

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

MEMOIRIST: HASKELL FROSTIG
INTERVIEWERS: JOHN KENT
RUTH EINSTEIN
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INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Begin Disk 1>

John: It's December 21, 2009. We're in Atlanta, Georgia. I'm John Kent. Let's start with your name and when you were born. What was your original name? Spell your name please.

Haskell: My name is . . . in Europe you say 'Chaskell,' but we don't pronounce the 'ch.' I took off the 'C' and made it Haskell. Haskell Frostig . . . H-A-S-K-E-L-L F-R-O-S-T-I-G.

John: What city were you born in and when?

Haskell: We were born in Germany.¹ My father had some family—sisters and brothers—in Poland. We left Germany in 1930 . . . I don't remember exactly the year.² We went to Poland. We stayed in Poland until everybody got liquidated.

John: When were you born?

¹ In their applications for United States citizenship, Beuthen, Germany is given as the birthplace of Haskell and his parents. Beuthen was a town in Upper Silesia, Germany. Before World War II, it had over 3,500 Jewish inhabitants. Most left before the war began. Those who remained were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in the summer of 1942. Today, the town is known as Bytom, Poland.

² The Frostig family left Germany around 1936. In the years between 1933 and 1939, the Nazi regime had brought radical and daunting social, economic, and communal change to the German Jewish community. The Nazi party began to persecute Jews through a series of antisemitic legislation that included more than 400 decrees and regulations restricting all aspects of their public and private lives. The boycott of Jewish businesses began in 1933 and Jews were soon expelled from almost all professions and commercial life. The first major law to curtail the rights of Jews was the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service in April 1933, which excluded Jews from civil service. Jewish citizens found themselves increasingly disenfranchised after the Nuremberg Race Laws were instituted in 1935. The laws formed the cornerstone of the German Nazi Party's racial policy and heralded in a new wave of antisemitic legislation that brought about immediate and concrete segregation.

Haskell: When? I was born on November 22, 1930. There are so many things to talk about that it's impossible. I was very good in school. Everybody loved me. I had the best grades. The teacher was proud and happy. Think about it like this: The war broke out in 1939. Then Germany divided Poland in half. We were on the Russian side.³

John: What city in Poland did you go to?

Haskell: That would be . . . the city would be called Lvov [Polish: Lwów] . . . Lemberg . . . in German it would be Lemberg.⁴ I don't know exactly what to say now.

John: Maybe let's start with more pleasant stuff. Who were the people in your family?

Haskell: My mother and father, and I have two sisters. They were older than I am . . . a couple of years older.

John: Names?

Haskell: My G-d. Can you imagine? . . . Rivka and Gittel. In Jewish [Hebrew] it would be Rivka and Gittel. In English, I guess . . . I forgot how you would pronounce it. Regina and Gittel? That's Jewish name, but I don't know exactly in English.

John: [What were your] parents' names?

Haskell: My father's name was Meyer . . . M-E-Y-E-R . . . Meyer Frostig. My mother was Dora Lubin Frostig.

John: What are your memories of normal family life during those earlier years before it went bad?

Haskell: I don't remember. Of course, I was a child at the time. My father was in business at that time. He knew a lot of people. He did business with them. He sold a lot of things. I don't even remember what. Then a lot of people didn't have any money to pay him. He said, "Don't

³ The "German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact" of August 1939, also called the "Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact" was a short-lived agreement between the Soviets and Germans in which they agreed to not attack one another and to divide Poland. German troops invaded Poland from the west on September 1, 1939. Soviet troops invaded from the east on September 17. By September 28, Germany and the Soviet Union had reached an agreement partitioning Poland and outlining their zones of occupation. The demarcation line between German- and Soviet-occupied zones ran along the Bug River, between Krakow and Lvov. Soviet forces occupied eastern Poland, where Haskell's family was, until the summer of 1941, when the Germans expelled them in their push east to invade the Soviet Union.

⁴ Also spelled 'Lwow.' Lwów was once a Polish town in the southeast of Poland. It is approximately 450 kilometers east of Krakow, Poland. The Germans renamed the city 'Lemberg' when they occupied it during World War II. Since the war, it is known as 'Lviv' and is a city in western Ukraine. When Haskell says his family went to Lvov, he is referencing the broader province around Lvov. The surname Frostig appears in multiple birth, death, and marriage records in the early twentieth century for the city of Lvov as well as in the nearby towns of Zolkiew and Mosty Wielkie. According to an interview Haskell did with the USC Shoah Foundation Institute in 1997, the family was in the town of Mosty Wielkie, about 45 kilometers north of Lvov. Mosty Wielkie [Polish] was established in the fifteenth century. In 1939, the Jewish population was about 1,400. There are no Jews living there today and it is now known as Velyki Mosty, Ukraine.

worry about it. One day, if you have it, you're gonna pay me." That's the kind of character . . . that's the kind of person he was . . . so good to everybody. That's how we survived—because of the goodness.

We had at least ten families that we went around every two or three weeks, from one place to the other to hide because the people who were saving us, they were afraid they might get in trouble. They came in at night [and said], "Please go. I'm afraid." We went to another family and another family. That's how . . . the last family . . . I'm telling you, we were . . . let me put it this way . . . we were sitting in the woods for two weeks and we didn't know that the Russians came in on our side.⁵ My father said, "You're a small boy. See if you can get close to the highway. Maybe you can see something." In 1939, the Russians came in our side. We knew exactly what kind of . . . what they had with them . . . machines, horse and buggy and whatever on top of it. I came in close to the door and I wasn't quite sure. I said, "I think it's the Russians, but I'm not sure. It could be the Germans too. I don't know who."

Then a big . . . a terrible thing happened to us. There was a big storm . . . an unbelievable storm. Everything we had—we didn't have much—got wet. The main thing [that] got wet [was] the matches. Without a match we couldn't survive, because if we sat in the woods lighting up . . . I guess most of the time at daytime or nighttime, I don't know exactly . . . and bake a potato, one potato a day . . . that was the last . . . before we survived . . . before the Russians came in. One potato a day. It's impossible to think about it after so many months. No medicine, no doctors or nothing. Nothing bothers us. Terrible hunger, that's the difference: hunger.

Another story I have to tell you. We were sitting in the woods [in the] summertime. There was cows coming through . . . cows. The man in the back—I don't know what you call him—he was going after them. In other words, they were coming from one place to the other, and the cows were coming close to us. My mother always used to be sitting out there watching. When she saw the cows coming, she got scared and she say [makes grunting sound]. The cows got scared and they left on the left side. The person with the cows, he went after them. He missed us. The cows missed us and the person missed us, otherwise we'd have been killed too.

⁵ After escaping from the Rawa Ruska labor camp in June 1943, Haskell and his parents hid in the woods and in the barns of friendly farmers. When the Russian army liberated the area in late summer 1944, Haskell recognized the Russian soldiers because they had occupied the area from September 1939 until June 1941.

There were so many different kinds of . . . things that happened to us that it was . . . I don't know, but it's . . . I cannot tell you exactly the pronunciation. Like I said, we were very hungry. We didn't have nothing to eat and it was in May time. The people put some stuff in the ground to . . . they put some potatoes . . . they planted some potatoes different places. My father went to see if he could find a potato. Maybe five or six different already got rotten. They was already sprouting out. One or two potato was still good. He took it out and he brought them back, but he didn't have a light to match up. My father said, "How are we going to survive?" He says, "I'll have to go see the person then [and see] who it is. In case there is some German in there, I'm going to ask the person, 'Which way do you go to such a place . . . to such area? Which way do you go?'" In case . . . because the *goy*⁶ wouldn't recognize . . . will see that we are trying to . . . not to telling who we are to the Germans.

The person said to us, he called, "Majorca . . . Meyer, are you all still sitting in the woods? The Russians have been here for two weeks. You're sitting in the woods?" My father came out from the house and hollered, "Hustle up. Everything's all right." I heard my mother say, "Wait a minute, you've gone crazy! Somebody's gonna hear. They're gonna kill us!" We didn't go. He [my father] came after us. He told us what's going on. We went to the house and they gave us something to eat. The next morning, we just left the place and went to the town where we were before.

How anybody survived? There were some people who survived and who said, "I'm afraid. I'm going back to the place where I came from because I'm afraid to stay here. Someone's gonna kill me."⁷ Those kinds of people were maybe out of their minds already. We knew that my father had sisters and brothers in Georgia . . . America. The people, when they found out that we were still alive, a lady . . . a cousin of ours, she sent us the affidavit . . . the affidavit to Poland . . . so that we could come over to Georgia without any problem because if you didn't have an affidavit . . . if you didn't have a family, they wouldn't take you right away.

⁶ In common usage, *Goy* [Yiddish: people, nation] designates a non-Jewish or Gentile person.

⁷ After liberation, many Jewish survivors encountered manifestations of antisemitism, hostility, and violence from the local populations when they returned home. In postwar Poland, there were a number of pogroms (violent anti-Jewish riots). One of the most well known examples occurred in the southeastern Polish town of Kielce on July 4, 1946. Polish civilians, soldiers and police killed 42 Jews and injured 40 others. While not an isolated instance, the massacre symbolized the precarious state of Jewish life in the Holocaust's aftermath and prompted many survivors to leave Europe.

We were the first ones that they let out [emigrate from Europe]. We came in 1946 to Atlanta.⁸
 What else can I tell you?

John: Let's go back a little. What were your memories before the war . . . when you were six, seven, eight . . . when things were still normal? What was normal life like in your town?

Haskell: You might not like it, but I'll tell you anyway. As a Jew . . . a boy . . . when the teacher came in during the morning, everybody had to stand up [and say], "Good morning, teacher," and say the prayer . . . whatever they say, I forgot exactly the prayer—the Christian prayer. The Christians, they crossed <makes Sign of the Cross> themselves. I didn't because I was Jewish. I would sit. Then the children, they picked me up and they held my hand in the back and start to [make] the . . . Christian [Sign of the Cross] . . . I didn't like that. Of course I didn't like it. I was very happy that the war broke out and the Russian came in. Why? Because when school started, we all went to school and the Russian teachers, all you had to say was, "Good morning, teacher," and sit down. I said, "Thank G-d, I don't have to put up with this stuff anymore!" I was so happy.

John: In what way was your family Jewish?

Haskell: My father was a cantor⁹ in Europe. When he came here to Atlanta, we joined a synagogue—Anshi S'fard¹⁰—and my father was a cantor. He could read Hebrew. He could read the *Torah*.¹¹ He was a religious man. Most people are [religious] in Europe . . . you're talking about, you want to hear about Atlanta after . . .

John: No, more when you were growing up. Was that a religious family?

Haskell: Yes, absolutely. Most people in Europe are religious . . . I would say 90 percent or maybe 95 percent . . . [when] *Yontif*¹² came or Passover or New Year's or whatever. Every week we used to go to the synagogue, like some people do. I've been going here to a synagogue every Saturday. I belong to Anshi S'fard since . . . 1950. About 1995, Rabbi [Eliyahu] Schusterman¹³

⁸ Majer, Dora, and Chaskell Frosting are listed on the passenger manifest of the *SS Ernie Pyle*, which left Bremen, Germany on June 12, 1947 and arrived in New York City, New York on June 22, 1947.

⁹ A cantor is the prayer leader in the synagogue.

¹⁰ Congregation Anshi S'fard is an Orthodox synagogue located in Atlanta, Georgia. It was founded in 1911 to provide a home for Hasidic worship and fellowship for Jews from Poland, Galicia, and the Ukraine who had settled in Atlanta. It is the oldest Orthodox synagogue in Atlanta.

¹¹ *Torah* [Hebrew: teaching] is a general term that covers all Jewish law including the vast mass of teachings recorded in the Talmud and other rabbinical works.

¹² *Yontif* is the Yiddish word; in Hebrew it is *yom tov*. It is a generic word for Jewish holidays. It includes all but the High Holy Days of *Rosh Ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur*.

¹³ Rabbi Eliyahu Schusterman is the founder and director of the Chabad Intown congregation of Atlanta, Georgia.

came in from the Chabad,¹⁴ which is a different religion, more or less. [It is] more religious. I joined the *Chabad* people. In Anshi S'fard I was a vice president, I was a president, I was . . . I could *daven*,¹⁵ too. Everything was fine. That's the . . . Atlanta.

John: What were the relations like between Jews and Christians in Lvov, during those years before the Germans?

Haskell: Being a child, I cannot remember those things. Nobody told me exactly. I think they were pretty good. When the Germans came in 1941¹⁶ . . . right then everybody had to check in to go to work [forced labor]. They took all the people and they lined them up to see how many people [there] are. Then they sent them to work . . . to work the ditches crew or whatever the stuff. In the afternoon or in the evening they came back. Now . . . my father and mother were very nice people that . . .

John: Give us your mother's name?

Haskell: My mother's name is Dora Lubin . . . L-U-B-I-N.

John: Say a little bit of what she was like, just to give us a sense.

Haskell: I got a picture of her. What can I tell you? What she was like . . . she was a person, observant . . . the holidays. Most of the people in Europe . . . the women of the past . . . mothers . . . they hardly went to work because that was the man's job. My father took care of everything. He went out, he bought some things, he brought it back. Let me tell you something else. When the Germans came in, they took everybody from the town. They took them out to put them in another section.¹⁷ They kind of tried together . . . altogether instead of it being a house here and a house there. They put in a section . . .

John: Like a ghetto?

¹⁴ *Chabad* is a Hasidic movement in Orthodox Judaism. In Atlanta, Georgia, Congregation Beth Tefillah and *Chabad* Intown are affiliated with the movement.

¹⁵ *Davening* is the act of reciting Jewish liturgical prayers during which the prayer sways or rocks lightly.

¹⁶ On June 22, 1941, the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in a military campaign codenamed "Operation Barbarossa." Mosty Wielkie was occupied on June 29, 1941.

¹⁷ When the Germans occupied Mosty Wielkie in 1941, acts of plunder, brutality, and isolation against the Jewish population began immediately. By fall, they were confined to a ghetto that had been established. Every day, the men were taken to work at the Zawonie railway station – about 15 kilometers away from Mosty Wielkie. The women were taken to work at a nearby sawmill. The ghetto was not enclosed in the beginning. In the fall of 1942, the ghetto became a labor camp, was enclosed with barbed wire, and the men were separated from the women.

Haskell: It was a ghetto in the beginning. The houses where the people moved out, it wasn't much. I happened to see them burning.¹⁸ There was burning one house here and the flames came to two or three. It started somewhere else. I said, "My gosh! Somebody do it on purpose?" Though this happened to be . . . They took us away and they made a ghetto out of it. Then they separated . . . the men separate, the women separate. There were no . . . there were children . . . there were some children. The children they took them away with the mothers. What happened to them? They took them away to some other towns, other ghettos, or concentration camps.¹⁹

I was lucky. I happened to be a small guy. My father was afraid in case something happened to me. He said, "Let me see if I can build you up a little bit." He got some kind of boots. The boots were . . . The first two days we went to work and it was very cold weather in February. We walked, coming and going, for two days. The third day, I couldn't go back because I had blisters on my feet. I said, "I cannot walk anymore." That was my luck that I survived because they took the children separate and the elderly people and the sick people to one side.²⁰ The people who were better—healthy—they were put on the other side. We knew . . . or they knew what's gonna happen. Everybody started running . . . the children and the people and the old people trying to go run away from them. It didn't help. The Germans killed them right on the spot. The one[s] that didn't get killed, they took them to the woods. They'd already got a grave for them. They all lined up and got shot with machine guns. Everybody just fell in the grave. They put some . . . paint²¹ . . . in case somebody didn't die, so they'll be suffered more. They'll suffer because, if you're sick and wounded, you put some paint. It's unbelievable.

¹⁸ Haskell may be referring to the brief period when the Germans occupied Mosty Wielkie in September 1939. According to other survivors of Mosty Wielkie, at that time, the Germans burned down many Jewish homes. The survivor's accounts can be found in *Mosty-Wielkie – Most Rabati, sefer zikaron* (Mosty-Wielkie Memorial Book), Ed. Moshe Shtarkman, et al., Mosty Wielkie Societies in Israel and the United States, Published: Tel Aviv 1975-77 (H,Y, E 2 volumes). A digitized translation can be found at <http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Velyki_Mosty/Velyki_Mosty.html>.

¹⁹ In October 1942, the Germans began thinning out the Mosty Wielkie ghetto's population. Many of the elderly & children were sent to the nearby town of Sokal and then to the Belzec extermination camp.

²⁰ The exact details of the events Haskell is describing are unclear. It is known that the Germans and their Ukrainian auxiliaries rounded up between 1,100 and 2,000 Jews from Mosty Wielkie in February or March 1943. They were taken into the woods on the way to the nearby village of Borova, shot, and thrown into a mass grave that had been prepared. According to some survivors, the women were surrounded when they lined up for roll call at the local sawmill. When they realized what was happening, chaos ensued and many fled to the nearby woods. Some escaped and managed to survive in the woods by foraging potatoes. Others were shot while fleeing. Similar to Haskell's recollection, another survivor recalls men, women, and children being mercilessly chased and killed in the ghetto.

²¹ Lime (calcium oxide) is a white powder often spread on bodies to reduce the odor from decomposition. It is a caustic, alkaline substance that can cause chemical burns when it comes into contact with moist skin.

Then, some people came out at nighttime from the grave alive. They came in and they knocked at our house . . . where we were in the ghetto. They tried to get in, saying, “Majorca, let me in, let me in. I run away from the camp. Please let me in.” They came in. We gave them something to eat—whatever we had. I was lucky because if I would have gone and been on the line the next day, they probably would take me away because I was short and young. I was lucky. When I saw what happened that day, I was hiding under the bed. Some of my friends . . . they were trying to get to the house. The Germans killed them right on the step. They killed them. I had to see where to go. I just ran under the bed and stayed all day until things quieted down. Then . . . they liquidated the camp.²² We knew what was going to happen. We knew . . .

John: Did the camp have a name, in particular?

Haskell: No.

John: Was it a factory of some kind or what kind of camp was it?

Haskell: You see, it doesn’t matter. Every city, just about, had a lot of Jews—mostly in the cities. In the beginning, they took them separately . . . maybe they had a name, I don’t know. Everybody was in business for himself in Europe. The life was all right before the war because my father was a businessman. He went out to different places to buy things [and] sell it. That’s how we survived. That was a good thing because of that goodness that my father did to the people. They knew that.

When you had to line up in the evening after coming from work, the people had sacks on their heads so we wouldn’t recognize them. When they came to my mother and father and my two sisters, [the bystanders would say,] “Don’t touch Frostig! [unintelligible: 19:36] Don’t touch!” The people . . . they knew who he was and nobody put a hand on anything. Nobody took anything and beat us up [or] something like that because of the name and respect for it. The rest of them were so beat up, blood was going everywhere and . . . the goodness, for me, has always been that way in our nation . . . the goodness. My father was a good man, a religious man, and he took care of everybody—doesn’t make a difference who you are, Jew, a Christian, or whatever. Those people knew who he is and that’s how we survived—because of the goodness.

²² The Mosty Wielkie ghetto was completely liquidated on May 1, 1943. Around 300 or 400 surviving Jews—including Haskell and his parents—were sent to a labor camp in Rawa Ruska, a town located about 37 kilometers (23 miles) west of Mosty Wielkie.

He was sold . . . I don't know exactly what he sold to the farmer . . . The farmer said, "I'll buy it, but I don't have enough money to pay for it." My father said, "Don't worry. If you have one day the money, you're gonna give it." He didn't say, "You've got to give me the money or I'm gonna take away." You know how some people are. "If you don't pay me, I'm gonna..." That's how we survived . . . because of that particular farmer. We didn't have no matches. Everything was wet. Whatever we had, the clothes and the matches got wet. It was a big old storm in the summertime. Without matches we couldn't light up and bake a potato in the evening time or the afternoon. One potato a day—that's all we had. Then the potatoes had run out. We didn't have any more potatoes. My father went to the . . . where they put the potatoes in the ground . . .

John: To hide them for later?

Haskell: Yes, where they put for later.²³ He went and picked [them] up to see if he could find some that hadn't been already ready to sprout. He found maybe one out of ten potatoes that were still all right. He took it out . . . and he brought them back to the woods. My mother said, "Oh my G-d! Someone's going to say, 'What happened to the potatoes?' They'll know something's going on out here!" We were scared to death because somebody can find out that somebody must have been down there and taken out the potatoes.

John: When did you leave the ghetto to go into the woods, and why?

Haskell: We knew that the ghetto was going to be liquidated and they were going to transfer us to another place. I happened to be already out from hiding. I was hiding by myself as a child.²⁴ My father promised somebody—a friend of his—if they going to keep me and the war ends, somebody's going to give you lots of goodness for your . . . He said we had some brothers and sisters in America, "They'll see that you'll be taken care of." He took me down there. The farmer agreed that I can go down there. I went down there, by myself. At nighttime and daytime all by myself. He didn't give me nothing to eat all day—maybe in the evening time something. My father came in every second day to see how I was doing. I said, "Daddy, take me back. I can't

²³ Potatoes are usually planted in early spring from seed potatoes—potatoes that have begun to sprout. Haskell's family began hiding in the woods in June 1943. By then, the potato crop would have already been harvested and seed potatoes gathered for planting the next crop.

²⁴ The exact details of Haskell's time in hiding alone are unclear. It is possible his father hid him with a local farmer when the rest of the family was first sent to the ghetto in the fall of 1941. Until the fall of 1942, the ghetto was left open and his father would have had been able to sneak back and forth to check on Haskell.

stand it. Take me back.” He came the second time, it was the same old thing. I say, “Take me back, please.” I was crying. He was crying. He agreed and he took me back.

It was lucky . . . if I would have been by myself with that farmer, he would have killed me.²⁵ He didn’t have to hide . . . he didn’t have to save me. What for? He’s got everything we had. We gave it to him and said, “Here. When the war ends, we’re gonna give everything we have.” Can you imagine what? The Russians came in 1944. My father went to the farmer, because he didn’t keep me [but] maybe a couple of weeks. He didn’t keep me until the war ends, no. My father went to the farmer and said, “I’d like to take the stuff that I gave you. My son wasn’t there hiding out, so I want it back.” The farmer said, “Do you mean to say that nobody else could bore that same thing (what he did)?” He wouldn’t give it to us . . . I said to my father, “Let’s get out because he might kill us. If he’s talking crazy things right now with the Russians already here, he doesn’t have no respect. He’s gonna kill us.” I said, “Let’s get out of here before he kills us.”

A few days later, when the Russians were over there, we met a Jewish captain. He came and asked us questions. He knew that we had survived. He asked us questions, “How did you survive? How the people were down there?” We couldn’t say too good about the people because they would have killed me and everything else. They would have killed some other people. I don’t know if I should say it or not, but my father gave him names, where he should go and take care of them. That’s all I can say. He took care of it. He comes the second day . . . he comes back. I said, “Forget it.” If you didn’t do it all at one time, forget it because something was going to happen, the Russians were going to find out, and . . . because the Ukraine people were fighting against the Russians.²⁶ They wanted to have for themselves a country. They were fighting each other. They didn’t win. The captain took care of some of the people for whom we gave numbers. I told my father, “Maybe you could put some other names down.” I said, “No, forget it . . . If you don’t know for sure what they did to somebody, then leave them alone.”

John: How was your mother and sisters during that period? What can you say about them?

²⁵ In Ukraine, as in German-occupied territories in Europe, antisemitism, nationalism, ethnic hatred, anti-Communism, and opportunism often induced collaboration with the Nazi regime. Such collaboration was a critical element in implementing the Final Solution and the mass murder of other groups whom the Nazi regime targeted. Collaborators committed some of the worst atrocities of the Holocaust era. Nationalists in the west of Ukraine were among the most enthusiastic, hoping that their efforts would enable them to establish an independent state later on.

²⁶ At the end of World War II, Ukrainian nationalism and hopes for independence from all foreign occupation gave rise to resistance groups that waged guerrilla type attacks on Soviet forces.

Haskell: I don't remember much about it because they were older than me. They happened to be in a different location. Even when we went to that camp, they took some rags and some straw in a horse and buggy. They put it and they covered me up so I'd be able to get into that thing. My sisters were all a couple years older. They were already working. There were two camps: a big concentration camp and a small one where we were, because I was too small.²⁷ My father said [that] maybe I can get out, maybe somebody gonna save me, maybe everything's gonna be fine. They let me out and my father said, "Please, he'll do something. Maybe he can go take some water and give it to the people working." The Germans agreed. That's how I survived too.²⁸ Every night [and] every day, the people came in from the camp to [or from] work. In the evening time, they went back to the camp by trucks . . .

It happened so one day, I wanted to go with my sisters. My sisters, they wanted to see . . . I didn't know exactly what that means. He said . . . my father and mother said, "Get out! Get down because you're too young! You cannot go with them!" He dragged me off in the truck. The same night . . . they surrounded the camp, with all the people, and they burned it—burned up the camp and the people together.²⁹ Some people . . . Christian . . . came in . . . they knew there was another camp . . . they came in at nighttime. They talked about, "Please, run away because the Germans already liquidated that camp. They're coming this way. They're gonna kill us [and] kill you, too." Everybody took off to the woods. Where else can you go?

But there's some people from different countries. How far can you go? You got to eat . . . you got to something . . . I imagine they all got caught and shot, but we were lucky because we were . . . my father knew the neighborhood. At nighttime, there was a big old river. We didn't know how deep it was, so my father said, "I've got to find something to get through it, to get by, because . . ." He took off his clothes. He was a swimmer. He could swim. He found a

²⁷ When Haskell refers to two camps, it is unclear if he is referencing the two sections of Mosty Wielkie or a separate ghetto that existed within Mosty Wielkie. It is possible his sisters were in the sub camp in Sielec Zawonie, where some of the women were sent in the fall of 1942.

²⁸ The exact details of Haskell's arrival in the Mosty Wielkie ghetto are unclear. When Haskell's father reconsidered hiding him with the local farmer (see footnote 24 above), his sisters may have been able to sneak him into the ghetto unnoticed in one of the wagons that went back and forth to the sawmill everyday. In the beginning, it seems Haskell may have hidden under the bed while his family was working outside the ghetto during the day. When that became too dangerous, his father may have convinced the supervisor of the ghetto, Hauptmann Johann Kroupa, to let Haskell deliver water to the workers. Kroupa was in charge of the ghetto until February 1943. He was known to be friendly to the Jews and was rumored to have accepted bribes for work permits.

²⁹ Haskell is probably describing Rawa Ruska, which was burned down after it was liquidated in June 1943. One survivor recalled that a Pole, who was working at the same railway yard as her husband, warned her husband of the liquidation the day before it occurred. The couple ran away and joined others in the nearby woods. She recalls watching from the woods in a horrible storm and seeing the camp surrounded and burned down.

place that was a little bit better than the others. He came back and says, “I found . . . I think I’ll be able to take you over. Take off your clothes.” He was a good swimmer. “I’ll take you over to the other side.” He took me first, take[ing] care . . . with one hand he was swimming and in the other hand he held me. He held me up and he made it through the river. Then he came after my mother—same thing. We came over and we . . . whatever we had still to put on the . . . whatever we had to put on [to] make ourselves comfortable.

We couldn’t stay too long in the woods because it’s possible the same people or some other people would be able to look around and see if anybody is still there in the woods. I imagine that it must have been a lot of people there in the woods because some people came from different countries, even from Poland themselves. They didn’t know where to go or who to talk to. Most likely they were killed a day later . . . They didn’t have nothing to eat. They probably got killed. We were lucky. We knew . . . my father was a businessman. He knew the neighborhood. That’s how we escaped from that—through the woods. Somehow a miracle happened. We were going to the village where my father knew some people. It so happened that we met a person, that she knew us, and she said, “I’m gonna help you. I’m gonna bring you something to eat.” She went home, [which was] not too far. She had a farm. She brought us milk and some bread and we ate.

The same day, I don’t know what happened . . . the Russian or German planes . . . we saw the planes. We tried to hide from them. In summertime, the water . . . you laid down no matter what.³⁰ It’s cold or some other things, but you laid down and the whole thing’s gonna spread because its . . . we laid down and the whole thing it got . . . emptied. The plane—I don’t know who it was, German or Russian—they saw something going on at that place. They came one time and started shooting. Nothing happened. A few minutes [later], they came a second time and they started shooting the machine gun. I could see the fire from the machine guns. That’s how close they were. That was the end of it. They never came back. I don’t know if they were Germans looking for the Russians or Russians for the Germans. It was a miracle because . . . who knows . . . so many things.

³⁰ Haskell seems to be describing a swampland. About 100 miles north of the area around Rawa Ruska is a geographic region known as Polesia that extends eastward through modern-day south Belarus and north Ukraine, and ends within Russia. On the western side between the Bug and Pripjat Rivers the region becomes very marshy. It is also one of the largest forest areas on the continent, making it a relatively ideal area to hide in. The Frostig family probably left Rawa Ruska in June 1943 and began hiding in that area.

That's how we started to go to the countryside and we . . . every few days my father knew some people. At nighttime we came to this stable you walked up with a ladder, to keep straw and hay in the summertime for the cows. That was in summertime. Everything [was] just about finished. They had nothing left. When they took me down it to hide, I had to go all the way to the end of [it] and sit in there all day long. My father used to come and see me, how am I doing. It was unbelievable because being by myself and not much to eat and you cannot go down and relieve yourself. I was crying. He was crying. I said, "Take me back! Whatever's gonna happen to me will happen to me!" He came a second time and a third time and he said, "I'll take you back." He took me back to the camp. That's how I survived because the camp was liquidated pretty soon. They took me over to that bigger camp and that's how—my father and mother and myself—we escaped. It's lucky enough, because we went to about ten different farmers. They knew him because he was a businessman. He did a lot of good for the people, even in Atlanta. He had a good heart, that's the kind of person he is. That's how we survived. Every week or two, we had to go to a different farm. We got up on the ladder in the morning or at nighttime, go up to the . . .

John: The loft? The top part of the barn?

Haskell: Yes, that's right. We came in [and] we were sitting on it until somebody came inside to feed the cows. My father got a . . . [He said,] "Hey, wait a minute! Hey, hey, hey, hey! I'm Majorca [sp]! I came here! Maybe you can help me to stay a few days." He said okay. We stayed down there a few days. They got tired because they were afraid. Something might happen. Somebody might see them . . . the neighbors or something. They told us, "Please, go somewhere else. We cannot keep you any longer." We go at least about ten different places because we knew . . . my father knew all of them. Nobody said 'no.' They saved us. That's how we survived because of the good nature of my father.

He was . . . in Atlanta a good fellow. He helped a lot of people . . . When we came into Atlanta, we went into business. After us, a lot of people came into Atlanta and they didn't have any money. I, as a child . . . I wasn't a child. I was 16 or 17 . . . I signed the papers in case something happened to them and they were unable to pay, then I'll be responsible. My father said the same thing. Thank G-d, everybody went into the business. They worked too long [but] they were doing okay. I didn't have to give them money. They went into the business and did

fine. It shows the character for the person is how you . . . if you do some good no matter who you are, it'll pay you [back] in the long run.

John: Can you describe yourself as a young man, as a teenager? What were you like?

Haskell: I couldn't say about my life. I was too young to think about it. When the Russians came in 1941, my mother and father asked the Russian people if we can open up a restaurant. Of course, if you have a restaurant, you gotta have beer [and] you gotta have whiskey. They agreed, so we opened up a restaurant. Myself and my father had to go every time to places to pick up drinks—some beer [and] everything—to bring back to the house. Just about every day we had to go to the supplies. It didn't last long because that was the end of the . . . the Germans invaded Russian territory and the whole thing was ended.

My life was pretty good because I had some friends, some Jewish friends and Christian friends. I was a good student and everybody liked me. That's my life. I cannot tell you exactly what else because I was too young to be long . . . too young to be long in the neighborhood. You went to town. As far as I can tell, we had Jewish people down in the neighborhood. Every time we came from school, we went out and played, and other kinds of things, and went swimming. [It was] wonderful.

One time . . . I can tell you now . . . maybe it's a funny story. We had a horse and if you have a horse, sometimes you've got to bathe them, to keep them clean. We took . . . I took him to a river, a place down there. Horses can swim. I don't know if you know about it or not, but they can swim better than people. I was on top of the horse all the way to the tail, just playing. Then I went backwards. It was funny . . . just how wonderful it was. People were nice in the neighborhood. We had no problem. No matter how poor you are, people are keeping . . . they're not asking for something better because they know they won't be able to get it. You do the best you could. We went to *shul*³¹ every Saturday [and] for the holidays. My father was a cantor. We had a normal life.

John: You said the Russians were in charge of that section of Poland?

Haskell: The whole territory. That was Ukraine half of . . . Poland was divided in half. Half was German and half . . . we were in the Russian territory.

John: What was different when the Russians took over? How did it look different?

³¹ *Shul* is a Yiddish word for synagogue that is derived from a German word meaning "school," and emphasizes the synagogue's role as a place of study.

Haskell: Different . . . first of all, everything was fine. They told us, everybody, to paint the . . . side . . . keep it clean. I was happy because of the thing when I told you before about what happened in the school time. I was glad when the Russians came in. You didn't have to say the prayer. All you had to do was get up and say, "Good morning. Good morning, teacher," and you sit down. That was my happiest thing because I was . . . scared. I thought maybe . . . they [the other students] go do something to me. I thank G-d they came in.

As far as being the Russians . . . I know what kind of people they are. They cannot do any business in Russia.³² My mother started to do some business buying things. The Russians went to the countryside and brought some things, different things. I don't know if they stole it or whatever. They brought it to my mother's house and they sold it. They wanted some whiskey to drink. No matter how much it was worth, just give them something to drink. The next day they'll do the same thing. We were selling vodka. One time, a Russian captain came in and arrested my mother because of what she was doing. She stayed in jail for two weeks. We couldn't take her out. Then she came [home]. When she got out, the same person, [that] captain, came to her again and asked for some vodka. My mother said, "How in the heck can you talk to me like that? First you put me in jail, now you want to do the same thing!" She said, "No. I don't have any more vodka. Keep going." That's how we escaped. The life in the Russian territory was no good.

Very few Jews survived in that neighborhood. Some of them survived. They came out to different places. Things had changed so much that they said, "I'm going back to the place that I came from. I'm afraid to go on the street." It was a terrible thing because, when you look at the town, the houses were burned down, the synagogues were burned down, everything. The people got killed in the synagogue—burned down alive.³³ It was unbelievable.

We went to Poland and, from Poland, across to Czechoslovakia and other places until we came to Germany. From Germany . . . everybody came to Germany to go overseas if they wanted. The ship came in . . . I remember that . . . [with] about 900 people at that time. The

³² While there was an initial feeling of relief at the arrival of Russian forces in 1939 because it ended the brief but violent German occupation, the Jewish population of eastern Poland was negatively affected by Soviet policies that nationalized their businesses and disbanded their religious communities. In addition, the Russians arrested and deported many Jews and Poles they considered threats.

³³ Haskell seems to be referencing when around 20 Jews were locked in the Mosty Wielkie synagogue, which the Germans and Ukrainians then set on fire in June 1941. Some Jewish homes had also been burned down in 1939 when the Germans initially invaded the area. Following the 1943 liquidations of Mosty Wielkie and Rawa Ruska, Jewish homes in the ghettos were also burned down. Any survivors who returned after the war would have found the Jewish community almost completely destroyed.

ship's name I still remember to this day: *Ernie Pyle*.³⁴ Ernie Pyle was a correspondent in the wartime. Very big nationwide . . . very famous orator . . . captain . . . reporter. That's the name of the ship. I even still got a card from *Ernie Pyle*, so I wouldn't forget the name of the ship. There was 900 people. Most of them got sick from the ocean. They got . . . people get sick. They just can't help it. I'm the one . . . really, it didn't bother me at all. I went to the kitchen place when they served . . . evening time supper. I saw some bread—white bread—and I said, “My gosh!” We hadn't seen white bread in years. I was so happy. It was *challah*.³⁵ As far as that goes, most of it we couldn't eat. If we did eat it, we tore up [became sick] and all that.³⁶

Then we came to the United States. We came . . . we stopped in . . . New York [City, New York] . . . for two days. Since we had a visa [and] permission to come . . . to Georgia [and] to family, they only kept us for two days and [then they said], “Let's go!” There are a lot of other people coming in every week from overseas to New York. We come in two weeks time and we settle down. It was a rough time here in Georgia, even Atlanta. The life was too bad, no matter who you were. Some Jews treat us terrible, taking advantage of us. Some people . . . until now, they still take advantage of the people who came from overseas. They cannot understand how the people came in, who went to the business, they bought some houses, they bought some shopping centers, they bought everything. They've been here for years. Fifty years and they haven't got nothing! They're jealous of us. That's true. Most everybody who came in—myself too, my mother, my father—we went into the business. Everything was fine. We bought a house. We bought some other things. We bought this house. I bought this house when I got married. We did pretty good. The people . . . they were not educated . . . those people who came after the First World War. They didn't know how to read and write. They couldn't even write their names and that's how they were jealous. But what can you do? There are still people now . . . they're still jealous because of some people who are still alive. I saw that in the paper. I'm not telling you no story. I'm taking the Jewish paper called the *Morgen Journal*.³⁷ I read the article. I even showed

³⁴ Ernest “Ernie” Pyle (1900-1945) was a well-known Pulitzer Prize winning American journalist. During World War II, he reported from the home front and from both the European and Pacific theaters. His columns ran in over 300 newspapers. He was killed in combat during the Battle of Okinawa in April 1945. Later that month, a Merchant Marine C-4 military-type cargo ship was named after him. After World War II, the *SS Ernie Pyle* was used to carry displaced persons (DPs) and refugees from Europe to the United States.

³⁵ *Challah* is a loaf of yeast-risen egg bread traditionally eaten for the Jewish Sabbath or on special occasions.

³⁶ After years of malnutrition and starvation, survivors often faced a long and difficult road to recovery. Eating foods that were too rich or complex often resulted in sickness.

³⁷ *The Jewish Morning Journal* or *Morgen Journal* was a Yiddish daily morning newspaper published out of New York City.

it to the rabbi. I said, “Take a look at that.” He said, “Yes, I saw that too.” I didn’t make up that kind of story because . . . Anyway, we did pretty well and we worked hard.

John: Did your parents discuss the decision to leave Europe instead of staying there . . . in 1945 or 1946?

Haskell: Everybody who survived . . . nobody would want to stay down [there]. First of all, it was going to be under Polish territory. Poland came back.³⁸ We didn’t care much about the situation before the war and after the war. Most of them—there’s not too many Jews left—most of the people had friends [or] relatives in different countries [and] in different places in the world. Everybody was trying to get out as fast as they can to America. Most of them went to America. Some of them went to Israel. I don’t know. What else can I tell you? I cannot tell you everything in about half an hour’s time. It’s unbelievable what he can . . . how can you tell a story in an hour [or] an hour and a half, if things happened for at least two years? Terrible things . . . to us [and] to everybody. How can he say, “I’m going to . . .”

John: What are some of the other memories?

Haskell: Like what? I cannot tell . . .

John: Just let your imagination go. What else comes to you?

Haskell: I missed my friends. I saw what happened to them. I just cannot believe how the world treated people. I happened to get an article about three or four months ago, about the place where we were in the camp. They were writing a big article about the whole camp territory that some rabbis went down in it and look at the places, the stores of the silos . . . what do you call it . . . beaten down, torn up. They made some sidewalks from them and put them on the street.³⁹

John: The gravestones?

Haskell: The gravestones. The rabbi said, “I would like to see if I can build it up because it’s unbelievable . . . what’s going on. Nobody’s taking care of it.” That’s the last thing of Poland

³⁸ Poland had suffered heavy losses—including extremely high civilian casualties and the massive destruction of cities and infrastructure—during World War II. When the Russian army advanced into Poland at the end of the war, the new Polish government became dominated by Soviet communism. Border and population shifts also dramatically altered Poland.

³⁹ During World War II and in the decades following it, Jewish gravestones, or *matzevot*, were frequently removed from cemeteries and reused for a variety of purposes both in rural villages and in cities across Poland and Ukraine. After the Rawa Ruska labor camp was liquidated in June 1943, the ghetto was burned down and the Jewish cemetery was demolished. Only a few tombstones can still be seen today. In some places, including Rawa Ruska, efforts have been made to recover the gravestones in recent years.

that . . . I don't know what else I can tell you. It's a lot of things to talk about. If you want to talk about it all night, I can talk all night. No, really, it's . . .

John: What happened to your sisters, then?

Haskell: I think I told you about it. We were in one camp and they were in a second camp. One time, at nighttime, they were going back to work, back to the camp, and I was going to try to go with them. My father and mother saw me on the truck. They took me down. They said, "Don't go now! You cannot go now! You are child. You cannot go now!" They dragged me off of the truck. The same night <interviewer sneezes> they surrounded the camp where my sisters were. I understand that's what was said. They killed everybody and they burned the camp.

John: While your sisters were in there?

Haskell: The sisters were there. If I had been down there, I would have been among the dead. Some people—Christian people—they were . . . I don't know if they were good people or bad . . . they came in running to us, to the camp, saying, "Get out of here because the Russians burned up the other camp and the people, everything else! They're coming your way. They'll do the same thing!" Everybody took off into the woods.

John: Did you ever hear an explanation for why they burned it down, the Russians?

Haskell: That wasn't the Russians, that was . . . no, that was the Germans. No, obviously the Russians . . . no, they were the Germans who did that in concentration camps. That was 1943. They killed in a lot of places, not just that particular area what I'm talking about.⁴⁰ Most of the time they took places from the smallest neighborhoods and then put them in the big neighborhoods until they got them surrounded. They killed them, most of them. We run away. That's how we survived. We were lucky because my father was familiar with the territory. He was very good to the people, to the Christian people. They had respect for him. That's how we survived—because of the good name my father and mother had.

John: The camp and the ghetto—are you using the same words?

Haskell: In the beginning there was a ghetto.

⁴⁰ As German forces entered Soviet-occupied territories of Poland in 1941, the Jews they encountered were immediately singled out through policies of exclusion for abuse or massacre. Mobile killing squads called "*Einsatzgruppen*" followed the German army as it advanced, carrying out mass-murder operations in Jewish communities in what is sometimes called the "Holocaust by Bullets." Those who survived were typically forced into ghettos. Most of the Polish ghettos were short-lived and destroyed after the 1942 Wannsee Conference, which framed the policy of the "Final Solution." Then, in June 1943, SS chief Heinrich Himmler ordered the liquidation of the remaining ghettos in Poland. Jews capable of work were removed to forced labor camps and those incapable of work were sent to killing centers.

John: The camp was a separate place?

Haskell: The camp . . . they liquidated the ghetto. That means everybody from the ghetto . . . they took them away in other part of the city they wired up.⁴¹ Nobody could get out and they had to go to work everyday. Being a child, I couldn't go to work. When everyone went to work, I'd hide under the beds. In case the German came in, he'd say, "*Raus! Raus!*" [German: (get) out] to see if everybody's gone. I was under the bed. I was scared. In case he looks around, I'm probably found. Thank G-d all they said was, "*Raus!*" and they went away. Every day [it was] the same thing. Then they liquidated that camp and took us to a bigger camp. That's how they got rid of the Jews.

John: Did the bigger camp have a name or a specific . . .

Haskell: Rawa Ruska.⁴² In the paper . . . last year, they had a big write-up from that camp, Rawa Ruska.

John: Can you spell it?

Haskell: It was R-A-V-A. Ruska would be R-U-S-K-A. Rawa Ruska. I even showed it . . . the item . . . the paper to the rabbi. [I] told him, "Take a look at what's happening. After so many years, they're the ones who wrote about the territory but we were." Until then, nobody had written about different places. It so happens that that was a plea. They still . . . of course there are no Jews down there. The cemetery is broken up. Nobody's taken care of it. I don't know if a lot of people went to Europe after the war. I was scared to go because if I were to go down there, they would have killed the people in that territory. They would think that we came after property, after houses. We had a wonderful house. They could have said, "He came in after to take away the house." They would have killed me. I said, "I better not go because you never know." Even nowadays, with what's going on in the world, you're not sure, no matter where you are.

John: You had to be afraid of both the Germans and the Polish people?

⁴¹ In the fall of 1942, the ghetto of Mosty Wielkie was enclosed with barbed wire and turned into a labor camp. The men and women were separated within the ghetto.

⁴² Rawa Ruska is a town that formerly was in eastern Poland. Today it is part of the Ukraine. Haskell spells the name with a "v", which is how the German "w" sounds in English. A ghetto was established in the spring of 1942. It was liquidated in December 1942 when approximately 1,500 Jews were shot to death and dumped into large pits by the Germans with the assistance of Ukrainians. After the Mosty Wielkie ghetto and camp had been liquidated in May 1943, about 300 or 400 survivors—including Haskell and his parents—were sent to Rawa Ruska as forced laborers and housed in the vacated homes of the former ghetto. The surviving Mosty Wielkie Jews were killed when the Rawa Ruska labor camp was liquidated in early June 1943.

Haskell: Not . . . yes, the Polish . . . the Poles . . . the Polish people weren't too bad. They saved us more or less. The Polish people and Ukraine . . . they divided the territory into two areas. We were on the Ukraine side. The other side was German. Then when the war broke out between Germany and Russia, the Germans took over the Russian territory in about two or three days. They traveled 300 miles from the place to Kiev⁴³ in Russia. That's how fast they went down there, the Germans. With planes, they liquidated . . . that's how they survived . . . the Germans . . . how they won the war. It so happened in 1943 or 1944, the Germans were already next to the place called Stalingrad⁴⁴ and . . . I forgot the second name . . . in wintertime. The big old cold down there . . . where they have that in Russia. Temperatures were unbelievable. The Germans couldn't move nowhere. Everything was frozen. The Germans themselves . . . thousands of Germans were frozen because they couldn't move because of the weather like it is. Now, it's not like here, of course. But the Russians . . . Stalingrad . . . you wouldn't believe how they won the war—the Russians. They would have lost the war . . . if the weather had been all right, they would have lost the war. The Russian people are strong. They're used to that kind of weather. Between you and me, they like something to drink. They give them some vodka. They got a little bit high [and yelled], "Let's go!" Thousands and thousands of people died in Russia. Millions of people died. That's how the war was won—because the Germans couldn't go ahead. The Russians came and the whole thing changed.

John: Do you know any names of more prominent people who were in the ghetto? Were there Jewish leaders or anything like that?

Haskell: That I wouldn't know. I was too small for that. No, I wouldn't know.

John: What did your parents talk to you about during the quieter moments?

Haskell: What are you talking about? Here or in general?

John: No, during those years.

⁴³ Kiev was the capital of the Soviet Ukraine when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. Over 160,000, or 20 percent, of the city's population was Jewish. Nearly 100,000 Jews had fled Kiev by the time German forces entered the city on September 19, 1941. The 60,000 who remained were killed in a series of massacres carried out by the Germans and their auxiliaries over the next few months. The most notorious massacre began on September 29, 1941. Over the course of two days, 33,771 Jews were killed in a ravine near Kiev called "Babi Yar", in what was one of the largest mass murders at an individual location during World War II.

⁴⁴ The Battle of Stalingrad took place between July 1942 and February 1943. In brutally cold winter weather, the Soviets were able to successfully defend the city of Stalingrad. The battle is considered to be a turning point in the war in favor of the Allies. The battle was also one of the bloodiest in history, with both sides suffering tremendous casualties.

Haskell: Usually the same thing. My father was a businessman. He travels a lot out of town, going to buy some merchandise, selling and buying. I hardly maybe saw him two or three times a week. I was going to school, coming to school, playing, and this and that. Then there's nothing to talk about. Life was very bad for everybody in Poland or in Russia, no matter where, especially after the war. There was a shortage of everything. We tried to do the best we can. It's nothing to talk about. Things were normal, as far as I'm concerned, until the war broke out. Even [during] the wartime, it didn't bother me too much. I was happy when Russia came in. That's how we survived and . . . how the Germans lost the war. I don't know how many . . . 300,000 Germans, I believe, died in that territory. They were frozen to death. There's nothing new about it. Everybody knows about it.

John: What was it like for you to see dead bodies and people shot? What's that like for a kid?

Haskell: You cry. Most of the time, you cry. You get used to it. It doesn't matter. You're already used to it. You know something's gonna happen to you. Sooner or later it's gonna happen to everybody. If the war would have lasted a little bit longer, we would have been killed too. The people would kill us, the people that . . . we knew . . . because you cannot . . . All the time I just wanted something to myself. We never had a cold. We hadn't taken a bath in a year and a half and we'd never washed our clothes. We did wash the clothes. There was a lot of lice. You know what lice [is]? My mother washed everyday and would hang it up. Everything was clean. You put on the clothes—we didn't have too much—the same clothes. The next day the whole thing is [done] all over [again]. I don't know how in the world! What kind of business that is! You couldn't keep clean. Thank G-d nobody got sick. Even in wintertime, whatever it is—cold, fever, toothache . . . nothing. I don't know if you're used to it or if you forgot about it. I think it was . . . a time that we were supposed to be living. I guess we survived.

John: How much information was coming in from outside the city—like about what was going on in the rest of Poland?

Haskell: Even in wartime . . . very little because most everybody was surrounded in concentration camps. You cannot have a paper. You cannot have a radio. I had a radio when I was a small child. My uncle gave me a radio. Another uncle gave me a golden watch. The German asked everybody if anybody had gold watches [or] rings, to turn it in. [They said,] "If

you don't turn it that stuff, we're all gonna kill you." There was a Jewish . . . '*Judenrat*'⁴⁵ they called it . . . about 12 people . . . they kind of controlled the whole thing. Whatever the Germans told them to do or say to them, they told the Jews. [They] told us what's going on. That's how everybody had [been warned]. Whatever they had, they gave it away. They said, "If you don't give it away, you're gonna get killed." I said, "What the heck? Who needs it? If they're gonna kill, better to give it." That's how we . . . I don't know. I just sometimes . . . I think how in the world we didn't go crazy from hunger and everything else. Can you imagine? Nothing to eat, not taking a bath or nothing, no medicine. Of course, thank G-d, we didn't need it. Everything was fine.

John: Did you have a friend throughout that period—anybody in particular that you were close to?

Haskell: I had some friends. When the Germans surrounded the camp⁴⁶ . . . He was a friend but he was already maybe a year older. He already was in the line to work. Then people saw what was going on. First they took the sick people, the old people, the children on one side. We knew what was going to happen. Everybody started to run different places. The Germans killed as many people as they could on the spot. The friend that I got, he saw the whole thing. He was running to the house where I was. On the step, the German with a machine gun, they killed him. Can you imagine how you felt about it, though? I was scared to death. I jumped under the bed. I stayed down there all day. My mother and father . . . my mother and my two sisters, they were in a different location, in a cellar. They stayed down there until evening time, then somebody came along and said, "Everything's quiet now. You can come out." You forget so many things . . . that you cannot remember.

<break in tape, interview resumes>

John: Before we get into the post-war period of your life, let's just stick with the early days a little more. What are some of the other memories, if you just sit and look back? We can't sum up the whole war in one hour.

⁴⁵ The *Judenrat* was a Jewish council set up by the Nazis within the Jewish communities of Nazi-occupied Europe. They were given the responsibility of implementing the Nazis' policies regarding the Jews, which included the confiscation of electronics like radios and valuable assets like watches or jewelry.

⁴⁶ In October or November 1942, the Germans began thinning out the Mosty Wielkie ghetto population. Most of the Jews in the ghetto—especially the elderly and children—were relocated to the nearby towns of Sokal and Zolkiew, where they were subsequently killed or deported to the nearby Belzec extermination camp.

Haskell: That's true. The other time . . . was for me . . . it was going to school. I was a good student. They were very proud of me. If anybody came to check out the children, they put me in front as an example. I'm a good student and everything. Everything's fine. Other than that, everybody had their own mind, their own thought in Europe. Nobody paid attention to about politics or this and that. Everybody was poor, just about everybody. There are people still starving right now in Russia. They have nothing to eat. Elderly people survived. Maybe you see sometime on television, these survivors . . . Holocaust survivors . . . they're my age [or] a little bit older than that. They're somewhere in Siberia, down there where the cold weather is. They haven't got anybody, nothing like that.

John: Talk about the Jewish part of your life during those earlier years. What was your family doing for the Holidays, at synagogue, and so on? What did it all mean to you?

Haskell: The Jewish life . . . first of all, if you had parents . . . they were the ones raising the children. My parents . . . my father was an educated man. He was a cantor in Europe. Everybody had respect for him. He knew how to read and write in Hebrew. Other than that, I was . . . people don't pay attention. As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter. Everything was all right. You go to school, you come back from school. One time, my father had a teacher who wants to teach me Hebrew. It didn't last too long. The teacher came in, stayed for a couple weeks, the war broke out, he took off, and that was the end of the learning. Everything was fine. We come, we went to school, we come from school. We played. We went to swim. We got lakes. We got this and that. It's just normal like everybody else. It doesn't have to be Jewish. It could be anybody. We had good relations with all the people down there.

John: Did the Poles treat you any differently because you were German originally?

Haskell: Nobody knew by that time. That was in 1936. When the whole thing started down there,⁴⁷ we went to Poland.

John: You didn't have a German accent?

⁴⁷ President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler Chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. Hitler and the Nazi party immediately began to persecute German Jews. Until the outbreak of war in 1939, German Jews felt the effects of more than 400 national and local decrees and regulations that restricted all aspects of their public and private lives. In August 1934, Hindenburg died and Hitler had declared himself *Führer*—the leader of Germany. By the time Haskell's family left Germany in 1936, the Nuremberg Laws had further disenfranchised Jews and the situation was rapidly declining. Between 1933 and fall 1938, German policy officially encouraged Jewish emigration and nearly 150,000 Jews—approximately 30 percent of the total Jewish population—managed to leave Germany, including the Frostig family.

Haskell: No, we have parents talking Yiddish⁴⁸ all the time. I don't think you . . . maybe someone who lived down there spoke German with an accent. I don't have an accent even right now talking English. I don't think so. A little bit? You gotta have a little bit. When I went to school here, the teachers were very surprised of me [and] how good I am a student. I was learning English in Europe . . . in Germany after the war⁴⁹ . . . As a matter of fact, a German teacher, he taught me English. He said to me, "Once you go to America, in six weeks you're gonna speak English just like that." I knew some English already in Germany. When I came over here, I went to high school. The teachers were so surprised. They told everybody, "Take a look! He came in from Europe, he's got all A's and B's. You were born here, don't know nothing!" Just like that! She told them like that! I did fail English when I came and went to school. They gave me an 'F.' All right, they gave me an 'F.' That's why I had to go to summer school. That's why they gave me an 'A' because . . . even a triple 'A' . . . I don't know if I've still got it . . . triple A because they were so happy about it. They got . . . you know how children they don't pay attention like here . . . they've got different things on their mind.

John: What was your impression of New York for the two days you were there?

Haskell: Only two days because of the family that we have here. Anybody else has family somewhere else. They sent us out because other people were coming in by the hundreds, sometimes by the thousands, every week. I didn't . . .

John: Were you in some kind of DP [Displaced Persons]⁵⁰ camp in Europe before coming here?

Haskell: I was in a DP camp. That was after the war. A lot of people went to DP camps. They had better conditions down there. They had places where you can rest and eat. We happened to

⁴⁸ 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 20th century.

⁴⁹ After the war, Haskell and his parents left Poland. They were in Germany until they immigrated to the United States in 1947.

⁵⁰ When the war ended in Europe, millions of people were left uprooted and homeless. They were classified as displaced persons (DPs). Allied forces established temporary facilities known as Displaced Persons Camps (DP camps) in Austria, Italy, and Germany. Often, shelter was improvised and DPs found themselves housed in everything from former military barracks, summer camps and airports to castles, hotels and even private homes. In 1946 and 1947, the number of DPs in the camps rose substantially and conditions were often overcrowded and harsh. New organization and policies eventually took shape that substantially improved the DPs camps. Refugees were given some authority to manage their own affairs and some survivors began to establish new political and cultural lives. Eventually, DPs were repatriated to their home countries, reestablished themselves in new countries or immigrated outside of Europe. Most of the DP camps were closed by 1950.

be outside the DP camp. We happened to be on the street. You couldn't have no street after the war. You can live on the street. You didn't have to go to the DP. We did live on the street.

John: What was the name of it?

Haskell: The name of the town was Ulm . . . U-L-M.⁵¹ That's the name of it. We didn't stay too long in Germany either. We went [to the United States after] a short time. There was quite a few . . . all of the survivors in DP camps. We were still the survivors in DP but we had streets that you could live on, the streets. You didn't have to be on exactly down there. I don't know if you had to have some kind of privilege or something, I don't know, whatever your father did. Which is all right. It's better to be outside instead of inside . . . even after the war . . . because all you see is sick people, hungry people. I already see there's plenty of them. If you go to some other location, you survive.

John: Do you have any interactions with Germans after the war—just the regular people? I'm wondering what their attitude was about things.

Haskell: I'll tell you something. After the war, we went to a concentration camp called Dachau.⁵² People lived close by, and my father asked them, "What happened? What have you all been doing here? Why are you all . . ." [Those being questioned said,] "We didn't know anything. We didn't know anything." It's maybe half a mile from the camp. They didn't know anything? Can you imagine? They were afraid to talk to us, or something like that. Of course they knew. Everybody in the whole world knew what was going on. You see people surrounded and have hunger and all . . . they don't know or not. They didn't want to say they did because people say, "How come you didn't do anything about it if you knew?" They kind of played it like they don't know nothing about it. Even some of them don't believe it now, that the whole thing happened. You take the . . . people in Tehran, Iran, down there. Can you imagine? Those

⁵¹ Ulm is a city in southwestern Germany on the Danube River. Immediately after World War II, it was in the American zone of Germany and housed a series of Displaced Persons camps.

⁵² A concentration camp in Germany established on March 22, 1933, Dachau was originally a camp for political and criminal prisoners in need of punishment and rehabilitation to the proper German mindset. After *Kristallnacht* several thousand Jews were imprisoned there to make the point that they had no future in Germany. The conditions were harsh but got more so during the war when medical care was inadequate, prisoners were murdered by lethal injection and used as guinea pigs in medical experiments, or worked or starved to death. In the last year of the war, 78,635 prisoners were registered there, doubling and tripling the size of a camp that was already a nightmare of sickness, starvation and death. Toward the end of the war, it was the dumping place for thousands of prisoners, mostly Jews and prisoners-of-war, who were then marched from the east where they were left to die without food, water or housing. Disease and starvation from the overcrowding killed thousands of prisoners. The Americans liberated Dachau on April 29, 1945. They found thousands of corpses strewn around the grounds and thousands more dying.

mobs are . . . talking crazy things about the Jews.⁵³ It's unbelievable. I don't know why America or Jews wait so long to take care of them. Well, they're afraid. America's afraid. They don't want to help the Jews. When war comes, they will help. Most of the time the Jews don't care. They can take care of themselves. I hate to say it, but I think it's coming . . . very soon.

John: Let's go into the American half of your life now, or more than half. What were your impressions of Atlanta in 1946? What was the city like in those days?

Haskell: The city of Atlanta were poor, as far as I can see. The family . . . what we . . . what my father had . . . [were] very poor. They were working for somebody else. They couldn't survive. They survived all right but they didn't have anything.

John: Do you remember those names—the relatives' names?

Haskell: Most of them got Frostig. My father had two brothers here and two sisters.

John: They left before the war?

Haskell: They was before the First World War, I believe. A lot of people left. Some of them . . . most of them . . . anybody who's alive . . . they're still in New York. I wanted to say something. I forgot what it was. I'm trying to think what I had in mind.

John: Just that those relatives were very poor and nobody had anything?

Haskell: They were poor. They didn't work with somebody else. The only people . . . person who sent us the affidavit . . . it was a cousin of mine. Her husband was a doctor. They had the money. They had a place where they lived. They were the ones who sent us the paper. The other people couldn't afford it because, in case something happens to it, they want to take care of themselves. How can they take care of us? We had a rough time being in Atlanta, working with somebody. Ah! What I tell you was going on in Atlanta, you don't want to listen about it.

John: Try us.

Haskell: They took an advantage of us! I worked. I worked on a newsstand downtown—forgot the person's name—about three o'clock in the morning. Every hour I had to go to pick up mail from the Post Office, carrying it on my back every hour. [I carried] different papers [from] Chicago [and] New York. I asked the person, "Can you give me something I can pull it? I can . .

⁵³ Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was President of Iran from 2005 to 2013. During his presidency, Ahmadinejad was viewed as a controversial figure within Iran and internationally because of his economic policies, disregard for human rights, and his push for a nuclear program. He was also an outspoken opponent of the state of Israel. In an effort to antagonize Israel, Ahmadinejad frequently made contentious speeches and statements, including numerous claims that the Holocaust was a myth. In June 2009, Ahmadinejad was elected to his second term in office. Violent clashes broke out between police and groups protesting the results of the election. Protests continued at the time this interview was recorded.

. I don't have to . . . ” He said, “No, I'm not gonna do it.” Can you imagine? A Jew man. He couldn't buy a little wagon . . . or whatever you call that thing . . . to push it. I said, “Heck.” I said, “Then I'm going out. I quit.” There were some other stories . . .

I worked in a bakery. My father did too. The person who I quit to the papers, the person said, “Come to me. I'll give you some more money. I'll take care of you.” I said, “All right.” When I came into the place of business, there was a lady taking care of the business. She got paid \$35 a week. I thought maybe I'll get \$20 or \$25. After all, I'm taking the business. The same thing what she's doing, I'm doing . . . the same thing . . . cutting up, wrapping up . . . Only \$14. He said, “I'm gonna [pay you] \$14.” The paper man gave me \$12. He said, “I'm gonna give you a raise . . . \$14.” I said, “Forget about it. I can't.” It's unbelievable! My father had the same thing. My father asked the person in Atlanta, “Give me a raise—just \$2.” He made \$17 a week. He wanted to make two because he got myself and my mother to take care of. He wouldn't do it. My father was intelligent. He knew how to count. He knew how to weight the merchandise. He knew how to take care of the customers.

John: Did he speak English by that point?

Haskell: No. Jews . . . that was a Jewish place. He didn't have to speak English. I don't . . . No.

John: That wasn't the reason?

Haskell: No, that wasn't the reason because most of all the people were Jewish. For instance, [on] Saturday afternoon [in the] evening time, the store opens up [and] people come in to buy. Business as usual . . .

John: Did you have any general sense of how the Jews here, what their attitude was about the immigrants who were coming in?

Haskell: That's what I've been telling you. All the Jews—not just in New York, all over—the Jews [and] the people that came in before the [Second World] war . . . after the First World War. They were poor. They didn't know how to sign their names. You'd be surprised. That's how they couldn't go in business for themselves. We went in business. My mother . . . years ago, we didn't have any registers. We had to write everything down with a pencil [and] add it up. My mother used to do that. Every time she wrote it up, she would add it up, and that's it. For me it was easy. Surely you know the difference from doing something, know something, and not to know something. You're talking about I . . . my father begged him. He says, “No.” He says, “I'm

quitting. I don't want to work anymore." Are you going to advertise too? Are you gonna say that they're still . . . what I'm talking about now?

Ruth: We'll edit the tape, but don't . . . we won't put anything that you would find to be embarrassing . . . you just tell us the truth.

John: You can edit this however you want.

Haskell: I'll tell you the truth. Now the place where we were, where we stayed in one room downtown . . . the town has changed, the old town. We stayed by a person. We told him the story. He said . . . to my father, "Come on, maybe you listen to me. I'll see if I can get you a couple dollars an hour." He went to talk to the person, Jewish person, [at the] delicatessen. Nothing doing. The person said to my father, "I'll tell you what. I'm gonna loan you \$1,000." We already saved maybe a few hundred dollars. He says, "You'll go into business." He buys up a grocery store. He didn't want anything. He didn't care if we were not able to pay him back. He was a rich man. I think he was a rich man. But a rich man and a poor man, you gotta have character. He loaned us the money and we went into business. Business went very bad. The first day I took in \$13. It was the worst afternoon. That was just the afternoon. It was a place with nothing. No fixtures . . . nothing. We built it up. We bought fixtures and in one year's time we spent \$10,000 . . . bought some new fixtures.

John: Where was this?

Haskell: In Atlanta . . . DeKalb County.

John: Was there a name for the store or the business?

Haskell: Yes, Frostig Supermarket . . . We built up the business almost ten times as much as it used to. We had to get a helper . . . a partner to help us out. It was so hard to work and my father getting tired, getting almost age . . . [too] old to work. I said, "You have to work. You're pretty soon gonna get Social Security."⁵⁴ I'll find me some other job." We sold the store. Something else I want to talk about.

John: I'm curious. The locals—especially the Jews—they didn't have a sense like they maybe owed the survivors anything—like being grateful that you all came over? Nothing like that?

⁵⁴ In the United States, Social Security is a federal program funded through payroll taxes that provides income to retired and disabled citizens.

Haskell: Believe me, I know some Jews that said to me and to my mother, “I wish Hitler would kill all of you.” Jews! I’m not telling a story. I’m not a man telling you lies—nothing like that. Can you imagine? Because they were jealous. I had . . . bought a business. A man worked in that business. I thought, “Maybe I’ll keep him for a few weeks or not.” He didn’t wait. He left the store. He said the same thing, “I wish you all had been dead over there with Hitler.” Can you imagine Jewish people talking like that? I’m not telling you no story. I’m telling you exactly what it’s all about. Unbelievable. Now maybe there still are . . . people who are still jealous. Like I told you in the paper. I saw it and I showed it to the rabbi. He said, “It’s unbelievable how Jews still . . .”

They don’t like us. Really, they don’t like us because we’ve got a pretty good life. We came in [and] we worked. Most everybody got a good business like, for instance, here. I bought a house when I got married in 1955. We bought a house [in] 1955. I’ve been here 55 years, I think . . . 54 years . . . same house, same location, same telephone number, same address. It shows you . . . there was the grocery business. The people . . . the black people, the colored people . . . they liked the way I am. They are the ones who gave me the business. I was young. I had patience. Then the school with the children, they come out of school, they want something in the summertime, you know, the ice . . . sucking them. I had neighbors down there. They didn’t want to play with the children. All the children from school came . . . [and] stayed in my line.

When they’re home and their parents send them to the store to buy things . . . the colored people, they’re very smart—the children. They know how to count. They know everything. The parents told them, “Go ahead. Give me . . . buy me this, buy me that.” They went to the store. Where did they go? They went to me. Why? Because after school they had something to do. That’s very nice. That’s how the name, “Go down to Frostig. He got the best meat.” Just like that. It used to be a grocery store. Why? Because . . . I used to go almost every day to the warehouses [or] packing store, buying some meat . . . like—I don’t know if they’re still here—Armour⁵⁵ and Right Provision⁵⁶ and all that kind of things just to have it at the place. The meat was nice and fresh and clean. That’s [why] they say, “You want something good? You go down to Frostig. He got the best sausage.” It’s just you build up the name and you’d be surprised.

⁵⁵ Armour & Company is an American meatpacking company that was founded in 1867.

⁵⁶ White Provision was a meatpacking company that opened in Atlanta in 1910.

People like me. Why? They like my mother and father too. We caught a lot of people stealing. My father was the kind, he'd say, "Wait a minute. If you steal . . ." he took the merchandise away from him, ". . . you gotta pay for it." They paid for the merchandise, and the money what we's collected, we give it to the church. The church [was a] big deal. The church . . . everyone likes the church. They said "Don't you mess around with Frostig!" They stop . . . coming [and] stealing.

<interview is interrupted, then resumes>

John: When you first came here, what did you notice about how the black and the white populations were relating, like in the 1940's and 1950's?

Haskell: Nothing, really, because as Jews . . . we didn't make any difference who they are and what they are. The poor section always lived separately from the white people. The poor didn't have no cars. They couldn't go out to big stores and buy things. They had to come in smaller stores to buy groceries and whatever it is. We had a good name and good merchandise. That's all you need. If you have a good name, you say, "Go to so-and-so's store." Like Kroger says, "Go on to Kroger, you got the best deal in town! Better than Publix!"⁵⁷

John: Tell us about when you met your wife and what the early days of marriage and family were like.

Haskell: I met my wife in 1954.

John: Her name?

Haskell: Her name is Adolfa Kruger . . . K-R-U-G-E-R. My father-in-law was the mayor in town. He was a big shot.

Ruth: The Fitzgerald Krugers?

Haskell: Yes. How do you know? Did I . . .

Ruth: We did interviews with them.

Haskell: Yes, Fitzgerald. It was nice person and educated and . . .

Ruth: Abe Kruger?⁵⁸

Haskell: Abe Kruger. What, where'd you get that?

Ruth: We're in an archive. We know all kinds of stuff. <laughing>

⁵⁷ Kroger and Publix are two competing supermarket chains operating in the southeastern United States.

⁵⁸ Abe Kruger came to the United States in 1911 from Russia and owned a dry goods store in Fitzgerald, Georgia. He served as mayor *pro tem* in the 1960's and was a leader of the local Jewish community.

Haskell: He was the mayor in town. He was a big man. He took care of everything. The people liked him . . . just like . . . [how] you like someone [and] you can't help it. He was a good man. I met her here in Atlanta, in a hotel. They came in—the parents—from over there. We got married in 1950 . . .

John: Can you spell her name, just so we get it right?

Haskell: Adolfa . . . A-D-O-L-F-A.

John: She was an American?

Haskell: Yes, of course. She was born over here. Her parents came in, I guess, before the war, the First World War or after the First World War. He was a cantor in . . . the name of the town is Fitzgerald.⁵⁹ He was a mayor . . . a mayor *pro tem*. He was a cantor, he was . . . the whole synagogue belonged to him. He took care of everything. It was a good name. He took care of the whole town—the people . . . the poor people, the rich people. He's in business. If anybody didn't have anything to do, he'd give [them] some money. A lot of people [are] goodhearted just like myself.

Now you talk about the difference between . . . we were sorry about the . . . between the colored people and the white people. Now, that's not the way it should be. It took a long time, but that's not the way. A person's a person. If you don't like the colored people, how can you like a Jew? The same thing. There are people . . . some people . . . most . . . don't like the Jews. You don't have to do that. We hadn't done anything to the people here in Atlanta or anywhere else. They recognized that we had a state. They were jealous because the Jewish people were very educated. They got a lot of businesses going here in America. They know what's going on in the whole world today. You didn't have to have a big territory, but as long as you know what you're doing, that's all right.

We met here and about a year later, we got married. I don't know, I still got a book. My father-in-law says he's got 500 people. [He] invited 500 people to the wedding. I got a book of all the names and all the presents they give. I don't know what happened to the presents. I don't know. [There were] so many people on that list! We had some Jewish people invited to the wedding. They came back saying, "We never seen a wedding like this in our life. So many people and it's a beautiful wedding."

John: Where was it held?

⁵⁹ Fitzgerald, Georgia is a small town located approximately 180 miles southeast of Atlanta.

Haskell: It was in . . . Fitzgerald. They got an auditorium. They put all the people in it. Everybody just about gave some kind of present. We should have never saw the presents! We left them . . . That's okay, though. Yes, we . . . I lived a couple weeks with my parents and I bought a house in 1955.

Ruth: Could you go back just a second? We forgot to ask you about when you came here. You started high school?

Haskell: Yes.

Ruth: First of all, which high school? Second of all, how did you relate to the kids here who were just American teenagers and you'd had this . . .

Haskell: The teacher told them, "Take a look at Haskell. He just came in from Europe. He hasn't [yet learned how to] speak English and he does some of the good things . . . A or B. You've been born here. You cannot do nothing." Just like that. I was happy. They didn't like it but that was the truth. I was a good student . . . in Europe, a good student. I am here a good student. I am a little . . . I *davened* in the synagogue for the holidays. I can be a *chazzan*, too.⁶⁰ I was.

Ruth: Which high school was it? Was it Boys' High?⁶¹

Haskell: No . . . the high school . . . I now forgot the name of it but now they changed it to Bass High School.⁶²

Ruth: In Little Five Points?⁶³

Haskell: There used to be another name. Hoch-Schmidt [sp], I think. That's it, Hoch-Schmidt. That's the name of the school. It was in walking distance. At lunchtime, the school . . . you maybe walked about ten minutes or less to the house, had lunch, go back to school.

John: Apart from being an immigrant . . . that you were survivor of what happened . . . that's a different type of experience. What did the people here make of that? Not just that you had an accent or whatever, but that you went through all that. Were they curious, did they ask?

⁶⁰ The *chazzan* (cantor) is the official in charge of music or chants and leads liturgical prayer and chanting in the synagogue.

⁶¹ Boys' High School was founded in 1924 and is now known as Henry W. Grady High School. It is part of the Atlanta Public School System. It has had many notable alumni, including S. Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A. It is located in Midtown Atlanta.

⁶² Bass Junior High School was built in 1923 and served Atlanta's Little Five Points. By 1948 it was a high school. The school was closed in 1990 and later converted to into loft apartments.

⁶³ Little Five Points is a neighborhood on the east side of Atlanta, Georgia that earned its name from an intersection where five streets came together. Little Five Points is known around Atlanta as a center for alternative culture.

Haskell: I don't know. I didn't have much time to think about [what] those people would think about it. I . . . we'd been in the business. We took care of the *shul*, took care of the business. Every time, every *Yontif*⁶⁴ or *Shabbos*⁶⁵ my father was going to *shul*. I was going to the synagogue. Now I'm a little bit sick, but I joined the *Chabad Intown*⁶⁶ . . . the name of *Chabad Intown* . . . Rabbi Schusterman. I *davened* down there for *Yontif*. I can do it.

John: How many other survivors were here in Atlanta during those days? That you knew?

Haskell: At least about 200 and maybe more . . . after, more. I counted 200 about a few years. Later, after that . . . there's a lot of more came in that [I] had no connection [with] because [I was] working too hard . . . working many hours. I didn't have a chance to socialize with people. I imagine quite a few of them came in . . . maybe another 100 people or something like that. Most of them died out already.

John: During the late 1940's and 1950's, you weren't in touch with them too much?

Haskell: Yes. We belonged to the Jewish Community Center [that] used to be on Capital Avenue.⁶⁷ No, I didn't do so much. I'd been working so many hours and got so tired. Every day, come home . . . I couldn't . . . and next day had to go to same thing. I worked at a store of my business from 8 o'clock till 6 o'clock everyday. That's long hours. When Sunday came, I just rested up. The time is, after all . . .

I'd been robbed a few times . . . they break into the store. I'd been [in] Underground Atlanta.⁶⁸ They came in from the basement . . . from underground basement . . . came into the

⁶⁴ *Yontif* is the Yiddish word; in Hebrew it is *yom tov*. It is generic word for Jewish holidays. It includes all but the High Holy Days of *Rosh Ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur*.

⁶⁵ *Shabbat* [Hebrew] or *Shabbos* [Yiddish] is the Jewish day of rest and is observed on Saturdays. *Shabbat* observance entails refraining from work activities, often with great rigor, and engaging in restful activities to honor the day. *Shabbat* begins at sundown on Friday night and is ushered in by lighting candles and reciting a blessing. It is closed the following evening with the recitation of the *havdalah* blessing.

⁶⁶ Chabad Intown is an Orthodox synagogue in Atlanta, Georgia founded in 1997 by Rabbi Eliyahu Schusterman.

⁶⁷ The Jewish Educational Alliance (JEA) operated from 1910 to 1948 on Capitol Avenue in downtown Atlanta, on the site where the Atlanta Fulton County Stadium was later located. The JEA was once the hub of Jewish life in Atlanta. Families congregated there for social, educational, sports and cultural programs. The JEA ran camps and held classes to help some new residents learn to read and write English. For newcomers, it became a refuge, with programs to help them acclimate to a new home. The JEA stayed at that site until the late 1940s. In 1946, it evolved into the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and, in 1948, moved to Peachtree Street. It stayed there until 1998, when the building was sold and the center moved to Dunwoody. In 2000, it was renamed the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta.

⁶⁸ Underground Atlanta is a shopping and entertainment district in the Five Points district of Atlanta, Georgia. During the 1920's, construction of concrete viaducts intended to relieve traffic congestion in downtown Atlanta elevated the street system one level. Merchants moved their operations to the second floor of their buildings, leaving the old fronts for storage and service. As Atlanta continued to grow above the viaducts, the original street level was raised by one and a half stories, and a five-block area was completely covered up. The lower facades of historic

store . . . twice. It was my fault. I had all the money down there [I'd] left. They probably . . . they found out the first time I had the money [and then] they came a second time. I think I knew who it was but I cannot tell if you do not know for sure.

John: Even if you didn't really talk about it or have time to think about it, how did that whole war experience affect you do you suppose? How are you different than a regular immigrant who didn't go through any of that?

Haskell: You're talking about immigrants after the war or before?

John: Maybe a non-Jewish immigrant. Somebody who is an immigrant and has to deal with money and resettling and everything, but who didn't go through the horrible experiences. I'm wondering how that part of your life has affected you.

Haskell: It didn't affect me too much because I didn't . . . Most of the time you work. You had to work Saturday. Being Jewish and a little religious, you're supposed to . . . We had an argument with Rabbi [Emanuel] Feldman⁶⁹ from Beth Jacob⁷⁰ years ago. We had a house and he had a house across the street. On Sunday, he cut the grass . . . the rabbi. My father goes out, "Rabbi, that doesn't sound right! You're a rabbi. You go to cut the grass?" He said, "In America, you can do anything." They wanted to join us to our *shul*. Beth Jacob wanted to [join] Anshi S'fard. [We were] just about ready to make a deal. Then we said . . . the rabbi got mad at us. Why? Because we work on Saturday. I said . . . my father said, "Listen." My father said, "I know as much maybe as you do—maybe even more than that. But I'm poor and I got to work because, otherwise, if I don't work on Friday night or Saturday, I might as well not work at all." That's why everybody . . . just about everybody . . . worked. They made business and they get paid up on Friday. [Then] they go out and buy something. Saturday [it is] the same. They have a little money. One time at *Yontif*, we closed. They went downtown to people with big bags . . . this Winn-Dixie⁷¹ store. They come in the store and say, "I want a celery." I said, "What the heck? You bought all their stuff and then you come here for celery?" The rabbi . . . we got . . . we kind

buildings constructed during the city's post-Civil War Reconstruction Era boom remained relatively untouched until the area was rediscovered and opened as a tourist attraction in 1969.

⁶⁹ Rabbi Emanuel Feldman was born in 1927 to a family of Orthodox Rabbis dating back more than seven generations. He is Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Beth Jacob, where he accepted the pulpit in 1952. In 1991, his son, Rabbi Ilan Feldman, succeeded him.

⁷⁰ Beth Jacob is an Orthodox synagogue on Lavista Road in Atlanta founded in 1942 by former members of Ahavath Achim who were looking for a more Orthodox congregation. Beth Jacob is now Atlanta's largest Orthodox congregation. The first location was a converted house on Boulevard-

⁷¹ Winn-Dixie Stores, Inc. is an American supermarket chain that operates in the southeastern United States.

of . . . we couldn't do that. The rabbi . . . I understand, that's the way it's supposed to be . . . they're supposed to work . . . but if you don't work . . . if you've got a business you have to work on Saturday . . . he can't help it. Most everybody who came from Europe worked on Saturday because . . . that was Friday night to Saturday. If you don't work on Saturday, you cash the checks, they go to the other places. If you don't work those two days, you might as well close up your store. How can you do a business if you cannot survive?

Ruth: I'm kind of curious how you ended up in Anshi S'fard rather than Ahavath Achim.

Haskell: Beth Jacob?

Ruth: Ahavath Achim.⁷²

Haskell: Anshi S'fard is a very religious *shul*, Orthodox *shul*. On the *Yontif* . . . just on *Shabbos* too . . . It's a different atmosphere. You *daven* religiously, the way it's written in the book without an explanation in English and things like that. Everybody knew just about Yiddish . . . knew how to speak [it]. Most of them Yiddish-speaking and most of them knew how to *daven*. My father came from Europe. He was a religious man, like we were. But me . . . I didn't have a choice to be that way because it's a different situation. I had to work. My father . . . he was a *chazzan*.

Talking about a *chazzan*, my father got paid one time \$300 for *Rosh Ha-Shanah*⁷³ and *Yom Kippur*.⁷⁴ Two days, \$300. There was a poor family about a block away from us, from the *shul*. My father opened up an account and put the \$300 in the bank. Every month he wrote out a check for \$25 and then gave it to a family who was sick, couldn't do nothing. That's how we spent the \$300. Can you see? This is the kind of person my father was. He did what he could to help somebody else. You don't find that kind of people. We could have used the \$300

⁷² Ahavath Achim was founded in 1887 in a small room on Gilmer Street. In 1920, they moved to a permanent building at the corner of Piedmont and Gilmer Street. Rabbi Abraham Hirmes was the first rabbi of the then Orthodox congregation. In 1928, Rabbi Harry Epstein became the rabbi and the congregation began to shift to Conservatism, which they joined in 1952. The synagogue is now on Peachtree Battle. Cantor Isaac Goodfriend, a Holocaust survivor, joined the congregation in 1966 and remained until his retirement. Rabbi Epstein retired in 1982, becoming Rabbi Emeritus and Rabbi Arnold Goodman assumed the rabbinic post.

⁷³ *Rosh Ha-Shanah* [Hebrew: head of the year, i.e. New Year festival] is the cycle of High Holidays begins with *Rosh Ha-Shanah*. It introduces the Ten Days of Penitence, when Jews examine their souls and take stock of their actions. On the tenth day is *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. The tradition is that on *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, God sits in judgment on humanity. Then the fate of every living creature is inscribed in the Book of Life or Death. These decisions may be revoked by prayer and repentance before the sealing of the books on *Yom Kippur*.

⁷⁴ *Yom Kippur* [Hebrew: Day of Atonement] is the most sacred day of the Jewish year. It is a 25 hour fast day. Most of the day is spent in prayer, reciting *yizkor* for deceased relatives, confessing sins, requesting divine forgiveness, and listening to *Torah* readings and sermons. People greet each other with the wish that they may be sealed in the heavenly book for a good year ahead. The day ends with the blowing of the *shofar* (a ram's horn).

ourselves. That was in the beginning, way back then. This is the kind of person, so . . . Is that true? You made . . . he made \$300. They paid him \$300 for two days, three days. He takes the money, opens an account, and gives the money every week to somebody else. He had a heart. That's how we are.

John: Did you have kids later on?

Haskell: Yes, I had kids. I got three sons. They're working for somebody else and . . . one of them works for himself. He used to be the weather report man. Weather . . . he used to travel a lot outside of town, [reporting on] tornadoes and all kind of jazz. He's in business for himself now. He's doing all right. I think he's doing all right.

John: Were you conscious of raising kids with any particular values or teaching them anything in particular because of where you were?

Haskell: Yes. They'd been going to school. They'd been going to Hebrew School. They made good grades. They came in, did what I did—on *Yontif* you come there to daven, went together, the Jewish people. It might not be 100 percent the way you want it to be, even in this country. Sometimes you cannot help it. They got their lives for themselves, what you gonna do? Tell them differently? They're not gonna want to know about it. They're not married.

<interview pauses during laughing and joking, then resumes>

John: Did your attitude about Jewishness change at all because of the war experience? [Did your beliefs become] stronger, weaker, different, or anything?

Haskell: I think it's weaker because most of the people . . . especially most of the people now in . . . America . . . from Europe to America and Israel . . . most [of] the newcomers, they had to work . . . most of them on a Saturday . . . Friday night and Saturday. Everybody took care of their own business. We didn't . . . Some people like to talk about each other and be that kind of people. We don't want to be that kind of people. Mostly everybody did pretty well for themselves. People who came over here—I would say 90 percent—they all went into business. They did buy some houses, they buy some land, and they buy some shopping centers. Sometimes it's good, sometimes bad. Times have changed. They changed for everybody . . . Those people I used to know, they're gone . . . died out.

Ruth: Who are your friends? Who were your friends who were survivors? Who did you hang out with?

Haskell: I hanged out with the people some from the synagogue. I had a partner. I hanged out with him a lot. I had one friend. You didn't have too many young people here . . . survivors. [Back] then I didn't have that much time to be social on the weekend, on Friday and Saturday. That's . . .

Ruth: You didn't go to the New World Club,⁷⁵ did you?

Haskell: No.

Ruth: A lot of teenagers who came here . . .

Haskell: New World? I never heard of it.

Ruth: New World Club. Yes, they were . . .

Haskell: I never heard of it.

Ruth: You might have been working too hard by that time.

Haskell: That's for sure!

John: Now that you're in the retirement phase of your life and you do have time, do you think more about the past?

Haskell: You cannot help it because if you read . . . I read Jewish papers. I read Jewish papers and English papers . . . and the things that are written . . . most of the time from Israel, it's unbelievable. Even Jews with Jews can't get along down there in Israel. There are some religious Jews and there are some not religious. They're having a rough time getting together. A lot of them came from Russia . . . the Jews . . . after the war . . . they're not even Jews. They just married a lady, a woman. Maybe she's Jewish and she made her husband Jewish. After they came into Israel, a lot of them divorced and stuff. They didn't want to have nothing to do with them. They went into business for themselves. They have businesses. They sell pork on Shabbos. They sell everything. They're just like in Europe. I don't know. It's . . . time's changed. I'm worried about the wars coming up. You don't think so?

John: What are you imagining is going to come?

Haskell: It's sooner than later because there's no way that you can escape. Iran doesn't listen to nobody! People talk about Alabam [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad] . . . I call him 'Alabam.' [They say,] "We gonna talk about it. We gonna talk about it." He can talk and he does what he wants to do. Time is running out.

⁷⁵ The New World Club was a social club organized for young survivors and those who had fled Europe just before the war.

John: What do you think is going to happen?

Haskell: It's gonna happen. Israel has to get rid of him. Then maybe another government will come along [and] change the policy. That's the only thing that could happen. Even now, if a war works out . . . broke out . . . a lot of people wouldn't even help us anymore. Like England and France and the rest of them. They just talk about it. But I think Israel can take care of themselves. They had an A-bomb for 50 years already. Nobody knows about it. I guess they do, but I don't know.

John: If you were the leader of Israel, what would you do to try to solve the complex situation there? Or is it solvable even?

Haskell: You cannot give away the territory what the Arabs took over . . . I mean, what the Jews give away to Arabs. The war started in . . . 1967 or something like that.⁷⁶ They lost the war. The Jews took over a lot of places. If the Arabs would have won the war, they wouldn't give nothing to the Jews. They would've run them out. Now they think that everything belongs to them because they see [that] the Jewish people . . . they can do things. They made a . . . from the desert, they made it bloom in the whole neighborhood, the whole country, things to grow and everything else. They've been down there for years [but] they didn't care about nothing. Besides, they got 20 countries . . . Arab countries. If they really want to take care of the people down there, each one can take care of a few thousand between themselves. They went one time . . . they went to another country—I forgot the name of it—and they were stealing and robbing. This is the way the people are like that. There are some people who helps them out. There were some German people who did help them out years ago. Even the Pope [Pius XII] wasn't so hot for the Jews in the Second World War.⁷⁷ He didn't say nothing about what's going on in the world. Now they think they want us to change a little bit . . . that he tried. Tried doesn't mean a thing. They should've done something about it. He was afraid himself, that's true, but afraid doesn't mean a thing. You can still be good. If somebody wants to do you some harm, they're gonna do it anyway. No, that's wrong of them.

John: How much do you suppose the Holocaust changed the world?

⁷⁶ The Six-Day War, also called the June War or Third Arab-Israeli War, took place June 5–10, 1967. Israel's victory included the capture of the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, Old City of Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. The status of these territories continues to be a point of contention in the Arab-Israeli relationship.

⁷⁷ Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) was elected to the papacy just as World War II was beginning. The Vatican was officially neutral throughout the war—even under Benito Mussolini's Fascist rule and while Rome was later occupied by Nazi Germany—yet the role of Pius XII and the Catholic Church during the Holocaust has been the subject of much critical and supportive literature.

Haskell: The Holocaust . . . Iran says it never happened. [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad] tells all the world something like that. The Jews have to take care of themselves and to build up to make sure that, if something happens, they can take care of themselves. We don't have another place to go. Not a place. I wouldn't be surprised [that] a lot of people in America would like to see something happen to the Jews. But it's a free country. It's a lot of different nationalities and they're trying to calm down.

John: Some of your other descendants—if you have grandkids someday and great-grandkids—if they see this, what would you want them to know about you? What message would you have to share a hundred years from now?

Haskell: I don't know what to say what's gonna be 100 years from now. I don't know what's gonna be next year. I don't know.

John: What would you want people to get out of all this other than just a horrible war story? Should anything be learned? Was there a moral to this or was it just another war story?

Haskell: The Jews should stick together. They don't even have to have a big territory. They're smart people. They can do a lot of things . . . which they do now . . . settling all over the country. One day, if something's going to have to happen, it's going to have to be better than it is now. Who knows? It's hard to tell. There's a lot of places [where] the people [are] still suffering. The world doesn't want to help them either.

John: Why do you suppose there is a bit of an anti-Jewish attitude? . . . You made some remarks that, even here, a lot of people aren't that fond of Jews. Why do you suppose that is?

Haskell: It is because a lot of people came from overseas and the hate . . . they brought it over here. Then they come out openly . . . this is the way they are. A lot of people in Europe, they know what happened to the Jews. They tell the different clubs and the different organizations . . . the Jews . . . It's a good thing the Jews have a country for themselves. What happens later, nobody knows. What [will] happen to the whole world, nobody knows.

John: Is there anything else you want to add that we haven't asked?

Haskell: You have to come back a second time. I could never stop . . . I cannot remember even what I said. There are so many things that you can talk about. How can I say things . . . what happened . . . in two hours or so? It lasted for years. Unbelievable.

Ruth: Right. When you think of those years, do you have some feeling or something that comes into your mind? What's the first thing that you think about when you think about those years?

Haskell: It seems like the world hasn't learned the lesson yet. The people in Europe—all over the world, not just in Europe—happened to be in . . . the guy down there in South America . . . I forgot his name . . .

John: [Hugo] Chavez?⁷⁸

Haskell: He got . . . he's trying to talk about different things, about America, yesterday and everything. It's ridiculous. Taken [in] by the government here that let them in the country now . . . they're no good, I can tell you that much. Things are gonna get trouble.

He [President Barack Obama is] gonna get in trouble, because he thinks he's a professor. He's a professor. He can talk to people, but to do something? He doesn't do nothing. That's all I can tell you. His government is no good here. There has to be a time, three or four years from now . . . somebody else will have to come in. That's no good for the Jews either because he'll listen. All the people in the world, he knows. He's been a member of the church in Chicago for 20 years and he doesn't know what the preacher used to talk about?⁷⁹ You mean, after 20 years, nothing? Nobody told him what was going on? It's a lie. That shows . . . it's a lie.

John: The good old days when [George] Bush was president—the golden years!

Ruth: The good part is where you always get another chance to find somebody else who can mess things up in a new and different way.

Haskell: There's always a chance, but . . . if he survives four years, three more years . . . it'll be a miracle. Maybe the world is gonna be different. He don't want to listen to nobody. He can't. He's afraid. He's afraid to talk about different things. He goes down to different countries, trying to make peace, but it doesn't mean a thing. It doesn't. He just talks about it. He talks [but] people don't listen when he talks. They already got tired of him.

⁷⁸ Hugo Chávez (1954-2013) was the controversial leader of a leftist Socialist movement known as the “Bolivarian Revolution” and President of Venezuela from 1999 until his death in 2013. A few days prior to this interview, on December 16, 2009, Chavez gave a speech at the Copenhagen Climate Summit, where he blamed capitalism for the ecological plight of humanity.

⁷⁹ Jeremiah Wright was the longtime pastor of President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle. In 2008, Wright gained national attention when the news media outlets and political commentators broadcast controversial excerpts from some of his sermons.

Ruth: Let me ask you one really quick question. Since we're sitting here, was it Rabbi [Joseph] Cohen⁸⁰ who was in Anshi S'fard during the years when . . . who's the rabbi there?

Haskell: His name was Rabbi [Nathan] Katz.⁸¹

Ruth: Katz, right. What do you remember about him?

Haskell: I was his partner. We got to get along pretty good. We sat together. We went on vacation together. He's all right. He wasn't . . . he didn't like the way things are. I think Rabbi [Harry] Epstein⁸² didn't . . . made him a big rabbi . . . He told me he's not exactly 100 percent rabbi. That's how things went down. He didn't get paid in the *shul*, only for *Yontif*. I used to pay him. I used to raise . . . I raised everybody's dues. Our dues used to be \$35 a year in Anshi S'fard. I raised it only \$100. That was a big deal. What's \$100 a year? Nothing. I don't know how much they charge now, but I was . . .

Ruth: [Today, the dues are definitely] more than that!

Haskell: Not that much more. Of course, you gotta . . . you're a rabbi. They pay more dues. I donate some money to them because I used to be a member. I'm still a member but I cannot go around anymore like I used to. We used to go together. We used to travel on vacations. He had a big mouth. That's all I can tell you. Excuse me, I didn't mean that for . . . Other than that, everything was okay. He's got trouble in his family, too. He's got one son, I think, that died a few years. Then the other son that don't want to know anything about it. He don't want to talk to him. Nothing. They're strangers.

Ruth: What were the differences between the Jewish community here in that *shul* when you came here and what you were used to in Europe? Did people talk to you at all about . . .

Haskell: In Europe it was a different situation. The *shul* . . . everybody was poor. Nobody had nothing to show off. Even in Europe. They had *besmedrech*.⁸³ They had a *besmedrech*. They had a *shul*. They took all the Jews, the rabbis, the *chazzans*, and everybody else that lived there . . . the children. They locked them up in one place next to the *shul*. They locked them up and then

⁸⁰ Rabbi Joseph I. Cohen (1896-1985) was born in Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey. He was trained for the rabbinate in Turkey and accepted his first pulpit in Havana, Cuba in 1920. In 1934 he moved to Atlanta, Georgia where he was installed as the rabbi of Congregation Or VeShalom, a Sephardic congregation. Rabbi Cohen officially retired in 1969, but remained active at both the synagogue and in the community until his death in 1985.

⁸¹ Rabbi Nathan Katz was born to a Chasidic rabbi in the Ukraine. He served as rabbi of Congregation Anshi S'fard from the 1950's until his death in 1998.

⁸² Rabbi Harry Epstein became the rabbi of Ahavath Achim in 1928. Under Rabbi Harry Epstein, the congregation began to shift to Conservatism, which they joined in 1952. Rabbi Epstein retired in 1982, becoming Rabbi Emeritus.

⁸³ *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.

burned them alive. That's how much I . . . It's awful to think about. You're passing by a *shul* and *besmedrech* and all the people down there . . . Can you imagine? Taking people . . . everybody, children . . . and burn 'em up? That's something I cannot forget. It's unbelievable. Unbelievable.

Ruth: Did you have grandparents or anybody else there? What happened to your grandparents?

Haskell: I don't remember them. They must have died before. I don't know. Long time . . . No, I don't remember. Probably best. Times change. You get old. You forget things a little bit.

John: Ruth has more tape. If you've got more memories, maybe we can do a part two.

Haskell: I don't know, but maybe it'll come up something to me. You cannot do that in two hours time to tell you a story in three years because everyday was a history-made.

Ruth: Probably doing this interview will spark some more memories. We'll just get together another time and we can go through some of this.

John: Maybe write down anything, so you won't forget.

Haskell: In the meantime, I wanted to go down to the Jewish Federation⁸⁴ down there and see what's going on down there. I sit in the house most of the time and don't drive. You get kind of lonesome. I thought maybe a couple times a week and meet some people and be more interested . . . you sit and watch television. That's no . . . television doesn't do much good.

John: Thanks very much for being willing to drudge up all these memories. I know it wasn't pleasant.

Haskell: Yes. I don't know. Sometimes I think it's better to forget, believe me. I just don't know how we survived . . . hunger and no sickness and nothing to change the clothes. It's worse than animals.

Ruth: Thank you both very much.

<End Disk 1>

INTERVIEW ENDS

⁸⁴ 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, educational opportunities.