

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Ralph Codikow**  
**April 20, 1990**  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Ralph Codikow, conducted on April 20, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

## **RALPH CODIKOW**

### **April 20, 1990**

Q: Would you tell me your name please?

A: My name is Ralph Codikow.

Q: Where and when were you born?

A: I was born April 9th, 1930, in Kovno, Lithuania and lived in Panemon, Lithuania all my life until I was 11 years old.

Q: Where is Panemon in relation to Kovno?

A: Panemon is on the outskirts of Kovno.

Q: Ralph, would you tell me about your parents and about your family?

A: Well, we were an average family in Lithuania before the war and...uh...my father, mother and a brother. I had a brother who was 7 years older than I was. And my father was in the ...lumber business and lived there with his father, grandfather that I know of lived in Lithuania. Before that I don't know.

Q: Okay. What was your childhood like growing up?

A: Well, it was a pretty happy childhood. I went to eider when I was about 6 years old, then at 7 I went to Hebrew gymnasium which is a high school until about...until I was about 10 years old. And then in 1940...

Q: Hold it one second. Before we get to 1940, tell me a little bit about...uh...the friends you had, the things you did during the day as a child.

A: Well, it was...it was an average life. We had a...we lived in a nice town. Panemon was a small community. It consisted of one long street with a few alleys. And it was the gateway to which were...were summer homes for the people who lived in Kovno. They used to come over to spend their weekends in the woods and the forests where they had built summer homes. Also was real close by and it was beautiful beach and we used to spend our weekends there and it was real nice before the war. And then in 1940, when the Russians took over Lithuania...uh...we didn't have any more Hebrew schools and we had to go to Yiddish schools and that's when we started learning Yiddish. I think Hebrew was outlawed or something. And I studied there for 1 year in a different school until the Germans came in. And...well...uh...we could talk a little bit...uh...about that one year.

Q: Ya. Tell us about that. Well, uh my father had to leave his business because uh you couldn't be a businessman under the Russian regime, and he tried to get a job several times and had difficulties because he didn't belong to any party, and he was not involved in politics. And being...having been in business before the war, it was a little difficult to get a job. So we kind of struggled through that year, but it wasn't too bad. We made it. And...uh...and then in 41, when the Germans took over, that's when all Hell broke loose, so to speak. Uh...First of all, I remember like it was yesterday. It was on a Sunday morning. And I had sat up until 4:00 in the morning making some names for my...for my...for the uniforms of my basketball team. I was about 14 years and I was...at 4:00 in the morning when I was extremely tired I went to bed. And at 6:00 in the morning, I was woken and told that the Germany invaded Russia and they're going to be in our town any day, the German army, and we have to leave because that may save our lives. So we had a horse and wagon. My father...uh...got it all together and we packed some of our belongings and took all...took my ...well, my whole family which consisted of my brother, my mother and my father and also my grandfather from my mother's side. And we just started toward Russia. Uh...We...I don't remember exactly how long it took us...a day or so to get to a small town. I believe that town was where my father was born and I think it was named...I'm not really very sure. And that is when the Germans met us and the border was closed, and there was no need to go any further. So we walked into the first abandoned home we found, probably was a Jewish home, other people who ran away, and we decided to stay overnight and see what happens the next day. And in the meantime, I remember...uh...a few hours later, we heard some knocks on the doors, vicious knocks...uh...by the Germans and they were looking for Jewish people I believe. They were yelling there were any Jews hiding here and naturally, we admitted that we were Jewish. So I remember they were kind of...a little vulgar and then they asked...uh...what time it was. One incident, and my brother kind of being proud of his Bar Mitzvah watch showed...showed him the watch and told him what time it was. They said, "Well, give me that watch immediately." And my brother kind of resisted, so when the Germans start pulling up his rifle, my mother went over grabbed his watch...grabbed my brother's watch and just handed it over real fast. And this was our first introduction to the German army. Then the next day, I believe, we saw that there was no use to hang around. There was no use to stay in that little town. We still had our horse, our wagon and some of our belongings and we headed back home back to Panemon, through Kovno. On the road, they had...some Lithuanian army, I believe it was, had set up a place where they intercepted all the refugees who had tried to leave and tried and kept them...stopped all of us and told us to move over to that particular, big huge place it was on the road. And they just kept us there for no reason at all. We...we spent a few nights there I believe outside on the ground, sky. It wasn't too bad. It wasn't cold...cold. It was summertime. And no...no one knew what the future's going to bring. But after that I remember...I believe that they took us to the Seventh or drove us to the Seventh the whole family. Exactly I don't remember how it happened, but I remember that our next stop was the Seventh Fort in Lithuanian.

Q: Tell us about the Seventh Fort.

A: Well, the Seventh port was, I believe, an army base before the war. It may have been some kind of a military defense area or something like that, but it was pretty green...pretty and they separated immediately the men and the women. Uh...I remember that my brother was 7 years older than I was, and when my grandfather went with my father on my one side, and my mother and I...they took us in another area of the Seventh Fort. I was 11 years old at that time. And we spent...and we spent...the exact amount of days...I don't remember how many days we spent there, but I...I remember that right before they took us to the Ninth Fort, and the Ninth Fort was a similar place as the Seventh Fort in Lithuania, they had given them an order to some of the younger...uh...younger people who were with the meant to...to go to the women's side, and I...someone told you...that I think the order was that all the children up to about 15 or 16 could go to the women's side and my brother tried to go over. I don't know, he probably thought maybe it is safer and my father may have told him to do 60. And...uh...they didn't let him through because they said he looked older. Actually, he was 18. And he looked older, and they didn't let him in...let him go to...to...uh...his mother. And...and right after that we heard and knew that everyone was shot over there. All the men were shot, but my father was not there. This is another long story. My father was a volunteer in the Lithuanian army. I believe when Lithuania in 1916 or something like that, he volunteered in the Lithuanian army to defend the...the country. And while Lithuania was independent between 1916 and I believe 1940, these volunteers took a in certain prominent Close Lithuanian life. They were ...and they were honored many times. My father had medals of it, and we were pretty proud of it. Uh...So before they told all the youngsters or after to go to another side, to the women's side, they also announced that everyone who was...they called themselves and those are volunteers. Every man who was a volunteer in the Lithuanian army to present themselves to the Lithuanian...uh., soldiers who probably did the massacre afterwards, and that they would take them out of there. And indeed, they did. They took them to a different place, which was called the...the Yellow Prison. They called it the Yellow Prison in Kovno. And I know that my father was there. So at that time my father was not shot. It was only my brother and my grandfather. Then the...and...uh...my father was...uh...in that prison I remember. And later on when we were released from the Ninth Fort, after being there...uh...and...uh...my father came home one day and...uh...he...we asked him how he did that. He was in prison. And he said he had promised the guard officers uniform and boots if he would let him go to see his family. He said, "Well, I'll let you go, but you better be back." And my father came to visit us. He spent a few hours with us and my mother begged him, I remember that. She begged him not to go back because it's not going to be there very good place. We knew about that. And...uh...he did go back, and...uh...they were shot over there also. They were shot. We heard all kinds of stories. Who knows why? But, we really don't know why. We really hoped and thought that being...being Xo the volunteers they were and respected before the war, the Lithuanian army who really directed most of these...uh...I don't know how to call it...uh...would...would really let them free, but they didn't. Uh...well, after...after this, we...uh...went to the ghetto. They...when the orders came, they told the Jews have to leave their towns...their towns and homes and belongings. Well, not all the belongings, but...uh...that you couldn't take with you and move to that designated area around Kovno which was called the ghetto. And my mother and I...we just took the things that we had. Couldn't...tried to exchange our home with

some Lithuanians, but I guess we just were not successful. Some people did. Some people gave up big mansions for little homes, and...uh...they moved in there, but there was not enough room for everyone so they...people who had those homes took in their families, their friends, whoever needed it, and we were sharing. I and my mother, we shared a room with a neighbor of ours who...uh...was...we were close before the war and...uh...that lady had also lost her son and her husband, and her daughter, who was my brother's age and I think they were friends...uh...had a room that they acquired somehow from some relatives or friends in one of those houses, and they took us in and we...shared one room, the four of us.

Q: Can you...can you go back. You had told me before that while your father was in prison your mother had taken his papers and tried to do something?

A: Yes. Well...well, my mother always cherished papers, a being the, that volunteers...and his medals. And that was...we tell that was a precious thing because most of the...most of our encounter all the misfortunes that we had until then were always caused by Lithuanian soldiers. And we didn't see that many Germans around at the beginning. I'm sure they gave all the orders. They were involved. But I we didn't see them. So we felt...she felt especially that those papers and medals may come in handy someday. She always kept them on her. Uh...Well...there's so much to talk about...

Q: You had gone ahead and you are in the ghetto now?

A: Yes, I'm in the ghetto now. But...uh...there was another incident that if I may I should back up a little but that's always stuck with me too is when...when the Russians came in, although we were not in great shape financially either, but my father since he was a volunteer and he was in the army, he kind of had respect for some...for the Lithuanian Army...for the Lithuanian army before the war. And he was friendly with some...uh...people in high command. And he find out where we lived there a general who was I think the Chief of Staff of the Lithuanian army and when the Russians came in they sent him to Siberia. And...and he had left his wife and children in our town, and my father knew them. And I remember that whenever he could, he used to take some packages over there or even lumber to heat the homes because in Lithuania most of the homes were heated by lumber, good lumber. And he...he was quite friendly with them and tried to help that particular year. And right after the Germans occupied Lithuania right before the ghetto, we were sitting in this lady's house, Mrs. Mudrick was her name, and...uh...just talking about the future in the ghetto and things like that, where we're going to move homes or whatever and I...I looked through the window. It, it was about two houses away from ours in Panemon, and I looked through the window and here was the General walking with his wife and was going back to their home in the...on the...They lived...they had a home in the outskirts of Panemon. And I kind of felt a great feeling because I felt this is one man who probably could help release my father from that Yellow prison that he was in. And I pointed her out to my mother, "Look who's walking by here. Why don't you go out and talk to him really quickly. I'm sure he knows us. Especially...she knows us, and maybe they can do something," my mother went out real quick. I was with her and I remember that for a minute they acted like...like...they didn't

even know us or pretended anyway. And...uh...she told them who we were and they nodded and she begged them to see if they'll...can do something about releasing my father. But needless to say, nothing happened. That is one incident that stayed with me. Uh...Alright, I guess now the next thing is the ghetto.

Q: Tell us again which ghetto you were in and how did you get there?

A: Well, from what I remember it was quite simple. We just walked or...or took a bus or something. I really don't remember exactly how we got there. Maybe on a wagon? No, I cannot. I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I know that we were there in 1941, and I was 11 years old with my mother and she had arranged to live in that room with Mrs. Widrick and her daughter, Rita.

Q: You are not in Kaunas. You are in Kovno.

A: Well, Kaunas and Kovno is the same thing. Kaunas is in Lithuania. Uh, well, from the beginning, I remember there was Aktions. They called for 500 people, and they called four thousand people to work, and they called for all kinds of things. And some came back, some people didn't come back, but those things did...did not affect me personally because, as I said, you know, being young, you...you don't understand a lot of things. I know...my...my mother used to go to work every day in a brigade. I don't remember exactly what she was doing and, but then we tried...we tried our best to survive.

Q: Did you see any of the roundups?

A: Uh...Not, not exactly. I seen a lot of roundups. I seen a lot of brigades going in and out, but...uh...there weren't...I could not distinguish between the ones who went and came back and the ones who went and didn't come back. Uh I was a go-for when I was about 12, 13 years old, I became a go-for for the administration in the ghetto...running around with papers, back and forth to offices...And...uh...I thought maybe...I really don't remember what I was thinking. I...I was just doing what I was told to do, After...and...and that's it. When I was about 14 I believe, I started to work in a...in a clay factory where we used to manufacture pottery, clay...out of clay. And that factory was run by a family of generations of...of pottery makers, and they were very experienced and did a very beautiful job.;5 ft

Q: Okay. Let's just pause. We need to change tapes.

Q: Tell us about your...

A: Well...uh...so, I was doing some running for that place, running around, delivering to the pottery, and also trying to help out with the clay, kneading clay and so on and so forth. A very important part of my life happened in that factory. When I worked there, I'm sure that's when the... First of the people know about the children's action which was the selection of the young children whom they...they picked out from the ghetto and took to the Ninth Street and killed them all over there.

As...as...uh...we heard, I was...the day they had that selection, I was at the pottery, at the ceramic factory. And I guess the boss or the leader of that factory had heard that there's a selection...they're rounding up all the children. Well, he was kind of concerned about me...uh...and he said, "Well, we gonna...since they're rounding up children we're going to; ao put you to work and make you look important. So let's see if...what we can do about it." I don't know...I don't know if I understood what was happening, what our destiny was, but he all of a sudden put me next to his old uncle who was 9 @t the best pottery maker, a real artist, and he put me right next to him to knead...knead the clay to prepare the clay ..for him to put on that machine and he was making the pots and vases and things like that. And I remember two~3 ;6t Ukrainian soldiers walked in. They looked around. They didn't see any children until they spotted me. And they walked up to me and they said, "How old are you?" And I 14 believe I said, "I was about 14." Maybe I was 15. Maybe I was 14." And one said to me, "Come with us." Well it r3 ;au didn't move that fast. I just kept on working, and the other one looked at me and said, "Aw, let him stay." "Oh no." "Let him go. Let him go. Come on. Come on." And Wz S then the...the boss, Ske name i~ Nicholas, and he intervened o and said, "Well, this is a real good worker and we need him here. n And he said, "Okay, let's leave him here. wJ And the second one insisted that I stay, and they walked away and t this is how I remained that time and uh this was an 0 4 60 important...uh...event, that clay factory. I think stayed in the clay factory until the evacuation to the concentration camps in Germany. But I think before that...before the clay factory, we had a very important O<ab Aktion...an incident happened. And that was what they called the big Aktion, the big selection where this particular day the German commandant selected 10,000 people O4 4b and they were all exterminated in one day in the Ninth Kort. And this is quite a story. Uh...They told us to present ourselves at 6:00 in the morning at a certain place in the ghetto. The whole...everyone...whoever would stay behind ..O \$ tt would be shot, and naturally everybody showed up. They...they put everybody in the gates...and some type of Jewish police and...uh...and the leaders of the ghetto tried to keep some kind of order, so as to try to present us in I o S ;=b guess a better light, and so not to upset the Germans, you 15 know, when...when we walked in front of them. I remember walking up in front of the German Gestapo men with my mother l ox c lt 06 s ~\1. and he asked my mother questions, says, "No men?" And my mother said, "No." And he says, Well, he pointed to the right. And as he pointed to the right, I o g 61 D knew right then and there that was death. That was the end of us. And...uh...I remember we started crying and we started worrying. And...uh...my mother told me in the convoys, "Don't worry. We'll be back. We're not going to U D go anywhere." And I thought she's really out of her mind. And...uh...~because that was unheard of. Once they decided something, there's no coming back. And...uh...she told me, # ■ she said...we had...we had a friend...and this is another story. We had a friend, Lithuanian, before the war who was a German-Jew, a refugee from Germany. And he used to come over to our house and be friendly with us, with my parents. And he in 1940, was = out by the Russians as a O8 ; 4 olitical prisoner. He escaped, came back to Lithuanian, and had some papers as if..if he was some political prisoner and against communism. And he was in ghetto. We knew that. o7 aO We used to see him. And she told me, "We're going to meet him on this side, and together with his papers and our papers, we're going to come back." My father's medals...what I was talking about. "We're going to come back." And again,



I...I didn't...I didn't know what to think. I thought my mother had lost her mind right there. To find him on the wrong side since he was, I think a single person. I don't think he had his family anymore. Well, to shorten it, they took us down about, oh, 50 yards or 100 yards in a different place after we were selected on the right side which was the wrong side and...uh...they were waiting for more people to come and when they had a certain amount...on that side they used to...they took us into the little ghetto. And that is different...altogether different story about the little ghetto. Well, as we were standing there and waiting to be taken to the little ghetto, I spotted that man standing about 10 yards from us and said to my mother, "Here he is just like you said." And she says, "Run over to him and tell him to come over and stay with us." And I did. And he kind of worked his way to us. My mother asked him, "How did you get over here?" Well, I tried to save a lot of people, children, and...and the commandant wouldn't even listen to me. He just put us on the wrong side and here we are." And he was just as scared and just as weak as I was. My mother said, "Let's stay together. Well, we went to the little ghetto which was empty, which was...which was exterminated before and as we came there...uh...there...uh...10,000 people were there at night. Ten thousand people were selected. And some thought that they may just separate us from the big ghetto and let us stay there and maybe live or do other things. So some 17 people tried to get their homes and get some beds to be able to sleep on or whatever was left from the people who were there before. And my mother said, "We're not looking for no houses. We are not going to look for any furniture. We don't need anything. We want to come back to the ghetto. Because she doesn't like the situation here. So as she said we picked one house right...right by the gate. I remember that we found some bedroom and there was an old mattress...mattress on which Mr. [redacted] was his name, Mr. [redacted] and I laid down and slept and my mother sat in a lounge chair all night long and I think [redacted], [redacted] something. And everytime I woke up I could see her sitting, not sleeping at all. At 6:00 in the morning, 5:00, 6:00 in the morning, we heard banging, yelling, screaming, insults, dragging people. We ran out and we saw already some...uh...rows of humanity being taken in the direction of the Ninth Fort which we knew...which street led to the Ninth Fort. And as we were in the line in front, almost by the gate, my mother decided, she said, "Well, now we're going to try to come back." She said, "But give me your papers." And she took the medals and my father's...paper and she ran up to one Lithuanian officer and told him that...pretended that Mr. Raston was her husband and said that he was a political prisoner, that he was a volunteer before the war, that he did some good things for Lithuania, and would he help us in...in sending us back to the big ghetto. Well, one...one said, "Well, don't worry wherever you're going you're going to be working. You're...you're just going to change places. It won't be much different." And she went to another one. Another one wouldn't even listen to her. The third one said I could not do anything about it, until Mr. [redacted] and I kind of gave up and told her "Let's...let's go where everyone else goes." And she said, "One more." She saw she spotted this lieutenant, Lithuanian lieutenant, and she walked up to him and she kind of with her last breath tried to explain the situation. And he said to her, "Look, I cannot do anything about it, but...but the German commandant is going to come over in a few minutes and reached...he took us and he put us on the sidewalk, rather than in the streets. And he said, "You stay here

and when the German commandant comes, we're going to present to him these papers and see what he can do about it." And that felt very good at that moment except that about a minute later, some soldier walked up, Lithuanian soldier, and he saw us standing on...on the sidewalk, not where everyone else was standing. And he had, a club in his hand and without any question he smacked Mr. [unclear] on his ear and split his ear and...uh...my mother on her back, black and blue marks on her back, and told us to get back in the row with all the other people. At that time that officer noticed it and he came over and he said to him, "Look, I told them to stay here and I want them to stay here and don't touch them." A minute later the German appeared, the German commandant. And the way it was situated was like this. The gate of the small ghetto was the end of one street. The whole thing happened...the way it happened was like an interception from which four or five streets...streets branched out. The German commandant was standing in the middle of the interception. The gate was on one street. About 90 degrees of that gate was the fence of the big ghetto from which we had come. No gate. Just barbed wire fence with German guards and the Jewish police on the other side of it, pretending to watch what's happening or to guard or whatever they were doing there. Probably seeing what was happening. The German was standing there, the lieutenant ran over quickly, took the medal the papers, and walked over to the German commandant and he talked to him. What he said I don't know, but I heard the German yell, "Where are those Jews? Where are those Jews?" So he ran...he came over quickly and got us and...uh...my mother walked up to him quickly and told...he repeated her story, and he said, "Back in the ghetto." And we could see...before I got to the fence, I could see the Jewish police...there was no entrance, but the Jewish police who were on the other side tore the barbed wire with their hands and their feet, tore apart...made a hole, and we just crawled back in. And...uh...that day 10,000 people died. One of the men who went was a cousin who we really hadn't seen, but we learned afterwards that she was there. And...uh...this is, I guess, how we survived that one. But...uh...it just worked out exactly the same way my mother predicted. - ~ . Probably one in a million. From what I understand is that there may have been a few others in [unclear] who hid in attics or some other places that day instead of going to the Ninth Fort, and I think when somebody told me afterwards...when the Jewish police and the firemen came in to check they found some people hidden and later got them out of there. They brought over uniforms and they dressed them up as policemen and they just got them back in. I don't think there was very many, but I know that...uh...that when we came back, we were the only ones.

Q: Where did you go? What happened to you?

A: Well, we went back to our place, to our...where we lived in the ghetto and we continued the ghetto life and actually the children's action and...uh...was after...after they would go out continue living in the ghetto until the evacuation.

Q: And did you see the children? The children's action that you had described earlier? > }  
D

A: Yes. And uh the ghetto kept on shrinking all the time, 21 less and less people. And even the area was reduced and I believe in 44 when the Russian army got closer to Lithuania, X for some reason and just evacuated us and took us to the concentration camp. But before that happened...uh...people were trying...trying to build some bunkers~ They were called bunkers, which were hiding places. They kind of expected that some day when the war was over that the Germans would not leave a trace of us. SO they built bunkers X And in that ceramic factory there was a bunker. And actually I...I forgot to mention X my mother was hidden in; q that bunker in the ceramic factory. And...uh...from what I understand Gb\* Ae was later that...when they evacuated the ghetto and some of the people stayed in the bunker, they; 4 D just put the whole...they just put a fire to the ghetto and they burned everything and everyone in there. And I don't know if any people survived that day. But I know there was some people hidden in this bunker. They had it prepared a ~: r real well. They pretended they were building a furnace...a furnace...0 oven for the ceramic because you had to take it utsst Dv 15 izq and burn it. And that was the ; fEcecece I live in-the big bunker. And I think I know...I think I heard that one of my aunts also was in one of those bunkers and she disappeared ffi right afterw~>~

Q: What was life like A for you in the ghetto? 22

A: Well, it all depends. It all depends. It was different for all people. For me 7 Well, when I was working...running a ^ so around and working, it wasn't that bad. Matter of fact...uh...I even had a chance to play soccer in the tc~\_ a l 6mb ghetto. I had a Pt5Bt. I had some friends. We formed a soccer team. We played there among ours Qlves and...uh...and ...uh...as a matter of fact, I had a good friend who was the captain of our team. He was studying at that time...incidentally, we had a...I believe an arts school in a o . a O the ghetto. And that arts school consisted of about four or five students, one or Mwo \teachers. And...uh...they were 0 iC OC c .1 < 9 0 (o o ~ ag=wsug some veedbe SteatA training. And one of the friend of ~ine heard that we were studying in this arts school and IQ l qb remember waiting for me and rushing him to get out of school so we could have a little more time to play and...uh...later on this arts school played another big part in my life. Uh...Otherwise I really don't remember too much. It was>;L ~nb just routine every day. I remember one incident when my mother went to work and she took me with...with her because she got a chance to go to home ~ in Panemon because the brigade was working there for...I don't know who...the Q; g D military or somebody. And I remember we went and came to our hometown and we walked into the barracks, the military barracks which was situated behind a home across the street from our house. And the people across the street from ouraa +~ house were Lithuanians, very good friends of ours. They had 23 a restaurant and I remember walking through...uh...I think she had made...I think Oer mother ~w walked a 3 crD through several times and there was a board in the fence that was loose, especially made I think for my mother to go over the board and walk through to their backyard and into their home. And I remember those people real well. We ofl v se>4 M \*v R» s aUL walked through there and we walked up nnd o tood boforc this restaurant and I remember that lady was there, Mrs. , friends before the war. They were very nice to me. And used to be our friends before the war, her sons, and even made one time at iaSi~ r;\*S forme, amsttk , a very small one. It was very cold. And

they poured water, used to freeze them within an hour. And they were good friends of ours. And I remember that they kind of helped us a little bit with some food. I remember when my mother used to come back from that job, I remember we ate pretty good. This was a maid sharing this food. I remember during my stay in the ghetto, in the concentration camp, most of the time I spent thinking about this food more than anything else. I don't think I was that scared to die or anything else, just tried to get some food just to feel better..That...that I remember. Is there anything else. After this...

Q: You are back in the ghetto. What happened to you?

A: Well. To me? Nothing that...nothing that I can remember. The big action I believe I believe I was 12 years old. I even had my Bar Mitzvah in the ghetto. Yes. I remember that. We had (laughing) we had some other friends who were also German refugees who came to live in Panemon in Berlin right before the Germans occupied.

Q: Let's hold it a minute. They need to change tapes.

Q: Would you tell us about your family?

A: From what I remember was this. There were no schools in the ghetto. If there were any, I didn't know about it. Uh...We had some friends as I said who came from...who also were German-Jewish refugees who came to live in Panemon and my parents became friends of theirs. And they were religious people, very religious people, and...uh...there were all the Jewish traditions and so on. They also made it to the ghetto. And I remember when I was about 12, 12 and a half, my mother...uh...said that this gentleman...I forgot his name...would teach me the Sa orah and everything that one needs to know to have a Bar Mitzvah. So every day he used to come over. I used to go over to his place and we would study. I don't remember how long, but...uh...but by the time the day of the Bar Mitzvah came, I remember there was a house and there were quite a few people, 10, 20 and I remember the women being in the back and...uh...they were doing their Saturday prayer just like in the normal times, and when it came to my parents I remember that I think I did fairly well with my prayer. And one thing I can remember that day, I had never seen my mother cry so hard and that day, it was...it was I remember it was impossible to stop her. Although after...after the Bar Mitzvah, they had a little party. Whoever had anything brought over, and we managed to celebrate. That was one incident I remember clearly. And...uh...in the ghetto every day life, work and we heard, of course, all kind of incidents. If I were to go to very day life, there was a hanging in the ghetto that I remember clearly because...uh...uh...one...they...they claimed they found in fact, one of the inmates with a revolver or a pistol trying to smuggle into the ghetto. And uh naturally the Gestapo apprehended him and uh we were ordered everyone was ordered to appear in one place. And the gallows were all prepared. They brought him back. I remember having seen him coming out of the cell all beaten up, swollen, hardly recognizable, and I remember the hanging incident. I

was maybe 12, 13 watching through a window because...uh...they had him \$4; a pistol or something. And I believe because of that...the # +O ghetto had to sacrifice a lot of people for him because they wanted to punish US and took some innocent people and just 26Wtg t3 did kill them Xe=roTth of that incident. It was not...it was not pleasant. You had to move from place to place. As they were shrinking the ghetto, we had to move from place to place. And...uh...tried to do the best...make the best of it. I am sure that there were a lot of other incidents thatt6 '2 thappened. I'll probably think of them later, but right now I cannot think of them.

Q: What happened then? Do you remember? 90

A: Well, when...when they evacuated us. We were one of the last ones to be evacuated, to Germany, to the concentration camps. They took us in a train. We traveled to Germany. I don't know. I don't remember how long it was. But I remember coming to Stutthof and uh and they separated the women from the men and...uh...kept the women in the Stuffhof camp someplace around Stutthof and the men they took to Landsberg. Landsberg was a...was the first stop in t Germany. That was a concentration camp. A small one I believe not far from Munich and not far from Dachau. And I remember being separated with my mother already and I justO G qocontinued with the trains to deeper into Germany. And that is the last time I heard of my mother until after the war. I had some people who were with her and told me that she died in the last days of the war. The exact details they O 5 CDnever told me, but...uh...probably for some reason probably 27 not to upset me or other things, but the exact way I don't know, but I know she...she died in the last days. And...uh...I came to Landsberg, and there were a lot of men, young men and older men. And we stayed there not too long, and they ordered all the children up to 17 years old to q O assemble and...uh...and they took us away. They took us away to...to Dachau. We were about 131 I believe, and we stayed in Dachau for 1 week and then they shipped us out to Birkenau, Auschwitz, Birkenau. And...uh...when we came to Birkenau....

Q: Tell us about that ride.Ot

A: Well, the ride to Birkenau. We were...we were put in three wagons, three railroad wagons, train wagons, 131 of us and D we were stopping someplace. The only thing I really remember from that ride is that we came to a place in a train station where some Russian prisoners were able to walk up to our train and there were some port holes in our cattleOq # 513 trains and warned U5 to see and try to...try to escape if we could because...uh...they said if you are Jewish and you are .. going to Auschwitz or Birkenau, that's where they kill them Oq » D all. So if you have a chance, just run away. And some of us couldn't . And it...it took quite a while to get there. And one incident I remember was that since we>q # O were all Lithuanian children that none of us spoke Polish so 28 to try to escape was useless or we wouldn't know to talk or how to talk. But in my...in my wagon, there were two boys who did speak Polish, a little or a lot I don't know. I knew they knew something about it. And they told us that a they were going to jump and escape. Now, we had a big dilemma because if they escaped and we knew from the ghetto I b Qd if one did anything wrong, all of us would be done. So we

had a plan made up with them that they...we would try to...there were two older German guards in that train, and we would try to distract them to try...there were maybe 60 of us or 50 of US on that train, and we would try...there was only...the was only made of about we were maybe about 5 or 10 kids involved in that. And...uh...we said like this, that they're going to go through that port hole, and try to climb down the step of the train and stay there for awhile until maybe the moment that the train slows down a little bit...I believe the train was going about maybe 40 miles an hour, 50 miles an hour, and when the train slow down and maybe in a brushy area where it would be softer...softer to land, they would try to jump. And to protect us because out of 50 kids someone had to see that they were jumping out and not to tell the Germans that would have been the end of every one of us. So we decided with them that they're going to jump and in about a couple of hours later, we would pretend...we would be about...and...100 miles away...120 miles away from that area...a couple of hours later, we would pretend that we just saw the kids jump, and we would tell the German guards that here two kids have jumped out and here they are. They're laying right here watching us. And...uh...maybe that would save us and...uh...in the meantime, well, they wouldn't...they wouldn't even look for them that far away and...uh...maybe they would. So we did it that way. We...we took four...four of us, starting talking to the Germans. They were kind of older and they were not from the SS. They were from the Wehrmacht, so...so you could speak to them once in awhile. They would...I remember someone was talking to them about knives, about other things. I don't remember the conversation. About we were watching the homes or the greenery while the train was going by. We just talked to them and kept them busy. And all of a sudden, like we said, about two hours later, one kid ran up to us and started to pretend that he's telling me a secret. And they got excited and they asked what happened. We said, "Go look quick. Quick. Through that window, the port hole, two kids just jumped out." First, they didn't believe it and then they kinda looked and then they said, "Well, it took you too long. They were right there." And thirdly, they started to call the officer somehow and made some signs that we should stop the train and to recount them because if they took them to the train, they were missing. Now that took a little while. And they stopped the train. They took us all out and they counted us three times, and two were missing. So they...they asked us, Where did it happen. And they said, "About five minutes ago, they all jumped out, and we reported it, we saw it." And okay, from what I understand they did call the local police in that town, but that may have had been 10 towns...those kids were about 10 towns behind us...and they...they were looking for them. What happened? We don't know. But from what I heard lately, I think one...one of 40 them did survive. Someone told me a story that one kid when they were transported from...uh...from...uh...we were going to Buchenwald to Birkenau jumped the train. One of the Lithuanian kids jumped the train, and he's somewhere in Israel right now. And I'm trying to see if we can make contact and meet him. And...uh...that I learned recently a year...maybe a few months ago. So we then we came to Auschwitz, - Birkenau. We were led in. We were kept for about 3 days in quarantine, and we didn't know why in a barrack with straw, not even a shower. Very little food. And we could see a lot of concerned inmates, old timers who used to come in and out, in and out, talk to us, and ask us questions. And we found out...out later, the reason we stayed there about four days before letting us into the camps is because this is the first transport of children

who were let into Birkenau alive. There were some children who came with their father or families. When I say 31 children, 13, 14, 15. And we were the first...it was late in the war and things had started to change a little bit. So what happened, we don't really know. But they told us later that...uh...they were very surprised and happy that we were the first ones let in, and we were in quarantine in a...in a camp which was called A-lager, A-lager. We didn't do anything from...just looked for food. Try see what...uh...we could do. That's all we thought about. There were hot days and cold days and all kinds of days. And I remember after quarantine they took us to a children's barrack in the...the D-Lager, which was a working lager, working camp. They were a lot of kommandos, people who used to go to work every day and come back. And we had those appells where you had to get up early in the morning, stand in that place being counted day and night, twice a day to make sure that everyone of us was there. And at the beginning I didn't do anything there either. There was not too much work for us, I believe. But there was one brigade that used to...that used to come out of this barrack. And they were some children who pushed...uh...some...they called it a roll wagon...it looked like a...like a buggy or like a horse and buggy, without a horse and it collected garbage in some places in the camps and the crematoriums and things like that. That was not a bad job because when you used to go to some of those places and being a child or young men, you used to meet some women and older people who used to give you some share with their rations or bread or whatever they had. But...uh...that was hard to get into until one day, I remember it was pouring rain, mud to your knees, and you had to go and push that wagon. Well, some of the kids who were working there before kind of hid or didn't show up, half way volunteering and half way being picked up into that job. And as I said before, many days that helped me because people used to hand me some things, food and things like to eat, which was the most important thing in that time. We stayed there not very long, maybe a few months. The...the crematorium had quieted down...quieted down from what I understand. They...they didn't exterminate people in those days as much as they did in the earlier days until one day we woke up and we did see all kind of flames going through those chimneys and we knew that's what's going on. We knew that they were burning people over there, but that day they...someone told us...I don't know how the rumors started. They had rounded up about 3,000 gypsies...gypsies and just took them to the crematorium and just gassed them and burned them like they did...they did the Jewish people. And that was...uh...kind of scared. Needless to say, also...now it's coming back to me...uh.. Those A and D lagers, we were...we were...there were selections too. I almost forgot about those. One day we were on the appell where we were supposed to stand every morning and evening and then he looked over. We...I was in a children's barrack and he looked us over, and...uh...I think that was before that Gypsy incident and he looked us over. He asked us our ages. And...uh...I remember I think I was about 14 at that...at that time, and...uh...the kid next to me, he asked him his age, and he told them 14. He marked down his number. Uh...I had felt that was not a good sign, so when he walked up to me, I told him I was 15. I tried to lie about a year. He looked at me twice and just walked by me. Well, that afternoon they came to pick up all the kids who had their number they had written down. I never heard from them again. Uh Another incident, also in Birkenau. One day when they showed up with a measuring

instrument, measuring device 7 like a square. And we had to walk under it. And I remember you never knew whether to be tall is better or to be short is better or to be older or to be younger. You never knew. There was a lot of deception, a lot of lies, and confused us completely. And this I think, also, was a Q D instrumental in...in some of us not being as resistant as we should have been because we were completely lied to, deceived and mishandled and by the time some of us woke up, .. Q it was almost too late. This measuring device I remember walking through it and I barely touched that bar across and my number was not taken that day. Some of the shorter ones I remember was taken. But you really never knew what was the right way. They had you confused completely. And 34 after that...I believe after Birkenau, we went...they evacuated us or they took us out to...uh...what they called...we went to Auschwitz for one day, and they did...and then Auschwitz, that was the big concentration camp near Birkenau. And then they took us to which was called farm. And that farm was called Birkenau again. There were different names. They separated a lot of us, and I wound up in that of a Birkenau where I was very sick. Had pneumonia and stayed in...there was a Hungarian-Jewish doctor took care of the little hospital. He had a few beds and...uh...he took care of me with some medicines. I was there for quite a few weeks I remember and just barely got better or well by the time they took us to Buchenwald. And that was quite a march. Also I...another incident happened. I forgot to talk about that one...in Birkenau when we got the needles. I don't know, 5, 10 of us got the needles and we were just a group (lying in what they call a hospital and the main doctor who took care of us was a French-Jewish doctor. He was extremely kind, understanding and tried to help us. Matter of fact, he saved our lives there. I remember before evacuation day, we had to be sick about 21 days in order to be declared not contagious and...uh...I think that day we were about 17 days in the hospital and we remember him running back and forth trying to get doctor all kinds of people in charge and what we remember, he signed something or declared us well enough, we were not...we were not contagious anymore. It was touch and go until he was able to declare us not contagious and...and they were able to evacuate us with everyone else. In that of Birkenau ....(Pause) we were...we were most of us were working at work. I don't remember. I didn't work at the time. When I was there, I was sick and I didn't do too much. And...uh...if not for that Hungarian doctor, I wouldn't have survived there either. Because I must have been well enough to make that long trip to Buchenwald. We were...we were (about 6 days I believe and 6 nights. We were walking for many, many, many days...for many hours and I think at night we stopped just for a little sleep a few hours. And then I think we were on trains. They put us on trains right before we got to Buchenwald. And it was wintertime and it was open wagons and you...we got...uh...one of my eyes was very infected and...uh...I lived with that through Buchenwald most of the time. Some days it was better, some days it was worse. But I don't think that I had any treatment for that. Uh...In Buchenwald we were again in a children's barrack, in a quarantine for 66. They brought 66 I believe in the back of the camp. In that barrack, there were a lot of Hungarians, Slovaks, German, Polish Jewish children and some of us, Lithuanians. And...uh...we didn't do any work because we were in quarantine. And we...when you were in quarantine, they didn't make you work. The day...36



Q: Let's wait a little bit. and we're going to change tapes.<t7 ~f' ~