

Harry Gordon: Oral History Transcript

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Name: Harry Gordon (1925 – 2010)

Birth Place: Kaunas (Kovno), Lithuania

Arrived in Wisconsin: 1951, Madison

Project Name: Oral Histories: Wisconsin Survivors of the Holocaust

Biography:

Harry Gordon was born in Kaunas (Kovno), Lithuania, on July 15, 1925. He was the only child of an Orthodox Jewish family with deep roots in Lithuania. In the summer of 1940, after Harry's second year of high school, the Russian army occupied Kovno. A year later, Lithuania fell to the Germans.

Shortly after the Germans arrived, Harry's ailing mother was poisoned along with all other patients at the Jewish hospital in Kovno. His remaining family members were herded into a ghetto with 35,000 other Jews. Harry's father was deported. Harry was shuffled between the ghetto and forced labor camps for the next three years.



In 1944, he was deported to Dachau, where he dug ditches for the disposal of corpses. In 1945 Harry escaped from a trainload of prisoners and walked to Landsberg-am-Lech, Germany, where he was met by Allied troops. By then he weighed only 50 pounds. Harry was hospitalized for eight months and recuperated at a rehabilitation camp for displaced persons. While there, he met and married Genia Lelonek, a Polish survivor.

The Gordons immigrated to the U.S. in March 1949. They lived in Pennsylvania and New York City before arriving in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1951. Harry moved from job to job before becoming self-employed as a scrap metal dealer. The Gordons had three children before divorcing in 1969. Harry wrote a book about his Holocaust experiences, *The Shadow of Death: The Holocaust in Lithuania* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1992). Harry died in 2010.

Audio Summary:

Below are the highlights of each tape. It is not a complete list of all topics discussed. Recordings that used only one tape side are marked: (no Side 2)

Tape 1, Side 1

- Family and religious life in Kovno
- Anti-Semitism in Lithuania
- Fate of family members
- Religious and secular schooling

Tape 1, Side 2

- Russian occupation, 1940
- German invasion, 1941
- Family hides from anti-Semitic violence
- His mother's murder at the Jewish hospital

Tape 2, Side 1 (no side 2)

- His family's capture and incarceration in the Kovno Ghetto
- Slobotka massacre, 25,000 Jews killed
- Burning of Jewish hospital and patients in Kovno
- Adolescent thoughts about life and death

Tape 3, Side 1

- Brutality in labor camps
- Liquidation of the Kovno Ghetto
- Transport to Dachau
- Resistance is futile at Dachau
- Unexpectedly meeting his father at Dachau

Tape 3, Side 2

- Starvation, labor and beatings at Dachau
- Living conditions at Dachau
- Escaping from death train as war ends
- Rescue by American troops

Tape 4, Side 1

- Conditions at Bad Worishofen rehabilitation camp
- Attempts to find surviving family members
- Departure to the U.S., March 1949
- First impressions of New York

Tape 4, Side 2

- Working on Pennsylvania mink farm
- Working at New York City textile factory
- Moving to Madison, Wisconsin, 1951
- Early homes and jobs in Madison

Tape 5, Side 1

- Maltreatment by Madison Jewish community
- Wife's family background
- Challenges of new immigrants
- Their children and family life in Madison

Tape 5, Side 2

- Children and family life
- Relations with Gentiles in Wisconsin
- American attitudes toward Holocaust
- Encounter with a Holocaust denier

Tape 6, Side 1 (no Side 2)

- Attitudes toward American culture and politics
- Reflections on his Holocaust experiences

About the Interview Process:

The interview was conducted by archivist Sara Leuchter during three sessions at Harry's apartment on August 24, October 27, and November 19, 1980. The first session lasted one and one-half hours; the second, two hours; and the third, one and one-quarter hours.

Harry's story is especially valuable because he lived under both the Russian and German occupations and recalls them in great detail. He is also one of the few who survived the liquidation of the Kovno Ghetto in 1944. His most detailed accounts cover the early days of the war.

Teachers should note that this interview includes several graphic descriptions of extreme brutality, which may not be suitable for younger students.

Audio and Transcript Details:

Interview Dates

- Aug 24, 1980; Oct 27, 1980; Nov 19, 1980

Interview Location

- Gordon home, Madison, Wisconsin

Interviewer

- Archivist Sara Leuchter

Original Sound Recording Format

- 5 qty. 60-minute audio cassette tapes

Length of Interviews

- 3 interviews, total approximately 4 hours

Transcript Length

- 109 pages

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Transcript

The following transcript is from the collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. It is an unedited, firsthand account of the Nazi persecution of the Jews before and during World War II. Portions of this interview may not be suitable for younger or more sensitive audiences. It is unlawful to republish this text without written permission from the Wisconsin Historical Society, except for nonprofit educational use.

Teachers should note that Harry describes many instances of horrific cruelty, which may not be suitable for younger students.

Key

SL Sara Leuchter, Wisconsin Historical Society archivist
HG Harry Gordon, Holocaust survivor

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SL: The first thing that I want to find out from you is a little bit about your family background. If you can give me your full name and your date of birth, your place of birth?

HG: I was born in July 15, 1925, in Kaunas, Lithuania, on Preplaukos Kanto, 23.

SL: That was the street?

HG: Yes.

SL: Was this the house then that you lived in for most of your childhood?

HG: Yes, this was the house I was born in. As far as I can remember, I was told, my mother kept telling me, that she was on her way. Her brothers were already here in the United States, her three brothers the three uncles I was talking about, and she was on her way to the United States. They sent her a visa, they sent her papers to come to the United States and she stopped in Belgium, Antwerpen, and there is where she met my father. They fell in love and a love affair started and instead of going to United States, they decided to go back to Kovno, back to Kaunas,¹ Lithuania. There they got married and there where I was born.

SL: What are the names of your parents?

¹ Mr. Gordon sometimes refers to this city by its Yiddish name, Kovno, and sometimes by its Lithuanian name, Kaunas.

- HG: My mother's maiden name was Chava Gunskevitch. When she got married to my father it was Chava Gordon.
- SL: Where was she born and when, do you know that?
- HG: No, I don't know when she was born. I know where she was born. She was born in Kovno.
- SL: So she was Lithuanian, too?
- HG: She was Lithuanian, yes. But she went to Russia to university. She was a pretty educated woman. She was a designer of hat designs. I remember she used to sit down in the window, this I remember, and all kinds of women walking by, and always, no matter what kind of hair she had, she had always a piece of paper with a pencil or pen and right away she started sketching all kinds of different design for that particular women. She also had a store where she used to sell women's hats.
- SL: This was in Kaunas?
- HG: In Kaunas, yes, Lithuania.
- SL: What was your father's name?
- HG: My father was Jankl Gordon and he was a mechanic. He was working in a textile... yeah a textile factory. He was working on the machines that make different yarns.
- SL: So he fixed the heavy machinery?
- HG: Right.
- SL: Do you know when he was born?
- HG: I don't know when he was born.
- SL: Was he also Lithuanian?
- HG: Yes, he was Lithuanian and he had a brother, Leibe Gordon, and he was a big furrier in Kovno. And the fact is that uncle what I showed you up here, the oldest uncle, and my oldest aunt and my father's brother, Leibe Gordon, they used to go to the United States for the season in the summertime. My father's brother was a furrier and my aunt's uncle, my uncle, the oldest uncle, he was a *schneider*. He was a tailor. So they used to come for the season to the United States, work for four or five months,

make a lot of money and go back to Kaunas. And then I used to hear them telling stories. I used to sit down. Every time we used to go to dinner, that's why I couldn't understand. When I came to the United States, every time in our house and we used to sit down to dinner, twenty, twenty-five people every night. And you didn't have to make a call. First of all, there was no telephones. Friends, my mother's friends, my aunt's friends, neighbors, everybody used to come, always at dinner and then they'd start telling stories. So my uncle, I remember he used say, when he used to go to United States, make money, then come back, he says, "It's a crazy, it's a *meshugene land*. It's a crazy world. It's nice, you can make money down there," he says, "but I wouldn't want to live there. Make money and come back."

SL: Do you know where he used to go to?

HG: To New York. I know he used to go to New York. Where in New York or what firm he used to work, I don't remember. This I don't remember. But they used to go to New York for the season time.

SL: Do you recall the names of your grandparents?

HG: Yes. Moyshe, my grandpa's name was Moses² Ganskievich, like a Polish name. That's my uncles who came to the United States, that's his three sons. When they came to the United States they changed it to Ginsberg. See their name when they left Kaunas was Ganskievich and I was looking for the name. After I got through the war I was looking for Ganskievich. Now can you imagine the difference from Ganskievich to Ginsberg? I didn't know that you can change your name anytime you want to.

SL: What was your his wife's name, your grandfather's wife's name?

HG: This I don't remember.

SL: She was dead before you were born?

HG: No, no, she wasn't dead. She wasn't dead. I remember her faintly, I remember her very faintly. I don't remember the name. I remember faintly my father's mother, too. I used to go down there on Saturday or Sunday always you know. When I used to come to my grandmother's, she used to give me some

² 'Moyshe' is a Yiddish form of Moses.

cookies. And I was really the only single child around. First of all I was the only one, see. There was no other children. My mother and father didn't have any. I was, what do you call it, I was the only child. So, I was the whole deal down there. I was a little spoiled, I remember, yes. My grandpa and my grandma. But I don't remember exactly the name. This I don't remember.

SL: Do you remember your grandfather's name on the other side, your grandfather Gordon??

HG: No, I don't remember.

SL: Do you know whether or not the family had been in Kaunas for a long time? Were they Lithuanian from far back?

HG: Yes, from far back. As far as I can remember. I never heard that any were born in different countries. As far as I know they were from Kovno, from Kaunas, far back away, yes.

SL: Do you have any special recollections of your grandparents? I recall at the pre-interview you told me that you remember riding on a wagon?

HG: Oh, yes, my grandfather was a great gardener. He was raising cucumbers. But Jews weren't allowed to have any land in Lithuania. You could only rent land from the Lithuanian landowners. So you used to go out, rent a lot of land. I don't know how many acres, but he used to plant a lot of cucumbers, pickles, and we had two wagons and four horses. And I also remember when the horses used to come home or on a holiday when I didn't have to go to school I used to be able to ride on the wagon, take the cucumbers to the market. And every Friday afternoon around 1:30 or 2:00 in the afternoon, my grandpa used to sit down on a little table and a big chair and take out big bags of silver and he used to pay out the workers in silver money. And all the workers used to be all women, because all the cucumbers had to be picked by hand. And mostly the workers were women. And then we used to go to market, sell the cucumbers and then go home, then I used to take the horses, ride the horses down to the Nieman Banner,³ to water them. Oh, it was fun, especially in the winter time. We used to have a sled I'd get two horses and a sled — ah, it used to be beautiful. It was more nicer than driving the car.

³ A river which flows through Kaunas.

SL: One thing I didn't get from you was your date of birth?

HG: July 15, 1925.

SL: And you told me that your father was a mechanic and your mother was a hat designer?

HG: Right.

SL: Was it unusual for women to be working?

HG: Right. At that time it was very unusual because the women were mostly in the kitchen doing a lot of cooking. And my aunt, my oldest aunt that's with that uncle here,⁴ she was a great cook. I remember she opened once in a resort area a little motel and a restaurant and especially she used to specialize in *gefilte* fish. And I used to sit, every summer I used to go to that resort area and stay down there with my uncle and aunt.

SL: Where was that located?

HG: That was about two-and-a-half hours by ferry boat from Kovno, to Kulautuva.

SL: Was it also Lithuania?

HG: Yes, it was all Lithuania. But you get there by ferry boat.

SL: So you had quite a few cousins and aunts and uncles that were living nearby, is that true?

HG: Yes, in fact those aunts, that uncle and a cousin and his mother. This one was his mother and is with me. This is the son, Moyshkye. That's his mother and that's his father. That's one family. This used to be, here, that's his uncle, aunts. They never had any children. I was their adopted son.

SL: Now these were all these relatives on your mother's side or were these on both sides of the family?

HG: That was all on my mother's side. That was mother and three sisters.

SL: And the brothers then were in the United States?

HG: Right. The only youngest brother was there, the youngest brother. This is the youngest brother, the only one who was left with them by then, and he had to go to the Lithuanian army. He got killed.

⁴ Mr. Gordon is referring to photographs of family members, some of which can be seen in his memoir, [The Shadow of Death: The Holocaust in Lithuania](#) (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992).

SL: What about your father's family? Did he have any brothers or sisters?

HG: Yes, I remember that one brother, that furrier, but I don't remember any sisters. I don't remember any sisters. I'm pretty sure he had some, but I don't remember them. Because they all got killed.

SL: Before the war started, what kind of contact did you have with your uncles in the United States? Were they writing you regularly?

HG: Oh, writing regularly and every month or two months I used to get packages. Big *pasilkes* you would call it in Jewish. Packages, big packages.

SL: What did they send you?

HG: Brand new clothes. I used to be the best dressed boy! I'll never forget it. I got some pictures. I'm asking for my other uncles to get some pictures. There's supposed to be a picture of me when I was two years old, like a little baby. And they have a tremendous collection of pictures what I supposed to get. But anyway, I used to be the best dressed boy in Kovno. I'll never forget, I got, it was on a holiday or on my birthday or whatever, I got two brand new sailor suits, one blue one and one white one, with the hat. Ah, I used to look terrific! I'll never forget that. Yeah. The relationship was terrific.

SL: You were a very close family?

HG: Yes, but I didn't know them, because when they left I wasn't even born yet. They left around in 1914 or 1912. I don't know when they left.

SL: Where did they eventually settle? Where were they living?

HG: They were in New York. They were big businessmen.

SL: What business were they in?

HG: They were supposed to have a big model agency. They had about twenty models working. That was before the depression. Then when the depression came in, he lost all his money, so then he became a farmer. One became a farmer and one got in and one was a manager. When I got to Buffalo, New York, one was a manager of five big clothing stores. One had a big tavern in Buffalo, New York, and this is the uncle who was the mink farmer. I think he was the poorest one. So I went on the mink farm.

SL: What did your home look like in Kovno, could you tell me what it, you know describe your house?

HG: Yes. The best way I can describe it is we had three big bedrooms, big ones; we had a big living room; we had a big kitchen. The kitchen was tremendous with a big, you know, iron cemented-in stove. You know, we didn't have the modern stuff you have now. And we had a big cellar. Half of the cellar we rented it out to a kosher butcher shop. They used to make kosher bologna and, I don't know, all kinds of different meats. And half of the cellar we used to fill up with ice. In the spring we used to fill them up with ice to keep all the products so they don't get spoiled. And we used to make pickles, cucumbers and sauerkraut, all kinds of stuff.

SL: Did you live in the middle of the city or were you in a suburb?

HG: No, it was right in the middle of the city. In fact, we didn't live too far away from the president, the president of Kovno. The president lived only on Laisves Lela.⁵ Laisves Lela was from Preplaukos Kanto like maybe five, six blocks. We lived right near to the city.

SL: Was it a Jewish neighborhood? Was there such a thing as a Jewish neighborhood?

HG: There was quite a few Jews living around there, but it wasn't just a Jewish neighborhood, no. Gentiles lived there, Jews lived there. There was more Jews living in Slobotka⁶ than there lived in Kovno, I think.

SL: Now how far away was Slobotka from Kovno?

HG: Slobotka from Kovno was between six and seven miles.

SL: Did you go there on a regular basis?

HG: Oh, we used to go there, yes. She was famous for the Slobotka but I wasn't too crazy about Hebrew school anyway. I had to go, but I wasn't crazy about it.

⁵ A major street in Kaunas.

⁶ Gordon uses a Yiddish pronunciation, "Slobetke," for this district just outside of Kaunas proper. The name is now more commonly spelled Slobodka.

SL: I was just going to ask you about your religious life. How would you characterize your family's religious life?

HG: Oh, Orthodox, no doubt, yes. We were very Orthodox. You had to go in *shul*⁷ where the men and women sat. They would separate them in the *shul*. You weren't allowed to cook. The last time you could cook was Friday afternoon between 2:30 or 3:00. By then we had to have already the whole pot already. In the bakery, they called it a *cholent*, because you couldn't cook. You had to fix everything. Around 12:00, 1:00, everything had to be ready. And 2:00 we had to take it to the bakery and the bakery put it in a bakery oven and there it stood for twenty-four hours, from 3:00 till Saturday 12:00. After going out of the synagogue after we finished praying at twelve o'clock Saturday, we went to the bakery to pick up that *cholent* and we went home and sat down to eat.

SL: Did you keep a lot of traditions in the home, orthodox traditions? Did you keep kosher in the house?

HG: Oh, yes, kosher. Kosher, yes. But it wasn't too much praying going on. I don't think so. My uncle, when he had to report to the Lithuanian army, everybody was so upset. They said, "Hey, a Jewish *bokher*,⁸ what are you going to do? What's he going to do to you?" You're going into the army, especially a Jewish guy going in the Lithuanian army. "Why don't you go away? We'll get you some papers. We get you a visa. Why don't you go to United States? You don't have to go in the Lithuanian army." But he went anyway. Used to come once a month he used to come and visit, or twice a month he used to come and visit us from the army on furlough. He used to carry the big the big gun he used to have. So one day when he came in. Right away, everybody, my aunts, my mother, his name was Shloyme, Solomon⁹ they say, "Hey, Shloyme, what does he give you to eat? What do you eat down there? Look, you lost maybe twenty-five, thirty pounds. You look like a *tshekhhotnik*," like somebody has tuberculosis. He says, "I eat everything what everybody else ate." He said, "What do you think,

⁷ Yiddish for 'synagogue'.

⁸ Yiddish for 'bachelor' or 'fellow'.

⁹ 'Shloyme' is a Yiddish form of Solomon.

they're going to cook me special kosher food?" "*Oy, zey make im for a khazer! Oy gevalt! Vos iz gevorn mit Shleymele?*"¹⁰ You know what it used to be, especially in the old country. But anyway, one day he came in and he came into my bedroom and sat down on my bed by my table down there where I used to do my homework, and he takes out a package from his pocket. And I see it's nice, red meat and he starts eating the meat. I says, "Uncle Shloyme, what are you eating down there." He says, "Oh, it's meat." And I said, "It looks good. Does it taste good?" He says, "Well, I like it." I say, "I want a piece." "No," he says, "you better not. No, you cannot have." I say, "I want to taste a piece." He gave me a piece. Then all of a sudden, I'll never forget, my mother comes in. She's trying to find out what I'm doing. So all of a sudden she sees me eating that piece of meat, says, "Where did you get it?" I said, "Oh, Uncle Shloyme, he brought it, so I wanted a piece and he gave it to me." "*Oy gevalt*, he's eaten *khazer!*" It was like ham. But was that good! It tasted good! Oh, it was terrible.

SL: You mentioned then that you didn't like going to Hebrew School, did you have to go to *cheder*?¹¹

HG: Oh, yes. Well, I wasn't a *cheder*, but I had to go to Hebrew school. That wasn't as strict as a real *cheder*. That wasn't. Especially before my *Bar Mitzvah* I had to go. I had a rabbi teaching me *berakhas*,¹² *Midrash*, *Torah* and that I had to do right. But it was not in a *cheder* where the rabbi used to really take me for a year, like you hear. No, I didn't go to that. I wasn't in any *cheders*, no. But I was in a regular school, grade school with Lithuanian boys, Lithuanian kids, Jews and Lithuanians.

SL: What kind of relationship did you have with Gentiles in the neighborhood, were you on friendly terms with them?

HG: Some of them we were on friendly terms. We used to play soccer together, Jews and Gentiles. But the Lithuanians were big anti-Semites.

SL: Did you yourself experience anti-Semitism as a child, growing up there before the war?

¹⁰ Yiddish, with English words, for "Oh, they made pork for him! Oh, help! What has become of little Shlomo?"

¹¹ Yiddish for a private school for the religious instruction of children.

¹² Hebrew for blessings, in this context indicating prayers.

HG: The only thing I experienced as a child [was] an experience with a Lithuanian boy, was when I started to go home and I just started off grade school and then one guy he started taking out on me, all of a sudden. I don't know. One Lithuanian boy used to come up in the morning when I used to come in already wait for me and try to beat me up, hit me. So I came home and I told Mother or Father about it, oh, he say, "Don't do nothing. Don't do nothing. If he hits you on the right, turn your left cheek." I say, "But it hurts! How long am I going to take all of that?" "You cannot hit him back. Don't ever hit him back." One time, a second time, until one time I came in the school and he was already waiting, he just came out from a corner and he spread his leg and I fell over and I hit my head on the floor and it was a cement floor and I really hit it and it hurt like hell, until I got mad and I really let him have it. Since then he never bothered me anymore. So then I came home with a big boil on my head, with the whole thing, and I felt really miserable. [My father] said, "What happened [Herzke? ¹³]." "Well, I told you. The same guy, he tried to beat me up again, but this time I didn't take it anymore. I let him have it." "You should have never done it." I said, "Why? How long am I going to take it? I can't take it no more. Even if he kills me, should I let him kill me?" But after that time, after I hit him really back he never bothered me again.

SL: What about anti-Semitism that say might not have happened to you but in your family or how did you, why do you say that the Lithuanians were anti-Semitic, what was your experience with them in a general way?

HG: Me, not as experienced. I was too small to experience anti-Semitic things. What I used to listen is to my uncles, to my parents, what they had to go through. All government employees were mostly Lithuanians so when you needed something done always had to go to a Lithuanian or you always had to *shmeer*.¹⁴ I know that. You couldn't get anything done unless you *shmeer*, you know, put some money in their hands if you had anything done. And if you wanted something done, especially Jew,

¹³ Yiddish diminutive here.

¹⁴ Yiddish for 'bribe'.

there was no, in fact is before, the only thing what I experienced and what I used to listen is what if a Jew wanted to open a store, they give him all kinds of difficulties. He couldn't own any the land, he couldn't own this, he couldn't do this, he always had to go to, there was always a Lithuanian above you. But you had to get permissions and sometimes he never give you the permission, what you wanted to, unless they didn't want to do it or any Lithuanians weren't involved in that, then they gave it to you.

SL: How long did you attend school before the war? What grade were you in?

HG: I was in the second grade of high school. In comparison to this country. Two grades of high school, that's as far as I went.

SL: Was it a secular school you attended with Lithuanians?

HG: What do you mean by secular school?

SL: It wasn't just a Jewish school.

HG: No, no, no. It was just...

SL: It was a Lithuanian public school?

HG: Yes, a regular public school between Lithuanian kids, Jewish kids.

SL: Did you have any cultural activities that you did in school, any clubs?

HG: The only cultural I remember, yeah, we done some plays. I don't remember exactly what kind of plays we done, but mostly the only cultural activities we really had was in sports together. But otherwise I don't remember any other cultural activities what we done.

SL: Were most of your friends Jewish, your real close friends?

HG: Yes, most of my friends were Jewish. I didn't have too many Lithuanian friends.

SL: Did you belong to any Jewish clubs, were there any Zionist organizations in Kovno?

HG: Yes, there were all kinds of Zionist organizations but me, myself, I was too young. I didn't belong to any clubs.

SL: Were your parents big Zionists?

- HG: I don't think that they were Zionist. They didn't belong to any organization at all. I remember Jabotinsky ¹⁵ once came. Yes, he came somehow, I don't know where he came from, but I remember we went to the train and we awaited him when he came off the train. That's about all I remember.
- SL: Did you see him?
- HG: Yes, I seen him from quite a ways off. But as I'm picturing right in mind how he looked, I don't remember really how he looked. But I know I seen him right by the train when he got off the train. And all the Zionist organization, you know, with the flags, with all the hullabullos they really going around. And oh, the Lithuanians they hated it. They didn't like that.
- SL: Was there a real strong Jewish community then at Kovno?
- HG: Oh, it was a very strong Jewish community.
- SL: Do you recall off-hand about how many Jews were living there before the war?
- HG: Before the war it must be about 150,000 Jews living there.
- SL: Any idea what percentage of the population that was? Was it a fair number of Jews for a city that size?
- HG: Oh yeah, yeah. In fact, not just in Kovno, I mean, in Kovno, Slobodka, and this is the suburb of Slobodka take this in and the surroundings of Kovno about 150,000 Jews.
- SL: As far as identification with the community, did you feel much more that you were Jewish rather than Lithuanian? What kind of sense did you have?
- HG: Oh sure, I felt I was more Jewish than Lithuanian because the whole surroundings was Jewish. Every Friday and Saturday you went to the synagogue to pray and you met Jewish friends and a lot of Jewish people. You didn't really come in contact [with Lithuanians], not myself. The only contact I had with Lithuanians was really what it was in school and that was only for four or five hours, you stay from 8:00 to 2:30, 3:00 in the afternoon, you went to school. But really myself with Lithuanians I had very little contact.
- SL: What languages did you speak when you were growing up?

¹⁵ Vladimir Jabotinsky, a British Zionist leader.

HG: I spoke Polish, Lithuanian, fluently Lithuanian, because you couldn't have known Polish, Russian unless you know Lithuanian fluently is he going to let you pass. You couldn't pass.

SL: How come you knew Polish, where did that come from?

HG: Because the Poles have taken over Vilna. That supposed to being the capital of Lithuania. Vilna was really capital of Lithuania, but then the Poles took Vilna away and then was they created Kovno as the capital of Lithuania. And then the Lithuanians got pretty mad and then they outlawed to talk any Polish. You couldn't talk any Polish. You were not allowed to talk Polish.

SL: Did you speak Yiddish with your parents?

HG: Oh yes. Yiddish, Polish, Russian, they couldn't hide nothing from me. You know like now, with the American kids you can talk Yiddish, if you talk Yiddish they don't know a damn word what you're saying. But there, Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, German.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

SL: Well we got basically up to the part where you've, you're in school as a pretty young kid, I guess 14 or so before the start of the war if you were born in '25.

HG: No I was 12, I was around 12. Not 14 because at 14 I was already in concentration camp.

SL: Alright in '35 then you were 10, but nothing... somewhere in that you were still pretty young. What kind of news though did you remember receiving about the troubles that were brewing in Europe?

HG: Oh yes, the news, we had radios. And we were very internationally inclined. What do you mean? Everybody was always listening to news, what was going on. Not just in Lithuania, because we were a very little country. The whole population was two-and-a-half million and we know that we are between the tiger and the lion, between the Russians and the Germans. Now someone is going to come in. We know that something is going to happen. So we were really scared, so we had to be more politically inclined and listen to the news more often than maybe the American people like in this country. Because who's going to take over the United States? You're not so worried about it. But there you were worried. Every day when you got up in the morning, especially 1935, 1936, when Hitler came to power, you had to worry about it. And news was coming out all the time. What Hitler's doing in Germany, what's happening to the Jews and how he came to power. We all know what was going on.

SL: You did know then that there was trouble brewing in Germany?

HG: Oh sure we did, we did, and we didn't like it. But we tried, the fact is that my family was trying to get somehow papers or a visa to get out of there. But you got to also realize we didn't think, we weren't thinking that even if war breaks out we didn't know that this is really extermination of the Jewish nation of the European Jewry. Nobody thought about it. Nobody even could even imagine a deal like this. They thought even if Hitler, sure, the war is no good, all the destroyed property and people are going to get killed, they'll maybe put us in a camp, they'll try to starve us to death, but they won't take us to crematoria. They won't try to exterminate us like animals. Nobody even thought about that.

SL: When the discussion came up as to your situation between Poland and Russia, was there ever any idea as to which would be the better occupying force?

HG: No, you mean between Russia and Germany?

SL: Yeah, Russia and Germany.

HG: We wanted the Russians, rather. Then when we see when the Russians occupied Lithuania because they took over the Baltic states, we were most surprised and happy that not the Germans were to come in.

SL: Why would you prefer the Russians to come?

HG: Because when we heard the stories what was coming out of Germany, we thought that it was getting pretty bad and we didn't think that the Russians are going to do the same thing to us as what the Germans are doing. We heard that they were putting already people in concentration camps. We heard that they were breaking windows in Jewish stores and they were burning books and they were doing all kinds of things. So we thought that with the Russians we'll be a lot happier than we were with the Germans. No, they were surprised when they saw the Russians taking over, and we were very happy about it. The Lithuanians weren't.

SL: The Lithuanians were not?

HG: The Lithuanians wanted the Germans and that's why...

SL: Why is that?

HG: Because they were more German inclined. They were a democratic state and some Lithuanians were pretty rich Lithuanians. Lithuania was like Wisconsin, a dairy state, and there were pretty rich Lithuanians down there, and the Russians they didn't like. They wanted the Germans because there was a lot of German Lithuanians, too. So they rather prefer the Germans to come in.

SL: What was the feeling in your family, the people close to you, when the German-Soviet friendship pact was signed in '39, right before the war, was that a scary time?

HG: That was the scary time, because we didn't know what the situation will be. We known that Germany and Russia signed a pact, but what was in the pact, that's what we were worried about. Is Germany going to come in and take over the Baltic States, or Russia? But we known, as soon as the pact was signed that the pact isn't going to last too long. We known that.

SL: How come?

HG: Well, we had a feeling. We know that the Russians and Germans, Germany was too smart and Hitler was too smart. We could tell because I don't think, see, we were better diplomats than the American was because when Chamberlain was flying to Europe and giving Hitler everything that he wanted, we known he was trying to appease him, that's all. I think the first time when, the Sudetenland, when he gave him the Sudetenland, that was the beginning of the end. If he wouldn't have given, if he would have stood up to Hitler and said, "No, this is all. We're not going to give you nothing no more." Every day he used to fly down there, Hitler used to give him the idea, "Hey, if you give me Sudetenland, if you give me Poland, if you give me France, I won't fight anymore." He gave him France, he fought; he gave him Poland, he fought; he gave him Sudetenland, he fought again. So what's the use of giving him?

SL: What was the situation in Lithuania then right after the beginning of the war, how soon was it after 1939 that you really had Russians in Kovno?

HG: In 1940. It happened on a Saturday afternoon. We went on a walk every Saturday afternoon after we used to eat the *cholent* with the *kishkeh*.¹⁶ Everybody used to fall asleep. You used to eat so much you couldn't move anymore. So you took an hour, you took an hour, an hour-and-a-half walk, a nap, and after the nap the whole family or friends or whatever it was in the house, we used to go out for a walk and take an hour or an hour-and-a-half walk. [Inaudible Yiddish words] The women used to look at the newest fashion and I used to look at men's fashions or whatever. And then one [Saturday], it was around 3:30, 4:00 in the afternoon and all of a sudden in closed tanks from all over. From over

¹⁶ A type of stew with derma stuffed with a mixture of flour, onions, salt, pepper, and fat.

the Nieman, from the river, over the bridges, started running through the streets. We didn't even know what was happening. It was a complete surprise. And after we seen the red star and sickle, we didn't know that it was Russian tank. Right away we got scared; we started running back home and tried to hide. We thought maybe that it was German tanks. We didn't realize what was happening.

SL: When was that, what month was that do you recall?

HG: It was June or July, I don't remember.

SL: Of 1940?

HG: 1940.

SL: So between the outbreak of the war in 1'39 and this time in 1940, how was life different in Kovno?

HG: Oh, it was a complete different. In fact Jews felt a lot more secure. The Jews had more positions, in fact that uncle was, they called him a *commissar* because the Russians didn't trust the Lithuanians.

SL: This was after Russians came in. What about that period before the Russians came in but after the war had already started in Poland? Was there a change of life in Kovno, or nothing really changed until the Russians came in?

HG: No, nothing really changed till the Russians. Everybody, the Jewish people started feeling scared. It was coming closer. But the real situation, life situation, didn't change much until the Russians came in.

SL: Okay, and then how did things differ?

HG: Well, then when the Russians came in, first of all, they gave right away, started giving Jews a lot of high positions in government. Like, for instance, let's say in the food situation, delivering food to the Russian Army was Jews. The Lithuanians hated it. You know, Jews started feeling a little more respectful, especially the younger generation, let's say, around twenty, twenty-five. [Vladimir] Jabotinsky, the Zionists they used to start giving the Lithuanians a lot of trouble. So then the Lithuanians started getting more anti-Semitic, very anti-Semitic. They couldn't express themselves. There was an order out of the Russian government or the Russian military that, first of all, no

Lithuanian could call a Jew, call him a "Jew". He could get six months in jail. No prejudices, there couldn't be any prejudices. If there was a job opening or whatever and anybody, whoever come in, and if he's qualified for a job he had to get it. Not because he's a Jew or he's a Lithuanian or whatever he is. Then the Russians started, as soon as they came in, first of all, they brought tremendous amounts of rubles. They couldn't buy nothing in Russia, bags, bags full of rubles and Lithuania was a pretty prosperous country. All kinds of stores and especially what they liked is the watches, handwatches. The Russians came in, they called them the big bands they were wearing on their hands. And when they see them little watches, they were crazy about it. So they started buying up everything they could buy. Shoes. I'll never forget it. There was an incident that was in a shoe store. My mother was buying me new shoes, and there a Russian soldier came in and he wanted shoes. I don't know he was wearing an eight-and-a-half, nine-and-a-half, and the store owner says, "I only got ten, and only a few pair left in the ten." [The soldier] says he wants to measure it on. [The owner] says, "If you wear an eight-and-a-half, it isn't going to fit you." He said, "What do you need a ten?" [The soldier] says, "I want to see it." So he brings him out a ten, he fits it on, and, oh, you know, he wears an eight-and-a-half, a nine, it's like a boat. You can take a ride on the river on them boats. He says, "I'll take it anyway." He took all the tens he had. You know why? He took the tens and he sent them right back to his relation in Russia, because there they didn't have nothing. Absolutely nothing. You got to remember that was in the Stalin era. So the first time the Russian soldiers took over the Baltic states, for the first time that a Russian soldier, any Russian human being, was out of Russia, and he opened his eyes. He didn't know what is happening. They didn't know what's happening in the world that there is nicer watches, there is nice dresses, there's nice suits. You had to see when the Russian army came in and then Russian officers were bringing over from deep Russia, from Moscow, their wives, you had to see how they were dressed. I went to the train, I looked at them. I exactly describe it in my book how she looked, an officer's wife. She was wearing men's shoes, men's socks with holes, red gloves. She was bad. In fact, when they came in, as the officers, their husbands, already staying

in Lithuania for quite a while, they were starting to buy up dresses, nightgowns for their wives when they going to come back. So their women, the first time was they started taking them out, go out to a nightclub, go out to dance, so they were wearing nightgowns because it's at night. Yes, exactly. And that's no lie. That's the truth. Wearing nightgowns to go to a nightclub to dance because they thought that's a beautiful looking dress.

SL: Why did you go down to the train station to see the Russians?

HG: Hey, you haven't got no idea. I was in love with the Russian army. Everybody. You have never seen any army who can sing, dance, and harmonize like the Russian soldiers. I was for night. I was sitting outside watching them as they were coming in. After the tanks, then the Russian soldiers started coming in with buggies, two, three horses and a buggy. So one soldier was trying to hold the horses, two were sitting in the back and there was a machine gun in the middle. So the one who was taking care of the horses was singing, the other one who was taking care of the machine gun was playing a harmonica, and the third one was singing, too. Always singing. You could go in the middle of the street, three soldiers, one soldier, one is playing the harmonica, two soldiers are dancing the Russian dances. Have you ever seen? They are terrific.

SL: Now how long did this nicer life last with the Russians in there? When did things change?

HG: It changed after six to eight months.

SL: And what happened at that point?

HG: After six to eight months, see there was already brewing, it was brewing. The whole peace wasn't going to last, and they known it. So they were starting to, the Russians were trying to get their army, the Russian army, more, what do you call it, ready for war with the Germans. And there was a lot of, I don't know how it happened that the Germans all of a sudden they decided that they want all their German citizens who live in Lithuania, they wanted to take them back to Germany. And that was an excuse for Hitler. When they came in to take out the German citizens, that supposed to be like the German CIAs, like American CIA. First of all, they came in, when they came to pick up the German

citizens from Lithuania they took all kinds of different photographs where the airfields were, where the Russian army was sitting, where their strongest points were. Because the Germans had already in their minds they're going to attack the Russians and the Russians somehow known it too. So first of all, they started to get citizens, evacuate citizens. They call it evacuation. And first of all what they started to evacuate was Lithuanians, the younger Lithuanians. So even the Russian Lithuanians that was working for the Russian government, they fooled them. They supposed to make out lists. Let's see, between forty to thirty years old, Lithuanians, it's supposed to be evacuated to Russia. So instead of giving the list twenty, thirty-year-olds, they gave them sixty to seventy years old. So they took all the old people, they left the younger Lithuanians because they known as soon as the Germans start attacking the Russians, the younger Lithuanians will go and start attacking the Russians from the inside. And then in the war, that's what happened.

SL: Was then there really no great change until the Germans attacked in '41?

HG: The great changes was already that we known it was coming is when they started evacuating already Jews, taking Jews to deep Russia.

SL: The Russian government was doing this?

HG: Yes, yes. They called it the Zionist. First of all, it was an excuse. They look and all the Zionists they're going to evacuate to Russia, to Siberia, because they were Zionists and they were democrats, you couldn't be a democrat, you couldn't be a Zionist, you couldn't be a, they were looking for all kinds of excuses. They were coming around twelve o'clock, two o'clock at night used to knock at the door, one soldier used to come in with a gun. Everybody get dressed, out in the truck, take them to a train station, and away they go.

SL: They said they were going to Russia? So did anyone ever hear from them again?

HG: As far as I know, I never heard from anybody or friends or neighbors, what happened to them. The fact is that the last couple carloads, the last couple, wasn't already, they didn't have time already to get them to Russia. The Germans got them, they bombarded them. That's already on the end when

the war started, when the war broke out in 1941. They kept evacuating Jews all the time, for the last two, three months, every night. Every night everyone was waiting already. If it was a neighbor, you hear trucks, you wouldn't even have to go to sleep because you were afraid maybe if I go to sleep you might as well be dressed because a truck might be arriving yet at one o'clock, two o'clock tonight, pick you up, put you on the truck, and there you go.

SL: Did they ever take any of your cousins or uncles away?

HG: No, no members of my family.

SL: What happened when the war broke out in '41?

HG: Well, in '41 then we started, I started to go. We know that the Germans are going to, well, first of all, the war started at 4:30 in the morning. The German ambassador didn't deliver the declaration of war until 7:30 in the morning. The war broke out at 4:30. At 4:30 the airfield, the airfield in Kaunus, Russian airfield was completely demolished. The Russian army didn't know whether it was coming or going. At 12:00 o'clock in the morning the Russian soldiers running from the front lines. One was running without boots, one was running without a gun. They were asking for food. There was no leadership. That was a complete mishmash. So then we decided that we know that the Germans are coming in, that the Russians won't stop them, so we tried to go with the Russians, run with the Russian army, run about 250 miles. We wanted to go to the Russian borders instead of falling into the hands of the Germans. We known what was going to happen. But we only got about 250 miles, 300 miles.

SL: This was with your entire family?

HG: Yeah.

SL: So you left then that night, the night that the war started?

HG: No, no, next night.

SL: How did you go, on your cart?

HG: Just walking, sometimes in wagons, some trucks. Russian soldiers and we asked them, "Do you want to take us for a ride?" Will they take us with them? When they say yes, we went and jumped on the Russian truck. We were seeing Russian soldiers riding on horses and all of a sudden from a house there comes out a machine gun, the Lithuanians. And they machine-gunned a whole platoon of Russians, maybe twenty-five, thirty Russians. Horses and men, dead bodies all over the place.

SL: So then this was right after the Germans attacked that you fled the city?

HG: Yes, right, next day. When we see them, the Russians, there was no leadership, there was no Russians left. In fact, we had a Russian pilot, he was living in our house, in my aunt's apartment. He rented a room, and when he went that morning when he went to, first of all, the way it started is, it started 4:30 in the morning. We heard all kinds of noises, 4:30 in the morning, Sunday morning, all of a sudden, what is happening? I run out of my bed and I run up to my, I got scared, so I run up to my dad and I said, "Hey, did you hear that?" The whole house was shaking. "What's that?" "Ah," he says, "the Russian planes are making maneuvers. Don't worry, go back to bed." Ten minutes later the same thing happened, the whole house shivers. I jumped out of bed again then ran to the windows, then all of a sudden, the airfield, we could see the airfield right from our house, full of smoke. That's all you seen is a bunch of smoke. He says, "I think it's trouble." So we went outside and then all of a sudden we hear the radio, the news. We put on the radios. Everybody started hearing the news that the Germans had attacked the Russians on the Lithuanian front, or wherever it started there, and the airfield was already in flames. There wasn't a plane left. Then the pilot come back, he says, "Nobody from my military, nobody's there. No planes. Everything is in flames," he says. "I got to run." I said, "Where are you running?" He says he's running back to Russia if he can get it.

SL: So how far did you end up then, how far did you go?

HG: About 250 miles.

SL: Where did you stop?

HG: Yanovo.

SL: And why did you stop there?

HG: Well, then we hear that the Germans were already about another three hundred miles from, they were cutting us, they had paratroopers, they dropped paratroopers. We were only 250 miles, [but] the Germans were already five hundred miles on the Russian territory. So what's the use going down there? We're never going to reach it, so we might as well turn around and go back.

SL: So you went right back to Kovno?

HG: We turned around and we went back, but on the way back there we ran into another family with our friends and then they had a daughter, on the way back, and all of a sudden we see all kinds of different bodies. You know, dead bodies, dead horses, dead men. All kinds of stuff laying on the road. And then a German, I don't know, a sergeant or whoever he was, came through on a motorcycle and he said she was a nice looking girl, a Jewish girl from the other friends that were going with us. We picked them up on the road, I don't know who they were, but anyway they were with us, walking on the way home again and he picked her up, he says, "I want that girl to go with me." So he took her out of there. He came back; the girl wasn't there, so you know what happened. He raped her and killed her down there, and then the family was going to look for the girl and they stayed there. You can imagine how they felt. So we went on the way home, in the same time that we left, the Lithuanians or the Germans started sealing off the Jewish homes. They know already. If anybody left, they entered their residence. If they going to come back, then we're going to get them. We came back to our house, [and] our house wasn't sealed up.

SL: How long had you been gone?

HG: Oh it would be about a week-and-a-half, two weeks, maybe. We came back and then we went up in our attic, tried to hide ourselves in the attic. It was a big house and the attic was big so we went upstairs and we hide down there for a couple of weeks. In the same time I was going around. Every day I had to go and collect rations because I was young, I know the Lithuanian language pretty good. Everybody was saying that I didn't look Jewish so I used to go in a line to collect the ration of bread.

And there in the meantime I used to see that they were taking Jews, rabbis, in the middle of the street. Lithuanians was walking them; the Lithuanians, Germans, were taking pictures. Some Lithuanians were putting gas on [the rabbis'] beards. You know, the Jewish rabbis in the old country, it isn't like they got their beards up here, just a little beard. There they had beards really hanging pretty near to the floor. They were putting gas and light a match to it. The screaming, the hollering. Dead bodies in the street. Kids, grown-ups.

SL: So this is something that you saw as you would go to get your rations. Did you come back and tell your parents about what was happening?

HG: Oh sure, I used to tell them what's happening. And there in the same time, my mother wasn't with us. She was in a Jewish hospital.

SL: Why?

HG: She was sick already before the war started. She had at that, what you call it, what you call it here, geeppers. Can you imagine I cannot think of the word? Let's see, if you get...appendicitis. The operation was okay, everything was okay, but then she got an infection and it got worse, because now appendicitis is nothing, but then you know it was 1940, and the doctors in the war and it was a Jewish hospital. And as we came back I wanted to go and find out, maybe I can take my mother back home, maybe she's better already, because she didn't know we left and we didn't know what was happening with her. And when I went to the Jewish hospital I had to push myself through fences. I know on the roads how to get through there but it was quite a ways to get there. And can you imagine the Germans? I was walking by Germans with Lithuanians and I was walking right straight by them and I thought maybe they're going to stop me or they going to say, "Hey, Jew boy." That's all I needed. But anyway I made it to the hospital, and it was a complete Jewish hospital. There was five hundred patients. I got in the hospital and when I got up to where the secretary was sitting, or whatever, by the window, and I knock on the window, and I said, "My name is Harry Gordon. I want to see my mother. My mother is here." She said, "What's your name?" I said, "Harry Gordon." She closes the window and

says, "Wait a minute." And I know it wasn't the same girl who was sitting there when I brought my mother in, when we took my mother in. She was Lithuanian, she wasn't Jewish. So right there I was a little suspicious of the whole works. She opens the window and she said, "I'm sorry. Your mother is dead." "Can I see my mother? Can I see her? Where's the dead body? I want to see her dead body." She says, "Why don't you go down in the basement because they keep the morgue, where they keep the dead bodies." I went down to dead bodies. There was a doctor there, a Lithuanian doctor. There wasn't a Jewish doctor. And I said to him, "I want to see my mother." He says, "There's 500 patients here." I said, "Five hundred? What do you mean five hundred patients?" He says, "All five hundred Jewish patients. They're all poisoned. They all poisoned them. How are you going to find [your mother]? When they are poisoned they all look alike. How are you going to find your mother's body?" When I hear that, I just ran out of there and I went back home. I can't imagine when I came back home and I told the story to my father then my uncle, to the rest of the family, what happened to my mother.

SL: So that was true? You never saw your mother again?

HG: No.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

TAPE 2, SIDE 1 (no Side 2)

SL: And you were hiding really in the attic with your father and some of your uncles and aunts, who was in the attic with you for a while?

HG: My uncles, my aunts, my father, and we were all in the attic. In the downstairs apartment, see we had a Lithuanian janitor. He moved in down there right away. He wanted it already. He thought we were dead already, we're going to be dead, and he's going to inherit the whole works. So he himself when we came back called the Lithuanian partisans and says, "Hey, them Jews came back and they're hiding in the attic." So Lithuanian partisans came around drunk, I remember. They were very drunk. Came up, all the way up into the attic down there on the third floor in the house, started knocking on the door. So we opened it up, Lithuanians came in, pretty drunk, and my uncle recognized one Lithuanian. He was an old friend that was, I don't know, they done business together. And he says, "Hey." Two Lithuanians were waiting downstairs in the yard, and three were upstairs. So he says, "Get dressed. Let's go." So my uncle says to the guy, "Where are we going?" He says, "We're going to kill you." [My uncle] says, "Why are you going to kill us? We haven't done nothing. Why do you want to kill us?" He started begging him and telling them he's going to give them some money. He says, "You are my best friend. Remember, we used to do business together. Why do you want to kill us?" "You Jews are no good," and all of that stuff. "You Jews are no good and you made the whole war, the Germans and the Russians, and you created the whole deal" — started giving you all that spiel. Anyway, they took us down and they put us in a, they took us to a little camp. That was me, my youngest uncle, this guy, this guy right here, this uncle and aunt, me, and that's it.

SL: Your father?

HG: Not my father.

SL: They didn't take your father?

HG: No, they let my father go. My father they let go, the other two aunts, they let them go, but they took the youngest uncle, my oldest uncle and aunt, and me. We entered that camp. First of all, the officer, the lieutenant from that camp, was a German, a Lithuanian German. As soon as we got to that camp, they brought us to the camp, we thought they were going to shoot us. But as they brought us to the camp, as soon as they got us in there, that Lithuanian German came in and he started telling us a story of when he was living in Lithuania as a disguised Lithuanian and he was taking all kinds of different pictures for the German army, he says, and he was working in a bakery as a Lithuanian baker and he was really working for the German army as a CIA agent or whatever. And how stupid the Lithuanians were, the Russians were. They didn't realize what he was doing, and he's a big man now, and he was wearing a swastika, the whole works. Well anyway, he says, "As long as I'm going to find out if you're not Zionist, if you didn't belong to any organization, I'm going to let you go free." We didn't believe it, you know, but okay. He's going to find out. He's going to look at all the papers we brought, if we got any papers, and he'll find out whatever papers he got, and if we didn't belong to any organization, you don't have to worry about it. That's what he said, anyway. In the meantime there was a lot of Jewish women, a lot of Jewish men down there. I think I was the youngest down there. There wasn't any other kid except me. But to me he says, tomorrow morning he'll let me out anyway. Papers or no papers, he'll let me out. And the same time as we had to sleep in the camp for one night or two nights, as we went to bed, can you imagine how you felt? Is it really what he's telling you, is it true, or tomorrow you might be dead because all kinds of different ideas was coming through your head. You don't know. He's telling you one thing and he's doing another. In the same time, in the same evening, all kinds of young German soldiers come in down there and looking us over, you know, Jews, a special animal. I was wearing, and I'll never forget it, I was wearing a red sweater at that time. It wasn't really red, but it was a reddish color. So first of all two young guys, oh, they must have been 19, 20, or twenty-one years old [at the] latest. The oldest comes up to me and says, "*Hey, der Jude ist ein*

Kommunist,"¹⁷ because I wear a red sweater. I got scared right away there, Communist, you know. But anyway, and this was it, and then we went to bed. Next morning we wake up, and the same time we're hearing already stories that somebody, that commandant, that German Lithuanian, he's taking bribes. He let already yesterday out quite a few Jews. He's taking gold, he's taking gold watches, money; he's taking anything he can and he lets them out. But some women, some Jewish women already started complaining that he let out this husband and let out her husband, "How come he didn't let my husband out?" He couldn't let everybody out at one time. But he was taking big bribes. Next day he calls me in his office. I go in. "Harris Gordon?" Harris Gordon, yes. "What did you do?" I said, "I didn't do nothing. I went to school. I'm too young," I said, "to do anything." "Tonight you're going to go home. I'll let you out tonight." Okay. I didn't believe him anyway. In the evening, it was 6:30, 7:00 it had gotten dark. My name was called, and he says, "Yes, you can go home." So I was a little suspicious. I didn't believe it. But when he says you can go home and then I started saying good-bye to my uncle, to my aunt, to my youngest uncle, from then I never seen my youngest uncle since that camp. They took him away and killed him right there on that, what do they call it? A Knight fort, a fort used to be in the medieval times, spilling hot oil from there? What do you call that? A castle.

SL: So they let you out and you went back to your house?

HG: I went back to my house.

SL: Did you find your father?

HG: Oh yes, my father was there.

SL: So he was there?

HG: Yes, they were really surprised. My other aunts were there. But I said to him, "Don't worry." I said, "I think my uncles and aunt will come tomorrow, the next day."

SL: Did any of them come back?

¹⁷ German for 'The Jew is a Communist'.

HG: That oldest uncle, not [the youngest] one. This one didn't come back anymore. I never seen that one since that day. This one come back.

SL: Uncle and aunt?

HG: They came back.

SL: How long after that were you put into the ghetto?

HG: Oh, that was about I think about a couple months, two months, because I was put in a bigger then they created a small ghetto and a big ghetto. The Jews, all the Jews that were left, after we got into the ghetto, there was about 35,000 Jews, from 150,000 already. The rest were already all killed. The little ghetto was, the only one that separated the little ghetto from the big ghetto was a bridge, a wooden bridge. The Jews weren't allowed to go through the street on the sidewalk. The only way you could go to the big ghetto, from the big ghetto the little ghetto, was by a bridge, a wooden bridge. And the ghetto was surrounded by barbed wire, electrical wire, fences, towers with machine guns, with guards, Lithuanian and German guards. And on the bridge were guards, too, two German guards. And in the same time as they created the ghetto, then right away they started taking Jews to work, on brigades, working brigades. The biggest working brigades we went was to the airfield, fixing up the airfield was bombarded. They had to fix the roads so the airplanes can land and get up again in the air for the German fighters and every day we had to get up 4:30, 5:00 o'clock in the morning, get to that particular place where the Germans used to come and pick us up. And that was the biggest working brigade, between four to five thousand people every day. We used to go out there, 4:30, used to get together 4:30, 5:30 the German guards used to come to pick us up, and took us about an hour-and-a-half to two hours to get there. To walk over there.

SL: Now the difference between the two ghettos, wasn't in actuality one of the ghettos really just mainly a holding ground before extermination? If you were sent to the little ghetto...

HG: Yes, sure it was extermination, sure, that's all it was, extermination. They exterminated the little ghetto and then they only made the big ghetto, and in the end they exterminated the big ghetto, too. But in the meantime, as the ghetto was created, it was a little ghetto and a big ghetto.

SL: What part of town was this in?

HG: In Slobodka.

SL: Oh, so the bigger ghetto was in Slobodka?

HG: The ghetto was in Slobodka and it was in a radius of, I would say, the small ghetto and the big ghetto was in a radius of maybe twenty blocks.

SL: So they took all the Jews then from Kovno to Slobodka?

HG: Right. Not just from Kovno, from all the surrounding areas, if there was any Jews left. Because they said, the last order was that if there is any Jew found hiding in a Lithuanian home, they'll not just shoot the Jews, they'll shoot the Lithuanian with the Jew together. So then every Jew went to the little ghetto and to the big ghetto; they went to the ghetto.

SL: Did you have idea what the reaction was of the Lithuanians to the Jews being marched off to the ghetto?

HG: At that time there was no reaction. In fact, as I didn't tell you the story about the beginning, before the ghetto, the massacre. As they called it The Slobodka Massacre. In Slobodka there was about 20,000, 25,000 Jews living down there, at that time, and the Lithuanians they wanted to have a holiday. The Germans came in. So one weekend it started. Friday night and they started to slaughter Jews. From Friday and the slaughter didn't stop until Sunday night. Going in every Jewish home and killing them. And what killings it was. They nailed them to the walls; they cut off their heads. Children, they cut them off their heads, their hands, their fingers. They nailed bodies right to the table. That's what the Lithuanians had done. That was before the ghetto was created. So that's how the Lithuanians felt about the Jews.

SL: How many people do you estimate that they crammed into the ghettos when you were there?

HG: Thirty-five thousand.

SL: In an area of, what did you say, twenty blocks?

HG: Twenty, twenty-five blocks.

SL: Were you given any kind of food at all?

HG: The only food you were getting rations. Yes, you were getting rations like that amount of bread for a week, that amount for sugar, that amount for horse meat. You were getting horse meat, a half pound or three-quarters of a pound or a pound per person a week.

SL: Where were you living?

HG: We were living in a little house. It was a two-room house. I remember my aunt and my uncles living in one room and I was sleeping in the kitchen. I was sleeping in the kitchen on two chairs. My head was laying on one chair and my feet was on the other chair. Because we didn't take too many things with us. You didn't have enough time to take too many things with you.

SL: So your daily life was, in effect, going off to work at the airfields?

HG: Right. I went to airfields for two months in a row, day in, day out.

SL: Was your father working also there?

HG: My father, my father, I lost; I never seen out of the ghetto. I have never seen my father after the ghetto. I lost him somehow in the ghetto. The Germans took him away, I didn't know. I thought for sure he's dead, and I met him when I came to Dachau one day. When I was taken into Dachau.

SL: How many years later was this?

HG: About three years later. That gave me enough hope already to think, hey, maybe there is maybe some family member still alive. See, the Germans were trying to deceive you. They kept telling us one member is being exiled in a different camp or in a different ghetto. Everybody's alive. They kept you in such a hysteria to think that your family members are alive. They're just in different camps or in different ghettos, exiled. Different places where they need different working men or working brigades.

And when I see my father there in camp Dachau when I met him three years later I really believed that, because I could never believe it that my father was alive yet, by then.

SL: So when they marched you from Kovno to the ghetto, that was the last time you saw your father, you lost him in the shuffle there going into the ghetto?

HG: Right, yes. No, no, not in the shuffle, but that was in the massacre where we got separated.

SL: When you were already in the ghetto, there was a selection of some sort?

HG: Yes, yes, some kind of a selection already, that is when I lost him and I didn't see him until 1944.

SL: How long were you in the ghetto before your father disappeared?

HG: In the ghetto, between six or eight months. Then the massacre is what they preferred right when you went into the ghetto. One day when we were waiting to go to work and the Germans didn't come to pick us up so we thought right away that something is brewing and all of a sudden, staying from 4:30 in the morning we stayed and waited for the Germans to come and pick us up to go to work, and they're not there. Then around 7:00, 7:30, nobody's there. Everybody saw the Jewish, there was Jewish police, too, in the ghetto, they created Jewish police, and the police told us to go back home. And then around 8:30, 9:00 the fences started, German army with Lithuanians, Belorussians, Russians volunteers who were in the German army, surrounding the ghetto then we known that something is in the making already. So that was the first action, what they done. What they tried to find out is if we're going to put up any, what do you call it, if we're going to try and put any resistance. So this was only a trial out. All of a sudden Germans and Russians and Lithuanians started running through the ghetto and pulling everybody out of the house, pulling everybody out of the house to a big field. There was a big field in the ghetto. In the big ghetto, we had to go over the big bridge and everybody was running. Where we were running nobody knew. And I known at that time German planes were flying over pretty low. Germans were taking photographs [of] what was happening. Trucks arrived, German trucks. They tried to put old people, old women, old men, young children, young kids, very young kids, and throwing them in the trucks and taking them out of the ghetto. About two or

three hours later they brought the trucks back with the old men, the kids, the children, and everybody went home. So everybody was happy again. They thought, hey, I don't know what it was but we know it was some kind of a maneuver to see if there is going to be any resistance. The next action wasn't like this. The next action was different. In the big ghetto we also had a hospital. So when the next action came, the first things they done was there is young kids, young kids, sick people, the doctors and nurses, whoever was in the hospital, they started on fire and burned the whole hospital with the people in it. The sick ones, the doctors, the nurses, everybody. People tried to jump from the windows from the second, from the third floor, in flames on the ground. It was miserable. So that's what they done to the Jewish hospital in the big ghetto. That is when my dad disappeared, in the second action, and then I didn't see him anymore till 1944.

SL: And then you only saw him that first day in Dachau?

HG: The first day, and then all of a sudden he disappeared. On the second day he disappeared again.

SL: Did they create a *Judenrat* in the ghetto when you were living there?

HG: There was. Yes, there was a *Judenrat*.

SL: Do you recall anything that they did, or what your feeling was about it?

HG: The feeling of mine was about the Jewish police. We also had Jewish police; we had a *Judenrat*. Hey, can you imagine they were only trying, anybody who had any relation to the *Judenrat*, can you imagine, was better fed, had more rationing, they was getting more food.

SL: Was there quite a bit of indiscriminate killing going on in the ghetto by the Germans or were people dying basically of starvation? Was it a pretty terrifying scene as far as dead bodies on the street?

HG: No, you'd gotten already so used to death that death didn't mean nothing to you. In fact, everybody was happy, was thinking that dead, you'll be sweeter than life because if you're dead, you're all gone already. Your worst is over. The live ones really had to get through the struggle, is to keep alive, because the dead ones was already dead. See you were so used to death already but in the meantime you also wanted to go on living. Especially like I was, I was young and what I wanted to know is will I

ever be yet a human being. How will it feel to be human again? To be a free man again, if it ever happens. And will Hitler really leave me alive? Really, won't he destroy every witness or every human being who is left? Is he going to let them stay alive? Because every German or anybody were always telling us that had the German Reich to capitulate at twelve, you Jews will be dead five minutes before twelve and it would have been true if he would have had the time. He didn't have the time.

SL: So how long did you remain in the ghetto?

HG: See, I wasn't in the ghetto long. I kept running from one camp — there was also different camps where the Germans kept me sending out. Like I was in a camp, Kaslove Ruda,¹⁸ in Lithuania.

SL: Was it a forced labor type of situation?

HG: Forced labor type of camp, yes?

SL: So they took you out of the ghetto to send you to forced labor camp?

HG: Right. It was still in Lithuania but it was in forced labor camp. And I was the youngest. Fact is that one day, they put me in a forced labor camp, I don't know, where I got shot. Belorussians, White Russians working in the German army, here I'm trying to have fun. So as we were standing in line to get our soup ration and our quota of bread, and in front of me there's a friend of mine, Pershl Schmidt. He wasn't a regular friend. I just met him in the same camp. We were together in the slave labor camp. So he was standing in front of me to collect a ration and I was standing in the back of him. And all of a sudden I hear a shot and all of a sudden Pershl Schmidt, my friend who stands in front of me, starting hollering, screaming. "Oh, my arm, my arm." And his arm was hanging. It was like exploding bullets they used to use, you know. If it hits a bone it explodes. And his arm was right away — it tore his arm right off. But all of a sudden I felt warm in my arm, too. The bullet supposed to have gone through my arm but it hit my flesh and hit his bone. I'm seeing a lot of blood running out of my arm. So I run out and I started screaming, too. I didn't know what was happening. They were just having fun. So he lost his arm and then he got killed anyway in the hospital. They took him to the hospital and the hospital

¹⁸ Mr. Gordon may be referring to Kazlu Rude in Lithuania.

was burned up. Then I was in another slave labor camp. When they took me to this slave labor camp, I'll never forget it, for this particular slave labor camp a Jewish policeman came. He came with a list. They needed that many, two hundred or three hundred people. So they took out three hundred people, wrote out a list. That's why the Germans created the Jewish policemen, so they wouldn't have to do the dirty work. Have the Jews do that. So go around with a list, like Harry Gordon or Mark Shapiro, or whatever his name was. Three hundred people they get. And at that time I just happened to come already from one slave labor camp with my arm, shot through my arm. And my leg. Somehow, I don't know, I got an infection in the leg and I couldn't wear shoes. On one foot I could wear a shoe, the other one I couldn't put no shoe. It was swollen just like a big [inaudible Yiddish word]. They didn't know what the hell it is. But anyway, he came by me. I said, "How can you take me to a slave labor camp?" I said, "I cannot even walk. What good am I going to do in a slave labor camp? I can't work. I got a bad arm, I was shot in my arm, my foot is swollen." "Your name is on the list. A Jewish doctor will come. He'll examine you and if you can't go, you won't go. We'll send you back home." I know what that meant. I was waiting for a Jewish doctor. A Jewish doctor never came. Took us on the trucks and put us in another slave. But that particular commandant, he wasn't bad. I don't know if they call it a miracle or not. When I came to that camp, and that was hard work, twelve, fourteen hours a day work, and I got up to the commandant and I showed him my leg, I showed him my arm, he said to that officer who was in charge of that camp to give me lighter work in the meantime. I should have lighter work. He says, "In a week or ten days he's going to have German doctors coming through here and when they come," he says, "you're going come in and they'll examine you, see what's the matter with it." I was a little afraid because the German doctors didn't care what was going on with it, I didn't want to be a guinea pig, an experimental animal. But anyway, a week later, after having been in that slave labor camp, two German doctors appeared. Anybody who's sick, who can't work, wants to register. So a lot of people, they didn't want nothing to do. There was a lot of sick work, believe me. I didn't have nothing to lose. I felt sick and mad and bitter and

everything. It was a mess. I said, "I'll go and see. It can't get any worse. That's all they can do is kill me." I got up there, they examined me, about thirty to forty-five minutes. They gave orders to commandant I'm not supposed to work. And to keep my foot in the sun, put it up high and keep it in the sun. It took me about seven to eight days. I never done anything. Everybody else was working like a horse, I was laying in the sun. Everybody got jealous at me. But they didn't want to go. I took my chances. After seven, eight days my foot got better, and after then I got sent back to the ghetto where my aunt was very sick. This one, with whom I was standing. I was staying in the house, this aunt, and she died in the ghetto. She had an infection in her stomach or whatever, something was wrong down there from the horse meat and she died right there and then. That was the end of that.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1 (no Side 2)

TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SL: We can try to pick up from where we left off the last time. You did mention to me that you resided for a while in slave labor camps. You mentioned that you had been shot through the arm and that you also had a leg infection.

HG: This was in two different camps, see. When they took me from the ghetto to that one camp they call it in Lithuanian; that was 150 to two hundred miles, Kaslove Rude. I was taken to that camp, it was around 4:30 in the morning. Two policemen came into the little house where I lived in the ghetto with my uncle and aunt, and my leg was completely infected. I couldn't even wear a shoe. I had to wear a big boot so I could put my foot in. And then two Jewish policemen came in the morning. About 4:30 they came in and they said, "Are you Mr. Harry Gordon?" "Yeah." "You're supposed to go with us. I said, "Where am I going to go? I can't go because my leg is infected." And at that particular day I didn't have no, from the doctor any furlough. In a ghetto you had to have a furlough. I couldn't even go to work. And the day before, I don't why, I couldn't go to the doctor. I was in bad shape. I couldn't even move because of my leg, so I didn't go to extend my furlough from the doctor. And they say, "Do you got a furlough or a what do you call it you know like, from the doctor you have some sort of...medical excuse?" I didn't have it. He says, "Well, I can't help it. You got to go with us. Your name is on my list and we have to bring [you] with us, but as soon as we get," I say, "Where are you taking me?" He says, "There's going to be more people waiting already. It's a special for another working camp", they didn't call it slave labor camp, but a working camp, "for the Germans." It's got to be 150 to two hundred miles away from Kovno, from the Vilijampole Slobotka, from the ghetto. So I say, "How can I go? I can't even move my leg." You know, and he says, "Get dressed, take whatever clothes you can, and when you get to that place in jail or wherever we're going to keep you, until all the people, we need about 450 or five hundred, people are going to be all together, and there there's a Jewish doctor. A doctor going to come examine you and if he think that you can't go, you won't go. We'll send you

back home." Well, we know the situation already, I had a feeling. They say, "Go, no doctors. Nobody's going to see any doctors and there won't be no doctors coming down there." And I was the only one with that particular... And the rest of them were in pretty good shape when I got there already in the place where they had taken all the people together, waiting for the Germans to come with the buses and pick us up. Took us around 4:30, 5:00. By 7:00 there was already about 450, five hundred people. And then I kept asking the Jewish policeman, "Where's the doctor who's supposed to come and examine?" "He'll be here, he'll be here, don't worry." Well, in case and point, he wasn't there. There was no doctors there. 9:00 they put us all in the trucks, then Germans came down and they started beating and hollering at everybody have to run to trucks. They put us on the trucks and they took us away. We came to, oh, we started around 9:00 or 9:30 and when we arrived in the camp, I think it must have been 1:30, 2:00 in the afternoon. So we got off the trucks and then we had to stand right away in lines and they started counting us if nobody escaped. And I came down with my big boot. He says, what's the matter with me? So he called the foreman right away, the Jew there, the Jewish guy who's supposed to take care of us. He says, "What is this guy doing here? He's got a bad leg. How is he going to work?" "Well, they said send him up here. There's nothing I could do about it. There's nothing I could do about it." Well, I started working the first few days, three, four days, the first week. First of all, them camps, them barracks, weren't finished yet. So some of us had to work on the barracks and some, we were digging. I don't know what you call it. They were working some squares. They were pulling out from the ground. We used to call it *turf* in Lithuanian or whatever. I don't know how you pronounced it or how you call it in American. But it's four squares. That's like 50-pound squares we had to cut out. Each one got a line about fifty feet long or six feet wide, and you had to do it in an eight hour shift, digging it up. Well, I could have died right down there and then. See, digging with a shovel you had to put some pressure with your leg and my leg was bothering me tremendous. So, one day, all of a sudden, that German commandant came out one morning and he said that this weekend or next week there's going to be a German doctor who's coming through and they are going

to give everybody a, what do you call it, you'll have to go for a...exam or whatever. And everybody got scared already, because nobody wanted to go for examination with German doctor. You know what they're going to do. They going to make all kinds of experiments with you, you know, they will treat you like an animal.

SL: Right, I think you told me this. Then the doctor examined you finally and then allowed you to rest for that week.

HG: Right, I told you that.

SL: After you rested for that week, did your leg get better?

HG: My leg got better, yes.

SL: Did you then continue working there at the camp?

HG: I didn't continue working because a week later, after my leg got better, then an order came from the ghetto, somehow to the commandant, to the German, to this particular camp that I should go back to the ghetto. And at that time, the German commandant, every two weeks he had to go and pick up from the ghetto. He used to bring provisions for us in the camp. So that time when he went for provisions he took me along and took me to the ghetto and I went along with him and I found out when I came to the ghetto that my aunt died. And I didn't have to go back to the camp again. But then after a while, two, three weeks later, I was sent to a different slave labor camp.

SL: What was the name of this next one?

HG: They used to call it the [sounds like; Worker Hof]. That was the name. And there is where I got shot in my arm. That happened on the second day, as we came in there. That wasn't Germans but it was mostly the soldiers were there White Russians. And as we were standing on the second day, we were working on the barracks, to fix up the barracks for the White Russians. There was more white Russians coming and they didn't have enough room so we were fixing up more barracks for them. And at that day when we were standing for lunch in line to receive our ration bread with our ration soup or whatever they call it, so we stood there in the line. It must have been maybe a couple

hundred. Then all of a sudden I didn't even hear the shot. I really didn't hear the shot. But a friend of mine, he was standing in front of me, all of a sudden he started screaming and crying, "My arm, my arm." And he ran out of the line, you know, and he fell down on the ground and you could see his arm was hanging. And all of a sudden my arm felt a little funny. It felt like it sweat, you know. Then all of a sudden I picked up my shirt and then I see my arm is bloody and I couldn't understand what was the matter. So I went right away to the foreman. The Jewish foreman came up and he says, "Hey, I think what had happened he said", the bullet went through my arm first. It was an exploding bullet they used to use at that time. If it hits a bone or something, it explodes, rip your arm right off or your belly, whatever. If it hits anything hard it explodes. It went through my flesh. It didn't hit no bones, and it hit his. It went right in his arm and hit the bone and exploded and the arm was right away hanging, it ripped the arm right off of him. So right there they send us back to the ghetto, recuperate in the ghetto hospital. And after that, then the evacuation of the ghetto started.

SL: Can I ask a couple more questions about the slave labor? First of all, what kind of barracks were you living in?

HG: The barracks we were living, they were more like, well how do you describe them barracks? It wasn't barracks, it was just put up like a skeleton. A skeleton building. There was no beds, there was no bunks, there was nothing. It was just black dirt or gravel or sand or whatever, and we had to sleep in the sand, right on the top of the gravel. There was no bunk beds or anything. And just at the top there was a roof you know with supports underneath, and that's about all.

SL: What kind of rations did you get? How much food were you receiving?

HG: All we were receiving was about a quarter pound of bread — or that's what you're supposed to get a day — and a quart of soup. But there was no soup. The soup was just plain water, warm water. And sometimes we didn't get that.

SL: Was there a lot of killing going on, a lot of shooting of slave laborers?

HG: At that particular time, in that camp, no, I don't know if there was a lot of killings going on because I only spent at that camp maybe about two, three days.

SL: What about the first camp that you were at? Was it any different really?

HG: In that particular camp there wasn't that many shootings going on because everybody was producing, everybody was working. They were a more younger generation. There was no old people; there was no old woman. It was mostly men. And there was a few women too but the women were all mostly younger age.

SL: What kind of work were most people doing?

HG: Like I said, very few were working on the unfinished barracks. The rest were digging ditches, digging up squares. We were using it for burning material, heating material. Sod, something like this. And that's what we had to produce, but it was sixteen to eighteen hours a day work. Get up at five o'clock, you start working. Come home around six, seven o'clock in the evening.

SL: Was there any resistance at all going on in the slave labor camps?

HG: There was no resistance no place. There wasn't any resistance. You didn't even think about any resistance in them camps. First of all, where were you going to run? The Lithuanians didn't like the Jews. They were very anti-Semitic. Now, where would you run? How long could you hold out? If you could get in contact with the partisans or with the Russian guerilla fighters, if you had a chance, how far would you have to run? How far did you have to go? And you were not in shape. And they had us in such a mental state you know, degradation. We were so dehumanized. That's the way I was thinking. I wasn't even thinking about running away. The only thing I was thinking, in particular me, is how I could go along that day, how I can find enough food to survive that day.

SL: Did you manage to make any friends in the slave labor camps?

HG: Sure, I had a lot of friends down there, we were making friends. But each one was for himself. Each one was trying to survive. See you get to the stage where you become an animal. Friends or no friends. It's you. At night we used to lay in the barracks when everybody was sleeping, four or five

hundred in one barrack, and at night when it was getting dark and you're supposed to lay down and go to sleep, you could feel hands were crawling over you, looking for some pieces of bread. Or maybe you were dead already or whatever. Because some people were dying just from starvation. And in the same time someone already was thinking maybe if you're dead. And maybe if you're not dead, you're asleep. Some people, they weren't using up the whole slice of quarter pound bread or whatever you were getting, the ration. They were eating a piece now and leave a little piece maybe for later so they, as they were going to sleep taking it with them, and if they wake up in the middle of the night, and they were eating it in the middle of the night. So in the meantime the neighbor who was laying next to you was feeling you out and trying to find, "maybe he's got a piece of bread", trying to steal from you.

SL: Did you have any thoughts, overwhelming thoughts about anything in particular besides where you were going to find food?

HG: Any thoughts, feeling other than finding food? The only thoughts or feelings I had, my personal feelings, what I think and what I had, what I was feeling, is how to get out of this camp. How to get out of here alive. Always thinking on the next day how to survive.

SL: Now, what happened then once you got back to the ghetto and they started the liquidation process? What was going on there in Kovno when they were liquidating the city?

HG: Everything was already in a mishmash. When they got me to the ghetto I couldn't find my uncles, I couldn't find my aunts. Some were already shipped out. Some were already shipped out. Some told me that they already put them on barges, barges to ship them to Germany. Some were put on train cars. Nobody knew what was going on. We know we're going to different camps. We were going to Germany because the Russians weren't too far away and they didn't want to leave us so the Russians will take us over, leave us as witnesses, and the Russians would get us. So they took us to Germany. They took us farther into Germany, and then they took us to Dachau, I got to Dachau. And there is where I met, did I tell you about that story where I met my father for the first time?

SL: Yeah. Can I interrupt you for a second before you get there?

HG: Yeah.

SL: Do you recall when it was that the Kovno ghetto was liquidated and when it was that you were taken to Dachau?

HG: That was in '44.

SL: So you had spent then quite a bit of time those couple years between the ghetto and the slave labor camps?

HG: Oh sure. I was from, well, the ghetto was in '41 and I kept running from one camp to another. I really didn't sit too much in the ghetto. They kept me out of the ghetto, brought me back in the ghetto, back in the slave labor camp, and then by the end they brought me back to the ghetto then I was already shipped to Germany.

SL: And that was in '44?

HG: Mm Hmm.

SL: Did they take a lot of young men your age from the ghetto to Dachau?

HG: Oh a lot of men, yes.

SL: So you were with a pretty large transport?

HG: Oh yes, quite a large transport.

SL: And how did they ship you there, by what means?

HG: By boxcar.

SL: Did you get any food or water at all during that trip?

HG: No, it was, we didn't get any drinking water. They put us in maybe 200 to 250 in a boxcar, in a closed-in boxcar. I think it was between five to six days or maybe seven days, I'm not exactly exact, as they took us from the ghetto to get us to Germany to Dachau. And in that time I don't believe it, yeah, we stopped I think once or twice where we got some food. But we didn't get enough drinking water. They couldn't get enough. And 200-250 people you were sitting in each other's lap, you couldn't even turn around, you couldn't move around. By the time we arrived there must have been between twenty

to forty people dead right in the same boxcars we're living there. I know some people they were drinking their own urine. It's impossible to describe exactly. Like I said in the beginning, we were so dehumanized, animals. We weren't human, we were more like animals. They looked at us like animals, they treated us like animals.

SL: Why don't you tell me about your arrival at Dachau.

HG: We arrived in Dachau and then right away they started sorting us in groups. I don't remember exactly how many in a group, twelve people, twenty people, or fifteen people in a group, and there was the main, the German who was starting to sort us, and he was standing on a little bench down there and we had to walk by him and one finger was to the right and this finger, with just this finger, just the movement of his finger, the index finger, it was right, left, left, right. Left was to the gas chambers, right to the light. He seen that it was younger, who they could get some more work out. They left them to the right and I happened to be in the bunch to the right. And they put us in a barrack, and the barrack must have been at least, I would say, between a thousand or 1,200 people in one barrack. Again the same thing, sleeping on the ground, one on top of the other. No clothing, no underwear, no nothing, just the Sing-Sing uniform and in the winter it was pretty cold. In Germany the weather is just like up here, it gets about twenty-five or thirty below zero and lots of snow. And when I got there and we had to march every morning. They used to wake us up, you just came from working, you fell asleep you were so tired, eighteen hours, nineteen hours a day's work. And then when you came home you had to stay in line again to get your ration, a quart of soup. It's supposed to be the quart of water and a slice of bread. And somehow all of a sudden the German guard started hitting you, just for nothing. Maybe somebody made a move in the line, he wasn't standing straight, just an excuse. Started hitting us and beating us and everybody from the line started running all kinds of different directions. You didn't even have a chance to collect your ration at that time. You were lucky to get to the barrack without getting hit or getting kicked or getting mugged or whatever. So you didn't even collect your ration already and you were lucky to fall down on your, you fell down so tired and you fell

asleep. And all of a sudden you fall asleep just, they made sure you're already sleeping an hour, hour-and-a-half. And then all of a sudden the loud speaker started hollering in German, "**Rouse**, everybody **rouse**," and the German guards started running through the barracks with the guns and started hitting you. You went to bed, it was only about 10:00, 10:30 and about 12:30 you were already up. And then they started putting you up in the field in the cold, rain, you're still asleep, you're still tired. You haven't had a chance even to relax. Started counting you again. It would take two to three hours to count. And nobody escaped. Where could you escape? You didn't have any power to run. But anyway it took two, three hours by the time they counted you through each barrack and there must have been maybe twenty-five barracks, thirty barracks, and each one had maybe 1,200 to 2,000 people. Still, can you imagine, counting one by one how long it took that? By the time they got counted you're ready to go back to work. And then it's the same day all over again, day after day after day.

SL: I interrupted you earlier when you were talking about meeting your father on the first day.

HG: Oh yeah, first day when I came and then all of a sudden, as I got to that particular barrack there was a sign and as I got out and there all of a sudden I see my father. Can you imagine? I haven't seen my father since 1941. I thought for sure he's dead. And I started talking to him. Can you imagine the meeting? It's like he was alive from dead, he came back to life. And I couldn't even believe it, and he couldn't believe that I am alive either. And then I said to him, "I thought for sure you were already dead." And he says he was in all kinds of different camps, they had him. From one camp to the other. And next day he was gone. One day I seen him. Then also a weekend later I met my uncle there. I met two uncles there.

SL: Did either one of those uncles survive?

HG: One survived but he was left in Germany. They wouldn't let him in the United States after the war, after he got out of there. He was in better shape than I was. Because when I was liberated by the Americans, I was all done. I couldn't even move. I couldn't do nothing. I was laying and waiting for the American ambulance to come and take me to the hospital. And my uncle who survived yet, he says,

"Hey, Harry, I'm going to look around, maybe I can find somebody from our family or some relation or some other friends. I'll look around." After then I heard, when I was in the hospital, that he had a mental breakdown. And after then they found that he had TB, tuberculosis. See, with tuberculosis they wouldn't let him in to the United States. And he found a son, a cousin, that's my cousin, that was his son, and he was younger than me. He was between seven or eleven. How he got alive, how he ended up in the French resistance somehow. He found him in the French guerilla system, where he thought for sure his son or his wife, everybody was dead.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

TAPE 3, SIDE 2

SL: I want to ask you some more about Dachau. You were talking to me about the daily routine that you had. What type of labor though were you doing there?

HG: Digging ditches. Then later on I started taking corpses, dead bodies. They couldn't burn them fast enough so you had to bury them and then burn them in the ditches. You had to dig big ditches. And dead bodies was laying by every barrack. They couldn't kill them fast enough. So I was in the group taking all the dead bodies outside the ghetto fences in a big field where they were digging big trenches and then put the bodies and then set fire to them.

SL: Were you also responsible for taking any of the valuables or whatever the corpses might have had?

HG: Them corpses there, there was nothing there left. Not in the camps. Them valuables was right after the ghetto. That was where they took care of the valuables. But the valuables right in the camps already, from camp Dachau there was no valuables left on them. All that was left was corpses and bones. There wasn't any skin on the corpses.

SL: Was that because they were just so emaciated?

HG: Well, there was no food, there was no vitamins, there was nothing. The people were living there on their extension, what they had in their bodies, and their bodies were shrinking. They weren't getting enough vitamins, enough food and they were getting smaller and thinner and thinner every day.

SL: Was there a lot of beatings going on by the Germans?

HG: Oh, yeah, all kinds of beatings. Just beatings like if you were working, if you weren't moving fast enough, you weren't digging the ditches fast enough, you didn't lift the dead bodies fast enough. They were right there with the rifles and hitting you on the head and the back and in the legs, wherever they could. And we were so, already so weak. With all them beatings so people were falling right in the trenches right there and then, dying right there. And I could talk to somebody already at night, and we were coming in from work, and we were lucky enough to get the ration of bread and the ration so we

used to sit down. We were tired, so tired. And all of a sudden you were standing or sitting down there and talking to somebody, I was talking to my friend, and all of a sudden he'd collapse and that's it and he was dead.

SL: Was this something that you ended up getting used to, seeing death?

HG: Oh, yes, there was nothing to it anymore. That was a way of life. It was a survival of the fittest. "Will I be alive tomorrow? Will I be alive tomorrow?" And at that time your mind is so conscious; your mind is so operating. No matter how, what do you say, no matter the hunger is so working on you, but your mind was also working. In fact, what I want to say is that the mind was sharper then, worked a lot better and kept you to the full alert. You're knowing that the end is going to be that you're going to die anyway. It's just a matter of time. And even if the war is over tomorrow, that he isn't going to let you stay alive. He isn't going to let any witnesses to survive. But maybe, maybe a miracle will appear. Maybe something will happen that you will survive. And you wanted to survive. I wanted to survive. I don't know how the other people felt. Because maybe I was younger and I had more, and I wanted to know what would happen after I survived. How is it going to feel to be a human being between humans again?

SL: Again, were you able to make any friends in Dachau, or was this survival instinct enough to keep you pretty much to yourself?

HG: There wasn't a matter of having any friends. You were everybody's friend and everybody was your friend, but everybody was all for himself. It wasn't a matter of being friends. It's hard to explain and it's hard to understand, but the next guy was laying right next to you, were working with, he was your friend and I was his friend and if I would fall down he would right away take my ration and eat it.

SL: Was there any smuggling going on there that you knew about?

HG: Nothing I can, no I don't think so. What do you mean by smuggling and what?

SL: Oh, bread, cigarettes.

HG: No, there was no smuggling of bread but the cigarettes was different. I know there was people who would trade their ration of bread for a cigarette. But there wasn't a real cigarette. Some were making cigarette from leaves from trees somehow. The guys who were working outside and they could get close to a tree were having leaf cigarettes. Somehow they made it. And some people I couldn't understand even then. That was so funny to me. How could you give a piece of bread away for a cigarette? I couldn't understand that.

SL: But you saw that happen evidently.

HG: I seen it, yes, yes. People used to trade away their ration bread for a whole day just to get one cigarette.

SL: I wonder where the matches were coming from, they must have been hard to get too?

HG: Not necessarily, there was little stoves. The whole barrack had one little stove and they used to let us make fire for a while. So you used to get a piece of paper or something or a leaf you find or a stick of wood and make a fire to light a cigarette.

SL: Were they wood fueled stoves that you had in the barrack?

HG: Yes, I think it was wood.

SL: Were they running all the time?

HG: No, they were running mostly at night when you used to come back from work, so they put on some wood and fires and make to let you warm up a little, especially in 20 to 25 below zero. And I remember everybody used to try to run to the fire. You know you are pretty lousy, you're full of lice. I could take off my shirt and just put it by the stove and you could hear it crackle. I could put my hand in my hair and take out a whole head full of lice.

SL: Was there any kind of sanitation there at all? Any running water?

HG: There was no sanitation, there was no running water, there was nothing. There was no toilets, everything was done right by the barrack, in the barrack, whatever you need to do.

SL: What about the gas chambers. Did Dachau have an operation of gassing?

HG: Not in Dachau. In that particular camp where I was there was no gassing. There was no gas chambers down there. Everything was done by digging ditches like I said, putting the bodies in the ditches and then set fire to it.

SL: If you were caught escaping or something then, what was the method of killing, hanging or just a shot?

HG: Just shooting you. I didn't see much hanging down there. But I didn't see too many people escaping there either. There was no ways to escape.

SL: What about you talked about the selections that happened at the very beginning, when people who went to the right survived and those who went to the left were killed. That was not accomplished by gassing?

HG: No, that was accomplished by shooting. That was still in the, that was done at that time by, do you mean in camp, or you're talking about a ghetto?

SL: In Dachau.

HG: In Dachau that was done by shooting.

SL: What was the contact that you had with the Germans, with the soldiers?

HG: Did I tell you the episode I had when it was 30 below zero in winter, cold, and so we wearing the Sing-Sing uniforms. No underwear, no coats, no nothing. And the shoes I was wearing was canvas and wooden soles. Top was canvas. And then one day after two months, three months, and it was so cold, walking six miles to one way, six miles the other way, from camp to work, from work to camp back and my shoes fell apart, ripped completely apart. And it was so cold and I felt I was going to freeze my feet. I was working with cement, working all kinds of cement down there with bricks. So I tried to put an empty cement bag on my feet to keep me warm so I could walk at least. One day I went up to the guard and I say, "Why don't you shoot me anyway?" And he says to me, "Oh, I don't have to shoot you, he says, "You're going to die anyway. The bullet I'm going to save for the Russians." And there was a German master they called him. He was the engineer. He used to engineer the project, I don't know what kind. In the woods they were building for the airplanes or whatever they done down there, all

kinds of work. And he listened to the story and after I got done with that guard he calls me like this. He was sitting in his little barrack down there where he had all the equipment laying down there, where on the table he was making the, I don't know, the figuring, the engineering. He calls me in and says, "I got a pair of shoes for you. See if they fit you." He gave me a pair of shoes.

SL: He never asked you for anything in return?

HG: No.

SL: How long did the shoes last?

HG: Them other shoes what I got, I think they lasted me until I got liberated. So see, there were so many episodes. Sometimes if you really keep thinking about it, it's like miracles because so many times I was near to death and I felt like, "This is it. This is the end." And then all of a sudden something good happens and then something bad happens again, until I survived. I don't know. When I got liberated. Even after I already got liberated, when I jumped from the cars. Me and my uncle jumped together. That uncle I was telling you who just died in '69 and got a mental breakdown. We together escaped from that boxcar where they were hauling us already to the German officers. They were going to finish us off before the liberation. And after we laid in that barn down there all night, in the morning we heard all kinds of voices. There was Polish workers, French workers, they were working for the German farmer. Then the Poles started shoveling a little hay down there and they uncovered us. We were laying underneath a pile of hay and they uncovered us and said, "Hey, who are them guys?" And then we started telling them in Polish. I was talking Polish. And they said, "We better put you in a different place because this is not a safe place." And an hour later they started bringing us fresh warm milk from the cow and fresh bread. I haven't seen any milk for five years and then I started drinking the milk and as I was drinking the milk and it was going down from the top and going out the bottom. I didn't even feel anymore.

SL: I don't want to interrupt that story, but I want to at least work my way up to the liberation, and I have a few more questions about Dachau. Was there any contact at all with women at Dachau.

HG: No, there was no women in any camp. The women was a separate camp. Women were in separate. There was no allowed between man and women. There was no camp where men and women were together.

SL: Were there any messages passing back and forth, do you know, between the women's camps and the men's camp?

HG: As far as I know, there was a women camp about a mile-and-a-half to two miles from our camp but I don't really remember or heard of any messages passing between the men's camp and the women's camp.

SL: Were you able to get any news of how the war was going?

HG: Yeah, some. We could tell approximate by the way the Germans were behaving. When they were getting pretty mad, and as they were starting to taking it out on us and start beating us one day, we could see that the war wasn't going, and we could hear that American planes were coming over and all of a sudden you could hear already the sirens going. The Germans were running right in their bunkers to hide themselves and we were standing there laughing and smiling and we were hollering, "Keep bombing! Keep bombing!" And the Germans were laying in the bunkers with the guns and shooting. We know that the war wasn't going good for them. We know that it's any day, any day. But we known also that if the war wasn't going good for them, that isn't going to be good for us either. Because, like they were telling us all the time, if Hitler loses the war 12:00, five minutes before twelve you'll be dead.

SL: So you were afraid that you were going to be killed anyway no matter what?

HG: Right. We known that because we known from all the atrocities that they were not going to, like I said, our minds were working pretty good. We known that they cannot afford to leave any witnesses.

SL: Was there any resistance at all in Dachau that you know of?

HG: There was no resistance. Absolutely no. There wasn't any ability of power or whatever. How could it be resistance when the average man down there, if he weighed seventy, eighty pounds was a pretty

- heavy man already? And he had everybody so dehumanized. Resistance was the last thing on anybody's mind. If it would have been starting in the ghetto, I would say yes, there was the time to resist. But not in the camp. Did you see the movie "Playing For Time?" You didn't watch it?
- SL: No I didn't watch it, but I know the story.
- HG: Did you watch the movie "Holocaust?"
- SL: Yes, that I saw.
- HG: Now when you see the people, how could you go and resist? When they lived in Warsaw they were still like humans. They looked as them. But when you seen them in the back of the barbed wire, in the back of the electric fence wires, they were just like skeletons. Now what can a skeleton do? He can't even move. He has a hell of a time moving around. Now how are you going to resist and fight a German guard, 200 or 250 [pounds] with a gun, with a rifle? How are you going to resist him? How are you going to fight him?
- SL: If I asked you what you thought the major differences were between the forced labor camp and Dachau, what would you answer to that, and what were the greatest differences between the camps?
- HG: You mean the forced labor camps what I was in before right after the ghetto before Dachau?
- SL: Yeah, what were the major differences in those camps?
- HG: The major difference between them camps and Dachau was that in that particular camp you had maybe a chance to go back to the ghetto. From that slave labor camp, if I'd gone back to the ghetto, I was still like a half a human being at least. In Dachau there was no more human beings. When they got us to Dachau, to them particular camps, Dachau, Auschwitz, or Bergen-Belsen, whatever camp, then you were an animal. You were already dehumanized completely. You didn't have a chance whatsoever.
- SL: Well why don't you tell me then the circumstances surrounding your leaving Dachau, when did that happen and what exactly happened?

HG: At that time, then, the Americans were already, when they were already on the invasion, they are in Germany already and they were close to Landsberg am Lechen. Dachau wasn't too far from Landsberg am Lech' and the last order of Himmler was to finish off all the rest of the inmates of the concentration camp, to take them to the German Alps and to finish them off, not to leave any witnesses. So they put us in boxcars, open boxcars. There was no closed boxcars, but open ones. They put us maybe 200 to 250 in a boxcar, and then they started taking us to the German Alps. But the Americans were that close already. They only took us as far as Landsberg am Lech', about fifty to seventy-five miles, between Munich and Landsberg am Lech'. And for the first time, then, all of a sudden, English planes. They stopped. And then English planes came down and they started machine-gunning the whole, in the front. They killed about 500 to 600 people and they knocked out the engine out of commission. The idea was that they thought that was German soldiers escaping from the front lines. A half an hour later, I don't know if it was the same planes or other English planes, came down and then all of a sudden we all started waving our Sing-Sing clothing, our jackets, our pants, or whatever, our caps, whatever you were wearing. They were so low that I think they could see it. They realized it wasn't German soldiers, that it was prisoners, and they didn't bombard it, they didn't machine-gun anymore. But that engine was knocked out of commission, and the Americans were already only about, as far as we know, between fifty to seventy-five miles away. Two-and-a-half hours later another engine from Munich, another steam engine came, hooked up to our, it must have been maybe twenty-five boxcars or thirty boxcars, hooked up again and started pulling us farther. But they pulled us only for another ten or fifteen miles and then they stopped. German guards came and we stopped, it was by a little woods down there, and the German guards who were watching us already it was in the boxcars with us, they're watching us with machine guns or with rifles. They jumped down in the woods and they didn't let any one of us. They mentioned, they say, if anyone tries to escape, if anybody tries to jump, they'll be shot right there. But we understood, we could see, that they were pretty nervous. Them guards were pretty nervous. We didn't know how close the Americans

were, but we could see that they were pretty nervous. Some of them had their civilian uniforms in their packs. A lot of them guards already run away but it was the real fanatics, the real Hitler fanatics, they said, "Heil Hitler. Hitler is going to pull us out of there. Hitler is still going to win the war." They were still laying in the woods and waiting that nobody would escape. I don't know, that night it started raining it was around 12:30, 1:00, me and my uncle were in the same boxcar. We jumped from the car and we started walking in the field. I don't know what field they were going, we didn't know what the hell it is, and it was raining. I remember I had a heck of a time pulling my legs out of the mud. But my uncle was in better shape than I was, somehow. And it was pouring, it was raining. I'll never forget it. It was terrible. So all of a sudden we seen a big barn. We didn't know where we are, but we known this must be a farm barn or something. So we said we got to get out of the rain, anyway, and see what's happening. So we got in the barn and there was a lot of hay laying so we hide ourselves under the stacks of hay and we lay there until next morning. And in the morning, all of a sudden we could see that the light was shining. So all of a sudden we heard all kinds of voices, couldn't understand, we thought maybe soldiers or somebody's still looking for the escapees and German soldiers, maybe. But then all of a sudden we heard Polish, we heard French, and then they started, the Polish guys, started with their forklifts started lifting the hay. They were feeding animals, so they needed the hay down there and all of a sudden they took up the hay and all of a sudden they seen two guys laying down there. So they said to me in Polish and my uncle, oh yes, he heard last night that there was a big trainload with displaced persons, with Jewish prisoners coming through and a few of them, they said, escaped. So he said this is not a too safe place, he says. He'll put us over in a different place. He put us in another corner, and they covered us with hay up, and they said a little while later they're going to bring us food. An hour later they brought us some milk, warm milk, just right from the cow. Can you imagine warm milk and bread, haven't seen that in five years. And I started eating and drinking that milk and then all of a sudden I could feel it, I didn't even feel it, it was coming from the top and going to the bottom and, oh, was I sick. Then the Poles, every hour they used to come in and say the

Americans are only fifty miles, thirty miles. By Sunday, I think it was on a Thursday or Friday when we escaped, and by Sunday morning they came in and said the American are six miles from here. I said, six miles, we could walk to town. And the German farmer wouldn't even give us, I didn't have to pep or the power to walk but I don't know how I kept going. My uncle was in pretty good shape, but I had a hell of a time. When I got in town I seen American MPs with Red Cross wagons, with ambulances running from one place. And I kept hollering, "I need a doctor, I need a doctor." I remember Americans they put me in an ambulance, they opened up the ambulance and some Americans were taking pictures. They put me on the end gate of a truck, of an ambulance, and they started giving me chocolate with cigarettes, and they were taking pictures and I keep hollering, "I want a doctor. I'm sicker than a dog." So my uncle, so we ran into a Jewish guy, I don't know who he was, but he says, "There is a basement. There is for all the sick ones who can't move," he said. "They lay right there by the basement." So I went. You had to walk about a block or two blocks until I seen people laying down there so I lay down with them. My uncle says to me, "I'll be back a little later." He says, "I'm going to look around, maybe I can see somebody from our family or friend. Maybe I'll find somebody from our *mishpocha*." *Mishpocha* means family. "And I'll see you later." In the meantime somebody came up, some American, and he started telling us that we'll have to stay here, it was in the morning around 9:00 or 9:30, that we have to lay here until they can make room in the hospitals. The hospitals are filled up with German prisoners. They've got to evacuate it to make room for us. And then around 3:30-4:00 in the evening they're going to come with ambulances and take us to the hospital. Around 4:00-4:30 in the evening ambulances started driving up and they started taking us to the hospital and it was in Wiedergeltingen by Landsberg am Lech', and then as they put me on that stretcher and they took me to the first time even for a shower and that wasn't for a shower like they call it in the gas chamber, that was a real shower. I'll never forget it. Two American MPs were standing with guns like this. Two high Germans, they were colonels or whatever, in German uniforms, and they were watching them. I was laying all undressed, a skeleton, that's all I was. First of all, they wake me up, they put me

on the scale, but I couldn't move. And it weighed exactly fifty pounds and I didn't believe it. And then they took me and they started scrubbing me and washing me, and for the first time in five years I had a shower. After the shower was done, then they put me in a hospital bed.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

TAPE 4, SIDE 1

SL: You were talking about that day, liberation, when they took you to the hospital and you had the shower. Were you also getting a delousing at that same time?

HG: Yes, you were deloused, too. But even a week later, when they put me in that hospital bed with white bedding, for the first time in five years I started feeling like a human being again, with white bedding. I haven't seen white bedding in a long time, five years. A week later, all of a sudden in bed there still started lice coming up again. I have to go for another delousing again. It's not because my body didn't have, my body didn't have any fat and I think that's when the lice really starts working on you. No vitamins to resist the lice and the lice start, I had to be deloused once or twice more. And after I was put in that bed, for eight months I couldn't move, absolutely. Everything. To the bathroom I had to go in bed. And then the American doctors started working on me. I had twenty-four hours watch by doctors, American doctors, it wasn't a German doctor. And I know how many shots I was getting. For eight months I couldn't move out of bed.

SL: Eight months?

HG: Eight months, yes. And after eight months I had to have two nurses take me to the men's room.

SL: What did they diagnose you as having anything other than just starvation and malnutrition? Did you have any real diseases that were identifiable?

HG: I don't know. As I remember, some doctor said that I'm not going to make it. Then they put me in an isolation room already. I don't remember what kind of disease I had, but they put me in an isolation room. When they isolated me there in the room I know I was in pretty bad shape.

SL: I don't think you remember too much about that hospitalization. Do you?

HG: I know one thing. In the beginning they kept shooting in me shots and I don't know what they were giving me. But I know one thing — after the eight months I started getting better. I started moving

around a little, and some doctor I met who was taking care right in the beginning of me, he didn't believe when he seen me walking around. He thought I was going to be a dead duck.

SL: Did you ever see your uncle again during that time when you were in the hospital?

HG: No, I never seen him. I was asking about him. I was trying to get through friends but he was then in an isolation room and had a mental breakdown.

SL: Did you see him again after you recovered?

HG: Oh, yeah. After I was released I seen him. I remember when I was still waiting in Germany.

SL: So what happened then when you were released, where did you go?

HG: Well, then they organized, through the Jewish Distribution Committee,¹⁹ displaced person camps.

There they put you in a camp that was not to do really. We were getting rations every month. I don't remember if we were getting any, there was no amount of money. Rehabilitation. First of all, after then it took me about two years to really rehabilitate. I was no good for working anyway. Took me two years to get rehabilitated, to get to myself. I really thought then that I was still sick. I'm pretty sick. I was afraid that if I get TB — I started working already to go to the United States. I know I had uncles from my mother's side in this country. But I also didn't know that they changed their names. I had a heck of a time finding it. But after I found them and I wanted to get to the United States, I decided I was afraid also that they won't let me in if they find any kind of sickness. And, hey, from five years of that kind of suffering, that malnutrition, you're bound to end up with something. They're going to find something and then they won't let you come to the United States. That's what kept me worrying a lot, too. And a lot of people committed suicide after waiting all those years. You know, it took four years to get the visa to come over here. I started working on that already as soon as I felt better. Let's see six, eight months, then I got in touch with the Jewish Distribution Committee. Everything was destroyed. I was trying to get in touch. In Russia down there, in Lithuania, I thought maybe some people were still

¹⁹ The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, an agency serving refugees.

alive in my family and not knowing if they went back to Kovno to look for relation. But couldn't find nothing.

SL: What DP camp did you end up living at when you were waiting for your visa to come through?

HG: That was in a rehabilitation DP ²⁰ camp. It was Bad Wörishofen.

SL: Where was it located?

HG: It was right in the western part of Germany.

SL: And how long did you live there?

HG: Oh, in Bad Wörishofen must have stayed at least a year and half to two years.

SL: What kind of barracks were you living in, what kind of housing did you have?

HG: Two in a room. It was like a hospital. It was more like a sanitarium or something. Some kind of sanitarium. And then we had our own police force to keep the rest of the guys. Everybody was getting loose. Everybody thought they can do this and they can do that because he's a displaced person. And the Americans didn't go for that kind of crap. They right away established order.

SL: So this place that you were living in then for this period of time was really as you said a rehabilitation camp, was it different from the regular DP camp where most of the refugees were living?

HG: Well, some refugees were already living outside, or trying to live already like in the cities if they could afford. German Jews, or whatever, could maybe go on back to their homes if they could find their homes, and live there. But a lot of people lived in displaced person camps with nothing to do all day long, running around.

SL: What kind of rations were you getting?

HG: Oh the food in our particular place, I suppose we were getting more, I don't know. We were getting pretty good food. Besides, it was not just from the Jewish Distribution Committee. We were getting from Germans. The German government, already established new government trying to, now, for instance, like the German government is paying retribution to Israel for all they done.

²⁰ Displaced Person, or refugee.

SL: Did you then move to a regular DP camp, where there were a lot of people, and there were families and things? After you left this other place, or from there did you go right to the United States?

HG: From there I went right to the United States.

SL: Alright, then let me ask you a few more questions about that, were there any organized activities such as movies, clubs, or Jewish organizations?

HG: There wasn't many Jewish, yeah, we tried to establish like a committee would go every month to go to Munich to report to this Jewish Distribution Committee. So we picked whoever is supposed to take care of our camp. But otherwise, there was no... yeah there was an Israeli organization from Israel, who wanted illegally a lot of people to go to Israel. But I wasn't too crazy about going to Israel because if you go to Israel I know and I had to fight, and I didn't feel like fighting anymore.

SL: Were you able to make some friends there at that DP camp?

HG: Oh, yeah, I had a lot of friends.

SL: What kind of experiences did most of those people go through, can you recall? Had they been through slave labor concentration camps or...?

HG: Each one had a different experience. Some was involved in experimental, like some German doctors were putting them the hospitals and making all kind of experiments over them. I had a friend of mine. He was must have been around twenty, twenty-one years old, and he was not a man. Completely he was like a vegetable. And he kept telling us the experiments the doctors done with him.

HG: But there wasn't too many families in our camp, no. They were mostly single guys. Single guys, single girls. Also, all of a sudden that is where I met my wife, when a bunch of Jewish kids came from Poland. They escaped from Poland because the Russians came in down there and some of them escaped to Germany and some of them girls, most of them girls came to our rehabilitation center right there in Germany, Wiedergeltingen. Yeah, where I met my ex-wife. And when I met her she didn't even know how to talk Jewish. All she was talking is Polish.

SL: What kind of daily activities were going on in this DP camp?

- HG: Oh well, with my friends we used to go play basketball, table tennis. That's the activities all we done.
- SL: Was there any black marketing going on?
- HG: Oh, yes, there was a black marketing then going on, yes. Some were paying cigarettes, especially with the Germans. We were getting coffee. In our rations we were getting coffee, cigarettes and chocolate bars. For this you could, especially for coffee, we traded for diamonds. I think me, three friends, we bought a car from a German doctor. I don't know how many packs, I don't remember how many packages cigarettes or chocolate bars we traded him on the car. And no one of us known how to drive.
- SL: What did you do with the car?
- HG: We hired a German chauffeur.
- SL: How did you pay him?
- HG: We paid him with chocolate bars.
- SL: So did you just drive out into the country?
- HG: Yeah, we were driving through the country. Our committee needed to go to Munich. It was about fifty miles, and so we took them with our car. In the meantime we took a trip, too. And that was really something there. Then the black market started right after, we started trading chocolate bars and especially coffee. For coffee the Germans would hang themselves.
- SL: Besides your uncle, who you mentioned, did you ever make any contact with other surviving family members in Europe after the war?
- HG: No, I tried it. There was no other survivor left, as far as I could tell.
- SL: What was the contact that you had with your relatives in the United States, how long did it take you to track them down?
- HG: Oh, I would say at least about a year or year-and-a-half because I was looking for, my mother's maiden name was Ganskievich. My uncles, when they left Lithuania, their name was Ganskievich. When they came to the United States they changed it to Ginsberg. Ganskievich and Ginsberg, and I

was looking for Ganskevitch. So by coincident, one day my uncle's aunt reads in the paper, it was in the Jewish papers or whatever, in American papers. The Jewish Distribution Committee, with all kinds of different committees, even gentile committees, whoever came to the camp and he investigated, he says, "Anybody having any relatives in the United States, I will try and find out for you." So I tried. Alex Ganskievich. So by coincidence one day she read somebody's looking for Ganskievich. "Her husband's first name when he came to the United States was Ganskievich. Then it must be a relative of his looking for you," and that's how we got in contact.

SL: Did they write you a letter?

HG: Yes.

SL: Did they send you any packages of food or clothing?

HG: No, they never did send me any packages and clothing in Germany. Never to Germany. I used to get packages of clothing before, before the war started.

SL: Yes, you told me that, when you lived in Kovno.

HG: Yes, but never packages in Germany. And then I tried to tell him that I'm in love with a girl and I want him to put them on my visa, when he's going to make the visa out that he puts my wife's name as Mr. and Mrs. Gordon. And he says, "Hey, why do you have to get married in Germany? There's plenty good American girls living up here. What do you have to bring a wife here for?" Well, maybe he was right, I don't know. But anyway.

SL: Why did you decide to go to the United States and not any other place?

HG: Well, the only thing is, I really wanted to come to the United States. And especially also, I really thought that my mother's brothers, my uncles, when I was a little boy, like I told you already, they used to send me all kinds of packages. I'll get a helping hand. I didn't mean really that they're going to put me right away in business. I meant that at least they're going to give me a little push, they're going to start me out on a new life. Help me anyway. But did I get help from my family! This is a story in itself.

SL: Okay, well we'll get to that in a few minutes. Let me ask you a few more questions first. How long did it take you then to get the visa to come over here?

HG: It took me four years to get the visa.

SL: When did you finally leave Europe.

HG: In March, '49, from Bremen. And it took me two weeks.

SL: Tell me about the trip.

HG: Ah! It started out beautiful. It was a twenty-ton remodeled army boat. It's before we went to the boat, that's the idea. How many doctors we had to go through. The aggravation. It was two weeks of doctoring and different x-rays, and every time you got out you were afraid. "Have I passed? Am I going to pass it? Am I going to be accepted? Is he going to let me go through? Is he going to let me go to the United States? Maybe he'll find something. Maybe I got a brain tumor. Maybe I got TB. Maybe, you know, after five years with all that suffering, with no food, without anything, that something must be wrong with you and they're going to find it. With all that monkey business, with all that monkeying around and waiting already four years, and the last two weeks, this will tell the story, "Am I going or not? Am I going to stay in Germany or what am I going to do?" And then after the last day, after the last doctor, when he called us in already and he says, "Mr. Gordon," in German already, he was an American doctor, "your x-ray is okay. We wish you good luck. You're going to the United States." Can you imagine what happened? So then they sent us to Bremen. We had to wait. A week I think we stood in Bremen. Where everybody had to wait for the boat. The boat wasn't there but if the boat come in, everybody going to on that particular boat. That was *SS Marine Shark*, they call it. Twenty thousand ton American Army boat. Five hundred women, five hundred men. Five hundred women were the first floor. Five hundred men, we were on the bottom. And I remember the first day, beautiful. Eh, and all the food I never seen. Grapefruit, such a fruit I never seen it. I didn't even know what grapefruit is. To me it looks like big oranges, with all kinds of different, ah, it was great, until we went through the English Channel. And then when we sat down to eat supper, the table was all kinds

of food. If you wanted more that's all you had to is ask. The crew delivered all kinds of food you wanted to eat. And all of a sudden as we were sitting and starting to eat and all of a sudden the chair started moving one way, the tables were going the other way, and you couldn't understand what the hell was happening here. And all of a sudden you started feeling sick. So we went right away, I went to my bed, my wife went to her bed. We separated. The women and the men were separated. Men were downstairs right on the bottom of the boat and every time that wave hit we thought that that boat is breaking apart. For two weeks we were on the ocean. Two weeks from Bremen to New York. Fourteen days. And I cannot forget. I couldn't get off my bunk bed. I got off and I was right away sick. I felt like the whole world is, and then the waves were hitting the boat. And one day I got the courage and the guts until I crawled up on the top to get a little fresh air. I didn't even feel like eating. I didn't have no appetite whatsoever. And as I got on the top, I seen a lot of people sitting on the top, cover themselves with towels, with heavy coats or whatever. And then some people their beards were so big and some people were hollering, "Oh, throw me in the ocean. I don't care, I don't care!" And I have never seen, for six days we were wearing, what do you call them, life jackets. And the co-captain, he says for thirty years he's on the ocean, that is the worstest, he said, he'd ever seen it since he is on the ocean. In thirty years. "Even me," he says, "it's affected. For thirty years, to me it's nothing new." But you could see his face was yellow and it was all kinds of colors and he was in terrible shape. The waves was maybe sixty foot high. For two weeks. The best what it would take is three, four days, five days. For two weeks.

But before New York, we came in I think it was around 12:00 o'clock at night, and the water got calm and you became human immediately. Right away your appetite came back. Five minutes later. As soon as it got calm. That's the craziest sickness I ever seen.

SL: Who financed your trip? Who paid for your crossing?

HG: I'm not so sure. I'm not so sure if my uncle paid part of it or the Jewish Distribution Committee paid part of it, too.

SL: Do you remember having any special thoughts when you saw the Statue of Liberty?

HG: No, at that time I didn't have any thoughts about the Statue of Liberty. But when I seen the skyscrapers before we came through New York. We were not supposed to have gotten in until 4:30, 5:00, until the tugboat started pulling us in. Going by them big, them big crazy buildings down there by New York. I said, "What is it? Where are we going?" Especially when we got off the boat, and then I thought my uncle's got to be there to wait for me and then we're going to go to his house or whatever. And then when we got off the boat, nobody's there. People are running from one end to the other. People are moving. They're not walking but they're running. I say, "Where is everybody running? And it's just like a bunch of bees, you know, BUZZZZZZZZZZ, in New York. I say, "Where am I here? What is that." I couldn't figure that out. And then all of a sudden somebody from the Jewish Distribution Committee came up, or I went up to him, I said, "My name is Harry Gordon and my uncle's supposed to come here but he's not here. What should I do? I don't even know where to go." He said, "What's his name." I said, "Alex Ginsberg." He says, "Oh, yes, he left some tickets for you. You're supposed to take a train to Bear Lake, Pennsylvania." Now how the hell could I know where to go in New York to take a train? The guy said, "He couldn't make it. He was busy, so he left you the tickets and you take the train to Bear Lake, Pennsylvania." So, my ex-wife, she had an aunt in New York. I don't know how she got the number or she had the number or what the deal is. She called her aunt and we stayed in New York. We took a taxi, and her aunt was a pretty old aunt, pretty old lady. I think at that time she must have been sixty-five, seventy, and she didn't talk too much good English anyway. But my wife got the address somehow and then we got a taxi. She said, "Come by taxi." We took a taxi. To the taxi driver we talked to him Jewish and German, we didn't know any English, tried to give him the address, to explain it to him. He seen that she's got a pair of greenhorns in that car. Then trying to explain it to him the whole story. So anyway, he took us to the address, so we stayed in New York for a week. Then as for going right to Bear Lake, Pennsylvania, to my uncle's farm, I had some uncles in Buffalo, New

York. From there we went to Buffalo, New York. I stayed a week there. From there my uncles took me to where I was supposed to be living in Bear Lake, Pennsylvania. This was a small farm town.

SL: Alright, one more things I wanted to ask you was what were your impressions of New York City when you were there for a week?

HG: I was scared to death. I thought I was in a insane asylum. I never been in a big city. The biggest city, like Kovno, Lithuania, there are about 150,000 people. Then I come in a city where there's ten million people population. And I said to myself, "Where are the people running here?" What I couldn't understand is, I talked to my aunt and then she says, I couldn't grasp that she says, "It's possible in this city that two brothers, one lives on the first floor, one lives on the tenth floor, and they might not seen each other for two, three years." And I couldn't comprehend that. That wasn't possible for me to believe that. But then I found out after, I left the farm and went back to New York... I lived in New York for six months, then I could understand the life down there. No, it wasn't for me either.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

TAPE 4, SIDE 2

SL: Okay, why don't you tell me what did you do when you got to Bear Lake? How long were you there? What kind of work were you doing?

HG: Well, when I got to Bear Lake and my uncle Alex's home, he had a mink farm, about 2500 minks. I didn't know nothing about the mink business. And he also had a man working down there. So when I came there with my ex-wife, he right away fired his man. And then he says, "Harry, I show you what there is to do about the mink." I says, "Okay". He says that's like little kids and it was like little babies. You got to treat them like little babies. First of all, the workers got to feed them once a day, water them twice a day. And in the morning we had to prepare the food for them. Before he brought me over to the United States, he was my sponsor, and as a sponsorship and the contract was I was supposed to have gotten room and board, \$75.00 a month. \$75.00 a month was pretty good. For me it was a lot of money. I didn't know how much \$75.00 a month was anyway or how much a dollar was. Well, then a dollar was a dollar. But anyway, it was in the country. We got one room, me and my wife were staying in the room. In the middle of the night farmers used to call up. They got a dead animal, they got a dead horse or an injured horse, so right away me and my uncle had to take the pickup. We had an old pickup with a winch, drive out to the farmer, pick up the horse and then in the morning get prepared. He had a butcher shop down there, butcher the horse.

SL: He butchered them for mink food?

HG: Yes. Mink food. And also fish, we used to use a lot of fish for the mink, too. But mostly dead animals or dead horses or injured horses, injured cows. And that was seven days a week work. It's like a farmer, you know. But this is not like cows. You got to make sure. And then the mink animals are very smart, very sensitive and especially in the time of breeding time, when they have little mink. The mothers are very devoted. When they have the little babies, if a stranger would come in the mink barrack, if they see him, right away they'll eat the babies.

SL: They'll eat them?

HG: Eat them. Eat them right up. And then you also got to know exactly, they won't bring them out, by the sound to know how many babies. A mink can have from two to ten babies. Make sure you got to give them just the right amount of food to support the ten babies or five babies. But they won't bring them out. You got to listen to the sound. And after you get to know them, and you have to get really to work with them, you know approximate. My uncle was in the business I don't know for how long, so he known already. When they have babies they are very sensitive. If a plane would fly over, make a lot of noise, they'll eat the babies, too. And especially in the heat, you know when it gets hot, then they die. They can't stand too much heat. They got to have just the right air flow. Everything has to be exactly. And right amount of food, and especially when you feed them fish. Make sure there is no bones because if they swallow a bone, kill them. And it's an expensive animal.

SL: What kind of treatment did you get from your uncles?

HG: Well that is what I'm going to say, I'm coming to it. So here is my uncle and I supposed to get, see, here I'm a married man and I'm trying to start out to make a new life for myself, a new country. So, one month, two months, I haven't seen a nickel. I haven't seen nothing. And here I'm just like a little kid. I say, "Uncle, hey, I need a quarter. I need a dime. I need to buy razor blades. I want to buy an ice cream." I say, "Uncle, am I ever going to get any money paid?" "Ah, don't worry. You just came over," he says. "I'm going to make you for a partner." I say, "I don't know if I want to be your partner." He had a son who was in the fur business. Had a store in Pennsylvania in a big city down there. He used to sell ready-made furs, you know. So any time my uncle used to sell a batch already mink, right away the son, he was always broke, right away come to daddy and get some money. And me I was going to be a partner to this deal and I know what kind of partnership it's going to be right then and there. Anyway, one month, two months, then my ex-wife says to me, hey, "Harry, I don't think so that's going to be a life up here. We're living in one room. If you want to make a life for yourself," she says, "I don't think so your uncle's going to take you in a partnership. After three, four months you didn't even

see a penny. We just gotten enough to eat and to drink, that's about all. But seven days a week work." So she says, "I'm going to write my aunt in New York a letter and see if she can find me a job in New York." I said, "Go ahead. Write a letter to your aunt. And her aunt had a cousin or another or she found some kind of a friend in her family who had a garment factory right in New York and they found her a job.

One day she comes out when we're eating supper and she says, "Hey, Uncle Alex and Harry, I'm going to New York." Says, "You're going to New York? What are you going to do in New York?" She says, "I found a job. I'm going to make a life for myself." He says, "I don't think so. You don't know any English." "We're living in the country," she says, "at least in New York we'll be able to go to night school, learn English." "Look at you! They're greenhorns. You just came to this country and she wants to get rich right overnight. She wants to go to New York, she doesn't like on the farm." I didn't say anything anyway. I said, "If she wants to go to New York and she got a job and she wants to, I say why shouldn't she be able to?" "How's it going to work," he says. "You're going to stay here and she's going to be in New York? What kind of partnership is it going to be?" "Well," I said, "we'll see. Let her go." All right, so she went. Six months I still haven't seen from my uncle a nickel. I write a letter to my wife. I said, "Maybe you can find me a job down there where you're working." She finds me a job with the idea that I'm going to become a cutter. I'll make thirty dollars a week, but I'll be learning to become a cutter. A cutter at that time was in a little children's garment factory where they cut out different sizes. At that time it was paying, that was in '51, in '51 it paid \$150 a week. For a good cutter that was good money at that time. So it's a great idea. One day as I was watering the mink in the morning, I go out to my uncle and I start to tell him. I said, "Hey, I'm working for you six months, I haven't seen a nickel. I came to this country," I say, "to make a new life for myself. Now what is my future in it? But," I say, "you don't owe me nothing. I think for the six months whatever money cost you to make me out my papers I think I paid you off for working on your farm. That's all I want from you is give me \$12 for a ticket to go to New York." I didn't have a cent. I didn't have a penny in my pocket. "You goddamn," he

says. "You just came to this country, you want to get rich overnight. I'm here for forty years and I still work so hard!" I said, "I don't want to get rich, but I just want to make a new beginning." I said, "That's no life. I stay here and my wife is in New York. I'd like to be together and maybe someday we can make together we get a good job and maybe we'll build a new family for ourself. Is that anything wrong?" "I brought you over here. You know that I can send you back to Germany?" "Oh, yeah?" I say, "You're going to send me back to Germany? I say to hell with you." I dropped the hose. I said, "You water the mink yourself. For six months I work for you," I say, "I don't want any money from you. I just want a ticket from here to New York."

I went back to my room and I didn't work the rest of the day. I stayed there one day in the room, the second day in the room. He wouldn't give me the \$12. He wouldn't give me the \$12 for a ticket. He had to take me about eight miles to the bus station, it was right in the country see. He wouldn't take me to the bus station. He wouldn't give me \$12 until his wife. I say, "I'm not going to work. I'm not going to be working here no more. What good am I to you? I'm going to be sitting there in the house. That's all I want from you is \$12 to go to New York. For six months work I think I earned it." After four days sitting in my room, he decided to take me up to the bus, but he didn't give me \$12 to go to New York. He gave me \$8 to go to Buffalo, New York. He says, "You go to the other two uncles. They'll give you the rest to go to New York." And the other two uncles they didn't want me around either because that's all he had to say. Not just say, "Hey, Harry, all right. You didn't go along with my brother Alex. You can stay here. I'll find you a job." He was a manager of women's clothing shops, big clothing shops. And the other uncle in Buffalo, New York, he could say, "Hey, Harry, I'll give you a job as a janitor. You can clean my bar." When I came to Buffalo, New York, "I think it's a good idea. We'll give you the rest of the money. You go back to New York." So I went back to New York. I got the job in New York.

SL: You got the job training to be a cutter?

HG: Yes, in the same place where my wife was working.

SL: Where did you live?

HG: I lived on King's Highway. It was a nice neighborhood. I think it was a one-room apartment. One room and bath. And I don't remember how much rent we had to pay. But it was pretty nice. It was a nice neighborhood. The only idea, we had to travel. From King's Highway it was about two hours. Had to get up every morning 5:00, 5:30. It was about an hour to an hour-and-a-half traveling on the subway to go to New York. An hour-and-a-half back from New York. That's three hours a day. And all three hours you had to hang like a herring in the subways. You did not just find a place. You were so pushed in you didn't need to sit down. One was holding the other. So that was going on and what was going on was this way. I came to work, that guy who owned the factory was a Jew. His nephew is a foreman who was working in that cutter also. He was a foreman in that particular department, but not from the cutters. He was taking care in the merchandise. And the cutter foreman was an Italian guy. The first day I started working down there, I started getting along with that Italian, with the foreman of the cutters, pretty good. He says, "Harry, when I call you up to the table I'll show you. I'll make a cutter out of you." "Great, that's what I want." "You're going to make money when you become..." Well, in two weeks I started cutting with a machine. But I didn't like the boss' nephew. Every time the foreman from the cutters, the Italian guy, used to call me to the table, the boss' nephew used to call me in the warehouse to take out some merchandise. So the foreman, the Italian, was getting mad. He says, "Harry, when I call you, you come to that table." I say, "You call me, the boss' nephew calls me in the warehouse, I don't know where to go." He says, "The deal was that you stay with me and I'll teach you how to cut." "But what should I do when he calls me in the warehouse to take out some merchandise?" He says, "You stay here. I tell you to stay here." One day, I come in the morning and the Italian guy calls me up to the table to start cutting and showing me how to cut. Then all of a sudden the boss' nephew comes in. He says, "Harry, come here. I need some help in the warehouse." "Harry, you stay in here," the foreman says to me, that Italian. He calls me to the warehouse. Well, the guys didn't like the boss's nephew. What happened? A fight started. Two guys were holding the

- nephew and the foreman of the cutters started beating the crap out of him. The next day I was fired! He went to his uncle and told him the whole fight started because of me. I didn't know what the hell to do. Well, that was the end of that. I didn't like New York, anyway, anymore. I said, "I want to go to a different city." Me and my wife decided we wanted to go to Colorado. Nice state. Everybody was talking, "Colorado's a beautiful state." Colorado wouldn't accept any more displaced persons because they had their quota. The only opening it was, was in Madison. I said, "All right, we'll go to Madison."
- SL: Did you know anything about Wisconsin at all?
- HG: I didn't know nothing about Colorado and I didn't know nothing about Madison or Wisconsin.
- SL: When did you get to Madison?
- HG: I think it was in the end of '51.
- SL: How did you make the trip?
- HG: By train, I think.
- SL: And who met you when you got here?
- HG: Rabbi Swarsensky.
- SL: Where did you live right away? Did they find you an apartment or something?
- HG: What apartment? They put four couples of us. It was another Gordon, Sam Gordon, and his wife. There was a Cooperman and his wife; and they put us in a two bedroom apartment. Each one of us had one room. It was on West Johnson Street. And can you imagine four couples? Everybody was hollering and screaming, and it was...
- SL: Who was the fourth couple, was it the Comins'?
- HG: I don't remember the fourth couple but I know it was Gordon, it was Coopermans, and it was another couple.
- SL: What kind of help did you get from the Jewish community? Did they find you any job?
- HG: The only one was through Rabbi Swarsensky. The first job I went was in Bowman's Dairy. I was stacking. At that time it was them big gallons of milk. I was working in the cooler. And every day I was

coming with a cold. It was hard work. Stacking ten cases, four gallons of milk in each case, ten cases up high. Then from there I went to Oscar Mayer. In Oscar Mayer I got put in cutting out the glands from the pigs. All day long for eight hours I was holding my hands in water. One day I come from work and at night all of a sudden I start waking up in the middle of the night and scratching myself to death. I couldn't fall asleep. So I went to a doctor. The doctor says to me, "Hey, Harry, you got to quit the job because you're getting eczema. You might get eczema and you might not be able to get rid of it. Or they got to give you a different job. If they don't, you got to quit. You got to get something else because that job is what's bothering you." I don't know what it was, but from holding my hands in the water all day, like eczema at night. I used to wake up in the middle of the night scratching myself to death and couldn't go to sleep anymore. From there I went to Sinaiko.

SL: They had a scrap yard?

HG: Yeah, they had a scrap yard. Seventy-five cents an hour. I worked and one day I came in and I wanted a ten cents raise. He says, "I cannot afford to pay ten cents a raise." I used to be already like a foreman. The turnover was about 300%. I known every place he used to go and pick up the paper with the truck but I didn't have the driver's license at that time yet so I had to go with a driver.

HG: But at that time I decided I was going to go for myself already. I built myself an old truck. It was a 1937 or 1938 Chevrolet, and the truck was falling apart. I got my driver's license, and then I decided. I went in anyway to ask for a raise. And that was a good excuse. He says, "I can't give you ten cents a raise. There isn't that kind of money to be made in the junk business." "All right," I said, "Mr. Snyder, if you can't give me a raise then I think I'm going to go for myself." "You're going to go for yourself?" I said, "Yes, I'm going to go by myself in business." He says, "What do you know? How do you know where to go? What do you know about the junk business?" I worked there I think about a year, but I really didn't know. Anyway, I really didn't know about the country yet, where I was going or where I'm going to go, where I'm going to start off. But anyway, I bought a truck so I thought, "Hey, I'm going to try anyway." I'll never forget it. For seventy-five cents a week I used to put in forty to fifty hours a week.

My taking home pay was around forty to forty-five bucks a week for fifty hours. So then I remember the first day when I quit down there I said, "All right." That was on a Tuesday. He owed me for two days wages yet. He says, "You stop by." They used to pay on Friday. So on Tuesday I quit and I went out. The first day I went out on the road and I said to myself, "Where in the heck am I going to go? I don't know where I'm going? But anyway I started out by Oscar Mayer's down there. Then it was still country down there. Then I started house to house for papers, for rags you know, like a peddler. There was a Polish woman, I knocked on the door and the Polish woman says to me, with a Polish accent she says, "Yes, I got some junk in the basement." And she takes me down in the basement, there in the basement she has a big box with photographic plates. But I really didn't know what it was, absolutely not. It was old copper plates, the quarter-inch plate like this. It must have weighted about fifty or sixty pounds. And I really didn't know what it was worth. She says, "What are you going to give me for it?" And that's honest the truth, I didn't know what I was buying. So I say, "I'll give you \$5 for it." She says, "Sure, you can have it for \$5." And then I said, "What the hell did I buy?" But I didn't want to go to Sinaiko. There was Palley. On the corner of Regent and West Washington there used to be a junk yard, Palley. I said, "I'm not going to Sinaiko. I'm going to Palley and see what he says." I said, "I got to box with metal. What is it worth?" He weighs it up, it was about 60 pounds and he gives me \$45. So I made in two hours, I made more already what I made in a whole week working for Sinaiko. So I take the check for \$45, I go over to Sinaiko, and I said, "Hey listen. I want my money what you owe me, right now." And I said, "Look, I worked for you for forty hours and you paid me only \$40 to \$45. I went out today and in two hours I made \$45," and I showed him the check. And he says to the bookkeeper, "Give him the \$45. I don't want to see the guy anymore." What a deal.

SL: So then is that what started you in your own business?

HG: Yes, right.

SL: So did you work for anybody else after that?

HG: Oh, yes I still went to work. The business wasn't really that hot. I still had to have a part-time job. I was looking for different part-time jobs. My ex-wife always thought that, she always wanted me to go back to school to take up some kind of a trade and I didn't care for going to school. I didn't have the nerves to go to school and sit down like a young kid, you know. Because I was too nervous anyway. I couldn't take that, to sit in one place. I had to keep moving.

SL: So what are you doing presently?

HG: Oh, I'm in the scrap business.

SL: You have your own business and you...?

HG: Yes, right. Then I bought a yard in Stoughton. I did buy a scrap yard, and after the divorce I sold the yard. I just phased the yard out and I went to work for Lorman Iron and Metal.

SL: Is that when you lived in Fort Atkinson?

HG: Yeah.

SL: So you're in the business now but you go from community to community?

HG: Right. Now I don't have a yard. I just buy and sell, that's all I do.

SL: Now you told me that when you first came you lived in that two bedroom apartment with all those families on Johnson Street. Where did you move after that, did you finally get a place of your own?

HG: Oh, did I get the place! It was a terrific place. It was at the recommendation of a friend of mine, Jake Heifetz. And he lived in an apartment on North Murray, 17 N. Murray. It was an old fallen down house. It was one bedroom apartment. It didn't even have a door and he was a carpenter. So he says, "Harry, when you move in down there, I'll put a door on for you." So he put a door up for me. In the summer it used to be hot. That was still when I was working at Oscar Mayer's. One day I come home, there's two detectives down there. And I didn't know who they want, but anyway, they said, "Are you Mr. Gordon?" I said, "Yeah." "We want to ask you some questions." "Sure, what can I do for you." "You live here?" "Yes, I live here." "You pay your rent?" "Yeah, I paid my rent. What's the trouble?" Well, I found out. Me and my wife was living there in the upstairs. Downstairs in one room was living a

Colored guy and the owner was a, he was a Czech. He must have been at that time around seventy, seventy-five years old. So what happened, that colored guy, owed him some money whatever for rent, so the guy caught him in the basement and he was asking him for his rent so the colored guy got mad, took a hammer and hit him on the head and killed him. And that particular morning I was having a bloody nose and the sink when I was washing, there was blood in the sink. So they thought that I was the one that killed him but then the colored guy confessed that he was the guy killed him. Ahhh, what stories! Madison is a story in itself. That's a book in itself. Right from there we moved I think on Chandler Street, Murray and Chandler. And from Chandler we moved to East Dayton. That was like a palace over there. There we bought a little house.

SL: What was the address on Dayton?

HG: I think it was 1738 East Dayton.

SL: How long did you live there?

HG: There we lived I think five or six years. Maybe a little longer.

SL: Then did you buy another house?

HG: No, right from there is where the divorce was already...

SL: So did your wife remain there?

HG: No, we sold the house. She bought another house on 2209 East Washington from there.

SL: Is that when you moved to Fort Atkinson?

HG: No, from there right away I moved to an apartment. I moved in one room. I moved out of the house, I didn't have nothing. I just moved out with a little suitcase and a pair of pants. That's all I got after sixteen years of marriage. And I moved in a one room apartment where we were living together. It was on 1700 block East Washington. Right by the vacuum cleaner shop. There's a vacuum cleaner shop and right next door is a beauty shop. Five guys. Five guys I moved in. I didn't know the guys down there when I moved in but I looked for a room. You know, I had to move out of the house. When, I got served with the papers and that's all I could afford it anyway. And at that time it was pretty hard for me

making alimony payments, support payments. And I was lucky at that time to get a job in Fort Atkinson. They wanted me to come and work for them so I closed the yard in Stoughton and I went to work in Fort Atkinson.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 2

TAPE 5, SIDE 1

SL: I wanted to ask you about the help from the Jewish Community, or lack of help from the Jewish community.

HG: I would say it was the lack of the help from the Jewish community. And at that time I think all the older Jewish people, when we came to this town of Madison, I think they seemed to be jealous of us or something because anytime, let's say, for instance, if I came out and I bought myself a pair of new pants, a pair of new shoes, a lot of people down there on Mound Street, especially Sundays they used to go up to Schechter's on Mound Street, there was a delicatessen store. We used to go up and all the Jews used to get together down there and talk over the international news, the situation, the international situation and then the older women and older men, like a Mr. Sinagub or Mr. Shapiro down there from the little Jewish butcher shop, "Look at that greenhorn, look at that. Just came to this country, he's got new shoes, he's got new pants. We had to sit here in this country. We had to go through the depression. We had to work for forty or fifty years before we were able to buy new shoes and new pants. Look how dressed up the greenhorns are." They had the idea I think that we came to this country and we had to go through that period of suffering like they did through the depression. So I think they were jealous of us.

SL: Did they offer help in any type of way?

HG: Ah, what offer help, what offer help? Nobody offered any help. They didn't offer anybody any help. We couldn't even get no apartments. When I was living on North Murray, you had to see what an apartment. There wasn't even a door. In the summer you could fry yourself like down there; in the winter you could freeze to death. And couldn't find an apartment. There was no offer for nothing. Not just offering get an apartment. They wouldn't even look for you, help you look for an apartment.

SL: Did they give you any money for food? How did you manage to pay?

HG: We went right away to work.

SL: They didn't help in your finding a job at all, arranging for you to have a job?

HG: Rabbi Swarsensky was helping me find a job when I came to Madison. He found me a job, like for instance, first job, I think was, yes, that was in Bauman Farm Dairy on Fish Hatchery Road.

SL: You had told me about that last time we talked about the job situation that you went from, but so as far as you were concerned then, the only person who ever really gave you help was Rabbi Swarsensky?

HG: Yes. They had the organization. There was some kind of Jewish organization who's supposed to be taking care of refugees who came from Germany, to help them, but there was no whatsoever. There was no help coming forth, nothing.

SL: Did you ever complain to Rabbi Swarsensky about the lack of help?

HG: Oh yes, complained, what did it help? It didn't help, no complaints. Rabbi Swarsensky really couldn't do all by himself. He needed help from the community, he needed some leaders to help him organize this deal. Rabbi Swarsensky was doing the best he could, but that's about all.

SL: Did they ever come to visit you, anyone from the community?

HG: Not me personally. As I remember, there was, I think, a committee of two or three women, the days they come to visit I was working for the Sinaikos. When I was working at Sinaikos, I went to ask for a dime raise, so Jerry Sinaiko called up the Jewish distribution, here in Madison, the committee, that committee, I don't know how many members of the committee there was, and complain, "Look at that. That greenhorn, I just gave him a job and he wants already a raise, for ten cents a raise." So what does he do? My wife wasn't working, my ex-wife wasn't working, she was home. So they came home and started talking to my ex-wife, and as I understood it they were telling her, "Hey, it's hard to get a job and he's making seventy-five cents an hour and here your husband already wants ten cents." And Jerry Sinaiko, he called us and he says, "He doesn't do nothing anyway. He isn't worth the ten cents." And my ex-wife, I understood after I talked to a person who was from the committee, in my house, that my wife even agreed with her. That I was lazy. That I was lazy and I really was not supposed to

have gotten a raise or whatever. Can you imagine that your own wife is against you? Oh, this burned me up. I didn't say nothing, but this really burned me up, the idea. That's the only time I remember that the committee was in my house, in my beautiful apartment. I think it was on Murray Street there.

SL: Did you feel that, in those early years in Madison, did you feel you suffered from being a new immigrant, were you taken advantage of by people because of your new immigrant status?

HG: Oh sure, there's no doubt about that. You know, as an immigrant you're always taken advantage of. The first one to go, no matter what kind of job this is, is that immigrant. Because you're a greenhorn, you don't know the language, you don't know the American way. You're not in with the rest of the people. So the first one to get kicked out is the refugee. There's no doubt about that.

SL: Did they take advantage of you in stores when you tried to buy things?

HG: No, I wouldn't say in a store they were trying to take advantage of me because I don't know if they known, maybe they did, with my accent or this, but I don't think so in the stores. What I think is the most who took advantage of me coming to this country is my own fellow Jews, relation, uncles, even my ex-wife. I didn't have any complaints against, oh, employees, yes, but no complaints against the store owners or wherever I used to go in shopping. There was no problems there.

SL: Did you suffer from any anti-Semitism when you first came here?

HG: Anti-Semitism? No, not necessarily. The thing is, why I didn't suffer from anti-Semitism is I exactly, no matter where I was working, I wasn't afraid to tell 'em that I was Jewish. I never tried to hide it from anybody. And I think the only people that really, the only Jews who suffer from anti-Semitism, is Jews who are afraid to tell them that you're Jewish. And then they take advantage of that. And the gentile thinks that "Hey, look, I know he's a Jew. I know he's a Jew, and he's trying to hide it. He doesn't want to say something about it." So it's easy. The Jew is ashamed of him so he's going to take advantage of it. Everybody knows, whoever I know, I got a thousand friends, everybody knows I'm Jewish. And not between the Jews, I'm talking about the gentiles, and I'm proud of being a Jew. And I tell this to my gentile friends and he should be proud what he is.

SL: Who were your friends during those first years? Were you friendly mostly with survivors or did you make...?

HG: Survivors, but then my ex-wife didn't like the survivors. They weren't intelligent enough for her. So she tried right away to get Americanized and get with the high society, like lawyers, doctors, rabbis. But Rabbi Ticktin ²¹ was very good. But you know we had some friends, lawyers, she tried. Not me, she. Because I wasn't in that kind of bracket. There was Evelyn Leib, Dr. Leib, and she got divorced. You know Dworetzky, Mrs. Dworetzky's daughter? She got divorced and then she married Dr. Goldman. Now at that time, that was when they build their first house on the west side. With that new high school they build there, Memorial. There was the first house down there and the first neighborhood when they're just starting building up that neighborhood. And that must have been in the '50s you know, '53, '54. Now can you imagine, it was like a castle. It was like a palace. And he liked to cook, she liked to cook. They had their own separate kitchens. It was like a restaurant down there. No, you come in the house and my ex-wife used to come there and we used to go and visit them down there. Now how could I be in the category of that kind of people? At that time, as a doctor she was making \$25,000 a year, he was making \$25,000. I was making 75 cents an hour! So, then she used to come home, what I remember, she used to start bitching. "Look how people live, look how people live." "Well," I said, "I'm doing the best I can. We'll have to live according to our means." But I said, "There's a lot of American women they go to work also and they help out their husbands. I haven't got no education, that's the best I can do. But I'm not going to rob banks and build you a beautiful home like this one. And I'm not a doctor and I'm not a lawyer. We'll have to live in the means what I can afford it, you know."

SL: Did you ever go back to school when you came to this country?

²¹ Rabbi Max Ticktin.

HG: No, I went to night school to learn the language but that's about all. I didn't feel like going back to school. I couldn't sit down for six hours in a bench down there, writing and reading and let a teacher talk to me for hours. I couldn't take that.

SL: Do you recall any special acts of kindness from those first years?

HG: The only special act I can recall of kindness is from Gentiles, more than from Jews. In fact is that big shot here, Alex Temkin, every year he gives \$10,000 to the Distribution Committee. He stole from me \$214.50. He bought from me merchandise, what I brought him in, you know like scrap. He says to me, "You know, I'm giving that much money to the Jewish Distribution Committee or to the Welfare Fund right here in Madison." So I say, "So what is?" I should give him the junk for nothing when I sell it to him. That is our nice-looking Jews, good Jews. Now, when I started in the junk business, I went in Lodi, that's about 25 miles north from here. I ran into a place and I seen he had a big pile of iron. Maybe I told you about it. He has a big pile of iron and that was anyway my first week or the first couple days when I started in the junk business and I didn't have enough money with me. I got in and I see if he wants to sell it, his name was Bill Brethorst. "Yes," he says, he'll sell it. "What are you going to give me?" So I give him a price. Let's see, at that time \$20 or \$25 a ton. And he says, "Sure. You can start loading." But I say, "I haven't got the money to pay you right now. I'll clean up the junk and after I clean the junk up, after I haul it out, I will pay you." He looks at me and he says, "All right, okay." So I load up. "When are you going to pay," he says. I said, "It's going to take me two or three days until I haul it out." It was on Monday or on a Tuesday and I say, "On Thursday or Friday I have the money for you." At that time, in '52 or '53, it must have been about \$250. Was a lot of money. So, on Thursday afternoon I made a special trip and I paid him the \$250. A week later I come back to Lodi again and there was another machine dealer there across from there. He was a John Deere and there was a Case dealer and he had another pile of iron. But that guy wanted the cash immediately. He wanted \$150 in cash and I didn't have that kind of cash with me. So I go over to Bill Brethorst and I said to him, "I got a pile of iron to buy from your neighbor down there," and I said, "I need \$150.

Would you borrow me?" He looks at me, he says, "You're just like an Indian giver. You just brought me, pay me for my junk. Now you want the money back." He went up to the register, took out \$150 in cash, gave me the money to buy the pile of iron.

SL: And you paid him back?

HG: Sure. A couple days later it got paid back. And we became such a good friends for twenty-five years. Anytime he used to come to Madison I used to take him out to eat. And when I come to Lodi, he'll never let me go without taking me out to lunch.

SL: How do you spell his last name?

HG: Brethorst, Bill Brethorst.

SL: I want to ask you a few questions about your family. I need to know the name of your ex-wife and her date and place of birth.

HG: Jean ²² Gordon, and she was born in Poland. I don't know, a little town. Really, I don't know. Maybe my oldest son, he could give you the exact name and the date and the whole business. I don't know really.

SL: Do you have any approximate date or a year of birth?

HG: Must be about four years younger than I am. She might be around 48, 49. But I don't know exactly.

SL: What was her maiden name?

HG: Her maiden name was, let's see what was her maiden name, Lelonek.

SL: How did you meet her or where did you meet her?

HG: I met her in Germany. She was hiding out with a Polish farmer. Her parents somehow gave her to a Polish farmer, friends of theirs. Her father was a farmer, was selling some fertilizer to the farmers, and he known a lot of farmers in the town she was born, where they lived. So she was the youngest of the family and she lived with a farmer for four years. In fact, they adopted her as their daughter. She used to go with them every Sunday. She used to go to church. I met her in Germany. That was in Bad

²² An Anglicization of her given name, Genia.

Wörishofen. Right after the war. They escaped from the Russians. A lot of Jewish kids came in at that time. When I met her she didn't know a word of Jewish. She had blonde long hair. That's all she talked is Polish. Yes, I met her in Bad Wörishofen.

SL: When did you get married?

HG: In '49 before coming over here. Oh, that marriage was something else. See, she was underage. She was around fifteen when I was going to marry her because, otherwise, if I couldn't marry, I could have gotten a marriage certificate from a rabbi, but that wasn't good enough. It had to be from the state. And she was about sixteen years old. Now I had to go to Poland, find her family, kin, whoever is alive, a cousin, a brother, and right after the war everything were destroyed. Now where are you going to find it? It could take years. I used to run around, every day I used to run to Munich to find. It wasn't just that she couldn't go. I had my papers all done, and she was on my papers as a wife. Now I couldn't produce the marriage certificate and if I couldn't produce the marriage certificate, not just she couldn't go, I couldn't go either. And that's what the whole deal was all about it. So one day I met a good friend of mine and he says, "Harry, what's the matter? You look so disgusted? Where you going?" Every morning, 5:30 in the morning, I used to get up, take the train to go to Munich to find out in all kinds of institutions to find out how I can get a marriage certificate. So I told him the whole story. "Yes, I got the papers. I got to go through consulate and I'm going to the United States but I can't get a marriage certificate. And I don't know what to do because she's 15, 16 years. It will have to go to Poland. The Polish courts will have to decide. Whoever it is alive, an uncle, an aunt, but this could take years and I haven't got that much time to wait." He says, "Harry, I'll come and see you in a couple days. Maybe I can fix you up." Couple days later the guy comes up. He was hiding out the last couple days before the liberation. He was hiding out with a German guy in a little town, maybe 500, 700 population, and he was the mayor of the town. And says, "He's willing to give your wife the marriage certificate." So we had the marriage ceremony. The mayor of that little town, the German and his son was the witnesses. They signed the marriage certificate and that was all was to it.

SL: Did you ever get married again in another ceremony?

HG: We got married by a Jewish law, yes, through a rabbi. Yes, this we got married before. But this was no help. Yeah, we got married sure.

SL: When were you divorced?

HG: '69.

SL: And where's your wife right now?

HG: She's in Minneapolis.

SL: She just moved there recently, right?

HG: Yeah, she moved this summer.

SL: Had she lived in Madison for that whole period of time?

HG: Yes. She's been in Madison as long as I am.

SL: What about your children, want to give me their names and dates of birth if you can remember?

HG: Yeah. Well Eric, that's my oldest, January 30. Harry David Gordon, Abraham. Abraham, I think it's August 14.

SL: In what year was Eric born?

HG: 1951, 37 below zero. On Murray Street we lived right there by the hospital. We walked that morning. Thirty-seven below zero. And Abe is born August, 1952 or 1953.

SL: And what about your daughter?

HG: Vivian Francine Gordon. She was born 1961, April 7.

SL: What are your children doing now?

HG: Eric is married. I'm a grandpa. He's married to a Gentile girl. He met her in MATC. I don't know where he met her. He's got a nice home. He is happy.

SL: What does he do?

- HG: He's a bookkeeper. He's working for Huston's Garden Center in Cottage Grove. He used to be a big *makher*²³ in Ella's Delicatessen. He used to go to school. He worked hard, he saved himself some money. He's doing all right.
- SL: What's your grandson's name?
- HG: Granddaughter.
- SL: Oh, sorry.
- HG: Sheyna Louise.
- SL: How old is she?
- HG: About three months old. She's a baby. She was a miniature baby. She was born four pounds, seven ounces, very small. But she didn't need no incubator, no nothing. When Eric was born, Eric was four pounds, eight ounces, too. My oldest son. And Abraham Gordon, well that is my movie star! Fact is I talked to him yesterday, find out what's happening when I heard about the fires I got a little concerned with all this mud, with all the earthquakes down there. But he says, no, they live right in Los Angeles, doesn't affect their area down there. But the crime rate is increasing down there and he's looking for a new apartment. He's got a nice looking girlfriend.
- SL: And what's he doing in Los Angeles, he's an actor part-time?
- HG: He goes to acting school. He has actor's workshop. He keeps telling me what a great actor he is but I haven't heard nothing about any jobs yet. But he's selling office supplies.
- SL: Wasn't he on television in the last year or so?
- HG: He had a few very small parts, I don't know. Yes, he was, but when he went to University of Wisconsin he was pretty good. Everybody was telling me that. And I seen him in a lot of plays here. He was really good. But I might be a little prejudiced, I don't know. But anyway, he's still waiting for the big break.
- SL: What about your daughter, where is she?

²³ Yiddish for 'a big shot'.

HG: She goes to, she's in Seattle Washington University. She wants to be a lawyer. She might change her mind yet but that's what she keeps telling me. That's what she wants to be.

SL: When your children were growing up and when you were all in the house together, did you speak English at home?

HG: Yes, we used to speak English. But anytime we wanted to say something to each other that the kids didn't understand, we used to speak Yiddish. We always spoke English. Really, I don't know why. It's because we wanted to catch the language a lot faster. To know better is to keep speaking. Even though we were sometimes making mistakes you know, and the pronunciation wasn't there, but always speaking English in the house. But once in a while we used to speak Yiddish.

SL: Can your children understand Yiddish at all? Or speak to you in Yiddish?

HG: They pick up words. But really, we should have paid more interest, but the kids want to, I don't know. They were already American kid. Tried to get them to Hebrew school. Again, this is like forcing. Everything had to be forced. Saturday they didn't want to get up. We'd fight with them every morning, on Sunday morning. Wanted to take them Saturday to *shul*. No *shul*, Sunday school, that was terrible. But they still had to go three times a week. I had my business in Stoughton, right from Stoughton I used to drive to the synagogue, to Beth Israel. I used to pick them up every day, three times a week. And then on Sundays, Sunday school. Every Sunday they used to have headaches and screaming and hollering. They didn't want to go to Sunday school. Especially that actor. Oh, with him, that was trouble! And so, they're really in the same thing. But now, she says, I don't know if she's got the time but she would like to enroll. In Seattle there is a small Hillel Foundation that she would like to go and start with the Jewish studies. And maybe she wants to go and study for a year in Israel. So that's different now.

SL: How much do your children know about your experiences?

HG: I really never talked to my children. Oh, I mean I tried to explain it to them once in a while, but I don't know if they weren't interested or they didn't want to listen. If I tell them the story, maybe they thought

I'm going to get excited about it or whatever. Have to go the same story over again. But now my daughter tells me that, a couple of weeks ago I talked to her, she says, "Now Dad, if you've got an extra copy, I think I'm ready to read your manuscript."

END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 1

TAPE 5, SIDE 2

SL: In comparison to other families, do you think your family is closer to one another than other families that you see?

HG: You're talking about the other refugee families?

SL: No, American families, American-born parents and children?

HG: You mean between me and the children?

SL: Yeah.

HG: I think yes. There is a closer — because that's all I got is my children, really. So there is a more closer relationship than there would be between the American kids and their parents if they move away. Because then their parents they got cousins, they got uncles, they got brothers, sisters. That is the only thing I got, and my kids, that's the only father they got. They haven't got no uncles, they haven't got no aunts, they haven't got no brothers, I mean, they haven't got no cousins. I mean intimate relations.

SL: Do you see yourself as a more concerned parent than other parents?

HG: In a way, yes, and in a way I think I am an average, because I like to see my kids doing good. I'm interested that they do the best and anyway I could help them. But that is the best I can do. And I think that's what every father, every parents, American or me. It doesn't make any difference. Every parent is interested in the kids, for his kids to do better and to do good.

SL: When your children were young, what were your greatest concerns for them?

HG: The greatest concern for me for my children, is to get a good education, have a good home and to be a good human being. I always try to explain it to them. Have respect for the other people. Don't ever try and take advantage on anybody. Be fair. Always try to be fair.

SL: Do you have any contact with your family members in the East?

HG: No. Family members, like my uncles? No. I just got in contact with them. I tried to get some pictures because I was pretty upset with my family down there, the way they acted towards me when I came to this country. That's just like a stranger. So I didn't have any contact with them at all. And by now they're all dead anyway. There are only the kids around and some of them are my uncle's kids. I don't even know them, I don't even remember them. They don't remember me either. I don't think so.

SL: What about your, are there any cousins surviving from Kovno?

HG: Yes, there was a cousin.

SL: Are you in contact with the cousin?

HG: I haven't been in contact with them either for a long, I always said, I don't know what it is about this country. When I left the old country, like I said, my uncle who died there, when I was talking about, who had that mental breakdown and then he had tuberculosis and they wouldn't let him come in. That is his son who is living in New York, who's married. But when I was still in Germany we used to see each other. I was living in Bad Wörishofen and he was living in Munich. So I used to be there in Munich maybe twice, three times a week. And I always said to my uncle, "Don't worry, when I go to United States I'll send you a letter every day." I remember that. But it doesn't work out that way. You come to this country and you get Americanized. You got so much trouble to make a living, you know to get... Maybe it's an excuse, but since I came to this country I really wrote him maybe four or five letters. It's really different. I don't know what it is, but that wasn't really fair. But I had a lot of trouble with making a living, getting established in this country. So at least I could find some time to write a letter to my uncle down there in Germany, but it wasn't there. And since I was in the United States, I may have wrote him four or five letters. But he's dead now. And with my cousin in New York, yes, I also haven't got in touch for a long, long time. I just got in touch with him about a month ago, two months ago.

SL: Who are your closest friends right now? Are they mostly Jewish or non-Jewish?

HG: Well, I got a couple of Jewish close friends, like Jake Heifetz who lives on Mound Street. In fact I came to visit him. But I got a lot of Gentile friends. I got more Gentile friends than I got Jewish friends.

SL: Are you still friendly with any survivors in Madison?

HG: Oh, yeah, with everybody. But we don't visit. Like with the Gordon family, the other Gordon, Sam Gordon. I don't know, my ex-wife never got along with his wife, so I don't know. Oh, when we see each other on the street or in a *shul*, yes, we know each other. We greet each other, we treat each other. "What's happening? How's it going? How's business?" That's about all. All the refugee families, sure. Because when my kids were smaller I used to go to *shul* and then I used to see more the Jewish people. Since the kids grown up, since they got out of the Hebrew school, with Sunday school, I don't go really to the synagogue at all. I go once or twice a year. Always everyday working except Saturday and Sunday. You got to do this and you're busy. You always got something to do.

SL: Do you belong to any organizations of survivors or a *landsmannschaft*?²⁴

HG: No.

SL: What contact do you have now with American-born Jews?

HG: With American-born Jews? Oh, I got a lot of contact. I got a good friend of mine, an American born Jew. Friedman in Stoughton. They invite me to holidays and I come and I see him pretty near every day. I work around Stoughton so I stop at their store. What do you mean in contact? What do you mean by contact?

SL: Well, how often do you see them? Have you ever talked to any American-born Jews about your Holocaust experiences?

HG: Oh, yeah, like when I was still married, we used to go to parties and there were people used to start, or sitting around the table, and ask all kind of questions. "What do you do? How did you get to Germany? What concentration camp?" Yeah, I used to start telling them the story. But that's about all. I wasn't

²⁴ An organization of people from a given town or region.

going around and really tell them, "Hey, I just was in a concentration camp and I want you to feel sorry for me." I don't want nobody to feel sorry for me. If they ask me, I tell them.

SL: What do you think their feelings are about the Holocaust?

HG: Well, when they look at the Holocaust, when they look at it in the movie, and they see it, and I suppose it bothers them. I suppose they feel sorry for, I don't know, they feel sorry for the Jewish nation, for the Jews who got killed in Europe. But after the movie is over, that's all forgotten really. And I don't really feel that they have to go around and keep on suffering for it because it's impossible for somebody, even like you. You go around and you listen to all those stories. You're putting down on tape. Now you tell me: what do you think? How do you feel about us refugee? What do you feel about the Jewry in Europe? About the killing of six million people? You get done with the transmission of the tape and then it's all forgotten, right? What do you feel about it? How do you feel about it?

SL: Well, that's something we can talk about when the tape is over because I'm not supposed to get engaged in conversation. But I think you're wrong, but it's not the same for me. I wouldn't have been involved with this project in the first place if it didn't mean something to me. It's not something I like to...

HG: What does it really mean to you? Cut off the tape. We'll finish the tape later. [tapes cuts off]

SL: Have you ever told any non-Jews about your Holocaust experiences?

HG: Oh, yeah.

SL: How does their reaction differ than the American Jews that you've told?

HG: Well, in a way, some don't even believe it that it is possible for a human being to go through that kind of tragedy, that kind of suffering. "How could you go through it," he says, "and still be alive?" Luck, I suppose, I don't know. I myself don't know what it is. One of the only thing I can imagine is it's because I was lucky. I got out alive without permanent damage. A lot of people they got mental breakdowns. But I am fortunate, I am really fortunate that I can talk to you about it. It comes to life for me what I went through. But an hour later when you leave here, I can lock it up in my subconscious

mind. Tomorrow morning, I'll get up in the morning, go to work, and I won't even know that it was there. And then somebody will come around: "Hi, Harry, how's everything? How's the international situation? What do you think is going to happen? What happened down there?" If he starts asking me the same questions again, it will open up. I will tell him again but I will still lock it up and I'll go on with my daily routine. My Gentile friends, when I tell them the story, they says, it's like the American Jews, they can't believe it. "How people can treat people that way?" It's really impossible to understand. It's impossible to explain it to somebody, what you went through, what people could do to you, being such a sadist. That's sadism. That's the lowest. Lower than animal. Animal to animal won't kill unless he is hungry. And the German nation is supposed to be the most sophisticated nation in Europe. Sophisticated killers.

SL: In the past few years have you had any unpleasant experiences with non-Jews?

HG: A lot of times I have unpleasant. Quite a few times. You know I go in, and because they know I'm Jewish you know, they sometimes do it to aggravate me and see my reaction. Where I pick up my scrap iron in Stoughton, I have a place and the foreman there, every time I used to come in: "You Jews, you got all the money. You own the banks, you own the film industry, you own the TV industry." What was his name? There was a red-headed fellow, he was an Irishman, always every morning on TV, Arthur Godfried. And he was so entrenched that Arthur Godfried is a Jew. And I tried to explain it to him, "Hey, there's a lot of non-Jews who made big money. There is a lot of non-Jews, like Rockefeller is not a Jew, and they got the Chase Manhattan Bank. The richest man in the country. The richest man in the world. There is rich Jews, there is poor Jews. There is rich Gentiles, there is poor Gentiles." "You Jews own the whole, you own the banks, you own all the money, you own all the television stations and Arthur Godfried is another rich Jew." I say, "Arthur Godfried's not a Jew in the first place." But he used to kid me. Even his old man working for him would say, "Hey, Jack, Arthur Godfried is not a Jew." They tried to explain, the other Gentiles. I didn't have to worry about it anymore

because they were taking the problem of mine. But anyway, I tell them what I think about it. To me they don't fiddle around with me, Jew or no Jew. I tell them where to get off.

SL: Do you belong to any political or social clubs?

HG: No.

SL: Now as far as your religious life goes, you did mention that your synagogue attendance has slipped off since your children moved away.

HG: Right.

SL: Do you keep any traditions in the home?

HG: No, I don't keep any traditions. What am I going to keep traditions for myself? I wasn't that traditional even when I was in Europe when I was a young kid.

SL: And your children did go through Hebrew school?

HG: Oh, yeah.

SL: How do you think your feelings about religion have changed since your experiences?

HG: It hasn't changed that much. You still believe in a God Almighty, the supreme being, that something is there. What else I believe? I don't really go too much for the religious deal. I feel, why should I go in, pray all day Saturday, and go around on Sunday or Monday morning, go and screw the people? I do the same. I don't have to go and pray to ask for God for forgiveness. I don't have to screw them. I treat them the best way I can. But Alex Temkin is going to sit in the synagogue the Saturday, right in the front row. On Monday morning he'll steal from me 215 bucks. So what good is all the religion? I can be a good Jew without being religious, without praying in a *shul*.

SL: Could you describe for me a typical day?

HG: Oh, yes. I get about around 7:00 in the morning. I eat breakfast. I get dressed. I go out to work. I work some days till 4:00 o'clock, 5:00 o'clock. Some days I'll come in at 1:00 o'clock, it depends. But very few days I come in at 12:00 or 1:00 o'clock in the afternoon. The most the days I put in between eight to ten hours a day. Saturday and Sunday I don't work. Saturday I take care of the house, clean the

house. Sometimes, then I go out for a drive or I go out to visit my son, now with my grandchild. But I haven't visited him really in the last two, three weeks because I was busy. Had to sit home so I can rent my apartment, you know, people calling.

SL: What do you do in the evening to pass the time?

HG: Oh, in the evening sometimes I go out. I go to the community center. I like to play table tennis. Otherwise I watch a little TV, then I go out. Or I have dates once in a while.

SL: Do you go to the movies?

HG: I used to love to go to the movies. I could go to the movies six times a week. Every day. I haven't been in the movies for the last four years.

SL: What changed your mind?

HG: I don't know what. I used to love to go to the movies. No matter what picture would play. I could go to the movies every day. I loved the movies. And then lately I don't think that they have such good movies. There wasn't such a good plays. And then you got a television that's much handier. You sit in the chair, you push the button and there you got the movie right in front of your eyes.

SL: What are your hobbies and special interests?

HG: The main hobby is work! The other hobbies, I like to do sports, I like to play basketball, I like to play table tennis, I like to go out skating in the wintertime.

SL: Do you skate on the creek here by your house?

HG: No, I go by Tenney Park. Used to live there. Oh, there's a beautiful skating rink down there. I never tried skating up here yet. And my daughter wants me to buy skis and go cross country.

SL: What kinds of things do you like to read?

HG: I don't read much.

SL: Why not?

HG: I don't know. I haven't got the desire to read or I haven't got the patience. I cannot sit down. I got to be doing something. I cannot sit down there for two hours and read a book. I'll get a headache.

SL: Do you receive any newspapers or magazines in the house?

HG: I get magazines, but no newspapers. What I need the newspapers? I get the news, at 5:00 and 5:30 I get the latest news. What do I need the newspapers?

SL: What kind of magazines do you get in the house?

HG: They send me all kinds of magazines, I don't know. They send me the Jewish magazines, too. Oh yeah, I belong to the *Chevre Kadisha*.²⁵

SL: From the synagogue. Are you a member of the synagogue?

HG: I didn't took it away, but I dropped my membership when I moved away from Madison, when I was working in Fort Atkinson. I really dropped it, but one day they called me up and they needed some help, so I said, all right.

SL: Have you read any books on the Holocaust?

HG: No.

SL: Did you watch the *Holocaust* television program?

HG: Yes.

SL: What did you think about it?

HG: I talked to my son about it, too. It's quite a ways from the original. Them scenes they show, there is no comparison whatsoever with what it really happened. But I talked to my son about it and he says, "Hey, dad that's impossible to produce it just exactly the way you want it." But what I think is *Playing for Time*, Vanessa Redgrave or whatever her name is. I think them scenes on that particular movie was already more closer than the scenes on the Holocaust.

SL: Did people become more interested in your experiences after the show was on television?

HG: Oh yeah, a lot of people. A lot of people ask me, "How come, Harry, you haven't been on television? Why don't you tell them your experience for Holocaust?" There's a lot of people they watch the *Holocaust* on Saturday night and a lot of people say, "Hey, there was a scrap dealer down there was

²⁵ A burial society.

- also in the concentration. We thought maybe it was you, Harry." I said, "No, it wasn't me. There was a different scrap dealer."
- SL: Where have you traveled in Wisconsin?
- HG: I've been in Door County, I've been to Wyalusing.²⁶ I've been around. I've been all over Wisconsin, pretty near.
- SL: Mostly because of your business?
- HG: No, just for trips. Trips, business, everything.
- SL: Have you liked any particular part of the state more than the others?
- HG: I like Madison the best, really.
- SL: Why is that?
- HG: Oh, I don't know, because I'm used to it, because I live here. So that's why, maybe. But its beautiful country in Wisconsin, there's no doubt about that. I was in New York, I was in Seattle, I was in Los Angeles, I was in... and I still think that Madison's a beautiful city. I don't like them big cities. Too big.
- SL: Does Madison at all remind you of your home in Lithuania?
- HG: Pretty close.
- SL: In what way is that?
- HG: In a way that is the winters, the change of the seasons, the population. Kovno was about 150,000. Madison is about 175,000. It's pretty close. The weather was exactly, I think in Lithuania the weather was just as cold but it was more drier down there than here. Here it's more humidity. But I mean the cold weather, the season changing, spring, summer, fall, winter, exactly like my country, the country where I was born. And that's why I think why I like Madison the best and I live here and that is where I'm making my living and that's where I got my family. So, that's why Madison I like the best.
- SL: How satisfied are you with the cultural aspects of Madison?

²⁶ A campground in western Wisconsin.

HG: Oh, I think Madison is a pretty cultural city as far as culture. I would say that Madison is a pretty, we got a pretty good university here, one of the top ten in the country. And as far as cultural achievements, let's see, now we got a new civic center. We should get quite a bit of culture with concerts, with all kinds of stuff here.

SL: How much happier would you have been living in a city that had a larger Jewish population?

HG: I don't know, really. What I'm not crazy about my Jewish people, is they like to put on a big act. I'm not talking about my refugees friends. I'm talking about American-born people. First of all, there's a lot of Jews, even in this town of Madison that they are afraid to be recognized that they are Jews. A lot of Jews like to put on a big show. They like to go Saturday morning, or Friday night they'll go to the synagogue, and they'll put on all their diamonds on their fingers, they'll put on their mink coats, get dressed, show off how rich they are, how much money they're worth. And to me, that doesn't impress me too much. To me, what impresses is a human being, what you do for your fellow man. That is what's important to me. I don't care if you got a mink coat or you got a hundred-million-dollar diamond or whatever. That doesn't mean nothing to me. It's great. I wouldn't mind having it. Yeah, I'll build myself a mansion, I'll live like a king. Good. But you can be a king but you can also be a *mensch*.²⁷ A *mensch* is what's important.

SL: How do you feel about living in Wisconsin with its high percentage of ethnic Germans?

HG: They don't bother me. I do business with Germans. And fact is, I run in a guy and he's a German and in fact he hasn't even got the American citizenship yet. He's living in this country, he's a big rich farmer, he's got a lot of money, and he's a very hard Nazi. A real Nazi. Because Hitler, to him, he kept telling me, he told me and I tried to persuade him that... He says to me, "That's just Jewish propaganda. There was never any concentration camp." I keep telling him in a nice way and that that is not propaganda and that is what it was. But he just don't want to admit it. I said, "General Eisenhower, when he came through Germany, when he liberated me, you had pictures and you had

²⁷ Yiddish for 'a good person'.

photographs and it's all in white and black, so how can you come around and say that Jewish propaganda?" And that shut him up." And there was a lot of guys, Norwegians and Danes, standing around in a nice way without being excited. And he didn't say a word. He just moved away. He got red in his face and he moved away. So I don't worry about him. I don't hate Germans. I don't hate them. The fact is, right after the war, if somebody would have come and give me a gun and say, "This is them who killed your family, those who killed your mother, killed your father" yeah, they're right there, I could do it. But I couldn't. Even today, if I could find them today, the same guy, I don't think I would have the guts to kill him.

END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 2

TAPE 6, SIDE 1

SL: What effort have you made to acquaint yourself with Wisconsin history?

HG: Not much. Not much of an effort to acquaint myself with Wisconsin history. Oh, once in a while I like go out to the libraries and I try to find out all about Wisconsin I can. But not too often. When my daughter used to be here, we used to go to libraries and find all kinds of different magazines or books on Wisconsin and take out. And she kept pushing me on that. Then since she left Wisconsin, she left Madison, and I'm not doing much of that. Wisconsin periodicals and that kind of stuff.

SL: How do you feel you have contributed to the Wisconsin community?

HG: How do I feel I have contributed to the Wisconsin Community? You mean in a whole or just the Jewish community?

SL: No, the whole community.

HG: Oh, the whole. I'm a good Wisconsin citizen. I pay my taxes. I'm giving some money to United Way. I'm trying, as much as I can, to talk to my fellow neighbors, to my fellow citizens and try to make Wisconsin a better state, politically. And that's all I can say about it.

SL: Do you feel an obligation to Madison or to Wisconsin for giving you an opportunity to start a new life?

HG: Yes, in a way I do because here I came, I didn't have nothing, and I done myself pretty good. So I do owe something back to Wisconsin. And Wisconsin was good to me. It was a hard road to go but Wisconsin was pretty good to me.

SL: What was your reaction when the American Nazi Party was planning to march in Milwaukee?

HG: I feel this way. Maybe I'm too liberal, because that's what democracy's all about. No matter what they done, no matter how the Nazis feel, they have a right to march and that is not just the Nazis. That's the Communist Party or the Ku Klux Klan. And I think if we can keep it more in the open then we shouldn't have to worry about it. It's if we keep them locked up and we don't know what they're doing.

As long as I know he's going to be marching in Chicago, let them march. I don't have to be out in the street and watch them marching. If they want to march, let them march.

SL: How satisfactory do you find American system of government?

HG: That is the best system of government I've seen. I lived under quite a few governments. And, fact is, that is the greatest country, now there you got a fact right there: the election between presidents. Now there is the losing president and there is the winning president. In different countries, take for instance in South American countries, the dictatorial countries, there would have been shootings, tanks in the middle of the streets. Look how nice and smooth. We don't even know it. By the time the old one will be smoothed out and the new one will come in and the country will be going on. And this, I think, a lot of people don't even realize what a great country this is. And look what's happening in the rest of the world. One is fighting the Shah. The Shah got killed or Shah got pushed out and now the Ayatollah Khomeini is fighting the other factions in his country. This country is fighting with this. In this country, the people have spoken. The people got sick and tired of the Democratic party cause he couldn't deliver. They were getting stale. So the people have spoken. I would say, hey, it's time to get the Democratic Party out and let the Republicans come in and see what they can do. Now, if the Republicans won't deliver, in 1984, we'll throw them out and Democrats will be going in. I think it's a great thing for this country. It's good for the country. It's good for a change.

SL: How do you feel about the prominence of Jews in American society?

HG: I feel very good about the prominence of Jews in the American society. I see that a new president coming in, Mr. Reagan, his top economic adviser will be Greenspan, a Jewish fellow, and I feel pretty good about it.

SL: What do you see are the most important issues facing America today?

HG: The most important issues facing America today is inflation, economic, and then the military. First of all, what I see is that the only way you can speak to the Russians is through strength. And I think Reagan has got a very good idea. I think the whole foreign policy will be changed and if the Russians

understand that you mean what you're saying, they'll quiet it down, because the Russians have a lot more on their mind. They got plenty of trouble. They got Afghanistan, they got with Poland, they got with all the eastern European countries what they have taken over. They haven't got no picnic. But the only thing they understand, and I lived with the Russians, I know them pretty good, that Reagan's idea is better than Carter's. Because Carter was a little too wishy-washy, and they know that they can do with Carter whatever they want. But if you sit down with the Rushkies by the table and say, "Hey, you want peace? I'm all for it. So let's make it right there, right down the middle. I will send inspectors in your country, if you really want peace. And you can send inspectors and inspect my country right there." It's very simple. It's a very simple deal.

SL: To what extent do you believe there is anti-Semitism in the United States?

HG: There is no doubt that there is anti-Semitism in this country. But I think there was more anti-Semitism in this country when I came to this country than there is now. It has lessened. I think right after the Second World War, when Israel was created, I think the whole world, especially the United States, has built a different picture towards Jews. Jews were always moneymakers, bankers. They couldn't farm. They wouldn't go and fight. But when Israel was created and they show them. And what Israel has achieved in thirty years, no other countries haven't achieved in 150 years. So there is a different attitude towards the Jews, completely. The Jews can farm, they can make money, they're good businessmen, they're good fighters, and they can run a country, too. And that I think gave us a lot of prestige. And I think that, sure, there is plenty of anti-Semitism in this country, but I wouldn't worry about it.

SL: How secure do you feel as a Jew in America?

HG: I feel pretty secure.

SL: What are your feelings about Germany and present-day Germans?

HG: Present-day Germans, the way I feel about them, to me they don't even exist. I don't even think about them. I don't love them and I don't hate them. To me they're non-existent.

SL: Do you receive restitution?

HG: No.

SL: Did you ever receive any?

HG: I did.

SL: Was it a one-time shot?

HG: A one-time shot. I think, for five years, \$1535 I got.

SL: Have you ever returned to Europe?

HG: No. I would like to go to Europe. I would like to go to my hometown where I was born. Not to Germany, but to my town where I was born. I would like to go back to Lithuania, yeah, and see what happened there since I left. It must be completely rebuilt or something. Or who knows? Maybe my house or where I was born, my place, might be still there. I don't know. There I would like to go.

SL: Have you ever been to Israel?

HG: No.

SL: Would you like to go?

HG: Yes, I would. Yeah, I would like to go. Very much so.

SL: Do you think it's easier for you now to talk about your experiences than it may have been five years ago?

HG: No, I talked about my experience five years ago just as I talk now. I don't know why it would be easier five years than it is now. In the beginning I think would have been a lot harder. It was a lot harder, I think, for me to talk about my experience right when I came to this country but not five years ago. Five years ago I could talk about my experience just as I talk about experience right now.

SL: So for you the time passed fairly quickly as to when you could start to talk about it?

HG: Yes.

SL: How do you feel about the increasing awareness in this country about the Holocaust?

HG: In a way it is very good, the awareness about the Holocaust. The awareness will keep from people maybe, and that's why we talked about before that we have to keep showing it and showing it over and over again. So by keep people reminding, that maybe then we'll never going to have any other holocaust like this what we had in 1940 and 1930s. But we have an holocaust right now. What is about a holocaust for me? Haitian people. We're talking only about Jews, but there's people having holocaust every day. I seen another picture a couple days ago, where there was a thousand refugees, Haitian. They were beaten and hit. No food, no nothing, kids going around with swollen bellies. They were put on a boat and they had to be pulled back to Haiti or wherever they were going. Now this is a holocaust, too.

SL: How do you feel about the fact that part of the funding for this project has come from the federal government?

HG: That it is coming from the federal government I think is a good thing because I think the government is interested in this project. That's why I feel it's pretty good. There's nothing wrong with that.

SL: Why do you feel it's important to participate in an oral history documentation on the Holocaust?

HG: First of all, I feel psychologically might be good for the particular person. Not too many people are fortunate enough like me. If they can get it out, you know? They keep it locked up and it bugs them, I'm pretty sure. It doesn't bug me because I keep talking about it every day, really. Not every day. But a guy, I come in a restaurant, sit down and have lunch, he says. "Well, Harry, what happened to your book? How come you don't get it published? How come you don't do it? What's the matter?" But some people maybe had it locked up for years and it's working on their conscience, they couldn't give it up. But now if a person would come around like you or no matter who takes interviews and then they let it out and I think it's better for their wellbeing. That's the way I feel.

SL: Well, I've run out of questions that I wanted to ask. I wanted to give you the opportunity if you wanted to add anything to go ahead

HG: The only thing I can add is this: I'm pretty lucky. I'm the luckiest man that I could come to a free country like the United States without any experience, without any schooling, without even the language, to come in a country and get established, make a good home for myself, and in the same time make some money. I don't think I could have done it in any European countries. And this shows how the United States, that's the country for opportunity, where every individual, if he's willing to work hard, can make a good life for himself.

SL: Well, I want to thank you very much for participating in this.

HG: You're welcome.

END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 1

END OF TRANSCRIPT