

Israel Wolnerman: Oral History Transcript

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Name: Israel Wolnerman (1922 –)

Birth Place: Zawiercie, Poland

Arrived in Wisconsin: 1953, Milwaukee

Project Name: Oral Histories: Wisconsin Survivors of the Holocaust



Israel Wolnerman

Biography: Israel Wolnerman was born in Zawiercie, Poland, on March 16, 1922, and orphaned at 13. When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, 17-year-old Israel was in Zawiercie actively participating in Zionist activities.

In an attempt to spare his older brother, the head of the family, Israel volunteered to work for the Germans. What he expected to be a three-month period of labor became a five-and-a-half year odyssey through 10 German labor and concentration camps. The last camp in which he was incarcerated was Staltach, a Dachau satellite camp. He was among thousands of prisoners from Staltach on their way to annihilation in the Austrian Tirol when the Allies bombed their train and the U.S. Army liberated them.



Israel spent two years at the Feldafing displaced persons camp and married in 1949. The Wolnermans moved to Dorfenmarkt, near Munich, where Israel worked in a tailor shop. Then they immigrated to St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1949. In 1953 they moved to Milwaukee, where they purchased Edgewood Tailors and Furriers and raised three children. Israel was deeply involved with the New American Club (NAC). It was established in 1950 as an organization for Holocaust survivors. The majority of NAC members are from Poland.

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

Tape 1, Side 1

- Family history, immigration to the U.S.
- Settling in St. Paul and Milwaukee
- Receiving help from local Jewish organizations
- Americans' attitudes toward the Holocaust

Tape 1, Side 2

- Reception in St. Paul by Jewish Family Service
- American attitudes toward Nazis
- Organizations that helped survivors
- Israel's wife and children

Tape 2, Side 1 (no Side 2)

- Being a survivor in the U.S.
- Milwaukee's New American Club (survivors' organization)
- Lives of the children of survivors he knows

Tape 3, Side 1 (no Side 2)

- More on the New American Club (survivors' organization)
- American-born Jews
- Marches by American Nazis
- Anti-Semitism in Milwaukee
- Inter-marriage

Tape 4, Side 1

- Israel's children and family life
- Religious practices in Milwaukee
- Milwaukee's Jewish community
- Israel's reading habits
- Depictions of the Holocaust in U.S. media

Tape 4, Side 2

- Reactions to Holocaust depictions in media
- Impressions of Wisconsin
- Milwaukee Jewish community and gratitude to U.S.

Tape 5, Side 1

- More on Nazi marches
- Israel's attitudes about the political climate in Milwaukee
- Anti-Semitism
- Jews in America

Tape 5, Side 2

- More on Jews in America
- American government and politics
- Thoughts on contemporary Germany
- Visits to Poland and Israel

Tape 6, Side 1

- Israel's thoughts on the place of the Holocaust in American culture
- Israel's family and childhood in Poland
- Leaving home to work at age 13
- Life in the cities of Zawiercie and Lodz

Tape 6, Side 2

- Israel's religious life and education as a young child
- Early Jewish immigration to Israel
- Traditional Jewish life in Poland

Tape 7, Side 1

- Israel's siblings and early life
- Memories of growing anti-Semitism
- Jewish life in Poland in the 1930s
- 1939 German invasion

Tape 7, Side 2

- Life under the Germans
- Israel's years in the Nazi labor camps: Auenrode, Johannsdorf, Grossmasselwitz, Neukirch, and Markstaedt.

Tape 8, Side 1

- The Funfteichen and Gross Rosen labor camps
- Transfers to Buchenwald, Bisingen and Staltach concentration camps
- Concentration camp living conditions, beatings, contact with women and guards
- Psychological effects of camp life

Tape 8, Side 2

- Transport by train to extermination camp
- Rescue by Allied troops
- The Feldafing displaced persons camp
- Unpleasant visit to his hometown
- Marriage
- Postwar life in Germany

Tape 9, Side 1 (no Side 2)

- Israel's business life near Munich, 1947–1949
- Preparing for emigration
- First impressions of the U.S.

About the

Interview Process:

The interview was conducted by archivist Jean Loeb Lettofsky in Wolnerman's shop on March 9 and 16, August 11, and November 18, 1980. The four sessions totaled eight hours. The interview does not proceed in chronological order because the archivist first asked questions about specific subjects for a presentation that spring and summer.

Audio and

Transcript Details:

Interview Dates

- Mar 9, 1980; Mar 16, 1980; Aug 11, 1980; Nov 18, 1980

Interview Location

- Wolnerman's business, Edgewood Tailors and Furriers, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Interviewer

- Archivist Jean Loeb Lettofsky

Original Sound Recording Format

- 9 qty. 60-minute audio cassette tapes

Length of Interviews

- 4 interviews, total approximately 8 hours

Transcript Length

- 107 pages

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Pictures:



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Transcript

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Key

JL Jean Loeb Lettowsky, Wisconsin Historical Society archivist
IW Israel Wolnerman, Holocaust survivor

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

JL: Now, Mr. Wolnerman, let's talk about your family background. If you could you tell me your date and place of birth, names of parents and grandparents and if possible their dates and places of birth.

IW: I'll give you my date of birth but I probably couldn't give you my parents' date of birth. I was born in Zawiercie, Poland , March 16, 1922. My parents' date of birth I unfortunately can't remember. They passed away at the age, my father at 61 and mother about approximately 50.

JL: What were their names?

IW: My father's name was Bernard Wolnerman. My mothers' name was Frances or Fermida.

JL: And their maiden names?

IW: Baumherzig.

JL: When did they pass away?

IW: My father passed away in 1935, my mother passed away three years later, about 1938.

JL: So we could make the computation. And the grandparents, do you remember?

IW: Unfortunately, none.

JL: And their names?

IW: According to my recollection, mine grandfathers' name was Samuel and one grandmothers' name was Ita or Irene. This is on my fathers' side, on my mothers' I have no recollection whatsoever.

JL: That's fine. And do you know where they were born?

IW: They were all born in Poland, I have no knowledge of place of birth.

JL: Now as we agreed earlier, we can skip a bit, not follow the chronology of your life but skip to the American experience. I'd like to begin with your boarding experience at Bremenhaven. Could you tell me what the voyage was like?

IW: Very rough because it was not a regular passenger ship. It was a small military boat which was used primarily for transportation of soldiers back and forth. With no comfort such, the accommodations were poor. They were multi-bed rooms, so to speak. Sanitary accommodations were very poor, so was the dining room and food. The trip took about 11 days. [Because of] the choppy waters there was a lot of seasickness on board. We arrived in New York Harbor on October, 1949.

JL: And then directly you went to....?

IW: From New York we were split up into certain groups. Mine group went to St. Paul, Minnesota where I lived for about 3 years until about 1953.

JL: Where did the others go?

IW: All over the states. Depending , you know, on where their papers where made out to. Assuming they were mostly relocated according to their professions or wherever there was space or arrangements made for them. Me and my family and some friends of mine, we were sent to St Paul. Again we lived there for about 3 years and then went to Milwaukee.

JL: Did you have welcoming committees?

IW: In St. Paul there was a presentation from the Jewish Family Service. They greeted us and had arrangements in some hotel for this time being and then we were relocated into an apartment.

JL: You stayed at that apartment the whole time you were there?

IW: At St. Paul?

JL: Yes.

IW: We moved once.

JL: What were your first impressions of the Midwestern state, of St. Paul, of the state in general?

IW: Harsh cold climate, which actually was opportunity as far as my profession is concerned, because I am a furrier by profession and as such, the northern states were probably shall I say the most opportunity as far as work and business.

JL: Did you have time for any other impression?

IW: You mean as...

JL: As far as physical surroundings, and social, people

IW: Well, until we start getting acquainted and started to make some friends. Without a car it was very hard to move around the city. Afterwards, as we begin to learn a little bit about the language we were more able to explore the city and lakes and surroundings over the weekends and so forth. Naturally, the beginning when you move into a city where you do not know the language you are limited, you know, as far as going around and exploring the city.

JL: Could tell me a little bit about how you spent your time in those first years in America. For example, how life was, work, friends and learning the new language to which you eluded.

IW: Myself, I attended twice a week the English language school, to speak. We had lessons in, it was like a community night school. Afterwards, we were learning little bit of citizenship. Mostly we were preoccupied with hard work and looking to earn a living. Times were a little bit rough at the beginning, 1949 and 1950 there was some kind of a recession so it wasn't too easy to get a job. But slowly we settled down and got down to normal life.

JL: What type of friends did you have?

IW: We tried to stay mostly in our group, mostly newcomers, Holocaust survivors and we tried to communicate with people mostly who knew Yiddish or Polish or German until we acquired some knowledge of the English language it was pretty difficult to communicate and move around in other circles. But as time went on naturally, we got acquainted and were able to spread out in the city and make different acquaintances.

JL: Why did you eventually leave St. Paul?

IW: Came to Milwaukee to visit a friend of mine and after a little conversation and persuasion I decided to move because basically Milwaukee is a larger city. The opportunities here presented themselves quite better and besides I got acquainted with a furrier who offered me a job immediately, so little by little we came to the decision and we did move to Milwaukee.

JL: But you were working in the furrier trade in St. Paul?

IW: Yes I did, I worked as a furrier and I came to Milwaukee already having a job and a business. I nevertheless I worked only for a short period of time. Afterwards a small business represented itself to me and I made the decision to go into business by myself.

JL: Is that the same business where we are now?

IW: Used to be next door, but it is more or less the same location, yes.

JL: Where did you live when you got to Milwaukee?

IW: We started out on 18th St. – wait a minute – actually I rented an apartment in 45th St. Again you know, in 1953 the apartment situation in Milwaukee was actually poor. You could hardly get a place to live. The city was a lot smaller. As far as I can recall, I think the limits by then were at that time 60th street, comparing when you take a look around today, we're almost three times as big since then. The city spread out and there were very few apartment buildings at that time. Mostly duplexes and four families beds. We decided then to move to 18th St. because of heating problems, we had to heat with coal and having small children the apartment would not warm sufficiently so we moved away from there, we moved to a heated place on 18th St. We had gas heat I think.

JL: And how long did you live there?

IW: Let's see... '53 we bought our first house...about five years later. I would say about five years.

JL: And the first house was in the area [inaudible]?

IW: Then we moved to 65th St where we purchased the house and we stayed there for oh about another 5 years and then we moved to 91st St., where we have been living ever since.

JL: What was your first impression of this city?

IW: It looked as a industrial complex a lot easier to find work. The people who settled down here were mostly employed because of different factories and all of that. At the beginning none of our people went into their own businesses. But little by little everybody kind of spread out and found their little outlet or little business and the settled down and slowly prospered.

JL: What comparisons would you make between St. Paul and Milwaukee or generally between Minnesota and Wisconsin?

IW: I would say St. Paul, we're going back to 1949, St. Paul was, well I'd call it a city but not a huge city it was more or less I would say a big town where mostly small farmers or whatever come into the city to make purchases but I wouldn't call St. Paul a big city, it was a mediocre city. Milwaukee looked a little bit more impressive but even so in the fifties Milwaukee was pretty well condensed into a small area. The building started out around '55 going out, otherwise Milwaukee is, I would say a multinational city. Basically, a lot of Germans and Poles, Jewish community is pretty well organized and active and most city life. The people who emigrated, mostly Jewish people have been pretty well taken care of.

JL: We've talked about your early years in St Paul, could you talk a bit about your early years in Milwaukee, again, the type of work you did but more about your work and where you lived we did talk about that, and English where you learned better or more.

IW: I learned this as I went along, I am a devout reader. I sat to read newspapers and books. By doing so and a little bit of education I acquired in night school, I got along pretty well and in I would say in about three...five years I was able to communicate and read and pretty well make myself understood as well as understand someone else. It was not easy not knowing the language at all when I arrived here in this country but with the children going to school and having to speak with them, the language, we probably learned by just necessity. As far as mine business life in Milwaukee, I've been in the same business for the last 25 years, 26 years. I've been making a living, made a lot of acquaintances a lot of friends and I hope to continue the same thing.

JL: When did you become naturalized and how did you feel?

IW: We proceeded with our citizen papers after five years living in this country. We had some help in citizenship, we educated ourselves and we went to night school, especially me. My wife, really, didn't have that much time to attend school but surprisingly she is doing pretty well, you know, comparing to a lot of people who have been living in this country since God knows what! So I think overall she manages pretty well. She reads, she writes she can do probably as well as anybody else. So there are no difficulties as far as language is concerned. Our children are probably as normal as any American born. My eldest was born overseas, the other two were born in this country and I would say they're probably as average as any other children in school.

JL: I'd like to get back to the naturalization. Did you have any special feelings that you could talk about when you were naturalized, when you became an American officially?

IW: You know you get a feeling that you are starting anew. It's like you're adopting or being adopted, it goes both ways. You prepare yourself. You have some kind of apprehension and some fears. Will I make it or will I not? You actually are not capable to judge your knowledge in language and history and laws and construction of government and the numbers of senators and congressmen. I had that feeling, at that time I didn't really comprehend how much we really knew, but afterwards I found out that we really knew more about government and laws and bylaws and amendments and constitution than the average American does. It's a matter of fact that we were supposed to get some help from a lady which was sent to us by the Jewish Federation just to take a look and help us with all of that. She came up to our apartment and we started to talk and she put down her coat and she says, "I think you know more than I do." [Laughs] It was kind of funny. By in large, I do not want to brag and say that all the newcomers had that much knowledge but most people do prepare themselves. They want to know what American government means, what the American constitution consists of what amendments are and legislature and judicial and the whole business. By now probably I am not capable to recall all of that we acquired at that time but it was interesting and I didn't have any difficulty seeing it to pass this test and neither did my wife. There have been cases where people, you

know, had certain difficulties because there was some young people who survived the Holocaust and they did not have any occasion to get any basic education, get any education before the war. For example, in 1939 when the war broke out, some survivors couldn't have been more than 10 to 12 years old, school was interrupted and as such they could not learn. Then came Germany with a different language, and after all when you arrive in a country and you have a basic education in different languages, the chances are that you will acquire languages a lot easier than somebody who has not yet any basic education. So as a result, it's a matter of fact that I was witnessing citizenship several weeks ago with a Polish citizen who was trying to make the citizenship, and I went over with him to the office there and I was sitting in amazement that the man could not read a sentence and was not capable to answer any, I mean, very very simple questions.

JL: He'd been here five years?

IW: He had been here five years. Again, apparently, the man is a child of the war and I found out that he did not get his basic education and as such, how could he proceed over here? I was trying in my humble way to influence the official there, I said "look the man to my knowledge is a decent man, he worked hard to get someplace and probably did not have a chance to learn." But I know he would make a good citizen, I would personally take it on myself to teach him a little bit more about the language. The answer was simple, "if this is the case go ahead teach him, let him come back [laughs], there's no rush. Let him come back in six months, a year or a year and a half. He has got all the privileges as anybody else, the only thing what he does not have is citizenship." In a way I understood. If a man is over fifty, they make allowances. They figure well, if a person is anyplace between 50 and 60 his ability to learn and comprehend is probably less than a young man who could really sit down at night and read and apply himself to the American way of life. But he would not pass it, he did not make his citizenship. The chances are that he will probably go on the way he was and if he goes again he won't make it unless he goes to school and at least masters the basic elementary education. At least the first grade, I don't think he has the ability of first grader.

JL: Do you think that he has the native ability?

IW: No. He might have a little bit. I was surprised when he used to mail packages home he brought them here for me to fill out the cards and all of that. But I thought maybe because his English is not good but apparently, you know again, that's exactly the situation, he's in the forties now, if you take away thirty some odd years, there you are. He was a product of the war and as such he did not get any basic education depending, you know where he lived there.

JL: We're nearing the end of the tape so I'm going to stop here and turn it over.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

JL: Let's talk a bit about the kind of aid you received from the Jewish community when you arrived, with the typical problems of the immigrant and the not-so-typical problems of the survivor.

IW: I would have to go back to St. Paul because when I arrived on Milwaukee, I was pretty well on my own as far as finding employment. But in St. Paul again, we arrived, we were received, we were more or less settled in an apartment and there was a man who was strictly our, well, employed for one reason, as to find employment for the newcomers. I myself were able to secure a job very early after I arrived because the line of work I would have been in had been needed. Under those circumstances I started to work, I'm pretty sure, about a week after I arrived in St. Paul. I've been employed ever since, until I left St. Paul. When I came to Milwaukee, again like I mentioned before, I was pretty well on my own. Going back to St. Paul, the family service was total supported, and what I mean by total supported, a family has been until the man of the family has been employed, the Jewish Family Service came into the house and they worked out a plan of needs. When I say "needs" it means not just food, and they sit down and they worked out, planned for clothing even dry cleaning and a haircut. I mean it was a total plan of what a family needs I'm not talking about luxury but for a family to live with dignity. They were pretty concerned about the children as such, kindergarten. They were concerned about the health of the new arrivers. Each family had an appointment in the dispensary where they had a thorough checkup, medical checkup. All the way through eyes and teeth, basic total physical, so did the children. If there were any sickness in the family, whatever you know, they had been taken care of. The apartment had been supplied with basic needs, like simple furniture and dishes, tableware and food in the refrigerator. By the time a family moved in, the basic needs have been supplied. Again, we are not talking about luxury, but nobody expected any luxury. Overall, we had been pretty well pleased and satisfied with what the Jewish Family Service or the Jewish Federation did for the newcomers.

JL: Was there any time -- you come to Milwaukee, you say you came on your own and then went from St. Paul to here. Was there any reaching out to you as a survivor from the Jewish community in Milwaukee?

IW: The tradition, or so to speak, the responsibility of Jewish Family Service of the Jewish Federation was such when a family arrived in a certain city, it was their responsibility to see that they are at least until they are capable of supporting themselves, they had a responsibility of supporting them. After a family did break out on their own or they moved to a different city, their responsibility was diminished. Because I think, you know, if I can recall they had been told so, if you're going on your own, as long as you stay here, you know, we have certain responsibilities toward you. Again, I didn't consider myself a ward of the state or whatever, I thought 'I am pretty well capable to manage my own life'. I acquired enough knowledge of American life, language and opportunity, so I thought I'll take a look at what I can do by myself and I would say probably succeeded, you know, as much as anybody else.

JL: What types of, in those early years, what types of friends did you have?

IW: Friends at here?

JL: In Milwaukee.

IW: In Milwaukee. Oh, actually, it was a friend of mine who came over on the same boat with me. He had a brother who moved to Milwaukee before. Then, he moved and then I came over to visit and was persuaded, and I moved over here too. There were other friends and acquaintances. It didn't take too long to get pretty well acquainted.

JL: Did you experience any anti-Semitism in the beginning?

IW: I would say probably less than in recent years. I would say the American people were so disgusted with Nazis and the war because after all, the Jews were not the only people who suffered during the war and the American parents who lost their sons in the war in Europe and probably through the hands of Nazis. Their feelings towards us was, I would say, more compassionate, with concern because they knew what we went through. By then the concentration camps and crematoriums were

pretty well known and publicized. There was hardly anybody in this country who didn't know about the atrocities and prosecutions. I would say in those years if a Nazi had walked down in the streets, he had been apprehended not by Jews as such, but probably by non-Jews. You know, unfortunately, nations and people do forget and the democracy, so to speak, in this country is so concerned about freedom of speech and freedom of assembly that they begin to forget that sometimes one's freedom interferes with somebody else's freedoms. And tolerating a Nazi uniform in the streets of cities and being protected by the law enforcing agencies in the cities of America is sometimes questionable. You wonder after all, the American nation went out and fought Nazism overseas and paid dearly for it in human lives and welfare. To be so generous or erroneously naïve to say that Nazis were not good in Germany but Nazis are good in this country, sometimes it puts a big question mark in front of your eyes. You know, what is it all about? What does wars really mean? Why do we fight? We always say, you know, we fight to eliminate evil and then shortly afterwards we kind of seem to embrace it. I would not accuse the American nation of being pro Nazis but in the same time, you know, I would question the wisdom of some of our authorities of condoning Nazi organizations which are totally prejudiced, they are totally against everything, you know, what this nation stands for.

JL: I'd like to ask you, did you experience, in the people's understanding of your experience, did you experience any special acts of kindness in those early years?

IW: In the early years, I would say yes, a yes plus. It was through Jewish organizations and non Jewish organizations. They were compassionate, they were concerned, they were helpful. They thought that it was a unbelievable well, story, so to speak. I could appreciate myself because it was so horrible and so unbelievable but the average decent person would probably find it hard to understand, you know, how anything like that could have happened. It's after 30 years I'm sitting here and trying to recall and it looks like a bad dream. I myself, question myself, you know, "how and why and what and why did it happen?" But the answers, you know, come slowly in my mind after analyzing the horrors in Cambodia and Uganda and Korea and all the other countries where atrocities are being committed

even in these days. I wonder, you know, how much the world really learned and the answers are not available. Apparently, the human species is a very aggressive animal. We talk about it, we disagree with it and it is committed in every generation, probably since the beginning of time.

JL: I'd like to go back to the positive. Would you mind discussing some of the special kindnesses that were offered to you? As you mentioned, you said "yes, plus."

IW: Well, I would have to go back, especially to the Jewish organizations. Which consist of the, we were brought over by the...at that time was it the HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society]? Well, I would say you know about kindness, our passages or our trip was paid for fully, we were never asked to pay back we were received and settled and supported and been taught and educated and embraced into the Jewish community and as such into the whole community in the cities where we lived. Again, you know where we were employed by non-Jews and most of the time have been received kindly. There have been probably, you know, some kind of, maybe some remarks anti-Semitic but of course, you can't help that. But overall, I would say America has opened its arms and really, like the statue of liberty says 'bring me your tired and'. I can't quote it exactly but it's exactly what happened. We came, we settled and we prospered.

JL: I'd like to talk a bit about your family. What is your wife's name?

IW: Irene.

JL: And maiden name?

IW: Maiden name is Wolnerman, too.

JL: What is her occupation?

IW: She is a housewife.

JL: Did she have another occupation before?

IW: No, she never worked. She helped some in my business but never was employed you know, any other place. She raised a family of three children and I always felt that she has been pretty well occupied in all these years [laughs].

JL: Could you tell me the dates and places of birth of your children?

IW: My oldest son was born in Germany.

JL: What is his name?

IW: Joseph Bernard was born in Dorfenmarkt, Germany. He was born in 1948. Mine other two children were born in this country. Fred and Anne.

JL: Now Fred was born here in Milwaukee?

IW: In Milwaukee, no Fred was born in St. Paul and Anne was born in Milwaukee.

JL: And their birth dates do you remember?

IW: [Laughs] As usually, Fred was born in 1953 and Anne was born in 1962. I hope [laughs]. That's terrible.

JL: Your present occupation is furrier and tailor?

IW: Yes.

JL: Do you speak English at home?

IW: We have to because of our children. When we have a personal conversation between me and my wife, we use Yiddish. We use the Yiddish language still when we meet with our close friends. Basically, in my business and my life I use the English language. And again, with the children we conversate in English

JL: Do the kids know Yiddish or Polish?

IW: My oldest son knows Yiddish. He took German as a foreign language and that helped him a little bit with his Yiddish. Mine youngest, Fred, took Latin as a foreign language, and has Yiddish as almost nil. Probably knows a few words but he could not carry on a conversation and neither does mine daughter. It might be unfortunate but I don't know why and how it happened. Maybe we were so anxious to teach them the American language that we forfeit our basic native language.

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

IW: At times, you know, when something drastic happened or something came through on television or a show. We're trying to answer certain questions. We did not make it as a habit to run a Holocaust teach-in. I did not find it, how should I say, necessary or advisable to sit down and keep on telling children, you know, my horrors of the Holocaust. I thought that it would come bits by bits that it would represent itself to them as it comes along and if there were any questions asked, they had been richly answered. But I did not say "come on children, tonight is Holocaust night and I'm going to tell you the story about like, of the night Passover and the story of leaving Egypt." I'm pretty sure that they know enough, but I did not go out of my way to make it as an educational process.

JL: What type of problems do you think that the children might have faced in school because of the unusual family circumstances in that there's no grandparents, no extended cousins?

IW: They were always, how should I say it, I can't express myself as well as I would like. They missed the love and compassion of a grandparent and for that matter any relative, because our family in the city where we live in we have no relatives at all in a lone winter. So there are no uncles, there are no aunts, there are no cousins. We have relied totally on friendships and maybe because of it we were kind of able to keep a group of Holocaust survivors intact because very few of our people did have any relatives as such. So we used to meet and visit and dine and celebrate more or less among our friends. At times, our children called our friends uncles and aunts because they wanted so much to have an aunt or an uncle that they just adopted one. Naturally you know, a child is brought up a lot richer and receives a lot more love when they do have grandparents or aunts and uncles. You know, they get visits, continuous visits in the house and kisses and "how are you" and "how have you been" and all of that. So it was unfortunate for our offspring, they did not have the experience of grandparents or for that matter, any other relatives. We have some distant cousins in the state of New York and New Jersey and in Israel. But in our immediate surrounding we do not have any relatives whatsoever.

JL: In terms of these circumstances, what problems do you think they might have faced in school, at all, because they were different from other children?

IW: I don't think we brought our children in narrow surroundings. If they did have any feelings, I am not aware of it. I don't think that they have been mistreated as children of Holocaust survivors, they spoke the language, they mingled the same way as we did. We did not try to keep them separated and as such I don't think they did really have any difficulty.

JL: In comparison to other families, do you see your children overachieving ?

IW: No, I would probably say they falling into the average American boys. I would not say they were overachiever or underachievers. I would put them in, probably into the average American kids.

JL: I think I'll turn it over here.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

TAPE 2, SIDE 1 (no Side 2)

JL: Do you think your family is closer than other American families?

IW: To a point, you know since as we mentioned before, there are no relatives, no grandparents. We kind of depend on each other a little bit more probably than the average American family. But, again, I don't think I would put a Holocaust survivor family into a special category. I would say they are average people with the average family. They live and exist like any other family in this city.

JL: Do you feel that your children's sense of family responsibility is greater than that of other children?

IW: No.

JL: Do you see yourself as a more concerned parent than others?

IW: Again, you know, I would not like to put our people or the Holocaust survivors into a special category. I would again say that we are probably, in most of the ways average. We go and live and mind our own business. I would not put any special categories on the Holocaust survivors as such. Unless you want to go and dig into a deep psychic experience, well that's a different story, but otherwise, I would not say so.

JL: You mentioned other family, some distant family members around the country and in Israel. Do you have contact with these people?

IW: Yes. We have relatives, like I said, in New York and New Jersey and in Israel, in Tel Aviv. We [are] in continuous contact with them. We write and we attend each other's celebrations like bar mitzvahs, weddings and so forth. And we are pretty well informed about their well beings and their happy occasions and, so to speak, their sorrows. Don't forget that thirty years passed by since, well over thirty years since the last war and most of the survivors are in their, the younger ones are in their fifties and a lot of them are in their sixties. We have to face the realities that a lot of people have been passing on and the number is shrinking.

JL: Now these surviving family members are cousins?

IW: Cousins.

JL: Are they yours or your wife's?

IW: Both, she has some relatives, I have some relatives and that's about as close as you can get. So there are no uncles but we do have cousins.

JL: You talked earlier about friends when you were arriving. Who are your close friends now and how many of them are survivors?

IW: I would probably say, you know, when we go into close friends they are all, most of them are survivors. We do have friends in the city. We have acquaintances. I personally belong to quite a few organizations. I imagine that you probably want to go back to that later, so we'll skip it for the time being.

JL: There has been a traditional animosity between eastern and western European Jews. Have you ever felt it and do you feel it now, although you are all American Jews?

IW: I would not say animosities. I don't know where you arrived with that kind of [inaudible].

JL: It's a bit strong of a word?

IW: I would say it's a bit strong. I do not know where that came from. I would say, as nationalities go, people who lived in different countries probably observed different cultures in their places of origin. They have different languages. We have Yiddish in common but in the last twenty years, a lot of Jewish people, you know, kind of forfeited or forgot to learn Yiddish. Yiddish used to be a universal unifying language for the Jews. For example, the Russian Jews, the Hungarian Jews, the German Jews, they all kind of, as far as language was concerned assimilated into their countries where they were born. And only because of that, you know, a different culture has developed between different Jews when they lived in different nations of in different countries. Again, you know, I would emphasize, you know, I would not call that animosities. I would say, there are differences, cultural differences, language barriers. But, for example, in the city of Milwaukee, the Federation does not make any differences between one Jew or the other. When a Jew needs help he is not asked "what is

your affiliation” as far as country of origin. They are all treated as Jews, period. Our group did try to be supportive or helpful to the new arrivals as much as we could.

JL: By new arrivals do you mean the Russians?

IW: The Russian Jews, yes. It is not exactly our job to do all of those things because there are institutions in this city, you know, which are a lot better equipped to take care of those things. But they organized themselves as a group and they do have their activities with the support and supervision by the Milwaukee Jewish Center and the Milwaukee Jewish Family Service and the Jewish Federation. So, again, I wouldn't call it animosity, I would say differences in cultural operating.

JL: You already alluded several times to your club, a New American Club. I'd like to talk about that now. Could you tell me something about the history of it?

IW: The club organized itself with the help of the, again, the Milwaukee Jewish Family Service, Jewish Center and the Jewish Federation, in 1950. As a matter of fact, it started very shortly after the arrivals started come in. Jews have a tendency of organizing in groups and like, kind of, to associate with each other. In other words, they like to have social groups. That club was organized, as far as I know, in 1950. It was named the New American Club, has been in existence ever since. It has always been active... Let's put it more in order. We meet every two weeks, we have social evenings, we engage speakers, we bring in films, at one time we brought in Yiddish theatre to Milwaukee. We celebrate certain holidays, we have New Years dances, we have a Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations and we have the Yom HaShoah activities, we are active in selling Israeli bonds. We totally supportive of the state of Israel, we try to do somewhat charitable work but it's very limited because we don't have any funds for that, but in case of a necessity if one of our own is in trouble, you know, we do go out and do help them.

JL: What is the structure of the membership? Who are the members?

IW: The members are strictly Holocaust survivors. The majority are Polish, Polish Jews and some Hungarian, some German but mainly it's a Polish-Jewish Organization. There are in existence, in the

city and I would probably assume that you are in touch with them, like the German-Jews and, I don't think you would be interested in the Russian Jews, as such.

JL: Not yet.

IW: Not yet. But as far as the Holocaust survivors, I would say it's the German-Jews survivors and actually you know, you'll find somebody from all over Europe. There are some French people here, some Romanian some Bulgarian which have been, probably have been in concentration camps. I don't know if they all went back into their, so to speak, homeland. But in mine experiences I have met French and Belgium and Romanian and Hungarian and Czechoslovakian.

JL: In Milwaukee?

IW: No, I'm talking about Holocaust survivors. They are -- I would say there is a pretty good selection almost from any country. I personally don't know all of them, but they are.

JL: And you have some representation, as you say, in the New American Club?

IW: I would say there are some. I would have to dig in, you know, it closer. By now time, you know, pass by and most of them speak English and they don't really care anymore where and what.

JL: Why do you still call yourselves a New Club?

IW: It's like a coat of arms, an emblem or actually it has a no special reason for it. It's because the Club had been named that way. Maybe we should call ourselves the Old American Club because the people are aging slowly [laughs]. We are not as new as we used to be.

JL: What kind of relationship do you have, if any, with any of the New Home Club?

IW: Very little. Again, there is a, just a strictly physical. It's a group of people who came in a certain time and they know each other from their hometowns and as such, they have a tendency to group around themselves, you know. It's like anything else, I would say, Polish survivors or Polish-Jews, they are a group of people from the same towns and there are some relatives. So, as you know, only because of this they get it together. Somehow not as united in the beginning, I remember there was supposed to be some merger between the Polish and the German Jews in a club. Somehow, I don't know why, but

they decided to stay in their own group. Now with the arrival of Russian Jews, again, we thought that they might be integrated in some of the existent clubs but they rather stay among their own people, again. First of all, there is an age difference and there is a cultural difference, a language barrier. They feel more comfortable amongst their own.

JL: I'm curious, excuse me, many of the Landsmannschaften around the country have sort of sizzled out. To what would you attribute the continuing strong qualities of the New American Club?

IW: Again, going back to having, you know, relatives, since we have none, I would say it is considered like a relationship. Don't forget, when a group of people know each other for [what] could almost be considered a life-time. Thirty years is a long time, I would say it gets to be like a habit, you know, it grows on you. If our membership doesn't get an invitation let's say for one reason or another, they say, "how come we are not meeting?". It isn't any more a accidental thing, it's a continuous way of life.

JL: Do you see any continuity with it in the next generation?

IW: As a matter of fact, the group has been organized. I have been in touch with Ateret Cohn and that girl deserves a medal because at one time or another our group had been talking about how to get the group in and we didn't realize the age difference and, what do they call it?

JL: The generation gap?

IW: The generation gap. If she is successful in organizing the second generation survivors, and it looks like she will succeed, it's going to be a tremendous thing because she is very well briefed in Holocaust history and it's going to be like, how should I say, a teacher. She will teach them Holocaust history. It will come out a lot better listening or getting it from a third party then from your own parent. It sounds a little bit more interesting. You know, when a parent tries to tell you a story it's like "you better feel sorry for me, see what happened to me," but there it's history.

JL: Can you perceive a trend in some of the kids perhaps that are older than your son's ages who have gone out of their way to study Holocaust history. Do you think there's a strong trend in that or a trend at all?

IW: In certain cities, believe it or not, the younger people kind of took over the reigns of that same club. For example, I heard that somebody visited Toronto, Canada. He walked in there there was a son of a survivor who was the secretary of that particular club. In other words, that was the kind of mingled in, some of them. I foresee in the future that it might organize itself in societies. Rather than a New American Club or whatever it is, if you look into a Jewish social clubs you will see that societies are this and that, that certain societies in certain cities, which is a way of survivorship actually. I would foresee that maybe someday they'll call it the Society of Holocaust Survivors. Or you know, if enough knowledge is going to be forwarded to the second generation of Holocaust survivors, they will probably continue with it and it might develop itself into a continuous society.

JL: The question is, are they forwarded, meaning are they going out to get it on their own [inaudible]?

IW: From what I heard and I am personally pretty much interested in the context with the management of the new club, you know, because I chaired the New American Club now for the last five years. As a result, I get the information and I get the input and our club took it on ourselves to try to finance that new organization. So we are supportive in more than one way and we pledge ourselves to continue and support them because it would probably be very difficult for us to organize it. But if it comes out spontaneously and under the auspices of the Jewish Center of the Jewish Federation, I am pretty sure that they will have a lot more success than if we would try to do it.

JL: You talked about being the president, are there any other officers and is there voting?

IW: Oh, yes. You know, we have more or less like a little constitution. Which again, it's mainly a social club. We have a sunshine committee in case someone is sick, we visit, we always buy and plant trees in Israel in name of the sick ones. We have a, you know, a secretary and a president and a vice-president a treasurer and a correspondent secretary. So we are pretty well organized, you know, as any other organization.

JL: In the club, the turn of office is how long?

IW: Two years. After it where we have elections and new officers are elected.

JL: Are you a member of any other spiritual organizations or any other organizations?

IW: Yes, I am. I belong to the ORT [Organization for Rehabilitation through Training], my wife belongs to the Pioneers, I belong to the Milwaukee Jewish Council. I am a member, as a matter of fact you know, I just joined the Masons. I am a member of the American Zionist organization. Let's see what else, there must be a few more.

JL: You mentioned the Mogen David Adom?

IW: Yes, I am a member of the Mogen David Adom. As a matter of fact, you know, I am one of the organizers of the Mogen David Adom. The Mogen David Adom in Milwaukee is an offspring of the New American Club, yes. It was organized in Milwaukee by our members and it is still run mainly by New American Club members. It started out, the New American Club wanted to do something for Israel so we couldn't decide what kind of gift to buy to the state of Israel. We did not want to go out and be just for the sake of buying something, so we informed ourselves, you know, what would be the right thing or the most useful thing the state of Israel could use. We have been directed towards Mogen David Adom because one time we thought of buying an ambulance, or some kind of vehicle. The Mogen David Adom said for the time being the ambulances are ample and not needed but they would like if we are willing to make a gift, they would like a blood mobile. A blood mobile is a vehicle which has built in refrigeration and a processing system where in case of need they can go out and receive blood from donors and type it, refrigerate it and when they filled up they can transport it to the front and make transfusions and all of that. So we thought that this would probably be more than just a gift, it would be a gift of life, a life saving vehicle. We went into work, naturally you know, you need money. The estimated cost was around \$40,000. At that time since we wanted to be a tax deductible donation we organized Mogen David Adom. Mogen David Adom is a recognized charitable organization and under that name we have been working and accomplished to buy and pay for the vehicle. And two years ago a group of mainly Holocaust survivors, and I was one of them, went to Israel and presented that blood-mobile to the Mogen David Adom in Israel and it was quite an

experience. So we still are active in Mogen David Adom, we raise funds , as a matter of fact Mogen David Adom is in the process of building a new blood center in Israel. It is going to be a underground facility. In case of war it is pretty well protected against bombing. It is supposed to be, as far as I know, a 10 million dollar building where there are going to be emergency facilities and all kinds of life saving equipment would be stored there. While I had been in Israel, you know...

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

TAPE 3, SIDE 1 (no Side 2)

JL: OK, Mr. Wolnerman, last week we were talking about the New American Club and you also told me about your Mogen David Adom activities. I'd like to ask you now, are you a member of any other organization?

IW: I'm a member of the Milwaukee Jewish Council and...are you talking strictly about Jewish organizations or any other organization?

JL: Others will be fine, you can mention others too.

IW: I joined a Harmony League of the Milwaukee Masons and I'm a member of the ORT. I think that's about as far as it goes.

JL: How active are you in those?

IW: Well, as far as activity is concerned, mainly membership. I don't have any -- I am active in the Committee of Soviet Jewry and I am especially active in the New American Club, but otherwise.

JL: How special a place in relation to the other clubs is the New American Club?

IW: Well the New American Club has a special importance in my life since I've been active in that particular club for the last, at least twenty years. I served as treasurer for four years and I've been president now for four years. I'm keenly aware of the necessity of that particular club since our people need an outlet of gathering and relationship.

JL: Could you talk a bit about the habitual activities of the New American Club?

IW: Again, you know, we are especially interested in the continuation of that particular celebration since in a way it is like a Yom Kippur for the Holocaust Survivors. It is a prayer being said always in memory of the deceased and there are speeches made and commemoration of all who succumbed in the Warsaw ghetto especially. The New American Club is actively participating in that kind of thing, you know. I myself, you know, have been very active in it for the last 4 or 5 years. I was the chairman of Yom HaShoah in Milwaukee in 1978 and it was a very successful day, we had participation from all

over the city and quite a few of the clergy. This year, we already met and the meeting is going to be chaired by Saul Sorrin. They anticipate usually about 500 people at those gatherings.

JL: Besides the clergy, will there also be other non-Jews?

IW: We cannot estimate really how many non-Jews come in. I would say there are some but not very many.

JL: What contact do you have with American born Jews?

IW: Businesswise I am continuously in contact and have conversations, many a times we do run into conversations about where I came from and they are keenly interested in history of Holocaust survivors. How it happened and why it happened. You know, unfortunately, I can't supply enough answers "why?" and "how?" I can testify that it did happen and how it was. Naturally, we, our children have friends and we move around and also grow friends. We are not exactly defined into one certain group of people.

JL: When you have these contents in conversations, do you think the people you talk to understand what you went through?

IW: Well, I don't know how much anybody could understand any situation like that because it's not easy to comprehend, even for those who lived through that particular period. Let alone somebody who just listens to a story which sometimes, you know, sounds so gruesome and so unbelievable people just stand there and shake their heads with disbelief, and I can't blame them because sometimes truths are, is probably more unbelievable than fiction.

JL: We started talking about, just mentioned that it is unbelievable. What, if there are any feelings that people have, what do you think are the feelings of American born Jews about the Holocaust?
[Inaudible.]

IW: Well, there would be a cross section of feelings. For example, people who did have relatives or close relatives in Europe, their feelings go in a little bit deeper than those who just read the papers or listened to the radio or heard the stories from Holocaust survivors. Usually, if something happens to

you, you feel a lot deeper so than when somebody tells you that something happened to somebody. I ran into a lot of American Jews who did have relatives in Europe and some had brothers and uncles and sisters. Most of them told me that their relatives succumbed in the Nazi concentration camps. Naturally, you know, those people are more inquisitive and asked more questions because they probably originated in... [phone rings] Done with it. Is there anything else you want to know?

JL: I would like to ask you now what you think are the feelings of most non-Jews about the Holocaust.

IW: There you touched a very delicate subject. There are people in the United States, I would not want to segregate nationalities because that would be awfully difficult but again, you'll find there is a lot of compassion and, well, feelings coming out of those people. Again, you know, with almost disbelief how anything like that could happen...[phone rings] Oh my... [tape turns off.]

JL: We were talking about the sensitive issue of the American non-Jews about regarding the Holocaust.

IW: Now with the people I came in contact, most of them have been interested, or commented "how" and "why", "how could it happen?" and so forth. But then, here and there you run into people who say "my goodness, it's grossly exaggerated" and "they are making a big deal about it" and "it doesn't sound so [inaudible]," and besides "there weren't only Jews", which is true, there weren't only Jews. But what difference does it make? It still happened, it's unfortunate that since 30 years went by the subject has not been brought up in schools. Since the projection of the Holocaust movie the whole story was kind of regenerated and more talked about, in other words there's a lot more interest now as there ever was about the Holocaust.

JL: I'd like to jump ahead in my questions right here and ask you what your feelings are about the Nazis marching in Milwaukee.

IW: When a question like that is put to a Holocaust survivor, you are arousing every tender feeling and myself, I speak in the name of all the Holocaust survivors. After a tragic war, after a certain segment of people literally drag the world into a total chaos and after most nations of the world went in to fight a malice and finally succeeded to wipe it off. You wake up in the morning and you walk out in an

American city and you see a reoccurrence of this same sickness in uniform with the audacity to go out and proclaim 6 million were not enough, and Jews and blacks have no right to exist. You ask yourself a question, what is it all about? How can a democracy like America allow a small group of people to disturb the tranquility and well being of cities? Because I have been participating in those demonstrations, I've been going out and looked around and I listened to their speeches and they have been surrounded by the Milwaukee police that their precious little uniforms should not get soiled or their precious little bodies should not get, God forbid, injured. And you ask yourself a question why, "where was the world and the United States when those precious Nazis built concentration camps and burned innocent man, women and children? Where were all those protectors?" You ask yourself, "why is something like that allowed?" and "where is this going to lead?", if getting under discussions they say "Huf, don't make nothing of it", "there are just a few of them", "it doesn't mean anything, don't pay any attention." But in Germany, in 1933 a small group of the same Nazi uniformed jerks, met in some kind of a Bierstube and look what developed in short time later. Are we supposed to sit by and observe and listen and do nothing about it and let it grow? There has been organized a group of Jewish people, they call themselves the Concerned Jewish Citizens. There have been meetings and speeches and contra demonstrations. To a certain amount, I suppose, you know, it's helped. But the question is, what kind of approach or what kind of remedy to exercise in a country where freedom of speech is preciously guarded and the freedom of gathering is protected under the constitution. There are different thoughts and different arguments, "if you forbid the Nazis to march, God forbid, some other organization's freedom will be hindered." There is some sense in it after all. We're all interested in protecting the first amendment, and I can't recall exactly which amendment and I can't recall exactly which amendment calls for freedom of assembly and freedom of speech and freedom of newspapers and all of that. But even freedoms have to have some kind of laws, where when one type of freedom interferes with somebody else's freedom, freedom ceases to exist. If somebody can be free to go out and preach genocide or murder or killing of certain segments of the population of a free

country, where is the freedom going? The freedom is disappearing very quickly. You know where is democracy? You know, if there is freedom, there should be freedom for everybody and you can't just call freedom to protect criminals when the innocent is being threatened his life and well-being, and here I am making a speech. I'm beginning to sweat.

JL: Would you like to rest for a little moment?

IW: No, it's OK.

JL: We've talked about feelings of American born Jews and what your thoughts are on non-Jews about the Holocaust. What have you told non-Jews about your experiences?

IW: In the years I have been here, we run into certain conversations. Again, some people approach with a total bewilderment and disbelief and questions all over, "how?" and "why?". Again, as we talked about it before, how much explanations can you give when most of our Holocaust survivors were at the age of anything between sixteen and twenties? The older people perished very quickly, the younger people who were able-bodied and could work and produce were half way kept in order to support the German industry and war machine. How much explanation can you give to a people, you know, who did not live and participate in anything like it? In other words, most of the things, you know, have been written up and documented pretty well in books and history. Those people who read it, know a little bit about it. Those who weren't interested don't show that much interest even today.

JL: Now we've just had a long chat about the Nazis. Have you had any other non-Jews, have you had any other unpleasant experiences?

IW: I didn't get your question exactly.

JL: Have you had any unpleasant experiences with non-Jews, aside from what we talked about earlier, the marchers?

IW: Well, you run here and there into a person or two who violently disagrees with the American government policy supporting Israel and talking about how much money is being taken away from this country supporting other countries, without really realizing what they are talking about. I run into a

specific man, who was a customer of mine, supposedly. He didn't even realize that I was Jewish. It was at a time when there were some fighter planes, were promised to Israel and they were held back. In my case the radio is on all day long and when they announced, I expressed keen interest in what they were talking the radio. When the man listened to the same thing he started disagreeing with the whole policy of America and slowly it turned out that he is of German descent and he was one of those who was probably a pro Nazi or at least his parents were. So after a little discussion, disagreement, we came into some words but then overall I did not run into any special experiences.

JL: On the gentleman coming into the store, is there anything else that you might recollect with this man hearing to the report on the radio? Just on a personal level.

IW: I did not have any personal experience where I would run into special anti-Semitic remarks. Not at least I can specially recall. There might have been several small incidents but nothing special.

JL: How would you feel if your children married non-Jews?

IW: Well, there is no more "if". 'Cause one of my sons, you know, got married two years ago to a non-Jew. They have been married now for two years. There are no children at the moment. To search my soul and to be very objective about it, I did not bring up my children in a segregated atmosphere. We talked many a times, you know, about intermarriage, about religion, about future generations, about difficulties of [the] upbringing of your children, and especially if there are two different religious persuasions. My house has been open for any friends my children were willing to bring in. They have been treated as friends in the house, at the dinner table or in any other place. They were never asked if they were Jews or non-Jews. They were never asked any questions, period. They came as a friend of our children and they were a friend of ours. I would hate to go in at this point and pour out mine heart and make comments about the merits of intermarriage. I don't think that this would be probably the proper place to talk about. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. I think that feelings like that should probably be left to the individual and again, there are different points of view when it comes to intermarriage. That goes for Jews and non-Jews. There are probably as much hesitation or discontent by non-Jewish

parents when they intermarry into a Jew or, for that matter, a Catholic with a Protestant, or whatever it is. To be presumptuous as to come out and start a new, shall a say, create new laws or advice. I don't think, you know, I'm exactly the authority to do that. I cope with my situation, you know, the best way I can, as far as I can see, you know, they have lived happily for two years and I hope that they will live happily for the rest of their lives and make a good home for themselves and I'd be content.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1 (No Side 2)

TAPE 4, SIDE 1

JL: As our last conversation ended when you were talking a bit about your son marrying a non-Jew and your feelings about that. Now I would just like to ask you a bit about your other children, what they are doing, school, work, where they live.

IW: I can't recall exactly if I mentioned my oldest son has a BA in Science. At the moment, he is employed by the Kohl's food market store. He is managing a liquor department. My youngest daughter Annie is 17 years old in the last year of high school, should be starting college in about a year or so.

JL: And your middle son, the one who's married, he lives in town?

IW: No, he moved to Atlanta, Georgia. He is employed in some kind of a company which I don't recall the name, data processing and a computer department. I hope he will settle down and lives happily over there.

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

IW: I would say not more, not less than any other parent. As Jews, we were trying to have some influence to develop a possible love for Israel, tried to steer them into Jewish youth organizations. They were all prepared for their bar mitzvahs, they all attended Sunday school and we had an open house. They were never taught any prejudice or discrimination. They were never taught not to bring certain friends to the house. Our house was open to all their friends and still is.

JL: So you never objected to any of their friends?

IW: Not really.

JL: Okay. What activities or forms of behavior did you forbid your children to engage in?

IW: They knew that they should not stay out above a certain time during weekdays. During school days usually they had to be home by 10 o'clock. Over the weekends, midnight was a curfew. I couldn't think of anything special that they were limited in.

JL: Any special activities that you encouraged?

IW: Yes, as I mentioned before, I was happy to see them when they were active in youth organizations. They attended summer camps. My oldest son was a water front director in youth camps for several years. Right now, he is actively engaged in leading a Israeli dance group in the city which has been active in it for quite a few years.

JL: Now, to you, what are your hobbies or special interests?

IW: Well, I fancy myself to be a very open-minded fellow. My interests are broad. I could actually develop interest in almost anything. At the moment, I am very active in presiding the New American Club or the Holocaust Survivors Club which I have been chairing for the last 5-6 years. I'm a member of the Milwaukee Jewish Council, I'm a member of the board of director s of the Israeli bond office. I'm a member of the ORT I try to attend almost anything you know, which has a cultural value in the city of Milwaukee, you know, especially in Jewish organizations.

JL: Besides these group and Jewish things, do have any special hobby for yourself?

IW: Being a small business man, my time is quite limited. So I would mention my poker games.

JL: [Laughs] Are you active at all in political organizations? I see how avidly interested you are.

IW: I never registered as a Republican or Democrat. I never vote in a party line anyway. I choose the man I can understand and learn to like him for what he stands for. That is the reason I never joined any political organization as such. I am open-minded, as a matter of fact, sometimes in time of elections I try to engage a speaker for our group in order to enlighten them with issues and answers.

JL: How large a part does religion play in your life, such as synagogue attendance, rituals?

IW: I keep religion as a heritage. I am not a year-round temple attendance. I observe the high holidays. My house is semi-religious . My children were brought up with the knowledge that they are Jews. I never imposed on them any strict religious boundaries. I'm stating this fact, you know, not to emphasize that I am proud of it or that I am criticizing myself because of it. I'm stating a fact that I did not want to insert into my children a deep national pride because sometimes, you know, it can be overdone.

JL: You mean for Israel?

IW: No, I'm talking strictly as a religious identity. When we're talking about Israel it's -- I recognize this as a nationality. I'm talking now strictly about the religion, or since for years I've been thinking, you know, that the differences between religions create a lot of prejudices and I try not to insert into my children the religious prejudices like, "mine is good, yours is bad" or "I won't eat in your house and you don't eat in my house". My children were allowed to eat in their friends' house and so did their friends eat in our house. I try to keep them open-minded and without any prejudices.

JL: Which synagogue do you belong to?

IW: Believe it or not, the Orthodox. The congregation of Agudat Achim, I was introduced to it right at the beginning when I came to Milwaukee through friends and I stayed with it, you know, over the years.

JL: You started saying, earlier you said your children were educated, were they educated Jewishly in that Agudat Achim?

IW: Yes, they were introduced to the Hebrew language and the Hebrew prayers by our rabbi. They attended services together with us in all of the holidays. They attended the Sunday school until they were bar mitzvah.

JL: Just Sunday. Did they have religious school in the middle of the week, too?

IW: They did attend it twice a week, yes, for special introductions. Usually, they go twice a week plus Sunday when they prepared for the bar mitzvahs.

JL: How have your own feelings about religion been affected by your Holocaust experience?

IW: During the concentration camp years, I have to admit that my religious upbringing and the inserted deep belief in God, especially in the almighty God, many a times I asked myself the eminent question, "*eli, eli, lama asavtani?*" Where is the justice? Why do you sit up there and watch your people being tortured, murdered, children chopped and gassed? I couldn't reconcile, you know, at that particular time how a people, you know, who have been brought up with a fear of God and the deep belief in justice of humanity, to watch a whole nation being totally annihilated by a murderous group marching around in shiny boots and taking, you know, most of the world. It's awfully hard in a situation like that

to preserve your deep religious belief and justice in a justible God. I would say that little by little when a person ages a little bit and is ready to face his maker, you begin to slowly to turn. You know, I don't know how much logic or how much fear, but it has been mine experience that with age, people begin to think a little bit deeper of what life or death is all about or you begin to wonder, you know, about the hereafter since you're getting close to passing over that threshold. I would hate to admit this in a regular conversation, but sitting here I have been asked a question about my religious convictions. I would say I am in a process of reanalyzing or researching my real feelings about religion as such, and particularly the Jewish religion, which I was brought up in. To be truthful, I couldn't really answer that particular question at the moment.

JL: You mentioned this fellow who came into the store and discovered that you were Jewish after you heard a report on the radio about the United States giving some fighter planes to Israel and this man's underlying anti-Semitic comment about the US giving so much to Israel. Have you felt any other discrimination in your dealings with the public, because you do meet the public so much?

IW: I would probably consider myself lucky for in my overall in my business associations, I hardly, very seldom ran into a particular person who directly expresses himself to be anti-Semite. Maybe because my approach to a lot of people is strictly open and undiscriminating and maybe because a lot of people, maybe don't know that I am Jewish. Not that I am hiding it, just the opposite, but I couldn't really count that many times when my business was hit with that discrimination or that people did stay away because I am Jewish.

JL: Also, a long time ago, you said to me that you were a devoted reader, could you tell me what kinds of things you like to read and in what languages?

IW: I can recall times in mine youth I've been reading Polish books and Yiddish to a point. When I lived in Germany I did read German. At the moment I haven't really got much time to read and I hope you are not going to ask me the names of the books I read. But I, again, I read habitually, again without

special -- there was a time in my youth when we were instructed to read certain things. Later on we just read.

JL: What newspapers and magazines do you receive?

IW: We have the Milwaukee Journal, the Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle, the Milwaukee Sentinel. We used to have the Post. That's about the most we read right now.

JL: Do you read magazines?

IW: Not especially.

JL: I said I wouldn't ask you anything about books that you would read, except, have you read any books or articles on the Holocaust specifically?

IW: I did, as a person who really lived it for 5 years, many a things which I read did not make on myself, you know, that big of an impression as it would probably to people who heard about it the first time. As a result, I glanced through some but I wouldn't say that I read the whole MacGuilla.

JL: What was your reaction to the *Holocaust* TV series? Did you watch it?

IW: I did, definitely I did. My first impression, when I was invited to a preview to channel 4, where they invited certain amounts of Milwaukee leaders from different organizations. There were some representative from the clergy, school principles, representatives from the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, the Milwaukee Jewish Council and also I was representing the Holocaust Survivors of Milwaukee. We were privileged to see the first segment of the *Holocaust* without interruption and without advertisement. I was sitting there and emotionally lived through the whole tragedy all over. Even so, I managed to observe the other attendants where they were sitting very quietly and you could literally observe or listen to heavy breathing and when it was over you could see that most people were just sitting there on their chairs. They were glued down to them with their heads bowed and taut. When the commentator asked for some comments most people didn't say anything, as a matter of fact, nobody had any comments. They were just sitting there. The only people who did have any comments were myself and a friend of mine. My comment was, after nobody said anything, I said,

“observing the attendance here,” I say, “I assume all the people here are very nice people. They have no comment. Neither did those nice people during the Hitler regime. When they dragged out their neighbors and they robbed Jewish stores those all nice people did not have any comments. They did not approve, God forbid, but did not disapprove either. They locked their doors, they locked their windows, they grabbed their kids, they said “don’t go out their” and “don’t interfere.” Sure they didn’t help, but they didn’t help the Nazis but they didn’t help the Jews, neither. Those were the nice people. They had no comment and neither do they have today.” I would say that still the silence was not interrupted by nobody.

JL: What did the other person spoke of?

IW: He made some comments about the same direction as we did. Unfortunately, no discussion was developed. Personally, I think the people felt a certain amount of guilt. Unfortunately, it is thirty-some odd years after the Holocaust and it sounds more like a story than a real fact of life. As any piece of history, you know, when you sit down and read, it is interesting. It is sometimes horrifying but very, very distant away from your personal life. Again, I, my personal observation is that unfortunately nations or people learn very little from their past history. Generations come and generations go. The stories beginning from the Exodus from Egypt, going through all the pogroms and discriminations are in the Jews themselves you know. [They] sometimes, you know, have the tendency to forget what really happened, you know, to them.

JL: We’re going to turn it over here.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

TAPE 4, SIDE 2

JL: I'd like to ask you now how generally your friends and other people that you knew reacted to you after the *Holocaust* series was aired. Was there any difference in the way they acted towards you?

IW: Are you talking about Jewish friends?

JL: Jewish and non-Jewish friends.

IW: In 1949...

JL: The *Holocaust* series, the series on TV.

IW: I didn't follow your question really.

JL: You were telling me you went to an airing, to a preview of the TV. Unfortunately the name is the same, the docu-drama, the TV representation of the Holocaust. You went to a preview for that, and then after it was aired to the public, how did friends react to you, acquaintance, was – did people act differently or did they want to know things now that this was aired on TV?

IW: I would say there was tremendous interest in the Jewish and non-Jewish world. A lot of people expressed themselves in bewilderment and almost in disbelief that an epoch or a piece of history developed in that light of horror. I have been asked many a question, I have tried to answer them and maybe fill in a few gaps in that particular dark chapter of history since I lived it. I mean overall, in the non-Jewish population it has been, I would say, an enlightenment or a new view of the World War II and the prosecution of Jews in Nazi Germany. As far as some of my Jewish friends, there was I have to admit, you know, a mixed reaction. Some admitted that they had to turn off the television because of that strong of an emotional reoccurrence or a reawakening of those tragic years. That it was totally sickening for them. As a result, I found out after watching the first segment or part of it, they never went back to it. Because the emotions were so, I would say, aroused that they weren't able to cope with it. And either I or -- myself, I watched it all through. As a matter of fact, I watched two previews twice, where I was invited to the station. Plus I watched all the series, you know, on television. I would say it was a dramatization, but no writer or no actor could portray the real tragedy of World War II and

especially the Jewish tragedy in Europe. Beginning with each family and finishing with the whole Jewish nation in Nazi Europe. How do you tell a story where families, eight or ten or twelve with survivors or one or two or sometimes even none? Myself, I'm the only survivor in my family. I assume that I have mentioned that I had three sisters and a brother. A married sister with three children and none survived. How do you tell a tragedy like that? How do you portray it in a show or in a movie? For that matter, how do I portray it, you know, my story? What is there to say? How do you express your feelings or how can anybody else feel what you feel? It's difficult, but even so, the Holocaust portrayal was at least a piece of history for those people who did not live through it. I would say, overall it was received favorably well. I would say it was received with a lot of interest. I would say that a lot of people were enlightened with the portrayed of the particular Jewish German family which was not exactly a deeply religious family, it was, again, an integrated family, a half assimilated family that could not escape the tragedy from the Nazi atrocity.

JL: I would jump a bit and I'd like to ask you about Wisconsin. Where have you traveled in Wisconsin?

IW: I arrived at the beginning and settled down in St. Paul in 1949. I lived in St. Paul for about three years. Afterwards, I moved to Milwaukee. I have been traveled around occasionally to Wisconsin Dells and to other parts of the state. I wouldn't say that I explored the whole state, but here and there we drove around.

JL: What parts have you most liked?

IW: The north, it's beautiful where there are a lot of woods and lakes. We have been to Fish Creek, Sister Bay, the whole county there, it's beautiful in the fall. We drove around in the whole area there. So again, occasionally we took our car and drove around in the state.

JL: How much does Wisconsin remind you of your home in Europe?

IW: As far as the climate is concerned, it's pretty close. We have about the same period of winter, spring and fall and summer. We weren't particularly offset, you know, with the climate. As far as a comparison, I would say Poland at my departure time was a little bit more primitive, smaller streets,

more primitive housing, poor transportation. Life altogether was at a different scale than life in the United States.

JL: Geographically, there's no comparison?

IW: Well, geographically, you're talking a country which is about the size of a state of the United States.

JL: I mean in terms of at least, topographically.

IW: I would say it's about the same. Especially Wisconsin is an agricultural state and so is Poland, as such, it's mainly agricultural. I would say if you drive out to the country it would probably be the same type of a picture.

JL: Would you consider yourself to be a mid-westerner, in terms of small townishness, slow moving and friendliness of the people?

IW: Definitely, it's right up my alley. I hate the noise and dirt of a huge metropolitan like Chicago or New York. As a matter of fact, when we arrived in New York, I could have stayed there. But I took one look around and quickly decided this is not the type of place I would like to live I would say that Milwaukee has a little bit of both. It has the appearance of like an overgrown city, well I would say, it's not a huge town. There's more tranquility here than in most cities in the United States. You have -- it's a big city, but it's actually spread out a lot.

JL: So I was going to ask you how much happier do you think you would have been living in an area with greater Jewish population? But that brings us to a city like New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles.

IW: I would say, you know, that Milwaukee has a pretty good sized Jewish community and an active Jewish community even though maybe the Jewish population is not that huge percentagewise. But they make up in activity and there are, for a city like Milwaukee, there's a sizeable amount of Jewish synagogues and temples, there are Jewish schools, Jewish Sunday schools. Anybody who was interested in Jewish life should be able to find enough activities to be satisfied.

JL: Given the choice, if you had the opportunity to leave Wisconsin, would you do it?

- IW: Unless when I retire, possibly to go into a warmer state like Florida or California. Possibly yes, but I can't even see myself even after retirement that I would move into a state where the warm or tropical climate would dominate mine all year-round living. I would probably prefer to spend the summers here in Wisconsin and the winters in Florida or California. But to leave Wisconsin altogether would probably be very difficult to me.
- JL: How satisfied are you with the cultural climate of Milwaukee? Does it offer more or less than what you had in Europe?
- IW: Well it's awful hard to compare. First of all, when I left Europe I was basically a youngster. I was locked up at the age of seventeen-eighteen and at that particular time my world was mostly among my young friends living in a small city. There was no particular way or opportunity to even talk about those things. I would say mine real life really began after we settled down in the United States and I began a family life and slowly by the time I learned the language and began to know a certain amount of people, it took a while but I would say overall I managed to find my place in a community. I developed a small business. I 'm pretty well satisfied with my life.
- JL: Are you satisfied with the cultural offerings of Milwaukee?
- IW: I would say yes. Well, culture isn't something somebody is dishing out to you. You have to go out and seek it and live it. I don't know how to answer a question "if I'm satisfied?". If a person is looking for, you know, you can always find a lot of places there is theatre and there are movies and libraries and lectures and there are many things where a person can find what he wants so I would say I'm satisfied.
- JL: How do feel about living in Wisconsin with its large percentage of ethnic Germans?
- IW: It did not interfere with my life as such. I would say the ethnic Germans today are keeping their German heritage to themselves and besides the war has been over for a long time. I can't crawl into any German and find out what his feelings are about Nazism. I'm sure that there are some people who regret that Hitler is not here anymore. But then you could find such a people in any other nationality. I

have been in contact with a lot of German people and I haven't specially encountered any special reaction. If anything some are not very proud of their heritage. A lot probably would have liked to wipe out all those years of Nazi Germany.

JL: What kind of effort have you made to become acquainted with Wisconsin history, the history of the state?

IW: I don't think that I really explored that part. I didn't feel any special need. I wouldn't say that I don't know nothing about the state but I never made used any effort to go out and get acquainted with Wisconsin history. Unless, I heard about Father Marquette traveling down the river and settling down here. Probably more or less, I know about as much as [the] average Wisconsinite.

JL: I'm going to ask you to be immodest, what contribution do you feel you've made to Milwaukee, to Wisconsin generally as a citizen?

IW: I have an old -- for instance, when I talk to young people or I talk to other people, I try to make people understand that every person alive, if he is active and he works, he makes a contribution. If, I don't know if I mentioned this before, I always see a city like a jigsaw puzzle and, we talked about it, if I get up in the morning and I pick up my piece and I do my job and put it into place, I think I make my contribution. A person who does not work, you know, he's a parasite. I myself, you know, since I came to the city of Milwaukee I never collected one unemployment check. I never got any support from any welfare organization. I have been a fully self-employed person. I was quite able to support myself by doing so. I think I made a contribution to the city of Milwaukee with giving service to the people that needed my own service. Regardless what the person's trade or profession is, if he does it and does it well, I think he makes a contribution to the city life.

JL: How great an obligation have you felt toward Wisconsin for giving you the opportunity of starting a new life? Actually it started in St. Paul, but you live here.

IW: I could not single out Wisconsin.

JL: Even the United States.

IW: If we're talking about obligation, I'm totally obliged towards the country. I mention this on every occasion, that the day we came into this country, we began to breathe a breath of fresh free air. We are fully integrated, not prosecuted. We have all the opportunities to pursue happiness. We can attend our places of worship without hindrance, we can work hard or very little, we have the freedom of the individual without feeling that we are minority. We have all the privilege of protection of the law and when I walk in the street I don't look behind me being afraid that somebody might be after me.

JL: Okay, I have a rather long question so I think we better stop here and I'll ask it in the next.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 2

TAPE 5, SIDE 1

JL: When we met in March you talked quite heatedly about your reaction to the marching of the American Nazi party. What kind of stand did the New American Club take as a group? Was there any official statement made?

IW: Most of our people, you know, joined the Concerned Jewish Citizen Organization at that particular time, you know. Most of our members have been members in that particular organization. As a result, we did take part in contra demonstrations. We had meetings and for a time, we were actually trying to find out as much as we could about the activities of the Nazi Party in Wisconsin. There were different probes into, for example, the Brennan Ordinance, I don't know if you recall that, about using the mail for hate literature and there were certain things they were trying to forbid the Nazi party to do in the streets. I don't think that ordinance ever passed but the Holocaust Survivors Club or the New American Club has been keenly interested and active in any contra demonstration against the Nazis in the city of Milwaukee.

JL: What are your feelings about a trial such as the one recently in Cologne of Lischka, Hagen, and Heinrichsohn, responsible for Nazi activities in France, at this time 35 years later?

IW: It's unfortunate, these days when something like this comes out, the lapse of time is compared to, you know, a court where an injured person in an accident has been totally injured with broken arms and broken legs. When he comes to court after two years, his broken bones have healed and his scarred face has healed and when he comes in front of the judge and tries to tell him the story how injured he has been, the judge takes a look at him and he sees a whole person. It's awful hard to find compassion for a person like that, you know, when, you know, his sickness has passed. If they would have brought in that particular person in front of the judge when he was laid down in bed with his bandages and cast, you know, the judge could see there the injured person. Comparing this to the trials thirty years after the happenings, you're talking to a whole different generation. The compassion, and the feeling isn't there anymore. Sometimes I wonder how much good it does but unfortunately, no

matter what, we, you know, have to prosecute, you know, the people for the sheer sake of to show the world that you can't get away with genocide and murder and everybody has to be responsible for his deeds regardless of the lapse of time.

JL: Wisconsin has a tradition as a progressive state. Have you found this to be true?

IW: Yes. I would say the city of Milwaukee shows a lot of tolerance and [is] probably more integrated than other cities in the United States. It goes for integrated housing and parks any other way of life in the city of Milwaukee. I don't see any special discrimination or places where one person can come in and the other one can't. So I would say, overall, it is an open city and a progressive city.

JL: How satisfactory do you find the American system of government to be?

IW: Personally, I would say I find it totally satisfactory. With a bit of worry because of the changes and certain freedoms which are abused. It's unfortunate that sometimes innocent people are submitted to vandalism and to lack of protection of the law because of the liberal outlook of our constitution. Unfortunately, the criminals abuse our freedoms and it goes for a lot of subversive organizations. Especially lately looking at the Iranian students, you know, where they abuse our freedoms using them as a offspring for propaganda and demonstrations, where they could not do it in their own country but they come over here and they demonstrate and literally abuse our law officers and get away with it. And sometimes I wonder if freedom has any boundaries. I would probably be the last person, you know, who would like to see a totalitarian government. But you ask yourself a question, to whom does the law enforcements supposed to have their allegiance? Are they supposed to protect the innocent or are they supposed to protect the guilty? Unfortunately, and I go back to the Nazi demonstrations, I remember when they walked out in their shiny Nazi boots and their Swastikas and their uniforms. They were totally surrounded by police and protected by the police. When they were standing there with their loudspeakers, throwing around dirt and abuse and murderous slogans against Jews and colored people. Again, if God forbid, any contra demonstration was taking place by sheer anxiety or loss of patience the police dealt harshly with the contra demonstrators because, God forbid, they

should not abuse the Nazis so maybe dirt their shiny boots or their shiny uniform. Sometimes I wonder, you know, who should be protected.

JL: How do you feel about the prominence of Jews in American society in politics, in the arts, etc. For example, how did you feel when Kissinger became secretary of state?

IW: Naturally, as a Jew, I am proud that we have prominent people. But at the same time I would not like to especially point out who is a Jew and who is a non-Jew in our government. If a person has the ability, has intelligence and is able to make a contribution to the welfare of our state, he should have an opportunity no matter who he is, Jew, Gentile, Black, Chinese or Greek, no matter who he is. If he is capable, if he has the education, he should have the right to take his proper place in society.

JL: What do you see as the most important issues facing America today?

IW: We probably have to get in to politics. Since we are in election year, you know, maybe we ought to talk a little about it. I see as an old newcomer, I get a little bit worried, I see that we are politically naïve. I think we are [a] well meaning country. I think that the United States is probably the most generous country in the world but in the same time I am beginning to look at this country and compare it to the good neighbor Sam policy. We have a tendency to cut the grass in everybody else's yard and forget that our back yard is full of weeds and the roof is falling in. I would like to see this country to look more inward regardless of the political cost. I would like to see this country rebuild our industry. I would like to see our citizens gainfully employed, I would like to see a cut in the imports, I would like to increase our exports regardless of somebody's opinion in our economical war. Sometimes I wonder, when I walk into a department store or into a car store or I walk in the street, I see everything made in Japan or made in Hong Kong or made in Korea or made in Taiwan or made in Romania or made in Spain. You know, I wonder sometimes when some day when a woman, you know, decides to have a family, where her kids are going to be made. We will forget how to make our own and I am totally serious about it. It's a country who has got everything it needs. I can't figure out why we can't make a radio in this country or a television set or for that matter, a pair of shoes. Little by little we're losing our

abilities. Whatever we used to know we literally forfeited it and our multinationals build factories in places where labor is a little bit cheaper in order to gain a little more profit. In the mean time, in 30 years since my arrival in this country, I have seen a country who has almost owned the wealth of the world in gold bullion and in machinery and a country who has been literally devastated by war and the United States has survived untouched, not a bomb reached our shores. In thirty years we managed to give away, you know, our gold, our wealth, our industrial markets, our ship building. And when I reach and put my hands in my pocket and try to find a dime or a quarter, it's iron instead of silver and I wonder how did it all happen. God knows I can't figure it out and probably our leaders, our politicians can't give a rational answer, neither. Its just pathetic to watch and see our presidents coming in front of our American population and make statements which are totally irrational, illogical and non sensible. A country who grows enough food to literally feed the world, can't feed their own population. A country who has stored away grain which rots and [is] eaten by rats and spends millions of dollars to maintain storage places can't put enough wheat on the market that a loaf of bread should cost pennies and let the cost of a loaf of bread rise from day to day. That does not make any sense to me. My country, who gives away billions of dollars to farmers not to grow food, at the same time, you know, a person who puts in the day in working, has to go out and spend 10-15 cents for a hard roll. Still doesn't make any sense to me. Again, you know, I am not an economical genius. I did not have a high education. But sometimes I wonder, if there is not a simpler way or explanation, you know, how to run our economy. I would say that I am a bit worried, as a matter of fact I'm more than a bit worried, I am worried a lot.

JL: Are you also worried that there is anti-Semitism in America?

IW: To a point. I am not worried about anti-Semitism as such. I am worried about political anti-Semitism. Let me explain what I mean by political anti-Semitism. When an average man is gainfully employed and brings home a check every week and has a full belly and shoes on his feet and on his children's feet and has a roof over his head, most of the time he is not mad at anybody. But when you run into a

time of depression or recession or let's put it in plain words of unemployment, the tendencies are, that if your dish is half empty, you look into somebody's, you know, who is half full. As a segment of the population, and I am talking about the Jewish population which are mostly professional men with a proportionally higher education and maybe with a little bit, I don't want to sound smug, a little bit more capability of a way to earn a living, with a tendency of saving always a certain amount of their earnings for so called "dark hour" which is a usual Jewish tradition. The result is that most of the time that the Jew will weather a depression or recession maybe a little bit better than the average citizen. There where the anti-Semitism will flourish. Because most of the time people are not that especially aware, you know with "why they haven't got it", but "why you do have it". In those situations, and I'm going back into history in Europe, the Jew in Europe, or whatever, most of the time the logical experience during a crisis or a depression where people were hungry, and they get hungry enough where they turn into irrational laws of the jungle, where when you are hungry you eat what comes next to you. The Jew was usually the easiest prey. The experience taught us that whenever a country is in trouble in an economical trouble, the Jew is who automatically gets in trouble as a nationality. So naturally, I am worried. I am worried as an American citizen and as a Jew.

JL: Now after all of that, how secure do you feel in America?

IW: Well, I learned a little bit about security. I would say the population in the United States is a mixture of different nationalities, the Jew as the non-Jew. When you walk out in the street, you know, you take a look around and if you gather let's say, 20 people and if you would go and you ask, "who are you?" or "what is your heritage?", you'll probably find anything, you know, from German, Italian, Greek, Pole or whatever. As a result, nobody can really claim that much ownership or superiority as a person. I myself, feeling that I am a person, I think that I should be able to feel that I am part, at least as good a part, of this country as any other nationality. And I would say a logical explanation -- if I use logic, I would say the Jew in this country it's probably more secure than in another part of the world. If a Jew lives in Poland, he is a Jew in Poland. But if a Jew lives in the United States, you know, and a Pole

lives in the United States, you know, they meet on an even level because the Pole feels that he is not at home and neither does the Jew, or they both feel that they are at home. As a result, we have the right to feel probably as secure as any other nationality. But again, that does not give us any right to be complacent. I think we should exercise our individual and political rights. We should watch who we vote into offices, and I'm talking about city office, state office and national office. We should be keenly aware what's going on and be so to speak the watchdog or the conscience of this country because we have the experience, the knowledge [of] what can happen if we overlook those things.

JL: Let me stop here.

END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 1

TAPE 5, SIDE 2

JL: A few more about what you were talking about on the other side of the tape. Do you fore see a situation arising in which you might again be threatened as a Jew?

IW: The Jew living for two thousand years in different parts of the world and not wanting to assimilate, or maybe not even being able to assimilate, you know, because of a strong heritage or let's put it in another way of a continuous Jewish education in a Jewish home. We somehow or other are a separate identity no matter how much we try to integrate into different societies. Somehow or other by sheer conditioning or by instinct, you know, again, I don't fancy myself to quote Skinner or Freud or whatever, that little bit of knowledge I have about evolution or conditioning I quickly realize that when a person is brought up in a certain way, in certain beliefs or manners, or if you want to put a scientific expression, he is conditioned in a certain way, no matter how much you try to break away from it, it will come out in you in your future years. It's awful hard to get away from habits. A Jew has been more or less the conscience of the world, we have been the first social innovators. By sheer beginning by, you know, the Bible we were talking about a liberation of slaves, about fair payment for a day's work. We were talking about the social revolution of a day of rest during the week. We brought in laws and the rights of the individual against the state. We are a people who do bring in laws. We always fight for somebody else's freedom because we can't help it since we know if there is going to be freedom for other people, there is automatically freedom for us. As a result we are always sighted with the underdog, because we know exactly what it feels to be the underdog. As a result the Jews always join socialist organizations because they were preaching about the freedom of the individual and the right of an employment and you know. It's all those things, you know, that have been keenly participated by Jews. In the United States, am I afraid? Well, yes and no. We talked about it before. Only a animal is not afraid because he does not have the capacity to understand, you know, fear. A logical person, you know, should know that he should not lean out of a window because he could fall down. The logical

thing to do is prevention, to look out for yourself. As a result, you know, you acquire security by preventing the actions.

JL: What are your feelings about Germany and present day Germans? Not in America.

IW: If we're talking about western Germany, I would say they're trying awfully hard to be a free democratic country. I visited Germany and I would say I was impressed by their productivity, by their capability rebuild a nation that has suffered a lot unfortunately by their own doing. But Germany today, and I'm talking about West Germany, is a democratic nation. I would say they do observe all the freedoms and laws of a free country. I would not venture to go in again into anybody's soul and try to search their personal feelings. But again, who am I to go and judge people, you know, what they think of. The Germans has a saying "*die Gedanken sind frei*"¹ and I think at least everybody has a right to think whatever he wants to, at least as long as he does not especially try to interfere with my thoughts. I certainly would venture out to interfere with anybody else's. At this particular time, I was impressed.

JL: When were you there?

IW: Two years ago. I think there's a strong sentiment at least by the government against the Nazis. Are there any Nazis in Germany? Yes, there are. Do they demonstrate themselves? Yes, they do. But if you can see them in a country like the United States, you know, which fought Nazism to the nail, my God, why should the show in Germany, were the cradle of Nazism was born. Not that I am applauding that they are there. But it is a fact. I experienced when they tried to make a demonstration in Frankfurt, they would not let them in to the city. The police was out in force. Then there were some Germans, you know, literally laid down in the streets and would not let them go through. So they did not have their Rathaus², so to speak, they apparently get it someplace else. I have experienced when I was there, that they were going to have a rally or God know what, but it did not come out.

JL: What are your kid's feelings about Germany?

¹ Translation: "The philosophers [thinkers] are free".

² German for "city hall". Literally "council house".

IW: If I tell you that I could not give you a clear answer, you probably wouldn't believe me. But I, again, we have to go back a piece. I did not insert any particular knowledge about the concentration camp yards into my children fearing that I would create a complex or a self-conscienceless as them being Jewish, that they feel that they are something lesser because somehow or another, you know, when you keep on talking about those things they begin to feel like a minority or a prosecuted people and knowing that I would like to shed that feeling from mine own person, I did not try to inflict it in them. Just let them grow up in a free country, as free children without the yoke or the guilt feeling of the past years. As a result, you know, I hardly ever talked to my kids about. We did once in a while, you know, happen to see a Nazi movie or when they asked any questions, I readily answered them. If they wanted any explanations I gave it to them, but I did not go out of my way to say "sit down and we'll have a concentration camp session" or a "Nazi education session", or whatever. I thought, soon enough will it present itself. When the occasion called for it, we talked about it. My son was readily ready to go and do his part when it came to contra demonstrations. So I don't think that they really lacked information, they know.

JL: To do his part when...?

IW: When for example, to do his part when they had to go to contra demonstrate against Nazis.

JL: What type of restitution from Germany have you received?

IW: We did get the regular Wiedergutmachung, which consisted of a certain payment for five years of work in the concentration camp. Later on, the German government passed a law where the people who had been locked up in the concentration camps, they recognized that they had the right to go to a physician and be checked over and if there was any sickness, they allowed a pension. They categorized according to the amount of injury or sickness which amounts to a small pension.

JL: How did you feel about accepting this restitution?

IW: It was a mixed feeling in the beginning. But quickly you realize it's like when you work for somebody for a week and you get mad at your boss because he is not a pleasant fellow, it does not mean that

you are not going to accept your check for your work. We did not take it as payments for our brethren, you know, which had been murdered, we took it as payments for the hard labor we put in building German factories and the war machinery. Would I really accept it in a true value of Wiedergutmachung, which means that "whatever was wrong, it has been made right," no. In that spirit I would not say that I accepted in that spirit. I accepted it in exactly as I said. I put in a day's work and I got a partial payment for the work I put in. Which is, if you want to figure five years of hard labor paid, you know, with a five thousand dollar bill, I don't think, you know, that you would call this that everything that was wrong was made right.

JL: Besides the time that you returned to Poland when you were in DP camp, did you ever return after that?

IW: Yes, I did. In 1945 when the war was over, we were scattered all over Germany, those who survived. The first instinct was go back home to the place where you, you know, originated and you thought instinctively if somebody else in your family they would probably do the same and go back where they started out from. I did go back. I did not find anybody from mine immediate family. I did find cousins and some distant relatives but nobody from my immediate family survived.

JL: Did you go back after you came back to the United States, have you ever returned since that time?

IW: Two years ago, I took a trip to Israel. I went back to Germany and visited the concentration camps and went to Poland and visited my home town, the cemeteries, and went to Auschwitz and revisited a couple of other camps. And it was a terrible experience.

JL: You said that you were to Israel, is that the time that you went to present the..?

IW: Bloodmobile. Yes.

JL: That was the first time that you had been to Israel?

IW: This had been the second trip to Israel.

JL: How did you feel visit in Israel?

IW: The second time around or the first time around?

JL: Both.

IW: Well, the first trip was more like a pilgrimage. It was a fulfillment of a dream which I had, you know, since my early youth when I belonged to Zionist organizations and the thought about Israel was like a dream to be fulfilled. Something, you know, you prayed for in your morning prayers and your evening prayers and your holiday prayers and it's something, you know, which has been talked about since the beginning of time and again something, you know, you were conditioned into to think about it, too long for, to anticipate, to wait for and finally, when that particular day came, when I was able to go too, it was hard to express the experience. Because sitting in the plane I can recall when the plane started to reach the shores of Israel, the people in the airplane started moving in to the windows and tried to look down. Myself, I just sit there, and I felt mine goose pimples were coming in my whole skin and literally my hair stood up. I had never been to Israel, but the whole feeling was like I was returning home. Why I should feel that way? I don't know. But somehow or another, you know, it was like a long, long anticipation or a long dream coming true. It was a feeling of somehow or another, of homecoming. I don't know. It could be, you know, if you believe in reincarnation or a part of you is inherited from your ancestors and who knows. Maybe deep in my soul was a buried longing, you know, or understanding that this is home. Maybe if it's true that we do have something, you know, in us, that we reincarnate into generations and generations and somehow and another. If this is true, you know, this is definitely a feeling like you've been there sometimes generations back and you just came back home. Because there can't be another explanation that a person have that much love, that much longing, that much enthusiasm, that much compassion for a place where you have never been. When we landed and I walked down the stairs of the plane, I was in total bewilderment. I didn't know how to cope with it. It was overwhelming. I can't talk for other people but I have a feeling that most of the people felt that way, at least those who came for the first time. For myself, it was a happy and sad and enthusiastic and solemn. On my way out of the plane I stood there for a moment, hesitating. Should I continue or just stand there? Somehow or another there were some of my relatives, you

know, waiting on the balcony and they must have recognized me because I could, you know, hear some signs and screams, that's when I proceeded. It's hard to explain when you...

JL: Now this was how long ago?

IW: It was in 1965, the first time when I went to Israel.

JL: And how was it two years ago?

IW: Two years ago it was not quite the same as my first trip. It was exciting but it wasn't you know, exactly the you know, same feeling when I arrived the first time.

JL: Would you care to tell me why the Poland visit was so terrible after so many years?

IW: Because it was a shredded picture. It was -- you went back to the place where you originated and back in your mind you looked maybe forward to finding everything, you know, the way you left it. No matter how logic you, you know, are capable to understand. You know, back in your mind there is a hidden childish wish, maybe the clock will turn back and there you will find your loved ones, your back yard, your house, the furniture and everything the way it was. You know, you thought that by going back you're going back in time, that your neighbors, your friends, everything is going to be the way you left it. And then you arrive, you know, and what did I see a play *Our Town*, and you come in like a ghost. Nobody sees you. You want so much that somebody would come out and say, "oh, how good to see you, you're back home" and "where have you been and what have you done?" and nobody asks you those questions. And there's nobody who comes out and greets you and there is nobody who opens the door and says "come on in back in home". And then finally you awaken and you see it's like that you had a dream and you awaken and it's all gone. That's why the feelings of coming back to Poland were totally different than going to Israel. You went to see a country and here you wanted to go back to find your home, your people but it wasn't there, it was gone. It was like the city was there, the house was there but nobody looked at you. It's like you came back as a ghost and you wondered why nobody sees you.

JL: [Inaudible]

END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 2

TAPE 6, SIDE 1

JL: Do you think that it's easier for you to talk about your experiences now than it might have been several years ago?

IW: Well, it depends on what you're talking about. Are we talking about life, are we talking about death, are talking about pleasure or are we talking about pain?

JL: I think we're talking about pain, about your Holocaust experiences.

IW: I would say, you know, over the years, you know, there has hardly passed a day at the beginning, you know, when you met with your friends that somehow you did not recollect the concentration camp days or people used to talk about their experience. Those who have been in the woods, those who been in the concentration camps, those who work near the crematoriums or in the crematoriums, those who worked in the factories. Somehow not everybody used to talk about their experiences, at least for a certain amount of time. At the beginning when your family, you know, was just starting to develop you mostly congregated with your friends, the children were smaller as I said before, so we used to gather more often and again talk about your experiences during the war. As I recall, people used to talk more about those things at the beginning than we talk about it now. It's pain like tears you know. After a while either you get used to it or it dries out. After so many years, people probably learned how to live, or I wouldn't say that they forgot, but I would say it's being talked about today less than at the beginning. We managed to raise new families and acquired new friends and possibly developed new interests. And as a result time, you know, probably took care of it. I wouldn't call it a healer but let's put it that way, scar tissue grew over it and people have a tendency, you know, to talk a little bit less about it today than they did at the beginning.

JL: Do you think it might have been easier or harder to talk to a person like me that is rather an outsider?

IW: Today or before?

JL: I assume that you were talking about the discussions that you had that took place with other survivors.

IW: I would say that we were more ready to talk about it in the beginning that we are now.

JL: Even to others?

IW: Even to others. I would say it was like looking for pity. You were trying to maybe, to unwind yourself, or to awake some compassion from outside. You know, maybe we were expecting, "oh you poor thing, look what you went through" or whatever. But somehow or another I recall that we did talk about it more then at the beginning whenever the occasion presented itself or when you found a ready listener or possibly if somebody asked you any questions. Especially these days sometimes something comes through the media, maybe sometimes, you know, they catch a Nazi and the story get a little bit steered up. [Phone rings.] And somebody who knows that you've been in concentration camps or lived through the whole Holocaust, so naturally they will approach you and talk to you and ask questions, so you reply. But otherwise you don't exactly engage anybody in that conversation.

JL: We have talked about this next thing somewhat, but how do you feel about the increasing awareness in America about the Holocaust? This time not the TV series but in general [inaudible].

IW: I would say that the *Holocaust* picture increased awareness about the war and the prosecution of Jews in Nazi Germany. Especially the comments and newspapers have been bringing it up and commenting more about it after the showing of the picture. General, I don't that there is any special keen interest right now where people would go around and talk about it continuously.

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

IW: It is surprising, but again I would say the real awakening of the tragedy and again I would probably give credit to Mr. Wiesel. His writings and his continuous pursuit of the Nazi history and prosecution. You know, brought reaction into it and apparently it must have been some influence in the White House where it was brought to their attention and a result, you know, we had those results.

JL: I mean specifically this fact that I am able to do these interviews, we have federal funding for that.

IW: How do I feel about? I am say I am pleased, definitely. Especially in those late years when there are still survivors who are capable to express themselves and tell the story because looking into our

community over here, you will find that there are getting less and less. I would say in the last few years we have had at least two or three funerals a year and my goodness. And it'll probably be increasing now more and more. I would say I am pleased and satisfied that there will be permanent record in the Milwaukee archives and I hope that in the future some people will reach out and use those for future references.

JL: Why do you feel it is important for you to participate in an oral history documentation project on the Holocaust?

IW: I would say I feel that part of me or part of my life will be permanently recorded and maybe someday my offspring will show enough interest and maybe go in and sit down and listen to it and maybe wonder a little bit. Maybe many a things I found difficult for myself to sit down with them and talk about come out a lot easier at this particular moment being recorded now. For future references I am speaking to my children, maybe I'll be dead and gone. Maybe someday it will be like a recorded testament. Let them find out what Jews have to go through. Maybe it will be a lesson for them for their future behavior or for their future Jewishness. Maybe they will understand, in spite of ourselves we have to remain Jews and there is no escape away from your heritage or from your fate. It's a continuation, like I mentioned before, we are what we are. And no matter how much somebody tries to influence us or maybe sometimes we try to influence ourselves, but somehow or another it comes out in you for better or for worse. If we know that we are born Jews, I don't see no reason why anybody should have the right to interfere with what I was born into and what my fate is and what my way of life is. And God knows I don't try to interfere with anybody else's.

JL: I really would like to shift gears somewhat to your earlier years. We already talked in the very beginning about your own parents and paternal grandparents, dates and places of birth. I'd like to ask you if you have any special recollections about your grandparents and if you could tell me a little about your father and mother. The type of people they were and kind of relationship you had with them.

IW: Regrettably I can't recall anything, you know, about my grandparents. But as far as my parents are concerned, I could give you a picture of a boy who knew his parents until I was about 13. My father died when I was at the age of ten and my mother passed away when I was about 13. I learned how to grow up very early in my age, actually I was fatherless at 10 and I took it very hard. Somehow or other nature has a way to equip a child with certain defensive systems when you get to be an orphan at a young age.

JL: With whom did you live?

IW: Well, I was 13 when my mother died and by that time, I finished grade school and I begin to learn a trade. So I learned some of the fur business at the tender age of 13...14. After my mother passed away I quickly decided that my hometown is not a suitable place for me to live in. Maybe I was trying to run away from mine childhood memories. Basically, I was a child, even in this country when you are 13...14 you are considered. But I did not look at myself at that particular age like I was a child. I left into a different city and I worked myself through. I was away for about a year.

JL: Where did you go?

IW: I went to Sosnowiec where I stayed for a little while. There I met a furrier and he happened to need somebody to help him out. He was from the city of Lodz. I was invited to come to his city and I was offered a job. In mine young adventurous nature, I went there. I was employed there for about a year and I took care of myself perfectly well.

JL: With whom did you live?

IW: I lived with a family where I worked. I was somebody adopted. I learned, you know, how to take care of myself. Unfortunately I didn't have any personal belongings when I came there. I left literally with a shirt on my back, nothing else. The first earnings went to buy a set of underwear and I used the city bath in order to wash myself. I changed my laundry right there and I took the dirty laundry to be washed. That's how I continued little by little and somehow or another I was quite capable to take care of myself.

JL: And your siblings, what happened to them at the time?

IW: There was only one younger sister and she stayed at home with mine older sister and older brother. One sister was married at the time already. After about a year of absence I came back to my hometown. Actually, I came home for a holiday and at that particular time I was engaged by a city furrier and he offered me a job and I decided to stay home under the influence of mine sister and brother.

JL: This was back in Zawiercie?

IW: Yeah. Where I remained until the war broke out.

JL: What were your sisters' and brother's names?

IW: My oldest sister was Bella, my brother was Shmuel, mine older sister than I was Hannah or Anne and the youngest sister below me was Yitta.

JL: And the youngest one below you stayed at the time that you left, that one stayed in Zawiercie?

IW: Yeah.

JL: Do you happen to remember dates and places of birth for all of them?

IW: They were all born in Zawiercie. The dates of birth, I could give you a pretty good guess. Going back to my oldest sister, she must have been born in 1910 or 1912. My brother was born in about 1918, my sister in about 1920, I was born in 1922, my youngest sister must have been born in 1926.

JL: Do you have any special recollections of them?

IW: Oh, I recollect them, you know quite well. Would you like to know any special impressions?

JL: Yeah.

IW: Mine oldest sister was married. She...

JL: What was her married name?

IW: Soldyn. As a matter of fact, that her husband or my brother in law survived the war and he remarried into our family. He married a cousin of mine.

JL: What is that last name? Soldyn?

IW: Soldyn. S-o-l-d-y-n. He lives in Atlantic City right now and managed to have a new family. He's got three children, they all live in Atlantic City. None of my other sisters and brother married and the all perished in the concentration camps.

JL: What were you father's and mother's occupations?

IW: My father was a kosher butcher believe it or not. I mean strict kosher. My mother helped him in the business and basically was a house wife.

JL: Was there any other family members in the town or near the area?

IW: Oh, we had an uncle in the city. Oh, we had some cousins. We had some uncles about 20 miles away from our city.

JL: All from your mother's or father's side?

IW: On both sides.

JL: In the city. Where there also in surrounding areas outside?

IW: Yeah, I'm talking about both. We had relatives nearby, you know, about 20...30...40 kilometers away from the city where we live.

JL: How long has the [inaudible] family lived in that area?

IW: They have been there all the time since I can recall.

JL: Did you have any family or close friends prior to the war?

IW: None.

JL: Could you describe your home and your immediate community surroundings physically, what it looked like?

IW: The city I was born to was, the population was about 35,000 to 45,000, it was a small community. What, you know, after I came back it kind of shrunk.

JL: There are no more Jews in Zawiercie?

IW: There was one woman there which I heard that she passed away. There was I think another was so but there are no Jews as such. There's no Jewish community, there's no Jewish life, there is none. I

think there is one man who married a Polish woman and they still live there. Nothing left besides the cemetery.

JL: Do you have any – when you left when you were 13 and got back later, how old were you then? 15 when you came back?

IW: About 15, yes.

JL: Do you have any memories of how it was then, how it looked?

IW: I would say when I got back mine life as a teenager really begun. I know I was a little bit mentally too mature for the rest of them. Growing up without parents really kind of matures you very early. But even though, as soon as I got back I rejoined the Zionist organizations and got to be really active in it. As I can recall, between 15 and 18 was probably the most beautiful time of my life because we were young and active and we used to gather in groups, meet at the Zionist organizations. And it was quite a beautiful time in my life until the war broke out.

JL: Could you tell me a little bit about what Lodz was like?

IW: Lodz was, you know, being a kid from a small town, Lodz was a new world. You know, in my eyes, at least, the big industrial city, population about 600,000 comparing to a 35,000 population in my home town. When I arrived I was overwhelmed, basically shy and bashful. But after a short time, you know, I begin to acquire the way of city life. Again, you know, being an orphan and being on my own, you know, I had to develop all mine defensive instincts in order to survive. I can assure you that there was no juvenile delinquency in my life. Apparently, I couldn't afford it. I had to work for a living. But I learned how to find friends and I, again like I say, survived quite well. Believe it or not, when I came home I managed to save a few pennies. And I came home, I left basically naked but when I came home I was dressed decently and I even managed to save some money. So it wasn't all bad.

END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 1

TAPE 6, SIDE 2

JL: Could you tell me something about your pre-war religious life? Synagogue attendance, traditions in the home?

IW: Our house was strictly based on Jewish religion. Strictly orthodox, strictly traditional and strict kosher. My father was brought up in a religious home and that's how he brought us up. He was a – he observed every Jewish holiday. In his daily life he observed our traditional three daily prayers and our house was based on Jewish tradition with two sets of dishes and one set for Passover. We had to observe our dietary laws and traditional Jewish life.

JL: Were any members of the family non religious?

IW: No.

JL: How was *Cheder*?

IW: *Cheder*?

JL: Did you go?

IW: Definitely. Our basic education started out in *Cheder*.

JL: At what age?

IW: As far as I can recall I went to *Cheder* all my young life since I could really think. I remember that I was carried by my father during the winter months. It was very cold, he used to put me under his warm coat and he carried me into *Cheder*. Literally

JL: How old?

IW: I can't recall how old I was but we used to get very severe winters. It was a little piece to walk into the *Cheder* and I was literally carried there because it was so cold. But again, our *Cheder* were like a ethnic school or was like a Catholic school or a Hebrew school in this country. We used to attend *Cheder* until the age of eight so we must have started at about four.

JL: It was only religious studies?

IW: No, it was a regular school but it was an ethnic school.

JL: Sponsored by the state?

IW: That particular school was not sponsored by the state. That was a Jewish supported school. But there was a city school which we were educated in the Polish language. It was a Jewish school attended only by Jewish youth. But that particular school was an elementary school like any other school. The only thing is that it was a Jewish school.

JL: That was after *Cheder*?

IW: That was after *Cheder*.

JL: But the religious studies continued with secular studies.

IW: Not in that particular school.

JL: It was just secular studies.

IW: Right.

JL: Did you continue your religious studies at all after that?

IW: To a point there were a certain amount of *Cheder* even afterwards. Until, like here, you know, once you got to be bar mitzvahed you stopped. Especially, you know, at that particular time we started to work at a young age.

JL: If you could, I know it's a late hour, could you perhaps describe the *Cheder* a little bit?

IW: Oh, definitely. Like I said before we started *Cheder* at a very tender young age. As far as I can recall there was a big room with some probably 40..50 kids.

JL: Different ages?

IW: They probably averaged from about five to eight. We were introduced to basic Hebrew prayers, the Hebrew alphabet in the beginning. By the time we left *Cheder* everybody was pretty well briefed in Hebrew prayers. I would not call it the Hebrew language but I would say we knew how to pray in Hebrew.

JL: What was the language of instruction?

IW: Yiddish. The aim of the teachers was not to teach us the Hebrew language but the aim was to teach us how to pray in Hebrew. In later classes, we were taught to understand the Hebrew language. As older you got you begin to study the more difficult parts of the Jewish *Tanach*, *Mishnah*, the [sounds like "*Chimara*"] and the Bible itself.

JL: How many teachers were in there for all these children?

IW: In that particular class the young class, there was one teacher. As you moved on later on to a little bit a higher grade, you had a different teacher. But basically, I can mostly recall two of them. It wasn't a school in the size or facility wise as you would have a school in this country. It was a small house, more like you see a school someplace in a movie in the western style way of teaching. You taught a little bit of everything.

JL: Could you describe the synagogue a little bit for me?

IW: Synagogues in our city were – you had two main synagogues. One was the main *Beth midrash* and one was a *Shul*. The difference was that the *Beth midrash* was more of a strict orthodox while the *Shul* was orthodox too, but it was attended mainly by more wealthy people because it was a nicer building and probably the Jews were a little bit tired of the other one. So it was a little bit more of a temple than a house of prayer. The people who came into the *Beth midrash* were orthodox Jews in orthodox Jewish clothing, with beards and payos and basically poor people. While the *Shul* or the temple was a little bit more of a nicer surrounding, better taken care of, you had a different class of people which were a little more modern. You didn't see exactly all people with beards because you'd see some of them already shaven. So there was a little bit of an easier going attendance down at the *Beth midrash*.

JL: What [inaudible] types?

IW: You had both. You had for example, the city roof, you know, belonged to the *Schul*, where the other one was more like a congregational, instead of a -- like a basic house of prayer were the more affluent people belonged to. But besides those two city places there were small congregations were they

gathered in somebody's house and they prayed. Like a dozen people, people that know each other and they kind of organize their own, they called it a [sounds like "*Shtiedl*"].

JL: Where they *Hassidim*?

IW: Yeah, they were Orthodox Jews and they had one man from their group who did a certain amount of praying and then another one took over and that's how they got along.

JL: Just another question on the general education. You said that you went then to another school at age 8, how long did you go there?

IW: Until about, 12...13. Until I started to work.

JL: Did you belong to any political or cultural clubs?

IW: At that age?

JL: Well you mentioned you belonged to the [inaudible].

IW: Well, I belonged to the [inaudible] was a young Zionist or a young scout organization, really. You know, because our basic education at that particular organization was scouting and the love of Israel was implanted in us. That's why it was the Zionist organization.

JL: You did mention to me that you were very active in it.

IW: You know, as much as I could, as soon as I had been in there, you know, I begin to be instructed to be leader in a younger group. You know, it's the same way as it is organized here. My daughter got to be president of a BBG group here. There we called in the Hebrew a [sounds like "*minahel*"] it's like a leader there of a certain group of children. Unfortunately I left my home town, again like I mentioned before, at a young age and mine social life at that particular city broke up until I came back and I resumed mine work in the same organization.

JL: Was there a – I should say what kind of clash was there between your religious observance and belonging to an active Zionist group?

IW: I would say it was a total separation. The home life was a different way of life and the organization was a different way of life. At home, you know, you lived like an orthodox Jew where the Zionist

organization was more liberal. [It] was geared towards a more proud upbringing. The youth was very much being taken care of, to be kept off the streets. We were taught, it's a matter of fact, not just taught, we were totally forbidden to drink liquor and smoke cigarettes, you could not belong to that group. Definitely not, it was totally forbidden. You were taught that you can't gamble and you can't... Yes, it was a way of life. Every time when we came in we had meetings in groups of 10, 12, 13, 15 depending how many.

JL: What kinds of things did you do?

IW: At the meeting the first 10, 15 minutes was spent in singing Hebrew songs in unison. After that the group leader, the [sounds like "*minahel*"] took over and we discussed certain subjects. We mainly talked about Hebrew [inaudible] in Israel. They named the places and what they did and we were kind of steered and taught about [sounds like "*Hashara*"] and how it would be when we get to the time and be able to go to Israel. What we have to do and how to behave and how to live...

JL: Preparing you.

IW: It was a preparation to a future life and life in Israel.

JL: Did you believe in that?

IW: Totally.

JL: And you were going to go?

IW: Yes. Again, I was so conditioned that I would not say that everybody who belonged to that particular organization, you know, went to Israel. As a matter of fact, you know, there were no possible outlooks to get there because that little bit of allowance with England gave to the Jewish population was a trifle of the Jewish population. They came out through the Balfour declaration, they handed out certificates that so many Jews can come into Israel in a year and that's all you could get. But even so, you know, Jews did go and Jews did settle in Israel. And a foot hole has been established. After the war, the declaration of independence, you know, was no accident because the Jews who did settle and did go even one by one, did manage to establish, you know, certain colonies and they tried to build in

strategically around certain places, you know, when the time comes that they be able to establish a Jewish nation, which they did.

JL: Just one last question for this evening. What -- when you went to Sosnowiec and Lodz, were you able to keep up your religious life?

IW: Every Jew was able to keep up a religious life. I would say by sheer condition and being away from home, automatically you kind of loosen up your reigns and you weren't quite as strict as you would be at home. But even thought, I don't think anybody was able to disassociate themselves from being a Jew. Regardless, you know, no matter how hard you would try. Basically the Jews in Europe were pretty much aware all the time of their Jewishness. Sometimes if they would have liked to forget, you know, someone would have reminded them quickly that they are either from the Jewish side or the non-Jewish side.

JL: And the man to whom you were apprenticed, I assume kept it up.

IW: True.

JL: What was his name [inaudible]?

IW: The place where I worked?

JL: The name of the man.

IW: It just left me. Maybe in our future conversations I'll be able to recall it, but at the moment I can't really place it. You know, Don't forget, you know, we're talking 1937, '38. That's a long time.

JL: Okay, the next of the questions that I have left all relate to the beginning of the war and your war experiences, and considering how late it is I think we'll stop here.

IW: Yeah, I'd imagine [inaudible].

END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 2

TAPE 7, SIDE 1

JL: In our last session I told you that we'd go right into your camp experiences but first since I've gone over your other tapes some questions came out of those and I'd like to just dwell on those for a few minutes. I had asked you earlier about recollections of your sisters and brother and somehow we got off the topic and I wanted to go back to that. What memories do you have of them?

IW: Starting out with mine oldest sister, she was married and had three children. In 1939, when I was taken away into concentration camps, I found out through mail that my oldest sister was picked up in the street and was taken away in a round-up. Her three children were left behind with mine younger sisters. Somehow they were not in that particular round-up. We never heard of my older sister. Never found out what happened to her. I assumed that she was gassed in Auschwitz.

JL: Excuse me let me interrupt you. Did, last time we talked we did talk about the fate of your sisters, but what I was getting at is more memories that you have of them as you were growing up?

IW: I could probably go back...starting over again, my older sister was married and lived a life of her own. Mine brother was very close to me, we literally did everything together. We belonged to the same organization. And we were very good friends, on top of it. Mine sister Hannah was a bit older than I was and she was a very, very compassionate and loving sister. Recalling when I was taken a way into camp and there was nobody else at home, she assumed the role of mother to us. She tried to send to us some kind of food or clothing or whatever as long as she had some. At one point I sent a message home, when we could still write home, that I am running out of clothing and underwear. And I received a package and I found underwear her own. And I just couldn't understand at that time, you know, at mine ripe young age at 17...18, I couldn't figure out why she would send lady's underwear in a camp. Belatedly, I found out that she took her own things and sent it to me because she couldn't afford to buy anything and most of the things were already sold out. I found this out because one of our cousins survived and she happened to be in the same city of ours at that particular time and she told me, you know, what was going on. She never, never write me "you know, how bad it is at home"

and “I can’t afford to do things.” My youngest sister, Yitta, well she was so young and at that particular age she didn’t really have much to say but she helped us much as she could. This is about as far as I can go at this particular point. My brother as I say before was taken away at the same time as I was, so you know pretty much about him and his end in the concentration camps.

JL: Which camp was he taken to?

IW: He was taken to Sarne, wait, that’s where he died.

JL: You said earlier that you had family in your area. What kind of contact did you have with visiting them?

IW: In Europe or at least in our town, your family were your friends; your friends were your family. There was usually a closeness or a continuous visitation and contra visitations, and most of it happened on a Saturday afternoon or on a Friday night after dinner. Most of the time uncles and aunts and cousins used to get together at anybody’s house, especially if somebody happened to cook something special or pleasant. You know, the rest of the family were invited to taste it, at least. A good mean was occasion to gather in the family’s house. So at least our family was very close and we used to visited each other very often especially in holidays.

JL: Now a question about Zawiercie, the physical surroundings in the neighborhood, the building where people lived and the shopping. What did it all look like?

IW: The city [was]of about 35,000 surrounded by small villages or towns or townships. The city itself, you know, was in Polish called [sounds like “*pugyot*”] which it meant that the main administrations were located in our city. The little villages around used to come in to take care of their businesses. There was a market place where once a week the surrounding farmers and people, did come in, both, either to sell or to buy. Fruits, vegetables and poultry was brought to the market and sold. The market day which used to happen on a Thursday was more or less like a big happening because the city was filled up with people from surrounding villages. And most of the people did go out to the market to shop and buy for the rest of the week. It was like an open supermarket owned by everybody and everybody was a customer there. The city itself was more or less a industrial city. It had a glass factory

of crystal, there was ironworks, there were foundries. At one time there was even a place where they made cloth, what would you call it.

JL: Textile?

IW: A textile, well, a small textile industry. Later on they closed it up because of lack of orders or they just closed it. At that particular time the city felt it quite severely, but altogether it was not a bad city to live in.

JL: Do you remember any of it changing while you were there?

IW: Surprisingly, that particular city didn't change much. I revisited Zawiercie in 1945, '46 really — no it was '45. I went back to my old town with hope to find somebody alive. Unfortunately disappointed, I didn't find anybody. Recalling that particular time being away for five years, there were no particular changes. I revisited Poland about two year ago in 1978 and even at that particular time there [were] very very few changes. So life runs a lot slower in Poland than in the United States.

JL: Question. You spoke of your father as an orthodox and that he was very observant. How about you?

IW: So long as I lived in mine father's house I was obligated to live by the rules of mine parents. As the family was broken up and we lived under different circumstances and with all the disappointments during the war, and our religious beliefs, well I wouldn't put it beliefs, at least observances diminished. The circumstances in which we lived in did not allow me at least, to live the way we did at home. The observance of holidays, the Sabbath begin to get less meaning than it used to be. And time even today, being a small business, we don't observe the Sabbath the way my parents did. As far as religion is concerned I never forgot for one minute of mine Jewish heritage. I consider myself a very much Jewish regardless of mine obedience to the strict religious laws.

JL: You told me that you were in *Cheder* until age eight and then you went to a general elementary school. Where did you get your religious education after age eight until and before bar mitzvah?

IW: We did split -- the education was split in two parts. We went in the morning to grade school and in the afternoon we went back in to Jewish schools. There was a partial education in the Polish schools, then

- we went back in to our regular *Cheder* or the Jewish schools. Besides, we used to have special classes like Sunday schools. Saturday afternoons we went to our regular rabbi.
- JL: And the schools you went to after the Polish school, were they the same, was that specifically a *Cheder* or was that *Yashiva* like?
- IW: At that particular age it was still a specifically a *Cheder*.
- JL: Just for people to come after public school?
- IW: Yes.
- JL: Okay. Now, what do you remember about the changing social and political scene in the rise of anti-Semitism in the community?
- IW: Poland by itself was basically anti-Semitic. I would not label every Pole as an anti-Semite but the feeling in Jewish circles was that the Jew was not particularly loved or admired. We were tolerated by some and hated by most. I could go in analyzing why the Jew in Poland did not assimilate.
- JL: Why didn't they?
- IW: I would say it is basically because of the deep religious beliefs. They dressed differently. Most religious Jews did not shave, as a result, you know, they were bearded. More deeply religious Jews wore their payos. Being dressed different and appearing differently and observing, you know, all the dietary laws a Jew appeared to be a totally different person than the average Pole. The average Polish Jew did not participate in any drinking or any brawling or for that matter, you know, the just didn't participate, period. They lived in a city but basically lived by themselves. We formed a form of separation or we put a ghetto into ourselves. We didn't mingle, we didn't associate. As a result, you know, the Poles looked at Jews with suspicion, sometimes with envy, sometimes with hate. Analyzing I would say that partially the Jewish population, you know, kind of helped along in creating a society which was looked upon as a different society, you know, than the main population of that particular country.
- JL: Did you feel any allegiance at all to the country of Poland or did you just define yourselves as Jews who happened to be living in Poland?

IW: I would suspect that any Jew living in Europe, not particularly Poland alone, mainly considered themselves Jewish. Especially in Poland I don't think that the Jew had a well, surrounding or like a...the country itself did not show the Jew any special love or special tolerance. I think, you know, the Jew more or less felt like a stranger in a different country. I would have to go into the whole situation why the Jew didn't feel more loyalty. I would say it was a two sided approach. None really felt close to each other.

JL: Did you have any relationship at all with your neighbors?

IW: As a youth I would say we had certain relationships. Once in a while we did play with non-Jewish kids but most of the time we did stick to our own.

JL: What did you hear about the growing storm clouds over Europe? Specifically Hitler's aggression and Austria, Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia?

IW: As I can recall the news started to sift in especially when a lot of Polish Jews who used to live in Germany, when they were deported from Germany and sent back into Poland. A bunch of Jewish refugees came back, a lot of them had relatives and they tried to get back and move into the cities with their relatives. But then a lot of Polish Jews who lived in Germany for a long time did not have anybody in Poland. I can recall that a committee was formed to try to integrate them and find homes and apartments for them, and slowly they were brought into the community.

JL: What were they telling?

IW: They were telling the gruesome beginning of Hitler's adventures. At that particular time they did not embark yet in a liquidation. All they did is they started out to send out Jews which did not have any German citizenship or lived on passports, you know, of their country of origin. When they disposed of them they started to go after the German Jews.

JL: How did your people react when you heard about Germany?

IW: Somehow or another, at least in my memory, it did not sink in. It looked like something happened someplace, but far away and it did not exactly include us. But soon enough we found out that it wasn't so.

JL: So then when were you first fearful of the life-threatening situation?

IW: I would probably say, when the invasion of Poland started and the occupation of the Germans in Poland. I would say in that particular time we began to feel the danger close to home and at first-hand.

JL: What do you remember of September 1st, 1939?

IW: As the Germans started to move in close to our city, a panic started in most Jews and other people started to leave town and to run away thinking that "we can outrun them". Unfortunately, they were going faster than we were and at a particular point they overtook us and we found ourselves, you know, instead of going forward, you know, we went back home. As I came home I found out that most Jewish males were taken away to one place of concentration and they kept them in there for several days until they were released. But the trouble started. There was a curfew. There were places, you know, right away where Jews could not go, certain streets where Jews were not supposed to trespass. There was a curfew until six o'clock in the evening, no one was supposed to go out into the streets.

JL: Until six in the evening.

IW: Until six in the evening, yeah. Actually I mean, well, you could go out in the day but six o'clock you were supposed to stay in.

JL: You could go out after six?

IW: No, you couldn't go out after six.

JL: So you actually went -- when the Germans actually went into Poland, as an individual where did you go?

IW: Actually we were trying to live a normal life for a little time. Until the Germans took hold of the whole administration, the Jew...

JL: I'm sorry I just had the impression, am I wrong, that you tried to flee? Because you said you came back...

IW: We just walk maybe 50 or 60 miles and then that was as far as we could walk. Then the Germans took us over so there was no sense to walk any further so we just went back.

JL: You and a bunch of other young people?

IW: Right, you know. So we just turned around and went back to Zawiercie and as we came home, you know, we found out that most of the Jewish people were taken to a place and they were held there for a certain amount of time.

JL: That was when the Germans came directly into Zawiercie, that's what happened?

IW: Right.

JL: What was your life like, you said you were living normally, what things did you do until the end of '39 when you went to your first labor camp?

IW: We proceeded, you know, with whatever we did. For example, I worked in the fur business so I worked. We tried to meet and slowly when Poland surrendered...

JL: Forgive me, I'm going to stop it now.

END OF TAPE 7, SIDE 1

TAPE 7, SIDE 2

IW: When the Polish army surrendered and the German army took over the full occupation, our city were directly under the German annexation. The Germans took part of Poland and annexed it to Germany, which called it the *Reich*. Then there was a Poland under occupation. In our city we were directly under the German rule and slowly life started more or less to normalize until, oh, the Jew was supposed to wear a, you know, star of David...

JL: How did you feel about that?

IW: I would say probably at that particular time we weren't used to be singled out. Most Jews pointed out and decorate it. Of course you know that didn't really last very long. The Germans, you know, started to surround the youth and take them into labor camps, so to speak. So mine life under the Germans in Poland was not more than about six months after the occupation. There wasn't really that much to say about that particular time.

JL: What were the circumstances of your arrest?

IW: Well it was not...are you saying arrest?

JL: Arrest. Well, I'm referring to when you were taken to your first labor camp. How did that happen?

IW: The word came out that the Germans are asking for one member of the family to join a labor force for three months and after three months they would be released and probably some other people would be taken. And they probably asked for a certain amount of young people. Apparently they did not get as many as the wanted.

JL: They expected you to come forward.

IW: They expected us to come in freely. I was one of those who did go there because of my older brother being the head of the family. I thought "if I go, he'll be able to stay there and take care of the family." Unfortunately, when at night they brought him in too. Apparently they did not get enough volunteers so they went out in the streets and who maybe they saw the caught or they went to houses and just...until they had enough people they wanted. Whoever didn't hide, they were taken away.

JL: What were your thoughts all of this time, while the Germans were occupying and then when they called for people to volunteer for labor?

IW: I'd say the Jew felt very much continuously in danger. We began to hear rumors, of course this was the beginning of building the labor camps we still hadn't heard of gas chambers or mass killings. It was at that particular time when the whole tragedy started. So there was apprehension, there was suspicion, there was a certain amount of fear but it did not reach the point of desperation, not at that particular time yet. As a matter of fact, there were a certain amount of youths who were trying to escape occupied Poland into the occupied Poland by Russia. A lot of parents would not let their sons or daughters go. They said, "Where you going? No, you stay here with us." Most of the Jewish people who did escape into the Russian occupation survived. Most of the people who stayed under the German occupation were killed.

JL: When -- do you remember the month when you went into your first labor camp?

IW: It was in October or November, 1939.

JL: That early?

IW: That early.

JL: Now since you were in so many camps, I'd like to ask you one general question. Could you tell me, if you can remember, all the labor and concentration camps in which you were, the date, not the dates but the months of when you went from one to the other? Could you compare them to each other and well also, let me ask you if you at that time had in any rational way, conscious way, compared the camps to each other yourself?

IW: Very much so. Most of inmates were very much conscious of situations in each concentration camp and each camp has a different characteristic with different kind of work or different management and there were different management in a camp by itself. For example, the first camp I came into was by comparison with the others, it must have been a camp where people would have survived. There was

a *Lagerführer*³ which was actually like, oh like in English how would you call...the director of the camp was a man, a German man but he was a total *mensch*⁴, a total man. He understood that the inmates were asked to work. At that particular camp we built the German *Autobahn*.⁵ We left in the morning and came in at night.

JL: Now this was Auenrode?

IW: That was Auenrode. The director of the camp saw to it that the meals were cooked and the food more or less nourishing and he tried to control the SR, the guards which took us to work and brought us back. He tried to interfere with unusual punishments or unusual exercises on a Sunday. He went into the kitchen and checked the quality of food. Until he came into a conflict with the guards, apparently he interfered too much and soon enough he was removed. Then life started out all together different. As the work proceeded, somehow or another that camp was designated to be occupied by Russian prisoners and we were dispersed.

JL: So how long did you stay there in Auenrode?

IW: In Auenrode? About a year, I think until the end of 1940.

JL: And then how did you go from that to the next one?

IW: Oh, they picked out groups and two hundred, five hundred and they were dispersed into different camps.

JL: Did you march to the other camps?

IW: I think we were taken by truck.

JL: Where was that next camp?

IW: The next camp was...I had it all in mine...

JL: Johannesdorf?

³ German for "camp leader".

⁴ Yiddish word for "man", used to denote a good person.

⁵ The German highway system.

IW: It was Johannesdorf, that's right. Thank you for helping Johannesdorf was basically the same type of camp as Auenrode? We still worked on the same project. The difference was, you see, those camps were strategically located on the *Autobahn*? Each camp had the jurisdiction of certain amount of mileage to build a certain amount of route and they were interconnected. For example, wherever the bridge was supposed to build, a camp was organized right at that point and that particular camp built the bridge. In Johannesdorf we did more or less the same type of work as we did in Auenrode. It was just a continuation. And again, you know, as we proceeded and finished more or less our work, we were sent into the following camps. In Johannesdorf the German government marched into Russian territory already at that time and they needed people to redo the railroad tracks in Russia and they sent some of our people into Russia.

JL: Did you go?

IW: No I didn't, I was supposed to be next in line but they picked out tall, strong men probably with a better physical appearance than myself. As the first group went, they never sent another group because they didn't have no facilities. A typhoid fever broke out and they never sent another group.

JL: Now how long were you in Johannesdorf?

IW: We stayed in Johannesdorf for about a year and a half and we were transferred into Grossmasselwitz. Grossmasselwitz was a different type of camp altogether, different characteristics. You can stop that for me. [Tape cuts out.] Grossmasselwitz was an altogether different type of camp. It was not a camp of construction as such. The camp consisted of warehouses, railroad tracks. The German government, you know, as they marched and occupied certain countries, they confiscated, you know, everything which they could confiscate and transported it into certain warehouses. And that particular camp was a camp of warehouses where they kept skies and sleighs and almost anything you could think of. It was all piled up and we were occupied with sorting out, and loading and unloading. It was basically it. From Grossmasselwitz they did sent out the people into Russia. In other

words, it was like a transit camp. So we stayed in Grossmasselwitz, let's see 1940...probably about all the way through 1943.

JL: Through '43?

IW: Oh, actually '42.

JL: Through the whole of '42?

IW: Yeah. As far as I can recall, it's hard to.

JL: Yeah. It was like another year and a half?

IW: No. It couldn't have been that long.

JL: You said you were in Johannesdorf for a year and a half, which brings us to middle of '41.

IW: I would say probably till the end of '42.

JL: So the end of '42 in Auenrode, I mean Johannesdorf.

IW: Auenrode, Johannesdorf, Grossmass...We didn't stay in Grossmasselwitz very long, really. We stayed in Auenrode for about a year and Johannesdorf for about a year so it would be '41, '42. When we liquidated Johannesdorf we stayed in Grossmasselwitz, most through the winter. I would say give and take, you know, about a half a year would be more accurate.

JL: So the beginning of '42.

IW: Yeah, from Grossmasselwitz, you know...

JL: Again, were you taken from place to place by truck, all of them or did you walk?

IW: Yeah.

JL: All of them by truck or did you walk for many, one to the other?

IW: The only time...most of the time we went by transport, in the train sometimes. When we were transported from camp to camp we were transported by transportation. The only time we walked was when they liquidated [sounds like "*Senstheihung*"], then we walked. It was, you know, already to the end. In the beginning we were still transported from one camp to the other.

JL: And after Grossmasselwitz?

IW: From Grossmasselwitz, you know, we went into Neukirch. Again, characteristics changed altogether. Neukirch was a camp of railroads. We attended the railroad tracks, we improved the railroad, we loaded and unloaded the wagons. So we were strictly, our main work was attending the railroad at that particular time. The time we spent at Neukirch was probably the most memorable because it was the work was very hard and the food was one the poorest. We found out that the director of the camp used to steal most of the food and really the rations, you know, were very poor, very meager the health facilities were very bad and the camp by itself was a very hard camp to survive at that particular time. So as -- when that camp was dispersed and I'm talking about myself, you know, my physical health, you know, was rundown. As I can recall, you know, at least part of us was sent to Markstaedt.

JL: So how long did you stay in Neukirch?

IW: Let's see...1942...I would say probably until '43.

JL: All of '43 or just the beginning of 43? Or don't you remember?

IW: We probably spent a year in Neukirch. From Neukirch we were transferred into Markstaedt. Again, total different situation. Different camp, different kind of work. Markstaedt was basically a campo which constructed factories. The factories were huge and the manufacturing of the...you know, they were supposed to build the first missile. At that time, we didn't exactly know what we were doing but later on we found out what was supposed to build there. Again, was hard work. The camp was situated about an hour from construction. We had to get up early in the morning and walk to work and the same walk back. The camp by itself was very strict. And it was under a Jewish *Lagerältester*⁶ or a *Lager*⁷ director who was very strict. He oversaw that food was spread out evenly, he watched over the kitchen, he tried to keep the camp clean. Basically the man was supposedly he was an officer in the Polish army and had military education. In mine estimation he confused our camp with a military camp not realizing that the people worked hard all day and walked many miles and back and were not capable to live in the regimated that life in a military camp. My feelings about that man are about half

⁶ German for "camp elder".

⁷ German for "camp".

and half. I would say he tried to keep the camp in order as much as he could. He tried to keep out the German out the camp by ruling the camp by himself but at the same time his harshness was sometimes overdone.

JL: Was he a Jew?

IW: Pardon?

JL: Was he a Jew?

IW: He was a Jew, oh yes. Prolong the appeals⁸ and overstay in the back yard when the numbers did not coincide or somebody did not report in the morning to work. He confused himself with a small Caesar in a camp of five thousand people. As I mentioned before, the work was totally different than in other camps. The construction was different, the German bosses were different. So altogether it was a hard camp to live in but we were working with different nationalities and as such, once in a while, you know, if you had the right contacts, you could secure a piece of bread or some kind of food outside the camp.

JL: Did this go for all of the places? Was it possible to do some smuggling?

IW: No, in most camps we worked just Jews alone...

JL: I see.

IW: But in Markstaedt we did have contact at least on construction because there were different nationalities, there were Czechs, Poles and Germans working in the same construction so we did have contact with different nationalities.

JL: Even where there were all Jews and no other nationalities, was it possible to do some smuggling?

IW: Hardly. First you had to have something to smuggle and if you did not have anything, well to buy or exchange with different nationalities there was no way you could bring anything in.

JL: Now how long were you in Markstaedt?

⁸ Mr. Wolnerman means to say "*Appell*", that is the daily counting of the prisoners.

IW: In Markstaedt we must have been all the way through '43 already. All the way '43 through '44.

JL: Through the year '44?

IW: I would say so, yes.

JL: So that's two years?

IW: No, well actually, well from '43 to '44.

JL: That means you were in Neukirch till the beginning of '43.

IW: Probably, yeah.

JL: So '43 to '44. I'm going to turn the tape over.

END OF TAPE 7, SIDE 2

TAPE 8, SIDE 1

JL: After Markstaedt, you went on to Funfteichen?

IW: Funfteichen was actually not too far away from Markstaedt. But the characteristic as a camp, Markstaedt was still considered a labor camp where Funfteichen was already a concentration camp. The difference between a labor camp and concentration camp was that when we got in there our heads were shaven, as far as I can recall all our private belongings were taken away.

JL: This didn't happen in the other camps?

IW: In the labor camps, you know, we still had, you know, some kind of personal things. Where in the concentration camps, you know, your clothing was taken away, you were given different clothing, whatever you had personally was gone so it was the first taste of a concentration camp. The work was basically the same because it was the same construction.

JL: What was it you were building?

IW: We were building the factories for the machinery and missiles. We were actually building the factories from scratch. At the time we were building we didn't know exactly what we were doing, we were just labor. We poured concrete and build foundations and put up walls and we just built it.

JL: Did everybody in the camp do the building? In that, once you were in the concentration camp, was everybody working?

IW: Everybody was working.

JL: So there were no specific facilities for killing people?

IW: In the labor camps no.

JL: In the concentration camps?

IW: Even in the Funfteichen they did not have any facilities for disposing of bodies. They had been taken away into I understand, I think Gross-Rosen where they did the burning. In the camps where I was there was no burning going on. People did die, but what they did with the corpses, they loaded them

and transported into the crematoriums. People who were not able to work because of sickness or deterioration were selected and sent away. But there was no crematoriums in Funfteichen.

JL: How long were you there?

IW: [In] Funfteichen, we stayed until the end of '44. When the Russian front started to move in, one morning we were moved out of Funfteichen at that time, you know, we did march. We did walk from Funfteichen into Gross-Rosen.

JL: How far was that, about?

IW: I would estimate, oh, could have been probably a hundred miles or more.

JL: How long did it take?

IW: I know we walked several days.

JL: Did you lose a lot of people?

IW: We did lose people on the way, yes. Some of them were shot if they did fall out of line. Usually if some people couldn't walk any further by sore feet or sheer worn out, one of the SS did fall back with them and we heard some shots and they just left the dead behind. As we came into Gross-Rosen, again, you know, we did not work very much in Gross-Rosen because a lot of people did come in, the camp wasn't finished yet and the facilities were very poor. From Gross-Rosen we went into a transport and we were sent into Buchenwald.

JL: So how long were you in Gross-Rosen?

IW: It was very short time. Very short time.

JL: A matter of days, weeks?

IW: A matter of weeks. Then we went into Buchenwald. Again in Buchenwald we were, you know, there for a short time. From Buchenwald we were sent into...we're talking already it's the end of '44 getting into '45. Still in that particular period.

JL: The end of '44 beginning of '45.

IW: The end of '44 and getting into '45. We spent in Buchenwald a certain amount of time, not too long and again they picked up a group of people and we were sent into Bissengen.

JL: Did you move as a group? Did you move together basically as a group, originally from the Auenrode group?

IW: Not necessarily, we were basically separated and they picked up a certain amount of people and sent them in. There was no relationship, you know, from one camp to the other. It just happened that sometimes there were the same people and sometimes there were not.

JL: So basically once '45 began you were moving away from the different fronts?

IW: Yes, mainly the Russian front. I found out, for example, when we were moved out of Funfteichen, probably two days later the Russians came in. So if we would have managed to stay a little bit we would have probably been liberated. As a matter of fact, the hospital so to speak, or sick room was liberated.

JL: They didn't kill them off?

IW: They didn't kill them off, no. but when we were sent away from Buchenwald because they needed some people in Bissengen for work the whole camp in Bissingen I understand was liquidated or they died or whatever. But the people got sick and there was -- it had some kind of epidemic. When we got in there, the whole camp was cleaned up and gassed. They must have had fleas or lice or any other insect in there. And as far as we know, nobody survived at [inaudible] when we came in there.

JL: So you came in there after everything was gone?

IW: Everything was gone, we came in, probably about 500 people.

JL: What did you do there?

IW: We worked, believe it or not, we extracted oil from shale. It was probably the pioneer of extracting oil from shale.

JL: What machinery?

IW: Oh, it was probably primitive as they do it now. Again, it was a terrible place to work on. Again, you know from Bissengen we didn't stay very long there either. I don't know the reason, apparently the front moved in and we had to move out of there too. From Bissengen we were sent into Staltach. And there was already a subsidiary of Dachau. The camp was not finished, the windows were open, the doors were open, and we were talking. We were liberated I think in April, if I am not mistaken. So we must have been in Staltach some place during February, March, at least two months.

JL: Before we go on to liberation, just some general questions about the camps as a whole. Were there men -- was it only men in most of the camps?

IW: In the labor camps there were only women in the kitchen. In other words, each camp had only 10 women and their main work was kitchen. Maybe, I don't know if there was laundry. In the concentration camps there was no women whatsoever, period. It was strictly male.

JL: Where you able to have contact with the women? Was there any attempt to have contact with women in the place where there were women?

IW: In the labor camps? Yes. They were in the same camp, they had separate quarters. There were contacts where we could talk, yes.

JL: What were the barracks like in most of the camps?

IW: In the labor camps there were two rows of beds, a straw mattresses and blankets. Each barrack consisted of two sleeping rooms -- or one sleeping room and one room was like a eating place. There were no other facilities as such. Each man had to take care of his own bed. The room had to be cleaned, scrubbed. The beds had to be made clean and inspections were going on during the day. For example, in Markstaedk there was no eating place as such. You picked up your soup and you went to your room with it, by the time that you got there most of the time it was already cold. The first camps did have eating facilities near the kitchen, like a mess hall where you could sit down and eat.

JL: After the first camp where you said wasn't bad, what was the food like generally, the rations?

IW: The rations did get smaller and less nourishing as time went on.

JL: What were they?

IW: Well, the bread rations were smaller. At the beginning we used to get butter and maybe cheese, or sometimes a piece of sausage at the first camp. And as time went on the rations...they cut out the cheeses, they cut out the sausage, then the butter. And then it consisted of a small slice of margarine and bread. The main suppers so to speak or the main meal in the first camp was nourishing, it was grains and potatoes and meat, where in the other camps, you know, the meat was unheard of, and it was mainly cooked potatoes and not that many of them either. So food got from bad to worse as time went on. Apparently, you know, as the shortage of food in Germany was severe, it got more severe in the concentration camps.

JL: What kind of treatment was there? Beatings and so forth? How were you treated generally throughout the camps?

IW: It was a strict, strict discipline. Most of the time, you know, you try to keep your nose clean and try to avoid trouble but you weren't always lucky. And no matter how much you tried, you always tried for survival, try to secure some food and sometimes you were caught and beaten up for it. Sometimes had encounter on construction with German bosses who weren't quite pleased with the way you performed so there were beatings, yes definitely. I myself was beaten up a few times because I was caught one time handing over a letter from one inmate to another. I was beaten up, they found some money in my pocket accidentally. So it was nothing to get excited about.

JL: How were you able to keep yourself clean?

IW: Most camps did have bathrooms.

JL: Did?

IW: Yes. Unfortunately they weren't big enough to accommodate that many people but if you tried to forfeit other things and get in as soon as possible, you did find running water and a place to wash up. It does not mean that you had hot running water in the winter time or a bathtub.

JL: What kind of contact did you have with Germans besides the beatings and discipline?

IW: Strictly, you know, just in construction, you know, when you worked with German foremen or German *Meisters*⁹ so to speak. We had contact with them. Nothing personal but here and there you could hear a word be said and some of them weren't exactly sympathetic with the Hitler regime, you know, by itself.

JL: Did they talk to you about it or what did they do?

IW: Once in a while, once in a while. They couldn't make themselves talk but here and there you could listen an innuendo or to some kind of remark between themselves and so forth.

JL: Was it possible to have any contact in the labor camps, when you were out working, was it possible to have contact with the German population?

IW: Not at all. It was strictly separated and isolated. The only Germans we saw were in the construction which consisted of guards and they German bosses but no civilian population.

JL: Generally, how did you get news, if at all, about what was happening in the world?

IW: Here and there we did get a hold of a piece of old newspaper which was eagerly read. Once in while there was some, like I said, some Germans who did let something loose or overhearing or whatever. I could not say that we were well-informed, but here and there, you know, some kind of news was leaked and it was eagerly spread around the inmates in camp. So if something, you know, did come through, I would not say much. I don't think that even the Germans themselves, you know, were very much informed at particular times.

JL: Through those over five years that you were in those camps, what kind of thoughts did you have about ever getting out, the future, or did you finally accept what was going on, what did you think of?

IW: There were periods in our lives, I'm going to analyze myself, and think about my times. At the first beginning the times weren't that desperate. Most of us had still their belongings from home. A lot of people took along with them certain amounts of food, we were fed. In the camp, I would say, there was enough food not to starve, you know, so the times weren't that desperate. But as time dragged on

⁹ German for "masters".

and we pictured a stay of three months, but as time dragged on most of us left families and girlfriends and friends, and we quickly began to realize that this wasn't going to be just a short period which is going to pass. Thoughts of escape, you know, begin to kindle. So I did send a coded note home that mine plans are to escape. There was a friend of mine, you know, who lived in the same house and the plans were that I would go with him. As they received the message, the answer was that we shouldn't try to do it because they do surround the families and take the rest of the families away.

JL: This was before the family, obviously?

IW: So this was before the liquidation of the whole city. So quickly we decided not to do that. And then again there was a rebellion in the beginning. There was desperation in the following years and then apathy came in, you know, to the end. With the conditioning of hunger and hard labor we turned into a submissive kind of people, you know, with very little will of our own and the main energy was used, you know, for survival, just how to maybe find that bite to eat or how to keep myself going. The thoughts of fighting back or escape were quite remote. We mostly existed by instinct just to survive, you know, just to survive and very few people did. Because people did get weaker, undernourished, overworked. The sanitary facilities were worse, the medical facilities were worse. None of the health people didn't care and if they did care they didn't had nothing to cure anybody with. I would say at the end of it there was mostly apathy.

JL: Now, when you came to the concentration camps, there must have been people that had been there for years or for a while. What kind of information did they give you? Were they able to give you any information?

IW: Most camps, when we got into, started with us.

JL: I mean in a place like Buchenwald, for example?

IW: Buchenwald was a camp which supposedly consisted of political inmates and they were brought in from different countries like France, Belgium, Denmark, Poland, all the occupied countries. And there were quite a few intellectuals in there. Again, the camp was managed from the inside. Unfortunately

they couldn't do what they couldn't do. There were crematoriums in Buchenwald and when they started bringing more inmates which were evacuated from different camps, Buchenwald got to be over-loaded and over-crowded and people were dying, you know, by the bushel baskets.

JL: You didn't get any inkling when you first got there?

IW: Oh, yes. We knew already what was going on. We saw -- being in Gross-Rossen we saw already the chimneys burning so we knew there were crematoriums and in Buchenwald, you know, we were told, you know, the whole gruesome story what was going on.

JL: And you believed them?

IW: There was no reason not to believe. Every morning we were loading the deads out of our barrack, so there was no reason not to believe.

END OF TAPE 8, SIDE 1

TAPE 8, SIDE 2

JL: One more question about news. Did you get any news about the extermination camps? In any way did you hear anything?

IW: We did get news especially when the selection started. We found out that people are taken into Auschwitz and they are disposed of. So if it were humanly possible, people did shy away and they tried not to stay in camp because of sickness or some kind of disorder because they knew, you know, if they were once on the list as being sick and when the inspection came in, regardless, you know, they picked you out and they took you away. So people did shy away from sick rooms to keep their names out of it, at least when we knew that it is dangerous to be there.

JL: How did you get the news, by word of mouth?

IW: By word of mouth, there was no publications, naturally. As we proceeded to different camps naturally, where there were crematoriums there was nothing hidden anymore.

JL: You told me that you were liberated from Staltach. Could you talk a little about that, how that happened?

IW: As we left Staltach by Dachau, well actually as the allies, you know, started moving in, the order was to liquidate all camps around and load them on trains and take them out of the area. Where we were supposed to be taken, I am not quite sure. But the word was that we were supposed to be taken into the Tyrolean mountains and there the whole train was supposed to be liquidated, shot or whatever it is. Fortunately for us, the tracks were bombed and somehow or another the train could not get out that particular circle. We were moving back and forth and the Allies and the Red Cross found out that we are there.

JL: What did the SS do?

IW: The SS was, you know, totally in charge of that transport. When we came into a halt and just couldn't move any more. We were contacted by the Red Cross and packages were handed out to us. There was no big deal because a lot of people died from it. I think we talked about it one time or another.

JL: They died from the food?

IW: They died from the food because they were too rich for the undernourished stomachs. There were conserves like meat or fish. When the people, you know, started to eat that stuff, you know, they just stuffed themselves with it and they just couldn't overcome it and they died from it. Myself, I did not eat but I used the milk up. There was a powdered milk and I mixed it with water. I secured the water from the [inaudible]. I was totally dehydrated and I couldn't get enough of that milk.

JL: How many people were with you?

IW: On that train I would say there must have been probably two or three thousand. The whole camp was loaded on that train. And the way we lived on that train it was interesting. Finally, when we were overrun by the American army, we could see that something was going on, you know, a couple of days before because the SS, you know, started to rip off the skull insignias from their uniforms.

JL: While the train was moving or while you were stopped?

IW: While we were stopped and, you know, the word came out that something was going on. Besides we saw already that the end is near, it was just, you know, all we were praying for was to survive that particular period. Some of them started to disappear, some of the guards, and soon enough the army walked in. As the Americans, you know, started walking in, some of the inmates knew where the bread on that particular train was located. So they overtook that warehouse of bread and they started throwing bread. As the American officer started approaching the train, the German SS transport director, hopped over to the American and started to report that so and so many people on the train but the American looked, you know, at the way they throw down loaf of bread and people grabbing, they were not paying attention to anything, just grab a loaf of bread and eat it. The American officer, you know, kind of dismissed him. The SS, you know, handed over his weapons. I can recall the American, you know, he spoke German he must have been, he says "with all that bread there you let the people starve?" And he kind of said some abusive words and they took the SS away. At the same time here we were left, so to speak free, and all we could think of is grab potatoes and grab bread and

we were free but no place to go. We were just sitting there on the tracks waiting for something, you know, to happen. Some more adventurous of our guys, you know, start walking into a village there. And if they went in a big group, some of those as the Americans approached, some of those did leave, they evacuated so there were some houses unoccupied. Some of our people just did walk in and settle down in the houses. By the time me and a friend of mine decided to leave the train and go into the village, you know, because we heard that the village nearby and there are people there and went into houses and some of them came back already dressed. So I walked in by the time it was already dark we walked in, you have to sleep someplace. So we knocked on the door and they wouldn't let us in, so we sneaked into some kind of a stall and spent the first night on a straw pile or whatever. Like I said at the beginning, we were supposed to be free but really there was no place to go, we didn't know what to do.

JL: Did the Americans direct you anywhere?

IW: Not at the beginning. The first front, you know, was moving on. Until they sent in some occupation force and besides it was a small village. They probably would have just passed it on if it wouldn't be for us. Because they did send in some kind of a group and they put up a field kitchen and they tried to cook up some meals for us and the people started, you know, to gather around and occupy some houses which the Germans, you know, vacated. A short time, you know, after we spent in that village the Americans, you know, came in and they loaded up and secured some German camp and we were brought into those camps where we went through a physical. We were treated as sick people really. Most of the people were undernourished, deteriorated. Didn't have no clothing, and were totally disoriented. We were fed three times a day with vitamins and the food was quite good. It was strictly administrated by the American army. We stayed in Feldafing, you know, for quite a while.

JL: Now this was Feldafing?

IW: It was Feldafing.

JL: This camp?

IW: Yeah.

JL: Before you go to Feldafing, did you have or while you were in there already, did you have any contact with surviving family members, you know, from the extended family?

IW: Personal family, none whatsoever.

JL: And cousins?

IW: There was no immediate family for -- until I returned to Poland in 1945 going '46, I went back to Poland. It's the first contact I had with any of my relatives. It was strictly cousins, no immediate family.

JL: [Inaudible.]

IW: None of my immediate family survived. I found out naturally through my relatives and people who were with them. That's how I found out, you know, how and when they perished.

JL: You told me about when your brother perished in "Sarne and the rest in Auschwitz?"

IW: Yes, "Sarne" and the rest in Auschwitz.

JL: And how did you find those family members? Did you go to a specific contact place?

IW: I went back to my home town where I found all the Jewish people who survived and they returned to Zawiercie.

JL: Was there one concentration place or Jewish committee?

IW: Some occupied homes were vacated by Jewish families and I think, as far as I know, they had kind of a kitchen facility where they cooked meals for all those people who returned. I'm not sure by whom it was supported. Either the Polish government donated those facilities or whatever, I could not tell you. In returning back to Zawiercie I found some relatives where they were and I went there to look for them.

JL: At that point you went specifically at that point, specifically, to look for family.

IW: Definitely, yes.

JL: Who went with you?

IW: Just friends.

JL: Just friends, so you weren't married?

IW: No.

JL: How did you feel?

IW: On my return to Poland and to mine place of birth it was a total disappointment. It was probably the most tragic moment after all the euphoria of being liberated. As I approached my home town there was very little friendship shown by the Polish population and not finding any relatives and close family, we were very disappointed and literally desperate. Right there and then I decided that I won't stay in Poland, that I would go back into Germany and try to emigrate from there. I left Zawiercie, looking for my relatives I found them in Ludwigsdorf, which was Germany occupied but in Poland. In other words it was like an exchange. Russia took a piece of Poland and gave Poland a piece of Germany. And it was Poland but it physically it was Germany.

JL: How did you find those people?

IW: By word of mouth. And when I found them we all understood that we were going to leave Poland.

JL: What did your neighbors say when they saw you?

IW: They were "oh, somebody survived" or "you did come back". Some of them asked about the rest of them or did anybody else come with us and there was no particular sorrow or deep compassion or whatever.

JL: Okay, now if you would tell me a little about life in the DP camps. So you were in Feldafing from '45 until '47?

IW: Well, '45 to '47. Yes.

JL: Where was the general population from, where were they from generally, in Feldafing?

IW: You could find from all over Europe.

JL: What were the living quarters like?

IW: Again, they were mainly military barracks. It was a *Hitler Jugend*¹⁰ camp originally. We were given rooms, occupied by 20-25 people per room. We used their beds and was again, it was a form of free concentration camp. Still. We were fed by administration. There was an American administration combined with some of our people. We were fed and clothed and taken care of by the occupation.

JL: What kind of food did you have?

IW: The food was good. We did get three meals a day. We had to register to receive our cards so we can receive our meals or whatever they had to give.

JL: Did they give you spending money too?

IW: No.

JL: How did you manage to get things that you wanted? Was there black market activity?

IW: We begin to move around. We sold some of our rations and there were already buyers for that. Because at the beginning the German people were hungry and we managed to have food and we did receive from the American army different articles of food, sometimes coffee and cocoa and chocolate and cigarettes. So a quick black market did form and by selling some of our surpluses we managed to get some money and buy some other things.

JL: What kind of religious life was there in the camp?

IW: Very little. Some people who were deeply religious continued their observances and again, you know, the liberals, you know, stayed liberal.

JL: Was there possibility for social life?

IW: Yes. They tried to bring in some entertainers. Of course, you know, it took a while until the camp settled down and the people had their mind on some social life at all. But then little by little, things started to organize. Concerts were brought in, speakers were brought in, we were visited by Israeli dignitaries and Israeli military men and American military men, and so there were continuously things going on.

¹⁰ Hitler Youth.

JL: Did you meet your wife there?

IW: I met my wife in Poland.

JL: Before?

IW: No, when I returned. We returned back into Germany and we got married later.

JL: When did you get married?

IW: In 1946.

JL: What kind of -- were there any Zionistic activities in which you participated in the DP camps?

IW: At the beginning there weren't at all, but then the [sounds like "*Prekah*"] which was an arm of the Israeli government which tried to smuggle in survivors, you know, into Israel. One time or another I was contacted, of course you know, I was still young and, you know, capable of helping and I tried to but somehow or another I didn't get into it. There was no special Zionist activities, you know, just get people out of camps and try to smuggle them into Israel.

JL: Before statehood.

IW: Before statehood.

JL: What was it like when the state was established? Was there celebration in the camps?

IW: There was celebration. Myself, after a while I moved out of the camp and secured a apartment or facilities in the city and went on my own.

JL: In which city?

IW: It was in Dorfenmarkt, in Bavaria.

JL: So it was not a DP camp there it was...

IW: No. I lived privately with...

JL: With your wife.

IW: My wife.

JL: Okay, let me ask you just another couple questions about the DP camps. Did you have anything to do with the camp committees?

IW: No, not at all. None, whatsoever.

JL: While you were in the camp, what kind of contact besides the black market dealings, did you have with Germans?

IW: On a social level, none. We lived in the city and again were pretty much among ourselves. A small community was established, a committee was organized. Again you know, we were, you know, supported by the central committee in Munich.

JL: Are you starting to talk about Dorfenmarkt?

IW: Yeah.

JL: I was just wanting to impart that's when you started to have some if any contact with Germans, by being in the city.

IW: Right.

JL: What feelings did you have about being in Germany?

IW: As I mentioned before, somehow or another, you know, when we were liberated there was a feeling of "who cares?" All we cared about is eat and drink and dress and forget about just to overcome the initial tragedy of losing your family. The feeling against the Germans? Again, after the euphoria we quickly realized that we are still Jews living in a strange country and the Germans are still at home and no matter what we did or how we lived, you know, the reality came quickly back. The Germans had their police and had their government and we were still strangers in a strange country. So there were no...I wouldn't say that there weren't some acquaintances made or maybe some semi-friendships acquired but I wouldn't say that there were some assimilation in the German society.

JL: What kind of work did you do while you were in [inaudible]?

IW: None.

JL: Did you have a chance to come across any *Ghettopolize*¹¹?

¹¹ German for "ghetto police".

IW: In the camp, the DP camp? At the beginning, if some of those capos survived, they were dealt with very harshly.

JL: By the population?

IW: By the population. Most of those capos or collaborators who did survive tried to stay away from DP camps because they knew that nothing pleasant was awaiting them.

JL: [Inaudible.]

END OF TAPE 8, SIDE 2

TAPE 9, SIDE 1 (no Side 2)

JL: When you were in the DP camp, what were your thoughts then when you had been so apathetic towards the end of the war, were you more positive? What kind of thoughts were you having then?

IW: In the DP camps, again, you know, we were very unestablished, very unattached, quite uncertain about the future. Different outlooks on life. We lived day by day not knowing, you know, what the future is going to bring. People with relatives in different countries like Canada, United States, France, England did slowly establish contact with relatives. Some relatives, you know, who lived in different countries, free countries did try to, you know, seek their relatives by themselves. But those people who did not have relatives in foreign countries sat there and waited for some kind of an opening or whatever. We really didn't know and some didn't even care until rumors started, you know, going around about closing certain camps because believe it or not, people living in camps begin to find a way of life. I wouldn't be surprised if camps would have been existed today that some people would still be there. You realize people did get married. People did have children in the camps. Apparently the German administration and the occupational forces realized what was going on and they did begin to press that some kind of immigration should be started. So certain countries started opening their doors and people did register and immigration started.

JL: Did you know Soryn at the time?

IW: No. I might have seen him in Munich but we never met personally. We talked about several times here, but I can't recall personally that I ever met him. Maybe if I would have been working in some kind of administration when I would have had chance to meet him but I never was connected with any of them.

JL: What made you decide to transfer to Dorfenmarkt?

IW: It happened to be a city who did register people.

JL: You mean for people to move in to?

IW: We had some people we knew -- the story behind it, there were people who were liberated in different places and people were loose in different places and once they were in the city they settled down and somebody went by and settled down and the you know how Jewish communities, you know, kind of get together. It's just a matter of knowing some people and settling down there, as simple as that.

JL: You were telling me earlier that a small committee was formed and a small community started to form, an administrative committee?

IW: Yes, we chose a committee which in turn was in touch with the central committee in Munich. And the central committee did receive all kinds of food, clothing and in turn they kind of spread it out into different Jewish communities. We had to have somebody, you know, to represent us and kind of get a hold of that stuff.

JL: You know how long you were there, for two years?

IW: '47 to '49, yeah.

JL: Now when and how did you come to the decision to go to the United States?

IW: I myself you know, was registered and ready to go to Israel. As I went to Munich for certain registrations and paperwork, I met in Munich a very close friend of mine, from my home town. And we used to meet periodically but we met in Munich and were talking, "what do you plan doing?" He said "I'm registering to go to the United States". I said "I'm going to Israel". He says "come on up with me and register", I say "for what?" he says "what can you lose? Whatever comes first." So I went up and registered and as luck was it, my papers for the United States came before my papers for Israel. As a result, I say "OK, if this is the way is supposed to be than this is the way I'm going."

JL: So you made the arrangements to go to Minnesota?

IW: I didn't, you know...

JL: It was made for you.

IW: It was made for me.

JL: How was it arranged for you to go on a ship? We talked about that.

IW: Yes. All the arrangements were made by the joint of the Jewish Federation and the [sounds like "ONRA"], the HIAS. They were all connected in that particular venture. We were checked out physically and mentally and politically and slowly it proceeded and we got our papers to go.

JL: How would you react, to come to a contemporary question, to the way refugees enter the United States now compared to way -- the things you had to go through?

IW: We are talking about two different situations. We are talking about a [inaudible] or a Holocaust survivor group which had no state or no country and had to emigrate someplace comparing to a people who come into this country now, running away from their countries for economical or political reasons sometimes. If you're comparing Cuba or the Dominican Republic or whatever, now with the Cubans it's a whole story on itself. I don't think there's any comparison to make whatsoever. I would say we had more difficulties to enter this country than the other people ever did.

JL: What was the name of the ship that you took?

IW: It was *General McRae*, if I am not mistaken. It was a military ship.

JL: We talked about the trip itself earlier. How did you feel when you saw the Statue of Liberty?

IW: As the ship arrived, the feeling again was very happy and kind of full of anticipation. When we approached the harbor and naturally saw the Statue of Liberty and everybody knew more or less what it meant, but not quite as well as we got to know it living in the United States.

JL: Let me go back a little to Dorfenmarkt. Did you work in Dorfenmarkt?

IW: We did organize, you know, a certain type of shop. Again it was in cooperation with the central committee in Munich. They did send in certain pieces of clothing, and even certain materials. Some people who were tailors or knew the profession, they kind of did some work there at least on a small scale. But most people didn't work as such.

JL: Okay. What contact with family members in the US did you have after the war while you were still in Europe, anyone that might have been here?

IW: I did not have any relatives in the US whatsoever, any person or relative.

JL: Well, this is the end of the formal questions I have for you. Is there anything that you yourself would like to add, any additional comments that you would like to make?

IW: The only comment I can make about this whole interview is my sincere hope that in the future whoever is going to listen to that will understand the interview has taken place some thirty-odd years after the Second World War and recollections are quite difficult to remember like dates and places. The idea of the whole interview is to preserve the memory of the Holocaust and maybe the people who listen will someday actively participate to prevent another occurrence of a Holocaust. The future generations should understand that holocausts, you know, have happened periodically in every generation. Somehow or another people do not learn from mistakes and history repeats itself. And it's only thirty years since World War II and we see holocausts occurring in Uganda, in Cambodia, in small scale in other countries. It's proved that humanity hardly ever learns from it. And if this particular statement or my testimony in a small way make any contribution in preventing a future holocaust, I hope that it will serve this purpose.

JL: Thank you very much.

END OF TAPE 9, SIDE 1 (no Side 2)

END OF TRANSCRIPT