



The South African Union of Jewish Students

Holocaust Resource Centre

84 De Villiers Street, Johannesburg 2001 South Africa
P.O. Box 18 Johannesburg 2000, South Africa
Telephone (011) 290417/337 3000



TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH MR PIATKA (X)
INTERVIEWED BY BARBARA MELTZ AND HILARY MEYEROV

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OF JEWISH STUDENTS

B M Mr Piatka can you first give us your full name and address, date of birth and your telephone number.

X P My surname is P-I-A-T-K-A.
My first name is X-A-V-I-E-R
I was born in Poland on the 8th July, 1919
My address is - 12 Avenue Fresnye, Sea Point, Cape Town
Telephone number - 44-8842 (Res) (Office) 21-7965

B M Mr Piatka can you tell us just a few details about your life before the war. First of all where were you born?

X P I was born in a town called VILNA, in Poland. That is the North Eastern part of Poland, which today is the Capital of Lithuania.

B M Can you tell us something about your family - were you an only child?

X P I was the only child. My mother came from Russia. My father was born in Vilna, he was a Doctor of medicine and we lived in the very select suburb near the Vilia River opposite the public gardens. It was about 5 minutes walk to the very important tourist attraction of Vilna - the Cathedral which was about 400 years old.

X P sit on the left side because it was a discriminative section, and of course the atmosphere at the Polish University was anti-semitic. There was a very big Nationalist group which was propagating that the Jews are entering into every possible way to compete with Poles. They didn't want Jewish doctors, teachers, lawyers, and engineers. They wanted the Jew to be a second citizen and of course we students didn't accept it so we had to stand wherever we could, near the wall, and we never sat on the chairs which were allocated to us.

B M I was going to ask, you decided not to sit down.

X P We decided not to sit down on the place allocated to us, we wanted to sit wherever we wanted to sit - with the others.

B M How did they respond to that?

X P Who are they?

B M Well, the authorities at the University.....

X P The authorities at the University instilled it. They proclaimed it for us and the pressure of the groups of students. And the students were doing everything possible for us not to have good studies - not to have a prominence in studying and they did everything possible even not to allow us to go into the hall sometimes. They used to stand there and beat us up. We used to go in by force about five/six of us and we went through the door.

B M Wasn't there any way that they wouldn't have known that you were Jewish.

X P Oh well, first of all they are Jewish names, secondly you can see that you are a Jew because they are all blond with blue eyes and we were all darkish and our nose was Jewish.

B M But your nose isn't Jewish.

X P Well my nose in Poland was very Jewish. Here I am taken

X P for a Greek, for Italian, for a Frenchman - but in Poland I was definitely a Jew and even with a little bit of a curse, was the name of "Jew" not only Jew, but "Blady Jew" or whatever - "Sickly Jew".

B M Did you ever stand up for your rights as a Jew in a physical sense. Did you ever attack these people for calling you a "Blady Jew"?

X P Well, I did once and this is the result, I got it with a knife.

B M A scar above the eye.

X P The scar is still with me

B M What happened?

X P I was about 16 - and four of them - the first thing I learnt about the Jew was, when I was about 11 and neighbours beat me up on Easter because I "killed Christ" and I sincerely said to them I never knew this, I never killed him. Although I knew who Christ was because my nanny was always taking me to the Catholic Churches and I knew all their religion and all their singing and everything. I assured the boys but they still beat me up. Then I don't remember how it was, how it started, there was a group and they didn't let people pass, especially Jewish, and I wanted to go and they wouldn't let me go so I just pushed one out and he started saying "you are a blady Jew" in Polish. So I asked him who do you think you are and I said something to him I don't remember what and we started to fight. The fight was not good because he had a knife and I didn't.

B M And he stabbed you?

X P He stabbed me in the ear and the eye. When I started to bleed they all ran away.

B M So what did you do?

X P I don't remember, I think I went to the nearest chemist or something, I don't remember. There were so many encounters with anti-semitism in different ways. I had a Polish friend and he invited me once to his house. When I came in the lady of the house, his mother, I think she was the wife of a banker or something. She said, "who are you", and I introduced myself. So she said, "oh, is your father this one and this one", so I said, "yes". "Then I don't want Jew socialists in my home". And she told her son, my friend from school, "just go out with him in the garden, not in the house". I got very red in my face and I said to my friend, "look I am going home, if I am not wanted". "No, no, come to the garden, don't worry about my mother." I said, "no, no thank you very much". And he was in my home more than in his home. He used to come and eat with us - he was a very good friend.

B M Did you ever resent being the target of this kind of antagonism - in other words did you ever resent being Jewish?

X P No, I didn't resent that I am Jewish. I always used to say that the unfortunate part of it is that I am a Jew in this country. If I would have been a Jew in France I would have never had it. Because in France there was no discrimination in those days with young people like myself.

B M Did you have family in France?

X P Yes, I have some friends and my mother. My mother had a sister there.

B M Oh, I see.

Can you describe what happened after the war broke out in Poland - the second world war in 1939. Does that in any way affect you.

X P Yes well look it affected me this way that we were invaded if you understand what happened in Vilna. We were invaded after 17 days by the Russians and everything what we brought up was against us, especially in my family. The Communists didn't like the Socialists and they didn't like the Zionists, especially the Betar Zionists, which meant that especially being a prominent member of Massada, I realised that I am against people who will accuse me that I am a Jewish fascist. This is what the Communists and the others in the same line - we are talking about the Jews now. They used to say that the Jabotinsky people were the Jewish fascists. My cousins and my uncle who was prominent in the press immediately had contacts with the Russians to establish a newspaper which will propagate whatever they want to do. And he said I know a young man who worked before for a newspaper and he is now here in town, why don't you take him as a reporter. And this is how after about four or five months when the Russians established themselves, and the Lithuanians were given Vilna as their Capital an established a socialist Republic of Lithuania - I got into my old newspaper under a new name and this was the Communist youth "PRAVDA" - that means "Truth". You see the official Communist party paper in Soviet Russia is "Pravda" which means the "truth" and in every little place wherever it was there was some kind of truth. And I was instructed to do sport, cinema, books etc., this was my line.

B M So they didn't worry you too much.

X P Nobody worried me too much. I didn't join any youth Communist party. I still attended the University. They didn't accept anything what I did in France because I didn't write any exams there. But they did accept me because I was at University. And at the University I learned about Marxism and Leninism and all these kinds of things which my editor was very, very happy about. But whatever I wrote they looked at it and the added something but I was not against it. And this is how I combined my life with being in a newspaper

X P and at the University and trying to get out. That was very difficult because everything was closed. My mother was in Paris - I didn't know what was happening there. My father was in Vilna and some of the boys who did go to other places with false papers they got through. They went to Shanghai, they went to India, they went to Persia, they went to Iran and so on. In my case I was a little bit afraid to go onto a different paper. I was always under the impression that somebody one day would say, "what is he doing there, he was there and there and doing this and this." And this was something which was in my mind and I wanted to be as small as I could be and not be visible.

B M I meant to ask you how long were you in the army for?

X P May, June, July, August. The 1st of September was the war, and 17 days later it was over - 4 months. Now you see the thinking was also changing. I was involved in entertainment.

B M In the newspaper?

X P In the newspaper - and I met a lot of people in entertainment and I liked what they were doing and I even was involved in sponsoring and making good with a group of revellers. It was a chorus of about five boys and girls. And I wrote an article about a very young, very talented girl there, and after a year she became my wife. Interesting that. So life was very exciting with them. Everything was new, everything was not as you expected and one day we never expected that there would be a war. And when we learned about the war it was already too late to do anything.

B M But now you got married in what year - in 1940?

X P No, I was married in 1945, after the war.

B M After the war - oh, I see. But you were not affected totally by the German war as such.

X P The German war was over. We were in a free country with

X P with no war. The war was going on on the other fronts. In Vilna there was a Lithuanian Soviet Republic with businessess with excursions to Moscow or Leningrad. There was a lot of refugees whom we had contact with.

B M Jewish refugees?

X P Jewish, Jewish, we are talking only about Jews. It was nearly a normal life and then suddenly we realised that there was no normal life there was a war. And within two days - it was June or July, I don't remember - it was June, the 22nd of June, 1941. Within two days the Russians ran away and the Germans were in the town.

B M And then what happened to you?

X P Well, my father said to me that I am a young man and he is worried about me, so I must get some kind of work. And I went when there was the small actions in Vilna, when the Germans used to come and take the Jews out of their apartments and take them to PANAR - Panar is the place where they killed all the Jews, in the forests. My father arranged for me to be about 15 kl from Vilna on a farm which was called BIALAWAKA. It is a place where they used to, workers used to cut out pieces of soil which was dried out and used as coal. You call it turf, and I was working there as a labourer. Then one day some people came in and they said, "we don't need your help". They retained the better and stronger workers and I was amongst the weaker ones, so they said I must go home. I walked the 15 kl and came home.

B M What date was that?

X P Somewhere in August.

X P And I came home and I used to go to the "Judenrat" to the courtyard of the Judenrat. The Judenrat was like the Jewish Board of Deputies, where they used to help people with work. Then I was also involved in giving

X P away things - like all the valuables that the Jews had in their homes was given away to the Germans. Valuables such as radios, furs, paintings and so on.

B M First of all where did you get the stuff to take to the Germans?

X P I had it at home. We were still in our homes and we had to stand in queues and give it away and be abused by the Poles and the Lithuanians and the Russians.

B M Did you ever refuse to give anything away - did you ever think of refusing to give anything away?

X P I broke my bicycle - I didn't give my bicycle away. I broke it in pieces.

B M Had you heard what the Germans had done to other Jews in other countries?

X P No, we didn't hear anything at all. We were not aware what was happening to the other people.

B M Despite the fact that you had refugees coming to Vilna before as well.

X P No. Those refugees who came to Vilna were refugees of the first onslaught of the German army. There was no specific action against the Jews. They were just afraid of the war and they knew that there was no war in Vilna so they used to come here.

B M I meant to ask you another question about the dissemination of information concerning the war in the newspaper that you worked for. Was there a lot of information about what was going on in the world?

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X P There was very little information about the war because our information came from "TASS" and TASS wrote what they wanted to write so we didn't have much information. When the Germans arrived there was no information at all, unless you had some kind of a connection like a radio or short-wave or listen to BBC.

B M And meanwhile had you heard what had happened to your mother in Paris?

X P No, I tried but there was no news from my mother at all. During the time when the Russians were still with us we had some kind of communication that the war is going on and that my mother is at home still. I got a letter from her in 1939 but in 1940 I didn't hear anything.

B M Was your mother just visiting in Paris?

X P My mother was staying in Paris. they were divorced - my parents were divorced and she was staying in Paris and I was staying with my father.

B M Now can you tell us a little bit more about the first part of the war - you life during those first few months in Vilna. You mentioned the queues where you had to give up all your things.

X P Now let me now ask you another thing. You know when you talk about the war you must specify - is it the war under Russian occupation of Vilna or under German occupation?

B M Well we have come to 1941 and its under German occupation.

X P Under German occupation. As a young man I did not go out to any queues. We had a very devoted servant, a Polish old lady, who spent nearly 35 years of her life in our home and she used to go out and get food and go

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X P to the country sometimes and bring meat etc. It was very dangerous for me to go out and be in queues. There was abuse and the Germans could have taken me away and I could have been killed. They used to look for somebody young and take them away. So the only thing that I did was I used to go out early in the morning, come to the courtyard of the Judenrat and ask if there is a job. A German used to come and say "I am from this and this place and I take 20 Jews to do this and this". Then we knew that we would work and there would be some soup and bread perhaps and then we would come back to the courtyard and he acknowledged that he took the Jews and brought them back. Sometimes they used to go and never come back. I also took a chance but most of the time I spent at home.

B M And what did you do while you were at home?

X P I read, sometimes I wrote, I helped my father.

B M Was your father still practising as a doctor?

X P Well he was practising but not as much as before.

B M Was he still having non-Jewish patients?

X P No.

B M They weren't allowed to come?

X P Not at all. Non-Jewish patients didn't come. From time to time a peasant used to come because from the olden days he remembered my father. He used to bring some eggs and a chicken to pay. And this is how it was.

B M Did you have to wear a yellow star?

X P It was a yellow star on both sides. A yellow star made out of yellow cloth and sewn into your jacket or your coat whatever it was. Whatever you were wearing.

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B M And did you wear it or didn't you wear it?

X P I had to wear it.

B M Had you never thought of defying the order?

X P You must understand that when you live in town for so many years especially in a Polish neighbourhood I was afraid that if I would go out without it and somebody will see me they will immediately arrest me, and I would be hanged for it. They hanged you just for anything, publicly.

B M Did you see these public hangings taking place?

X P I didn't see it, but I knew about it because there were big notices in the streets about it.

B M For Jews and non-Jews?

X P Mostly Jews and those who sympathised or helped the Jews. They made a show of it.

B M So in other words your servant was a very brave lady.

X P My servant was a very good lady because she helped us all the time.

B M Now how long did this go on for that you were actually staying there.

X P Well you see in September the Jews had to go to the ghetto and they established where the ghetto was. It was the old Jewish quarters, small streets, old houses and so on. And we had to take whatever we could on our selves and in our hands and take it to the ghetto and this is how it started with the exodus to get out from our own homes and leave the home as it is and go to the ghetto. So we went and I knew somebody who lived in the ghetto and I went to them and they said, "you can have this corner".

X P I was educated in a Catholic school. My father was a City Councillor and he insisted that I have a very good Polish education. I matriculated, not with honours, but with good results and I was accepted as a medical student to the Columbia University in New York, but unfortunately in 1937 my father became seriously ill - he had a heart attack - and being the only son I could not leave him and I enrolled at the University of Vilna. It was called the Stefan Batoria University. Stefan Batoria was a very famous Polish hero.

B M You enrolled to do what?

X P I studied Human Letters, because I wanted to be a newspaper man - having had experiences as a newspaper man firstly in the school Gazette and afterwards as a reporter for a daily newspaper. My uncle had a very big advertising agency in Vilna and through his influence I got a job as a reporter while still being a student at the University.

B M What newspaper were you a reporter for?

X P The name of the newspaper in English would have been "The Vilna Courier" and I was assigned to various assignments - sports, youth club activities and I also wrote different kinds of essays on the topics of the day.

B M Such as?

X P Such as what young people do with themselves. Why people don't like this school or the other school. All kinds of things.

B M What year did you actually start working as a reporter?

X P 1935.

B M Of a room?

X P Of a room.

B M You were by yourself, or you and your father?

X P No, my father went to the hospital - he went to the hospital, he got himself a bed because he was still practising.

B M He was practising?

X P He was practising in the ghetto.

B M Your father was practising as a doctor in the ghetto?

X P Yes.

B M And so he got himself a bed in the hospital in the ghetto?

X P Right.

B M Was he much better at this stage because you said

X P Ja, ja, he was much better - he was much better already. It's amazing that he was beaten up by the Gestapo because he had some sacharine smuggled into the ghetto for those who needed sacharine. He went out and they beat him up with a chair and the Jewish police brought him back to the hospital and he was there about 2 to 2 weeks in bed, but his heart was alright. And when we were in the camps together and we had to run from one place to another to show that we can walk, my father used to outrun me.

B M And his heart was much better?

X P It was much better because he lost weight and he didn't eat any fatty things and he was always hungry and his heart was alright. And when we were separated, I learnt after the war that he died in a camp in "KÖNIGSBERG" in East Prussia, near the place where they used to do the

X P V I Rockets and when they learned he was a doctor he was assigned to do pedicure to the soldiers.

B M Pedicures?

X P Pedicures, yes it means

B M Yes I know what it means.

X P He was a surgeon also - a good surgeon.

B M I would like to ask you just a bit more about the ghetto. What were your feelings about having to uproot yourself, having to have a little corner in a room, having to have very very few belongings with you.

X P It is very difficult to talk about feelings. If you will understand sometimes poetically talking - what does it mean to be a squirrel in a roundabout toy when the squirrel is running and running and running. This is what we were in the ghetto in the first couple of months. We were looking for food - looking where to sleep - we were afraid of being taken away. I used to go out and work in a German military unit in an army barracks to do electrical work because I was afraid to say that I am a writer, that I am a newspaper man, a reporter. I said I am an electrician. I had a friend who was an electrician so I went with him as an assistant. We had to put bulbs for lamps into sockets high in the ceiling on a ladder and German youngsters with bayonets used to stand and stick the bayonets in our "behinds".

B M For fun?

X P Of course for fun and we had to work. And they used to say, "shnell, shnell - quick make good the job - vervlugte Jude - you Jews you don't know how to do the job". In the meantime they used to put on their carbine with the stiletto whatever you call it and pick at us and laugh and to them it was big fun.

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B M Did you react in any way?

X P How could we react to them - in what way can you react. You can react only in one way to do the job quick and come down the ladder and go to another room, perhaps there is nobody there.

B M First of all why didn't you want to tell them that you were a newspaper man?

X P Well you see, you must understand one very important point of the Germans their technology in killing Jews. They had a proper establishment of psychiatrists and psychologists and learned men who prepared the plan how to annihilate the nation - "the Jewish nation". And their plan was that first of all there must not be intelligentsia. People with a little bit of "kop", people with a little bit of intelligence must be out - the first to go. Then what we need is to use these masses of Jewish people to work for us and only those who can do something useful the Jew who is needed, who can be useful must remain on our books. Others we don't care about. Now whoever was somebody with intellect, was not good to them. So if I would have said I am a newspaper man I would have been one of the intelligent men. They would have asked what newspaper I worked for and if I would have told them they would have said, "you work for the 'Truth' you are a Communist."

B M It's just important that it is mentioned on the tape as well.

X P Those people who will take out from the tapes, they are learned people. They know exactly how it was in those days because you must also understand that more and more people who learn about the Holocaust and more and more books are written about the Holocaust and people understand what happened to us during the Holocaust - to the survivors. Some people cannot understand that we are still normal but we say that we are normal.

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B M Can you describe one day in the ghetto from the time you woke up in the morning until say night-time.

X P Well it's a very easy story. First of all you wake up hungry.

B M At what time?

X P You wake up with the idea of what's going to happen to me today. Let's say that I have to go to work - I am working somewhere in a place where I have to clean up the yard. First of all I am hungry because I haven't eaten properly. Then I have to wash myself so I have to stand in a queue either to the kitchen or the bathroom - there were not many bathrooms in Vilna. So we washed in the kitchen in the sink and not much water was allowed so we could only take a little bit of cold water. Then we had to dress ourselves properly because it was very cold so we used to put paper under our clothes. We couldn't use old newspapers because it had the "news" in it. We used to put the paper around our legs to protect the cold. Now we are dressed and ready and somebody who takes care of you - your wife, your girlfriend, your mother or your father or whoever it is, gives you a little bit of coffee, old chicory coffee with a piece of hard bread. So by putting the bread into the coffee it became soft. Then we had to go to our group in the street and stand and wait till the Germans came to take us.

B M And what time is this?

X P It's 5.30 a.m. At 6.00 a.m. the Germans come in and we walk for about an hour. We are not allowed to walk on the pavement. We are only allowed to walk in the street and in Vilna there were only two streets that had asphalt all the other streets had stones and it was very difficult to walk on stones when there is snow. So after walking an hour you arrive at the place where you have to work and you are already very tired. But you have to camouflage your tiredness by showing that you are very eager to walk and to do because the Germans are looking at you.

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X P So you manipulate your time to work until you get a little bit of soup at 12 o'clock which is done by the Germans from the day before which remained from the others. So we got a little bit of soup sometimes with a bit of bread. And then you carry on working again until about 4 o'clock.

B M Now is the work always different?

X P It all depends - the work can be different can be the same it all depends where you work for whom you work and how you work. In the meantime you scheme perhaps to steal something or perhaps you see somebody who is non-German also working there who wants to buy something which you can get in the ghetto and he will bring you food or something we need. At 4 o'clock we finish work and we get back to the ghetto at 5 o'clock and at the gate we are searched in case we have any food on us - sometimes we are not searched and we just go in.

B M Who searches you?

X P The Jewish police, the Germans and the Lithuanians it all depends when and what. It all depends on the mood and the instructions which are given. When you come into the ghetto you go in to see what is going on, what happened during the day. You see friends, you see family, you see your girlfriend and the time is now to arrange something for tomorrow to see somebody about something. Then at 8 p.m. there is a signal for curfew and you have to be at your place and there is no lights, no electricity, perhaps some candles. You talk to people and discuss something and fall asleep till the morning.

B M Was there no other life in the ghetto besides work - some kind of cultural life?

X P Yes, yes. You see you must understand what's happening in a ghetto. The ghetto is a "stethle"*. The ghetto is a stethle in which you have all kinds of things going on.

*Yiddish for "town"

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X P When it is a quiet time where people already have their jobs - steady jobs and insecure jobs - when there is already an established administration which provides for children, which provides for schooling, which provides for those people in the ghetto for their food and their well-being, where there is some care for mothers - then the life is a normal life under duress. We have a restaurant....

B M In Vilna ghetto?

XP In Vilna ghetto, you have a cafe where you can come and sit down and drink coffee and discuss politics and talk to the others. There is a theatre which have beautiful performances of opera, reviews of musicals even classical plays. There is a symphony orchestra, a camera orchestra. Literary evenings. Evenings of satyr, a cabaret in the cafe in the evenings.

B M Do you have to pay to go in?

X P Yes.

B M So where do you get the money from?

X P We earn the money, we are paid for our work. We have to buy food.

B M Does the money come direct to you?

X P The money comes direct to every worker.

B M And where do you obtain the food from?

X P From shops.

B M Within the ghetto?

X P Within the ghetto - yes. There were shops that had all the luxuries.

B M Where did they get the goods from?

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X P They are getting the goods from a group of the "strong underworld" who have contacts and bring in the food in coffins. And life goes on, jealousies, love stories, pregnancies, unhappy marriages. It is a life under duress. Under duress that one day there is action and the Germans, the Lithuanians and the Estonians are encircling the ghetto and the order comes in - "we need 5000 men, there are too many of you, you are eating too much, you are not producing enough". And they look for somebody to take away and the system is done in such a way that whoever works has a 'working certificate'. Those who don't have certificates must be liquidated.

B M So it's very useful to be working all the time?

X P Very useful to have a certificate. Some people even sell their certificates for money or for goods, or for gold or whatever it is. Some people falsify certificates and others will do anything to get a certificate.

B M Did you still continue with any kind of Betar involvement while you were in Betar?

X P Yes. Mostly the Betar people became the police They became the organisers of order because they were told to give orders.

B M Through the youth movement before the war?

X P Yes, and in the ghetto was a very strong Communist movement and youth movement and each one helped each other. I was also helped. After being very unsuccessful with work which I did outside the ghetto, through knowing somebody who was 'somebody', I got a job as a clerk in the Work Department.

B M With 'work allocations' or?

X P Work allocations, yes.

B M That was of the 'Judenrat'?

X P Yes, the Judenrat. So I used to be very early in my office together with others and I used to get the demands - the written demands of how many people are needed. I used to call out who wants this and this job and write it down and appoint somebody who is the leader of this particular group and responsible for the group and wait until the Germans will call for them and tell them look this and this people are yours - and you go. This enabled me to get a certificate that I am needed and this also enabled me to get a card for food and I used to go to the supplier and ask for what I wanted. We used to get paid but it was very little but this was the money which I could buy myself something from the store.

B M Now you mentioned something also that you helped to keep the order in the ghetto.

X P Not me.

B M Oh, the members of Betar.

X P The members of Betar, and another group something like Habonim. They became my friends - a lot of my friends were in the police

B M So how long were you a clerk for?

X P I was a clerk for approximately 1941/42, and then through my connections I realised that I have good connections outside I still had some stamps with somebody.

B M With who?

X P With a friend of mine - with a Polish friend who had my stamps. Not all because some were taken away from me. You know it's funny my collection was well known, and about a week after the Germans arrived, a Lithuanian man and a German policeman came to our house and said, "are you so and so," I said, "yes". "Do you have a stamp collection of this

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X P and this", I said, "yes". "You have to hand it over to us".

B M What kind of stamp collection was he specifically after?

X P I had a special stamp collection with overprints of Europe. It means all the stamps that are issued and then afterwards by some story overprinted and issued again. This was my collection. In Vienna I got a bronze medal.

So they took the collection away because when I complained about them taking my stamps, they said, "listen do you want us to take you to the gestapo or will you give us these stamps?" I gave them the stamps. But the other stamps which I had I gave to a friend of mine who was a Polish friend and he kept them for me and I wanted him to sell them for me. But he was not a collector and he didn't know who to sell them to and he was afraid. So I realised that I have to get out of the ghetto and knowing the art of establishing groups, I got in touch with some of the groups which were already established and I said to them I can get you much better conditions if I will become your leader for several groups.

B M What established groups are you talking about?

X P Lets say there is an established group of 60 people who go everyday to work in a shoe factory, and there is another group who goes to another place where they are tailors, and there is another group who goes out to Lithuanian private co-operatives which are making little bags from leather or whatever. And knowing those people who were going there they were without a leader. In the beginning they needed a leader but afterwards they didn't need a leader. They knew where to go and what to do and so on and so on. I told them look it would be better if I, with my connections, in the Judenrat and everything, I will become your leader and this gave me the permit to walk in the streets with an armband saying that I am from the working department - department of the ghetto - and I used to visit, you know like an inspector visiting. I used to go there and have a good time, getting food and everything, talking to the Lithuanians about the conditions of my Jews and if there

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X P was a complaint I used to go to them and say, "look if you want them to work better why don't you give them better food, they are hungry, they are without anything. Allow them to have an hour rest instead of half-an-hour rest and then they will work better for you, they will produce better." And there was some complaints of different natures. Seeing that everybody was afraid of everybody - even the Lithuanians were afraid that here was somebody from the ghetto and the ghetto was under the German Administration, so this was a contact you see, and in this way I was making contact for myself and I started to buy in the ghetto pens, fountain pens, Nobody needed fountain pens in the ghetto. I used to have a stone on which I used to modify the old pen, make it better, the nib of the pen, and I used to go out of the ghetto and sell them because you couldn't import anything there was a war going on. And I used to barter it for food, for better shoes, for socks etc. I used to go out and meet my friend with the stamps and send him to a shop which sold stamps and get some money out of it. I had contact with my old servant.

B M Was she still staying in your house or what happened to her?

X P No, no she was not staying at the house, the house was taken away by the Germans, but I knew where her old auntie was and I sent somebody there and she answered and she brought me something to eat. In this way I used to get a contact. It was already August 1943, and we heard rumours that the Germans don't need the ghetto anymore and the ghetto will be liquidated. And the liquidation of the ghetto meant that all of us would go to Panar and they would kill us. And then suddenly there was an offer. The able people can go to Estonia and in Estonia they need workers, they people to work in a forest where they have to build a railway to bring yellow coal from one place to another place where they make oil out of it. What 'Sasol' is doing now, the Germans did already in 1942/43 in Estonia. It's unbelievable.

B M I would just like to ask a few more questions about your schooling in terms of your inter-action with the non-Jews.

X P We were in a class of 40 and there were 7 Jews and all 7 were very prominent scholars which was normal in those times. The Jews always did better. We had a religious education studying the history of the Jews. The religious education besides this was only for those who attended Shul on the High Festivals. My father was a "Gaber" in a very small Shul - very old Shul - where I had my Barmitzvah, but we were not very religiously inclined. My father was a member of the Polish Socialist Party and was rather inclined to belong to the Rightest Zionist Organisation called "BETAR" and they were mostly Yiddish speaking. We had a young Jewish organisation who spoke Polish like you speak English now. It was called "MASSADA" and this belonged to the Revisionist Party of Jabotinsky. I was on the higher command of the organisation being their secretary.

B M When did you actually join Betar?

X P In 1934 and in Vilna this organisation was a very strong one. There were many other organisations. Vilna had a very active Jewish life. There were many organisations from Communists, Hashomir Hatzier, Poalei Zion, Bnei Akiva, Mizrachi and all kinds of organisations. Every kind of thought was perpetuated and cultivated in the town known as a town of Jewish specially Yiddish learning.

B M Were your friends mainly Jewish or did you have both?

X P My friends were mainly Jewish but I had one or two friends who were Poles with whom I had contacts through a hobby. I was a very ardent stamp collector until today and this was the contact which we had. Otherwise there was no socializing with Poles.

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B M Can I just ask you some questions before that?
 You were in contact with the Judenrat in Vilna.

X P Yes.

B M Did you know any of the leaders of the Judenrat for
 example the head of the Judenrat.

X P The man who helped me to get the job in the Works Department,
 was Samuel Gens, brother of Jacob Gens, and I met Jacob Gens
 several times. Jacob was the Commandant of the Police and
 he was the one who instituted, in 1943, meetings on Sunday,
 meetings of all the Brigadiers of all the leaders where he
 discussed with them - we were about 800 like myself - and
 discussed problems what and how, and when, and he was very
 famous in saying in Yiddish, "Mir weln iberleben" - "We will
 outlive them". And he would do everything possible to do it.
 I was full of admiration for this man, because he sincerely
 believed that he would outsmart the Germans - and they killed
 him. His best German friend with whom he drank and made him
 rich with goods with everything so that he would not kill so
 many, was a Gestapo man by the name of 'Weiss', he killed
 him, because he knew that if he will allow him another two
 days he will go to the forest and join the Partisans.

B M He knew that Jacob Gens would go to the forest.

X P He knew that Gens will go to the Partisans.

B M While you were in the ghetto did you have any contact with
 members of the partisan movement or with the?

X P I didn't have any contact. I knew that there is something
 but I didn't have any contact with them. Some friend of
 mine said to me, "we are going to the forest, what about you?"
 and I said, "I am too weak, I am too afraid, I have no
 strength to go for it". I was always a writer, I was
 always one of the delicate ones, I don't know why but this
 is how I was built up. My mind, my brain could take it,
 but not physically. And it's very possible, I believe in

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X P it from what I hear now what they went through in the forests, I would have perished there very quickly.

B M Do you know of the attitude of the people when you used to go out with the work parties - do you know what their attitudes were toward the Judenrat at all?

X P Of what people?

B M Of the people - when you went outside to the workers - is it the Jewish workers....?

X P Yes.

B M In the ghetto - their attitude towards the Judenrat as such. Did you know what they expressed what they felt.....?

X P The Judenrat today, by the historians and by those who survived, is taken as a very needed force in the Jewish life. In the time when everybody fought for himself, the Judenrat was very much hated. The Police was hated for helping the Germans. But if not for the help of the Police, the Germans would have killed more, would have instituted more discrimination, would have made life sharper and harder for everybody and the administration of the Judenrat enabled those who lived longer to survive, because if there would have been no administration it would have been the law of the jungle. And the Jews are even worse than the others when it comes to this kind of thing. We had in the ghetto an official Jewish hanging of four people, who murdered other people and the Jewish police hanged them. There were four of them. They were murderers - they murdered for gold, one murdered for food and they were caught and hanged. And this quietened those down a little bit who were, you know, because the intelligent people were quick to perish and the underworld was still strong who believed in Bolshevism. Some of them lived in the ghetto in better conditions than ever. They had everything that they wanted.

B M Can you just tell us a little bit of your religious life in the ghetto?

X P I cannot tell you anything - I was not religious.

B M Okay. Now you mentioned about going to Estonia. Can you carry on from there again.

X P Nobody wanted to go to Estonia because they were afraid that if they went to Estonia the same as some people who went to Kovno or Riga and instead went to Panar with the trains. So a group of Jewish policemen with a group of people whom they persuaded to go, went to Estonia and came back to relate to people what it's like. A big camp, a lot of food and very nice conditions, open fields and so on. And whoever wants to work will be alright. So then Gens called for volunteers and in the first days of September, 1943, after hearing what's going on in the ghetto that there are groups who want to fight.....

B M They want to fight who?

X P To fight the Germans because they wanted to liquidate the ghetto so they would fight and we had some people who had arms and everything. So I said to myself, "Xavier, get rid of the ghetto, go".

B M So from whom did you hear about the liquidation?

X P I went to my father and I said to him, "look I am going", and he said, "bless you, you go, don't worry about me, you go". And I went and I registered to go and I met a lot of people. We had 3½ days of a horrible train journey to Estonia because it was in one truck and there were about 40 people where only 8 horses were allowed.

B M Was it an open truck?

X P We had one piece of bread and one tin of food given to us for the 3 days and from time to time water. Sometimes the train used to stop and we used to go to relieve ourselves. It was horrible, but anyway.

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X P We arrived in cold, wet fields. It was so wet in this field in Vaivera. It was Vaivera in Estonia - V-A-I-V-A-R-A - that our tents were made on wooden poles and then a wooden plank because at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon the mist used to come up to our legs and this is the way we lived there for a couple of months, preparing for the railway. You can imagine myself weighing about 60 kilos - very thin - with 5 or 6 others carrying railway tracks. One is taller one is smaller, the taller has to take all the brunt and we had to carry it from one place to another. It was very hard work. And then one day the German Commandant said, "I need 200 people to work in the mines because we need the yellow coal. The place was called KUNDA, and in this camp there were about 1500 people.

B M How did you get to that camp - to Kunda?

X P We are still in Vaivara, but the Commandant said he needed people for Kunda. And I said to myself maybe the mine will be better. I was one of the first to step forward and say that I am volunteering. So he assembled about 200 people and then he said, "who can write German?", so somebody pointed out to me that I can write German. He remembered me as a 'schreiber'* as one of the clerks, and the German called me in and said, "can you write?", I said, "yes I write". So he first of all gave me a knock which is a..... they have this kind of - how do you call it in English - a leather long stick which you used to call.....?

B M A strap?

H M A whip.

X P A whip - yes but for a horse it is a whip. So he whipped me with this in my face and he said, "you must understand when I call who can write and you know that you can write, you must step forward, not somebody else must call you." So this was my first lesson.

B M Do you know his name?

*Yiddish for writer

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X P No, I don't remember his name. And then we went to Kunda and I was the 'schreiber' (writer) of the camp.

B M And what did you have to 'schreib'- what did you have to write?

X P I was a prominent person there. Because you know in a camp there is a* (which means the eldest of the Jews) and his assistant and then there is the one who is the technical man - who is an engineer for building and for all the utilities and so on and besides this there is the man who provides food and arranges the distribution. And then there is the man who has to write all about it - and I was the one who had to write all about it. So my job was a 'kushy' job. I had a table and chair, paper and pencil. I was already I didn't have to go out to the mine. I didn't have to go down and work hard. I was very happy about it. And I was a good 'schreiber' because I did a lot of things because my connection with the German official used the same psychology - didn't disclose that I somebody, because my father was educated in Germany I said to him. He always wanted me to understand the German culture. This German now brought me an extra piece of bread. He had discussions with me about culture.

B M Was your father with you at this stage?

X P My father was in another camp not knowing to me that he was there.

B M Ja, because you said goodbye to him.....

X P I was not aware when I said goodbye, "it was goodbye", and he went somewhere and that's that. And then came a time when the Commandant - KLEIST - something like that was his name - he became very very bad to us, extremely bad. A couple of us used to meet in the evenings to discuss what's going on. We knew that he is a drinker and when he was drunk he used to beat up the women - we had about 60 women working for us. We had a very good camp because we built ourselves a 'zalna' for a bath and we had very nice toilets and we had a group of tailors and shoemakers.

*German or Russian.

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X P Somebody was a very good plumber and somebody was a very good builder and we had one of the better camps for this particular time. Our life was not so bad because there was no danger of killing because we did a good job our boys worked together in the mines with Estonian miners and they co-operated and they helped the Jewish prisoners with food with everything. We felt if this will be like this and the Russians will come because they have been already going towards us, we will be liberated and everything will be alright.

B M What is the date now?

X P The date is now 1944.

B M What month?

X P The beginning of 1944 - September, October, November - no it was the end of 1943. It was winter. It was snowing and from blankets that they gave us our tailors made for everybody a coat because we never had a coat. We were in the paper clothing. Our clothing was made out of paper. And they made shoes - we had "klumpas" which is wooden "clogs" - and on snow you cannot walk in clogs. So what we used to do we used to steal from a nearby depot - we used to steal tyres - rubber tyres, press them out and put the rubber under the clogs so we were a little bit higher of the ground. And this man "Kleist" - yes . JOHAN KLEIST - that's the name, now it came to me, he was a criminal or something. He was in the S S. But he used to beat up the women, he used to beat up the men for the slightest thing and we wanted to get rid of him. And the eldest came to me and said, "Xavier you must write a letter in German and send it to the address where your reports go to". And the reports used to go to Riga - Latvia. And we used to send the reports of how much food they accepted and the sanitary status of the Jews. How many are sick etc., etc. We had an aktion there - one day about 5 doctors arrived (I am jumping but this is interesting) Five doctors arrived and one doctor, a German doctor, asked everybody to stand up in a row and used to go and look in the eyes of

X P

every man and woman and say, "you to the left, you to the left" And those people he took to the left, we knew that they are sick people and he looked only in the eyes and he saw in the eyes what sickness they had or something like this. And after the war I learned that there is some kind of a sign in your eyes and the doctor can see what is wrong. Anyway they took them away and there was one old man who was very religious in the camp and he kept all the Yomtovim and he didn't eat any meat and he only had bread and some kind of vegetables. We even made him a vegetable garden especially for him. And he had a son of about 22 who was also very religious, and when they took his father, the son stepped forward and said, "I am going with my father". Because they said that he was going to the sanatorium. So the doctor said, "no, you are not going, you are too young, you have to work". He said, "where my father goes I go". And he kicked him and he still wanted to go. So he said, "alright, you want to go, go. Put him on a truck. And when the truck came back in blood it was written... "vengeance". And we understood that something happened to them. They were killed - about 40 or 50 people from the camp. And on the truck written in blood was the word* "vengeance". And we understood that the young one wrote it.

B M

But how could he have written it?

X P

Perhaps he knew that they were going to kill them so he might have cut himself and wrote. You never no. You know we heard a story about it and it was a Yom Kippur day when it all happened and I remember that on this particular night we didn't eat at all and the "Yaks" the Russian transporters, we heard them coming far, far in the sky was this droning sound because this was the sound of the Russian transporters going towards the West.

Going back to the letter I had to write. I wrote the letter in German without saying who we are and what we are, saying as one of those that sees what is going on here. I must report to the Commandant that our Commandant Johan Kleist is having an affair with a Jewish woman.

*Yiddish or German for "vengeance"

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B M Was it true?

X P No it was not true. There was a Jewish woman who - we had one girl who was a little bit derranged and she committed suicide in the camp and we wrote the story that this woman was raped by him and she committed suicide afterwards. One day two people arrived, they didn't say what, they didn't say how and the Commandant was taken away and a new man arrived by the name of HANS BECKER. Now this Hans Becker came to the office, he was introduced to the camp that he was the Commandant and he was a very strict man and we must do the work - and if we work well he will be good to us. If not, he will punish and all these kinds of things. And he came into the office and asked who we were and the eldest introduced me and another man working with us and he said look, "I want the group of the prominent to come in and I must talk to you. Look, I don't want any trouble from you, and you will not have any trouble from me. I know the story of what happened to Kleist, I am not a man like this. If you will do what you have to do, go to work and make no struggle for me, then your lives will be alright and thank you very much". The first month was okay, the second month was okay and he came in and he said to the Kitchen man, "how much margarine do you have". He said, "about 50 packets". He said, "I want five packets every month. I want the kitchen to make me this and this. I want this and this to be done. It must be packed in a parcel and brought into the office." And in the office I had to put on stamps and write his home address - he used to send it home. He used to steal from us the meagre food we had. And he used to tell me I am not an assassin... by heart, I am doing this job because I have to. Everybody is stealing I am also stealing. I am a chemist - I am a chemist in a little town near the Polish border and they came to me and they said they are now occupying Poland would I like to have a big chemist. I said, "yes". So they gave me in a town in Poland - Bromberg, a chemist and I put there my assistant and three months later they came and said to me, "now that you have been given this, you must join the S S because you are now in a foreign country and you must be careful 'what and how', we must protect you, and we can only protect those people who

X P give us an oath for Hitler. So he said, "I gave the oath and I was told that I am alright I will not go to war!" And all the time they kept me I didn't go to war. I used to come to the exercises, to learning, to seminars and then one day they said to me I must go to Estonia to be a Commandant of a camp and this is why I am here. Now to my mind Hans Becker saved us from liquidation, because he kept the camp till the last moment as a protective camp, with good workers still doing good work and so on and he increased the food. He used to buy larger quantities of food for us and he allowed us to have whatever we wanted, there was no security. And as we heard that the Russians were coming, our committee on which there was a very important man by the name of Mr Meller, he is in Israel now, and this Mr Meller organised a group which will organise the mines and we will leave the camp and go to the mines and stay there until the Russians will come and we will then be saved - so the Germans will not kill us. And Hans Becker said I agree with it and if you don't mind I will go with you because I don't want to go to Germany - Germany is "kaput". And of course we said "yes, yes we want you to go with us." And we already arranged with the Estonian workers that they will help us. When we discovered for example the date would have been the 7th - I don't remember the month, the year was 1944. About three days before this date the 7th when we should have left, three young S S men arrived at the camp and said to Becker that he is needed for a conference in TALLIN because the Russians are very near and we must evacuate and we must prepare for evacuation - and he had to go. So he took the train and he went to Tallin and the three men remained with us and they put us on alert and we stood "on appeal" - its called an appeal - we stood for at least seven hours. They didn't allow us to eat, they didn't allow us to do anything, we just stood there for seven hours.

B M Sorry I wanted to ask you - was this only the Jews or was it together with the Estonians?

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X P The Estonian soldiers were outside, they were the soldiers guarding our camp.

B M And they were the ones

X P The Estonians who had to help us were mining workers whom we meet at work 3 kilometres from the camp underground. We had food prepared for three weeks, we had bedding, we had everything, we had carbide lamps, we had candles. Everything what we needed to stay for four weeks. Now it comes and this man said, "alright - we have got the order now, you can relax, sit down, on the soil - we sat down. They called out every fifth person and said, "go to the rooms, make a parcel of your things, because you are going now to Tallin, another camp, and leave everything that you don't need". And when these five used to go another soldier used to come and take them out of the camp to the train and in this way they evacuated the camp by themselves. We never saw Hans Becker. They put us in the train and locked the train and the train went with us to Tallin.

B M You were also on that train?

X P Ja. On this train we stopped at a place called "KLOOGA" and we had an intake of new people from Klooga, and in our truck we got about four of them and they started to pray that they are blessed by G-d that they are in this train. So we couldn't understand what was going on and he said, "we are the ones whom they did not finish. A lot of people were taken alive in Klooga and put into big pieces of wood-- one on top of the other and burned, because they didn't have time to kill everybody with shooting. And we were the ones who were outside the camp. When we came into the camp they said to us you are going to the station." Amongst those who were burned there and killed was a poet a brother of my late wife. He was a very talented poet, he wrote a lot of Yiddish poetry. He belonged to the group "Jung Vilna" Young Vilna, and his name was LEIB ROSENTHAL.

B M And the language which you spoke at your home, was that also Polish?

X P At home I spoke three languages - one was Polish, Russian and French.

B M French?

X P French.

B M How come?

X P My mother insisted that I should learn French because she as also educated in French. She didn't like to talk too much Polish.

B M Because she was Russian or what?

X P She was Russian and she had an education from France and my father was also very pleased about it.. He said you must always learn a language. And I also had some kind of a basic knowledge of English.

B M That you had learnt in school or...?

X P In school - about four years in school and Latin.

B M And your knowledge of Yiddish?

X P My knowledge of Yiddish was approximately non-existent - perhaps a little bit of cursing or grammatic expressions but otherwise only in the ghetto did I learn to speak Yiddish and even to write Hebrew letters prior to this I was not interested in learning it. I was one of those who even was propagating in a small way latinizing Hebrew. Because although I spoke several other languages, Hebrew came to me in a very difficult way, I don't know why. perhaps I didn't try to much being occupied with other things.

X P So we learned that something happened in this Klooga - it was a big camp. We arrived in Tallin and we were pushed onto a big ship - a big passenger ship and the German army was on top and we were at the bottom of the ship - and at the bottom of the ship we had nowhere to lie down, where to sit and it was a horrible journey. To me it was the most beautiful journey because somebody came up to me and said, "listen, your father the doctor is on the other side." And I met my father again. He was in Klooga - he was one of those who was saved.

B M Do you know how many of them that were saved?

X P I don't know - not many in Klooga.

B M I wanted to ask you something else. While you were in either of your camps had you heard about the mass murders of other Jews?

X P Well we knew that they are murdering them - we knew that so many people went to Auschwitz.

B M Had you heard of the place named Auschwitz?

X P Yes, of course, because some of our people went to Auschwitz. And some of our people went to Auschwitz and Auschwitz didn't accept them and they came to Estonia. Some people from Vilna were sent to Auschwitz - women - and they were not accepted there because it was full or whatever I don't know the reason that they had to come to Estonia. They needed workers here so they sent the whole transport back to Estonia.

B M And they told you stories about the

X P They told stories that they heard about this and that. We knew there is a liquidation. We knew because the Germans - this Kleist used to say - "you will all be killed".

B M And you believed it?

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X P Of course we believed it.

B M Okay.

X P We believed in it - we knew, especially I, I was more knowledgeable than the others because I knew what's going on - we had discussions about it. Groups of people with whom we sent out to work didn't come back. It was bad to know - but it was better not to know. Anyway so we are now already coming from Tallin to Danzig. We arrived in Danzig.

B M Do you remember the date - did you know the date?

X P No I don't remember the date. We arrived in Danzig and we saw the Russians - the prisoners of war working in Danzig - and we were told not to have anything to do with them. We were standing there waiting for a barge which came in. They put us on the barge and they took us to a Concentration Camp "STUTTHOF". Now all the time we were in Labour Camps, this was a KL - a Concentration Camp - and this is the difference between the two camps. In this camp it was written with big letters "ARBEIT MAG FREI", and of course we understood what it meant and the first thing what we knew that everything we had was taken away from us. We went through this washroom and when we came out naked we were given the clothes which was the paper clothes.

B M Different clothes now?

X P We did not get our own clothes, our own shoes - nothing.

B M Were these stiped or....?

X P Striped, yes. These were the striped ones.

B M But different to what you had in the other camp?

X P Different to the other camp. In the other camp it was entirely different. So we got these clothes. My father

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X P always used to say to me the most important thing is to have good shoes - and I was looking for shoes.

B M Why did he say that to you?

X P Well he knew from the First World War which he was a part of it, that shoes are an important thing in marching and in being somewhere with other people. And I was looking for good shoes and I got the horrible shoes, and in the first three days at the camp I gave my bread away for a pair of good shoes - I exchanged it with somebody - but they were broken underneath because the Germans looked in the shoe to see if there is any gold or something so they broke the shoe. But I had good shoes - I was happy. And I was in a barrack and I saw my father in another barrack and I met a nice fellow, a very tall fellow who was standing next to me so we were assigned to the same bed - you know what a bed is - its a wooden place where to sleep and we have to sleep like 69 - my head his feet - his head my feet on some kind of a straw. He said to me, "my name is 'MALINKEN', Malinken means 'little', and he was taller than I am - 6 foot something. He was a housepainter from Kelner - from Kovno. He said to me, "listen, we will perish here". We went out for work, the work was in a group to take big stones from one place to another and then put it back.

B M So that was your work?

X P That was the whole work and there was beating and it was very bad. So Malinken says to me, "listen we must think something up to stay inside not to be outside because the weather is starting to be bad - it's already October.

B M October 1944.

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X P 1944, yes. I said, "look, what must we do?" He said, "look I am a painter, perhaps we can get painting done". So I met the "karpo" of this barrack, he was a German criminal.

B M Do you remember his name?

X P No, I don't. He liked it only when the Jews sang songs for him - "Die Zun Vergeit en Flaumen" - it was an old song of the prisoners - "that the sun is going down, but the sun will come again, but not for me because I will be dead". He loved it. On a good occasion I came up to him and I said, "you know I have an idea which will make you a famous man in this camp". He said, "what is it - talk, talk quickly". I said, "you know, when a German passes by a barrack, it stinks with urine. Why don't you get us some of the tar. We are painters, we will paint out the walls where people stand and 'do it' (urinate) there will be no stink. "I don't like the idea". I said, "okay". The next day he called me in and he said, "here is the tar - do mine first". I was smiling to myself, and we started to paint it and we didn't allow people them to do anything in this place and we painted it and it was beautiful and of course the German passes by, the karpo calls him in and says, "you see, I am doing everything for the health of the people, look how nice." "Ah! that's good". So he called another karpo from another barrack and said, "after they finish here they must go there". We had 24 barracks to do.

B M So where did you actually put the tar on the walls.....?

X P On the wall of the latrine.

B M Oh, I see.

X P There is a latrine on one side - on this side there is washing basins and when the water from the washing comes it goes by the canal into where the latrine is and goes away. You see, when you wash in the morning there is no soap, so you just do your washing like this.

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X P Then, "schnel, schnel", quick, quick, quick. But the water is there so its coming down and this is when we had the idea to do something. It was not tarred, it was just whitewash and we had the idea of putting on tar because in Poland in the 'dorpies' in places like this there was no tiles there was also tar. So we did the tarring.

B M Did it really keep the smell out?

X P Yes, the tar smell is stronger. So when we did this we were already aloud to be in the camp. So when there was rain we were in the camp under a roof. Of course we had to be on the appeal for 2½ hours and we had to stand.

You know all kinds ofwhich the Germans had against us we had to stand, but we were somebody because I came to the kitchen and I said there must be some places where you want to tar your kitchen. So we got to tarring the kitchen. We were now in the kitchen so we could get some potatoes. I was already a little bit known, my face known, my number was known, you see. So we had things a little bit better because when we used to take bread

B M Oh, now you were allowed to take bread?

X P We were to take bread four of us. A big board - a board like twice this table and they put bread on it and you take the board and you take it to the barracks and then the 'karpo' gets three people to cut it in pieces. So when we are the ones who are taking the bread, so the chef of the kitchen says, "will you take care of the bread, yes, nobody will steal the bread, no, you are responsible for 42 pieces, yes, alright here is a quarter for four of you". So we already had an extra piece of bread. So it is already prominence. And then my father comes to me and says to me, "I got a job as a doctor in a place called "Königsberg" and I am going". And he said goodbye. I said, "wait, do you want soup?" I had soup near the tar - where we kept all the tar - from the tar I cleaned out a nice metal box and when I had extra soup from the kitchen I used to keep it.

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X P I said, "here I have some soup for you". So he ate it, we kissed and he went with this group which had to go.

B M Do you know what the date was?

X P No. It was some time in September/October 1944. And as my father went I felt I don't have anybody here to stay in this camp. And there were times already when people started talking that a big camp like this when the Russians are nearer they will liquidate all of us. And there is an announcement that they need welders to go to Danzig in a small camp. So I said to Malinken, "Malinken, aren't we welders?" So Malinken said, "we are welders already, we are tradesmen." And we volunteered to go to this place. The place was called "B-U-R-G-R-A-B-E-N" - Burgraben, near Danzig.

B M How did you get there?

X P By barge and by train.

B M And how long did the barge take?

X P A day, because Stutthof was in the lake district not far from Danzig. So we came there - it was a nice camp - with a hospital, with a small sick room and a Jewish Doctor and they needed people who will work in the harbour. We came to the harbour - it's a magnificent big place, all kinds of people working there. Italians, Portuguese, Greeks, British people, but we were not allowed to talk to them. We were taken to another place because they were all prisoners of war working in the harbour, in the stockyard. And we come to a big hall where we have to do some work as welders and there is an old man, a German, who was in charge, and he said, "well, who is the forman, who is the welder?" And one man comes up and says "I was a welder about 35 years ago". He says, "do you know the new machines". He said, "no". "How did you weld?" (Inaudible)
"Alright, so I will show you how to do it, I will give you

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X P six lessons for the next six days." And we all learned what we had to do, stupid we were not. So it was very quick that I knew how to keep my mask and how to weld steel to steel. On the seventh day he said, "you never were welders and you never will be welders, but it's okay with me. I am an old socialist

B M This German?

X P Yes. "I sympathise with all of you, the German is 'kaput' but I had to join the party because otherwise I would have never had a good job, and that's that." We didn't answer. And he said, "look every day (we were six of us) I will bring something and I will put it in the waste basket, and every day one of you will come in and each day there will be another one to come and take something for yourself." And he used to put some bread, sometimes a piece of wurst, sometimes something from the last meal which he had, but always something, because we only used to get soup and a piece of bread that's all.

B M Were you staying in.....

X P No, we used to come by train from Burgraben - about half an hour - a small train and they used to walk through Danzig Street, and come into the camp to work for the harbour. And when he knew us a little bit more he said to us, "listen, now that you are already welders and you will soon go to weld our boats under water, don't weld to good, make it very lightly, cover the hole very slightly so when it comes under the pressure of water it will open and the boats will come back and our boys will not go to war. So what, the war is finished why must they go and die."

B M What was the man's name?

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X P I don't know, I don't remember. He brought us once a piece of soap and on it was written RJF - "Rein Judische Vet". And he said, "if you don't believe me we know that this is made of Jewish bodies."

B M Why did he bring you that fat?

X P Just to show it to us.

B M For what reason?

X P I don't know, the German thought that we would be excited by seeing RJF on the piece of greenish/gray soap. I have never forgotten it. And so we were welders for a little while. I was upset that we were separated because Malinken got the night shift and I got the day shift and then we changed so we used to meet always somehow in the streets of Danzig when the group was going out and I was going in. And he would say, "the potato is there, go in and fetch it", things like that - we were very very close to each other.

B M And there were only Jews in this?

X P Only Jews - this was a Jewish camp. And one day I was not clever enough and a piece of metal went into this finger.

B M The thumb, the left hand thumb.

X P In the thumb, the left thumb. Because you keep your mask you keep with your left hand and you work with a stick of metal in the right hand. And it went into my thumb and in about one day it got swollen and the doctor had to cut and I had to be in the camp for about 3½ weeks.

B M What in Burgraben?

X P In Burgraben.

B M In the camp or in the hospital?

X P In the camp, in the hospital I was for a day. In my place. So I saw Malinken many times and then they gave me a job. I had to clean with the good hand. The right hand was the good hand. So I used to clean.

B M Clean what?

X P Clean potatoes and clean the floors. Do the jobs like a servant in a place because a lot of people used to work and in the camp were only a couple of Germans. One night the guardsman called me in and said, "how many people are still there?" "About seven," I said. "Make a group of four we will go and steel potatoes from some farmer".

B M This German said to you?

X P The German guard - he was as hungry as we were. And you know the farmers, the peasants, during the winter they used to put the potatoes in the soil, in the ground and make a little bit of a mound of soil to protect it, to keep it warm. So we used to go but we didn't take anything no knives nothing, we used to take the frozen earth with our fingers and dig, dig, dig until we got to it. So we got some potatoes and were bringing the potatoes - there were five of us - he promised us we could also have some potatoes - and we came to the guard and the same guard was not there, there was another guard and he said to us, "ah! you are stealing the potatoes, leave all the potatoes here". And they beat us up very badly and one thought that I still have potatoes, and I didn't, and he pushed me down into the snow and with one foot he kept my feet or my neck - I don't remember - and with the rifle he 'hakt' me on my spine - "give away the potatoes - give the potatoes where do you hide it - where did you left it". And I was shouting that I didn't. Anyway another guard came in and said that you are making too much noise. Have you taken all the potatoes from them, let's have now a good bite and this was between the two of them they made it up. One to call us, to go for the potatoes and the other one to pretend that he knows nothing. We learned about it.

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B M Now the next day?

X P The next day I couldn't move - I couldn't move and the doctor didn't want to make any trouble with the guardsman because he would have killed me. And he said, "you must go out to work and I will write a note for you and so on".

B M Was he a Jewish doctor?

X P He was a Jewish doctor, I forgotten his name. He is still alive somewhere in Australia I think. So two boys helped me out and kept me among themselves and so the three of us marched together. And I came there with this note in German for the foreman that I wanted to work but the situation of mine is not so good (inaudible) and I showed him that the finger was already better but I told him that something happened to my spine I don't know if I slept bad that's why I cannot move. So he said, "oh, I have it all the time, but I am going to work"; the German said. Anyway Malinken was free that same night and he got some oil or something I don't remember what it was and he massaged my back and I started working and so on and three weeks later we were taken from the camp in Burgraben and we marched - it was the evacuation. No more work. The Russians were already coming in. It was already 1945, February, just a moment - end of January beginning of February, and we were marching towards Germany.

B M They told you this?

X P They told us. We know where is West and where is East, the sun is there. In the snow some people cannot make it and they lay down and the guards shoot them. We walk during the night only. During the day we are closed in a school or in a place like a Church. The food is very scarce because each town doesn't give too much food. A little bit of water and the water is cold and everything is cold and we are freezing.

B M How many of you were there altogether - started off on this journey?

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B M You did have a barmitzvah?

X P Yes, well a barmitzvah is the same as you go to Cheidar and you have to learn like a monkey, what the teacher says. My teacher was a young talmudic scholar who taught me to say what I had to say. He even wrote letters to me in Latin. So I learned it by heart and that's how it was. And the same day when I had my barmitzvah and we had the lekach, honey and apples at the Shul - at 2 o'clock when it was all finished I went to see the film "Dr Jeckal and Mr Hyde". That is how I celebrated my barmitzvah. It was not a big event.

B M Can you tell us a little bit more about your Youth Movement activities.

X P Well the Youth Movement - you would have called it today a Scout Movement - but the Scout Movement which we had we did everything what the Polish scouts did and we added to it a little bit of entertainment to attract the young people to our club and besides this we had long walks into the country, we had sports and the knowledge of course of Zionism, was the most important. The knowledge of Hertzl. The poems of Jabotinsky and his learnings and also being involved in geography and history of Palestine and all the Youth Movements and the ideas through which Betar is a "rightwing organisation" and we learned to discriminate between what is socialism and what is who didn't want Palestine and what is communism which was negating the whole story of placing Berribijan as the most important for the Jews in Soviet Russia.

B M I was going to ask you did you have contact with otehr organisations?

X P Yes, we had contact with other organisations.

B M Other Zionist organisations?

X P I am talking about the Zionist organisations.

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X P About 400.

B M All men?

X P All men, no women. And we are walking again and suddenly we stop because we see there is a camp and there is nobody in the camp - its empty. So the two guardsmen, S S men go first and look and there is nobody and they see that there is some food. So they said alright, "this part go here and this part go there". And so they divided us up into different sections. We go into the camp and there is a telephone and they phone up. And one of the Germans when we were marching he took a fancy to Malinken - he was a big tall man, walking and helping - and he says to him, "you, come here, you will be in charge here, you will arrange everything". So he said, "okay". "Unfortunately, he said, we are all doomed to be here for four weeks, this camp is a typhoid camp. You went into a camp which is a typhoid camp. The people that were here were all typhoid cases. They were burned, we learned about it. Not to spread the infection all over these people were burned. So we were in a typhoid camp.

B M After how many nights of walking did you get to the typhoid camp? Did you know the name of the camp, or what it had been called before?

X P No, I don't remember. There is a name but I don't remember. So we are now in the camp and we don't have any food.

B M It's in Poland still?

X P No in Germany. We don't have food, so the Germans killed a horse.

B M One of their horses?

X P One of their horses or they got it - anyway we know that they killed a horse. So we had some food from the horse now. But people started to die and we didn't have where to put them. They didn't want to burn anybody they said we must make big pieces of ground opened up and put them

X P in and that's all. Then a truck comes in with lime, white lime, because they know that it is necessary so that the infection will go. And in the camp there is bad feelings about everything because there is no food. And the piece of bread that we got was very small.

B M It was about 2 square inches or something.

X P Something like this, just enough for a tooth. And people are falling - just walk and fall down dead. I felt sick. I will describe it to you. A room like 15 x 15 - double of this room let's say. It's a big dinning room. In a double room like this we were about 80 people lying on the floor - all of us sick. Screaming, convulsions. Doing everything under ourselves. There was a big stink. Somebody has to go out to the latrine when you can still walk and he walks on people because everybody is squeezed next to each other. Everybody is covered with lice.

B M Did you also have lice?

X P I know that for 2½ days I was screaming and shouting and I didn't know where I was. Malinken was so desperate that he broke a window at night and took me on his shoulder and ran out of the camp through the snow, through the forest until he spotted a house. He knocked on the door - they didn't want to open but they opened. It was an old couple, Germans, about 70 or 80, and he told them if they will not take care of the sick man and him when the Russians will come he will tell them that they were against us and so on. He found spirits - 80% spirits - you know alchohol and he rubbed me and he forced me to drink it with water and he saved my life.

B M Why did he make you drink it with water?

X P Because he wanted to kill everything that was in me - all the bacteria.

X P In the olden days he told me that he remembered stories of the grandfather or granduncle talking about the typhoid during the First World War, the lice and everything and the best way to clear it was spiritus - alchohol. He didn't know if it had to be drunk, but he understood that the lice are all over in your body already the eggs and everything - so to kill it it must be a strong potent thing and he did it with this. He massaged me and so on. They washed me with hot water and I was laying for the first time in many many years on five big German cushions in a high bed like in the old German homes. And as I came to myself about 3 or 5 days later and I was better, the Russians were already in the camp. And when the Russians came to the camp they asked who we were - we were told afterwards by those who were there, who survived - and they answered, "we are Jews". And the Russian officer said, "Ha! Hitler didn't kill you yet". And the other Russian said, "don't worry we will feed you to the dogs, who wants the Jews". That was the welcome of the liberators.

B M Do you remember the dates - do they remember the dates?

X P It was end of February, 1945.

B M The Russians didn't kill them?

X P No, they didn't kill them they took them all to the hospital in a nearby town called 'LAUENBURG' formerly POMARANIA, a district of Germany near the Baltic sea. So I am still weak and a group of Vilna people attached themselves to the house and I was lying there for about two weeks until I came to some kind of walking possibility.

B M Sorry this wasn't the same town or same place where you had actually gone into that house with the Germans. How did you get from that little house

X P Right, from the little house when the Russians arrived and so on, Malinken took me to the town called Lauenberg which was approximately lets say 5.kl. from the place. It was a nice town, big town, Lauenberg in which nearby camps were liberated and we learned that there were Vilna girls - suddenly we learned that there were Vilna girls nearby liberated and Hungarian girls and we said to them why must you still be in the camps come to town - be in town because we were afraid. The time of liberation was on the 10th March, 1945, by the Russians, now I remember. And the Russians were raping every girl from the age of 10 up to 90. They did not care what happened but they were just going around raping. And there was no difference to them if you were a survivor or not - a Jewess or not - if you were a woman a girl, 'give'. That was their motto. They were the first ones to go to the front and they hadn't seen women for a long time and they grabbed them and they were the occupiers of the land. They used to burn the town. They used to destroy everything what was German and they used to rape all the women and most of those people were sick with venearial decease and this was the hate which they had. But when you are lusty for it and there is no punishment for it what is the difference if you got a Jewish girl. So we tried to get our girls out in our three-storey building which we occupied - we were a group of Vilna people about 10 of us and we had about 5 girls on the 2nd floor, barricaded. One day two of the Russians came in and I was there

B M Is this already

X P This is already March 1945. Its already liberated - we were free people - and they came and said where are the girls. So we said, "there are no girls". "We know that there are girls". And he takes out his gun - revolver and said, "I will shoot you if you will not let us to the girls". And luckily, you know, we invited one Jewish Major who was a doctor, to talk to us - to tell us what knews and so on - and he was passing by and he heard a commotion and he saw somebody come out and call for him and he said, "what is going on here?" And I said in Russian, "I told them that

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X P we don't have any girls here and they want to kill me because I am not giving them any girls, we don't have any German girls, we don't have any Jewish girls". The Major knew that there were girls because he met them already and discussed with them different things and so on. So he said to the two soldiers, "give me your names and so on and out". The next day they were sent to the front. He told us about it that he did it. The girls were very very nice about it because he saved their lives. But one of the girls became sick - typhoid - so I took the old medicine. I looked for some spiritus and I massaged it all over the girl who was blushing but I did my job properly and I saved her life and in consequence she gave me two nice daughters for it - THIS WAS MY WIFE - and this how it happened.

B M I would just like to ask you some questions about your liberation. What was the first thing that you actually wanted to do once you were liberated - what did you do actually - did you know where you were going to go to besides having gone to this house and met up with the woman who became your wife.

X P Look, I was brought to the house because I was sick. When the liberator's said that we can do anything that we want, I realised that I must look for my family - find my father. My mother was in Paris. So my mind was that I must stay as far away from Vilna because I don't need to go to Vilna, I had nobody in Vilna. So I went to the office of the Provisional Government of the Russians and I spoke to them and they said to me, "well you speak a good Russian where are you from". I said, "my mother was Russian". "Can you write Russian?". I said, "of course I can write Russian". "Can you write Polish?" I said, "yes, I was with the Polish Newspaper". "So you were with the Newspaper, so you can write." "Come here, come here". And he called somebody and in came a man and introduces himself and he was the Mayor of the town - appointed Mayor - a member of the Communist Party.

X P What is his profession - a shoemaker. Now that the workers of the world came to power he was already in power. He said, "I need somebody to translate for me because my Russian is not too good and I need somebody to write and to understand the orders which come in. You don't mind helping me?" I said, "I don't mind". And so I became his Secretary, again I am a 'schreiber'.

B M For how long?

X P I was a 'schreiber' in Lauenberg for about a month and I realised that a lot of people don't want to go back to Russia. Because the order was that when you belong to this territory, you must go back to the territory where you are from. So when people came to the office and said can you help me I am from there and there but I would rather go to the other side to the West. I said yes we will write a document, you don't have any documents we will write a document that you were born there and this is what we did we helped some people. And some people were against it because they wanted to go back and some friends didn't want to go back. So they came and made a row about it and I had an argument with my Mayor who said, "why are you writing false papers for people". I said, "because I need them in Poland, not in Russia". "Ah, now I understand no that's clever". And then one day he said to me, "you must go to the town of Bromberg because you must do this, this and that". I said, "can I take my wife with me?".

B M When did you get married?

X P I was married there in 1945, in Lauenberg.

B M What is her name?

X P My wife?

B M Yes.

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X P C-H-A-Y-E-L-E - Chayele, and her maiden name was Rosenthal. She became a very famous Jewish actress.

B M So were you married by a Rabbi or a Civil marriage?

X P Civil marriage. So I said to him, "I don't want to leave my wife alone here after all this, she is a survivor and we don't want to be separated." "No, of course take her, take her I will write her a note so that you can take her with." You see you couldn't travel on a train without a notice from an official. I wrote myself this notice and stamped and signed it. We went there and there was a Jewish committee there.

B M In Bromberg?

X P In Bromberg - Poland, there was a Jewish committee and we met a lot of people and somebody said to my wife, "we know you, aren't you performing, aren't you doing concerts". She said, "no I am not". "But you should". So she said, "but I have a sister still". They said, "yes but your sister is already in another town - she is in Lodz". So my wife said, "oh, then I must go to Lodz and I have to go back". So some of the people said to her that she must be in a concert and that they have connections with the radio and she should do something over the radio. She said that before she went to Lodz to see her sister she would do something on the radio. And this was arranged. Now I took her to the radio

B M What radio?

X P Polish radio in Bromberg. The building of the radio station was near a park - a garden park - and I said I am very nervous about this thing you go on your own and I will walk in the park you will meet me there. The park was full of flowers and a person doesn't see this kind of things so I wanted to be on my own.

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X P It was already April. And I walked and I walked in the park and I see somebody very familiar to me in a uniform of a Russian officer, walking and passing by. I turned around and he turned around and he said to me, "Piatka is that you?" I said, "yes, but you must excuse me, I have just had typhoid, I remember your face but I don't know who you are". He looked at me and said, "I was your Editor for the newspaper, what do you mean you don't remember me". I said, "Major you are Sosnovsky?" He said, "yes I am, what are you doing here". I told him the story in five minutes and he said to me "I need you, I have a newspaper here which is called 'THE FREE POLAND' and I am the editor and I need people like you".

B M Was he a Jew?

X P No, no, he was a Pole - a communist. He said, "I need you, you must work with me, what are you doing now?". I said, "I am a clerk in the". "There, you don't need it, you are an important man I know you". He asked me for my documents and I told him that I didn't have any documents and that I just came from the camps. So he said that he would have documents made. So I told him that my wife was in the building. We went into the building upstairs and they all stood up - because a Major in those days a Russian Major - they all used to serve. My wife just finished and I introduced her to him and she said to him, "you know I have a problem Major, my sister is in Lodz and I want to see her". He said, "all done, there is a car going to Lodz when do you want to go, tomorrow?". He arranged for me a flat - an apartment. He got a car for me, he fixed up a job with payments with a uniform with a status. I became somebody suddenly. And this is how I got back to my profession.

B M How long were you a journalist for?

X P There?

B M Yes.

X P Till 1947

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B M

In Bromberg?

X P

No, no, not in Bromberg. We were working in Bromberg for about 3/4 months and then I was in LIGNICA, that was the headquarters. Then I got sick and he sent me to warmbaths because my back started to get bad and I needed help. These baths were near YELENajoora. It's called 'HIRSCHBERG' in German. Yelenajoora means springbaths. This place was beautiful. There was a hospital and a doctor who took care of me and there was also a physiotherapist and so on. And it was there that I was appointed as editor to the local newspaper. Then my wife started to play in Jewish theatre. She was in Breslau, which was 3 hours by car - I had my own car. Then one day a friend of mine said to me - a Jewish friend who was with the security - "Xavier there is an investigation. You were in Vilna in 'BETAR'. You were never a communist you were never in the party. Now you are with a newspaper - a party newspaper - what is your status. Do you belong to the party or not?" I said, "you know what, I will still have to reconsider it to belong to the party or not." So he said, "yes but you know you must be a very good party man. You were in the Jewish fascist movement, so you must be very careful". During my work as a newspaper man, I was very friendly with some newspaper people in the Capital in Warsaw and I arranged that I would like to go and see my mother because I had no news from Paris. May I be sent as a correspondent to the United Nations Assembly in Paris in 1947/48. And this friend of mine said of course we will arrange for you Xavier you gave us such a beautiful time when we came to Yelenajoora to be in the mountains and in the snow and I arranged a lot of things there for them. I was a judge in motor racing - rallys and so on. You know like a newspaper man is something in the town and it was a small town of about 25 000 made up of Poles and Germans and in the meantime something happened. My wife was playing in the theatre and the most important impressario in the world - a Jewish impressario from America arrived to see the Jews of Poland and he heard about her and he arranged an audition for her and he said to her I will arrange for your papers to play in Paris and then you will

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X P come to America to be my wife. She said but I have a husband. So he said what does he do he is a newspaper man, can we make him as a Rabbi, because as a Rabbi I can arrange for him to go to America, but as a newspaper man it is very difficult. But perhaps I can arrange for you to go to Paris. So she said whatever you can arrange, arrange. And in the meantime I not knowing about it was arranging something for myself to go to Paris. Because I wanted to see our flat, I wanted to see my mother - perhaps she was alive, perhaps not. I went through all kinds of channels so that I could find out something about her - no news. The letters came back - no news. But I wanted to know what happened. It so happened that we left in May

B M In 1947?

X P In 1947.

B M What was the name of the impressario that came?

X P Sol Hurok - there was a film about him. He was a very big impressario. He discovered people like Chaliapin, Pavlova. He was the most important man. He died about 15 years ago. In New York where people used to ask for big things he used to arrange it - ballet, opera.

B M And what plays did your wife act in was it only Yiddish theatre or was it

X P Yiddish, survival, ghetto songs. She was playing in the theatre in the ghetto.

B M Was she a singer as well?

X P She was a singer and a comedian. So the end of the story is that I got my passport for two weeks. I left the house as I leave it here, you see, a house like this with books with everything, with a piano. I left it and I went into the train and my wife was also on the train with her passport on her name, not on mine, and we left Poland.

B M Just like that?

X P I will give you an example of something which we used to do very often. When a prominent speaker used to come and they had a meeting somewhere we used to go to the meeting - in the morning or the night before - and place white, blue flags and streamers and install pigeons with white and blue streamers and took them out when the speakers started to talk. Just to show the Jews of Vilna that "red" is not the colour they must go for, although Vilna was a town of 75,000 Jews where approximately 80% were poor people, workers - and to them they would talk of socialism and communism which was very, very strong. Many of the Vilna people went to the Polish concentration camps - they were communists and workers for the "Red". We used to repel very strongly. Our movement used to go out on the 1st of May against the "marchers" and throw at them white and blue papers and when they went past we started singing "Hatikva". It was very active and very buoyant and it was very - it reminded me something of what the UDF is doing now today here. Because we had the same feelings about it.

B M How did people respond to your actions e.g. say on "May Day" or even

X P Look there were fights and some of them used to get hurt badly. In some cases there were fights that I haven't seen in any other country. We used to take away their girlfriends for example. But it was big fun - when you are young it's okay. Of course at the University we had other things to do and took things more seriously.

B M Before we get to that I want to ask you just another question. Did you ever want to go to Palestine?

X P Yes, yes I even participated in a march. I wanted to go to Palestine and I applied to the Haifa Technion in 1938 and I was accepted. As a matter of interest the only document I had was being a matriculant and being a first-year student at the University, because after the war I didn't have any other documents and this one in Haifa they had it in the archives, so I got it. And my picture as a young man.

X P Just like that. With a typewriter and a camera and two changes of clothing. And my wife had in her hair \$100 which I changed my old money into \$100 and the whole irony of my survival is that when we reached West Germany and we saw the first German policeman on the station, we cried from happiness that we left the communist empire, the oppressors, because the life under communism is the worst life every man can have and we experienced it and "now we are free". We are in Paris - we were under the auspices of JOINT - American Joint Committee, who helped us. My wife played in the theatre. I was at the United Nations. The Secretary to the Ambassador - the Polish Ambassador - who was also there, was a friend of mine from school - from Vilna who was a Communist, whom I didn't remember but he remembered that once he had some literature when we were about 16 and he asked me to hide it and I was not under suspicion, he was. And I did hide it for him and he said to me that he had never forgotten it but I remember that I did hide it because his mother had a cinema and we used to go there for free so I hid it for him. But he was now the Secretary - a very important man, he fought in Spain in 1938. He didn't do his matric but he went to fight for communism in Spain and afterwards he was in Russia and when the Russians occupied Poland again he was already an important man. And he arranged for me a job in a Polish Newspaper in Paris.

B M Despite the fact that you weren't a communist and everything else?

X P They needed people - they needed people who could write. And there was nothing wrong with me. I wrote back a letter saying that I got the job and here is my mother's place and son and so on and I would like to stay here a couple of years. And I stayed in Paris until 1951 - until the last day I worked for the newspaper.

B M And did you find your mother there - do you know what happened to her?

Interview with Mr X Piatka

X P

The story of my mother is a very interesting one. My mother had good connections with White Russians and they made out her papers as a White Russian not a Jewess. She was helping a lot of Jews a lot of friends bringing them food, buying for them, instigating, going around and so on - and three months before the liberation, I was told, that she was caught in a flat together with the other Jews and the Gestapo took her away. I went to the Minister of the deportees and I went to everybody who could help. Look I was so many years in Paris - and I couldn't get anymore information. Three years ago I learned from a book that?..... Klarsveld, who had something to do with this man from Lyon - the barber of?..... that she wrote a book about the deportees from France - because the French officials didn't want to disclose that they were involved in helping the Nazis, but Mrs Weil who became - she was from Auschwitz, a Jewess, she became the Minister of education, through her Mrs Klarsveld got hold of the archives which the Germans and the French kept. And I wrote to the Institute which Mrs Klarsveld has and the answer came to me three years ago - my mother's name, the date of her birth, where she was caught. She was taken to a camp in Drancy near Paris - taken to Auschwitz with a group of 170 women - she was gassed on this and this date. This was when I learned what really happened to my mother.

B M

Did your wife find her sister in Lodz?

X P

My wife found her sister in Lodz. She brought her sister with her husband to Yelenajoor where I was. I arranged for them to have an apartment next to us. I arranged for her to have everything that she needed like one family. When my wife was playing theatre all over, she provided the food and cooked and everything. She had a little baby - a daughter whom we loved - we still love her. She is now a mother of grown-up children in Israel. She is the Secretary to the library of the University of Tel Aviv - her name is ..?..... And when the time came when we went to Paris, I made a notarial occupation of everything what I left to my sister-in-law. And my sister-in-law left Poland in 1956 - she sold everything and this enabled her

X P to go to Israel - she is still alive.

H M What happened to your friend?

X P Malinken. - Malinken had a wife who was pregnant and he was worried about her.

B M Was this before the war?

X P We are talking about the war. When he came to the camp with me, his wife was already somewhere else in a camp but pregnant and he knew about it. - and all the time he was worried about her. When we were liberated he learned from somebody that his wife is somewhere nearby - go and look for her. So we packed some things which we 'ganved*' from the Germans from the empty houses. Womens clothing for him, stamps for me and he took the two big cases and he went away and I didn't hear from him. I didn't hear from him for many years. When I was in Africa already - I came to Africa in 1951, on an invitation from the Cape Times, I got a job there. Why did I come to South Africa - because my wife played theatre here a year before with African Theatres with a group of Jewish actors - a Jewish theatre she brought in and when she described what kind of a life it is here - in Paris we stayed in a hotel, although I worked, we lived from day to day and she wanted to establish a home. She said this is the place where I want to be. So I came here to work and we established a place we stayed in Vredehoek then my first daughter was born - Naava. Then I worked for 'Die Burger' and then I established my own business - in advertising, publicity, public relations, promotions and so on. Chayelev went to perform in Israel and somebody said to her, "you know, there is somebody in a little village who was in camp with your husband". She said, "I would like to meet him". Because she heard already about Malinken from me, and when she heard that Malinken is there she went to visit him and she found a derranged woman - this is the wife - whom he found. The woman was derranged because she saw how the Germans killed her son - the baby - and she was not well, but she survived. And because of her he began to drink and he became an alcoholic.

*Yiddish for 'stole'

Interview with Mr X Piatka

X P And only that he found a brother that also escaped and who was also a housepainter, who helped him to get a job with him when he was sober. He helped him to establish a room, a house a little part-house and he lived there. When I was in Israel in 1973, I went to the stamp exhibition in Jerusalem - it was the first time I went to Israel, I went to ...?..yehuda to see him. The meeting was not successful. His wife started to scream and said that, "how could you survive, you must be S S - you must be Germans, this is in her mind like this. And he from the pleasure of seeing me, alive and goodlooking, well-dressed, he took the bottle of Vodka and started to drink in front of me." I am drinking to your health he said, here drink also". And of course I was with my daughter and the daughter of my sister-in-law and we were very upset about it. I said, "look, I don't want to drink." And she was screaming because he locked her up. She was mad. And the neighbours said, "what's going on, when are you going away from here we cannot stand this mad woman". And his brother said to me, "leave him alone, he is sometimes as mad as she is". I wrote to him several times and he didn't answer.

B M Did they have anymore children?

X P I don't know - its very possible they did.

B M And your father?

X P My father was in Königsberg. He was doing pedicures for the soldiers and he died one night a normal death.

B M Before the liberation?

X P I don't know what happened later on. The only thing I know that he had from the time of the war he was beaten up by a Polak in 1919 - at the time when I was born - and he didn't have teeth for many years so he had a bridge made out of gold. So during the time when he was with the Germans he spoke a bit peculiar covering his lip because of the gold he was afraid that they would kill him and take away the gold.

Interview with Mr X Piatka

B M I want to ask you something, did you have any thoughts of revenge at all after the war. I know you wanted to leave Poland, you wanted to leave communism, but did you have any thoughts of revenge as such?

X P Well I would like to explain something: In my particular case, being very sick and being saved by a kind of a miracle, I was not thinking about any revenge. I didn't have any particular person to whom I could refer and say, "oh, he inflicted on me something and I will look for him". Others had this particular feeling - they knew somebody that did these kind of things. I didn't have these kind of feelings. And afterwards being involved in administration; involved in being in something else everyday, my thoughts were getting better in health first of all and trying to get away from all this and to find myself - "what am I now". I didn't know what happened to my father, I was not sure what happened to my mother, I was the only son, I didn't have anybody - only my wife - and she was of a very peaceful character and she was involved in theatre and in which I also became involved very much. And then came my work - the work which was the essence of my life working for a newspaper I loved it, I had the ability for it and I was intelligent enough to understand that this is my line and this is what occupied my mind more than anything else and I was not surrounded by people who looked for vengeance, you see. In Yelenajoor there were very few Jews, I was mostly with Polish people and the time was to be careful in showing that you are Jewish. There was the time of?..... pogroms in which the Polish.....? the A.K* - 'the people's party' and the 'people's army' which was anti-communist identified everything was anti-Jewish. It is very understandable because the only people whom the new Russian owners of Poland could trust, were the Jews and the survivors. They didn't trust the Poles too much and here they had some Jews that survived everything and some Jews that came back with them - with the army and so on. The Polish nationalists saw it as a danger of?..... the whole thing and who are there still again the Jews. The same Jews who were in the forefront

* Russian or Polish

X P of the Communist Party during the 1939 regime. So in many, many cases by hearing merely a Polish name, I was not identified in many cases as a Jew. I was already in an entirely different environment but my association was with the survivors and worked with the Jews who were in this part of Poland where the land was liberated from Germany. German land but we were there. And in many cases the head of the security in my town was a Jew. The head of the Party was a Jew. In the main town, in the Capital of this part - Salisia - the Director of the hospital was a Jew. So we had a lot of people there and this was the place where all the survivors and the newcomers from Soviet Russia who ran away from tragedies and started coming back to Poland. They were all settled in this place as a part-time settlement before they go further West. In my town for example, I helped to establish a point where the Aliyah Beth started to go and went through my town to Czechoslovakia. And I went to talk to the Polish and the Czech frontier guards for the arrangement to be paid so much and so much for each one they would let through. One of my friends with whom I arranged it and who was very thankful that he could organize Aliyah Beth, became afterwards a member of the Israeli Knesset, his name is Hili Zaidel, and he was a MK. And when I saw him in Tel Aviv we had a long talk about it. I showed him a picture of him in the forest with a revolver. He said I remember when we took it we had to go to the Polish guards. So it was very interesting and this is the reason why the Germans in our town which we evacuated, all the Germans and white and everything in 1946/7 before my leaving the town, it was interesting that they were all old people and women to whom no vengeance could have been done. In years past when I became associated with Bnei Brith Organisation and I worked myself up from a member to be the Lodge President and afterwards for a couple of years a National Vice-President of Bnei Brith of South Africa. The idea of vengeance and hate was not propagated at all. The Bnei Brith taught humanity and taught us to acknowledge people as they are and not what they were forced to do. And I realised the philosophy of the Jewish sages was not the stereo-typed vengeance - 'an eye for an eye' but rather don't do something to

X P someone the same what he would have done to you. And if I would have had the hate, let's say to the Germans, the hate would have been in me - a kind of venom - and I realised that my association with the local Cape Town German people to whom as a Jewish Times administrator used to come and ask for advertisements, and they gladly gave it to me. But I felt "what have you been doing during the war if you are about 45/50 or 55?" And of course when I spoke to them and I said that I am a survivor, there was always this feeling that they are trying to tell me that they never knew about it and they "never this and they never that" and I realised. Look if I will take our situation in South Africa and somebody will come to me say in 15 years time and say, "you know you are guilty by the association with the Whites, you never helped the Blacks". And I would say that they are right. And perhaps this is the same thing which a German can say to himself or to his son who participated with the in the army and did nothing to help the Jews and this is a very problematic story because amongst our survivors are people - still today, who would like to go and kill and would like to hate and wont buy German goods and so on. And I feel that I cannot have the hate that they have. They hated the Jews, if I will hate the Germans I would be the same Nazi as they were.

B M Thank you. I wanted to ask you something else - how ill were you and for how long were you ill after the war, and did you need any kind of medication or.....?

X P Well I was ill - I had a lot of pain, my back troubled me. I couldn't work properly, I was always tired. Sitting too long. Even during the time when I was in Yelenajoorra I was under the doctor's care. In my holiday time in Poland I used to go to special places of healing where there were baths and there were specialists for my back. When I arrived in Paris I had to go to the hospital and I was a frequent visitor* in Paris. I was given different kind of tests - they even injected silver in my spine to see what is going on.

* Name of a clinic .

Interview with Mr X Piatka

X P - And on the third day of my arrival to this country in South Africa I was taken ill and I was in the hospital and I was under the care of a former Mayor of this town, Louis Gravner and he brought me a doctor who was the doctor for the Cape Times and he said perhaps I should help you with some treatment and later on I had some very famous Professors at Groote Schuur who insisted that I come there every Thursday for treatment - physiotherapy. And when my case was already 2/3 years old, and it was no help at all because I had pain I couldn't walk properly they said no sitting, it was a slipped disc and some damage to my spine.

B M That was all from the gun?

X P Yes and from the malnutrition and from typhoid and from walking in the snow and from working in the mist and rheumatics - all this together brought me to an attack of paralysis of my left leg. I was hospitalised about in the Wynberg Military Hospital because there was no other place where to put me. And my doctors insisted that I had to be there because they had to cure it immediately it was a kind of a spasm of my nerves. And after a month I was walking on crutches for about two months until it became a little bit better and from time to time when I had attacks when my spine went into a spasm, I had a physiotherapist and about six to 12 injections and therapy and electro-massage and I was better. Now this brought also some kind of relief in finance because for seven years I fought with the German Government to give me reparation money and I won my case. The lawyer from Germany, a Jewish lawyer, who is now in Munchen and he won the case for me and I decided that all the money which I get will go for my grandchildren. But with all this the most important is that as a survivor I understood that I have to live a normal life and with the help of my late wife, who was very active in theatre, providing entertainment to a lot of people, I had this mental capacity to provide good

Interview with Mr X Piatka

X P education, a good home for my two daughters - it was very important. Because in many cases the survivor's children have some kind of guilt of "why did you survive, we don't have grandparents, we hate the Germans" and so on. The older one, with whom we had difficult times when we arrived in this country in bad conditions, without anything. We had to start from the bottom so she didn't have everything that she would like, she is very devoted to the Holocaust historians. She is on the committee, she works for them and she participates in plays and education. And the younger daughter teaches children, she is the Principal of a drama school. It is an afternoon occupation for children who want to do play-theatre, music, concerts and all kinds of entertainment - to give children more culture and to also give them more confidence in themselves. She has five schools like this.

B M Where is that?

X P Here in Cape Town - my younger one, Zola. On Yom Hashoa she will stand with me, but the whole year round she is not interested in all those things. To her it is something that happened - it is history. She was at Herzlia school for about 1½ years teaching and she did with them 'the young generation must look in the past' and the children of standard 5 and 6 made albums of their project and she insisted that they go to uncles, grandparents, aunties and take letters and pictures from their old homes to know exactly. And it was very beautifully done, very interesting. I was very delighted that she did a thing like this - I was very proud of her.

B M I am actually going to get to your daughters again but I still want to ask you some questions about the liberation. You have mentioned the fact that your wife was invited to come to South Africa and you went with her - is that correct?

X P That is correct.

Interview with Mr X Piatka

B M What was the exact date of your arrival in South Africa?

X P May 1951.

B M Was there any difficulty in your actually getting into South Africa?

X P No - it was not difficult because we used a very simple story. I didn't arrive here as a newspaperman, I arrived here as a lino-type operator. In France when you are a newspaperman and worked in the printing shop I was* that means the technical editor. At the last moment you come down from your writing and you come down and you have a look at the latest telegrams and what other news you can put in and I was very friendly with all the printers. They liked my attitude, I didn't demand from them too much. And when I realised that I cannot come into South Africa as a writer - as a newspaperman, because the National Government will not allow it, especially a Jew, we arranged with people here to employ me as their printer.

B M Which people here?

X P 'Cape Times' who needed printers they asked the union to employ people and because I knew about it my sponsor, during the time that my late wife was here, they discussed what to do. I was notified about it and I applied for it. I was interviewed, I told them what I knew and when I arrived here they put me into printing the newspaper. Because I was printing the newspaper I was in contact with the editor and I spoke to him and I showed him my International Journalist Certificate, and he said, "can you write in English"? And I said, "yes, of course I can write in English". And I arrived there in May and on the 14th of July, which is Bastille Day, I had the leader page - my first leader page - so I wrote about Bastille Day in France, because I came from France. And afterwards I wrote more and more and when I joined 'Die Burger', I was assistant editor to the 'Jongspan' which is the children's newspaper. Do you remember it?

*French

X P But I couldn't go although I had the papers. There was a white paper which didn't allow us to go and we had to have a certificate. But for education I had to go, but my father was very very sick with a second attack and being the only son he wanted me with him.

B M How did you get on with your father in terms of the fact that he was a socialist and you were a member of Betar.

X P We never discussed politics at home.

B M You didn't.

X P No. I acknowledged him as a leader of his group and he acknowledged - perhaps he was happy that I was doing something for Palestine. In those days Palestine was mostly in the hands of the "left". So he would say this is okay let him do it, young people must do it this way. He was never against it. I remember when Jabotinsky came to Vilna in 1938, and I stood guard at his hotel and the Poles used to say, "the Jewish King arrived" and the Blue and White flag was put up on the hotel mast. My father even asked if he could organise something at the City Hall for him. And I said he doesn't need the anti-semites.

B M Why were you guarding Jabotinsky?

X P It was not guarding him it was just like an honour. Each one of us had an hour - and I had my hour.

B M I see.

X P He made a very famous speech and over 2500 people came to the City Hall to listen to him and he was shouting and screaming "Vilna idiots, leave, evacuate, don't sit here on the volcano. We want you to go to Palestine, march to Palestine. Do everything possible to get out of Poland." The next day even the socialist newspaper in Yiddish wrote in big letters - "Evacuation - No". This was the official standard of the establishment to stay where we are. Not to move.

Interview with Mr X Piatka

B M Yes.

X P The children had to buy it - it was in Afrikaans, but everything that I wrote was in English.

B M They translated it for you?

X P Everything. 'Die Burger' had a lot of translators. And until today I have a lot of friends in the 'Cape Times' and in 'Die Burger'. I am a very welcome guest because they like to talk about the past. I had a good time - when Dr Malan was in Israel, he was the Chairman of the Nasionale Koerante of 'Die Burger', and when he came back from Israel - he was the first Prime Minister to visit Israel - he came to 'Die Burger' on one occasion and there was a bit of a party and I was introduced to him. And he said to me in Afrikaans, "ek is baie bly om die enkele Jood ta ontmoet". And I said to him that I am also very pleased and was he impressed to visit Israel.. (inaudible)

B M Did you have any thoughts about coming to South Africa which is a racist country - an apartheid country - didn't that ever enter.....?

X P No, look when I was told about this country there was no way of thinking about racism. It was the thought of 'paradise' a Jewish paradise where people go with with the Magen David very freely and they say they are Jews and there is no anti-semitism. There was some kind of anti-semitism with the 'grey shirts' afterwards I learned, but when I arrived here and I saw people on the beach wearing Magen Davids around their necks and yarmelkas and the shuls were open and the rabbis are preaching - its a Bible country - to me it was a revelation the life and how people lived here - I found something here which for my nerves and my thinking - now I can relax, now we can have a family.

B M Your wife didn't have any family in South Africa?

X P No. I had some cousins in Johannesburg whom I met and who helped me and were very nice to me.

B M Did you ever talk about your experiences to to them or to anyone else?

X P A lot of people didn't want to hear the first few years about it. They didn't want to know. I had a feeling that they are guilty - that they feel guilty that they didn't help, that they were not insistent on people to come. They didn't send perhaps they saved and they didn't send. They didn't make the effort to push the relatives that they must leave and come and whatever it is "don't worry, we will sleep in the same bed" or something. They were too comfortable making money and not thinking about it and this was the guilt feeling which they have. It's not only here, but in America it was the same story. This is how I felt and I didn't talk about it at all.

B M I would just like to ask you some questions about your children - where and when were they born?

X P They were born here.

B M Both in South Africa?

X P Born in South Africa, in Cape Town at the Booth Memorial.

B M And what are their names?

X P The elder one is NAAVA and the other one is ZOLA. Naava is NAOMI, VIVIAN and Zola is ZAHAVA LORNA. Funny names ha?

B M They are lovely names.

Interview with Mr X Piatka

X P Well Naava is, you know, Naava is 'black and beautiful.' This is from Shira Shirim - from the Solomon's songs when he spoke about the beautiful Sheba and Zola - Zola is 'pretty' in Bantu language. You know Zola Budd, so you know now what Zola is. It stemmed from me picking it up because Zahava - my father was Zacharias - so I wanted her to be named after him. Zahava is 'gold', 'golden girl'. She was the head girl of her school - Girls School here, and Lorna is 'Leon' - after Leib Rosenthal. He was my wife's brother who was killed and we wanted to have his name also. And Naava - Naomi Vivian - well Naomi was after my wife's father Nachom - and my mother was Vava - Vivian. And Vava in Hebrew is Batya. In Russian B and V is the same. Here you have it all.

B M Have you ever told your daughters about your story?

X P Yes, yes, definitely yes. They were very interested to hear it from me and they knew all about what we went through and the horrible things that went on and they accepted it and one took it to her heart and the other one not too much. She is very pragmatic - she just lives for today.

B M Your other daughter, not the one in Cape Town, where does she stay?

X P The older one, Naava is in Boston and Zola is here in Cape Town. Today they are all in America because they went to visit them for a couple of weeks - it's holiday time. It's very possible, and I am pushing, that they will be together in America.

B M Were either of them ever involved in Jewish youth movements?

X P Well they went to the camps - to Betar camp - both of them. Naava was in Israel for three years she started at? She worked as a Graphic Artist - these are all her paintings by the way.

B M They are lovely.

X P And Naava worked at the 'Israel Economist' - it's a weekly English newspaper and then came back here for a holiday and met a very nice fellow in Johannesburg and got married. They decided that he wanted to study in America and successfully he opened a business of computers and they have children.

B M So how many grandchildren do you have?

X P Three. A granddaughter of six, a grandson of three and a little granddaughter of two months. And every time when the children were born I was there, because they were all born without the grandmother.

B M When did your wife pass away?

X P Six years ago, nearly seven years, September the 1st. It's a bad date for me September the 1st, the war started, evacuation started, the liquidation of the ghettos started. Her last role was in 'Fiddler on the Roof'. She played with Mulholland here at the Nico Malan and she was 'Golda' the mother. She was already sick - she had cancer. And she died a week after the closing of the show. She played for two months being sick and nobody could tell that she was sick.

B M It's incredible.

X P The acting kept her going - that's how it is. So I must go on as life must go on.

B M It's a question that we actually didn't touch on before but one I would like to ask you anyway.

X P Go on.

B M Do you believe in God?

X P No.

B M Not at all?

X P Not at all. I believe in the Jewish G-d let's say. Because we were Jews, I am a very traditional Jew. Not because I suffered as a Jew because I was brought up this way. But it was not pinpointed to me that I must be kosher for example. I can be a good Jew without being kosher. I can be a very good Jew without going to Shul. If I insist on being human, being good, not do anything wrong to others and so on. then in my mind I am a good Jew. I was shattered by the Holocaust, by the calamity, by what happened to all of us - what happened to the little children - to the innocent. To say that I was guilty that I was not in a Shul, I didn't "daven"* I didn't have the "boxes" (Tafillim)* and the Tzizot*. Alright, I am guilty but what about the innocent - what about the children - what about those pious men who went..... And it made me feel - look I will say, "Oh G-d it shouldn't happen to you" and the proverbs, "from your mouth to G-d's ears". You know all kinds of things which are synonymous. To make me practise religion, I am not this. It is very possible that it is an excuse also.

B M Do you have any phobias related to your experiences. For example some people won't go to Barmitzvahs because of the crowds, they don't like the fact that there are so many people in one room together. Other people won't go on trains or planes?

X P I don't have any phobias about my life in the camps or in the ghettos. There was a period which I experienced and it remains with me. I have from time to time bad dreams what do you call it

B M Nightmares.

X P Nightmares, yes.

B M I was going to ask you about that.

*Pray

*Used for early morning prayer

*Worn under a mans clothing

Interview with Mr X Piatka

X P Yes, I have nightmares from time to time. And it's very possible that I have it together with some kind of a meeting, or listening or talking - then it comes to me. It's usually which I was always afraid of something. It is to find myself going through a very narrow tunnel or sewers or a hole and I cannot push myself through I am in pain and behind me people are pushing me, "go, go, go", and I cannot, and I wake up sweating. And it's very possible that this is the experience which I had once. You know the word 'mellina' - mellina is a hiding place. It is a

B M Like a den.

X P Yes, like a den. It's a name - thieves only use this name to hide when the police come they are not visible they hide in the mellina. So when we had the so-called aktion when they used to jump on us unexpectedly surrounding the ghetto and sometimes I didn't have my certificate on me and there was a time when I didn't have a certificate at all and I had to go into hiding so one of these hiding place was that we had to go through a floor into the handmade hole which didn't lead to anywhere. There was no going out you go into this hole and like a mole you sit there. I went into it, we were about seven people in it and there was a small baby as well and it started to cry and the mother had to put a cushion on her.

B M On the baby?

X P To the baby. I don't know what happened to it because I don't remember it well but I was one of those who was the 'listening post' - it means I was the one nearest to the floor to listen what is going on. I was the youngest I think and of course when the soldiers came in and so on, it was a horrible experience knowing that they might shoot or kill you or whatever it is. And I was always thinking that when somebody builds a thing like this, they must build it in such a way that there must be a way out somewhere .

B M Were you ever caught?

X P No, no, I was never caught.

B M What are your feelings towards the Germans today or the Poles?

X P You see, you must understand I never went back to Poland because I feel that Poland with their catholicism and their religions - anti-semitic - Hitler could only kill Jews in Poland because they were helping - even by not doing anything they were helping. They were the ones who used to go and tell on Jews. To them to discover any Jew and give them over to a German was a pleasure - not only the money - but it was a pleasure, a physical pleasure. They were fully anti-semitic. I didn't find Poles who were not anti-semitic even the best Pole. So I don't have time for them. When I see them and I see them often because they come here to Cape Town with the whaling ships and so on and I find them, I make myself visible to them and talk to them and to inflict on them that I am a Jew who survived. I don't want to go to Poland it is a cemetery of my own people and Poland can never be the same without Jews, and this is what I tell them.

B M And how do they respond to this?

X P Their response is that they don't know what a Jew is. Because they are a new generation they don't have Jews there. The whole of Poland has about 5000 Jews - old people. They heard about Jews, they say - there are still jokes about Jews - there are still songs in the cabaret satirical about Jews who are in America and so on. But what is a Jew, they don't know.

B M Did you ever want to go to Israel to settle in Palestine - not before the war but after the war?

Interview with Mr X Piatka

X P

After the war I didn't want to go. Look a man who suffered and went through so much didn't want to come into the time of?..... the time of uncomfortable leadership and economically lower power, this was one reason. The second reason, you know you have the feeling already that I am tired of Jews - rather become a little bit more cosmopolitan and have something wider and brighter things than again fighting the Arabs. Because this I had - when my sister-in-law settled in Israel - I was in a very poor state in France and I still sent her food parcels to Israel in 1956/7, it was very difficult then. I still helped and so on and when it came to money I still gave, but to settle, I don't know, it is a very difficult story. When you have lived in comfort in South Africa, and I was comfortable as I established myself here through hard work, I just felt that I could help Israel by giving money, by going there as a tourist, by coming there as often as I can, and that's that.

B M

Did you feel that you found security coming to South Africa?

X P

Yes, I felt that I am more secure in South Africa than I would have been in Australia. I had a job in Australia in a newspaper in Melbourne called "The Age" and I decided to listen to my late wife and to come here because to my mind this was a little bit nearer to everything - to Israel, to America to Europe and the Jewish community - the Jewish community of Lithuanian Jews who are nearer to me than anybody else. For the first time I met here a German colony of Jews and I started to understand how valuable the people are and Bnei Brith - this was a very big education - I was against them talking German amongst themselves and then I realised what an idiot I am because I speak to my friends in Polish from Poland so why not they were brought up in Germany they could talk in German and I apologised to them and we discussed all different things - we call them 'jekes' and they called us the? and we found that we understand each other when we communicated and I found in them a lot of intellect and a lot of goodness and they brought a lot of comfort and a lot of good technique into South Africa - the German Jews.

B M How do you feel when you read about people who have denied that the Holocaust ever occurred?

X P I am very much against it - I am giving all kinds of documentation and witnesses about this especially with Bnei Brith - I have written many times to the Bnei Brith publications because they are fighting this kind of thing.

B M Yes they are. Can you recommend a solution to all this besides just writing.

X P Well look, if somebody wants to believe in something - if somebody wants to believe that for so many thousands of years that the Jews killed Christ and even the insignia from the Vatican doesn't help it to instil in them that it is not true - the Romans did it - you cannot fight it otherwise by providing evidence in public and I was very pleased it was about in October I was in America in Boston and I went to a meeting of the Civic Rights League of Bnei Brith and there was a lawyer describing to us the case of a private citizen a survivor of the Holocaust who answered an advertisement it was some kind of test of \$50 000 that there were gas chambers in Auschwitz and he won the case although a lot of Jewish establishments didn't want to talk about it too much. He put it into writing and there was a public apology and this is the only way - the only way of slanting and fighting is the thoughts of public opinion and it must not be kept quiet. It must not be said, "no, no, no don't do it", we must shout and scream, "you are not right". And the book which South Africa wrote about, "Six Million Did Die" is one of the answers.

B M Do you feel any guilt about either having survived or even being labelled a survivor?

X P No I feel no guilt. I just feel that one can believe in some kind of fate - a fate of not only of survival, a fate of some kind of written law that you will be for so long

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X P Look you must believe in something. I believe not of my ability - I believe that it is written somehow that I had to survive and whatever I did this way or the other way it helped me to overcome difficulties and overcome the moments of danger. It was not cleverness. I don't see when I look at it where did I do something which was heroism of some kind. I did it and now I was clever. No I wasn't I tried to be as small as possible and I tried not to be visible. Although in many cases I was in the forefront as an official as a clerk as somebody. I was already not the grey masses of people. Perhaps this helped me, I don't know.

B M But you still feel no guilt?

X P No I feel no guilt at all.

B M Did you attend the World Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in

X P I was in America at the same time.

B M And the one in Jerusalem?

X P The one in Jerusalem, I was in America at the time with my daughter who had given birth to a baby.

B M And then in Washington in 19---

X P In Washington I didn't go.

B M And the Partisan gathering in

X P You see I am not a Partisan, I never was so I didn't go to this gathering.

B M What do you feel about the student project to interview all survivors living in South Africa?

X P Well I am one of those who instigated it. I am secretary of the Holocaust Survivors Organisation - one of the

B M Why was he saying that you should move?

X P Because to my mind he was a prophet. He predicted that there must be a war and the Jews will be the ones that will suffer.

B M And what was the argument with the newspaper that you mustn't evacuate that you must stay.

X P Because they believed that the future of the Jews is established in Poland for 33 million people of which 10% - 3 million were Jews. And they felt that the best place for the Jews to leave and to cultivate its cultural life. And they preferred that when it comes to Palestine and to Zionism its done in the normal way not with aliyah not with clandestine goals and to provoke the Arabs and British mandate to be against the establishment of Zionist organisation. And many of us started to walk. We had rucksacks and boots and we walked for about 15 to 20 miles and the police stopped us and we had to go back. And the groups which did go - about 1500 reached the Rumanian frontier - I remember there was a whole scandal about it and the Rumanians wanted to let them through and the Poles were contacted by the English and they said, "you must not let them go to the mediterranean sea, they must be stopped and they must go back. That's what happened.

B M And was there an outcry about that?

X P Well there was an outcry from our sources but not a big outcry from the The times were not good, economically it was a bad time for everybody and everybody was looking how to make a living and suddenly there is some kind of trouble and people wanted to leave as there was nothing left. Parents were not allowing children to go and that's how it was.

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X P founders here and I wanted this kind of thing to be done a long time ago. When Yad Vashem started the testimony, the first testimony, which was written out who your friends are, who is alive and who perished, I was the one who propagated this kind of thing. I was the initiator of showing the film "The Holocaust" here in Cape Town and in South Africa, and at our meetings we always discussed to put in, not only students, we wanted to do it differently. We wanted to engage people to write a book about each of us and the lady who started doing this job suddenly got a call to come to New York, she is Elaine Durbach, perhaps you know her - she writes for the "Sun" newspapers - and now she is in New York. I am commending on it.

B M Are there any concluding messages that you would like to give?

X P Well the message which I have, it all depends to whom I have to give it. This story of mine which we discussed today - you questioned me and I answered you - is on a tape which will go to some kind of institution which will provide some kind of statistic which will be put on a shelf together with perhaps hundreds of thousands of others of which there will be some kind of resolution. I believe that I am one of the last..... as a witness of what happened. I am the one whose is now heard, unfortunately we are not in the same stage of founding this thing like the Americans because they have a video for everyone.

B M Yes, yes.

X P Right. Perhaps it will come to us to. I will be in America in April and I will make a video which will be a document which will show in any other case which will be brought into justice against those people from the research or from the others to say that the Holocaust never existed. We are those to show it to them that it did exist, but still we were the ones who witnessed the Nazi murderers what they have done to us.

Interview with Mr X Piatka

X P And of course the message to the young people like you is -
"that you are doing a very good job of work with these
interviews and it must be kept up, because when we are
gone you will be the ones who remembered that we did exist."

B M Thank's very much.

X P Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

B M Can you tell us a little bit more of your University life - how long were you there for and?

X P University life is not a big story with me because at the end of 1938, my mother was in Paris and she wanted me to be there with her and I left for Paris, and I enlisted at the to the Sarbonne University and also humane letters which was - languages, literature, political science. I wrote my exams in Vilna already, so I had one year already behind me and this was accepted. Then in 1939, I was mobilized to the army. There was a mobilization for those people who were overseas..... and I had to come back.

B M I am sorry - what happened to your father in the mean time, your mother was in Paris.

X P My mother was in Paris and my father was in Vilna and I had to come back to Vilna. My father had some kind of connections and I was assigned to Intelligence in my own town.

B M In the army?

X P In the army and it was just like an office job. I used to read the foreign newspapers which always used to come about seven days later and assess the situation and give it to another officer who was older than myself and whatever he did I didn't know. I was just happy that I could get off as much as I want and go back to my home. And then suddenly we had the war.

B M So before that were there any indications of anti-semitism?

X P All the time there was indications of anti-semitism. Even at the University we never sat. The University allocated to the Jews the left side of the hall where you sit and learn and study and listen to the lectures given by the Professor and we decided that we will not