vilna to the Lithuanians. So the Lithuanians didn't want to have Jewish refugees from Poland in their capitol. So they sent me out to a town in Lithuania – Telz was the name of the town. And there I start to work a little bit in accounting. And after, I met my future wife there, and I got married in 1940 in December. And in 1941, in June, started the Russian-German war, and we start to run again. So then I run with my wife – always going by foot.

Q: Were you able to live openly as Jews in Vilna?

A: Oh, yeah. Lithuania I think was as anti-Semitic, but was a free country.

Q: And you were able to practice your profession.

A: Yeah. I was actually not so able, because they didn't want people not citizens of Lithuania to work – not to take away jobs or something. But I made a living. But after, when the Russians came in, I was married. I came to Lithuania in January. 1940. But in June 1940, the Russians took over Lithuania. And when the Russians took over Lithuania, I could already work – officially – and I was working there as an accountant in a factory, till June 1941. Then I run away with my wife – with other few people. On the way was already Lithuanian partisans. They killed, from anti-Semitism, killed more Jews than Germans. On the highway, people came running already: "They're killing Jews on the way."

Q: Did you always wear your yarmulke? How could they recognize a Jew?

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A: No, I wasn't wearing a yarmulke. You can recognize a Jew. Sometimes you can make a mistake, but you recognize a Jew. It's not so hard to recognize a Jew. So, all the same story on the highway, the German planes were going down, with the machine guns shooting, and then we went to a freight train and came to Kovno. Kovno was before, the capitol of Lithuania. Then I caught another train, also a freight train, and I came to Riga. My wife got a friend, and I was sleeping there overnight, and in the morning I want to go out, the Germans were already in the city. But only by a miracle, the train depot was on the Russian side, Russian sector, still.

We went from this house; we came to the depot. There was staying a train with the families of the Russian soldiers. There were trains

there. But there was not order – nothing. Nobody asked you who you are, what you are. We went into the train, and we went to deeper Russia, till 200 miles before Moscow. On the way, like I told you, the train stopped every 15-20 minutes, and the people got off from the train because the German planes were bombarding the trains where they're going. But we came safely. This was already in July 1941. I was there till end of August.

Q: Do you remember the town?

A: It was a kolkhoz. This is a cooperative town – the Russian name. This was near Danilov. I was there a couple of months. And then I saw the front is coming nearer. And it started to be cold, and I have nothing to wear, and my wife didn't have nothing, so I decided we will go southeast.

Q: How did you survive on the farm? Were you workers? A: We were working, yeah.

Q: Were you accepted as Russians?

A: Not as Russians!

Q: They knew that you were Jews?

A: Yeah. There was not, especially the farmers, not anti-Semitism, not any there. In the government was anti-Semitic, but not in the time of the war. In the time of the wars they were dependent[s] of United States and of England.

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Q: They were allies of the U.S. and England.

A: Allies, yeah, Sure, you could hear something about anti-Semitic, it was single people, but not from the government. You didn't feel the anti- Semitism. There was a law against religion, yeah, but not anti- Semitism. Even then they let down the fight against religion also, because they were allies of the United States.

Q: So you didn't form a synagogue on the collective farm! (Laughs)

A: No. So the Ukrainian trains were going steady to the east, because the front was coming nearer. So, I went in a train. Nobody asked you who you are, what you are, and we went. And I

was in Novosibirsk, and from then I went south till – different trains, not the same train always – till we came to Samarkand. This was in middle Asia. We didn't have what to eat. We were without anywhere to sleep, we were sleeping on the streets because a lot of refugees were there.

Till finally I came to a little town, and I got a job as an accountant, because they'd mobilized a lot of the Russians. They were eager to get somebody to work for them. And I was working there afterward in another place. And after, I was settled in Samarkand, and I was there till 1946, in May. In May, I was evacuated from there to Poland because there was an agreement from United States and Russia, that all the Polish citizens, they got to let them out from Russia. So I came to Lodz. My youngest daughter was already born. She was born in Samarkand. This is not far from Afghanistan, a couple hundred miles, not more, maybe less, I don't know exactly. And then I came to Lodz. And it was our idea to leave for Germany – there was the Jewish camps – and from there to go to Israel.

Q: But of course, when you returned to Poland, you heard all the stories of the atrocities, and most of your family members....

A: Oh, year. I didn't find nobody!

Q: Tell me about that.

A: Being in Lodz, I heard everybody is gone! The Holocaust! I heard before, but now I see. I looked for a relative, friends. I couldn't find nobody! Lodz is like a little park, people know my family. My sister and brother-in-law were taken to the concentration [camp]. She got a little baby, and the baby was killed. And after 1945 they were driven

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on the highways, in Germany. They passed away on the highway in Germany. Somebody told me this. And my mother passed away. My grandmother, I don't know. I decided to go out to Warsaw to visit the grave of my father, because I know I'm going to leave already Poland. And my wife, I left her in Lodz, because it was very dangerous then to ride the trains, because the Poles saw a Jew, they threw 'em out the window. It was right away after the pogrom in Kielce, done already by the Poles. But anyway, I went to Warsaw. In Warsaw I didn't find Jews at all. From there I went to Prague, this is the other side of the river. Next day I went to Warsaw. I tried to come to my apartment, where I was living. All the houses were all down! But just my apartment was not destroyed. Amazing. I went in there. There a man was living. I asked if I can see the rooms. "Yes." And after that I went out, the gentile told me that "You've got a lot of books in basement." But I was afraid to go down there with the gentile, because this was after the pogrom. I didn't trust the Poles, especially to go down in the basement.

So, I went from there to the cemetery, to my father's grave. I couldn't reach, because it was weeds and trees growing during the war. In the beginning, right in the beginning of the cemetery, there was a monument of my grandmother's great-grandfather. He was the first rabbi in Warsaw. And I come in there and I take a look to the left side, a little stone is there, and I read the cover, and this is the grave of my grandfather by whom I was raised. And I didn't have a camera with me to write this down. So I took the cast. This is the copy of this. I want to show you. This is a copy of my grandfather's stone. I wrote this down. I recorded by hand.

Q: What does it say?

A: What this says is: "Here is buried Rabbi Moshe Alexander, the son of a Rabbi Yonke Vesukeh Engelman" – this was the stories that I want to tell you, they're written – "...a grandson of a rabbi, of a big scholar from the city of Koll. He gave out a book, the name of Bet Aaron – The House of Aaron." This is all what is written in this. There the book is, the second on my grandfather's father's. They're written, all the stories, there.

Q: This is a book that was published recently. A: This was published in '46, in New York.

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Q: And these books tell the story of your family members. So that's something to be very proud of. It may be that people from the ADL would like this material, but I won't ask you for it now. I'm sure that's very valuable to you!

A: To me it's a matter of life and death. From the cemetery I found when my grandfather passed away. He passed away a few months before the liquidation of the ghetto. Who put up the stone, the monument, I don't know who it is, but I found it there.

Q: What stories did you hear of the resistance within the ghetto? Did you meet people who had taken part in it? And who had survived it?

A: I met people what resisted in a concentration camp. I met not a lot of people from concentration camps, but I met a person what he was from the fights in the resistance, and in the concentration camp they ran out. They caught some, and two or three were left alive. After coming back to Lodz, we went to the Czechoslovakian border. And there we smuggled, and with my little daughter in hand. This was in 1946. She was a year old. From Czechoslovakia we went to Austria. Was always illegal, but was already organized by the Bricha. You know what Bricha is? This was an Israel organization where they managed to take out the Jews from Poland to take 'em to Germany, and from Germany to Israel. I went with them from Czechoslovakia to Austria. From Austria we came to Germany.

Q: What was that like – to go through Germany at that point?

A: Was not very pleasant. I got a room from the Committee in a house where her husband was a general in the German army.

Q: Did you not experience hostility at that point? A great deal of hostility?

A: There were afraid. Right after the war, the Germans were afraid. But I saw a lot of this. The woman asked me if I can't help make a Sunday, to clean up the stones by the house there, because all the neighborhood made a project. So, I took a look on that, and told her, I was working enough for the Germans, not to work again. (Laughs)

Q: How did you deal with your own anger at this point – living in Germans – and among Germans?

A: We got used to this. Everything. Like think now about the running, and suffering, and not having what to eat, and the airplanes from up,

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shooting – it was terrible! But when you're living this hour, you're not thinking even about this. The body's going so immune to these dangers. You're not afraid more. You get used to this.

Q: And I suppose you begin to think a lot about your own survival and what it means?

A: Oh, year, sure. Everybody what survived, it was a miracle! Because they saw death hundreds of times and you see lots of it yourself, death before your eyes. But I happened to survive. It was a miracle.

Q: Did this strengthen your relationship with your God?

A: I don't know. When I went out before, I was religious. The last few years in Poland, I was religious again, but I was already more worldly. I start to be a member of the Zionist organization. And, after coming to Russia, I was not able to observe at all the religion. I remember, when I ran away from Poland, this was in 1939, I never eat not-kosher food. And this was Erev Yom Kippur, the day before Yom Kippur. We were running and didn't eat nothing. Came sudden a little village, and a Polish farmer gave us soup to eat. That this was the first time when I was eating not-kosher food with little pieces of meat inside, but I was not eating in a couple days!

And then, during the war you couldn't have it. You started being not so religious. You was not looking for religion. I still observed, even in Russia, observed the High Holidays. Passover I

didn't eat bread. But the rest is sacrilege. After I came here to the United States, in the beginning, I wasn't so religious at all. Just the last years is turning back to religion. Not that I seem so ready, about 15, 20 or 30 years.

Q: It takes time to be Jewish.

A: Yeah. I was working here on Sabbath! But after, when I went in my new business, it was possible not to work the Sabbath. I stopped and worked non-Sabbath. And now my business is up and closed.

Q: Was it the same organization that helped you go to Israel that had helped you before? You mentioned the Bricha.

A: The Bricha? Yeah. They helped me from Czechoslovakia to Germany. And from Germany, I want to go to Israel, but Israel was still not a government, not independent. Was 1946. And I had a little girl. I couldn't go illegal. So my wife got here in Minneapolis two brothers

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and two sisters from before. So we decided to go to United States. In 1948, we came to United States.

Q: Which organization helped you make that change?

A: HIAS. Actually, the relatives paid for everything. But they did it.

Q: At this point, what would you say that it means to be a survivor of the Holocaust?

A: (Sigh) What it means to be a survivor of the Holocaust. Sometimes we're very well off. You raise children. No uncles, no aunties, no grandfathers, no grandmothers, and you do, everything by yourself! And you start a new life! And I suppose they got some on your psychology, you got something, a kind of print on this! The brain is a computer.

Q: An imprint of what you lived through, that you never really erase.

A: Imprint, yeah. And you can never forget this. But life is life. Is going on. And this is life. You can lose in death, dear ones, friend ones, but life is life!

Q: But always this feeling of being cut off from your roots.

A: From the family – the roots, yeah. But I go a lot of times to Israel, because there I got some cousins – near cousins, far cousins – I've got some family left, over there.

Q: Has your belief in a Supreme Being changed over these many generations?

A: I told you. Logically you think, "Why! Why! Why!" You cannot answer. You believe, and this is your tradition. This is all. Because this is happening, should I start to be not religious? I can't tell. I started to be not religious, because the circumstances were.

Q: Right, but you didn't turn away from God! A: I didn't turn away from God, no.

Q: You didn't feel that God had failed you.

A: No, no, no.

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Q: Some do that.

A: Well, some did it, yes. You got in the Jewish religion, you got rabbis asking, "Why? Why they suffered?" In all the persecutions that was during the last 2,000 years. Everybody asked the question, "Why?"

Q: Do you have an answer?

A: No answer to this! You cannot tell. You can't tell this. Q: Do you find that you're cynical about humanity?

A: Yeah, I'll tell you, but it's not only the Germans. Even the Americans in this time, even Roosevelt! They called it up, reconnaissance photographs, and they didn't want to give out what they asked him to bombard there the trains what I going to Auschwitz. They didn't do it.

They didn't let it be known. Now, hundreds of thousands of refugees from Viet Nam, from all over. Then, nobody's let in to the United States! Jews – the ships were going back to Germany. They didn't let in. The same thing, England. Didn't let in nobody to Israel. So you got a cruel world. Sure, the Germans were terrible. But I figure, all the world was against the Jews!

Q: Do you think our Jewish tradition makes us different? Do you think that there's a sensitivity and an ethical value that we're brought up with that makes us different from other cultures?

A: From other cultures? The ethical values is got a lot to do with this, because you calling this the "Am a sepher" – the nation of the Book. Because really, Jews were studying, always studying. And they got a lot of ethical and moral teachings. And this went in their blood – the teaching, the moral teachings – like anti-Semitism went in the blood of the gentiles. In the churches, they were always telling them, through the centuries, "Jews are the God-killer, the Jews are poisoning our lives and our water and everything." And this went into their blood!

Q: Were you brought up to believe that all life, whether Jewish or gentile, is sacred?

A: Oh, no question! No question! Every life is sacred. According to Jewish religion, the whole life is sacred. You got some things that make a difference, between Jewish life and a gentile guy, but he got to agree to this. But not in our days. Then was tied to circumstances. For instance,

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if I would be in a concentration camp, I would make also difference between Jewish life and German life. I will not hesitate to kill a German. Culture is changing. Conditions are changing, and you can never know.

Q: Survival becomes the primary value in that. When you came here as a refugee, did you feel a tremendous sense of separation from other people – non-survivors?

A: You feel there a difference between other people. Even today, seems to me, people thinks still I am a refugee. I heard some people talking, my friends, relatives, they want to say, "Take a look" – my son – "His kid makes a living. Take a look how the refugees..." They forgot to say I'm a refugee, also. (Laughs) "Take a look how the refugee's doing well now." But, I don't know, this is life.

Q: What about the idea of "survivor guilt" that many people have written about? Have you ever experienced that?

A: I figure, very wrong! Because you got a Jewish saying: "Don't judge a person till you'll be in his place." If a German faces you with a gun, you angry! What can you do! You can't fight with him! I will tell you another story. I remember I was one time in the Center here. There was an Israeli; was talking about the same problem. And he was saying that Jews were going like sheep to the slaughter. And he even mentioned this, this got to do with the Jewish religion, because the Jewish religion didn't allow you to fight!

And I answered him [with] one question: Babi Yar was in 1941. That was after the revolution. How many years after the revolution? The revolution was in 1917. This was about from '17 till '41, 24 years. And there was all the Jews there, were not religious. So they're together with the Russian people – assimilated – and while thousands and thousands of Jews were killed in Babi Yar, and nobody started a fight against. This had nothing to do with religion, nothing to do because you're afraid. This has to do with they got guns and machine guns, and a lot of army. You stand naked!

Q: And what do you teach your children about power? About this act of survival? As a Jew and as a survivor. How did this affect your training of your children?

A: I always tried to teach 'em Jewish values. Very high. They're always going to Talmud Torah. And my boys are going a couple of years to

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yeshiva, and one was going to Yeshiva University. But I told 'em the same thing. You gotta fight for your rights! No question! But it depends on the circumstances. If you are sitting in a prison, you can do nothing. And I tried to give 'em all the Jewish values. This is all.

Q: What about the treatment of the Holocaust in books and in films – in terms of what you experienced. Do you feel that it's valid?

A: (Sigh) I would say it's very valid. And it's got to be written more in English – for people to know – all the world to know! I was last week in St. Paul, the Holocaust Remembrance in Temple of Aaron. But I didn't like it. Made like a theatre, a play of this. The singing was not correct; I not like to make it into a theatre, because it was a tragedy! They made it a kind of a play. I think it should be a lecture, or talking about this.

Q: There was a tendency then to "romanticize" the events? To romanticize?

A: A little, but not too much. I didn't like the talk.

Q: Somehow you feel that the truth is lost as we become very theatrical.

A: Yeah. Was with the theatricals the truth was just lost. And was even there a cantor was singing.

Q: And you don't see it as a show?

A: Was like a show. Was singing something. I don't know what they were singing with the melody from "Bei Mir Bist du Schoen." I didn't like it!

Q: What about the T.V. movie, The Holocaust?

A: The Holocaust was very good. There was another movie, that was also very good. What was its name?

A: There was Playing For Time, about the women who played and sang in the orchestra in a concentration camp.

A: Yeah, yeah. This is part of the true life what happened! The same thing: What could she do? She could resist? She couldn't resist! And this is true! This is true life!

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Q: To what extent have you shared your memories of all of this with your children?

A: Oh, I've told 'em all the stories – what happened. And if was a film about the Holocaust, I always tried to take 'em to see it. And there was memorial days on the Holocaust, was some gatherings, I took 'em always.

Q: Are your children interested in these memories?

A: Of course they're interested. They were raised completely Jewish. Q: Do you think of America as a land of promise?

A: I don't believe in America to happen this, what is happened in Germany. But it surprises. You got all the surprises in history. Who would believe that this will happen in Germany? So cultural a nation. But America's a little bit different, because you've got different nations. It's built not from one nation.

Q: Different nations within the nation.

A: See now, what happened, with Jackson. Farrakhan and his racism. He's got many followers. And this is the Black community! Where they all got persecuted. So you cannot be surprised. You've got surprises in history. Can never know. For instance, if I would go to Israel, it's not because you want to run away from the United States! You want to go because you know there you will be able to have a full Jewish life! But not to run away.

Q: Well, I gather America has been good to you.

A: Yeah. I have not to complain about America. I complain of this or that – during the war in America! But not now.

Q: And now you participate fully in the Jewish community here? A: Oh, yah. Synagogues, Federation, and so forth.

Q: Okay. Well I thank you very much.

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