

Louis Koplin: Oral History Transcript

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Name: Louis Koplin (born Ludwig Kopolowitz)
(1920–)

Birth Place: Nelipeno, Czechoslovakia
(now in the Ukraine)

Arrived in Wisconsin: 1947, Madison

Project Name: Oral Histories: Wisconsin Survivors
of the Holocaust



Louis Koplin

Biography: Louis Koplin (born Ludwig Kopolowitz) was born in Nelipeno, Czechoslovakia (now in the Ukraine), on July 30, 1920. He came from a family of Orthodox Jews who had lived in an area known as Subcarpathian Ruthenia for hundreds of years. Louis graduated from the Munkacs Gymnasium in 1941, two years after the German-sympathizing Hungarian government occupied Subcarpathia.

Although the Hungarian government did not persecute the Jews until the spring of 1944, Jewish men were sent to the Russian front beginning in June 1941 to mine and dig trenches. Louis was sent to a labor camp in Komarom, Hungary. He was chosen from among 2,000 men to remain there as a shoemaker. The others were never heard from again.



Louis remained in Komarom until March 1944, when the Hungarians abandoned the camp after the Nazis invaded Hungary. Louis was rounded up and sent to the Austrian border, where he worked in a forced labor camp until February 1945. He was then force-marched with thousands of others for more than 300 miles to the concentration camp of Mauthausen. More than 95 percent of the prisoners died en route. Soon afterward the Nazi guards fled the camp, leaving the inmates on their own until they were liberated by the advancing U.S. Army several days later.

Upon his arrival at a displaced persons camp in Germany, Louis was hired by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) to help resettle refugees throughout Europe. Through the JDC, he was accepted at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where he arrived in September 1947. Louis studied pharmacy and moved to Milwaukee after graduating. Louis married in 1954, opened a pharmacy in 1957, and raised three children. Louis retired in 1992.

Audio Summary: Below are the highlights of each tape. It is not a complete list of all topics discussed.

Tape 1, Side 1

- Childhood and family background
- Virulent anti-Semitism in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s
- His father's World War I experiences

Tape 1, Side 2

- Public school and secular education
- Transfer to private Zionist school in city of Munkacs
- Factions within the Czech Jewish community during the 1930s

Tape 2, Side 1

- Hitler's rise and the approach of war
- Hungarian annexation of Czechoslovakia, spring 1939
- New anti-Semitic laws
- Louis is drafted into the Hungarian army, 1941

Tape 2, Side 2

- Assigned to forced labor in Komarom, Hungary, 1941
- Meeting his father during a trip to Budapest
- Conditions at Komarom camp
- The city of Komarom in the 1940s

Tape 3, Side 1

- Labor and social life at Komarom camp
- Louis tries unsuccessfully to escape through Budapest
- Communications with his family and the outside world
- Shipped to camp on Austro-Hungarian border

Tape 3, Side 2

- Brutal living conditions at the border camp, 1944–1945
- Camp abandoned as Russian troops approached, 1945
- Death march, Austrian border to Mauthausen concentration camp, spring 1945
- Expecting to die in the war's final weeks

Tape 4, Side 1

- Starvation and brutality at Mauthausen
- Liberation on May 8, 1945
- Hospitalization in the U.S. refugee camp
- Travels Europe in search of family, 1945–1946

Tape 4, Side 2

- Reunited with his brother
- Considers illegal emigration to Palestine
- Medical school in Prague
- Learning the fate of his family

Tape 5, Side 1

- Prague after the war
- Aliyah Bet and illegal emigration to Palestine
- Working with the JDC in 1946 helping displaced persons
- 1946 pogrom in Kielce, Poland

Tape 5, Side 2

- Immigrating to the U.S., September 1947
- Studying pharmacy in Madison, Wisconsin
- Moving to Milwaukee and meeting his wife

Tape 6, Side 1

- Children and family life
- Friends and social life
- Milwaukee's Jewish community in the 1950s and 1960s

Tape 6, Side 2

- Religious life in Milwaukee
- Thoughts on American culture and politics
- Anti-Semitism in the U.S.

About the

Interview Process:

The interview was conducted by archivist Sara Leuchter on February 13 and 19, 1980, at Louis's home in Milwaukee. Louis had never before spoken to anyone at great length about his experiences.

Louis's testimony about the culture of the Jews of Subcarpathia is historically significant since more than 70 percent of the Jewish population of Hungary was destroyed by the Nazis.

The interviews proceed in a straightforward, chronological order. Louis seemed to greatly enjoy the first few hours of the interview when he related pleasant memories of his childhood. He was visibly shaken by the memories of the last months of the war.

Audio and

Transcript Details:

Interview Dates

- Feb 13, 1980; Feb 19, 1980

Interview Location

- Koplin home, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Interviewer

- Archivist Sara Leuchter

Original Sound Recording Format

- 6 qty. 60-minute audio cassette tapes

Length of Interviews

- 2 interviews, total approximately 6 hours

Transcript Length

- 108 pages

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Transcript

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Key

SL Sara Leuchter, Wisconsin Historical Society archivist

LK Louis Koplin, Holocaust survivor

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SL: First I'd like to ask you about your family background, your date of birth, place of birth, and also the same type of information about your parents. Their names and where and when they were born, but you can start off with your own information.

LK: My name is Louis Koplin. Should I give you my so-called maiden name? My birth name, or actually my original name, was Kopolowitz. It was changed after I arrived into the United States at the request of my brother, whose name was changed when he was inducted in the Army and went to Korea. He thought that having the same name for brothers would be more desirable. I was born in Czechoslovakia in a small town by the name of Nelipeno. My parents, my father was a shoemaker. His name was Zalmin. My mother was Honey, maiden name Klein. I do recall my grandmother on my father's side. Her name was Rekhe, or Rachel. My grandfather, whose name was David, I do not recall him because he wasn't around at the time anymore. On my mother's side I remember the grandfather. They came from the other side of the city we resided on, they were adjacent to city by the name of Holubena, or [sounds like; Galombosh?] in Hungarian. His name was Chaim and I remember he was a musician. He and his brothers played at weddings, at Jewish weddings of course. That's all of the recollection I have. I think he also had a tavern, and I recollect that just as a child.

SL: What I actually didn't get was your date of birth.

LK: I was born on July 30, 1920.

SL: Do you recall your parents' dates of birth, or at least the years?

LK: Yes, I remember the years. My father's birth year was 1894, and my mother's was '96.

SL: Do you have any recollections of your grandparents' living when you were a child?

LK: I do remember my father's mother, in other words my grandmother, who I was very close to.

SL: What was she like?

LK: She had a candy store, and of course that makes it so much more memorable. We used to visit her quite often, at least once weekly. The town was about three to four kilometers from the place we lived and I made it a practice visiting her practically every Sabbath. She was a widow, and I recall her having this candy stand. That's how she made a living.

SL: If you traveled to see her on the Sabbath, how would you do it?

LK: On the Sabbath we walked and on any other day we bicycled there. It was a small resort town and it was quite a nice place to visit, regardless of any particular reason.

SL: Were there many Jews in that town?

LK: Yes. The Jewish population was prevalent in the whole area.

SL: And in Nelipeno, too?

LK: Nelipeno, also. It was a very small village and I would say 50 percent of it was Jewish.

SL: I'd also like you to, if you can, tell me something about your parents; any special memories, something really nice that happened, you know, a special relationship.

LK: It's all a big pleasant memory, other than the hardship of being hungry once in a while. As a matter of fact, that's the only unpleasant memory that I do have. It was a very large family by American standards. We were six children and we occupied the size of a two-room house. We were crowded. We shared beds, we shared space, quite closely. All I can say that my memories as a child, or for that matter, until the day I left the house, was nothing but pleasant. I would call my childhood a very happy one.

SL: Can you give me a description of, say, how your father looked?

LK: Of course I remember him very vividly. He was, by the way, taller than I am. He had a moustache. My mother, they said that she was quite a beauty in her time. But she was a mother that devoted her whole twenty-four hours to the family. I don't recall her ever eating out a meal or ever going on vacations or any of the pleasantries that people are doing today. It was a complete devotion to family's care. My father was a shoemaker, his shop was also within the confines of that two-room house.

SL: The shop was there, too?

LK: Yes, yes, it was in the kitchen.

SL: So people would come to him with their...

LK: They would come to the house and bring their shoes or to have them fitted for new ones. And yet, I don't ever recall it being an unpleasant experience, considering the standards by which we live today and the sizes of our living quarters. Of course, as a child things do look usually always better than they I'm sure would otherwise be. That's about it. It's all a big pleasant memory.

SL: Think you could you give me a description of the countryside around Nelipeno? What you remember of maybe going on picnics or going into the mountains for pleasure?

LK: Many times I see pictures of places that I traveled with my wife. I always try to pinpoint any similarity at all whenever I experience such to my wife, that this is what it looked like home. It was a mountainous region. It was at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains. In any given direction you could always see mountains, hills, forests, rivers. It was a very beautiful place. I'm sure that real estate of that kind today would be greatly appreciated here. Of course I never could see farther than, up till the age I have left town or home, I've never seen flat land. My world was always confined to the valley that we happened to have lived in. My travels were very confined totally to the extent that our bicycles or our feet could take us to, since the economic situation was such that travel of the scale that we know today was beyond anybody's reach. I many times miss that feeling of what I was used to at that time.

SL: When you were younger with your friends would you take a bike trip into the mountains?

LK: Not really, because the effort of getting anywhere at all out of necessity was such that a trip just to go somewhere without any reason was not something that was done with regularity. Other than on a picnic or hikes. Hikes used to be a very common thing that we used to do from school. Either overnight or otherwise. But it turned into excitement only if it was beyond somewhere that I haven't been before. Otherwise it was just a very routine thing.

SL: I would like to know a little bit about what your house looked like in the area of town. Were the houses close together? Or did you really have kind of farm property?

LK: No, we lived in a city, and I would say the houses were as close as they would be in a city block, except without pavement, and the proximity I would say would be almost the same but with big backyards, and they were row streets only. In other words, the whole city was composed of one single street, but the houses were built next to each other on that row of streets, and there was no depth to those villages. In other words, there was only one single or maybe a few more blocks, but that's about it.

SL: Now just as your father had his shoe repair in the house, did other families have their businesses in the house?

LK: Yes. As a rule there were no shops as we know it today. Most of the people that were self-employed had their, I recall the tailor and I recall even the grocer, they always lived under the same roof where they plied their trades, so to speak.

SL: Was there a rich family? Or were there certain people that were the...?

LK: Yes, there were, of course. There was a big industry, a wood-distilling industry, a wood-processing industry, in town, and I recall the director of that factory was a Jewish man who owned the only car in the city, for example. Also, the baker was somewhat better off than the average, and maybe the owner of the mineral water well was somewhat richer. But on the average, most people were about on the same economic level, with the exception of a very few.

SL: Was there much interaction between the Jews and the non-Jews in the town?

LK: Well, only on the business level, whenever business was conducted. In terms of social contact, I would say the Jews kind of stuck with each other. I would say there was not any social interaction to the degree that you see here today.

SL: Did you experience anti-Semitism as you were growing up from the non-Jews in the community?

LK: Yes, we did, and it was quite verbal and loud. You were told that you were a dirty Jew right from the moment that you could understand. You couldn't understand it or you could, on the first opportunity you ran into anybody he let you know that you were a dirty Jew and you were different from anybody else.

SL: Would they beat you?

LK: Yes, at certain times, at a certain stage of our growing up that happened quite often where the gentile kids ganged up on the Jewish kids. And I would say certain routes or certain times of the year, certain seasons of the year, it was quite dangerous to walk alone.

SL: When would those be?

LK: Especially around Christmas and Easter, when you try to stay out of their way, especially around Christmas time. I recall that we avoided the carolers who were masked, and anytime they could catch a Jewish kid they would rather, it would be an unpleasant experience.

SL: Do you recall that your parents may have told you that this was a part of growing up as a Jew in this area? Did they give you any advice on what you do when you were accosted?

LK: No, it was a way of life, and I don't think this caution was even necessary because you experienced it yourself and you knew how to avoid it. It wasn't a matter of having to be educated. It was a self-evident development, in other words, it was a situation where it didn't have to be taught to face it. In other words, it was something that you faced every day, whether you were told or not.

SL: Did you look differently than they did? Did you have, say, any typical Jewish traditional clothing? Could they pick you out just by the way you looked?

LK: Well, yes. As a rule, most Jewish kids that I knew, we wore certain distinguishable features that made us different. We were easily picked out of the crowd as being Jewish. Because up until the age, if I recall up

to the age of fourteen or fifteen, I had side *payot*, they called it, side curls. I always wore a cap or a hat, whether it was winter or summer, and there was something about a Jewish kid that was different than a gentile kid. And, of course, we were easily picked out of the crowd, and that of course made us always a much better target for abuse and whatever.

SL: The area that you were living in, in this Subcarpathian Ruthenia, there seemed to be a mixture of different types of ethnic nationalities; Hungarians had been in there and then when the Czechoslovakian Republic was created there was a certain Czech nationalism, but you were always really part of a Jewish world that was there. How did you get along with the non-Jews as far as language-wise? Were you forced to learn any number of languages to talk with all these different people?

LK: The language spoken at home, at least in Svaljava, was Jewish. In other words, between the family members we always spoke Yiddish. As soon as we walked out of doors, depending upon who you ran into, you had to use another one or two languages to survive, to communicate. The indigenous population was primarily Ruthenian. Ruthenian is kind of an ill-defined language consisting of Russian, Slovakian, and some other mixtures of languages which had no really an official standing at any time, at least not at that time; however, it was a language which must have come through the millennia most likely out of a combination of languages. And this language we picked up very easily, and we had no problems communicating. But the official language in school was Czech, and there was a compulsive language. And then my parents, between each other, spoke Hungarian. This was a remnant of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and it was always the thing to do. I would say it was the classy language, and as you traveled south of Svaljava to Munkacs, that was predominantly a Hungarian town, as you traveled further south over the Hungarian border. So any child, in order for him to survive, had to speak at least three languages.

SL: Was Ruthenian also a printed language?

LK: It was printed but it always looked at it as being jargon of a sort. If I recall, it was not taught in school, it was not a required language, and it was printed phonetically. I don't recall ever it having an official status.

SL: When I talked to you before in the pre-interview you mentioned to me something about your father having talked to you about his World War I experiences. Do you, I just remembered that at this moment but I wanted to know if you can you remember any particular story that he would tell you? Did he fight in with the Austro-Hungarian army?

LK: No. It's very interesting that you mention it because I always try to compare it to my experiences in World War II with my children, as opposed to his experiences in World War I with his children. Even though these conversations may have started somewhere at the time I may have been six or older, it wasn't that far removed chronologically in terms of years from World War I, and yet to me it seemed as if it was in ancient times. And I've always felt that my children must have the same feeling about World War II, that it also occurred way, way back in the past, in some times like in the Middle Ages. There must be, however, one difference: that is that with television today, and with the various other means of bringing back some of the things of recent happening, must have a somewhat different impact on them than it did on me, which was only hearsay, while here they can actually visually see what really happened. But he used to tell me about his experiences. I do know, if I recall well, he avoided being inducted in the Hungarian Army by crossing the border into Poland and avoiding the draft. And he succeeded in doing that.

SL: Did he tell you what he was doing while he was living in Poland?

LK: I don't recall how he did it or how he managed to survive.

SL: I'd like to go back to your immediate family. You said you had quite a large family with many brothers and sisters. I was wondering if you could give me their names and, if you remember, the years that they were born in?

LK: Starting with myself, I was born in 1920. Next is my sister Lenka, who was born in 1922. She is a survivor also. She lives presently in Providence, Rhode Island. She is married and she has a child of her own. Then there is a jump of about four years because there was a child born in between Bernie and Lenka, and if I recall, that child died in infancy. He was born in 1926. He presently lives in Florida, Hollywood.

SL: This is Bernie?

LK: Bernie. He has a family also, with three children. The rest of them did not survive and they're as follows: there was Suri, Sara. By the way, the children were about two years apart in age. Sara managed to survive for about, now this information I do get from my sister Lenka who tells me that Sara was with her, confined in Auschwitz, and she managed to hold on to her for most of the time. But about a month or two before the end of the war she was finally taken away and, I understand, then gassed. Wait a minute. What did I say?

SL: You said that Sara was with Lenka.

LK: No, no. I'm sorry, this is Rifka. This was Rifka. Then comes Sara and Eva, who perished with my mother at the time they were taken to Auschwitz.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

SL: You told me before that you moved to Svaljava in 1932, that means you were 12 or so. First of all, how far was Svaljava from Nelipeno?

LK: I would say about two, three kilometers.

SL: Was it a much bigger town?

LK: It was a much bigger town. I would say Nelipeno, which may have been two, three thousand in population, Svaljava was about 15,000 to 18,000 in population.

SL: So the memories that you had really of growing up were more of Svaljava?

LK: More of Svaljava.

SL: Did your father still have his shoe business?

LK: Yes, he continued to do the same.

SL: Did he have greater competition in Svaljava?

LK: No, he was quite a well-known shoemaker and his reputation has preceded him, so to speak. So that when he came to Svaljava he did have more competition, however most of his customers came from Svaljava.

SL: As far as the Jewish population was in Svaljava, was it also, say, half the city population, as in Nelipeno?

LK: At least, yes. It was a very much Jewish town.

SL: And what was the remaining population?

LK: Was all Ruthenians, with a few Germans, Schwabs they called them, German Schwabs.

SL: What are Schwabs?

LK: Schwabs were Germans in origin. So there was multiple mixture of various people living there. But the majority was Ruthenian, though.

SL: Do you recall making that move from Nelipeno to Svaljava?

LK: Yes, I recall that very much.

SL: Could you tell me about it?

LK: All I remember is the horses. In other words, I followed the van, so to speak, the horse-drawn van with our furniture. And I remember walking behind that van all the way to Svaljava.

SL: Were you excited about moving?

LK: I imagine I must have been. It's a very vague recollection about this.

SL: Did you have any other relatives that lived either in Nelipeno or Svaljava?

LK: My grandmother continued to live in Nelipeno, and then there were an assortment of other cousins and uncles. By the way, my favorite uncle continued to stay in Nelipeno. Who, after the war, in other words, after the creation of the state of Israel I met in Israel.

SL: Is he still living today?

LK: No, he's not living today.

SL: But he managed to survive?

LK: But he managed to survive the Siberian experience. Because he ran away in 1939. He crossed the border into Poland in order to avoid capture by Hungarians, and in the hope of surviving the war there. He had a very bad experience, almost equal to that that we had with the Germans. I had information that he was not alive, that somebody saw him in the last minutes of his life. And suddenly one day I got a letter from Israel announcing his arrival there.

SL: What was his name?

LK: His name was Shleyme.

SL: Was he a Kopolowitz?

LK: Kopolowitz, of course.

SL: You said that he was your favorite uncle.

LK: Very favorite.

SL: Why?

LK: Because in terms of age, he was the closest to me. He was only about five years older than I was and we were always very close. I remember him very well.

SL: When you moved to Svaljava, what year were you in school? Did you start going to another school after you moved?

LK: Well after I moved I was still... When I moved to Svaljava it seems to me like maybe that, in terms of the year I may not be very exact, but I do recall that I was still in Svaljava I was still in grade school, so it may have been that we moved there earlier. But I recall starting *gymnasium*¹ at some later date. So I'm not very positive in terms of what year that was exactly.

SL: So you went to public school up till the time you entered the *gymnasium*?

LK: Until I entered *gymnasium*.

SL: You went with just the people who lived in the community with you, mostly Ruthenians?

LK: Right.

SL: But you all had to learn Czech?

LK: Czech was the required language.

SL: I would like to know something about your religious life as a child.

LK: We lived in an Orthodox setting even though my father was not very Orthodox in terms of or by the standards of the city. He was a worker, he was not a *khosid*,² so to speak. However, life was very Orthodox in terms of what we know today. In other words, there was *kashru*³ at home, was the observance of the Shabbat, there was attendance of temple, or the *shul*,⁴ regularly, daily, there was laying of *tefillin*.⁵ I would say that by American standards as we know them today, we were very Orthodox. By the standards at the time, we may not have been very much so.

SL: You went to *cheder*?⁶

¹School of secondary education.

²Yiddish for Hasid.

³Kosher laws of purity.

⁴Yiddish for synagogue.

⁵*Tefillin*, also referred to as "phylacteries," are two small leather boxes connected by a band. Laying tefillin refers to donning them for the morning prayers.

⁶Boys' schools in many Jewish communities. Rabbis provided religious instruction in Hebrew and religious texts.

LK: We went to *cheder*. Went to *cheder*, as a matter of fact, until the time I left for the *gymnasium*.

SL: Did you learn Hebrew in *cheder*?

LK: You learned the Mishnah, the Torah, and then started the *Gemara*.⁷ But that's when I left.

SL: Were there any girls who went to *cheder*?

LK: No, strictly boys. Girls did not attend school.

SL: Do you remember ever discussing with your sisters the fact that they couldn't go to the...

LK: By the way, they did learn how to read Hebrew, but it was usually done with somebody that came to the house to teach.

SL: A traveling *malamud*?⁸

LK: So-called the *malamud*, yes, who came to the house. But I remember teaching them myself. Once I entered the *gymnasium*, I taught them how to read Hebrew.

SL: Okay, well, since we're getting up to the *gymnasium* maybe we could start to talk about that a little bit. Actually, you should just probably tell me you could start telling me what you remember about it. You did attend this, actually it's a somewhat famous one in Munkacs?

LK: Right. As a matter of fact, it was the only gymnasium of its kind in central Europe, which was a private school supported by Zionist organizations, very much objected to by the *Chasidic* community because they considered it to be an abomination, an atheist, antireligious institution where the Hebrew language was being violated.

SL: Because it was being taught.

LK: Because it was being taught, not for purposes of learning the Torah. The gymnasium was something that has, in other words, was an institution that was controversial not only in terms of the *Chasidic* terms but it was also controversial in terms of the government. They really didn't know what to make of it, whether

⁷The Torah refers to the ensemble of the Jewish Bible. The Mishnah refers to those sections dedicated principally to the law. The Gemara constitutes the remainder of the Torah.

⁸Hebrew for teacher, with a connotation of relatively little training.

they should support it or ignore it or not let it develop. However the Jewish community was, as time went on, the Jewish community had political identity by itself. When censuses were taken, you had a choice of stating as follows: either you were Czech nationality, counted yourself as a Czech; you counted yourself as a Ruthenian; or you counted yourself as a Jew, which was not a very common occurrence in those days because identification was never given to a Jew as being somebody that could be self-represented, and I think the *gymnasium* was an outgrowth of this political movement. As a matter of fact, the president of the school eventually became the elected representative in the Czech parliament.

SL: Is this Chaim Kugel?

LK: Kugel, yes. In terms of my parents, it was a great conflict in my father's mind whether he should let me go. On one hand, he wanted me [to go] because it was a prestigious institution. He felt that my future and my education would be much better served if he sent me there. On the other hand, he had this conflict, this religious conflict. He also had doubts about its purpose, and he also was influenced by what the rabbis were preaching at the pulpit practically every Saturday, where they used to talk about this terrible institution. But in spite of all of this he decided in its favor, and he did send me there. He could not afford to send me; however, I did get support. There were available all kinds of scholarships, which got me through the eight years without having to have his contribution, financial contribution.

SL: The school was how far away from Svaljava?

LK: That was about thirty kilometers away, and I commuted for eight years.

SL: By train?

LK: By train. In Czechoslovakia, the train, if you were a student, the government was giving all kinds of assistances, and the cost was so minimal that it was of no consequence.

SL: How long a train ride was it?

LK: It was about an hour.

SL: So it was two hours a day on the train?

LK: On the train.

SL: Did you study on the train?

LK: We studied on the train, and also I remember very good times on the train. I remember during the winter months, during the snowstorms where we were stuck many times somewhere in between the two towns, and stuck for twenty-four to thirty-six hours, snowbound, and these are very pleasant memories. We had a great time.

SL: Would you go out of the train?

LK: No, no, we were completely buried and then they had to come and rescue us and there was really a quite hardship, too, because the train left at 6:10 in the morning. I recall that figure very well. And I was about a mile away from the railroad station, and the only means of transport were your legs. As a matter of fact, every morning I had to lay *tefillin* before I was even allowed to drink a glass of milk, and many times that nourishment carried me over for the day. So the only hardships I do recall, because there wasn't enough food to make a sandwich. And I never could eat out either because I never ate in a restaurant until the age of 21.

SL: Who went with you on the train?

LK: I would say at least two dozen other Jewish kids, plus the closest *gymnasium* was only in Munkacs for the rest of the population, too. So that train at 6:10 was strictly a student train.

SL: Picking up people on the way?

LK: And picking up people on the way, making about a half a dozen stops.

SL: What did you do after you came home at night? Were you so exhausted that you went right to sleep?

LK: I got home about four or five or as late as eight, and then we studied. Sat down next to the bench, my father's bench, I recall, because it was the only decent light we had. It was a naphtha lamp and did my studying until midnight or something. I always recall going to bed very, very late and kept him company telling him about all the things. He used to love to hear what I was learning. To him it was all new revelations.

SL: Were you the only member of your family to attend the *gymnasium*?

LK: Yes.

SL: Was there any conflict say between you and your brother and sister that were closest to your age about the fact that you were going there and they weren't?

LK: Well, my sister was a girl. Girls usually felt that they did not deserve or didn't have the same things coming that the boys were, and as a matter of fact, she was quite helpful with my lessons. She used to hear me out, she used to test me, she used to do all kinds of things. As a matter of fact, to this day, she still remembers Hebrew from that experience. Every time we meet we always talk about that, "Remember when I used to hear you out on your lesson," and all that stuff. All pleasant memories.

SL: What about Bernie, did he...?

LK: Well, Bernie was about six years younger, and he never reached the age, in other words he never reached the stage where he would have gone to school because the war broke out.

SL: How many students were at the *gymnasium* when you were there?

LK: If I recall, my grade consisted of about a hundred students to start with. But by the time graduation came around there were about twenty.

SL: So there was a big decline in the number of students?

LK: Tremendous decline.

SL: To what was that attributed?

LK: Strictly failure, I would say.

SL: On the part of the curriculum?

LK: On the part of the curriculum, the standards were very, very high. That was the case in all *gymnasiums* as far as I know in Europe, that the fatality rate was tremendous. And this was an eight-year stretch. This was a long haul. In other words, only the most, not that I'm very capable, but unless you tried very, very hard, you did not survive.

SL: Can you recall for me a typical day, curriculum-wise? What was your students' day like?

LK: It's quite different from, what it is, school is conducted is here. The subjects were multiple. You didn't have a choice. In other words, all the subjects were being taught year in, year out, year in, year out, without let off. There were as many as twelve to thirteen subjects that we covered, and the examinations were mostly oral examinations. Not like here. Very few written examinations were given, other than on subjects like language, like English or Hebrew or something like that. But every other subject matter was tested orally only, and you had to be prepared at any given time because you never knew when you were called upon. It was not only a matter of pass or fail, it was also a matter of great embarrassment in front of your fellow students, and that, I think, was the hardest part of being successful with your grades, because the embarrassment in front of your other students if you didn't know your subject.

SL: Did you receive any kind of report card?

LK: Yes, at the end of the year there were report cards, same as here.

SL: What languages were you instructed in?

LK: The language instruction was strictly Hebrew. All subject matter was taught in Hebrew. This was a remarkable thing, considering that Hebrew was considered a dead language and many people could not understand how that can be done. And it was remarkable how it was done. With the exception of foreign language, in other words, with the exception of Czech, which was taught in Czech, of course, and one other foreign language, such as English was the other language of choice. Everything else was in Hebrew.

SL: Did you yourself learn English there?

LK: Yes, that's where I learned it.

SL: When you go to Israel now, do you rely on the Hebrew that you learned at the *gymnasium*?

LK: You know, it's very interesting, my first trip to Israel was in 1964 and the last time I uttered any Hebrew of any consequence was in 1941, and it's just amazing that when I got to Israel how fast these things came back to me, and I weathered it very well.

SL: Was the school, the *gymnasium* itself, a cultural center? Did you go into there when you might not be having school but there was a gathering of the students?

LK: Not really, because the school was always in attendance. It was occupied strictly for studies, regularly scheduled studies, practically all the time. In terms of its physical makeup, it was not a monstrous institution. It was rather small, and it grew as needs arose and it was expanded. I recall the expansion program. But it was a very unique school in terms of its influence on the community. You couldn't help when you had a few hundred students coming, getting an education, with completely new ideas, that it couldn't help but having an influence on the community.

SL: How big a community was Munkacs?

LK: Munkacs was a rather large community. It was, if I recall, it may have had about eighty, ninety thousand people, of which 60 to 70 percent was Jewish.

SL: Was the school located in what you might classify as a Jewish neighborhood?

LK: Yes, definitely.

SL: So the interaction with the people in the community was really one of Jew with Jew?

LK: It was one of Jew with Jew, and the controversies were strictly within the Jewish community. They had nothing to do with the outside of the Jewish community.

SL: Do you recall any incidents when you were involved with the outside community in Munkacs?

LK: As a matter of fact, there were tremendous upheavals in the community. There was a famous rabbi, the *Munkacher Rebbe*,⁹ who would forbid, for example, his disciples to come even close to that building, and he put out edicts, one edict after another, about the institution and he cursed it in the strictly theological and religious sense. You were an outcast if you attended it. There were tremendous upheavals and tremendous controversies going on there.

SL: To explore that further, as I understand it, a lot of the controversy was over the fact that the school was really in a sense run with Zionistic tendencies.

LK: Well that was the whole problem. As a matter of fact to this day, as you and I know, there are many groups within the Jewish community worldwide, especially the Mayer-Sharim community which to this

⁹A famous Chasidic position.

day has not recognized Israel as a state cause it was not created with divine intervention. And they felt that the Zionist movement would lead to such an event which was not in line with the deeply religious Orthodox thinking.

SL: As far as the Zionist, actually a rejuvenation that occurred after the formation of Czechoslovakia because of the increased awareness of the state as far as the Jews were concerned and you were allowed to have certain rights and apparently the Zionists then took advantage of this by becoming more vocalized. What kind of influence did they have on you as far as your own way of thinking? Did you consider yourself a Zionist before you went to the school, or was it something that you kind of learned from reading?

LK: I would say there were various local groups formed. I recall when I was still in grade school and as a kid you were very much influenced by various of their activities. Which was very appealing to the youthful mind. I recall belonging to various groups, all the way from *Shabei Zion* to the *Betarim*.¹⁰ This was something that allowed us to imitate what the Gentiles were doing in terms of self-awareness, in terms of self-expression. We could come out of hiding and march down the streets with a flag of your own, which was tremendous thing. Till then all we could see is flags that were not your own. Now you walked with a flag and marched that you could call your own. Always en masse, not having to be afraid of anybody. And all these things make great impressions on you as a kid. That was happening before I went to school. I recall that very vividly.

SL: Did you realize at that time that you were in a unique situation in Czechoslovakia that you, as Jews were really experiencing something that wasn't happening elsewhere?

LK: No, not at that time. I don't have that feeling, or that recollection that it was anything special, because the information was not available as to what was happening any other place. We weren't exposed to world events to the same degree as we are today. You assumed that that same thing was happening everywhere, I imagine, but I'm not sure. You were concerned only with your own community at the time. At least I was, anyway.

¹⁰Zionist youth groups.

SL: Was there a battle even amongst your Jewish friends as to the ones who were pro-Zionist and the ones who were more Czech nationalist?

LK: Not that I can recall.

SL: So most of your friends then really were...

LK: [tape skips] ones that were my friends belonged to these organizations. If there were some other groups that were not in agreement with you, you just ignored them anyway, so it didn't mean anything anyway. In other words, you did not associate with a group that went only to temple as the only thing that they were concerned about. You were only associating with the ones that did what you did, or you liked to do.

SL: I'm at the end of the tape again so I'll stop.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SL: You were just telling me that you found yourself in a kind of a remarkable situation in the community because there weren't very many of you who attended this school.

LK: Right, it was limited to only, I would say, a few privileged ones in terms of both opportunity, and in terms of joining a very unique and controversial group. I remember distinctly how I used to visit some of my relatives in the mountains for some reason or other, which I'll come to later on, and I remember they knew about my attendance at that school, and their curiosity was without bounds as to the information they wanted to get from me. I recall the endless evenings they used to gather around me to listen to my ideas, which was to them very exciting and new and hopeful, because really down deep in our hearts we felt that something was going to happen, especially with the gathering clouds in Europe with Germany and all that. Although nobody ever thought that the scale of the happenings would be to the degree that it did happen. But they were very interested, even though they may not have agreed with me and certainly was ungodly in their minds.

SL: You were the radical.

LK: Oh, very much so, and yet in my own mind I didn't think so. Because my way of life really had not changed. I continued to go to pray and to abide by the rules we have always had.

SL: So there really was no conflict in your mind between the religious aspects of the question and the Zionist aspects?

LK: Not at all. Not at all.

SL: You were old enough really to perceive that things were beginning to change on the European scene. Do you recall how you felt at the time of the Rome-Budapest-Berlin axis? Was that a big turning point as to when people began to take notice of dangers?

LK: These particular historical events had no particular influence on your thinking because the events have gradually become intolerable as time went on, regardless of what particular event has occurred. The problem was that even a people who have been around for a long time, have lived under various,

including my father who has lived under the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy and under the Czechs. As a matter of fact, he, with his experiences under the Hungarians, he felt that a reversal to the Hungarian rule would be a benefit to us rather than an event of some great consequences because his memories, again, as a child, were not so unpleasant. And we had arguments about that, that if Hungary would occupy us, which was expected to happen, that things would be okay, that they weren't so bad after all, how bad could they be? Somehow or other nobody really expected for things to develop the way they have.

SL: That's very interesting, because my perception was that the Czechoslovakian Republic was a very unique entity in Europe the way that it developed, out of, kind of, the backwardness of what was happening in that part of Europe, as a recognition of different ethnic groups. I've always been led to believe that the Hungarians were very anti-Semitic. Now you say that your father, living under the Austrian-Hungarian empire, had it relatively good. Why would he want to give up what seemed to be so good in a Czechoslovakian Republic to go back to what might have been even worse?

LK: That's a very interesting question. You know, it's interesting that he always considered Czechoslovakia's presence in Subcarpathia as that of a foreign occupation. That's very interesting. Of course, I never did because I didn't know any other way, and I couldn't compare as to how the Czechs were compared to the others. In terms of anti-Semitism, anti-Semitism really has not changed because you lived in an environment which really basically did not change. The guy who was sitting in an office in [sounds like; hafstock,] by the position of mayor, whatever have you, it wasn't a guy who really mattered. What really mattered is your next door neighbor and those things really have basically not changed. So I would say that my father and many of his contemporaries, who continued, by the way, he never learned Czech. This was another sign that they never really accepted the Czech occupation, or the Czech presence, as something of a permanent nature. As a matter of fact, the objection of the Czechs to Jews was always that of not accepting the Czechs, either their culture or their language. The Jews continued to persevere in their German language in Moravia and in the Sudetens, and continued to hold onto their Hungarian

background all along the Slovakian and Subcarpathian border. They objected to that terribly because they felt that the Jews were considering the Hungarian so superior, both culturally and what have you, above the Czechs. That the Czechs were really not something of any value.

SL: This is a really fascinating situation. Because as the Jewish party got really more representation and became a more viable part of the Czech government this was really, as I understand it, in response to the fact that, with the storm clouds that were growing and with all the sporadic nationalism the closer to the Hungarian border or the ones who were in different places they all wanted their own groups, the Czechs began to depend on the Jews to be the ones who would really support Czechoslovakia because they were given certain rights.

LK: And they did not. That was interesting. And also the interesting thing is that Kugel,¹¹ who was representing the Jewish population there, was really not a Czech. He came from Eastern Europe and this was only a temporary stay of his there. As a matter of fact when the Hungarians did come in, he had to leave because he was not a Hungarian citizen by the conditions that they set for Hungarian citizenship. So you see, this nationalistic movement was not even an indigenous movement, it was a foreign movement. Because Kugel, to him, a representation of this kind was meaningful. It was not meaningful to the indigenous population because they were not really mature enough to conceive of its benefits.

SL: Do you remember arguing with your father about considering yourself a Czechoslovakian rather than part of the Hungarian empire? Was this something that you discussed? Who your alliances were?

LK: Right. We always used to have arguments about it because the propaganda that the Czechs fed us about the Hungarian monarchy was that of terror, of very, how should I say it, of a nondemocratic entity. In other words, it was nothing like what the Czechs were like. In other words, they were an ancient government, a government of repression, a government of terror, a government who only rules without any privileges. That's what we were taught in school. And I came home and I read that history to my

¹¹Chaim Kugel was born in Belorussia, and was among the first two Jews elected to the Czechoslovakian Parliament, in 1935, as a representative of the Zidovská strana, or Jewish Party.

father and he said, "That's not true." That is not true. The king, Franz or whatever his name was, was a great man. He let everybody live, he gave us privileges and all that stuff. The Czech history book said otherwise, so of course we always argued about that. There's no question that. But this was his experience.

SL: This issue of propaganda is quite interesting. Was it disseminated through any other means other than the school? Did you get it in the newspapers?

LK: There were no newspapers. It was a small town. I don't recall a newspaper in the city at all. There was radio. Of course we didn't have a radio at that time, either.

SL: Do you know what kind of a broadcast that they were?

LK: Most of them came from either Prague or the closest one was Kosice, I recall. We had a radio later on but not at that time.

SL: Do you think your father ever regretted sending you to the *gymnasium* because of these new ideas that you learned?

LK: Oh, God, no, not at all. No, as a matter of fact he was very happy and very proud of the fact that I did go and he always pointed this out to anybody who he has met for the first time to make sure that he knows that I am attending *gymnasium*. He was very proud of that.

SL: Chronologically now we've really come up to a time in the late 30s when it's impossible to not know what is going on in the rest of Europe. What kind of news were you getting at all as to what was happening in Germany with the rise of Hitler?

LK: First of all, you couldn't avoid hearing his speeches. They were coming with regularity.

SL: Did you understand German?

LK: Yes. They were coming with regularity, and of course, the threats were of such degree that they couldn't be taken seriously. Even though I'm sure you hear about this all the time, that he has threatened and threatened all the time, but nobody really took it seriously, and there was always hope. We always thought that if ever there is a war, of course there is England, there's America the mighty, that we have nothing to

worry about, that Germany would be defeated in no time at all, and all that stuff. So anyway, the hopes were always that the things would not happen that he promised or threatened to do.

SL: Were the threats that you felt more threatening to you as Jews or just as an unstable political situation?

LK: Strictly as Jews because in every speech practically, he never failed to mention the Jew.

SL: In 1938, when the Munich-Vienna Conference, kind of, began to split up central Europe. Subcarpathia-Ruthenia, and Slovakia were given to Hungary, is that right?

LK: No, Slovakia became independent.

SL: Oh, that's right, sure.

LK: And Bohemia was occupied by Germany, and Ruthenia was occupied by Hungary. Actually, it happened in 1939. There was a kind of a six-month period of Ruthenian presence, which didn't last very long. But the Hungarians came in the spring of 1939.

SL: What do you recall about that?

LK: All I recall is going out on the street and seeing an army of bicyclists occupying the city.

SL: What was your feeling?

LK: I was bewildered, a certain excitement also to a certain degree. My father always assured me that there's nothing to worry about, that he knows the Hungarians very well, and that everything will be okay. And there were no problems, of course, at the beginning.

SL: The Hungarians were seen as a calming...?

LK: As a matter of fact, after that period of about six months of chaos, so to speak, of a lack of any government or authority, this was rather a calming effect.

SL: Still in that period in the late '30s and early '40s Hungary was really annexing more and more territory.

LK: Right. They also annexed Transylvania, which was a large piece of territory.

SL: Again, through your eyes at that time did you see this as an act of aggression or more as a stabilizing effect on the area?

LK: No, no, no, this was an act of aggression. There was no question, because it was done under the supervision and planning of the Germans.

SL: So that you were aware that this was...?

LK: This was the grand plan. All part of, oh, we were aware that things are not good. And, of course, already, in the news coming in about the treatment of the Jews in Slovakia and Germany were of such nature that they could not be ignored. Even though we still hoped this could not happen here. What happened there is a different story. Each community kind of had its own hopes that this would not happen to the community involved.

SL: What kind of news were you getting?

LK: All kinds of news, in terms of concentration camps and killings and economic oppression and that kind of stuff.

SL: And how was this coming to you, by word of mouth?

LK: By word of mouth mostly, travelers...

SL: Many people that I've talked to who escaped from bad situations and would go from town to town always said that when they went to a new place the people refused to believe that things... Do you recall an instance where someone came to you and you know you...?

LK: Right. Or you ignored it. Even when the transports from Slovakia later on went through Svaljava and we brought food to the station for the Slovakian Jews, we handled it as if we were on the outside of it. Well, this is something that only happens to some other people and not yourself.

SL: Were they trying to tell you things from the trains?

LK: They didn't have to. You could see what was happening. We knew what was happening, but we hoped that this would not happen here, and they always told us, well, these people were really foreigners to Slovakia, they were not permanent residents, that they were in flux from recent comers. There was always explanations. That this would not happen to the permanent population. And then there was no choice, there was no escape. You always can put yourself in a defensive frame of mind if you have no choice.

There was nothing we could do about it in any given stage. If I recall, my father could never, under any circumstances, even if he had decided to move his family away from Europe, he could not scrape together enough money to put us all on a train and to get us to a certain destination. It was just beyond his ability to do so, and so it was of the whole community's.

SL: And there was then no question of at least resettling in another community? You felt that there was really no escape?

LK: There was no escape. I mean we just take it as things come.

SL: You were still in school during the time of the Hungarian occupation?

LK: I was also out of school for about six months, because there was no school. I could not get into Munkacs. There was a complete upheaval so there was a lull of about six months that we did not attend school. And then we didn't know what the Hungarians are going to do about the *gymnasium*. And then finally, under various pressures, they did reopen it, but not, in other words, there were certain conditions that they set and they reopened it.

SL: Do you remember what they were? Those conditions?

LK: First of all, the conditions were that the people that ran the school were replaced by Hungarian administrators and educators.

SL: Jewish?

LK: Some Jewish and some not Jewish. And then, of course, the Hungarians were anti-Zionist, the government was anti-Zionist, so certain principles had to be changed about it. So they felt it's better to keep the school open under any circumstances than to close it just for the sake of principle. So they did reopen it and allowed it to function for another two, three years. That's all.

SL: And you tell me you were made to learn Hungarian?

LK: Then, of course, in order to graduate within the Hungarian educational system, you had to comply and be up to the Hungarian standards, and that involved Hungarian history, Hungarian language, Hungarian everything.

SL: Comparing the history of Hungary that you learned from Czechoslovakian textbooks before...?

LK: Compared to Czech it was just the opposite poles, of course. Of course. The kings were murderers; now they became heroes. No question.

SL: Then when did you graduate from the *gymnasium*?

LK: I graduated in 1941.

SL: By that time the Hungarians had been around for two years.

LK: The Hungarians been around for one, yeah, about a year and-a-half, two years.

SL: Was there a growing anti-Semitism that came with the occupation of the Hungarians?

LK: Oh God. First thing they did was that they had to set up conditions under which a Jew could continue to stay in Hungary, to qualify for Hungarian citizenship. One of the conditions was that you must have lived within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy's border. I don't recall whether it was a hundred years or something, I suspect it was about a hundred years, if I recall. In other words, you had to have lived or some of your ancestors must have lived within that given area since 1850. And in order to prove that, that was quite a job and that's what I, as a matter of fact, I did. I traveled throughout the mountains to seek out some kind of proof, whether it was in form of a birth certificate or a real estate transaction or a deed or anything like that that would prove that my ancestors, either my great-grandfather or somebody, lived there at that time, which, by the way, I successfully did find. It was a matter of a deed of some sort, deed transaction.

SL: How long did this take you?

LK: Oh, it took me quite a number of visits. I remember I did it with bicycle up into the mountains and by bus and whatever means, by horses I recall, and it took about a year. But by that time I already was taken into slave labor and so that actually the papers didn't, I remember my father telling me, writing to me, that they got the citizenship while I was already in slave labor.

SL: This must have been quite a frantic search for you because, I suppose you were aware of the fact that there would be grave consequences if you didn't find any proof.

LK: The alternative was, for sure, death, so to speak. Because what they did is they took you and just put you across the border and abandoned you. And, of course, across the border you were also a foreign element. You were just destroyed, that's all.

SL: Okay, after you graduated from the *gymnasium*, you were inducted into the Hungarian Army, could you tell me about that?

LK: Yes, right. In the beginning of the Hungarian occupation, the rules applying to Jews were the same as applying to the rest of the population in terms of military induction. The only difference was that if inducted the Jews were taken to nonmilitary service, such as slave labor or paramilitary, and the Gentiles, of course, went into military service. In 1940, I was taken in for a medical examination, and I did not pass it because I was underweight, undernourished, under whatever-have-you, and then in 1941 I successfully passed the examination.

SL: Were you any heavier than you had been in 1940?

LK: Not really. Not, because we'd worked at it very hard not to reach a certain whatever health status and they inducted me. I was taken to Komarom, which was at least a thousand kilometers away. It's on the Danube. It's west of Budapest. It was half Czech, half Hungarian city. It's known under Komarno under the Czechs, it's known as Komarom under the Hungarians, and I stayed there from 1941 until 1944. I was lucky enough to have stayed there for one reason and that is I was chosen to become a shoemaker. On the first day of our induction they lined up at least two thousand of us and I remember the commander, who was marching in front of the line, said, "All shoemakers, one step forward." There must have been a thousand shoemakers that could have stepped forward, and by the grace of God he stopped next to me and he says, "One step out," and about three or four of us were chosen and that provided a certain security for the next three years.

SL: I was going to back up a little bit. You had a year in which you were not in school and not inducted into the army. Do you recall what you were doing at the time?

LK: At that time, I was doing nothing. I did the traveling at that time to try to find the papers. I did, just hanging around, just trying to survive somehow. In other words, in terms of doing nothing, because there was really nothing that we could do. I could not go on to a university, which I originally intended to. I did not want to become a shoemaker either. There were no opportunities for jobs, so just was at home.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

SL: Let's go back to talking about your arrival at Komarom. First of all, when you were inducted and told that you, were you told that you were going to be sent there, what your final destination would be?

LK: Yes, you get papers. You get instructions just like you would get here were you to depart.

SL: So your parents, your family knew where you would be?

LK: Yes.

SL: What was your last visit with them like? Did you feel that you would see them again?

LK: I'll tell you. These were the most emotional parts that I recall because I managed to see them many, many times after that, but I was the only of very, very few who had that privilege. Most of the boys that left home never saw their parents again. I don't know how these things happen, but somehow this is one gift that I feel that I was given that I had above most of them, and that is that I was able to see them again, quite a number of times. And that was, as I said before, quite a privilege. But every time I said goodbye, it was as if I would not see them again. Because things really started happening with such rapidity, and events were occurring in such threatening form, that you never really knew what tomorrow will bring. So that every time I did say goodbye was as if I will never see them. My mother was the one that really was the worst off, because she's the one that could hardly handle it. I was always her favorite. I was the oldest, however, I was somehow or other physically the smallest, the weakest, she always felt, the least capable of surviving. She always felt more strongly about me than she did about the others. At least I had that feeling. And saying goodbye always involved that she never came to the station because she felt she couldn't handle it. My father took me to the station, the rest of the kids took me. I had to say good-bye at home. And that was it. But as I say, I saw them many times after that.

SL: When was the last time that you saw them?

LK: The last time I saw them was in 1943, the spring of '43. I saw them in '41, I saw them in '42, a number of times in '42, and then I saw them in '43. And the reason why I could see them was that I promised the commander leather if he lets me home, if he gives me a pass to go home, which he did. And, and in '43,

I'm not sure, I must recollect, '43 what happened, and there was something happened in 1943. In '44 they were taken away. They had the last Passover, I'm sorry, I still saw them in 1944. That was spring of '44, very early '44. And that was before the Hungarian government decided that they would give up and [Miklós] Horthy has resigned, who was the head of the government. That was the time when the Germans, in fear of losing the country, came and physically occupied the country. That was the end.

SL: When the transports...

LK: The transports started. But I managed to get home in spring of '44, early spring.

SL: Again, I would like to go back to Komarom and your transport there. Did you assemble at a station in Svaljava and then get taken there?

LK: No. When you get induction papers you are given orders by mail. The induction centers were throughout the country, and for some reason or other, I was the only one who went from the town to that induction center. So I traveled by train on regular induction papers. And I remember we had this military trunk made, which was a standard item that every inductee for the past hundred years had it made before he inducted in the army. Was a wooden trunk. I remember how with great care went to the cabinetmaker who made it to specifications and everything. I remember that when I had it all packed and I tried to lift it, I couldn't even lift that thing, it was so heavy. Because my mother and my father tried to put in this and put in this, "You may be too cold, you may be too hot," and what have you. And I remember one thing that was very outstanding and that is that my father, who always insisted that I lay *tefillin* every day and to my recollection never missed, the *tefillin* which did not weigh too much, however it did add some weight to it. He opened the case and he said, "Don't take this." He says, "You want to pray, you can pray without it." And I looked up at him and I thought that this was such a basic thing in our way of life, but he felt even this is too much weight for one to carry. And he says, "Leave it, leave it here." This is one of the most outstanding events that I can recall in our relationship, when he said, "Don't take it." And this was something that would have been unheard of under any circumstances before, because I had at the threat of missing trains many a morning in heavy snow, he would have never let me get away without laying

tefillin, no matter what happens to that train. Even if I had to run at a hundred miles an hour to make that train, but I had to lay it down. And here he thought that this was too much of a burden even for a Jew to endure.

SL: How long did the train trip last?

LK: That was a long trip. That was a trip that took a whole night, and then in Budapest you have to change trains.

SL: You went through Budapest?

LK: Yes, and then took another train to... I remember that, very hard. All I remember is lugging that thing from one place to another and it was very hard, very hard.

SL: Can you recall any thoughts that you had on that trip?

LK: It was the first time away from home so that was another hardship. That's the only thing I remember, that loneliness. The letters that I wrote home for the first few weeks, they were just emotionally so laden with pain and suffering that my father always used to kid me later on about this and how lonely I was and that how come I don't write it about it, because after a while you got used to it and, of course, you forget about this. It becomes secondary. But the loneliness, the missing of your parents and it was a very, we always were at home, I never was away for overnight. So you can imagine what that meant. Not only to go away to a safe place, but to go away to an unknown future, to almost with a reasonable amount of knowledge that you may not come back at all.

SL: When you got to the induction center, first of all, were you given any kind of identification at all that you were you Jewish? Did you stand out as Jews from the rest?

LK: Oh yes, oh sure.

SL: How?

LK: First of all, the uniforms that were given to us. And the uniform consisted of a yellow band and military cap, that was the only uniform a Jew was given, while the Gentiles were given full uniforms, with weapons

and everything. And from then on, for the duration of the next four years, I was never allowed to take off my band under the threat of whatever military punishment there was.

SL: So when they lined you up that day, and they asked the shoemakers to step forward, were you only amongst Jews?

LK: Was all Jews. This was strictly a Jewish assembly.

SL: They separated you out when you first got there?

LK: Yeah, they told us were to go and that particular place, which was a former Turkish, how should I say it, it was, you know, the Turks occupied Hungary about a hundred years before, 150 years ago, and they built certain military underground, what do you call them? Not enforcements, but military barracks or something. They were all built underground, so that you couldn't see if you went on the countryside unless you knew there was a particular thing you could almost miss it. You walked into a stone built underground enforcements.

SL: They were bunkers?

LK: But they were very nice.

SL: How did you get down into them?

LK: You walked into a hill. It was all built under a hill. That's the way the Turks did their military operations. So there was a former Turkish military establishment, and the Hungarians must have fixed it up so that it became a very habitable and very pleasant, as a matter of fact, that saved our lives many times during the bombings.

SL: So you really were living underground during that time?

LK: Underground. Well, it wasn't underground only. It was underground in terms of the living quarters were underground, but as soon as you walked out of the building, you were outside, but it was in moats. Everything was a moat. It was like those Roman moats they used to build in the medieval castles, that a whole complex, living quarters, were built within the moat setup. This was the same thing.

SL: When they separated you out and you went with this group of Jews, was there an indication that the ones who weren't picked for certain occupations right there in the compound were going to their deaths?

LK: Oh, yes. We already knew that. They were going to the Russian... By the way, by that time, in 1941, the Russian front started, and they were taken to the Russian fronts for picking mines and doing all kinds of work that normally would not be the duty of normal military activity. And we knew that. This was going on for about six months now, and we knew that there were some people who've come back, the regular military came back. In other words, the non-Jewish military were telling us stories about what they were doing to the Jews.

SL: So even at that moment when the soldier said "you come with me, step forward" did you know that your life had been saved at that moment?

LK: Not really, because you didn't know how long you're going to stay there, for how long, but I stayed there for the whole duration.

SL: Could you give me an example of what a typical day like for you there?

LK: Now, remember that my situation was not a representative situation of what it meant to be a slave laborer. Mine was only slave labor in terms that I was confined to stay there. Otherwise things were not very unpleasant. I got up in the morning, they served us breakfast, which was in a military fashion. You lined up with your can or whatever, that container that they put food in, and we went into our labor area, where we sat down at stools like my father used to do and then do repair work from eight or nine o'clock till noon and then we were fed lunch, the same way as any other military. By the way, this was a big headquarters, military headquarters, this particular compound served as. But it just so happened that this military headquarters handled only Jewish affairs. So all the inductees from large areas, from all over the country, came into this. So what I was witnessing there was the bringing and gathering of all those people and then shipping them out. This was going on day in and day out, week and week out. So I saw tens of thousands of them coming and going all the time.

SL: Jews?

LK: And eventually run into people who came from my hometown and I was able to help some of them, getting them extra food which I had access to, and what have you.

SL: What kind of news did they bring from Svaljava?

LK: They brought me news. Many of them brought me letters, because they knew they were coming there. Then of course, again, as I say, there was no telephone communication, but there was letter communication was going on regularly. I had a P.O. number and all that stuff like military would have, because I was really assigned to serve the military, not my fellow Jews. What I did repairs was for the Hungarian officers. And the reason I was let go to go on my vacation with military orders was the fact that I promised the officer to bring him leather enough to make himself a pair of shoes.

SL: Did you always manage to get that leather?

LK: Always managed to get. My father always managed to, and he was glad to do it.

SL: Did your brother ever come through there?

LK: No. No, he was too young at the time. He was only about twelve or whatever, and they never got to it. But it did happen many times that my father managed to get to Budapest, and I met him on a weekend, for example, in Budapest.

SL: What did you do there? Do you recall that weekend at all?

LK: We stayed with some friends. He stayed with some friends, and he saw me. You know, the fact that we just met, even though I only got a few hours, I mean I got away only for a few hours to Budapest. It was very close, it was only about an hour ride by train for me; however, it was an overnight trip for him. So we met and my God it was a fabulous occasion.

SL: This happened only once?

LK: No, no, this happened a number of times. I don't recall exactly.

SL: So he had access to traveling still?

LK: He had still had access to travel. Now, you have to remember, once his citizenship was established, there was a relative safe period with certain reservation, with certain limitations that the Jewish population was

under. Now, if you worked for the government, you would have been long fired. If you were in any security job, you were long fired. But if you're a shoemaker, you always continued to make a living, you see. So then again the military establishment became a very powerful establishment in the country, and what happened he again managed to serve this particular military establishment in various vicarious ways, in underhanded ways, so that he managed to get certain privilege and was able to travel. He was able to do, for example, the local military, he was sent to buy leather in Budapest. So he made these trips. As a matter of fact his financial situation has improved considerably since the Hungarians came in. He was able to do things that he never was able to do before.

SL: Do you care to elaborate on any of the slightly underhanded things that were going on then?

LK: Leather was very essential, almost like gasoline would have been here. It was a rationed item. It was very strictly conserved item because the military needs. In order for the general population to get a pair of new shoes, you had to have a ration card for it. So he did certain manipulations with that. I recall he had unlimited amount of rations so that he was able to give it to whoever he pleased to. That's how he managed to *shmir*,¹² so to speak, certain military officers.

SL: So, in a way, that's how you got the leather from him, because he had the tickets.

LK: That's how I managed to get the leather, which was an unusual... Because a military officer to him, to get leather to get a pair of new shoes was a tremendous thing, appeal, and that's how I managed to get my freedom ticket. At least three, four times a year. This was an unheard of phenomenon for slave labor to come home. The only thing that worried me was the trip itself, it was under great threat. It was filled with dangers because I had to have my yellow band on and, even though I was covered under military orders, I was perfectly legitimate, there was always a threat of traveling soldiers because only soldiers traveled, as you can imagine. Remember Hungary was deep up to their necks in the entire Russian campaign and there were tremendous casualties. Those trains was filled with casualties, and here a Jew gets off the train, the first thing they said, "What are you doing here you dirty Jew? You are the guy who

¹²Yiddish for 'bribe'.

send us fighting. Those Russians are killing us because of the Jews," or whatever. Everything was the Jews' fault, whatever happened. That's the only thing that scared me was to get home safely and to get back safely.

SL: Do you recall on those visits, particularly with your father since you had been speaking of political things with him for a long time, that you discussed the situation of the war and what was happening to other Jews? Did you get into that heavy of a discussion at all?

LK: No, the discussion was only in respect to what is going to happen. We were becoming more and more aware that all the things that we feared that might happen, just might happen. Because you couldn't help it, you could see what was happening all around you. You could see how people disappeared. By the way, all the people that could not get their citizenship were all deported, were never heard from again. I remember my father going out on a limb to try to save certain families. Because, by the way, this situation with this leather bit managed to give him certain amount of powers that the rest of the members of the community did not have. And I recall very distinctly that I heard from people came to Komarom the last days just before they were taken away about the heroic things that my father did to save certain members in the community.

SL: What would he do?

LK: He was, by the way, deported the last from the community. He was given so-called trustee, you know he was a trusted Jew, so to speak. He was given certain privileges, so the family did not have to go into the synagogue with everybody else, he was allowed to stay till the last minute. And he did certain things by talking to certain officials and what have you, so that some people were not deported, were left in the community and what have you. I heard all kinds of things which I was very delighted about. But those were after I saw him. This was all hearsay; this was all secondhand. And my brother, of course, tells me about these things.

SL: That's right, because your brother lived with him.

LK: My brother was there with him all along.

SL: How big a complex was this Komarom? How many people lived there?

LK: There was also a large community. Komarom, I would say, had 100,000 people or more. Was a large community. And we got to know some members of the Jewish community there by the way. We were invited out. Because their situation up until 1944 was the same as my parents at home. They were still allowed to live. We were still allowed to go to, I remember the temple we went, and then we met people from the community invited us for meals and what have you. The fact that we stayed there for such a long time, this little nucleus got to know the community people quite well.

SL: This was not then an unusual situation that you could go out into the community with other Jews?

LK: This was unusual, right, because under any other circumstances, once you went into slave labor you were done for. Our situation was rather unique, in effect, because we were really permanent residents in that compound and we developed certain privileges with it.

SL: How many people really were involved in the same situation?

LK: I would say maybe a dozen.

SL: You became very close then with those people?

LK: Right, there was tailors, shoemakers, the cabinetmaker, and what have you. There was just a little nucleus. Unfortunately, I had pictures of this group and everything else, and it was all lost somewhere in the shuffle. I don't know where. But I met with some of them after the war, some of them just disappeared, I don't even know what happened to them.

SL: Were the friends that you made, the ones that stayed there, did they come from your same area?

LK: No. They came from all over. I remember one from Balaton, which is the eastern part of Hungary, his name was Gross. He was the head tailor. Very interesting, I met another fellow from Sagat was it? Not Sagat, from another town, and his father owned a factory that was the largest producer of wooden nails. Wooden nails were used to make, soles were affixed with wooden nails. And that's another interesting thing. To get wooden nails was impossible during the war. But I met this young man who became a part of our group, and I got to know his family. He invited me for weekends to his family who was very, very

well off, and see, the first time I had an insight of what prosperity is like, especially in the Hungarian setting. These were really rich people, people who were not nouveaux riches but I mean established, old, rich Jewish families. I succeeded in getting nails shipped from his family to my father, which added another power to him, because he not only could get leather but he also could get nails, which was a very hard thing to get. See it's interesting how things worked out. So during this time that I was there, I had some rather pleasant things happen, too. But it was all under so-called like the guy who's getting his last meal or last wish, this is how it really felt.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2

TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SL: Let's continue talking about some of those special friends that you had amongst that group of people who stayed with you in Komarom. Who else do you recall that was there besides the guy with the wooden nails?

LK: Then there was another fellow shoemaker, who came from a small town in the area, approximately where I came from, and then there was another tailor, who came from western Hungary. That's about it, the ones that I recall. There were some other skilled laborers, but they weren't as closely associated with our group, because the tailors and the shoemakers shared the same facility.

SL: Did you only have one uniform?

LK: Uniform was civilian clothes with a yellow band on the left hand and a military cap. That was compulsory to be worn anytime you left the premises, I mean the camp.

SL: What kind of news did you get from the front? Were you getting news also from the western front?

LK: The news that came, it was strictly coming from mouth to mouth. There was no radio or newspaper in the camp. We were not allowed to listen to it. As a matter of fact, one of the restrictions that was put on Jewish residents was that the ones that did have a radio had to have that radio taken in to the authorities, which set the radio to the official Budapest station, and then they put a band-aid type setup on the tuner and they waxed it so that they sealed the tuner so you could not manipulate it to listen to any other station. That was a standard procedure. Our radio at home had the same setup.

SL: They would give it back to you after this?

LK: Yes. They poured wax on it, on the two ends of the tape, which went over the tuning knob, and it was fixed strictly to the official Budapest station. Didn't you know that?

SL: No, I had no idea. Were there people who in fact had contraband radios?

LK: No. No, you were not, because in Europe, if I recall, it was the situation in Czechoslovakia before the war and it was in Hungary the same and I suspect it's all over Europe, in order to own a radio you must have it registered and pay a fee, which is a license. It's a yearly renewable fee. So that any radio other than

that's officially registered would be contraband and would be quite dangerous to own. However, I remember before I left for the camp, it just so happened that the knob sooner or later gets loose enough so you can manipulate it a little bit, and the BBC was almost adjacent to the Budapest station. And we used to have one of our children stand outside the house to watch if anybody was coming and in case anybody was approaching the proximity of the house to knock on the window so that we would turn it back to the Budapest station. But I used to listen to BBC with regularity.

SL: What were you getting from BBC?

LK: Oh, well, the BBC: I listened to Edward R. Murrow, I listened to Hungarian news from England, used to listen to English news from England, and whatever have you. And there we used to learn as to really what was going on.

SL: Did anyone else, any of your close friends or relatives, know that you were picking up the BBC?

LK: As a matter of fact, most of them did that. It was a practice that was quite widely practiced.

SL: Once you were in Komarom, though, you did not have the opportunity to do something like that?

LK: No, there was none at all. The news came in strictly from hearsay, and if somebody new came into the camp he told us what was going on. But otherwise you're completely, or whenever I went on vacation or I left the camp and got into the city, then we picked up on the news.

SL: But still, in that event then, were you familiar at all with what was happening on the western front, say with the Allied invasions?

LK: Yeah, well, the Allied invasion, that was already after I left camp. I was already in concentration camp.

SL: So there was really nothing big coming in anyway?

LK: I would say the invasion, which occurred, what month of the year? Was early spring, right?

SL: In June.

LK: The Allied invasion. In June, right. I heard about it maybe a couple months later. Everything was delayed but sooner or later we did hear about it.

SL: Before we move on to what happens afterwards, is there anything else that you can , I'm sure there are lots of stories, even just one day at a time. But, is there anything else you want to add about what happened to you there in Komarom?

LK: I also used to get permissions to go to Budapest on weekends as I've told you before, which I took advantage of. Not only to meet my father there once in awhile, but also to visit some friends that still lived freely in Budapest. On one such occasion I had a terrifying thing happen to me, and that is Sunday night on the way to the station to go back to Komarom, I was approached by a Hungarian patrol, which I am supposed to salute. For that matter, I was to salute any military personnel of higher rank. And they accused me of not saluting them. And they arrested me and we were on the way to some kind of a military compound. Fortunately, as I was walking, the last man who I was following I started talking to, and I kind of managed to make some contact with him and create some kind of communication with him, so that by the time we got to the military camp, wherever that was, in order to arrest me and to put me to jail because I supposedly did not salute this patrol, and which would have made me late to Komarom, which would have been a violation of the curfew, which was consequences that would have been, I don't know, unforeseen, this young soldier was so nice that he told the head of the group to let me go. "Oh, he's a nice fellow. Why don't you let him go?" But of course on the way to that compound we picked up more and more Jewish fellows for the same reason or another. In other words, they were strictly out to get any Jew that they could catch on the street. He let me go and I managed to catch the train and I got back. I always felt that this was such a close call, and had it not happened the way it did, who knows, they would have just shipped me to the front right away. That was a very frightening experience I had. But this was already the days before the Hungarian collapse and there was a situation of terror in the city. And as a matter of fact that was the last time I ever asked to go there again.

SL: So you spent three years in Komarom?

LK: In Komarom.

SL: I don't know if you can think about it really the way it was then or if this is really more looking back on it. Did it seem to you that the time passed very very slowly because you were doing the same thing all the time?

LK: It did pass very slowly because it was not a vacation by any means. It was away from home. It was among circumstances that were very, very threatening. I would say it lasted a lifetime. As a matter of fact, I felt that I spent a lifetime there, even though my circumstances were not as bad as they could have been or as they were for anybody else.

SL: During the day while you were working, were you able to talk with your fellow workers?

LK: Oh, yes. There was complete freedom.

SL: What would you talk about?

LK: You have to remember we were very young, even under those circumstances we did the best possible things in order to survive. In our free time we played ball, I remember we had a very nice volleyball game going practically all the time. I remember one thing we did was we played, what do they call it, that game, the real estate game that you...

SL: Monopoly?

LK: Monopoly. There was a type of a Monopoly, as you know it.

SL: In Hungarian?

LK: In Hungarian. I remember buying and selling real estate in Budapest, and we spent a lot of time. In other words, we tried to make the best of the situation. We did a lot of reading. There was some reading material available because people used to bring in books. Otherwise, there was no social life otherwise, mixed social life, other than when we were allowed to go into the city, which was once a week.

SL: You went into Komarom?

LK: Yes.

SL: Then what would you do that would be special?

LK: And then we socialized like we would...

SL: With the Jewish element?

LK: With the Jewish element. Oh, strictly with the Jewish element.

SL: So there was actually very little contact with women then?

LK: Well, only the ones that lived there.

SL: There?

LK: In the community.

SL: In the city?

LK: In the city. Because the community was still intact, just like I said before, my home was still intact back in Svaljava. It was intact in terms of its presence. Although it was limited as far as its function and as far as what they were allowed to do and what they were not allowed to do. There were Jewish laws being published all the time, edicts being published with regularity, progressively more and more limiting.

SL: Did you find yourself in social situations with the Jewish women in the city? Was there any possibility of having a date or anything like that?

LK: Yes. To a degree that was possible.

SL: And how were you viewed by the Jews in Komarom?

LK: They were very protective of us and very helpful.

SL: What were the circumstances leading to your release, your exit from the camp?

LK: In 1944, [Miklos] Horthy, who was the head of the state, realized that this is a losing battle, and he resigned and wanted to get out of the war, which the Germans prevented him from doing. They arrested him. But they set up their own government, which was the Green Cross, or, I don't remember. It was the Hungarian Fascist party took over, and they, oh, that day when this happened, an order came into the camp that all who wish to leave the camp may do so. They were free to go. Also, in the same time, rumors were spread that if we were able to get to Budapest, we could pick up some international passports, such as Swedish, Swiss, and Papal passports. And with these passports in possession, we could possibly either be able to live in Budapest or be able to leave Hungary. I have no idea how that was

contemplated, but anyway, there was the whole idea. So all of us picked up our belongings, whatever we had, got on a train, and went to Budapest.

SL: They gave you their permission to leave the camp?

LK: Yes, the whole, it was just abandoned. All the military just left. The whole thing just dismantled because there was a complete breakdown of government control. In other words, we thought this is it, this is the end. Little did we know that Germany, of course, would not just stand by and do nothing. So we left for Budapest and got to Budapest. We were told, I don't know who even told us but it must be some of the Jewish fellows who got a hold of some information, said we should go to a certain place, which we did, and we were given, if I recall, I was given a Swedish passport. But of course it was of no avail because the next day walking on the street we were questioned by roaming patrols and what have you and asked for identification. As soon as they saw that this identification was of questionable origin, they arrested us, and they took us all, by the thousands, because they were coming from all over, which must have been in the same situation as I was, because many camps all over the area must have been abandoned. They rounded us up into some military compound in Budapest, and they marched us to the railroad stations and loaded us up into cattle cars and they shipped us to Austria.

SL: When you left Komárom, what possessions were you able to take with you to Budapest?

LK: Just what we had. Maybe an extra, I don't recall.

SL: Didn't take the trunk?

LK: No, no. I just, I don't recall any luggage at all. I must have just traveled whatever was on me.

SL: Did you have any money?

LK: No, not at all. That was another problem. Also there was no lack of finding support wherever you went, as far as meals or what have you. The Jewish hospital, I remember, was an active place where you could always find something, somebody to help you. Oh, I knew some people in Budapest that I went to where I could stay overnight, and things like that.

SL: Now, what month was this?

LK: This was in June or July of '44.

SL: Can you describe what it was like when you arrived in Budapest? What was the city like, what was happening there?

LK: There was complete chaos. I did not conceive. I had no idea what was happening. It was a feeling of elation, yet there was a feeling of fear as to what is going to be, because it was very obvious that this is not the end of it, it cannot be the end of it. There were too many military around. We didn't know what was happening, and this is exactly what happened. Out of nowhere we were just arrested and all I could see is thousands and thousands and thousands of us being herded into trains. I mean endless, endless, endless transports.

SL: Jewish transports?

LK: Jewish transports were being shipped.

SL: Women along with men?

LK: No, they were primarily occupants of slave labor camps, which was primarily men.

SL: So then you really only spend a day or so in Budapest.

LK: About maybe, to the best of my recollection, maybe a couple of days.

SL: Were you separated from your friends? The ones that you had come with from Komarom?

LK: I was separated from my friends, because some of my friends really went home, and then I never saw them again. I did see them after the war, but not — I saw one of them.

SL: Did you, at any time, feel that you wanted to get back to Svaljava rather than...?

LK: No, not at that time, because I already knew at that time that there were problems at home. Already heard that they were already rounding them up because the Russians were threatening, you see, and the Germans already were there at the time. I had some communications from my parents, desperate communications. They felt that this is the end, something terrible is going to happen. They described an event that happened to them during Passover, during the Passover meal. They forced them to take in some German officers for lodging. I don't know how in the world there was room for anything like this, but

anyway they had one or two German officers as lodgers. And one of them, this is the oddest thing, one of them participated in the services, a German officer, and they couldn't figure out why he cried throughout the service. They suspected he may have had some Jewish background because he participated in the *seder* services. I knew this letter very vividly. This was the last communications that I had.

SL: After Passover?

LK: After Passover.

SL: Did any time after that did you learn of what had happened to them? Or was it not until after the war than?

LK: Not until after the war. I had no idea what happened. But by that time, as you'll find out later, my situation changed for the worse and then was no way for me to find out, and it was a matter of life or death for me, from day to day existence.

SL: On this transport to the Austrian border you were packed in cattle cars. Do you have any idea how many people were in that car with you? In one car?

LK: Oh God, it was just practically standing room.

SL: Did you receive any food, anything at all?

LK: Not at all until we traveled either all night and all day, or something like that, I don't recall. But all I know that when they opened up the car we were told to step out, which we did. Some of them never got out because they would have either died or suffocated or what have you. Even though there were all men, there were no families, but some people must have been in a condition that they could not tolerate the trip. As it turned out, they let us out on the Austria-Hungarian border, and they created groups, and I got into one group and marched us to the city of [sounds like; Kirsek], and I remember the first night staying over in a brick factory, where they manufacture bricks. And I remember it was very warm, because [of] the ovens where they heat the bricks. The last time they must have done it was a long time ago because this was not in use anymore, but the walls were still warm. And then the next day they separated again, created groups, and we were sent to a tent camp. And from there we were sent every morning out to

work. And the work that was done was digging military ditches for against the Russians, military enforcements. And we did that from the end of summer, somehow around there, I don't recall exactly when I got there, until about January or February of '45.

SL: What kind of rations were they giving you?

LK: One soup a day, that was it, once a day. If you're lucky enough to get to the beginning of the line, you'd still get some solid pieces in there. If you came to the end of the line, it was all just water or sometimes nothing was left. Fortunately, I was in prime shape when I started this ordeal, and by the time I... Well, here is what happened. There again I managed to finagle, so to speak, a job that I didn't, I went out to work a few times, but then I managed to finagle a job that I didn't have to go out, that I worked right on the premises. That provided a certain amount of protection for me, too.

SL: What did you do?

LK: I don't even recall. But all I know that I did not have to go out. I did some work in the camp. I don't even remember what. All I know that the death rate was frightening and once in a while they asked for volunteers, it wasn't once in a while, it was every other day or so, they asked for volunteers to remove the dead bodies. I managed to avoid that somehow. Somehow they didn't notice me, or I was too small. I managed to hide so they didn't pick me to do it. Because what it meant really was every other day or every third day to load those bodies up into a truck or a wagon to haul them away because all the bodies were dumped into one tent. When it filled up, then they just hauled them away. The death rate was frightening there. We had very little protection from the elements there. It was in a tent situation. When it snowed, it snowed and then it melted the water you were sleeping practically under water. I think I had very good shoes and I must have had a good coat that I must have been protected, because I never got sick. Most of them got sick and, of course, died, and malnutrition, disease, what have you. They seemed to have kept up the count by bringing in fresh people to replace the dead ones, but this really was the first time when I started seeing what this was all about, what was happening to the Jews for the past three-four years. I had no idea. This is what you heard about, but I never witnessed it.

SL: Was it a real terrible shock for you?

LK: It is not a matter of shock, because it's a matter of resignation. It's a matter of take it and make the best of it, survive. I never made an issue of anything. In other words, if you did that, then that was the end. And, somehow managed to survive. Maybe I managed to blot out what happened there because this was really a very bad experience, and I many times try to correct like you ask me, what did I do, and I don't have recollection what I did. Now, how can you blot out three-four months or whatever? All I remember is certain times that I went out to work and I knew that I could not survive that ordeal day in, day out. And something happened that I didn't have to go out. Now, what happened, I don't recall. I know one thing, that there was some women there. There was a young lady who was, I think, attractive, whatever recollection I have. That she caught the attention of the commander, and he took her into his quarters. Nobody questioned as to what she did or what she didn't do, but I know one thing, that with regularity, she brought me food. I got to know her, and something happened between us that she felt she ought to protect me, and I remember her very distinctly meeting me regularly every day and bringing me a piece of bread, a piece of meat, I recall, fruit, things that were very sustaining in terms of life. And this was going on for quite some time.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

TAPE 3, SIDE 2

SL: This woman that gave you the food, was she Jewish?

LK: Yes, oh, yes. I don't know how those women got there, because I never saw any women and suddenly there appeared a number of women. I met her just by accident after work or after whatever happened. I started talking to her and she turned out to come from the same general direction that I came from and we must have been about the same age or something. It was so unusual, the reason why I somehow was attracted to her, because she was very unusually attractive in terms of everybody around and turned out to be my lifesaver in the long run. I never asked any questions as to what she was doing. The only thing we were concerned about that she wouldn't be caught that she's giving me food on the side. But she managed to bring it practically every evening after the meal. Another thing that sustained me for a while was I had a watch which I managed to, there was some contact between the population of the city and the people that were going out to work, so I gave one of those men that supposedly managed to maintain this contact, there was some so-called black market activity, I gave him the watch and the next day he brought me, I don't recall, was either a salami type thing or something that again sustained me, for every day I took one little slice and that sustained me for a certain period of time. That I recall as one event. I needed very little. I was used to sustain myself on little as opposed to some of them who required much more. And these little incidences, occurrences, managed to carry me over.

SL: Were you able to keep track of the days?

LK: You were not. There was no...

SL: Just by the temperature changes?

LK: Just by that, you knew that approximately it's supposedly January or February or whatever have you. There were no civilized means at our disposal. None whatsoever. Nights were horrifying. Every night you stay here, a few men would have to ask, when they left the tent, asked to go to the latrine, many of them never came back. I developed a habit of never to go to the latrine at night, because you heard what was going on. Invariably you heard permission being asked from the guard, permission given, and a shot after

that. Things like that. So you did it for a while and I mean you heard that for a few times and then you realized that you do not go, that's all, if you want to survive. It's an instinctive behavioral patterns you must develop in order to survive. And this is what must have happened with me because I somehow managed to get out.

SL: So there was killing happening, other than just, the death rate was not always from natural causes.

LK: Oh God, no. Anytime there was a misconduct of any kind at all, they lined us up. They wanted to know who did it, who was responsible. There were no volunteers, he said, "Okay, I'm giving you five minutes to volunteer. Nobody steps out, ten men will die." Ten minutes went by, they took ten men out of the line, and they shot them right in front of the whole lineup. That happened many, many times. There was target shooting. During the day for no reason at all, the guard just picked out any target he wanted and just killed him. All it was, the man fell, the guard came up to the next guy to him, he says, "Pick him up, dump him into the tent where the bodies lie." That was the worst thing of it all, because I always had to pass that tent to see those bodies lined up. I mean it was really the worst, the worst representation of what concentration camp was about. And this was not even in a permanent concentration camp setting at all. This was in a temporary border-like, what do you call it, front. In other words, front setting, so no permanence at all. There were no crematoria, nothing. It was just a temporary setting. So you can imagine what must have gone on in a temporary setting.

SL: The thinking that you did in your own mind and the survival mechanisms, how did you come to view death? You wanted to survive, certainly those instincts carried you along but, was it being so visible all the time, was it something that you accepted as almost invariable for yourself? What were your thoughts about all this death that you saw?

LK: I don't recall. I have no idea what I thought, but obviously I must have managed to do something right about it. I would say if issue was made out of it, if a conflict within you, they would have, I'm sure, killed you. I don't think that it could be a human endurance to overcome these struggles unless you made no struggles. You made no issue of it. You just mechanically did the path of least resistance to survive. I'm

pretty sure this must have been, because I really have a no recollections to what my thoughts were. I think that it's like having a terrible experience and being in shock and then realizing what happened to you after it was all over. This has been, I would say, my primary behavior.

SL: Did you ever run into anyone at that camp that you knew?

LK: Nobody and that was the best feeling of it all.

SL: Why was that?

LK: And that's what I have the most guilt feeling about. I always prayed that I should not. And the idea of having to run into a relative, I mean a family, that would have been beyond anything I could have endured.

SL: To watch?

LK: In other words, to survive by yourself is really the easiest to survive, and to have to worry about survival of your family member makes things much harder and I don't think that I would have been capable of. And that's why I kept always thinking, which we'll come later to that when we started running into various transports and the death march, I always wished and hoped on one hand to find a survivor, on the other hand not to. Because you would have had an additional burden to your own survival.

SL: Were you able to, in those circumstances though, become close with certain people?

LK: Other than, in this particular setting in that camp, the only one that I got close was this young lady. I have no recollection of being close to anybody else or knowing anybody else intimately. In other words, intimately, I mean by intimately even talking to. I was strictly an observant. I observed things that were so basic in terms of what survival can bring out of you, the best or the worst. I observed, that's why, to come back to the fact that I was always worried to run into relations, was when I observed a father and a son fighting over the share of the bread. When they divided, they gave them only one piece and they had to divide it between them and the one got the smaller part was fighting for the bigger. While, on the other hand, my brother, who tells me about his father, how they were pushing the bread on each other instead of taking it away from each other. So you see, survival can bring out the worst and can bring out the best

and I witnessed it and I saw it all and I saw the worst. So you see, that's why I was really lucky not having to be put to test what would have happened to me.

SL: What happened in January or February, after you had been there for a while?

LK: Then the Russians occupied Budapest. They started threatening the Austrian-Hungarian front. They picked us up and set us out in a death march, which I didn't know what the march was, but all I know was we, I remember the snow started melting, and we got on the road. That's all I remember. And started marching. And the march never ended.

SL: How many of them were there?

LK: We started out just the people that were in this camp. We marched for half a day and other people joined us, and more people joined us and more people joined us. And we started marching, all I know, I was marching west because we went by way of Vienna, so I knew we were marching west. And we went through the whole Austrian Alps and it started out somewhere around February or March. Really, these dates are completely not clear. And groups were joining us from all over, and this is where I said that I, by the way, this young lady started marching with me, so she survived that. But somehow [she] just got lost somewhere on the way. I never managed to find out where she was or whether she survived or anything. I had some words about her that she was in Israel, but I never found out.

SL: Do you think that, with this woman, that you probably had as great an emotional type of relationship that you had had in a long time with anyone, just as far as caring enough about somebody else, or even looking out for somebody else that seems to be almost contrary to what was happening the survival was so innate in each person?

LK: Oh, things were happening that were, as I say, both things could happen. I mean, there were things that brought out the best of us and things that brought out the worst of us. Oh sure, circumstances like that will do that.

SL: Now this march, this death march, did you do nothing every single day?

LK: Just marched.

SL: Did you stop? How long was it? Sleeping at all?

LK: We marched until sundown, and then they said, "Stop." And we stopped, wherever we stopped, and wherever you were you lied down, and you slept.

SL: Did you eat at all?

LK: Once in a while they surprised us with handing out a piece of, what do you call it? It looks like potato, it grows in the ground, it's like a radish, turnip. They handed turnips out. I would say in all the death march maybe we were served hot food, maybe two, three times. In other words, we really lived off whatever, so-called fat of the land. Whenever we got into a field where we thought there were some turnips, we ran in to grab something if the guard didn't see us. If he saw us, he shot us. I remember once milks being delivered to the waysides for trucks to be picked up from the farms, but to be delivered to the cities. I don't know if you've even seen that kind of setup. In other words, the farmers bring the milk into big containers to the sight of their main road. We managed to sneak into those and have a couple of gulps of milk until the guard got to us and chased us away. We found dead horses, dead cows, that were injured by bombings because we were strafed, we were bombed by the Russians and by the English. I don't know who did the bombing, but some people they strafed us. There were always casualties. The meat was used.

SL: Did you eat it raw?

LK: I don't recall. All I know that I used to eat, those crawling things in shells, on the side of the road, those beautiful things in shells, it's a crawly thing it's got a shell on it it's got a beautiful shell, snails, used to pick those up and just swallow that whole the way it was, and I recall that feeling. But this was a matter of survival. You didn't give it much thought. You felt it might help. You got to put something in your stomach. Those are the things that I lived on. Once in a while we went through a path or something, and suddenly there were machine guns set up, and you never gave it any thought because there is a war. There's constantly shooting all over. Remember this was practically the end of the war. And suddenly there are shots, and you start running because you're afraid. You don't know whether it's air bombing or

whatever it is. And suddenly you see there are dead bodies all over the place. We get to the other end of the mountain or the other end of the valley, and then you realize that they were shooting at you. And you just kept going and going and going, and the line was being depleted and depleted.

LK: I remember seeing the first sight of the Alps and it was the most magnificent view. It was unbelievable how beautiful it was. And I remember marching next to my fellow marcher and I looked up at him and I said, "Look how beautiful this is." He looks back up at me and says, "You must be insane." So it must have been something that my attitude was such that I still saw hope, I still saw beauty. This one comment I'll never forget. And of course he had no chance for survival.

SL: Did you ever run into any peasants on the road? Any other contact other than the people you marched with?

LK: The people never helped. Once in a while the guard, who happened to march with you, most of them were the old guard, in other words they were, the resident guard, they didn't use the real soldiers, they used only older people, and you befriended the man and he realized what, he was no fool. He saw what was going on. So he was being fed, so he had a hot potato or something, a boiled potato. He gave you half a potato. So those sort of things that managed, too. And that half potato carried you over the next twenty-four hours.

SL: The soldiers who marched along with you, were they also on foot?

LK: Also on foot, yes.

SL: Were they dying like the Jews were?

LK: No, no they were not, because they only accompanied you from village to village and then the new group came in. These were people that were not in the regular army. They were just given duties, and then there was a new guard on duty after that.

SL: Did you eventually wear your shoes out? March in your bare feet?

LK: No, the shoes never wore out. My father made me those shoes. I think that's what saved my life. The shoes were outstanding. He made me a pair of shoes that lasted me throughout the war. And those

shoes must have been made for me. Not from the beginning, they must have been a second pair or whatever have you. And there was, by the way, never took off those shoes because once you took them off they stole them, they took them away from you and I think that was very important, depending how protected you were from [inaudible]. And I must have had a good coat, because I know the coat survived with me, and it was so full of lice on the day of liberation that the only way to get rid of it was really to get rid of it. I remember I hated to get rid of it because it really protected me so well. There was another thing, the lice were debilitating you see. Terrible body lice, and there was no way to get rid of it, especially in the last year or so, six months or so. So there was another thing that there was no way that you could, and when every drop of blood is so precious, you haven't got that kind of the thing to deplete you more. That was one of the big problems.

SL: Physically they were... are they parasites as far as...?

LK: Oh God, sure.

SL: How much they can take your strength away...

LK: Whatever it was, it's uncomfortable, and I'm sure there must have been some of it, because I remember the size of them was just fabulous. But then as soon as we were liberated of course they gave us bath. We were treated with DDT. I remember the spraying. But we had to get rid of all our clothes. It was the only way.

SL: How long do you recall this march lasting?

LK: That I know exactly because I arrived to Mauthausen in April. I think my certificate says April 15.

SL: What kind of certificate do you have?

LK: From Mauthausen.

SL: You have a certificate?

LK: Yes.

SL: I don't understand; what is it?

LK: That I was a prisoner. On the day of liberation they gave me a certificate.

SL: The ultimate destination of this march was...

LK: Was in Mauthausen. And then I stayed there in April, for about a month, six weeks, and that's when I was liberated.

SL: Did you not know until you arrived there that that's where you were going?

LK: No. As a matter of fact, when we got there we didn't know, other than I saw the sign.

SL: What were your impressions?

LK: I never heard about Mauthausen. It didn't mean anything see.

SL: But as soon as you walked in there you must have been...

LK: First of all, there was somewhat more permanence to it. We were put into more permanent housing. Up to now, this was our first permanent housing. We were put into big bunks, wooden bunks, and given a place to lie down. So that changed, number one. Number two, we were given soup again, regularly, every day. That was another thing. But on the other hand, we also saw death even more than we did in the camp that I came from on the border, because there were many more of them. The camp was just loaded with people, and half of them you didn't know who was alive and who was dead. But all the facilities of a camp were there. There was a definition to our camp. There were defined quarters and that kind of stuff. But it was already at the end. Obviously, the guards and the military must have known that this is the end, so things, of course, were different than what they were, let's say, a year before when we arrived. But I knew I was in a camp. There was no question about it. But since it was the end already, it looked like the end.

SL: Were you filled with a sudden strength, or something, realizing that the end was so close?

LK: No. The only thing was that you didn't know whether you're going to make it. You heard the shots, you heard the bombing, you heard the cannon fire, and you knew that it can't be very far away, but you were the end of your rope. This was already at the end. I was already starting to adopt some of the looks, some of the feels that you knew that if you ever get to them, this is the end. You become expert to foretell who is going to live and die, just by the way he looks, the way the eyes look, the way your tummy is distended,

what your weight is. So that it really was a matter of desperation. There you knew that every breath, that every move you make must be done with calculated risks, and here it was really a matter of am I going to make it or am I not? The last few days, that's when I started realizing that there is a pretty good chance I'm not going to make it, that I'm not...

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

TAPE 4, SIDE 1

SL: The last time that we were talking we began to discuss your arrival in Mauthausen and as you were telling me, just a while ago, you said you thought they took you to a newer section of Mauthausen.

LK: Right. It must have been of recent origin in terms of facility. It was made out of wood. They were large barracks without any partitioning. Each barrack must have housed hundreds and hundreds of people. It was outside of Wels, off a main highway, if I recall, in a pine wooded forest. The people were coming, I imagine must have been the last leg for all the marches. The shelling was in evidence all over the place. In other words, the bombing was being heard all the time. We knew that the end must have been there or at least pretty close to it. I only hoped that it would happen sooner than later. As I have told you before, we were without food now for quite a number of weeks, and I must have survived strictly on whatever resources I had in my own body. But some of the evidences and some of the symptoms that I started experiencing, I recall that very distinctly, were a little somewhat frightening to me because they were very similar to the ones that I have observed all these months. And suddenly one night, it happened on the night of May 8, suddenly there was a rumor, there was no other evidence, no other event that would have alerted us to it, there was just a rumor that the guards are gone and that we are free. The interesting thing is that most people would expect a certain amount of exhilaration, a certain amount of expression of joy or what have you. I recall there was none of that. I do remember that some of my friends who I have known, who have known me for a long time, who came from my own hometown, asked me if they could join me to get out of the camp, because we were told that we can go freely.

SL: Who told you this?

LK: It was just rumors, just hearsay. There was nobody of authority to tell us anything. All I remember is that everybody ran to the storehouses. I remember myself getting into the storehouse and managing to come back with, I think, with a loaf of bread. The loaf of bread did not survive, I mean its wholeness, because by the time I got back to my barrack everybody grabbed for it, and it was a matter of survival, really. We were, as you can imagine, in a state of such, oh, what should I say, complete depletion of all our

resources that if you saw somebody carrying a loaf of bread you obviously would grab for it. But I do remember that as soon as it got somewhat light in the morning, we must have been about four or five friends of mine, we started out, got out of the camp. Everybody was going, running whichever way. There was no organization. As I said before, there was nobody telling us anything at all. And all I really watched is the which way to turn, to go either right or left on that main highway, and we assumed because of the lightning that was occurring to the left of us, we assumed that that's where the battle was occurring, and we turned right. And as it turned out to be we walked toward the city of Wels. We did not walk very far when someone ordered us to stop, which I recall frightened us terribly because we were afraid that some Germans might still be around. All it was, it was a negro patrol, or a colored, a black patrol and that was by itself a very frightening experience because we had never seen, at least I have never seen, a black man. However, they were friendly and told us to continue on our way, all they asked was where we came from. And of course as soon as they heard that they let us go. And all I recall is approaching the first house in the outskirts of the city and all I can tell you that I felt no, let me put it this way, I didn't feel any animosity toward anybody. I didn't feel any anger. Maybe I didn't have the strength for it, but all I remember is knocking on that door and a very frightened woman opened that door and I asked her "*Bitte schön, kann ich ein Stück von Brot haben?*" — which meant, "Please, could I have a piece of bread?" After, I have thought of that many, many times after that how in my right mind I could have approached my so-called enemy with kindness and courtesy.

SL: Which you obviously didn't remember that you said...

LK: Which I obviously did because I never thought of it, to do any other way, I never had it in me. This item especially came to my mind as soon as I noticed, days later when refugees pouring into the city from all kind of situations, that means concentration camps, labor camps, oh, and of course from military, in other words, war prisoners camps such as Russians. Their behavior was nothing like what I have just described. There was a lot of shooting, there was a lot of killing, there was strictly forceful acquisition of anything they could get a hold of. We witnessed that for about three, four days inside the city where the

American military had an attitude of hands-off, let the so-called wrath play itself out. They did not interfere with whatever the refugees were doing for about three days. And after that they clamped down and brought things under normal, so-called order, military order. I recall finding lodging in the household where again we asked permission for it. We started going around town to get a hold of some food because food was our only need, the only overbearing need. I recall eating without stop for the next at least month to six weeks. When the military, on request of someone, who I'm not sure who it was, in order to facilitate the return of all these masses of people, they have started assembling these refugees into camps. And all I know that one day I was asked by the military to get to a certain square. And there we were put on trucks, American trucks, and we were taken to a nearby former, I think it was a German, air force camp. Housing was rather good. We were assigned housing, we were assigned a certain amount of clothing, we were, by the way, deloused, which we were still facing the first few days, which we were still suffering from, and they gave us all the basic needs to kind of get on our feet.

SL: Excuse me, in other words, when you left the camp and you went into Wels and you knocked on the door, the house of that woman, were you still in your concentration camp striped clothing? Did you ever don that clothing?

LK: No. I have never donned that clothing. We were strictly in civilian clothes.

SL: Did you still have the yellow band?

LK: No, not when I left the camp. I took that off. To my recollection I did not have it. I did have it inside the camp.

SL: But you did not really have a change of clothing, then, until you went to this American compound?

LK: The American military gave us the change of clothes. We were deloused. We were given haircuts. I remember they sprayed us with DDT, and after all the, whatever procedures they had to do, they assigned us housing. They tried to give us the housing in with our friends. Keep friends together, families together, etcetera.

SL: How did they treat you? Did you feel that they were over kind? Did they treat you with any animosity? What was your perception of them?

LK: By the way, the first few days when we were left free to just roam, we must have been liberated by a negro, that's what they called them at the time, by a black division of the Third Army. And later on they must have been rotated, and white soldiers came in and then after a few days the people that handled us seemed to have been people who must have had some training or some know-how in this respect. In other words, we were handled by social workers in the civilian segment. In other words, these were people who knew how. They were very kind, very compassionate. They catered to all our needs. They were very, very friendly. That was the first time when I ran into some Jewish soldiers because they seemed to have, by the way, that was another thing. They asked us, they gave us some temporary identification, and that identification did state what religion we were and that facilitated our so-called separation, or not separation, but getting all the Jewish refugees in particular barracks, which we requested to. It was always requested by most of us.

SL: Do you recall where the barracks were? Close to Wels?

LK: They were close to Wels, because we did not move far away from there. They were not in the city, they were in outskirts of the city. I do not recall the hospital. The reason I don't recall much about it is that after about a week or two of being there, I suddenly passed out, and I have no recollection of anything that happened to me for the next, I would say, this must have happened in June and maybe half of July I have absolutely no recollection. I must have been hospitalized. I do remember waking up in a hospital, but this was at least four weeks later. The diagnosis they told me was either typhus or something like that. Most of the ones that did survive, by the way, died. Many of them died right after that. I was fortunate enough to survive it. That was the fate of my father, who survived in Buchenwald. I have definite witnesses who said he did survive, and he died within a week or two after liberation. Judging from what I have seen and witnessed, this was the case. Either they could not handle the food, or they were beyond the stage there was no return. They didn't know much. I understand that even today, with whatever

advances medicine has made in this respect, they are still unable to save a child or a human being beyond a certain stage of starvation. And of course, in addition to that, the infectious diseases of various kinds have contributed to the tremendous loss of life, I would say, within two to three months of liberation.

SL: Going back to what you said about being in Mauthausen when you discovered some friends of yours. Were they from Svaljava? You said you met some people that you had known from before and that you left with them when you left Mauthausen.

LK: Yes. What happened is there was an ingathering of these marchers from all over the area, and I understand that the same job that we did in building these enforcements on the border of Hungary and Austria, there were many other camps like this doing the same work, and many of them were in very close proximity. And when I met up with them in the marches we compared notes as to how things were there as opposed to how things were at my place, and I was very sorry that I did not know about them, because had I joined them things may have been somewhat better, and yet in some respects would have been worse. But we did meet up with some of them that happened to have come from my hometown. There may have been about three or four, that's about it. That's the extent of it.

SL: Did you receive any news from them as to what had happened to your family?

LK: No, that I have found out later on, much later. At that point I did not know about anything or anybody as to what happened.

SL: So you then woke up in the hospital in the middle of July?

LK: Must have been around July.

SL: Then what happened to you?

LK: And they must have taken care of us and taken care of me and until the day that I was in good enough shape. By the way, there was a military field hospital, an American military field hospital, and as we became well we were released to go wherever we pleased. And that's when I left and joined the route of hundreds of thousands of survivors who traveled from designated cities to cities in pursuit of finding

survivors. The places like Budapest, Prague, Bucharest, Bratislava became almost routine routes. We traveled without passports, without any money. We learned how to survive by finding out where the UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration] kitchens were. To my recollections, we were very well fed. As a matter of fact, this was the only thing we looked for fulfillment for at the time, that was to try to get from one meal to the next as if there was no tomorrow, so to speak. I was always small in stature. I never needed much food. As a matter of fact, that may be the reason why I did survive. But I recall that right after, at least two-three years after that, I don't recall ever stopping eating, just continually, just went in and out without gaining any particular weight. I would say the day of liberation either a doctor or somebody told me, when they took me into the hospital, that I weighed seventy-eight pounds. I did not gain my present weight, or at least the weight of 120, which would be the normal weight, for many, many years to come, in spite of the monstrous amounts of food that I have ingested. And the travels were done with know-how — how to avoid the ticket agents. We learned how to carry certain contraband materials from, let's say, Budapest to Prague and then back again, which was only needed enough to survive. We needed a certain amount of, not cash, but a certain amount of items that we can trade for whatever our needs were.

SL: Would you trade them for tickets?

LK: No, tickets we never bought.

SL: How did you manage to stay on a train when the ticket takers came along?

LK: We learned how to avoid them. We would always be ahead of him from car to car, and then when it came to a station we got off the train and ran to the beginning of the train again. Somehow we managed to avoid it. And if we were caught, showing them that we were refugees going home or refugees from a concentration camp, they really never enforced the regulations in terms of requirement for tickets. Somehow I never had any problems, and yet I do not recall ever buying a ticket at that time. And also across borders. Although the borders were quite open, because of the tremendous movement of people, because you have to remember, this didn't involve just us. It involved millions of military personnel who

were in various prisoners-of-war camps, and that involved Russians going east and then the refugees or prisoners from the east going west and etcetera. So this was a mass migration of peoples, so I don't think they paid too much attention to that.

SL: Now, you mentioned some of this contraband stuff that you would carry from one city to the next in order to barter for something?

LK: To barter for survival, right.

SL: What types of items would you carry with you?

LK: Oh, it usually involved, for example, if I took cigarettes from Prague to Budapest it was a good item to barter for something else, let's say, like food in Budapest and clothing from Budapest to Prague, or vice versa. This was strictly just on a scale that — enough really for survival. During my travels the way we found out about each others were running into people that you knew or from your own hometown. You found out from hearsay, you found out from witnesses, you found out from various wall writings. What happened, anytime, anyplace, where we congregated and that usually meant where we could get lodging and food, wherever there was a wall, a smooth little one-square-inch space, everybody left his name there. And when we arrived to a new place or a new city that was the first thing we did is read those wall writings and it was a very good method of communication. I found out about many of my friends who survived, some of the townspeople that survived, but I never did see any of my brothers' or sisters' names in that manner, even though I'm sure they must have been there somewhere.

The first one I found out about my sister was on a trip from Prague to Budapest...

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

TAPE 4, SIDE 2

SL: We were just talking while the tape was being changed and we realized that you met your brother first before your sister.

LK: That is correct. The reason for it was I was able to let her know about him being alive. That is right. We practically chased each other all over Europe. Whatever town we came to, I heard about him being in a particular city. By the time I got there, of course he was gone. But he heard the same way about me and of course by the time he got after me, he was gone. But eventually we did meet up at home, and that is in our own home birthplace. I found out about that also by hearsay, by somebody telling me, "He is home. If you go there right now, you'll find him."

SL: This was in Nelipeno?

LK: And then this was in Nelipeno. And I remember, I don't know how it happened, because we obviously did not know, there was no such communication possible for us to let each other know that we were coming, but all I know is I was coming from the direction of Svaljava, which is in the south of that small town, and as I approached the last so-called elevation, so to speak, a little hill, after which you approached the small town, the small village, all I know that as I was approaching that little hill and there was a bridge there, too, and I started seeing the tops of the huts and houses. There he appeared beyond the horizon coming toward me, and I'll never forget that scene when he must have seen me in the same time, and we both ran toward each other, and of course it was a very nice event, which I don't think we'll ever forget. What happened after that was that this was already Russia, and its effort of takeover of that part of the country. We were very worried about staying there for too long, because we did not know when the Russians might close off the borders or seal their borders, and leaving would be an impossible task. The Russians, even though they were to some of us also liberators, they never acted that way. They have imprisoned many, many liberated refugees. They could not understand or differentiate between the enemy and the ones that also suffered from that same enemy. They may have had too much on their hands, but the stories and some of the experiences that some of my friends have had made us enough to

worry about it, and we were, kind of ill at ease while we were there. While in my hometown I did a few things that were very helpful later on, such as getting my birth certificate and also getting a hold of a yearbook from my school. Which later on served as a certificate or a proof of my educational background. It didn't seem to be very important at that time, but I must have had something like that in mind, that it may come in handy. And anyway I did get those items in Svaljava and in Munkacs, and we just left town. It was easier to cross the border than we expected. I remember being on the train in a... you know, trains are divided into little vestibules. They've got little cabins. And I befriended a few Russian soldiers and no problem, we came to the border, they never even asked for any identification. I remember this particular train went to Budapest, and we stayed in Budapest for a very short while, but after that we headed to Prague because that was our intention to do. Now, there's another thing that I have to mention that before I heard about my brother being alive I was in our wanderings between Czechoslovakia and Hungary. I got involved with an *aliya*¹³ and I was almost on the way to Israel when I heard, by the way, about my brother being alive. And that's why I got off that particular transport and I stayed on and continued in my search. Now the time was approaching fall, it was quite late in the fall.

SL: What year was this?

LK: This was still, oh, this was '45, late '45. So it must have been running on July, August, September it was at that time. We decided to go to Prague and we heard about some kind of a, not contract, but some kind of a, as the terms of the occupation of this Subcarpathia, one of the terms was that in the population, they have a right to choose between either staying in Subcarpathia or becoming Czech citizens. That was part of the deal.

SL: Subcarpathia then being part of the Russian sphere?

LK: Not sphere. All of Czechoslovakia was in the Russian sphere. However, Subcarpathia becoming actually completely part of Russia, with the border now running between what was formerly Slovakia and Subcarpathia. We had an option, we were given options to apply for Czech citizenship. Now that option

¹³Hebrew for 'going up'. Refers to Jewish emigration to Israel.

was very helpful. It was even more so, and it would have been without a hitch, if you could prove that during the 1930 census the parents considered themselves to be Czechs. Now to do that you had to go to the Ministry of Interior and find that record. I remember standing in line for days and finally getting a hold of that record. And it turned out that my parents declared themselves to be Jews. That was quite a problem. Even though at that time it didn't seem to be, it was a hurdle of a sort.

SL: Because at that time, this is clarification I guess, historically, since I think I'm familiar with it but people listening to this tape might not be, during that time you could declare yourself either a Czech, a Jew, or a Ruthenian.

LK: Or a Ruthenian, right. Or any other minority that had a political validity or standing.

SL: Because the Jewish probably had representation.

LK: Right. Which Kugel was, by the way, the first one to be elected. Now what happened was I enrolled into the university. Based on that yearbook they accepted my credits. They enrolled me into the Charles University in the medical school.¹⁴ I was given, I think it was 200 crowns, which was quite a bit of money, as a living subsistence. They also provided us with room and board, and all the books, and everything. Suddenly there were some rumors that all those who were really not Czech citizens and were not of Czech nationality would really not be accepted as Czech citizens. One day there were specific rumors that the Russians have requested, that all those people be rounded up and returned to Subcarpathia. Now that was the last thing we wanted to do. It must have been either January or February, no it must have been later because it was really nice, it must have been around March or April and in 1946, where I got a hold of my brother who happened to have lived in Cheb, which was a small town in Bohemia. As a matter of fact it was in Sudetenland. We got together and we decided that we would seek the help of those underground *aliya* movements and get out of Bohemia. We were told where to go, we assembled at a particular spot, we were put on trucks, and everything seemed to have been well-organized, we knew

¹⁴Karlova University in Prague.

exactly what we were doing, we were taken to the border. We were told to get to a certain spot, and from there on we were taken care of. We were dropped off at the border.

SL: Which border?

LK: The Czech-German border. We were told that we must wait until dark. When darkness came, we were escorted by some civilians to a border check and we crossed the border without any problems. The next morning I found myself in an UNRRA¹⁵ refugee camp. It was one of the UNRRA camps, or displaced person camps as it was known later on.

SL: What was the name of this camp?

LK: It was on the Czech border. I don't recall because we didn't stay there very long. It was kind of an assembly camp, too. I don't think it was really of any permanence. It had no permanency to it. Was, again, a former army camp.

SL: Did you go back to Prague at all after you got across the German border?

LK: No.

SL: Ok, can I back up then and ask you a few questions before we lose that train? First of all, we want to find out about how you meet up or how you learn about your sister? That's a good story.

LK: Traveling between Prague and Budapest on one of the trips, getting into one of those cabins, I was trying to sit down on one of those benches. The bench seemed to have been very muddy, and on the floor there was a piece of newspaper, and I picked up a piece of newspaper in order to wipe off the bench. And as I held the newspaper in my hands I suddenly noticed a list of names and practically on the top of that list it said, with a heading saying that the following persons were taken to Sweden by the Red Cross, and there was my sister's name, practically either the second or the third name on top of the list. I got off at the next station because I knew Budapest could not provide any communications because it was not a liberated city, it was an occupied city, very badly destroyed. I got on a train going the other way, got to

¹⁵The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

Prague, sent her a telegram, and within twenty-four hours we were in communications with each other.

That's how I found out about my sister.

SL: Do you recall when this was?

LK: Well this was, this was sometimes, must have happened, I'd say about October, September, somewhere around there of 1945.

SL: So you were able to tell her that Bernie had survived.

LK: That's right, and in the same telegram I sent, "Bernie and I fine, what about you?" I recall, "Have you heard anything about the parents?" because we really still didn't know about any of the others. So that's how we found each other.

SL: And when was it that you finally saw her for the first time?

LK: I did not see her until about 1950, I think. I didn't see her for about ten years.

SL: Were you able to keep the communication with her while she was in Sweden?

LK: Oh, we kept communication, very close communication. As a matter of fact, she sent me the first so-called care package I have ever received and she sent me, I recall, a pair of black shoes which I wore for many, many years after that. She sent me sweaters and all kinds of things because she was in Sweden where her position, in terms of possessions, was more normal because she lived with a family and the normalcy to her returned much faster than to me.

SL: I'm trying to reconstruct what you finally found out about the rest of your family.

LK: In one of the lines waiting to be fed I met someone who told me that my father died about a week after liberation. About the rest of my family I found out from my sister who actually witnessed most of it. She witnessed the separation, and of course so did my brother, the separation from each other of my mother and youngest two children. She managed to hold on to Rifka, who was the third oldest. She held onto her for quite some time until finally she could not keep her fed enough or take care of her enough to qualify for work. Until one day they just grabbed her away and that was it. My father, My brother was with my father for long period of the time in Auschwitz. Then they were both transferred to Buchenwald. There

again they took care of each other as long as they could and eventually they got separated, even though my brother hoped that he would be all right. But I guess he didn't make it. I was the only one who was alone, away the farthest. Left the home first and all I know is that my brother tells me and my sister tells me, she says that, even on the way to Auschwitz in the crowded train my mother always kept saying, "I wonder how Dudi is doing." Even then, when she saw that she had enough reason to worry about the immediate people who were with her, kept wondering what my fate was at the time. As I think I mentioned to you before, that there was one thing I always hoped, kind of wished and secretly hoped, that I would not run into anybody during the death march because survival by itself, of one's own person, was so overwhelming, that to worry about another person would have made the job impossibility. And it was always much harder for people to survive who were with their close ones.

SL: It must have just been an incredible shock to both your sister and your brother to discover that you were alive, because after all, as you said, the rest of them were together to a certain extent but you hadn't been heard of for an awfully long time.

LK: They did know that I was in relative safety as long as I remained there, however they didn't know what happened after that. Because they sure didn't certainly didn't hear from me for a good, oh God, over a year. Nothing at all. As a matter of fact, more than a year by the time they found out whether I was alive. But of course in the same time I did not know about them, however, I had good reasons to believe that they would not be alive from all the reports. And I was, of course, very, very delighted to hear that, although the survivor rate there was just average, it was about what the survivor rate was in most families, other than the ones that perished completely. But the ones that had a chance for survival, I would say this was about average where about a third or 40 percent of the family survived.

SL: I wanted to ask you, to talk a little bit more. You said that Budapest, for example, was an occupied city and communication was totally unheard of as far as being able to, say, to contact your sister. Did you spend much time in Budapest?

LK: Not, not really.

SL: You really spent more time in Prague.

LK: In Prague, yes.

SL: Physically, what was the city like, what had happened to it?

LK: Physically Prague was not damaged as badly as the others. There were a few somewhat damaged but, you have to remember Prague, it was the capital of a people that was suffered quite badly from the German occupation. Being in Prague felt much better than being anywhere else.

SL: Safer you mean?

LK: Safer. You shared the same, or even though not the same, but you certainly you had a lot to share with your people or the host of that country. We all had a common bond in that respect, and it felt better being there. The people were devastated, both emotionally and physically. That country was practically at a standstill for about four to five years while the occupation lasted, even though the Czechs did not suffer the physical deprivation that some of the other occupied countries did, because Czechoslovakia did not participate in either of the wars. But there was Lidice,¹⁶ as you know about, and there were other events of the kind that certainly made their suffering, they are living symbols and memories as what the occupation was all about.

SL: Was the city as frantic as you remember Budapest to be in 1944 when you got there after leaving Komarom?

LK: It was not. Of course, I only got to Prague after the liberation and of course there was a certain amount of uplifting feeling, after all this was time of liberation. While Budapest had no such celebration, I think Budapest was the raped city by the Russian invaders. They were the enemy, while the Russians in Prague did not behave the same way. I don't know how Prague was during the occupation, but I can imagine that it must have suffered quite a bit.

¹⁶In what was at the time one of the most infamous atrocities of the war, Nazi troops on June 9, 1942, killed all of the nearly two hundred men of the Czech mining village of Lidice, and removed all women and children to concentration and penal camps, where many perished.

SL: Were there a lot of transients such as yourself that were in Prague at that time?

LK: Yes, yes. As a matter of fact, I recollect many, many of my friends who, as a matter of fact, left with me together for Germany. We stayed together.

SL: Could you describe at all what the atmosphere of Prague would be as a liberated city? Were people staying up at night and going to cafes that were open all night long? A lot of gaiety or anything?

LK: I would say no. No such thing happened. You have to remember that this was a time of great physical needs for rebuilding of anything that was of any comfort. This was a city where there hasn't been a school open for the past five years. There was a city where there hasn't been a single building repaired for many, many years. Certainly the city was not held up as a model for German, how should I say, German pride. It was still a city that was occupied for many, many years and with a very hostile people, even though as a rule the Czechs are very passive people. They fight their war passively rather than actively, see. And to this day I think their resentment to the Russians is expressed in the same way.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 2

TAPE 5, SIDE 1

SL: I have a couple more questions about Prague. Did you perceive any attitude that the Czechs had towards Jews in the city, towards, say, the refugees who were Jewish?

LK: I do not recall. As I said, we were so busy pursuing the kitchens and to keep fed and sheltered and all those things, and, as I said, we did share a common bond with the Czech people in terms of our very recent experiences. I don't recall anything to be able to express an opinion on that.

SL: Do you recall what your feelings were about the fact that you were remaining in Europe at that point?

LK: I think that the overwhelming feeling really was that I would not stay. These were so-called holding patterns. On one hand, we didn't want to stay. On the other hand, we had to make and take advantage of an opportunity that was being given there. This was a great opportunity to go back to school at no cost, with all the imaginable help possible. This was an opportunity you could not ignore. But, as you can see, that even a rumor or the slightest reason was enough to uproot us again and to be on the run again. And that's exactly what happened.

SL: Who was paying for your university tuition?

LK: That was done by the government, by the state.

SL: Were they picking it up for you because you were Jewish?

LK: No, they were picking it up because it was traditionally done in Czechoslovakia. Education from the lowest to the highest level, if qualified, was always subsidized by the government. But it was more so now, both because they felt that I was deserving of it because of my circumstances, and number two, they, I think, bent over backwards to try to get as large an enrollment as possible to, kind of, get the educational system going again, which was been at a standstill for four or five years.

SL: One more question, just kind of about your, going back to your train travel, when you were really traveling quite a bit after the war. When you went through the countryside, did it look as if things were normal? When you weren't in a city and you were on a train and just looking out the window? What did the surroundings look like?

LK: No, as a matter of fact, it was not at all, because they were not normal conditions. The trains were loaded with passengers that are normally not passengers. They were all refugees. The trains were filled with people heading home or away from home but en masse. It seemed to have been like the whole population was on the move, particularly the population that I was close to, and that is the people that have been uprooted for the past number of years. If I recall there were very few indigent people traveling, there were very few Hungarians on the trains. There seemed to have been an international set traveling. But under not international setting as we know it today. Things were not normal by any means. It was a kind of fluid situation.

SL: What about the landscape? What about the places that you would pass on the trains? If you looked out the window, did it look as if any regular trip would have looked? Could you tell by the countryside that this major catastrophic event had just occurred?

LK: No, the catastrophic events were usually evident only in the city because of the destruction of the cities, in Germany in particular, and, of course, it was generally in evidence. But it was, of course, very evident only in the cities. In the countryside it was very little evidence of any war or upheaval or peace just being broken out or anything like that. But yet, remember that my observations at that time were so limited in scope of sheer joy of survival and of course the basic pursuit of from meal to meal, from lodging to lodging. The scope was very narrow in those terms. I was not an inquisitive traveler who was looking for sights or observations of any other kind but what I've just mentioned. So this really wouldn't be very representative of what a traveler would experience under certain circumstances.

SL: How about if we move back to that night that you and your brother kind of were smuggled across the border. You ended up then in a DP camp. Were you there a long time?

LK: We ended up at DP camp. By the way, this movement of people was going on practically all over Europe, across many a border. This was a so-called underground movement. If I recall, the people that handled us and gave us instructions spoke our language but also spoke Hebrew. They were members of the underground *aliya* movement and they were the people who were obviously in the service of the various

efforts to get Jewish people to Israel. That was the ultimate goal. I remember on a previous occasion when I was on a transport already we were given actually certain passports and identification papers of the country to which we were headed. And then the next country were given other papers to be prepared for the next country. Just as a means of proving to the authorities that we are being repatriated, and that under the name of repatriation, you were really able to move freely throughout Europe practically, with the proper papers. It didn't work very well if you were, let's say, a Russian heading toward the west. However, anytime you were traveling to Russia you had no problems.

SL: How long did you end up in this DP camp? How long did you stay?

LK: There was a very interesting thing happened. I remember it was a bright sunny morning, I had a feeling of being free again somehow. It was a very nice day and myself and about three friends of mine who crossed the border with me, I think we were trying to speak some English and somebody in uniform overheard us and he approached us and asked us if we spoke English. We said that we have had some background, by the way, all of us attended the Hebrew *gymnasium*, and that all we would need is a little bit of practice and we would be okay. So he asked us if how would we like to work for the Joint. The Joint was the [American] Jewish [Joint] Distribution Committee. And we had no idea what he really meant by that, but that explained to us that we would be given American Army officers' uniforms, we would be billeted, we would be taken care of, we would be paid in military script, which to us meant a very desirable thing. We said we might consider that. So he said he would arrange an interview with his man in charge and if we qualified we would proceed from there. And sure enough, within the next few days, by the way, this fellow's name was Joe Fink, who I'm in contact to this day, he's a very nice gentlemen, to whom I'm indebted for many things to come after that. Well, anyway, we had our interviews, we were hired, we were given military uniforms, we were given military identifications, which took us out from the status of the peasantry to the status of the higher up echelon. Suddenly we were able to enjoy some of the privileges that the American army officers enjoyed and that was quite a step forward.

But anyway, from then on we were involved in many projects that the Joint was involved in those days, such as organizing new DP camps, such as meeting transports at the border and accompanying those transports to the various camps. Our ability to communicate in the languages most the people spoke was quite helpful. We were involved later on in various efforts such as emigration. We were involved in liaison duties between the army and the volunteering agencies. During the period of the following next year, year-and-a-half, I was stationed to the various points in Germany, such as Munich, Stuttgart, Frankfurt. I did a lot of traveling. I was given my own jeep, that means transportation. I was taught how to drive a vehicle, of course, and then given the vehicle. All this was done while we were kept together. Most of the duties were assigned to us so that we would not be separated very much. And all the time, we were in close contact with Mr. Fink, or Joe, who after about six months had approached us and asked every one of us, at least the original group, the original threesome, whether or not we would consider going back to school or going to attend the university in the United States. When he approached me, I thought that I would not be able or capable of doing anything like this, since I've been out of school now for many a year, and then especially to start studies in English and in a new land and in being in competition with young men who just came out of high school, seemed to have been to me an impossible task. Well, he persisted because he felt we would be able to do it if he was able to arrange this deal. What was involved here was the creation of a scholarship by B'nai B'rith for a limited number of students who would qualify and who would be admitted to various universities, who'd cooperate in this matter in the United States, and if placed they would provide for full scholarships for a period of four years. I provided him with all the documentation that I had in my possession, which was only at this time a certificate proving that I was an enrolled student at the Charles University of Prague. And that seemed to have been sufficient as documentation that I have finished high school, and there were a half a dozen universities throughout the United States that took a chance on these students, and I was chosen to go to Madison. And that's how I ended up here.

SL: How long were you in the camp then?

LK: Now in the camp we didn't stay very long because we were assigned our duties and we left camp and if I recall we were taken to Munich, which housed the headquarters of the Joint, of the Distribution Committee.

SL: How'd you make that trip? By train?

LK: No. This was done already with military vehicles. And by jeep, I recall. We stayed there on various duties until we were assigned to various duties outside of Munich. One of the things that was an outstanding event at that time was the result of the Kielce pogrom, which happened in 1946 in Poland in the city of Kielce, when a number of Jews who thought they might pick up where they left off before the war and returned to their homes.¹⁷ For some reason in this particular city of Kielce, they may have been somewhat more than usual, and when getting there have asked for their abandoned properties. Obviously the local populace was not willing to give that up. There was a pogrom, which resulted in the death of a number of Jews, and that event has created such fear in the minds of all those that have thought that return to their previous homes was a possibility. Tens of thousands of Jews from throughout Poland left their homes, their newly found homes, and headed for the German borders in order to enter DP camps and from there to head either for Israel or any other overseas locations. The influx was so great that within a period of, if I recall, of a period of about two or three months, tens of thousands of people had to be handled when they arrived to the border, transported, found places for them to house them, to feed them, to clothe them, and what have you. This was one of the outstanding, I think very contentful jobs that I have done while in the service of the Joint Distribution Committee. Our job was to meet, each one of us assigned a train and a station. The train usually consisted of a cattle train because it's the only mode of transportation available for such mass handling of people. We met them at the Austrian border. We were given assigned destinations with enough food for the duration of the journey, which usually lasted about somewhat less than a week. When we got to the destination we handed over those people to whatever authority was there to take it from there. And then, again left for the border, and picked up the

¹⁷In the Kielce pogrom of July 4, 1946, forty-two Jews were killed.

same type of transport, and again headed for a different destination. I do not recall the exact number of such trips, but it occupied us for quite some time. We were traveling on strictly military orders. I remember the signature was that of General [Joseph T.] McNarney who was the head of the European Command headquarter at that time. These orders had to be of military nature because they were assigned military escorts, they were given military food, and what have you that was necessary for successful transportation. Once in a while this job was not as easy as it sounds. The influx was so great that the American military actually ran out of places to place these people. In once instance, they tried to place a whole trainload of people in a previously, what was it, it was a concentration camp previously. I do not recall the exact location of that, but it was a camp that had the wire fences, it had the towers, I'm not sure whether or not it was a concentration camp but it must have been one camp that either held war prisoners or concentration camp inmates. But certainly when the train approached that location and they were told that they have to disembark, when they saw the setup, they would not leave the train. I recall after being there for about twenty-four hours and nobody would leave that train, conditions became unbearable. There were many pregnant. Sick children on the train. I recall having had to call for some higher authorities. I remember having the fellow by the name of Dr. Joseph Schwartz, who was the head of the Joint Distribution Committee at that time here, he came down. I remember Rabbi Hyman, who was the chief rabbi for the armed forces, and to my recollection even General McNarney came down to try to talk these people to leave that train. After a number of days of negotiation they finally managed to get them down off the train with a promise that they would stay there only on a temporary basis. But that gives you an idea that even though it meant temporary refuge, but to go back to any concentration camp setting with wires and gates, what have you, they would rather not leave the train at all. But anyway then these people did stay there for a very short time.

There were many other events, many excitements. It was a lot of fun working for the Joint Distribution Committee. It meant a number of privileges, which was not had by most of the population of the DP camps. Freedom of travel, because we had certain documentations which allowed us to travel. I was a

member of a delegation that went to Holland, which was sponsored by the UNRRA in order to see and study the possibilities for a settlement in Netherlands. There was a country that was looking for labor and they looked for it in DP camps. I remember the report that we had to write after that and what our opinion was about the possibility for settling Jewish people there. The demand was primarily for people with coal mining experiences, and I didn't think that many of the Jewish inhabitants of the various DP camps have had any such experiences and I thought that it would not be a good idea to send any. This job I held until the day that my student visa arrived and I headed for the United States.

SL: And what was that date, do you recall?

LK: I arrived on the first day of school, I think in September 1947. I don't recall exactly the day. The only day of any significance is the day of liberation, which is May 9, and the birth of my son on May 9. Other than that, the days are not of any significance.

END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 1

TAPE 5, SIDE 2

SL: We've got you arriving in Madison in September of 1947. Let me ask you about your trip to the United States. How did you come?

LK: Came by boat. The name of the boat was *Ernie Pyle*. It was a liberty boat.¹⁸ I learned later it was a boat that was intended for the steerage of about two hundred, three hundred soldiers. We were about nine hundred refugees on that boat. Travel occurred in the fall, which is the start of some very stormy weather. Everybody was very, very sick. I was not. I was delighted to be on it. I remember it being a very fun trip. It was full of young people, some that I knew; most of them I did not. I landed in New York. I had some relatives meeting me. I stayed overnight, they put me on a train, on the *Pacemaker* if I recall, to Chicago. In Chicago, while waiting between trains for a change to Madison, I noticed a young man at the lunch counter who I thought might have been a refugee also. I walked up to him and I ask him, "Are you a refugee?" And he said, "Oh, no. I'm from Rhode Island." His name was Goldstein, Bernard, and he's a very good friend to this day. But I always kid him about the fact that he looked like a refugee.

SL: What was it about him that made him look like a refugee?

LK: It was something about him that I thought. As a matter of fact, later on in school I joined a fraternity, or a fraternity asked me to join them, for the purpose of extending a helping hand in my expenses. There was a young man who I noticed always in the same jacket and the same pair of pants. I kind of thought him to be a refugee, also. And one day I asked my fellow students what country that young man was from. They said, "Country?" He says, "He's from Milwaukee! His name is Royal Taxman. Don't you know him?" I says, "Why do you — ?" "Well, he's one of the richest boys in Milwaukee." And also a very good friends to this day and I have many times kid him about that refugee status also. You have a certain picture about a refugee and I assumed that if you have only one jacket and one coat and look kind of shabby, you would be a refugee.

¹⁸The liberty ships were mass produced in response to the large number of ships being sunk by German submarines. They were mostly used for merchant cargo.

SL: Did you see the Statue of Liberty when you arrived?

LK: Yes, I saw the Statue of Liberty.

SL: Do you remember what you thought about it when you saw it?

LK: Of course it didn't have the same meaning it was supposed to have had. I don't recall ever knowing much about the Statue of Liberty other than seeing pictures about it. But I didn't know what it stood for, what its message was. In retrospect, I think the Statue of Liberty, the sight of that brings the real meaning to me. At that time it didn't mean anything, it only looked familiar, that's all, because that's what it's supposed to look like, you know, the high-rises and everything else. All it meant: "Oh yes, I have seen that before." I was met by Rabbi [Theodore] Gordon in Madison who was in charge of the B'nai B'rith student program. He took me under his wings. He was also very helpful in his own way. He had me tutor his children in Hebrew, which added a few dollars for pocket money. He was there for about one year and then Rabbi [Max] Ticktin took over and he continued my supervision until I left Madison.

SL: How did you feel about coming to the United States rather than going to Israel, especially since you had joined up with that *aliya* group?

LK: It's very interesting how, how you... I think that it's like having an experience and being a shock and not realizing or perceiving the extent of your action, or what is happening to you. You do certain things with the idea that you have to do it in order to, whatever that happens to be. In retrospect, then later on, you start having second thoughts, or guilt feelings, or I should have, or I could have. Now in respect to Israel, I had the same, I had those feelings, especially after the creation of the state. I felt that as a result of my survival and the need for more people in Israel, this is really where I should have ended up. And I think, so to speak, to make up for that, I think that possibly is the reason why I had my daughter, or allowed my daughter, or encouraged my daughter, to go to Israel at such an early age as fifteen. For her first trip, not a trip but for studies, she spent a whole year there. Many of our friends couldn't understand how I could let such a beautiful child, such a lovely child, go and be away from for a year. And I thought that this is the makeup. This is how I was trying to make up for, which I felt was what I should have done. And I felt

very proud and I was very happy about the fact that she did go and she has had the experience. And to this day, every time we have an argument about the fact that I wish she would stay here in this country, she'll tell me, "Dad, well you know you really don't mean that. You really want me there, don't you?" As if she understood my feelings, and then of course that's the end of the argument.

SL: When you got to Madison, where did you first live?

LK: I was put into a private home with some lovely Jewish people.

SL: By the name of? Caught you on that one [laughs].

LK: Yes. I know their business was the [sounds like; Leider] Laundry. You caught me on this one. Maybe I'll remember it later.

SL: How long did you stay with them?

LK: I stayed with them for about a year. I can see them right in front of me. Then the opportunity, AE Pi, I don't recall how exactly it happened, but anyway I was invited to the A[lpha] E[psilon] Pi to live there and an arrangement was made with the B'nai B'rith that some of the money that I was receiving be paid for my room and board there which was much less than they normally charged to their members. And all my friends that I have to this day have all been created there, of course. So when I came to Milwaukee I did not come to a strange city at all. I had tens and tens of friends, and very good friends, to this day.

SL: Of course, A[lpha] E[psilon] Pi was a Jewish fraternity.

LK: Yes, definitely. I wouldn't think of joining anything else but.

SL: Were you the only refugee?

LK: No, there was another one, as a matter of fact. However, his background was different. He came from Hungary. He was also a pharmacist and he was also a member of A[lpha] E[psilon] Pi. But he was not here on a scholarship. He was on his own, and he was supported by some of his relatives.

SL: Now, you got your degree in pharmacology?

LK: No, in pharmacy.

SL: But yet, when you were in Prague, you were at the medical school.

LK: That's true.

SL: Why did you...?

LK: The reason is because the system works differently in Europe than it does here. In Europe, after you finish the *gymnasium* you enter the school of your choice. There are no premedical, prelaw, or pre-anything. You are equipped to enter the so-called graduate school right away. After a four year course, which was at that time, you get your medical degree. As opposed to here. When I came here, I had no doubt that this was where I was heading for is the medical school. When I came to register, they said, "Oh, you can't do that. You must go to premed first." And of course that was an impossibility because of the fact that my scholarship only lasted for four years, and another thing was that I came on a student visa, and I was not sure whether the extension would be given for a longer stay. But somebody, I think the dean of the school, suggested, "Well, why don't you go into pharmacy? That's somehow similar." And I thought, "Oh, yes, that is similar." And that's how I started, I never gave it any other thought.

SL: Were there pharmacies per se in Svaljava?

LK: Oh, yes, there was one pharmacy in Svaljava. Because in most European countries pharmacies are limited to a number of people. In other words they are not competitive businesses. You cannot open a pharmacy just because you would like to, or you are a pharmacist, or you have money. Each pharmacy must handle a certain amount of people and no additional pharmacies can be opened unless special licensure is given. The pharmacy, I remember, in Svaljava was a very professional setup. He was a Jew, also. As a matter of fact there were two professional people, highly regarded, and I think that may have impressed me. There was the physician and, oh, by the way, there was the lawyer. The lawyer, the physician, and the pharmacist were all Jews.

SL: How did you find dealing in the English language? Did you pick up it up real quickly?

LK: I would say I have no problems.

SL: Technically?

LK: To my recollection I had no problems at all. It was somewhat difficult the first semester, I had difficulty in understanding. But after that, it was smooth sailing.

SL: Did you run into any problems of anti-Semitism while you were on campus?

LK: Interestingly enough I was living quite a sheltered life here. Almost as sheltered as the *shtetl*. I was brought here, I was under the supervision of a Jewish organization. I was raised in a Jewish home. I was an oddity in my classes, and they knew right away I was a foreigner. Curiously they asked where I was from, and as soon as they found an indication that I may have gone through what they thought I did, they had certain amount of bewilderment, curiosity, and certainly there was never any sign of animosity. As a matter of fact, sometimes some of my assistant teachers invited me to their homes in order to hear some of the stories. Everybody was very helpful. I have no recollection ever of any comments that would indicate that I was not welcome, so I really cannot in all sincerity say that I have had any anti-Semitic experience.

SL: Did you feel that you experienced any problems that were typical of those a new immigrants' problems?

LK: I would say I did not. First of all, I came, so to speak, in the right age; I had no responsibility for support or worries about any other member of the family, so that made it quite easy. I was well taken care of. I was not made aware just through my associations that I was a refugee, as if I would have been had I ended up in a group type of similar experiences, like if it would have been in New York or any other place. As a result of the fact that I was alone, I did enjoy certain privileges that friends and acquaintances have extended to me. Because while I did not feel as being an outcast or outside of things, I did experience that I was being treated with a little bit more consideration than anybody else. So maybe this was the only thing that may have made me feel different.

SL: Did you feel uncomfortable about that?

LK: No, I did not, not at all.

SL: In Madison, were you helped at all by any community organizations? Or did the B'nai B'rith Hillel through the university take care of all your needs?

LK: I never had any contact in terms of organizations; however, I did have some feedback from private homes. Like I was almost adopted by the so –called Sweet family.

SL: Which ones?

LK: I don't recall exactly, because there were so many of them. I was invited with almost regularity for a meal and was invited on various holidays. I was never left alone. Even though I didn't have a place to visit or a home to go to, I was never left alone during holidays or days off from school. Invariably I was invited either by a friend or an acquaintance to their homes for such holidays as Christmas and Easter holidays, I mean Easter recesses. So in that respect I was very well taken care of. As far as organizations in the city, I had very little contact with.

SL: Were your first experiences in Milwaukee as part of going back with friends during holidays to visit?

LK: Right. I have gotten to know most of my friends' parents well because of that fact that I did stay in their homes.

SL: Were you quite a bit older than they? Or did the fact that some of them may have been in the war?

LK: That's right. As I say, again, I came at the right time because I didn't feel older, even though I was older than the average normally enrolled student at age of eighteen. But because of the tremendous enrollment of returned veterans, many of them were my age or maybe just a year or two below me. So I never felt really out of age groups.

SL: What was the first job that you got after you graduated?

LK: The first job had to be an internship, which is a requirement for licensure. I did that in Madison while I was still living in the fraternity. As a matter of fact the fraternity made special permissions for me that I could stay on for another year at the fraternity, because I had no other place to go to and since the internship wouldn't pay enough for me to have an apartment or something like that. They permitted me to live there with room and board and at a very reasonable rate. The only problem I had at that time was to prepare for licensure in terms of the requirements that were at that time required for submission for licensure. Such as citizenship, or if no citizenship is available, a declaration of intentions. Now because of

my student status I could not declare intentions, and for a while there I thought that this might pose a problem. However I had some friends in Milwaukee who had asked, I recall it was Senator [Alexander] Wiley, to submit my name for a change of status which did occur and to this day I still have the copy of the Congressional Records in which my name appears.

SL: And as I recall that was 1952.

LK: And that was 1952, right.

SL: Did you immediately apply for citizenship after that time?

LK: That was a normal procedure. I did that right away and within three or four years, I don't recall, I got my citizenship.

SL: But the submission of your name by the senator was enough to declare your intent?

LK: No, actually what it did, it changed my status from temporary to permanent.

SL: But that was then enough to...

LK: But that's enough basis to declare intentions, right.

SL: Where was the pharmacy located in which you had your first job?

LK: It was on the Square in Madison at Bergmann's Pharmacy.

SL: Were they Jewish?

LK: No, it was not.

SL: Could you tell me about the circumstances surrounding your moving to Milwaukee? What made you leave Madison?

LK: Well Madison was, once I was out of school, I do not believe Madison is good hunting ground for somebody out of school. Most of my friends that I have acquired left town. The majority of them came to Milwaukee and I felt that I would like to live in Milwaukee in proximity to my friends.

And that's exactly what I did. I moved to Milwaukee, I got a job at Walgreen's, and I worked for them for one year. Then I worked for Shore Pharmacy, which was on the East Side. The owner, by the name of Max Goismann, is a Jewish fellow. And that was another important station in my life, because the store

being located on the East Side enabled me to make a new set of friends, and I would say many of the friends today are friends that I have made because I worked on the East Side with a large Jewish population.

SL: What part of Milwaukee were your friends from?

LK: Most of my friends were on the east side also, from the east side. Some of them were over on the west side.

SL: And where did you live when you first came to Milwaukee?

LK: When I first came I lived on the west side. It was also with a Jewish family, who rented me kind of an apartment setting.

SL: And what year was that that you...?

LK: That was in '53.

SL: You were single at the time?

LK: I was single at the time.

SL: How did you meet your wife?

LK: It was a blind date. I was fixed up by some friends of mine who knew Lorraine and knew me and they thought that would make a good [sounds like; *khille*] so to speak. But not really. But anyway, I dated Lorraine for about a year, and we got married. That was in 1954.

SL: What was Lorraine's maiden name?

LK: She's an Eder twin. She's known by that designation very well in this city. She has a twin sister who's very much like her. She is a medical technologist. At the time, she worked for two or three physicians in an office, and we had something in common there besides other things.

SL: She is Milwaukee-born and bred, right?

LK: She's in Milwaukee, yes. Born and bred in Milwaukee.

SL: So did you then acquire another set of friends through people that she had grown up with?

LK: Not really. I would say of all the friends that we have, 99 percent of them are my friends. Because Lorraine did not live in Milwaukee. She was a newcomer to Milwaukee too. She lived on the West Coast for many, many years, from the time she graduated to the time she met me, practically. So she really didn't have too many friends here. And most of my very close friends are really my friends.

END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 2

TAPE 6, SIDE 1

SL: We can continue talking about your family. You were married in 1954 and you have three children, do you want to tell me their names and dates of birth?

LK: The first one to come was a boy by the name of Steven Zalman, named him after my father. As a matter of fact my son prefers to be called Zalman. He was born in 1955 on May 9. The next one was a girl by the name of Ann Irene. Ann is after my mother; Irene is after an aunt of hers who happened to have died the same week she was born. She was born in 1957 on December 23. Then comes Rita Rifka, she's named after my oldest of the non-surviving. She looks like her, too. She was born in 1959 on January 3. They are all away from home now. Anne is, I mean Steven graduated in Chinese history and Chinese language. So far all he can do is maybe make a Chinese meal. However, he continues his Chinese language studies on a part-time basis while he's working.

SL: Where is he working?

LK: He's working at the Ovens of Brittany in Madison as a part-time waiter and cook, that kind of stuff, while taking some Chinese language courses at the university. One of these days he'll decide which way he'll be going. He did apply for an exchange program to China. My daughter Ann graduated from Bar-Ilan University this year, or last year, 1979, in psychology. Bar-Ilan has a world-known psychology department. She is presently in Seattle, just on a temporary stay here in the States. That's what she tells me. She is very fluent, almost perfect, in Hebrew. The Israelis tell me that they cannot tell her apart from a *sabra*. I'm very delighted about that. I speak Hebrew somewhat myself and to have a daughter or child that speaks the language so fluently is quite heart-warming. Rita is still in school, she's a junior. She is still in pharmacy, in a pharmacy program. I'm not sure if she's going to continue. She says she doesn't want to work as hard as I did. She's good at it, however. She also, by the way, is very fluent in Hebrew. She spent a year in Israel and she has been taking Hebrew language courses from the time they started giving it at Nicolet, which is the high school here. And she has continued it through all their programs

including the programs given at the university now. To my recollection she has never had anything worse than an A in her studies. Also speaks very fluently, very well, very beautifully.

SL: Okay, you now have your own pharmacy that's down on the south side of town. When did you start your own business?

LK: I opened my pharmacy in 1961...no. The first pharmacy I opened was in 1957. It was about 5 miles away from my present pharmacy which I opened in 1961. It is lower-middle class, German, no, primarily Polish, Polish descent. It's a solid non-changing neighborhood. At least it withstood any changes that I can observe.

SL: When did you move into this house that you have here?

LK: We've been living here since 1960.

SL: Where were you living before then?

LK: Before that it was in an apartment where all our children were born. It was on the East Side, on Fairmont, I think, yes.

SL: Do you speak English at home with your children?

LK: Yes.

SL: Do they speak any of your native languages? Either Yiddish or any Hungarian?

LK: They do not.

SL: Do you converse with them at all in Hebrew?

LK: Yes we do.

SL: But your wife doesn't understand?

LK: My wife does not and that is what makes it difficult. And my wife being American made it impossible for us to converse in Yiddish or any other language that I would have liked to converse in. So my children are only bi-lingual in terms of Hebrew and English.

SL: How many languages do you speak?

LK: Well, I can understand and somewhat converse in English, in Hebrew, in Hungarian, in Yiddish, I have forgotten a lot of Czech, German.

SL: Do you know any Russian at all?

LK: Very little. I can read it, I can understand some of what because the Russian language is very close to Ruthenian and Czech. And I would say that if you master one of them it is very much easier to understand the rest.

SL: How do you converse with your clients at the drugstore?

LK: Interestingly enough, everybody thinks that I must be speaking or I must have the knowledge of Polish. This is second and third generation and none of them speak Polish, so even the slightest or the easiest greeting in Polish has them puzzled.

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

LK: I would say they know quite a bit more than a child who does not have a parent as a survivor. We have never made it a point of making it a routine subject matter. However, they couldn't help but overhearing a lot of it. And anytime a question came up in respect to their grandparents or relatives you couldn't help but absorbing quite a bit of it.

SL: Do you think your children faced problems in school because of your circumstances? The fact that maybe they only had one set of grandparents or no relatives on your side?

LK: I would say no. Not at all.

SL: In comparison to other families do you see your children overachieving maybe to compensate for some things that you couldn't do yourself?

LK: Not really. I consider them quite normal.

SL: Do you think your family is closer to one another than other American families that you've seen?

LK: In terms of what?

SL: Maybe the responsibilities that you have towards one another, the caring for one another, respect.

LK: You know that this is interesting but I expect this answer to be given at some later date. I think that the ultimate test is really not come yet. I think that what happens to them and their more important decisions of more consequence, such as will come in to account as to who they decide they are going to marry, when it comes to some more important bridges to cross that will tell really whether or not they have respect and love and appreciation for me and for their parents. The fact that they are courteous and they care in terms of calling wherever they are if they are delayed to make sure we don't worry I think are all very important but this any good, well-behaved, well-trained child would do anyway.

SL: Do you see yourself as a more concerned parent than some of your other friends?

LK: I really don't. I think I have tried to avoid that pitfall. I think I am no more concerned or no more overindulgent with my children than really my next door neighbor is.

SL: I would just like to pursue for a little bit the contact that you have with your sister and brother. When did your brother come to the United States?

LK: Well he came about two years after I got here and my sister came about a year after that.

SL: And do you see them frequently?

LK: I see my brother every year regularly. My sister, who is physically not as well, her I also see at least once a year. She has been here, we have been over there. She has had some very serious operations. She was born with a dislocated hip which at that time was something they did not do much about. And she has been, as a result of that she has had a number of operations, very serious operations. The last one, which occurred just very recently, and Lorraine went, made a trip to Providence to see her when she got out of the hospital. But we talk to her quite frequently. And my brother who is a very successful businessman in Florida, we see him at least once a year, if not more.

SL: Who are your closest friends in Milwaukee? They seem to be people that you met when you were, in your days at the university.

LK: Right.

SL: Do you have any close friends at all who are survivors?

LK: Not at all. I do not know of a single survivor who would be a close friend. No.

SL: Traditionally there's been animosity in the Jewish religion between the Eastern and Western European Jews in the way they thought of one another culturally. Has that been something that you have felt? I guess, first of all, how would you classify yourself?

LK: I'm an Easterner. I'm a Galitzianer.

SL: Have you ever met Western European Jews with whom you felt some sort of animosity because of this difference?

LK: Well, right. The first time I met them was in the concentration camp. Because when I was taken to Komárom, that's the first time I ran into the so-called Western Jew. Many of them came from Budapest, very supposedly rich, wealthy families. They somewhat looked down on us. However, my personal experience, and my personal relationship to them was that of friendliness and of no animosity at all. As a matter of fact, if you recall, I met those, like that family that was the producer of wooden nails and got very close to them. And then that tailor who came from behind the Danube was another one. There were quite a number of them who took me in, in their midst, invited me to their homes when it was still possible and I never felt any animosity. The subject came up more after liberation during the creation of the camps where the groups were openly fighting each other in terms of controlling various aspects of camp life. And that was very evident. It went to the extent of physical disputes between each other. When the camp so-called various governmental agencies that were formed to rule the camp. It was just amazing the animosity between them. The distrust and what have you. It went so far that various camps were known to be only Hungarian camps, German camps, Galitzian camps, Litvicha camps, because sooner or later if you ended up, if you was a Galitzian and ended up in a Hungarian camp you just left it. So sooner or later the camp became whatever the majority happened to have been. Being somewhat on the outside after I got the job of supervising certain activities this became very evident.

SL: Have you run into any of that situation here, say in Milwaukee, running into Western European Jews who are now Americanized?

LK: Yes, I would say, as a matter of fact we happen to have a relationship with certain people who are of German origin. There are certain things about them that I dislike because of their attitude and respect to their former homeland. I would say I have a certain feeling. Although some would maybe an educated type of feeling because you were set, you were told, you were taught to look for certain aspects of his behavior which I may not have noticed had I not been told about it, if you understand what I mean? I really, it was never an important problem.

SL: Do you belong to any organizations of survivors?

LK: No.

SL: Or lansmanschaft?

LK: As a matter of fact I do not know of any.

SL: I guess you know about the New American Club of Polish survivors. Do you know about that here in Milwaukee?

LK: Only to the extent that I heard it exists but I wouldn't qualify anyway.

SL: You have quite a strong contact then with American-born Jews.

LK: Right.

SL: Do you think that they have made an attempt to understand the experiences that you have gone through? Have they asked you about them?

LK: Yes. I would say the intellectual curiosity about what happened has always been present. I know many of my friends have listened to my story many a time and I'm sure they don't stop to wonder. I would say that, on the other hand if you asked me if I blame them for anything, for any shortcomings that they may have, may be accused of in terms of help or whatever they could have done; not at all. I know that certain events today in the world, where I sit in the same place where they are and the world doesn't seem to be really any different.

SL: What do you think the feelings of American Jews are about the Holocaust?

LK: How can you define that?

SL: The ones that you've talked to, what type of feelings do they express about what happened? Do they express? I know, for example, my mother feels sort of guilt because her cousins who were in Europe were destroyed and she for some quirk of fate, you know, her family was here and not there. And that's her kind of a guilt that she feels and I wondered whether or not anyone that you've talked to has had any kind of feeling about what ...

LK: Well, depending on the given situation and respect of the particular individual it all depends on how far he is removed from his roots. If he, obviously, has had not personal loss whatsoever that he can not at all trace any casualties to what happened he would be somewhat less affected than the person who happens to have grandparents, or uncles, or what have you that he may have lost in Europe. Also it makes a difference, what I have noticed is, to have at least friends or some other relative who may have had losses so that the contact, the informational contact is there and I think that is really what determines. I think as a whole their feelings and so-called paying of debts for what has happening is expressed in their behavior toward Israel. I think that Israel is the embodiment of, as the so-called outgrowth, the logical conclusion or event or development, not conclusion but development, of what happened in the Holocaust. And all you have to watch and notice the persons' concern and support for Israel as if this were an outgrowth of this whole tragic event how much he supports. And I would say I happen to be associated with people who, or friends, who are substantial givers, who are substantial supporters, substantially involved in various activities in support of Israel or Jewish causes. I think it affected my giving. I think Jews what one person may think as being a sufficiently large gift turns out to be very poor in comparison to some other circles who are in no better financial or economic position than others, that's also an educated-type situation, it depends what your influences are. So it varies very much, there is no definition which would cover the answer to this question.

SL: Do you think you could attempt to answer that question to the feelings of non-Jews toward the Holocaust? Any that you have talked to?

LK: On a personal level is one thing. The only ones that I have talked to were the ones that got to know me personally and they feel deeply about what happened. On the other hand it depends, are you talking to a German are you talking to somebody like most of my customers who happen to be Polish also suffered from the Germans. It's so complex that again, you cannot define any of that. I have never run into anybody that has belittled it or thought it to be all hogwash or whatever, that it all wasn't true or anything like that. I really never have put a gentile to test, really see how he feels about it.

SL: What have you told your non-Jewish friends about your experiences?

LK: Very little. I have very few non-Jewish friends.

SL: Have you ever had any particularly unpleasant experiences with non-Jews?

LK: I have not, not since I've been here.

SL: Okay now this is a question that we ask and I'm sure that your reactions are quite different. Just knowing you the way I do already that this may open up a new can of worms, but how would you feel if your children married non-Jews?

LK: I would be terrified. I'd be very upset. I feel that all the sacrifices were for naught, were for nothing. I think that, when you asked me about the question about my children, about their respect or their concern about me, that's when that's going to come to test. This is the ultimate test. I feel very, very deeply about that. I think this is one of the crucial, crucial problems. What was it all about then? What did I need to bother, if it comes to, especially for my children, I could see if maybe down the line. But my own children, if they don't see that then it's silly.

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

LK: I don't belong to political clubs. Social clubs, I belong to professional social clubs. I belong to Jewish pharmaceutical fraternity. We belong to various Jewish organizations. My wife is very active and was always very active in ORT, of course attended all the events, all the dinners and all that stuff. She is very active now with the Haifa University, the Technion. Other than that, no.

SL: Okay, I'm going to have to turn the tape over again.

END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 1

TAPE 6, SIDE 2

SL: I'm going to talk about just some of the, the part that religion plays in your life, so to speak, in your everyday life. You used to light the *pielen* and be fairly religious but how often do you go to synagogue now?

LK: Not very often. I would say maybe a dozen times a year.

SL: Holidays and whatnot?

LK: Holidays and once in a while on Friday nights.

SL: Did your children receive a Hebrew school education?

LK: Yes they did.

SL: Through the synagogue?

LK: Through the synagogue.

SL: What type of affiliation would you say you have?

LK: It was reformed.

SL: Do you have any traditions in the house? Any rituals that you do in the house?

LK: Yes we do, we light the candles with regularity. We do not have outright [sounds like; trafe] things in the house. When Anne visits we turn the house into a Kosher home. We observe most of the holiday rituals.

SL: You have a *seder* and you light the [Chanukah candles].

LK: *Seder* and *Chanukah* candles, and that kind of stuff.

SL: How have your feelings of religion changed since your Holocaust experience?

LK: Well, obviously it is changed because I do not have the same house as my parents had. Very little of it, as matter of fact, very little of it is left. I would say that the reason for it is that to a certain degree I have felt that religion, as it was practiced by my parents, has not given them or has given me any refuge or consolation or whichever way you want to put it. Also basically I have not lost faith; I believe in God, I believe in the Almighty. However, what I have lost is His either ability or willingness or for that matter whether it was ever so that God has taken each human beings' fate in His own hand and manipulated it.

I just, that I don't believe and as a result of that I think I have lost that intimacy that my parents used to have with Him. I feel that He is doing the big, in other words, He is more on a universal level, on a more cosmic level rather than a personal level. I don't believe in a very personal God.

SL: Because of what you saw?

LK: I think that is part of it. I have never really delved into it. I have never really made an issue of it. I have never come to conflict with it. But I somehow feel comfortable just with this view.

SL: What types of newspapers and magazines do you get in the house?

LK: Religious and non-religious?

SL: Just name them.

LK: Alright, so we get *Time*. First of all, the daily Milwaukee papers coming regularly, *Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle* was coming regularly, then *Time Magazine*, the *New Yorker*, New York magazine, the *New York Times* whenever I can get a hold of it. *Jerusalem Post*. Those are the magazines we subscribe to.

SL: What about this Czechoslovakian magazine here?

LK: Yes. I beg your pardon, I almost forgot. During our visits to my aunt in Czechoslovakia she wanted to make sure that I don't forget her country, her homeland. She must have subscribed and given me a lifetime subscription to the magazine called Czechoslovinski Sveyette. Which means the Czechoslovak World. And I do just glance at it, look at it and I usually give it to somebody I know who is much more interested.

SL: Are you able to read and understand the Czechoslovakian?

LK: Yes, I do it pretty well, not every word, but the gist of it I can get out of it.

SL: Isn't it kinda of propaganda at all? It's really an internal magazine, isn't it?

LK: It is strictly propaganda, as a matter of fact, that's why it turns me off.

SL: Have you read any books on the Holocaust?

LK: Whenever my wife lets me get away with it, I do. She usually will censor these things to me. She'll censor the shows. Like she would not let me watch *Holocaust*, although I did watch it. She objects to my

watching or reading anything on the subject. I have not read anything that would deal in details about the holocaust. I would read other things that would be a little bit removed or little bit removed from the details of the holocaust. I personally myself, I would not, I don't like to watch the gruesome details, otherwise the subject matter does not turn me off exactly. Also, as I say it depends upon how detailed it is that is what will either make me, arouse my interest or not.

SL: Did you watch any of the television program?

LK: Yes, I did.

SL: Did you have any reaction to it?

LK: Yes, I thought that considering the immensity of the subject matter I think it brought home something, at least some idea because it is impossible to portray in its gruesomeness and detail and the time. Most people don't realize it lasted years and years and years without let up. And to bring that to the screen with any meaning, it's impossible. And yet I think it must have had an impact.

SL: Did any of your friends become more interested in your experiences after having watched the show?

LK: Not my friends.

SL: Where have you traveled in Wisconsin, different parts?

LK: I've been to the Dells, I've been on the peninsula, I've been up in Rhinelander. I've been to Iron Mountain up to Iron Mountain Michigan. I've been to, I've been practically everywhere.

SL: Have you liked it in one part of the state more than another?

LK: No, I don't like this state. I think it's too flat. I like mountainous country.

SL: How much does Wisconsin remind you of Svaljava?

LK: Not at all, not at all.

SL: Not even the lakes?

LK: No, we didn't have lakes. There was never a flat enough area to have them.

SL: Not even between the mountains?

LK: No, they had rivers. I do not recall a lake; I have never seen a lake in my area. I saw lakes in Hungary and in Germany.

SL: How much happier do you think you would have been living in an area with a larger Jewish population such as New York or Los Angeles?

LK: I wonder about that many times whether I, in a way I miss, I think, I'm losing out on something. I think in a way I think that I'll be short-changed because I was placed in a completely non-homelike environment when I came to Madison. And the reason I say that is because when I did visit, went east and did run into people, or some of my friends managed to get together some old timers that I knew from the other side and there was a certain *haimishkeit*, a certain something that I think I really missed out on. On the other hand, it helped me get along and get acclimated to this country by being thrown so-called to the wolves. So everything has its pluses and minuses, but I think I would like it, not for a regular menu, but I think if I could at least get together with them more often.

SL: How do you feel about living in a state where there's a large percentage of ethnic Germans?

LK: I don't, the language upsets me. Like, for example, we traveled from Geneva to Bern, and the change was so radical, when I got off the train, we intended to stay there for two days and I left after just overnight stay because it reminded me of Germany so much.

SL: Do you see Wisconsin as being bothersome because there's so many Germans?

LK: No. I don't really see that many of them.

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

LK: No particular effort.

SL: Have you felt an obligation to Wisconsin for giving you an opportunity to start a new life?

LK: Not a conscious effort, no.

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

LK: My reaction was that, I did not consider it a threat, let's put it that way.

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

LK: Very satisfactory.

SL: Have you taken advantage of being able to vote?

LK: I voted tonight, I made it a point of doing that. I don't think I've ever missed an election since I became eligible for voting. I follow American politics, American scene quite closely. News is of utmost interest to me, I read the paper regularly. I am very much interested.

SL: How do you feel about the prominence of Jews in American society, such as in politics?

LK: They're not prominent enough. The more the merrier, the better. I feel pride, I feel, I'm proud to be one of them. It's like seeing the, looking at after a airplane accident looking for Jewish names, after an election looking for Jewish names. There's a certain compassion that I cannot help but having.

SL: What do you see are the most important issues that are facing the United States today?

LK: At this moment? Well, I think the important issue is right now is, of course, inflation, energy crisis. I think that the United States should have better defined foreign policy if it is to maintain its position in the world. I think we need a little bit more guts. I would be in favor of more radical actions and responses to some of the things that are happening in the world today. I'm very upset about that, that the post-Korean or Vietnam attitude is not doing us much good. Other than that it's not too bad.

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

LK: To what extent as compared to?

SL: Do you see it as a deep problem or...?

LK: No, I do not see it as a deep problem. I know it exists, I know there are some regions of the country where anti-Semitism is being produced and supported by vicious males and by the airwaves and what have you. I've listened to some of them. It's somewhat frightening but I would say over all I do not believe it's particularly threatening.

SL: Do you foresee a situation arising in America where you would again be threatened as you were in Czechoslovakia?

LK: I don't believe that.

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

LK: I assume that if we are to continue and survive, I think Israel as a state must continue to live alongside them. West Germany is a very important political entity, and for the sake of the state, I think [Israel] must do so. However, I, as an individual, do not have to do so, and I'm sorry, I cannot forgive and that's why I'll always feel a certain, not hate, but non-forgiveness.

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

LK: Oh, definitely. As time goes on it gets more remote.

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

LK: Well, I think it's immensity was so overwhelming in terms of being able to perceive what really happened that a certain amount of time had to pass and we had to step back in order to be able to take it all in and I think that's why the subject matter is becoming more and more, is coming more to the forefront and it's being picked up more and more. If you'll notice the *New York Times* in its critique of books that the number of books coming at such a late date is just amazing. The Holocaust it took 20 years, 25 years to produce. So what I'm saying here that it took time really for it to sink in and we had to so-to-speak get some space in between to really be able to even start analyzing it.

SL: Do you think that it's dredging up old memories that shouldn't be talked about?

LK: Oh, definitely cannot forget it. We must not forget it.

SL: How do you feel about the fact that part of the funding for this project that we're doing is coming from the federal government? Do you feel they have some sort of responsibility towards the citizens to give them the opportunity to have this type of material?

LK: Well, I think that federal government which I always felt should be responsible for the people's education and information; I've always been in favor of the federal government setting the standards and I think some of our problems in our so-called local schools varies so much because of the fact that there are no standards being set. I think a subject of this nature should be and must be funded by the federal

government as an educational source of great importance. I cannot see it happening from the local level because many of the local communities or parts of the country would never get the expenditure for it because the interest isn't there. So I think it must be done by an entity such as the federal government.

SL: Why do you feel it is important to participate in an oral history documentation such as this one on the Holocaust?

LK: I think one thing it may accomplish is to make it more veritable. It isn't just something that you read about but you may have a chance to hear first hand. I think that would be one of the reasons.

SL: I have run out of my planned questions and I just wanted to ask you if there's anything else you felt you wanted to say and that I hadn't put into some sort of structure. You're certainly welcome to talk about anything you want. If you want to. Don't feel like I'm putting you on the spot. If not, it's all right, because we've been talking for a long time.

LK: We have been, and it's getting late. Well, I think that I don't know how much I have contributed to this interview. All I can say is that if this contribution has done anything at all to inform and to, as I said before, to bring it to life about the events of my life and my experiences and if it is at all going to deter anything, even one iota from it happening again certainly I may have accomplished something and I think this is what really we have in mind here; all of us that by retelling the story we may prevent it from happening again.

SL: I think that anybody who listens to this interview can't help but learning something. Thank you very much for doing this for all of us.

END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 2

END OF TRANSCRIPT