

**THE WILLIAM BREMAN JEWISH HERITAGE MUSEUM
ESTHER AND HERBERT TAYLOR
JEWISH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF ATLANTA
LEGACY PROJECT**

MEMORIST: RUBIN LANSKY
INTERVIEWERS: JOHN KENT
RUTH EINSTEIN
LOCATION: ATLANTA, GEORGIA
DATE: DECEMBER 3, 2003

INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Begin Disk 1>

John: Let's start with your name now and your name at birth also.

Rubin: My name is Rubin Lansky. I'm born in June 1922. I'm going to start when [the Germans] took us away.¹ They organized right away. They come in a strange land. They wanted 120 people to go to work. They had made already the Jewish police and they came for us.² It's not . . . they couldn't help it. If they wouldn't come, the SS would come.³ We went in the movies [theater] and wait for the people to take us wherever. We didn't know where we going. We went up in Lodz [Poland].⁴ Over there, they brought in the rich Polacks to go to the Protectorate [of Bohemia and Moravia].⁵ They wanted to make just like in France—make a Polish state unto

¹ On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Ruben lived in a town called Ozorkow [Polish: Ozorków; also Ozorkov] in central Poland, about 32 kilometers [20 miles] northwest of Lodz. In the spring of 1941, several hundred young Jews (especially those aged between 17 and 21) were rounded up and sent to forced labor camps.

² To assist in managing the large communities within ghettos, German authorities installed a hierarchy of Jewish administrative units under their control. A *Judenrat* was established in Ozorkow shortly after the German occupation began in September 1939. The *Judenrat* or *Ältestenrat* was a Council of Jewish leaders installed to manage the communities and provide the Germans with forced laborers. A *Judischer Ordnungsdienst* [German: Jewish Ghetto Police; also known as the OD] was also established to keep order in occupied areas and often were responsible for rounding up Jews selected for forced labor or deportation. They were often referred to as the "Jewish Police." A Jewish police force was established in Ozorkow in the winter of 1940-1941.

³ The SS or *Schutzstaffel* was a major paramilitary organization under Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. It began at the end of 1920 as a small, permanent guard unit known as the "*Saal-Schutz*" to provide security for party meetings. Later, in 1925, Heinrich Himmler joined the unit, which had by then been reformed and renamed the "*Schutz-Staffel*." Under his leadership, it grew from a small paramilitary formation to one of the largest and most powerful organizations in the Third Reich and was responsible for many of the crimes against humanity during World War II.

⁴ Lodz [Polish: Łódź] was a large textile manufacturing city and Jewish cultural center about 75 miles from Warsaw, Poland. The Germans occupied it on September 8, 1939 and renamed it 'Litzmannstadt.' On December 10, 1939, a ghetto was established. Waves of Jews from the surrounding area and Western Europe were pushed into the Lodz ghetto making the total number of Jews who passed through it at over 200,000. Deportations of Jewish men sent to forced labor forced labor on German road building began in 1940.

⁵ On March 15, 1939, Nazi Germany invaded and occupied the Czech provinces of Bohemia and Moravia. The German occupation authorities refashioned the two provinces as a German protectorate, annexed directly to the Reich, but under the leadership of a Reich Protector.

them. But nobody would take it from the Polacks, so they didn't trust them. From over there, they took us to make the first *Autobahn*⁶ . . . what you call here the . . .

John: Freeway?

Rubin: They call it the 'freeway.' Over there, I don't know if it was a mistake or it was in the beginning [and] they didn't have the experience. We came in the camp, everything [was] ready—new barracks, new tables, new everything. We thought, "This is it." We didn't know different. We started working [on] the *Autobahn*. They posted . . . they were supposed to watch us. There was a few old guys in the black uniform. The black uniform was not SS; they was SR.⁷ They didn't watch us because there was no place to go—there was nothing but woods. The guys who took us . . . was on the streetcar to Lodz. In Lodz, they took us to the *Autobahn*. Over there, we could write home. They wrote to us. We got paid a few *Deutschmarks* and the *Lagerführer* [German: camp leader], the guy who was . . . we thought everywhere is going to be like that . . . he was very good. We been there one year. They fed us and there was no electric wires. We could walk away and come back a day later or two. Nobody knew even that we . . . They weren't organized.

John: Was there a name for that particular *lager* [German: camp]?

Rubin: It was not a concentration camp. It was a working battalion. We worked for *Organization Todt*.⁸ This was an organization in uniforms [they wore uniforms]. They'd been in business . . . they rented us out, like you rent a horse or a car. They paid eight *Marks* . . . for

⁶ The *Autobahn* is a federal controlled-access highway system in Germany. Construction of the *Autobahn* was begun before Hitler came to power, but the Nazis appropriated the project and the *Autobahn* became one of the Nazi regime's showpieces. Rubin was among a group of forced laborers constructing a section of highway across the 'Polish Corridor' (also known as the 'Danzig Corridor'), a small narrow piece of land that was ceded to Poland after World War I and provided access to the Baltic Sea, but in the process divided the bulk of Germany from the German province of East Prussia. In the tensions leading up to World War II, Poland had denied German demands for construction of an autobahn that would traverse the area and connect Berlin with the East Prussian city of Königsberg. This became one of the pretexts Adolf Hitler used for the German invasion of Poland in September 1939. Partial construction had begun in late 1933, but slowed as Germany geared up for war in 1938. Work resumed after Poland was defeated and continued through 1942, mostly with a labor pool of forced laborers. The highway remains unfinished today (2017).

⁷ The *Sturmabteilung*, also known as the "Storm Troopers," "Brown Shirts," or "SA" or sometimes as the "SR," was the paramilitary of the Nazi Party commanded by Ernst Rohm (German: Röhm) and responsible for helping Adolf Hitler rise to power in Germany in the 1920's and early 1930's. By 1934, tensions within the party saw Heinrich Himmler and the SS (*Schutzstaffel*) replace Rohm and the *Sturmabteilung*'s position as the dominant organization within the Nazi Party.

⁸ *Organisation Todt* was a civilian engineering firm in Germany. They solidly supported the Nazis and were awarded many large contracts for construction and engineering in Nazi Germany. One of them was the construction of Hitler's desired autobahn both in Germany and Poland. The Germans paid *Organisation Todt* so they could feed and maintain the work camps, so while Rubin was helping to build the road, he was under civilian, not SS, control. Although much depended on the individual *Lagerführer*, life in these camps was relatively decent.

everyone. In wintertime, it was frozen and we stayed in the barracks for three months. We sing. We had a good time. We didn't know what's going on in the whole world because [there was] no [news]paper . . . just like dummies. Then the war went out with Russia, and they took us onto the street, near the front.⁹ They stole . . . over there, there was a lot of woods . . . pine. We make some holes, we cut them, and the tractor came over and took it to Germany. Just stealing.

Then it got wintertime. It was sometimes 30 [degrees] below zero. I got here <indicates legs> marks . . . all busted . . . in back. <gestures to his back> Only when young you could . . . We had to move from one place to another. Maybe that's why they couldn't make a concentration camp—because we had to move. We was trained already to work hard because the ones who didn't work . . . like Marty Storch you mentioned . . . he said he sick, so they sent him home.¹⁰ He came home. I got a letter [that said], “Don't come home. The first party came home. The next one, I think they're going to be killed.” That's what happened. We all worked hard to do what they tell us to do and not to go home . . . to send you home! It was a different situation. Most of the camps were not like that. They going to send you home? They'd shoot you. It cost too much to send you home.

John: What was the date approximately . . . that year?

Rubin: This was when the war broke out with Russia.¹¹ When was it? In . . .

Ruth: 1941?

Rubin: Yes, 1941. This was maybe September, something like this. We went to take a swim. We had a lake over there. One of our boys got drowned. The *Lagerführer*, he sent a letter to the family and sent all the . . . and tell us that he was going to make a nice burying. He had a speech, “Not to worry about it. Some people die young, some people die . . .” I remember the words. He said, “But life has to go on. Next time, don't go by yourself. Go with somebody who knows where the lake is deep” and whatever.

We'd been there three and a half years in Latvia, Estonia. Very cold . . . this would be like the sun shines. From over there, the Russians start to approach. So [the Germans] came for us. They sent us . . . They put us in a concentration camp in Riga [Latvia] . . . small

⁹ Germany attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. After that, the building of the *Autobahn* was abandoned and the workers sent elsewhere.

¹⁰ Marty Storch is a Holocaust survivor who settled in Atlanta. He has contributed several oral histories to the Herbert and Esther Taylor Oral History Project.

¹¹ Germany attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. After that, the building of the *Autobahn* was abandoned and the workers sent elsewhere.

concentration camp.¹² In the back, they had some gasoline [storage]. They knew that nobody was going to bomb it because it was a concentration camp. That's what they thought. But this was the Baltic, and everything went two ways—from Germany to the front, through the Baltic.¹³ The Russians came over and they wanted to bomb it—the gasoline [depot]. Before you could see them, the [Germans] shot them down.

Over there, we heard rumors that they gonna . . . if the Russians were going to stay, they were going to take us away. But if they going to . . . go back [retreat], they would have to kill us, because we going to join the [Russian] army. We were young. We didn't know what to do. There were some children and some women from Riga. They took us on two boats to Germany.¹⁴ I'd been on the boat . . . there were Germans, there were sick, or ruined, or half-killed [half-dead]. We didn't know where we were going . . . we'd been in the basement [hold] and they'd been upstairs [on deck]. After the war, we found out the second boat . . . they drowned . . . with the Jewish people. They didn't have no soldiers over there coming back. From over there, they put us in a concentration camp for about three days. Then they sent us to Buchenwald.¹⁵

¹² The Kaiserwald concentration camp was located north of the city of Riga—Latvia's capital and largest city—and established in March 1943. Jews from Hungary, Poland, and most of the Jews that survived the liquidations of the ghettos in Latvia (including Riga) were sent to Kaiserwald and its sub-camps. By March 1944, there were around 12,000 prisoners in Kaiserwald. The prisoners were used for slave labor and contracted to German companies for the production of electrical goods or worked in factories, mines, and on farms. As the Russian army advanced in the summer of 1944, thousands of prisoners were murdered and the survivors were deported to the Stutthof concentration camp.

¹³ The Baltic States are Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. All three on in northern Europe east of the Baltic Sea

¹⁴ The Germans evacuated the Riga-Kaiserwald slave labor camp in August and September 1944. During the evacuations, some prisoners were marched to Stutthof, while most were marched to the port of Riga and boarded onto ships bound for Stutthof via Danzig [Polish: Gdańsk]. On August 6, 1944, the *Bremerhaven* departed with 6,382 Jews. In mid-September, another transport—called the “Rosh Hashanah Transport” by the prisoners—departed Kaiserwald. On the Rosh Hashanah Transport, a Soviet submarine sank one ship. Those who had been placed aboard a Red Cross flagged ship survived, because its status protected it from attack. On September 24 or 25, 1944, the “Yom Kippur Transport” left with 3,155 prisoners. The final 190 Jews left Riga by ship on October 11, 1944. Those who survived the horrid conditions on the ships (overcrowding, illness and little to no food or water) were marched from Danzig to the Vistula River, where they were crowded onto barges for two or three days before being transferred to Stutthof.

¹⁵ Buchenwald was established near Weimer, Germany at the beginning July 1937. Originally it held political prisoners, criminals, Communists, “asocials” etc. from the area. During World War II, it housed a significant population of Jewish prisoners, foreign prisoners, and Soviet POWs. The total population in Buchenwald varied between 8,000-10,000 inmates to a peak of roughly 48,000 prisoners in April 1945. In all, approximately 56,000 of the 238,980 prisoners who went through Buchenwald died.

Buchenwald . . . One day, they marking the skies [with flares].¹⁶ We didn't know why there were marks in the skies. But around Buchenwald they had factories . . . the Germans make factories. They thought nobody was going to bomb Buchenwald because half of Buchenwald was Germans who opposed Hitler. Buchenwald was built for Germans . . . not in 1939 when the war broke out or after . . . 1933, when [Hitler] came to power, that's why they built Buchenwald. More than half of them over there was Germans, Communists, people-said to be Communists [i.e. political prisoners], who knows . . . The people went for lunch over there . . . whatever they got. An American [plane] came over and started bombing Buchenwald . . . the factories . . . they marked it [with flares] not to bomb where the people were.¹⁷ In the *lager*, the Germans came with cars . . . with bicycles. They told us for sure that this was not going to be no bombing ground, but they bombed it.

After the bombing, they sent us to Bochum [Germany]. There was a factory for ammunition.¹⁸ Everything with push buttons. There was an oven [forge]. I don't know how hot it was, a few thousand [degrees] . . . The heat was as though it was . . . when I got close to the oven, I took out about four or six pieces of iron. Another one pushed it. The Russians were working over there, and they say, "*Davei!*" [Russian] *Davei* means, "Fast! Fast! Fast!" When it went in, it maked a hole. It came out, the water went on it to cool it off. When they said, "Fast! Fast!" it start cracking. Right away, the Germans came over: "One more time like this, we'll

¹⁶ During bombing raids in World War II, the Allies would first identify the target area for the bombers by dropping color-coded magnesium flares, called target indicators. The target indicators allowed following bombers to locate the target and begin releasing their bombs. Unfortunately, placing bombs from a great height directly onto a target—even with flares marking it—was very hard to do.

¹⁷ The Allies deliberately did not bomb camps where only the labor was kept. However, around Buchenwald, there were many legitimate military targets in the form of factories. During the day of August 24, 1944, American bombers attacked the armaments works and SS facilities located near the main camp and largely destroyed them. Because the prisoners were forced to remain near the factory during the air raid, 2,000 of them were injured and 388 killed.

¹⁸ Bochumer Verein [also known as Bochum-Verein or simply referred to as Bochum] was a mining company established in 1854 in the town of Bochum, in western Germany. During World War II, the company became one of Germany's most important armaments manufacturers. It manufactured flak guns, gun barrels, bombs, shells, torpedo parts and cast-iron pieces for the production of aircraft engines. In January 1944, the company employed thousands of foreign forced laborers and POWs, constituting more than 38 percent of its total labor force. In mid-1944, it began using concentration camp prisoners from Buchenwald to offset increasing labor shortages and barracks surrounded by barbed wire were constructed to house them at the plant. The prisoners did heavy physical labor in the foundry in high temperatures. The company paid the SS command in Buchenwald for the laborers. There was a system of reward within the labor camps at Bochum for above average production, which allotted between \$0.30 and \$0.50 *Reichsmarks* that could be cashed in at the company's canteen. However, most prisoners were beaten and mistreated by the SS guards, foremen, and the company rather than rewarded. By November 1944, the Bochum Verien sub camp held 1,706 prisoners. The camp was evacuated on March 16, 1945 and the 1,356 surviving prisoners were transported back to Buchenwald.

know what you did. Everybody going to get shot.” If they said that everybody was going to get shot, they were going to do it. It was no joke.

I see those factories [at] Bochum, Kalb, Düsseldorf—nothing but chimneys.¹⁹ I told . . . the one who watched us, I say, “I’m scared here.” He said, “Why are you scared?” I said, “Everywhere I’m going, they bombed me. I’ve been in [unintelligible: 11:45], the Russians were bombing.” He said, “No, no, no, no. Not in here.” “Here,” he said, “they’ve been here already, two years ago . . . but we gave them a lesson. They’re never going to come back.” I thought he was telling a story. This was true . . . the Americans . . . He said, “We didn’t even let them go back to England. We got them . . . everyone had to be down [were shot down].”²⁰

This was about . . . I worked over there maybe three weeks or something, maybe another week . . . at the most, a month. The American [bombers] were coming by the hundreds . . . you saw them this big. They started bombing in the nighttime, the English. They put a light [flare] . . . for a second to see exactly where they bombed. The Americans bombed . . . the carpet-bombing. Today it’s [unintelligible: 12:48]. Next day, 12:00, they come in [unintelligible: 12:53] to [unintelligible: 12:53]. Everything had to be bombed. Oh, my G-d, here was no food, no water . . . people laying on the street already . . . it looked like Auschwitz-Birkenau, those pictures what you see.²¹ Can you imagine hundreds of planes? You had one plane or two planes

¹⁹ There were several sub-camps of Buchenwald in Düsseldorf, which is a city 48 kilometers (30 miles) west of Bochum. It is unclear where ‘Kalb’ is. There was a sub-camp of Buchenwald named ‘Heinrich Kalb’ in Bad Salzung— a city 265 kilometers (164 miles) east of Bochum—but this is unlikely the factory Rubin is referring to.

²⁰ The city of Bochum was first bombed during the Battle of the Ruhr—a five month long campaign from March until July 1943, in which the British Royal Air Force (RAF) strategically bombed cities in Germany’s heavily industrial Ruhr region. German air defenses inflicted heavy losses on the RAF. On 4-5 November 1944, Bochum was again bombed in an attack involving 700 British bombers. When the Bochumer Verein plant was hit, more than 10,000 high explosive and 130,000 incendiary bombs stored there caused extensive destruction in the surrounding neighborhoods. An aerial image of the destruction can be seen at <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/SUK13897/>.

²¹ Auschwitz-Birkenau was a network of camps built and operated by Germany just outside the Polish town of Oswiecim (renamed ‘Auschwitz’ by the Germans) in Polish areas annexed by Germany during World War II. It is estimated that the SS and police deported at a minimum 1.3 million people (approximately 1.1 million of which were Jews) to the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex between 1940 and 1945. Camp authorities murdered 1.1 million of these prisoners.

over there in New York [City, New York].²² Did you see what happened? In Germany, wherever you throw a bomb it was something. It was not like Vietnam.²³

John: What condition were you in at that point, in terms of your health and your outlook?

Rubin: I was okay. We all were okay. Over there . . . in Latvia . . . where we'd been over there, they called themselves . . . they call us "Israelites." They believed in Saturday, not Sunday. Everything was pigs. The fish . . . you could smell from fish . . . everybody. They were very nice to us over there. We could . . . when we left, the one family that . . . there was not electric wires or anything, so we went . . . we make some friends. We spoke already *Lettish* [Latvian], a little when we were young. She was so happy. She said, "Jesus going to find out what we did for the Israelites" . . . they called us the 'Israelites.' "The fish are going to be this big . . ." Don't ask. After the war, I tried to write to her. I got back. They were sent out to Siberia or something . . .²⁴ This they got for being nice . . . We wouldn't know how to thank them what they did. If Jewish people had been there, they couldn't do better.

A few miles away, they killed all the Jews. We didn't know about it. Do you know up two streets from here, what happened? You don't know. Anyway, we left over there. When we first came, there was a camp. They took a house or two houses and make it and put us in. In the front was bread, and rolls, and a big can of milk. They had a letter [orders]. I know Jewish people don't like to hear that . . . there was a letter . . . if they not going to treat us nice, that somebody was going to die here. He was scared . . . the *Lagerführer*, what they called him here. There was four guards on the door watching him until it quieted down. We still keep thinking about him. From over there, where we went again back to . . . no, over there . . . was the

²² Rubin is referring to the attacks of September 11, 2001, also known as the '9/11' attacks, which were the deadliest terrorist attacks on American soil in United States history. Nineteen militants associated with an Islamic extremist group hijacked several commercial airplanes and attacked targets in New York City and Washington, DC by crashing the planes into buildings. One failed attack resulted in a crash in rural Pennsylvania as well. The attacks caused extensive death and destruction and triggered an intensive United States effort to combat terrorism in the Middle East and around the world.

²³ The Vietnam War occurred in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from November 1, 1955 to the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. This war fought between North Vietnam—supported by the Soviet Union, China and other communist allies—and the government of South Vietnam—supported by the United States and other anti-communist allies.

²⁴ Siberia is an extensive geographical region in Russia that extends eastward to become what is often referred to as 'North Asia.' It is a sparsely populated area with long, cold winters. Siberia has been a part of Russia since the seventeenth century. The majority of Soviet forced labor camps in the 1930's through 1950's were in remote areas of northeastern Siberia. The Siberian labor camps were used as a form of political repression and prisoners were often worked to death.

SD²⁵ . . . came over there to the camp to watch that . . . you're not stealing anything, or doing something, or I don't know.²⁶ The SD was over the SS. You never heard about the SD? You speak German a little?

John: No.

Rubin: *Sicherheitsdienst* [German: Security Service] . . . It's like . . . they were sworn to watch Hitler. They had to be over six foot. They had a little racket here . . . they need help. Red is this, blue is this . . . very organized. Here the SD . . . they could hold you on the highway, they could . . . The SS was scared [of] them, very scared. A lot of people think it was just SS; it was SS, SD, SR, *Arbeits* [German: work] battalion . . . different . . . They bombed . . . One day goes by [with] no water, no toilet, no nothing, no food. The SD came over and they said, "Who wants to volunteer to take the bombs out?" I said, "What have I got to lose?" I'm going to take a bomb out. How can you take a bomb out? I don't know how deep it is. They tell us already that these are time bombs. If they didn't tear up the factory . . . you can't go back to work, because a time bomb can explode anytime, in a day, two days, in an hour, whatever. They took us and they make [signs warning,] "*Lebensgefahr*" [German: danger to life] . . . nobody should go through over there and we going to take out the bombs. They gave us some sticks was about . . . I was there, maybe another Jew. Everybody was scared to go. I said, "I've got nothing to lose. I mean, I'm going to starve to death here." They let us loose over there, and they stayed and watched what we going to do. We didn't know what to do. We went in the bombed houses.

In the bombed houses, in the basement, they had everything . . . salami, anything. They knew if something going to happen, they wanted to be ready with the food. I said, "What's going to happen tomorrow? Now we're going to eat. I can't take much back to the camp because they're going to tear me up . . . having food." I go out . . . I could speak a little German. The Russian stayed. He started hollering . . . the SD, "What are you doing? What you coming here?" I said, "Wait a minute! I can bring you out anything you want! There's salami over there, there's whiskey over there, this over there." They start smiling. I bring them out. The next day they said, "Everybody wants to go because we brought some stuff." We [hid in our] clothes here <seems

²⁵ The *Sicherheitsdienst* [German: Security Service] also known as the "SD," was a special branch of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*) that acted separately as the Nazi Party's own intelligence and security body.

²⁶ In August 1931, Heinrich Himmler created the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD; "Security Service"), a special branch of the SS that acted separately as the Nazi Party's own intelligence and security body. After Adolf Hitler became chancellor in 1933, the SD was given extra power to deal with all opposition to the Nazi government. After World War II, like the Nazi Party, both the SS and the SD were declared criminal organizations by the International Military Tribunal and banned in Germany.

to indicate his pants> . . . we put in whatever we could. He said, “No.” He wants the same people. [He said,] “Anybody who wasn’t there yesterday, if you’re coming out, you get shot.” If he said he’s going to shoot, he’s going to shoot! He’s going to get a medal! So we went back another day.

Then the third day, they took us back to Buchenwald. Before we went to Buchenwald, the SD brought over some food for the people who still alive or half-alive. They all were hollering, “The army . . . they’re barbaric . . . the worst of the worst . . .” They didn’t forget that they were the first ones who bombed. They laughed. They liked it. But now they didn’t like it. I gave a sandwich . . . a German was another one gave him a little water. We did this about a couple of days. They always wanted the same guys they knew already . . . the few Russians, myself. We come back to Buchenwald.

There were so many people coming: French resistance, Italian, and all kinds.²⁷ We didn’t have no barracks, nothing. They put us in the woods. [They said,] “Go over there.” We slept over there. I got up, somebody took my shoes off [had stolen his shoes]. You don’t know what’s going to happen. To make it short . . . after a week, maybe another day or two, they come in . . . the *Einsatzgruppen*, whatever they called them . . . I think it was the *Einsatzgruppen*.²⁸ [They yelled,] “*Juden raus!*” [German: Jews out!] . . . that we should come to the *appel* [roll call] . . . “*Juden raus!*” I’d been with my buddies . . . Ozorkowers [Jews from Ozorkow, Poland] . . . we kept together.²⁹ That’s what helped us a lot. We knew each other.

John: Who were your main friends throughout that whole period?

Rubin: Who was my friends?

John: Yes, who were the main people you stayed with?

²⁷ In addition to a large Jewish population, Buchenwald also held political prisoners, criminals, Communists, and “asocials.” Over time, more and more foreign prisoners were sent to Buchenwald, including Czech, Slovak, Dutch, Polish, French, Spanish and Soviet POWs, forced laborers, and resistance fighters. Eventually, there were prisoners from 35 nationalities in the camp. As the camps close to the advancing Allied front were evacuated in August 1944, Buchenwald’s population increased to 31,491 prisoners and its 64 sub camps had a population of 43,500 prisoners. By the end of the year, 63,048 men and 24,210 women were in Buchenwald and its sub-camps. The overcrowding left many lodged in tents or with no roof over their heads whatsoever.

²⁸ The *Einsatzgruppen* were mobile units that followed the regular German army (*Wehrmacht*) into the Soviet Union when Germany invaded it in June 1941. They were responsible for the deaths of a minimum of 1,000,000 Jews in the occupied East as well as anyone they perceived as an enemy of the state.

²⁹ Ozorkow [Poland: Ozorków] was a textile manufacturing community in central Poland, 26 kilometers (16 miles north of Lodz). When World War II broke out, some 5,000 Jews were confined in a ghetto where workshops were opened. Over 1,000 Jews worked outside the ghetto in a German factory. In 1941 many Jews from Ozorkow were sent to labor camps in Poznan, Poland and the surrounding area. Between May 21 and 23, 1942, about 2,000 Jews were deported to the Chelmno death camp and murdered. In August 1942, the remaining 1,800 Jews were sent to the Lodz ghetto to work.

Rubin: The Ozorkowers . . . the one that are left. We went to *cheder* together, we went to school together, we knew the parents . . . Most of us made it because of circumstances that we'd just been in the right place or who knows. They say "*Juden raus!*" Here I am with a bunch—not only with Ozorkowers. It was some Lodzers [Jews from Lodz, Poland], who knows. One was a Jewish cook. He was a little older. His name was Mendel. [I said,] "Mendel, what are we going to do now?" He said, "What are you going to do now? What going to happen with everybody is going to happen with me and you." I said, "No, not with me." I run away and I went in the toilet . . . this was the toilet for one camp and this one was for the other one. <He makes gestures off camera, apparently indicating two separate toilet facilities in separate areas but near each other> It was . . . you couldn't go from one to another. The toilet was just like a . . . So I go in toilet. I said, "What are you going to do here?" I went down the toilet. There was some barbed wire. I pushed the barbed wire away and somehow I made it to the Polish . . . I didn't know where I was going to end up. When I come up, I saw the Polish guys. They went out but not in the . . . the Jews had to come in the big space [roll call area] . . . that you can see who it is, what it is. The way they came in . . . [the Germans] howled at you, "*Juden Raus! Juden Raus!*" with the dogs barking, and here with machine guns . . . with guns [unintelligible: 24:57]. I got up. I said, "Let me go in the barrack and see what's going on." Who they are being counted. I opened the door, I see sick people. They're all sick people. They were going to take them too, the sick . . . they didn't care who was sick. They'd take and they'd shoot you.

I went in the next toilet doing the same thing. Barbed wire . . . I did the best to get through, whatever, a scratch or something, who cares . . . you know that something will happen bad to you. I see the Polacks making a line. I go in the line and I saw a guy from Ozorkow. We lived in the same neighborhood. 'Roman' was his name. He stayed in the front and I went behind him . . . no, the other way around . . . he stayed and I went in the front . . . in the front, maybe he's going to say, "*Jude!*" . . . They'd take me out. I said, "Roman, do you care if I stay here or if you stay in the front?" He said, "No, I can stay in the front." In the front, I can see that he's going to say that I'm a Jew, so I would say that he's a Jew too, so we both would go. He knew that. You get smart when you're in those conditions.

They took us on the railroad . . . open railroad [cars] . . . Every place we went, we buried the dead . . . that died [in the] night time or the day before. You got up, you saw this [guy] is dead. What are you going to do? I worked in the German kitchen, so some of those guys, the

SS . . . knew me. One was . . . he was an SS, but he couldn't even discipline the people that be on that railroad [cars]. We went from one place to another . . . here the French are coming, here the English are coming . . . they didn't know where to go, no food. We stopped in a place . . . I told him, "Otto" . . . Otto was his name . . . little guy, he probably was wounded or something, so they put him in uniform to watch [guard]. That's what I'm saying: everybody was different. Not everybody was . . . because he was an SS, that he killed anybody or whatever. That's what I saw. I said, "Let's go. I see a house over there. We're going to wash up." He said, "Okay." We went over there, and he didn't say nothing. I told over there . . . the people who were already Czechoslovakian . . . Czechoslovakian and Polish you can understand, just like Russian and Polish. [After we washed up,] I said, "That guy's hungry. He wants something to eat." He said, "Yes." We sat down, we ate . . . went back. I said, "What's going to happen now?" He said, "There was some children that I brought over." When the wagon got half full, they had to bring some . . . from another camp. I don't know who they were. They didn't speak my language. I couldn't understand what they were saying. They were about maybe 10, 12 years at the most.

With them came a Jewish *Lagerführer* . . . you know what a *Lagerführer* is? He runs the commandant [camp]. He started cussing and hollering and screaming . . . the Germans don't say nothing, but he is a Jew. He is our kind. [At] nighttime the children start peeing . . . it was open, and the wind blowed on his face. *Oy gevalt* [Yiddish expression expressing shock], he started beating the hell out of them. I was strong. I found out that he was a half-Jew. I let him have it. But he knew that the bigger guys, the Germans who transported us . . . they heard screaming . . . the children . . . he screamed in German. They said, "Everybody quiet! If not, we'll have to shoot you! We don't want to have a word!" I didn't know what to do. He knows those guys and I don't. I know that [\[unintelligible: 29:30\]](#) . . . you're not going to be able to do anything. In the morning when we went to eat . . . what I told you before . . . I came back and everybody hollers . . . the children, "Rudi! Rudi! Rudi!" I said, "What? Rudi? What?" They showed [told him] that that half-Jew took the bread away from the SS. The SS man didn't care. He ate, so . . . he was that kind of a type . . . not everybody is like that. When the officers heard the children hollering and screaming, they came over and said, "What's going on here?" The SS . . . the guy that I knew [Otto], told him, "He stole my bread when I went to wash up. He's a *Totschlagen* [German: dead beat] . . . Kill him. He stole the bread . . . kill him." I heard "killing." I went up and I let him have it. He had another guy that . . . got his shoes . . . like a *cafeactory* . .

. like a butler.³⁰ He was a butler to him. We start [to] roll and I still don't know who the children are, and why they're there, and what, or nothing. When we got off and I throw him down . . . I don't know where he got the life or not . . . but I had to throw him down . . . *meshuggenah* [Yiddish: crazy]. Children . . . because they make you wet a little bit . . . he hit him; he had a stick or something. Now the guy who watched him, I tried to get him too. He said, "I had to do what he told me! I had no choice! If not, I would starve to hunger!" If we got bread, he said the first thing he gave him and all right.

To make it short, we stopped. I saw on the . . . where we stopped was Theresienstadt.³¹ I didn't know what Theresienstadt means . . . just another place. The rail . . . they opened the doors, they say, "*Juden raus! Juden raus!*" I see that they start crying . . . [the] children started crying . . . to show who is a *Jude*. I thought that they were Jewish, they were all Jewish. The one who cried and hollered, "*Jude! Jude!*" I put him down. I didn't know where they were going or why they were going. I put him out and I told him, "That's all . . . This is *alles* [German: the end]." They took off. I didn't know what. After the war, I went on television over there, looking for those children that I saved . . . that I threw down to gentiles [non-Jews]. Here I didn't want to tell them nothing but I had no other choice. That they could have been quiet and I would say, "There is no *Juden*."

We take off from over there . . . over there we take off and we come to Chemnitz.³² All of the sudden, I see different uniforms with different . . . and they're talking to the SS. There were more SS and SD because they wanted to save themselves. They didn't want to go to the front. I asked one, "Why are you so scared for the front?" He said, "You crazy? Over there [is a] one-way ticket. You get killed or you get for hunger or disease or froze to death. You have no chance." I see they talk, and talk, and they have . . . I said, "I don't know what's going on." All of the sudden, on the loudspeaker they say, "Anybody Czech came here to the hallway."

³⁰ A *calefactor* is a small stove. It is also an old-fashioned word for a butler, or one who warms things up for someone, in this case the German's shoes.

³¹ The Theresienstadt (Terezín) "camp-ghetto" near Prague in the present day Czech Republic was opened in late 1941 and existed until May 1945. It served as a ghetto, an assembly camp, and a concentration camp. It was originally designed to hold prominent Jews, persons of special merit and old people and to camouflage the extermination of European Jews of world opinion by presenting it as a "model Jewish settlement." In the course of its existence, approximately 140,000 Jews from Germany, Austria, and about one third of the Jewish population of Bohemia and Moravia were sent to Theresienstadt. Roughly 33,000 died in Theresienstadt itself. Nearly 90,000 Jews were deported to other ghettos, concentration camps, and extermination camps in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe.

³² Chemnitz is the German name of a town currently on the border with the Czech Republic. In Czech, it is known as *Saska Kamenice* and it is 23 miles from Terezin/Theresienstadt.

I told them I'm a Czech. I don't know what to expect . . . Why? What? I stay over there, and Otto, the SS, he comes for water over there . . . He had the little thing to keep water [canteen]. Every station had a place that you have some water to drink. Otto said, "Rudi, you're not a Czech. You're Polish." I said, "Otto, do you care who I am?" [He said,] "Oh, no, no, no, no." I still didn't know what was going to happen here. They said, "All Czechs" . . . it's better to be a Czech than be a Jew.

They asked me my name and I told them 'Dzielanski.' My name was Zychlinski. I cut it in half [later] . . . Lansky. I told them, Dzielanski, a little like Czech. [They asked,] "Where were you born?" I said, [unintelligible: 35:00; sounds like: "Shlomozyskie cesky saska"]. Sometimes it was Polish, sometimes it was Czech. They call it [unintelligible; sounds like: "Shlomozyskie," "Shlomshoziaski" or "Schloss Onzyskie"]. Everything . . . still don't know what's going on. All of the sudden, two big trucks come over . . . open trucks. All the Czechs, including myself, go on the trucks and I don't know. When we went on the trucks and we start rolling, I saw something going on that I don't know . . . something big. People waiting with flowers and throwing flowers on us and take off their watches, their rings and everything, and throw them at us. I caught the bread, a big bread . . . see the cut? <Begins to unbutton shirt sleeve at cuff> I went with those Czechs. The Czechs, some of them had with knives. See here. Can you see it? Maybe it's this one. <Showing his wrists> I don't know. Maybe it's this one. I caught the bread, and everybody with the knives . . . I see blood is going. I say, "Oy, *gevalt!*" I throw it away. I'm not going to eat any! Then wherever we go, I see people outside. They don't know what to do with us. I said, "Well, I got in the wrong place. Who knows what's going to happen?"

We come to Pilsen.³³ Pilsen is the second biggest city from Czechoslovakia. I never saw so many people. They holler, "Did you see my mother? Did you see my brother?" Did I see your brother? Like somebody in Israel asked me, "Do you know Moishe from Brooklyn?" I say, "In Brooklyn there must be two Moishes, about 200 Moishes!" They put us out nice. I saw already that the Germans are nice to us, but I still don't know where I'm going. The last one goes in and opens the door. I look. Oh, my G-d! The SD sitting over there and asking questions. Then . . . "Next! Dzielanski!" I go in. There was a table. They had the guns on the table, some of them. There was a guard over there, I remember, watching them . . . maybe I come in with a gun. He

³³ Pilsen [Czech: Plzeň] is a city about 90 kilometres [56 miles] west of Prague. The Germans occupied it from 1939 until General George S. Patton's Third Army liberated it on May 6, 1945.

said, “Can you tell me, in short, why you’ve been in [a] concentration camp?” I said, “I lived in **Shlomozyskie**. When the Germans come in—the army—they wanted some people to go to work. There were a lot of volunteers. I was young and I went to church one day. When I came out from the church, they asked me if I wanted to volunteer for the German army. I said, “I’d be glad to.” He asked me a few questions . . . where I’ve been. I told him I worked on the *Autobahn* and the war broke out. They took me behind the lines, on the Russian front. When the Russians approach, they didn’t know what to do with us. They brought us to concentration camp. The last thing he asked me, “*Haben Sie Verwandte die verhassten die Juden gehabt?*” [German: Do you have any of the hated Jews as relatives?] “Did you ever have any family from Jews?” [I said,] “Jews? What Jews?” [He] stamped [my papers].

I’m coming out . . . the Red Cross watching for me . . . they picked me up and put me in the hospital. I come in the hospital. They told me that there were, I think, thirty-some Czechs [that had been released there]. Four died when they brought them to the hospital. They died already. I said, “*Mazel tov!* They died! I’m going to die, too. I’m not a Czech. I don’t know what’s going to be next. What are you going to do next? You’re in the hospital.” I’ve been in the hospital. Did I make a good move? What can be bad? They have the machine guns with everything . . . “*Juden raus.*” But I’m here and I don’t have where to go. I don’t speak the language . . . I can understand a little . . . a few words. I see people coming in to [see] everyone: a brother, a father, a mother. They talk, they pick up, they bring in stuff, and they go out. Here [to me], nobody comes. They came from the radio to interview me. From all the people, they came to me because they [the others] were already packing. They were going. I took the blanket, I said, “I can’t talk. I’m sick.” They covered me, they didn’t say nothing. What’s going to be now?

Then they told me that they would give me to eat . . . no, a doctor, it was a woman doctor, she says, “Take off your clothes.” I never . . . a woman’s going to help me to take off my clothes? In Poland I never experienced that! I said, “No.” She said, “Yes, come on.” [I said,] “Alright.” After this, I said, “How about food?” She said, “We can [not] give you food. We’ll give you a little soup because four died already. If you gonna eat, you’re going to die, too. That’s

what happened to them. They were so hungry.”³⁴ But I still don’t know what’s going on. Why? What? At nighttime, I started opening doors to look for the kitchen . . . until I found the kitchen, I ate and I took with me food, whatever. I’d been there a few days, maybe three days, four days, something like this. Not long.

A guy comes in—a tall guy, maybe in the middle fifties—with a whole package . . . I don’t know what he hold over there. He said, “I see you must have a gun.” He talked to me. There was maybe another one or two still left. He said, “I’m looking for somebody who’s been in concentration camp and doesn’t have where to go . . . lost everybody,” and on and on. I said, “That’s me.” I didn’t know that I’d lost everybody, but what I got to lose? Maybe he’s going to help me. He said he was going to take me home. He took me to the police to register.

I come back to say goodbye. They told me there’s going to be a funeral, and they wanted to have six people that are strong enough to give him the last honor. It was going to be the family going to be first, and then they wanted us to take the last few steps. I came out and see police [unintelligible: 43:24], made with flags, with flowers, with music, with . . . *oy gevalt!* [I thought,] “What’s going on here? Am I crazy?” People tried to push some money in my pocket, and another one a watch. Police saw this . . . they took us . . . we’d been six of us. They wouldn’t let nobody come close to us.

[The Czech man] took me home. He showed me he had about forty-some people working for him. He was a baron . . . you know what a baron is? A baron, he has a lot of land . . . hundreds and hundreds of acres, and he has people working. He had an old mother and a sister. I ate with them. After a day or two, I got sick, I got temperature . . . just not knowing what in a minute is going to be. About maybe three or four preachers come over, with their clothes [vestments]. They told me to kneel, and they say something, I don’t know . . . “Exit . . . Affect this,” whatever. They said, “Now you shouldn’t worry about it. You’re going to be okay.” All right, I’m going to be okay, but I still don’t know why all this treatment. You know what I found out? When we went over there to Chemnitz, the SD made a deal with the government that they going to let . . . this was—the guys that I got together [with] . . . they were the government from Czechoslovakia before the war, and they were in Buchenwald. They came out at the same time when I came out to go. We didn’t know where we were going. We were going right, and then we

³⁴ After liberation, camp survivors faced a long and difficult road to recovery. Eating foods that were too rich or complex for survivors’ bodies to handle could exasperate years of malnutrition and starvation, resulting in sickness or death. The Czech doctors were keeping food from Rubin so that he would not eat too much too soon.

went back, and then because . . . I found out that they make a deal for gold. They were going to release those people who had been in the government before. They took the money for themselves, probably.

Before you know, the radio said that the Czechs make the revolution . . . they gonna free themselves.³⁵ What is so bad, if [General Dwight David] Eisenhower was not going to come to help them . . . he was not far away . . . they were all going to be killed.³⁶ The guy who got me in his home, he went to fight. They go from one place to another. He had a machine gun and something else that was in the field buried. Nobody would know where it is. There was so much land. Then he came back . . . I told him, “I know I told you that I don’t have nobody, but I want to go home to make sure.” He said, “You don’t have to run. We’re going to bake . . . we’re going to give it to you. If you want to come back, you come back. If you don’t want to come back, you don’t owe me anything.” He didn’t ask me if I’m a Jew, if I’m not a Jew . . . I went home and we saw the Russians coming in with the . . . No, we saw the Germans . . . they surrender already. Those Germans, the SD, they make a good deal. They got the gold . . . I don’t know what they gave them. They made a deal. They let them go. They would be free anyway, but would be . . . maybe a lot of them would die. I see those Germans . . .

I’d met already a few Russians . . . White Russians.³⁷ To me, they [were] all the same . . . Russian and Crimean [a peninsula on Ukraine's Black Sea coast] and . . . all of the sudden, we be eight of us. We came in a city . . . a small city, and the Germans going like on a parade. They were going to surrender, but everything was order . . . order means to be just . . . I see people spitting on them, some of them throwing rocks, this and that. There were some guys and they tried to do something, but they saw us. They knew who we are . . . coming from camp

³⁵ The Prague uprising was an attempt by the Czech resistance to liberate the city of Prague from German occupation during World War II. Events began on May 5, 1945, in the last moments of the war in Europe. The uprising lasted until May 8, 1945 with a ceasefire between the Czech resistance and the then retreating Germans. The Germans had unconditionally surrendered to the Allies, effectively ending the war, on the previous day. The Americans did not help the Czech insurgents due to previous political agreements with the Soviets. On May 9, the Soviet Red Army entered Prague. The city was liberated on May 11, 1945—nine days after the fall of Berlin and three days after the Third Reich’s capitulation.

³⁶ Dwight David Eisenhower (1890-1969) was the 34th President of the United States, serving from 1953 until 1961. He was a five-star general in the United States Army during World War II and served as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, headquartered in Reims, France. Prior to the Prague uprising in May 1945, the Soviets and Western Allies had agreed upon a demarcation line. Much of Eastern and Central Europe, including Prague, would be controlled by the Soviets. Although American forces were already in western Czechoslovakia and could reach Prague sooner than the Soviet forces advancing from the east and south, General Dwight D. Eisenhower denied requests to advance on Prague, as it would have violated the agreement.

³⁷ ‘White Russian’ refers either to a Russian who supported the tsar in the 1917 Revolution and the Russian Civil War (1917–1923) or to a person from Belarus, particularly the eastern part of present-day Belarus.

or wherever. They gave us pipes . . . plumbing pipes. In the front goes a German . . . I don't know who . . . big rank. Then go two, and then go three, and then the whole army. I walk over and say, "*Blei Macht stehen.*" [German: Leader, stand by.] "Stay right here. Don't move." He said, "*Ich hapt kein order.*" [German] I have no orders. I took that pipe and I split his head. He fell down. I took over the boots. He had beautiful boot. I put it on. Everybody applauded, and then the Russians and everybody, we started picking him up . . . he couldn't get up. I let him have it. I didn't know that they did so much that I didn't know, but what I saw was enough. Not to let the people go, without food, and people dying for hunger . . . what is hunger? You get blown up before you die. I told him, "You tell your army you're not an army. You're bandits, you're robbers. You tell them to throw away everything what they robbed in the whole world. If not, we're going to kill every one of you." There were hundreds of them. Here I had a few guys . . . but on both sides there were the Czechs . . . so he couldn't talk. You know what he did? They threw it away. Only Germans can do that. He was told to throw it away. He throws it away, not like in [\[unintelligible: 50:10\]](#). We run after him, we still knocked him, whatever we could. Nobody tried to defend himself.

Then the Russians left . . . no, the Americans left and the Russians came in.³⁸ They had already marked which zone is going to be. The American is going to be here, and this is going to be here. Now we've got the Russians, so first comes a tank. The Russians start talking to them. We said that we heard that the SD is in a building someplace downtown and we want to see them. He said, "What do you mean you want to see them? If you're going to see them, what are you going to do?" I said, "We're going to kill them." They killed us, why not? They took us on the tank and went to . . . it was in the middle of the city . . . he let us off, and he went farther. Over there was already Russian. The Russian said that he couldn't let us in. He had orders not to let nobody in. Right away, the Czechs assembled over there, "Let them in! Let them recognize the bandits!" and all this. Right away, I see a Russian in a Jeep go by. He hears people hollering, screaming. He stopped and say, "What's going on here?" They told him that we wanted to come in to see the SD. [The guard said,] "I have orders not to let anyone in." He said, "No, let them in." He was a big rank.

³⁸ American forces under the leadership of General George S. Patton liberated western Czechoslovakia in early May 1945 but halted outside of Pilsen (about 90 kilometres [56 miles] west of Prague. They remained until November, when the Soviets took over.

We come in . . . I think it must have been a school or a hospital. We saw they tried to give them some food. We throw it out. We said, “They didn’t need no food. They deserve to die just like our brothers did.” One Russian goes with us, with a revolver. I came in. The SS over there, the big guys with the uniforms still on and everything. I said, “*Grüss Gott.*” [German: G-d bless; good day] *Grüss Gott* in German, is “Hello” or “Goodbye” . . . like here, “Hi” or something. “*Grüss Gott,*” I said, “*Ich bin Jude.* [German] I’m a Jew.” “Oh, a Jew,” he said, “My best friends were Jews.” He went to school with one. I said, “Look, you know Jews don’t fight. Germans are good fighters, but instead of fighting, they kill for nothing. Now you have your chance to show that Jews can fight. Only Germans can fight and conquer.” They stopped. They didn’t know what to do . . . big guys with the uniform. Yesterday he was the master, he could kill, he could do anything. Now . . . We went on those guys with those pipes. We meant to kill them. I was strong and they were strong. The Russians had to stop and say, “*Stalin skazal . . .*” [Russian: Сталин сказал; Stalin said . . .] Stalin said we can beat them up but don’t kill them.³⁹ Because they tore up Russia, they have to build it back. In five, six years, he’s going to be dead. It’s too good. You kill him now, we’re going to bury him, and nothing happened.” We went to another one.

I’d been over there about . . . two-and-a-half weeks. Every day we came to visit, they brought SD . . . only SD in that place. I got tired of it. I said, “Well, let me go.” I wouldn’t believe that my father was not alive, and my mother is not, my brother is not, nobody’s alive. I come back to Ozorkow. I buried something before we left. I showed my brother, my father . . . even though I was younger, but I was more . . . my brother wasn’t so . . . I went to the police. I said, “I buried something and I heard that the police have to go with me to see what I can find.” They said, “What’s your name?” and I said, “Zychlinski.” [They asked,] “Oh, Zychlinski! Who was the guy over there we saw in [unintelligible: 55:10]?” I said, “This was [unintelligible: 55:15]. He was a Communist, so he couldn’t get a job. He worked for my uncle. When the Russians came in, he became the commandant of the police.” It was very nice. He said they were going to send a couple of guys “to watch you because somebody . . . if you were going to find something, somebody might want something or whatever.” I said, “Okay, but volunteer and give

³⁹ Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin (1878-1953) was the leader of the Soviet Union from the mid-1920’s until his death. He is considered one of the most powerful and murderous dictators in history.

something to build back Warsaw because Warsaw was all gone.” I dugged and I couldn’t find anything. I found only the *Kiddush Bacchus*.⁴⁰ You want to see it?

Ruth: A little later, yes.

Rubin: Yes. I got tired of it. There were the Polacks who didn’t have coal to burn, so they tore up whatever from the house to burn it. I told my friends over there, “I’ve got no place anymore here.” This was Wednesday. I said, “Next Wednesday, I’m leaving.” Two run away from the Russian army. They got other clothes . . . One’s in St. Louis [Missouri] now. I spoke to him yesterday. He said that he wants to come with me [and asked,] “Do you know where you’re going?” I said, “No, but I know I’ve been in Czechoslovakia. I’ve been in Germany. What have I got to lose? I’m by myself. Nobody’s alive.” Another guy came, so we been three guys and two girls. We took off. They wanted to know where I am going. I said, “I don’t know where I’m going. If you want to go, you go. If you don’t want to go, stay here. I don’t want to see no more Poland.” I went on the railroad. It was the beginning. They weren’t sophisticated about . . . to hold you on the [border] when you approach or whatever. Before you know, two guys—Russians—come over. They want to see papers. Those two guys, they ran away from the Russians. They didn’t have no papers, nothing. I look on them, and they both got white. I wasn’t scared because I didn’t know that they could be so bad. When they got close to us where we were sitting, the railroad [train] started moving and they jumped off. They said, “Who’s the boy?” We settled in Bamberg [Germany], about 50 kilometers from Nuremberg [Germany].⁴¹

<End Disk 1>

<Begin Disk 2>

Rubin: In Bamberg, we got some places to stay. I didn’t go to [a] camp. They had the UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration] camps.⁴² The UNRRA camps, they fed you, but that was private. Did a little business with the American soldiers. **Willie Fisher** . . .

⁴⁰ The *Kiddush Bacchus* is a goblet—often lavishly decorated and made of silver—used during the Kiddush ceremony, where a glass of wine is a blessing recited over wine to sanctify the Shabbat and Jewish holidays. The association comes from a misinterpretation by Plutarch, a first century pagan, who mistakenly interpreted the use of wine in Jewish customs with worshipping the Greek god of wine, Dionysus, and the Roman equivalent, Bacchus.

⁴¹ Bamberg is a historic city in central Germany, located on the Main River, approximately 55 kilometers (34 miles) north of Nuremberg [German: Nürnberg]. After World War II, Bamberg was one of the largest cities in the northernmost part of the American zone of Germany, close to the Soviet zone.

⁴² When hostilities ended on May 8, 1945 in Europe, as many as 100,000 Jewish survivors found themselves among the 7,000,000 uprooted and homeless people classified as displaced persons (DPs). Allied forces established temporary facilities (DP Camps) across Germany, Austria, and Italy to house DPs. From 1945 to 1952, more than 250,000 Jewish displaced persons lived in camps and urban centers in Germany, Austria, and Italy. Allied authorities and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) administered these facilities.

[of] **Fisher [-Price?] Toys** . . . he was my best friend. He was the musician. I lived across the street from the American governor [head of occupation forces in Bamberg], so every morning at 7:00, they woke them up with the band. I was so mad. I said, “Willie, you wake me up at 7:00?” He said, “I don’t wake you up. I wake up to the government.” When I came to the United States, he come to see me, and he couldn’t believe it. “Rudi speaks English! Rudi speaks English!” He had a wife and he was making business. He said he has a wife and a child.

In Bamberg over there . . . I went to Munich [Germany].⁴³ I met over there an aunt. She told me we have some family in [a displaced persons] camp. “What was the camp?” I said. “Would you like to see them?” she said. I said, “Yes, sure. Any family . . . I have nobody.” I found out in no time exactly what happened. In the Lodz [Poland] ghetto, first was my sister and brother . . . my younger brother⁴⁴ . . . and they got letters from Czestochowa [Poland]—a city.⁴⁵ People wrote that they had gotten to eat and they’d been treated nice. They registered. [In] this way they took him straight to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Just fooled him, you see? They told them they fed them and everything for a while. Maybe then the other one got Auschwitz-Birkenau, too.

I went . . . Feldafing [DP camp] was the camp.⁴⁶ This used to be like Miami [Florida] for the Germans. They put in all those guys [survivors] from the [concentration] camps. I saw Lola . . . saw the sister, the brother.⁴⁷ I wasn’t used to it . . . a sister, a brother, a father. I said, “What’s that?” When I went, my aunt took me to the railroad [station]. She said, “When you coming back?” I said, “Maybe next month.” She said, “Next month? You heard that I’m alive

⁴³ Munich is the capital of the German state of Bavaria. It is located on the River Isar, north of the Alps. After World War II, the city was occupied by the United States.

⁴⁴ Rubin’s mother, Leia, died in 1942. His father, Mojsze, died in the Lodz ghetto on March 12, 1944. Rubin’s older brother, Abram, was deported from the Lodz ghetto on September 1, 1943, but it is unclear where he was sent. His younger sister, Fajga, and younger brother, Icek, were deported from the Lodz ghetto to the Chelmno extermination camp on July 12, 1944.

⁴⁵ Czestochowa [Polish: Częstochowa; sometimes also spelled ‘Czenstochowa’] is a city located about 200 kilometers (124 miles) southwest of Warsaw, Poland. The Germans occupied Czestochowa on September 3, 1939. In April 1941, a ghetto was created and the Jews were forced into it along with refugees from Lodz, Radomsko, Warsaw, Krakow, Plock and other cities. Between September and November 1942, the ghetto was mostly liquidated in a series of *Aktions*, but the able-bodied men were sent to temporary labor camps outside the city, some of them belonging to HASAG, a major ammunition manufacturer.

⁴⁶ Feldafing was the first all-Jewish displaced persons camp. It was originally a summer camp for Hitler Youth, and was located 20 miles southwest of Munich, Germany in the American zone of occupation. The DP camp was opened on May 1, 1945.

⁴⁷ Lola Borkowska (1926-1999), her sister Henia Borkowska, their older brother, Luzer Borkowski, and father, Miechel (Leon) Borkowski, survived the Holocaust and immigrated to the US in June 1946. Lola’s stepmother died in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp one day after liberation.

and you didn't come." I said, "You're an aunt, but this is a second-cousin. That's different." [She said,] "I see. When are you coming back?" I said, "Lola . . . it wasn't bad for the cold . . . I saw the face but I didn't see the legs." When I came back, Lola said, "You want to see the legs?" [I said,] "Show me the legs." We kid. I went back to Bamberg. She left [for the United States] with the family.

Like I said, in about maybe four or five months I was back in New York [United States]. You want to hear in New York what I did?

Ruth: You did not go to Feldafing? You didn't live there?

Rubin: No, I lived private. It was a time when the Russians, and the Americans, the English and the French, they had the same money. This was for the soldiers. The Russians had, let's say, a cross the Americans had an "O," the English had something else. Everybody should print so much. The Russians printed, let's say, one hundred million . . . they printed ten hundred million. They came to buy gold, diamonds, whatever. We went to meet them. In this way I could buy some groceries and I had an apartment for myself. I had a motorcycle. I had an old car. I've got pictures here with the . . .

I didn't want to stay in Germany. Just to hear the language and all this is . . . knowing that they killed my parents and all the Jews. I didn't know . . . we didn't know it was this bad because we didn't have so bad like the others, like Auschwitz-Birkenau. There were hundreds of smaller camps. If they brought them to work and they trained them . . . it was different.

Just to tell you how I could make a living . . . I'd been there a year-and-a-half. Friday, we went to the synagogue. There was an American chaplain. He had to sing with us *Ein Keloheinu*.⁴⁸ This was his favorite. He was a businessman. He made a lot of money over there—this chaplain—from the **Green zone**. One day I didn't have what to do. I go to the synagogue. I know that I'm going to meet some other **Greeno**, what you call. When I came over there, we started talking, "What do you want to buy?" Right away they make a little stock market. They were so young, they remembered what it is. You could buy dollars. The dollar went up, the dollar went down. They got together and they said, "Let's sell it." Another time, "Let's buy it."

⁴⁸ A Jewish hymn sometimes changes at the end of the morning services. In many synagogues it is sung; in some Orthodox synagogues it is said quietly to themselves.

I see a Jeep comes in over at the synagogue. Two officers . . . maybe a lieutenant or second lieutenant. They had . . . the marks who they are. They were dressed different, too. They said, "Letter! Letter!" I said, "You got a letter?" I couldn't see the letter. I wanted to see the letter. They hollered, "Letter!" Then more people came over. They surrounded the Jeep. They tried to take off. They took off. They went on the highway. I followed them with a motorcycle. I went in the front and I told them to stop. What did I have to lose? I stopped and said, "Letter!" They want something." I knew already what they want . . . maybe diamonds, maybe who knows what. Because the money they got, they sent home. They got \$10 for it at home. I gave them the Allied *Mark*. Instead of \$10, they could have \$100. Then the United States saw was too much coming in. They figured that the Russians already printed more than they were supposed to. Anyway, they stopped and I said, "Letter! Letter!"

<interview pauses, then resumes>

Rubin: I said, "Letter! Letter!" They said, "A letter costs money!" But with a hand . . . one spoke a few words of German. They both were not Jewish. They said, "A letter costs money." I said that I wanted to send a letter. We couldn't send to the United States a letter at that time because the post didn't run . . . only for the soldiers, the American army had. They said, "Money?" [I said,] "Yeah, I got money . . . [new] money." They show us to go in the front and show us where I want them to come. I figured they might arrest me, but what did I have to lose? Nobody was going to cry over me. I go with the motorcycle. It was a brand-new Adler.⁴⁹ They followed me. When we come up, they sat down, and with the hand, we start talking. I said, "What do you need?" They said they needed diamonds. They wanted to buy diamonds. They got dollars for it. They just exchanged from the Allied when they were with another bunch of guys. I said, "No, I don't have diamonds, but I have Allied money and I need dollars." They said that they got a friend . . . he came from the United States with dollars. They were going to go down . . . one of them was going to go down and call him up. Everything with the [was communicated with the] hand . . . a little, whatever they could. I figured maybe he goes down for the wagon to put me in! No, he came back. He gave me the address. He said, "About 60 miles from here is a camp for the big Nazis. He is watching them but you can't go to the camp but there's a little town before the camp. Over there is an office from the United States. You can find out where he is and what he is. You should be over there at six o'clock in this restaurant."

⁴⁹ Adler was a German automobile and motorcycle manufacturer from 1900 until 1957.

I come to the restaurant, it was a little later, and he's not there. Here I got Allied money and I didn't know what I was going to do with it. I got to sleep someplace, so I asked the guy over there, "Do you have a place to sleep?" It was a restaurant. He said, "Yes, we have some rooms. People once in a while get in it." I had the money. I said, "Where am I going to put the money?" I put it around the leg—[I figured] if they were going to come for the money, they were going to have to touch . . . open the leg—with a handkerchief or something.

In the morning, I get up. I went to the office from the Americans and I told them that I got a letter from my cousin, this is his name, and this is his place where he is stationed. They said, "Where's the letter?" I said, "I forgot I got to bring the letter. I don't have the letter, but I can give you the name and all, what is written down here." It was a German girl that talked to me, and then she talked to the American over there . . . lieutenant or whatever. She came back and she was so happy. She'd spoke to the cousin already or somebody who knew the cousin. He was going to be here in about a half hour. He came in. We hugged each other like we know . . . like a cousin. We did the business.

After this, when I came home, I remembered I'd got already from the . . . some papers to fill out . . . I'm going to the United States. I had another guy . . . he sold me some watches from the Swiss. He spoke Yiddish.⁵⁰ He probably came . . . I made good from the watches, so one day he came over and said, "Rudi, how much money do you have?" I said, "If I would know how much I have, I wouldn't have much. I got enough. I don't know exactly." He said, "You give me every penny, and I'm going to bring the same watches that I brought you so cheap. It's going to be about ten days. I'm going to be back." In ten days, he didn't come back. I went to look for him. I saw the soldiers already with different . . . the marks, who they are. I asked them, "Where is the other one?" or whatever. "America, America. He went to America." I didn't give him all the money. I said, "I've got to do business. I've got to eat." But I gave him so-and-so much and the rest . . . if he takes it, he takes it. If not, then I'm going to make some money." He took it. I never saw him again. Then I came to the United States.

Ruth: Had you decided to marry Lola by that time?

Rubin: Yes.

Ruth: You skipped that part. Go back.

⁵⁰ Yiddish is the common historical language of Ashkenazi Jews from Central and Eastern Europe. It is heavily Germanic based but uses the Hebrew alphabet. The language was spoken or understood as a common tongue for many European Jews up until the middle of the twentieth century.

Rubin: With Lola, in Germany, I came already over to the camp twice. She came with her brother to Bamberg to see what I was doing . . . what I am. She didn't know. She had some friends she'd been in camp with so she went to visit them. They said, "What are you doing here?" She said, "Well, I've got a boyfriend. He's my second-cousin." They told us to come over. They said, "That guy . . . He's not going to live long. He runs with a motorcycle . . . with the army . . . No, he's going to be killed before you know." When she left, we wrote to each other. I've still got the letters. I came to the United States. They put us in an old hotel in Manhattan . . . 103[rd Street], I think it was. It wasn't bad . . .

John: Who was it who arranged that?

Rubin: Probably the HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] or somebody.⁵¹ I don't know what. We got on the boat, we got five dollars each.⁵²

Ruth: Before the interview started, you were telling me a little bit about your boat trip. Can you tell us about that?

Rubin: The boat was terrible. We went on the boat, we'd been so happy. We'd been in the Funk Kaserne . . . the German government building.⁵³ We were singing in Yiddish, and Russian, and whatever. A German came over and says, "What are you so happy about?" We said, "We're going to America." He said, "Yes? You see here Hamburg? There's another German who was in America three times." He said, "You want to be in America? You stay here. This is going to be America." I said, "An antisemite, why are you telling us this? He said, "You're going to America. Everybody's a millionaire." We saw the pictures in Poland from Chicago [Illinois]. We thought everybody is underworld [a gangster], everybody is killing just like you think in . . . They ask me when I go back to Europe . . . An American asked me right when I came here, "Is there restaurant? Is there something that we can . . ." I said, "Anything that

⁵¹ HIAS was founded in 1881. Its original purpose was the help the constant flow of Jewish immigrants from Russian in relocating. During and after World War II, they had offices throughout Europe, South and Central America and the Far East. They worked to get Jews out of Europe and to any country that would have them by providing tickets and information about visas. After World War II, they assisted 167,000 Jews to leave DP camps and emigrate elsewhere.

⁵² Rubin left the port of Bremerhaven, Germany on January 3, 1947 aboard the *SS Ernie Pyle*. 896 passengers were aboard—among them were 628 concentration camp survivors, 92 orphaned children, and 176 repatriating American citizens. The *SS Ernie Pyle* was a transport ship used after the war as a carrier for displaced persons (DPs) and refugees from Europe immigrating to the United States. The ship encountered four days of storm while at sea. It arrived in New York City, New York on January 16, 1947.

⁵³ The Funk Kaserne Emigration and Repatriation Center was operated near Munich, Germany by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). It was originally a military barracks built in 1936. *Funk* is German for "radio" and *Kaserne* means "barracks."

you have here, you took it from Europe. Even the language is not yours, so why are you asking such silly questions?" Only Thanksgiving is American and the Fourth of July. The rest of them . . . *Yom Kippur* is not American!

Anyhow, when I come over there, they sent me, I don't know, it was HIAS or it was a different organization. I had an appointment a day or two later, maybe three, I don't remember. She asked me what I can do. I said, "What I can do? I can eat." She spoke Yiddish, and she said, "We have a tough time. People used to come, they used to be tailors, they used to be shoemakers. Now you come and you went to camp . . . 10 years old, 12 years old. You don't know anything. What are we going to do with you?" I said, "You're going to be surprised." She said, "Do you know what is coming to you?" I said, "No, I don't know what's coming to us." The boat was terrible. They had to put in water in the basement [hold] where the food was because they used to bring tanks with those boats. Now the people don't weigh so much. I laid . . . I was sick . . . everybody was sick . . . even the one that worked on the boat, they was sick. But the minute we stopped, we got back to normal. She said, "You need a pair of American shoes." She said, "American shoes." They're going to show you pictures? [She said,] "American shoes and you need this and this . . . Do you smoke?" I said, "No, I never smoked." [She said,] "Never smoke?" [I said,] "No." [She said,] "Do you drink? Do you read papers?" I said, "Yes, I can read papers, but I don't understand what I'm reading." Like you can read Spanish, but you don't know the meaning. She said, "Okay, you're entitled to \$400." I said, "All right." I didn't ask for it. I didn't think that I was going to get it. She said, "Go back. Next week you call me. We're going to see about a job." I said, "Okay."

In the meantime, a guy who worked in a factory, he said, "Listen, the boss is looking for somebody to be a . . . presser of this. Come with me. Maybe someone is going to be hired." I said, "Okay." I went over there. *Oy gevalt!* Coming from . . . it looked like a concentration camp—this sweatshop. One of them held his head. I said, "Mister, why are you holding your head?" He said, "What do you mean 'your head?' You greenhorn!"⁵⁴ He said, "If it wouldn't be for that head, I wouldn't make a few dollars more." He got high blood pressure. I didn't know what high blood pressure was, but I still remember that he said he got it, so he hold his head. In the meantime, he holds his head but he works. Then the presser, no air-conditioning .

⁵⁴ A 'greenhorn' is an inexperienced person, and oftentimes refers to newcomers who are unfamiliar with the ways of a place or group.

. . the windows are open, but the next building was about 50, 60 floors high, no air, nothing. *Oy gevalt!* I said, “What am I going to do here?” I come up. The boss told me, “The presser needs somebody to help him. He wants piecework. He’s going to pay you, and you’re going to make a price with him.” Mr. Zinger, I don’t remember from yesterday, but I remember. [He said,] “Yes, what’s your name?” I said, “Mr. Zinger, how long have you been working here?” He said, “Twenty-nine years with press with this . . .” *Oy gevalt!* I said, “Those guys, how could they live like this? This is unbelievable.” They made about \$100, \$90, \$100, but this was piecework. Whatever you make, that was what you got. I started working, pressing, and after a day or two, I got swollen here. I’d never worked like this with an iron. They all was in the seventies. Everybody was in their seventies. How do I fit in here? I don’t know. Lunchtime, they took out their teeth. They started cleaning. I saw that! I said, “This is America? *Oy gevalt!*”

After a few days, I’d say, he gave me, I think, \$35 or \$40. But it was not eight hours, it was . . . this was all union, it was . . . seven hours . . . three-and-a-half and three-and-a-half, and not a minute later. I called [the social worker] up and I said, “I got me a job. I don’t know if I’m going to stay there or . . . because I don’t know . . . I’m not . . . I’ve got to get used to all that. They all rush. Piecework! This is seven hours . . . seven hours, before you know it is gone. After three days or four days, I said, “Mr. Zinger, how long did you tell me that you’ve been working like this?” He said, “Oh! You don’t like America, huh?” I said, “What is there to like? You go home to sleep and you come back and . . . no air, no nothing, no air conditioning . . .” “They had a fan, but the fan was even worse. Everything blowed in your mouth. I said, “I think you going to work a little longer than . . . I got enough.” The boss heard me talking. He come over . . . the boss was already, maybe . . . in high seventies. He already shaked. He looked like I’m looking now. He said, “What’s going on here? What’s going on here?” He told him, “He doesn’t like America.” I said, “I didn’t say I didn’t like America. I said I don’t like to be a presser.” He looked on me, the guy, and said, “Listen, you’re a young guy. I’m old. Maybe you can come over and see what I’m doing. If you can do what I’m doing, you would have a good job here.” We had a clothing store in Europe. I know something about it, but not the American way. Because this was: the one who pressed, just pressed; the one who make the seams, make the seams. It was all different. I walked over, and he was a contractor for a jobber. He showed me this is four . . . the four you put on this, and you pin it up. I looked and I tried to do . . . like I did and like he did . . . maybe not in the beginning. But he saw that he might make a *mentsch*

[Yiddish: human being] of me. “How much did [the presser] promise you?” I said, “He said \$40.” He said, “I’ll give you \$40 just to watch what I’m doing and what’s going on here.” It was a factory and there were woman with men. Nobody spoke English. There was a few Italians, a few Greeks. Most of them were Jewish people. They know to take the subway to go home and come back. They didn’t go no place—no car, no nothing.

I looked on Manhattan . . . everybody asked me, “How do you like it?” I said, “I need this one job! What I need all those buildings? I’d rather have fresh air.” [They said,] “So you don’t like America?” I said, “This is America? This is not America. This is New York. There must be places that is nice.” Coming from a little town and here it is so . . .

I called up [the social worker] and I said, “The boss took me on his side. He gave me a table and he told me to watch what he’s doing. If I can take over, I can make a nice living.” She started laughing. “People are coming from the other side and they don’t have jobs. You come over here and say, ‘I don’t know, but this is a job? Am I going to like it? Are you going to like it?’” But I don’t have much choice. I’ll do the best I can. She said, “Next week, call me.” I called her. I said, “He said he’s going to give me \$50. She laughed. She said, “If you should fall out, need a job or something, anything, just call me. This is my name, this is my . . .” Very nice.

Before you know, he saw that I was taking over. He started giving me another few dollars, and before you know, he came over late already . . . he said, “Rubin, you don’t need me, do you?” I said, “What do you mean, I don’t need you? Without you, I wouldn’t know what to do.” He said, “Don’t tell me. You’re joking. You know what you’re doing.” At that time, can you imagine? They worked five days . . . seven hours. I worked whatever was needed, because when they come in tomorrow, there had to be everything for them to sew and operate, whatever. Before you know, I got \$200 a week.

Lola went in a place to work, and the boss was **[unintelligible: 28:10, sounds like a Hebrew or Yiddish phrase: a nuvacova]**. So Fridays, she didn’t work. She make the *Shabbos* meal for the brother and this . . . She make \$100 in four days . . . piecework—she make 40 skirts a day. Not make altogether, just to operate, and then the pressing, the finish work, whatever. With \$300, we needed about \$30, because an apartment was \$42 or \$43, with the heat on Broadway. I said, “Lola, we’ve got to save money. I’m going into business.” Before you know, I was already there about two-and-a-half years, maybe a little more. [My boss] went to

Miami [Florida]. He gave me his house on Coney Island, to stay on Coney Island over there.⁵⁵ I had a good time. He knew that he could depend on me.

John: What was his name, by the way?

Rubin: Kaplan. One day I took a drink of water, and we had a chairman . . . he was from the union. He said he when to stop, to cut off, to make the light out. You couldn't do anything . . . seven hours. The boss tells me, "Rubin, you don't take enough money." Rubin heard this. The boss was [there]. He comes over and said, "Rubin, did I hear something like I think I heard or was I dreaming? Because the old man, he fights with us for every penny with the union. The union makes . . . between him and the union, they make a price: how much a seam, how much this . . ." I said, "What did you hear?" [He said,] "I think I hear him say that you don't get enough money." I said, "Yes, that's what he said." "You don't know," he said, "This is woman's stuff. This is . . . he needs you. Since you come over, he goes on vacation, he comes in late, he goes home . . . He never had it so good." I said, "Yes." He said, "So what did you say?" [I told him,] "I said, 'All right, give me cash. One hundred dollars every Friday.'" He said, "Okay." I make \$300! Would you believe that?

All of the sudden, they brought over camel hair and cattle hair suits to make. There was a time . . . that was very modern years ago . . . I don't know if you remember, you were too young. I started coughing. I coughed and before you knew it, I couldn't stay on my legs. I told the boss, "I don't know what happened to me. All of the sudden, I'm coughing . . ." He said, "You've been in camp, you're a little mixed up." I said, "No, if I would be mixed up, I wouldn't be here. I'm here because I was not mixed up." He said, "What is it?" I said, "I don't know what it is, but I can't . . ." On the other hand, I said, "Where I going to go? I'm going to go work in the grocery? Fifty dollars? I'm going to work as a painter? It's maybe \$60. But not that kind of money, not the [same kind of] hours!"

One day, I opened the window and I start putting my head out to get some air. Lola heard it. She said, "You're not going back. You can't catch air," and all this. I told my boss, "I have to quit. I've got no other choice because . . ." "No," he said, "There's some psychiatrists . . ." He wanted me to go to a psychiatrist. I said, "I told you, there's nothing wrong with me. I

⁵⁵ Coney Island is a peninsular residential neighborhood, beach, and leisure/entertainment destination on the Coney Island Channel, which is in the southwestern part of the borough of Brooklyn in New York City.

came over here strong and everything.” They sent me to a doctor. The doctor gave me about a hundred scratches. They told me, “You have to quit. You’re allergic to it.” So I quit.

Where did you get a job like this? Somebody going to give me \$100? It was peanuts [what they offered compared to] what I made. I went to the union. I said, “Maybe I’m going to go in another place.” On Fifth Avenue, was a big house over there that had 13 designers. They make for the fire department, for the police, for everything . . . a whole building . . . 500 Fifth Avenue. I come over and after a week or two, I stopped coughing. I was okay. The same thing . . . all people . . . Greeks, and Turks, and who knows what. Most of them were Jews. But the price wasn’t \$300. It was \$150. It was not seven hours. It was what was needed. If you needed another hour, it was the same price. If you have to come in Saturday or so, it was still \$150. One hundred fifty dollars was a lot of money. If I would tell somebody what I was making over there at that time, nobody would have believed me.

It took a few weeks and I started coughing again. I said, “Now I’ve got to go.” I spoke over there to the foreman . . . he was over us . . . it was a big place, unbelievable . . . for the Red Cross, for everything. The guy who was over us took me around. He said, “Rubin, don’t quit.” I said, “Why do you say that? I’m getting sick. What can I do?” He said, “I’m retiring next year and they’re all in their seventies. You’re going to have my place.” I said, “Yeah, it’s okay.” That guy made . . . I don’t know how much he make. We had 50 contractors in New Jersey. He was the one who had the less work . . . to send back the work or to let it go. I just had to say what is wrong and make a mark where I see that it was wrong. For a contractor to give him a few thousand dollars was nothing to it, because when he sends it back and they have to go over it, it cost a lot of money. “Now,” I said, “What I going to do now? I know what he’s talking about. He didn’t tell me that he gets money.” He said, “But you don’t know what you’re missing. I’m retiring. I see you’re a young guy, and you’re going to be the one.”

We had to move from Manhattan [borough in New York City, New York] because the schools were no good. **Maury** had to stop going to school. So we came here to Atlanta [Georgia] to see what’s going on . . . to **Maury**.

John: What year was that?

Rubin: 1953. I came to Atlanta.

Ruth: Why Atlanta?

Rubin: I had here my cousin, Marty Storch and Jack [Storch]⁵⁶ . . . they came because they had an uncle here . . . second uncle. We said, “We have to move anyways, so why not move me here? Why live on Broadway over there?” So we moved over here. Here I had a grocery . . . the grocery, you could make a living . . . people thought you have a grocery and said, “You’re a millionaire!”

Ruth: Where was the grocery?

Rubin: I had in East Point [Georgia] I had one and then I had it on Forest Avenue.⁵⁷ Another one I bought and then when I worked it up a little, I sold it. But it was not what I was looking for . . . a grocery. I couldn’t believe it, that I can stay in a grocery. You got to get up at six o’clock to go in the market. It was not like now where they deliver to you.

John: Did you have any particular expectations before the war about what you were going to do as an adult?

Rubin: Before the war?

John: What was your expectation of what you wanted to go into?

Rubin: Like what we did. We had a clothing store. I probably would have wound up with something in the clothing store. It was not like here—the father’s a shoemaker and the son is a lawyer or a doctor. Your grandfather lived here, and you lived here, and then the children . . . it was like . . . here it was the same thing. By the way, all of my uncles were in the United States, and they came back to the *shtetl*.⁵⁸ They had it much better in the *shtetl* than was the [Great] Depression . . . they couldn’t get any jobs.⁵⁹ They asked them, “How come? Where are the rest of them? Where is Moishe? Where is . . .” [My uncles said,] “They didn’t have money to come back.” [They asked,] “How did you come back?” He said, “We worked one day here, another over there. We slept in the park, so it didn’t cost us nothing.” They came back. At that time, when you’re young, yes, you think what you’re going to do. But I was good on it. My father could depend on me. He could leave and I knew what it is and how to sell.

⁵⁶ Jack Storch is a Holocaust survivor who settled in Atlanta, Georgia. He has contributed an oral history to the Esther and Herbert Taylor Oral History Project.

⁵⁷ East Point is a suburban city located southwest of Atlanta in Fulton County, Georgia, United States.

⁵⁸ A *shtetl* [Yiddish: town] is a small town, usually in Eastern Europe, with a significant Jewish presence in it, who primarily spoke Yiddish.

⁵⁹ The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression in the decade preceding World War II. The time of the Great Depression varied across nations, but in most countries it started in about 1929 and lasted until the late 1930’s or early 1940’s. It was the longest, most widespread, and deepest depression of the twentieth century.

John: During that phase when you were still in New York, what was the Jewish part of your life like? Did you and Lola get into that culture much?

Rubin: No, you couldn't get into . . . with the American, you mean?

John: Yes.

Rubin: No, we were greenhorns. The [perception was that] greenhorns are dummies. They didn't know what I went through. As a matter of fact, we lived here in Rock Spring. All the Jews lived here in Rock Spring. The one who had to pay . . . the rent, at that time, was \$105. One hundred five dollars was a lot of money. I had here my friends, they worked for \$25 a week. Here in Atlanta, there was no union, no nothing. But I had a doctor in my house, a Jewish guy—he's still alive—and two other Jews. I was the fourth Jew. Those three got together and they bought a little swimming pool for the children. It maybe cost \$5 or \$10, I don't know. One came in and told me to take my son out because he don't belong there. This was for Americans. Yes, I still don't talk to him. I see him and I see her, and that's the way it is. I didn't blame him. He wanted to be with his own.

We didn't speak English. Lola spoke already. She learned in Germany. She took lessons. But I went to school a few nights. There was Jewish teacher and every time he started singing, "G-d Bless America." He spoke some Yiddish. He was a bachelor. I said, "Can you tell me how I'm going to make a living from 'G-d Bless America'?" Every minute you start off with 'G-d Bless America.'" He said, "You pay me?" I said, "No." [He said,] "The government tells me to teach you how to sing 'G-d Bless America.'" I said, "The heck with it. I've got to learn English some. I'm not going to be a scientist or anything like that."

John: After that first \$400, did you ever get any other help from any other agency . . .

Rubin: Never. I didn't need it. I could give them. You know what I mean? We needed about \$30, \$35, maybe. We didn't have no telephone because there was nobody to talk to. We didn't know anybody. Now my grandchildren, every week they have a *bar mitzvah*.⁶⁰ Every week from the . . . We didn't have no *bar mitzvahs*, no weddings. Before you know it, we started having parties, *bar mitzvahs*. We got together . . . only the greenhorn. We said, "What you doing?" We socialized. But with the American, we couldn't . . . we didn't have anything in

⁶⁰ A *bar mitzvah* [Hebrew: son of commandment] is a rite of passage for Jewish boys aged 13 years and one day. At that time, a Jewish boy is considered a responsible adult for most religious purposes. He is now duty bound to keep the commandments, he puts on *tefillin*, and may be counted to the *minyan* quorum for public worship. He celebrates the *bar mitzvah* by being called up to the reading of the *Torah* in the synagogue, usually on the next available Sabbath after his Hebrew birthday.

common. I don't blame them. They were talk about the colleges and we would talk about the concentration camps. This was a little bit different. But even [in the] camps, the German Jews didn't get along with the Polish Jews. The Polish Jews didn't get along with the Hungarian Jews. The Hungarian Jews didn't get along with who knows. Even here, I heard before the war, Ashkenazi would not marry a Sephardic.⁶¹ That's the way it is . . .

Just like I told the guy that I worked in the German kitchen. He was a middle-aged guy. He talked with me openly. "The war is already gone," he said, "We can't win it. It's so cold, they freeze, they can't fight." I told him—Paul was his name . . . I said, "Paul, after this war, there wouldn't be any war. Look at what's going on here." People . . . we saw them going through from the front. Children, fifteen years . . . they told us to clean out . . . they were crying. They had . . . the radios on to make them feel good. What did they know about war? They sent them over there. I said, "After this war, what I'm seeing now, there wouldn't be any more war." He laughed, "Two people get together, and they kiss each other, and hug each other, and have children together. Before you know it, it's a fight." He said, "Do you want peace?" I said, "Everybody wants peace." [He said,] "Leave one. If gonna be two people on earth, it's gonna to be fights." I still remember what he told me and this is so true. He say, "Leave one because [with] two is gonna be fights."

The grocery was no big deal . . . long hours . . .

Ruth: What was the name of the grocery?

Rubin: Albert's Grocery. It was **Albert Lavinger** who sold it to me. You knew about Albert Lavinger? No? He bought some groceries in the . . . stolen groceries. The detectives put it in for him. He built up and then he sold. That was his habit. He was a good guy, but he had to buy hot [stolen] stuff.

John: How did you like Atlanta after being in New York? The culture, the mentality . . .

Rubin: I like better here . . . over here . . . especial if you want to have some children. You could drive the car. In New York, you went to Brooklyn, it was a day. To the Bronx, you've got to go the bridge. Who knows how long you have to wait. Here there are no bridges, no nothing. You could go to ten places in one day . . . at that time, not now. Now it's like New York. You've been in New York? All right, it was easy, maybe, to get that job over there, and

⁶¹ Ashkenazi is an ethnic division of Jews, which formed in the Holy Roman Empire in the early 1000's. They established communities in Central and Eastern Europe. Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants.

not now. Now Atlanta is just like any big place. It's not what it used to be. But I liked it because you felt that you were breathing free. Over there, you've been free, but subways and everything .

..

In the beginning, I said, "How am I going to make that?" But when I came here, I had a grocery . . . you got to stay twelve hours. Saturday until ten o'clock. Sunday, Lola picked me up . . . we went to the beach for a few hours . . . two o'clock, she picked me up. But everybody had a grocery, so if everybody had a grocery, it's not so bad, so you're going to have one, too. I've been 18 years in the grocery. But getting rich in the grocery? No way, no. You can make another few dollars, but . . . So I start . . . we had some tenants in Ozorkow [Poland]. I knew a little about it. I wanted to go into real estate. In East Point, over there was a bank . . . Hapeville [Georgia] . . . not far from East Point. The building we'd been in was a barber and a beauty parlor and a washitarium [laundromat]. No air conditioning, plain building. It was about, maybe, five years old, maybe a little more. I told the girls over there, "I want to see the president." They said, "What do you want us to do with the president?" I said, "Well, he owns a building that I rent, and I want to buy it." She asked me the name. I told her my name, gave her the telephone [number].

It took about a week, maybe a little more. I got an appointment. I came in and I told him, "You're my landlord. I live in . . . I've got a grocery in your building." [He said,] "Yes, what can I do for you?" I said, "I want to buy the building." He said, "Do you have enough money?" I said, "No, I don't have enough money, but I gonna give you a down payment. If I don't pay, you take it back, and you're going to have my money, and you're going to have the building." He said, "Ah, so you know how it works." I said, "Yes, it's just like anything else. You pay it off, it's yours. You don't pay it off, you take it back." He said, "I'm going to give you a loan. Let's just talk later on about a price. I worked in a bank in Chicago [Illinois]. I have people coming from East Europe, and they got loans. I didn't lose one penny. If they couldn't make it until seven o'clock, six o'clock, they made it ten o'clock. If this was not enough, they took their grandma in to help. There's no question that you come from the right place, that people like to have a good name, and this is more than anything." Then we started bargaining . . . so much. Anyway, I bought it.

After this, every time he saw me in the bank over there in Hapeville, he'd say, "Rubin, why don't you get some more money? Can't you buy something . . . we're going to do

business?” I said, “I never like to take a mouth more than I can swallow. I’m going to pay this off . . . not all the way . . . then I’m going to get something else. But right now, I don’t want to do it.” He had the mortgage on a house and he foreclosed the guy. The guy came in and shot him, but he had the glasses here. <indicates a front shirt pocket> The glasses saved him. He still had to go into the hospital and be operated on, but the bullet didn’t go far enough to kill him. He said, “You see? A guy . . . I lend him the money, he came over and shot me.” What was his name? I forgot. The people who came before me make the name for me. Right away, he said, “You’re from Eastern Europe, you’re going to get it.” Then I sold it. I bought something else and, somehow, made a living.

John: What was Lola doing throughout these years, just to get a sense of her life?

Rubin: Lola, first of all, she had two children. She came in about twice a week to the grocery. She wasn’t physical . . . with a grocery, you have to *schlep* [Yiddish: To carry, drag, or lug], you have to . . . twice a week I went home or I went . . . I had already an apartments. I had to go to the apartments. I had to furnish . . . I couldn’t rent them . . . I had to furnish them. To furnish an apartment was some job. A guy comes in, he wants a single bed. Then he leaves, he takes the toothbrush. He leaves and you need another tenant. The other tenant comes with a wife; he wants a double bed. In special, when you had a few girls moving in a two bedrooms, like three or four. I knew there was going to be a fight. They broke everything. They’re terrible. The men, the boys got along much better than the girls. Can you believe that? I keep on, and now my son is with me and my son-in-law is with me. They got the college and I got the know-how. Just like somebody asked in the newspaper, “What is a limited partnership?” You know what a limited partnership is?

John: I’ve heard the term.

Rubin: You don’t know? You’re a greeno? A limited partnership, they take a guy who doesn’t have anything, and they are responsible for the whole loan, whatever it is. The other ones can just lose what they putting in. They putting in \$50,000. After the year . . . depends who is president . . . you get back maybe more than the \$50,000 in depreciation. It depends how much you make. You can take off from nothing.

I had an experience the first time: I had 150 units on Roswell [Road] here. A guy came over. He was looking for a place like this. He wants to buy it. I had it about a year and a half or something. I said, “You want to buy it?” [He said,] “Yes.” [I said,] “You going to give me

profit?” He said, “Sure.” He gave me a book to study what is a limited partnership. Then I saw in the newspapers somebody asked a real estate man, “What is a limited partnership?” “A limited partnership,” he said, “one guy got the knowledge, the other guy got the money. After a year or two, the one who had the knowledge has the money, and the one who had the money has the knowledge.” You understand what I’m saying? This is the limited partnership.

Little by little, I got education from the guys that come to buy or to sell. I bought some land in Gwinnett [County]. The same thing. I wanted somebody to come in with me so we could buy a bigger piece. They said, “You are a greeno. What do you know about the United States? I am born here. I wouldn’t even go over there to *look* on them!” Then he say, “When do you think we’re going to make a profit?” I said, “I spoke to a scientist. He told me that Gwinnett still virgin land. The land is about 16 million years old. If we make an investment here, 100 years is nothing.” [He asked,] “You think 100 years we’ve got to wait?” I said, “I didn’t say you had to wait 100 years. Maybe you’re going to have to wait 200 years, and maybe you’re going to wait ten years. Nobody knows.” This was my experience. We enjoy the United States, like everybody else. Some people took longer, but as an average, I would say that we did better than the average American.

John: Talk about your family life also: your wife, your kids . . .

Rubin: In Europe or here?

John: Here. What was it like raising a family, being a father?

Rubin: It just comes naturally. You become a father and the baby cries, you’ve got to clean it or you’ve got to feed it. I didn’t see much of my children because when I was in the grocery, I came home late. That’s why Lola left them with a maid. I went home for a few hours to eat with the children twice a week. This was about all . . . like Saturday, Sunday, we went to the beach . . . I saw them. But some people need parents everywhere they go. Like **Maury**, he needed the parents but Karen was born independent. Knowledge is one thing. To be born . . . what they say is ‘street smart,’ and then there’s ‘school smart.’ You can be a doctor and be not with everything. Like I had a doctor when I first came here . . . it was unbelievable how he become a doctor, but he had a good mind to learn.

John: Were you aware of raising your children with any particular values, considering your past?

Rubin: I didn’t talk to them much about what I went through because they wouldn’t

understand. Just like I didn't understand when my father spoke to me and he said, "You don't know what we had to go through in World War I. We didn't have enough bread. We didn't have enough this . . . You have it very good. This is a free country. You can do what you wanted," and all this. He didn't know what was waiting for us. The same thing now. It's going to be somebody who was going to throw the atom bomb. It might not be here, it might be in India, or Pakistan, Kazakhstan . . . They got so many places that they're fighting. It's worse now than before the war. Everybody wants to kill.

John: How would you say that survivors were different from other Americans at that time? When everybody's earning a living, how are you different?

Rubin: How we've been different?

John: Yes, when you say, 'How could they understand us? They're talking college, we're talking concentration camps.'

Rubin: Yes . . .

John: How would you say you were different?

Rubin: Like Lola, she played cards with some American girls that she knew from ORT.⁶² She was the secretary. That's why I could buy some property . . . everybody sent the money in here. She was busy with the [Eternal Life-]*Hemshech*.⁶³ If it wouldn't have been for her, there wouldn't be the monument out there in the [Greenwood Cemetery].⁶⁴ Coming twice a week for about four hours or something . . . then it's a job raising children. I don't have to tell you, you're probably a father.

⁶² Founded at the end of the eighteenth century, the ORT's [Russian: Общество Ремесленного Труда, Obchestvo Remeslenogo Truda, "Association for the Promotion of Skilled Trades] mission is to advance Jewish people through training and education. After World War II, ORT was very active in the DP camps with rehabilitation programs in 78 camps. Some 85,000 Jews were trained in new profession and provided with the tools they needed to rebuild their lives.

⁶³ Eternal Life-*Hemshech* is an organization of Atlanta Holocaust survivors, their descendants and friends dedicated to commemorating the 6,000,000 Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Approximately 100 Holocaust survivors living in Atlanta, Georgia founded Eternal Life-*Hemshech* in 1964. *Hemshech* is a Hebrew word that means "continuation." Their purpose was to build a memorial to serve as a place to say *Kaddish*, the Jewish prayer for the dead and "perpetuate the memory of their beloved families along with all of the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust." The committee was comprised Abraham Gastfiend, Mala Gastfiend, Gaston Nitka, Rubin Lansky, and Rubin Pichulik. Dr. Leon Rosen served as chairman and Lola Lansky and Nathan Bromberg were co-chairs.

⁶⁴ Eternal Life-*Hemshech* built the Memorial to the Six Million in Greenwood Cemetery in Atlanta, Georgia. The open-air structure is composed of four granite walls that interlock to form a single "interior" space where six white torches rise above the walls. The torches rise from a black granite coffin that contains the ashes of an unknown victim from the concentration camp at Dachau, Germany and are lit during special ceremonies. Funds for the memorial were raised entirely within the Holocaust survivor community in Atlanta. The memorial was dedicated on April 25, 1965 It was the second Holocaust memorial to be built in the United States and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on April 21, 2008.

John: You mentioned that monument. Can you tell a little more about that—the monument—of how that came to be built?

<End Disk 2>

<Begin Disk 3>

Rubin: The monument . . . was a lawyer here, a greeno . . . just so you know what I'm talking about. He got together with Lola that we're going to build a monument. But we didn't know where to build it. Some of them wanted to build it in front of the [Atlanta Jewish] Community Center.⁶⁵ We said, "The Community Center? Maybe one day they're going to raze it," because Jewish populations started coming in . . . which they did. Another one said here, maybe there. We agreed on the cemetery was going to be there . . . the cemetery's not going anyplace.

Ruth: Why did you want to build it?

Rubin: We wanted to have the names over there in a place, once a year, to go and remember them. We said that we were not going to take money from anybody but from our own to build it. We didn't. They didn't. Maybe they offered, but we said, "No, we've got to do it ourselves." Lola—before she died [in 1999]—it started falling a little apart so we paid about \$25,000 to \$30,000 to fix it.

Again, we didn't know. Most of the people, especially in Detroit [Michigan], Miami [Florida], and the big cities, they did very good. I have a *landsman*.⁶⁶ He was nine years old when the war broke out. He has a hotel now next to Rockefeller Center [in New York City]. He comes here . . . he's going to have the . . . every time I have a *bar mitzvah* . . . something . . . all the Ozokowers who are still alive, they get together . . . this was the family. He got married in New York or he had a *bar mitzvah* or something, they all flew in from Israel, from Los Angeles [California], or from Sweden, from everywhere. This was the family.

John: You mentioned at the very beginning, before we started, that survivors are largely dying off now . . . you just started to mention that. What does that do to you?

Rubin: Nothing. I never thought they were gonna live . . . I'm going to be 82 years old. I still can walk, and see, and hear, so I'm not going to complain.

⁶⁵ The former Atlanta Jewish Community Center (AJCC) campus was located in Midtown Atlanta. Today (2017), The Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta is the primary Jewish community center in Atlanta.

⁶⁶ *Landsman* is a Yiddish term for a fellow Jew who comes from the same district or town, especially in Eastern Europe.

Ruth: I just wanted to follow up on what you just said. The Ozorkowers, did they become your extended family in a way . . .

Rubin: Yes.

Ruth: . . . with your children? Can you talk about that a little bit about . . .

Rubin: No, the children in New York, they intermarried, but not in Atlanta. In Atlanta, they were spread out. Like, I lived in Rock Spring. Another one lived in Marietta [Georgia]. It depends on where he got the grocery. I had to be closer to the grocery. But in that time, was no big deal driving because wasn't so many cars. Like now, I say, "I'm going to be there in a half hour." Maybe an hour and a half is more likely!

Ruth: I guess what I meant to say was, when you were raising your children without grandparents, did some of the other people that you knew here, that were survivors also, become your family in a way, for your children?

Rubin: Yes.

Ruth: Like who were you close with?

Rubin: My daughter, she knows all the . . . They died out. There are few left. The ones left . . . years ago you could make from two greeno, one. Now you need four greenhorns to make one, because one doesn't hear, one doesn't see, one can't work . . .

John: Who were your main friends throughout that period?

Rubin: Harold Hersch was a survivor.⁶⁷ His wife [Helen Lefkowitz] is American-born. Abe Besser,⁶⁸ and [Boris] Ulman,⁶⁹ all the people who've been . . . just like you've been in the army and you belong to . . . even if you didn't know him then. But he was in the army and you were in the army, you've got something in common. Maybe your rifle was bigger or smaller or could shoot farther or whatever, but you've got in common . . .

John: Who built this house?

Rubin: We did.

John: Wasn't it . . .

Ruth: The design that . . .

⁶⁷ Harold Hersch (1924-2013) was a Holocaust survivor from Lodz, Poland who settled in Atlanta, Georgia and became a successful grocery store owner.

⁶⁸ Abraham (Abe) Besser (1926-) is a Holocaust survivor from Krzepice, Poland who settled in Atlanta, Georgia and started his own construction business.

⁶⁹ Boris Ulman (1925-2006) was a Holocaust survivor from Braslaw, Poland who fought the Nazis in the Russian Army in the Partisan Underground Resistance Movement before later settling in Atlanta, Georgia.

Rubin: He . . . what's the name that . . . Ben Hirsch.⁷⁰

John: How did that come about? He was one of the earlier survivors in Atlanta.

Rubin: Yes, he was a child. The mother just put him on the train. She didn't know where they were going, "Just go! Go away from here!" But they all did good. Yes, he designed it. At that time was so high. Lola came in, and we didn't have any furniture. She said, "I'm not moving in here." I said, "I sold the old house! What do you mean you're not going to move in here? We're going to put in furniture." Anything that we brought in didn't match . . . in the old house we had a little chair . . .

All right, listen to this: we're here on a long vacation. You're talking about death. Everybody has to die. It's not that some people die younger, some older, but as a whole that . . . I don't know if it's a blessing—living long—or if it's a curse. We had somebody in our town, there was a butcher . . . **Brand** was his name. I remember from so many years. On *Shabbos* [Yiddish: Sabbath], you went to the synagogue. He had a cane. The rabbi let him make an *eruv* so he can walk with a cane.⁷¹ You know what an *eruv* is? So he can hold something. Otherwise he can only hold the *siddur*⁷² in the . . . He knocked on the door for the children to come out. When we came out, he gave cookies. He gave . . . to be remembered . . . He is remembered. We talk about him. My mother said, "**Reb Shimson**, how are you?" "Oh," he said, "Somebody cost me. I'd like to know who cost me. Nobody should live 100 years. I can hear good, I can see good, I can . . ." He told me what, "Nobody . . . this is a curse." Nobody he knew, he said, is alive. Everybody is dead . . . all the friends, all the . . . so it sounds good [that maybe] you should live to 120 years. But I don't think . . .

John: Is this how you feel now?

Rubin: What?

John: Are you talking about yourself?

Rubin: Yes, I wouldn't want to live to 100, no. A lot of people say, 'I'd like to live to 100 years if I feel good.' I say, "An old car is not a new car." You expect an old car to be good? You

⁷⁰ Benjamin Hirsch is a Holocaust survivor from Frankfurt, Germany. He and four of his siblings were sent on a Kindertransport to France and then the United States and Atlanta. Ben is an architect who designed the Holocaust Gallery at the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum as well as the Memorial to the Six Million in Atlanta's Greenwood Cemetery. For a more detailed version of the construction of the Memorial, please see Ben's oral history for the Herbert and Esther Taylor Oral History Project.

⁷¹ An *eruv* is an exemption that allows religious Jews to carry things like house keys, medicines, babies or use strollers and canes, all of which are strictly prohibited on the Sabbath.

⁷² A *siddur* is a Jewish prayer book, containing a set order of daily prayers.

stop hearing, you stop seeing, you stop thinking, you . . . but it sounds good . . . 100 years. You look at the guys who are 100 years, how they look. They don't even know that they're alive. But I'm not scared for Hell. They ask me, "How come you're not scared for Hell?" I said, "I've been in Hell already. You think they're going to put me twice in for the same crime—because I'm a Jew?"

John: Talk about your wife a little bit more also, especially towards the end . . .

Rubin: You want to see her? She's got a book, what she did in her life.⁷³

Ruth: Yes, we'll show it . . . later. Maybe you can just talk a little about it.

Rubin: She liked to be in the Jewish community. You work for the [William Breman Jewish Heritage] Museum. You see my name over there—Lansky? Yes. That's what she liked. She worked with Ben Hirsch. She was the president [of *Eternal Life-Hemshech*] for years and years. Ben is a nice guy. He's unbelievable. He built it here but they make a mistake, and he started tearing his hair out. I said, "They've got to work it over . . . just to build this." He had . . . the people didn't know how to get into it. I said, "Lola wouldn't know the difference. Let it go." He said, "What?! Let it go?! What do you mean, 'Let it go'?! I'll pay for it!" I said, "Listen, before you know, you wouldn't have nothing to be paid." No, he's an honest guy. [Ben's] brother was a good boy, nice. Lola liked to help people. She like to give away, she always wished that I would have a job and come home on time like everybody else. I said, "Yes, but I'm not everybody else. I don't have a father who's going to leave me something or who knows what." I said, "I've got to work hard and I like what I'm doing." Even now, I like what I'm doing. I meet some people . . . we go out to look on something . . . maybe buy, maybe sell, maybe this. I like it.

John: In what way were you and Lola different in your outlook or your reactions to what happened?

Rubin: She was different. Everybody's different. Even your brother is different than you. Who was right and who was wrong? We've both been right. I wasn't born to run [Eternal Life-] *Hemshech*. At one o'clock, she was up, getting in the money or paying the bills. We have insurance on the monument, We have to pay for the light . . . those lights when they light up. In one day it can be \$300 or \$400 dollars because they're so powerful. She liked it and I didn't like

⁷³ Lola Lansky's story can be found in Helmreich, William B. *Against all odds: Holocaust survivors and the successful lives they made in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Simon & Schuster, 2012.

that. But I was not against it and I helped her whatever I could. But if we both would like the same thing . . . you need a few dollars, too!

John: Thinking toward the end of the war, you did actually get revenge against some of those people.

Rubin: Ah, revenge! Revenge would be if I would kill a million of them . . . what this kind of revenge it is. We've been like a junkyard. But do you think that only Jews been in concentration camps? You know already. A lot of people think . . . When [the Germans] came into Poland, the first ones they took is the preachers, the teachers, the ones who can organize.⁷⁴ They killed them. A lot of them went to concentration camps. You could see that everybody has a mark of who he is.⁷⁵ Like myself, I had a Polish flag, a number, and why you were there. Yellow is a Jew, *Jude*. The gays had pink. I didn't know what gay was. I'd never heard of gay when I been in Poland. [The Germans] were very good organized. That's why they could do it. No other country could do it, being so organized . . . a small country and they were fighting the whole world.

John: How come you mentioned that not only Jews were in the camps? Was there some reason you bring that up?

Rubin: Yes, because a lot of people think that they was only for Jews. A guy—a plumber—he worked on my apartments one day. He saw the way I talk. He said, "You're the one that they burned in camp?" I said, "I'm the one that I burned? Can't you see I'm alive?" I said, "You know who burned the first one?" He said, "Who?" I said, "Your preachers and your teachers." [He said,] "What?! The son-of-a-guns, they killed our preachers?!" He didn't like it, but he make fun of it. I always told Lola, "Why saying that only Jews? Must something be wrong

⁷⁴ Although racial policies and nationalistic sentiments drove most of the Nazi regime's persecution of civilians during the Holocaust, any potential political opponent was also persecuted. Professors and teachers were often persecuted and the Nazi regime also saw a potential for dissent in criticisms that came from both Protestant and Catholic church leaders.

⁷⁵ From 1938, a yellow star sewn onto their prison uniforms (a perversion of the Jewish Star of David symbol) identified Jews in the camps. After 1939 and with some variation from camp to camp, the categories of prisoners were easily identified by a marking system combining a colored inverted triangle with lettering. The badges sewn onto prisoner uniforms enabled SS guards to identify the alleged grounds for incarceration. Criminals were marked with green inverted triangles; political prisoners with red; "asocials" (including Roma, nonconformists, vagrants, and other groups) with black or—in the case of Roma in some camps—brown triangles. Homosexuals were identified with pink triangles and Jehovah's Witnesses with purple ones. Non-German prisoners were identified by the first letter of the German name for their home country, which was sewn onto their badge. The two triangles forming the Jewish star badge would both be yellow unless the Jewish prisoner was included in one of the other prisoner categories. A Jewish political prisoner, for example, would be identified with a yellow triangle beneath a red triangle.

with the Jews why did they put them in concentration [camps] or why they hate them. Tell them the truth, that not only Jews . . .” The Jews were automatically to be dead, to kill them. But the other ones, for any little thing, you went to concentration camp . . . because somebody said that he don’t like Hitler, let’s say. There was no lawyer, there was no nothing. They picked him up and throw him in a concentration camp. But the average American thinks that this was only Jews. When you saw those pictures even, I can tell you who was Jewish and who was not on the picture.

John: How would you say the war changed you from how you were in 1939?

Rubin: What it change me?

John: How were you different by 1945?

Rubin: I’m not different. I was in business since I was 12 years old. I liked it and I couldn’t sit down and do something. I had to . . . we had some apartments . . . not like here . . . but I took care on it. My brother didn’t even know what it is. He didn’t like it. Since I remember, I like to have something, to do something. Even now, I’m going in. I’ve been in the office today . . . it was 8:30. I was in the office already.

John: What would you say you’re proud of about yourself and about what you’ve done with your life?

Rubin: I don’t go around saying, “I’m proud of it.” What somebody says doesn’t mean anything. What other people say about you, that’s what counts. Everybody says . . . the girl says, “I’m pretty.” That don’t mean nothing. It depends what the boy say, right?

John: How do you feel about yourself and what you’ve done with . . .

Rubin: I feel I did my job the best I could, not because I’m smart or I’m dumb. Like I say: I believe you’re born, you’ve got your computer. Your computer tells you what to do. I see about the grandchildren even. Sometimes my daughter says something about one child. I say, “Listen, you’ve got to do the best you can what you have. You’re not going to change.” Say you don’t want to put the shoes away or you want this, I said, “That’s what’s going to be.” Not exactly what I’m saying, but most . . . the one who went to concentration camp . . . he was crazy, he came out crazy. Just like the Vietnam soldiers. They complained that Vietnam made them being sick or something, and some is true, and some . . . they went in like that and now they blame the government. That’s the way it is. I mean, it’s . . .

The twins . . . my daughter has the twins. Both of them are so different, unbelievable. She said she's a ballerina. He said, "I don't like ballerinas. I like soccer." Right away. Who told him about it? Instinct.

John: What would you want people to learn from your experience? What would you want to change because of all that?

Rubin: Change whom? People . . .

John: How would you want the world to change or to learn from what you all had to go through?

Rubin: It's still going. You take people now, you send them to Iraq. Before you know it, they bring in a dead boy that he had nothing to do with it. He don't make the politics. You just happened to be in the army and they sent you out over there. He can say the same thing I'm saying, "Why me?" When I was in a camp, I thought that the whole world was going to pieces. We got free, I thought, "The world is not going to go away. The world is going to be here." It's people who are going to suffer or not suffer . . . it depends on where you're at. You've got to be in the right time, in the right place, in the right . . . It's okay. Like my brother, he wrote me right away that he was not going to make it. He was in a death camp. I never thought that I'm not going to make it but I was not in a camp like he was. I just happened to be, like I told you . . . For one year we had it pretty good. Then it was wintertime. We didn't have work to do, so we had some Lodzers . . . older guys. We went out and we start singing and make like a parade. The *Lagerführer* came out and he applauded. He said that everybody was going to get double this, and double that, and don't ask. People came to bring the potatoes, he should sign it . . . that he gave it to the *Wehrmacht* [regular German army], whatever. He chased them away. [He said,] "I don't have no pigs here. I've got people, just like you. Now I've got to watch out for them." Then he asked us, "Next week my family wants to come over here. I want you to parade, put the nice stuff . . . we used to get from home . . . packages." Then we exchanged with different . . . I said, "Yes, we're going to do it." We start marching, we start singing and cursing the Germans in Yiddish. He applauded, and everybody . . . again, we're going to get double this and double . . . I wish I would meet him, but I don't like to tell it to people because they think that something is wrong with me. You've been in camp. This was one year then they send us . . . still, I'd never been in real concentration camp for more than maybe two months. We got to Buchenwald, they sent us out to work. We came back, they sent us to another place. But as a whole, most of us

survived. I got into New York, I had a few Ozorkower . . . they were still alive. One makes a *bar mitzvah* next month. The guy who has that hotel, he was nine years . . . the parents didn't think that he was going to make it, probably. But he'd probably been in the right place at the right time. That's the way it is . . . the same thing here.

John: Have you ever been back to Germany or Poland over the years?

Rubin: Germany, no.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

John: I wonder . . . often it sounds like you have a disappointment in your voice. I'm just wondering if that's true or if I'm just hearing it that way.

Rubin: Disappointment? No, I never took a pill for being down or being up. I never smoked. I never got drunk in my life. I had the grocery. A guy asked me if I drink. I said, "No." [He asked,] "How about smoke?" I said, "No." [He asked,] "How about woman?" I said, "I'm married!" He said, "How long are you going to be here?" I said, "I'll be here until eight o'clock." He said, "I'll come back with my gun, I'll shoot you. You'll be better off." That's what it is, but no, I've never been down. I don't say . . . it could be tomorrow, I can be down. But until now . . .

John: What is important to you nowadays? Are there goals still?

Rubin: I'm used to it. Just like anything else, you get used to going to the office and see people. An insurance man comes or somebody comes who wants to buy something or sell something. They want to know . . . they're young, "How could you do it? You came over here. You didn't have nothing." I tell them, "The first thing, you got to save a few dollars and take a chance and see how you can do it." A lot of people had apartments, especially doctors and lawyers. But they didn't think of the reality of it. They thought they were going to get in the money, like the agent told them, and they're going to put it in the bank, and that's it. Even if you have a manager . . . if the manager wants to do something, he calls you. [He'll say,] "The roofer was here. He said that we need a roof." You've got to go and see if what he tells is true or not. Sometimes he goes on the roof . . . it rains in . . . he might make you a few holes instead of fixing it. Not everybody is made to be in real estate or a doctor or a shoemaker. It takes certain people like . . . the first one I had on Briarcliff [Road in Atlanta] was nothing but Jewish people. Everybody was scared. The Jewish people are too . . . they demand too much. I said, "I like it. If something happens and you don't fix it, it doesn't get better by itself. It gets worse." They've been the best tenants . . . the older one. They move out and nothing is broke, nothing is tore.

John: I wonder, over the years, when Americans have asked about your past—especially the last 30 years as the Holocaust has been more in public knowledge—how do you explain to people what that was like?

Rubin: If they want to know, I say, “I’ve been over there and I can understand. How are you going to understand?” I did something because my religion . . . I was born to Jewish people. I was not even a Jew when I was born. If I had be born to an Italian, I would have a cross instead of Magen David [Star of David]. They didn’t ask me if I wanted to be a Jew, or if I wanted to be a Catholic, or whatever. That’s the way I feel . . . that not every Jew is a Jew and not every Catholic is a Catholic. It’s just the parents were Catholics, so they’re Catholics. Some of them change it because of marriage or whatever. But most of them—of the people—they don’t choose. They get used to it, just like food. What kind of food do you like? The food your mother gave you. The same thing is with religion. They interviewed people from . . . the brides from Vietnam. They ask them, “What is the worst thing that you saw in the United States?” They said, “The worst thing is the food. We can’t eat American food. It’s so bad.” Murray was in Vietnam—my son. I asked him, “What they eating over there?” He said, “Nothing. They’re eating some flies, some junk.” But their mothers gave them and that’s what they like. The same thing is with the religion.

John: Do you have any sense of how the war experiences affected your children?

Rubin: No. I didn’t discuss it with them. Why was I going to bother them? When they were young, I going to tell them about killing and all this stuff? They wouldn’t understand anyhow. The grown one can’t understand. I can’t understand that special people, being so educated, and so organized, and being so mean. It’s hard to understand that if it would be in Africa or in Asia, some place in the wilderness . . . all right. I just happened to be in a bad place. But I didn’t come to Germany to take its job or to do some business or anything. They came to us and said, “You have to die.” They were playing G-d.

G-d was good to Hitler. He watched Hitler special. They tried to kill him a few times, but nothing happened. I wonder how G-d keeps us like the ‘chosen people.’ If this is chosen . . . I told her—somebody very religious—“If you see Him, you tell Him to take me off from the list. I don’t want to be the chosen!” I come back to Poland . . . the rabbis with the *payess*, with the beards, and they wearing tallit [prayer shawl] and everything. They all gone. We

lived with some Polish people. We got along very good with them. I came back, they are all alive. They're not the chosen. You feel that you're chosen?

John: Is there anything else that you'd like to mention that we have not gone into yet? Any other memories?

Rubin: I don't know what you want to know. By the way, we brought a *Torah* to the AA [Ahavath Achim].⁷⁶ You know about it?

John: Explain that.

Rubin: We came to Ozorkow. There was a few Jews left. One [Tobias Drajhorn] told me that he found a *Torah* and he don't know what to do with it. He would like somebody to take it off his hands. We said, "We can do it." We got some letters from Rabbi [Harry] Epstein and other people.⁷⁷ We sent to the Polish government those letters that we here in the community . . . there are about a few of us from Ozorkow and we wanted to take the *Torah* out. They had a law. I think it's here the same thing. You couldn't take out antique that's more than 100 years old. My grandfather . . . he was reading from the *Torah*. It was, in that time, a big deal. They sent us [it by] mail. It came here to the house. We made like a wedding bringing in the *Torah*. It was not kosher, so we fixed it. But it's so old that every few months, they need money to fix the *Torah* . . . \$7,000, \$6,000 . . . but we're fixing it. Karen [Edlin, Rubin's daughter] made the mantle.⁷⁸ She worked on it for more than a year. Now it's sitting over there, and every holiday they take it out. On *Shabbos*, they take it out because it's small and the other one is so big. When there's a *bat mitzvah* . . . a little girl . . . you give the *Torah*, so they take it out.⁷⁹ We did more than one thing

⁷⁶ Ahavath Achim (known as 'AA') is an Orthodox congregation founded in 1887 in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1977, AA dedicated a *Torah* saved from Ozorkow, Poland. For a more detailed version of how this *Torah* came to Ahavath Achim, please see the testimony of Lola Lanksy, Rubin's wife or visit <http://thebreman.org/Portals/0/Manuscript%20Collections/Mss%20167%20Rubin%20and%20Lola%20Lansky%20Papers/mss0167.001.012.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Rabbi Harry Epstein (1903-2003) served as the rabbi of Ahavath Achim from 1928 to 1982. Under his leadership the congregation began to shift to Conservatism, which they adopted in 1952. Rabbi Epstein retired in 1982, becoming Rabbi Emeritus.

⁷⁸ The *Torah* cover, or *Torah* mantle, is an ornate covering that both protects and beautifies the Sefer *Torah*, typically made of velvet and embroidered with metallic thread, silk, and ornamental beads.

⁷⁹ A *bat mitzvah* [Hebrew: daughter of commandment] is a rite of passage for Jewish girls aged 12 years and one day according to her Hebrew birthday. Many girls have their *bat mitzvah* around age 13, the same as boys who have their *bar mitzvah* at that age. She is now duty bound to keep the commandments. Synagogue ceremonies are held for *bat mitzvah* girls in Reform and Conservative communities, but it has not won the universal approval of Orthodox rabbis.

too. The [Jewish] Federation here is very organized.⁸⁰ Every year they're getting better and better . . . very professional. Now, with the Jewish schools, it's unbelievable. Every school has 500, 600 children. They love it.

Ruth: Do you feel like your *Torah* from Ozorkow is safe within a healthy Jewish community?

Rubin: Here?

Ruth: Yes. How do you feel about the *Torah* being here? Something that your grandfather read from . . . and now it's here. It's being used here in America.

Rubin: I feel okay . . . but nothing . . . it don't mean so much to me if I wouldn't gone through all of this and seen what happened to the *Torahs*, how they burned it . . . and nothing happened to the one who killed.⁸¹ If Hitler wouldn't have killed himself, he would be alive today, like the rest of them. [The Nazi leaders] went to different countries.⁸² They had enough money to bribe and everything else.

John: It sounds like you don't see any justice or any meaning to any other, the way you describe it.

Rubin: What do you mean by justice? There was no justice for anybody in Germany . . . even for the Germans, there was no justice. By the end, they were more scared than . . . we'd been in already. They were scared that they might go in, somebody got mad at him or whatever. Justice. In America . . . not in America . . . the Free World . . . when they say, "The Free World, only in America," it's not true. In France, from my time, twice was the prime minister Jewish—Blum and the other one.⁸³ Most of those lost . . . that we have here, came from England and France. Or you don't know about it?

John: A little bit.

Rubin: To be in the . . . what do you call it? . . . in court you have the six . . .

Ruth: Jury by your peers.

⁸⁰ The Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta raises funds, which are dispersed throughout the Jewish community. Services also include caring for Jews in need locally and around the world, community outreach, leadership development, and educational opportunities. It is part of the Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA).

⁸¹ The desecration of *Torah* scrolls and other holy artifacts was a popular method of humiliation and abuse employed by the Nazis.

⁸² Some former Nazi party members and SS officers did find safe haven in other countries after the end of World War II. Many—such as Adolf Eichmann, Eduard Roschmann, Walter Rauff, Gustav Wagner, and Dr. Josef Mengele—found shelter in South American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile.

⁸³ Léon Blum was a French politician, who was three times the Prime Minister of France (1936-1937, 1938, 1946-1947). Pierre Mendès France was Prime Minister from 1954-1955.

Rubin: This comes from England . . . most of it comes from France and England. When somebody said, “The Russians! Now they came. They dressed just like we are!” I said, “They didn’t steal it from you—the style. What kind of suit are you wearing?” He said, “European.” I said, “You said it! You wear a European suit! What else?” I said, “Even the language is not yours!” One vote was made to speak English. You know that? We would speak German because the Americans didn’t like the English and they didn’t want the English, but one vote [could have] make you speak English.⁸⁴ If not that one vote . . . what they voted, what language you would speak German here in the United States?

John: Who voted on that?

Ruth: The Congress in the early years. They hated the British so much . . .

Rubin: Yes. Everything you have here, it was a few hundred years before, in Europe. Americans have their holidays—like I told you, the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving—and McDonald’s.

John: Thank you for telling us your story.

Rubin: But I don’t have nothing to complain. I’ve never been arrested, which, when I came to the United States . . . I could go on drugs like people have . . . they have nothing to gain by it. I can’t understand. I lost . . . no father, no mother, no brother, no nothing, no money, no language, no nothing. I didn’t complain. I did what I had to do. Would I go on drugs, where would I be now? I still can’t figure out when I hear about drugs . . . all right somebody gets sick, it’s different. But making yourself sick in a country like the United States? You have a chance to go to school. You have a chance to be somebody. They got me in the penitentiary, like I told you . . . they asked me questions, “Why we didn’t fight?” and all this. I said, “Did you see the people of Vietnam when they took them . . . did they fight back . . . the Americans?” I said, “No. Why would you think that the *Jude* fight back?” I said, “I’m not a policeman, but I can make you so . . .” I always thought . . . put you in a little room for two days. No water, no music, no television,

⁸⁴ The United States has no statutory official language; English has been used on a de facto basis, owing to its status as the country’s predominant language. In January 1795, a proposal was made to Congress to publish copies of federal laws in German as well as English. While the United States House of Representatives debated a 1794 petition made by a group of German immigrants living in Virginia, no bill was ever presented or voted on. In fact, only a vote to adjourn and sit again on the recommendation was made. That vote (sometimes known as “the Muhlenberg Vote,” after the Speaker of the House of Representatives) failed 42 to 41, which led to rumors about German nearly becoming the official language of the United States. A month later, the House again considered the issue and finally approved publication of current statutes, as well as future ones, in English only. The bill was agreed to by the Senate and signed by President George Washington in March 1795.

no nothing. After two years . . . after two weeks, two days, you're a monkey. All you think is about food. Food. But there's a whole . . . I was stopped just like anybody else. Maybe a red light, a yellow light, but they were nice. I didn't fight back. I know is their job. One time, I told a guy, "I'm glad that you want to be a policeman. From what I read in the paper, you killed, and stabbed, and raped, and whatever. You deserve to get a raise." He said, "You know what? I'll let you go." I said, "How come?" He said, "Nobody told me that. You're the first one." It's true. I don't know who wants to be a policeman. What kind of job it is? You go to arrest somebody and somebody shoots you. Then they say, "He was on drugs and he didn't have a father. The father beat him . . ." This is already . . . Everybody says the same thing. But this . . . I don't know what kind of people those are with the drugs.

John: How do you explain that you survived? Was it all luck? How much of it was your own decision, things like that?

Rubin: I told you. When I went in the toilet and I joined up with the Polacks and the Russians, this was it. The people what they took out, what they said, "Jews out!" and they took them away. About two hours later, they all were dead. All of them.⁸⁵

John: You made some good decisions at the right time.

Rubin: You never could tell. Like with the SD, when they interviewed me . . . there were no Jews over there. They knew that there was no Jews over there. Otherwise, they could tell me to put down the pants. In Europe, only Jews were circumcised. I tell you the truth, I don't know why I joined them. I said, "What did I do? Maybe those people, they go to work or something, and then I say, "No, to work, you don't take them like this." The German shepherds were hollering and [the Germans] were screaming, "*Raus! Raus!*" Just to look on them and the atmosphere, I said, "No, I'm not going to go." But a lot of people make mistakes—like my brother and sister. They got letters that they got good, they'd feed them . . . so they fooled them. That's what I'm saying. You never could tell what is true or is false. This was a government without morals, without anything. Just do anything to take the world . . . if you have to kill. Then when they bombed, I laughed. One day, I was staying, looking on them. They came by the hundreds . . . closer then, by the hundreds . . . this big. All of the sudden, I see all of the planes fall down. I said, "Oh, my G-d." When they come down, there was aluminum foil. Aluminum

⁸⁵ Selection (German: *Selektion*) is the term the Nazi regime used to describe the process of choosing victims for the gas chambers in the extermination camps by separating them from those considered fit to work.

foil is steel so the Germans had hit their aluminum foils so they could get away.⁸⁶ I saw it one time on television. I saw this, that aluminum foil—big pieces, make a noise too . . . you thought the plane would come down. I was so happy to see that they were tearing up Germany. You can't even imagine how it looked. You saw one plane, two planes over there in New York. Can you imagine if hundreds are coming every day?

John: We had just one last question. In Germany recently there's talk about, "How long do we have to feel guilty?" and, "How long do we have to keep apologizing for our grandparents?," and that sort of thing? What's your opinion on that?

Rubin: The Jews didn't forget the Spanish Inquisition.⁸⁷ It's already more than 500 years. The gentiles didn't forget one man got killed—Jesus Christ—and now that's over 2,000 years and they didn't forget it. Why should we forget? No, the Jew is not going to forget. Not only the Jews. Look . . . even the Polacks, the Romanians, and all this . . . It was not because he was a Polack, but any little thing . . . it was not concentration camp. It was . . . some days, they hung . . . every city had to hang so many people . . . not Jews. It could be Polacks, could be . . . it's hard to understand that they could be better off.

My mother, when they arrested me, I said, "I've got to go out to the toilet." I went out. She said goodbye again. I said, "Don't worry. The Germans been here in World War I. They said, "*Leben, leben, lassen.*" [German] Live and let live. They were very nice. When they ran away from Poland, everybody was crying, "You're going to be back. They're going to give you a job and all of this is going to be all right." If somebody would have told me this was going to happen, I wouldn't believe it. You wouldn't believe it. They did something that didn't happen before.

Like in Spain, if you wanted to be a Catholic, they let you live. I've been in Spain. I met some people who remembered that their grandmother . . . on the Sabbath, they still hide

⁸⁶ Large amounts of strips of aluminum (chaff) were thrown from bombers during World War II, which would jam the radar and allow the actual airplanes to be undetected. The countermeasure was first used by the British but was immediately copied by the Germans and used back against them.

⁸⁷ Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile established the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, commonly known as the 'Spanish Inquisition,' in 1478. It was originally intended to ensure the orthodoxy of those who converted from Judaism and Islam. Those Jews who converted were called "*conversos*" (converts), and were regarded with deep suspicion by the tribunal. Eventually, all Jews who refused to convert were totally expelled from Spain in 1492. The figures vary dramatically from 800,000 to more modern figures of 40,000 (with about 40,000 Jews converting to avoid expulsion). The *conversos* who remained in Spain were heavily persecuted, and, if accused and convicted of being a "crypto-Jew," were often burned at the stake. Other minorities suffered as well.

everything and they tried to pray in Hebrew . . . whatever they did. But they had a chance at least . . . something. But here, because you're a Jew, you've got to be killed. This had never happened before. [Albert] Einstein . . . they let him out . . . this was before Hitler came to the chancellorship.⁸⁸ The chancellor was a murderer. We still can't believe it. People like scientists, doctors, they . . . it was not like in Poland. The Jews are like their [unintelligible: 43:50]. The German Jew, what I saw, was more than a German . . . they were 100 percent. The way they talked about, "After the war we're going to go back. Hitler's only going to be there a few years. We like Germany and everything . . ." In camps, they talked to us. But it didn't help. When Einstein came to the United States . . . you saw the picture, what happened. He wrote a letter to the president, President [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt . . .⁸⁹ They put it in the trash. A guy from Germany come with an old coat—the coat was 40 years old already, with long hair . . . he sends a letter to the president. He didn't hear, so he sent another one. The FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigations] or whomever that come over there and said, "What are you crazy or something? You sent a letter to the President? You want to meet the President? You've got something to tell him?" He said, "Yes." [They asked,] "Why can't you tell us?" He said, "No. You tell the President that I've got to tell him something that is good for the United States to know." He was invited to the White House. He started talking about the atom bomb. Roosevelt didn't know what he was talking about. He told him that he was working on heavy water in a little place . . . where was it . . . not [unintelligible: 45:35].⁹⁰ He told him where it was, and the United States got

⁸⁸ Albert Einstein (1879-1955) was a German-born theoretical physicist. He developed the general theory of relativity, one of the two pillars of modern physics. He was visiting the United States when Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933 and, being Jewish, did not go back to Germany, where he had been a professor at the Berlin Academy of Sciences. He settled in the U.S., becoming an American citizen in 1940. On the eve of World War II, he endorsed a letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt alerting him to the potential development of extremely powerful bombs of a new type and recommending that the U.S. begin similar research. This eventually led to what would become the Manhattan Project. Einstein was affiliated with the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, until his death in 1955.

⁸⁹ Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945) was the 32nd President of the United States and a central figure in world events during the mid-twentieth century, leading the United States through a time of worldwide economic crisis and war.

⁹⁰ Heavy water is a form of water that contains a larger than normal amount of a hydrogen isotope known as 'deuterium,' which was thought to be useful for developing atomic (nuclear) bombs. A Norwegian company, Norsk Hydro, became the first commercial heavy-water plant in 1934. The Nazi invasion of Norway in 1940 transferred control of the plant—and most of the world's heavy water—to Germany. Between 1940 and 1944, the factory was the target of sabotage and bombing strikes by British forces and the Norwegian Resistance. In the early 1940's, Allied countries joined the race for heavy water, and by 1944, the Manhattan Project had made 20 tons of the precious liquid.

together with the English and told them, “You’ve got to tear it down. It doesn’t matter—any the cost.” They worked on something that Mister . . . not Einstein . . . professor . . .

Ruth: Oppenheimer?⁹¹

Rubin: No, the professor with the . . .

Ruth: Werner von Braun?⁹²

Rubin: No.

Ruth: Neils Bohr?⁹³ Enrico Fermi?⁹⁴

John: [Edward] Teller?⁹⁵

Rubin: No, this was with the long hair, with the . . . he’s still the most known professor in the whole world.

Ruth: Einstein?

Rubin: Einstein. Yes, that’s why I didn’t say it because you . . . Einstein. Then this guy up and dies and they told Hitler to stop working on it.⁹⁶ Hitler said, “The war is going to be over before we gonna finish it, so we might as well stop.” The Germans stopped working on the atom bomb because he told them that it’s going to be . . . we’re going to have the world before that.

Einstein . . . He was smart . . . very smart.

John: Can you think of any other questions or angles?

⁹¹ J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967) was an American theoretical physicist. He was among those who are called the “father of the atomic bomb” for their role in the Manhattan Project during World War II. After the war he became involved with trying to stem the development of nuclear weapons.

⁹² Werner von Braun (1912-1977) was a German rocket scientist, aerospace engineer, space architect and one of the leading figures in the development of rocket technology in Nazi Germany during World War II. He is credited as being the ‘Father of Rocket Science.’ Von Braun was the central figure in the development of the design and realization of the V-2 rocket which used slave labor to build the rockets and which killed 9,000 civilians in England and Belgium in late 1944. After the war, he and some select members of his rocket team were brought to the United States as part of the then-secret Operation Paperclip. He worked for NASA and served as director of the newly formed Marshall Space Flight Center and was the chief architect of the Saturn V launch vehicle, which took the astronauts to the Moon.

⁹³ Niels Henrik David Bohr (1885-1962) was a Danish physicist who made foundational contributions to understanding atomic structure and quantum theory, for which he received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1922. He is often referred to as the “father of the hydrogen bomb.”

⁹⁴ Enrico Fermi (1901-1954) was an Italian physicist and the creator of the world's first nuclear reactor. He has been called the “architect of the nuclear age” and the “architect of the atomic bomb”. Fermi won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1938, the same year he immigrated to the United States to escape Mussolini’s fascist dictatorship. He then became one of the leaders of the team of physicists on the Manhattan Project.

⁹⁵ Edward Teller (1908-2003) was a Hungarian-born American theoretical physicist. He was an early member of the Manhattan Project and headed a group at Los Alamos in the Theoretical Physics division.

⁹⁶ Germany began its program to develop an atomic bomb in April 1939. Influential people involved in the program—which was called *Uranverein* [German: uranium club]—included Kurt Deibner and Werner Heisenberg. Significant work on the German project was halted in June of 1942, as little progress had been made and resources had to be allocated to the immediate war effort.

Ruth: No, I think we've covered about everything, unless there's something else that you'd like . . .

Rubin: I can tell you about our *shtetl*. We had a synagogue which, like here, the Temple⁹⁷ . . . people without the beards, without the *payess*. My father was one of them.

Ruth: Was it *misnaged*?⁹⁸ Were they Orthodox?⁹⁹ Why were they not with *payess*, not Hasidic?¹⁰⁰

Rubin: That's what people in America think—that in Europe everybody was a Hasid and everybody was . . . It was ten percent. Just like here.

Ruth: Yes.

Rubin: You had the *Besmedrech*¹⁰¹ . . . were the Orthodox people. They had *shtiebelekh* . . . means 'the room.'¹⁰² In a room like this, maybe 20 people got together. They prayed together, and they danced together, they sang together. They had a good time. Because years ago, in Europe there was a hunger until they brought in potatoes.¹⁰³ The rabbi told them that this is . . . the Messiah is going to come now, because that's what the *Bible* says . . . so they made it. They danced, had a good time, and everything was going to be okay. The same thing that you see here, we had over there. It was *Hasidic* . . . ten percent with the *payess*. The other one was . . . they were Jews and they went [to the synagogue] on *Shabbat*. They ate kosher and everything but they were not Orthodox. Like on Fridays, we had the store open. We had to fill a few customers. They had [unintelligible] *Shabbos*, they showed it [and said,] "Look on the watch. You've got to close it." The Jews lived in Midtown, they had a business . . . when they closed it, you couldn't

⁹⁷ Founded in 1867, The Temple on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, Georgia is a Reform congregation and the oldest Jewish congregation in Atlanta.

⁹⁸ The term '*Misnagdim*' or '*Mitnagdim*' [Hebrew: opponents; pl: *misnaged* or *mitnaged*] gained a common usage among European Jews as the term that referred to Ashkenazi Jews who opposed Hasidic Judaism.

⁹⁹ Orthodox Judaism is a traditional branch of Judaism that strictly follows the Written *Torah* and the Oral Law concerning prayer, dress, food, sex, family relations, social behavior, the Sabbath day, holidays and more.

¹⁰⁰ Hasidic Judaism is a Jewish mystical movement that was founded in eighteenth century Eastern Europe by Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. It promotes spirituality through the popularization and internalization of Jewish mysticism as the fundamental aspect of the faith.

¹⁰¹ '*Besmedrech*' is a Yiddish term that refers to a prayer house or study house, often found next to Orthodox synagogues in Eastern Europe, where members of the congregation study the *Torah*.

¹⁰² A *shtiebel* [pl. *shtiebelekh*] is a Yiddish term meaning "little house" or "little room" and is a place used for communal Jewish prayer. It is not a formal synagogue as it is far smaller and more casual. It was usually a room in a private home or place of business. They were common in Jewish communities in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust, and they continue to exist in Hasidic communities in the United States today.

¹⁰³ Spanish Conquistadors first introduced potatoes to Europe in the sixteenth century, but the potato only gained popularity as a relatively easy crop to grow and became a common part of Europeans' diets after wars, diseases, and crop failures created famines throughout Europe in the seventeenth century.

get anything. It was just like Jerusalem. You should see the one where the **Kakhbat** is, with the *shtreimel*,¹⁰⁴ with all this. The Polacks were used to it already. They didn't pay attention to it. But Hitler helped a lot for them to be antisemitic. It don't take much for somebody who doesn't have a job, who is a drunk, to blame somebody . . . it can be your brother, it can be your sister . . . If they drink and have a good time, and if you work hard, and you save, they're not going to like you.

Ruth: You didn't have any Polish friends or were they just Jews?

Rubin: All of the business we made with the Polacks. But we didn't have anything in common. The same thing with my children. They go with the Jewish children. Sometimes we talk about it. [I ask,] "Why not mix up?" But nobody wants to mix. The Italians want to be with the Italians. The only ones who want to mix are black people—they want to mix. After they mix, who knows what's going to happen. Other than this, I had a Greek bookkeeper. His son went out with an American girl. He was born in the United States. One day I come over. He was crying, "What happened?" The son went out with an American girl. [He said,] "Where is our wisdom? Where is our culture? Where is our . . . she's not the same. All of this is going to go from nothing and we're not going to let him do that." As if she were from a different country! They both were born American, but they wanted him to marry a Greek girl. But now the Jewish people intermarry over 50 percent.¹⁰⁵

Ruth: Does that bother you?

Rubin: No. If that's what they wanted . . . You want to give them freedom? This is freedom. I see some gentiles become Jewish, especially the ones who intermarry. I don't know how this is going to last or whatever, but you never know. Even if you marry your own, you don't know.

John: Does Jewishness have any particular significance to you?

Rubin: Yes, sure. I was born . . . if I wasn't born . . . but I was raised Jewish. I went to a Jewish school. I went in the . . . with my grandfather. He took me to different things where we

¹⁰⁴ A *shtreimel* is a fur hat worn by many married Orthodox Jewish men, particularly (although not exclusively) members of Hasidic groups, on Shabbat and Jewish holidays and other festive occasions.

¹⁰⁵ Jewish leaders have historically looked upon intermarriage of Jews and non-Jews with strong disfavor and it remains a controversial issue today. According to a nationwide survey called *The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-2001: Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*, which was conducted by the United Jewish Communities, 47 percent of Jews in the United States marrying between 1996 and 2001 married non-Jews.

got together to talk about *Torah*, to talk about *Gemarah*, about all this stuff.¹⁰⁶ Very few people, especially when there's intermarriage, I think the . . . I never heard a Jew become a Christian. It's the other way around. Is that what you experience?

Ruth: Often.

Rubin: Yes. I don't know then what. I know one . . . Karen told me, the boy goes with the father to the synagogue, and the girl goes with the mother, or the other one, to the church. How is this going to work?

Ruth: People find . . . all kinds of ways to deal with their [unintelligible].

Rubin: It's not happening only here. It's happened now in the whole world, in Russia . . . Even Israel today, they marry with Arabs. If they could, there would be more of it. It's different times in life . . . different. In my town, one Jew married a gentile woman. I remember he went to church, and four policemen were watching him with their bayonets. The *Chasidim* would tear him up.¹⁰⁷ They would kill him. Then he came out, and they put him on the streetcar to Lodz. They didn't let anybody on that streetcar. They closed it or something, and he never could come back. Was this right or was it wrong? I don't know. What right do they have to run after him?

When it comes to religion, this is much stronger than the army. The army, you can talk to them. Some say, "Why fight? We're not going to win." But when it comes to religion, you never heard anybody saying, "Back to the preacher" or "Back to the rabbi." A guy came into the store. He was a preacher. He said he didn't make enough. I said, "Do you preach to the people in the church?" He said, "Yes, sure, but they don't send in the way they're supposed to." I said, "They never say, 'no.' Tell them that G-d told you that they've got to send in so-and-so much money and you've got to make so much money. They're not going to say anything. You've got it made." He laughed, but that's true.

Once in a while, I like to hear a preacher. There was a black preacher, nicely dressed with diamonds and everything. He said, "If you send money to the church, the church sends it to G-d, and G-d puts it in the bank for you if you're going to need it. You're going to get it when you're going to need it." Nobody asked him, "How am I going to get it? By mail or by . . .

¹⁰⁶ The *Talmud* is a legal code spanning 1,000 years based on the teachings of the *Bible*. It has two divisions: the *Mishnah* and the *Gemarah*. The *Mishnah* is the interpretation of Biblical law. The *Gemarah* is a commentary on the *Mishnah* by a group of later scholars.

¹⁰⁷ *Chasidim* [From the Hebrew word "Chasid" meaning "pious"] refers to a branch of Orthodox Judaism that maintains a lifestyle separate from the non-Jewish world.

.” This is religion. That’s why Hitler, when he came in, the first thing he wanted to get were the teachers, the preachers, the intelligent. They can organize and you see what’s going on. People like to go and help them because they tell them that women are waiting for them. They believe it. At least if the rabbi would say something like this, everybody would walk out. Take it out, put it in the bank. When you’re going to need it, you’re not going to get it!

Ruth: Thank you so much for that interview.

Rubin: Okay.

<End Disk 3>

INTERVIEW ENDS

Cuba Family Archives