

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
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Interviewee Surname:	Wiesenfeld
Forename:	Izak
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	24 July 1924
Interviewee POB:	Przeworsk, Poland

Date of Interview:	26 October 2006
Location of Interview:	Salford, Manchester
Name of Interviewer:	Rosalyn Livshin
Total Duration (HH:MM):	3 hours 33 minutes

**REFUGEE VOICES
THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

INTERVIEW: 132

NAME: IZAK WIESENFELD

DATE: 26 OCTOBER 2006

LOCATION: SALFORD, MANCHESTER

INTERVIEWER: ROSALYN LIVSHIN

TAPE 1

Tape 1: 0 minutes 19 seconds

RL: I am interviewing Izak Wiesenfeld and today's date is the 26th October 2006. The interview is taking place in Manchester and I am Rosalyn Livshin.

So if you can tell me your name?

IW: My name is Izak Wiesenfeld.

RL: And were you named after anybody?

IW: Hmmmm ... I must have been named after my father's ... father ...

RL: And when were you born?

IW: Where?

RL: Where and when.

IW: In Przeworsk, in 1924.

RL: First of all if you can tell me something about your family background, about your parents and grandparents.

IW: Well, my grandfather was a watchmaker and a jeweller and an inventor. He was very handy, he could do anything if he wanted to with his hands, but my father also, he learned watch making in his place and was carrying on, with life. Life in Poland where we were, wasn't very, very, very good. I mean people were poor, during the week, people couldn't afford, I mean most of the people, couldn't afford fish or meat, but for

Shabbos of course you always prepared the very, very best. That is why on Shabbos there was such a contrast, everybody looked forward to Shabbos, it was something

Tape 1: 2 minutes 14 seconds

extraordinary, something special. And we went to Cheder, normal, Cheder was a private Melamed, a private teacher, and every Friday we had to pay for the tuition, and I remember that once my father, Olov Hasholom, he made Kiddush on Friday night, and all of a sudden he made Kiddush on a glass, and I said "Why?"

"Well, I didn't have enough money to pay the Melamed, so I pawned the silver becher." Later on of course he redeemed it, but he could hardly, hardly earn what you needed, never mind about putting away anything or so on. And then we went to Cheder, and from Cheder to the Beis Hamidrash and that is until 1939, I was learning in the Beis Hamidrash. We went to ordinary school, but it was very ... very anti-Semitic, and we had to be let out many times, five minutes early, because otherwise we were attacked by the shegutzim, you know the other ones of the pupils. So, we stayed away most of the days just the same, and there, but of course in Cheder, that was the most occupation, that was the most pleasant one, I mean if you compare ... so ...

RL: Can I just take you back and ask you a little bit more about your parents?

IW: Yeah ... yeah ...

RL: Your father's family, can you describe your grandparents? What kind of people they were like and where they were living?

IW: Well I didn't know actually my father's grand ... parents ... and so on. Because you know in Poland, travelling before the war, or anything like this, we were all the time in the Beis Hamedrash and we didn't think about anything else.

Anyway, no matter ... I told you ... my mother, she was the daughter of this handy watchmaker, jeweller, inventor, and then ...

RL: Did you know him?

IW: Pardon?

RL: Did you know him, your mother's ...

IW: Oh yes, of course, and how ... yes ... we lived next door to each other. It is interesting about him, he, as I said, he could do anything, in Poland, he had his own house, a house where very few people had, a one storey house, and instead of taking an architect or anybody, so he took builders and he instructed them and that is how the house was built. And later on there was a law there, that for a new house you didn't pay tax for five years and that architect that everybody took, he became the Mayor of the city and when he applied for the ... for the concession, so he said "Who built it? You didn't

take me did you?" And he refused to give him ... he said "I want to see the plan." So he made a plan afterwards and he had to accept it, so handy he was in anything like this, and he got the concession eventually.

Tape 1: 6 minutes 12 seconds

Anyway, so life was normal, I mean most of the people in the town were religious. Very, very few, I don't think there were a few shops open on Shabbos or things like this. People were frum, but poor.

RL: How many brothers and sisters did your parents have? Did you know anything about their families?

IW: Brothers ... well I only knew the other sons of my ... that is my mother's brothers, two uncles and I knew only one auntie of my father, that is all.

RL: What were their names?

IW: One was Uncle Berlish and one was called Uncle Yankel, yes, and the auntie there, I can't remember.

RL: What did they do? What did they do for a living?

IW: Who?

RL: Your uncles.

IW: They were all in the watch making trade, all these ... that is how ... you know there, mostly, when children got married the sons, they either went into the father's business or learnt the same trade, for about two years they used to be ... allowed to learn the trade or whatever and afterwards of course everyone had to earn his own living.

RL: So that was your mother's father that was the watchmaker? Do you know what your father's father did?

IW: No, I have no idea, no.

RL: Do you know anything about them at all?

IW: I know very little about the family.

RL: Do you know what kind of upbringing your father would have had?

IW: Well they all had religious ... they were all frum people, very frum people, observant people.

RL: Did he go to Yeshiva at all?

IW: Who?

Tape 1: 8 minutes 30 seconds

RL: Your father.

IW: Well actually we had no ... the small places had no Yeshivas, there was the Beis Hamedrash, of course, all talmidei chachomim, all learned, all Shomrei Torah mitzvahs, you know all these ...

RL: Where did your father work from?

IW: First, he worked with my grandfather, in the same place, and then you seehe had to go away in a nearer place, he worked on his own and came home for Shabbos.

RL: So where did he go?

IW: It was called Shinowa, it was called. There was the famous Shinowa tzaddik lived there.

RL: And he was away all week?

IW: Yes, he wasn't the only one, there were many people like this.

RL: Where was your grandfather working? Where did he work from?

IW: Well my grandfather had had in his own house downstairs a workshop. He was also doing what was called, optical work, anything, anything that he wanted to do, he could do. Yes, people came to buy glasses, everything, but he wasn't rich.

RL: Do you have any idea how your parents met?

IW: In the old days it must be a shidduch, there was no other way, it just ... you know ... meeting yourself your next lifelong partner. Surprising enough even today most of the frum people are being shadchanned. I have got a pupil now, he is a barrister, he is already 40, he is handy, but he is not married, and he thinks he must find the one himself, if you know what I mean, and unfortunately because, you know a lot of people are divorced nowadays, you know life, how it is, his friends and so on, he is afraid, he is not married.

RL: When did your parents marry? What year?

IW: When were they married?

RL: Yes ...

IW: Young. I don't know exactly, we never thought about putting down dates or anything like this. People married when they were 20, 21, 22 ... I don't know ... it all

Tape 1: 11 minutes 29 seconds

depends when ...

RL: When was your older brother born? The older one in the family, how much older than you was he?

IW: Who?

RL: Your older brother.

IW: My older brother?

RL: Yes.

IW: I am the oldest.

RL: You were the oldest.

IW: Yes ...

RL: So you were 19 ...

IW: No, not the oldest, my sister was the oldest.

RL: Your sister was the oldest. So when was she born? How much older than you is she?

IW: About one and a half years earlier.

RL: Right ... so they must have married not that long before that.

IW: Yes, yes you know how it is. One never thought – one had documents from when we were at school, but everything was burnt. We had to run out when they burnt the houses.

RL: Can you describe your home, where you were living?

IW: The home was a poor home. We had two rooms and that is all the family. No luxuries, everything was just ordinary, but people were satisfied with what they had.

RL: Where did you all sleep?

IW: Well, we all slept in one room, in one bedroom ... nothing ...

RL: Was that in an apartment?

Tape 1: 13 minutes 12 seconds

IW: It was a house let to different people. We lived on the first floor.

RL: How many other families lived in the house?

IW: In that house?

RL: Yes.

IW: About three or four families. I mean, the way we live now anyway is no comparison. I mean we had no electricity, no gas, everything ... was wood, and paraffin lamps, we had to draw water from the well, life wasn't easy, especially during the winter when there was snow and frosts. But nobody complained at the time because people were satisfied with what they had. Just the same ... they didn't complain very much.

RL: How did your mother cook? What did she have to cook with?

IW: There was a special, a special ... I don't know what you call it, you know you put wood in a, nowadays you have got it with gas or electricity, but then it was with wood and so on, you put on top of it and you cooked. And when you had to do it quickly you took out the middle something and put it in the saucepan.

RL: What about heating?

IW: Well, heating was a problem. You had the oven, and of course you had to buy the wood and heat it, and when it was very, very cold you needed it, and the most heated place was the Beis Hamedresh where you went to daven and you went to learn.

RL: Can you describe the Beis Hamedresh?

IW: Well, in our town there was only ... it was a small town, it was a very big building and it had a big oven, specially for during the winter it was heated. Actually in the Beis Hamedresh already, electricity was already coming in, they introduced it, so again there was a contrast. We sat on benches, we had a table and that is how we learned, we studied all day long. The Melamed, as I said before, the teacher, he had one room for his class and he used to come and teach and it was all day long, except as I said before ...

RL: Was there a Rav at the Beis Hamedrash?

IW: We had a Rav, we had a very famous Rav, and we had a Dayan and we had one shochet.

RL: Do you remember any of their names?

IW: Well the Rav I remember, Rav Eliyohu Tuvmin, was his name. But the Dayan

Tape 1: 17 minutes 0 second

and the shochet I don't remember.

RL: And the Melamed?

IW: I don't remember the name.

RL: How many Shuls ... did that Beis Hamedrash have a name?

IW: Just the Beis Hamedrash. We had a very, very big Shul, famous Shul, beautiful Shul, and the ceiling was extraordinarily special, but it was only for Shabbos. During the week everybody davened ... we also had a very famous ... he wasn't famous at the time, but after the war, yes, Rav Itzikel from Przeworsk, he was in Antwerp afterwards.

RL: What was his name?

IW: They called him Rav Itzikel and on Shabbos he had a special minyan on Friday night, and again for Sholosh Seudas, but otherwise we just had the Beis Hamedrash and the Shul, the Shul was for davening and th Beis Hamedrash was for learning, for studying and for davening.

RL: The community, was it Hassidic?

IW: Yes, most of the community was Hassidic, and people worked very, very hard to earn a living. A lot of people had shops, and that is how it is.

RL: Which Hassidic dynasty was it?

IW: Well, different ones, but there was a, there was Kolshitz, Chesenow, Belz and some other ones, some small ones.

RL: What was your family?

IW: My one, actually, my one was Kolshitz, and I, the Kolshitzer Tzaddik he lives later on in Rzeszow, Reichshof in and when he came to Shabbos, likvod Shabbos, he was so famous that all the Chassidim came, Belz or .. and so on, and later on, when he was in a near town Lzensk when he came for a Shabbos so they, the Kolshhitzer Chassidim

insisted that I go there for a Shabbos, and I had a beautiful voice, and I sang Hamavdil there at that time, there, in front of all the people.

And after the war I met somebody from Lzensk and he said to me “Shalom Aleichem, Hamavdil”, he still remembered, it made such an impression. Later on, when we came to Siberia, it was exactly the same, we were in Siberia, and we worked so hard, and down hearted and so on, when we had a bit of rest, and they said “Yitzchik sing habeit min shomayim ureh” in translation in Yiddish, and in the forest, and later on I met someone

Tape 1: 20 minutes 45 seconds

in Eretz Yisroel who said “Shalom Aleichem habeit min shomayim ureh”. Things like this people do remember, even the goy who was in charge, he stood like anything when I sung like this, because you can't compare, you know, when you sing on a tape, when you actually sing, you know, the atmosphere and the feeling and so on ...

RL: Can you describe the visit of the Rebbe to your town?

IW: The Rebbe?

RL: Yes ...

IW: Of course, when the Rebbe came, they made special, in the evening, Motzei Shabbos they went out with candles and lights and singing, you know, like welcoming the Rebbe, and during the week people went to the Rebbe to give kvittlelech, you know, when people apply for this or that or whatever, you know it was a special occasion. Because when the Rebbe came, not only did he come, but a lot of Chassidim came from different towns came so it was something extraordinary, a very, very happy occasion.

RL: Where did he stay?

IW: Where he stayed? One of the baal batim, you know, everybody wanted that he stayed there ... it is interesting, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok from Berdichev, the very famous Rabbi, it was at first, he went incognito, and he came to a town late, and he looked for a place where to lodge, and wherever he knocked people said, “No, I am sorry.” And he came to the last one and said “I will have to try it.” And they said “Well, if you don't mind sleeping in a place in a furnished like mine, you will be welcome.” And later on he became very, very famous, and everybody wanted that he should stay with them, and he said “I am staying with that person, the one who took me in at that time.” That was Hakores Hatov, showing appreciation, gratitude to a person.

RL: Did the different Chassidic sects have their own minyonim?

IW: No, no, no ... usually now they have got, but as I said we only had this Beis Hamedrash and everybody davened there during the week.

RL: How many Jews would you say were in that town? How big a community was it?

IW: Well ... about ... between 150 and 200. I used to go on a Friday actually, to collect some money for things that we repaired there, and it took me an hour to go around everywhere.

RL: What were you collecting for?

Tape 1: 23 minutes 52 seconds

IW: You know, when you need books, when you need something repairing, anything ... you know, for such expenses, everybody gave a few groschen, you know.

RL: Was your father or grandfather active in the community?

IW: Well you see, almost everybody was active. It wasn't like nowadays when you have got just a few people who are exceptionally active in organising. Nothing was on a big scale, it was just, there was no activity, there activity was to be active to serve Hakodosh Boruch Hu, I mean they were not Gaboim or anything like this, no ...

RL: What about kosher food? What kind of facilities ...

IW: Well, as I explained, most of the food that people ate were potatoes and vegetables and sometimes a bit of fish, and there was the shochet. It was not done like you go to a shop where you buy meat and so on. My mother, on erev Shabbos, mostly, she used to go out to the market and buy a chicken, take it to the shochet, and he was shechting it, she brought it home, she plucked it, she made it kosher, and that is how it was, it is how everything was done, by oneself. There was a butcher, he was selling some meat or ... I can't remember buying chickens like this, chickens everyone bought and so on ... like this ... I mean everything was used. I mean nowadays what is being chucked out, all the things, I mean the lungs and ... I mean it was the cheap meat and the poor people used to buy it, all this ... nowadays when you buy a chicken the legs and all kind of things and the head has been thrown away, and you can't even get it, but there everything, you would hear my mother in law, my wife's mother, she used to open up here when I brought it home and clean it and everything, I mean everything was precious, everything was appreciated. Nothing was thrown out. When I go now in our street, and I see a piece of bread, or, in the street, or challah or anything, it breaks my heart, because in Siberia where we were, for months we didn't have a crust of bread, yes, yes ...

RL: Can you describe for me a typical Shabbos? Take me through a typical Shabbos.

IW: Shabbos was, my mother, olov Hasholom, she used to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning on a Friday. She used to bake, not only challahs, cakes ... even the bread for the week. Anything like this, you did everything yourself, as I said Shabbos was like a party, Shabbos was a special treat, we had fish on a Shabbos, we used to buy leibedike fish, you know, fish that when you opened it, I mean you made it kosher, I don't mean kosher, a

fish once its kosher its kosher, and cook it, and we had meat and we had kugel and we had compote, and for Shabbos people, you had everything, yes, but nothing luxurious. And on Friday night you went to Shul and we came home and we sung zemiros and you ate and in the morning you went to Shul and in the afternoon again to Shul and it was this ... this ... it was the children at home, no cheder, nothing at all, it was a lovely day, Shabbos was really something people looked forward to.

RL: How did you keep the food hot for Shabbos lunch?

Tape 1: 28 minutes 11 seconds

IW: Well, the ordinary soup for Friday night stayed there, on this special warm, what do you call it, on the cooker, anything like that, and the rest you take to this baker, this special place, like the baker, the challah for instance, when you had to bake it, you couldn't bake it at home, you didn't have an oven, so everybody had to make the dough and take it to the baker, and make a special symbol on it, so you should recognise it, and you baked it there. And the cholent was taken to the baker and there it stayed until Shabbos morning and then it was taken home and that is how it was warm?

RL: So was there an eruv in the town?

IW: There was an eruv in the town. Tacky if it happened the eruv was broken then there was trouble in bringing home the food and other things, yes. There was an eruv in town, yes.

RL: So what would happen if the eruv was broken?

IW: Well you had to do it ... in the worst case with children, you know under the age of bar mitzvah or bas mitzvah or goyim, you know what I mean. Or we had to see if it could still be repaired in such a case.

RL: What about bathing and bathing for Shabbos?

IW: You had to go to a place what is called, even here when we came in 1947, we didn't have bathrooms in your Yeshiva in Eitz Chaim as it was then, we had to go to the public bath, the mikveh was there, for women as well and for men, in the mikveh you had to go down about 15 or 18 stairs down, and that is where you got some hot water to wash yourself. There was no baths you know there.

RL: So you went to a special bath house in the town?

IW: Well it was a little bit, this place where the ladies had to go, and the men, and also on a Friday, was only once a week.

RL: And you say there was no running water in the house?

IW: No, no ... that was a difficulty. There were special people called wasser trager, it was people, and it was their occupation, and they used to carry it from the well and they used to bring it to the house. And people who couldn't afford it had to go themselves, of course you had to pay for it. That was, yes ...

RL: So how did your family get the water?

IW: Well, mostly we used to get it ourselves, yes.

Tape 1: 31 minutes 19 seconds

RL: Was that a job that was done just once a day, or when you needed?

IW: What?

RL: Getting the water.

IW: When you needed it, you had also to sieve it through, and of course you know, and you had to there should not be worms in it and things like this. We go... into a keli, it was a job.

RL: What about toilet facilities?

IW: Well, the toilet had to be outside, not in the house, and it is interesting about toilets, you know, the farmers from the villages, sometimes they used to come in the evening, without your knowledge or without anything and just take away the, the erm, what is it called, you know, for the ground, to ...

RL: Manure?

IW: Manure, yes, and so on ... that is how we used to get rid of it.

RL: What about milk?

IW: Milk we used to go, a lady she used to go, she used to go for milk, and we used to buy it, and she used to measure it, not bottles like this, and that is how you bought milk.

RL: So she used to collect it?

IW: She used to go and there were a few, one or two like this, she used to go the farmer and get the milk, you know, straight from the cow, and bring it home, and she used to make cheese also, and ... there was nothing imported.

RL: What about wine?

IW: Wine we used to make from raisins only. Raisins, that there used to be a name for, and you used to cook the wine erev Shabbos, the raisins and it had to cool off. Before Pesach you used to have to go a few weeks before and make the wine from the raisins, same as used to be borsht for Pesach. They didn't have the acid and anything like this, you used to put up the beetroot six or eight weeks before Pesach and it became proper borsht afterwards, yes. And what we called shmaltz fett, for Pesach, we used to do Chanukah time. They had the geese at the time, you put it away in the cellar, you melted it and put it away in the cellar before Pesach.

RL: So why was that done at Chanukah time?

Tape 1: 34 minutes 34 seconds

IW: Well, Chanukah time was Chanukah time, just, you can see the Chanukah lights, all from oil, mostly, not a special time, the only time it was really different it was Pesach.

RL: Tell me a bit more about Pesach.

IW: Well, Pesach, you know it's not like nowadays when you buy matzahs and they come from Eretz Yisroel and you buy matzahs from different bakers and so on. For instance we used to bake our own matzahs and we had to go to a special baker when ovens were prepared for Pesach, and if we did matzahs our neighbours used to help me, and when they did their matzahs we used to help them, and that is how we baked our matzahs, we used to hang them up, because we used to get visitors, these rats and anything like this, you know, and you used to hang it up, hanging down from the ceiling, and some were baked erev, that was ... you know the very frum ones and those who could afford it, especially shmurah matzahs, anything like this, but otherwise everybody baked his own matzahs. It was the same with the meat and with the chickens, as I explained, they went to be shechted and you made it kosher and you cooked it and so on ...

RL: And what were ...

IW: There were no luxuries on Pesach or anything like you have got nowadays. Matzahs ... eggs, plenty of eggs there used to be there, potatoes, you make everything from potatoes, latkes, kneidlach, all kinds of things from it and so on. It is ...

RL: Did you used to eat kneidlach on Pesach?

IW: Well, we didn't ... until the last day, because we didn't eat gebrochts, you know what I mean, most of the people didn't.

RL: How did the house ... how did you prepare the house for Pesach?

IW: The house for Pesach was, you know you had ... it wasn't papered like this, it wasn't ... you had to take out everything from the house, and it was specially ... not painted ... what was it ...

RL: Whitewashed.

IW: Yes, whitewashed, refreshed, anything like this, specially for Pesach, little by little, everything cleaned, you know what I mean, the floor, you have got a wooden floor, it was a very, very big job to get it ready. But on the other hand, you only had two rooms. It was ... yes ... of course everybody had to help, the children and everything like this.

RL: And what about Seder night?

Tape 1: 37 minutes 51 seconds

IW: Well, the Seder night was beautiful. The Seder night was a Seder night. We had everything that we needed for a Seder night. We had the wine as I said, made especially for Pesach, weeks before, and we had everything, everything, whatever you needed. And of course we didn't eat gebrochts matzahs, we used to make from potatoes, special kneidlach and we had to do it, or some people had potatoes in it. Borsht of course everybody had almost, you know what it is. Yes, yes ... and then nothing, nothing luxurious, nothing like ...

RL: Do you have any special memories?

IW: The singing and the telling of the history of Pesach, and the stories and the children, it was something extraordinarily special. Families used to join especially for Pesach, like nowadays, so it was pleasant.

RL: Who used to join your family?

IW: Sometimes the two neighbours joined, sometimes the family, some of the family came, I don't know ...

RL: Did your parents have different keilim for Pesach?

IW: Of course, everything was different. Everything for Pesach was different. Of course we used to kasher as well. You know, nowadays, you have got paperware and nothing is like it. Everything was different, you had to put away the chometz and you carried on, and you brought in the Pesach keilim.

RL: What would you kasher?

IW: Pardon?

RL: What would you kasher? You say you used to kasher things as well. What kind of things needed to be kashered.

IW: Well mostly the silver cutlery, and some pots, you know special ones, that were expensive to buy knew ones, because for Pesach you used to have the most beautiful ones, and they were very expensive, so whatever could be koshered would be koshered.

RL: And how was that done?

IW: Well, it was special, like, you know, like this here, you have got the Rabbi, under the supervision of the Rabbi, and they bring it there and there they have got everything ready, what should be done as far as koshering is concerned, and it was done. Sometimes you would do it at home yourself as well, it all depends how much, and what you had to do. For instance bottles, you had bottles for wine, when you made your own wine.

Tape 1: 40 minutes 50 seconds

Bottles you kasher, you pour in water for three days, you change it every day, and then afterwards you can use it, because normally it is cold what you use, glass, it is ok like this, but when my mother in law here made wine, she koshered a bottle from whiskey like this, and later on it because, because the sharpness never went out and it exploded, so it just shows you that you can't kasher a bottle like this. It is amazing, even if you wash it with hot water, or anything like this, it is, if it is just got ordinary wine or any other drink then it is ok.

RL: How many brothers and sisters did you have? Who was in your family?

IW: How many what?

RL: Brothers and sisters. Tell me who was in your family.

IW: We were six. Four children and my parents.

RL: You were the oldest boy?

IW: No ... oh ... the oldest boy ... yes

RL: So just take me through your siblings.

IW: Well, we didn't have much what you have nowadays, toys and other things and so on, we started at five to go to cheder, and we went from cheder to cheder and school and so on, and that is how it is, I mean we very rarely had the enjoyment that children have got, you know toys and bikes and something like this.

RL: Did you have any toys?

IW: Very, very, very few. It was expensive and people couldn't afford it.

RL: So what would you play? When you wanted to play, what would you play?

IW: Oh, just ordinary, ordinary play, you know like children play, with nuts, and all kinds of things, yes ... but nothing ...

RL: Did you have a ball?

IW: Yes, oh yes ... a ball we had, yes.

RL: Did you ever read?

IW: What?

Tape 1: 43 minutes 10 seconds

RL: What about reading anything? Did you ever read anything? Any books, or ...

IW: Well you only read sometimes maspir, stories from great Rabbis from here and there. There was nothing you know, like special exciting books or anything like this. It was mostly spiritual, davening or learning, and on Shabbos we used to go to be vahered, you know to some, someone special, baal habos, they used to vaher you and give you sweets or something if you knew, but nothing like the children have got nowadays.

RL: Did you ever go swimming?

IW: No, there was nothing like that. You were afraid to go swimming, or something, because of the shegutzim, you could be attacked or something like this.

RL: Were you attacked often?

IW: Oh, many times, throwing stones and other things. But it was part of it, we got used to it, what can you expect from goyim, you know what I mean.

RL: Was there any non Jews that were friendly towards the Jews?

IW: Well there were some, there were always exceptions, among the Germans there were a few who were helpful in the, who were quite good and friendly, but very few, most of them were not.

RL: Did you have any non Jewish neighbours?

IW: Well, where we lived, we lived almost all together, and also the shops were also ... that is why the Germans, when they came in, in 1939 ... Can we start now about 1939?

RL: Not yet ... nearly, but not quite.

IW: Yes ...

RL: I want to just finish off on this section first.

IW: Yes ...

RL: I was just asking about non Jewish neighbours.

IW: So, we lived in one neighbourhood. Almost all the Jewish houses were in one neighbourhood, and all the shops also.

RL: Did your father deal with non Jews in his business?

Tape 1: 45 minutes 48 seconds

IW: Well of course they came to have their watches repaired, they had to do. I mean, we used to take in, before Pesach especially, a goya, you know to wash the washing, and other things, because everything had to be done by hand, and everything like this, of course we had to, but nothing like nowadays where they have char women in every day and everything like this. You had to do everything yourself, mostly, and in a hard way, the most difficult way, but people were somehow satisfied, they didn't know any better, or expect any better.

RL: Just thinking about, with you living on the first floor, were the other families in your house all Jewish families?

IW: All Jewish families. All frum families.

RL: Do you remember the names of any of the families?

IW: No ...

RL: No ...

IW: Well, the one downstairs, he had a shop downstairs, he used to sell chocolate and sweets, and ice cream which he made himself, all kinds of things.

RL: Was the landlord Jewish?

IW: Yes, yes ...

RL: What happened on Succos time? With you living on the first floor, how did you manage?

IW: The Succah was downstairs, always in the ... and the Succah always used to be shared by many neighbours, because to make a Succah, it is not like now you got Succahs made, or you had everything if you paid, you had to do it ... so, we used to share a Succah with the neighbours.

In our, actually, in my grandfather's garden there was a Succah and he had other neighbours also came to eat there and so on. Of course, nothing like nowadays with the roof, or anything like this, if you covered it on top or something in case it rains, and then when you went in you just uncovered the top.

RL: What was the weather like at that time of year?

IW: Well, it was getting colder. It was getting colder. You couldn't sleep in the Succah, that is why you see most of the people, although it's a mitzvah to sleep in the Succah, we didn't sleep in the succah, we couldn't, it was too cold, nowadays, people

Tape 1: 48 minutes 18 seconds

the neighbour bought a succah next to us, it has got electricity underneath, we have got heaters, electric heaters, anything like this, it is not so difficult.

RL: You were telling me about having to go to school, and ...

IW: That was, that was the worst, when you had to go to school, coming in school and coming back from school, because we were not many among so many anti-Semites, shegutzim, and the teachers were not much better, so it was very, very, it was something when you came home, you were so relieved, I told you, we missed more days in the year than actually went.

RL: So the teachers themselves, were they also not good?

IW: No ... it is a well known fact, that says, "Esof sonch es Yaacov", that the goyim, they don't like the yidden, and there you could see it, I mean. Reb Chaim Volozhin was a great tzaddik and he once went with a few talmidim for a walk, and a shaygitz passed by and he threw stones. "Well," he said, "what can you expect?" No, no, first he said anti-Semitic words, and he said "What can you expect?" and another one threw stones. "Well," he said, "this one is a chossid, he does more then the regular thing."

RL: Can you give me some incidents of what would happen in school, you know, what would happen with the Jewish pupils. How the teachers would ...

IW: Well, in school, we were taught like anyone else, but when the time came, the bell went, and we went out, as I explained to you, if we went out at the same time, then we were hit by all the shegutzim, and throwing stones, even when we already a little bit far away, so eventually he let us out about ten minutes earlier, it was, specially before, before

Christmas, when they went to church in the evening, the Beis Hamedrash was empty in the evening, because we were afraid to go out ...

RL: Was there ever any very bad incidents?

IW: Well, there was nobody killed in my time. No, yes, sometimes a person was more injured. You know, when you throw stones, you know, in all events, where ... if it is aimed, or where it just comes ...

RL: Ok. So, as you say, you spent a lot of your time learning. What kind of things at that age were you learning?

IW: First you learned to read, Chumash and Rashi, and then immediately you went to Gomorrah, and learned Gomorrah, and it went on and on ... only very few later on, those who could afford, could go to Krakow, it was different, where there was already a Yeshiva, or something like this, or Vilna, you know what I mean ... I don't know ...

Tape 1: 51 minutes 58 seconds

RL: What were your sisters doing?

IW: People ... it is not like nowadays, after a chassana you have got people who go to Kollel and learn ... after the chassana you thought about an occupation, about earning, about supporting yourself, most of the people were working, it wasn't like nowadays, you know that every chossen, everything like this, you know the very frum ones, they go back to Yeshiva to Eretz Yisroel or anywhere to learn, to study, and they are being supported by the parents on both sides, or the grandparents, some children, when they get married, when a shidduch is proposed, "how are the grandparents?" Life is entirely different.

RL: What about your sisters? What did they do? What were they doing? ... your sisters ...

IW: My sisters, they were helping at home, and later on there was already, the last few years, there was already Beis Yaakov, I mean, the youngest one was young, but even so, that is it ...

RL: Did they not go to a non Jewish school?

IW: Of course they all went to school, all to a non Jewish school, they had to, you were forced to, you took chances many times, not goyim ... but officially you had to, it was the law, every child had to go to school.

RL: Were there any kind of youth groups or clubs at all? Any kind of leisure activities?

IW: No, nothing. Not as far as I know, no. People stayed at home mostly.

RL: What about music?

IW: Well, music, well musical people could sing, when there was a Chazzan came it was something extraordinary, something ... but then, not studying music like playing the piano or anything like this, or musical instruments, some ...

Music you only knew when a chassana came, then you had music, specially came from different towns, sometimes, so then you knew all kinds of music, there was. We didn't have a radio or anything like this, you know what I mean. Some people had already records at homes, Chazonishe records, to listen a little bit and so on to songs, but it was nothing special.

RL: So you say it was when a chassana?

IW: Of course when it was a chassana you used to lead the Chossen and Kallah to the Shul with music, and if you were invited, it was something special.

Tape 1: 55 minutes 23 seconds

RL: What would they play? What were they playing on?

IW: Well different instruments, mostly the harp and these things ... drums, you know, special music, books and ...

RL: Did you attend any weddings?

IW: Did I ... ?

RL: Did you go to any weddings?

IW: Well if you were invited ... well people ... you didn't have a wedding like you do nowadays with a caterer, and you got a hall, people used to make it mostly at home, and most of the weddings were just families, or neighbours, they would invite a few neighbours. It used to be surprisingly enough erev Shabbos, a Friday, and then Motzei Shabbos was the end when you have the music and other things. So Shabbos you had a bigger meal for the people and other things, sheva brachos. Nowadays you have got some sheva brachos every day like a chassana.

RL: What about different customs that might have been practiced then? For instance when a baby was born or a bris, do you remember anything special?

IW: That was mostly in Shul. A bris or anything like this, if you made a small party it would be at home, anything like this, birthdays or anything like this were not celebrated. Even anniversaries, anything like this, when we had our anniversary here, our 50th anniversary, it was something special, something extraordinary.

RL: I think this film is about to end, so we will just stop there.

Tape 1: 57 minutes 23 seconds

TAPE 2

This is the interview with Izak Wiesenfeld and it is tape 2.

Tape 2: 57 minutes 35

I was just asking, if you can just tell me what brothers and sisters you had.

IW: Well I had my oldest sister Genia, that's Genendel and I had my youngest, she was the youngest the sister, the one who now lives in Gateshead.

RL: And her name?

IW: Manya.

RL: And your brother? Where did he come?

Tape 2: 0 minutes 46 seconds

IW: My brother, he lives here in London.

RL: What number child was he?

IW: He was number 2, that is my ... I was the second ... no number 3 he was. I was number 2, my brother was number 3 and Manya was number 4.

RL: So there were four children?

IW: Four children, yes.

RL: Four children, right. And they all attended the same school?

IW: Well the girls went to a different school. It wasn't mixed, even amongst the goyim.

RL: And did they suffer in the same way?

IW: Not so much as we. Of course they did, but not as much as we.

RL: Did you personally ever get into fights?

IW: We had no chance to fight. Because in our class there were only about four or five yiddisher boys and 15 or 16 other ones. I mean, when the whole school was let out, we were very few in number against them, there was no chance of fighting, or any chance, or any chance of escaping was difficult.

RL: At school what kind of things were you learning?

Tape 2: 59 minutes 33 seconds

IW: All the kind of things that you learn in school, reading and arithmetic and ... all kind of things, history, ordinary ... things that one learns in school.

RL: What language were you speaking?

IW: Mostly our language was Yiddish, but in school we had to speak Polish.

RL: And did you know Polish?

IW: Yes, but not like ... because you never spoke it at home or anything like this.

RL: How did your father dress?

IW: Pardon me?

RL: How did your father dress? What kind of clothes?

IW: Chassidishe clothes, of course, on Shabbas a shtreimel and a bekkishe, you know what I mean, chassidishe, almost everybody in our town, as I said to you, was chassidish.

RL: During the week how did he dress?

IW: He had a little kashketl like these frum people have got, and ordinary things. Trousers and shirts or a blouse or whatever it was.

For Pesach he couldn't afford a new suit, and he used to take it to a tailor, and he used to redo it from the inside out, to make it look new. It was ... you know it went off colour on this side ...

RL: Did the children get new clothes?

IW: I am speaking of when I was a child about this, yes ... those who could afford did, but those who couldn't tried to renew the old ones, other side out and things like this.

RL: And what about shoes?

IW: Shoes ... during the week you could see everything was patched up, and everything was repaired, especially shoe makers, who did all this. Nothing was thrown out unless it was impossible to wear it any more. We used to repair everything you see. It was a special trade, after the war, I am sure there were some shoemakers who made and repaired shoes, now ... who makes shoes?

RL: Besides visiting that Rebbe who you spoke about in that other town, did you ever travel out of your town?

IW: The only time you went out was if the Rabbi was in a different town. A near town, so you went for that Shabbos there, or paid a visit to your relatives, for a week or two or something like this.

Tape 2: 1 hour and 3 minutes 1 second

RL: Did you do that?

IW: Yes.

RL: Where did you go?

IW: I went to Glasgow to visit my mishpocha or to an uncle, it all depends ... to Jaroslav, it all depends, but very rare. Of course it was difficult, not just financial, you were afraid to go, wherever you went you were not safe to go.

RL: Now I think we have come up to 1939.

IW: Well, in 1939, when the war broke out, the Second World War, you know that the Russians and the Germans were allies together, and they attacked Poland, the Germans from the west and the Russians from the east, and they divided it, and we lived not far from the new border that was made between Russia and Germany, it was in Jaroslav, and they had a river, a special river, a river called San, that is where there was a border, the new fixed border between Russia and Germany. After being for weeks with the Germans, so they called us all out into a market place and said "We don't want you here. Go over to the Russian side." You are speaking about the people who lived nearer from there, 15 kilometres. So, we had to take whatever we could, and we walked, and eventually we came over to the part of Poland that was already Russia.

The people who lived there automatically became Russian citizens, because it became part of Russia. We were refugees there. And immediately when the Russians came in there ... there were rations, there were shortages of all sorts of all kind of things, but people somehow, you were free, you were not attacked ... you were not When the situation between Germany and Russia became strained, and war between them looked imminent as it happened in 1941, so the Russians called us, and they said "We want you to become Russian citizens" and we refused. Because first of all it was ... most of our

family who didn't live near us lived on the German side, and at that time there were no concentration camps, no gas chambers, nothing, it was four weeks after the war started. And we knewafter the war, once you go into Russia, you never get out, nobody imagined the war would take five years and the whole world would be fighting them, and we said "No, we don't want to go to the Russians." Then it became more strained, and everything like this, and then one Friday night, a knock at the door, 12 o'clock, "OUT!" And it was a matter of luck as well, if those soldiers were human a bit they gave you a bit of time to take something with, and if ... anything, so you just went as you were, we couldn't take anything with us. Later on you will find out just how important it was to have something with you. And, we were taken to the station, packed into cattle trains, all in, locked, men, women and children together, everything like this, until we crossed the proper Russian border. That Friday night, when this happened, and the local Jewish people saw, they cried bitterly at our fate, and that we were being taken to Siberia. Little did they know that this worked out, for some people, it was an escape, because we were not there later on when the six million Jews were killed, murdered.

So across the Russian border, and it already opens up, and we were on the train, and we got a bit of water and could buy some other things, and after a few weeks we came to Siberia.

Tape 2: 1 hour and 7 minutes 52 seconds

RL: Can I just ask you ...

IW: Yes ...

RL: ... some questions before we go into Siberia.

IW: Oh, yes ...

RL: First of all you said you were under German occupation for four weeks.

IW: Yes.

RL: What was life like under their occupation for those four weeks?

IW: That four weeks ... we had one casualty or something like this, but nothing really ... that was one of the reasons we refused, it wasn't like, we could get anything there, we could daven, we could go to Shul, we could still carry on, it wasn't yet so terrible, it happened an incident here and there, you know, that a private soldier killed somebody or anything like this and so on, but life wasn't too bad at the time, it was only the beginning, that is the point, and that was also one of the reasons, in comparing this with the Russian side, it wasn't too bad ...

RL: And when they told you to get out ...

IW: I forgot to tell you ...

RL: Mm?

IW: ... that immediately when the Russians came in ... the Germans came in, in 1939, in the afternoon, they burnt the Shul and the Beis Hamedrash and all the Jewish houses that we were there ... and we were without living accommodation, and only because part of the people, before, when the war broke out, escaped to be able to run away, but later on, in two weeks time, they occupied all of Poland, so we broke into their houses and we were living there ...

RL: So did you ... ?

IW: So later on when we were on the Russian side we met one or two at least. "Did you bring my tallis and tefillin from there at least.. ?

RL: Did you manage to take anything from your home at that point?

IW: From our house, nothing, nothing. They didn't give you a chance. In the Synagogue, in this Beis Hamedrash there was a special Sefer Torah, it was only, Reb Moshe Sopher, he was very famous there, and it was only given to extraordinary guests, to have a look to someone who came. This was something precious, and even that was burned, we didn't have a chance for taking any Sefer Torah, or anything like this, I mean, it is a lot of luck, the town next to us, Lanzut or Jaroslav the Synagogue is still standing. And the Beis Medrash is still there. Again it depended on who were the soldiers who came in there.

So, as I said, even the Russian soldiers, some people were given quarter of an hour, twenty minutes to take things with, and some were just "out" ... it all depended on ... mazel ... or anything like this ...

Tape 2: 1 hour and 11 minutes 8 seconds

RL: You had no Tefillin?

IW: No, no Tefillin, nothing at all, not tallis, no Tefillin. We got some Tefillin there, when we went in the part of Poland that was Russian, that became Russia, a little bit, I can't remember, but not everybody, we used to borrow a pair of Tefillin to daven, you know what I mean.

RL: So whilst you were staying in these other people's houses, under German occupation ...

IW: Yes ..

RL: ... how did you manage with davening or ... to keep ...

IW: We had no minyan, nothing at all, we just davened at home, we did the best. Some people ... who lived in other parts that weren't burned took in people to their houses, they helped. Jewish people helped each other. For instance I was in a different house, somebody looked after me, you know what I mean, yes ... that was until we were occupied, yes ...

RL: So this was just for one month that you were in that situation ...

IW: Yeah, yeah ...

RL: And then when the Russian ... when the Germans told you to get out, was there any warning of that?

IW: Well of course, when they said you have to get out, you have to get out, your life was in danger if you didn't. We walked, walked, walked ... eventually we came to Jaroslav and then to another place, that is how it is ...

RL: Can you describe that journey? How it went ...

IW: Well you can imagine a journey carrying little bits of anything like this, and goyim looking through, and making fun, enjoying themselves at our fate. The Poles were very, very anti-Semitic, very, very bad, that is why they made the concentration

Tape 2: 1 hour and 13 minutes 6 seconds

camps and all the gas chambers and so on in Poland, they helped the Poles, and later on the Ukrainians and all these.

RL: So you walked ... Where did you stay over night? How long was the walk over the border?

IW: Well we went out, we arrived at night ...

RL: And where did you sleep that night?

IW: With the Jewish people ... there around it, those who lived there, of course they were very helpful, later on we got a room, and my father still had a few tools and he started to do a bit of watch making.

RL: Where was that? What place was that?

IW: That was, that was, what was it called? You see my memory is so bad now. Well it was over the border, yes. Maybe I will remember later on.

RL: How long did you stay in that particular place?

IW: Well, in that, this was in 1939, and we were deported in 1940.

RL: How big was the Jewish community there?

IW: Well the Jewish community was carrying on like life was in Poland before. But, of course shortages etc of everything, made life more difficult, but the Jewish people, the greatness of Jewish people, they always start anew and try to do the best of every situation.

RL: Did your father manage to find work?

IW: Well he ... he opened up ... he did repairs ... you couldn't get certain things you needed, but he did whatever he could.

RL: And what did you, the children, do at that time?

IW: Nothing. At that time we did nothing. We davened, we came to Shul, and we came home.

RL: How did you spend the day?

IW: Pardon.

Tape 2: 1 hour and 15 minutes 18 seconds

RL: How did you spend the day?

IW: I don't know, doing nothing that is it. We had one big room where we all slept and everything, and lived.

RL: Was there any learning? Was there a Beis Hamedrash to go to?

IW: There was a Beis Hamedrash of course, because the local Jewish people still had everything there. As I said the Germans didn't burn all the Botei Midrash, it all depends on who they were and how ...

RL: This is in the Russian part now anyway ...

IW: We were in the part of Poland that became Russia.

RL: And the Beis Medrash there was still ...

IW: Yes, yes ...

RL: Would you go there to learn?

IW: No, nobody thought about learning at that time.

RL: Where would you go to daven?

IW: We went to the Beis Hamedrash there. What was it? I can't remember the name of it.

Remember, even from our town, Reb Itzikel from our town, he was deported to a different part, it all depends on where they took, where the trains were and everything like this ..

RL: What did you manage to eat at that point? What was the food like?

IW: The food was the minimum. We could have bread, bread, bread ... potatoes ... maybe an egg sometimes, and of course on Shabbos we did our best to get a chicken or anything like this.

RL: Did the local Jewish community help you?

IW: Oh yes, of course, Yidden always help each other.

RL: How did they help?

Tape 2: 1 hour and 17 minutes 20 seconds

IW: Oh, they helped ... those who couldn't, or didn't have a job, those who didn't have anything, like nowadays even here, some people are being helped, all the time.

RL: Where were you living?

IW: People needed very little, and were satisfied with ... you know with minimum, ya ...

RL: What were you living in at that point? What was the accommodation?

IW: The accommodation is ... we had two rooms, two rooms. The front room was also the place where my father worked.

RL: Was that in an apartment or was it in a house?

IW: It was in a ... house, a part of a house.

RL: What was the language being spoken there?

IW: Yiddish, we spoke Yiddish all the time.

RL: Did you see much of the Russians in the street?

IW: We saw Russian soldiers all the time ... most of the houses, most of the luxurious houses were occupied by the Russians, taken over, but whatever one got, whatever one received, whatever one had, one was happy. First of all we felt such a relief from the Germans, because there was freedom there at that time, but life was more difficult, but still in comparison with the part that was under the Germans, and being afraid what might happen every minute of every day, so it was a great relief.

RL: Did the Russian soldiers ... you know, did you have much contact with them, did they leave you alone?

IW: They left alone, yes, they left us alone, of course it was under the Russian government, you had to obey certain laws, here and there, pay certain things, nothing, no restrictions, you know what I mean ... as ...

RL: And then you say ... what was the year that they asked you if you would become Russian citizens? When was that?

IW: Well, that was, when the situation became strained between Germany and Russia ...

RL: Mm ...

Tape 2: 1 hour and 20 minutes 54 seconds

IW: ... and they wanted everybody should be Russian ... you know what I mean ...

RL: Did some Jews become Russian citizens?

IW: Which one?

RL: Did some Jews take on Russian nationality? Or were they all like you?

IW: Well all the occupied Jews didn't, and you will see later on how useful it was that we didn't. That is why I am here ...

RL: So you were describing how they rounded you up, can you describe that journey, what it was like.

IW: The journey, as I said to you, was a really unpleasant journey, until we crossed really the Russian border, all packed in, no facilities, men, women, children, everything like this, closed wagons completely, like cattle wagons, it was very difficult, but later on, little by little, when we came past the Russian border, so you could, at the station, some Russian peasants came out, and we got some eggs, and some vegetables, you could,

because you stayed in a certain place for a quarter of an hour, you could buy something, you know, and they supplied already rations, bread, you know, the minimum that you needed ...

RL: How long were you on that ...

IW: Over four weeks. Yes, until we came to near Novosibirsk, Siberia there, and then we were taken by lorries into the forest. In the forest there was a huge barrack built, again men, women and children together, everything like this, and the first speech of course, they welcomed, which was "You will never get out of here, here you will die, and if you don't work you won't get any food." So, most of the people had to go to work, I was already fourteen and a half and I had to go to the forest to cut down trees and dry out swamps, all kinds of things, difficult work, and ...

RL: How do you dry out swamps?

IW: Pardon?

RL: What do you do to dry out swamps?

IW: Well, you had to cut down, when you cut down trees, trees have got branches, they cut these branches and then put them on the swamp, and then you dug ground and you put earth on it. And they used to measure the cubic metres, how far we had dug and so on, so at the beginning it was 1940, before the war broke out, they used to give the person who used to go to work, a kilo and 200 gram bread, and the people who couldn't

Tape 2: 1 hour and 23 minutes 30 seconds

go, or who were too young to go, half a kilo of bread. The bread inside was like clay, outside was a bit better, so when we got rations for all of us, every family, they didn't give each one 1 kilo and 200 grams, they gave bread for all the family, so bread was so precious, so you made a little scale at home, so that every ration was weighed so that I shouldn't get any more than another one, today I get the crust, tomorrow you get the crust ... because in volume, it was something ... and when we came to work they used to bring out some soup in the place that we work, and with each soup they used to give, 200 gram of bread or more, and they said "How many soups do you want?" And everybody said "one, two, three", because you threw away the soup, it was just water, you need the bread and everything like this. And you know when you haven't got, you can eat and eat and be dissatisfied, be hungry, and we had nothing as far as vegetables, fruit, fat, sugar, or anything like this, but because of it we couldn't see at night, we really lost the sight. And of course, in charge of us were the Russians, they were called the Gulags, they were the people who in 1917 when Russia became communism were supported to Siberia, the important people, now they were in charge of us!

So, they, they lived already from 1917 and we were now in 1940, so as I said before, the people who could take something with themselves, and when you went ten, twelve

kilometres, were they actually where they settled, if you gave for an egg a rouble, which was a fortune, they wouldn't sell it to you, because it was useless to them, they couldn't buy anything, but if you had something to barter, if you had a shirt, a tie, a sheet, you could get vegetables, you could get potatoes, and other things, and barter for it, it is interesting.

We translated it differently from Yaakov Avinu, Yaakov said "lechem, lechem ... bread to eat" and "begeg l'libosh ... and a garment to wear", ordinarily, it means we know what we do with it, it means we should be well enough to be able to enjoy food, if we can't eat we can't work. There we said the other way round, if we had a garment so we could eat, we could barter it, and ... the other way round ...

RL: ... did you ... ?

IW: But then when war broke out, in 1941, they stopped all the bread as well, and we had to live from what we could collect in the forest. During the summer we had strawberries or mushrooms and all kind of things, and that is what we had to live on for a long, long time.

RL: How did you know what was edible?

IW: Well that was a difficulty, through the help of these Russians. A friend of mine who was in the same brigade as I, he lives here now, when we went to a steam bath there, that was very primitive, we had a hole in the wall and there were bricks there, and plenty of wood in the forest, and we made it hot, and you poured water in it, and that was the steam bath. When you poured the water you had to stay to the side, and he forgot himself

Tape 2: 1 hour and 27 minutes 44 seconds

and it was just, and he ran out in agony, and luckily this Gulag was there, he said run quickly, take a piece from the horses, what is it called, put it in your face, and it saved his face.

Anyway, things like that happened. When we got malaria in Siberia, during the three months that it was hot, people think of Siberia as being cold, that wasn't the worst, the worst months were the three months when it was hot, like a tropical country, because then it was like in the Torah, in the Tochocho they say "in the evening we waited for morning, and in the morning we waited for evening." In the evening when we came home we couldn't sleep in the barrack, because there were the bugs, and outside there was the mosquitos, thousands of them, and then we waited for the morning. And we went to work in the morning in the forest, every bee was thick like this, and every bite you got your hand was swollen, and your feet was swollen, and you waited for the evening, so it was ... it was very, very difficult.

RL: And did you catch malaria?

IW: Yes. And there, from ... for malaria there is only one cure, quinine it is called, and here ... anyone who gets malaria, either he gets an injection or he gets pills, there, after pleading and pleading and pleading, we got it in a powder form, and if anything is bitter, this is the bitterest thing in the world, and we couldn't take it, again one Gulag came, and he said get hold of an onion, and between one piece and another one, they have a very thin skin, and get out these skins, wrap up this powder in it, with a bit of water, and that is how we could take it and so on. But a lot of people didn't survive, once they became ill there, you are finished, no cure, no doctor, no medicine, or anything like this, so that is how my father died in Siberia, and my friends father, now I was a bit lucky, because although I was fourteen and a half I was short, so when my father died I was still able to sit shiva there, but when my friends father died, he didn't go to work and they put him in prison for eight days for this.

RL: What did your father die from?

IW: Well, he became ill, and that was it.

RL: What was your mother doing? Did she have to work?

IW: Most of the women didn't work there. Well, they looked after the family, did what they could, it was a very poor life in every way.

RL: And your sisters?

IW: Sister also, the sisters didn't go to work.

RL: Can you describe where you were living? The barrack where you were living?

Tape 2: 1 hour and 31 minutes 15 seconds

IW: Well the barrack was an ordinary barrack, built from wood, from ... I don't know .. and we slept on ... made from wood, kind of, like this, benches ...

RL: How many were in the barrack?

IW: How long?

RL: How many were in ...

IW: Well, again we were divided in different parts of the forest, we were occupied together, and again it was a matter of luck, if you those that were in charge of us were a bit human they used to get things that needed, shoes and so on, anything to wear, special ones for winter, and someone knows, it is ... if ... you used to go in the forest, without shoes I used to go and my feet became swollen, and it was a job, it was very difficult.

RL: Was the barrack for a lot of people or were they for each family? How was the barrack ...? I haven't got a picture of it ...

IW: Well each family was kept separately, but it was for everybody, as I said it was divided a few kilometres from us were another family ...

RL: How many would there have been?

IW: We were about 120 or 130 and about 39 women and children died during the one and a half years we were there.

Now the end of this here in England, there was a Polish government under General Sikorski. And of course when the war broke out between Russia and Germany they spoke differently, because they needed the help of all the allies now, and one of the conditions that they would go and help these soldiers or to get help, was to free us from Siberia, to free all the Polish citizens, because we were still Polish citizens, from Siberia, and we had a choice to go to Russia, to any part, of course not back to the part that was still fighting under the Germans or Poland or anything like this, and we chose to go to Juma near Samarkand and it was near Teheran, and we thought that maybe we would get a chance of eventually to get out of Russia, Teheran to Israel, or somewhere.

RL: Can I just ask you a little bit more about Siberia before we move?

IW: Yeah, yeah, yeah ...

RL: Because I am just trying to build up a picture of life at that point, I mean ... how many days a week did you work?

Tape 2: 1 hour 34 minutes 21 seconds

IW: Seven. Including Shabbos, including Yom Kippur, including everything. You could not, you had to go out to work, and ... the work was ... during, cutting trees for instance, we were taught how to cut trees, you know ... two people with a saw, and an axe and something like this, and we had to do it to a certain size, I mean these trees were, were ... with the help of a horse and a peg, were dragged out towards the river and when the snow melted it used to go to the towns, and that is how they exported, so that we, about one and a half meters from the ground, when we cut it, so during the summer it was ok, but during the winter when we got a meter of snow or two hundred, you couldn't cut on top, so we had to dig around it and you were like in a cave, and ... with a tree ... before you cut it, you had to inspect it to see how the branches were, where it was going to fall, and when it was going wrong this way, you would run away, so it wouldn't be on you, but there when you were inside like this, and one person couldn't escape and one lost his leg because of this, it was, so various things, accidents like this, happened here and there.

RL: How big were the working groups?

IW: Then again, even the working groups had something, some had people who had money, people who had something, they could bribe those who were in charge and work less hours ... it was good for different ones, ten, twelve, it all depends on what they needed. The younger ones, were doing easier work a little bit, straighten the roads and other things and so on ...

RL: What was your brother doing?

IW: Pardon?

RL: Your brother, what was he doing?

IW: My brother, because he was younger than I, he wasn't taken to work. And my sister also not.

RL: So were you the only one?

IW: I was the only one who worked so hard like this, but from my family.

RL: What hours were you working?

IW: Hours, seven, we started at seven and come back in the evening.

I remember one incident ... as I said, everything depended on luck, because in some parts of Russia, in some towns they had plenty of bread and plenty of salt, and the next town, if you had salt on the way back you knew you could get anything for it. In some places they had flour, they didn't have orders to use it and there was no bread. In some they had

Tape 2: 1 hour and 37 minutes 42 seconds

plenty. So we were taken once to clear away snow, about 10 kilometres from us. We couldn't go back on time, before night, and there was a school there and we were there overnight on the floor, and there we got some bread, it was good bread somehow. And we queued up, with our names, and she couldn't read our names, and I remember some of us queued up three times, we got three kilos 600 grams bread. We lay down on the floor, it was only bread, nothing else, and we couldn't fall asleep until we finished the whole lot, because for months we didn't have any, and so on. And ...

RL: So what were you living on?

IW: What we could. What we could find. Different berries and things in the forest. Again, as I said to you, those who had some money, or something to barter, so they went ... they managed to buy things.

RL: What about your mother and the rest of the family? What did they get to eat?

IW: Well, they got less to eat. As I said, those who didn't work in the family instead of 1 kilo and 200 grams of bread, they used to get half a kilo of bread. Soup used to be there. And it was just barley water, and other things.

RL: Were you aware of the Jewish calendar? You know, what day was what?

IW: Well luckily we had a few people who knew. Even the people who were nifta were buried properly in the forest, properly as a Jewish person should. We did know, but it didn't help very much, I mean as far as work is concerned and other things. At least at home we knew what to do. So you see as I said to you, because we didn't accept Russian citizens we were freed from Siberia, and then from middle Asia, and then in 1945 when the war came to an end we were repatriated to Poland. And because of us, because we remained Polish citizens, a lot of Lubavitcher, all these Russian Jews, also they bribed, they also came as Polish citizens to Poland, so it came out as double tova, double good.

RL: Coming back to your work in the forest, how were the people who were overseeing you, the Gulags, how were they in terms of supervising your work, you know, how did they treat you.

IW: Not too bad, they did their job, they came, they measured, how many trees we cut, and how, as I told you, how the pit was that we dug out and so on, and again it depended what kind of people were in charge. Mazel played a big, big part in this.

RL: Were there any who treated you badly?

IW: Well, you see, we were families together. But the people who were single people who were sent to Siberia, they were treated very badly. Like real prisoners and anything like this. I mean we were in the forest, we were free, we couldn't go anywhere, it was in

Tape 2: 1 hour and 41 minutes 56 seconds

the middle of the forest. We had no transport, no paper, no radio, we didn't know the world existed, or anything like this.

RL: How did you manage with the cold?

IW: With?

RL: With the cold ...

IW: Cold?

RL: Yes.

IW: Well, the cold, until, the cold weather is actually very healthy weather, if you had proper clothing and you had proper special boots made for it then you didn't get a cold in Siberia. Again, as I told you, we got very late our boots and anything like this, and they worked us without boots, it was very, very hard. But you know, a human being can survive different climates. You can take an animal from a hot climate to another climate, and you don't make the conditions properly, it will die straight away, but somehow, Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives us special koyach, if I was to eat now what I did there, or if I would walk now on snow with bare foot, I wouldn't be well here.

RL: Did you get frostbite?

IW: No, no, no ... you see you had your ears covered, and those who worked, and we had special tops and special boots afterwards. When you got them, sometimes you didn't.

RL: Was there any attempt to keep up any kind of Jewish life at all?

IW: Whatever one could, one did keep. There wasn't a question of eating treife, there was no treife there, to eat meat or anything like this. Although we had a shochet, a young shochet there, who nebbich was nifta, he was 28 when he was nifta, but we didn't get chicken, only those who could, as I said to barter something, as I said, might get some chicken, and they would bring it and shecht it.

RL: What about .. ?

IW: I forgot to tell you ... remember, I said we couldn't see at night, because of the lack of vitamins. One of the Russians said "If you get hold of a piece of liver and you eat it, your sight is going to be restored." And eventually we got hold of one, and it came back.

RL: Was there a chance of davening at all?

Tape 2: 1 hour and 44 minutes 58 seconds

IW: No, very rarely we could daven, with a minyan, or anything like this. We didn't have Siddurim or anything like this. Some people had, some people didn't have.

RL: What about any of the festivals? Was there anything that you could do? On Chanukah, was there any way that you tried ...

IW: Well, you could kindle the lights with flat wood, even inside the barrack, as far as light was concerned, we didn't have electric, not paraffin, we took these very special flat pieces of wood and we kindled it, and as long as it was on, then we had some light, then it went dark.

RL: Was that done specially on Chanukah time? Did they light?

IW: Well of course on Chanukah you had an extra one. There was no shortage of wood. It was amazing the things that happened there. There were people who got some potatoes and they peeled the potatoes and they put the potato peel into the ground, such potatoes came out. It doesn't happen anywhere, because the ground was so fat and anything like this.

RL: Were there any Rabbonim amongst the people there?

IW: Well, we didn't have any Rabbonim. It all depends in the next there was. It all depends how these Rabbonim were, they told them where to go and which part, they didn't tell them Rabbonim here and there and wherever ...

RL: I am just wondering how your mother and sister spent their day.

IW: Well, I don't know myself how we spent our days. You know, you can waste a day doing nothing and the time flies. We had no libraries, no books, no nothing ...

RL: So, were you all Jewish in that barrack?

IW: Well, as it happens, we were, some parts were non Jews as well a few, but mostly Jews, they deported the Jewish people from that part of Germany. But they had some Poles in some parts, not where we were.

RL: Do you remember who was in charge? Do you remember any names of those who were in charge?

IW: No, they were just, as I say, these Gulags, they themselves were ex-prisoners.

RL: So when was it that they told you that they began to move you out? When was that?

Tape 2: 1 hour and 48 minutes 11 seconds

IW: Well, that was after one and a half years in Siberia. They made some..., and they said "Well, you have got a chance to be free from Siberia now, you can choose a place where you go", and of course, as I said, we chose a place nearer to Asia, that was Uzbekistan, because we thought it was not far from Iran and we thought we would get out of Russia completely, because we didn't know we would be deported later on, in a few years time, in 1945.

RL: So how was the journey, how were you transported to ... ?

IW: Now, this time the transport was good. Completely different. This time we already knew when we stop at a station you buy something, whatever it is, the next day, you can get, as I said ... salt or sugar. We were in proper trains, but when we came to

that part, that part was Uzbekistan, was very primitive. These Uzbeks were very, very primitive. And again, it was a bit of luck, some people were taken into Kolkhoz. Have you heard about Kolkhoz? Kolkhoz were collective farms, and ... there, if you were in a Kolkhoz food was there, you could steal food, you could get something. We were taken to Kolkhoz were they were growing cotton wool. Well you can't eat cotton wool. And if you think Siberia was bad, there it was worse, in Uzbekistan. Because as I said, in Siberia it was a very healthy climate, and once you had whatever food you had and you were dressed properly, you could ... there we got proper malaria, typhus and dysentery, you know all kind of illnesses, and again it was a matter of luck. When I had typhus there, so I was in hospital for about six or seven days, and then when my brother got typhus there was a Jewish doctor there, and the Jewish doctor, said "I am keeping you for a few months here", and there was food, and he used to give us some food, and even sometimes a cushion or a sheet, specially she kept him there, so it helped us. Generally, things did happen.

Eventually, we, as children, we were taken into a special Polish, into a ... you know what they have got for children ... what do you call it?

RL: Kindergarten?

IW: Well, it wasn't a kindergarten, it was a more ... And there we were already free, and some food came from Teheran, already parcels and so on, it came better and better, until 1945, when we actually ...

RL: When you first arrived there? Where were you taken to live?

IW: Where? In Asia?

RL: Yes.

IW: Well, they said "You go and live where you like." They offered us ... and there we lived once, outside this small town, with nothing, there were no beds, on the floor we

Tape 2: 1 hour and 52 minutes 6 seconds

slept, we went out to get some food, whatever we could, until actually this was organised, the Polish special school, what was it called, for Polish citizens, for ... orphans ... because we were orphans, we lost our parents, my mother died there in Asia, in this Juma, and there it was already not so bad.

RL: When did your mother die?

IW: Pardon?

RL: When did your mother die?

IW: My mother died when, a year later, or a year and a few months later when we came there. As I explained to you, it wasn't easy there, as far as, everything was so primitive, and once again you became ill, it was very, very difficult.

RL: How did you manage to get food? How did you keep alive?

IW: Again, the Uzbeks, used to bring down from the villages food to sell. They were very primitive, they brought down butter, it was full of hair, the butter, and there were inspectors coming round, you know, they used to take some of it and just do it like this. And later on the inspectors went away, and they just redid them nicely to sell them, cheese and food. And then they used to realise what was happening, and they used to pour on the dirty food, they used to pour paraffin so they wouldn't be able to use it any more. It was, it wasn't ... but a lot of fruit was there, there were grapes, you could get, for the money you could get a kilo of bread you could get about ten kilo of grapes or anything like this. Different foods they used to grow, these Uzbeks, and we used to buy, or we used to beg, those who couldn't buy. And also food already came in help, as I said from Teheran, for the Polish people.

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

Tape 2: 1 hour and 54 minutes and 36 seconds

Tape 3

Tape 3: 1 hour and 54 minutes and 45 seconds

This is the interview with Izak Wiesenfeld and it is tape 3.

So you were just mentioning what had happened to your documents in Poland. If you would like to just tell me about them.

IW: As I explained, the Synagogue and the Beis Hamedresh, and all the Jewish houses, ours included, were burned down, everything, we didn't have a chance to save anything, so we didn't have any documents at all, so when we were actually occupied, and they asked us, like you asked, when were you born, so we made ourselves four years younger, all of us, because, you know as children, the younger were treated a little bit more humane and so on. And through this we were taken later on to the orphanage. There was a special for Polish orphanage, this one in Asia, do you remember that?

Tape 3: 1 hour and 55 minutes and 17 seconds

RL: Because you were all four years younger than your actual age ...

IW: Yes, yes, yes ...

RL: Right.

IW: And also, because of this, we were later on able to come to England as Yeshiva students.

RL: Now, before you went to the orphanage, before your mother died, can you describe a bit more about what life was like.

IW: Life was horrible. Terrible. As I explained to you, all kinds of illnesses. There was typhus, malaria, dysentery and all kinds of things, and you lived on whatever you could get. When we were in this Kolkhoz at least we got some food, but later on we were free to go wherever, we were not slaves there, it was very, very hard, very, very difficult. Food started to come in from abroad, specially for the Polish people, and organised this orphanage. With them taking my older sister, they were taken to the orphanage.

RL: In the Kolkhoz what did you do? How was your day?

IW: As I told you, in Kolkhoz is a place you work and everything goes to the government and you just get what you need and so on and we were in a Kolkhoz where cotton wool was growing, and of course we had to starve many times, and so on, but we weren't long there.

RL: Did you have to work there?

IW: Of course.

RL: And what work were you doing?

IW: Well, in the fields, yes, yes.

RL: What did you have to do in the fields?

IW: We had to cut down these, these ... digging, all kinds of things, watering, whatever was needed ... whatever was needed.

RL: And did your sister have to work also?

IW: Yes, my sister also worked there. It wasn't a question of having to, it was a question of getting occupied and getting some food.

Tape 3: 1 hour and 57 minutes 59 seconds

RL: And in return for work you got food?

IW: As rations were going ... yes ...

RL: Were there other Jewish people in that place?

IW: No, only Uzbeks. There were a few Lubavitcher Chassidim in Samarkand camp, which was also part of this one, not far from us. Because you would see in Russia, during communism, it was very, very dangerous to be frum or anything like this and so on, but these Lubavitchers had special mesiras nefesh, but they were the only frum people amongst us, were those freed from Siberia.

RL: How many of you went to that particular Kolkhoz?

IW: Again we were divided, different places, here and there. Different trains, different parts. Not too many, maybe 50 or something like this.

RL: What was the living accommodation like?

IW: Terrible, shocking. You know you like lived in small houses, it wasn't like a barrack or anything like this, there were no beds, no nothing, you know what I mean, nothing.

RL: They were small houses, small huts?

IW: Not small houses, for themselves, you know like in the old, old days, like huts. Very, very primitive.

RL: How many were in a house?

IW: Room, you mean room. Well it all depended on how big the family was, we were now four people, both parents were not there any more. And later on when the orphanage was organised, three of us went to the orphanage, my older sister, she had to fend for herself, and she got married there.

RL: So you were four children there on your own?

IW: Yes.

RL: At what stage did your mother die? At what point did she die? Where were you?

IW: We were there, in that Juma. In that ... middle Asia, in that town.

RL: And then you were the four of us on your own.

Tape 3: 2 hours and 0 minutes 34 seconds

IW: Yes, for only a little time. And then this orphanage was organised so we all went to this orphanage, the three of us, except my older sister.

And it is very interesting, my older sister, she lived about ten kilometres from us. And, I once went to see her, and today you couldn't book a train, unless you had some reason or other, so if you wanted to go, you went to the station, and you saw the train going that way, and the train started to move, you jumped on it, and I jumped on it, and I was noticed by the fellow in charge, and the train was in full swing .. and he came to me and he said "I could kill you here, and you die here, and nobody will know anything, but if you have got something to give me, so I will let you live, but you have to get off of this train." So I said "I only have one tin of cocoa which I was going to give to my sister, here you are." So I gave him the tin of cocoa, and when the train slowed down he said "Jump off." I jumped off and I walked all night until I came to that place. So it was either a tin of cocoa, or your life ... well, things ... but whatever happened you get such strength. You think, how could I do it.

RL: So, tell me about the orphanage. What life was like there.

IW: Well, the orphanage, we had freedom there, and we had quite good food, because it used to come from abroad, all food came there from abroad for the Polish. But it was boring, you know, no special education, no nothing at all, we were just occupying ourselves, one with the other one, here and there.

RL: How?

IW: Talking, I was singing ... you know, for the people, all kinds of things.

RL: Were they all Jewish?

IW: All Jewish, yes.

RL: How big was the orphanage?

IW: Pardon?

RL: How big? How many children?

IW: Over 30 or something like this.

RL: Who was in charge?

Tape 3: 2 hours and 3 minutes 09 seconds

IW: Again, a Polish woman.

RL: Was there any Jewish activity?

IW: Nothing special, nothing ... nothing ... And that was until 1945 when the war came to an end.

RL: How many years were you in the orphanage?

IW: Oh, about ... over two years ... and you think "What did I do for two years?" That is how it is, we just occupied ourselves, entertaining each other, doing whatever one could ...

RL: There was no education?

IW: No, there was no classes, no teaching, nothing at all, not even books, because we were still, we were still hoping to go back, anything to normal life, and ...

RL: Were you aware of what was going on in the war? Did you ever get any news about the war?

RL: When we were there in Asia already then we got some news, whenever we could, that it was going, that the Germans were, that ... in Stalingrad, it was the first winter that there was defeat, that the machines couldn't move because of the frost and so on, and the tanks couldn't move. We knew it was going, coming to an end, little by little, but not details, not ... we had no radio, no paper, it was just what one could here. There were some Asian papers, but we couldn't read it.

RL: Did you hear some news about what was happening to the Jews?

IW: Well, we never knew what had actually happened until we returned to Poland, we knew of the Germans, of how they were planning to make judenrein, how they were planning to make the world completely without Juden, and anything like this, but how far ... everything ... about the gas chambers, about all these things, only we discovered afterwards when we came back.

RL: In the orphanage, what was the age range of the children?

IW: Well you see, I was actually 15, but officially 11. And that is how it is, more or less about this age.

RL: Were you allowed to go out?

IW: Yes, but there was no entertainment to go out or anything like this. We went to the market, and see what was going on and what the Arabs were selling or anything like this.

RL: Did you used to go out anywhere else?

Tape 3: 2 hours and 6 minutes 19 seconds

IW: Well there was nowhere to go. There were not clubs, no schools, no Shuls ... you know what I mean ... I just don't know now how I spend the time ...

RL: Was there any countryside to walk in?

IW: No, no, no ... we didn't ... there were villages, these Arabs were very primitive.

RL: How did ... what was the relationship like between them and the Jews?

IW: They were quite friendly. I must say, helpful sometimes, they helped some Jews sometimes as well. You know, when people went begging sometimes a little bit, they were very generous. They lived a very poor life, very primitive. They could sit down, five people together and have raisins and a bit of tea, and there friendship ...

RL: Was there some kind of Jewish community in that area?

IW: No, there were no local Jews when we were there, no, there were no frum, definitely not, some Jews maybe who were Jews but didn't reveal that they were. Because when it came to get a job, even under communism, it wasn't easy for proper Jews to get a job or anything like this.

RL: In the orphanage. Were you aware at all of the Jewish calendar?

IW: A little bit here and there. I mean, we didn't worry about all this.

Only one ... one ... the one who was in charge there who got married with a girl, and I remember I copied their Kesuba, to write down for them, and everything, it was one event, a little chasuna we had there...

RL: Who was it who got married?

IW: The girl who was in charge of it and a man, two of ours. Those who were in charge, elderly, but they were responsible for the Polish people, not the Russians or anything like this, and they were paid for it and they were ok.

RL: What kind of food were you given to eat in the orphanage ?

IW: Vegetarian food mainly.

RL: Was there enough?

IW: Pardon?

RL: Was there enough?

Tape 3: 2 hours 9 minutes 32 seconds

IW: Yes, yes ...

RL: And how did ...

IW: And when you get enough food, you don't eat so much.

RL: How did your sister get on who was working? How did she manage?

IW: She managed somehow. And she got married there. She met her husband, we weren't at the wedding, we couldn't ... As I explained to you, to go to a place was difficult, impossible ...

RL: Were you in touch with her?

IW: Yes, whenever we could, yes, by post, or ... eventually when I went to see her, you know ...

RL: Where was the person, the man that she married, where was he from?

IW: Also from Poland, yes ... also one of your refugees.

RL: So when did she get married? How long into your stay there?

IW: A year before we left, maybe a year and a half.

RL: Did she have any children there?

IW: No, not there. In Poland afterwards when we were repatriated.

RL: Did you meet him whilst you were still there?

IW: No.

RL: Did you know that she had got married?

IW: Yes, I think so, yes.

RL: So how did it come to an end, how ...

IW: Well, you know, in 1945, we were still Polish citizens, in a Polish orphanage, and we were given permission to return to Poland, and that is how we went back to Poland. When we arrived at the station and the Polish people ... said ... "There are still Jews in the

Tape 3: 2 hours and 11 minutes 44 seconds

world!” You know, they said ... and to meet us at the station were the non frum Zionists, who took us to their kibbutz, freier kibbutz, you know what I mean.

Unfortunately, the frum people were not organised to meet us. And then my uncle discovered, we had an uncle who also came back. And he took us out from there. And then there was a Yeshiva, from Vaad Hatzollah in Katowice. And I went to Yeshiva there, with my brother, and Rabbi Dr Schonfeld came from England, he had permission for 28 students, Yeshiva bochurim and so we went to England in 1947, and we came to the East End, Thrawl Street, the Yeshiva there, Etz Chaim ...

RL: I am about to ask you about the kibbutz that they took you to. Where was that kibbutz? That the Zionists had.

IW: You must remember that when we were repatriated, we never went back to our town. In our town there wasn't one Jew left. I can't see the Poles, I can't look at them, but my son, the older one, he went to Poland, he went to that city, to Przeworsk where I was, and even the cemetery is a bus station now. And it is written on top that once upon a time it used to be a Jewish cemetery. There is nothing there now.

You see, after the war, part of Germany became also Poland, part of Poland became Russia and so on, we went back to the part of Poland that was before the war Germany. And from their Rabbi Doctor Schonfeld came to interview us.

RL: So what was that place called?

IW: Let me remind myself. Reichenbach, I have forgot, my memory is so bad now ... and from there we came to Poland, to England ...

RL: You mentioned Katowice?

IW: Katowice was where the Yeshiva was ..

RL: It was where the Yeshiva was. But the kibbutz? The kibbutz you think might have been in Reichenbach?

IW: No, the kibbutz was in the part where this was occupied. This became Poland. I can't remember now, there were already a lot of frum people there, a lot of Jewish people.

RL: So you didn't go back to your home town?

IW: There was nothing to go back to there.

RL: Did you know that?

Tape 3: 2 hours and 15 minutes and 1 second

IW: Of course we knew. We were not taken there even, we were taken to that part of Poland that was annexed to Poland. It is still Polish.

RL: How long were you on the kibbutz for?

IW: A few months.

RL: What were you doing?

IW: There were a lot of activities. The Zionists, the Ukrainians ... there little by little I managed to, although they didn't keep kosher, or anything like this, I managed to not eat what was treife, little by little ...

RL: How did you spend your day?

IW: They were interested to train people for Eretz Yisroel there, what was it called, this part of Poland, I can't remember.

RL: We can look at the map afterwards. We can look it up on the map later and see.

IW: Yes ...

RL: Yes, yes, yes ... So were you altogether at that stage, the three of you, all went to that kibbutz, the three children.

IW: Yes.

RL: And were you with other people who had come back with you? Was there a whole group that went?

IW: People were young, at that orphanage, and most of the people were repatriated to that part of Poland, you could travel back to some other part of town ... at certain parts there was nothing.

RL: Which was the uncle that found you?

IW: It was old Uncle Beresh. People were looking after the war for survivors or anything like this ...

RL: Was that your mother's brother?

IW: Yes.

RL: And what did he do?

Tape 3: 2 hours 17 minutes 28 seconds

IW: He was also a watchmaker, he was also an inventor, you know, he was like my old grandfather, but the other uncle didn't survive.

RL: You say he put you into the Yeshiva? He took you out of the kibbutz.

IW: Well, when I heard about the Yeshiva, and he saw I was put into the Yeshiva.

RL: And what about your sisters? What happened to them?

IW: They stayed with my uncle until ... well actually my sister, she never came to England, the older one, and the younger one, was after we were already here, you know, some people, some people who said they were going to be responsible, took them in. Mr here he took her in, as one of his.. to look after her and she stayed there. And later on, little by little ...

RL: And you two boys, you both went to the Yeshiva.

IW: Actually my brother came with the first ones, six months earlier. Dr Schonfeld came twice. Such terrific work he did, he risked his life, they were shooting at him twice in Poland. Because he was dressed like an English officer with the Magan Dovid on top, and in Poland, after the war, you still had two pogroms, the Polish people who killed quite a few Jews.

RL: Were you aware of that at the time?

IW: Not at the time, afterwards.

RL: So tell me about the Yeshiva.

IW: The Yeshiva was wonderful. The Yeshiva was Gan Eden. You had everything, you had learning, you had good food, you had good company, everything was similar like in Poland. It was ...

RL: How many boys were there?

IW: There were a few groups. It was nice, but again, we didn't think there was a tachelis to stay in Poland. The idea was always to get out. When the Zionists got out to be in Eretz Yisroel, and the other ones who had certain relatives to got to America, or to go to anywhere. And we, as Yeshiva bochurim, we came over here.

RL: Who was in charge of that Yeshiva?

IW: Well, in that Yeshiva, there was a lady's committee who was in charge, but we had a few very famous Rabbonim there, who looked after us spiritually. Food was

Tape 3: 2 hours and 20 minutes 49 seconds

supplied and everything, we were satisfied with anything that we got. After a few years when the Hungarian people, Hungarian boys came to that Yeshiva, and I was already by myself, it was already after a few years, I started to be by myself, and I was invited for a Shabbos there, it was like a four star hotel. Remember they started to suffer only in 1944. we started in 1939. Once in Yeshiva, they were given kippers, so they took a string and hung them up and put them in the Beis Hamedrash, they didn't want kippers. They were very particular. And it was such a difference and so on.

RL: Who were the Rabbis?

IW: Rabbi Greenspan and Rabbi Lopian, the famous Rabbi Lopian, and Rabbi Ordman, and Rabbi ..., there were a few there, quite a few. This Rabbi Lopian was famous, very, very famous, and he became more famous when he went to Eretz Yisroel. When he went there, because he was a very good maggid, a very good speaker, so, when we were in Yeshiva, we came over ... about 24 or 28 students, I don't remember exactly, so we were getting dressed, and they asked us "Wie gehen?" "Where are you going?" We said "We are going to evening classes", a few of us went to evening classes to learn English there. And another Rebbe stood next to him there, and he said, "I never went to evening classes." And the others said "That is why you don't know English properly." He said "I don't know? This is a chair and this is vinder." He said "A vinder! A window." He was a Litvak who corrected him. The rest just picked up colloquial English, but a few of us went to evening classes to learn English.

RL: So this was in England. I was thinking of the Yeshiva in ... the Vaad Hatzollah Yeshiva. Which Rabbonim were there?

IW: They were the ex Vilna – from the Vilna Yeshiva, I can't remember the names, you know the Vilna Yeshiva in Poland, they were there.

RL: I was just thinking of that Yeshiva there. How long were you in that Yeshiva?

IW: I can't remember exactly, I mean, maybe nearly a year.

RL: Did you pick up the learning as before? How did you find it?

IW: It came back, little by little.

RL: Where were you living? Were you living in ...

IW: Oh there was good accommodation there, because there were plenty of empty houses in Katowice, Jewish houses, and anything like this, there was no shortage of accommodation there after the war.

RL: So were you living with a family?

IW: No, no, no ... as Yeshiva bochurim, separately, we were in Yeshiva, we were eating and sleeping and in complete ...

RL: So you were there for one year. Did you have contact with your uncle during this time?

IW: Whenever we could, yes.

RL: So were you in Yeshiva for all the festivals, for all the yom tovim.

IW: Everything, yes. Whatever there was.

Tape 3: 2 hours and 25 minutes 5 seconds

RL: Were people, were bochurim leaving during that time, or did you all leave together.

IW: Some bochurim had relatives in America, so by the time they got to know about each other, so ... they were emigrating.

RL: Tell me about Dr Schonfeld coming, about what you thought, and how it was.

IW: Well, Dr Schonfeld, he was an extraordinary person, he interviewed us, and asked us, you know, are we really interested to go to Yeshiva and so on. He had such a terrific memory, that when he came back the second time he remembered all our names. And you know, when he took us to England, he couldn't get wherefore, he had to go to Gdansk that was a Polish port, he couldn't get an ordinary ship, he couldn't get first of all an aeroplane or an ordinary one, from Warsaw, so he took an aeroplane without seats or without anything, he said get out as quickly as possible. A boat also, he got an ordinary boat, where the soldiers were on top, we were underneath, for the first time we had cornflakes there, with milk. He did everything, there was nothing to stop him, the quicker he could get us out from Poland, he did everything. He was extraordinary. We all considered him our father. All our weddings, he was always there.

RL: Describe your journey.

IW: Pardon.

RL: Describe your journey.

IW: The journey, the journey was like a journey on a boat. And ...

RL: You travelled from Katowice, to where, where was the first stop?

IW: From Katowice to Warsaw.

Tape 3: 2 hours 27 minutes 16 seconds

RL: By train?

IW: Yes. And from Warsaw by aeroplane to Gdansk, and from Gdansk we got the boat to here. And we arrived in 1947, just Shavuos. It was erev Shavuos when we arrived the same time.

RL: And where did you go to on arrival?

IW: To Yeshiva Etz Chaim on Thrawl Street in the East End. We were taken there. Just before Shabbos, it was Shabbos erev Shevuos. And the impression when we went out of the station and we saw tall policemen for the first time. Because at that time only tall policemen were allowed. And a great impression was made. And there was such freedom there, here in England.

The first Pesach, when we finished our Seder at 1 o'clock, so we went to see Tower Bridge in the East End. We were not afraid to go out. It didn't occur to you ... when I was still, when I became a chossen, and I lived in Stamford Hill, and I walked to Yeshiva three times. Friday night I went on the way there by bus, and then I walked back, in the morning I walked to daven there, and went back. I went at night, it never occurred to me to be afraid, and we lived in the house, in the flats, and later on, little by little it deteriorated, and that is how it is nowadays. Nowadays you are afraid to live anywhere. I mean, even in my street, where I live in Romiley Road, there I was once going to be attacked by four. And I gave such a shout as I never did in my life, and I was safe. I mean you are not safe anywhere nowadays, in your own home, in your own street. What happened?

There is only one answer, young people are unoccupied, purposeless life, and they have got nothing to do and they turn to violence. No Yiras Elokim, no afraid, because people know eventually they can get away from the police, but not from Hakodosh Boruch Hu, they think twice before they do something they ought not to do. That happened we find twice in history. That when Sora was taken to Avimelech, and she said that she was her brother and sister, and when he complained, what made you tell a lie. I said there is no "Yiras Elokim, anything can happen" And when the midwives were told to kill the boys, where there is no Yiros Elokim, they didn't do what Pharoah told them. And four words seemed to be superfluous. You know why they didn't, because they had Yiros Elokim, that is the only deterrent, that can stop all this what is going on nowadays in the world.

RL: Coming back to Etz Chaim, where were you living at that point?

IW: In the Yeshiva. Etz Chaim. Because I said in the beginning we didn't have a bathroom there, but later on we complained and they made two bathrooms. We used to

have to go to the public bath. And, the Yeshiva was a hotel, it was luxury, I mean to what we were used, proper meals, and everything, and spiritually, and ... the other way round also, it was quite good.

Tape 3: 2 hours and 31 minutes 28 seconds

RL: How many boys were at the Yeshiva?

IW: Well, there were different classes, different ... well about ... over 50, or something like this.

RL: And were they mainly refugee boys?

IW: You know, as I said, everything depends on mazal, there were certain Yeshivas, that ... even here, the Yeshiva, what is it called?

RL: Shaarei Torah.

IW: Shaarei Torah, and the one before, they have got a Kollel now from the famous Rabbi. What was it before?

So here also, this Etz Chaim always had to import Yeshiva bochurim. Only during the war they were more successful. I don't know whether to mention this one. Because some people just instead of the army became students there. Yes. So they were English born. Most of the boys were English born, we were the refugee boys there.

RL: So what percentage were English born when you were there?

IW: I think most of the English were there for evening classes, after school. And during the war they were full time there.

RL: And how long were you there after Yeshiva?

IW: In the Yeshiva, we were for three years there.

RL: And what did you think of England?

IW: Well, wonderful, as I said, a free country like this. Whenever we went out, you had everything, you could buy anything. People were generous. If you want shoes, go to the shop and get shoes and I mean, everything, when everything was rationed, even after the war, and you couldn't get certain things, and then all of a sudden, you go to the shop you will get it. People were very helpful. People were very good. I mean, I had no relatives or anything. I came penniless. If I look around at what my family have, my children, my grandchildren, great grandchildren. You see my family here kneine hora.

If somebody had come to me in Siberia and said that one day you will live to see that. I would have thought they were a meshuganer, it is a dream, how is that possible. Thank God, at every simcha I mention that one, how grateful and thankful I am to Hashem that something like this happened.

Tape 3: 2 hours and 34 minutes 25 seconds

It is only a pity that my parents couldn't have survived to live such nachas, or anything like this.

RL: Did you get to know families in London?

IW: Oh yes, yes ...

RL: Which families did you get to know?

IW: All kinds of families. In the East End, in the East End, first of all the East End was mainly occupied by Jewish people. I mean, the East End, after communism, in 1917, so a lot of refugees came from Russia and settled in the East End. All the factories were Jewish, I mean, in the ... the tailoring business was Jewish completely, in the ... we worked hard and anything like this. Jewellers, I mean now a lot is imported, but it used to be made by hand and everything like this. The East End was completely Jewish. Now if you go there you would think you were in Pakistan. Because all this was occupied by the Russians now, very few, only very few synagogues left. When we came, in every street there was a Synagogue, a chazzan, a Rav, and the famous Kosovitzky, with a choir. It was, life was, all the Chassidim were there in the East End, and little by little they moved, to Cazenove Road, Stamford Hill, Golders Green, Hendon, Edgware. You know ...

RL: Which street was the Yeshiva on?

IW: Throw Street ... T-H-R-O-W ...H-A-W ... I think ... Thrawl Street, ya. Off Brick Lane.

RL: Did you used to be in the Yeshiva for Shabbos?

IW: Yes.

RL: Yes. You were in Yeshiva the whole time?

IW: All the time.

RL: Did you ever go to eat with families? Did you ever come out of the Yeshiva?

IW: No, it is interesting, we didn't, no. Only time I went out, was in the Yeshiva already, I was already a chazzan in the Shul on Shabbos ... and the Gabbai ...

RL: How did that come about?

IW: The Gabbai came ... we came Shavuot, and before Yomim Noroyim before Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur, a Gabbai from Jubilee Street in the East End, came and said

Tape 3: 2 hours and 37 minutes 4 seconds

“We have got a marvellous chazzan who davens Mussaf and everything, but we need a Baal Shacharis, someone to daven Shacharis. Have you got any bochor who can do it?” I said “I can do it.” And I went on Saturday morning to ... it wasn't far, and I davened and they liked it, and they appointed me that I should be the chazzan for Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur, for Shacharis, it was my first £25 I had earned in 1947, it was something, it was a fortune at the time, or anything like this. But when I came to Shul in the morning to daven on Rosh Hashona, at the beginning there were about 14 people. And I thought to myself “Here I am going to be the chazzan, I am going to daven, on the solemn days”, I took it on, I took my brother along and a few more boys to help me you see ... and so on. But later on when I was occupied with my davening and I couldn't think about anything else, later on when I turned around to face the people for Tekias Shofar, the Shul was full. So, I realised, in the Talmud and the Gemorra it says that Tekias Shofar, we have got an hour before Mussaf, we used to have at Shacharis, but for a few reasons it was transferred to Mussaf now, and one of the reasons is, because,, because Hakodosh Boruch Hu's glory is more when it is done together with a lot of people, so, at this you got a lot of people for it.

RL: Which Shul was that?

IW: That was Jubilee Street.

RL: Who was the Rav there?

IW: Oh, I forgot his name, a very famous Rav, yes, I forgot his name. Almost every Shul had a Rav, the East End was the Jewish life.

RL: So did you continue to be chazzan at that Shul.

IW: Even after I left, I was occupied to be a chazzan there, and then I became ... I joined the shechita board, and I worked for 33 years at the shechita board. Then I became a headmaster at the Synagogue evening classes, and ... and that is how I ... little by little.

RL: First of all you said ... you were talking about evening classes, you said that you actually went to evening classes to learn English. Which evening classes did you go to?

IW: Where?

RL: Yes.

IW: I forgot the name of the street, it was special evening classes for refugees.

RL: And how long did you attend?

Tape 3: 2 hours and 39 minutes 44 seconds

IW: Oh, for quite a time. The first song was “Take up your troubles in your old kit bag (sang)”. We had a teacher, he was very, very good.

RL: And when did you start with the Shechita Board?

IW: As soon as I left the Yeshiva. First of all I worked together with my brother in jewellery, and then you see it wasn't enough for two, so I looked out for a job and started in the Shechita Board. I was in charge of kashrus and other things and I worked for 33 years there.

RL: What kind of work ...

IW: ... and that was also ... pardon?

RL: I was going to say, what kind of work were you doing?

IW: Well, to look after the seals, to look after the drivers, all things ...

RL: So did you have to travel around?

IW: I used to travel around with the Rabbonim there, I didn't travel around, no ... I made the accounts for the, I mean we used to have when we started, I am not talking about the Kedasia, when we started, we used to have about 14 wholesalers there, and in the ... in every street we had small shops selling kosher chickens and so on, and ... and ... Harley Street, no, no, I have forgotten the name of the street. And they used to phone up, and when on the phone “What would you like?” “Half a chicken, a few giblets”, and they were served, and now, even in Stamford Hill there isn't even one job under the Beth Din, it is all Kedasia, all very frum, the frummet, like here Machzikei Hadass, you have got this one. Because most of the people went to Yeshivas and Kolelim and schools, and all these were frum people, and frum people can all grow large families, and everything like this.

RL: So the Shechita Board, this was Beth Din, ...

IW: Yes, yes, yes ... Like here you have got the Shechita Board of the Beth Din.

RL: So was your duties more office duties?

IW: It was in the main office, I used to take the seals, and then I had to make an account, how many were done today, and to see the treifas were sold to non Jewish people, all kinds of things that were necessary to do. Go and collect the money from various wholesalers, you know, whatever was needed to do. I worked very, very hard, I used to go out in the morning, and afterwards to evening classes, Sunday teaching, private pupils, and everything like this. But thank God I have got something to see for

Tape 3: 2 hours and 43 minutes 19 seconds

my work, but as I said, from nothing, no help. And the Polish people who were in Russia during the war didn't get anything, those who were in Poland itself, in the concentration camps, anything like this, they got some compensation, no, we didn't get anything.

RL: So when you started working, where were you living then? When you left the Yeshiva.

IW: I lived with a family, in Hessel Street, that was the street, you get most of the butchers there, Hessel Street, and you see, it was people, the Jewish from people worked very, very hard. For instance in all these factories where they were employed so when it came the short days and they wanted to go early on ... and work Saturday night for it or Sunday, they would make it up, anything like this, so I lived with this family, and I stayed there, and I paid, and they looked after me.

RL: What was there name?

IW: Do I remember? Oh, different people ... one of my friends Reverend Balinov, treated me like the child next door. People were very good, friendly, helpful, I didn't know all these United Synagogues pieces then, I used to go there with a tailor Come now and I will help you ... little by little ... and I was always willing to learn from everybody ... so little by little ...

RL: What was he teaching you?

IW: Uhu?

RL: What was the tailor teaching you?

IW: Because in United Synagogue they sing different pieces, you know, when you take out Sefer Torah, and you put back Sefer Torah, Ain komaicho and Uvenucho Yomar and different tunes and so on. I mean I knew the nusach, he davened nicely, he had a nice voice, and everything like this. I learnt all this.

RL: So whilst you were working at the Shechita Board, were you still acting as chazzan?

IW: Yes, of course. Not only there in the East End. I was a chazzan in a lot of places, afterwards, part time.

RL: Which places?

IW: I was in Ainsworth Road, that is in Hackney, with Dayan Fischer, zecher livrocha, and I can't remember the other places actually, he now lives here the Rabbi, and his son became the Golders Green Rabbi, I don't remember, my wife will remember. Yes.

Tape 3: 2 hours 46 minutes 18 seconds

RL: So was it just Shabbos mornings that you ...?

IW: Only Shabbos mornings.

RL: Shabbos mornings ...

IW: Except duties as well sometimes, you to go to a l'voya or a metzeyva, when I could so I went, but it wasn't such a well paid job, but you had to combine.

RL: You mentioned having private pupils ...

IW: Yes ... I still have ...

RL: So what ...?

IW: To teach Bar Mitzvahs ... to lehn ... and to do a drosha, and all these things. I have got so many Boruch Hashem, I came here, once when one of my granddaughters was born here, and they mad a Kiddush, and one boy came to me and he said to me "You taught me how to speak", because when I teach a boy to say a drosha, some of the people can understand ... not just ... you know. It gives me a lot of pleasure all this.

RL: And did you say you used to teach as well, was it in cheder?

IW: Well in cheder I was a headmaster/teacher. But in this private, when I came home from cheder, I will tell you what, nothing was too hard, or too difficult for me, when I took over one place and I developed it, and I needed more teachers, so it was outside Woolwich, so I asked one of the neighbours daughters you know, to come, and they said, "Well if you take me by taxi there and back, then we'll come", but when I went I used to take a bus to the station, and from the station a train, and from the train I walked a little bit. So I went to the secretary and I said "By all means I will pay, get it", but for myself I didn't think it was ... I used to come at 8 o'clock home, 7 o'clock I started, by the time I davened, at the Shechita Board, every day 8 o'clock home, after teaching.

RL: So you would go from the Shechita Board to ... ?

IW: Teaching.

RL: Where were you teaching?

IW: Afterwards I taught in Stamford Hill, but at the beginning, for five years, I was in Woolwich, a headmaster/teacher.

RL: In the cheder. Yes.

Tape 3: 2 hours 48 minutes 49 seconds

IW: Under the London Board of Jewish Education.

RL: How many nights a week?

IW: Pardon?

RL: How many nights a week?

IW: Three times, two evenings and Sunday morning.

RL: Did you do that from ...? When did you start doing that?

IW: When I was occupied as a, at the Shechita Board, and also as a Chazzan, specially after you got married, you needed more money, and anything like this, so to augment my income I had another job, another job, another job ...

RL: How did you meet your wife?

IW: Well, I was a chazzan in the Shul. And my Rav was Dayan Braceiner, and Mrs Braceiner knew my wife. And one day I was invited to a place and I met my wife. And that is where we met, we walked and walked for hours and talked, and eventually we got married. And ...

RL: Where was she from?

IW: She was born in Belgium, yes. But her parents came from Poland originally.

RL: And did she have family here?

IW: She had a mother here still. She told you about her father, I think, when he fell into the water, while he escaped.

RL: Just repeat it for us again. What happened?

IW: When they escaped from Belgium and they had to go on a ship and anything like this, he slipped, and he fell into the water. They only found him a few years afterwards in France, buried among other people and he managed, because he had a kapel and other things on him and so on, and he buried him.

And the mother came here, and her older sister, and one sister also was in Eretz Yisroel. So, her sister was already married when I got married, her older sister. And the other sister was in Eretz Yisroel already.

RL: Where did you marry?

Tape 3: 2 hours 51 minutes 9 seconds

IW: We married in Stamford Hill Beis Hamedrash that is the famous Rav Rabinov was there.

RL: And what was the year?

IW: Pardon?

RL: What year?

IW: What year ... well ... we celebrated, about two years ago fifty years. My wife can give you little details like this. She has got a good memory..

RL: This film is about to end, so we will stop there.

Tape 3: 2 hours 51 minutes 46 seconds

TAPE 4

Tape 4: 2 hours 51 minutes 54 seconds

RL: This is the interview with Izak Wiesenfeld and it is tape 4.

So I was just asking you when you got married.

IW: Well, in 1952 on the 14th of December.

RL: Where did you marry?

IW: The street is called Grove Lane, it used to be called Grove Lane. And Stamford Hill Beis Hamedresh.

RL: Who was the Rav?

IW: Rabbi Rabinov, zecher tzakik livrocha.

RL: And who were your unterfuhrers?

IW: I don't think I remember.

RL: What did you have, you know, for the wedding? What kind of a wedding was it?

IW: It was a proper wedding. Because from my wife's side, my mother was there, and her mishpocha, it was a proper wedding, but a small wedding, not like weddings nowadays.

RL: What did you have?

IW: A proper dinner. Everything, yes ... and, speeches, music, everything.

Tape 4: 2 hours and 53 minutes 10 seconds

RL: Where did you go to live?

IW: We lived in, I went to live with my mother in law, in the flats, where they lived, because she was on her own, and my sister in law was also living there, and later on we bought a house, in Holmleigh Road.

RL: So where was your mother in law living?

IW: In, in ... in the flats, in Seven Sisters Road ... flats.

RL: Seven Sisters Road?

IW: Yes ... Council flats.

RL: How long were you there?

IW: A few years. I don't know exactly.

RL: And is that when you took on your extra job in the evening at cheder, was that when you started that, once you were married, or were you already doing that?

IW: I was already doing that.

RL: You were already doing that, yes.

IW: I was already doing that. I was already teaching and everything, yes.

RL: And then on Shabbos you were busy ... so which different Shuls did you act as chazzan.

IW: Well, as I explained, my first one was in the East End. What was called the street now, near New Road, Weincourt Synagogue. And then Ainsworth Road, Hackney. And then the Shul was called Rotzon Tov, I can't remember the street exactly where it was. Again it is also part, between Stamford Hill and the East End. And also afterwards in Spring Road, where Dayan Bukovitzky was there.

RL: Was this every Shabbos?

IW: That was for the Yomim Noroyim, that was only for the Yomim Noroyim for a few years. And now I am still part time in Egerton Road, Synagogue, part time, in United synagogue, reader and Rabbi, giving shiurim, leining, you know and so on ...

RL: Did you ever take smicha?

Tape 4: 2 hours and 55 minutes 56 seconds

IW: No, no I didn't take smicha. I was too occupied with other things.

RL: Did you act as the minister of that Shul?

IW: Yes, I did, part time minister of that Shul.

RL: When did you start that particular job?

IW: When, the Rav went away from there, I forgot his name, he now lives in Manchester actually. This Rav, my wife ... I don't know ... a few years ago, five, six years ago.

RL: You say after a few years you bought your own house?

IW: Of course, when we bought our own house, we let three rooms first on top, then two rooms, then one room, because we didn't, we never dreamt of getting help, or asking anybody to help or anything like this. My wife has been working, I have been working, or even now, and so on, that is how we managed to have such lovely families, such wonderful children and grandchildren.

RL: What work was your wife doing?

IW: She is still doing. Office work. At first she used to work in Hatton Garden, and now she is still working for Chinuch Atzmai, that is the famous Jewish school in Eretz Yisroel that has got thousands of pupils.

RL: She does office work there, is that it? Yes ... does she work there all throughout?

IW: She works there, she takes home work ... she is in charge of all this.

RL: And what children do you have?

IW: What?

RL: What children ... which children ... name them.

IW: The first one of course is the older one, is Yaakov Tzvi, he is a surveyer as I said before. And then there is Moshe, he is Boruch Hashem doing quite well, he is a bit in insurance, a bit in buildings. And then we have got Devorah Basya here, Deborah, you know and Mechel. And then we have got my youngest, that is Channah Rosa, and she has got a husband, he is an accountant.

RL: Which schools did they attend? The children.

Tape 4: 2 hours and 58 minutes 0 seconds

IW: First of all they attended Avigdor School Lordship Road, it was under Doctor Schonfeld. And then, then the boys went to the Hasmonean, that is in Hendon. I will have to ask Debbie, to somewhere local, the Jewish schools.

RL: After school. When they finished school, what did they go on to do?

IW: They had homework; they had other things to do.

RL: I mean when they had finished school completely.

IW: When they finished school they worked, they worked in offices. Debbie worked in a travelling office, and the ... and, the boys went to Yeshiva of course, in Gateshead, and they worked.

RL: Where you were living, Holmleigh Road, what area of London is that?

IW: That is part of Stamford Hill.

RL: And has Stamford Hill changed over the years?

IW: And how!

RL: How was it when you first ...?

IW: When we came you could hardly see people with shtreimelech and something like that, and bekkishers. Now you have so many shteibelech, so many Chassidim, so many Chassidishe families, it is like a Jewish part completely.

RL: When did it begin to change? How did that come about?

IW: When we refugees came over to England, little by little we developed this huge community. As I said at first in the East End, and from the East End to Cazenove Road, and from Cazenove Road to Stamford Hill, and from Stamford Hill to Golders Green, Hendon, Edgware, and now everywhere. Like here you see, in Manchester you have got the same. You have got Machzikei Hadass, and you have got the other Shuls, and you have got the Gerer Shteibel and you have got the Belzer Shteibel, and you have got all kind of there, the square ... all kind of.

RL: When you first went to Stamford Hill, what was there then? In terms of Shuls and Shteibels?

IW: First it was proper synagogues, you know like the United ... there were a few under Federation, but also proper Shuls, not Shteiblechs, there were only a few, one or two ... but now ... there are so many Yeshivas, so many Kollelim, so many Shteiblach, even

Tape 4: 3 hours and 2 minutes 16 seconds

some Satmar for instance, you have got three already, big places, and Belz, they have also got three. Kneine Hora their families are growing and growing and growing. There is hardly a street in Stamford Hill where you haven't got a view, a Yeshiva or a Kollel or a Beis Hamedrash.

RL: Is it mainly Chassidish?

IW: Yes, mainly Chassidish. United there is very little now. Yes, here in Stamford Hill. And Beis Din also, all these shops and butchers, very few now. It is all by Kedasia, the Chassidim taking over now, the milk, everything ...

RL: Are the Chassidim mainly from families who came over after the war?

IW: All of them. All of them.

RL: Do you still follow Chassidish minhogim and Chassidish customs? Or do you ...

IW: Myself? Well, I am the type of a person that wherever I go I can do what they do. Even the way of davening. If I am in a Chassidish Shteibel I daven like a Chossid, if I am in a United, I daven like a United. Teaching as well, when I teach Bar Mitzvahs, if it is ... if it is a German one I teach the Yekkish way, if it is ...

RL: At home what do you follow?

IW: Normal life according to the Shulchan Aruch. Life based on Torah values and principals. My wife said something, “My husband without a beard,” before I had a beard, “is more frum than you with a beard.”

RL: Have you, do you wear a shtreimel at all?

IW: No, never.

RL: Do you follow any particular Rebbe?

IW: No, I follow Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Yes.

RL: In terms of organisations, do you belong to any other committees or organisations?

IW: Well, that is ... to the ... to the ... what do you call it, to the Kedassia. That is an organisation. To the frumest.

RL: You have never thought of, or you have never wanted to return to see ...

IW: To Poland?

Tape 4: 3 hours and 5 minutes 30 seconds

RL: To your home ...

IW: Never. There is nothing to return to. As I explained to you. There is nothing there. There is nothing. I have got a little bit of pleasure, that now the char woman, who comes to wash our toilets and so on, they are all Polish, and still they have to come to us, and there are tons of them, they all clean our houses and do the washing and everything.

RL: Do you remember Polish?

IW: Some people, when they have to contact them, they contact me to interpret a little bit. I wouldn't say I know it perfect, but they can understand me at least properly.

RL: How do you feel towards Israel?

IW: Pardon?

RL: How do you feel towards Israel?

IW: Towards Israel ... it all depends ... Israel like a country, I have got quite a few of my mishpocha there who haven't got anything like this. I mean a frum person always feels good towards Eretz Yisroel, not particularly towards Israel, you know what I mean. We help organisations in Israel, Yeshivas in Israel, Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes, everyone ... always ... we do ...

RL: When did you first visit Israel?

IW: Well ... I will tell you something, in ... I don't know exactly, my wife will remember. I told you, I was a teacher and a headmaster, so we went, immediately after Israel became Israel, a year later or something like this, so we went about 29 teachers, or 30 teachers, to Israel, you know for a visit, for about four weeks. And when we came there, we were taken to different places, and we were staying in different hotels, one hotel was very luxurious, and I wasn't there, and they said, "Well, if you come, and if you conduct there the Shabbos Tisch, and everything, and we will take you here." And I went there, and there were all Chassidim sitting there on Friday night, by themselves, but when we started to sing zemiros and other things all the people came round there. And wherever we went, I was the interpreter, in Ivrit also, because none of them, those teachers, took any evening classes, so they couldn't, I could understand many tongues, when they welcomed us, Boruch Haba and so on. It was very pleasant, very good.

RL: How did you feel being in Israel?

IW: Well, at that time, Israel ... I wish it was like that now. You had no fear, immediately you were in Israel ... you could go wherever you liked, you were free, you weren't afraid of anything, it was a mechaya.

Tape 4: 3 hours and 9 minutes 1 seconds

And the second time when I went, and I had backache and I used to wear a corset, and my wife was afraid. How will you climb? How will you do this? And so on. And when I started there to climb, and I started to enjoy myself, I came home cured, without all this.

RL: Could you speak Ivrit?

IW: Yes, I wouldn't say I could speak fluently, like a ... like somebody born there or something like this. But I could always ... any person who learned in Yeshiva for years, and knows the Hebrew language with a bit of ... he can explain himself, I can ... as it happens, two years ago, I went to my nieces Bar Mitzvah there, and she asked me "Please speak in Ivrit". It was my first speech in Ivrit, I made there, and they said wonderful.

RL: Which of you ...

IW: Of course, when I do this I prepare ... yeah ...

RL: Which of your family went to live in Israel?

IW: That is my sisters from Gateshead, they are mostly there ... my other sister is also there. In ... the older sister, I told you, she is there, and the ... her three children are

there in Eretz Yisroel, and I have got ... let me see ... I have got grandchildren there, and Yeshiva bochurim, and Rabbonim, and ... quite a few.

RL: What happened with your younger sister? Where did she go?

IW: My older sister?

RL: Was that your older sister? Who went to Israel? Was that your older one or your ... ?

IW: The oldest one.

RL: The older one, yes. And the younger one?

IW: The younger one is still in Gateshead.

RL: She is still in Gateshead.

IW: In Gateshead ... and she looks after these people financially and everything like this.

RL: And your brother?

Tape 4: 3 hours and 11 minutes 16 seconds

IW: My brother is now retired. He lives in Hendon. He has also got family there. His grandchildren as well. And his grandchildren are learning, are studying there.

RL: What did your brother do for a living? What did he go into?

IW: Well, he was producing jewellery. Artificial jewellery. At the beginning we were together ...

RL: And he stayed in that trade.

IW: He stayed in it until he retired.

RL: And he lives in London.

IW: He lives in Hendon.

RL: Who did your sister in Gateshead marry?

IW: She married a ... of course an ex refugee as well. And he was the only butcher in Gateshead. At the time, and people thought he was making a fortune, he has got the

monopoly, but when he was ill, and my sister went into the business and she realised how little came in. And she started to buy little small properties, and that is how he looks after the families who study in Israel.

RL: What is her married name?

IW: Her married name is ... ohhh ... in a minute I will remember. Leitner, Yona Leitner was his name. Everybody knew him and everybody liked him.

RL: So did she live there from marriage?

IW: Yes.

RL: Where did she marry?

IW: She got married in London. Yes. Then she moved to Gateshead.

RL: And your other sister, your older sister, where did she marry?

IW: Well my other sister, my older sister, unfortunately is not, didn't stay like we frum and anything like this, and of course her husband wasn't like this, and she has got also, she has got children, but a different class.

RL: She married already ...

Tape 4: 3 hours and 13 minutes 33 seconds

IW: Yes, yes ... Zionist ... you know ...

RL: So did she emigrate there from?

IW: Poland.

RL: From Poland to Israel?

IW: Yes, later on.

RL: How do you feel towards Germany?

IW: Well, you see, a frum Jew is like the Amalakites. It is not only you remember what they did, but, al tishkach, you mustn't forget. You can't forget a thing like this, what they did. Of course it wasn't just killing a person, but it was the way they have done all this before they made, they tortured the people, something had never happened before like this. How can you feel? How can you feel? Unfortunately some people compare the Israelis to the Germans, what they do ... but ... in Israel whatever they do is

for defence, if they are not attacked they are happy to be at peace or anything like this. that is how it is.

RL: How would you describe yourself in terms of ... first of all in terms of nationality?

IW: I am British now. And very happy to be. To be British, I mean it is a lovely country. All these Jewish people, all these from people get supported and everything like this, it is marvellous. I mean it's British and of course I'm mostly am a Yid and that is the most important, yes.

RL: How at home do you feel here?

IW: How what?

RL: How at home do you feel here?

IW: Very good. Very good. And even in Stamford Hill, a lot of people ask "Why don't you move? To where the children are". We have only got one daughter in Stamford Hill. We are at home, it is homely, we have got such lovely neighbours, and everything like this, I mean my whole life was in Stamford Hill, I mean all ... everything that I did develop there, we feel very homely.

RL: Have you come across anti-Semitism there, in this country?

Tape 4: 3 hours and 16 minutes 25 seconds

IW: It is a well known fact, I mean, it is everywhere. In some places it is less, in some places more, as I said to you, you are not safe anywhere. Golders Green, Hendon, everywhere. We had one Reverend, I forgot his name, and he lived all the time in Stamford Hill, and he remarried after his wife was niftar, and the first Shabbos he was there, in Golders Green, he was attacked, you know, it is just degrees. I don't have to tell you, you know what is going on nowadays, you are not safe anywhere. In comparison with us, when we came over here, a free country, when I came with my sister. You went out, the paper is there, you pay, you take your paper. The milk, you left it outside, you didn't care, nobody would take it, but nowadays you have to put a few locks on the door, you have got alarms, all kinds of things and so on.

RL: Did you ever talk to your children about your background and your experiences?

IW: A little, but not much, like I have told you.

RL: Did they show an interest?

IW: Yes ... but you know nowadays, lot of you don't want to hear what was going on in the trouble ... when my Moishe's son, I was telling something like this, about how life was difficult, and he said "If you had a difficult life we have a difficult life."

Thank God, you know, it is very rare we have such a family, kneine hora we have large families everywhere. And, all wonderful, all ...

RL: Did your children belong to any clubs or ... groups, youth groups, in Stamford Hill? Was there anything organised?

IW: I don't think much, no, not in Stamford Hill. Moshe was once a bit with Mizrachi, but nothing much.

RL: Would you manage to go away on holidays at all?

IW: We used to go a little bit here and there on holidays, but now I don't go, it is very rare I go, because of my hearing, even the weddings, it is so difficult and unpleasant to sit opposite people who talk nicely and clearly and loudly, you can understand, and otherwise ... children ... thank God for that. The doctor said to me "What do you expect at your age?" "You are wonderful", he says, "so active".

RL: Do you think that your experiences have affected you in any way?

IW: Oh, definitely. It gave me what you call bituchon, trust, in Hakodosh Boruch Hu. You see bituchon is something like an insurance policy, the higher the premium the more secure you feel, definitely, when I see things, that people describe as natural, or coincidence, I see the Yad Hashem in everything, and I show it to my wife many

Tape 4: 3 hours and 20 minutes 6 seconds

times, when it comes now, when I need lifts, or anything like this, it is just people who come to me, and often people don't, people try ... and very often I just go out, and I find it difficult to walk, and someone stops and says "Where are you going?" I believe everything is from Hashem. I see it in every little thing that happened in my life from the beginning to the end, that it is not just a coincidence, not just a ... not just something that happened, and even when I speak, I always mention this, and something like this, you know they have got now also ... "Start the day the Torah way", you have got it here, I spoke there as well, once, or twice, I always mention this.

One more thing that I saw, is that everything that seemed a tragedy, led to something good. Had we become Russian citizens who knows what would have happened to us, we would have been deported, we would have been in Poland, same fate would have happened.

As it happened, when we were in Yeshiva, one of the Rebbes, Rebbe Bendes, he was not only a great speaker, he was a maggid in the Shul as well, and ... the Russians, after the

war, they said “They deserve a medal”. Hadn’t they deported us to Siberia, we would have remained in Poland and we would have had the same fate as the other Jewish people. And he said “You find exactly something similar ...” Shall I go on?

RL: Yes ...

IW: It says in the Torah that the Moabites and the Ammonites mustn’t come in contact with Jewish people, we mustn’t have anything to do with them and so on, and the Torah gives us two reasons. One, because when the Jewish people came out from Egypt they didn’t even offer water to them to help them. And the second was because they hired Bilam to give a curse, so they complained bitterly, “We should be punished so severely? We didn’t have enough bread and water to offer to so many people.”

“Ah Bilam we owe you. We are ready to give whatever you wanted. Good we hired you to give a curse?”

“In the end of course he gave us a blessing.”

“You hired him to give a blessing? You hired him to curse the Jewish people, Hashem made you do this. When they reported us. They didn’t mean to save us. They starved us and ...” It so happened that through this Hashem made that some Jewish people should be saved, they don’t deserve any medal, any credit.

RL: Were you left with any physical after effects from your experience? You know health wise? Did it affect your health in any way?

IW: Oh, only for the good. For helping in the house, and enjoying everything, what you have and what you develop, from little, from gurnish, from nothing.

RL: So you had no health problems as a result?

Tape 4: 3 hours and 23 minutes 53 seconds

IW: Nothing at all. Because what to some people may be problems, to me, as I explained to you was no problem, hardship or anything like this.

RL: Were you in touch with any refugee organisation in this country.

IW: No, no organisations. Only friends who went through the same thing as this.

RL: Did you have much contact with English born people?

IW: Well, in Yeshiva Etz Chaim, as I explained to you, there were English boys who were studying there, some during the day and some in the evening, with them I was quite in touch, they helped me with English as well, in the beginning, you know ...

RL: Did you ever speak to them about your experiences? Did anybody ever talk about things.

IW: Oh yes, always, always something comes out from the past.

RL: When did you become a British citizen?

IW: A British citizen, well, I can't remember the year, I was already married, and ... you remember, I made myself younger by four years, but when it came to retirement, it would mean that I get my pension four years later, and then I applied, and I had to prove and anything like this and so on, and everything worked out eventually.

RL: So you are back to your right age?

IW: Yes.

RL: So, I suppose, finally, is there anything that you would like to add, that we might not have touched on? We haven't spoken about grandchildren or where they are, or you know, your families, what they have ...

IW: Well, they are all wonderful, they are all married, and have all got lovely partners, everything, Boruch Hashem, Thank God. I mean, in this part, in this case, I always admire more people, who do work, plus Torah, plus Torah, and occupation together, you know what I mean. And Boruch Hashem, all my children, as you can see, are all doing this, and my grandchildren are also the same way. So it gives me great pleasure.

RL: What are your sons in laws doing?

IW: They are all, well you can see my sons in law, one is Mechel here.

RL: What does he do?

Tape 4: 3 hours and 27 minutes 2 seconds

IW: He is a dentist. You know he is a dentist here. And he is a Sofer, he wrote a Sefer Torah and everything like this. And the other one is an accountant, but they all, you know, before and afterwards they learn, whenever they can, and they bring up their children as Jewish orthodox children should be brought up, and it gives great pleasure to me. What is life? If a person has got money and property he takes nothing with him when he leaves. But when he has got, kneine hora, when you leave families like this, children who carry on the work of the parents, this is wonderful, there can't be anything better. The nachas that you get from children, grandchildren, great grandchildren thank God.

RL: Do you have great grandchildren?

IW: Kneine Hora, plenty, thank you.

RL: Where are they living?

IW: In different places. I have got some here as well. One of my granddaughters lives here and she has got four grandchildren, and I have got some other ones in London, who married also lovely boys, and now I have got great grandchildren.

RL: Did your children all stay in England?

IW: Yes, all of them, except one granddaughter is in Israel, Moshes. I don't know, eventually she will also probably come over here.

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

IW: Pardon?

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

IW: To?

RL: To end ... to finish ... is there a message you would like to finish with?

IW: To the children.

RL: Yes.

IW: Well, we are all very proud of them, and the way they are such lovely children, and grandchildren, be on the increase, and Hakodosh Boruch Hu should give them what they need, because they richly deserve it.

Tape 4: 3 hours and 29 minutes 27 seconds

RL: Thank you very much.

IW: Right.

RL: Thank you.

Photographs

IW: This is a photograph of myself and my fiancée, and it was taken in London in 1952, our engagement photo.

RL: And the names?

IW: Her name is Henrietta. My name is Yitzchok.

RL: Surnames?

IW: Pardon?

RL: Surnames?

IW: Wiesenfeld and Goldfischer.

That is my wife and my two daughters, Debbie and Roslyn, approximately taken in 196
...

RL: nine ... And the place?

IW: Outside the house.

RL: In?

IW: I think it is I can't really

RL: The town?

IW: London.

This is a wedding photo of my daughter Debbie. From left to right is my son, Moshe, Roslyn my daughter, Gabby and Yankie, taken 4 September 1984 in London.

RL: This was taken at the Hachnosas of the Sefer Torah in honour of our parents, zichron livrocha, in 2004, August, in London, from left to right is my brother Chaim, my son in law Mechel, and myself, Izak Wiesenfeld.

Tape 4: 3 hours and 26 minutes 4 seconds

This was taken at my daughter Debbie's wedding in 1984 in London, from left to right, my sisters Manya and Genia. My daughter Debbie, my sister's in law Fayga and Eva.

This was taken in Belgium in 1999, front row from left to right, my son in law Jonathan Teller, myself Izak, my son in law Mechel Haffner, back row from left to right, is my son Moshe, my nephew Kuki Wiesenfeld and my brother Chaim.

This was taken at our Golden Wedding, in December 2002 in London. It shows myself and my wife, Izak and Hetty Wiesenfeld, with our family tree above us.

This was taken at our granddaughter Michal's wedding in November 2000. It shows the Wiesenfeld family with our children, grandchildren and our great grandchildren.

RL: Where was it taken?

IW: In London.

Tape 4: 3 hours and 33 minutes 4 seconds

END OF INTERVIEW