

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

**MEMOIRIST:** ISAAC WISE  
**INTERVIEWER:** UNKNOWN  
**LOCATION:** ATLANTA, GEORGIA  
**DATE** UNKNOWN

**INTERVIEW BEGINS**

<Begin Disk 1>

**Interviewer:** Mr. Wise, if you could begin by just stating your name and telling us a little bit about your childhood, your early years, how many people were in your family, and the small town that you grew up in.

**Isaac:** Okay. Before, I think I had already [said this] at one time. I was born in a *kleytn stedtl*, this means a small village in Yiddish. This is Vendziogola, a little place in Lithuania.<sup>1</sup> [I come from] a family [with] seven children. We had . . . like most European places, we did not have too much—something special, but we lived nicely and not too rich, but I don't think . . . It look[ed] to me like nobody was poor there because every family had its own garden. They had a cow and a goat. When they have these three items, they are already rich. They had what to eat. Everybody had it.

Later—this was early—we had a school. Everybody was religious and went to Synagogue. We had a public school where we begin and go to public school. If we want to learn higher, then we had to go in Kovno, in a big city, where the government had the gymnasiums.<sup>2</sup> They call them 'gymnasium,' but they are high schools. There is no high school, you understand. The high school is a gymnasium in Europe. The gymnasium is . . . If somebody graduates from the gymnasium, it is almost like he goes at least to two years of college. That is what happened with me. I finished the public school. Then I went . . . They kept me in Kovno. I had family there and uncles. They put me in the gymnasium. I learned in the gymnasium . . . I went till the fifth grade.

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<sup>1</sup> Vendziogola (Lithuanian: Vandžiogala; Yiddish: Vendzigole; Russian: Vendziagola) is a small village about 24 kilometers (15 miles) north of Kaunas, Lithuania. In 1940, the Jewish population was 350, or 58 percent of the total.

<sup>2</sup> Kovno (Yiddish: Kovne, Kovna, Kovni; Polish: Kowno; German: Kaunas and Kauen) is a city in south-central Lithuania. Between 1920 and 1939, it was the country's capital and largest city. Prior to the Second World War, Kovno had a significant Jewish population of 35,000-40,000, about one-fourth of the city's total population. Kovno had a rich Jewish culture with almost 100 Jewish organizations, 40 synagogues, many Yiddish schools, 4 Hebrew high schools, a Jewish hospital, and scores of Jewish-owned businesses.

After the fifth grade, somebody offered me something like a future job. It starts now. It happens [that] they asked me something. I told them and they believed me. They wanted somebody to tell them, but he don't know what to say. They think I . . . not knowing what to say, they'll take my word for it. They had asked me to show them in which place to make an office and which place to make a factory. I didn't know what to think at all. I told them. They made it. It was lucky. Then they said, "You are . . . You get a future job here." I really grow up there and get a good job. I jump in. I get a good job . . . I worked there until I been there at the level of salesman and a good level of salesman. I used to make money.

I met my girlfriend, my wife [Rachel Lager]. In gymnasium, they used to keep the boys separate and the girls separate. Then we used to run away for a while to look at the girls through the fence. When I seen the girl, I didn't know her. Later on, my parents moved out from Vendziogola, from the little part in Kovno. I fell in love with her and we married [in 1936]. We were so happy. We got us such a nice living. I made good money [with which] we can arrange our life the way we want to. Nobody could expect there happens a war.

Now I come by the wartime.<sup>3</sup> One day, Sunday, was at night, everybody laying and sleeping so peacefully, and quietly, and everything. We heard bombing . . . Lithuanian bomber. Everybody got up and went to see what was happening. About 9:00 when I walked already in the streets, there was on each side you'd find plenty of dead people. The bombs did not kill them, but the Lithuanian Nazis killed them.<sup>4</sup> They had prepared—the Lithuanians—for this. You know, like the people here with swastikas and all this.<sup>5</sup> They keep for themselves the job to be the first

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<sup>3</sup> Germany attacked the Soviet Union on Sunday, June 22, 1941, invading Soviet-occupied territories including Lithuania. Immediately before and following the German occupation of Kovno on June 24 and the village of Vendziogola on June 25, bands of Lithuanians went on bloody rampages against the Jews, attacking and brutally murdering hundreds of Jews in Kovno and surrounding areas. Some Jews tried to escape into Russia, but most were turned back and local Lithuanian nationalists killed some on the road.

<sup>4</sup> The persecution of Jews was not solely the result of German actions. In occupied territories like Lithuania, Nazi leaders required the help or cooperation of locals. Throughout their occupation of the country, the Germans continued to recruit auxiliaries for their police forces, military units, and civilian administrations. The police played an especially vital role in the consolidation of Nazi power and the brutal persecution and mass murder of Jews. Prior to the German invasion, Soviet occupation (1940-1941) had brought traumatic changes to Lithuania, which fueled later violence by nationalists. As the Soviets took control of the country, they began targeting people declared to be enemies of communism. Politicians, intellectuals, and community leaders were purged and executed in an atmosphere of lawlessness and extreme violence. The Soviets also began to nationalize farms, factories, and mines, transferring both people and equipment inland as part of their economic strategy. The Soviets sent tens of thousands of Lithuanians to Siberia for internment in labor camps (gulags). Although some Jews supported a version of socialism or communism, the majority did not. This fact did not prevent Lithuanian nationalists and others from claiming that Jews were collaborating with the Soviet occupiers. Others openly accepted the claims of Nazi antisemitic propaganda. These factors set the stage for a brutal display of hostility and vengeance toward the Jews.

<sup>5</sup> The word *swastika* comes from the Sanskrit word *svastika*, which means "good fortune" or "well-being." The

people to kill them, until [the Germans] came in the same day. I almost . . . Thank G-d, until here, until coming here to America [in 1948], until now, I've been lucky.

I went to get . . . I had a job there, back there by the Russians.<sup>6</sup> They hadn't pay me. I thought, "In a time like this, I [should] get my money." We didn't understand . . . I needed money to buy something. I walked in and there was already Lithuanian Nazis. I didn't bother with them really, but they said, "Oh, Mr. Wise . . . You came for what?" I told them the money. [They said,] "Yes, we've got it ready for you." He told the men, "Go ahead. Take him where the money is." I understood real good what he meant. They meant to take me out and kill me right away there. I didn't walk too fast. I meant to run away. He didn't . . . He meant to tell the men, "Go after him..." He wanted me to. I really saved this time my life. I left the money. I didn't pick it up.

On the way home, I had to walk. I [was] scared already to go on the bus or something. I had to walk. I walked and I seen what they were doing with people. They took out a man, from his store, from his business, that was Jewish. They took him. They put a garden hose in his mouth and let him burst. Everything I saw . . . It is hard to explain. They didn't kill people to kill. Certain deaths . . . not done to people . . . to animals nobody could do it. We seen it like this and they think, "Is this all?" But then starts all our pain and all our troubles.

The next day, they announced that they need intelligent people who were smart [and] didn't go because the Jewish people, they understand already what is going on here. The smart ones ran away. They walked out. They didn't . . . They made it special to fool the people. [They said] they need 534 [people] or something like this.<sup>7</sup> Between them was my brother-in-law. He

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symbol (a hooked cross) first appeared around 7,000 years ago and to this day, it is a sacred symbol in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Odinism. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the symbol was widely used in Europe and Asia. The Nazi party adopted it as its symbol in 1920 as a symbol of "Aryan identity" and German nationalist pride. It soon became associated with the idea of a racially "pure" state, striking fear into Jews and others deemed enemies of Nazi Germany. The swastika became the most recognizable icon of Nazi propaganda, appearing on flags, lecture posters, armbands, medallions, and badges for military and other organizations.

<sup>6</sup> The history of the Kovno area of Lithuania is complicated. Between the two world wars the area was contested by both Poland and Lithuania and finally ended up as part of Lithuania. On January 16, 1939, Lithuania and Germany signed a nonaggression pact. When the war started on September 1, 1939, the Russians annexed Kovno, but then turned it back over to Lithuania. In 1940, the Russians re-occupied the area, annexing the entire country in August 1940. Then on June 22, 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union and Soviet forces fled the country. By July 1941, the Germans occupied Lithuania.

<sup>7</sup> The first action undertaken after the Kovno ghetto was sealed occurred on August 18, 1941 in what became known as the "Intellectuals Action." The ghetto leaders were told to pick out five hundred men from the intelligentsia who were to be put to light, professional work in the city. As the selection of people for forced labor had become a norm by then, the order did not initially raise suspicion. In all, 534 young men were taken out of the ghetto under heavy guard and never returned.

stood in the line. Later, he sees too that there's something wrong. He came out all right. From then, he decided to tell what happened to us in an hour, in a minute. We couldn't stand in line for the piece of bread. They used to pass by us and say, "Jewish out."

There was a time when I feared . . . My parents lived in a suburb from Kovno. We had been going to work for the Germans already.<sup>8</sup> They took us to do hard work right in the first days already. One day we're going over the bridge from Kovno to this and the guard carried us. We heard how they say through the microphones all the Jewish people who are walking on the sidewalk could go down. They aren't supposed to use sidewalks, only the middle of the way. There was a big rain, a rainy day, big enormous rain. A horse ran away from somebody's house, and he ran on the sidewalks, but we had to go down in the rain, in the middle. You felt so low already. You think you're nothing worth no more. Then we only talked to ourselves, "G-d, is it really this? This is what we deserve? This has got to be our end?"

It took a long time until they started to move us from one place to another, until they made it to go in the ghetto.<sup>9</sup> Ghetto is different from concentration camp.<sup>10</sup> When they sent us to the ghetto, we had to leave everything that we had in the houses. We had . . . They made a place where we had to give away our worked for things like diamonds, or gold, or watches, or antiques, or anything. They said if they will find somebody hide it or didn't give away something, then they would kill them and [everyone from] six blocks around. We seen that we can believe them and trust that they'll do this. I came home from work and they told me . . . My family had given away everything. I see my wife, my father-in-law and mother.<sup>11</sup> They don't

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<sup>8</sup> Under German direction, Lithuanian nationalists formed a local administration and soon introduced a series of anti-Jewish measures. Jews were forbidden to use sidewalks, maintain relationships of any kind with non-Jews, and Jewish houses had to be marked with a sign saying "Jude" [German: Jew]. Jews were forced to perform labor including agricultural work and domestic service, as well as demeaning tasks such as cleaning outhouses.

<sup>9</sup> On August 15, 1941, the Jews of Kovno were forced into a ghetto in the suburb of Slobodka and it was closed encircling nearly 30,000 Jews. A poorer section of the city known as Slobodka in Yiddish or Vilijampolė in Lithuanian that was in the northern part of town and had previously housed only 8,000 people would now house approximately 35,000. For the first two months, the ghetto consisted of two separate areas: a "large" ghetto along the Neris River and a "small" ghetto to the west, connected by a wooden footbridge. In the ghetto, all men aged 16 to 57 and women aged 17 to 46 performed forced labor in workshops established inside the ghetto or in construction sites outside the ghetto.

<sup>10</sup> During the Holocaust, the creation of ghettos was a key step in the Nazi process of brutally separating, persecuting, and ultimately destroying Europe's Jews. Ghettos were often enclosed districts that isolated Jews from the non-Jewish population and from other Jewish communities. Jews living in ghettos experienced miserable conditions and overcrowding. A concentration camp is different from a ghetto in the sense that it was used to house slave laborers and prisoners of the Nazi state who were detained or confined, usually under harsh conditions and without regard to legal norms of arrest and imprisonment that are acceptable in a constitutional democracy.

<sup>11</sup> Isaac's mother-in-law, Chassa Lager, his father-in-law, Israel Lager, and the first child of Isaac and Rachel, Chaim, later died in the Holocaust.

know what to do. They find from the baby . . . When he was born, somebody bought a silver spoon as a present with his name [on it]. They forgot to give this away. They are scared to go, maybe it's too late. I took [the spoon and] I put it in my pocket. When I passed by the place, I threw it. I seen nobody had seen it. It's not the story from the spoon, but to show you how, in what kind of fear we've been, how scared. We've been scared for such things.

Anyway, from there they took us to the concentration camp.<sup>12</sup> I'm skipping a lot from the concentration camp. They took us all without wives, without kids.<sup>13</sup> They put us in the trains without windows, without nothing. I guess you've seen it already in the movie where this is. They took us to Stuttof.<sup>14</sup> Stutthof is the place where they had the biggest crematoriums. When the train stopped, we already could smell the people that they had already killed and burned all the time. There, they kept us overnight. The next day, whom they wanted they left in the Stutthof to the crematorium. Somebody, they looked younger or a little stronger, they needed to work for them.

When they started to kill us in Dachau, it was when they feel already they're losing the war it looked like.<sup>15</sup> But we didn't understand this. We've been through it. You [must] understand, if we seen something [like] a better day, if they give us a little piece of something—better bread or whatever . . . We already . . . There's something wrong with them. Most of us had

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<sup>12</sup> On September 15, 1941, work passes were distributed to 5,000 skilled Jews, together with their families, who would allegedly be spared because they could work. On October 4, 1941, Kovno's Small Ghetto was liquidated and some of the buildings were burned to the ground. Only those with work passes were spared. The rest of the Jews were taken to the Ninth Fort, a nearby nineteenth century fortification, and murdered. In the "Great *Aktion*" of October 28, 1941, all the remaining Jews were told to assemble in the central square of the ghetto. There they were separated by the Germans and by the end of the day 9,200 Jews, about 30 percent of the ghetto, were taken to Ninth Fort and shot. Thereafter life in the ghetto for the remaining 17,500 Jews settled down somewhat and stumbled along until November 1943 when the ghetto was turned into a labor camp known as the Kauen concentration camp with a string of smaller camps attached to it.

<sup>13</sup> On July 8, 1944, the Kovno labor camp/Kauen concentration camp was liquidated as the Russians drew near and the remaining Jews were evacuated to the west. The women were sent to Stutthof concentration camp, while the men went on to Dachau and other camps in Germany.

<sup>14</sup> Stutthof was established in 1939 near Danzig (present-day Gdansk, Poland), on the Baltic Sea. There were a series of sub-camps attached to the main camp, which acted as a reserve for slave labor for the others. Conditions in the camp were brutal and more than 60,000 people died there. From the summer until the fall of 1944 Stutthof received some 25,000 prisoners in wave after wave as the Germans evacuated other camps in the East that were about to be overrun by the Russians.

<sup>15</sup> Established on March 22, 1933, Dachau was the first concentration camp established by the Nazi regime. It was located in southern Germany near the town of Dachau, about 10 miles northwest of Munich. Over 188,000 prisoners passed through Dachau between 1933 and 1945. Prisoners at Dachau were used as forced laborers and thousands were literally worked to death. Between 1940 and 1945, at least 28,000 died there as a result of the harsh, overcrowded conditions, medical experiments, and executions. Toward the end of the war, around 7,000 mostly Jewish prisoners were sent on a death march from Dachau to Tegernsee far to the south. Upon liberating the camp at the end of April 1945, American soldiers came across thousands of dead and dying prisoners as well as more than 30 railroad cars filled with decomposing bodies that had been brought to Dachau and abandoned.

big hopes because everything makes us believe . . . But until they could, they needed us to work.

In Dachau, they had in their mind we had to work. When they had to finish us up, we had to prepare our own graves. Some of our people did that kind of work. Some did they kind of work they needed for the war. But there come the day when they tried to destroy us, and they were told to leave not one. We worked but we had to work for all this, day and night. We worked for three days and three nights. Then it was at night, dark there through the woods, we followed them. They said, "Now you can rest." Rest meant sleep. Then we used to fall . . . everybody wanted to be on the bottom, to be covered up because we been in ice, water and snow and all.

Then we come to Tyrol, the place they called it.<sup>16</sup> We came to Tyrol and there was . . . really, they didn't even let us rest. They wanted to go faster and come to the point. Going through the woods, you don't see where you're going. You don't see nobody. It is dark without light at all. Even the moon doesn't shine. Then, I stayed, that said that the fifth in the line walking behind me. There were thousands of them. I feel somebody pushed a piece of bread. Where they put me, I don't know. There was German ladies there. The women knew what is going on. They know that they are end and they want to be -- more people like that got it. They're walking They would say, "Look, somebody gave me a piece of bread like this. You see, I told you they were like this. They're losing the war. Let's hope you'll be alive if you can stand it." But we didn't know the guards were to kill [us]. The American Army knew exactly the place where the graves are prepared for us. They know the time and everything of where we were walking, where they're carrying us. They used to go with the planes so near that we could see the American soldiers inside. They scared them. They couldn't do it.

That same night . . . I think the morning had started. It started to get lighter and lighter. I seen a German soldier came up to me, and opened up my jacket, and said, "what you got here? Two jackets?" Then another soldier came and said, "Don't give it to him. He won't take that jacket back. He wants to run away." They thought we were getting free. I see already that the [amount of] guards is not the same size. It used to be guards on each side. Here it was [now only] maybe ten to twenty machine guns and guards. Everybody started to talk to each other [saying], "I think we're getting free."

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<sup>16</sup> Tyrol is a historical region in the Alps; in Northern Italy and western Austria, in the area where Tegernsee is located. Just three days before the liberation of the Dachau camp, the SS forced approximately 7,000 prisoners on a death march south to Tegernsee. During the six-day death march, anyone who could not keep up or continue was shot. Many others died of exposure, hunger, or exhaustion. The surviving prisoners reached Tegernsee on May 2, 1945 and were soon liberated by American troops.

Here we saw on the side—it was in a field—a dead horse, or he got killed or something there. When the people see the horse, they started on it like animals, eating the pieces.

<End Disk 1>

<Begin Disk 2>

**Isaac:** They start to tear pieces from the horse. At the same moment, came out a man—a German—with a white flag and he started to say, "People, what are you doing? You're killing yourself. You're already free. Germany lost the war." Like this. This is unbelievable, to explain you . . . to have the feeling what we had at that moment, everybody.

In a little while, came out . . . People started talking. They stopped again and started [saying], "It's not true." I went out already from the line. I walked. Where I walked, I didn't know, but I walked. I passed by a German house. [I had] hunger. The German ladies, they like to look through the window like this <leans forward>. They sit down in the window. Nothing to see. They watching. They looking like that. There was a nice looking lady not far from me. I think, "I'll try to beg a piece of bread or something. She'll help me. She'll give me." I say, but I want to be nice. I couldn't beg right now for the bread. I said, "Dear lady, can I ask you something?" She said, "Yes." [I said,] "Give me a little water to drink?" She said, "Oh, yes. I'll bring you." In the same way, [I asked,] "If you can, give me a little piece of bread, too?" She said, "Are you hungry?" Like she wouldn't know I'm hungry! I said, "Sure." Then she said, "Come in, inside."

Then I feel I am free for sure. If somebody called me already like a person. I walked in I hadn't seen real furniture for a few years, a table, or a chair, or a house, or something. It was a rich, good looking house and everything. I walked in and there were cooked potatoes with the peels. I took a potato and I eat with the peel. I didn't . . . She said, "No, I'll give you everything at the table. Sit down." There were some things she gave me. She gave me good food. I'd really been hungry. I had the sense; I was scared to eat a lot in one time too. What I did [was] I ate the potatoes. On the way back, I took the peels which she took off. On the way back, [I thought,] "I can't believe it. It's true. I am free. I get something." That was my freedom.

I skipped one . . . what I told you a while ago. By my private, I found a potato. When I find a frozen potato in the ground, in the ice, I kicked it out with my wooden shoe. I took it to get warm [under my arm so that] maybe I can eat it later a little.

The Commandant in the camp there<sup>17</sup> . . . I'm talking back a little. In my Dachau camp, they bring about 4,000 people back from work. The Commandant inspected always the people when they're coming in and whether they're . . . He sees me. He recognized that my arm is a little bit higher here. He came [up beside me]. He took a switch and he hit me over my body. This means I got to go out from the line. The first thing, I lost . . . I let the potato fall down. He said, "Pick it up." He hit me again for a little potato. Then he let everybody go in. All my friends—they know already that I am not going to be alive. He'll kill me for sure.

Then the guard was to stand . . . If you seen the fence around the prison, it was like this: here's aisles and here's aisles. People can walk there. Then, he said to the guard, "For two hours, let him keep the potato in his mouth and not to let out, exactly two hours, and then you let him go in the camp." I took it and for the first minute, I think really I will not keep it in for ten minutes. I feel like I'm already dead, almost. The German—that guard—he was good. He was better than [the Commandant] anyway. He see how I feel bad. He made like he was walking away, like he's not watching me, so I can take out the potato and put in when he'd come back. He'd walk away. Later he'd come back, [he said,] "Good. Good." Then he came and he took it away and he said, "Your time is over." This was maybe fifteen minutes away. When I walked in it, nobody could believe that I came back.

Anyway, I'll start from there. Now, I come back to when we got free. The first night, walking like a highway, lots of them, many thousands of people walked. First we came to a man, a German man. He had a barn, and horses, and cows. I don't know. He was a farmer. This is maybe about a half a kilometer, half a mile from where we got free. We asked him, "Can you let us sleep the night here?" He said, "Only in the barn by the horses, by the cows." We were happy with this. This was like a hotel for us. We sleep through the night.

I got sick with the finger. In the morning, I got up and he had started to work already. He said that here are the American soldiers. They're driving the trucks and the motorcycles. On a jeep was four soldiers. They see me. I was laying on the ground in the field and the finger . . . They stopped the jeep and asked me, "What's wrong with you?" I showed them the finger. He said, "Hospital." He stopped some other Germans and asked them, "Is there a hospital here?" The

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<sup>17</sup> Wilhelm Eduard Weiter (1189-1945) was a German bureaucrat who became a Schutzstaffel Obersturmbannführer and concentration camp commandant during World War II. He served as the last Commandant of Dachau from November 1943 until the end of the war. On April 26, 1945, Weiter left the camp with a transport of prisoners and is said to have committed suicide on May 6, 1945.

German told him the hospital is a military hospital hiding in the woods, nobody knows from him. He told him [to come with us]. He carried us through the woods to the hospital.

The Germans in the hospital didn't know that they had lost the war already. They didn't want the American soldiers in there. They had one American soldier that jumped out and took away all three of the guns. He said, "Crazy people! Where is the doctor?" They ordered the doctor to do something for me. They didn't know. They see the American soldier, they knew for sure they lost. Then they treated me with bandages and everything. They told . . . the Americans that so many miles from here is a hospital, a military too, another one. There is a bigger and a better one for me. They'll treat me. They have more people. They see people. They took me there.

In hospital, I find my brother already later. There I met Sam. Together, we been happy, but how happy can it be sharing a place like this? There was an American doctor every day, not a German. They didn't trust the Germans by themselves. The American doctor used to come everyday and check, and order what to give us to eat. How much butter they . . . every day a little bit more . . . or how much meat, or this. We had . . . unbelievable. When we got a little better. We felt a little better day-by-day. It got warmer out. Came the summertime almost. We used to go outside.

They organized groups, what they used to go all over Europe and see people who is alive and who is dead. Like, if I am alive, they ask me who I know from my friends or somebody is alive. They used to come everyday and put up a sign who is dead and who is alive. When I used to read, I would read who was alive. To the [list of] dead, I didn't go and hope. I had no hope. Only for my wife. She is the [only] one left from the family then, besides my brother.

There came to me one day like she told you—the same guy—and he told me. He told me, "Isaac, I . . ." He was with me in the same camp, but he already had time, a couple of weeks to run away, to be in Lithuania. I told him, "What do you mean I have regards? From Rachel?" He doesn't know. [He said] from Rachel, I got regards. I told him, "What you mean? I don't believe you know her." I couldn't believe it. [I thought] they died, but hopes I got. I think, "Maybe it comes from G-d somehow, this." I told him, "How does she look?" [He said,] "I know your wife from . . . Believe me. I wouldn't tell you a story." I said, "When did you see her?" He said, "Sunday, I eat supper [with her]. She invited me for supper. She invited me for supper." I knew in Russia they didn't have food to eat. How she can have even already have food for some other

friend? [I asked,] "What did she feed you?" He said, "I eat borscht and potatoes." I said, "Borscht and potatoes?" I said, "That is my wife." This is what she likes in food. Then we kissed each other for the good of the G-ds above me.

A German lady was the boss lady over the whole hospital. All of us, we didn't have clothes, or nothing, or pajamas. She gave us pajamas. I come down to the lady right now. I said, "Lady, I've got some good news for you, or for me. My wife is alive. Somebody come and give me the regards." She said, "Really? Oh, this is nice. Where is she?" I told her, "She is in Lithuania." [She said,] "Oh, we'll do everything to bring her here." I told her, "Lady, please understand me. Nobody knows her like I knew her. If I will not come to her, she will not come to me, not in Germany." She said to me, "You stay. You have got to be cured. When you're feeling healthy, we'll help you to go there. Right now, I couldn't let you out." She didn't let me out, but I walked out with the pajamas at night.

I walked with a cane like this. I see from far, a house with a light. I came in the house. The lady was scared. She really was afraid of the refugees, the Holocaust survivors. She said, "What can I do for you?" I told her, "Lady, not too much. I need a pair of pants, a shirt, and a pair of shoes, and that's all. If you would get some more for me, perhaps a hat, but this is I want. I want to go out, to go to Munich, Germany." She said, "My G-d, I haven't got any men here in my house." I told her, "Your neighbors got some, I think. Your neighbors got men. Any size." [I told her] just to go. She walked out and she brought me everything.

I came to Munich [Germany].<sup>18</sup> [In] Munich, I find already more people. I try to tell from Munich I got to go to Lithuania. There, I got to go to Poland. [In] Poland, there are hotels. Lodz . . . large city.<sup>19</sup> When I come in Lodz, I find from my city, my state, so many people I know. They see me. They say, "Isaac, you know we're coming from Kovno. I seen your wife there." I told them, "I know too. That's why I am here now. I'm going to her." They said, "Oh, no, we'll

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<sup>18</sup> Munich is a city in southern Germany, located just north of the Alps and approximately 16 kilometers (10 miles) south of the Dachau concentration camp. After World War II, the city was occupied by the United States. When hostilities ended on May 8, 1945 in Europe, there were hundreds of thousands of uprooted and homeless people classified as displaced persons (DPs). DPs included non-Jewish people who had been deported to Germany as forced laborers for the Nazis as well as liberated Jews who had emerged from concentration camps and hiding places, plagued by illness and exhaustion and bereft of home and family. Allied forces soon established temporary facilities (DP Camps) across Germany, Austria, and Italy to house DPs. The first all-Jewish displaced persons camp, Feldafing, was established 20 miles southwest of Munich, Germany and began absorbing Jews from Dachau in the summer of 1945.

<sup>19</sup> Lodz [Polish: Łódź] is a large textile-manufacturing city in central Poland, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) west of Warsaw. Within two years after the end of German occupation in Lodz, the Jewish community was rebuilt to be the second largest in Poland. More than 50,000 Jews had settled in Lodz by the end of 1946.

not let you go. Why you should go and take a train? You got to steal [across] the borders, you know. We will not let you go." My cousin came and said the same thing. I thought, "Maybe they're right. Soon she will find out. She will come."

Then I had the best decision of all. A Russian general, I met him and he liked me too much. Anyway, until he found out that I am not telling him the truth. I tell him a story. I couldn't tell him the truth because if he . . . You couldn't trust the Russian Communists then.<sup>20</sup> Later, when he found out, he got so mad at me. He said, "You lied to me. You said you were going to the doctor's. You could go right now. You are afraid to go in Lithuania to pick up your wife. I bet you I can make her come to you. [I said,] "She don't know." He said, "I know what you are . . . You're making false things. Everybody got an excuse." He took and write a letter . . . We come together and this is the story. Do you want some more?

**Interviewer:** Tell me a little bit more. You were talking about the march from Dachau. They took you out of Dachau and marched you to a place where they thought they were going to kill you. If we backtracked to that time when you were in Dachau.

**Isaac:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** They took you out. They marched you through the towns?

**Isaac:** No, they marched . . . We been far from a town. This was where they were marching us. This was when I found the potato.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Isaac:** This was here where I found the potato. But I'll tell you a story. Can I go back?

**Interviewer:** Sure.

**Isaac:** This is before they get that? They took out where they make the axes. They killed out 2,000 to 10,000 of the kids and everything. Later, the most healthy, they asked everybody to go out in the field and everybody who got a trade to raise their hand. Whoever haven't got a trade, they don't need. They need people that can work and can . . . Everything in the world what you wanted, a shoemaker, a bricklayer, everything is for them a trade. A salesman is not a trade for them. This is all really factory studied for them, for their workers, for the Germans. They know already. I haven't got no trade. I don't know what to do. We standing in the rain I start to shake.

Then, next to me was a bricklayer. No, he was a carpenter. He said to me, "Isaac, what's

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<sup>20</sup> Following the end of World War II, both Poland and Lithuania found themselves under the domination of the Soviet Union, which began installing communist governments that did little to protect Holocaust survivors from renewed antisemitic violence amid worsening political and economic conditions.

the matter with you? What, you're scared? The Germans don't know. Tell them you are a carpenter." I told him, "What you mean I am a carpenter? I am not a carpenter. I never did it." He said, "You used to make your own toys. You used to cut up from a tree and make a wheel or something like this. You will become a carpenter. Raise your hand. If you raise your hand and you're a carpenter, then maybe we'll go together and you can work with me. Under my hand, I'll help you. You'll be a carpenter." They come to my line and [I told them] I'm a carpenter, so I am a carpenter.

[They tell] everybody they've got to come. The main Commandant come to look everybody over. He say to me, "You come with me." He needed one carpenter and picked me out. [I thought,] "What I do now?" Now, it was more certain than before when I told him. He took me. On the way, I talked to G-d and I swear from then I believed more in G-d than ever, "G-d help me out. Don't leave me like this. Please." He [took] m to his place by an airport, where he had this woman and an apartment. He lived there. He said to me like this, "Listen, I got two *Kaninchen* [German: rabbits]." *Kaninchen* is what they call rabbits, like the kind of rabbits. They got some white kind of rabbits, like little rabbits. These two *Kaninchen* is a husband and wife and she expecting babies. This German's thinking when she has the baby, we can eat. We killed the rabbits. Then they eat them up. The man ate up the babies.

He wants me . . . any kind of wood I want and any kind of tools I want . . . He wants me to make a duplex for the husband and for the wife. When I build the duplex he said, "I don't think how long it will take you, but I want it to be beautiful, in wood and be divided like this." He said, "I give you a truck with a man—a German soldier. You'll go get all the lumber you need." I bought all the lumber I needed—not much—but I bought it. He took me in another room, a carpenter room. I took my time and I swear that G-d helped me with that. After I made it, he wanted it to be painted too, in colors. I painted over. Later, I think, "Now is the time I come tell him it's ready."

When he see this, he touched me like this. <pats himself on shoulder> He said, "Bravo." He took out for me a loaf of bread. He said, "Here." That's how he paid me. I think, "Oh." Now, in my mind I thought that maybe he's a good man to me. I asked him, "Sir, I want to ask you a favor. My wife would like to work too. She'll clean your house. She'll do everything. Would you let her come to work to your place?" He said, "Yes." All for just a little piece of bread.

They used to eat chicken or . . . They used to throw away the bone . . . not give it to you,

but throw away in the sand. You used to pick up it from the sand and chew it a little while. So he did my wife a favor for the piece of bread. This was the story from before.

**Interviewer:** That's about it. The tape is almost over.

**Isaac:** Okay.

**Interviewer:** Thank you.

**Isaac:** I hope for the people who see this, they will believe me . . . only a couple words from them.

**Interviewer:** You did great. You were great.

**Isaac:** It's not for them. I hope the world will see. After all, when I see now the swastikas in America, I couldn't believe it. I could not believe this will happen after this. Nobody would believe it. I know you understand my feelings in my heart when I see a swastika naturally. When I see swastikas, I know so much blood. Me, with my brother . . . together what we know of our family—cousins and everything—was 134 people [were killed].<sup>21</sup> All of them. My sisters they burned alive in a hiding place, in the house with their children . . . the husbands and the children. This cannot . . . These people with the swastika . . . I can see why. It gives me such a feel over my body. Not for myself. I will not be a coward or be around not for a couple more years or maybe longer, but for my grandchildren. In their time, G-d forbid if they will come to power—these swastikas. As I read it in papers, lots of people believe this can happen.

<End Disk 2>

**INTERVIEW ENDS**

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<sup>21</sup> Before World War II, the Jewish population of Lithuania was 160,000, about 7 percent of the total population. By the time Lithuania was liberated, about 90 percent of Lithuanian Jews had been murdered—one of the highest victim rates in Europe. Within six months of the German occupation of the city, the Germans and their Lithuanian collaborators had murdered half of all Jews in Kovno. Less than 100 managed to survive in Kovno after its liquidation on July 8, 1944. Tens of thousands who had been transferred to other camps died in camps or on death marches. Meanwhile, the Vendziogola ghetto had been liquidated on August 28, 1941 by local partisans and Lithuanian policemen. According to one report, 252 Jews (42 men, 113 women, and 97 children) were shot in a nearby forest.