

**INTERVIEW WITH ABRAM ROITMAN**

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## INTERVIEW WITH ABRAM ROITMAN

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, this is an interview with a survivor, Abram Roitman. Mr. Roitman, could we start with your age and where you were born? Or your date of birth, and where you were born.

**ABRAM ROITMAN:** Yeah. 1918. August 19 is the date. I was born in Poland in a small place, they call it Zulkiewka. Zulkiewka.

**INT:** Could you spell that?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. Z-u-l-k-i-e-w-k-a. Zulkiewka.

**INT:** Where was that near?

**ABRAM:** This was near Lublin. And when I was born, so in my home, was already in that time seven brothers, and two girls. And my father in that time, didn't got in his mind a name, because he got already seven, so he went to the rabbi with this problem. So the rabbi told him, you don't have to have a problem. Now goes the Sedrah, you know this -- the Chumash, the Sedrah -- Abraham. So gave him a name Avram. Avraham. Avram.

**INT:** And that's how you were named.

**ABRAM:** And this is my name Abram.

**INT:** Are you the youngest of ten children, then?

**ABRAM:** Yeah, I'm the youngest.

**INT:** You're the tenth.

**ABRAM:** And even after the war, near the war, of course, in that time a lot of children died with diseases, you know. In that time was no doctors like today. And till 1939, I was the youngest brother from four, and I was the youngest one. So I got before me three brothers. One brother was in his young age, he went to Russia in that time. And this is interesting because I wanted to tell the whole story from my life.

So when I was small, in that time, is the brother which went to Russia, he was a yeshiva bocher. He went to the yeshiva.

**INT:** Which brother was this?

**ABRAM:** This was the oldest one.

**INT:** What was his name?

**ABRAM:** His name was Teyvel. In English, Tadek. No, Yiddish, Teyvel. He went to the yeshiva in, was a city near Lublin, they called this city Zamosc. I don't know if you hear it. Zamosc. And he went to the yeshiva there. And after the zeman -- you know, I don't have to tell you the zeman -- so he's supposed to come home. So he came, he is supposed to come home, and he was a very good student, because his head was very bright. And in the yeshiva, I don't know what happened. He changed his whole philosophy. When he came home, he came home like not the same as he left. Different. With a different mind. He got peyos, he cut the peyos off. You know, he became different. And my father at that time was crying, was ashamed.

**INT:** He became totally not religious, or just, he cut off his peyos?

**ABRAM:** Not religious. Totally. Because in that time he made contact with the young communist party, in that time, in Zamosc. I don't know if you know, in Zamosc was born Rosa Luxemburg, and she was famous in that time, in the social democratic party. And later, they called it the communist party, in Germany. And she was born in Zamosc, also in the city where my brother went to the yeshiva. When he came home, was before Pesach. The whole city was waiting for him to come home. He was a good student. He got a...he was, how to say a speaker. He could speak very good. So he going to held a drosha shiur, and my father was waiting, the whole city, the rabbi was waiting for him. When he came home, he came home a different person. And this was the first, for my parents in that time, because I was small. I don't remember this everything. And I know this from the history. Because he was fifteen years older than me. He was the oldest one, and I was the youngest.

So when I grow up, so my father told me, my brother, my mother, you know, little by little, I know the whole story. And after the holidays, he didn't go to shul in that time. He didn't want to go to shul, because he came totally a different person. And you know, in that time, in a small place, like we used to live, everybody knows my father, knew my father, knew him.

**INT:** Can I interrupt you for one minute?

**ABRAM:** Of course.

**INT:** Could you tell me how big a town it was that you grew up in?

**ABRAM:** The town was a very small town, maybe the whole town was about 500 people.

**INT:** Was it Jews and non-Jews?

**ABRAM:** Mostly Jews. Maybe in the town was mostly, let's say, it was 500 families. Is maybe was 400 families Jewish, and the rest was Polish. Mostly Jewish.

**INT:** And of those Jewish people, were most of them religious?

**ABRAM:** Mostly religious.

**INT:** Was your family religious?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. My father was with a beard, you know, and very religious.

**INT:** What did your father do?

**ABRAM:** He was a tailor.

**INT:** And what was his name?

**ABRAM:** Jacob. Yankel.

**INT:** And your mother?

**ABRAM:** My mother was Rivka. This is the bubbe. My daughter, the name from my mother.

**INT:** I see. And where were they both from, your father and mother?

**ABRAM:** They were born in the same city, Zulkiewka.

**INT:** Both of them?

**ABRAM:** Both of them.

**INT:** Could you tell me a little bit about your father's family, and then your mother's family, what kind of family your father came from?

**ABRAM:** My father came from a family also a religious family. Because in that time, everybody was religious. Even somebody wanted to be no religion, he was ashamed to do it. Because everybody know each other, you know? If somebody wanted, let's say, to have a cigarette. So they went somewhere else, behind the back by somebody. No, not in the city, not when Jewish people went to daven or to shul. So everybody was religious.

I remember when I was three years old, and in this city was a very small city, and after a rain, it was not like here, after the rain we got, you know asphalt, it was, how to say, mud. You couldn't walk. So my father took me on his shoulder, and I was sitting like a small boy, and he carried me to cheder. So he was, I was of course, I grow up in a religious home, kosher. We didn't know what means, in my home, didn't came nothing non-kosher. Everything was kosher. I remember my mother, if she bought fleish, meat, how she used to make kosher. You know, salted it and an hour must be in salt. But I remember this. And my father used to go to shul three times a day, you know, to daven. In the morning, in the afternoon, and to Mincha.

**INT:** What kind of family did he come from? It was a religious family.

**ABRAM:** Also religious.

**INT:** What did his father do, do you know?

**ABRAM:** His father? His father, mein zayde, he was like a small socher, he bought something, he selled something.

**INT:** Do you remember him?

**ABRAM:** No. I don't remember.

**INT:** Your grandmother from your father?

**ABRAM:** No.

**INT:** And your mother was born in that town, as well?

**ABRAM:** My mother was born in the same town. I remember even if you are interested in the date from my mother, the year from the birth. My mother was born in 1880. 1880. My father was born in 1882.

**INT:** So your mother was a little older.

**ABRAM:** Two years older. When they got married, and my father was twenty years old, and my mother was eighteen years old.

**INT:** Twenty-two.

**ABRAM:** Twenty-two. That's right. She was two years older.

**INT:** What kind of family did she come from?

**ABRAM:** Also the same, religious, you know?

**INT:** Do you remember your grandparents from your mother's side?

**ABRAM:** No. I don't remember not from my mother and not from...

**INT:** They had all died?

**ABRAM:** They died before. Before.

**INT:** Could you just name your siblings, tell me each of your brothers and their names, and your sisters and their names?

**ABRAM:** If I'm going to remember. Mostly I remember the [ones] what got alive till the '39. The oldest one, like I told you, was Teyvel. He was born in 1903. In 1903. My second brother was Sumer. He was born in 1907. My third brother was born in 1915. In 1915. His name was Izaak. Isaac. And I was born in 1918. In 1918. And the rest I know we got them, no, they died after they lived maybe a year or two, and they died.

**INT:** I see.

**ABRAM:** They died.

**INT:** From childhood illnesses.

**ABRAM:** From sickness, different kinds of sickness.

**INT:** So there were ten children, but only four survived childhood?

**ABRAM:** No, we were nine children.

**INT:** Nine children.

**ABRAM:** And four survived. And I am between the survivor. I was the last one, and I survive everybody. This is a pity, what can I tell you? And this is the story from mein childhood.

**INT:** Could you tell me a little bit about your economic background when you were a child? What was it like?

**ABRAM:** Poor.

**INT:** You were poor?

**ABRAM:** Very poor.

**INT:** Could you describe that a little bit?

**ABRAM:** You know, in that time it was very hard to make a living. My father did everything what he could to make a few dollars in that time. And the time was very bad. And we were poor. What can I tell you? We were poor. And later when we grow up, you know, and when I start to work, my older brother start to work, was a little better for my parents. Was easier. So in that time when we made a few dollars, so we came home, we gave it to mother. She should have to cook something or to buy for herself something. It was not like today. This is my money. (laughs) Nothing was mine.

**INT:** But would you say that it was hard to get food on the table, that kind of poor, or...

**ABRAM:** You know my mother was a good balabost. When she got a dollar, she managed for the dollar to make food to eat for us. She was very clean. This I remember. She was washing tonight, let's say in the night, in the morning we got something to wear. Two pair of pants nobody got. Two shirts, nobody got. Two stockings, nobody got in that time. Sometimes we shared the shoes. You know? Because not everybody got a pair of shoes. So the life was very poor.

**INT:** And your father was a tailor?

**ABRAM:** He was a tailor, but he didn't got work.

**INT:** Did he work at home?

**ABRAM:** He worked at home, he worked for somebody. He did different kind of things to make a few dollars. And it was very hard.

**INT:** Did your mother work outside the home?

**ABRAM:** No. Because she got children in that time, you know. And at that time the woman was very little went to work. They got to eat, it's all right. If not, they didn't got nothing, no, it was no places to go to work, either. If my mother would like to go to work, nobody would take her. There was no place, no industry, nothing.

**INT:** Could you describe the town a little bit? What did people do in the town for work?

**ABRAM:** In the town mostly people tried to make a living to buy something to sell, and mostly was, how to say in Yiddish? One was a hat maker, one was a shtrickdreier, you know they make, how you say, different kinds of things. One made a roof, you know. And...mostly they helped, one helped out the other, even to make a goy, he wants him, he should do something for him. He did, he paid him. This was to make a living. Very, very hard.

**INT:** And it was a very small town, so there was no factories or anything like that?

**ABRAM:** No factories, nothing. This was the problem.

**INT:** And your relationships with the non-Jews in the town, what was that like? Was there anti-Semitism in the town?

**ABRAM:** In that town I wouldn't say there was anti-Semitism, no. Because we used to live in a small place. We went to school, let's say together. Maybe was once, somebody told, "Oh, you are a Jew, you are a Jew." No, mostly not. We lived together in that time, you know? We didn't...stay in their way, and they didn't stay in our way, you know?

**INT:** Did you live all mixed together, or the Jews lived in one part of the town?

**ABRAM:** Mostly we lived Jews separate. You know? That's in the whole town, was let's say about 400 families Jewish. They used to live in center from the city. And around the city, in the background, there used to live the Polish people.

**INT:** Did they have farms, and that's why they...

**ABRAM:** They got farms, yeah. They came sometimes to the Jews to make a few dollars, also. Was different times, you know?

**INT:** So you dealt with each other.

**ABRAM:** Yeah. We did.

**INT:** You sold to each other and you...

**ABRAM:** We bought by them, let's say, they came, they sold eggs, they sold butter, they sold this, that. We bought and they bought by us, let's say, a shoemaker make in that time boots, or shoes. They came, they buy. They paid.

**INT:** And what language did you speak when you were growing up?

**ABRAM:** Polish. No, mostly between us, Jewish.

**INT:** But you understood Polish, and you spoke it.

**ABRAM:** No, mostly between us, we spoke Jewish. 90% Jewish. Jewish. Because good Polish, good Polish seldom from us they speak a good Polish, you know? Because we grew up mostly in Yiddish, you know? Because for telling the truth, when I grow up, so I got a friend and he called me, instead of Abram, Avrom, he called me "Adek." Like in America from Abraham was Abie. And my father heard this, "What? What kind of name is this? Why you call his name?" And I told him more not to call me this name, I was ashamed from my father.

**INT:** It was like a Polish name?

**ABRAM:** Like here Abie. If my father would listen, they called me Abie...

**INT:** He wouldn't like that either.

**ABRAM:** Of course he wouldn't like it. He knows Abram. Avrom. So mostly we spoke Yiddish. We grew up in Yiddish. This is the reason I speak very good Yiddish. And Polish, I know Polish, though not 100%.

**INT:** But you could understand it when they spoke to you.

**ABRAM:** Oh, yeah. I understand and I speak. Not like, you see my wife Eva, you know Eva? She speaks a good Polish, because she was between the Polish people during the war, and I was not.

**INT:** I just want to backtrack a minute. I forgot to get a little bit of information about you right now. You're married and you have how many children?

**ABRAM:** I have just Rita.

**INT:** You have Rita, and she's married...

**ABRAM:** Yeah, she's married. She's married and she has a child.

**INT:** A girl.

**ABRAM:** A girl. And I'm happy.

**INT:** And are you employed now?

**ABRAM:** No. I retired.

**INT:** And what did you do before you retired?

**ABRAM:** I was a tailor and later I got a cleaning store, my own.

**INT:** Okay, if we could go back, I'm sorry, I just had to fill that in. If we could go back and if you could describe for me your father. What was he like, what kind of person was he, and what kind of a relationship did you have with him growing up?

**ABRAM:** He was a very good person, what can I tell you? He was a very good person. He was...he want us to be religious in that time. He send us to school, to cheder. Polish school he didn't care. He was a good person. He was a good father. He tried the best for us. No, he was poor. I don't remember he should give me let's say, like today a quarter, or twenty-five cents I should buy something, because he didn't got it, and I didn't ask him. And I didn't ask him. He was very good. He never beat me up. Never. I wouldn't say I was a good child, also. And so my brothers the same thing. We grow up a very peaceful family. Peaceful.

**INT:** Everyone got along?

**ABRAM:** Everyone got along to each other. As a matter of fact, when I left my home, I left with a brother. This is the third one. Before me. And I went with him, I was to him a brother and a friend, and everything.

**INT:** Which one was this? What was his name?

**ABRAM:** This was, I told you, Izaak. I lost him here in America. I lost him here in America. He died. About age 55. Very young. So we grow up in a very peaceful family. My mother used to wear a sheitel. You know what mean a....she was religious. I told you, kosher home. And we observe every holiday and every Saturday. Yom Kippur my father didn't come home from shul, because he was the whole night there. And the next day I went with my mother there to shul. Of course, I was, when I was small I was a whole day with my father in the shul. And the same with my mother. And you know, years ago, when we went to shul everybody used to took a chair. Was not like today. I have a seat, and that's it. In that time, we took a chair from home, we should have where to sit. Of course I didn't need, my father used to need this.

And so I was brought up in a very peaceful, nice, religious home, and this is my background.

**INT:** Could you describe your mother for me? What was she like? What kind of person was she?

**ABRAM:** She was a very good person. She was very warm. I remember still she got a few sisters. There were about six sisters and one brother. And my mother was the older one. And everybody came to her and how to say, with eytzes. You know? With questions. And she should decide what they are supposed to do.

**INT:** She was the oldest.

**ABRAM:** She was the oldest. Very warm person. Of course, how many times even now, I remember her and I start to cry, because she was very good to us.

**INT:** How so? Could you give me some examples of what she was like as a mother?

**ABRAM:** How was?

**INT:** When you were a little kid.

**ABRAM:** I don't understand the question, I'm sorry.

**INT:** Can you give me an example of what kind of mother she was to you, when you were a little kid?

**ABRAM:** This is what I'm telling you. Very warm. She tried the best. I remember now, if she got a few cents, I should buy for myself a roll, she gave it to me, because I was the youngest one. And at that time I was the youngest one, and not so healthy like the others. The others, they could eat, let's say, bread from yesterday. And I wanted a pretzel, like today a bagel. A bagel. So she gave me a few cents, I should buy a bagel. And I was happy. She was very warm. And when we came home, she gave us what she could, always cooked something for us. She was very nice, and a very nice person. I miss her even today, after so many years.

**INT:** What was your parents' relationship like? How would you describe their marriage?

**ABRAM:** Very good. **Very** good. I never heard, how to say, a bad word in my family, they should yell each other, what to call, names, never.

**INT:** Did they ever have arguments, or disagreements?

**ABRAM:** Maybe they got arguments...

**INT:** But you didn't know about it.

**ABRAM:** I never, I can't point that day I remember that fight between, no. No. Quiet. Quiet. Very quiet.

**INT:** So you think they had a good marriage?

**ABRAM:** Not bad, very good. A very good marriage.

**INT:** When something bothered you as a child, if something happened to you, to whom would you go? Your mother or your father?

**ABRAM:** Mostly to my mother. Mostly to my mother. Yeah, mostly to Mother.

**INT:** And she would help you?

**ABRAM:** She would, always. Like you say, a mother. My father, maybe sometimes you know, I wouldn't say that when I was small I did everything what I, what my father shouldn't yell at me. You know, we like to run around, we like to do this. The other things. Of course, if a neighbor, I did a bad thing, and he told me, "I'm going to tell tomorrow your father, that you do this." And I was crying, "Don't do it, don't do it." I was afraid. Respect. We got very high respect for the parents in that time. And I remember when I was already about sixteen, fifteen, sixteen years, the respect for my father was very high. I would say from all the brothers, from my all brothers.

**INT:** Well, how was discipline handled in your house? If you got into trouble, how would your father handle it, or how would your mother handle it?

**ABRAM:** To tell you the truth, I got in very little troubles. Because I went my way, very little. And if I did something bad, and the neighbor told me, "I'm going to tell your father," I was so scared, I begged him, "Don't do it. I'm never going to do this, what I did." And that's it, and this was over.

**INT:** So you were afraid of your father?

**ABRAM:** I was not afraid, I didn't want **he** should have tsuris. You know, you understand, what I did. Because I wanted always to be nice. Until now, I'm such a person. What I'm doing for people, now, even now, all mein years. To do a mitzvah for somebody, I would go in the middle

of the night to do it. And I'm doing it, and I did this. If somebody moved, and I could help him, I did it. I didn't count the hours. I could help him, I helped. Even now, what I'm older, and I try to do things for people. You know?

If you're interested in this also, maybe for ten, fifteen years, I'm going to a place for older people, this is a senior citizens center. When I came there, I was not a senior citizen at that time. I sing for them, till now. They make an Oneg Shabbat every Friday. We got somebody which...

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

**ABRAM:** Friday, from 1:00 to 3:00.

**INT:** This is in Brooklyn?

**ABRAM:** This is in Brooklyn. And to tell you the truth, I went through a lot, and I have a cousin of mine, she's very religious, and she told me, "Avramele, this what you're doing, and this and this, G-d helped you. You went through operations with the heart," and I feel all right. And the second, twice, the same operation, and I feel all right. And she reminds me always, "This what you're doing is einetze, and G-d meets dein tate, dein mame, the gute menschen, what you're doing for them, they me as a father, you should be healthy." And thank G-d, till now, I feel all right. I feel all right. A lot of people, they went through the same operation, and seldom they're all right like I am. Till now, I walk, I'm going, I'm dancing, I'm singing, and I'm very happy. And thank G-d for this.

**INT:** That's wonderful. Can we get back to your brothers? If you could. You said you were very close with Yitzchak?

**ABRAM:** Yeah, I was close with three brothers. The eldest one, when I was, when he left, when he left, like I told you, so after the Passover, he left the small place, city, and he went to Warsaw. This is the main city in Poland.

**INT:** After he left religion? And how old were you?

**ABRAM:** And since then, we never saw him again. Nobody.

**INT:** How old were you when he...

**ABRAM:** I was in that time, when he left, when he left in 19...let's say I am born in 1918, and he left Zulkiewka when I was about four years old, so I don't remember him.

**INT:** So you don't remember him at all.

**ABRAM:** At all.

**INT:** And you never saw him again.

**ABRAM:** He was alive. No, he was in Russia. He was in Russia. He went to Russia.

**INT:** After Warsaw.

**ABRAM:** He went to Warsaw, and he was in the Communist Party at that time.

**INT:** What year was this? About what year?

**ABRAM:** This was in 19, let's say about '25, '24. I was still very young, so I don't remember. And after this, we left also. The Zulkiewka, the small place, and we went to Warsaw. My parents was alive in that time, and we went to Warsaw.

**INT:** Okay, before you moved to Warsaw. If you could tell me a little bit about your relationship with your other brothers. So you really didn't know your older brother at all.

**ABRAM:** The older brother I didn't know. The brother after him, which was born in 1907, he was a very nice person. He got married.

**INT:** His name was again...

**ABRAM:** Sumer. He got married with a nice girl from the same city. From the same city. Her name was Malka. Malka. And she was very good to us. She was like a sister. I remember every Friday I and my brother, Izaak, we went to them. Every Friday she cooked a soup, this was like tradition. After about 12:00, and when I went there, I bought such a challah, such a big one, and then when I came with the challah, and she was ready with the soup, and we ate, let's say, lunch all together. My brother at that time, and my sister-in-law, and she got at that time two small kids. So the relation was very good. Very good relation.

**INT:** But he was much older than you. He was about eleven years.

**ABRAM:** He was 1907, and I was in '18. So he was about eleven years older than me.

**INT:** But you still had a good relationship with him.

**ABRAM:** Very good. He helps us a lot. Let's say we start, when I grow up, and with the brother Izaak, we start to do something to make a few dollars, we got money to start with nothing, so he borrow us the money, we gave him back, and we made a few dollars. So he helped us out. The relation was very good until we lost him in 1939. When I left Warsaw. And he got two small children. And he was in Warsaw. He didn't leave Warsaw. Because we went, we didn't know, let's say, tonight, what will be tomorrow. So we didn't got the time to talk over that I would like to go away. And we went away in such a terrible time. We left my brother with my parents, without saying good-bye.

**INT:** Okay, well I don't want to get to that yet, if that's okay. But he got married and he stayed in the same town where you were. And then your other brother, Izaak, Yitzchak, so how much older than you was he?

**ABRAM:** He was three years older.

**INT:** Only three years older. So then you were the closest with him.

**ABRAM:** The closest was with him.

**INT:** Okay. So you all stayed in this small town until...

**ABRAM:** No, no, we stayed in the small town till 1930. After this my brother, which was born, Sumer, he went from Warsaw, and he took an apartment, and he took his wife, and later he took my mother and my father, and little by little, we all came to Warsaw.

**INT:** But why?

**ABRAM:** This was in 1932.

**INT:** Why were you moving to Warsaw? What was the reason?

**ABRAM:** Because it was better to make a living there. This is a better economic situation. We left the small town.

**INT:** Could you just tell me what your earliest memory is as a child? What would be your earliest memory?

**ABRAM:** My earliest memory is what I told you, I remember I was maybe about three or four years old when my father took me to cheder.

**INT:** And you remember that?

**ABRAM:** This I remember. It was a cold day. It was like now, was dark, no lights in the streets.

**INT:** Early in the morning?

**ABRAM:** No, in the afternoon. Was very dark, was a cold day, was very dark, and my father was, and it was after a rain, it was not a nice weather, and he took me on his...shoulder, to cheder, afternoon. This was in an afternoon. And he came later, he came to take me home the same way.

**INT:** Were you scared when he left you there, or you were okay?

**ABRAM:** No, I was not scared, because I knew the children, I knew the rabbi at that time. He was good to me.

**INT:** What was school like? That's how you started school, in cheder?

**ABRAM:** This was a cheder. This was not a public school. This was exactly only Yiddish. To learn davening, davening. How to know to daven. Nothing more. Not to write.

**INT:** Oh, okay. So this is just for little kids.

**ABRAM:** Not to read. Just to learn the davening. How to daven.

**INT:** How long did you stay there? How many years was that?

**ABRAM:** Just a few years. A few years.

**INT:** Was it all day? How many hours was it?

**ABRAM:** No, this was mostly a whole day.

**INT:** It was just boys, or boys and girls?

**ABRAM:** No, boys. Just boys.

**INT:** And then after the three years, where did you go to school? Also yeshiva?

**ABRAM:** No, after the years, and this was the time when I was already in that time, about ten years, about eleven years, so we left the town.

**INT:** Oh. So you went to cheder the whole time you were in the small town.

**ABRAM:** I went to cheder. Polish schools, I got only maybe for two years.

**INT:** In the small town? There was a Polish school there?

**ABRAM:** Yeah.

**INT:** So you went with Jews and non-Jews together?

**ABRAM:** This was non-Jews and Polish kids together, and my father at that time a very bad thing. He didn't want me and my brother, the older one, to go to Polish school. He was against. And he didn't...he didn't...let's say...

**INT:** Register you?

**ABRAM:** Register in time. Till somebody told the police at that time, and you wouldn't believe it, this was before Yom Kippur, they took my father to prison, because he kept two children without school. This was me and my brother Izaak.

**INT:** So it was a law that you had to go to Polish school, even if you were Jewish, that was the law?

**ABRAM:** This was the law. And my father was against. And this what I, he didn't register us a few years. So when they came, when we came to the Polish school, we were older already.

**INT:** And you didn't know anything.

**ABRAM:** And this, they took him before Yom Kippur, and the whole city didn't know what happened, for what? And the rabbi from the city went at that time to the police to ask why, what happened. They told him. They said he didn't do any crime. He didn't rob, he didn't steal nothing. No, only this. So the rabbi told him, "Let him out for the holidays, and after the holidays, he gonna do it, and they gonna go to school." So they let him out, he promised, and at that time I start to go just for two years to school. No more.

**INT:** So what was that like, going to Polish school?

**ABRAM:** It was not bad. It was not bad, because a lot of Jewish kids went there.

**INT:** But you were older than the other kids.

**ABRAM:** I was a little older, because we hid. We hid for two years. He hid us.

**INT:** Right. But how did you feel about that?

**ABRAM:** Now I feel bad. In that time I didn't feel much better. I was not mad on my father.

**INT:** No, not mad at your father, but how did you feel in the school? Were you comfortable?

**ABRAM:** Of course I was not comfortable. You know what? The reason was this. When we start the Polish school, not I and not my brother could talk one word in Polish. They ask mein older brother what I belong to him. He couldn't tell them that I'm his brother. No, he told them in Polish that I am **his** brother. The **teacher's** brother. You know? Moshe Kapoya (?). You know? This was the mistake from my father. This is the reason. And this what I know Polish, I learn after when I grow up. Later when I was in Warsaw, you know, I learned Polish.

**INT:** But you didn't learn it in this school?

**ABRAM:** Very little.

**INT:** You were there for two years, though.

**ABRAM:** I'm telling you, for the two years, when you start, I didn't know how to write any little thing in Polish. And when you start, the time went by, and my father was not interested I should know. He told me, "I would like you should know how to daven. That's it. Nothing more." He was not interested in more.

**INT:** He didn't want you to get an education, or he didn't want you to get a Polish education?

**ABRAM:** Just to know how to daven.

**INT:** Just religious education.

**ABRAM:** That's all. Nothing more. He was not interested.

**INT:** He never thought about college, or that wasn't...Gymnasium...

**ABRAM:** Very, very little went to college in that time. Very little.

**INT:** So what do you think he wanted from you boys when you grew up?

**ABRAM:** He wanted to be religious, and that's it. Nothing more. And later to learn how to make a living something, or to be a tailor, or to be a shoemaker, or other things. That's it.

**INT:** But education wasn't...

**ABRAM:** Not education. He was not. Because my father also not an education. Of course, he knows how to daven. You know, he was religious. He could say, daven, not from the siddur, just from his mind.

**INT:** Did you have seforim in your house? Did you have books in your house?

**ABRAM:** Yeah, the Jewish books. We got a siddur, we got for every Chumash for every holiday.

**INT:** Did your father learn the Talmud with anyone, did he sit with the Talmud?

**ABRAM:** No, no. No we gotten so far. No.

**INT:** So how would you describe your father's education, then? Also cheder, and that was it?

**ABRAM:** Just cheder, how to daven, that's all. Nothing more.

**INT:** No yeshiva?

**ABRAM:** No yeshiva. No yeshiva.

**INT:** Could your mother read? Could she read Hebrew or Yiddish?

**ABRAM:** She could know how to daven, yeah. She was the best. Everybody was listening how she was davening, and everybody after her. She was the only one which knew how to daven.

**INT:** All right. So you went into this Polish school for two years. And you had friends there, you had Jewish friends and non-Jewish friends, or how did that work?

**ABRAM:** I got very little Polish friends. Very little. Mostly the Jewish.

**INT:** Was there any anti-Semitism in the school that you remember?

**ABRAM:** No. I don't remember it. No.

**INT:** With the teachers or anything? No problems?

**ABRAM:** No. No. I had no problems. And the same I remember was for everybody. Jews used to live a thousand years in Poland, side by side. And of course, they're anti-Semitic, because they showed it in 1939, the war. Before, no. You know, in our time, in our town, nobody closed their door, and nobody came to do something wrong with the Jews. Nobody came.

**INT:** There were no pogroms in your town?

**ABRAM:** No. Not in my time. Of course, pogroms was later, when I grow up and I used to live in Warsaw. Was a pogrom not in Warsaw, not in the town where I was born. I don't know if you're familiar, there was a pogrom, Przytek, the name was Przytek, a small town, it was up in Ukraine, in that time was a pogrom. Not in the town I was born, no.

**INT:** Is there anything else you want to tell me about that time, in that small town, before you moved to Warsaw? Is there anything else that you think is important that you'd like to add at this point?

**ABRAM:** I don't know what you'd like to know. I think I told you everything about the town where I was born. Was a very small town, very religious. Every holiday was observed, every Saturday, every Friday. Friday let's say, in the afternoon we start to prepare for Shabbas. Everybody went home. If we have somebody works somewhere, went home to wash himself, and to prepare for Shabbas.

**INT:** Was there one shul in the town, or there were many shuls?

**ABRAM:** There was a shul and a bais medresh. This I remember.

**INT:** And that was it. Just one.

**ABRAM:** That's it.

**INT:** Were there Hasidim in the town, or it was...

**ABRAM:** Everybody of course was not. Everybody have, this is my rabbi, you know? No, too many rabbis was not, because there was just one rabbi, and that's it.

**INT:** So you weren't Hasidic. Your family wasn't, they were Hasidim, or they weren't?

**ABRAM:** They were Jewish, no, not Hasidic. Not like today's they have so many.

**INT:** Satmar and...

**ABRAM:** Satmarer, and you have Lubavitch. No. No. That town was not like this.

**INT:** Did you look forward to Shabbat, to Shabbas and to Yom Tov?

**ABRAM:** At that time, yeah. Because we like it. It was nice. And you know, in every house was prepared for Shabbas, you know? The lights, the candle lights in every house, and this gave a lot of nice things. And I remember was, we were all poor, no, Shabbas was a challah, was something to eat. And the whole week was not so to eat, no Shabbas, we did everything for Shabbas.

**INT:** Right. So what would you eat during the week, and how would it be different on Shabbas? What would your mother make during the week?

**ABRAM:** No meat. We can't allow meat.

**INT:** It was too expensive.

**ABRAM:** It was too expensive, and we are lucky we got just for Shabbas to buy a chicken. And during the week she cooked, today is all right, because today we got to watch the diet, you know, cholesterol. And at that time we didn't know about this. No, if she got to make a soup with a little bit of oil or shmaltz, she was happy, everybody was happy, you know? No, a whole week we didn't care; what my mother cooked was all right. No, for Shabbas, everybody tried to have a chicken, and to have some meat, and traditional, like to have a soup, you know? And of course I remember was very nice. My father came from shul, he made kiddush, and we taste the wine, everybody, was very nice, and I wish today the same thing, to tell you the truth. It was very nice. And this is in my mind till now.

**INT:** You can remember it.

**ABRAM:** This was a good time. A very good time. A very good time. The best time in my childhood was when I was young, I didn't know too much, and I went with my father to daven, or I didn't go daven and later he came home, and everyone was waiting for him, we sit by the table, he came home, "Gut Shabbes," made kiddush, and this was the best time in my life. Which I remember.

**INT:** Did you have a good relationship with your father?

**ABRAM:** Very good. Very good. And so with my mother. I still admire the name from my mother, and the name from my father. When Rita was born, this is my mother's name.

**INT:** What was your father's name, I forget. Your father's name, again, was...

**ABRAM:** Jacob. Yankel. Yaakov.

**INT:** Did you have any special friends in that town, anybody that you remember, anyone in particular, or...?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. I got a lot of friends. I still have from the same town, friends, which, now, I was in Israel, and I met a few from the same city, of course. I met a few. And they live, one lives in Nahariya, he's mein age, he remembers we went together to cheder. We remind the same thing when we went to cheder, who was the teacher. Was very interesting. And we went to other friends, which he is older, he's from 1914. He lives in Kfar Bilu, this is...this is a...not a city, very small place, how call it?

**INT:** A moshav?

**ABRAM:** A moshav. Kfar Bilu. The name is Kfar Bilu. Not far from Rehovot. And he remembered us from that town. And I got one, I got in Netanya, also from the same town. I was eight days in his house.

**INT:** Did you keep in touch through the years?

**ABRAM:** Yeah, we kept in touch. Mostly we kept in touch. No, when I came there, of course I called one guy, and he called everybody, and they knew that they are supposed to come, that I was there. So I saw everybody. I saw everybody.

**INT:** So now tell me why your parents decided to move to Warsaw.

**ABRAM:** Because that time in the small town was bad. And I was older, and my brother was older, and we start to make a few dollars.

**INT:** How old were you?

**ABRAM:** I was at that time fourteen years, when I start to work, and to make a few dollars.

**INT:** What did you do? How did you make money?

**ABRAM:** We got an uncle, my mother's brother was living in Warsaw. And he used to make for money such things to put money in.

**INT:** Wallets?

**ABRAM:** A wallet. And my brother Izaak, he learned him, the first one, to help him, and he caught the whole thing, and he was very fast, and he maked right away, let's say in that time, he made about twenty, thirty dollars a week. This was a lot of money. And I was three years younger from him. And later when he made already more than thirty dollars, and I thought, maybe I going to do the same thing, and I start to learn how to do it, and I catch the whole thing, and I made, let's say, when I was about fifteen years old, I made already also about twenty-five, thirty dollars. Zlotys, in that time. Not dollars. And this was a lot of money, and my father, my mother start to live better. Because I made a few dollars, my brother made a few dollars, and we brought it home, and this is the reason we moved. My father was not happy because, you know, when somebody is in a small town all the years, he was feeling very bad, and in a big town nobody knows him. And there, my brother knew him. In Warsaw so many people, and he didn't know nobody. No, for the household was better. My mother, of course, I brought home a few dollars, my brother, and we gave it to home.

**INT:** So who made the decision, if your father didn't want to leave, who do you think made the decision to go?

**ABRAM:** They made the decision, to tell the truth, made after this, my mother. My mother. She went before...and I went, no, no, my mother went, and she came back.

**INT:** She went by herself.

**ABRAM:** Yeah, and she came back to take my father and me. In that time, we left all together.

**INT:** She went to see what the situation was, and to...

**ABRAM:** And she came back, and she decided whether we going to move to Warsaw.

**INT:** She made the decision herself. Was it always like that in your house, do you think?

**ABRAM:** This was the main decision, what we made.

**INT:** This is a big decision, yeah.

**ABRAM:** Nothing more decision, big decision. This was a big decision, of course. We changed, you know, from so many years, my father was born in that city, and my mother was

born in that city, and everybody from us was born in the city. To go out from the city is a big decision. This was the main decision.

**INT:** Did you know anyone in Warsaw, did you know anyone there, relatives, or anybody who lived there?

**ABRAM:** Yeah, my mother got a sister there. She used to live from years before there. And later they came the other sisters, and little by little everybody...

**INT:** So she had family there already.

**ABRAM:** Yeah.

**INT:** Okay. But she decided that things were so bad, it was time to move.

**ABRAM:** Yeah, and to telling the truth, we got a few good years. If not the war, we would got a very nice life.

**INT:** It was a better living, there. It was the right decision.

**ABRAM:** We start to live better. I start to make more money, and I and that brother, we got a very good name, we could do things very, very good, and we got a lot of people, they want to invest money, we should do the thing, and they going to invest money, and they going to pay us. And this was in 1938, we got a very good years, like Sinatra sings the song, "In 1938 was a very good year." And we start to do it, I with my brother by myself, I and my brother, no, sponsors we got people they gave us money, they invest money we should do this and this, and they took away the work what we did, and they pay us. No, we got money, let's say enough to buy the leather things, what we got to buy. So they gave us, like today a check. And before, and we took the check, we went, and we bought material, and we start to do it, and little by little we made very good.

**INT:** Could you describe the house that you lived in, in I forget the name of your town.

**ABRAM:** Warsaw.

**INT:** No, the little city, and then describe the place you moved.

**ABRAM:** When we left, we lived in mein father's house. This was a yerusha. You know, a yerusha, from his parents, and we used to live years after years. In that time was not a moving, we could live hundreds of years in one place.

**INT:** Was it an old house?

**ABRAM:** Was an old house. No, in 1938 there was a fire, in the...

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

**INT:** Okay, could you describe what it was like when you moved to Warsaw? You were fourteen.

**ABRAM:** I was less than fourteen. And I start to learn how to do this, the wallets. And I learn very fast, and like I told you, I with my brother, we worked together. When I was alone, and I start to learn, the whole thing how to do with the wallets, I did it about half a year myself, by myself. And I, you know, I bought, let's say, for very small amount of money, this, and I made, let's say, this went by dozen. You didn't buy let's say a few...not let's say, a single thing. No, dozen. I make a dozen, and I sold a dozen. And they pay me for the dozen. You understand? And my brother, saw that I did it myself, he said, "Why you have to do it by yourself? Let's make together." And then we became partners. (laughs)

**INT:** But it was your idea.

**ABRAM:** Because he was older than me, he knew better than me. No, I wanted to show him that I know also. I'm fourteen years old, and I know how to do it, how to prepare, and I know how to sew and how to finish it.

**INT:** But was this after you moved to Warsaw, or before?

**ABRAM:** After. Before, I was too, before no.

**INT:** So what was saying good-bye to the town like? Was that hard for everybody to do?

**ABRAM:** For me, was not so hard. For my mother, was also not so hard. The worst thing was from my father. The worst thing. He, all the years, when he was living in Warsaw, he was crying about the town. He didn't get used to the big city. He didn't feel good.

**INT:** And you left your one brother behind there, who was married with the children, Sumer, he was still living there?

**ABRAM:** No, no, everybody was in Warsaw. In Zulkiewka, we didn't left nobody. Just friends. That's it. Nobody. From the family, nobody.

**INT:** So where did you move to in Warsaw? What was it like there?

**ABRAM:** We moved in, let's say my brother, the older brother, he bought, in that time he bought such a, for himself like, like today, he bought two rooms. You know? And in the two rooms, he took my parents and us in. Of course, we don't use to have everybody a bed. I remember since I was small, I was sleeping with my brother, and sometimes with the three brothers, you understand? Not everybody...

**INT:** So you were used to that kind of...

**ABRAM:** Separate. Yeah.

**INT:** Did your brother have children then? Sumer?

**ABRAM:** Which one?

**INT:** Sumer.

**ABRAM:** Sumer, yeah. He got two small children.

**INT:** What were their names?

**ABRAM:** Their names was born, one was Baruch, a boy, and the other one was Shlomo. Shlomele. And...

**INT:** So you all lived with your brother, to start.

**ABRAM:** At that time we lived all together. Mostly all together, in the same city. No, we lived in a different part of the city in Warsaw, and my brother. And of course, we came together every holiday, we were together.

**INT:** What was it like for you to move to a big city? It must have been very different.

**ABRAM:** For us, was good. For me was good, for my older brother was good. Because we made a living better there. And you know, when you have money, and your life is better, you're happy. Nobody was happy in the small town.

**INT:** Did you enjoy living in the big city, though, also?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. And you know what, the old friends which I told you I met, they remind me now, when I was in Warsaw, and they was in Warsaw, they were ashamed to come to me to tell me that I know you. Because they was feeling bad, because I was there like a...like a...like I would live maybe for ten years there. And they came, they didn't got a home, they didn't got nobody, and they was feeling bad, they remind me now. They saw me in the street, I was...

**INT:** A big macher, huh?

**ABRAM:** A macher. And I was dressed nice, like in a big city, and they were ashamed to stop me. And I told them, "I never saw you in Warsaw. If I would saw you, I would stop you. I wouldn't be ashamed. I would help you maybe with something."

**INT:** So you just found this out. Many years later.

**ABRAM:** This I find out now. Just now. I find a lot of things which, you're older, you're wiser. And they remind me that I was a big shot in that time, in their eyes from them. Because they didn't got this what I got. So the conditions for us was very good.

**INT:** So you adapted very well to the change.

**ABRAM:** Very well, I was happy.

**INT:** And your father?

**ABRAM:** My father was not happy till the end. To tell you the truth. He was not so happy.

**INT:** Was he able to work?

**ABRAM:** He was working. Later when we start to make a living, we didn't let him do nothing. Let him go to shul, and that's it.

**INT:** So you took care of him.

**ABRAM:** Yeah.

**INT:** And how was he with that? How do you think he felt about that?

**ABRAM:** He didn't feel good. No, he got no choice. He got no choice.

**INT:** How old was he by that time?

**ABRAM:** When the war break out, he was 55. He was young. His looks, I see him now, like an old person. He was a young age. He was in the fifties, in the high fifties.

**INT:** How was your mother with the change?

**ABRAM:** She didn't miss too much the city. Because she got two sisters in Warsaw from before. So she was happy.

**INT:** So what was it like in Warsaw? The Jews lived all together, or it was all mixed in?

**ABRAM:** Mostly even in Warsaw, was streets, a lot of streets which was living only Jews. Only Jews. Only the sanitation man which cleans was a goy. So, mostly Jews.

**INT:** And probably in Warsaw they had religious Jews and not religious Jews, which they didn't have in your small town. Is that true?

**ABRAM:** Even not religious, they didn't work Saturday. **This** I remember. This, on Saturday, nobody worked. I wouldn't say what would be later. Till 1939, nobody was working on Saturday. If somebody was working, he closed the window, nobody should see it.

**INT:** But people knew that other Jews were not religious anymore, but they just did it quietly.

**ABRAM:** They didn't want to do something, everybody should see.

**INT:** Not on the street.

**ABRAM:** No, mostly was religious Jews. They observed the Sabbath.

**INT:** The shops all closed.

**ABRAM:** Shabbas was closed. No store was open. Every Jew went to shul. Of course, there was a lot of shuls. So everybody went to shul.

**INT:** Do you know how many Jews lived in Warsaw then, or how many people altogether?

**ABRAM:** In Poland, only in Warsaw used to live 300,000 Jews. In the whole Poland was 3,000,000 Jews, till 1938, '39.

**INT:** So Warsaw was the biggest...

**ABRAM:** The biggest city was in Warsaw.

**INT:** And was there any anti-Semitism there? When you moved to Warsaw, do you remember any?

**ABRAM:** I wouldn't say there was not. No, not such a big, to make a big deal, no. According to what was later, it was nothing. It was nothing.

**INT:** Did you interact with the non-Jews in the town, the way you did with the...

**ABRAM:** They went their way, they didn't bother us, we didn't bother them.

**INT:** Did you buy from each other, though?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. They used to come to us, we used to come to them. Of course later, later, later, near the war, they, when Hitler came to the power, of course everybody knew at that time, no, you know, in Poland was, I don't know if you're familiar with it. He was the head from Poland at that time. Pilsudski. And he, when his life, the Jew got a good life. When he died, they start already, more anti-Semitism. After his death.

**INT:** When did he die?

**ABRAM:** He died in 1934. And then later, later, start a little bit. No, not too much. Not too much. Of course, later, when the war break out, and Hitler came to us, of course in that time anti-Semitism he was allowed. The Polish people helped a lot. This everybody knows. They know already now, they helped.

**INT:** But you didn't see the anti-Semitism before?

**ABRAM:** No, before, in my time, in my time I went all over Warsaw in the young age. You know, we didn't got cars, and I wanted to go from one place to another. We went you know, by foot. We didn't...

**INT:** No problem.

**ABRAM:** No problem.

**INT:** Did you wear a cap, you were still religious then, or you were...

**ABRAM:** A cap or not a cap. Nobody bothered me. No. Of course, I went with Jewish friends, even I start to went with girls, I went with Jewish girls.

**INT:** It would never occur to you to go out with somebody who wasn't Jewish?

**ABRAM:** No.

**INT:** Were you still religious at this point, when you were a teenager?

**ABRAM:** We were...I wouldn't say when I was a teenager, of course, I didn't do this what my father wanted to do. I didn't start, you know in the big city, he went in this shul, so I went to the other shul.

**INT:** Why? Why did you go to another shul?

**ABRAM:** Because it was more modern, more modern. And he went in such a place which in that time...was not for me, was not so good. So I told him, "Daddy, I'm going with my brother there."

**INT:** Okay. But what wasn't so good about it for you? Could you describe it to me?

**ABRAM:** It was, see, too religious for me in that time.

**INT:** It was like the small town. Your father was looking for...

**ABRAM:** My father, he wanted to be the same like he was in Zulkiewka.

**INT:** Now what made you go the other way with your brother? Was it your brother's influence, or you just started looking around at different shuls?

**ABRAM:** To tell you the truth, I regret it now. I regret it now.

**INT:** But you were going to shul. I mean, you were going to shul...

**ABRAM:** Why I didn't go with my father. Why I make tsuris for my father, you know? At that time, I regret it now. And I regret it, when my brother was alive, after the war, and I was talking with him, and why we did this, and we did it already, you know? And my father was not happy about this.

**INT:** Did you discuss it with him, or you just went? You talked to him...

**ABRAM:** No, no, I discussed with my brother.

**INT:** But with your father, did you discuss it...

**ABRAM:** No, no he was not alive already.

**INT:** No, no, but I mean back then, did you talk to your father and say, "I want to go to this shul now, I don't want to go to shul with you, I want to go over here"?

**ABRAM:** Yeah.

**INT:** And what did he say?

**ABRAM:** We went, no, he was not happy. We did it, and he was not happy. He was not happy, no, when we got respect, when we knew that my father is home already, or he goes from shul, we came home at the same time.

**INT:** I see. You tried to meet him.

**ABRAM:** That's right. When he came from shul, we were home already. This is the respect.

**INT:** But you did this together with your brother.

**ABRAM:** I with my brother.

**INT:** So what was different about this shul? What was more modern about it?

**ABRAM:** I went to shul where, where my father went the shul was not a chazzan, no, was a how to say, a baal koreh, a baal tefillah. You know, a baal tefillah. And I went, at that time was in Warsaw was a shul which Moshe Koussevitzky used to daven. And this what I liked, and I went to this shul.

**INT:** To hear him.

**ABRAM:** To hear him. And he is famous all over the world. And I went and we every holiday, I went with my brother in that shul. And my father wouldn't go there.

**INT:** He wouldn't go. He wouldn't go to hear him?

**ABRAM:** No. He wouldn't go because he likes the place where he went in a bais medresh, which they got a baal tefillah davening.

**INT:** A small place.

**ABRAM:** That's right. But Koussevitzky is not for him. And I went with my brother and mother. No, now I regret it. If I would got my mind like now, I would go with my father. I'm telling the truth.

**INT:** Why? So that you wouldn't hurt?

**ABRAM:** I regret why I did this. Because my father was unhappy in that time. And this has bothered me till now.

**INT:** You didn't want to make him unhappy. Because you said also when you were a child, and you would get in trouble, and somebody would say, "I'm going to tell your father," you didn't want your father to be hurt.

**ABRAM:** That's right. We got respect. You see, I grow up with respect for my father and for my mother. And my uncle and for neighbors. We learned in our home to respect an older person. You know, I never, till now, I can't sit when an old man comes in or an old woman.

**INT:** You stand up.

**ABRAM:** I have to stand up, even now. That I'm also not so young, you know? No, the respect for an older person. And this we got since the beginning, from cheder. To have respect on older people. (pause)

**INT:** Okay, this is a continuation of an interview with Abram Roitman. It's the seventh of November, 1994.

I just had a couple of questions about last time that I wanted to ask you before we continue. I was wondering if, you had said that education wasn't that important to your father. That he wanted you mostly to learn to daven. But he sent your oldest brother, Teyvel, to yeshiva. He sent him away.

**ABRAM:** This is because, I'm going to tell you why. Because I know from what my mother told me, and what my father told me later, when Teyvel went to cheder, when he was small, is the beginning of the week was always you know, Sunday. Saturday, I don't have to tell you what Saturday. So he went Sunday to cheder, and a rabbi at that time, he went to the biggest already. And he taught him, he show him that this week goes this parsha, from Chumash. And in the same day, he knows everything. So when my father came in the middle of the week, he told him, his name was Yankel, Jacob -- "I have nothing to do, because I show him once, he knows already, the other kids are supposed learn a whole week, and he knows right away in an hour. He knows everything." And he gave him the idea. For him, in this place in Zulkiewka, that I'm the biggest. There's no more. The best thing is find him a yeshiva. So he recommend Zamosc yeshiva.

**INT:** And your father sent him there.

**ABRAM:** And then my father did the best what he could, he sent him. And I told you before, my father was very, not rich. He got to pay, and to send a kid, even at that time, it cost money, no, he did it, because he was the older son, and want to make from him somebody. And this is the reason why he sent him to Zamosc. And later, for the rest, because we were little, and after him, we just, he wanted just we should know how to daven.

**INT:** But that was another question I had. When he sent Teyvel to yeshiva, so then he became not religious, from that experience.

**ABRAM:** He became there. In the yeshiva.

**INT:** Right. So do you think your father might have been afraid to send the rest of you away to yeshiva, because it might happen to you, too, or...

**ABRAM:** No, this I wouldn't say, because he never told us about this. No, this is the reason, when he was a zeman there, a year, and when he came home, he was a different person. And nobody expect, the whole city knows him. You know, in a small city, he was a good student, so everybody know. In a Saturday, he went to the biggest, which they learned Torah, he should say something for them. And he went all places, and everybody was happy about him, because he was very smart, and an open mind, and he knows a lot. And this was the problem, if he maybe wouldn't send him to Zamosc, in a smaller place, maybe he would have come out different. This is very hard that I should predict.

**INT:** But when did you know what happened to your brother?

**ABRAM:** When he came for Passover home. You know, they sent him, according my knowledge, they send him after Pesach, a year before, and he came back, he's supposed to come back, let's say the second year, for Pesach home. And he came home. And he came home in that time a different kind of person. He got peyos, he cut off, and specially in Poland every Jew, and every religious Jew, used a hat, a special hat, maybe you saw already. And he got such a kind of hat. My father wears such a hat till the end of his life. And everybody, religious Jews went in

such a hat. So he changed the hat. He took off the peyos, and he became a different person. And this is what my father didn't like it at that time.

**INT:** Was it discussed in the house? What happened after that? After he came home for Pesach, did he disappear then?

**ABRAM:** To tell you the truth, I can only prescribe (describe) which I know from later. And that time was not Pesach, it was like before Yom Kippur. Everybody was crying, my father was crying, he was ashamed. He didn't want to go to the shul. And he was a different kind of person. And this was my father lived through, because he was ashamed for the rabbi, for the rav in the shul, for the shammas, for you know, for the whole community. Because everybody, they think Teyvel kommen, and they gonna have a drosha, and we gonna hear something from him. And this was a disappointment, at that time, and my father used to cry. So he told my father, "Don't cry, after Passover I leave." And this was. And he left.

**INT:** And he left. And he went to, where did he go, do you know?

**ABRAM:** We never saw him alive more. Now we know what happened. Now, my father didn't know. Now, I know.

**INT:** What happened to him?

**ABRAM:** He went to Russia. They send him to Russia. He went to Warsaw from Zulkiewka. He was at that time, he was, of course he was young. He went to Warsaw, and he became a member of the Communist Party at that time. And he worked for them. And...he went to prison. They caught him, with other people, he went to prison. And in that time...

**INT:** When was this?

**ABRAM:** This was in 1926.

**INT:** So who put him in prison? The Russian government?

**ABRAM:** No, no, no. He went, the Polish government, because he was anti-Polish. He was a communist. And the Communist Party from Russia at that time, took him out. They make an exchange with Polish, in that time in Russia was Polish people, which they were against the Czar at that time. And for Polish, they were fighting for Polish, Poland should be independent. So they went to prison in Russia, you understand? And so they make an exchange. They took him out, and they took him to Russia, and they gave Poland other people, which **they** demand. And...maybe it's too early, I should start to tell what, when the war break out.

**INT:** No, but just finish what happened to your brother.

**ABRAM:** What happened to my brother, he was there, he became a big man. You see, I regret it because I didn't bring the picture, the last picture, what they sent me. His grandchild took out,

after the falling from the Communism, we know everything what happened to him. Before we didn't know. And she opened the whole...how you call it in English, the whole...

**INT:** Archives?

**ABRAM:** Paper. Like this, the whole...

**INT:** File?

**ABRAM:** File. And she sent me, because I'm his brother, and this is a grandchild from my brother, she is now in Israel. And this is the reason I went, when she came from Moscow to Israel, and I went to see her. And they killed him.

**INT:** The Russians.

**ABRAM:** The Russians, the communists, Stalin at that time, arrest him.

**INT:** After World War II?

**ABRAM:** Before the World War II. And his, against him, that he was anti-Russian, he was a spy.

**INT:** But he was a communist.

**ABRAM:** He was a communist. Stalin did a lot of this, you know?

**INT:** Did he kill him because he was a Jew?

**ABRAM:** It's very hard for you to understand. The best people which made the revolution together with him, he sent to prison, and he killed everybody. So he killed millions of people. After Hitler, was the murderer Stalin. And he killed my brother.

**INT:** What year, do you know? Do you know what year your brother died?

**ABRAM:** Now I know.

**INT:** What year was it?

**ABRAM:** They killed him, he was arrested in 1936, in 1936, no in 1937, and...in July. In July. And in September they killed him.

**INT:** In '36. Well, he must have been married then, and had children.

**ABRAM:** He was married, he got three children. No, this is a long story, because when I was here already, I went three times from America, to see my sister-in-law, and she didn't know at

that time that he was killed. After, after the fell from Communism, we know everything, you understand?

**INT:** Okay, so maybe we should wait.

**ABRAM:** When I left Poland, in the war with my older brother, Izaak, we were happy, maybe we going to go to Russia. In Russia we have a brother, and we going to be saved.

**INT:** Okay. So let's not get to that yet. Maybe we'll wait for the rest of the story of your brother.

Another question I had was, if you could describe a little bit, describe a little more for me your two brothers, Sumer and Izaak. What were they like?

**ABRAM:** Sumer at that time, he was a quiet, very quiet man. He didn't belong, he didn't want to belong to no party. He got married, and like I told you, with a girl from the same city. She used to live in our home, with her mother. Her father died. And we got, like I told you, my father got a house from his parents, and we took them in, was a mother and a daughter in that time. And she was very nice, and my brother fell in love with her, and they married in Zulkiewka, and later, like I told you in 1932, they left Zulkiewka for Warsaw.

**INT:** What did your brother do?

**ABRAM:** He was a shoemaker. And he got a good job, he made some money, and they lived not bad in that time. And later when we came, he was already established a little bit there. And this was my brother. He was a very nice man. He helped us out a lot. Of course, he was against what my brother did. He was in contrast to him, he was mad at him, because he thought that he became a big shot, and he doesn't want to hear from us. And this is not true. Now, we know. He couldn't, because in Russia, the Communist Party, he told him what to talk, and what to think. Not to think by himself, what the Party wanted. And...

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO)

**ABRAM:** And this is not true.

**INT:** But then he blamed your brother.

**ABRAM:** That's right. And...

**INT:** Was he religious, your brother Sumer?

**ABRAM:** No, to tell the truth, he was not, he didn't go to shul, nor did he work any holiday, he didn't work. He didn't work. He sent, I remember he sent, when the boy was born, this is, the

name was after my sister-in-law's father, Boruch, he sent him to cheder. And the house, my sister-in-law was kosher, and the house was kosher, because this was the way of life. We didn't know others. Kosher. No, he didn't go every day to shul. On a holiday, yes.

**INT:** What about Shabbas? Did he go on Shabbas?

**ABRAM:** Shabbas he went. And I, and Izaak, my older brother, three years, he, when he...became let's say, about fifteen, sixteen years, he start to belong also, to the Communist Party. Because he wanted, he took a sample from my older brother. And everybody knew him. A lot of people knew my brother. "Oh, you're Teyvel's brother. You got to belong to us. You have to belong to us."

**INT:** I see. So they influenced him.

**ABRAM:** So he start. And I didn't know nothing about this, so he pushed me also. He took me in. And I had...

**INT:** You were still very young. You were still...

**ABRAM:** Of course. I was at that time maybe fourteen years, and I didn't know, and he pushed me in.

**INT:** He took you to meetings, or what?

**ABRAM:** He was older by three years, so I didn't go to meetings with him, I went with small, my age. And somebody came, an older guy, and he gave us different lessons at that time about Communism, about Lenin, about this and that.

**INT:** What did you think of it? Do you remember?

**ABRAM:** In that time, to telling the truth, at that time, I start to believe. I start to believe. And my brother believed also.

**INT:** Because they thought it would be better economically for people if they lived like that?

**ABRAM:** Yeah.

**INT:** And you agree with that?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. Because, in the books, Communism is very nice. Now, the practice is very bad. The first day, when we came to Russia, we saw this is not like in the books. It was a very hard life. You have no rights for nothing. You have no right to talk. You have to keep quiet. We have to eat, it's good. If not, we have to keep quiet. Don't say nothing, because if you're going to say something against the government, you're right away in prison. This was the problem.

**INT:** So it wasn't as nice as it was in the books.

**ABRAM:** So when we came, we saw this gehinnom, and of course, we start to think different.

**INT:** When you were going to these meetings, did your father know that you and your brother were going?

**ABRAM:** He didn't know. He didn't know. He didn't know.

**INT:** Were you afraid he would find out?

**ABRAM:** No, no. He didn't know. No, he could, he kept us near him. He couldn't do this. Because we got to go outside. We became the...how to say, he was dependent on us.

**INT:** You were making the money. You were supporting him.

**ABRAM:** We making the money, and we gave him.

**INT:** And you were out in the city.

**ABRAM:** We went out. So he didn't ask too much. He told, only thing that I remember till now. I remember till now, and I spoke with my brother till he died, till the end. Now I have nobody to talk this, because it is a long story, nobody could understand, even Rita what I gonna tell about the politics. She didn't, it's not for her. So my father used to say, "I don't know. Mein luck, I have no mazel, my all children went of a way like go to the devil. Devil's way. Not the right way." This he told us in 1938, before the war break out.

**INT:** Because he saw by then, had you left religion by then, or you became totally communist?

**ABRAM:** No. He thought that his all sons, went in a bad way, not what he wished, and like he went the way to the devil. Tzum tavel. In Jewish, is tzum tavel. To the devil. And of course at that time, I thought, what he talking? Nonsense. We didn't pay attention. No, after, in the war, and my brother was alive, I told him, "You remember what our father said? And this is true. Take a look. For what we struggle, for what my older brother struggles? And gave away his life for nothing." And this is what he meant. Tzum tavel. The way of the devil.

**INT:** But Sumer didn't do that.

**ABRAM:** No. Sumer was different. He was against us also, what we doing.

**INT:** He was not political at all. He wasn't involved in any kind of politics?

**ABRAM:** Not at all. Not at all. He was a quiet person. He liked his family. He got a nice wife and two children, and he was very, very, very conservative today. We were the rebels.

**INT:** Could you describe what your life was like in Warsaw, as a teenager? And what you were doing? You were in the business with your brother.

**ABRAM:** As a teenager, was very nice. I enjoyed in that time. Of course, I was young, and what we made a few dollars, we gave my mother, and she managed. We came home. Was clean, we got something to eat, and of course we were happy. Was a happy life. And was better for my father, and for my mother also. We bought nice to wear. We bought my father, you know?

**INT:** Did you live in an apartment?

**ABRAM:** We lived in an apartment in Warsaw. It was very hard. Later, we rent an apartment. And we got a good life till the war, because we start to make some money, and we went little by little, like I told you. We went into business, I with my brother. Which we did a thing which a lot of people was against what we're doing. Because according to them, this was not the right way. We should become self-sufficient, you understand? And make more money. And we gonna become rich in the future. And this a lot of people is against.

I was talking with my brother. We've got to do it. If not, we're going to have no life at all. And this last till 1939.

**INT:** So you were in this business, making wallets. And were you doing other things, or it was just wallets?

**ABRAM:** No, this. And this was a good business. My older brother want to go into later, to put some money, and to go with us. And we would do it.

**INT:** You were doing very well, then.

**ABRAM:** Yeah. And the war break out. We got to leave everything.

**INT:** Okay. Before the war, just a few more questions. Were you going to school at all at that time?

**ABRAM:** No. To telling the truth, I didn't go to school, because I was young, and I didn't got the, how you say, the...I didn't got the opportunity to go to school because I got to make a few dollars.

**INT:** Because you were working. So you never got back to school.

**ABRAM:** You know what? My sister-in-law, Sumer's wife, she went to a school to learn Yiddish, how to write and to read. She teached me. How to start, and I catched this very fast. She gave me the alphabet. Aleph, bais, gimel, dalet, and later I put myself a sentence, until, and thank G-d for her, that I'm writing now, and I know Yiddish.

**INT:** She taught you how to read and write.

**ABRAM:** She told me, and my head was good, and I caught it right away. And I'm writing Yiddish. I'm...

**INT:** Reading it? Can you read it?

**ABRAM:** I'm reading, of course. I read a lot of books now in Yiddish. I became a very good Yiddish writer.

**INT:** But she taught that to you.

**ABRAM:** She told me this. And the same with my brother. No, not the school. We teach this, I and myself, and my brother Izaak by himself. Until now I write it, and I read Yiddish.

**INT:** So what were your days like in Warsaw? So you were working all day? What did you do?

**ABRAM:** We didn't work all day. You know, on a Saturday and on a Sunday, we got off. And we went in the city with...different people. We went, let's say, like today, we got, we went all together by bus somewhere. So we spent the time very quiet, nice.

**INT:** Who were your friends? Who did you get friendly with there in Warsaw? How did you meet people and...?

**ABRAM:** We meet people the same class as we were. The same.

**INT:** Also working and not...

**ABRAM:** The same. Also working people. To telling the truth, in that time I was fourteen years old and then was a girl, which she remembers even my parents. I met her after the war in Canada. And she told me, and she got a wallet what I made it for her, and she got it still, she kept it. And she remembers my parents at that time. I met her, and they used to live in Canada, in Montreal. And I used to live in Montreal when I came from Europe. And this kind of people we got till the end.

**INT:** You stayed friends with them.

**ABRAM:** Till before the war. We spend very nice. We read a lot, because I wanted to read. You know? I was very little, and sometimes I took a book bigger than me. (laughs) And they ask me, "What you gonna do with such a big book?" "Don't worry. I'm gonna read."

**INT:** What kinds of things did you read? What were you interested in?

**ABRAM:** I used to read about different kinds of things. I used to read, let's say about writers, big ones. I used to read Upton Sinclair.

**INT:** In Yiddish? They had him translated in Yiddish?

**ABRAM:** In Yiddish. And in that time he wrote a book about, was two anarchists. I don't know if you're familiar with this. And he wrote a book, "Boston" in Yiddish, and I read a few books of his. And later I used to write Maxim Gorky. He's a Russian writer. I used to read Anna Barbie, a French writer.

**INT:** So all of these were translated into Yiddish and available in Warsaw.

**ABRAM:** In Yiddish. And I know a lot of things only from books. Not my father told me, not nobody. If no, I wouldn't know nothing, because my father didn't want to talk about this kind, you know? So this what I know, I know only from books, which I read at that time.

**INT:** Was that your own influence that did that?

**ABRAM:** This was mine.

**INT:** That was just coming from you. It wasn't coming from your brother or...

**ABRAM:** And my brother the same thing. He used to like...I more than my brother. Because I was more interested to know more. And this what I know, I did by myself. And to telling the truth, between you and me, about politics, I know too much. Sometimes I wish I would know a little less, it would be better for me. It would be better for me. And a lot of time I'm happy, because I have very little education, and I got only a few years from cheder, which I know how to daven, nothing more. Nothing more. And this was I know from books, which before the war, and right after the war. When I came to Canada, of course I was young, I was thirty years old. So I used to read a lot. Jewish books. I went special to the library to find out. Even I came to...America. I went to the library to find out if they have Jewish books, and I find a lot of books, Jewish. No, now I stopped to read Jewish. I'm telling the truth. Because now I want to better my language, English.

**INT:** So now you're reading English.

**ABRAM:** I'm reading now English. Just a paper which is a Jewish paper, comes out a week, I buy the paper, because I wanted to see what's going on in Jewish life. Because from the books I don't know nothing about Jewish life. And I'm interested in Jewish life, what's going on in Israel.

**INT:** But you get the paper in English, so that...

**ABRAM:** No, I got it in Jewish.

**INT:** Oh, you get it in Yiddish.

**ABRAM:** The other things, I don't need. I like, I'm reading now English, mostly English books. And I improved my English. I improved much better my English. Because I didn't go, when to go to school, I didn't go to school, but to learn English. Like now, people coming, they're paying, they're going to school. I went right away to work. Rita was two years old when we came. And I came without money.

**INT:** What other things did you like to do when you were a teenager? On your days off. What would you do?

**ABRAM:** I liked to play ball with the boys. Sometimes with girls we played different kinds of games. And when we came together, you see, in my, when I was a teenager at that time, we came together, we talk about useful things, not about stupid things like now. And we play games which everybody got something from the games, you know? Not just that they should go buy. Was useful for us. We learned, from everything we learned something.

**INT:** Can you give me an example?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. We went let's say, now, this is from the same organization. You got such a people which they know much better than I at that time, and they talk different things, and we wrote something, let's say a book, and we discussed, after a page, we stopped, and we discussed about this page.

**INT:** What organization was this?

**ABRAM:** This was the...the communist. The young. They called it Pioneer. Pioneer. The beginning. You know? And of course, was very nice, very useful, and I learn a lot. I learn a lot.

**INT:** About politics? Was that what you were reading?

**ABRAM:** About politics, about people, and about different kinds of government. You know?

**INT:** This is a group for teenagers?

**ABRAM:** This was teenagers. We wanted to know everything.

**INT:** Was it boys and girls?

**ABRAM:** Boys and girls. And of course, we spent, you know, in that time, when I was in this time, was also a boy with us, and later he became a writer. His name was Shulstein. Moshe Shulstein. Very famous. He went to Paris, and he died already. And I have his book till now. He wrote a poem at that time. And we discussed about this poem, and he was a teenager, he was my age at that time. You know he became later a writer, and a big one. So we learn from each

other, you know? No school, from each other, we learn. And I know a lot of things, what can I tell you?

**INT:** Could you describe for me, what your belief in G-d was at this time, when you were a teenager, and you were getting involved in the communist ideology?

**ABRAM:** It's a big question. This is a big question. In that time, in that time when I was very young, of course I didn't got my mind, if I believe or not. I did it. I went to school, I went to cheder, I went with father to daven, and the holidays, and Shabbas. No, when I became more independent, we start not to believe. I'm telling the truth. Not to believe.

**INT:** How did that happen though?

**ABRAM:** You know why? To tell you the truth why, is very hard to prescribe. I'm not, till now, I'm not against, I'm not against, I respect people which they are religious. And I thought to myself: I would like to be like these people, religious. Why I'm not? And I can't change myself. I'm telling the truth. I talk a lot of times, even to my brother when he was alive. Why we are not like this, like people, come Saturday, they know it's Saturday is Saturday. They're shomer Shabbas, and that's it. And it's good. And I couldn't do it, and my brother couldn't do it, because we went in the wrong way. In the wrong way, you understand? We turn away from the way which my father wanted.

**INT:** But what was it? First you said that, when you were in the little town, you were in the shul with your father. And then when you went to Warsaw, you went to the big shul. You went to a different shul from your father, and you decided to go there because you said, I think you said, that you wanted to hear Moshe Koussevitzky. But there was more than that, though, right? It was more than just hearing Moshe Koussevitzky, it was more...

**ABRAM:** No, this was, after of course, then we went out from the shul. We came home. We got the Shabbas meal. No, after the Shabbas meal, we went out and we went, and we met the people which they are the same, you understand? We didn't go with my father after to Mincha.

**INT:** Right. You came home for kiddush and the meal, and then you went out.

**ABRAM:** We come home at the meal.

**INT:** And then where'd you go, to the communist meeting, yet, or you...?

**ABRAM:** No, was not meetings. We met let's say, and we talk a little bit, and everybody went his way, and let's say I have a friend, or a girlfriend, or my brother, maybe sometimes we went together, because I was not a big difference from him.

**INT:** But you didn't come home in time for Mincha or anything.

**ABRAM:** For Mincha, no. To Mincha, no. Only for Shabbas meal, after the shul.

**INT:** And then you were gone for the day.

**ABRAM:** Gone. And this, we became not religious. I'm telling. No, I regret it now, because I would like even now to change myself.

**INT:** But what was it, can you describe to me how that happened, how that process happened for you?

**ABRAM:** It's very hard to prescribe, and I will try. I will try. To telling the truth, my background, my background, from when I was born till I got older, was with my parents, and go and do the same things what my parents did. And the worst thing was later, when we start to be older, and we go, we went a different way. And this spoiled us. We turn away from things religious, things, to things which have nothing to do with religion. And this was the bad thing. No, my background, like we say in Jewish, I'm used to a Jewish life. I can't take, let's say, I shouldn't be between Jewish people, I wouldn't be alive. I must have Jewish people around me. Even now. When comes to holiday, I'm going Yom Kippur, I'm going to Kol Nidre, I'm going Yizkor, I'm going, let's say Yom Kippur night when it finish, how you call it?

**INT:** Neilah.

**ABRAM:** Neilah. This I'm used to it. No, to sit a whole day in shul, this I can't.

**INT:** But back then, at that time, not now, but at that time, when you were a teenager, even before you were a teenager, when you were a child, did you ever question whether G-d existed, or did you just do the practice, you just did it because that's what you did?

**ABRAM:** When I was a teenager we discussed, and the right answer I didn't got it. I wouldn't dare to ask my father this. No, between boys and girls we talked. And we came to the conclusion nobody knows. I was not against, and I was not for. And we let it go. We didn't think about it. We didn't think about it. Matter of fact, when my daughter was born, I wanted to send her in a Jewish school, Rita. And my wife, you know my wife Eva, was against at that time. "What she needs? A maidel, what she needs a Jewish school? What she gonna teach, Torah, this, that?" Nu, I didn't fight with her, and I wanted to do it. If it would be a boy, I would fight. You see? I would fight. I would send him to school, to a yeshiva, and I would do it what my father wanted to do with me. No, she was a girl, so I didn't care too much, you know.

**INT:** Okay. But to go back to when you were a teenager, could you describe the process for me of how you went from being shomer Shabbat, did you continue to be shomer Shabbat, but you went to the meetings, or did you, little by little you drifted away, or how did it work?

**ABRAM:** When I was a teenager.

**INT:** When you were a teenager in Warsaw.

**ABRAM:** It went away.

**INT:** Little by little, or the whole thing?

**ABRAM:** No, we didn't care. We didn't care. We took this life better than the others.

**INT:** So you stopped with Shabbas and you stopped with, I see.

**ABRAM:** We stopped. To telling the truth, when I came to America, when I came to America, this is very interesting. I was like I'm now. No, I didn't know that in America everybody works in a Saturday. 90% works on Saturday. And for me was strange this. Because in Poland, when I was till the war, if I am religious or not, no Shabbas, nobody worked. And when I got to work Shabbas, was for me not so easy. I thought to myself: My goodness, if my father would be alive, he would see me work on Shabbas, he would tell, my goodness, what is this? Nu, this was America, I don't have to tell you. Not I, everybody used to work on Shabbas. And this is the reason I am what I am. Now I regret it that I am not different. I can't help it now. I don't like to lie, and I wouldn't do a thing against somebody's feelings. I wouldn't hurt my feeling, and I wouldn't hurt somebody's feeling. You know, you understand? I'm now, I'm doing things which I like to do between Jewish people. To telling the truth. **I can't be without Jewish people.** And I should know what's happening. I listen every day in New York is a Jewish station, the news from Israel. And when I'm here, and I thought, Oy, what happened there, and I don't know. I have the radio there, everything was going on, no, special, about Israel, I can hear home in the Jewish news. And this I miss, just the few days when I'm here.

**INT:** You have to have that news.

**ABRAM:** I have to have it. I have to have it. And Sunday is also half an hour Jewish news, which I am like, G-d give the Sunday, I have to listen. I have to listen.

**INT:** (pause) Okay. Could you tell me what things were like in Warsaw in the thirties as far as anti-Semitism, as we're getting on closer to the war in 1939? Could you describe for me what it was like? Did you experience any anti-Semitism in those years?

**ABRAM:** In some places, let's say, in some places, maybe if somebody went in a Polish neighborhood, maybe something happened. No, I used to live in an exclusively Jewish neighborhood. Nobody touched me. Because if somebody would touch me in a Jewish neighborhood, **he** would be killed, you know? Because we were young.

**INT:** You had your friends.

**ABRAM:** And we got power. And...and I can't say that I was in such a situation to be afraid to go out for something. Of course, we heard that somewhere in the other side of Warsaw, something happened. No, very small things. Not specific.

**INT:** Nothing dangerous to your life.

**ABRAM:** No, not dangerous. No, if somebody came, and he start something...

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE)

**INT:** Okay, did you know that Hitler was coming to power in Germany? Did people hear about that in Poland? Did you know what was going on? Could you explain what that was like?

**ABRAM:** Hitler came to power in 1933. This I know. And how he came to power, I don't have to describe this. No, of course, when he came to power, we Jews in Poland start not to be happy, because of this. Because I know Hitler book, what he gave out, Hitler's Mein Kampf, and what he talked about Jews. We know about this. I knew at that time about this. Of course, we start to regret it, what was the reason, and why they let him go to power. Was a reason why.

**INT:** The economy, right?

**ABRAM:** Other things. If, in that time, he actually came to power, like here according to the Constitution. No, before he came to power, what he did, he start to do, of course was strange to everybody. And especially to us Jew. And this was the beginning in 1933, the beginning when he came to power, he didn't do this what he did later. After a few years, he start to...you know, to fight against Jews. Don't let them be open the stores, don't let them, they break the glasses from the window. He start little by little. Of course. We know about this, and we were against why they let him go to power in that time. And he went to power according to democratish way.

No, at that time, I don't know if you, maybe history you know. At that time was Chancellor Hindenburg. Marshall Hindenburg. He gave him, he gave him over the power. And this was the mistake. And at that time, if the Communist Party would be, go together with the Socialist Party, they could prevent him to power. No, they didn't. They didn't.

**INT:** They stayed divided.

**ABRAM:** Yeah, they were divided, and Hindenburg gave him the way to power, from him to him, and he started what, you know, what I have to tell you? And this was the mistake, from both parties. Start from the communists and from the democratish.

**INT:** Were the Jews affected in any way in Poland at this time, was there an outbreak of anti-Semitism?

**ABRAM:** We start to be affected. We start.

**INT:** Okay. How did that happen?

**ABRAM:** Of course we start. Because any little thing they said to us, "The Germans going to come. They gonna teach you a lesson." You know? Always, they start to remind us what's going on. And in Poland start to also, I forgot the name, a party which was sympathetic to the Germans. Anti-Semitic party. And we saw, we saw that this was coming. We were afraid. Of course we were afraid. We were afraid.

**INT:** Did you talk about it with your friends or with your family, and what you should do?

**ABRAM:** Of course. I didn't talk with my father about this. I'm telling the truth.

**INT:** You didn't. Why not?

**ABRAM:** No, we talk between friends. My father didn't understand too much about politics. To telling the truth, when he waked up, he knows to go to shul. Nothing about politics. He never, he never listened to a radio, we never got a radio, he never, he read a paper, he didn't know nothing was going on in the war.

**INT:** So he had no idea.

**ABRAM:** No, he had no idea.

**INT:** Did you want to warn him, or talk to him about it at all?

**ABRAM:** Maybe, if I would now, I would talk to him about it. At that time he got no interest, because he wouldn't listen to me. He wouldn't listen. "Ah, what did you know?"

**INT:** He wasn't interested, or he just...

**ABRAM:** He wasn't interested. But not him, others like him, they wouldn't be interested to listen. No, we knew that was coming. We knew. Some day we got to go. To run away.

**INT:** So how were you preparing yourselves? You were thinking about running away?

**ABRAM:** We was not prepared. No, especially in 1938, in 1938 was a year before. The war brokeed out in 1939. And a year before, of course I went from Warsaw to Zulkiewka.

**INT:** Oh, no, you didn't tell me about that.

**ABRAM:** To see the city in that time. I told you, in 1938, the whole city burned down. So my mother got a sister in a village not far, seven kilometers from Zulkiewka. So she went there, and I went to my mother, to see her from Warsaw, with my brother Izaak. And at that time we went there, and I met a girl, and my brother met a girl. He became Chasan-Kallah. You know?

**INT:** Both of you, or just...

**ABRAM:** Both of them.

**INT:** Where was this, in the little town?

**ABRAM:** This was in Zulkiewka. No, they used to live in a village. No, they came always, seven kilometers in a Shabbas, we went, you know, we didn't go by bus or by train.

**INT:** You walked.

**ABRAM:** We walked. And this was very easy, to go about seven kilometers by young people, is nothing.

**INT:** So you knew these girls before, or...

**ABRAM:** No, I didn't know her. And my brother actually, when the war break out, so we went back to Zulkiewka, and he took the girl, and he got married with her. And I was, I didn't take mine, because I was something mad at her, and I regret it why I didn't do it, why I didn't take her. And she, she got killed.

**INT:** How old were you then?

**ABRAM:** I was twenty years at that time. Twenty years. And of course, in that time, when I was, when the war break out and I came back to Zulkiewka, I was a few days and the Germans came in.

**INT:** Okay, but wait a minute. When you went back to the town, it was in 1938, when there was a fire.

**ABRAM:** This was 1938.

**INT:** And then you decided not to marry this woman.

**ABRAM:** No, no, we were only acquainted a little bit. And I went back.

**INT:** Oh, and you went back. But where did your brother go? Your brother got married.

**ABRAM:** No, he got back with me.

**INT:** He went back with you. He married her later?

**ABRAM:** No, we left the girls, and later we got interested in them. We wrote a letter and they answer. That's it.

**INT:** Okay. So now you're back in Warsaw. And it's still 1938, and what happened then?

**ABRAM:** 1938, of course I told you, I was working with my brother. We were more interested in business than in politics at that time.

**INT:** It doesn't work with Communism!

**ABRAM:** We decided enough is enough. And we didn't know the whole story about Communism, but we find out later. Nu, we wanted to make some money, we wanted to be dressed nice. I was dressed nice, my brother was dressed nice, and my mother used to live better, and my father. Of course, we made a holiday, was nice. She got the money to prepare. And we started to live better, in that time. This went on a year. Till 1939.

Till 1939 was not bad. And when the war break out, then start the problem. When the war break out in a Friday, the first of September, in 1939, was a Friday morning. The war break out. Was a very bad day. And a very bad Saturday. And the Jews couldn't go to shul, were afraid. No, still they went. My father went. It was...was very bad in that time. Now, a week later...

**INT:** What happened to you when the war broke out? On September 1, and you were in Warsaw, how did it affect you? Did it affect you? Did the Germans come into Warsaw already?

**ABRAM:** No, no, they didn't come right away. No, they send just their airplanes, they bombed Warsaw. And we got to go to shelters, and in the night was dark. That start the problem. This for me, went by a week later, a week later, was very bad, and was in that time, was in the Polish government, was a how do you say, announce[ment] that young people should leave Warsaw. They have the right to go. And my brother, Izaak, he didn't told me that he preparing with his friends, something to go away. And I caught him in time. And I told him, "You not going without me. I see that you're talking with them, with them, about going away. If you going, I'm going."

**INT:** Why didn't he tell you?

**ABRAM:** He didn't want to tell me.

**INT:** Why?

**ABRAM:** Because I was the youngest one. And he told me later, I ask him later why. And I thank him I'm alive. He told me, because he was afraid that I wouldn't be used to a bad life. I would not know where to sleep, and not to eat in time, and not to drink in time, and I was the youngest one, and everything prepared my mother. I didn't know, this is true. I didn't know how to make for survival a cup of tea. This what I know, I learned during the war. In the war. So this is the reason, and I told him, "You're not going. If you're going, I'm going." And I went with him. We left the second, the next Friday. We left in the morning, we didn't say good-bye to the parents.

**INT:** You didn't tell them you were going away.

**ABRAM:** Nothing. And we left.

**INT:** Why didn't you tell them?

**ABRAM:** Because they would start to cry, and to take them was impossible, because in that time, of course, today, about 55 years old is not an old man. At that time, and in that time it was very old. Where we going to take them? And what they going to do? How they going to walk? So I went, I left with my brother, and we left behind mein father, and my mother, and my older brother Sumer.

**INT:** Did you tell him?

**ABRAM:** No. We didn't tell him either. And this I have in my mind till now, why we didn't. No, there was not time. To tell you, there was no time. If we wouldn't do this, I wouldn't be alive, and my brother wouldn't be alive.

**INT:** Did you go with a group of people, or it was just you?

**ABRAM:** We go, half of Warsaw went. Young people went.

**INT:** Oh. Jews.

**ABRAM:** Jews. Mostly Jews. Mostly Jews.

**INT:** What do you mean by young people? What age group would you say?

**ABRAM:** The age was like I was in that time, let's say about eighteen, nineteen, till thirty. No, no more.

**INT:** What if they were married with children?

**ABRAM:** It was very hard for them.

**INT:** They would bring their wives and children?

**ABRAM:** They left them. The best way to go away was with people which was not married, and they were young, and I took something, and later I throwed it away, because it was too heavy to carry. You know, when you take something, you think, Ah, it's not so bad. No, when you walk one mile, another mile, everything start to be heavy. So I throw everything away.

**INT:** Was Yitzchak married then?

**ABRAM:** No. We both was not married. This is the reason, what we couldn't told, if I told my brother, they would start to cry. "Where are you going, and why are you going?" And we wouldn't go. You have to do in such a situation. Of course, it was not nice, till now I regret it

what I did. I didn't say good-bye, I didn't kiss my mother, and I didn't saw her since then. No, we got to do it. We did it. Maybe it's wrong to say we got to do it. We did a thing which is not...is not nice. We saved **our** life. You know? We didn't save my mother's life, or my father's life. We saved our lives. No, if we wouldn't do this, we wouldn't be alive. Because in such a situation, nobody knows what to do, if it's good, if it's bad. Sometimes it turns out good, and sometimes...

**INT:** Why did you, how did you know to leave? Was it becoming clear that Hitler was going to kill you if...

**ABRAM:** No, no, the Polish government. He didn't say, he didn't mean in this that somebody going to kill us. In that time, they didn't mean this. They meant only the young people should leave Warsaw because will be an invasion of Warsaw from the Germans. It's better to leave. And we did it. You see, in the same day, if I would like to go back, they wouldn't let me.

**INT:** Once you're out, that's it. You can't go back.

**ABRAM:** That's it. We got to cross a bridge. And we went over the bridge. And back, if you would like to go back, that's it. You wouldn't do it.

**INT:** So there was like this exodus of people out of the city.

**ABRAM:** Exodus from the city.

**INT:** And where were they going?

**ABRAM:** We going, nobody knows where. We went.

**INT:** East? You want to go east?

**ABRAM:** We went, mostly we went east. Because...

**INT:** Because the Germans were coming in from the west.

**ABRAM:** They come from the west. And east is Russia. So we went near to the border to Russia, you know? It was a very bad day in that time. When we left Warsaw, not far from Warsaw the airplanes start to cross around us, and how many times we got to...

**INT:** They were shooting at you?

**ABRAM:** They going to shot at us. And they did it. They bombed, they shot. It was terrible. No, we went. You know? We went.

**INT:** What did you bring with you?

**ABRAM:** What?

**INT:** What did you bring with you?

**ABRAM:** Nothing. I got this what I wear. It was a hot day, a light suit, and I took a few shirts, and later, I told you, I throw it away. I took more pants, I throw it away. No, I will have just in a suit with a shirt, and that's it.

**INT:** No coat.

**ABRAM:** No coat, nothing. And we left everything behind. Everything behind. We came, and the first was Friday. We came the first day we came in a Jewish place. I remember like now, we went to a shul. We went to a shul, and people brought us something to eat, and Saturday, we were staying in the shul, and Saturday night we left the city. It was a small place. And we left the city, we went into a bigger city, and the bigger city was bombed. It was on fire. And we went around and around to escape from the place. We saw the war was already, is not a joke.

**INT:** It's there.

**ABRAM:** It's there. Of course the people left, was not so easy.

**INT:** Were other people joining you as you're going east?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. From other places. They came. And a lot of people, they couldn't do it. They left behind a lot of people which were older. They left behind. And what happened, I don't know.

**INT:** Your parents couldn't have gone with you, because they couldn't walk all that way.

**ABRAM:** They didn't go.

**INT:** They couldn't have. They...

**ABRAM:** No, and you see, and I with my brother, when we went. And he told me, "You see, younger than my father and my mother, they couldn't make it. How would my father make this, or my mother?" Of course. And so at that time we were happy we didn't take them. No, who knows, nobody knows what happened. Nobody knows that Hitler gonna kill six million Jews. This was unbelievable.

When I was in Russia, and I was in Siberia, nobody think about this. I thought, Oh, my father is at home, my mother is home, and why I, and I'm in Siberia. You understand, we left two different kinds, and I thought, they make better there than I'm making here. Why we did it? Why are they there? And nobody knows. Of course, later we know, that we did the right thing, we did. We did.

**INT:** Okay, so you're traveling on the road a long time? How long were you on the road?

**ABRAM:** We're traveling on the road a few weeks, till the Russians came. Till the Russians came. When the Russians came in...

**INT:** The Russians were coming into Poland to fight the Germans?

**ABRAM:** To Poland. You know, I start to tell you. When we left Warsaw, we went east. And later, it was very bad, and my brother told me, "You know what? Maybe we're going to go back to our home, where we are born. You have a girl, I have a girl there. Maybe it'll be better." So, I thought, let's go there. A lot of friends went with us, and they didn't make it. They went back, and they, I never saw them alive. And they got killed somewhere, and we didn't know where. So we went back, and we didn't go by train. We went little by little. We came to Lublin, to Lublin. In Lublin, I got my brother remembered that we got my father has a sister used to live in Lublin. And we went there, and she was alive, she gave us something to eat. And we wanted to go, like I told you, back to Zulkiewka. And little by little we came. We came to a village, what I told you, what I met the girl which I met there. The village was called Maidan.

**INT:** Can you spell that?

**ABRAM:** M-a-i-d-a-n. Maidan. And there was also a sister. My mother had a sister was living there. And my girlfriend, which I told you I met her in 1938, was also in that village. So I came to that village, I thought, we're lucky. We not alone now. Was, we came also on a Friday. I think this was the third Friday. And mein aunt made a Shabbas, we got a Shabbas still like it's supposed to be, with cholent, with everything. And we thought, oh my goodness, we came back to life. We were lucky. And it took four days. The Germans came in. And when the Germans came in, start, everybody was afraid. They start to take people to work. You understand, you went on the street, [beckoning] Come on, come on, come on. It was no good. What can I tell you? And later, I went from the village, I thought, what am I going to stay in the village? Let's go to Zulkiewka. Maybe there will be better. We went there and my brother's girlfriend used to live in Zulkiewka, and of course we went there, was better than the village. Anyway, and this took, let's say a week, and we knew that the Germans will go away, and the Russians are supposed to come in this place. And this was true. They left after two weeks, the Germans left, and this was between the Russians and the Germans, they made up, they gonna take, half Poland, and they gonna take half Poland.

**INT:** The Warsaw Pact.

**ABRAM:** Yeah. And they took, let's say, in that time ost, east, part of east Poland.

**INT:** The Russians did.

**ABRAM:** The Russians. And a part of west, the Germans. So we went, in that time we went with the Russians already.

**INT:** Because you were all the way in the east.

**ABRAM:** We were. We were all the way in the east. So, at that time, this was the best time for us, because the Russians, they didn't kill. They helped us. They told us, everybody which wants to go, has a right to go. If we going to give them buses, we're going to give them everything. And everybody can go. Of course, the young people went, and the older people didn't go. What they gonna do? What I gonna do? I gonna leave my bed, I gonna leave this? And they didn't go. And so we went. And we went into the territory in that time from the Russia.

**INT:** You went into Russia.

**ABRAM:** Yeah. With them.

**INT:** With the army.

**ABRAM:** The army. They gave us the right to go. And they gave us the buses, and they gave us cars, and we went. We went there. And what can I tell you? And when we came to Russia, is again started different kind of tsuris. We didn't got what to eat. Was very bad.

**INT:** Were you with your brother, still?

**ABRAM:** I was with the brother, yeah. And my brother took the girl from Zulkiewka, and later they married. They married.

**INT:** So he took her into Russia.

**ABRAM:** Into Russia. And he saved her. And thank G-d, she died, after Rosh Hashanah she died. After this Rosh Hashanah she died.

**INT:** What was her name?

**ABRAM:** Dobe. And they left three children. Of course they are big ones already. One name is after my father, the son, is after my father Jacob. And the third one is Nachum, after her father's name, my sister-in-law's father's name. And they got a daughter, is after my grandmother's name. Sore. Bubbe Sore. They called her Sarah. He named her Sarah. She was born in Russia, in Siberia, when they send us to Siberia.

**INT:** Okay, so you got into Russia, you were with your brother, and your brother's girlfriend, and, I guess a lot of other people?

**ABRAM:** Of course.

**INT:** So...

**ABRAM:** They gave us in that time, we got the sign that we're going. They took us like we're going into Russia, we're going to work there, we're going to be with the Russians together, you understand? And when we came, they was waiting for us, there was music, they took us not bad. No later we start to work and to see what's going on. Was the problem. Was the big problem. And the war goes on. It was very bad.

**INT:** So they took you to a work camp? Where did they take you?

**ABRAM:** They took us to work. To work.

**INT:** And you had a place to stay and everything.

**ABRAM:** Yeah. They gave us a place to stay, and gave us, let's say, you belong here, we belong...different places.

**INT:** What were you doing? What kind of work?

**ABRAM:** We were working in a place which they made different things to...was the war, at that time. We made different things for tanks. Was very hard work, very dirty work. And they gave, of course, was better than the German, to telling the truth. Was not good, but better than German. We got not afraid, nobody beat us up.

**INT:** You got food. Did you get food?

**ABRAM:** We got food. We got not enough. No, we got something, you know? And later, they took everybody. I don't know for what, and they took us to Siberia. From the places.

**INT:** Where were you originally? Do you know what...

**ABRAM:** I was, originally I was, the name of the place where they send us was the name Kirovograd. Kirovograd.

**INT:** Where is that near?

**ABRAM:** This is near Kiev. Near Kiev. And...

**INT:** Why did they send you to Siberia?

**ABRAM:** This was from Stalin in that time. He gave the permission not to keep us in the cities, and they took everybody.

**INT:** Jews and non-Jews and everybody?

**ABRAM:** No, most that went were Jews. Maybe was a few Polacks. A few.

**INT:** Okay, but they took the people who had come from Poland, and they sent them all to Siberia.

**ABRAM:** To Siberia, different kinds of places.

**INT:** How long were you in Kirovograd?

**ABRAM:** In Kirovograd I was six weeks. And later they send us to Siberia, and Siberia I was two years. Cold, we got to work in the forest.

**INT:** Did you go with your brother too? And his wife?

**ABRAM:** Yeah.

**INT:** Did they have any children yet?

**ABRAM:** And there was born, the way to Siberia was born my brother's first child, this Sarah, like I told you. The girl. She's now 54 years old. She lived through. She's the oldest, my brother's daughter. And now she's 54 years old.

(END TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO)

**INT:** Okay, so you were in Siberia in 1940. And what were you doing there? What did they have you do there?

**ABRAM:** And there they brought us to Siberia. It was in the summertime. They took us in the summertime away from the places, and they brought us to Siberia, and Siberia in that time was summer, was in July. Of course was very bad. The food was bad. And they gave us a place where to stay. Now around was the forest, nowhere to go, no what to do. We thought: this is the end of our life.

**INT:** What did you think when this was all happening?

**ABRAM:** We thought that's it. This is the end. We're gonna be, we're gonna, the circumstances was very bad. The food was very bad. In the forest, the fly, the comeras, was in the millions. They, when you open the mouth, you got a full mouth with the comeras. It was very terrible.

**INT:** With what? I'm sorry.

**ABRAM:** How you call it?

**INT:** Some kind of insect?

**ABRAM:** Insect. The comera. Comeras.

**INT:** Flies?

**ABRAM:** Flies. Were a lot of flies. The people what they did, they went with such a [face covering] they couldn't go to the faces, and we came like this with nothing. So they came to our faces, to our mouth, to the eyes. Was terrible. We got used to it, what can I tell you? A person can get used to everything. And of course, was very bad.

**INT:** What was it like where you were living? What kind of place did they put you in?

**ABRAM:** They give us like, they call this a barrack. A place which people which were sent before us, they built this, for **them**. And later when we came, they sent them away somewhere else. Russia was a prison, till the end of Communism. Was like a prison. Nobody knew what's going on inside. Nobody. Because nothing, everything was all right. No, for the world, the whole world didn't know nothing what's going on, till the end of the Communism. What we know now, is the whole Russia was a prison. Where we went was before us prisoners. And they start to build. And later they left, they took them somewhere else, and we took over the few barracks. What they started.

**INT:** So it was like bunks?

**ABRAM:** Yeah, like bunks they start to build. And inside was very dirty. What can I tell you?

**INT:** It was all men in one? It was men and women, it was men...

**ABRAM:** No, they gave us, they gave us, let's say, a few families in a apartment. A few families. And we got to manage where I should sleep, where my brother, where there, where there. We, between us, we didn't fight. We all was in a bad situation. And so the life was very bad.

**INT:** What did you do for clothes and food?

**ABRAM:** We got no clothes. Till we got the clothes which we need, we went like, what can I tell you? We went like, in shmattas. We got nothing. We got no shoes. And the summer was not bad. No, after, a month later, they start a winter there. And the winter is coming there in September start the winter. We came in July. So we got July/August, and September start the winter. And when the winter start is right away cold and cold and cold. This is a nine-month winter there. And of course the winter was very bad. Very bad. What can I tell you?

**INT:** What did you have to eat?

**ABRAM:** They made, they made, was like a restaurant, what they did it. The government supplied us with the food. No, they gave very little. And they didn't got what to cook, what can I tell you? The transportation was bad. To bring there something is very bad, and so we didn't

got to eat. And the situation was very bad. What can I tell you? A lot of people died. Especially the older people. The younger people, the stronger people went to work. And they gave little by little something. They gave a few hundred, they call it on the gram, I don't know how to describe, for half a pound for a person bread for a day. A half a pound. And this you have to...

**INT:** Live on.

**ABRAM:** To live on. And the half a pound bread, you could squeeze it and make it in one bite. Anyway, what can I tell you? The situation was very bad. The older people died, the young ones went to work. No clothes. No, later, later, after a year, we got something. They gave us something to wear. And to prescribe how we lived through is very hard. I don't know myself.

**INT:** What kind of work did they have you do?

**ABRAM:** We went to the forest. The forest was the kind of work, we put the trees, down.

**INT:** Cut them down?

**ABRAM:** Cut them down. And we put, everybody got, let's say, how you call it, a hack?

**INT:** A saw, or a hatchet?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. And to take off, to make from the tree pieces, what they told us to do. And that's it. And this was the work.

**INT:** That's what you did for two years? You did this for two years?

**ABRAM:** I did this for two years.

**INT:** What were you thinking and feeling then? What did...

**ABRAM:** We think that we gonna die there. I didn't think that I gonna be...alive and I gonna have a family, and I gonna see somebody, I will be in America. Of course, we didn't think. That's it.

**INT:** Because you saw people dying around you, you thought that you would, too?

**ABRAM:** A lot. And then we thought that this is the end of our life. And they said, the Russians say to us, they say to us in Russian: "Here you gonna die. If you're not gonna used to this life, you gonna die." And we knew about this. A lot of people died. Older people died. No, the younger ones stayed alive.

**INT:** Did you talk to your brother about this? What was he doing?

**ABRAM:** We all together. Of course we talk.

**INT:** What did you talk [about]?

**ABRAM:** We talk. What happened to us. You know, what happened to us, maybe if we go the other way, would be better for us. No, who, in that time, who, nobody did expect this. That this would happen, the war would become, and the Russians will be in Poland, the Germans will be in Poland. And we didn't know where to go, and we went in the wrong way. If we go to German way, maybe it would be worse. So, in such a situation, the decision is very hard to make. And this is what I was alive, is not that I was smart, or not smart. G-d made this, and that's it, what can I tell you. I have to tell you now. I was alive, is maybe G-d did it for me.

**INT:** You don't think it was your own strength, or...

**ABRAM:** No. I wouldn't say. Not that I was smart, or the other was not smart. This is the way of life, if we got a life, and...of course after the war was also not good. They let us go, and we didn't know where to go.

**INT:** Wait. Before we get there. Did you ever feel like giving up, or you just kept going every day the same?

**ABRAM:** No. No, no, no. I didn't feel to give up. Special, I'm a person, I'm talking about me, which in the worst time, I'm not giving up. I'm trying to adjust even to a bad life. I tried my best to adjust even to a bad life. What I have to eat, I eat. If I have not, I have not. And I was young, and this helped a lot. If I would be older, I wouldn't be alive. No, this was, I was young, and I lived through everything.

**INT:** But how did you do that? How did you get that coach to do that?

**ABRAM:** How, I don't know how. To say how, I don't know. Is very hard to prescribe how. The situation was bad. No communication, no hear from nobody.

**INT:** You didn't know what was going on in Europe?

**ABRAM:** We knew, no, not too much. Not too much. What's going on in Europe, we didn't know.

**INT:** You knew the war was still going on, I guess.

**ABRAM:** The war was still. So we didn't know. We didn't know what's going on the other side world. And in Russia, in Russia we got a big discipline. You didn't, it's not allowed to talk too much in that time. You couldn't ask too much questions. And that's it. It was very bad.

**INT:** Who was in charge of you? Did you have soldiers guarding you or something?

**ABRAM:** There were soldiers from the Communist Party, and they did this, what the Party told them to do.

**INT:** Did they treat you, how did they treat you?

**ABRAM:** They treat sometimes not good, sometimes not bad. You know? This depends on the individual, how I adjust myself, you know? I was very happy guy, and I liked to sing, and all of a sudden I start to sing a Jewish song. And mein, how you say, that which he got to do with us, he liked that song, and he start to dance. They're nice people, the Russians. I wouldn't say. He started to dance, and he told me, asked me in Russia, "What kind of song is this?" I told him, and this was, "Oy, a Rebbetzin, Oy iz dis a Rebbetzin." Maybe you heard in the Jewish, such. And he liked this song. And when he told me, when he saw me, "Abrasha, devie me a rebbetzin." Devie me a rebbetzin, this means, sing me a rebbetzin. In Russian the word "Give me" is devie me.

**INT:** So you were learning Russian when you were over there.

**ABRAM:** Yeah, and I was singing to him. And later, I start to be acquainted with him. He helped me out. He helped me out, he gave me some things which he didn't give nobody.

**INT:** Was he Jewish, or you don't know?

**ABRAM:** No, he was Russian. No Jewish. He was a Russian, no he likes, I was a happy guy, and I used to sing the Russian songs, and he liked my singing, and we build up, I with a few guys, we build up such a club. We came every night. And he came in. In Siberia we got no radio, nothing, and we used to sing, and we used to dance, and he was dancing with us. And this was, in that time, I was happy.

**INT:** That helped you.

**ABRAM:** This helped me a lot. This helped me a lot. And no, when I came home, is my brother's child didn't got nothing. We didn't got nothing to give her to eat. And I, one time I thought to myself: I got to do something. What can I do? And I thought to myself, No, I'm not going every night. I'm going to stop. And he sent for me, that man, which he told me devie a rebbetzin, that I should sing for him. And so somebody came, "Abrasha," and in Russian they called me Abrasha. Abram is Abrasha. So I told the guy that I feel bad. Maybe he can help me. And he came back, and he start to ask me, what do you need, maybe he can help you. So at that time I need a little bit of sugar for mein, for the little kid. She hasn't got nothing. So he sent me in a few pounds of sugar. And this helped me a lot for the kid. You understand? I made that special, that I don't feel good, because I need something. And later he helped me. He gave me other things to eat. To have for the baby. Otherwise we didn't have nothing. The baby would die. And this was a trick for myself, and I did it. And so we lived through. We lived through. What can I tell you? It was a very hard time.

**INT:** How long were you there?

**ABRAM:** Two years.

**INT:** And then what happened?

**ABRAM:** And then we got free. Was very hard to go out from there.

**INT:** What time of year was it when you got out?

**ABRAM:** This was in 1942.

**INT:** But what season was it? Summer, winter?

**ABRAM:** This was the beginning of, the beginning of winter, no the end of the winter. The beginning of summer. The end of the winter. So we left, we left, I and my brother and my sister-in-law, with their child. She was a year old already. We went, we didn't buy a ticket. No, they let us go, you know? Where we got a place, is good, if not, is not. So we went to a station and we went in that time, how you call it, Uzbekistan. And the main city in Uzbekistan, they called Tashkent. So we went to Tashkent. We went to Tashkent, we came to Tashkent, thousands and thousands of peoples, came in one place. Was a park. And everybody was in that park. The one thing was good, it was summer, summertime. Every, with kids, older people, younger people. Everybody was in that park.

**INT:** How did you decide to go to Tashkent?

**ABRAM:** We decided because we went, we asked people, where is a warm place. Because we got already enough cold weather. They told us Tashkent is warm. Uzbekistan is warm.

**INT:** So you didn't think to go back to Poland, yet.

**ABRAM:** No, no. We didn't got this in mind. So, what can I tell you? In that park, we didn't got where to wash, to change. I don't want to tell you, everybody got millions, millions of lice. What can I tell you, this was the worst time. And a lot of people got sick.

**INT:** And all these people in this park, in Tashkent, they were refugees, they were...

**ABRAM:** We slept in the park. We got no place where to go. The government didn't give us nothing. Nothing.

**INT:** What did you do to eat? What did you do for food?

**ABRAM:** They'd given us nothing. They tried, mostly nothing. Everybody was looking for some food on the cities. We went to find something. To beg some people. If somebody got money, they bought something. Nobody got the money. Was very bad. Was very bad. Till somebody came from the government, in that park, and was a guy which told us, who wants to

go to work. They called the...village people which they worked in Russia, they called it cohorts. Maybe you know about this. They made, let's say, a few people from the village, they got together, and they made such a, they call it cohorts. They work together, and what they did, it went for the government. To work in such a cohorts. And we gonna give you something to eat. We gonna give you this, where to sleep. So I right away decided I'm going with my brother. We're still young and we're going and we'll work. We're gonna do it. And so we went, and we came to that cohorts. They gave us mostly nothing. They gave us just, just a little bit of flour. You can make yourself. No, I couldn't do it. No, good was my sister-in-law, which I told you. My brother took her from Zulkiewka. She made a few, she was a woman, she made a few rolls from that flour, and baked it, and we got something to eat. And it was time which we got nothing, and was very bad.

I remember I went once to a cohorts to look for food. I came in, they told me they have nothing. They got only onions. And they gave me a few onions, and I start to eat the onions. I couldn't eat because I start to cry. What can I tell you? Was a very bad time. And later, later from that cohorts, if we would stay there, we would die, so little by little we went in a bigger place.

In a bigger place, I started to work, I and my brother, in such a big plant, which they built. They built a sugar factory, for sugar. And we start to work there.

**INT:** This was still in Tashkent?

**ABRAM:** No, this was not far from Tashkent, in a smaller place. And there, we worked let's say, by year, also very, very bad conditions. No, still they gave us something to eat. They gave us something to eat, was a restaurant in that place. They gave us in the morning they gave us something, and for lunch something. We couldn't die, and it's very hard to live, and we couldn't die. And no, later, if somebody, it depends on the individual, how you adjust your life, better or worse. And the time was very bad. What can I tell you?

**INT:** Was this worse for you than Siberia? The situation in Tashkent?

**ABRAM:** Yeah, it was better.

**INT:** It was better.

**ABRAM:** Better. The one thing was, the weather was good. Because the weather was like a enemy for people. We got not used to so cold. We got not the right clothes, you know, for there. It was better than Siberia. We didn't regret Siberia. In Siberia, we got, is a song which we sing, that somebody is going out from Siberia alive, he seldom somebody gets out alive from Siberia.

**INT:** But things were still very bad.

**ABRAM:** Very bad. And the war went on. Still there was the war, you know. And telling the truth, the people in Russia got not better than we got. They were hungry the same like we. We did things more, if they would do a thing like this, what we did, they would got killed. And for

us, they have a little respect, because we, in that time, they couldn't tell me that I'm a Russian citizen. No, that I'm from Poland, you know. They have to respect me more. And I got more right than the Russian people in that time. Because they respect, I'm not a Russian guy, I'm from Poland. No, the situation was very bad. And little by little we worked night and day, night and day, just to get something to eat.

I went to work with my brother, I went to work for a whole night where they promised they gonna give us soup, in the middle of the night, about 12:00, how many I could eat. And this was a good deal. And we went to work for this. And, no how many soup you can eat? No bread. And the soup was like water. What, you think the soup like today?

**INT:** But you worked all day for that.

**ABRAM:** And I work a whole night for this. And in the morning, for breakfast was again nothing. What can I tell you?

**INT:** How long did that go on?

**ABRAM:** This went on, this went about two years. About two years. A lot of people die. And later, when the factory was built, we got lucky. Where I was working with a group, which, when something came into the place, we got to take it away. You know? So we got the privilege to work, in not special hours. No, when something came to us. To make the sugar came the, how you call this. When you make the borscht, the bulkes.

**INT:** Beets. Sugar beets.

**ABRAM:** Sugar beets. This came. And when this start to come, we ate this. We ate this even raw. And later we find out we can cook this. And when you cook this, is not so bad. You can stay alive and eat this. So we start to steal. In Russia you can't buy it. We got to steal this. And if you steal this, and they gonna catch you, they gonna send you **again** somewhere. And this was the trick how to do it to stay alive.

**INT:** How **did** you do it?

**ABRAM:** To tell you the truth, I was young, and I make friends with everybody. This is my luck in life, which I can go and get friends even with the devil. Until now. I have so many friends, which nobody could get along, and I'm getting along with them. And I got a lot of friends there, and they help me out. Even the policeman which was looking not to steal, he was acquainted with me, and he told me, "You can take something. And go home." This was my luck.

And later when the factory start to produce the sugar, we was looking for a little sugar. You know, we never got a little sugar. So I start again a lot of mein girls which I knew from before used to work inside. So I make with them up, "Give me something, and I gonna take it out, and

we gonna sell it. And what I gonna make some money, we gonna split." And this was the way of life. I start to build such a business.

**INT:** Yeah. Sugar business.

**ABRAM:** What can I tell you? Today, is good to laugh. And they brought me little by little out. They was working inside. And I got us in a small place, and later I went, I took it out, because I told you I was acquainted with this and with that. And they let me, they watched like this (spreads hands over face with fingers open). Behind me. Others couldn't do this, and I did it. And this was, later I sold this, and they got something, and I got something. And later I bought myself what to eat. And this was the way I survived.

**INT:** What about your brother? What was he doing?

**ABRAM:** My brother, when I was working by this, good you asked me, he got sick. All of a sudden he got sick. He got this, how you call it, in Russian, typhus.

**INT:** Oh, from the lice. Typhus.

**ABRAM:** In English. Typhus.

**INT:** He got it from the lice?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. And he was sick, and he told me that he wants to see me. I went to the hospital, and he got no money in that time. What can I tell you? And I told him that I'm doing this and this, and I'm going to help him with some money. Anyway, I helped him what I could, and we both survived. We both survived. He couldn't work in that time. No later, he, start to make -- he was very handy -- he start to make boots. For the big people. They gave him material, and he cut it, and he made for them boots to wear it, and then he made also not bad for himself. He got to eat. They gave him something, and he survived also with this work.

**INT:** And the little girl?

**ABRAM:** He was like a shoemaker. He was a shoemaker. And he worked for the big people. And they gave him the material, and he did for them. And I was, this was my job. Because this was for me better. I start, my business grow bigger and bigger and bigger, and I made a living from this.

**INT:** Who were you selling it to?

**ABRAM:** The people. You wouldn't believe it. In that time, a roll was a hundred rubles. A roll. And if you worked in a factory, you made a hundred ruble a month. Now, how can you survive? How can you survive? And when I sold this sugar, in that time was a kilo, there was for the kilo...

(END TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE)

**ABRAM:** And a roll was a hundred rubles. So for me, when I let's say, I got a few kilos sugar a day, I can survive. So I could buy such a roll. I could buy, let's say in that time, a few peaches, you know, for the money. If you got money, you can get it. The government didn't got nothing. No, on the black market.

**INT:** You'd have to buy on the black market, and sell on the black market, because...

**ABRAM:** The government store was empty. And this was the life until came 1950, 1945, and the war stopped. The war stopped. Was a celebration in that time for everybody, and everybody was happy. And after that, when the war stops, we start to knew what was happened in Europe. In that time we find out, what the Germans did to Jewish people. (pause)

**INT:** Okay, when we left off last time, we were talking about the end of the war. But I want to go back and ask you, if you can try to explain how you think you got through those four years, the two years in Siberia, and the years in Tashkent. What gave you the strength to get through that, do you think?

**ABRAM:** This is what I told you. In Siberia, when only I was lucky, I was young. If I would be older, it would be harder to go through the whole thing. I was young, and I didn't lost hope in that time. That I will always be there, or I gonna die there. I got much hope in myself. And I believed that the time will come, and I gonna go out from there.

**INT:** You believed that. You didn't think you were going to...

**ABRAM:** I didn't give up.

**INT:** Because you said earlier that you thought when you got there that this was going to be it, that you weren't going to get out.

**ABRAM:** We talked like this. We talked like this. You know, when you come from a big world to such a place, which I never was, I never think that I gonna be in Siberia. Because I didn't do nothing wrong against nobody. No, this was a war, and everything in wartime can happen. And when we came there, like I told you, was just forests, nothing more. They build a few barracks, which before people, which was standing there, you know. They were working, and later they sent them away. They hold the barracks for us, you know?

**INT:** So in the beginning when you got there you felt...

**ABRAM:** We felt, of course we felt very bad, because from a place, from cities, what I was all the years, to be in such a place, and of course I didn't imagine that, we didn't know what the next day will be. Nobody.

**INT:** But you didn't give up.

**ABRAM:** No, we didn't give up. Special I didn't give up.

**INT:** What would you do when you would get very low or depressed about the situation? How could you help that?

**ABRAM:** This would be very bad. If somebody would be depressed there, and especially in my age, to give up. I know a lot of young boys, they give up. This is true.

**INT:** What happened to them?

**ABRAM:** Which they couldn't take it, so they gave up. They was just lying on one place, and that's it. They gave up. They didn't wash themselves, nothing. If they got food, is good. If not, they was lying. And this was the end. No, I was not that type. I didn't give up.

**INT:** So you saw this happening around you. You saw people...

**ABRAM:** Of course.

**INT:** How did that make you...

**ABRAM:** Of course I was feeling very bad at that time, because I didn't want to die in Siberia. Because in that time I thought I left parents, I didn't know that they gonna be kill. We didn't talk about this in 1940, you know? And I didn't give up. And I hoped that some day we gonna go out from there. And like I told you, I knew that I got a brother in Russia, maybe I gonna meet him, and he gonna help us. And we didn't know nothing what happened with him, also. And I didn't know what happened with my parents in Poland. And I was only with that one brother, we were together. And...of course for me was good, what we were together. So we could talk.

And one thing I must tell you: I got in one day, in the middle of the night in Siberia, this was in a very cold night. I went to sleep early, and I got a dream. And in that dream, I didn't told nobody after awhile. And the dream was this: that my father got killed in Warsaw, from the Germans, and they put him in a grave together in a big grave, you know, with other people. And this was my dream in that time. And I didn't want to told my brother about this, because in Jewish, in the Jewish history, if you have a bad dream, don't think that this happen. No, put it in a other way, in a better way. He's gonna live long. My father gonna live a long, long time. Because this is all just a dream. And I went on with that dream a few months.

**INT:** You kept having it.

**ABRAM:** Yeah, I kept having this, and I didn't told nobody. And later I thought, what I gonna keep my dream. I have to tell my brother about that dream. And when I told him about that dream, you know what he told me? That he knew that what I was dreaming that he knew,

because he met, when he went before they send us to Siberia, he met somebody which came after us from Warsaw. This was, let's say, a year later. And my brother met that guy, and we used to live like neighbors, not far from each other. And he told him, that my father got killed on the streets from Warsaw. And they, and they put him in a grave with a lot of people, and this was true. This was a dream what I got. And I start to cry, and my brother start to cry, and I didn't want to tell him about the dream, he didn't want to told me about that guy what told about my father. You know? We kept both secrets.

**INT:** How long had your brother known that, then? Before he told you.

**ABRAM:** He told me that he knew this before, about half a year before. And he didn't told me, and I didn't told him. And when I explain about my dream, he explained me that he knows about it, and this is the true, what happened to my father. And still, I didn't lost hope. Of course, it was a very bad time. We lived through a very bad time. Hunger, cold, what can I tell you. A lot of tsuris, like we said in Jewish. And we didn't lose hope.

**INT:** And you think that's because why? Why do you think you didn't lose hope?

**ABRAM:** Excuse me, what is the question?

**INT:** Why do you think you didn't lose hope?

**ABRAM:** Why, because until now I don't lose hope. If anything happen. What I went through lately, let's say, about fifteen years ago, when I start to feel bad about my condition, my heart condition. And I went through an operation, open heart surgery, and when I went to the surgery, I went with so much hope that I was not afraid, and I was, I can say now I can say that I was sure, that everything will be alright. This was after my first operation. And the second, when I went to the second operation here in Philadelphia, four years ago, my doctor said he never saw a patient like I am. I went to the operation like somebody go to a wedding. With a smile. And I was joking with the girls, when they took me, and they gave me the last needle, I should fall asleep. And I told them, that after the surgery I gonna come to see you, and I gonna take you out. And I was joking with them. And then I fall asleep, and when I wake up it was over the operation. The operation was over. And this is my whole life, I'm such a type, that I don't lose hope. And even a bad situation, I see something good, also.

**INT:** Were you like that as a child, before you went to Siberia? Growing up, were you also like that?

**ABRAM:** I was always like this.

**INT:** Always like that. Even before any troubles happened.

**ABRAM:** I was, in my family, according, my all brothers, I was such a type which I was always with a smile, I liked to sing, I liked, you know, to be happy. Even in a bad time, I made myself happy.

**INT:** So this is a strength that you had, you think always, maybe.

**ABRAM:** This, no, no. This, I think that my nature, what I got, and this war, and this gave me hope. My nature gave me hope I gonna survive, and of course I hoped to see, when I gonna come home, I gonna see the friends, I gonna see the family. Even I knew in that time that my father is dead. And I didn't know that my mother is dead.

**INT:** Do you know exactly what happened with your father?

**ABRAM:** After the war I find out. After the war I find a person, which he was, when my mother, with my brother, Sumer, they went, when Warsaw, when the Germans came into Warsaw already, they left Warsaw to Zulkiewka, to my mother's, you know, where we were born.

**INT:** Hometown, right.

**ABRAM:** And they used to live in that village what I told you, not far from Zulkiewka, Maidan. And when the Germans took all the Jews to send them to the death camps, they took everybody together from the villages, from around the village, around Zulkiewka, and they send them in 1942, they send them away all to Sobibor. This was maybe you heard of Sobibor.

**INT:** Not very many people got out of Sobibor.

**ABRAM:** Not many, a lot, mostly died. And they make an uprising against the Germans in that time. And the main from the uprising was the son from that rabbi which was in Zulkiewka. That rabbi, what I told you. He used to know my brother. His son was there, the head from the uprising against the Germans in Sobibor. And in 1942, this was in May, they took all Jews from Zulkiewka, from all around Zulkiewka, from the villages, and they send them to Sobibor. And at that time went a family which only one son was left. Because they was looking for a shoemaker, and he was the youngest one. And the father and the brother told them, "Go, say you are a shoemaker." And they pushed him, and he says to the Germans, "I am a shoemaker." And they took him to the, for work, to make shoes, or to repair shoes. And the next day he told me after the war I find him. That the next day, and he used to know my family, he used to know my brother Sumer, and he told them the next day nobody was alive already.

**INT:** Where did they take them?

**ABRAM:** They killed them.

**INT:** In the towns?

**ABRAM:** No, they killed them in Sobibor. They took them there, and they killed them.

**INT:** So is this your mother?

**ABRAM:** And this was my mother, and Sumer, with his wife, and the two small children. And the next day, he told me, nobody was alive. No, he was lucky. He was alive. He died a year ago in Israel.

**INT:** They took everyone from those two towns. And your father was already, had been killed in Warsaw.

**ABRAM:** My father was killed already, like I told you. When the Germans came. He died, or they killed him, exactly, nobody knows exactly.

**INT:** So what years was that? Maybe when they first came in, in 1939?

**ABRAM:** No, this was in 1940. The Germans came in in 1939.

**INT:** Right. Your father was killed in 1940.

**ABRAM:** No, he was killed in 1940.

**INT:** And your mother?

**ABRAM:** And my mother was alive. No, my brother, Sumer, went, left Warsaw with his wife, with the children, and they went to Zulkiewka. And from there in 1942, he was alive till 1942. Because he was a shoemaker, was working in the village.

**INT:** And your mother, too.

**ABRAM:** And my mother, too. And I met a goy after the war. Which he told me that he bought a...he bought a, my brother used to have, I remember, before the war he made for himself such a...how you call, a coat. A very warm coat, made to order. And the coat in that time, he pay about two or three hundred zlotys, was like now three hundred dollars, and maybe more than three hundred dollars. And he told me like this, the goy. That he knows that my brother was alive, and he bought by him that coat, and he told me, "I have the coat. If you want it, I can give it to you." It was a nice goy. But I told him, "You bought it, it is yours. If you would took it away from my brother, that means it doesn't belong to you. No, if you're telling me you bought it, I don't want it. You can have it." And he told me also that my brother was in that village till the Germans took them all together, and they sent them to Sobibor.

**INT:** Sobibor was in Poland.

**ABRAM:** This was in Poland. This was not far from Lublin. Sobibor.

**INT:** Could you tell me what happened when the war was over in Russia? You were still in Russia.

**ABRAM:** When the war was over, I was in Russia, and this was in 1945. Was a celebration, they made a celebration. Of course, everybody was happy that the war is over. No, we didn't know what happened.

**INT:** You were still with Yitzchak.

**ABRAM:** Oh yeah, with my brother.

**INT:** And the wife.

**ABRAM:** And his wife. And that girl, what I told you, she is now already 54 years old. She was born in 1940. And later I start, I wanted to find out about my brother which he used to live in Moscow. And he was, and I lost everything, every...not relations, I lost every contact with them.

**INT:** This is your oldest brother.

**ABRAM:** This is the oldest, which is Teyvel.

**INT:** How did you know he was in Moscow?

**ABRAM:** I know that he was in Moscow.

**INT:** But how? How did you know? The family knew that?

**ABRAM:** We know in Poland, when we used to live in Poland, that he used to live in Moscow.

**INT:** Did he write to your parents from there?

**ABRAM:** He write from time to time. Very little. No, he used to write. Very little, a few words. Even in Jewish. Not in Russian. In Jewish. No, he became a, he was very intelligent, he was very smart, and he got a big job there. No, the problem is he got killed. He didn't enjoy his life, nothing. He was 34 years when they took him away. He was born in 1903, in 1937 they took him away. So he was 34 years old. If I would know about the interview, I got a picture, the last picture, which his grandchild opened the files in Moscow, and he got a picture when they took him, and he got a picture before they killed him. How he changed in three months. He was with a beard, and very, very, very...how you say, not alive at all on the picture. Like a dead man. A big difference, and in three, four months, what they did to him.

And in 1945...

**INT:** When the war was over.

**ABRAM:** When the war was over, I start to write to Moscow and through the Red Cross was there. Red Cross. And I find a address, where they are. Because in the wartime they left

Moscow. And they were in other places. No, after the war, they came back to Moscow. And when they came to Moscow, is before I left Russia, I told to my brother, "Izaak, you go home, and I'm going to Moscow. I have to see mein brother's wife, and maybe I gonna know something." We didn't thought that he's not alive in that time. We didn't know. And when I, before I left Russia for Poland, I went to Moscow. I went to Moscow, and I went and I find him. I found my sister-in-law, and I find the children.

**INT:** And what about your brother?

**ABRAM:** And my brother was still, they didn't know. They told me, they took him away, and they didn't give him an answer what's what...

**INT:** His wife didn't know.

**ABRAM:** No. Nobody didn't know till 19...55. 1955, Khrushchev, you know about Khrushchev. He was the head from the Russia government. And he got in that time a speech against Stalin. What Stalin did. And in that time, came to my sister-in-law, from the Communist Party, a letter that he was rehabilitated, and she start to became a pension from him.

**INT:** But they told her that he was dead.

**ABRAM:** And then they told her that he died. Not that they killed him. No, he died after a sickness.

**INT:** Was that true?

**ABRAM:** Of course, this is not true. Now I know they killed him.

**INT:** They lied to her. They told her...

**ABRAM:** They lied to her, of course they lied.

**INT:** He just died in prison, from...

**ABRAM:** They lied. You see the Russian government, all the years they lied to people. All the seventy years the existence from the communists, was just a lie. A big lie. And people used to believe. Millions of people believed. Millions. Not only a group. Millions. The whole world, they believed on Russia. On Stalin. And then I decided to leave Moscow for Poland. I didn't want to stay there. I was single in that time, and my sister-in-law told me, "Maybe you gonna stay with us. And maybe your brother will come back." She still thought that he gonna come back. According now, he was dead already. No, she got it in mind. She didn't want to believe they gonna kill him. Because there was no reason. For what.

**INT:** How old were you at the end of the war, then? In the twenties, still.

**ABRAM:** I was in the twenties. Let's say about 25, 26. And when I left Russia, I went to Poland. I went to Poland in that time. Back to Poland. Of course, I came to Poland. The first thing I went to Warsaw, I thought maybe I gonna find somebody.

**INT:** You went back to the house.

**ABRAM:** Yeah. I went to Warsaw. Nu, Warsaw was, what can I tell you? Ruins. From the whole street was nothing. Where he bombed, there was the uprising, the Warsawer ghetto uprising.

**INT:** Was the wall there of the ghetto? Did you see the wall of the ghetto?

**ABRAM:** The ghetto was, nothing was left.

**INT:** Because the Germans.

**ABRAM:** Because the Germans, they did it. They killed, because of the uprising against the Germans. They bombed every house. Everything was finished.

**INT:** Your house was no longer there.

**ABRAM:** Was very hard to recognize a street, even. When I came, I find everywhere was ruins. Nothing more. No streets. Especially in the Jewish neighborhood. Everything was finished.

**INT:** You were by yourself at this point?

**ABRAM:** I was by myself.

**INT:** So how did you feel when you went back there and...

**ABRAM:** I was feeling very bad. What can I tell you? I was crying.

**INT:** You still didn't know anything, right? What had happened.

**ABRAM:** I knew, I saw what happened. And nobody left. Of course in that time, I knew more than in 1942. We didn't know nothing. No, in 1945 when I came to Poland back was 1946.

**INT:** But when you came to Warsaw and it was all in ruins, were there people you could talk to to find out what happened, or...

**ABRAM:** I met different kind of people. And everybody was with a very, with a very bitter heart, against the Poles, and against what happened to our Jews. And in Warsaw especially I didn't find nobody which I knew. It was strange to me, in a city which I know so many people. When I left. And for me, it was like, I didn't know what, it is a dream, it is a bad dream, it is true. It was very hard to take this. Very hard. To telling the truth, I came in the morning, let's

say from Russia, into Warsaw, and of course no transportation was. And I went without transportation, by foot. I knew the streets, I knew how to go. I went to the places which the Jews used to live. And I find nothing. Everything was in ruins. Of course I was not alone. In the city I met a lot of Jewish people which used to live in my neighborhood, and we went together. And nobody which I knew, let's say before the war, I didn't meet nobody. Nobody.

**INT:** Nobody.

**ABRAM:** Was very strange, I didn't know what to do. I was sitting on a...I went to the place where we used to live. And I thought maybe I gonna find something. Nothing, nothing. So, I sit down on a stone, I was crying. And what happened to our people. Was very, very...

(END TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE FOUR, SIDE TWO)

**ABRAM:** ...In a place where to stay, to sleep over the night.

**INT:** Who were the people that you were meeting in Warsaw? They were people just that you didn't know, but they were Jewish people, that had come...

**ABRAM:** No, no, I know they're Jewish. They came from all over.

**INT:** And where were they coming back from?

**ABRAM:** They coming back a lot, they came back from Russia, a lot came back from concentration camp, you know? And everybody wanted to know what happened to their families. And this is the people which I met at that time in Warsaw, and we talked the same language, and the same story, the same broch, what happened, you know, the same bad luck, what I got. They got the same. And when came the night, I didn't know what to do. I didn't got a place where to go, even to a house.

**INT:** Everything was destroyed, all the houses.

**ABRAM:** Everything was destroyed. And in a Polish home I didn't want to go. And nobody would take me. Because they ask such a stupid question, the Poles, the Polacks. "Why you came? And for what you came? And where the hell so many Jews again?" You know, was strange for us. So I didn't know what to do, I decided that, and I left Warsaw for Lodz. For the other city after Warsaw. Also a big city.

**INT:** Right. And why did you decide to go to Lodz, and not to...?

**ABRAM:** Because I got nothing where to stay in Warsaw.

**INT:** Was Lodz near Warsaw?

**ABRAM:** It was just three hours, right. And they told me that in Lodz is more Jews left. And this was true. So I, you know, in that time, the train didn't go like it's supposed to be. So I went the whole night, I went in the morning. I came to Lodz.

**INT:** What time of year was this? The war was over in May.

**ABRAM:** This was in 1946.

**INT:** But what time? The war was over in May.

**ABRAM:** In May.

**INT:** And you stayed in Russia for how long before you came back?

**ABRAM:** Till I got out, in 1946. A year.

**INT:** Oh, you were in a year in Russia.

**ABRAM:** A year after the war. After the war ended. Because the papers, until they let us out. This was not the beginning, we couldn't go. The area, without a permission, you couldn't...

**INT:** I see. So you were there a whole year after the war.

**ABRAM:** For a whole year after the war.

**INT:** And that year that you were in Russia, you didn't know anything that happened back in...

**ABRAM:** We knew, no, not so much. Not so much.

**INT:** Did you know about the concentration camps?

**ABRAM:** Because in Russia in that time was also bad for Jews. Special in that time.

**INT:** Because of Stalin.

**ABRAM:** Because of Stalin. He didn't like the Jews, either. Because he did things which Hitler couldn't do, so **he** did it. You know? Mostly the Jewish culture, the most important people, was arrested after the war. You know? After the war. The best, the...which maybe you are familiar with Shlomo Mekors, and the writers, Itzhak Marshkish, Pfeffer, Hobstein, and a lot of Jewish writers.

**INT:** He killed them all.

**ABRAM:** They killed them. They killed them in 1952.

**INT:** Because you were there for a year, and then you come back to Poland, and you don't know what was going on. Did you know where your brother Yitzchak was?

**ABRAM:** Yitzchak I find him in Poland.

**INT:** Oh, okay. When did you find him?

**ABRAM:** I find him, he came mostly in the same time, when I came from Moscow. And he was in a place, and I went to him, and I find him in that place.

**INT:** But first let's go back. You went from Warsaw to Lodz. So what did you find? Did you find Izaak yet?

**ABRAM:** No, no. In that time I didn't know about Izaak. So when I went from Warsaw to Lodz, and I came in the morning, in the morning, let's say 5:00 in the morning, I don't remember exactly the time, because I don't remember if I got a watch in that time. No, this doesn't matter. So I ask some, I find on the streets some Jewish people. Which they used to live already in Lodz. Where can I find somebody. They told me there's a Jewish place, and they told me the street. A Jewish committee is in this street, and they trying to help some Jews, whatever they could. And I went there, and I find the place, because I didn't know Lodz from before the war. This was the first time when I came to Lodz. After the war. I never was in Lodz before. And I find some people which, nobody, was a Zionist organization, a kibbutz. And they told me in this and this street is a kibbutz, and you can go in, because I still was also young, and this was true. I went into such a kibbutz. And in that kibbutz I find a lot of people which, they left before I went out from Russia, they left. They was very young. And they send them out before. And I met them in that kibbutz, they were waiting to go to Israel. Because from Poland they send right away a lot of young kids to Israel.

**INT:** Did you think that's what you were going to do too?

**ABRAM:** In that time, to telling the truth, I didn't think about it. No, I was happy that a lot of young people they are going to Israel, because I wanted to see what's what. Maybe somebody, I gonna find somebody.

**INT:** So you didn't want to leave yet from Poland. You wanted to find your family.

**ABRAM:** No, when I met, in Lodz I find out that my brother Izaak came from Russia with his wife, and the son Jacob, after my father's name. He was born a few days before they went out from Russia. You know?

**INT:** And he knew your father had died, so he named his son.

**ABRAM:** Yeah, this we knew already. And they gave him a name, they made a bris there, and they gave the name, I was not on the bris already, because I was in Moscow. And so, when I

find my brother, and my brother told me that he doesn't want to stay in Poland. He wants to go out from Poland with the children, and in that time he wanted to go to Israel. And they send him from Poland to Israel. When he went to Israel, I still was in Poland.

**INT:** So he went with his family to Israel. Did he...

**ABRAM:** No, not right away to Israel, they send them out to Germany. And in Germany. All Jews, after the war, everybody came to Germany. And from Germany they go...

**INT:** They were in the DP camps.

**ABRAM:** Was the DP Camps, and they sent them little by little to Israel.

**INT:** So that's where he went. Did he know, he had been in Poland longer than you. Did he know what happened to your mother? He didn't know either?

**ABRAM:** No, I was longer.

**INT:** Okay.

**ABRAM:** He went because...

**INT:** But he went before you, to...

**ABRAM:** He got an occasion, because this small, he got the two small children, which the girl was born in 1940. She was in that time about five years old. And Jacob was born, he was a child. So he got priority. They send him before.

**INT:** I know, but what I'm saying is that he, he came from Russia to Poland before you did, because you went to Moscow to look for your other brother, so while he was in Poland, did he find out what happened to your mother, and what happened to...

**ABRAM:** No.

**INT:** No. He couldn't find anything out?

**ABRAM:** I find out later.

**INT:** You found it out.

**ABRAM:** I find out later.

**INT:** So he was ready to leave Poland without knowing.

**ABRAM:** He was ready to leave Poland, because when he came to Poland he knows already what happened, and he didn't want to stay in Poland.

**INT:** Did he encounter any anti-Semitism when he was there?

**ABRAM:** Because they find out right away. Because when they came, and the Poles, they couldn't believe. So many Jews coming back to Poland? They was against. And they understood what they talked in Polish. And he decided he didn't want to stay. And I decided in that time, that I gonna stay for a while. I don't know why. I got no reason to stay.

**INT:** Did you want to stay maybe to find your...

**ABRAM:** This was the reason. Because after, after I find out, I find that man which he knew about my brother. Before I didn't know. You know, it took a while. I didn't know who was alive, who was not. We didn't know. Everything was like...

**INT:** How did you find out information? Did that committee that you went to...

**ABRAM:** No, through people.

**INT:** Through people. Not through the Red Cross.

**ABRAM:** One told the other, "Oh, that guy is alive, and that guy is alive. He is alive."

**INT:** It was like word of mouth.

**ABRAM:** Right. From mouth to mouth. No telephone, not radio, nothing.

**INT:** The Red Cross you couldn't go there and find out?

**ABRAM:** No. Couldn't, no. And so between us people we find out everything. Little by little, it took us a long time. No, not years. Not years.

**INT:** Did you know then, that so many Jews had been killed, that six million?

**ABRAM:** Yeah, in that time. We know they got killed. No, if six million, this was, we find out after the war. After. Let's say in 1947. Because before nobody knows 100% how many people got killed.

**INT:** Did you know that the Germans had killed Jews in other countries, and not just Poland?

**ABRAM:** Of course. Of course. Later we find out everything. No, before we didn't know. Being in Russia we didn't know nothing. Little by little, from mouth to mouth. No, we should know 100% what happened, we didn't know. No, when we left, we came to Poland, we find out mostly everything.

**INT:** So what did you do in Poland for that time? Your brother had left.

**ABRAM:** My brother had left. I was doing different kinds of things to stay alive. I came without money, I came with nothing. I didn't find nobody. I didn't got where to stay. So, in that time, when I came to Poland, I went to different kinds of places which Jews mostly established...

**INT:** To help?

**ABRAM:** To help, or to stay. Not everybody can go out in one day or in one, you know? And I went to that place, and I find some people which knew me from before, which I know them from before, and they start to help me, and I start to help them, also. In different kinds of things, what they wanted from me. And this was the way of life. They gave me something because they know me from before. They gave me something. They gave me even money to buy for myself something, food or other things. Because I came with nothing, and I find nobody. The time was also very bad. I didn't got where to sleep. I didn't got what to eat.

**INT:** Were you staying in this kibbutz place?

**ABRAM:** The kibbutz, I left the kibbutz, because the kibbutz was just for younger, younger kids, let's say about fourteen, fifteen years old, and they sent them right away.

**INT:** Who didn't have parents anymore, probably.

**ABRAM:** They without parents. And I was older, and so I was on my own. You understand?

**INT:** So you couldn't stay there anymore.

**ABRAM:** Of course not. For me not, because younger people, they took care of younger girls, boys, they got nobody, and they were too young to stay on their own foot. And I was older already. And I could do, of course was bad. No, till I was not afraid anymore, and...anti-Semitism was very bad in that time, after the war, in Poland.

**INT:** What was it like? Could you explain? Did you experience any of that when you came back?

**ABRAM:** I don't know. Maybe you know. Was a pogrom was in Kielce in 1946.

**INT:** They killed like fifty Jews.

**ABRAM:** They killed so many people. This was after the war.

**INT:** Did it happen in Lodz? Did anything happen in Lodz?

**ABRAM:** No, in Lodz didn't happen. This happened only in Kielce. And the police didn't do nothing. And they killed so many people. And after Kielce, people start to run from Poland. Nobody wanted to stay.

**INT:** Everybody heard about it.

**ABRAM:** Everybody heard. And everybody wanted to go out. And it was very hard. Everybody can't go out in one time. And this was a very bad situation. Confused. We didn't know. We came back to our homes, and we find such a situation. Which was strange for us. They got not enough? They killed so many Jews? They want to kill us, we're the survivors. What we lived through so many things, so many gehinnoms, and then in the end they want to kill us? Of course was very bad. And everybody wanted to run.

**INT:** What about you?

**ABRAM:** And I was staying, I was staying a little longer because, not that I got something to do. No, I don't know myself, there is no explanation. I start, of course I start to do something, to work something. You know? And to get something to eat. Because I got nobody.

**INT:** Where were you living?

**ABRAM:** I was living in a place which called, a small place, which called, this was, Poland took over a piece from the German land. It was called...what is the name?

**INT:** Sudetenland?

**ABRAM:** No, not Sudetenland. They took over...how you call it? Breslau, the name Breslau was a German city, a big city, they called it Bratslav. This, and German, (?), this is sounds more German. (?). But this place belonged to the Germans. No, the Poland took it over from the Germans. And I was in this place. A small place. They called it Swiebodzice.

**INT:** Could you spell that?

**ABRAM:** [spells it] Is very hard! (laughs)

**INT:** It sure is!

**ABRAM:** Is very hard to explain.

**INT:** I wouldn't have figured that one out.

**ABRAM:** And this was the place which I start, I start with somebody. Which he knew how to make stockings. Like this, and gloves.

**INT:** Who was this person?

**ABRAM:** He was strange to me. No, he knew these things, how to do it. And I was with him, together, he did it, and I was, and they gave me, I was like, I took care of for the younger people, they should work, and to have something. Until they gonna go out from Poland. And we got in that time subsidized from the government. They gave some money us. And I got also some money, to live in that time. And this was in 19...47. I was a year there. Yeah, a year. The beginning, the end of 1947 I left the place. I left Swiebodzice, and I went to Lublin. Of course I came to Lublin, which I didn't know so good Lublin before the war. I was, a night, I went by. No, I didn't know the streets, I didn't know people, I didn't know nobody. No, in 1948, the end of '47, the beginning of '48, I came to Lublin. And I came to Lublin, and...I know one guy, just. Because this was my sister-in-law's cousin.

**INT:** Sumer's wife's cousin?

**ABRAM:** No, Izaak's. Wife's cousin. His name was (?), and I found him, and I told him that I am, that his cousin is my sister-in-law, and he was there already, and he got a place, and he took me to be with him. And he gave me some money, he borrow me some money to give me back later. No, he was a nice guy.

**INT:** Why did you decide to go to Lublin?

**ABRAM:** Because it was near the home which, the hometown. Of course, I went later, I went a few times to Zulkiewka, because I wanted to take out some papers, maybe, and my brother took a certificate from when he was born, and I did it for my sister-in-law, and I did it for myself, I took out some papers which we didn't got no papers. Everything was gone in the war. And in that time, I met Eva in Lublin. My wife.

**INT:** How did that happen?

**ABRAM:** She got a uncle with a aunt, and the aunt is still alive. She lives in Winnipeg. The uncle died. And I know her before Eva, my wife came to there. And when my wife came to there, somebody told me that a nice girl came, she was a...she is a survivor, and she is a nice girl, and I should go to see her. And I went, with somebody, and I knew the uncle and aunt I know. And so we got, we met and...we start, I fall in love with her. And she fall in love with me, and after six weeks, we know each other, and we got married.

**INT:** After six weeks?

**ABRAM:** After six weeks.

**INT:** That was fast.

**ABRAM:** Very fast. (laughs) Is **very** fast! And at that time, the uncle said, he got already ready to go out from Poland also, to go to Canada. So he says to us, before he gonna leave Poland, Lublin, he want us to marry. So I was not against, and we got married, and was a rabbi

at that time in Lublin, he got us certification, and we got married kadosh Moshe ve Yisroel. You know, a 100% a Jewish wedding.

**INT:** Who came to the wedding?

**ABRAM:** I got a few, not from my family.

**INT:** Nobody from your family.

**ABRAM:** Not from my family. My brother was not, nobody. So we got married in that time, and after the marriage, I decided I'm going to leave Poland at all, for good. I didn't want to stay any longer.

**INT:** Had you found out anything about your family yet?

**ABRAM:** No.

**INT:** But you just...

**ABRAM:** I didn't find out more what I knew.

**INT:** You knew they were dead, or you didn't know...

**ABRAM:** And then I left Poland.

**INT:** Did you know that they had died? Did you know that your mother was dead, and your...

**ABRAM:** This I know already.

**INT:** You knew that.

**ABRAM:** This I knew. When I got married, when I was in Lublin, I know everything already. So then I decided I have nothing more to do in Poland, and legal was hard to go out. So I made it not in the legal way. I paid people which took me over the border to Germany. And I went in that time with Eva, I paid let's say for the, we went a group. We went a group of about ten people, or twelve.

**INT:** With the uncle and aunt, too? Did you go with them? Did you go with the aunt and uncle?

**ABRAM:** No, they didn't. They left for Canada. They left for Canada. Legally we left for Canada, with papers, and I didn't go legal. I didn't know, legal...they wouldn't let me out. So I got to do it this way. And I was lucky. I was lucky that I made it. I was lucky that we made it. And that person which took us, he told us, if somebody thinks he couldn't go, let's say about 34

kilometers during the night, through the border, they should stay home. They should start to go. So, I was young, and we think we gonna make it. And we did. We made it.

**INT:** So you walked.

**ABRAM:** We walked a whole night. Was very bad. Was very bad. We went, not in the, through the, let's say through a, we went like this. You know? To make the way shorter, not through the roads. We went through fields, it was very hard to go. You know.

**INT:** Where did you want to end up? I mean I know you wanted to go...

**ABRAM:** We wanted to go to Germany.

**INT:** Yeah, but what did you have in mind to...

**ABRAM:** To be in Germany, and from Germany, we're going to see what's what, and where to go.

**INT:** Oh, okay. So first you were just thinking: get out of Poland.

**ABRAM:** The first thing is, we wanted to leave Poland. To leave behind Poland. We knew we going to Germany, what the Germans did to us, no still in Germany every Jew from all over came to Germany. And we decided where to go.

**INT:** So you knew, you weren't happy about going to Germany, but you knew that all the Jews were there?

**ABRAM:** We went to Germany not to stay in Germany. Just to go through.

**INT:** That's how you had to get out? That's how people had to get out?

**ABRAM:** This was in our mind. Just to go out from Poland, to go to Germany. To telling the truth, the Germans, they did everything. No, the Germans, they forgot already what they did. This is a different story about the German people. Because when I was in Germany, I never heard something they should say about the Jews. They know what they did. A lot of people, the better Germans, was ashamed what they did. Because Germans should do a thing like this, to kill people for nothing? Like they did? A good German, was also against the Germans, what they did. You know, when I was in Germany, one German used to say, "We got to kill ten million Germans, is maybe the rest is going to be good." One German said this. He knew what they did. So when we went, I went from Poland, we didn't think to stay in Germany.

**INT:** So where did you end up?

**ABRAM:** And when I came to Germany, we came to Berlin, we made it through the night, and the next day, some, the man which took us over the border, he got some connections, and they took us with cars into Berlin, and there were DP camps. And there took us. They gave us papers.

**INT:** What was the name of the DP camp where you were? Do you remember the name of it?

**ABRAM:** I remember this was in the French zone. You know, Berlin was, and this was in the French zone we came. And we came into, it was an old people used to be there. It was like a...

**INT:** Like a nursing home.

**ABRAM:** A nursing home. And they gave us places to stay.

**INT:** You don't remember the name of it?

**ABRAM:** I forgot the name.

**INT:** Not Regensburg or Deggendorf?

**ABRAM:** No, no. I think it was, the whole section, I think Charlottenburg. I think Charlottenburg was the name.

**INT:** It was in Berlin.

**ABRAM:** In Berlin. And...

(END TAPE FOUR, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE FIVE, SIDE ONE)

**ABRAM:** No, when we came to Berlin, was in a very bad time. Because in that time, I don't know if you're familiar, the Russians made a blockade around Berlin. And Berlin was in that time...

**INT:** Divided? Is that when they divided it?

**ABRAM:** Divided. It was dark at night, because they didn't got...

**INT:** Street lights?

**ABRAM:** Fuels to operate the, there should be lights in the street. Was dark. Certain hours. Especially in the night was dark. It was in a very bad time. And after this, they send us out, after a while they send us out from Berlin to Munich. So we came to Munich. From Berlin we came to Munich. In Munich we came in the DP camp. Into the DP camp, which the name was Freiman. It was a DP camp, was Freiman, we got a small room.

**INT:** How many people were there, do you know? How big it was?

**ABRAM:** Was the DP camp? Oh, was a big. It used to be a few thousand people there. A few thousand people. So everybody got, we got, this took away from the Germans the place, and was a lot of houses, and a big camp was there. For years. The liquidation, they liquidated that camp, was in 1951. When I left Germany, there was the liquidation from that camp. And Rita was born in Germany.

**INT:** In this DP camp?

**ABRAM:** And she was born, yeah, yeah. We used to live in the camp, and the camp, the DP camp was liquidated, because a lot of people, they left for Israel. Very, 80% left for Israel, and I was, I came late, before the liquidation, and I couldn't live anymore longer there, so I got to take, I took a room across the city by German people, which somebody told me, nice people, and they took us in. They gave us a room. We got to pay some rent for this, and...we used to live there. Of course we got papers. Papers to show, and the Joint used to help us in that time. The Jewish Committee used to help us.

**INT:** Used to give you money, or food?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. In that time, Rita was born, she was a very little child. And we came in the beginning of 1949, and we left Germany 1951.

**INT:** And Rita was born, what year was Rita born?

**ABRAM:** In '49. In July, '49. And we left Germany in October, '51. We left Germany.

**INT:** So she was two years old when you came.

**ABRAM:** Two years old when we came to Canada, when we came to Canada, from Munich to Canada.

(pause)

**INT:** This is a continuation of an interview with Abram Roitman. It's November 8, 1994.

The last time we ended with you coming to Canada, when your daughter was two years old. But if we can, I'd like to go back to Poland, just for a bit, and talk about your wife, and how you met her, and what attracted you to her, and what made you decide to marry her? And a little bit about her background, also, if you can.

**ABRAM:** Her background?

**INT:** Her background.

**ABRAM:** I think she will, okay, I can tell you her background, because in the six weeks which I know her, used to know her, I find out a little bit, and she told me also about her family. Her family was also a very nice family. Her father was a young man, no, he died very young. Eva was the only child by her father and mother. And the father was, you know he was, he used to be...he was, how do you say, not a workman, he got some business with wheat. He bought, he sold. And he was, according to what Eva told me, he was a very warm man. And he was a Cohen. And he was religious. He went every Saturday, he went to shul. Because without him they couldn't have a minyan. And the rabbi in that time was very pleased with him. And she, when the war break out she was only fifteen years old.

**INT:** Can you tell me where she was born, and what town?

**ABRAM:** She was born in the city they called Ludmir. In Polish Lozhimiz, and this was in the east, it's up in Ukraine. This was...Volhynia, they call it. All the area.

**INT:** Was that Poland?

**ABRAM:** At that time it was Polish. And her grandparents was, the zayde was with a beard, religious. And kosher home. At that time, like I told you, everybody was kosher. We didn't know such a thing, not kosher.

**INT:** So she had no brothers or sisters.

**ABRAM:** No. She was the only child.

**INT:** Do you know anything about her mother?

**ABRAM:** I know her mother, when her father died, she got sick. She got a nervous breakdown in that time. And after her father died, the zayde with the bubbe, you know, the grandparents, took her to a village not far from the city. They used to live. And she went to school. And they supplied her with everything.

**INT:** So she lived with her grandparents.

**ABRAM:** She lived with the grandparents.

**INT:** How old was she when her father died?

**ABRAM:** She was twelve years old.

**INT:** Do you know how he died?

**ABRAM:** He was sick. He was sick with tuberculosis. In that time was no cure. Today, nobody dies from tuberculosis. They have antibiotic. Not in that time. This is the reason that a lot of children, mostly, 60% of children, when they're born, died.

**INT:** Is that how your sisters and brothers?

**ABRAM:** This what I got. We were eight children. We left just four. So 50% died. You know? Was no cure. And this what I know, and I hope she gonna make an interview with you, she will tell more about it.

**INT:** But when you met her, what was she like, and how old was she?

**ABRAM:** She, when I met her, she was 22 years old. 22, 23.

**INT:** And what was she like?

**ABRAM:** She was very nice. To telling the truth, she was the nicest girl. Because in the whole Lublin, was in that time five girls, Jewish girls, and when she came, everyone was interested in her, a lot of boys. And I got a friend which he knew her uncle better than I knew him. So, and the uncle wanted him, she should marry him, you know, because he got the money. And he was also, he was a survivor from the Germans. And he got money in that time, I don't know how, and I came from Russia without nothing, like I told you. I got nothing, and I got no family, and nowhere to go, where to sleep, and where to eat. I went through another war, after the war, another war. A hunger war.

Anyway, anyway, and he wanted me to come, I should see Eva. I should see with him. And I told him right away, "Why you need me? If you like her, why you need me?" Because he was the quiet type, and I knew this is not Eva's type. And...he would like to marry her. And her uncle would like he better than me, because I got nothing, and I was not so quiet. You know, I liked to sing, to dance more lively.

And when I came with him to her house, when I met the first time Eva, was in that time a few girls in the house, and you know, in that time was no television, no radio, we were sitting and talk. And they was very bored. So I start, you know, to sing a little bit, and we start to dance, like young people. And this was the first evening I met Eva. And since the first evening, I can say I used to like her, and she used to like me. And I start to come in.

**INT:** What happened to your friend?

**ABRAM:** He didn't feel too good about everything, no, still he didn't say nothing. He was also a quiet. I still friends with him till now. We didn't fight nothing. He was at the wedding, and he took out a girl from the same five girls like I told you, he took the other one. By him was no difference. (laughs) You know, by me there was a difference. I could make a difference, you know? And so is Eva. Eva, to telling the truth, Eva got boys which she would got maybe a better life than she got by me, because I got no money, I came without money to Lublin. And I

told you, my sister-in-law's cousin, he helped me out, he borrowed me some money, I should have, I should start to do something.

Anyway, and so went by a few weeks.

**INT:** Did you talk about the war with her, at that time?

**ABRAM:** Oh, yeah, she told me a lot about the war. She told me how she, I told her how I, what I went through in Russia, and she told me what she went through in Poland.

**INT:** What happened to her during the war?

**ABRAM:** What happened. She lost everybody. She lost, first of all, she lost her father at twelve years. And later, when the war started, she was about fifteen years, she was living with her grandparents, with her grandparents, and of course, she got not bad. And they got, like they say in Jewish, rachmones, pity, and she got everything. They cared about she should have clothes, and the money to go to school. And money, what she needs for school. And she got not bad until the war broke out. When the war broke out, you know, the beginning was not so bad. No, little by little they start to punish the Jews, right away with the Jews, and especial, where she lived was more Ukrainian than Polish people, and the Ukrainians, they're worse than Polacks, than Polish people. And they used to like her grandparents, because they came, and they lived very nicely, till the war. And after the war, they start little things. So when her zayde, the grandfather, went, let's say from one village to another, he was with a beard, they start to fight with him, they start to touch the beard, so he saw that this wouldn't be no good. So one day he went, and he shaved his beard. And when he came home, his wife, this means the grandmother from Eva, start: "What did you do to yourself? Why you do this?" And he told her, "You know, the time is now for us very bad. And I don't know what tomorrow will be. And I'm going from one village to another. They throw me stones, and they start to bother me." And never was this, let's say before the war.

**INT:** He never had any trouble.

**ABRAM:** Never. He got respect. And in that time the trouble start. And in 19...43, 1942, they took also away, they took away her grandparents, and they shot them. They killed them. And not far from the home where they used to live, they buried them. You could see, when they buried them, the whole, the foot, the pieces from the foot, you could see, because they didn't bury like supposed to be. And they start the whole thing.

**INT:** What happened to her, when they took her grandparents?

**ABRAM:** And then she start to think about going away. She didn't want to leave them because they were like a father and a mother to her. And at that time her mother was sick, and they took her to the hospital, and she didn't know what happened. And in the meantime, they killed the grandparents, and she starts to go away, to look for her what to do.

**INT:** By herself?

**ABRAM:** By herself. So, a lot of people which she knows, knew, she went to school in that time, helped a little bit, to go away from the place which everybody knows her, in the night. And so she start to feel what means the war. And she will tell you more, you know. For me, it's hard everything to tell about her. And she went through very bad time, very bad. And when after the war, when the war ended, of course she find a teacher, a Polish teacher, which used to live there, and teach her own uncle, her aunt, or her mother, and they took her in.

**INT:** After the war.

**ABRAM:** After the war. They took her in. And after the war she got a aunt in Argentina, and she find the address, and she find them, and they used to send her a few, and she wrote them where she is, by whom, and they remember the name from the teacher which they used to know, and she was living with them. And she was living with them, and later she went to work, also, was short in teachers. And she went to teach some children, let's say, third grade, or second grade, or fourth grade. Eva. Because she's very good in Polish. She's very good in languages at all. She catched the language right away. You can see what kind of English she talks. And she was there till she find that uncle with the aunt, they used to live in Lublin. And this is the reason she came. If not the uncle and the aunt, she wouldn't came to Lublin. She would be there. You know? Because she knows already people there, you know?

**INT:** And that's where you met her.

**ABRAM:** And this is the way we met each other, and she didn't go back. After this, what she met me, she didn't go back to, this was the city Gdansk. By Gdansk was the work.

**INT:** That's where she was staying.

**ABRAM:** She was staying there. But this is the port near the Baltic, you know.

**INT:** That's where she was with the Polish teacher.

**ABRAM:** She was living there till let's say 1945, the war ended, and she came to Lublin about the end of '47. And I met her there. At the end of '47, beginning of '48, and we got married, and she never went back.

**INT:** Now let me ask you, what made both of you decide to get married so soon? It seems like a very quick, six weeks.

**ABRAM:** I gonna tell you. Now I gonna tell you. I was the only one which I wanted to marry, because I wanted to leave Poland. And my brother, what I told you, when he came to Poland and decided not to stay in Poland, to went out, he was in Germany then, in that time, and from Germany he wanted to go to Israel. And he went to Israel. And when I came to Germany, he was in Israel. And I wanted to go also, in that time. I was ready to go. And Eva was already,

you know, the time goes, and she was pregnant with Rita. And I wanted to send her before, and I could wait later a little bit to go. No, she got a priority. They wanted to send her before, because she was pregnant.

**INT:** But why did you decide to marry so quickly?

**ABRAM:** Because I wanted to go out, and I wanted to see my brother. Be united with my brother.

**INT:** So it's easier to leave if you were married, is that what you're saying? If you were married, you'd get out sooner?

**ABRAM:** No, no, no. I wanted to go out with her. I told her the whole thing, that I want to go out from Poland, I want to leave Poland, and she agreed also to leave Poland. And the uncle, her uncle with the aunt, they wanted to go to Canada in the same time, and he told her, "We're not leaving, we're going to stay till you gonna get married, then we gonna leave." So she got pressure from my side and from, and we decided to get married. And we got married in the uncle's house. We got a few friends, and the uncle was.

**INT:** Did you stay there long after you got married?

**ABRAM:** No, we didn't stay long, because we prepared to leave Poland. We stayed maybe a few weeks, and we left. A few weeks, and we left.

**INT:** How did you feel about leaving Poland?

**ABRAM:** Not bad. I was happy to leave Poland. Because if I would stay in Poland, I would got more problems from the Polacks, and it's better I left. And she wanted also the same thing. She hate the Polacks, you know, some Polacks helped her. No, what she knows about the Polish people, because they didn't know that she is Jewish. They talked everything what they wanted to talk. If they knew that somebody understand, the Polacks have such a, they wouldn't talk so much about Jews. No, they didn't know that she was Jewish. They thought she was Polish, or she's Ukrainian, because she speaks very good Ukrainian, very good Polish, and she could hide. I wouldn't. Because I'm not good in the Polish language. Because I never spoke, in my house, never we spoked a word Polish.

**INT:** So she really knew how anti-Semitic they were.

**ABRAM:** And this is the reason we got married. I wanted to go out, because I wanted to be with my brother, united. Because a few years I didn't know where he is, he didn't know where I am. And this is the reason we got married and out from Poland. And now we're happy we went out.

**INT:** So your relationship with your brother was very close, and you wanted to be...

**ABRAM:** Very close. Very close. I always was with him. And unfortunately I lost him, in a young age. In 1970. He was 55 years, he got a heart attack, and he died.

**INT:** He went to Israel.

**ABRAM:** He went to Israel, and to telling the truth, he went to Israel, he got two children, but I told you, the daughter was born in 1940 in Siberia. And the boy, Jacob, was born in 1946 when we went out from Russia. He was a child, a small child. And when he came to Israel, the time was in that time very bad, and you know, and they got, there was born another son, Nachum, which the name from my sister-in-law's father, Nachum. And especial, I wanted to say, that Nachum is very religious, till now. He's very, he's like his, I don't know, or his father, or like my father. He's very, he lives in Boro Park. And he's very religious. He never would eat in my house, not his brother's house, nowhere.

**INT:** So he's the most religious of the cousins.

**ABRAM:** He's the most religious. So he got three children. And when I came to Germany, and I was ready to leave for Israel, he wrote me a letter, the last minute. Because I wanted to send Eva because she was pregnant. She was in that time in the sixth month, or the beginning of the sixth month. There was no time to wait too long. So I got a letter from my brother, in that time, and he told me, "Please stay wherever you are. Go wherever you can. Don't come to Israel. For you it will be very bad." Because I was not so healthy like he was, and the climate was hot, and the circumstances were very bad.

**INT:** There was about to be a war there, too.

**ABRAM:** So I helped him out when I was in Germany. I helped him out. I send him money, I send him food. So he was lucky that I was in Germany in that time. And he could care about the family, his family. There were small children. They didn't got nothing. I send them salami, I send two kilo chocolate. And he sold this. He didn't eat everything. Because every week I send a package. So he send, he got some money for this, but he sold some chocolates.

**INT:** So you helped him after the war.

**ABRAM:** So I helped him out, and I decided in that time, when I was in Germany, I gonna go, I got two countries which I used to love. This was Canada, or America. Who gonna come first. So at that time came first Canada.

**INT:** Permission to go to Canada.

**ABRAM:** Permission to go to Canada, because the uncle which left Poland send us an affidavit.

**INT:** Eva's uncle?

**ABRAM:** The uncle which married us, what I told you.

**INT:** He got there first.

**ABRAM:** He got first, and he took for us a apartment, and we wanted to go to him. So this is the reason we came to Canada. Because America we got to wait longer in Germany. And Eva and I wanted to go out. You know? Because Rita was born, and we didn't want to be in Germany too long. You see, this is two years old, when Rita got born and this was on a cake, what we made it two years old, and this we kept already so many years (pointing to a wooden number two decoration for a cake) Rita is, thank G-d, 45 years old, and this is old 43 years. 43 years old.

**INT:** It's a wooden letter two from when she was...

**ABRAM:** This is the letter which was in the cake. And this was the reason we went out from Germany to Canada.

**INT:** Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like in the DP camp for those years and what you did there?

**ABRAM:** The DP camp when we came to Germany was, people used to live there longer, before they came before, and I came too late. When I came was the liquidation from the DP lager in that time, and they told me I can stay till I gonna find a place. They didn't throw me out, they took me in, because Rita was a small child, they gave us a place where to stay, and they gave us food, and I got the same things like other people, you know. This is what other people got, I got. I belonged already to the UNRA in that time, they helped us with everything. Very good. Very nice. And the thought was just to leave Germany. We didn't want to stay in Germany. Of course, a lot of people, they went to Israel, other people went to America, and the best, everybody wanted to go to America, to telling the truth. Or to Canada. Because Canada and America, these are the best countries in North America.

(END TAPE FIVE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE FIVE, SIDE TWO)

**INT:** You had said that there were a lot of people there.

**ABRAM:** I know a lot of people which went to Canada, which they are survivors. A lot of people that are survivors from Warsaw ghetto which I know them, and a lot of people that are survivors from other ghettos, and they are in Canada.

**INT:** So everyone in this DP camp was just waiting to get affidavits?

**ABRAM:** To get out.

**INT:** And to get out.

**ABRAM:** Nothing more. Of course they tried to, because when you get something from a government, is not enough. Is not enough to live, and too much to die. You got to do something to make on the side a few bucks.

**INT:** So what did you do?

**ABRAM:** So we go out, we buy something, we sold it, to make a few dollars. And this, you know, Jews, they can do this profession, to buy to sell it, and to make a few dollars. We didn't go, I was without money. I wouldn't go to rob somebody. No, to buy something, to sell something, and this we did. And this was the way to make a few dollars, to live through the time till we gonna go out.

**INT:** But you had food in the DP camps. Did they provide that?

**ABRAM:** We got food. No, to telling the truth, like I told you, when you getting something, this is the same thing when you live on social security. Is not enough. You got to have something. If you don't have something, then it's bad. To live just with this, what you get from the government. And the same thing was in the DP camps. Was not enough to live, and too much to die. No, if we did something, let's say somebody was a tailor, he went to work. If somebody was a barber, he went to work. If somebody was other, a baker, he went to work in a bakery. You understand? Everybody went to work to make on the side a few dollars. And the UNRA didn't care if you make a few dollars or not. This what they got to give you, they gave. And this was the way of life, what we did.

**INT:** Can you tell me how you mourned for your family? The losses that you suffered during the war. After you got out of Poland, and you were married, and you were living in Germany in the DP camp, did you have someone to talk to about any of this, or...

**ABRAM:** We talk a lot.

**INT:** You talked a lot?

**ABRAM:** We talk a lot.

**INT:** To whom? To each other?

**ABRAM:** I met a lot of people after the war which we get acquainted. I met people from Warsaw and they told me how, and they used to live through the uprising, Warsaw Ghetto uprising, and they still alive. Two brothers in Toronto. They live in Toronto, which I know them very good from after the war. And they used to talk a lot, in Germany. And before we left, in Poland I didn't want to stay too long, because everybody went out. Mostly the people which came back from the DP camps, from Auschwitz, from any concentration camp, didn't want to stay in Poland. Poland was just to go through, and not to stay too long, because the Polish people took us with hate. They saw two Jews together, was too much for them. And everybody

feel this, and this is the reason nobody wanted to stay in Poland. Better to go to Germany. We went better to Germany, because most of the DP camps, they build up in Germany. The German government in that time was not bad. Of course, they helped the Jews to go out. To go out. Nothing more. Because the help came from the Jewish organizations. From the HIAS, from the Joint.

**INT:** But you were able to take your feeling, what you were feeling after the war, and you were able to talk with other survivors that you met, strangers, and then you became friendly with them, and could talk to them?

**ABRAM:** Yeah, a lot.

**INT:** And what about with Eva? Were you able to speak with her much about the war? Did the two of you talk?

**ABRAM:** Eva, to telling the truth, Eva till now, she doesn't like to talk about the war, because she doesn't want to remind herself what she went through. She's different. I told her, she got to talk. Because even Rita supposed to know what she went through, and Rita wanted to know, you know? And we talk her into this, she should make the interview, because she went through more difficult than I. I went through maybe more tsuris, no, I was not beaten. And nobody wanted to kill me. You understand? Because I got not the Germans. The Germans they wanted to kill every Jew. And when I was even in Russia, they didn't kill me, and they didn't want to kill me. This what I was, the time was bad, was for everybody. And...

**INT:** Did you try to get her to talk in those early years, when you first came out of Poland, and you were living in the DP camp, and you had first gotten married, and you're just getting used to living together, and that sort of thing, what did you do with your feelings?

**ABRAM:** We talk.

**INT:** You did talk.

**ABRAM:** We talk. No, I was talking a lot with strange people. With strange people, in the beginning was strange. After we got to talk, we feel like sisters and brothers. I have a lot of friends like this. We met in the war, after the war, in between the war, and we're still friends. Of course, we're older people already, no, we're still friends. I have friends in Canada, which I met them in 1940, from Warsaw, a whole family, and we're still friends.

**INT:** Are you more comfortable, would you say, with people who went through the war than with people who didn't?

**ABRAM:** Excuse me?

**INT:** Are you more comfortable being with people who went through what you went through, or similar?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. Yeah. Because we have something in common. With people which they didn't live through the war, we have nothing in common. They can't understand what we went through. So more I'm having in common with people which went through the war. Of course. A lot more.

**INT:** How do you feel about the Poles in general, and the Germans?

**ABRAM:** I have no sympathy for them, no. I wish them they should go through what we went through. This what I wish them. And they should suffer so many million people like we suffered.

**INT:** And the Germans? How do you feel about them?

**ABRAM:** The Germans. The Germans, of course I hate them. I wouldn't say that I love the Germans. No, to telling the truth, the Polacks are worse than the Germans. Because a German never could recognize a Jew. He didn't know. When I went by him, he didn't know that I'm Jewish. The Poles, they recognize me. Because Poles with Jews, they used to live a thousand years together. Side by side. And they, the Poles, helped the Germans. "Oh, here is a Jude. This is a Jude. This is a Jude. This is a Jude." If somebody was staying in the line, let's say, to get a piece of bread, the Poles came in, and they look in the eyes from the people, and they are looking to find a Jew.

**INT:** They wanted to.

**ABRAM:** They want, and they find. They find.

**INT:** Why do you think they're like that?

**ABRAM:** Because they're bad. They're **born** anti-Semitic. They're born, from the beginning, from the cradle, like you can say. This is the Polacks. You see, Hitler was not so stupid. If he would make the DP camp, the camps, somewhere else, he wouldn't succeed so much like in Poland. Why he didn't do this in Czechoslovakia? Why he didn't do this in Hungary? Only in Poland? Because he knows that the Polacks will help him. And this is the Polack. Nobody, from all the, I don't know how many survivors is from Poland, maybe 300,000, 300,000 I think we survived, from 3,000,000 Jews, nobody wants to live in Poland. Nobody wants to live in Poland. And they wanted we should come back. No, nobody wants. I consider my home, I hate the place where I was born. My home is now America or Israel. This is my home.

**INT:** But why do you think if for a thousand years the Poles lived side by side with Jews, and, as you told me, at least in your experience before the war, you didn't really experience much anti-Semitism? There wasn't too much of that.

**ABRAM:** No.

**INT:** So why do you think that when Hitler came to power, the Poles helped him so much?

**ABRAM:** This is a very, is a question. To telling the truth, which I know, Jews used to live in villages and nobody bothered them. This is true. Because in that time in Poland, was the law. The law was a law, you know? The law was a law. Even a young boy wouldn't do this what he used to do when Hitler was in power, when Hitler was in Poland. He gave them the green light, they can do everything. And before he didn't got the green light.

**INT:** But you think he had the feeling before, but he just...

**ABRAM:** Maybe they didn't feel warm to Jews, no, they couldn't do this, because the law didn't allow them. And this, when the Germans came into Poland, and they gave them, they can do everything what they wanted, and they created so many bad things, nobody could think about it. The Germans can do a thing like this. The Germans? Was the heirs, the...most...

**INT:** Cultured.

**ABRAM:** Cultured nation in Europe. The Germans. Nobody predict a thing like this. Even the smartest man. Nobody. Nobody.

**INT:** How do you feel when you overhear the German language, or you're with German people? How do you feel about that?

**ABRAM:** To telling the truth, I feel, when I hear German I feel not so bad [as] when I hear Polish. This is the truth. Because I know in Germany now, is different kinds of Germans. No, they mostly, mostly Germans after the war, which are born, they didn't know what their parents did, or what their grandparents did, and a lot of German people hated this what they did. You know, in Israel, I met a lot of German people they were coming. They were coming for visitors. And they respect Israel, and a lot of German people convert, you know, to Judaism. I know about this. And they hate what the Germans did to Jewish people. And the government, the German government, hate also what the Germans did before. This is why they are paying the money, what they pay.

**INT:** Reparations?

**ABRAM:** That's right. So, I don't feel such a hate to the Germans. But the Germans, they did it, and finished, you know? They know the Nazi party did this. Now, no more Nazism. German. And in Poland is a difference. The Poles, no Jews in Poland. And why they anti-Semitic? Why? No Jews now. Is left maybe from 3,000,000 maybe is living now a few thousand older people. Which they doesn't want to go out. I know a son which lives not far from me in Brooklyn, which his father is a veteran. He was in the Polish army. He was a colonel. And he is 85 years old. And he told his son, his son wanted to take him to Brooklyn, to America. "What I gonna do there? I am an old man. Here I have my pension. I have the language. And here I want to die." Is only maybe in whole Poland is maybe three, four thousand such a people.

**INT:** But that's very unusual, you're saying, to want to stay in Poland.

**ABRAM:** And they stay. The son alone wanted to take him, no, he doesn't want it. What they gonna do there.

**INT:** So you think the Germans are different now, but the Poles haven't changed.

**ABRAM:** No. The Germans are different. If I would got a choice to live in Germany or in Poland, I would choose Germany, not Poland. Because I know, by the German people, they are not born anti-Semitic, they could become anti-Semitic. Not born. The Polacks, they're born anti-Semitic. And the churches, they talk about this. You know, was a time, where I remember, when came Christmas, when I was young, we were afraid to go out on the streets, because we killed the god, what they got a god. He would be alive till now, according them, you know? So we got to hide. This night, everybody was afraid to go out. And this, in Germany we didn't, nobody was afraid to go out until Kristalnight. Of course, when Hitler came to power, he made a Kristalnight. No, this is not the nature for the Germans, what Hitler did, was not the nature.

**INT:** Why do you think the Holocaust happened?

**ABRAM:** Unfortunately, the Holocaust happened because Hitler, this was the theory from the Nazi party. If wouldn't be Hitler, the Germans wouldn't do this, what they did. He wrote the book, Mein Kampf, is only -- this is I'm sorry, I miss Jewish -- Hitler, Mein Kampf, the book, what he created, you know, this was his platform. He is going this way he's gonna go. And he created the whole bad things. He was with his Goerring, with Himmler, with other his friends, and they wanted to, they were anti-Semitic, they wanted to kill all the Jews.

**INT:** But the people went along with them. The German people went along.

**ABRAM:** Went along, because you know, he was something new, and everybody goes after something new. If creates something, a new organization, they start to have people. He started very little. He start only with thirteen people. I know...his way to power. He started only a few people. And later he's a big demagogue. He talked them in, he's gonna do this, he's gonna do that. He's gonna take away everything from everybody, and the Deutsche, the German people will be the main people. Like we said, the best people in the world. We're gonna do to other people bad, and we're gonna do for the Germans good, and this is demagogue, and this he got luck, and he got the power. Like I told you yesterday. They gave him. They gave him. The Hindenburg gave him the power. And nobody stood against in that time. This was the mistake from the two Socialist Party, and the Communist Party. If they would be together, he wouldn't got the power. And this, he wanted to do to show the people, this is mine, what I'm thinking. He wanted to show the German people that he's doing a lot for the German people. He's killing Jews. He's taking away everything what the Jews, and mostly he went with the Jews got everything. The Jews got gold, and if not they gonna kill them, they gonna kill us, they're going to take away from us the power. And this, a lot of people, and you have different kinds of people in every nationality. They're not educated too much, and they think everything is true. Is very easy to talk them in. You gonna take away from him, you gonna have it. And everybody wants

to have. And to take. And he gave the green light for everybody. You can take a Jew, take him out from his home, and kill him, and you gonna take over everything. A lot of people wanted to do this.

**INT:** And it's legal to do it.

**ABRAM:** And this start the Holocaust. And you know, was very smart people from our Jewish people, nobody predict a thing like this, that Hitler's going to do this what he did.

**INT:** What do you think of this Tchernikovsky, or whatever his name is, in Russia now?

**ABRAM:** Very bad.

**INT:** People aren't believing it, people don't believe that he's...

**ABRAM:** He is very bad. He is like a Nazi. He wanted to make everybody like, that only the Russians. Only the Russians. Like Hitler wanted only the Germans. Only everything for the Germans. Now he wanted the same thing for the Russians. He's very bad. He's very bad.

**INT:** But again...

**ABRAM:** And he is very anti-Semitic.

**INT:** But people aren't believing again.

**ABRAM:** You see, unfortunately his father is Jewish. This is a problem. His father was Jewish. Maybe this wouldn't let him go too far. Maybe this wouldn't let him go too far, because his father is Jewish. No, he wanted to create such a party, like Hitler did it in Germany. He wanted to do this in Russia.

**INT:** How do you feel when you read about the neo-Nazi movement in Germany and hear...

**ABRAM:** I feel bad. No, I feel bad, no nothing can happen.

**INT:** You don't think the Holocaust can happen again.

**ABRAM:** No, no, no.

**INT:** In this country?

**ABRAM:** No. We're talking about Germany. In Germany, no.

**INT:** What about here, in this country?

**ABRAM:** No. I don't think it could happen.

**INT:** Why not? Could you explain why you think that?

**ABRAM:** Because we have here a very nice system, which I like, because I used to live in a system, totalitarian regime in Russia, and before the war in Poland was also not so democratic like here. And I like, like Churchill said, the best thing is, the best government is a democratic. To be democratic. And I don't see. Of course we have here a lot of anti-Semitism. We have a lot, unfortunately between the colored people, which we helped them. We helped them a lot in the beginning. I don't have to tell you. And how many Jewish guys got lost, killed, and now we have such a Farrakhan, which Farrakhan is the same like Hitler. No, I hope he wouldn't go too far. He wouldn't go too far.

**INT:** But do you think that the system in America would keep that from happening, would keep Farrakhan from...

**ABRAM:** Yeah. Couldn't happen, this. Because the system is very good, which is good for people, for everybody. And I hope this wouldn't happen in America.

**INT:** Where do you see G-d's relationship in the Jewish people, and as far as the Holocaust is concerned?

**ABRAM:** This is a very, very big question. And I don't think I'm going to be able to answer everything. Because I know people which, before the war, they were against G-d, and after the war, they became very religious. Very, very religious. And I know people which were religious, and after the war, they became not religious. And why? Because the question why was: Why did G-d did this to us? Why? Because the Germans, the Polacks were laughing. What the Germans did, what they did bad to Jews, they did always on a holiday. On Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, when Jews went to shul, they made pogroms in the shul. They went in with horses, with everything, and the people were afraid, and they start to beat them. Everything in the shul.

Is the question. Where was G-d? G-d didn't know what's going on in Europe? This is the big question, which I myself sometimes, tell myself the question, why, everything what somebody's doing, he's doing with G-d's help. So why G-d did a thing like this, to help the Germans so much against the Jews? And why didn't he do something drastic they should see is a G-d? Why shouldn't he stop them? And this is a question which I don't want to discuss. I'm sorry, I don't want to discuss too much, because I never would ask a religious person why G-d did nothing. I wouldn't ask it. Because I respect him. I wouldn't ask him. Because he would answer, I know his answer. I know his answer. Maybe somebody was in sin, and G-d did this.

**INT:** It's a punishment.

**ABRAM:** It's a punishment. I understand. Maybe the grownup was sin. A million and a half Jewish kids got punished? What did they bad?

**INT:** So you can't ask that question to a religious person. Does it make you angry, the answer they give you?

**ABRAM:** No, I don't want to...put him in a bad stage, because he wouldn't give me the right answer, which I want that he should give me.

**INT:** What's the answer you want him to give you?

**ABRAM:** I can't...is very hard for me also to have this question to answer, I'm telling the truth. Because I'm not against religious, and I'm not so religious. I'm Jewish. I always, I'm happy that I'm born a Jew. If I would have to be born again, I would like to be Jewish. This is my answer. I am, like I said, Jewish, born a Jew, and I want to die a Jew, and I want my children and grandchildren to be Jewish. This is mein belief, and I would like this should be after my death. No, I should go into, it's too hard for me, I should answer such a question.

**INT:** You don't have an answer?

**ABRAM:** No.

**INT:** Can you live with that, that there's no answer?

**ABRAM:** It's very hard. It's very hard. Because I ask myself sometimes, why my father went to shul every day. And day, in rain, in cold weather, nothing stopped him. Nothing. And why he got to be so punished? Why? For the good things that he did? Now, who can give me an answer to this? Nobody.

You see, I have my nephew, which he knows a lot now. He didn't go to the yeshiva, no himself. When he became thirteen years old, he got a Rabbi Hecht, maybe you're familiar with Rabbi Hecht in Brooklyn. He died already. No, his sons took over. He was a very nice rabbi, I used to know him. And he was the teacher with that boy. He brought him to his bar mitzvah. And since the bar mitzvah, he start to be religious, from thirteen years old. Before, he didn't know nothing. He went to cheder. He know how to daven. No, he should know what is kosher, what is not kosher, it make no difference. No, after the bar mitzvah, he start to be very religious.

(END TAPE FIVE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE SIX, SIDE ONE)

**INT:** You were talking about your nephew.

**ABRAM:** Even my nephew, which he knows now better what I know, because he has a very good, he is very smart, he has education, he is the same age with Rita, he's 45 years old, he knows very much. He got the best head from all three children.

**INT:** This is Nachum?

**ABRAM:** Nachum. Very smart. And he's very religious. I wouldn't dare to ask him the questions, because I know he wouldn't find an answer, and I don't want to put him in a bad stage.

**INT:** Did you talk about this with the people after the war, that you met? Did you talk about where was G-d, or any of that?

**ABRAM:** We? We talk a lot. We talk a lot. And everybody came to this conclusion. Why didn't G-d answer the pain, the crying and from children, from old people, from women, which, what the Germans did, and they separate mothers from the children, the children took away. Is terrible things happened. And G-d didn't exist then, in that time. I just now, am walking with a man, which he was in Auschwitz. I know him very well, we walk every day, I know him about five years. So he is alive, and the Germans did to him, helped him to stay alive. No, the Germans asked him, "Where is your G-d? Why he do nothing against the Germans?" And he didn't know what to answer. He was very young. He is alive with his brother. In case something supposed to happen, he told him, "Hide, where you can. And later I gonna come, and I gonna give you where to stay, where to sleep, and where to go to eat." He helped the two brothers. And I talked with him, sometimes we're going for hours. Every day an hour. Why, why G-d didn't answer the crying, for so many cries from the children? We can't find the answer.

**INT:** So even after all these years, you haven't come any closer?

**ABRAM:** To telling the truth, I heard a conversation with a correspondent, with Elie Wiesel. I know, I don't have to tell you who is Elie Wiesel. He was a child when he was in concentration camp. And I heard a conversation with him, from a correspondent, what is his name? I forgot his name. Was very, very interesting for me, also, and he is educated man, and he is famous. And he, and he asked him, "When you were in concentration camp as a child, what did you think in that time? What did you thought in that time?" And he gave such answers, which he is very smart, and very educated. No, in the end, he told him, "To tell you the truth, I was more prepared to death than to life. To death I was prepared. What I saw in the young age, they took away my father, and they killed my father, and I was ready to die in that time. And when the war ended, I was not ready to stay alive. I was not prepared for life. I was better prepared for death. And now I'm alive." And you ask me why? I don't know why. I don't know myself. Is very hard to understand why. Of course, he is alive, he is famous. No, he still talks about this what he went through, what the Jewish people went through. I couldn't say that he speaks against G-d, no he doesn't speak for G-d. And he is, I don't have to tell you, he got so many books written, and he's very smart. He lives, when I heard the conversation, and this was for me like, Oh, very good. I was so happy when I heard the conversation, the correspondent with Elie Weisel. And he told this to everybody, everybody from our people was more prepared for death, than to stay alive.

**INT:** Do you agree with that? Is that how you felt also?

**ABRAM:** I agree with that. I didn't expect that I gonna go out from Russia. I didn't expect I gonna go out from Siberia. I didn't expect I gonna stay alive, and I gonna live, let's say I'm now

76 years old. And when I was in Siberia I was about twenty years old. I didn't expect to stay alive. I was ready to die. And you know, I don't want to tell you, not only the food, what we didn't have. The sickness. I was sick on the street, I got typhus, and I didn't got a bed where to lay down. I was outside. Summer and winter. I got no home, who was thinking to stay alive? Nobody. Even in Russia. Nobody beat me, no, I got no place to stay. I got no place where to warm up myself.

**INT:** Do you have an answer for that? For why you survived?

**ABRAM:** No. I survive, no answer. I can't find an answer. My luck was this. And I survive. No answer. Is very hard to find a answer. And this what I talk with a lot of people. You know, I have a friend, which he went through, he was between the Polacks, and he stayed alive because he looks like Polish, and he speak good Polish, so he told me, with, let's say about ten years ago, "I don't know why I stay alive, why I was alive. I saw in my city, the best people which the city got. Jewish people, the rabbi, the cantor, the shammas, where they got killed, but I saw this. And I was between them, and they didn't touch me. Why? I was a good Jew?" He knows that he was not. "I never went to shul. And I am alive, and they got killed." Now, who can answer why? It's very hard.

**INT:** Does the world make any sense to you?

**ABRAM:** Of course, a nice world makes sense. I wouldn't say, like I told you, I'm not against G-d. I'm not against G-d. I'm not against, and not for. I told you in the interview with you, that sometimes I wish I should change myself. I can't change myself. No, it's impossible.

**INT:** Change, how?

**ABRAM:** To be more religious. I can't. Because I have a lot of questions to myself, and I can't find the answer. I can't find the answer.

**INT:** But yet being Jewish is very important to you.

**ABRAM:** Yeah, this, yeah. This what I told you. If I would have to be born again, I wouldn't be, I wanted to be Jewish. I want my children to be Jewish, my grandchildren to be Jewish. Because Jewish people, they are not murderers, they wouldn't do this to other people which they do it. You know? "And never forget what Amalek did to you." This is, you know...

**INT:** In the Torah.

**ABRAM:** In the Torah, when they left Egypt, so many thousands of years ago.

**INT:** And in every generation, there's another Amalek.

**ABRAM:** And we remember what Amalek did to us. We are not people which, let's say if I got the power, I wouldn't go to kill Germans, because they killed my people, or the Polacks. I

wouldn't do this. Because Jewish people are not murders. They like to live a peaceful life. To build, to work. I came here with nothing. I didn't become a rich man. No, still, I brought up my daughter, I send her to school. She is educated. And the same did my brother, and thousands of other people did the same thing. We came with nothing. After the war. With nothing. And we went to work, we worked. What we made, we made. A peaceful life. If one became rich, all right, it's his luck. I didn't become rich, it's mein luck. And I...I have no regrets what I did. Because I did it to be alive, to build my family. To have nachas from my daughter. This what we did.

**INT:** It's a big success.

**ABRAM:** No, to be, this what I told you: Jewish people never gonna do this, what the goyim are doing to us. Every goy. This is what I told you. If I could be born again, I would like to be Jewish.

**INT:** Because you think that Jewish people are different than non-Jewish people?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. They're different. You see they're different. We have to admit that they're different. Even Israel. In Israel, after the war, when they became a state, they got nothing. Was so bad times. They got nothing. And people went there, and they knew they were going there to suffer. Not to live, to suffer. And they went, and they helped to build. And thank G-d that that's kind of people we got now a country. Is a beautiful country. And when Israel became a state was 600,000 people. That's it. Nothing more. And thank G-d we have over 5,000,000 altogether. Jewish people is about 4,000,000 in Israel. And this we did after the war with a small group of Jewish people.

**INT:** How do you feel about Israel?

**ABRAM:** Very good. To telling the truth, if I would be young, I would be in Israel. Because a lot of friends, which I was with them in Russia, they went right away to Israel. And they're now very good off. They worked all the years, everybody has a nice house, everybody has nice apartments, they have children educated. Of course, I have one friend, he lost a son in the war, in 1973, the Yom Kippur War. No, this is a big loss to him. He got one son. No, what can you do? Is a war.

**INT:** How do you feel about the world's view of Israel? How do you see the world's view of Israel?

**ABRAM:** Now? Very good.

**INT:** You think it's good?

**ABRAM:** Now it's good. I'm very pleased with the peace initiative. Very pleased. You see, a lot of people are against. I'm not against. Because they're afraid we gonna give back this, for peace is worth everything. And I see a good future for Israel. A very good future.

**INT:** Do you trust the Arabs?

**ABRAM:** No. I don't trust them. No, we got to try.

**INT:** But how can you, if you can't trust the Arabs, how can you make peace with them?

**ABRAM:** You can't, you have to make peace, because to lead to one war after another is no good. You know?

**INT:** You have to try it.

**ABRAM:** Let's say, when they made peace with Egypt, a lot of people in that time was against. And still is better a bad peace than a good war. And still nobody...not one soldier got killed between the Egypt and Israel since the peace made.

**INT:** They're not real warm towards each other, but they're not...

**ABRAM:** No, better this. Now, the peace with, of course I like better the peace with King Hussein.

**INT:** Than with Arafat.

**ABRAM:** Than with Arafat. With Arafat, I don't know. Because we don't know what will be tomorrow. No, we got to watch him very, very, very close. And I believe that the government of Israel is enough smart, they gonna watch him. If he gonna do this what he supposed to do, it would be bad for him. Israel would be Israel. They can squeeze him, and that's it. And the peace with King Hussein will be the best peace. And this is what I predict, if I may say. I predict that in the future, Arafat will disappear. I don't know how. He could be killed from his people, like...

**INT:** Sadat.

**ABRAM:** Sadat. And King Hussein, if he will be alive, will take over the West Bank. And this will be a confederatzia (confederation) between West Bank with Jordan and Israel. This is my, what I predict. And the best peace will be with Jordan.  
(pause)

**INT:** Okay, if we can go back to when Rita was born. Do you remember that, what that was like, to be a father?

**ABRAM:** Rita was born in 1949, the eleventh of July. This was on a Monday morning. She was born Sunday night. And of course we were happy. And we gave her the name from my mother, my mother's name, Rivka. And of course we got in Germany, when we came to Germany, we were poor. This is my luck. We came also without money. We got a few dollars, nu, not too much, because we left Poland with nothing. And I came to Poland from Russia with

nothing. And still we survive. I did different kinds of things, and to make a few dollars. To support Eva and my child. And after, when we left Germany, I was happy to leave Germany. Eva was happy to leave Germany. We wouldn't stay in Germany. Even would have a good life. Like some people are doing. Some people, they live till now in Germany, you know? I wouldn't do this, and Eva not. Because we're not the type just for money. Of course, money is a very good thing to...

**INT:** It helps a lot.

**ABRAM:** To make, helps a lot. It makes the life easy. No, still, when we came, when we left Germany, we left, what can I tell you? It's a shame to tell you. With nothing. When we came to Canada, we came to Canada in 1951. The 19th of October, in 1951. Rita was two years old, like I told you. She was more than two years.

**INT:** Where in Canada did you go? What city?

**ABRAM:** Montreal. You see, actually, we got to go to the uncle to Winnipeg. No, my wife Eva, got an uncle in Brooklyn. He was her mother's brother. And he wrote a letter, before we left Germany, that if we're coming to Canada, we should stay near New York, not go to Winnipeg, because the uncle was living in Winnipeg in that time, and he prepared for us an apartment in Winnipeg. And then we decided to stay in Montreal. Because Montreal is closer to New York than Winnipeg. And we made a mistake. For us it would be better to go there.

**INT:** Why?

**ABRAM:** Because her uncle, he told us, when he's going to be near us, is going to come. And we got to wait a half a year till he came. In the half a year, we got nowhere to stay. You wouldn't believe it. We came in a Friday, we came from Quebec. We came by ship. And the ship landed in Quebec. And we went by train to Montreal. And everybody got somebody which was waiting, and I and Eva and Rita, she was a small child. Nobody knows from us, and we were staying on the station, and didn't know what to do. Nobody was waiting for us.

So I got a friend, which I told you, from Warsaw, which I told you he lives now in...he was in Warsaw Ghetto, he lives now in Toronto. And he was, got a brother, which I know him also from Russia. Him I know from Germany, and him I know from Russia. And I called them up, if I can come to stay just overnight. Because I got nowhere to go. This was Friday night. And to telling the truth, without money. I got five dollar in my pocket. Nothing more.

And I called him up. Was very hard till I find him. I didn't know nothing English, till I find the number, the name, the number. Was very, **very** bad.

**INT:** Did Eva know any English, either?

**ABRAM:** No! I could more at that time, because I was outside with the...with the American soldiers. If they want something, I brought for them. And she couldn't, nothing. And maybe

one word I knew. And little by little I find the number, I called them up. Of course they know me, and they told me, "Take a taxi and come." And this what I did. I took a taxi.

And I went to them. This was Friday night. And we got a place overnight to stay, and the next day was Saturday. Saturday was Saturday. And Sunday I went right away with my friend to look for an apartment, to find something where to stay. And I didn't got even money to pay nothing. So the people, which I leant some money, and I find a room for \$35, Gan Eden money, and I paid, and Sunday, I didn't got nothing to take. (laughs) We came with nothing. And we went just to took a room. You know? They gave us a bed where to sleep. And this was when I came to Canada. Was very bad. And I start to look for work.

**INT:** But how did you know how to do that? Was anyone there to help you?

**ABRAM:** Because that guy, the two brothers, what I told you, they knew a little bit already. What to do, because they stayed, maybe a year or before I came, or two years. So they know already, and they went with me, and we find a place where to sleep. And later, I was looking for work right away, because I got no money. And I went to the HIAS. And the HIAS gave at that time, people which came, they gave thirteen dollars a week. To have to live for a family. Now, can you live with thirteen dollars? So I went up to them, to the HIAS, and I told them, "Listen. I came to Canada not to get thirteen dollars a week. Even you gonna give me a hundred, I don't want nothing. I want a job. Send me any work you want. I gonna do it. Because I'm young, and I'm willing to do any job. So people, I talk in Jewish, because I couldn't English, and I was glad that they understood what I talked to them, and between them, they said, "He's right. What's he gonna do with thirteen dollars? He wants to work. We got to find him a job." So they start to look in factories. Nobody needs. Nothing.

No, one man, he told him, I have somebody which came from Europe, a survivor, and he was also from Poland, not in the trade which I knew. I went just to work any work, so I went in how to say, they make out leather. How you call this?

**INT:** Tannery? Like they make leather from skins?

**ABRAM:** The leather from the felt, from the skins.

**INT:** Right. Tannery.

**ABRAM:** I was with this, this was strange for me. No, I told him, what you told me to do, I gonna do it. And when he came to him, he look at me, "You're gonna work by this kind of work?" I told him, "Why not?" And I told him right away. I need. (crying) I told him, I have nobody here. I have no family. Nobody to support me, and I have a child.

**INT:** Was it hard work? Is that what he was telling you?

**ABRAM:** It was not so hard. It was very dirty. Very dirty, the smell was very bad. And...he took me. He told me, "What I can do for you, I gonna do. Because I see you are a nice person.

You are a survivor." He was from Bialystok. Maybe you heard of this in Poland. "And I gonna tell you right away. Don't expect that you're gonna make later better, because this is not a place for you. No, I'm doing this because you told me that you need a few dollars, and you have a child. So come tomorrow for work. I gonna give you 75 cents an hour." And I agree. And I got there to work, was very far from where I used to live. I got to take two buses. No, this is not important. And I was working a year there, by him. He was very good to me. He gave me, let's say, sometimes, a little overtime, I should make \$30 a week. At the beginning I made \$25.

**INT:** Was that enough to live on?

**ABRAM:** It was not enough. And I paid rent \$35 for a room. So imagine how. Anyway, I was lucky. We are out from Europe. We are out from Germany, and we gonna build a new life. And of course I was happy. I made, I remember when I got the pay, I gave Eva fifteen dollars, she should manage how to live through the week. And in that time, everything was cheap. To telling the truth, was cheap, and we got to eat. Of course, it was very hard to buy something. Rita was a child, and we had to buy for her something, a dress, shoes. Nu, we managed. We managed. And I was working a year by that man. Later I find a better job. By tailoring. By tailoring, of course was better.

No, this year, what I work by that man, was a very hard year. I never gonna forget this year. No, that man did for me a lot. Because I told him, "I wanted to bring my brother." He was in Israel. "No, I need from you a favor. And don't worry, you wouldn't have trouble from him. I guarantee you. I want just you should sing an affidavit, that he's gonna come, you gonna give him a job. Nothing more. You don't have to give him a job."

**INT:** Just say that to get him over here.

**ABRAM:** And he told me, "I understand. I gonna do it. Of course I gonna do this." He told me right away, "I am Jewish. I know what is happening in Europe. I got my family there, and they are all killed. So I gonna do it for you." And he did it.

(END TAPE SIX, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE SIX, SIDE TWO)

**ABRAM:** ...from Israel, you see? Because my mind...

**INT:** Did he want to leave Israel? Did he want to come to Canada?

**ABRAM:** He wanted to come, because the situation was bad, very bad. He couldn't make a living. He worked and worked, and the time at that time was very bad. What can I tell you? And everybody will admit at that time it was very bad.

**INT:** So you were still in contact with him, back and forth with letters.

**ABRAM:** Still in contact. And anyway, when he came, of course I took him in, because her uncle, which told us to stay, near in New York, after half a year he came. After half a year. When he left, he left us \$500. And with the \$500, we were able to take an apartment, to buy an apartment. We got to buy the furniture, everything. You know, if it was worth it or not worth it. This was the way, in that time. So this \$500 helped us to take this apartment, was a nice apartment.

**INT:** In Montreal.

**ABRAM:** In Montreal. Was two bedrooms. And I thought right away, if my brother will come, we can live beginning together. And this is the reason we took this apartment. And we manage with the \$500. We bought the furniture, we bought everything. And this was good. We left the room, what we got, what we rented from the lady, and we went to our apartment.

**INT:** So how old were you around this time? Were you thirty yet? Or are you still in your twenties?

**ABRAM:** I was in the beginning of the thirties. When I came to Canada, I was...33 years old. The beginning of 33. So I was young. And so went by. Of course later, when I start to work by tailoring, I made more money, and we started to do a little better. We start to live a little better, till, after eight years we came to America.

**INT:** Eight years you were in Canada.

**ABRAM:** Eight years.

**INT:** And you worked as a tailor.

**ABRAM:** And when I came to America, I came not like already like an immigrant from the beginning. I was already eight years in Canada, we knew a little English, and I went right away to work here.

**INT:** Why did you decide to move from Canada to America?

**ABRAM:** Because...

**INT:** Of the uncle?

**ABRAM:** Of her uncle. She wanted to be near her uncle. The uncle didn't help us a lot. This, besides this.

**INT:** He lived in New York?

**ABRAM:** He lived in New York. He could, if he would be nice, he could help us more than the \$500 at that time. He was not a poor man. He was not a poor man.

**INT:** Could you tell me again which uncle this was? This wasn't the uncle that you got married by their house, right? This is a different one.

**ABRAM:** No, no. If we would go there, the uncle there was poor, no he would help us more than the rich one.

**INT:** The one who lived in Winnipeg.

**ABRAM:** We made a mistake. No, this is over already. It's over.

**INT:** So this was an uncle who had already moved to America before the war?

**ABRAM:** He left Poland before the war. He left Poland the year, the year before the war start. Let's say the ship which brought them, couldn't go back already. She was, in the war she stays in America. No way to go back. He came with the last ship, and he was lucky.

**INT:** So he lived in New York. And you came to New York to be near him.

**ABRAM:** He lived at that time in New York, and we came to him. No, when I came to New York, I was not a greenhorn already. I went right away to work, and I make not bad...

**INT:** Can I ask you something? When you went to Canada, who were your friends? Did you hook up with other survivors?

**ABRAM:** Only survivors. Only survivors.

**INT:** Did you find that the Jewish community in Montreal wanted to hear your story?

**ABRAM:** No. No.

**INT:** How were they towards the survivors?

**ABRAM:** To telling the truth, for them they looked to us not like supposed to be, like brothers and sisters. Strange. Strange. They thought we came, everybody came with, let's say, we made, how to say, we didn't got a light valise. We made such a box, and they thought in that box we got money. That everybody came with boxes with money. This was, they got in mind.

**INT:** Did they know what you had gone through?

**ABRAM:** They didn't **want** to know. They didn't want to know.

**INT:** Why do you think?

**ABRAM:** You know what? Even the Jews in America. I live in America already for forty years. I have no one friend from American people, from Jews from America. All that I associate is only with people which...

**INT:** Why is that do you think?

**ABRAM:** I don't know why. They don't want to know. Nobody asked us. And you know what they told us in the beginning? "You went through? What do you think, we got better here?" So it's a shame to talk about this.

**INT:** Why bother talking to them.

**ABRAM:** So what do you got bad? "We couldn't eat, was no steaks, we got to eat chicken." So we didn't got bread. And they got just the chicken. This was their answer. This we went through.

**INT:** You couldn't communicate with them at all. It was just impossible.

**ABRAM:** Till now.

**INT:** Even today.

**ABRAM:** Even today. I don't know why. And the Jewish people, the community, the American people, they helping a lot, let's say Israel. They need money, they give them money. No, to sit down, and to listen to the story as you're listening now to me, nobody wanted it.

**INT:** Why do you think they didn't want to hear you?

**ABRAM:** I don't know. Is strange. Strange. I have, even now, I live in a community which is mostly Jewish. No, nobody from the old timers, like to say from the American Jews, nobody would ask, "I would like to listen to the story what you went through." Nobody.

**INT:** Do you think it's because they don't want to hurt you? Or do you think they just don't want to know?

**ABRAM:** They don't want to know. They are not interested. So between, we have a lot of people which they are newcomers like I am. We are the society. We keep close one to another.

**INT:** And you speak Yiddish with these people?

**ABRAM:** Mostly Yiddish. Mostly Yiddish. Mostly Yiddish.

**INT:** How did you learn English when you came here?

**ABRAM:** When I went, I was working in the garment center, let's say in New York. When I was working in the garment center, between people, we talk Jewish. In the beginning we didn't know nothing, to call this in English any little thing. So we speak Jewish. And we know very little English. Everybody the same. Very little English. So later, when I left the garment center, I made a cleaning store for myself, and I got to do with the English people, and **then** I learned.

**INT:** So it was many years later.

**ABRAM:** Yeah. After eight years.

**INT:** You didn't really learn much English in Canada.

**ABRAM:** Until I went to the store, I did very little English.

**INT:** But Rita must have been going to school.

**ABRAM:** Rita went to school. Eva caught the language from Rita. And I didn't got the time, and I wanted Rita should speak Yiddish. And Rita spoke Yiddish, till she were a big girl already.

**INT:** She spoke Yiddish to you.

**ABRAM:** I spoke to her here, I told her, "I don't want to know English." She should speak Yiddish. And I spoke to her Yiddish. She spoke to me Yiddish till she was twenty. And now, even now, she can't. No, she has nobody to talk. No, she understood. And I sacrificed my English, because she should know Yiddish.

**INT:** You wanted her to know Yiddish. That was important to you.

**ABRAM:** You see, this is mein background, what I told you. What I like Jewish, I sacrificed my English. Of course, later, I did it myself. Which I know, that I talk to you in English, nobody taught me. I catch it myself. And when I would spoke English to Rita, since she start school, maybe I was better in English. And I didn't want to. I sacrificed my English, she should know Yiddish.

**INT:** Why was that important to you?

**ABRAM:** For me was very important. I wanted to continue the Jewish language, which my father spoke, my grandfather, and my grand-grandfather before me. And this I wanted to continue. I would be happy if Rita would speak Yiddish to Elizabeth. I would be happy. No, I can't do it, because if I gonna speak to her the day what I'm here, this is nothing.

**INT:** You have to do it every day.

**ABRAM:** To know a language, you have to speak constantly in the home.

**INT:** Did you speak with your wife only Yiddish?

**ABRAM:** Yeah, even now. We speak Yiddish. Even now we speak Yiddish. She speak very good English, and very good Polish. Polish...

**INT:** You don't speak.

**ABRAM:** No. We don't want to. If we speak, it's English, not Polish. Not Polish. We hate the Polish. The Polish language, the Polish people. And this is what I am telling you.

**INT:** So when you came to New York, Rita was how old?

**ABRAM:** Rita was, when we came to New York, Rita was ten years old.

**INT:** And she went to school where in New York?

**ABRAM:** She went in Brooklyn, we lived in Brooklyn, she went...public school. Later she went to high school, Tilton High School. She went to Tilton High School, and later she went to college.

**INT:** What kind of a child was she? Can you describe her?

**ABRAM:** A **very** good child. She was so good, like Elizabeth now. You know, we have a friend, when Rita was small, and they went, because Raymond got a meeting every year, from the AIDS, from...how you call that, from scientists, every year, somewhere else, and once was in Montreal. And Montreal for Rita and for Eva was the first home. So, and we got friends there, which we came together, and we still kept the friendship. And when Rita came with Elizabeth there, so the lady and the husband told, called me up. I was in that time in Brooklyn, but of course I didn't go. I didn't got the time. I got my cleaning store. And they told me, "Elizabeth is the same. I see the other Rita. In Elizabeth, I see Rita when she was small." And this is true.

**INT:** So can you describe her?

**ABRAM:** This is, you see Elizabeth, Rita was. Rita was a quiet child, never demanding. She should, "Oh, Daddy, I want this." Nothing. What we gave her, is all right. We tried to give her the best what we could. No, she was a very good child. Very good.

**INT:** Was she interested in school?

**ABRAM:** Oh, yeah. Very interested. She wanted to learn. And we gave her everything, she should go to school, and even later to college. We tried the best. And thank G-d, she is now a professional.

**INT:** What does she do? What is her job?

**ABRAM:** She is a psychotherapist. And she's doing very good. And she married Raymond. If she wouldn't be educated, I don't know if she could marry Raymond, because he's high educated.

**INT:** And what does Raymond do?

**ABRAM:** He's a scientist. So this is what I accomplished. From all the tsuris, what we went through. We accomplished something. We got something to show. And this is not I. Other people, which are the same. We came after the war to America with nothing. And everybody accomplished. Everybody got children, they're doctors, lawyers, and that's it. Everybody's something.

**INT:** Could you describe how you raised Rita as far as religion goes? What was Judaism like in your home? And what kind of practice did you do?

**ABRAM:** To telling the truth, we didn't gave her a special Jewish education, because when we came after the war, it was very hard in that time to do it, what my father did with me. To took me to the cheder, you know? This was a different time. And if it would be a boy, it would be different. I would try different. No, Rita's a girl, and of course, when I went somewhere, let's say I talked to her in Yiddish. And everybody was happy, because such a girl in America talks Yiddish? Not every girl was talking Yiddish in that time. And I did it. No, special to send her in a yeshiva, or in a Jewish school, I didn't. Not I didn't want to do it. I didn't. I didn't. I don't know why. I didn't. I didn't. No, still, tradition, she knows the tradition from every holiday. Every holiday we made Passover, we made a Seder. Let's say, Yom Kippur was Yom Kippur, and the holiday was in the house, and she knew about it. Every holiday she knows. Simchas Torah I went with her, and I remember I gave her a flag, like we're going on Simchas Torah. And she knows, all the things she knows. No, to send her special in a yeshiva, I didn't. Not because I didn't want it, and not because I was against. We didn't do it. But she knows she's Jewish. She knows. No, she should know too much about Judaism, she doesn't know.

**INT:** Did you talk to her about what you'd been through, as she was growing up?

**ABRAM:** She knows, no not too much. She gonna learn now.

**INT:** Did she ever ask you when she was little?

**ABRAM:** She asked. She asked. She wanted I should tell the story, even Elizabeth, or Eva should tell the story. She was interested. I wouldn't say no. No, she knows a little what we went through. She knows what we went through a lot. That we are survivors, and she is a child from a survivor's family. She knows. I wouldn't say no.

**INT:** Did you tell her everything, or did you tell her just bits and pieces?

**ABRAM:** In pieces, not everything. Not like I told you.

**INT:** How about your wife? Did she ever?

**ABRAM:** Also the same. Not too much. Not too much. Not too much.

**INT:** Did you want to protect her from it, or it just didn't come up, or...

**ABRAM:** Not protect, no, this is not protecting. We didn't do it, because to telling the truth, everybody, for our people, of course, some which is more religious, they send to the yeshivas. I know some from which I know them very well, they send girls to yeshivas. And after they left the yeshiva, they got married with a rabbi, with this, with that. And I was not that type. Telling the truth, I was the same as I am now. I was Jewish. I know I'm Jewish, and I like Jewish life, and from time to time the holiday, I went to shul. No, I didn't practice too much. So I couldn't make her better than me.

**INT:** What about Eva?

**ABRAM:** The same thing.

**INT:** So you and your wife were pretty much the same as far as, you were in agreement on...

**ABRAM:** If it comes to religion, we are both the same. I don't insist on her too much, and she doesn't insist on me, that I have to do this and this, or she's supposed to do this or this.

**INT:** Did you ever talk about how to raise Rita between the two of you, or was it one person more than the other who raised her?

**ABRAM:** We both wanted, we both agreed, let's say when Rita was born, that we're Jewish people, we gonna bring up like a Jewish home is supposed to be. And she knows everything about this. She knows about kosher, not kosher. I don't know, she doesn't observe this. But she knows about it. She knows about every holiday, you know? She, to telling the truth, when my brother died, my brother was more, he was more...because of the children, he got two boys, he wanted them to give a Jewish education, a little bit. They went to cheder. So he made the holidays more for the boys they should know a Seder, this and that. And after mein brother died, I didn't, I was very depressed when this happened, at such a young age. And because we now come to a country which we could live a little together, and be in a nice way, and they took him away, when I lost him, the first few holidays, I didn't do nothing, because I was very...left alone. Like alone.

**INT:** Did you used to go to his house to celebrate the holidays?

**ABRAM:** Always.

**INT:** When he came to America, and then you all lived in New York together?

**ABRAM:** Of course we made the Sedarim together. The first day was in my house, the second day was in his house.

**INT:** All through the years.

**ABRAM:** All the years. No, when he died, this stopped. And when Rita moved here, and when Elizabeth was born, Rita told me, "Daddy, we should start to make a Seder." And I was in that time, I thought to myself, Oh, my goodness. Why didn't I say this before? This is supposed to come from me, not from her.

**INT:** And you had stopped because of your brother's death.

**ABRAM:** This, I got the reason, I'm telling you. And when she told me that we start to make a Seder, and Elizabeth should see what we are. And Raymond is not against. You know, when comes the holiday, he comes before, and he helps everything, what we need. He is very nice.

(Pause)

**INT:** Rita married someone who isn't Jewish. So how does that work, and how do you feel about that? How did you feel about that when it happened?

**ABRAM:** I feel not bad. Because he is good. If he wouldn't be good, maybe I would, I could say different. No, so he is a good person, and I'm happy. I'm happy, my wife is happy, mein whole family is happy. I have the cousin, which I told you, she's very religious, and she knows about Raymond, and she told me, "He's a tzaddik, because what he's doing for people." And she knows. What he's doing for me, that he's a tzaddik. Like I shouldn't consider him not a tzaddik, I wouldn't give him the title. No, he's a good person, and I feel that Rita got a good life. And if she has a good life, and my child, Elizabeth, got a good life, that's why I feel very good.

**INT:** So it doesn't matter.

**ABRAM:** No. It doesn't bother me. Because he didn't observe, between you and me, he's not Jewish, no, he's not religious...

**INT:** Christian either.

**ABRAM:** Christian either. He's a person. So how can I be against?

**INT:** Is he sympathetic to Jewish things?

**ABRAM:** He's more sympathetic to Jewish things. He knows the holidays. You know what, if I made a mistake by the Seder, he's telling me. "You've got to stand up to drink the wine." So he's telling me, (laughs) I'm sorry, I didn't do it. Because he reads this in English, and I'm telling this in Hebrew, you understand? So he's a good person, and Rita got a good life. They love each

other, they love Elizabeth, and the family is a very good family, so I couldn't be against. Even his parents is very good to us. We don't feel something is different.

**INT:** You can talk to them.

**ABRAM:** Of course.

**INT:** Because you said that it's hard for you to speak to other people who haven't, don't have your background.

**ABRAM:** I don't speak with his parents, this what I speak now with you.

**INT:** But you can talk to them.

**ABRAM:** We can talk to them. They're friends. They like us, we like them. His parents are very good people. Very like Raymond. Rita has a mother-in-law, is like Eva to her. And she told us, "It's not so hard to love Rita. She is like us a daughter, not a..."

**INT:** Daughter-in-law.

**ABRAM:** Daughter-in-law. She's like a daughter to us. And Rita's also a good person, what can I tell you. She brought up not to be against, and not, we didn't send her to a Jewish school. No, she knows about everything, she knows. Because we, when came any holiday, we observed the holiday. Not always in a religious way, to go every Saturday to shul, or every morning. No, like Jews. We're Jews.

**INT:** Could you describe for me a little bit, how would you describe your marriage over the years?

**ABRAM:** My marriage?

**INT:** How was that for you?

**ABRAM:** Like every marriage. (laughs) What can I tell you? Ups and downs. What can I tell you? Was good times and bad times. And to telling the truth, the last few years came to a crash between me and Eva. Because she wanted to live here, and I have nothing to do here. Let's say, I'm here for a few days, it's all right. Because I have no friends here. I have no to whom to [interruption]

**INT:** You were saying that there isn't anything for you here.

**ABRAM:** Yeah. And we got, not a fight, we are very good relations. You see, she wanted to live here.

**INT:** To be near Rita and Elizabeth.

**ABRAM:** I couldn't be too much against. No, I should live here, is for me a big problem, because I have to leave all my friends, and all what I'm doing, you know?

**INT:** What are you doing?

**ABRAM:** No, no, I'm not working.

**INT:** Yeah, but...

**ABRAM:** No, I have, I'm doing a lot of, to say, I'm involved in...in two places. They called senior citizens center, which we make every Friday for about fifteen years, we make an Oneg Shabbat around 2:00 till 4:00, and I like to be there, and to sing there, and the people like me very much. And the evening, Friday night, we got a cultural place, which we got a speaker. We talk everything in Jewish. We talk about different things, about Israel, about what happened to Israel, or from writers. We talk about every writer which what we got, and what his thinking was. It's very, in a cultural way. And of course, there's an hour talking. An hour is singing. Everybody reads a poem, you know? And this is from 8:00 until 10:00. And I hate this to lose.

**INT:** And you have all your friends there, too.

**ABRAM:** And everybody knows me. Let's say, when I have to come here, I try not to come in a Friday, because I don't want to lose this, so I'm coming a day after, or a day before.

**INT:** It's very important to you.

**ABRAM:** For me it's important. For other people, maybe not. But for me, it's important. This is my life.

**INT:** So you couldn't come here with her.

**ABRAM:** And this is the other thing. I was waiting for an apartment, I was waiting seven years to get it. This is the Trump Village. Maybe your husband know. He used to live in Brooklyn, I think. And this is a very, the best section in Brooklyn. Near the water. I have the boardwalk, I have the ocean, and there's a park there, and the shopping is near. Everything is near. And mostly our people lives there.

(END TAPE SIX, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE SEVEN, SIDE ONE)

**ABRAM:** Eva told me that she's not willing to move. She doesn't like to do it. So I ask her why. She doesn't want it. That's it. What you gonna do? I gonna find a place where to stay by Rita. And this was strange to me. And she did it.

**INT:** She moved down here.

**ABRAM:** I took the apartment, and I took some furniture, and she was left in the old place where we used to live together, for a few months, till she finds something here, and now we're like separated. We're not separated. I live there, and she lives here.

**INT:** But you didn't get a divorce.

**ABRAM:** No, I wouldn't do. And everything in a peaceful way.

**INT:** How did you do that? How did that work? Who decided, who made that decision that you're going to stay there, and she's going to come here?

**ABRAM:** The decision she made. But I wanted she should stay with me. And whatever you want, you can go to Rita. I'm not against. No, she wanted to move at all here. So I told her that at all, I got such a nice apartment, and I'm happy with mein apartment. I have three rooms, and center, which everybody wished to go there, because for money you can't get such an apartment. You have to work. And even some apartment goes for money, you have to put about ten, fifteen thousand dollars in. And the rent is very reasonable. I'm paying \$260 a month, one bedroom, no light, including light and gas. Where can get it, such a thing? So I'm happy. So I stay there. And she is here.

**INT:** So how is that working?

**ABRAM:** It's working. That's it. What can I do? It's not good. For me it's no good. I have to prepare for me everything alone. I have to cook.

**INT:** You're not used to that.

**ABRAM:** Now, I'm used to it already. It's two years already this way.

**INT:** Oh. Two years.

**ABRAM:** And I don't like it. If she likes this, I don't know. I don't ask her. No, I don't like it. So I'm here now. I came just, Eva's birthday was this week, she's 70 years old. She's born in 1924, the first of November. So I came and celebrate together her birthday. And I'm going back tomorrow, after tomorrow. So could I be happy? Nu, I'm happy. Let's be like this. Because it's not her fault, and not my fault. We're not divorcing each other. To telling the truth, I love her, and I don't know if she loves me, I don't know. I know she likes me. (laughs) Like and love is a different story. Anyway, anyway, and we go like this. What can I tell you?

**INT:** How was Rita with this decision? Did she get involved in it at all?

**ABRAM:** She doesn't get involved. She's not talking about nothing. She didn't help her, nothing. This I know. She's not so happy. No, she's more happy that we became, we just, we

friends, we're not separate. That we should be mad for each other. No. Everything in a nice way. When I'm here, she prepare for me to take home for myself. She send me cookies. And now she makes different things I should take home for myself.

**INT:** She's still taking care of you.

**ABRAM:** That's right. So we separated. I don't know how you call this. (laughs)

**INT:** I don't know. It's a unique situation.

**ABRAM:** It has no name. In Jewish is not allowed like this. A couple is supposed to be together, and we're not divorced, and we're not together, and I don't know how to call it. It has no name. (laughs)

**INT:** How would you describe how you raised Rita when she was growing up? How was discipline handled in the home, would you say? Who was the person who...

**ABRAM:** To telling the truth, I was every day I went to work. Eva was more with Rita. She raised her more than I. Because when I came home, sometimes later I work overtime, Rita was sleeping. In the morning I went away. Rita was sleeping. You know, only in the weekend I saw her. And was a pleasure when I didn't go to work, let's say, the weekend was a pleasure. And Rita was more raised from Eva. And she was raised very good, in a good nice way. I was not against. I never beat Rita since she was born. I should did to her something. No. Rita never did to me something wrong I should beat her up. **Never.**

**INT:** She was a good kid.

**ABRAM:** A very good kid. Till she went out from the house, about 21 she got married to the first husband, which was no good. I got no problems with Rita. Not I, not Eva, nobody. She was a very good kid. She got very good friends. You know, the most important is friends. Because in our Jewish Bible, I don't have to ask you where you are, I gonna see your friends, I gonna know what you are.

**INT:** What kind of friends did she have?

**ABRAM:** Very good friends.

**INT:** Jewish, non-Jewish, both?

**ABRAM:** No. Mostly Jewish. She has, till now, she has a friend she is in California, which they went to school, they know each other since the public school, and they're still good friends. And they're mostly the same age. She's Jewish.

**INT:** Where did Rita go to college?

**ABRAM:** In Manhattan.

**INT:** Did she live away from home then, or she stayed home?

**ABRAM:** No.

**INT:** No, she stayed home.

**ABRAM:** She stayed home. We didn't allow her to go out.

**INT:** You didn't want her to.

**ABRAM:** No, we didn't want. Especially Eva. She was a good kid, and a good student. She made junior high school, she made instead of three years, she made it in two. She skipped a year. She was a very good student. So we got no problem with her.

**INT:** But why didn't you want her to move away from home?

**ABRAM:** We didn't want her to. We didn't. She wanted. Other girls go outside, and especially Eva told her no.

**INT:** You were afraid for her?

**ABRAM:** We were afraid.

**INT:** When you were raising her, were you ever fearful that something would happen to her? Were you...

**ABRAM:** You know, when Rita was a teenager was the time when was hippies and shmippies and hippies, you know? All the tsuris. And this we were afraid. She shouldn't get involved with such kind of girls and boys. And thank G-d she didn't. She got a very, the friend that I told you, her name is Kay, her father was a doctor, and she was raised nice. And these are the best friends, till now.

**INT:** So she stayed out of trouble pretty much, in high school?

**ABRAM:** Never got trouble. Never got trouble.

**INT:** Were you fearful for her when she would go out, or when she would get sick? Would you be okay with that, or was it very hard for you?

**ABRAM:** We watched her. Of course, we watched her very good, and we know every move she did. We knew where. When she went somewhere, she left a note, that I gonna be in this and this home, and this and this telephone number.

**INT:** You wanted her to do that, to let you know.

**ABRAM:** Yeah, of course. We should know where she is. We gave her the right she can go. No, not too late. And we wanted her to know we're home. Who is there. We kept an eye on her, and she was very good. We got no problem. No problem.

(Pause)

**INT:** When you got married, did you and your wife feel a desire to have, what was your view of having children? How important was it to you...

**ABRAM:** Very important. We liked children. We both liked children.

**INT:** Did the Holocaust have anything to do with your desire to have children?

**ABRAM:** You know, when everything is over, and we stay alive, you have to continue generation after generation. If we wouldn't do this, after the war, to have children, to get married, it wouldn't be no generation after generation. It would stop. And this we wanted to continue. And mostly we, when the Holocaust started, was mostly young people. The older people, they killed them and they died. And after the war, everybody was in the twenties. Young people. And young women. So the desire was to get married and to have children. To continue a Jewish people.

**INT:** Was that a conscious thing in your head, that you thought of that as being important?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. Yeah. We knew we got to do it. Even everybody got different times, even after the war, good and bad, there was a time we got nothing, and this shouldn't stop the way of life. We wanted to have children.

**INT:** What would you say have been your successes in life, and what have been your regrets, I guess?

**ABRAM:** I wouldn't say that I got no success. Of course, I didn't become a rich man. No, according what I came with nothing, I accomplished a little in my life. Which I told you before, which I give Rita a good education, and she got everything what she need. What she wanted. And we both loved Rita, and we didn't, we wanted she should have more than I got when I was her age, and she got it. I was working hard, Eva was working sometimes a little bit, to give her more than we could. No, we did it. And later, later when I went for myself, let's say I was working about eight years for somebody, and after the eight years I decided I'm going to go in business for myself. And I went and I got a cleaning store. And I got a cleaning store, I was in the business about 22 years. And I was my own boss, and I make not bad. Maybe if I would be, got the mind what I have today, I would got more money. I would put away more money. So we go, I went to, I make a lot of trips, which I went to Russia, I helped my family in Russia a lot. I went three times from America to Russia, and this cost me a lot of money in that time. I got to pay, just to stay in a hotel, \$60 a night.

**INT:** When was this? What year was this, when you went?

**ABRAM:** This was when I got from my brother, which was in Russia, the older brother.

**INT:** Right. Teyvel.

**ABRAM:** Teyvel. When he went to Russia. And the kids were small at that time when I went, and I got to help them. And I came from America, they didn't got nothing, and I bought them everything from shoes to a watch. And there was two, three kids, and my sister-in-law was alive, and was a grandchild already in that time from my brother, and she was small. And she is now in Israel.

And this what I did three times. I could do this. So I think this is a big success for me. I could do this. And every trip didn't cost me just a few dollars. It cost quite a few thousand dollars. To telling the truth, I spent with my three times trips about \$40,000, and this I could invest it, I would have it now, maybe \$200,000. And this I did it, because I got to do it. Because my brother died, and I was just the only one, which I got to do this. Can I regret what I did? I do not regret it. If I would have now \$200,000, the hell with it. I did a good thing for them. And they remember. Of course, they're not alive now. Because they died. And this what I accomplished. So to telling, and I'm still alive. This also I accomplished, what I went through. Two heart surgeries in my life.

**INT:** I was just going to ask you, do you have any health problems over the years?

**ABRAM:** No.

**INT:** But your heart. You had two heart...

**ABRAM:** To telling the truth, I am a survivor from the Holocaust, and a survivor here in America. I survived two heart attacks, and I take not one pill for my heart.

**INT:** You walk every day.

**ABRAM:** I walk every day, and I'm active, and I like to be between people, and...I'm dancing, because I like, and I'm singing. So, what can I ask for more? I made the last checkup, and the doctor told me, everything is all right. So this also I accomplished for me.

**INT:** What do you do when you're feeling low or depressed? How do you handle that?

**ABRAM:** I'm not a person which I let myself to be depressed. No. When I'm depressed, I'm going out, I'm going between people. And I'm not depressed.

**INT:** So as soon as you feel depressed, you go out, and...

**ABRAM:** Of course sometimes, you know, of course every person sometimes feels sometimes bad. So I stay a little bit in the house by myself, I think about this, about that, and I say to myself, "Abie, this is not the way of life. Go out and make a smile on your face, and that's it." And that's what I'm doing. A lot of people ask me a question: Abie, how you can do this, what you're doing? This is my nature, I'm doing this.

**INT:** And you think you were like that before the war, too?

**ABRAM:** No, before the war I was young. I didn't got as many problems as I got now. No, I always was a happy child. I was always happy, when I was young. I always was happy. And this, until now, and this what I'm, for me it is very good. Because the people is telling me, and my wife told me, "I wish I would have such a nature like you." She is more depressed sometimes, and I'm not. Because I have a different nature. I don't let it. If I'm depressed, I'm going out. I wouldn't sit home. When you come between people, is a different story. No, if you gonna sit home and cry about what happened to you, and nobody gave you an answer. So what you gonna accomplish? Nothing. You killed yourself. So I'm going out between people. Between people I like to make a joke, and this and that. We talk, and that's it, and I'm again, my role to life.

**INT:** Do you think about the Holocaust very much in your life?

**ABRAM:** Of course I think. I think a lot about my parents. Which I left them and I never saw them again. The day that I left was in the summer in 1939, and I never saw them again. And I never once saw them again. Of course, I think a lot. And we got a big family, with cousins, with aunts, with uncles, and I lost everybody. Of course. I think a lot about the Holocaust, what happened.

**INT:** Do you read books or see movies about it? Are you able to do that?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. I read a lot of books, and lately, I'm not reading, like I told you, lately I'm not reading too much Yiddish. I'm reading English. No, not about the Holocaust. I'm going, when is, let's say, every year when is the Holocaust day, the Shoah, so I'm going, I see the movie. I saw the movie.

**INT:** Did you go to Schindler's List, for instance, would you go to see a film like that, like Schindler's List?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. Of course I saw. And you know when I saw Schindler's List? In Israel. I went special with my friends, I told you. I said I want to see it. And they went with me, and they saw also. And the lady which I stayed, she's a survivor, and the husband a survivor. So we went all together to see the movie.

**INT:** Was that difficult for you?

**ABRAM:** To telling the truth, I know more what I saw in the movie. I saw much more. I know about much more. Of course, is very sad when you see what happened, how the people were dying, and what they went through. No, I know much more.

**INT:** Do you think people should know about the Holocaust?

**ABRAM:** Yeah.

**INT:** It's important for everyone to know, or just Jewish people?

**ABRAM:** Everybody. Not to forget. Not to forgive, and not to forget. This what I tell everybody. Not to forgive, and not to forget. And this what I'm happy what I'm doing. And I was willing to do more, if I could.

**INT:** Because you want people to know. Do you ever have any nightmares or flashbacks to, about the war?

**ABRAM:** Lately no.

**INT:** Did you in the past have?

**ABRAM:** No, lately, no. Because to tell the truth, I don't let to this. I have no nightmares. You see sometimes Eva, when she was younger, after the war, let's say ten years after the war, fifteen years, in the middle of the night, she was crying. And I wake her up. "What happened? Oh, a German was after you, and after Rita, and they took you away." You know? Such a nightmare.

**INT:** So she would have them.

**ABRAM:** Yeah, and I told her, nothing happened, everything is all right. She has more, and I have less. I have less.

**INT:** What have been your happiest moments in your life, would you say?

**ABRAM:** My happiest moments in my life? My happiest moments in my life was when I came to America. I established my life here. And when Rita got married, of course, I was unhappy when she divorced, I talk about the first marriage, and now I'm happy about Rita, when I'm coming here, and she has a good life. And this is my happiness.

**INT:** What would you want your legacy to be to your daughter, and to her daughter? What do you want them to know about you?

**ABRAM:** I would like that they should know what I went through, and I would like that they should know to be what they are. You understand what I mean? They should be continue. That's what I am, and they should be what they are. They should know they are Jews. This is my wish.

**INT:** And what would you want them to learn from your life?

**ABRAM:** I would want them to learn from my life, the good things. The good things they should learn. Because I show Rita the way of life, I, also Eva, we have to like people, to live with people. To help people. Not to be...selfish. Even now, in the middle of the night, if somebody would need my help, I would do it. Because I did a lot of times this. Is very hard to tell everything what I did. And I did a lot of good things in my life, which I helped people, which other people wouldn't do this. I did it. And I did it. And this what I would like my daughter should do good things, for people, to help people. And to live a life, a good life, a nice life. Like people should be. And not to forget what they are. This is important. To be Jews.

**INT:** Would you consider yourself optimistic or pessimistic? You know, hopeful, or...

**ABRAM:** I am an optimist. I know this expression very good. I never was a pessimist. In the worst time. I never saw things dark. Always I see things with a shining light. So I am not a pessimist. I'm an optimist.

**INT:** Are you trusting of people, or suspicious of people? People in general, people that you met.

**ABRAM:** I trust people. I still trust people.

**INT:** Do you feel safe or frightened most of the time?

**ABRAM:** I feel safe most of the time.

**INT:** Are you a worrier? Do you worry a lot about things?

**ABRAM:** No, no. I am not a worrier too much. Because, like I told you, I see life, I'm not looking, I'm not living in the past. I'm living in the future. This what we went through, we lived through, not to forget. No, we can't live with it all the times. We have to make ourselves happy. We got to enjoy the life. You know, this is my way of life. To enjoy it when you can. Not to live every time with the past. The past is over. We got to look at the future. If everybody would live in the past, nothing would go forward. Even Israel. If you would live everybody in the past, they wouldn't build nothing. They wouldn't got such a nice country which they got. And this country is built from people which are survivors, mostly. We are a surviving people. Of course, now the other generations, they have now the second generation, and soon going to come the third generation. But the people start to build from survivors. And they did a lot of things.

**INT:** Do you belong to any Holocaust organizations, or survivor organizations, groups, that have meetings?

**ABRAM:** No.

**INT:** Did you ever belong to any of them?

**ABRAM:** No.

**INT:** You just had your friends.

**ABRAM:** Not that I don't want to. I have friends, and this is important, not important. Because to telling the truth, I am very involved in Jewish life. In Jewish life. And this gives me a very, very, this is my happiness in life. I like to be involved. I like to be involved. And I told you before, I think yesterday, that I wouldn't like, I have to be with Jewish people. I can't be, let's say, with people, which they don't speak Jewish. I have to speak the language. I can't be, let's say, for a while. Let's say a few days, a few weeks. No, not forever. I have to have Jewish people to hear Jewish music, to hear Jewish talking.

**INT:** That's a comfort to you, through your life.

**ABRAM:** Yeah.

**INT:** Could you tell me what you think the importance of the Holocaust is on generations to come? What is the lesson that you think should be learned from it?

**ABRAM:** This I would like they should know what the parents or the grandparents went through, and they should not forget. And not to forgive. Of course they know who did it. Who was involved in the Holocaust. Who produced the Holocaust. And not to forget, this is the main thing. And this is supposed to go to generations and generations. Not to forget, and not to forgive. Even, like I told you...

(END TAPE SEVEN, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE SEVEN, SIDE TWO)

**INT:** So that's what you would say. Not to forget, and not to forgive.

**ABRAM:** Not to forget, and not to forgive.

**INT:** Thank you very much for the interview.

(END TAPE SEVEN. GO ON TO TAPE EIGHT)

**INT:** This is an interview with Abram Roitman. It's December 27, 1994.

Okay, over the past month or so since we've completed the interview, we thought we completed the interview, there were several questions that came to me. And since you're back in town, I thought I'd take advantage of you being here.

So I wonder if you could describe for me your brother Yitzchak's personality. He was very close to you all through your life. He was very important in your life. He influenced you as a teenager in Warsaw, and you stayed with him all through the war, and you were in Siberia with him all those years. And I was wondering if you could describe his personality and how it was like yours or different from yours, or just what he was like as a person.

**ABRAM:** He was a type like I am. This is the reason we got all the years a lot in common. He was a friend and a brother. When we became that age, let's say, he was seventeen, and when I was fifteen, it was a difference. In those years was a difference. Later, when he was nineteen, and I was seventeen, we came near each other, and let's say when, in 1939, I was nineteen, and he was 21, the difference disappeared between us. He was a friend, a brother, and we got always to talk a lot. Even till the end. Every day we got to see each other. And he was like I am till now. He liked to do a person a favor. And if he can help somebody, he was always ready. This is what I am today.

**INT:** What about liking to be with people, and singing and dancing, and that sort of thing?

**ABRAM:** He couldn't sing like I am singing. And he was dancing, of course, he was dancing. He tried to sing. No, he got no voice to sing. He didn't catch a song like I'm doing till now. Because I'm singing till now. The last Friday I was singing, and they knew that I wouldn't be here this Friday, so they gave me a chance, and I got to sing four songs, one after the other. (laughter) They were happy because they liked my songs, they liked my singing, and I'm happy also.

**INT:** But would you say that he was a more serious person than you?

**ABRAM:** This is true. He was more serious than I am. When he got some problems, he took it more seriously than I am. Till now. I have, even now. You know, every person has problems. Even no money problems, there's other problems. Every day something else. Now, I'm a person which, I have problems, no, when I'm going out, if I have to go out, nobody can recognize that I got problems. I'm always with a joke and with a smile, and nobody knows.

**INT:** You don't show it.

**ABRAM:** No, never till now.

**INT:** And was he like that?

**ABRAM:** No. When he got some problem, his face could tell right away that he has got a problem. He couldn't hide it too much.

**INT:** So he was married, and how many children? He had the three children, right?

**ABRAM:** He has three children. The oldest one, you wouldn't believe, was born in Siberia.

**INT:** I know, the baby.

**ABRAM:** On the way. And she is now, this was in 1940, and she is now about 54 years old, the girl. And the second was born on the way out, in 1946, the way out from Russia. Also when they were on the train.

**INT:** Again on the train! Unbelievable.

**ABRAM:** They got to take her off to the hospital. And the third one was born in Israel, in Tel Aviv.

**INT:** And he's the most religious, you said.

**ABRAM:** And he's the most religious. This I have to tell you. I can't believe that both of my brother's children, they are so much apart, the two brothers. I'm talking about the two brothers. The younger one is Nathan, Nachum. And the older one is my father's name, Jacob. And they are so apart, they never can get along. I don't know why.

**INT:** Do they both live in Israel?

**ABRAM:** No, they both live here.

**INT:** Oh, they both live here. That's right.

**ABRAM:** The religious one in Boro Park, and the other one in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

**INT:** And they don't get along.

**ABRAM:** They can't get along because, all the years. Not because he's religious. Because the other one, Jacob, when he got married, so he provided a kosher home. The other one, he wouldn't eat by him, because he didn't believe him. It was not really kosher. And when my sister-in-law died now, is not long ago, they got more far apart from each other. And I can't understand why. They have nothing in common. They never, they don't know too much, let's say, about the history. Because I told them years ago, "Now your mother's alive. I'm alive. If you would like to know something, is now the time you can know, because you're not familiar with the history from your family. And this is no good. Because you're going to have children and they're going to ask you. And children grow up, they want to know, how was my grandfather, how was my grandmother, how was my aunt, how was my uncle. And you wouldn't know nothing." And I don't know, till now, the sister-in-law passed away, now I'm the only one. And they told me lately they would be interested to know, because I told them about the interview that I gave you. That Rita's going to have the whole history, and I would like to know, also. So I told him, now is the time. I don't know how long I'm going to be here. You never know. Until now they didn't do nothing about this. No, this is, the brothers have nothing to do in common.

I with my brother, we could talk from the family, about the family. Let's say what happened to the family. And we got always in common a lot.

**INT:** Would you say he was your best friend, like all through your life?

**ABRAM:** He was a brother and a friend. Without him, I never went. We went always together. Even to a movie, to a Jewish theater.

**INT:** You lived nearby?

**ABRAM:** Not far. No.

**INT:** Do you think it helped you that you were with your brother during the war? Do you think that was helpful? Did you strengthen each other?

**ABRAM:** Yeah, it helped a lot, yeah. It was a big help for me, for him. To have me, and for me to have him.

**INT:** Could you talk a little bit about when he died and how that affected you? And what, where did you go for comfort when that happened, and how did you deal with his death? Because you were so close.

**ABRAM:** For me was a very bad time after his death. One thing what, you know, I was so close to him, that I couldn't believe it that I'm going to stay alive. To telling the truth. Because a whole year, a whole year, I didn't go out. One thing what I did, I think was a good thing, after the eight days shiva, I went right away to work. I got in that time a cleaning store. So I got to go in. This was my relief in the daytime. When I was in the store.

When I closed the store, and I came home, then start my problems. I was like, alone. I have nobody to talk, nobody will understand me. Of course, how many times, of course, I was 23 years ago, younger, and how many times I took the car, and I went to his grave. And when I came to the grave, you know, I was talking to him. No answer. And I went back. I did it a lot of times, and nobody knew. Nobody knew what I did in that time. Because nobody would let me do this. This, to go special every time to the grave? No, I did it because I was close to him, and I couldn't believe it. He never going to come back to me? He left me like this? My mind was...

**INT:** It was hard to believe it. He was very young. He was only in his fifties.

**ABRAM:** He was 55. Anyway, I got a very bad time. The first year, the first few weeks, I didn't go nowhere. Months and months, I didn't talk to telephone. And I was like resigned from my life. Till I went the first trip to Israel. After the year I decided I'm going to go to Israel, and I went to Israel. And in Israel, you know, I have a lot of friends. I went this place and that place. And everybody made a party for me. And little by little I start, you know. And I came to the belief that I have to go on with my life. If not, I will go to him, not he will come back to me.

And this what I decided in that time. To go, and when I came back, I was very happy to be in Israel.

**INT:** Was that the first time you'd ever been to Israel?

**ABRAM:** No, this was my first time. Of course, I took a tour. Two weeks I was with a tour, and I went all over. The places. In that time was the, I was not afraid. I was in Hebron, and everything was like, a pleasure in that time. They got respect for the Jews, the Arabs, and the Arab children went after you to sell something, to get a few pennies, a few dollars. And it was a different story. Of course in that time, I thought, Oh, thank G-d we have an Israel.

**INT:** Was this before the Yom Kippur War?

**ABRAM:** Of course. This was in 1970, after the Six Day War. Before the Yom Kippur War.

And I was happy. In that time, I went back little by little to my life. And...

**INT:** How long were you in Israel?

**ABRAM:** I was three weeks. And after a year I went again for four weeks, and after a year I went again for four weeks.

**INT:** So every year you went.

**ABRAM:** Yeah. Mostly every year, and one time I went with Eva already, to Israel. With Eva, it was the last time before the war. With Eva. And after this, we left '72, and after this was the Yom Kippur War.

**INT:** Did she like Israel as much as you did?

**ABRAM:** Oh, yeah. She likes Israel. She loved Israel. To telling the truth, she is not, because she knows very little religious, because she was fifteen years, when her father died she was eleven years old. And she doesn't remember so the religious things like I am. No, still she's Jewish in her heart. When something happens to Israel, she feels very bad. You know? She feels very bad.

**INT:** So you think that by going to Israel that time, that sort of brought you out of the mourning that you were doing for your brother.

**ABRAM:** Yeah, it helped me a lot.

**INT:** You were able to get back to your life. Okay. Another question I had was, I was wondering why after the war you stayed in Poland for so many years. You stayed there, your brother left and went to Germany, I guess, to go to Israel.

**ABRAM:** This is a really good question. I will answer you. (sighs) You see, when I came back from Russia to Poland, and a lot of people they knew me, they remembered me from before the war. It was after the war I came back. Was not such a big distance. Was a few years. And when I came back from Russia, and I went right away to Warsaw. Because we lived in Warsaw. And there was my home, and I left there my parents, you know? So the first, I went back to Warsaw.

When I came back to Warsaw, and I saw what happened to Warsaw. This is not the Warsaw that I left. Everything was finished, in ruins, the whole streets, I couldn't find the street where I used to live. Anyway, of course this was a big reaction what happened to the Jews. I didn't cry about the houses. No, where are the Jews? The Jews went with the houses, and nothing was left. I wasn't long in Warsaw during the day, because I find nobody, and I went, at night, I had no place to where to sleep, where to stay. So I left Warsaw for Lodz.

Anyway, I think I told you this. And when I came to Lodz, I find some Jewish people, they told me where to go to find something.

**INT:** But that you stayed for a couple of years, it seemed like.

**ABRAM:** And later, when I left Lodz, I went to Bratslav. This is a city which was a German city before, and it was called Breslau in German. The Polish government took over the place, they named it Bratslav. A Polish name. In Bratslav, I was on the street, and a guy, a young guy, approached me at that time, and I was looking at him, and he was looking at me, and we stopped, both, we stopped. And this was a guy from Warsaw, which I knew. He was older, let's say maybe two years, or three years, from me. And I look at him, he look at me, and I ask him, "Is not your name like this and this?" He telled me yeah. "What is your name?" I told him, "My name is Abram." "Oh, you're Avramele?" Mostly they called me, I don't know, all the years, Avramele. Even now. They call me Avramele. Because I'm not so young. Maybe this is a name when you like somebody, you call him in a nice way. "Now I recognize you, too." At that time, he was involved in the committee which got to do, a connection with the Polish government. This was no on a Jewish way, you know? The Jewish people, let's say, which were communists before, they took this over, and they got a right, let's say, to do this and this and that and that for people which they knew. And when I met him, I got nobody. He was the first guy which I met which I know him from before. And he took me right away, he asked me, "You have somebody?" So I told him, "I have nobody." Nobody. And he remembered Itchik also. And I told him Itchy is still in Russia, because I came before. Later he came back from Russia.

And he told me, "Come to mein office. I'm going to take you to mein office." He got a office already. And...he gave me something to eat, you know. And he was busy, you know, telephone calls, was an office. And I was waiting, and later, when he remembered me, he told me like this: "You know what? I see you have nobody. And I'm going to help you with a lot of things. You have to do things which we need, which I need. We need." And I understood at that time that he wants to give me something which will be connected, let's say, with this what I did before the war. Because the government was a...was a communist government, let's say, which is connected with Russia.

I got no choice, I got no money, so he told me later like this. "I want you, you should go to Warsaw with a group, with people. Which you gonna work, you gonna work for the rebuild of the new Warsaw. To clear the streets, and you gonna be in a group with about 35 people, and you gonna be the head of them. I gonna give you some money, and I gonna give you, special, which I can, give you such a loan, you don't have to give me back." And he gave me at that time 10,000 zlotys. In Poland it was zlotys. Like here, a dollar. The value was not like here.

**INT:** So how much was that, about?

**ABRAM:** In that time the value was, to compare to, let's say in that time to the dollar, maybe, maybe was about fifty dollars. Maybe less. You know, when you have nothing, any little helps.

So in that time, he told me this, "I'm going to give you some money for the people, till Warsaw, and there you're going to meet other people, and they're gonna take you over to tell you what to do. You'll be, let's say, four weeks there." Nu, I got no choice, I took the job. I got no...

And he gave me right away for me, he gave me right away the 10,000 zlotys, and right away I have some money. And he told me, "I'm going to prepare everything, and the next day, tomorrow, you gonna go to Warsaw." And at that time, I was happy and I was not happy. Because I knew when I gonna start, I gonna be connected with something. And this was true. And I was there, I went, I got no choice, I went. Because I got nowhere to sleep, I got nowhere to stay. I got no relatives. I got no too much friends. Because after the war, if I would find out there is there, there is there, which you know. And I went to Warsaw. Warsaw was mein place, which I knew a lot. And this was true. I went with the group. When I came to Warsaw, I met more people, which they knew me. They used to know me from before.

**INT:** Did you know about your mother and your brother yet, that they had been killed in Sobibor?

**ABRAM:** This I find out later. I didn't know nothing. And I was four weeks in Warsaw. When I came to Warsaw, he gave me a letter, which I have to give the people in Warsaw, and they took the letter and they took me in also in the office, and they talked to me. Because he recommended me to there. So it was like I'm not a stranger. They can trust me, they wrote in that letter, because they know me from before, that I was in the Pioneer organization, which I mentioned. Oh, of course, and they opened the door for me. This was true. They gave me, the next day they gave me for the people, clothes. To work, and something for after the work, which we can change. They gave me permission to go in a magazine, and to take, and they gave me, for me, permission that I can take which I like, and what I need, this is special for me and for the people. So I thought, My goodness, I'm in heaven now. I can take shoes, I can take something to wear. Because I came from Russia with nothing. For me, it was in that time a big deal. And I took for the people. I took 35 shoes, and 35 shirts and pants. And I took a lot. And let's say, I gave everybody. And so we went to work.

**INT:** Doing what?

**ABRAM:** To clean the streets. In Polish they call it Odbedover Warsawe. To build again Warsaw. And so we start to work. We got trucks, they took us in trucks.

**INT:** How were you feeling when you were doing this? I mean you're cleaning up the city that you grew up in, you lived in, and...

**ABRAM:** To telling the truth, I was feeling that I'm doing something. No, on the other side, I was feeling I'm doing it more for the Polish people than for my people. What can I do? What, we're going to stay in Warsaw, we're going to build Warsaw like it was?

**INT:** You didn't believe that you were going to build it for the Jews again.

**ABRAM:** No, I didn't believe it. Maybe in the beginning, you know what, when you're in such a situation, your mind works different. Your mind works for and against, at the same time. You think you're doing good, and in a minute, you think: What am I doing? What am I gonna build? I'm going to build Socialism in Poland? And you fight with yourself. You don't know what you do.

**INT:** Is that what you were doing inside your head?

**ABRAM:** And you don't know if you're doing the right thing. I'm telling the truth. Later, I regret it. Anyway, I got to do it. Because I got no choice.

**INT:** It was a job, yeah.

**ABRAM:** When I was working, for a week, came somebody, a big man, and he ask people from where you are? So they came to mein people, they ask, "Who is in charge of that group?" They told, "Roitman. Abram Roitman." And I was not near the group. And they looked for me, and I approached them, let's say, from somewhere. So, "Somebody wants to talk to you." Nu, somebody wants to talk to me, all right. I was ready to talk. So I went, and a guy approached me. He asked me, "You friendly with that group?" I told him, yeah. So he told me, "My name is..." Before the war his name was Kutzik. A name like this. He made it more sounds like Polish. Kuterko.

**INT:** But he was a Jew.

**ABRAM:** Yeah. Kuterko. And I look at him, and I didn't believe it. Your name is Kuterko? I think I know you. And he was from Warsaw, and I was from Warsaw. And this was in Warsaw. And I told him, "Is your name Kuterko before the war or after the war?" No, not before the war. After the war. And I got in mind his name. "You're not Kutzkik?" He told me, "Yeah, how do you know me?" And I told him, "You remember, I..."

(END TAPE EIGHT, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE EIGHT, SIDE TWO)

**ABRAM:** Because you're older than me, and you know more than me, and you gave me lessons, about this and this. And I remember you from that time. Oh, and of course, for him was a big deal. And you wouldn't believe it. He wrote, and he was later the redactor from the Jewish Volkstimme in Poland, in Warsaw. Was very famous, from the Communist Party, the Jewish Communist Party. And he was the head. He was the head from the, to gave out the paper.

**INT:** Why did he change his name?

**ABRAM:** He changed it, it should sound more Polish. Kuterko.

**INT:** But why?

**ABRAM:** You see Kuterko, Kutzik is 100% Jewish. And he wanted for the Polish people, to sound more, a lot of people did, they changed their name. If somebody was Lazaroff, Lazoff, they make Lazaroff, it should sound more Polish.

**INT:** Why, because of the anti-Semitism in Poland?

**ABRAM:** At that time, yeah. To predict, because Kutzik couldn't be. It shouldn't sound like Jewish names. Moshe never calls Moshe. Marek. You know? Should sound more Polish. And at that time, he wrote an article about me, right away, in the next few days, came out the papers, and I didn't know, there was an article about me. So I start to be involved.

**INT:** Yeah, you started meeting people from before.

**ABRAM:** And this was for me no good. Anyway...

**INT:** Why was it no good for you?

**ABRAM:** Because I didn't want to build Socialism in Poland. Because I was against everything. My mind changed a lot.

**INT:** Because of Siberia?

**ABRAM:** No, because the whole thing in Russia. I saw the life in Russia, and the Socialism in Russia, and how the people live in Russia. And I didn't like the whole thing. I wanted to leave this.

Anyway, little by little I was more involved. After the month when I was in Warsaw, of course I went a lot of meetings. They make parties for me and for other people, and I was the head from the group, so I was with the bigger people.

**INT:** Was this group all Jewish people, by the way?

**ABRAM:** Jewish. All Jewish. No Polish people. Jewish people. And we did for the Polish government. We did for the communist government.

**INT:** Did you find out about your mother yet?

**ABRAM:** No, this was later. Later, when I came back, when I came back after the month in Warsaw, I came back to Bratslav. And I finished my job, and after this, they start to give me other place, what I should do. And it would be good for me, and good for them. And I was involved. In between, I hear that somebody which I knew lived there, and I start to put my puzzle together. Maybe I can find out what happened to my family.

So somebody told me in that time that in Lodz, where I was before, I was in '46, and this was later in '48. Is a man which was born in Zulkiewka, the same place, and he knows my whole family. He knows my brother. The whole family. And they told me that he is in Lodz. And I find the address, and I went to Lodz, and I find him, and he told me. And from him, I find out. That mein brother left Warsaw in 1940, Sumer. With my mother. My father died in Warsaw in 1940.

**INT:** Killed by the Germans.

**ABRAM:** He was killed by the Germans. And maybe I mentioned that my brother was buried in, this I find out. Was buried not by himself, in a grave with a lot of Jewish people.

**INT:** Where? Do you know where?

**ABRAM:** In Warsaw. This I know. I know even the cemetery. To find the place is impossible. I was, I couldn't find. Was not an individual [grave]. (Phone interruption)

**INT:** You looked for the graveyard, you couldn't find it.

**ABRAM:** Anyway, I couldn't find it, and I left Warsaw, because in Warsaw I got nobody. Anyway, let's go back. And I find that man, which he was a survivor from the group, from Zulkiewka.

**INT:** How did he survive, do you know?

**ABRAM:** He survived, when he was, he went to Sobibor. Maybe Sobibor you heard, was an uprising in Sobibor they did it. In the whole, they took the Jews from Zulkiewka and around, the villages, and the smaller places. They took all together, and they went, this was in 1942, in May. They went to Sobibor. In Sobibor, there was my brother, my mother, and his family. In the same day, the next day...(interruption) Why he survived? They was looking for a shoemaker. In the whole family...he, at that time, they ask for a shoemaker. His father was a shoemaker. He got other brothers. He was the youngest. They told him, "Go. Go tell them that you are a shoemaker." And he went out to the group, he told them, "I am a shoemaker." And they took

him right away, they took him to work. He was working as a shoemaker. And he survived. And he told me...

**INT:** But everyone else no.

**ABRAM:** No. And the next day nobody survived.

**INT:** But he was the one that told you.

**ABRAM:** He was the one who told me.

**INT:** And that was in 1948, that you found out?

**ABRAM:** This was in 1948.

**INT:** What was his name? Do you remember?

**ABRAM:** His name was Yitzchak. I forgot the name.

**INT:** But your brother wasn't there anymore. Your brother had left.

**ABRAM:** No, he told me that he saw him, that he got killed in 1942.

**INT:** No, but I mean, your brother Yitzchak had left Poland already.

**ABRAM:** No, after, when I met my brother, he came back to Russia from Poland, I told him the whole story. He knows. He didn't see that guy. I saw him.

**INT:** Yeah, so he didn't know. Okay.

**ABRAM:** And the last time, he went to Israel. From Lodz, he went to Israel. When I was in Israel the second time, I saw him again in Israel, you know. And he remembered my older brothers. My whole family. Now he's gone already. When I was now in Israel, they told me he's gone. He's not alive anymore.

No, I wanted to tell you, the question was, why I was standing so long [in Poland]. And this, I have to go farther. After this, when I finished my job in Warsaw, and I went back to Bratslav, they gave me another job. I should go in a place, it was a small place, which they built there a plant. Which they gonna work with a lot of people, and I should be again the, involved with them. You understand? I was in such a situation, to go for myself was impossible, and I got to took, let's say, what they gave me. And I went. And I got no choice. And I went there, and I took over. This was such a small place, which we start to work with other people, to teach them was somebody a teacher, and I got to watch them. Anyway, this was politics involved. And this I don't want to mention. And I became with that man, they told me that he is an enemy. I became very friendly with that man. And we became friends. And he understood why they

brought me up, let's say, from Bratslav there. To check him. And we became so friendly. He couldn't say nothing against me, and I couldn't say nothing against him. And I was a short time, I was involved deeply, every day, deeply, deeply, deeply. And at that time I decided I have to get out. If not, I don't know what's going to be with me. Or, I gonna stay alive, or they gonna kill me, or I will be arrested.

**INT:** Now, who would arrest you? What were you afraid of?

**ABRAM:** Because I didn't want to go to take position after position for myself to work. And to help. And...

**INT:** Because you were afraid you'd just be there for the rest of your life?

**ABRAM:** That's it. And I thought, I have to think for myself, not for the future for Poland. And then I left his small place, they called this Swiebodzice.

**INT:** Oh, you spelled that for me before.

**ABRAM:** Yeah? And I left this place, and I never came back there. I went to Lublin, and at that time, I find Eva, and we got married. And I took a risk. We left Poland, not legal. I told you.

**INT:** Right. You snuck over the border. You had to walk across the border.

**ABRAM:** And I was lucky they didn't catch me. If they would catch me, it would be very bad for me, because I left everything in the middle. Not finished.

**INT:** And you didn't tell anybody you were leaving?

**ABRAM:** No. And I left, and this was my...

**INT:** So before you left your wife, you were pretty resolved to leave Poland. You had made up in your mind that you didn't want to do this anymore.

**ABRAM:** No, no. When I came from Russia to Poland, like I told you, I was confused. My brother, he was, he wanted to leave Poland right away. Because when he came, he saw right away that anti-Semitism grows. Because they saw three Jews together, "Oh, so many Jews coming back!" And I didn't pay attention, because I didn't hear that. Because I went other places like him. And he left right away. He did the right thing.

**INT:** You didn't see the anti-Semitism so much when you were there, is that what you're saying?

**ABRAM:** I didn't want to see.

**INT:** You didn't want to see.

**ABRAM:** You see, I'm telling the truth. I didn't want to see. I didn't pay attention. Because the few years that I was there, I was connected with, nobody could do me something back. You understand? I was with people which, with a government that protect us. So I was not afraid. When I left **them**, then I was afraid. I went on my own. This is the answer to your question. When you told me, why it took so long I was in Poland? I regret it, what I did. The best thing, if I would leave right away. Would be better. I don't know it would be better. I wouldn't got Eva for a wife in that time. (laughs) You understand? So...

**INT:** You just sort of got, you were confused when you came back from Russia. And you just sort of got, little by little, sort of sucked into different jobs, and couldn't get out.

**ABRAM:** That's right. And this is the answer to your question. Why I stayed near three years. Why I took so long.

**INT:** Maybe if you hadn't met all these different people, and were just on your own, you would have left as quickly as Yitzchak.

**ABRAM:** Maybe it would be better for me. Anyway...

**INT:** That's how it was. Did you feel, what were you feeling, when you were there for, I guess it was like three years you were in Poland.

**ABRAM:** Three years.

**INT:** So, what were you feeling about the Polish people, and about what they did to the Jews, and what was going on inside your head? Do you remember?

**ABRAM:** To telling the truth, I was very confused at that time. I was so confused, I didn't know where to start, and what to do. And to ask too many questions in such a time is no good. Every people was confused, so you can't ask somebody should help you, when he is also confused. And the people which wanted me to stay in Poland, they should know, for them is no good I should open my heart. Would be no good for me, you understand? So I got to keep a lot of things inside.

**INT:** Nobody to talk to.

**ABRAM:** Nobody to talk. And I went in such a way...

**INT:** Why couldn't you talk to those people?

**ABRAM:** These people, what I was connected, they want me to stay in Poland.

**INT:** They don't want to hear bad things about the Poles, or anything.

**ABRAM:** They wanted to stay. And they wanted to build.

**INT:** But their families were killed, too, probably. And they went through camps and everything, too.

**ABRAM:** Of course. The political, how to say in English, the political view, they got to be with the Polish people. To stay there, to build. I can't be a Jew, no I gonna be in Poland, you understand? And I decided, better to go out. This what, I got married, and after we are married, we left Poland.

**INT:** She also wanted to leave right away.

**ABRAM:** Yeah. Eva wanted also to leave. And this is the reason what I was there a few years. I got good times, and I got a little bad times. You understand. No, always like in Russia, the same they want to build in Poland, the same way like in Russia. You happy, you're not happy. You have mazel, you have that. You can be happy. And any little thing, you're lost. So, and I wanted to go out. And this I decided, and I left Poland.

And this what I'm talking about, about the Polish people, I never got a good mind about them, and I have not till now. I have no attention, let's say, I never would like to go back. I never looking back to Polish people. Which I'm not, you see, I like everybody. This is my problem. If somebody is good to me, even a Polish guy is good to me, I'm good to him, also. To take the Polish people together, I hate them. I hate the Polish people. Because I'd rather be with other nations, even, and not with the Polish people.

**INT:** Because they're so anti-Semitic.

**ABRAM:** Because they're **born** anti-Semitic. They're born.

**INT:** Okay. Could you tell me a little bit about your trips to Russia? You took several trips to Russia in your life. Could you tell me what years those were, and what you did when you went there, and why you decided to go there?

**ABRAM:** This is a family meaning. I didn't go to Russia, which I like Russia. Because I was six years there, and I know the Russian life very well. And my trips to Russia was only to help my family. Nothing more. Nothing more. And in that time, I helped them a lot. When I came the first time, in 1966 to Russia, my sister-in-law was alive, which I showed you [the picture].

**INT:** Teyvel's wife.

**ABRAM:** Yeah. She was alive. And the kids were alive, they were young, still grown up people already. And they got nothing. What can I tell you? When I came to Russia, the first time I went with my brother.

**INT:** In 1966?

**ABRAM:** Izaak.

**INT:** Wasn't it hard to go there in '66? It wasn't open yet.

**ABRAM:** It was hard, no it was, American citizen. I was allowed to go. So I went. Because I was so close to my family, to telling the truth. Our family, I suffered my whole life, to telling the truth, if I wouldn't be so friendly with my family in Russia, I would be now a millionaire. Because my whole work, what I did, my whole life, I went three times, and every time, cost me, the trips to Russia cost me about \$50,000, together. And to telling the truth, I was happy and not happy. Because it helped them with everything, was impossible. Even if I spend \$100,000. A million dollars. I couldn't give them everything. No, still, I helped them with something. They got no clothes. They got no shoes. They got no nothing. And it was a big family. So everything, I spent, I spent, I spent, and I went home with nothing, and I was working another two years or three years, and went back. And I did it also, only for my family. I didn't make for myself nothing easy. I helped them a little bit. And I came back with the same thing. And when I went the third time, the same thing.

**INT:** Did you go each time with Yitzchak, or not?

**ABRAM:** No, no. After one trip, when I went the second time, Yitzchak was dead already. So it was hard for me, so I went, I lost him, and I thought I have to keep **this** family.

**INT:** I see.

**ABRAM:** So I was the only survivor which helped them.

**INT:** Was there any way they could get out of Russia?

**ABRAM:** No. If they would tell me in that time, I was afraid to ask them, because they was involved with the Communist Party. Everybody, when you live in Russia, you have to belong to something. And they was involved. They was afraid, and I was afraid. I helped them a little bit, and that's it. Even the big people which was in the Party, I brought them something. They grab it. Because they need it.

**INT:** They had nothing there, yeah.

**ABRAM:** You know? I brought them, you know the winters there is very cold. I brought them underwear. Warm underwear. I gave it. They grab it! Like somebody is hungry, he took a piece of bread. And when I saw this, I thought, My goodness! To live in such a, to build Socialism in such a place, and the builders, they have nothing. The builders have nothing. I'm supposed to come from America, which I work in America. Nobody gave me. So I'm able to help them, and they have nothing? They build a...they build a land for what? For nothing. And

they got nothing. So I was in a better position. And my sister-in-law, she said, "I don't know how can you do this? How can you do this?" I did it. I'm doing this.

**INT:** So it was important for you to keep the connection with your family.

**ABRAM:** So this is the reason I went. Nothing more.

**INT:** Was the family connection.

**ABRAM:** Just to help the family. And I helped them till the last minute. Till now.

**INT:** When did you find out about your brother, Teyvel, how he died? That was later that you found out, right?

**ABRAM:** This, I find out, this has to do with politics. I find out in 1956. In 1956, not I find out. In that time was Kruschev the head from Russia. And he got a speech on the Communist Party session, about Stalin. What Stalin did. The problems what Stalin did. And this was the first which he admitted the bad things what Stalin did. Because good people...

**INT:** He killed a lot of people.

**ABRAM:** He killed my brother, for what? And in that time my sister-in-law got a letter from the government, from the Russian government, that my brother died in 1943. What he died, and what the causes of death.

**INT:** It didn't say.

**ABRAM:** It didn't tell. And he was in that time rehabilitated. And she got in that time from him, they gave her a pension after his name. And with the pension, she could live all day. This is not important now. And then we find out that he is not alive anymore. Because she was thinking, she told **me** to think, that he is still alive. And...

**INT:** But when did you find out when he really died? I mean, he didn't die in '43. He died before then, didn't he?

**ABRAM:** The last, his grandchild, I find out, what I told you the pictures I show you. She opened the books, the files, and she find out everything.

**INT:** I see. And he died even before World War II, they killed him, right?

**ABRAM:** And she find out how. And what time they killed him, and how they killed him.

**INT:** How did they kill him, do you know?

**ABRAM:** They killed him, they shot him.

**INT:** I have a few other questions. One of them was, could you talk about the trip you just took to Israel? Didn't you take one pretty recently, and you saw a lot of your friends there from before the war?

**ABRAM:** Where?

**INT:** In Israel.

**ABRAM:** Oh, in Israel, yeah.

**INT:** But had you seen them before, the last trip that you went, all these people? You said you went in the seventies, several times to Israel, and you met up with your friends then.

**ABRAM:** Yeah.

**INT:** So this trip back, just recently...

**ABRAM:** I met them now, also. This is the fifth time, yeah.

**INT:** And how was that for you? Was that a good time?

**ABRAM:** Very good. I met everybody in a position, because they are older people already. They're in pension, and everybody is very good. They have very nice apartments. For themselves. They have a nice pension. Nobody told me that he has a bad life. That he can't, let's say, he had not enough money. He couldn't buy this, he couldn't buy, no. Everybody is very good adjusted. With nice homes, the kids are married, and they have everybody a very nice life.

**INT:** So you had a good time when you went back there. See everybody.

**ABRAM:** The last trip, I enjoy it very much. Because everybody was in a good situation. Good.

**INT:** No sad stories.

**ABRAM:** Yeah. They live nice, they have nice pension, they have nachas, you know, from the children. And everybody was happy.

**INT:** I wanted to ask you also that you had two heart attacks. And you had, I think, two surgeries on your heart?

**ABRAM:** Yeah.

**INT:** How did you get through that? How did you get the strength together to get through that time? How recently was that? Was that a long time ago?

**ABRAM:** Yeah. I will talk. You see, I'm born, and this is what I thank G-d for this. He gave me a lot, I'm a person which in the worst situation I never lose hope. Like you say in Yiddish, bitachon. Bitachon. This is in Hebrew. You have to have bitachon.

**INT:** Faith, total faith.

**ABRAM:** To the Rabbone shel Olam. And this is what I am. I never lose mein hope. Even in the situation when I was sick. And a lot of people maybe, in that time, maybe they were feeling lost, and I, when I was on mein bed, even in intensive care, and I was full with hope that I will go out. Nothing will happen.

(END TAPE EIGHT, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE NINE, SIDE ONE)

**ABRAM:** And now with the sickness. When I was sick, in that time, I got a cleaning store. And Eva was standing in the cleaning store. And this, I have to tell you, because the question is connected to mein answer. And Eva, in that time, thought maybe we're going to sell the store, because maybe I wouldn't be able to work anymore. And she came with the idea, and I was in intensive care. And she told me, "Don't worry. You won't go back to work. We're going to sell the store, and you don't have to worry." And I told her -- she's a witness, I can tell her even in her eyes -- "Who decided I gonna sell the store? Who decided this? You decided? I'm not selling the store. I'm going to be back in the store. I'm going to be back in the store." I was 100% sure, I don't know how, or why. I believe that I'm going to be back. And I went back to the store. And it happened again, and I went back to the store.

And when I got my first operation, this was in 1979, I still got my store. And after, the doctor told me, after the operation, that I'm going to be all right. Of course, I was a little depressed. Because you know, when you're going through such a big operation, and for me like I was the first person with such an operation. I never saw a person with open heart surgery before. Now I know a lot. But not in that time. And I went to the operation like everybody goes to a dance. With so much hope. To be back in the store. I'm going to be back in the store.

**INT:** You really weren't afraid. You really thought you'd be okay.

**ABRAM:** No. And...after the operation, everything went good. No, one thing I must tell you, what gave me hope. Before mein operation, because I don't want to tell you that I believe, or I not believe. And, how do you say a cholom, a...Eva!

**INT:** A dream?

**ABRAM:** A dream. I believe in a dream or not believe in a dream. No, this I have to tell you. When I got my first operation, I got a dream from my brother, from Isaac. He came to my bed. (pause, crying) And I told him...I'm sorry.

**INT:** It's okay.

**ABRAM:** I have to go for such operation. (pause, still crying) And he told me, "Don't worry. Go have the operation. Everything will be all right." And this gave me also a lot of hope.

**INT:** This was your first operation?

**ABRAM:** The first. That dream. And from since then I never saw...(crying)

**INT:** That's an amazing thing.

**ABRAM:** Anyway, I got the operation, and this operation was so successful, after the operation I was feeling like a nineteen again. **Nineteen.** I got so much energy. What can I tell you? I start to work, and still then I got the store, and the doctor told me after three months I can go back to work. And everything went very good. And I start to work, and everything was healing up so nicely. No, no problems. Other people got problems. This was swollen, this was swollen. By me, thank G-d. Nothing was swollen, and after three months, I went back to work.

I went back to work, and you know the store was closed three months. I got to build up...

**INT:** The business again.

**ABRAM:** The business again. People, which they heard that I'm back, they start to come, and I build up the store again, very nicely. And I made a nice living till the last minute.

**INT:** So everything was working.

**ABRAM:** Everything was working. Anyway, and to tell the truth about my health, I walk a lot, and later I was back dancing, and I went dancing, I went singing, and I was like a young boy again.

**INT:** So how do you think that dream helped you? Do you think that dream helped you? Were you worried before you had the dream, or you were still okay?

**ABRAM:** I wouldn't say that it makes me bad. I got a good feeling about that dream. And like mein cousin, which she is religious, she's telling me till now: "Your brother keeps an eye on you, and your father, and your whole family, keeps an eye on you." And thank G-d for this. I have to believe. Because it's true.

And after twelve years, everything was good. And after twelve years, I felt that there was a change in my body. And this was when I told Eva that my walk is not like it was to be. It was a little different. And she called right away Rita, and Rita, when I came to here, Rita told me right away, "Daddy, you're not going back home. I made an appointment with a doctor, to see what's what. Because you didn't tell me. Mommy told me that you have a problem with the walking."

Anyway, and I went here, already, to the doctor. And he asked me, and I told him. It's not like before. I got to stop. And I feel that something is not so good like it was. And he told me that, "According to what you're telling me, I can't see nothing wrong. I got to look inside." And I was ready. He have to look inside, do whatever he wants. And I'm not afraid. And I was not afraid. To telling the truth, I went like...

**INT:** No problem.

**ABRAM:** No problem. And he made me in that time an angiogram, and he told me, "You have to have again the operation, because the arteries are clogged." And I asked him, this was my question: "Can I have it?" And he said, "Why not?"

**INT:** Another one.

**ABRAM:** "You are a good candidate for this kind of operation." So I told him, "Go ahead."

**INT:** How many years ago was that?

**ABRAM:** That was four years ago. This January, February, it will be four years.

**INT:** And now you're feeling okay? (He knocks wood) Thank G-d.

**ABRAM:** Till now. And to telling the truth, of course this came already when I'm older, twelve years, from the first till now is more than twelve years. Is fifteen years. Of course, I lost a little energy. I have not that kind of energy that I got. I don't have it. And I think this is age. Because I asked the doctor, he told me. The first operation you got twelve years ago. Twelve years is twelve years. According mein age, and mein health, I have no other problems.

**INT:** You're doing pretty well.

**ABRAM:** I'm doing very good. Just this problem. (points to broken tooth) (laughs)

**INT:** Yeah, well, we're going to fix that. We'll fix that today.

**ABRAM:** And thank G-d, the other problems, I don't have it.

**INT:** I guess my last question would be kind of a big one, which is, how do you think the Holocaust affected you in your life, and how do you think it affected your wife's life, and your daughter's life? It's a big question. You could maybe start with you. How do you think what you went through, and what happened to your family, how has that changed you or not changed you?

**ABRAM:** No, I wouldn't say, like I told you before, when I have problems, of course, when I have the problems, I feel bad. When I find out about the Holocaust, and which we lost so many of our people, six million Jews, and the families in between, of course I was feeling very bad.

And...of course in that time, I was not a friend from the Germans, what they did. I was not a friend from the Poles, which they helped them doing this. To kill our people. No. (pause) The thing in that time was we got to stay alive. We got to stay alive to build back our people, and to build back our family. This I came to the conclusion, after the whole thing. Of course, this takes years, you understand? This can't throw away in one day. And so little by little, and you know, we went back to normal. It was not so easy. We went back to normal.

It affected everybody.

**INT:** How did it affect you, do you think?

**ABRAM:** It did affect me a lot. In that time, you know, when you start to build something, and when I start to build my family, and when Rita was born, I was looking in the future, not in the past. When you look in the past, you can't build nothing, you understand? And this is what our Jewish people are doing. We build back our existence. I came to Canada, and the first, I came from Europe, I came to Canada. And I was eight years in Canada, I was working. And I came without money, and without no family. Here, they should help me. And I was making very, very small wages in the beginning. No, still we got to eat. Still we were happy. I was working in that time for 75 cents an hour. And I was happy. Because we're not in Europe anymore. We got a good time in Canada in the beginning. And Rita was growing little by little. This was a pleasure. Till now, we have a lot of nachas from Rita.

**INT:** Do you think because you were able to put it behind you, and look at the future, that was how it helped you to go on with your life?

**ABRAM:** Of course.

**INT:** Because you can't keep thinking about...

**ABRAM:** If I would be alone, it wouldn't be good. Of course. When you have a family, you build something. You looking forwards. When you see Rita grows. She's four, she's five, she's six, she's seven, she starts school. You know, so, so.

**INT:** You get a lot of joy from that.

**ABRAM:** This is a lot of joy, brings to the people. Of course, in between I got a lot of problems. Life is not so easy. With jobs and works. No, still, I took it very easy, until now, you know? I wouldn't say, of course I didn't become a millionaire, I never was without a dollar since I'm in America. You know? Since I left Europe. Of course, the best time, the best time in my life is here in America, you know? And I don't want to look back to the past. I don't want to be far from the past. I like to remind. No, I'm not connected too much with the past.

**INT:** And that's what helps...to cope with all the losses, do you think?

**ABRAM:** This helps.

**INT:** How do you think the Shoah affected your wife? How do you think she coped with all that, what she went through?

**ABRAM:** I wouldn't say, she went through also a lot. You didn't ask her about that.

**INT:** Not yet, no.

**ABRAM:** You have to ask her. Do it for me. To telling the truth, she went through also very much. I think worse than me. And also, that day we got together, we build a family, and she told me not once, a lot of times, she never thought that she would stay alive, she should have a child, and to be a mother, or later a grandmother. She never think about this. Because she was, you see, when I was in Russia, I was not so afraid. Nothing could happen to me. Just, I can die from hunger, or can die from other things. And she was afraid she could die from a Polack, she can die from a German, from any little thing. She would be dead.

**INT:** Her life was in more danger, you think, than your life?

**ABRAM:** Her life was more dangerous. My life was not in danger.

**INT:** But people were dying all the time, you said.

**ABRAM:** Was dying, no, not in danger. Not killed. You know? I never was beaten up by a Russian guy. Never. I was in Russia six years.

**INT:** They didn't want to kill you.

**ABRAM:** No. They laughed with me, I was singing, I was dancing. We laughed together. You know? In Siberia they treat me very good. Because, to telling the truth, this helped me a lot in my life. I was singing, and he was, the head from me, he was dancing. You understand? This makes a good feeling. I sing and he danced. You understand? He couldn't do me bad things. When I ask him something he could give me, he gave me. Because he liked my singing.

**INT:** Do you think that your wife was able to put it behind her the way you were?

**ABRAM:** She put it behind. She did it.

**INT:** She was able to look toward the future?

**ABRAM:** She did it, and she's normal, she is normal to Rita, and to the children, and to me. Everything is back to normal. No problem. No, it affect a lot, when it reminds us. No, we don't live with the past. We live with the future.

**INT:** Okay. And then my last question would be your daughter. How do you think the Holocaust has affected her in her life?

**ABRAM:** She knows about the Holocaust. And I don't think that she knows too much. If she read about the Holocaust, if she writes, if she reads books about the Holocaust. No, I wouldn't say that it affects her, no. She's like, born in America. She doesn't feel that she was born in Europe. She has nothing to do, no connection with Europe.

**INT:** Did she have any anti-Semitism growing up? Did she ever experience anything?

**ABRAM:** She knows, no she is not connected with this. You understand? She was a few times in Europe already. She was in Europe. She was in France, she was in Germany, she saw the place where we used to live, the place where she was born. You know? She's never going to go to Poland.

**INT:** But you didn't tell her too much, growing up, about what you went through.

**ABRAM:** Not too much. She didn't ask me too much, and I didn't...

**INT:** You didn't tell her. When did she get the whole story? Did she ever get the whole story from you and your wife?

**ABRAM:** She got, little by little. She knows, although not like I am telling you. You know my story.

**INT:** But she got little pieces from you over the years.

**ABRAM:** Little, like a puzzle. She didn't put it together.

**INT:** Was it hard for you to tell her?

**ABRAM:** If she would ask me, I would tell her. But she didn't ask me. She didn't ask me. She will be now interested to have this, and maybe she doesn't want to ask me too much, because it will be hard for me to tell her. And maybe it's a different reason. You know Rita. She's very intelligent, and she's a very good girl. No, she don't ask me too much.

**INT:** Sort of to protect you from...

**ABRAM:** Well, maybe she doesn't want to bother me, or she doesn't want to bother Eva.

**INT:** Is there anything else you'd like to add to the tape? Anything that we haven't talked about that you'd want to...

**ABRAM:** Yeah, I am very happy that I did this. I'm very happy, because I would like, this what I went through, shouldn't go for nothing. People after me, the future generations should know everything, what we went through, even in Russia, or in Poland. Especially our people, what we

went through. And I would like to add that I am very happy that I lived to this day, and I can bring out everything what I went through. And thanks to you.

**INT:** Thank you to **you**.

**ABRAM:** Thanks to you. Because you did it, and I'm very happy I did it. And it's very, the few hours, what we spent together, to telling the truth, makes me so close to you, like you're in my family. I mean it. Like you're not a stranger to me, you know? Because I open my heart to everything to you. And thanks to you that I did it.

**INT:** It's very important what you did.

**ABRAM:** And this is very important. Very important for the generations that they're gonna come. They should know what we went through. And what the Germans did to our people.

**INT:** Thank you very much.

**ABRAM:** You're welcome.

(END OF INTERVIEW)