

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	62

Interviewee Surname:	Ginsburg
Forename:	Waldemar
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	9 October 1922
Interviewee POB:	Riga, Latvia

Date of Interview:	23 May 2004
Location of Interview:	Elland, West Yorkshire
Name of Interviewer:	Rosalyn Livshin
Total Duration (HH:MM):	4 hours unfinished

**REFUGEE VOICES:
THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE**

INTERVIEW: 62

NAME: WALDEMAR GINSBURG

DATE: SUNDAY 23 MAY 2004

LOCATION: ELLAND, WEST YORKSHIRE, ENGLAND

INTERVIEWER: ROSALYN LIVSHIN

TAPE 1

RL: I am interviewing Waldemar Ginsburg and today's date is Sunday 23rd May 2004. The interview is in Elland, West Yorkshire and I am Rosalyn Livshin.

Ok, so if you can tell me first your name.

WG: My name is Waldemar Ginsburg.

RL: And was that your name at birth?

WG: Yes, that was my name at birth, yes.

RL: Do you have any other names?

WG: Yes, my other name is Volva, which is a Russian nickname, yes.

RL: And did you have a Hebrew name?

WG: Well they used to call me Velvel, which is Yiddish actually.

RL: Do you know if you were named after anybody?

WG: No, I believe it was after Schoenberg Creation, King Waldimar, which was a work of music called Gurrelieder, and my parents were very fond of Schoenberg, so as far as I remember that was one of the main reasons for my strange name.

RL: Where were you born?

WG: I was born in 1922, October 1922, in Riga, Latvia.

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RL: How old does that make you now?

WG: It makes me seventy ... eighty one.

RL: Now, what were your parents' names and where were they born?

WG: My father was from Vilna, his name was Michael, he was from Vilna, they called him Misha. That is the Russian equivalent.

And my mother was born in Kaunas, Kovno, which they are both Litvaks, and her name was Pauline.

RL: And her maiden name?

WG: Her maiden name was Strom.

RL: Now thinking first about your father's family, can you tell me something about his family background and his parents?

WG: Well, they were resident in Vilnius and my grandparents from my father's side were, the father, the grandmother was a housewife, the father was a teacher at a secular school, so ... but we were cut off from Vilna, because there was a division. There was an iron curtain between Kovno and Vilna created by the occupation of Vilna by the Polish army, so the Ginsburg family of Vilnius were not really in touch with us.

RL: Did you ever meet your grandparents?

WG: I met my grandmother, but not my grandfather, so really they were quite removed from our side.

RL: And how many brothers and sisters, siblings, did your father have?

WG: My father had two sisters and two brothers and they were mostly, one sister was in Vilnius, in Vilna, one brother was in American, one brother was in France, and they were all scattered all over the world.

RL: Do you know what they did? Do you know anything else about them?

WG: Pardon.

RL: Do you know anything else about them? What they did?

WG: Very little, very little, very little. About my father's family I knew very little because of this division, because of this iron curtain between Kovno, Kaunas and Vilna.

Tape 1: 4 minutes 45 seconds

RL: Do you know what kind of upbringing he had? Religious upbringing?

WG: They were not religious, the parents of my father were secular Jews.

RL: And what kind of education your father had?

WG: Education was basic education, and eventually he came to Kovno from Vilna and after he got married to my mother he could not settle in Kovno. He was actually for part of his life, he was employed as a sailor on various ships flying the seven seas, and he was based in Marseilles. So actually he ran away from home and went to France and that is where he made his living, in France being a sailor. When he came to Kovno or Kaunas and he got married, he would not settle and he decided to take me and his wife to Marseilles, where he had all his connections, and he, imagined that he could make a living there. It didn't work out. After four years in Marseilles the marriage collapsed and mother and I were taken back to Kovno, to Lithuania, and father stayed in Marseilles.

RL: What kind of work was he doing at that point?

WG: He was, he reckoned that being a married man, he wouldn't be able to sail as he did before, so he took a shore based job, a clerk in a shipping company, and he was bored stiff with it.

RL: And then what did he do?

WG: The marriage collapsed and we came back to Kovno and that is where my mother's family were well established, and that is where really, at the age of, I was about, I should say about 6 or 7, that is when I changed, my life changed completely, from a busy, big port, I came into a provincial town and really our life was quite enjoyable there.

RL: Did you have any contact with your father after that?

WG: The contacts were for about two/three years they had contacts, and then mother asked for a divorce, so father said unless he gets custody of his son he would not give a divorce. So he did not give a divorce, so she had to, so when she got married, she had to use a clause, which allowed her after a certain time absent from her first husband she got an automatic divorce, and she got married again. So I became, I got a stepfather, I had a stepfather from then on.

RL: So ok, so taking you, looking at your mother's family and her family background.

WG: Now they were settled in Kaunas or Kovno in Yiddish, and they were quite wealthy people. My grandparents were actually Orthodox, and they had an off license business, at the time. When we came to Kovno they were ready to retire, and they made us an offer to move in with them and we accepted the offer. So mother and I moved in

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with the grandparents, grandma and grandpa and we settled in very nicely into our new surroundings.

RL: And what happened to the off licence business?

WG: The off licence business was sold and the grandparents retired.

RL: Did your mother have brothers and sisters?

WG: Yes, now it was quite a prosperous medium sized family. My mother had a sister, my mother had two brothers in Kovno, and one brother came from Israel back so there were three altogether, three brothers and two sisters.

RL: And what kind of occupations were they in?

WG: They were mostly in business, they were mostly business people.

RL: What kind of business?

WG: One of the brothers was running a lottery, one was a travelling salesman, one brother, and the third brother was in a commercial business. I believe he was selling and buying stuff, it was a commercial enterprise.

RL: And what kind of upbringing did your mother have?

WG: Well the children of my grandparents were originally taught in the Yeshiva, because the grandparents were Orthodox, but they were seduced by the new progressive ideas, which were popular in Lithuania amongst the intellectual circles, and they changed their views and from being religiously educated they changed to secular education. So really they became secular Jews, but very much Jewish in their outlook. So with them it was a case of belonging, but not believing.

RL: Did your grandparents remain Orthodox?

WG: The grandparents remained Orthodox, and despite the difference of opinions the relationship was very close and very affectionate.

RL: What kind of education did your mother have?

WG: My mother went to school in Kaunas, and later on she took a course in accountancy which meant she had to go to Berlin to study and she took this course in Berlin and finished it and she became an accountant.

RL: Was that before she was married?

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WG: That was before she was married, yes.

RL: When did they get married? Your parents?

WG: They got married in 19 ... 1919 or 1920 ...

RL: Had your father been in the First World War?

WG: Yes, but he escaped to France, so he sailed the seas while the fighting was on. So he was sheltered from the war. He was quite a long time, he was based in Argentina, so he was away from the hostilities.

RL: Were you the only child?

WG: I was the only child, yes.

RL: What is your earliest memory as a child?

WG: My earliest memories were actually of Marseilles. I remember very little about Riga or Kovno, I was two when I was taken to France to Marseilles, so my early memories was of life in Marseilles, which was quite interesting and quite exciting, it was quite a town, we lived on the Corniche. It was a nice seaside suburb and as far as I remember we used to do a lot of boating, spend a lot of time on the sea shore, and occasionally we would go into the centre of Marseilles and go to an operetta, go to the theatre, and it was quite a nice fulfilled life, and I also went to a kindergarten in Marseilles, so my memories were very pleasant from Marseille.

RL: How old were you when you left?

WG: I was two when I left Lithuania to go to France and I was six or seven when I came back. That was quite a break of tradition and ambience.

RL: How did you find Kovno?

WG: Well, I found it very quiet and very peaceful, but the family was very close, and I established contacts, especially my grandfather. I had to learn to speak Yiddish, all my uncles and aunts spoke French, so I had no problem with them, but to communicate with grandma and grandpa I had to learn Yiddish, which I managed to do, and I established a very close relationship, especially with grandpa.

RL: Can you describe the home that you were living in there?

WG: Well, the home we came to was on a third floor. It was on one of the main streets of Kaunas, Kovno, and I was straight away enrolled in the German school, although we

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were in Lithuania and there were a lot of Lithuanian, Russian, Yiddish and Hebrew schools, this German school was reckoned to be superior. So I was enrolled and I was there for four years, until of course Hitler came to power and anti-semitism was spreading across the border into Lithuania. So the Jewish children were taken out of the German school because of the hostility.

RL: Up until that point how had you got on with the other children?

WG: Up until that point the relationship between Germans and Jews was very close. For some reason there was a connection, the Jews preferred to employ Germans, and the other way round, the German firms employed Jews. Was it because of the Yiddish similarity to German, but there was a close connection between the Germans and the Jews, until it was broken by the Nazi gaining power in Germany. That is when the trouble started and this antagonistic, anti Jewish sentiment spread into Lithuania, across the border from Germany. So the Jewish children were moved out of the, most of the Jewish children moved out, left the German school and some went to Hebrew schools, some went to Russian schools and some went to Lithuanian schools. I went to a Lithuanian school, but you must understand that Kovno was a very cosmopolitan city. We had a lot of minorities there, who tried to preserve their culture and their way of life. That is why they had so many different schools.

RL: And how did you get on at the Lithuanian school? How friendly?

WG: It was a bit difficult, it was also difficult for me to learn a new language, to learn German, and then I had to learn Lithuanian. It was a real mix up, so I spoke Yiddish to my grandparents, I spoke Russian to my step father who was from Russia, who my mother married, I spoke French to my mother and I spoke German to my school friends and then I had to learn Lithuanian which became my main language after all that, but it was nothing unusual, in fact most of the residents of Kovno spoke four languages, even the uneducated people found it natural to speak Lithuanian, to speak Russian, to speak Polish. They were the three main languages spoken, and the educated people of course spoke many more languages, in addition to that they spoke German. So it was a cosmopolitan place.

RL: Your step father, what was his name?

WG: Samuel. Now he came, he came, in 1933 or '34, in 1933 I believe, he came from Russia, which was quite unusual. It was quite unusual to get out of communist Russia. The borders were sealed and to leave Russia was quite difficult even in those days, but he got permission because he was of origin, he was a Lithuanian Jew. So after a lot of applications and a lot of trouble, he and his brother managed to leave Russia and they

managed to settle in Kovno, and the connection was that the father of Samuel was a property owner, a wealthy man in Kaunas and he still had his property there and he was

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well to do. So the two brothers, they came from communist Russia, into Kovno and they had a very good life in Kovno.

RL: What did he do for a living?

WG: He was a building engineer, structural and building engineer, and he found a job in Kovno to his, in his profession. It wasn't like it was in Russia, there were no huge building projects but he managed to find work and to keep himself going in his profession.

RL: Was Samuel his surname?

WG: Samuel Garzon, Samuel was his first name.

RL: And his surname was ...

WG: Garzon.

RL: And when did he marry your mother?

WG: They got married in '35, they had to wait for her divorce to come through. '35 or '36 they married.

RL: And did they have any children?

WG: No, they didn't have any children and mother continued in her accountancy work and he worked as an engineer, as a building engineer in Kovno/Kaunas, which was then the capital of Lithuania. It was the pre war capital city of Lithuania.

RL: Once they were married did you move into another apartment?

WG: Yes, they moved, we also had a bigger apartment which we shared with the grandparents. It was a different apartment, a bigger one, but we still kept the family together, the grandparents were still with us.

RL: So can you describe the apartment to me? What it was like inside.

WG: We moved twice, the apartment was on a ground floor. I had my own room, there was a large living room, mother and step father had their own room and the grandparents had a large bedroom for themselves. There was a pretty decent kitchen and it was not far

from the centre of Kaunas, but it was on a quiet side street, so it was quite pleasant and it was also near a river.

RL: And did you get to know your neighbours?

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WG: Yes, most of our neighbours were Jewish. It was near the old quarter of Kaunas and one third of the Kaunas population was Jewish, so really the quarter where we lived I should say was three quarters Jewish.

RL: Was your mother or step father involved in the Jewish community in any way?

WG: Yes, he was involved in the Jewish community and in charitable works but not in religious activities. They were secular Jews as I mentioned before.

RL: What kind of charitable work?

WG: Well, Keren Kayemet and all that and they contributed to different secular organisations and really they were very much involved in the secular Jewish life.

RL: Can you describe it a bit more?

WG: Well, they had Jewish papers, they had Yiddish papers, and the circle of our friends, the circle of friends were mostly Jewish, although there were some also non Jewish friends, but the closer relationships and the main friendships were formed with Jewish friends.

RL: Did they belong to any clubs or societies?

WG: I don't remember the name of the clubs but they were, there were some Zionistic movements, the Grossman movement, there was Betar movement, there was a left wing Jewish movement which I belonged to some of the movements, and there was a fall out between the left wing and the right wing movements, and that is when I left. There was recriminations and there was a lot of bad blood so I left the movements.

RL: What was it over?

WG: It was actually over their approach to the Zionist cause, to go the left wing way or the right wing way, the Betar way or the Grossman way, and the decision was to split and to stop quarrelling and to have separate Zionist movements.

RL: And which one did you belong to?

WG: I belonged to the Grossman movement, until I left.

RL: And was that the left wing.

WG: Yes ... yes ...

RL: And your parents? Your mother and step father?

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WG: He was non party. He was no party. But they had Zionist tendencies. They felt that the Jews should have their own homeland. That was accepted, accepted way of thought amongst secular Jews, most of the secular Jews were zionistically inclined. Of course the religious Jews were supposed to wait for the Messiah, so there was again a split in the religious Jews. My grandpa was on the side of the Zionists, but he was really I should say a keen Zionist, which was not becoming for an Orthodox, religious Jew.

RL: Did they belong to a Synagogue?

WG: Of course, yes. My grandfather belonged to a synagogue and thanks to him I had my Bar Mitzvah, he taught me the bible and all that.

RL: Which synagogue did he belong to?

WG: He belonged to the main synagogue in the centre of town. It was called the main synagogue, I don't know the name, and he also went to the shtieble of course.

RL: And what did you have to do for your Bar Mitzvah?

WG: Just read a portion and that is it, and after that I parted company with the religious life.

RL: Did he teach you that or did you have lessons?

WG: He taught me and then after that, to his disappointment, we had to part company in our beliefs.

RL: So other than what he taught you, did you have any other Hebrew education?

WG: No, no I didn't, no.

RL: Coming back to the Zionist club that you belonged to, what kind of things did you do in that club in the Grossman ... ?

WG: We had gatherings, and we had a lot of Yiddish literature, and a lot of preparation for the eventual arrival in Israel, so really it was a Zionist orientated movement.

RL: Did they do any kind of physical activity?

WG: Exercises, physical activities, yes, yes.

RL: Any sport?

WG: Sport was quite an important section of the activities, yes.

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RL: Did you ...

WG: I was also quite a keen sportsman.

RL: What kind of things?

WG: We did a lot of swimming, running, jumping and our main sport was actually, I did a lot of swimming. That was one of the main sports, because we were at a river, so we had facilities to swim.

RL: Did you belong to any other organisations as a child?

WG: No, that was it. Oh, I belonged to the scouts for a while, which was also quite interesting, we used to go camping and ...

RL: Was that a Jewish Scouts?

WG: No, they were a non-Jewish Scouts.

RL: And how did you get on with the non Jewish children?

WG: In fact there was very little anti-Semitism that I experienced at school or in the scout movement, but as I told you it was this Nazi take over in Germany. The anti Semitic propaganda was reaching Lithuania from across the border and whereas at the beginning there was very little anti Semitism and I felt quite free, with time, in the late '30s, attitudes changed, and conditions became more difficult for Jews.

RL: Can you ...

WG: And it was all due to the influence of the Nazi propaganda from Germany.

RL: Can you describe how the attitudes began to change and how you noticed the change taking place.

WG: Well, there were some Lithuanians, a minority I should say, although it was a significant minority, who became very enthusiastic about the racial theory and the anti - Semitic views of the Nazis, mind you anti-Semitism was endemic in Lithuania and this

additional impetus that they got from Germany was fuelling it and helping it on, and it became by the late 1930s it became pronounced and it became even in the educational establishments. Even there it became, they didn't take any more Jewish, there was a restriction on accepting Jewish students. At school I didn't notice much anti-Semitism, but on the streets you used to have occasional calls, anti-Semitic expressions, and that was from the, by the end of the 1930s it became quite common, quite usual.

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RL: Did you continue to have any non Jewish friends?

WG: Yes, yes, I continued to be, to have non Jewish friends, but in general I must say, the close friendships were with Jewish friends. The non Jewish friends were not as close as the Jewish friends. There was quite a difference. Jews mixed more with Jews than with non Jews.

RL: Did you notice a change in attitude with your non Jewish friends? With those that you were ...?

WG: No, with those that I was friendly with, there was no attitude, there was no change in their attitude, but there was a general change, which was quite noticeable.

RL: And did this affect your parents in their work at all?

WG: No, it didn't affect the parents, in fact, the people my parents worked with, in the accountancy and engineering were predominantly German, most of them were German, by strange coincidence, and they were quite friendly to the Jews. They did not swallow the Nazi propaganda. However when orders came from Germany for ethnic Germans to pack their bags and to rejoin the father land, and that was in 1939, they did do as they were told, and we were very surprised. We had some friends, who were Lithuanian citizens, they had a good life in Lithuania, they were ethnic Germans, and when orders came, well they weren't actually orders, when instructions came from the Nazis in Germany, that all Germans must rejoin Germany proper, they packed their bags and they went to Germany, so that was quite a surprise for us, and it was quite disturbing, because we just wondered were there any plans afoot to start a war.

RL: So when would this have happened?

WG: That was 1939, before the war started.

RL: Were there any outward signs on the street of anti-Semitism, besides name calling?

WG: There were some, very few physical attacks, but there were verbal attacks on Jews, so there were some, and there was also anti-Semitic propaganda by the newspapers, by trade union organisations and things were becoming unpleasant.

RL: Were you still at school at this stage?

WG: I was still at school at this stage and later on when I entered university, some of the anti-Semitic, some of the leading anti-Semites seemed to have concentrated at university.

RL: When did you enter university?

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WG: I went to university in 19 .., 1940.

RL: And did you have any trouble getting a place?

WG: Now that is when I experienced the most virulent anti-Semitism, which was at university. It was caused by a small group of agitators, a minority, and most of the students believed that it was a temporary abhorration and it would sort itself out, but it continued throughout my stay at university. It made life unpleasant at university.

RL: So first of all, was it difficult getting a place at university?

WG: Not for me it wasn't because I went to a Lithuanian school, but for my friends, my Jewish friends who went to a Hebrew school or to a Russian school they had to pass special entrance exams, and there was a certain difficulty presented to them in entering university, so it wasn't easy.

RL: What did you study?

WG: Architecture.

RL: You say you find it difficult with the anti-Semitism.

WG: I felt the atmosphere was poison by that small minority of anti-Semitic students.

RL: How did it show itself? What did it practically mean?

WG: There were, there were verbal assaults and sometimes physical assaults, but there again it was a minority and the majority did not participate in it, and that lasted until 1940.

Summer 1940, disaster struck, our eastern neighbour, Stalin, the ruler of the communist empire decided to annex Lithuania, so the red army marched in and occupied my country/ Every aspect of life was turned upside down. The secret police arrived, the KGB. They sealed the border. Nobody could get in or out and they began their pillages. Now straight away they divided society into two groups, the baddies, who were the enemies of the people. They were the business people, the clergy of all denominations. It didn't matter what kind of clergy, Zionists, they were all targeted, land owners, leading intellectuals,

they were all branded as enemies of the people and the usual punishment for being enemies of the people was deportation to a Russian or to a Siberian labour camp. And the goodies were the working classes. So they divided society into those:- exploiters of the working people and the working people. Now we were exploiters of course, because we had property, so we were put on a list to be deported, and just at the time, when the time came for us to be deported, when all the deportations started in a big way, fate intervened. What happened was the German army invaded and attacked the soviet empire

Tape 1: 43 minutes 31 seconds

and that was Operation Barbarosa in 1941, 22nd June 1941. The Red Army was taken by surprise and they fled in disarray, in two, three days, Lithuania was occupied by the German Wehrmacht. Now on the first day of the hostilities, there was a chance for us to escape. They were scarce, and we could have packed our luggage and tried to escape. That was on the Sunday and we had to make that big decision what to do, to stay put, or to try to escape and survive under Russian control. Well, on that day, 14 members of our immediate family gathered to take that fatal decision, and they argued all morning what to do. Eventually we decided to stay put. We assumed that it would be easier to survive under the Nazis than escape to Russia and finish up in a slave labour camp. Well, out of the 14 members I was the only one to survive, because they all perished.

Now as I told you, the German army swept through Lithuania, and on the heels of the Wehrmacht, the SS and the Gestapo arrived. They were the shock troops, they were the Nazi troops, and they began their own purges. In fact they began planning our extermination from the word go, and they arrived, and within a fortnight they were settled in Lithuania planning to exterminate us, but of course, it is not so easy to do away with quarter of a million Jews in Lithuania, that was approximately the Jewish population. Out of three million in Lithuania they had a quarter of a million Jewish population, so they had to soften us up for the kill, and that they did very effectively.

They knew that to demoralise people you have to deny them access to food and starve them, and that was the first thing they did. We were not allowed to purchase food, and we were hungry, in fact we were starving. Then all sorts of petty measures were introduced to torment us and to separate us from the non Jewish population. So how did they do it, first of all we had to wear yellow stars of David, front and back, on the back. Then we were not allowed to step on the pavement, to step on the public place, to sit on a bench, to use public transport, to have a telephone, to have a radio, all sorts of petty measures to demean us, to degrade us. So we had to walk in line like animals, in the gutter, instead of walking on the pavement. But that was bad enough, but what really frightened us were the wave of executions. They were just arresting Jews and taking them to an execution place, not far from town. It was an old fort, a disused fortification, used for a prison, and that is where they were taking the Jews they were picking up and they were shooting them. To give you some figures, in my town the Jewish population was 35,000, within two months of the Nazis marching in, that is they marched in in June, July and August 5,000 were taken and shot, so our population was reduced to 30,000 in two months.

RL: Were any of your family?

WG: No, not my family, in fact we were in an isolated quiet spot and we didn't dare walk out. We were hungry and we were stuck at home and we avoided this massacre to start with, so out of the 14 members, we were still alive when the Germans decided to lock the Kovno Jews into a ghetto.

Tape 1: 50 minutes 30 seconds

RL: Up until that point how had you managed to get food to keep alive?

WG: Well, they managed to scrounge it from our Lithuanian neighbours, buy it, scrounge it, but we were very short of food.

Now eventually the Germans decided to lock us into a ghetto. So they emptied a quarter from the original inhabitants and they crowded the 30,000 Jews into that tiny enclave surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. The ghetto gates shut on 15th August and we were at the mercy of our Nazi jailors.

RL: Were you able to take anything with you?

WG: We were allowed to take basic essentials with us, clothing and furniture, but it was so crowded, there was no room for our belongings, so we had to limit ourselves to the basic necessities.

RL: And how did you find somewhere to live within ...

WG: Oh, we were allocated, it is what the Germans did, they appointed a Jewish Council and they were given the power to sort out the affairs and to have the internal administration, to be in charge of the internal administration of the ghetto, and to establish a Jewish local police force, and they had the power to allocate us facilities for living quarters and they also had the power to deal with the rationing of food, which was really inadequate to survive, they were starvation rations.

RL: What kind of place were you allocated?

WG: We were allocated a little house, we were sharing with three more families, so we were really crowded.

RL: How many rooms was that?

WG: There were about four rooms for three families.

RL: And how did you divide up that space?

WG: Very difficult, we had to use curtains to divide up. We had to make do with a corridor as a room, and the hallway was a room, it was very difficult, the conditions was very difficult, very difficult, but the main snag was that we were starving.

And there was another development which frightened us, they promised, the Germans promised that once we were locked in a ghetto the atrocities and the executions would stop. Well they didn't, they carried on selecting, picking out Jews and executing them.

Tape 1: 54 minutes 25 seconds

This was really frightening, by within, two months again, August, September, they took another 3,000 Jews out of the ghetto, so the ghetto population was again reduced to 27,000 instead of 30,000. And then one day in October, it was 4th October, the Nazis turned up with the local collaborators. They surrounded our hospital, our ghetto hospital. They poured petrol over the hospital building and they set it on fire. That was on 4th October. Anybody who tried to escape was shot, so the choice was to be shot or to burn alive in the hospital. But worse was to come, on 28th October, again, the Nazis, the SS, the Gestapo and the local collaborators selected 10,000 Jews, took them to that execution site, to that fortification, and they were all shot.

RL: Were any members of your family included in that?

WG: Everyone in the ghetto lost some of their loved ones. Just imagine 10,000 out of 27,000, we lost half of our immediate family. There were seven members, so you can imagine how we felt.

RL: How were people selected?

WG: There was a selection and they were taken away, and we didn't know the purpose of the selection. Slowly it became clear that the people who were selected were people who were not suitable for work.

RL: How did the selection take place?

WG: The selection took place on 28th of October. We had to gather on that day, early in the morning, on a large place and everybody had to be there, even babies, disabled people, everybody had to appear on that selection place, and then the German officers came, the SS and they were selecting people, right and left, right and left. To begin with they were clever enough not to make obvious what was happening, so they selected people who were able to work and who were not able to work and they mixed it. Later on predominantly there were non working people who were selected to go to one side, so we became suspicious but still they didn't realise that the selection was for death.

RL: Now we are just going to have to stop here because this tape is about to end.

WG: Right, it is one o'clock we will have to have a sandwich or two.

RL: This is the interview with Waldemar Ginsburg, and it is tape 2.

Now I just wanted to take you back a little bit, before we go on, and talk about life in Kovno, and if you could tell me a little bit about life there, and maybe about the Yiddish culture.

TAPE 2

Tape 2: 0 minute 26 seconds

WG: Now let me give you a general picture. Lithuania was a tiny country, three million people, sandwiched between two super powers, on one side the communist empire, on the other side the Nazi empire, yet it was a cultured, self sufficient, small Jewish community **because** second to none. In fact I think that we were one of the leading exponents of the Hebrew Yiddish culture. To give you some idea of our set up in Kovno, or as it is called now Kaunas, we had four full time schools catering for the Jewish population, three were Hebrew schools and one was a Yiddish school, and the language of instruction was not Lithuanian, it was Hebrew or Yiddish. We had forty odd Synagogues, just in one town, in our town, to serve a population of 35,000. And we had two theatres, one big one full time and one part time theatre, performing plays in Yiddish, and we had also journals, magazines, newspapers, daily papers, in Yiddish. So really it was a thriving Jewish community, a small one but nevertheless, nevertheless a very educated one, a thriving one.

Now as far as religion was concerned they weren't fanatics really. They were mostly, half, or more than half of the Jewish population was believing, was observing, and it was the Orthodox, the Litvak Orthodox variety, the Chassidim were not much in evidence. They were our enemies the Chassidim, according to the traditional, the Orthodox Litvaks. However, the menace of secularism forced the Chassidim and the Orthodox closer together, the external menace of the secularism. So lately, relationships were better than they used to be in the olden days when they were deadly enemies, the two.

RL: Were there Chassidim in Kovno?

WG: Not many, I heard there was, I didn't know a single Chossid in Kovno, but there must have been or in Vilna there must have been Chassidim, but I didn't know any.

RL: You were going to tell me about the Slabodka Yeshiva.

WG: Now then, coming to the religious life the Gaon of Vilna started to break through, what he did, he introduced secular knowledge into the Vilna and other Lithuanian Yeshivas, and that was a novelty, and thanks to him the standard of teaching, of learning, religious and non religious went up enormously, and it was attractive to a lot of people outside Lithuania. So if you wanted a good religious education, with a little bit of secular knowledge you send your children to the Lithuanian yeshivas, and one of the most outstanding ones, which was world famous, was the Slabodka Yeshiva. Now that was a

real top class establishment, and I am afraid that during the pogroms they were the first to suffer tremendous losses. They were very exposed, they were concentrated in one suburb and when the hostilities broke loose, when the Nazis occupied Lithuania, Lithuanian thugs broke into the Slabodka suburb and they killed 1,000 civilians, mostly Jewish Yeshiva bochorim, Rabbis and their families. They were the main victims of this terrible pogrom which was perpetrated in the Slabodka suburb of Kovno. So that is how the spiritual life developed.

Tape 2: 6 minutes 42 seconds

RL: I wanted to ask you, when war broke out between England and Germany, and before that was the invasion of Poland ...

WG: September 1939 ...

RL: Did life change at all for you in Lithuania at that point?

WG: Yes, now, it changed in so far as we had a lot of refugees from Poland who came to us and they tried to escape from the Nazi rule. Now we had to donate, and we had to help them. They came in the thousands and they told us about the atrocities in Poland, but there is one point we must notice. At that time the extermination policy of Jews, the Nazi extermination policy was not in force. The Polish was to expel Jews, to torment them, to degrade them, but not to murder them systematically. So that was not in force yet. So the picture we got from the refugees was that life was not in danger. Their welfare was in danger and they were helped a great deal and in fact we had a Japanese consul, called Sugihara and he supplied about 1,000 to 2,000 Polish refugees with visas to go through communist Russia, east, and they took advantage of this generosity of Sugihara's action and they got visas, Japanese visas. They crossed Russia and they finished up in Shang Hai, in the Far East, so they escaped from the Nazis that way.

RL: Were you aware of this at the time or did you learn it afterwards?

WG: No, I learned it afterwards.

RL: Right.

WG: But I knew that some were escaping from Lithuania, but we couldn't do anything about it because we didn't have any passports, any foreign passports, our passports were confiscated by the KGB by then. He did it while the Russians were in occupation of Lithuania.

RL: So when the refugees arrived ...

WG: Yes ...

RL: Where did they live? Where were they put up?

WG: Oh, we made them room in our own houses and our own flats.

RL: So did you take in people yourself?

WG: We took in one chap. We also took in one chap from the Slabodka Yeshiva to eat with us and he lasted about a couple of years and then he left us, but we were helping the Jewish community a great deal. You mustn't forget a fact, which is not valid any more

Tape 2: 10 minutes 20 seconds

now, Lithuanian secular Jews were committed to being Jews, they identified to being Jews, and they contributed to Jewish causes. They were not like Jews in Western Europe, once you become secular you become assimilated. Lithuanian Jews didn't get assimilated, they remained non religious but as Jewish as they ever were.

RL: Why do you think that was?

WG: I don't know, the culture was a Yiddish culture which did not exist anywhere else, which doesn't exist now, either you are religious now or you assimilate, or you lose your Jewish roots.

RL: So, other than the fact that refugees came to Kaunas did life change in those early ...

WG: I also mentioned to you that anti-Semitism did increase, life became very unpleasant in certain aspects.

RL: And then after Russian came in and took over ...

WG: Yes ...

RL: How did life continue at that point? I know that they were deporting to Siberia ...

WG: No ...

RL: But how did you manage to live on a day to day?

WG: No, we lived under Russian rule for one year, between 1940 and 1941. Straight away religious institutions were curtailed, but somehow the Jews suffered more than the Catholics, the Christians. The synagogues were shut, the Jewish schools were shut, and they didn't go after the Catholic institutions in the same way they did the Jewish institutions, the Jews suffered a lot.

The other fact was that the property in Kaunas, to a great extent it was Jewish owned. The Jews were more thrifty and they had proportionately a bigger stake in property than the non Jews, and when the property was confiscated, nationalised, it was actually

confiscated because there was no compensation, the Jews suffered most by virtue of being property owners. So there again that was the Jews who suffered more than any other minority from the Russian occupation. And then the Rabbis were persecuted, the leading intellectuals, the Jewish leading intellectuals were mostly Zionists, and to be a Zionist was a deadly sin in the communist eyes, so they were put on a list to be deported.

RL: Coming back to your particular family ...

Tape 2: 13 minutes 55 seconds

WG: Yes ...

RL: How did life change?

WG: Now, first of all we were frightened, and I will tell you why, the two brothers, the Garzan brothers, Samuel and Mike, who came from Russian, they were in the bad books of the communist authorities, because they were openly critical of the communist regime. They told us the story of the purges in Russia. They told us the story of the fake trials in Russia. It was a judicial farce the trials, it was all put up, and they exposed it and they told us how it went on, and they gave us statistics of the people murdered by the communist regime. They gave us the figures of the people who died by the enforced collectivisation of land in the Ukraine and somewhere else. So they were known as anti communist agitators. So we were very frightened when the communists marched in, and knew that sooner or later they are going to reckon up with the Garzons.

RL: And what happened?

WG: What happened, fate intervened.

RL: Were they able to continue working for that year?

WG: They did continue working for that year, although their property was confiscated and the janitor, the caretaker, was appointed manager. Of course the caretaker had the power to evict the original owner and he did it. The caretakers did it, they reckoned that the capitalists exploited the working classes and in many cases the caretaker, the janitors evicted the original owners, but in the case of Garzan he was illiterate, so he had to rely on them to do the accounts and to put everything in order, so he couldn't afford to evict them, so they stayed in.

RL: Were you able to continue at school?

WG: I was able to continue at university, yes, I was able to continue, but it was all on a temporary basis. We knew the lists are being prepared and we knew that we are going to be deported.

RL: What about in terms of anti-Semitism?

WG: That died out, you see the people who were contaminated by this Nazi anti-Semitism, they kept their heads down, they shut up, they went into hiding, because they were anti-communists and so there was peace in that respect and in fact some Jewish left wingers believed that the communists will abolish anti-Semitism, which was just an illusion that they believed and they greeted the communists as liberators. So there were some Jews who welcomed the communists, but they were a minority. More so the Jews suffered through this communist occupation.

Tape 2: 17 minutes 40 seconds

RL: So during that year did any of your friends or acquaintances get transported?

WG: Yes, yes. Now the transportations started, by the time they sorted themselves out, by the time the lists were ready it was already June, and the lists were ready then and they only had one fortnight before the Germans invaded. So really they started deporting our friends, our acquaintances. They started deporting them a fortnight before the war started, the Russian, German Russian war started.

RL: And then of course Germany came in ...

WG: Germany came in and everything was finished.

RL: You were talking about the ghetto that was created ...

WG: Yes ...

RL: How was this surrounded? What was it surrounded by? How was it made into a ghetto?

WG: Yes. There was a suburb in Slabodka and that was separated from the town by a river, so all they did was they deported about, 6,000 or 7,000 Lithuanian people. They forcibly removed them from their own houses, and they crowded the 30,000 Jews in there and it was surrounded by double barbed wire and by armed guards, and that was called a ghetto, it was a sort of open prison.

Of course the Lithuanians greeted the Nazis as liberators from communist rule, for them they were liberated, for us it was another chapter in the road to the final solution.

RL: Were Jews able to get out of that ghetto in any way?

WG: Now then, our ghetto, to start with we were hungry, as I told you, and we were really starving, and we were locked in, and then, unwittingly the Nazis threw us a lifeline. They told us to register for life, which meant work was in town, or around Kaunas, which meant we could leave the prison. We were always guarded, that was true, but nevertheless we could leave the prison. We could contact Lithuanian friends and we

could scrounge for food and we could trade for food because we had things which the Lithuanians valued. So there was a big smuggling going on, not only did they have food for us in the workplace to eat, but we also managed to smuggle in some food into the ghetto and that helped to prevent starvation. We were hungry of course, but we were not starving, there was no danger of us dying of starvation.

RL: What did you exchange for food?

Tape 2: 21 minutes 46 seconds

WG: We used to have a whole range of goods which we used to take out of the ghetto and we used to exchange for food, shirts, underwear, clothing, jackets, trousers, bedding, utensils, anything we could smuggle out of the ghetto could be sold. And we could also, it was dangerous, we could smuggle in the food back into the ghetto. There were searches, but we could bribe our guards to let us through, they had some arrangements.

Now something else I must mention, some Jews who had good connections with Lithuanians managed to hide in town. That was very risky, anyone hiding a Jew was shot and also there was a danger of neighbours denouncing and also there was the necessity to feed the Jewish people who were hiding, which was very difficult. So really some Lithuanians were prepared to risk their lives to hide and to save Jewish lives. But nevertheless quite a lot of Jews were found, quite a lot of Jews were executed and Lithuanians as well for hiding them.

RL: So did you come out of the ghetto yourself for work?

WG: Yes.

RL: What kind of work were you doing?

WG: I was working originally at the airport. Now that was a bad job because you couldn't contact Lithuanian friends. It was difficult at the airport to contact anybody, and I was chopping wood for the winter stock pile, and then I was working at the airport on night shift digging trenches for the drainage, which was very difficult, back breaking work, but we got an extra bowl of soup when we were working outside, watery soup, but it helped, and by then the rations were established in the ghetto. We got starvation rations but they helped us, in addition to scrounging food and the rations we got in addition to smuggling, in the situation, as far as hunger was concerned improved a great deal.

RL: Were you able to smuggle in food?

WG: I was able to smuggle in food, yes.

RL: And where did you get it from?

WG: Now, after I finished working at the airport I got a job with the Heeresbau dienst stelle that means Heeresbau was an army construction and building unit, and their job was to repair and to renew buildings in town and to convert buildings to hospital use and for that they employed Jewish labour, a lot of Jewish labour. Now the first task of the Jewish labour force who worked for Heeresbau was to measure and to draw up plans of disused army barracks in Kaunas, that meant we could go all over town and we could contact Lithuanians, non Jews, and I managed to scrounge potato peel. I was very

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good at scrounging potato peel, and that also helped. I mean it was difficult to wash it and to clean it and it also tasted bitter, but it was very nutritious, potato peel. So that was my first job, making plans of the barracks and the man, the chief engineer who was in charge of us, the German, he was an anti-Nazi and he helped us and he provided us with work, as long and as much as he could, in fact he said, "Whatever you draw and do I will tear it up and you can start from scratch again, I will keep you going. How long it will last I don't know, until probably they find out what I am doing and punish me, but as long as I can I will help you and keep you going, I want to preserve the engineering intelligenzia of Kaunas." And he employed all the leading engineers, drawing plans and measuring barracks and he really managed to keep them going for about half a year.

RL: What was his name?

WG: Wagner.

RL: And he was from Germany?

WG: He was from Hamburg.

RL: So were you with that unit for the whole of that time?

WG: So, we had a good job really. There was, it wasn't difficult work, it was outside. We spent winter measuring and drawing and in the end however, their Staff Sergeant, their Master Sergeant, discovered what Wagner was doing and he sent him to the front as punishment. So he was punished for his good deeds.

RL: And did you have other work after that?

WG: Now, after that, the engineering unit, the draft unit, was disbanded and I became a plumber's mate, so I continued with Heeresbau doing plumbing work, which again meant working inside and being in contact with the outside world and being able to change, smuggle in food, being able to trade goods for food.

RL: Did your mother and step father have work at this time?

WG: Yes, he worked; he was an engineer, so he worked. He had the same job as me, and Uncle Mike also had the same job. Now, I must mention this, when the so called big action took place, the 10,000, the massacre of the 10,000, Wagner called in Uncle Mike and he told him that the German employers who were using us as slave labour, and the lower Nazi echelons, the ones who were in charge of us, were also shocked at the massacre of the 10,000 and they plucked up their courage and they sent a petition to Berlin, putting it diplomatically that to kill skilled Jewish labour could have a detrimental effect on the war economy and could damage the effort of Lithuania to provide the materials which were needed for the war effort. The reply came that economic

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consideration cannot be allowed to interfere with the efforts to solve the Jewish question. So Wagner warned us, nothing and nobody will stop the Nazis from their final solution, he said, "That is what I expect from them". And that was before the Danzig Conference, that was before this official conference to establish "How to kill the Jews." That was in October, November, and there were already Einsatzgruppen killing Jews in a systematic, wholesale manner.

RL: Were their selections carried out in the ghetto on a regular basis or was it ?

WG: They continued after, after that 10,000 action, we went on strike, we refused to come out to work, but of course hunger forced us to go back to work, but there was also a promise from the people in charge of the holocaust, the people in the charge of the ghetto administration, the Nazis, they promised us there wouldn't be any more actions. They called them actions, selections and actions, as long as we go back to work we would be left alone, but that wasn't true. Picking up a selection of Jews, not in a big way but in a small way, continued and they also took Jews for various slave labour camps in Estonia and in Latvia, and conditions there were terrible. So it was very difficult to get the Jews to go there, and it was the task of the Jewish police and Jewish council to provide lists and to select the people to go to those outside camps. In the end it was necessary for the SS and for the local collaborators to intervene and do the dirty work personally because the Jewish police couldn't always manage the required number of people. It was a very difficult task.

RL: How did someone become appointed as a Jewish policeman? How did they become ... ?

WG: Now, it started off at the German request that the internal affairs of the ghetto will be run by the Jewish Council, and the Jews were supposed to select their own functionaries. To start with nobody wanted to volunteer. Eventually a respected Kovno doctor by the name of Elkes was persuaded after a lot of arguing to take all the job and he was a decent, honourable man. However, no matter how decent and honourable he was they were all brow beaten to do the bidding of the Nazis, that is what they were there for. Eventually over the time decent people were very reluctant to accept jobs in the council,

so really the people who were serving on the council weren't always of the highest calibre.

RL: Did you know any of them personally?

WG: I knew a lot of them personally and I must say it was an impossible situation.

RL: Did they get any perks for being in that position?

WG: They got double rations. And then they had to appoint policemen, so the policemen were again, probably, against their will became police, and they had double

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rations and they had safety. They were the ones selecting people. They were not the ones who were selected.

RL: And how did they behave?

WG: Some of them behaved very decently. Some of them risked their own lives to try and protect the ghetto Jews, and some of them relished the power, so you can't generalise. But on the whole, the whole ghetto and for that matter concentration camp administration system, that was run by the Jews was very, very doubtful. How they could justify it, it is difficult to understand, and difficult to judge them, but the result of that system, the ghettos and the concentration camps, wouldn't have been able to function as efficiently as they did.

RL: In the ghetto was there any attempt to set up schools?

WG: Well, we tried, we tried to set up schools in the ghetto. We tried to continue the activities of synagogues and all that. It was very difficult, there was a ban on it, but nevertheless, secretly the guards weren't always inside the ghetto, so secretly we managed.

RL: So what kind of things did they manage to do?

WG: Well, we managed to have education for children, on and off, under trying conditions. We managed to organise prayer meetings, also under difficulties. We managed to organise concerts which was allowed officially.

Now, let me come back to the big action and the shock and our attitude towards it. Now, our biggest shock was the loss of our dear ones and loved ones and families and so on, but what also compounded our horror was the fact that our killers, the people who pulled the trigger, were our own Lithuanian neighbours, thousands of young men who had volunteered to help the Nazis. As I told you anti-Semitism was endemic in Lithuania, and then in addition to that, there was the Nazi propaganda, the Nazi indoctrination, and that

was so effective that thousands of young Lithuanian, ordinary Lithuanian men joined the Nazis and they were used to do the dirty work. Now the fact was that 80% of the killing machine was non German. There were Ukrainians, there were Hungarians, Rumanians, Croats, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians. The supervision, initiative, organisation that was German, and that was also a shocking finding, we knew who they were, the people. It would have been of some comfort to us if we could have identified our killers as sadists, as misfits, if we could have removed them from the human race, but they were part of the human race, they were like you and me. They were not much different, and yet they could be brainwashed to murder innocent people, so really this shook, this shattered my belief in a progressive and benevolent humanity. And there is one explanation that the human brain is departmentalised, it has got separate departments and one doesn't communicate with the other. So you can have a person who is in one way cruel, on the

Tape 2: 42 minutes 29 seconds

other side he can be caring towards his family and be ordinary in many ways, and yet it is separated in his brain, compartmentalisation of the brain, that was one explanation. The other explanation was that we came to a conclusion that really our concept of evil was wrong, we realised that the line separating good from evil was a lot thinner than we imagined, and it was a lot easier than we imagined to brainwash, to indoctrinate, quite ordinary people to cross that line between good and evil, so good and evil were really very thinly divided, the division was very thin.

RL: You know you talked about the burning down of the hospital?

WG: Yes, the burning of the hospital.

RL: Had that taken ...

WG: That happened just before the big action ...

RL: Yes, yes ...

WG: That happened before the big action.

RL: And was it Lithuanians that ...

WG: That was SS and, SS and Gestapo, the Gestapo department and Lithuanian collaborators, yes ...

RL: Had there been other ... executions if you like inside the ghetto before that?

WG: I didn't mention to you how the 10,000 were executed, actually they were separated and taken into a small ghetto, into a department, into a branch of the big ghetto, which could be sealed off from the big ghetto, so they were kept overnight in the branch of the big ghetto called the little ghetto, and then the next morning they were marched out

towards that fortification, all 10,000, children, women, men, and they were taken in batches of 100 and pushed into a deep pit which was prepared before hand. So they were pushed in and machine gunned and they were eliminated in batches of 100. It took the whole day to push them in, and then they started covering them with soil, and anybody who was still alive, anybody who was still moving they were still shooting, and that was all witnessed by Lithuanian people who lived not far from this fortification. And the soil they say was heaving for a night and a day from the people who were still moving and were still alive, and in fact the one boy aged 14 or 15 managed to crawl out at night, when nobody was watching, he managed to move the dead bodies and he hid until daylight and then he marched into the ghetto. He was covered with lime, but he managed by a miracle he survived, he managed to reach the ghetto, and he told the ghetto council what was happening. He was sworn to secrecy. They told him not to tell anybody what happened because there might be a panic in the ghetto and people might refuse to work,

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to go to work, and they said that would be the end of the ghetto, they would kill everybody, so he kept silent.

Now, what happened next was that there was a brigade of slave labour, working for the Gestapo in the building requisitioned by the Gestapo. They were working in the yard, and their job was to sort out clothing of the victims which were shot, prior to the big action, during the big action and after the big action. And they discovered amongst the clothing, there was clothing of Russian prisoners, they were shot. They discovered clothing that was of local origin, and they found clothing of their own families, of the people who were taken, and that could not be hidden, so they came back into the ghetto and within a few hours the whole ghetto new about the execution of the 10,000. And nearly the ghetto went on strike, but what happened, what happened then was, at the same time we noticed that there were transportations arriving from France, from Holland, from Czechoslovakia and from Germany to be killed at the same fortification where the 10,000 were executed. They had a good team of killers, everything was organised and they decided to use this Kovno execution place for western Jews, because they didn't want to kill the western Jews in Western Europe. They tried to keep it secret, the policy was to do the mass executions in Lithuania, in Russian, in Latvia, in Poland, but not to do it in Western Europe. So they took all the trouble to transport western Jews by train to eastern Europe to be executed, and just at that time we noticed and we saw the western European Jews marching past our ghetto, the highway to the fortification was via, was going near the ghetto gates, so we saw it, we witnessed the western European Jews, well dressed, well fed, with little suitcases marching by and they were told they were going to work in Lithuania, and we tried to warn them, and some people managed to contact them, but they just dismissed it as trouble makers trying to cause difficulties. They were completely convinced that they were going to work in Lithuania. That is what they were told, that they were going to work in Eastern Europe. Now, they were taken to the same fortification and that is what the ghetto council told us, "That is your fate, if you don't work, so you better go and do as the Nazis tell you."

RL: Did this fortification have a name?

WG: Yes, Ninth Fort, it was called the Ninth Fort.

RL: Were there any executions inside the ghetto?

WG: No, none at all. Oh there were shootings, if you didn't take your hat off, if you didn't walk around with yellow stars you could be shot on the spot, but it was spontan ... random, it was not organised. You could also be shot on the streets of Kaunas, but it was too messy, they tried to avoid it, they tried to organise it to take people out and shoot where they had to be shot. It was German love of ordnung, order. You know they didn't want dead bodies on the street, or in the ghetto.

RL: Did people die in the ghetto of starvation?

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WG: No, no. That has been solved, the problem of starving to death has been solved by the requirement of the demand for slave labour that saved our lives, because as you know, in the Warsaw ghetto people were dying of hunger.

RL: Was there any disease in the ghetto?

WG: There was, but it was contained, they had very good doctors, and again we smuggled in medicine, not only food but medicine was also smuggled in, and the Germans were so frightened of epidemics that they also probably relented in some cases and let some medicine in.

RL: What happened after the hospital was burnt down?

WG: After the hospital was burnt down they had another smaller hospital. We had a little hospital.

RL: Was there any idea why the Germans had done that?

WG: Yes, the reason was that they were frightened of contagious disease, They wanted to eliminate the problem of having any diseases in the ghetto. This hospital was also for contagious diseases.

RL: If somebody died in the ghetto, what would happen to their body?

WG: That was organised, that was all organised, There was no difficulty there. There was a cemetery and it was buried in a proper manner, and there was the ceremonies, that was ok.

RL: Was that in the Kovno Jewish cemetery ... so they were allowed to ...

WG: There was a cemetery and the burial took place, so don't forget that the natural death in the ghetto was not very numerous. People were killed outside and they were just thrown into the lime pit, and they were not dying of hunger, so the death rate in the ghetto was not excessive.

RL: Were there still children, many children left, after the big action?

WG: Yes, there were many children left after the big action. Now that is another atrocity which really was one of my most traumatic memories, and it remains so until this day, it was called "Kinder Action", "Children's Action". You see orders came from Berlin to eliminate all non productive personnel, and that was winter 43/44, now, we heard rumours, in fact we were well informed about things going on, there were all sorts of non Jewish people who made a point of informing us, about Auschwitz for instance,

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about the Warsaw ghetto, about events in Lithuania. We were in contact with the population at large, so we were quite well informed, and there were rumours going around that in the town, Siauliai not far from Kovno, they had eliminated all the non productive personnel. It was a so called "Children's Action".

RL: Now this tape is about to end so I think before you start on the story we will change the tape.

WG: Okay, change the tape. So I won't do the children's action now.

TAPE 3

RL: This is the interview with Waldemar Ginsburg and it is tape 3.

Now before you go on to the Children's Action you were going to just go back and tell me other things that happened after the big action.

WG: After the big action, the Germans promised to leave us in peace and let us be forced labour, and let us to continue our engagements as forced labour. Well, they kept their word up to a point. We had peace in the ghetto until 1943, until autumn 1943, I say peace, well it wasn't quite correct to say peace, because executions continued on a small scale, they were still picking up Jews and taking them to the Ninth Fort and shooting them. There were still deportations to various forced labour camps outside Lithuania.

Now, in 1943 there was a change of management, the SA, Sturmabteilung, who were in charge up to then, civilian administration, yielded their command of the ghetto and of other concentration camps to the SS proper, so the SS became our controllers, autumn 1943, and a chap called Goeke became our new boss. Now he was a real die hard Nazi, fanatical Nazi, and he was implementing the Nazi doctrine to the full. We had in the

ghetto some half Jews and some spouses of, some non Jewish wives of Jewish ghetto inmates, and they were now, they were also classed as Jews and they were treated as any other ghetto inmates, unless they were prepared to leave the ghetto and live outside. Now, the Nazi doctrine of racial anti-Semitism was different from political, social economic anti-Semitism which went before. Now of course, anti Judaism, religious anti-Judaism, anti-Semitism was going on for centuries, it was nothing new, but what the Nazis introduced was racial anti-Semitism. In other words Jewish identity was determined not by religion, but by ancestry, by the bloodline and the result was very bizarre. A lot of Christians discovered that they had somewhere a Jewish grandmother or somebody Jewish in the family, and they were also persecuted, they were also targeted, in fact, in Warsaw, in the Warsaw ghetto, there were two churches for Christian Jews, for baptised Christians who were classed by the Nazis as Jews because they had Jewish ancestry and they were also taken to Treblinka with the rest of the Jews. It didn't save their lives being Christian. So that was the difference.

Tape 3: 4 minutes 43 seconds

RL: Was there any church inside the Kovno ghetto?

WG: We didn't have a church. There weren't so many of us, but that was the difference between racial anti-Semitism and the anti-Semitism before, before Hitler. Now this racial anti-Semitism became the catalyst for the examination of the European Jewry, so Goeka was the one who was looking after this doctrine and he was the one who had to implement it with his henchmen.

So what he did, he renamed the ghetto, he renamed the concentration camp, it wasn't any more a ghetto, it was under the regime of a concentration camp. So first of all anybody who worked at a place which could have been clearly identified and separated from the ghetto, he did take out of the ghetto. Heeresbau was a separate unit, employing about, I don't know, 800 people or something like that, so all the Heeresbau workers were taken into a concentration camp built specially for Heeresbau in a suburb of Kovno called Sanciai. So we were about four miles away from the ghetto.

RL: When did that happen?

WG: That happened in the end of 1943.

Now, the brigade that worked at the airport, they were also easily separated so they were taken to a concentration camp near the airport and they stayed there, so from December 1943 we weren't any more in what was the ghetto, we were in a concentration camp, Sanciai, in a suburb of Kovno.

Now I am coming back to the Kinder Actzion, the Children's Action, so we heard rumours about this Children's Action and there was a terrible panic in the ghetto. What was the ghetto, in the camp, we were already in the camp then. We didn't know whether it was true, but we trusted they could do anything, as they wanted, and the whole camp

was agitated. The children in our camp was well looked after, they were never hungry, they were never short of food, they were looked after. They were sheltered as much as possible, and then on baby blessings all the time, our most prominent Rabbis blessed them and people were prepared to give their lives for them, but the prayer was, "Save our children", the children must not be harmed, and there was a genuine conviction that there will be divine intervention where the children were concerned. On the 28th of March a detachment of Ukrainian militia walked in with orders to eliminate, not only the children, but anybody who was non productive, which means the old, the sick, the ill, the disabled, and that. We were at work, I don't know what would have happened if we would have been there, if the able bodied bodies, men had been in the camp, but we were at work, and the most cruel, in the most cruel manner, the babies were separated from their mothers, some mothers were shot, some mothers went with their children, they were thrown into wagons, into lorries, the old and the sick were also forced in, it was a blood bath, and they were taken to a local spot where they were executed, and that was on the 28th of March by a detachment of Ukrainian militia this time.

Tape 3: 10 minutes 20 seconds

RL: Which year was that?

WG: Pardon.

RL: Which year?

WG: 44

RL: 44

WG: This was 44. That was when the ... and the same sort of action took place, not only in our camp in Sanciai. It took place in Slabodka, on the airport and everywhere else, it was synchronised.

RL: Were there members of your family ...?

WG: That was a terrible blow, it was something which really shook us up, even more I should say than the big action.

RL: Were there members of your family taken?

WG: My grandpa was taken, yes ... there were only five, two were taken between, there were five left in the camp, grandpa was taken, there were four of us left alive.

RL: Which were the four that were left?

WG: Mother, myself and the two Gazzan Brothers, Samuel and Mike.

RL: When had your grandmother been taken?

WG: No, the grandma was not, she was the only one who died a natural death in the ghetto, and she was buried with a proper ceremony and it was really a blessing that she died when she did, because what they went through was indescribable.

So there it is. There were four of us left alive.

RL: So when you came back from work that day ...

WG: It was finished ...

RL: Did you know whilst you were at work what was happening?

WG: No, we didn't, we came back and we got a shock. You can imagine what was going on in the ghetto, you can imagine the parents who stayed behind ... and this was

Tape 3: 12 minutes 36 seconds

something, a million and a half innocent children went to their death and that shook up even the religious people, I must say, a lot became disaffected.

RL: How did you manage to keep going?

WG: That is what I am asking myself. How did you manage? We wanted to go on strike but the kapos said, "Remember what happened to the French Jews, what happened to the German Jews, what happened to the Russian prisoners of war, you will starve to death if you don't go out to work." So after a day we went out to work. It is amazing how much punishment one can take.

RL: Up to what age child was taken?

WG: 14. Now, after that atrocity the victorious Red Army was already on the borders of Lithuania, so the Germans had to decide what to do with us. They were still about 15,000 altogether Jews alive, out of the quarter of a million, there were still about fifteen to twenty thousand alive.

RL: Were there still Jews in the original Kovno ghetto?

WG: There were still Jews in the original, which was renamed concentration camp. There were still Jews in the ghetto, in Siauliai, in Shavli, there were still Jews somewhere else in the concentration camp, there were probably fifteen to twenty thousand Jews, so they had to decide what to do to eliminate us and then burn our bodies, that was another atrocity they committed. The orders came, I forgot to tell you about it, the orders came, from Berlin again, to eliminate all traces of the mass killings. What they did was they took slave labour to the Ninth Fort and they forced them to dig up all the dead bodies, the

thousands and thousands of dead bodies, put them on a big bonfire fuelled by logs and petrol and they were burned and the bones were pulverised. There was a whole team of workers working there, and these were the orders to eliminate and they knew that if they leave the traces, if they leave the dead bodies the Russians will use it as propaganda, so they wanted nothing to be left, and the same policy was also enacted in all the different concentration camps, elimination of all the dead bodies.

Now, so the Germans had another fifteen or twenty thousand slave labour Jews. They could have killed us off but there was no time to burn our bodies, so what they did was they took us to Germany. There was another factor, there was a shortage of slave labour in Germany itself, the catchment area was reduced because the Russians had already reoccupied a lot of eastern Europe, so they didn't have chance to get slave labour from there, so they had to use us as slave labour. They took us to Germany, on the way to Germany they stopped at a concentration camp called Stutthof. There men and women were separated.

RL: Can I just ask, how were you taken?

Tape 3: 17 minutes 33 seconds

WG: Now, we were crowded into cattle wagons, seventy to eighty in each wagon and given a ration to take with us. Now the wagons were dirty, rough hewn timber, two slots on top for fresh air and there were buckets, at one end buckets with fresh drinking water, and at the other buckets for all our needs. And there was a blanket separating the place which was used as a toilet, and that is how we were crowded in and taken.

RL: How long was the journey?

WG: The journey was three days and three nights and we were separated in Stutthof from our female prisoners. I had to say goodbye to my mother. I never saw her again, so there were only three of us left, the two Garzons and myself, and we were transported to Bavaria to a concentration camp which was a branch, a part of Dachau, of the oldest and largest concentration camp in Germany, and our task was to build underground bunkers for the manufacture of the new type of Messerschmitt jet fighters.

RL: So when were you taken there?

WG: We were taken in July 1944.

RL: How long were you at Stutthof.

WG: In Stutthof we were, I should say, half a day.

RL: And how long was the journey on to Dachau?

WG: Three days, three nights. Three days, three nights.

RL: Did anybody die on that journey?

WG: No, nobody died. They had their ration and we had water, the ration ran out but there was sufficient to keep us going until we got to Dachau, camp number one. So we were taken to the branch of Dachau, branch number one. As soon as we approached the camp they realised that it is not an extermination camp. There were no crematoria, there were no gas chambers, we could see it was in a green wood, fenced off, double barbed wire, watch towers, and the surroundings were very pleasant, but we were prisoners in that camp. As soon as we arrived we were taken in and the searching, the frisking started. We were still in our civilian clothes, we still had our documents with us and we had to surrender everything, and we got blue striped prison uniforms which looked like pyjamas. Now I had to surrender all my documents, all my papers, all my pictures, and until then I was still a person, I still had an identity in the camp in Lithuania. Here I got a number, sewn into my uniform and I had to surrender every picture, every paper I had, but apparently the German prisoner, he was a German criminal, who searched me, apparently he had some compassion because he took my mother's picture and asked me, "Is that your mother?" And I said, "Yes, that is my mother." "Well I will give it back to

Tape 3: 22 minutes 34 seconds

you, you had better keep it." But everything else was taken away, but unfortunately just at that moment an SS supervisor was passing by, he took the picture and rebuked him, "You can't do that, he might still imagine he is a human being." He took the picture and tore it up, so that was the last documentation I had from home.

Now, we became numbers, we became non persons in that camp, there was no access to food, you couldn't scrounge nothing in potato peel, and within a fortnight, three weeks we looked like walking skeletons.

RL: What rations were you given?

WG: We had to survive on three hundred grams of bread a day, and that wasn't always 300 gram, sometimes it was less, it had a bit of margarine, a bit of jam occasionally, a bit of cheese. We had Ersatz, substitute coffee and a kind of soup which was also watery soup, with all sorts of vegetables in which looked very suspect. Now this was not a ration for people who were supposed to do concreting, levelling, digging and building underground factories, and doing underground bunkers and all that physical work involved, so no wonder the attrition rate, the death rate in that camp was very high.

RL: What number had you been given?

WG: 82336, and that was my number instead of my name.

Now the camp system again was more favourable to certain people than to others, the privileged people were perpetuating their privileges. It is very strange how once you get

into a privileged position the pressure from the other privileged people and the drive is to keep all the privileged in the same group, so the ones who were better off in the ghetto became also privileged people in the concentration camp in Sanciai, and they had better jobs and better positions, and they were usually in kitchen jobs, or kapo supervision jobs, which was always easier than any other jobs.

Well, we came to Germany, the order was already more or less a pecking order was already established when we came. However, it was like a miracle, the people who were privileged in the concentration camp in Sanciai, got kitchen jobs and cleaning jobs in that new concentration camp, and they were again privileged. So it was self-perpetuating, the caste system, to have a charmed life, and it meant in a camp like ours it meant extra rations, it meant easier work, and it wasn't an extermination camp, not like in Auschwitz, anybody could be killed, a privileged person had a good chance of surviving in this German concentration camp, if he hadn't to do concreting and didn't have to do the heavy work involved in building those underground factories.

RL: So was the concreting what you were having to do?

Tape 3: 27 minutes 10 seconds

WG: I had to do concreting.

RL: So who was in charge of that work?

WG: Organisation Todd, there was a German supervisor who was quite demanding, and they really pushed themselves beyond their ability and they pushed us beyond our ability, and it was very frustrating to work with hungry emaciated people.

RL: What hours were you working?

WG: Eleven hour shifts, night shift, day shift, but in a certain way I was privileged, because when we came into the camp they asked for plumbers, so that was my chance to be a plumber and for a while, until winter came, I did not work for the firm Moll, who were in charge of building the underground bunkers. I was working for a different firm, for a plumbing firm, I was working for a plumbing firm, doing work, some undercover, and it was easier work. We had to install sewage and we had to install a water supply which was quite easy work. That is how I managed to survive on starvation rations.

RL: Were there only Jews working in this camp or were there other ...

WG: There were Jews, there were also German criminals, but they had a privileged existence, they were mostly in a supervisory role, the German prisoners, and the four main kapos, the four main people in charge, two were Hungarian Jews and two were German criminals.

RL: And how did they treat you?

WG: Badly. They had to show how keen they were and how cruel they were, otherwise they couldn't have kept their jobs, but our own kapos were not as bad. One was bad, another one was pretty cruel, but normally our own kapos, the people from our ranks who were put in charge of a group of twenty, or a group of ten, of a group of the plumbers, of a group of the joiners, they were not as bad, they had to pretend to be cruel, they had to pretend to hit us, but it was pretence, so it was not as bad, but some of the chief kapos they were very, very cruel.

RL: Can you give an example?

WG: Yes, well, their position and their privileges was dependant on their willingness to beat us up and to show how cruel they could be, and to show how keen they could be, and later on when the liberation came they paid a price for it. They were beaten now themselves.

RL: Did you have to work every day of the week?

Tape 3: 31 minutes 3 seconds

WG: No, we had a Sunday off. One day was off.

RL: What did you do on that day?

WG: We used to catch lice, clean our lice and try and wash ourselves. We were overrun with lice, there was no change of clothes, there was no facility, there was just cold water taps so we couldn't have a proper wash and even if we washed ourselves we had to put on the same dirty clothes again so it was a real problem to keep clean, so the result was we were overrun with lice and what we did was whenever we had free time, a free hour, we used to take our garments off, turn them inside out and try to eliminate the lice, now it became so bad that the lice were spreading infection, typhoid fever and by the beginning of winter, winter 44/45, the whole camp, the whole of camp one was quarantined. Unfortunately the plumbing brigade was outside the camp when it was quarantined and we could not get inside the camp, we were not allowed in, so we were taken to camp number three, and this was a camp which was employed by Moll, to build underground bunkers. So that was it, we had to spend all winter, three months of winter, 44/45 working, building those underground factories for Moll. Luckily camp number three was easy going, there was no roll call which lasted for hours and the camp commandant was not a Nazi so he didn't persecute us, he didn't beat us up. We were all right, we could smuggle in firewood and we could heat our barrack but work conditions were atrocious.

RL: Now in both of these camps were there men and women or was it only men?

WG: No, men and women were in, no camp number one had men and women, men were separate from women but the women had privileged jobs, all the jobs which the women had were cleaning jobs, kitchen jobs and even if they worked at Moll, the

construction site, they were in charge of making the soup, and the food, so really they had better jobs than men. Not many women were employed in heavy manual work.

RL: And in camp three were there any women?

WG: No, there were no women in camp three.

RL: How big were these camps?

WG: How near?

RL: How big?

WG: How big ... camp number one was about one thousand two hundred, one thousand five hundred, camp number three was about one thousand or even less.

RL: What were the sleeping arrangements in the camp?

Tape 3: 35 minutes 22 seconds

WG: We had bunks to sleep on, but the whole barracks was hardly visible from the ground, in fact we were in a dug out, and the bunks, the planks we were sleeping on were on the ground level. Now the roof was only about a couple of foot above the bunks, and it was apexed, so in the middle we could walk standing up and in the middle of the bunks it had a ditch so we could walk in that ditch and on each side we had wooden planks to lie on, and that was called our bedding quarters, our sleeping quarters, it was very primitive, the door was on one side and the planks were our bed, covered with straw, and the whole building, the whole barrack was covered with roofing felt and soil. So you could hardly stand up in the middle of the room and if you lie down you have to be careful when you try to sit up that you were under the apex, the apex was alright, you were under the eaves, your head was under the eaves and if you stood up you had to go to the middle of the room to stand up.

RL: What were the sanitary arrangements?

WG: Sanitary arrangements were a hole in the ground, primitive.

RL: And food, you had your own utensils?

WG: Yes, we had our utensils from our own Lithuanian camp. We had a soup tin and we had a spoon, you couldn't survive without it.

RL: Did you keep those on you or did you leave them ... ?

WG: We kept them all the time on us, and that was vital, if you couldn't have a utensil for soup you were lost, coffee, soup and we had a little canvas bag to keep our bread in.

Now, as far as the conditions were concerned they were extremely primitive and I must say that this last year, the one year was spent, we became really demoralised. The concentration camp system was not only degrading, they torment us, it was also degrading. The torture was degrading everybody and we became completely indifferent to the suffering of our fellow prisoners. When they died they died, that was it, we used to put them on the cart, take them out, outside the perimeter and dropped them into a shallow grave, there was no ceremony, no consideration.

RL: What happened if somebody fell sick?

WG: Oh, he died, mind you there was a hospital, called the Revier , and anybody who was temporarily ill was kept there for a few days or even a week and if he did improve that was fine, but if he didn't there were selections and anybody who was hopelessly ill, anybody who looked emaciated was taken to Auschwitz. In fact, my step father, Samuel, was picked out on one of those selections. It was in November, the beginning of November, an SS man just went around with a whip, "You, you, you ..." Anybody he

Tape 3: 40 minutes 30 seconds

didn't like the look of, was taken out and taken straight to Auschwitz to be gassed, and that is how I lost him. He was healthy, he was fit, he looked emaciated.

RL: And his brother?

WG: His brother was, thanks to his connection, he had a doctor for a friend who was in hospital. They managed to hide him when the selection came, so he was on and off ill and then he went to work, he was ill again. He could not adapt to the circumstances, he was a real gentleman of the old school, and he was the wrong age. People my age still had a chance, people his age were already doomed, so he did suffer a lot and in the end he died two days after he was liberated. So he was alive when liberation came.

RL: Tell me about the Appells.

WG: Now there was a roll call, night shift, day shift, as we went to work, as we came from work, there was always counting going on, they were very concerned about prisoners escaping, so they counted us and counted us again and we were always lined in five so it was easier to count, and we were kept for hours, it was snowing, it was raining, it was freezing, we were drying again, and really we should have had pneumonia but luckily we were spared pneumonia, and these Appells were specially bad in camp number one, in camp number three they didn't bother a lot, it was, the regime was a lot easier.

RL: Did anybody escape?

WG: No. Not as far as I know.

RL: What did you have on your feet?

WG: My shoes were supposed to last me over the winter, well, about, it was about autumn, I should say October when my shoes started disintegrating and I stood on the parade ground with leaking shoes, and it would have finished me off, until I was told to go to the warehouse, and there is a decent German there, there is a red triangle, sorry, and Willy, he is a homosexual and he is not a Nazi and he tries to help wherever he can, and fortunately he gave me a pair of wooden shoes, and they were really my size and they saved my life I should say, and he also gave me a warm coat to last me the winter, at Moll, and that was before we were taken to camp number three.

RL: Did other people have coats like that?

WG: Some people were fortunate to have coats, there were coats specially adapted for prisoners, and they were sliced up in the back, and a strip of different coloured cloth was sewn in to show that they were prisoners, so they couldn't escape, specially doctored for prisoners, but some didn't manage to get anything warmer and they had to survive in this pyjama like uniform.

Tape 3: 45 minutes 18 seconds

Now as far as socks were concerned, there weren't any, so what we did, we cut up army blankets which we were given to cover ourselves. We cut a piece off and we made foot wrappers, that was warm enough and it helped, but it was very risky, because Kirsch, our Lager Kommandant discovered what we were doing and he accused us of sabotaging army property and that was punishable by death. So he took as an example five prisoners, and they were hanged in front of the whole camp, and their bodies were left to hang for 24 hours as a deterrent. Later on, when the Americans came, he was tried and he was himself hanged, Kirsch, so he got his punishment.

RL: Were there any other executions?

WG: No, these were the two executions. There were five men who were hanged.

Now I was frightened to death, because I had wrappers and I quickly put them into the lavatory and I used cement bag paper to wrap my feet in, which wasn't very efficient but that was all we could do. Now when I was at camp number three I started my game again, I cut out blankets again, those paper wrappers were no use whatsoever so I risked my life again, and I took a knife and I cut two pieces of blanket for foot wrappers and I think that helped me a great deal to keep warm, but unfortunately when the quarantine was over, that was spring 1944, we were allocated to go back to camp number one, so in one sense this was a good move, because our torture at Moll at the building site was finished and we could go back to our plumbing work at camp number one, but there were changes, as soon as we approached camp number one, we were not let inside, we were told that we are going to a entlausung, that is a heat chamber to disinfect us and to do away with lice. So the treatment for delousing was heat, a heated chamber, which would

kill our lice. The temperature was not high enough to burn our clothing, but it was high enough to kill all insects. Now we were given a bath, a shower and we were disinfected, now when we entered the entlausung we were told to take our garments off, to strip naked and to leave everything in the heat chamber. I suddenly remembered that I had the foot wrappers cut off from an army blanket, which was a death sentence, so I was in a real panic, so what I did, I tried to hide it, and I put it into the sleeves of my jacket, one foot wrapper in one sleeve, and the other foot wrapper in the other sleeve, and I thought that nobody will notice it, and then an announcement came, "Don't hide anything in your sleeves, leave everything open so it can be aired." Well, I took a risk, I walked into the shower, I had a shower, and when we finished with the showering, suddenly an SS man broke into the room with a prisoner, held up my jacket, called out my number and the number of another prisoner. They called out two numbers, "Whose garments are they, despite our order not to hide anything, two prisoners have hidden their foot wrappers in the sleeves of the garment." Now he didn't say anything about the foot wrappers being cut off, he was only concerned about the heat treatment, so that was a bit of a relief, and then he told us the punishment for it will be twelve lashes, but I want you to run around the whole delousing holding your foot wrappers and to shout out, "I kept it hidden, and that is why I was punished." And I got twelve lashes, which was quite a relief really, so the first prisoner when they came back from running around, he was told

Tape 3: 52 minutes 24 seconds

to bend down, and another prisoner got a whip, and the SS man told him, "Get on with it and don't spare your arm." He got two blows and a lot of brown stools gushed out of his behind, well I think that saved our lives actually, because the SS man got fed up with the smell and he just wanted to shoot him and he changed his mind and he walked out of the room and he said, "Clean it up", and he walked out of the room, so the prisoner got another ten lashes and he had to clean up his dirt and he was led away. Then my turn came, I got twelve lashes, but it was better to get twelve lashes than having a rope around your neck. I left my foot wrappers there and then and I walked into the camp and I met my old friends and Uncle Mike who was in the hospital, and I discovered that this quarantine was a God send. They had the same rations as we had but they didn't have to work. However quite a number of prisoners died from spotted fever, and that was the sad news.

Now something else happened during our stay in camp number three, they received a parcel from the red cross, cigarettes, condensed milk, and something else, I forgot what it was, there were three items, that was also a big help, because what I did, I could barter my cigarettes or potatoes. There was a kitchen worker, who was a very heavy smoker, and he used to pinch potatoes. Just shows you how privileged, while people were starving and dying of hunger, the kitchen workers had extra rations, not only for themselves, but sufficient to smuggle and to work and to business in the black market. So, I got two potatoes for one cigarette, and that helped a lot. So we got two parcels during our stay in that Dachau concentration camp.

RL: Were you able to cook the potato?

WG: Oh yes, there was no difficulty in cooking, our soup container, we had cold water available, we could boil it, yes.

RL: Where would you get the fire from?

WG: The fire came from the building site, so they had firewood, especially in camp number three, there was plenty of firewood, they brought it in, they smuggled it in, in small amounts.

RL: Were there any examples of the prisoners helping one another?

WG: No, I didn't see anything like that. Everybody was looking out for themselves, we were too demoralised. I hear tales from prisoners being generous helping each other, being altruistic, but I haven't experienced it myself.

RL: Was there ever, did you ever see anybody praying, or were there any signs of religious ...

Tape 3: 57 minutes 5 seconds

WG: The religious Jews did pray, yes. There were some Hungarian Jews who did pray, but Lithuanian Jews were more hardened, they had four years, and they had this business of the children, and a lot of them became disaffected.

RL: Now this tape is about to end so we will just stop here.

TAPE 4

This is the interview with Waldemar Ginsburg and it is tape four.

So you were telling me how you came back to camp one.

WG: Yes.

RL: And met up with your old friend. Who was it you met up with?

WG: I met my friend who I worked with at the Heeresbau, and the airport when we were together in the Kovno ghetto, and he actually, it was him who gave me the list of all the people who died of typhoid and he also informed me that the camp is now clean and the danger of infection has passed and the scourge of the lice is also past history, so conditions as far as hygiene is concerned improved a great deal. The rations did not improve, and there were a lot of changes, there were a lot of Hungarian, Czech and Western European Jews in that camp. Conditions for us improved straight away, we worked for the plumbing firm Lingeman. The work wasn't difficult and the people in

charge were also not as strict as the Organization Todd people at Moll, at the building site, so life was a lot easier. In fact the two German supervisors who were in charge of the plumbing department, one was a Berliner who lost an eye and had a brain injury, so he was invalided to be in charge of the plumbing department. The other was a Bavarian, a keen Nazi, who had his one foot frozen, or his toes frozen on the Russian front, and he was also invalided and given a job as a supervisor. Now they supervised the plumbing department, and they weren't too bad, especially the Berliner. He was an anti Nazi, and he always quarrelled with the Nazi who was a Bavarian, but for me conditions improved, simply because they singled me out for the job as a storekeeper, so instead of going out to work I stayed in the warm office issuing parts and tools and looking after the work schedule. I could read the German papers and I could listen to the quarrels between the two supervisors, one defending the Nazis and one cursing the Nazis. So that gave me extra strength and extra rest to face what was to come, and the ordeal which we had to face was a long march, and it was called the dead march, death, death march.

RL: And when did that take place?

WG: That took place end of May, no, it was the end of April, that was the end of April, we were told that our camp has to be evacuated, and the reason was that the Americans were already near us. We could hear gunfire, and we were expecting to be liberated any

Tape 4: 4 minutes 43 seconds

day. Orders were to evacuate all these branch camps, to take us to Dachau, the main camp, and then from the main camp to take us into the Bavarian mountains and shoot us. Of course it was impossible to do, the Americans were already surrounding us, but the Germans kept to their plan to the last minute. We were evacuated, we were given a tin of bully beef, which was a privilege really, and we were given a slice of bread and we were taken in the direction of Dachau, of the proper main camp of Dachau. The ill and the sick were allowed to stay, now they were very suspicious so they dragged themselves along with us, but they couldn't go far. They were half way, after a march of about two or three hours, they were gathered by the wayside and they were taken back to the camp, so instead of being shot, they were taken back, I don't know why that happened, because that was unusual. Anyway, we were taken on a march which lasted a day and a night, to Dachau. There we stayed, we got some soup, we stayed overnight and the next morning we were taken in the direction of Munich.

RL: How many of you were there?

WG: There were, our group was about 100/150.

RL: And was it all men?

WG: All men. The women were in a separate group. Now we were marched, sometimes day time, sometimes night time. Anyway nights and days merged into one, I

didn't know anymore, if it was night, if it was day. Sometimes we slept in the day, sometimes we slept in the night.

RL: Where did you sleep?

WG: Outside, in ditches, never under cover, and they kept us away from populated areas. They tried to keep our march separate, keep it secret.

RL: How many were guarding you?

WG: There were about ten or twelve guarding us, but they were not a group, they were mostly foreign, foreign militia, very few Germans. And they were as tired as we were.

RL: Were they walking also?

WG: They were walking also, also their food wasn't forthcoming, so they were also starving.

RL: What happened if someone couldn't walk any further?

WG: Oh, he was shot, there were shots, we heard some shots, but it was quite easy to hide actually. We could have, the guards weren't so keen, we could have hidden on the

Tape 4: 8 minutes 56 seconds

third or second nights, but we decided to march on towards the Americans, we could hear the gunfire. So we marched until the first, the last day in April. The last day in April we slept in a little wood, it was snowing, and by the time in the morning we woke up we were covered with snow and we were wet through, but we were so exhausted that we slept through this snow blizzard. We woke up and I was completely stiff, Josh had to pull me out, and it was a sunny morning, so I went out of the wood to get some sunshine. No guards, we were alone. In the distance I saw a Russian prisoner of war and he announced that overnight the guards disappeared, and he said the Americans are due any time.

Well, we heard a rumble and we quickly hid in the bushes just in case they were the retreating SS troops, but as we looked out we saw a few vehicles, and the first one had the French tricolour, so I realised that these are allies, must have been a reconnaissance group, they approached us and they looked at us, "Where do you come from?" I had to explain in French what we were, and my first words to him were, "Du pain s'il vous plait." Some bread please. And they gave us chocolate, stupid it was. Anyway they fed us, and they took us to the place for displaced persons.

RL: How many days had you been on the death march?

WG: On the march? Oh, a week.

RL: And how many survived from your group?

WG: Now, the liberation came, and out of the 35,000 Kovno Jews only 2,000 were still alive, and as I said, my Uncle Mike despite all the efforts of American doctors he died two days after. And some of the 2,000 died after they were liberated, they were too far gone. They couldn't be saved.

RL: Of those on the actual death march how many had survived?

WG: I don't know, they scattered, I couldn't tell you, all I know is that they took us into an SS barrack and they started feeding us, and that is the last thing they should have done, they overate, there was such a void inside us, we started eating like crazy. I could eat two rolls at a time without stopping, and Josh started eating, and we were both sick. In the end we managed to get on to an even keel, but then Josh fell ill. On the march they had already an indication what was happening because we began itching, you see we were very stupid, in Dachau, when we were taken to that main camp, our blankets, Josh had one and I had one, they were sodden, they were absolutely useless, so we saw a building and there was a sign, "Don't enter, it is quarantined, danger of typhoid fever", and we broke into that building and we took a blanket each, now that was stupid, we thought that we are immune because we lived through the epidemic. We started itching already as we were marching, in, it was about a fortnight after we were liberated, Josh suddenly fell ill, he was taken to a hospital, and I fell ill, I became paralysed, I couldn't move my feet, I couldn't move my arms, I was taken to a hospital, Josh didn't survive.

Tape 4: 15 minutes 6 seconds

Now, I was taken to a hospital called St Ottilien, and there they established that I was, St Ottilien, I was suffering from polyneuritis, inflammation of the nerve ends, and that causes paralysis, I was unresponsive to any stimuli. Anyway, it took me half a year to recover, you see at that time the news was filtering in about our losses. You were asking me how many survived of our 100, I didn't even know how many survived of the 35,000, thus while I was in hospital, that is when I discovered that only 2,000, I looked at the lists and I discovered as far as Hitler was concerned his victory over my community was complete. My family, my community was no more, there was nothing left.

RL: Under whose control was the hospital?

WG: Under American control.

RL: And what was Josh's surname?

WG: Rez, R-E-S, R-E-Z ...

So there I was, in a gloomy hospital, paralysed, I couldn't do anything for myself, and the news was coming in, day by day, trickling in, of our losses, so really I became depressed, I didn't know if it was a blessing or a curse to be a lone survivor. Eventually I got a

message that the women from the Stutthof Concentration Camp, who were liberated by the Russians, were arriving. They escaped of the Soviet Union and they went through the Russian lines and they smuggled themselves out from behind the iron curtain and they were bringing the news ...

Well to cut a long story short, the news was not good, my mother died, and I realised that I was on my own. Now, my recovery took half a year and while I was in hospital I met Ibi, my future wife. Now that meeting was really a turning point, we compared notes, we discovered that for a time we were in the same camp and we worked for the same employer, Moll. We helped each other to overcome the traumas of the past, and we decided there and then that it is time to look ahead.

RL: Where was she from?

WG: Hungary. So we fell in love, we got married in 1946.

RL: Where did you marry?

WG: We married, we had a civil marriage in, near St Ottilien, near Munich, and we had a religious wedding in Wieden which is in southern Germany.

RL: How was that organised?

WG: She will tell you about it because ...

Tape 4: 20 minutes 25 seconds

[Voice in background] It was a kosher marriage ...

WG: It was a kosher marriage, and she will tell you about it because she will give you the complimentary facts of her side of the story, so I don't want to repeat.

RL: When you came out of the hospital, where did you go?

WG: When I came out of the hospital we decided that we must start living again. I went to investigate what are the possibilities, education possibilities, and just then there was a course being started in radio technology, and I joined that course, and I got, we got accommodation near Munich and then in Munich itself, and I stayed with that course for a year and got my diploma and then I became an assistant teacher on that course, which lasted until 1948, October, when I left Germany on a work permit to work in textiles in Yorkshire.

RL: Why did you decide to leave?

WG: Well, we had relatives, we had relatives in Yorkshire who ran a textile business, and they sent us, they sent us this permit. They found us on a list of survivors and they sent us a textile permit to work for them.

RL: Were these relatives on your side or your wife's?

WG: Relatives on my side.

RL: How are they related?

WG: They are related, my cousin, first cousin was married to the textile owner, textile owner's son, to be precise, so that was the connection.

RL: Up until that point how did you manage to re-establish yourselves in Germany?

WG: Well, I told you, I finished that course and I didn't fancy staying in Germany of course, and then I got quite a good position as an assistant instructor, but again, I thought I better join my relatives in England and see how I get on here, and we decided to take up the offer to come here.

RL: When did they contact you?

WG: They contacted us in 1946. It took two years to establish all the procedure, all the permits.

RL: In the meantime how did you feel living in Germany?

Tape 4: 24 minutes 8 seconds

WG: We were quite settled, we were in our own group of Jewish displaced persons. We had contact with Germans of course, but the Germans were also in a state of shock. We were all trying to forget the past, the Germans and the Jews. To mention the past was taboo, nobody wanted to talk about it. Nobody wanted to relive the past traumas, so the talks that we had were all trivial all about the future and the trivialities of the present. Nothing was discussed in depth or philosophically.

RL: Was the course that you were on within the displaced persons camp and was it within the displaced persons camp or was it somewhere different?

WG: You mean after the liberation? We were not in the displaced persons camp all the time, we started off being in the displaced persons, St Ottilien and so on. Later on we got a flat, we got a room, near Munich and later on we got a flat in Munich so that I could study and I could continue my work. So conditions were quite reasonable in Germany, and we received parcels and on the black market for the goods which I received, the parcels like cigarettes, coffee, bronnen coffee, real coffee we could get on the black

market, we could get goods and establish ourselves, we could purchase a lot of necessities, so in a way we were privileged.

RL: And then you made the decision to emigrate ...

WG: Yes ...

RL: How did you put that into practice?

WG: We packed our bags and left, there was nothing complicated about it, but Ibi will tell you any more details, I don't want to repeat it.

RL: And the journey across?

WG: The journey across was pretty straight forward, we went from Munich to Hamburg, from Hamburg to Hull and from Hull to Yorkshire, and of course our relatives picked us up from Hull from the harbour.

RL: So describe the first few days here.

WG: Now, the first few days was a little bit strange. It was October and when we came to Hull everything seemed grey, the buildings were grey, the weather was grey, the people looked grey and it was a bit depressing. It wasn't the picture of England we had imagined, but still we went into Yorkshire. We went past York Minster, and that was quite a sight, and that cheered us up a little bit, and we came to Yorkshire. Now we settled in with our relatives, we shared their semi detached house, and the first few months were a little bit difficult for us. The surroundings were strange, and we had to learn very fast to speak English, we didn't speak the lingo. And then the fog came which

Tape 4: 28 minutes 40 seconds

was also a little bit unnerving, to go out into the street and not be able to find your way back home. You see the trouble was October, November, December. There was no clean air act. The factories were belching out smoke, it wasn't smog, it wasn't fog it was smog, so the air was saturated with this foul smell. But, there were compensations, we were helped by the British people quite a lot. We were welcomed with open arms, wherever we asked, wherever we went the civil service was polite, helpful, they couldn't do enough for us, the policemen were helpful, we were registering, we were Wherever we called, wherever we enquired it was easy, it was helpful. When we started working in textiles, the workers were helpful, they welcomed us, they took us into their confidence. We were friends straight away and we learned English very fast, so really we felt at home straight away.

RL: How did you pick up the language?

WG: Oh, very quickly, it didn't take me a long time. If you have to, you do it, if you have a choice and you live in a family who doesn't speak English that is a different matter, but we spoke English straight away and instead of speaking Yiddish we started speaking English between ourselves so it didn't take us long to pick up.

RL: And how soon after arrival did you start working?

WG: We started working after a few months.

RL: What did you do for the first few months?

WG: I was weaving. And Ibi was mending.

RL: Before you started working what were you doing during the day.

WG: Oh, I was walking around and I was looking, looking around and doing all the necessary office work, registration and all the procedure, I had to go through.

RL: And how long did you stay with your relatives?

WG: We stayed with our relatives ... you had better ask Ibi, I have forgot, I think we stayed about half a year.

Wife in background: Oh no, (I couldn't understand what she said).

WG: Well, how long did we stay ...

Wife in background: We arrived 48 ...

WG: 48, October. How long did we stay with Margaret and Joseph?

Tape 4: 31 minutes 43 seconds

Wife in background: Yes - (there was again a chunk here that I couldn't hear) - and we didn't leave Margaret until 1950.

WG: So we stayed for a long time ...

Wife in background: I had Pauline there ...

WG: You see I was mistaken ...

Wife in background: Pauline was about seven months when we moved out.

WG: So you see, you had better ... she has got a good memory.

RL: Right. So you started weaving, and how did you get on with the job?

WG: Oh, I got on all right, it was a bit difficult to get used to, the noise was terrific, but the people helped me a lot and I had to do it, I had to earn a living.

RL: How much were you earning?

WG: How much was I earning? £4.50 a week.

RL: And how long a week was it?

WG: It was a 42 hour week. Yes.

RL: Were you the only Jewish people working?

WG: We were the only Jewish people working, but I didn't weave a long time, they were recruiting a lot of foreign workers from Eastern Europe and I began teaching them to weave, so I was an instructor, I was a teacher again, and then I became a manager in the textiles.

RL: So was this your cousin's factory?

WG: It was a cousin's husband's factory.

Wife in background: Father ...

WG: Yes.

RL: Right. And how long did you remain in that position?

Tape 4: 33 minutes 31 seconds

WG: Until I retired I remained in textiles.

Wife in background: Not with them you didn't.

WG: No, I changed employers once.

RL: What was this firm called.

WG: The firm was called Thornton Textiles, to start with, the firm was called Thornton Textiles and then I changed and worked for Kagan Textiles, which was the only change.

RL: And what did you do there?

WG: At Kagan Textiles I was a weaving shop manager, which was the only change.

Wife in background: (I couldn't understand what she said here).

RL: Right. And when you moved out of your relations home, where did you go to live?

WG: And then we went to live in Brighthouse.

Wife in background: To our own house.

WG: We purchased a heavily mortgaged property and we moved in, and we had to let two rooms upstairs to pay, to help to pay the mortgage.

RL: And how long were you there?

WG: We were there, about ...

Wife in background: 1954.

WG: No, we were longer.

Wife in background: No we weren't. I had Lisa in 53 and we moved out of there the following spring. We were two years in ...

WG: We moved to Stainland in 1957 ... ?

Wife in background: We moved to Stainland in 1954.

WG: No we didn't. There is a difference of opinion here.

RL: Alright, forget the dates; just tell me about the move.

Tape 4: 35 minutes 32 seconds

WG: The dates are uncertain. We moved from Brighthouse, we moved for three years to Stainland and then we moved to Elland.

RL: And why did you move each time?

WG: We wanted to move to Elland because it is where our work was, in Elland, but the houses, they were being built. They were not ready yet. There was no opportunity to establish our presence in Elland, so we temporarily moved to a place not far from Elland, just across the valley, called Stainland. We stayed two years in Stainland and then we managed to move into Elland and we stayed in Elland ever since.

RL: How did you get on with the local communities?

WG: Very well, we really mixed with Jewish and non Jewish people. We joined the Bradford Reform Synagogue, and we have a lot of Jewish friends, not in Elland of course, but we have a lot of Jewish friends in Leeds and Bradford, and we have got a lot of non Jewish friends in Yorkshire and outside Yorkshire, so we are integrated.

RL: Did you ever come across any hostility?

WG: No, we never came across any hostility, really we came across friendship rather than hostility, and as I told you it is amazing the welcome we got, that we came to, we wouldn't have the same welcome nowadays. It was a different, different attitude then.

RL: How did you make contact with the Jewish community in Leeds and Bradford?

WG: Ah, Ibi will tell you exactly how that happened. She has got it all in her memory. Set in her memory, it was very interesting how she could not establish contact with the Orthodox and how the reform welcomed us. What a difference in attitudes, she was the religious one and she was in charge of our integration into religious, into Jewish religious life.

RL: What family did you have? Do you have?

WG: Well we have two daughters. One lives about two miles from us, and one lives just outside Leeds. And we have got three grandchildren.

RL: When were your daughters born?

WG: One was born 40, 28th '49 ...

Wife in background: December '48 ...

WG: '49 ...

Tape 4: 39 minutes 2 seconds

Wife in background: '49, sorry.

WG: '49, and the other one '57, right?

Wife in background: That's right.

RL: And where did they go to school?

WG: They went to Sowerby Bridge Grammar.

RL: And after school?

WG: After school they went to university. Pauline went to Bradford University and Mandy went to Kings College.

Wife in background: London ...

WG: London.

RL: What did they study?

WG: Social, applied social services, was it?

Wife in background: I couldn't understand what she said here.

WG: Social Studies, Pauline Social Studies, and Law, Kings College Law was Mandy, Amanda.

RL: And who did they marry?

WG: Pauline married a student from, also she met at Bradford University, called Malcolm Gardener, and they had two boys.

RL: How old are the boys?

WG: The boys are now 21 and 24.

RL: And Mandy?

WG: Mandy has got one daughter.

RL: Who did she marry?

Tape 4: 40 minutes 20 seconds

WG: She married first a gentleman called Ivor Town, and then she divorced, and now she is living with a partner called Colin Harvay, and she has a daughter ...

Wife in background: With him ...

WG: She has a daughter with him called Amy Harvay. And she is eleven, eleven and three quarters. That is her picture there, smiling at you.

RL: Did you join any clubs or societies, any organisations in this country?

WG: Holocaust Survivors Friendship Association, and I joined, I joined, Beit Shalom, I was a member of Bnei Brith, Reform Synagogue, who else ...

Wife in background: (I couldn't hear what she said here)

RL: What have you been a member of the longest of those things?

WG: Well, Beit Shalom made the biggest impression on us, because that is a memorial place for us to go to and cry.

RL: Did you, were your children interested in your background, did you talk much to your children?

WG: Yes, we told them about our background, yes. But they are not obsessed by it. They take it in their stride, not like some children who are very keen on it, very keyed up, they take it easy, which is good in a way.

RL: Do you think that your experiences have affected the way you have brought up your children, or affected you in any way.

WG: Definitely affected us, yes, yes ...

RL: Can you describe how?

WG: Well, my beliefs were rather naïve and optimistic, and my belief in humanity, in a benevolent humanity, and a progressive humanity, got a severe knock. Now I am a skeptic. I am not quite a cynic but I am a skeptic, and I believe that all these atrocities, all the mass murder, all the genocide, it is going to last for a long, long time. They were really inhumane towards our own species. They are a menace to our own species, they are like a malignant force, destroying everything in our path.

RL: Do you think there is anything that can be done about that?

Tape 4: 43 minutes 48 seconds

WG: We are so easily brainwashed. It is not the Hitlers, it is not the Stalins, it is not the Mau, it is not the Husseins, Saddam Hussein's who are the danger, it is the ordinary normal human beings which are the menace. They are the ones who are being brain washed, they are the ones who are so easily indoctrinated.

RL: Is there any answer?

WG: I don't know an answer, no ... eternal vigilance, the price of freedom, everything can be corrupted.

RL: Has it affected you psychologically?

WG: Yes, very much, yes, yes ...

RL: In what way?

WG: Well, I, I don't believe in the goodness of humanity any more. I don't believe in the guiding spirit any more, I don't believe in the interventionist power any more, I think it is Hefka, you know what Hefka is? Everything is random ... the extastentialist belief of an absurd life. Events are unconnected, undeserved, very gloomy view of life I have got.

RL: Does it affect your sleep?

WG: Yes, I have got nightmares occasionally, yes I do, yes ... after what I have been through, specially these atrocities, they are bound to leave you damaged in certain ways.

RL: Do you feel that you were able to live a normal life afterwards?

WG: I, I live quite a normal life, I can distance myself and I know how to live with it, but sometimes it just gets too much, and I try not to let it get on top of me.

RL: Did you use to talk about your experiences when you first came over to the country?

WG: No, no, there was a silence which lasted many years until, until, my children became old enough to be told about it. They kept asking certain questions, you know, "Why do you talk with a funny accent?" and "Why don't we have grandparents and family like the other children?" So we had to tell them something.

Wife in background: Darling, you need a rest now, it is twenty to five and you are going to your children for six.

Tape 4: 47 minutes 26 seconds

RL: Can we just get to the end of this reel of film, which is not long. We will just get to the end of this reel and then we will stop.

WG: Ok.

RL: What about in terms of nationality, how would you describe yourself?

WG: I feel very Jewish, a British Jew. But if I had to choose to live somewhere else I wouldn't, I would stay here, I think the way of life in Britain suits me.

RL: What is it that appeals to you?

WG: The way I was welcomed here. It was so different to my own country where every policeman was a little dictator. There was no spirit of civil service, the English people can only criticise their country, instead of realising the good points. They only see the

bad points. They don't appreciate how fortunate they are. They don't appreciate how lucky they are to live here.

RL: Is there anything you miss about Lithuania?

WG: I miss the Yiddishe food, really, the cholesterol laden dishes that we used to have at home, that was very unhealthy, very naughty but very nice. And I miss of course the secular Yiddish tradition which existed in Lithuania and has died out completely, it doesn't exist any more. You are either religious or you are non Jewish, it doesn't exist.

Wife's voice in the background: (I couldn't understand what she said)

It was a culture on its own, it has gone Haskala. Did you learn about the Haskala? How all pervasive it was? How positive it was? It has all vanished.

RL: When did you become involved with holocaust activities, educational activities?

WG: We became involved actually in 1992, that was the first, 1992 or 1993, the first talk that we gave to the University of ...

Wife in background: Sussex.

WG: Sussex University. That was, we had to, we had to go down especially for that talk. That is when they were establishing a German department and they were going to research Jewish life in Germany, which wasn't my field at all, and yet they invited me to talk.

RL: How did they hear about you?

Tape 4: 50 minutes 54 seconds

WG: They heard from a German Jew who knew me and was in touch with them. That was the connection, a Berliner Jew.

RL: And when did you become connected with Beit Shalom?

WG: 1946 (he said 1946 here but he must have meant 1996). They opened in 1995, and we became connected about a year later.

RL: And how are you involved with them?

WG: We do talk to school children, to students, to adult audiences, to all sorts of gatherings, and it also our place of memorial. That is where we go to grieve.

RL: And the Leeds or the Bradford HSFA, when did you get involved with that?

WG: That came later ...

RL: That came later ...

WG: That came a year ago, or two years ago ...

Wife in background: Three, four...

WG: Three, four ... time flies ...

Wife in background: I didn't understand what she said here.

RL: Have you ever been back to Eastern Europe?

WG: I have been back to Moscow, but not to Lithuania. Nobody wants to go to Lithuania. Nobody wanted to go to Lithuania when it was occupied, it was a place to escape from ... not to go to, until 1990, then Lithuania got independent, and I should have gone, but I didn't. Jews are going there quite a lot. Israeli Jews are going quite a lot to Lithuania.

RL: Do you want to revisit?

WG: I would love to go to Lithuania, but I am not fit enough, I think I would break down if I go there.

RL: What about Israel? Have you ever been to Israel?

WG: I have been quite a few times to Israel, yes.

Tape 4: 53 minutes 10 seconds

RL: When was your first visit?

WG: My first visit was in ... ?

Wife in background: '67 ...

WG: '50 ...

Wife in background: '67 ...

WG: '67 ...no ... was it? I think I have been before that, I don't remember now ...

Wife in background: No, I was ...

RL: And how did you feel when you went there?

WG: I feel an affinity with Israel, really, I used to be a Zionist. Now I am a bit doubtful about Israel. I am very disappointed in Israel, they have taken a wrong turning.

RL: When was the last time that you visited?

WG: The last time was 19 ... 199 ... no, 2001 I think ... that was the last time I was in Israel.

RL: Do you have any family there?

WG: Yes, Ibi has a sister there ... and family. You have a lot of details about Israel and the family from Ibi.

RL: Was there any member of your wider family, besides yourself ...

WG: Yes, yes there were, there were people who were saved by Lithuanian friends and who survived, and they still, one cousin, is still living in Vilna, Vilnius, she was saved, by Lithuanian friends, and she survived and she spent all those years in Lithuania, under Soviet rule, and under independent Lithuanian rule.

RL: And are you in touch with her?

WG: Yes, she comes here every year, or twice a year.

RL: Does she have family?

WG: She has family here in England?

Tape 4: 55 minutes 30 seconds

RL: Was she the only one?

WG: There was another two cousins who survived, also hidden by Lithuanian people. Now one cousin lives not far from here and one cousin died not so long ago, and he was also saved by friends, by Lithuanian friends, and they are all righteous gentiles of course.

RL: And what are their names?

WG: Margaret Kagan is one cousin and Alec Strom is the other cousin. And Werner Verseiti is the one who now lives in Vilna.

RL: And where did they live when they came to this country? The two that ...

WG: Well one, the youngest of my cousins is Alec. Now he spent his war years in care of a Lithuanian, which was a print shop manager, and he hid, not only him, he hid quite a

few Jews, so he is really a very deserved righteous person, he saved a few Jewish lives. Now Alec got liberated in 1944, he spent his subsequent years and his studies in Kaunas, in Vilnius and in Moscow. And he came to England in 1977.

RL: And where did he live in England?

WG: He lived here in Yorkshire partly.

RL: And ...

WG: He was a university lecturer at Bradford University.

Wife's voice in background: There is his book ...

RL: And your, the other cousin, Kagan ...

WG: The other cousin was also saved by another Lithuanian; they were provided with a hiding place and food by a Lithuanian, who wasn't even a friend of theirs. They got to know him when they were in the ghetto. Now she escaped from Lithuania at the first opportunity, she was not going to stay and live under the communist regime, so she came to England via Rumania, via Europe. She came to England to, she is the one whose husband's firm had a textile business, so you see the connection ...

RL: I am afraid this film is about to end, so we are going to have to stop here.

WG: Yes fine.

TAPE 5

RL: This is the interview with Waldemar Ginsburg and it is tape 5.

Now, I am interested to learn a little bit more about the organisations that you joined whilst you have been living here in Elland and what you have got involved in over the years.

WG: When we came to England we did not have a word of English. That was October 1948, so we had to catch up. And it didn't take us so long, in fact we were helped a lot, people didn't speak our languages, so we had to adapt very quickly, and we managed to learn English within a year, we were fluent.

Now the first impressions of England were not very favourable. We arrived after a stormy journey from Hamburg to Hull, and it was a grey day, low cloud, everything looked miserable, the sky was grey, the people were scurrying around, sheltering from the rain, and at the end of October it was pretty cold as well. The winter of 1948/49 was pretty grim. Smog, it was cold, and we had to settle in. However, what was of great help was the welcome that we got from our fellow workers, despite us being competition for

work places, they were very kind and very fair to us. They helped us as much as they could. Also the civil service, the police, all the civil service that we dealt with, they were all very helpful. We were not used to it, in Europe the policeman or the civil service was a real dictator. Now here they were very kind and very helpful, so that helped us to integrate and that helped us to feel at home.

Now these are the positive sides, the negative sides were soon apparent. First of all every street corner had a pub, the pub culture was very pronounced. Now, socializing around alcohol was not so popular on the continent. We had coffee houses, we had a coffee house culture, so we had coffee and cream cakes which was bad for your waist line but it didn't pickle your liver and it didn't make for unsocial behaviour, so that was what I missed, the coffee houses I missed greatly.

The other surprise was the press, our press in Eastern Europe was censored and we looked forward to a free, well informed, objective press in England, and indeed we found it, however to our disappointment the strident, vulgar, tabloid press was outselling the quality press many times, and I could never understand it. I could never get over it, to have the best papers in the world and then to have the strident, vulgar press outselling them.

The other disappointment was the family ties. In Eastern Europe there was no welfare state, so we had to rely on our family, we had to rely on our community, as a last resort, but not as a state and that made for closeness, that made for family ties, that was very important. Now in England it wasn't important, it was a nanny state, which took over

Tape 5: 5 minutes 20 seconds

many functions which in our country was taken over by the family or the community, so that was another disappointment.

The other disappointment was that professional people were valued more than scientific people, sciences were not appreciated, scientists were not appreciated, engineers and people who were involved in technology. Professions were all the important class of professions, it wasn't like that on the continent. On the continent, technology, engineering was very important and they had quite an important place in society, much more important than here. So these were the negative aspects. But of course the positive aspects outweighed the negative ones, and we settled in very quickly. It didn't take us long to feel at home and settle in .

RL: What organisations did you join ... ?

WG: And then, we tried to join the Orthodox Synagogue in Bradford, and the welcome was less than friendly. They seemed to be very insular and they ignored us, so we went across to the Reform Synagogue, and they were friendly and welcoming, so we joined the Reform Synagogue, and then of course we joined all sorts of societies, holocaust survival societies, friendship associations, survival, friendship, we joined the Beit Shalom

Holocaust Memorial Centre in Nottinghamshire and that is where we do most of our talking.

RL: How often do you give talks?

WG: We used to go about twice a month. It varies a great deal, but now we are semi retired so we do a lot less, but we also do talks locally, to schools, to adult audiences and that takes up quite a lot of our time.

RL: What kind of response do you get when you give a talk?

WG: We get a lot of interest and people are usually very keen to listen to us. Even youngsters, even pupils, starting at 13/14, even they seem to take it in and they seem to be able to concentrate. Our talk doesn't last long, we each have about 35/40 minutes, sometimes less, so really we don't over step the concentration limit of the pupils, and they ask very intelligent questions. They seem to be, some of them are very well informed, some aren't so well informed, but we find that we make quite a good contact, quite a good understanding.

RL: Have you ever met any negative response?

WG: No, I haven't met any negative response. Even the Muslim children, even they listen, they are not supposed to come and listen to Holocaust talks, they are usually boycotting us, but sometimes they do come and even they ask questions, but they bring

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Palestine into it usually with their questioning, So their attitude is different to the non Muslim attitude. That has been pronounced recently.

RL: You say they usually boycott it. Is that a general policy, or is that ...

WG: The boycott is a general policy, yes, they try to boycott anything to do with the Holocaust because for them it is a disaster.

RL: You mentioned also last time, being a member of the Bnei Brith.

WG: Yes, we were for a time but we are neglecting it now.

RL: How did you become involved with that?

WG: Through friends, through the Synagogue, and this lasted a few years and then we found it a little bit more difficult to travel to the meetings, which are quite a long way from us. We are a little bit isolated here in Elland.

RL: Where did you use to meet?

WG: Where did we meet? Shipley; that was the meeting point.

RL: And what kind of things did you do?

WG: Well, the programme was, usually to do charitable work, visits, and help disabled people, and visit hospitals and hospices, but we found it a little bit tiring and too much so we gave it up.

RL: Which Jewish community have you had most contact with?

WG: Well it was the Bradford Reform Synagogue community, but, the Bradford Reform Synagogue and the Orthodox Synagogue are very close, they are both losing members, they are dying communities, and at one time there was even a plan to merge them, but it didn't work out, so now I am afraid they are losing members and the community is dying out slowly, which applies not only to Bradford, it also applies to larger centres, provincial centres.

RL: Did you have any contact with Leeds at all?

WG: Yes, the Leeds contact is mostly with the Holocaust Survivors Friendship Association. They have got regular meetings and they invite guest speakers and it is quite an active and well run organisation. They have got about, I don't know, forty, fifty members. It is not, Leeds is not a large community, not like Manchester, about ten or

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twelve thousand Jews altogether in Leeds, which is also shrinking. It used to be twenty four thousand.

RL: And how often do you go to these meetings?

WG: We go every three months, every two months, occasionally we have an occasional meal laid on.

RL: When your daughters were growing up, did they have any contact with the Jewish communities?

WG: They went to the Sunday school, on Sundays they went to the Bradford Synagogue for lessons, but it lasted until they were about, I don't know, 12/13, and then they gave it up. Again it was a big job, they were a long way from Bradford as well. They hadn't got much contact except having Jewish friends, and the Jewish friends were not in Elland of course, they are mostly in Bradford or Leeds, so the connection with Jewish life is rather tenuous.

RL: Where are your daughters living now? Where do they live?

WG: One daughter lives near Leeds, and one lives near us. So the one which lives near Leeds has got a lot of Jewish friends, she is part of the Leeds Jewish community, but the one who lives near us has very few Jewish friends.

RL: What would you say that being Jewish means to your daughters?

WG: Being Jewish means heritage. Not a religion. They are conscious they are Jews, and belong to a Jewish culture, but religious wise as far as religion is concerned they are not interested. And their children are also not interested in the religion.

RL: Do they have any Jewish input into their lives, your grandchildren.

WG: They had a little bit of Jewish input, but I think now the way it is going, they know they are Jewish, but the way it is going they will be marrying out by the look of it, there is very little chance for them to find a Jewish girl.

RL: Did your daughters marry Jewish, or have Jewish partners ... ?

WG: My ... no, no, they did not. And that had a lot to do with it as well.

RL: And how tolerant are their respective spouses.

WG: Very tolerant, it does not play a big part in their lives, to be Jewish, or be non Jewish, and again they are not religious, so there is no religious prejudice.

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RL: Did your grandsons have a Bris?

WG: Yes, they had a Bris, yes. But they didn't go through with a Bar Mitzvah.

RL: And with the Bris, were the husbands happy for that to happen?

WG: Yes, very happy, quite, yes, quite, yes. I think Ibi will give you more details about it. You will have to ask her about it, she was involved in it.

RL: Ok, so is there anything else you would like to add that we might not have covered? Is there anything else that we might have left out that you would like to speak about it?

WG: I think we have covered it. It has been quite a lengthy and informative discussion.

RL: Is there any kind of message that you would like to end with?

WG: I would like, my aim is to point out the importance of remembering the past. Young people should be able to remember, historical self knowledge, because if you forget your history, if you forget the tragedies you have been through you are bound to repeat it again, and that is what we are trying to avoid, and I am afraid we are not very successful at avoiding it. So humanity has taken a wrong turn, it was a terrible century, the 20th century has been a terrible century, and now we seem to repeating all the mistakes that we made. It is very difficult to learn from past mistakes, you seem to be able, it is necessary to go through the same experiences and learn it from your own experiences, you can't impart the knowledge.

RL: Well thank you very much.

WG: Now these are my paternal grandparents, the Ginsburgs, and the pictures were taken in Vilna before the First World War.

That is my father, Misha Ginsburg, the picture was taken around 1920, 1921, in Kovno, Lithuania.

Now that picture was taken in Palanga, by the seaside in Lithuania, in 1937, the two extreme sides are occupied by our friends. My mother and I are in the middle, in bathing costumes, enjoying a beautiful day in Palanga.

Now that picture was taken in 1897 in Kaunas, Kovno, and this is our ground floor flat, where we lived for many years. My room was on the extreme side near the entrance to the garage.

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RL: Can we just say the date again when this was taken. When was the photograph taken.

WG: 1987.

Now that was taken in 1937, in Kulautuva. That was a holiday place, very popular, and I used to take my bike going around all these holiday places visiting friends and family.

That picture was taken in 1931 in Leningrad and the smaller gentleman of the two is my step father, Samuel Garzan, the taller gentleman is his brother, Mike Garzan.

And that was a document which was issued to me after I was liberated from the Dachau Concentration Camp to certify that I was a prisoner in that camp.

RL: Do you know what date that would have been?

WG: Oo, that would have been 24-5-46. So that was a year after we were liberated actually.

Now this is a picture taken in 48, when I was instructor at the Old Technical College. I am on the right with all my fellow teachers.

RL: And where was it taken?

WG: It was taken at the ORT vocational school in Munich.

That was our wedding picture in Weiden, Oberpfalz, Germany. Taken in 1946.

That is my work permit, issued to me to allow me to work in textiles, and the date is 24th November 1947.

RL: And the place?

WG: The place where it was issues is London.

That is my book, published in 1998 by Beit Shalom Holocaust Memorial Centre.