

**Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series**  
**Norbert Friedman interview**  
**Conducted by James Newberry**  
**November 11, 2013**  
**Transcribed by James Newberry**

**Full Transcript**

Interviewer: All right, this is James Newberry. I'm here with Norbert Friedman on November 11, 2013. We're at the Museum of History and Holocaust Education at Kennesaw State University. So Mr. Friedman, when and where were you born?

Friedman: I was born on December 20, 1922 in the city of Krakow, Poland.

Interviewer: And what was life like for your family and friends in 1920s and 1930s before World War II?

Friedman: Well, life in 1922 was different than it is now here. We had no...we didn't have the technological advantages that we have today. We didn't have television. We had no internet. We...I didn't even have radio 'til I was 14 years old that I had to build myself. Uh...in a city of 25,000 people, there were a handful of cars maybe. Okay? So getting around was much more different than it is today, and as far as recreation is concerned it was a lot different than it is today. The only...the basic recreation that we were able to avail ourselves to was reading, whether you read it in the winter with the kerosene lamp where darkness came in early or in the summer with a flashlight under the covers. But that was the only recreation that you had except for sports, which in winter was skiing and skating, and the summer was playing soccer. That was basically, you know, the life of a youngster growing up at that time.

Interviewer: And what role did your Jewish faith and identity play in your life as a young person?

Friedman: It played the most prominent role. My house was a house of observant family. My father was a kosher butcher. The laws of the Bible were observed strictly. Uh, we were not what you would call ultra-Hasidic, you know, my father was clean shaven. Uh, I always wore a head covering. I attended the Jewish day school 'til about the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. For the 8<sup>th</sup> grade I went to a public school. So Jewish life was the center. That was it, okay. I had non-Jewish friends because we lived in a non-Jewish neighborhood, but Jewish laws and Jewish customs were central to our life.

Interviewer: And, um, in 1933 when the Nazis came to power in Germany, did your life change at all in Poland or did it remain somewhat the same?

Friedman: Not, not in any obvious way. It was changing a little bit politically, but uh, it took a while 'til the events in Germany started having an effect on our lives. It started

when Germany started to extradite Jews of Polish origin from Germany. They...by 1938 they wanted every Jew, who originally...whose family came from Poland, to be moved to Poland. And they were moved to a camp on the border of Poland. Poles didn't want to accept them. They claimed they were German citizens, and the Germans didn't want them. This is...this is one of the reasons for the Kristallnacht because the parents of the fellow who shot the German official at the French embassy, which triggered Kristallnacht...his parents were in that camp. He was so frustrated and affected by the, you know, uncertainty of their fate, that he shot the German official, the German ambassador in Paris. But after '38 when the Jews of Germany started coming to Poland and we were getting firsthand reports of what was transpiring in Germany...but uh, anti-Semitism to, you know, existed not because of what was happening in Germany although there was a political party, the National Democratic Party called the Endecja...Endecja because END, and consisted mostly of academic, academia and intellectual people who wanted the Jews out of Poland. Uh...there were, there were political negotiations taking place between Poland, Portugal, United States about extra-...extraditing Jews to the island of Madagascar which was a Portugal, Portuguese territory. In 1936, President Roosevelt and his, uh, communications with the interior minister of Poland...I had a copy of the letter which I obtained under the Freedom of Information where he writes to the Polish minister, "if you're gonna get rid, if you're gonna extradite the Jews, please first, I would suggest you ship out the young people to create the labor market for the Polish young people. Okay? That's 1936.

Interviewer: So, I mean, were you mindful of these talks as a young person?

Friedman: Uh, these particular talks we were aware of when they appeared in the newspapers, but there were other aspects that affected my life specifically. Because in 1936, as I told you my father was a kosher butcher...in 1936 after the death of the Polish, uh, Marshal Pilsudski, who was the de facto leader of the Polish government who tried to enforce laws protecting the minority...after his death in 1936, the Polish government issued a decree. Originally they wanted to totally do away with ritual slaughter, but they finally had a...they came to an agreement that they would allow one third of what was used before for ritual slaughter to be available to Jews for slaughter. My father was a butcher. He could not make a living by selling one third of the amount of meat that he was selling before. So economically things had become much more difficult for us at that time.

Interviewer: So why do you think the Nazis were able to come to power in Germany?

Friedman: You asking about the political question, okay? From my experience and from my research and talking to Germans, not only Jewish citizens of Germany, but Germans, you know. Before World War I, in my opinion, Germany was the most cultural, the most civilized advanced nation in Europe. And they were proud of

who they were. And 1914, during World War I, they felt that they going to be victorious, and because of the forces of England, France, and the United States, they lost the war. And on November 11, 1918, when the Versailles Treaty was written, they suffered a tremendous amount of humili-...being humili-...you know, they...being humiliated. And the sense of pride, you know, was affected. And after 1918, the powers tried to keep Germany economically unable to produce war equipment again. There was unemployment in Germany. There was inflation to the point that if you went, one morning, you know, to buy a loaf of bread and you couldn't buy it because you didn't have enough money because what was hundred mark yesterday was 500 today. And you went next day, you took 500 marks, you couldn't buy the loaf because that loaf was next day 1,000 marks. There was rising, speedily rising inflation. The people were very very depressed, and uh, when Hitler came to power and promised them, you know, prominence again, promised them work, and put the blame on their situation on Jews, using the Jews as a stepping stone towards, you know, towards his power, uh, he was very successful. People gladly grabbed, you know, a particular idea, and they joined him.

Interviewer: So with this rise of anti-Semitism, was there any talk in your family, any serious talk of leaving Poland or, you know, the continent?

Friedman: By, by the Germans?

Interviewer: No, in your family.

Friedman: In my family, those who were affluent sometimes...I had a second cousin who was sent out to the...there was fair in New York, the World's Fair. They sent her out supposedly to the World's Fair, and she stayed in the United States. There were two...first of all obtaining a visa to go any other country was very difficult. Countries in Europe did not want the Jews to come into their countries. Okay? So unless you had a lot of money and you could, you know, you could buy papers and so on, it was very difficult. Okay? It was very difficult to leave the country. For young people like myself the only hope at the end of a tunnel was Palestine where we were gonna build a country for ourselves. Because if you go through the history of Europe, every prominent country---that includes Russia, France, Germany, England, Spain, Portugal---at one time or another expelled the Jews that lived there. Okay? So, you know, we knew there was really no future for us. When I...when I finished my education, my public school education, I applied to a minor polytechnic trying, you know, to study mechanical engineering, and out of the...we had 200 applicants for that course. We had two days of written exams and a week later we supposed to have two days of oral exams. Out of 200, I and two others had our oral exams waived because of the excellence of our written exams. But when the day came and they announced who was admitted, my name was called past "not admitted." Only one Jew was admitted to the class. What was being practiced in the education field, in the middle education and higher

education, was what's known as a numerus clausus. Okay? There was just that certain amount of Jews that were admitted. Uh, Polish universities were known for their anti-Semitic stance, and at the Polish universities during the classes there was a special bench, what was today called a Jim Crow bench, one bench reserved for the Jews to sit on. As a means of protesting, Jewish students at Polish universities never sit down through the four years of attending the universities. There were incidents of beatings and couple cases of murder of Jewish students. Okay? So we knew that there was very...more affluent Jewish youth used to go abroad to study, okay, to other countries. But...so we knew there was no, really, you know, there was no future for us.

Interviewer: So with the war beginning in, uh, September 1939 with the invasion of Poland, how did that affect your immediate family?

Friedman: Well, as I told you, I was born in the city of Krakow. Uh, when I was in the fourth grade we moved to another city, and uh, which was close to the German border. When the war broke out, I was living, working in Krakow living with my aunt. And on September 1<sup>st</sup>, the German Stuka planes, the fighter planes, bombed a Polish barracks, army barracks, across the street from where I was staying with my aunt.<sup>1</sup> That's the first time I saw dead and wounded being carried out. And we realized that, you know, this was the end of a certain part of our...chapter of our lives. And a new chapter was beginning. This happened on Friday. On Saturday night, my mother was able to get a bus from the city where my parents lived to come to Krakow. And they had a meeting with her three sisters and two brothers. And the decision was made that the young men, which was I and three of my cousins, should leave and go east in the hope that eventually the Polish Army, you know...and by Sunday France and England declared war on Germany already. And we just couldn't believe that the army of those countries would not be able to, you know, overcome the "madman with the mustache" as we called him. Okay? So we left Krakow and we went east and uh, we marched about 400 kilometers before the Germans caught up with us. And they told us that the deal was made between Russia and Germany that Russia is gonna occupy eastern part of Poland up to the Vistula River. And west of the Vistula River the Germans would occupy. So we...because the father of one of my cousins spent the World War I time in Russian camp, prison camp, and you know his experiences were not that, you know, encouraging, we made a decision to go back to our families. And we walked back to Krakow. So in total we walked about 7-800 kilometers during the four weeks. When we came to Krakow, it was already occupied by the German forces because they marched in Krakow on September 6th. And already, there were atrocities and certain laws taking place and beatings, and...and people being taken away to labor camps from which they never returned, etc. So our lives changed completely.

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<sup>1</sup> Stuka translates to "dive bomber."

Interviewer: And at that time you and your family, your parents began to move around.

Friedman: Well, we stayed in Krakow from the outbreak of the war. We stayed with our aunt in my grandparents' apartment. And in 1940, when the rumors started that the ghetto gone be created in Krakow. We...since we were not citizens of Krakow – we had no jobs – we left Krakow, went to a smaller town, the town of Tarnow. And there in 1941, we learned that they're gonna create a ghetto in Tarnow. So we left the town of Kra-, the town of Tarnow, and went to a smaller community called Zawidow. And from there we had to leave because my father was caught butchering, and there was a price on his head. And we went to the village where he was originally born, where his parents were and his family.

Interviewer: So was he informed on about his...?

Friedman: Uh yeah, he was informed on. Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, and um, that was a Polish informant?

Friedman: The person that informed on him was a chimney sweep, okay, who had access to all the houses, who knew what was going on. And he informed to the German authorities that he was slaughtering meat.

Interviewer: And what repercussions did...?

Friedman: Well, they caught you slaughtering, it was death penalty, okay? Because it was against the law. And they didn't have many nuances in the laws. You were found guilty or innocent. You were found guilty, you know, they got rid of you. And bullets were less expensive than courts.

Interviewer: So, at that time were anti-Semitic laws particularly...?

Friedman: Those were not-. These were not anti-Semitic laws. These were anti-Jewish laws because uh, when you say anti-Semitic you have to include some people who were Semites, who were not Jews. Okay? There was a, a sect of Jews, people who converted to Judaism, and they were Caryites in minor Asia. Okay? And the Germans left them alone because racially they were not Jewish. Okay? So the laws were...you call them anti-Semitic, but they were strictly anti-Jewish laws.

Interviewer: Okay. And um, so at that time, uh, your family was...your father was informed on, and what was the punishment for that?

Friedman: That punishment was death. We ran away. We had my Polish friend, Mikhail Kravitz, arranged for us to be able...he saved our lives. We were able to leave. And while we were gone, there were posters, you know, with a price, you know, on my father's head. Because, you know, he was-. He was being sought by German authorities with the help of Polish authorities who had no choice, but they were subservient, you know, to the German authorities.

Interviewer: And this is when your family...

Friedman: This is when we went to the village where the parents of my father, where my father was born, and where his parents were living, his brothers and sister. And this is, this is the village from which we eventually went to the labor camp.

Interviewer: Okay. And um, so you moved around quite a bit. And then...

Friedman: I, I moved a lot more than I told you because I had to...we had to...you had to have a income. You had to live. So my father had a permit from a marmalade factory that had a Jewish owner, and eventually they had a German overseer. So he had papers. He was allowed to go in the countryside and buy fruit for that company. And I had to help him get around. And I-. Jews were not allowed, from February 1940, Jews were not allowed to use public transportation. So I had to use false papers as an Aryan, and on some occasion I had to impersonate Germans in order to accomplish, you know, what we had to do, you know, to make sure whatever food my father bought was able to ship from the area he bought it to the city where it was being used. And uh, all the trains and all the transportation was taken by the Germany army, because they were already at that time they were moving-. They'd started the war against Russia in June of 1941. So all the transportation was, you know, requisitioned by them. So I had to impersonate a German in order to be able to move our merchandise from one town to another.

Interviewer: So, during that time, your younger brother lived with your grandparents.

Friedman: My-. I lost an uncle. My father's brother died of a heart attack in 1938. My grandmother was very distraught, and uh, she loved my little brother. And she insisted that she, that he stays with her. So he stayed with my grandmother in another town. When the war broke out, he was with my paternal grandparents in the town where they lived, and uh, eventually he arrived-. They also went to the village where my father was born, and he came with them.

Interviewer: And um, so, then in 1942, the Germans surrounded your town, and at that point they asked the men. They called the men up for work.

Friedman: On the night of June 15, 1942, they surrounded the village. I wouldn't call it a town. It was a village. And they set up megaphones, and they made an announcement. If the able bodied man will volunteer to go labor camp, the women, children, and elderly will be spared deportation. So we had a discussion among ourselves, especially my father and my mother and I, since we, you know, we didn't live in that village. We just recently arrived there. My father and I, we decided that we'll volunteer, and so did two of his brothers to save our families. And we went into the labor camp of Mielic, which eventually became the concentration camp of Mielic. Four weeks later, Germans rounded up that village, marched them to the nearest railroad station. They put them in the cattle cars, and the whole village was exterminated on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, 1942, including some, about 50 members of my family, including my mother my brother.

Interviewer: So can you describe what your mother gave you when you were leaving to go, to join the workforce?

Friedman: What was what?

Interviewer: What your mother gave you as you were leaving.

Friedman: Oh. When we were leaving and saying goodbye, she reached in the bottom and took out her handkerchief, unknotted it, and took the five dollar gold coins that was sent to us by a relative in the United States. And she gave it to me saying, you know, "Keep it. It may someday by your freedom or life." Okay, and very prophetically she said, "We will never see each other again."

Interviewer: So, was there a sense at that time that you were going to do something other than work? Or did y'all not yet have...?

Friedman: We didn't have a specific idea what we were gonna do, but we were told that we were going to a labor camp. We were gonna do work. What kind of work we were not told. Okay? We loaded on two trucks and we were driven about, it was close to 60 miles away to the labor camp. When we arrived at the labor camp, we realized that the camp was adjacent to an airplane factory. That camp, we came in there in June. The camp existed since March of 1942 where the adjacent town of Mielic, the Jewish population was sent out to camps, exterminated, you know, during an action. And the able bodied men were also put in the camp. So when we came to that camp, there were already several hundred people in it.

Interviewer: Okay. And um, could you describe...in that first work camp that you went to, you know, describe the adjustment to living and working there? And the conditions in the camp.

Friedman: It was a different universe. It was a different world. You know, all of a sudden you were thrown from what you considered a normal way of life – you got up with your family, you had breakfast, you know, you had discussions – here the kapos woke you up at six o'clock in the morning by hitting your feet with the trenchants.<sup>2</sup> Okay? And you had to line up. And you got some black brew masquerading as coffee. Okay? And uh, sometimes some boiled farina.<sup>3</sup> That was your breakfast. And then you had to line up and march to whatever labor assignment you had. You uh, you were a slave. You were not a human being anymore. You lost your identity. Nobody called you by your name. You got a number and you were prisoner number so-and-so. You lost your humanity. You lost the self-, you know, reliance or self-perspective of who you were.

Interviewer: And um, and you have tattoo on your...?

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<sup>2</sup> A **kapo** or prisoner functionary was a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp who was assigned by the SS guards to supervise forced labor or carry out administrative tasks in the camp.

<sup>3</sup> **Farina**: flour or meal made from cereal grains and cooked as cereal, used in puddings, soups, etc.

Friedman: Yeah, I have-. I have a tattoo on my forehead. There only two camps where they tattooed. One is very well known, the camp of Auschwitz, where they put the serial number on the left forearm. And the other one was the camp that we were. We were a satellite of the larger camp in Płaszów, the camp that was made infamous in the Schindler's List film. Okay? So that camp and the satellites of that camp had a tattoo on the forearm. Okay? Originally, when the order came in, the German commandant of the camp, Hauptscharführer [Josef] Schwammberger, announced that the tattoo was going to be done on our forehead unless we turned in every available valuables that we had.<sup>4</sup> So the internal camp police collected whatever people had: money, values, treasures, chains, gold chains, watches, rings, whatever we had. We collected them and gave it to him so as not to have the tattoo done on our forehead. When we brought it to him, he looked at it and said, "Is that all? Where's the gold from the teeth? Unless you give me the gold from the teeth I'll take it out from their dead bodies." So the dentist start pulling out. It was very common in Europe to have the fillings and bridges done with gold. So he pulled out all the gold from peoples' teeth and we gave it to him. In 1945 when the war ended, Hauptscharführer Schwammberger was apprehended on the German-French border, and he was found – I have the newspaper clippings from that time – he was found with eight bags of treasure, jewelry, whatever it was. I didn't know how big the bags were, you know. They were not pillow cases. They were small cloth bags. He apparently was able to buy freedom, and he disappeared. In 1978, he was found in Argentina, extradited to Germany, and he was tried, found guilty, and sent to life in prison. He died about nine years ago in prison. If you go to a library, some library might have a book called the The Last Nazi. You can read about his life. He was-. Before he came to our camp, SS guards came ahead of him to build the barn – he said he had two horses – to build a barn for his horses. And they told us what a heroic man he was. He himself liquidated a ghetto in [Polish town], and he himself executed about 600 people. And he gave a gun to his five-year-old son to shoot the children. So he brought the child with him. By the time they came to our camp, he was already six years old. I worked nightshift. One morning, they woke me up and said, "You have to go to Hauptscharführer's barrack. The kid's toy broke. See if you can fix the kid's toy." So I went in there. He had a little tank that you wound up, and it wasn't working. So I got on my knees to start taking it apart. One of the springs broke, and I took it out and hoped to be able to fix it. But it took time. So he came from behind, and he kicked me in the behind. And he said in German, "Hurry up, you shitty Jew. Otherwise I finish you off." He was six years old at that time. I tried to find out what happened to him after the war; see how he managed to live with memories of who he was, what his father was. I wasn't able to find him. There was no trace of him. I don't know what happened to him.

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<sup>4</sup> **Hauptscharführer**: master sergeant of the SS



Interviewer: And you went to the camp with your father?

Friedman: Right.

Interviewer: And so in the camp, were you able to stay beside each other and keep track?

Friedman: Well, the camp when we came in had several hundred people. Eventually the camp had 3,000 people when it was closed in July of 1944. We had 3,000 inmates. Uh, we, my father got a job as a-. When we came to the camp, he got a job in the kitchen, a German kitchen, since he was a butcher. He was able to help the butcher in the German kitchen. So then when they created a kitchen in the camp, he was made, you know, he was one of the heads of the-. He used to run the kitchen in the camp. So he worked on the camp premises. I worked outside the camp. I worked in a-. Originally I worked in a airplane factory. Then I worked in a, for a while, the garbage detail, and then back to in the factory. So during the working time we were separated. And he lived in a different barrack than I did. I joined the barrack with people of my age. You know, we felt more comfortable. We had more in common with each other. So this is why I lived..., but we saw each other every day.

Interviewer: So, you went eleven different camps over the course of time?

Friedman: Over the course of three years we always, you know, one of the things that baffled us was, the first camp...we were there for two years in one camp. In the consequent year, we went to ten difference camps. And we wondered, why were moved from one camp to another? So, we did some research and it turned out, out of the ten camps that we were in, there were either transit camps where we were just a short amount of time, where they had, you know, the selection and determined who was still physically able to do work and was sent to another camp. Or who was not able to do work and was sent to an extermination camp. So we were in those ten camps. Some of them were transit camps, and all the others were somehow affiliated with airplane manufacturing, either Messerschmitt-werke [Messerschmitt factory] or Heinkel-werke [Heinkel factory]. What happened while we were in that first original camp, we were categorized into different work, being able to do certain type of work. We wore different, you know, under the number, we wore different letters. Either you had a letter Z, letter W, or letter R. Letter Z indicated that you worked for the civilian aspect of that particular camp. Letter W indicated that you worked for the Wehrmacht, you know for the military aspects, and the letter R was Rüstungsindustrie, indicated that you were a skilled defense laborer.<sup>5</sup> So that particular...you know, the Germans were very meticulous wherever we went, you know, the documents went with us. Okay? And those who were categorized as skilled labor were sent to factories, you know, where we were manufacturing airplane planes or parts of airplanes, fuselages, that so on. So that's-. And because of the shortage of labor –

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<sup>5</sup> **Rüstungsindustrie**: defense industry.

the German youth went into the army – so the only labor they had was slave labor. Or labor from prisoners of war that they had. So we were an important, desirable element for the defense industry. We didn't know it at the time, but we found it out later.

Interviewer: So as you were moving from camp to camp, was there a point at which you realized, uh, what, you know, the ultimate intention of...?

Friedman: We had no idea. When you came-. One of the first things that you tried to find out when you came to a new camp-. And out of those ten camps, there were no two camps the same. Each one was different depending who the German commandant of the camp was. The first thing when you came to a camp you tried to find out, who were the interior authorities that ran the camp. Each and every prisoner in the concentration camp wore a triangle over his number. The triangle was a different color. That color indicated the reasons you were in the camp. The red triangle indicated that you a political prisoner. The green triangles indicated that you were a criminal. The black triangle, you were a conscientious objector. No, black was gypsy. Purple was conscientious objector. Purple indicated you were a homosexual. The Jews were either red triangles in some camps, but later on we wore the Star of David made out of the red and yellow triangle. So when you came to the camp, you looked who the kapos were, who were the enforcers so to speak, and if they were red triangle, you knew your existence was going to be more moderate. Okay? Because these were political prisoners, these were intellectuals, professors. You know, for whatever reason they were in the camp. But they were more understanding. But if you came to a camp that was run by green triangles, this was run by criminals, by pathological killers, by sadists. That was a very, very bad place to be. So that was the first thing that you checked out. The second thing checked out: what kind of food do they give you. When and how much. And of course, you're sleeping accommodations, etc. And what labor, what kind of work, you know, was least exposed to physical, you know, punishment, etc. So after a while you became a camp-wise, you know, convict. And these were the first things that you tried to find out.

Interviewer: Were there any sources of outside news, news of the war?

Friedman: When we were still in Poland in the camp, in the first labor camp, we occasionally would find scraps of newspapers, etc. We had contacts with the Polish underground. Uh, you know, you heard about the V-1, V-2s? The flying rockets that fell on London? I mean, according to – and I just saw a program on television – according to the historical documents, they were all manufactured in Niedermendig, which was close to the German Baltic Sea. Okay? This is not true. I wrote about it in my memoir, and the historian who read it said, "Take it out." Because I wrote that I used to see V-1s and V-2s flying over our camp. Okay? We heard the noise and we looked up. They were gone already. And one day, as a matter of fact, as I was working inside the factory, the Polish engineer who

worked next to me-. All of a sudden he grabbed me by the neck and pushed me under the desk and he himself. And we heard an explosion. It was one of the V-1s that fell several kilometers away from this and exploded. Uh, and I wrote about it, and he said, “No, no, no, only in Niedermendig.” And today, if you google...if you google the name [German word] you find out that there was-. This is where there were experimental work done on the V-2. That V-2 that we heard exploded-. Part of that V-2 was shipped to England by the Underground. If you read Churchill’s memoirs, he tells you about it.

Interviewer: So you said the Polish Underground...did you have any, uh, contact with resistance efforts at that time?

Friedman: There were all kinds of underground activities. There were those who were active, you know, military kind of activities. My best friend, my Polish friend, the one who saved our lives, he died blowing up a German transport. But there were other activities. There were political activities. There was building of resistance. You knew some-. You have a picture of mine with four Polish friends in the town of Zawidow. They were all students at the Agricultural vocation school. That picture was taken this Polish friend, Mikhail Kravitz, who enrolled them all into Underground. I was able--. Because of the support and help of the underground I was able to go in July of 1941 to the Warsaw Ghetto and in September 1941 to go to the Krakow Ghetto looking for members of my family because my mother’s three sisters and two brothers lived in Krakow, and we stopped getting news from them. So the Underground existed. There were different organizations. There was underground that was run by the socialists organizations, the Polish socialist party. There was underground that was run by the military veterans, by some of the academics. They all did different things to, you know, oppose and to do harm to the German establishment and German occupation.

Interviewer: So within, back in camps, with, you know...

Friedman: I knew that one of the Polish engineer, the one who pulled me under the thing, I knew he was a member of Underground because he’s the one who gave me, who brought me the news that my friend was killed in the raid against, you know. My friend Mikhail Kravitz was killed. He wouldn’t tell me the sources. But he said, “Don’t ask. This is it. I want you to know.” So I knew that he had-. He was able, if I sent out mail, the picture of the four, of myself and the four of my Polish friends, that’s the only picture that I have during the war. I sent the picture to a sister of a friend of mine who lived on Aryan papers and Polish papers, and he was able to mail it to her. On the back of that picture, the original that I have, is my note to this girl written in 1941.

Interviewer: You said your friend was killed. Describe the situation and what happened.

Friedman: What?

Interviewer: You said your friend was killed.

Friedman: Well, my friend was a member of the Polish underground and while I was in a camp – it was the end of 1942 – he was involved in blowing up a German military transport. And he was cut down by machine-gun fire and was killed doing that. They knew that he was my friend, and they brought me the news of it.

Interviewer: Okay. In the camps, with such poor food and no medical attention, and you didn't know the rest of your family...what situations they were in...how did you survive? What was motivating you at that point?

Friedman: You know, how you survive is the most frequently asked questions by my audiences when I speak to schools or-. Okay? I wrestled with that, you know, with that question myself. Was it the divine intervention? Was it-? I came to the conclusion that there were two factors: first, it was sheer luck 'cause you never knew when they lined you up, and they picked the one part of the group as they did when we came to the first camp in Germany. They divided our transport at one point. Part of the transport went to Mauthausen camp from which less than five percent survived.<sup>6</sup> The other part, while I was in, we went to a camp in Czechoslovakia [Leitmeritz] and eventually to Dachau where the survival rate was higher than that, okay? Do you didn't, you know, you had no impact on it. It was just sheer luck. But in order to get to the point of sheer luck and in order to survive to that particular point, you needed besides physical support, you needed what I would call spiritual and emotional and intellectual support. And that came from people, from examples by certain people, by the nobility of their spirits. They were able to rise above the existing norm in the camps by their willingness to give of themselves, by the willingness of sacrifice, sometimes their lives, in order to save other people's lives. Those particularly rare instances are what gave us the strength, the moral impetus, to keep going. We still were worth something. There was a world outside. There was a humanity outside. If you came across very difficult conditions and somebody was willing to share with you his ration of bread when you were in bad shape or give you a spoon full of soup, your esteem, your faith in man, you know, was reinforced. And if you yourself found the strength to give of yourself and share what you had and give it to others, in your own esteem, you felt you were a more worthy person. And you should try to fight and get through it and survive.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about Hamek Schildkraut?

Friedman: The story of Hamek Schildkraut takes more than a few minutes to tell. Hamek Schildkraut was...I told you when we came to the camp, boys of my age decided to find a barrack where we could live together. We had more things in common. Hamek Schildkraut was the leader of that barrack. Every barrack had to have a

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<sup>6</sup> **Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp:** hub of a large group of German concentration camps built around the villages of Mauthausen and Sankt Georgen an der Gusen in Upper Austria

leader because when the inspection came in, he had to report to the German authorities how many people were in there and how many people worked, etc. And he was the leader in our camp. He was several years older than most of us. He was married before the war. His wife was killed during the deportation action in his town of Tarnow when she refused to part with her infant child. The child was shot in her arms, and she was shot also. He was a very, very talented, very active individual who helped other people who had to get through emotional difficulties. He was a cartoonist. He was a great draftsman. He drew the scenes of our camp life on the walls of our barrack. And uh, he worked in the [power plants] department, and one day he came very dejected. And we didn't know what happened. We found out. It turns out that he was setting up a job and the dyke crashed. His number was taken down, and we knew what happened in cases like this. We knew that anytime you were found guilty of spoiling material or something, you were accused of sabotage and your number was taken down. When there were enough people to be taken out to be executed on the killing grounds, you know, you were included. And once his number was taken down, we knew that, uh, we had to watch him. We assumed that he would try to escape. It was possible sometimes, escape. The Germans instituted a rule of group responsibility by which, if somebody escapes from a labor detail, 10-20 prisoners in that labor detail were taken out and executed. If you escaped from the camp premises, you know, 10-20 members of the barrack that you lived in...they were taken out and executed. And the first ones to be executed were if you had members of your family – a brother or a father – they were the first ones taken out to be shot. We had instances where people ran away, leaving their family, brothers, their father, to be executed. The reason they ran away, they-. 'Cause they had a young wife and child someplace in the forest, and they wanted to join them. So when his [Hamek's] number was taken down, we decided we have to watch him because if he runs away, it's gonna be death sentence for most of us. So we had always somebody accompany him whether he went to latrine or when he went to for food, we always somebody with him. And we knew that execution gonna take place when the gravedigger used to leave the camp and go to the killing fields. So that particular night the gravedigger went out, so we knew the next day they were going to be executing the people's numbers that were taken down. So that night we decided to watch "Hank," Hamek Schildkraut, more closely. None of us went to sleep. And we knew that he knew, but nobody talked about it 'til at one point the youngest inmate in that particular room, who his protégé, blurted out and start crying, he says, "Hank, save yourself, save yourself! Run away. We'll follow you. We'll be alright. Save your life." Okay? And he got up, and he said-. And some of us, you know, said, "Well right, go. Run away. Save yourself." And uh, he got up, and he said, "Don't worry. I will not run. I will not jeopardize your lives to save my own. I go and I die like a man. I die on my feet like my wife did. I will not cower before them." Because what the routine was, when your number was taken down, you went out for execution...they made

you undress, kneel down naked in front of the grave, they shot you in the back of the head, they kicked you and pushed you in the common grave. And he said, "I will not give 'em the satisfaction to cower before them." And the next morning, he and eight others were taken out to the killing grounds. We could-. When they brought the clothing back from there, eight pair of clothes were clean. Only one set of clothes had blood on it. And that was the clothes of "Hank," Hamek. And we found out from the gravedigger what happened. When the order came to undress, he was the only one who wouldn't undress. He just started walking away. And they yelled after him, you know, in German, you know, "Come back, you dog, you!" And he turned around and gave them the finger, and he kept walking. Took four shots to bring him down. Okay? And to us it was an act of heroism, okay? Of self-sacrifice.

Interviewer: So, you also describe the Allied bombing of Dachau when you there.

Friedman: Yeah.

Interviewer: And um, what were your feelings at that point? Did you feel maybe there was an end in sight?

Friedman: Well, Dachau-. We went to Dachau. We came to Dachau on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1944. So you know that historically the war was well advanced, okay? At no time, during the whole time, of all the camps we were in, were we ever bombed. You know the story that they never bombed the railroad to Auschwitz, you know, was the complaint? If that had happened, maybe that many people wouldn't have died there. But we felt the fact that they didn't bomb where we were, they didn't bomb our tormentors, was a sign we were totally abandoned. Nobody care who we were. We when we came to there-. We came to Dachau in cattle cars for three days without any food. When they unloaded us, they lined us up in the square, and they had kettles of potatoes and jackets and cabbage. And we could smell the potatoes and the cabbage. And they lined us people. People were supposed to get a few potatoes and a leaf of cabbage. While we were lined up, the air alarm sounded. And they chased us to a special trenches dug for this particular purpose. And we sat in the trenches while the planes flew over us. And we begged them "please bomb, bomb us and this, you know, together with our tormentors!" 'Cause we didn't ever think we were gonna survive by that time. This was five years of war already in 1944. We just-. The only chance we had is to choose how we're gonna die. But we knew we gonna, not gonna survive. And we begged them "please bomb, please bomb." And they flew over and they bombed the industrial complex a couple miles away from the camp. And after that, you know, they-. While they were flying over, people, they were so hungry, they could smell the food. They couldn't control their hunger. They ran out from the trenches towards the kettles. And the SS in the watchtowers machine-gunned. The square was full of dead and injured bodies laying there. And then eventually they called us out and they lined us up. And the food was cold and bitter-tasting. The sight of

our comrades laying there in the square did not help. It was one of the most depressing and disappointing, uh, scenes I remember.

Interviewer: And um, the only possessions that you managed to hold on to was the picture of you mother and your toothbrush?

Friedman: Right.

Interviewer: And describe that.

Friedman: Ah...while we were in Poland, you know, we had access to limited possessions, okay? You could have a handkerchief. You could have a spoon. Once we came to Germany, we were stripped from everything that we owned. Once we came to Germany, we were given for the first time the striped pajama-like uniforms, okay? We had a shirt underneath. We had a dish, a metal dish, on our rump. And we were-. And this spoon-. And in order to have a cutting implement, we would take a rock and turn out the handle of the spoon to serve as a cutting instrument 'cause we were not allowed to have knives. Everything else, you know, was uh, during inspection, taken away from you. Oh yeah, you were allowed to have a belt, okay, which eventually they took because they needed the leather or something. I was able to conceal two items. I had them wrapped in a rag and attached to the inside of my jacket. One of the items was a picture of my mother. The other item was a toothbrush. The picture of my mother was my link to my life before the war, to my home, to the warmth of her love, to all the family events. And when I used to sometimes miss the liking of her I used to take the picture and look at it. The toothbrush was the last vestige of civilized life. The brushing of your teeth, actually not teeth but gums void of teeth that had been knocked out by different butts of different guns by different Germans. These ulcerated gums...when you brushed them with cold water without toothpaste, without tooth powder, just with this brushing of your teeth, this daily mundane, you know, function was your connection to normality, to life, to humanity. And I kept these two items with me concealed. When we came to Dachau, after a couple of days we were notified that we have to go for the lousing. So when you go for the lousing they take your uniforms away, and they, the uniforms go for the lousing. You go for showers, disinfection. So we were going for it. We were lined up. The ole timers in the camp, they said if you have anything of value, anything, give it to us. We'll keep it for you because otherwise they're gonna take it away from you, because you're gone be naked. You won't have it. Those who did it never saw their valuables again. You know, they never gave them back to them. I didn't give it. I took the, my, my treasure, and I ran under one of the barracks, and pretending I was doing some cleaning work, hid it under the barrack. Covered it with ground. After the lousing, they gave us new uniforms. They gave us new number. I ran under the barrack to retrieve my treasure. Apparently somebody saw me puttin' it there. When I came there, it was gone. And I was like wild animal. I dug up the whole area, you know, looking for it. And at that moment, I stopped being a human

being. My connection to my life as a person was gone. My connection to a civilization was gone. And I decided to commit suicide. There was no point in me going on. And I tried to get on the electrified wire that surrounded the camp. And somebody saw me running got my father. My father came running and pulled me away. And then of course I broke down crying. And he says, “We’ll get through it. We’ll make it. We’ll survive. Don’t do it,” you know.

Interviewer: So you were forced to march and, um, as the Allied troops were pushing inward, you know, from the east and west. And, um, can you describe liberation?

Friedman: If you had asked me that question after the liberation, I would have told you no. I wasn’t, years later even when I started to write, I was looking for terminology for words to describe the emotions. I mean, you know, you-. After six years of slavery, of un-describable horror. And here, you have your freedom. How you should-. You should feel a certain, you know, surge of emotion, of gratitude, something. I didn’t feel anything. I couldn’t find words. I couldn’t understand why can’t I write about it, why can’t I think about it, why can’t I retrieve what I experienced. And then I realized that at the time of liberation, we were so numb, so worn out, so cynical, that we were void of what normally are human feelings. It took months before, before we could laugh, before we could cry. It took years before we could love. The emotions were drained from us. The thing that we lived by was the fear of death and the striving for overcoming hunger.

Interviewer: And you were in the barn at the time?

Friedman: Well, to-. You know, there was a road leading to the liberation. The last camp that we were in was finally bombed by the P-51 Mustangs on the 16<sup>th</sup> of Jan-, of April. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, that camp was closed. And we were put what was later known as the Ganacker death march.<sup>7</sup> The name of the camp was Ganacker. We left on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. By the 27<sup>th</sup>, two thirds of the convoy was almost gone, either executed by, for their inability to keep going, or exhausted and dying from exhaustion. Uh, the German commandant of that convoy made the deal, which we found out later, with the eldest of the prisoners, that he’s gonna try to save. We could hear, it wasn’t only the big guns. We only could hear already the machine gun fire. So the Allied troops were close by. So he made a deal with the eldest of the prisoners. He’s gonna try to save whatever that was left from the convoy for him trying to save his life when the Allies, you know, come. So vouch for his benevolence so to speak. And he called us out in the clearing, and he gave an order to the SS that was still left with us, for each guard to take five or six prisoners and hold out in the farm house ‘til the glorious German army will vanquish the enemy and reassemble. So we, my father picked a Hungarian SS man, an SS man of Hungarian background whom we used to watch his conduct. We knew he was a benevolent individual; he didn’t harm anybody. And he went

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<sup>7</sup> **Ganacker concentration camp:** satellite of Flossenburg in southeast Germany.



with us. And we wound up in a barn on the outskirts of a village. And that barn on the morning of May 1<sup>st</sup>, we heard a rumbling and we ran to the cracks in the barn and we watched three tanks with five pointed white stars on the sides and soldiers marching behind it marching on the road into the village. We thought-- Five-pointed white stars to us was Russian stars. We didn't know the Americans, you know, used the same five-pointed stars, and we yelled, "Oh the Russians, the Russians are here." And the Hungarian said, "No, no, Americana." So we were sitting there, we started crazily dance. First of all we were shocked. We were free. It was over. The nightmare was over. And we couldn't react to it. One of them, all of a sudden dancing and jumping up and down in the hay. We were up there screaming and dancing. Okay? And a couple hours passed by and I decided well, we have to find out what it is, what it means, are we free? Can we go? What's going on? So they picked me as a scout to go in to the village and find out what's going on. The reason they picked me is because I always bragged about I used to love American movies. I used to go to American movies whenever they played in the neighborhood. And I used to brag about them so they felt I probably speak English. The only thing I knew in English is "I love you" and "goodbye darling." How was that going to help me? They didn't care. They sent me in to the village. And I came into the village and the village square in the village of Hebertsfelden there were American soldiers sitting around mostly on their helmets or leaning against the tanks or the jeeps. And they were eating. What they were eating-- I thought they were eating Napoleons. You know what a Napoleon pastry is? It has cream inside. But what they were eating was processed cheese between crackers from C-rations. I didn't know. I never saw a C-ration. I never saw processed cheese. To me they were eating Napoleons. This is what the army was doing! And I was walking around, and I was wearing the concentration camp uniform. I was all of eighty pounds. Haggard. Dirty. Totally confused. Not knowing. I didn't know how to assess my situation. Until one of the soldiers called to me in broken-German from an American army book, how to speak German, and he said "Kommen sie hier." [Translation: Come here] And I went over to him and so he started asking me who am, I so I said "I'm Polish." I was unsure it was safe to say you were Jewish yet. Okay? I knew what happened to Jews. I knew what happened to you if you said you were Jewish. So I said I'm Polish. So he started yelling, "Hey, Stachu [spelling?]?! Come over here. There's a Polack here." Okay? Called the Polish-speaking soldier. And they came to me and asked me in Polish. And I tried to tell them as best I could where I was, who I was, what happened. And he translated that to the other fellas. And they started, you know, giving me food. They saw what I look like, emaciated. And they gave me K-rations and C-rations, and they loaded 'em in my hand. And I just couldn't hold all this. They-. Stuff start falling off my arms, rolling down the pavement. And I started to cry, first time I shed tears in years. Because here was a life-giving food. I was losing it. It was falling away from me. And they got [cough], they got on their knees. They put the food in a backpack and handed it to me. And that was the first act of

compassion, first act of kindness for a uniformed individual, shown to me in six years. And there was a surge of like light, of hope. You know, that maybe this is the end of our suffering. And maybe there's a good future for us.

Interviewer: So with the end of the war and liberation, what did you do after the war and how soon did you emigrate?

Friedman: Well, we were in that village...lived on a farm. Several weeks later we went to the nearest town to find out what was going on. Most of all we wanted to put the names of our families so others could see it. That was the way of information. People put out, you know, on walls the names. If somebody knew or somebody came across a given person. When we were going to the town, one of the people who was in the convoy on the march, comes running to me and tells me, "Hey, I saw your buddy Oskar in an American uniform." Now let me tell you about my buddy Oskar. My buddy Oskar was my best friend, my classmate from school, my childhood uh-. We used to walk to school together and from school together. We belonged to the same sport organization. And the war separated us. I didn't see him. And they brought him in one of the camps. They brought a transport from another camp, and he came with that transport. And from that time on we stayed together. On the death march from the last camp, he was in such a bad shape. He was running temperature. And my father said he's not gonna make it. You know? If he's not gonna keep up, they're gonna shoot him like they shot everybody else. So the next time we stopped for a rest, my father says we're gonna bury him like we bury all the other who die. So we put him alive-. We buried him alive in a ditch. We covered him with branches and leaves. Okay? And then we marched on. And I never thought I ever see him again. So a few weeks later when we were in town, this fella tells me, "Hey, I saw your buddy Oskar." I say, "What are you talking about?" "I know, I know, they stationed in the school over there." So I run over to that school, and there's a guard standing in the entrance. And I couldn't speak English, so I tried in German. I'm telling him, showing my striped uniform. I says, "Oskar, Oskar! You know Oskar?" He say, "He sure, Oskar come on down here!" Here comes my buddy Oskar down in an American uniform. After the convoy passed, he got up and started wandering around. And he asked some people, you know, and they told him there's a P.O.W. camp not far away. And he marched towards the P.O.W. camp. Right. This is already the 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> of April. The Germans know the war is coming to an end. The guards let him into the P.O.W. camp, and the medics diagnosed he had pneumonia. They put him on medication. Okay? On May 1<sup>st</sup>, that camp was liberated by the American army. All the P.O.W.'s went back state wise. But he, he was not an American citizen. So he stayed with that company, and came to that town. So he was telling me this story, and he says, "You gotta come, you gotta stay with me. You gotta live with me." "What am I gonna do?" "You're gonna work like I'm doin'." I says, "I can't speak English." He says, "It's okay. We have a captain. He's from Chicago. His name is Kneelan. His mother was Polish. He talks Polish. We have-." So I went to

work, and I worked in the kitchen with, as a translator. I kept...he spoke Polish and English. I spoke German and Polish. So we became a conduit between the American army and between the German population. And whatever he needed, you know, he used us to be the interpreters. And I worked with that outfit for a while. And then they left. And we were assigned to another outfit, which was the 35<sup>th</sup> tank battalion of fourth armored-, third army, General Patton's troop. And they were stationed on a baronial estate in southern Bavaria. And I went to work for them. We had a captain, Captain Kingsley, who was a hero of Battle of Bulge. You can find his name in annals of fourth armored. And uh, I worked as an interpreter and assistant mess soldier. And that-. I spent a whole year with that company. That year was the year of convalescence, of physical convalescence, and of emotional and intellectual rebirth, thanks to the soldiers, the way they treated us, the way they cared for us.

Interviewer: And when did you immigrate to the U.S.?

Friedman: Well, once we decided – my friend and I, Oscar and I – that we wanted to go to the United States, we applied for the 1946. When we told the captain, he was elated that we want to go to America. How could you not want to go to America after being embedded with American soldiers and hearing their stories about their country? They came from all over the United States, from California, New Mexico, New Hampshire, from Brooklyn. And they all told the same story: the love for their country and how they wanted-. They, they, they, the values in life. They taught us what later on would probably be called Democracy 101. They taught us democracy by practical living, by the care of, you know, the underdog. And by the love of sports and teaching us how to throw the ball back and forth. Okay? They called it baseball [laughs]. And how could you not want to go to their country? So we applied to go to the United States. When the captain found out, he said, "Look, I can't give you anything that'd be more valuable for you, more precious for you when you go to America than education." I said get some education because we had to wait. We knew it was going to take years because before our visas come through. And he hired a tutor for us, a Professor Stahofsky [spelling], to prepare us for college entrance exams. We worked during the day. At night we studied. We studied what we thought was necessary to be admitted to a university: algebra, history, Latin. I took six years of Latin in six months. I still remember gallia, patra tres, divida es [spelling] okay? Alright. And when the company was leaving in 1946, before 1946 we applied-. We were admitted to university in Frankfurt, Germany. My visa came through. Oscar left in 1949. My visa came through in 1949, and I was working on my PhD at that time. And I asked the consul to postpone it another three months, and exact-. And again for three months. And eventually he called me in and said, "Norbert, you go now or you're going to lose your number. You're going to wait another three or four years before your number comes up." I says, "Yeah, but you know, I want to get the degree." He says, "Who the hell wants a German PhD in America?" He says,

“You can make a better living cleaning the streets.” I says, “I don’t want to clean the streets.” So he says, “It doesn’t matter what you do in America as long as you do a little better than the guy next to you, okay?” And I-. I left Germany in May 1950. I came to United States in June 1950. We arrived in New Orleans on Sunday, I think it was the 4<sup>th</sup> of June. We couldn’t debark on Sunday. We debarked on Monday. Monday night I was put on a-. What do you call it? Redeye train from New Orleans to Atlanta, Georgia. I arrived in Atlanta, Georgia June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1950. If you looked at the secular calendar-. If you look at the Christian calendar, June 6<sup>th</sup> is St. Norbert’s Day. Couldn’t be a better omen than that [laughs].

Interviewer: And what did you do for a living?

Friedman: Ah. Well, they picked-. The three young ladies from a-. Three young ladies-. Two young ladies from an organization called Hias, H-I-A-S, which is Hebrew Immigration Aide Society that used to help immigrants that come to the United States to acclimate themselves. And who actually provided the bonding for us to come to America to guarantee that we will not become charge of the American government. You know, we would not become a burden to the American government. So they had a fake labor contract for us etc. And so they picked us up. I said us. There was another girl from another university who came to-. She was-. She had to go to Columbus, Georgia, but she came to Atlanta with me. And they had a big sign, and we walked over to them. And they start to speak to us in Yiddish, which is the language of the Jews, you know, the jargon. They assumed that because they knew the others that came in, they didn’t speak English. So they start speaking to us in Yiddish, and we said to them, “Don’t bother yourself. We both speak English. It’s okay.” So they were so elated that they could converse with us in English, they took us for lunch. And I remember what I had for lunch. I had date nut bread, you know, bread with raisins in it, cream cheese, tea and milk. And when check came in-. I came to the United States with \$15.00 in my pocket that a friend of mine gave me. I spent one dollar over at the Birmingham, Alabama when we were on the train that I brought breakfast for the other girl and myself. So I had \$14.00 left, but I grabbed the check. Okay. But I said, “No, no. We have funds for it.” I says-. “As good European male chauvinist,” I says, “I’m not going to start my life in America having a woman pay for my food.” [Laughs] And I paid for the breakfast. And they dropped the girl off where she was going to live, and they told me I was going to live in a house where there are four other family of newcomers. And they took me to the house on the corner of 11<sup>th</sup>, corner of 11<sup>th</sup> and Peachtree. And I went up to the second floor, and the woman, the housewife opened the door. When she saw me she fainted [pause]. She was from my hometown. She was a friend of mine; after the war they lived in the same displaced person camp that my father did. Her husband was a close friend of my father. So when she-. She knew somebody was coming, but she didn’t know the name. So I lived with them. She took good care of me. I gained twenty pounds in four weeks. That was before I got a job. And I started looking for a job. When I

came to Atlanta, there was a bus strike. So the only way that you could get from point A to point B was with what was known as a jitney. I don't know if you're familiar with that. Was a private car, and people used to drive you from one point to another. You gave 'em a dime. So I went looking for a job. The first job that I applied for was a, the job of my dreams – to be a journalist. 'Cause that's what-. We didn't have journalists and faculty in my university, but I took the subjects that were closest to that particular discipline. So I went to *Atlanta Journal* to apply for a job. And the head of the personnel listened to my story. He says, "Come on, I'll buy you a cup of coffee." Took me to the Rexall drug store across the street; bought me a cup of coffee. And he says, "Listen to me. You're not an American-." I had an accent a little worse than it is today. He said, "Listen. You're not an American. You're not a southerner. And you're Jewish. You got three strikes on you before you start. If I give you a job on the paper, you're going to be in the copy room for the rest of your life making forty bucks a week. Do you have any other skills?" I says, "Yes, I'm a machinist." "Then get the job in it." So I started looking for a job in a machine shop. Eventually I got a job in Southeastern Machine and Foundry on Marietta Street, and I went to work over there.

Interviewer: So how did your experiences during World War II and the loss of your family, how did it impact your later life, your family life, your marriage, and also, how did it motivate you to later tell your story and start sharing your experiences?

Friedman: It wasn't planned. It just happened by itself as it went along. When we came to the United States, whether it was here in Atlanta, Georgia, or later on in New York or New Jersey, where I moved after one year, you try to tell your experiences. And people either wouldn't listen, and if they listened, they didn't understand what you were talking about. So the survivors' community clammed up, stopped talking about it. We went inwards. We could not relay it because it-. We didn't feel or we didn't think that we were understood, that anybody could comprehend what we went through. When I went up north, through the efforts of a cousin of mine, she introduced me to a young lady whom I fell in love with. And I got married in 1955. We lived in New Jersey. In 1968, I think, we moved to Long Island, and we functioned you know. I had friends in the survivors' community. We used to get together. Why? Because we knew each other. We didn't need to tell each other what we went through. We just, through a word, a name, a place, and the other person understood. And I moved in that community. I joined a congregation. And the spiritual leader of the congregation, Rabbi Molafson [spelling], whose family came from Poland in the '30s or '20s, he felt that my reluctance or failure to share my experience was an emotional burden. And he prodded me to share my experiences with the congregation. And what happened? The young people of the congregation came to me and said, "Would you like, would you be willing come to my school and tell my classmates of what you're telling us 'cause we never heard about? We never knew about it." So I

slowly started speaking and at different schools in the Long Island area. And then later on in 1996, I joined the fledgling museum in New York, the Jewish heritage museum, the living memorial to the Holocaust, which opened up in 1997. And there, you know, there was a forum for speaking and sharing your experiences. We had thousands of young people coming because when the museum opened up. And it opened up strangely on 9/11/1997, I was-. My job was to introduce the chancellor of education, Dr. [Rudy] Crew. And I went to pick him up and brought him to the podium, and he spoke. And when I was taking him back to his seat, I said, "Dr. Crew, unless you send us your children, this whole entity, this whole building, is nothing but empty walls and pictures." [Pause] Four weeks later there was a directive to all schools under his administration in the greater New York area that designated the museum as a major educational center and encouraged every school to go and visit it. And my exposure and my opportunity to speak to young people is what eventually cured me of what I didn't know at that time was Post-Traumatic stress symptoms. We didn't have that terminology. I was asked to speak at Fort Gillem recently, and when I came to Fort Gillem, the base commandant asked to speak to me. So I went to see General Wagner and General Jujitsky [spelling], who happened to be both of Polish Heritage, and they told me what they were doing – who am I going to speak to. He says, "What we do here, we treat veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders. That's what we do here." And when I went to face the audience, I realized-. I changed my whole presentation, and I addressed myself to what I felt were common experiences that they and I had. And I gave them the benefit of my experiences. And I suggested that the only way you can get out of the prison of your experiences is by sharing it, by speaking about it, by writing about it, by getting it out, by verbalizing it, by facing it. It took a little longer than that for me to tell them that. When we finished they all lined up to shake my hand and thank me. And one of the soldiers was standing on the side. You know the new uniforms are the greyish camouflage, and they don't wear the insignia on the lapels. They wear them here. I didn't know what rank was this individual. But later on I saw he was a soldier in First Class. When everybody passed by he came over to me and he said, "I just finished the second tour of duty in Iraq. When you serve in Iraq, they give you a badge." It was that-. Excuse me. He pulled down the badge and handed it over to me. He said, "I want you to have it." I mean I don't have to tell you we wound up crying on each other's shoulders, knowing that we understood each other's problem.

Interviewer: Thank you very much, Mr. Friedman.

Friedman: Thank you.