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# John Rinde and Irene Rinde oral history interview by Chris Patti, December 4, 2009

John J. Rinde (Interviewee)

Chris J. Patti (Interviewer)

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**Christopher Patti:** All right, Dr. Rinde, thank you so much for being willing to be interviewed today; we really appreciate it. First, can I ask you to say your full name and to spell it?

**John Rinde:** It's John, J-o-h-n, middle initial J., and last name is Rinde, R-i-n-d-e.

CP: Could you tell us your middle name and spell that for us?

JR: It's French. It's J-a-c-q-u-e-s. Jacques.

CP: Thank you.

JR: You know, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, you know? Jacques.

CP: Was that your complete name at birth?

JR: No.

CP: Can you tell me your complete name at birth and spell that as well?

JR: Well, the—my first name in Poland, the Polish name was Ya'kob, which stands for the English, Jacob. And that was the only name I made them—and the Hebrew name, but the last name was the same.

CP: Have you ever gone by any other names, during the wartime, before, or after?

JR: Yes. During the war, when we were masquerading as Catholics, our last name was changed to Kroczykowski.

CP: Could you please spell that for us?

JR: K-r-o-c-z-y-k-o-w-s-k-i. And my first name became the Polish equivalent of John, which is Janek or Jan, you know, and after the war I just kept the first name. And then the middle name was added when lived in France, (laughs) and that's how it was.

CP: Could you spell Janek for us?

JR: Yeah. J-a-n-e-k.

CP: Thanks. What is your date of birth?

JR: January 3, 1935.

CP: And what is your current age at the moment?

JR: Well, I am almost seventy-five.

CP: What was the city and country that you were born in?

JR: Przemysl, Poland.

CP: Could you spell Przemysl for us?

JR: P-r-z-e-m-y-s-l.

CP: Okay, now I would like to talk about your family. Would you just describe your family for me?

JR: Yes, our family was very well-to-do in Poland. The family owned the second biggest toy factory in the country. Plus, they had bunch of other businesses that they were involved, you know. My father was one of seven children, he was the youngest of the seven, and they all had participated in the factory or had other independent businesses. One uncle was a physician. Another one was an engineer, he run the factory or was the

engineer in the factory; and other members, you know, that had the mills, wood mills, and they are making lumber—lumber mills.

And my grandfather had a huge wholesale business dealing in toys and also religious Catholic items, you know. They would be selling rosaries and crucifixes and all the holy pictures, which they sold to what I would say is the equivalent today to our flea market guys, you know. Every Sunday those guys would set up shop in front of churches and peddle that stuff. So, he was quite familiar with the—you know, with the Catholic acted and what they bought, and the names of all the religious items. Which (laughs) ended up being helpful later on in life. (laughs) He didn't know that at the time.

But he worked with his father, my grandfather, in the business, in addition to working in the factory. And, you know, my grand—my paternal grandparents were very, very religious, you know. My mother's family was not. But you know, we were, as I said, very wealthy and the help was very cheap, so when I was born I had a nanny. When my sister was born, she had a nanny. We never (laughs) saw our parents, except maybe at night, for dinner. (laughs) But during the day, we were being taken care of by the nannies. Things changed when the war broke out.

CP: Can you tell me your father and mother's names?

JR: Yes, my father's name is Maurice; actually that is the English equivalent, you know, of his Polish name. My mother's name was Stella.

CP: What was the Polish version of your father's name?

JR: They called him Mishek.

CP: Mishek?

JR: Mishek.

CP: And can you tell me your sister's name?

JR: Well, current name is Irene. Before the war it was Ruth.

CP: Um, do you remember the name of the toy factory? Did it have a name?

JR: Minerva.

CP: Minerva?

JR: (murmurs in agreement)

CP: And what was your—what did your mother do, most of the time when you—

JR: Had fun.

CP: Had fun?

(both laugh)

JR: (laughs)

CP: (laughs) Can you explain that for me?

JR: Well, you know, just think what did Jackie Kennedy do? Okay, all day long? You know, supervise the help and then go to the club—and they didn't play golf, in those days. They played bridge or other games, and shop and nothing. (laughs) You know, the wealthy rich, they didn't do much. The men worked and the women just had a good time.

CP: When you were younger, when you were at—you know, during that time, do you remember feeling like you were wealthy, or did you know you were wealthy? Or it was just normal?

JR: No. No. No, all I know is that I had all the toys I wanted. (laughs)

CP: Can you tell me about the city that you grew up in the area?

JR: Well, the city was in eastern Poland, about 100, 120 miles from the Russian border. And our town, I think, had a population of about 60,000, and they were maybe 40, 30, 40 percent Jews, you know, Jewish. They were also a lot of Ukrainians, and the Ukrainians hated the Poles—and hated the Jews—because they wanted that part of Poland to be annexed to the Ukraine, you know. So, there was there was some tension, and the Ukrainians, as it turned out, were the worst anti-Semites of the whole lot. And if you know Polish history, Poland was dismembered and partitioned between multiple countries throughout its history. At one time, Poland was strong and invaded as far as Kiev, but that was rare.

Anyway, during World War I, you see, that part of Poland belonged to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. So, my father lived under Franz Joseph I, you see, and during World

War I they escaped to Vienna and that's where he learned German really well, you know—which, again, happened during the war.

CP: You mentioned that the Ukrainians were the most anti-Semitic.

JR: Virulent. Yes, they were.

CP: Do you have any examples of that, or memories of that?

JR: Well, not firsthand, but from what my parents were saying, yes.

CP: Could you tell me about some of those stories?

JR: Well, this became apparent, you know, during the early transition days. You see, when the war broke out in thirty-nine [1939], the Germans just walked right into Poland and the war was finished in about two weeks or so. And the secret Ribbentrop Pact, which was the pact between Stalin and Hitler to partition Poland, agreed that the boundary would be the River San, which run halfway through our town, from Przemysl. Luckily, we lived on the eastern side of that river. (laughs) So, anyway, because they moved so fast, and the—they were supposed to stop at the river, but they didn't; they kept on moving. And the Russians were slow moving up from the other end, so that we were briefly occupied by the Germans, right after the war broke out. And those guys were very well organized.

They had a list of people that they were looking for to arrest, you see, the permanent people in the city, in the—you know, the *intelligentsia*. And they came looking for my father. Luckily, he was trying to escape to Romania, because the belief in those days was that Hitler was really bad for men, but women and children he would leave alone. So, the men in the family started going towards Romania, and they reached the border and the Polish officers, who were also fleeing, got there first and they tell the Romanians, "Oh, these are Jews. Don't let them in." So, they didn't. (laughs) So, they turned around and came back. By the time they came back, the Germans had retreated to their side of the river and the Russians were coming in. My father at least escaped being arrested by Hitler right off the bat.

And there was a period of chaos, with no—when the Germans retreated and before the Russians came in. There was no authority, really. And that's when the Ukrainians tried to foment their own pogrom against the Jews. Luckily, the Jewish leadership contacted the Red Army and they came to the rescue. So, that did not occur.

So, anyway, the Russians came, and they didn't particularly love the Jews but they didn't particularly hate us either. They hated rich people. You see, under Stalin being rich was a crime, and owning means of production was a very serious crime. So, we were persecuted on that behalf, for that reason. They nationalized the factory. They grabbed

everything else they could and confiscated it, they quartered soldiers in our apartment, and finally, they kicked us out. They evicted us. Also—

CP: They evicted your family from where you were—

JR: Yeah, my parents, my sister and I, from our apartment. They just kicked us out. And also, everything was rationed. There was always a shortage of everything: food, clothing, shoes, you name it. So, you had to have rationing cards to buy food. You could, of course, buy stuff on the black market, but that was exorbitantly expensive. And the Russians said, "Everybody has to work. If you don't work, you don't need to eat. And, frankly, if you cannot find a job, we have lots of jobs in Siberia. We'll ship you there." (laughs). So, everybody made sure they had a job. But being a capitalist, you couldn't get a job because you didn't need it. So, that's when we moved to Lvov, you know, which is further east, closer to the Russian border: a bigger town, where we weren't so well known. And my father managed to get some kind of a menial job there, which made him a working-class person, hey. And we got our rationing cards and we lived there. And life went on.

CP: Before you—I'm very interested in talking about your life once you moved to Lvov. But before we go there, I was wondering, can you tell me, before the Soviets invaded, how was religion in your community at that time?

JR: Well, the majority of the Jews were very religious. As I said, my paternal grandparents were Orthodox, kept a kosher home. My mother tried to keep a kosher home, but she didn't come from such a religious family. So, the in-laws, my grandparents, didn't trust her. So, she said, "The heck with it. If you don't want to eat in my house, I won't keep kosher at all," (laughs) and that was the end of it. So, we were not kosher, okay. But the majority of the Jews were kosher. And they lived in, essentially, self-imposed ghettos, you know: just like blacks lived in Harlem in New York, Jews had their quarter.

And many of them sent their kids to the religious schools, the *cheders*, you know, where the language of instruction was Yiddish. And Yiddish was the language spoken at home, so many of them didn't speak Polish very well. They spoke Polish with a typical Jewish accent. Just like here, you know, blacks speak in their way. You don't have to see the color of their skin to know that they are black. The well-educated ones speak English well. The same thing was in Poland. The Jews who went to religious schools and Polish was the second language spoke Polish poorly. Luckily, my parents went to the Polish schools and they spoke Polish well. So that, again, was very helpful later on.

CP: That's very interesting. Do you have any memories of that time of just daily life, anything that comes to mind? Any scenes?

JR: No, not really. I just remember the nanny taking me to the park and playing, and occasionally I would go to Grandfather's store and pick up some toys. (laughs) And that's about it.

CP: Yeah?

JR: No, I—you know, in thirty-nine [1939], I was four and a half—

CP: Yeah.

JR: Just a good kid life.

CP: Yeah. But then, when the Soviets invaded, it seems like that radically changed your life, like—what was that like for you at that time?

JR: Well, the fact—the only thing was that we got rid of the nannies, you know, the parents took over our care, but otherwise, I don't think we felt any different. At least, I don't remember feeling any different. You know, we realized that the Russians were living in our apartment: instead of having whatever it was, five or six or seven rooms, we suddenly had half and then they were there, and then, finally, we had to move to a different town and a smaller place. You know, a more modest place. Yeah.

CP: Can you tell me about life once you moved into the—you said you moved to Lvov?

JR: Lvov. I don't believe that there was anything major; life went kind of (inaudible), you know, I think I went to school. I really don't remember. I know I had a tutor at one point, to teach me Hebrew—you know, private tutoring, both Polish and Hebrew language. But there was enough food to feed us, and we had enough clothing. We did not seem to lack for anything.

CP: And then things changed again, right, in the summer of 1941?

JR: Yes. In the summer of forty-one [1941], Hitler suddenly attacked Russia. Again, they were on the San, and we were maybe sixty miles, sixty to eighty miles, east of that. So, it was in one day or two we heard the firing in the streets, and the Germans came in. And shortly after they came in, they passed a decree that all the Jews over a certain age had to wear that armband with the Star of David on it. And being caught in the streets without it was an automatic death sentence. Okay? And one of my aunts was caught like that, you know, was outed, and was taken away never to be seen again.

You know, what I also didn't mention is that many Jews had a typical—besides not speaking Polish very well, had a typical Jewish physiognomy, you know: the curved nose, the curly hair, maybe swarthier skin. Oftentimes, you could tell that they were not Polish Catholics, you see. Not all of them, but many. So, those people couldn't, you know, pull the wool over people's eyes. But the others could, and the Germans certainly couldn't

tell who was who without asking you for an ID—which was another problem because in Poland, even before the war, everybody had to have an ID, which identified your religion on it, you know. So, it was your name, your address, when you were born, all the statistical stuff, plus your religion.

And when the Germans came, for the Catholics they exchanged those for the German ID, what they called a *Kennkarte*, which is a German name for—a word for ID card. So, anyway, if they—and you had to have a form of ID at all times. Here, if you don't drive a car you don't have to have an ID, but over there, you had to have an I.D. So anyway, when people tried to ignore this rule of wearing the armband, the local Polish population turned them in, you know. They were actually active collaborators, and the Ukrainians were the worst gang, in that respect.

CP: Do you know what kind of things they would do?

JR: Well, there would be the ones to try to ferret the Jews who didn't wear the armband; they could catch them and beat them for no good reason. You know, they would have work detail. The street was dirty; if a Jew was coming by, "Go clean it up." You know, this kind of stuff.

And I am not quite sure at what point, how many months after, a ghetto was formed, but it was. I just remember (laughs) vividly this one instance, you know, where they already had prisoners. And a truck, an open truck full of—I think it was Jewish prisoners or inmates, whatever they were called—stopped in front of our building. And they looked famished, so my father gave me a loaf of bread and says, "Go give it to them." So, I went there, and I came to the truck and gave it to them. Those guys grabbed it, like ripped it out of my hands; they started eating on it. One of the Gestapo guys grabbed me, slapped me in the face, threw me to the next one. I went in the circle three or four times and they said, "Get the hell out of here." (laughs) And I did. I was lucky they didn't throw me on the truck.

But at any rate, you know, things were getting bad. Finally, we were forced to move into the ghetto. And the ghetto was small, and there were lots of people who were forced into the ghetto. You know, not only from Lvov proper, but from the suburbs and neighboring area. They didn't have necessarily a ghetto in every single town. And we were made to share an apartment with another family. If I have it correct, there were just two rooms, two bedrooms and a common kitchen. So, we had one room and the other family had the other room, and we shared the kitchen.

And the Germans would—you know, they formed the *Judenräte*, which is a Jewish city hall, and they picked some prominent physicians and lawyers and so on to run it, to do their bidding. And they also made a Jewish police, you see, to do their dirty work. So, then when they needed people to for a work detail they would call the *Judenräte*, say, "Okay, send us hundred men tomorrow morning" to do whatever, and those guys would pick who would be sent for the work detail. And there was a tremendous shortage of food. People were starving and there was no money. And they would, you know, be marched out of the city—out of the ghetto, into the city to do whatever had to be done.

And they weren't allowed to walk on the sidewalks. They had to walk in the street with the cars and stuff like that. One day, one of the bigwig Germans was coming to visit the town, so they got the crew—it was in the fall—to sweep up the streets. Well, they swept the streets, but then came the wind and new leaves came down, and they had to go back and sweep all over again. (laughs) You know, it was just degrading, dirty work.

And they had factories that worked for the *Wehrmacht* to sew uniforms or make munitions or food processing, what have you. So, people who worked in these kind of allied industries that were supposedly helping the war effort had a special stamp on their ID cards, which made them somewhat exempt of being deported, at least early on. So, everybody was clamoring and trying to get one of those all-important stamps on their ID so they would be supposedly left alone. And the ghetto started to shrink, you see, and every so often they would have what they call "actions" or "round-ups," you know, where they would come and grab people and put them on trucks and take them out of town. And the Germans had very good propaganda, of course; they never told you that they were going to send you to a death camp. You were being "resettled," you were going to a "labor camp," and many people believed it. They kind of deluded themselves that that was true, even though there were many rumors that that wasn't the truth, that people were being sent to death.

My uncle the physician was a radiologist, and when the Germans came, Jewish physicians were not allowed to treat Catholic patients, only Jewish patients. Well, he was one of the few, or maybe the only radiologist in town, and he was a good one, and in those days, those were the guys who set broken limbs instead of orthopods, [orthopedics]. So, some Catholic fellow broke his, I don't know what, one limb, and went to him to be treated, and he treated him and set the cast and let him go. Instead of paying him his fee, he denounced him to the Germans and he got deported, him, his wife, and his daughter, never to be seen again. And he sent a card, managed to send a postcard while he was being shipped to the concentration camp to the family—I don't know if he sent it to my father or one of the brothers or whoever—telling him what's what. So, whereas much of the population of the ghetto allowed themselves to be deluded and believed that it was really what Hitler was saying, my mother didn't, and she was the driving force for us to do something about it.

In retrospect, you know, you have to say that the doubters or the deluders had some historical justification for the decisions, because after all, Jews were being chased out of places of all history. You know, they were expelled from Spain in 1492. They were expelled from other countries. They didn't achieve full citizenship in most countries until sometimes during the nineteenth century, and even until then they lived at the sufferance of the local ruler. And in Poland, even though the Jews before the war had supposedly full citizenship and there were some Jewish representative in the Sejm—which is the Polish Congress, you know, House of Representatives—there were quotas for admission to universities, I don't know, 5 or 10 percent. And many of the Jewish fellows had to go to study abroad—ironically enough, to Vienna. Both my uncles, the engineer and the doctor, studied their professions in Vienna.

So, anyway, there was enough circulating rumors that things really weren't as the propaganda tried to portray it. Things were really to going to be much, much more dire.

CP: Did your parents—do you remember your parents talking to you, at that time, about any of this, or did you have any idea of the kind of political situation that was—

JR: No.

CP: —was happening?

JR: No. All I know is that there was a shortage of food and that there were times when we're going hungry, and that delicacies—you know, chocolate or fruit—were hard to come by. You know, our apartment was near railroad tracks, and one day a transport of Italian troops stopped there. The Italians were nice guys, you know, so they gave us some stuff. But no, it was bad, and the Germans, you know, imposed taxes. They called them "contributions." And then, when the troops got stalled under Stalingrad because of the very severe winter and the troops were freezing, they had the Jews give up all their furs—fur coats, fur whatever, whatever fur clothing they had, they had to give it up to send to the troops in the field to keep them warm. (laughs)

CP: It must have been such a radical change, though, at that young age, to go from living this very lavish—

JR: Lap of luxury. (laughs)

CP: Then, all of a sudden, into a ghetto.

JR: Yeah, right. It wasn't fun.

CP: And then you said your mother was one of the people, because of your uncle, who picked up on the signs that this is worse than people thought.

JR: Well, there were lots—besides that, there were many rumors circulating. You know, word always filters somehow. So, again, I don't know exactly how long we stayed in the ghetto. At least six months, I would say. Okay? And, as I said, they were conducting those round-ups, you know, the "actions," they called them. So finally, my parents, especially my mother, decided to get false papers, you know, so our name was changed to Kroczykowski. As I said, everybody changed their first names, you see—and even though Rinde is not typically a Jewish name in this country, it certainly was in Poland. You know, names like Horowitz, Rubenstein, Rosenberg, Schwartz, Weiss, those were typical Jewish names in Poland.

So, you know, the names had to be changed. The first names had to be changed. The date of birth remained the same. The place of birth was also, I believe, changed to a city where we knew that the city hall was bombed so the records would not be available for easy

check. And, you know, that took money. I mean, the forger didn't work for free. My mother had to sell one of her diamond rings to pay for the papers, and we escaped from the ghetto. We were smuggled out with the help of a Catholic fellow—for money, again—who took—

CP: Do you remember his name?

JR: No.

CP: Do you remember that, when you were smuggled out?

JR: Yes, we were taken on the tramway—you know, the streetcar—and went through the gate, that's what I remember. And apparently, Irene and I were taken out first and placed with some Catholic families, and then the parents came. And then some complications with Irene; but anyway, to make a long story short, we all ended up together.

We stayed in Lvov for another week or so, hiding in a factory, a honey factory, and then went to Lublin. And again, we went with a guide, with somebody to help us through, and we came to Lublin. And again, Poland—at least at that time, maybe before—was a police state, so we had to go to the police station and register and say, "Here we are." So, they said, "Why you here?" You had to have a reason. So my father said, well, he saw an ad in the paper: some outfit was giving a bookkeeping course, and he wants to enroll in that. Well, all right, fine. So, they gave us a permit to stay in town. Well, you know, to this day, if you travel to Europe and go to a hotel, what's the first thing they ask you for? It's your passport, right? They don't ask you for your credit card; that comes next. First thing is your passport. In this country, they don't care; (laughs) all they want is the money. They are much more conscious about those things over there.

So, anyway, we got permission to stay, and then we had to get a place to live. Again, you couldn't just look in the paper to see if there is something for rent. They had an office that assigned you an apartment. So, my father went to the office and said, "Here I am. I have a wife and two kids. I want an apartment." They said, "Well, we don't have any, but we just emptied the Lublin ghetto, kicked all the Jews out; you can have one of their old places." He says, "Okay." So, we got an apartment. As I remember, it was just one room, you know, like a studio place, a dilapidated, old place. There was still many of the Jewish—in the streets, or in the basement, in the corridors, you know, religious items, like phylacteries and stuff like that. And my father says, "Don't pay attention to that." Anyway, so we moved in there, and that was that.

In the meantime, my uncle, my father's brother who was left in Przemysl—things started getting very bad for him. So, unannounced, he just got on the train and showed up at our apartment, so we took him in, and then his wife shows up. My paternal grandparents committed suicide. They had cyanide pills. And my maternal grandfather, he passed away before I was born; he died of lung cancer. And as we mentioned earlier, one of my mother's sisters was on the [M.S.] *Saint Louis* and the ship got turned back and we don't know what happened to her, but she didn't make it. And my mother's mother stayed in her

hometown of Tarnów with another of my mother's sisters and her child, and she ended up dying. I will tell you more about that later.

But anyway, my father's brother and wife showed up. So we were kind of tight in that one-room apartment for six people. So, my father started looking for a job and saw an ad in the paper where this outfit was looking for a German translator. Since he spoke German very well he applied, passed the test, and got the job. The company was making bouillon soups—you know, the Maggi cubes. And again, because everything was being rationed, they had to get the raw materials requisitioned from the German authorities, in return for which they had to produce and deliver to them so much finished product. So, whomever they hired had to deal with the Germans. So, my father was essentially going to the lion's den, you know, once a week or once every other week to negotiate with those guys for supplies.

So, anyways, that was that, and he found out—the factory was kind of on the outskirts of town. Not too far from the factory was a house, a free-standing house where a railroad widow was living and they kicked her out, and he wanted that house. So, he went to the housing department and asked for that house and says, "Oh, we can't give you that; we're keeping that for a German." But he managed to convince them to give it to him because it was near the factory and he needed to work for the army, you know, made a whole big story, so we got the building. And that was a nice, nice house. It was—there was a cellar; the main floor, which consisted of one big living and sleeping area; and a huge kitchen, you know, something that the Russians call an *izba*; and there was an attic with a ladder. So, the uncle and his wife, who did not have papers, would hide in the winter in the cellar and in the summer in the attic, and at night they would come down and sleep with the rest of us.

Well, the uncle had two daughters who were sent to a convent to hide—of course, they couldn't hide them, so the Mother Superior was willing to help. Unfortunately, they didn't fit, you know, they stood out. And what really clinched it was one day they were in the chapel for services, and the chapel consisted of two rows of pews, you know, against the wall—central corridor, aisle, and another set of pews. Well, it just so happened that one girl in front of them, who sat against the wall, had to go to the bathroom, so she stood up and the girls to her left stood up to let her out. They didn't know. People stand up, they stood up also. You weren't supposed to stand up during that part of the service. Everybody (laughs) laughed and it became embarrassing, and the next day Mother Superior says, "Hey, I cannot keep them there anymore. They have to leave." So, they showed up at our house. So, now we are hiding four people.

But just to show you how easy it is to give yourself away, the same thing happened to us in this country, you know. We know about the consequences. When we moved—both Toni and I were raised kind of—myself Conservative, and she more on the Orthodox side, never been to a Reform temple before. We moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, and we joined a Reform temple. And the first High Holiday services we were late. It was a two-story building, so we came in late, and together with all the latecomers were sent to the balcony. So, we sit in the balcony, and some ways through the service a bunch of people in the front stand up. Well, monkey-see, monkey-do so: we stand up, too. Everybody starts laughing. That was the choir. Who the hell ever heard of a choir in a Jewish temple?

(laughs) So, we were red (laughs) and a little bit embarrassed, but that was the end of it. But when you are trying to hide and pretend that you are something that you aren't, that's a serious problem.

So, anyway, we ended up with the two girls living in the house. Now, the house had no electricity, no running water, and no toilet. We have an outhouse and a well, you know, and the well was deep, and you didn't have a rope with a crank; it was poles. You had to push the pole down and then do that, and I was too weak to do that so my father was the only one who could bring water for the house, you know. And the people who were hiding never saw the light of day. I mean, on the darkest night when there was no stars and no moon, they would go out in the yard; we had a huge yard around us. But otherwise, they were in hiding. You know, they were using chamber pots, which we had to carry out to the outhouse. (laughs) It really wasn't very much fun. And during this time, until the war ended, at times we were hiding as many as six or eight other relatives—you know, transiently, because they were trying to find a place to go and we had the safe house.

So, the problem of food was a serious one. I mean, we only had ration cards for four people legally, and we had to feed eight, ten, twelve. So, we had to buy stuff on the black market, and again, my father was a wheeler-dealer. You know, a guy would come to him and says, "Hey, Mr. Kroczykowski, I have a hundred kilos of potatoes that I will let you have real cheap." "What will I do with a hundred kilos of potatoes? There are only four of us." He said, "Well, it's a good price. Believe me, take it." He says, "Okay, I'll do you a favor. Send it over." And that's how we managed to get enough food. We had—they used to deliver milk, you know. You didn't walk to the store to buy milk; they brought milk to the house. We had two different deliveries: one came at eight o'clock; one came at ten o'clock. Unfortunately, one day they both met. (laughs) We had some explaining to do. How come we have two—we always had to be on the lookout for some, you know, how to explain things.

CP: How did they explain that situation?

JR: Oh, I don't know. We are having some party and we needed more milk today. I don't know. And my father was traveling a lot on business and he was always concerned, you know, that if he go to a town where he would be recognized, the jig would be up. But—

CP: He was working for the German government?

JR: Well, no. He was working for a Polish company which, in turn, was working for the German—was making food, which they had to deliver to the German government.

CP: And he was translating? Is that—

JR: Well, he was a translator because they had to deal with the German authorities, you know: they had to agree as to how much production they were able to make so they could get the raw materials, in return for which they had to make a finished product.

So, anyway, he developed a very good relationship with the Germans, and they would give him bonuses. You know, when Christmas came, he would get an allotment of candy or sugar or other staples, which were hard to come by. So, he would bring it to the factory and he and the boss would share it, and the rest they would sell on the black market, you see. The boss somehow or other found out that we were Jewish and was very helpful to us, you see. My father's official salary was 400 zlotys a month, which was a pittance. He was paying him 2,000 or 3,000, you know, under the table. And then, when they made those little deals, he got extra money so we could feed the whole party.

So, my father was always very, very cautious when he went on a trip. So, one day they were going to go to Krakow. He went to the—before they went on the trip, he went to the German authorities and asked them to give him an official letter that they're traveling on behalf of the government, and they asked—the German authorities are requested to render him all courtesies and services to help him in his endeavor. And the boss laughed at him, but he did it anyway. And they went to Krakow, they're coming back to Lublin, and the railroad station is surrounded and nobody is let out. Everybody is being packed into trucks. And that was towards the end of the war, you know, maybe early forty-four [1944]. So, my father comes to the Gestapo with his letter and shows them that. "Okay, you can go." So, he and the boss left, and they were being picked up by the railroad station by a horse-driven carriage that the factory owned. And the driver says, "Boy, you're the only two people who left the railroad station." Everybody else was sent to the concentration camp, to Majdanek.

You know, in the mornings everybody, of course, was downstairs. We just woke up and we had breakfast, and nobody was too keen to go to their respective hiding places. And my father was supposed to come back from a trip, and he was late. So my mother says, "Go out and have a look and see if he's coming." And I come out and there is a Gestapo truck coming up and stopping in front of the house. So, I run in and tell them the Gestapo's here. Everybody went into a panic, locked the door, and everybody starts climbing to the attic. Normally, when they were in hiding they would pull the ladder so there would be no inkling that there was anything there, but they didn't have time to do that. And the foot was still hanging out when they start banging at the door.

So, my mother took her time to get to the door, and the Gestapo—they are looking for somebody; somebody gave them the wrong address. Luckily, my mother didn't speak German too well, so with her broken German they—and we had, you know, chickens; we were like real Catholics in the countryside, so we were raising chickens and ducks and we had little chickens running around the house. So, anyway, we kind of looked okay, so they left us alone: didn't search the house, (laughs) luckily.

CP: So, you mentioned that you were like "real Catholics," 'cause you—what did that mean? How did you—how were you able to pull off that charade?

JR: Well, I had to go to school. I had to—the religious instruction was compulsory, to study catechism. I had to go to church every Sunday. I had to go to first communion. When Christmas came, we had to have a Christmas tree with all the ornaments and stuff and then have gifts and sing, sing carols. The most difficult thing was Easter, because at Easter, you see, what the Polish people do, they put eggs and stuff into a basket, and they go to church to have it blessed by the priest. Well, what do you put in that silly basket? And how do you arrange it? Are the eggs peeled or are they not peeled? (laughs) I mean, everything was a problem, you know. We didn't know. So, luckily, my father's boss, who by then knew we were Jewish, they gave us instructions what to do, you see. So—

CP: Do you know any reason why your father's boss decided to help you out? Was it that he was—

JR: Well, 'cause he was a nice guy.

CP: Just a good guy?

JR: Yeah, and because of that he's recognized as a Righteous Gentile at Yad Vashem. Yeah. I mean, he took some risks. He wasn't necessarily hiding us in his house, which would have been really, really dangerous, but he took some risks. He did some vouching for my father, because there were rumors in the factory that he was Jewish, and some people tried to denounce—in kind of an awkward way, without being traced—that there was a Jew working in the factory, you know.

So, some police guys came and said, "We have a report that a Jew is working in the factory. We want to speak to the manager or the owner." My father was the manager. (laughs) So, he says, "Well, go talk to the owners." So, he spoke with the owner. The owner says, "I assure you, there are no Jews working here." So, he says, "Well, you know, we have a sure way of finding out. We'll just have them all disrobe and see." So, the boss says, "Yeah, well, you could do that, but we work three shifts. If you do that to the first shift, if he works the second or third shift, he's going to fly the coop." He says, "Oh, yeah. Okay, then you look for it, and if you find any inkling, you let us know." He says, "Yeah, yeah, I will do that." (laughs) Of course, he never did.

So, he was helpful. He helped some of our aunts and cousins get jobs, you know, as maids either for him or other people. And of course, he paid my father more money than he legally had to. And as I said, my father was a sociable kind of guy and made friends fairly easily. And he made friends with the Germans, so whenever the workers in the factory would get into trouble, he would always go out there and bail them out. So, even though they may have suspected something, they wanted to have him around so that he could bail them out, you know.

One incident that he reports in his memoirs was this guy was caught doing something or other illegal, and they were going to deport him. So, he went to the Gestapo with a German-speaking fellow to plead his case, and they said, "No, you have to go." So, he went to my father and my father went there, and they said, "Well, he already was here. He

already told his story." "Yeah, but he told you his story from his point of view. But I have to tell you the story from the factory's point of view. He's such an indispensable worker; if you deport him, we are going to have to cut our production by 20 percent. Now, what is the *Wehrmacht* going to say?" They said, "Well, well, all right, if you put it that way, we'll let him stay." And he pulled this kind of stuff several times, so the workers liked him and valued his services. So, there was a fairly big support scheme, and—

CP: If I could stop you there. I think we—it's about time to change the tapes.

JR: Okay.

CP: And we'll pick it up back there when we—

JR: Okay. I think I'm almost done, but okay.

***Part 1 ends; part 2 begins***

CP: This is tape two of my interview with Dr. John Rinde. And where we left off in tape one was with experience of your family pretending to be Catholic—

JR: Right.

CP: —in Lublin.

JR: Well, again, we lived very close to Majdanek, which is a concentration camp. Whenever the crematoria would be used, we could smell the fumes, the odor of burning flesh. And, you know, we always had a few close incidents. As I mentioned before, only Jewish males were circumcised. Well, I had a bunch of buddies I was hanging out with, and one day we decided to go swimming in the local brook or river or whatever. While everybody went skinny-dipping, I couldn't do that. But I wanted to go swimming, so I went wearing my shorts. Everybody laughed at me, and when we came home they went and tattled to my mother, you know, "How stupid he is. He went swimming with his shorts on." My mother pretended to scold me in front of them, and the one on the left says, "You did right, but keep up the good work."

In the summer, as I said, the girls—the family would hide in the attic. And there was a trap door, you know, so they could open it and get some fresh air and sunlight into the house, into the attic. Well, some of the urchins decided to climb on the roof and peer in. So, they did that. As the girls heard the footsteps, they run into the crevices to hide; but there was a table set up with food, and they saw that and they left. We had to explain that somehow. I mean, why would there be food in the attic? So, my mother concocted this story that I was a bad boy and I was being punished and I had to eat by myself in the attic. (laughs) And I had to reinforce that story, you know, to the boys.

CP: So, your friends must have thought you got in trouble quite a lot as kid.

JR: I got in trouble and I was punished, so they said, "Look, you do that, we'll tell your mother and you'll eat in the attic again." (laughs) All right, I'll eat in the attic again.

You know, the religious Poles—the less educated ones—when they walked into your house, they didn't greet you like say, "Hello," or "Good morning." They had a religious greeting, which in free translation would be something like, "Blessed be Jesus Christ." You see, that's how they greet you. The Germans said, "Heil Hitler." So, anyway, there is a very pat response to that. I mean, they say their part and there is a pat response, and the response is something to the effect, "For centuries to come, amen." One day, my aunt was caught in the kitchen and didn't manage to disappear when this delivery lady came and says this Polish greeting. And she looks at her and doesn't know what to say and says, "Oh, so be it." (laughs) My mother had a stroke, (laughs) and had to say, "If you are that stupid, get the hell out of here!"

I mean, you have to have a presence of mind, you know. And as Irene pointed out, we couldn't socialize very much because we didn't want people coming into the house and observe and try to see something that might betray us. So, what they built was like a huge closet, which was really just this rectangular frame that stood against the corner of the room, with a curtain in front and no back. So, if someone walked into the house when one of the hidiers were not in the cellar or in the attic, they would run into that closet and step behind, you know, into the empty space in the corner and stay there. But how long can you stay motionless? You know, (laughs) when you have somebody stay visiting.

So, we always tried to cut the visits short, so they wouldn't be—you know, because you have to sneeze, you have to cough. I mean, (laughs) you just can't keep people standing quietly without making a sound for hours on end. So, one day, somebody there got restless, and my mother says, "Oh, damn it, we are having mice in this house again." My stupid aunt was scratching on the wall. (laughs) You know, we had to have to have enough beds to sleep two to three times the amount of people that we—slept two to three to a bed, you know. Anyways, my father was, you know, the only one who was really living legally there, and he was kind of organizing everything and helping all the other members of the family that he could. You know, my mother tried to have her mother and her sister come join us in Lublin, but they wouldn't. So, they ended up being deported and perished.

At any rate, one—and you see, there were Polish people, as I said before, who would make it a sport to turn Jews, like us, to the authorities. Some did it just for the fun of it; some did it for financial gain. If they found out you were Jewish they would blackmail you, you know, until you had no more money, and then they would turn you in. Well, this was very prevalent, particularly in Warsaw, but happened everywhere. Well, one of our cousins got caught in this kind of scheme, and she was living in downtown Lublin, and my aunt would always ask my father to stop by and see how she's doing. Well, damn it, timing was bad and he walked in on them while she was being blackmailed, and those guys says, "Ah, we have another pigeon." And they took him home to our home and they, you know, blackmailed us.

And it happened, I think, three times. It got so bad that, you know, we were running out of stuff to give him. And there were air raids, so people were building trenches, you know, to hide when the bombs come. So we had trenches built in our backyard, and the men were prepared to kill those bastards if they came another time and bury them in the trenches. Luckily, it didn't come to that. But the final time they came, there was no—we weren't home, I mean, my parents and I and us; the kids weren't there. And they came and they took everything they could, you know: linens, clothes, whatever they could carry off. They didn't have cars in those days, so whatever they could carry in their hands they took.

And we had a signal, you know: there was a little kind of an opening in the attic wall, and if they put something, an object, in there, it meant that there was problem, don't walk into the house. And my parents were coming back to the house with invited guests, together with the boss and all. And there was that stuff in the door, in the window, and he didn't see it. So they coming, they coming, and the uncle up top there is getting panicky. He stuck his whole hand out. (laughs) And finally, finally my father saw it and he said, "Okay, guys, we can't go in; we're having a problem." He talked to the boss and the boss made up some story, because the boss was being blackmailed by the communists for other reasons. So, he says, "Oh, he's having the same communist problems I'm having. We can't go in."

And so he walks in, and the blackmailers locked everybody up in the cellar, except for him in the attic, and closed the doors with a piece of wire and told them to stay there. So, my father says, "All right, come on out." He says, "I can't get out. They told us to stay." He says, "What, are they going to come back and do something to you? If they send the Gestapo, they will find you whether you are there or not. Get out." So anyway, we regrouped. Luckily, my father was able to manage to get some more, you know, allotment coupons so we could replace some of the things. You know, everything had value: used shirts, used shoes, used anything. Everything had value on the black market. So, you know, getting that kind of stuff out of people was like getting money.

What I forgot to mention is when we lived in Lvov under the Germans, the German officers had, you know, *chutzpah*, to come into a Jewish person's apartment and look around and say, "Oh, I like this, I'll take that. I'll take that." Go through your drawers, look at your clothes, and say, "Oh, yeah, that's a nice shirt. I'll take that." And they came with an aide, you know, enlisted the soldiers and said, "Carry that off." They're like—they would walk to a store and take whatever they wanted. It was unbelievable. I mean, you just had no rights, no nothing. Whatever they liked, they took. You know, when my mother was getting the false papers, she needed money to pay the forger, and she didn't have any money so she had to go and sell a diamond ring. And she had to go to Warsaw, apparently, to find a seller—I mean, a buyer.

CP: This back still in Lvov?

JR: That was in Lvov. Yeah, I backtracked. At Lvov—

**Irene Rinde:** Out of Lublin.

JR: Out of Lvov, yeah.

IR: Out of Lublin.

JR: Out of Lublin? But then—

IR: That was not for the false papers.

JR: Oh for something else? Oh, okay.

CP: Okay, so this is in Lublin?

JR: In Lublin.

CP: Okay.

JR: All right. So, anyway, she went to Warsaw; she had a contact there with a Jewish fellow. And they were walking down the street, and this policeman stops them and says, "You look—you know, you look Jewish." He asked for their IDs, so she gives him the IDs and he looks and he looks, and you know, they were good forgeries. And then he looks at the other guy and says, "Well, something looks fishy. I'll have to take it to the station." And my mother laughs and says, "Well, that's a joke on me. Boy, everybody back home is going to have a funny laugh on that, that you think that I am Jewish." She was blonde and had blue eyes. And the guy says, "Hmm, okay. I think you're okay, but I think he's Jewish. But I'll let you guys go." You know, you just had to have *chutzpah* and then play it straight and not flinch. Anyway, so as I said, we had many close calls, but had to have presence of mind; and as they say in German, "(inaudible)," you know, you be ready for an answer whenever called upon.

Anyway, the war ended up for us sometime in the summer of forty-four [1944]. Again, because we were still fairly close to the Russian border, as things go—Lublin—so we were liberated early. And by then we were poor, so the Russians loved us. We weren't big, rich capitalists anymore. And I went back to school, and many, many Jews who returned either out of hiding or released from concentration camps, when they went and tried to retrieve their properties, were killed by the Catholics because they did not want to give up the squatter rights to the properties that they occupied for the previous four or five years. So, the difficulties did not end just because the Russians came in. The local population was still against the Jews. And anyway, once the—

CP: Did you—can I—I'm sorry, can I interrupt?

JR: Sure, yes.

CP: Did you face any anti-Semitism when you went back to school, or did you see—

JR: Well, no, we did not revert to our Jewish name right away.

CP: Okay.

JR: Again, I am not sure at what point we did but, but we stayed—remained as Catholics. And, you know, there were through the Red Cross and other organizations lists of survivors, which they published so that people could find each other, find relatives, and people abroad could find out who survived. So our uncle—my father's brother, you know—found out that we were living and they would be sending us packages of food and stuff because there were still shortages. Well, when the package would come to the post office, we had to go pick it up and they would give us a hard time, you know. Oh, you know, bring everybody who got packages and we'll just make one distribution, you know. They were trying to throw roadblocks.

Anyway, after a while, the agreement that Roosevelt had with Stalin, Russia annexed a part of eastern Poland and Lvov became part of the Ukraine—part of Russia, but Ukraine. And in return, Poland received the eastern part of Germany, and they made the new border, the Oder-Neisse Line. And Danzig, or Gdansk as they call it in Polish, became a Polish city and we moved there. Essentially, what the Russians did to the Poles, the Poles did to the Germans: they kicked them all out. They said, "Take two suitcases and get the heck out." So, they left the apartments fully furnished with bedding and clothing and pots and pans and books and everything, so that was the new squatters.

So, we moved there and we lived in Danzig for a while, and then when the war ended everywhere—that was in Europe, at least—we decided to go to United States. And again, you know, you heard of the *Refuseniks*? (laughs) In Russia, it wasn't that easy to get out of Poland, even though they were so much more liberal with Jews, but you couldn't leave a communist country that easily. But with persistence and some bribes and this and that, we managed to get an exit visa from Poland and a transit visa through Paris, France, three-day transit visa. So, anyway, we go on the train—oh, let me tell you another story before I do that.

Russians were little bastards in their own right. When we were traveling from Lvov— from Lublin to Danzig—Polish railroads had doors on each side of the train, you know: there was a corridor on the platform side and then the compartment. And each compartment had a door to the tracks. The train stops at the railroad station, the door from the tracks opens, and the Russian soldiers walk in and say, "Everybody evacuate. Everybody evacuate!" Everybody starts pushing towards the corridor side. They grab some suitcases off the rack near the door and run out and say, "Okay, now you can stay."

They grabbed one of our suitcases. So we get off the train and go to the station master to complain, and the guy is a Pole and he says, "This happens every day. Forget it; you'll never get your suitcase back." So, my father doesn't give up. He goes to the Russian commander and complains. He says, "You have the temerity to insult our brave Russian soldiers? You do that again, I will throw you in jail." (laughs) So, he turned around and we lost a suitcase.

So, anyway, we went to Danzig and we got the visa, and we went through the border from Poland to Czechoslovakia. If you think that they search your luggage when you go in the airplane here, you should have seen what happened over there. (laughs) They unpacked every single thing and rummaged from top to bottom. Anyway, so we come to Prague, nice place, and we had to go to Paris and the only way, apparently, from Prague to Paris was through Switzerland, and those guys wouldn't give us a transit visa. They were afraid we would jump ship and stay there, and they didn't want us. So, my father says, "Hell, put us into a locked compartment. Lock us up; we don't want to stay in your country. We just want to get through." Nothing doing. We spent several days in Prague trying to work something out.

Finally, we ended up taking the airplane. We got to fly and we only had three seats for the four of us. And we flew, landed in Strasbourg, and then again we went on to Paris. We come to Paris and we go to the U.S. Embassy—Consulate—and say, "Hey, guys, we want to go to the U.S." And they say, "Well, join the crowd. The line is over there. (laughs) Here is your number. When your number comes, we will call you." I said, "Well, how long will that take?" "Well, we don't know: a year, two, maybe longer. It depends." I say, "What do we do in the meantime?" "It's your business, we don't know." So, the federation came to help us. They put us up in a public housing that they had for refugees. They helped my father find a job, and you know, we extended our transit visa from three days to ten days, from ten days to a month, from a month to three months, from three months to a year, and ended up having a ten-year permit.

In 1947, my brother was born to me—to us. My mother had another kid. And we kind of got settled. My father got into some business and the urgency to go to the United States kind of waned, you know. We learned the language, at least Irene and I. My father spoke French fairly well and my mother didn't do so well. But anyway, we made the living in France and we were planning to stay there. But then came the Korean War and my father had visions of World War III, and he said he lived through World War I and World War II in Europe, and he wasn't going to be caught dead in Europe for World War III. We are going back to the United States, after all. Our quota had come up, you know, in forty-nine [1949] or fifty [1950], and we let it lapse. So, he went back to the Embassy and says, "Hey, remember me? I want to go now." They say, "Well, you have to reactivate the paperwork." And that took another, I don't know, six months to a year, and finally, we left France in December of fifty-one [1951]. Slow boat by, you know, across the Atlantic and made it here in January of fifty-two [1952].

CP: And you were sixteen, at that time?

JR: Well, in fifty-two [1952], I was seventeen. I just turned seventeen when we landed.

CP: You remember the name of that boat, is that right?

JR: It was a Liberty ship, one of the troop carriers. Do you remember?

IR: It says *General Stewart*.

JR: Yeah, that was the name, *General Stewart*, right. But it was the Liberty ship, one of those troop carriers. So, you know, men and women were separated. We slept in those three deck cots, you know, the cloth hammock-style, and we apparently hit one of the worst storms in the last ten or twenty—previous ten or twenty years. For three days, we were locked below deck. We weren't allowed on deck because waves were washing over. The boat was rocking like that, and getting off that bed to go to the bathroom was an ordeal. I must have lost ten pounds during that crossing. (laughs) And anyway, that's when our ordeal ended. I mean, at least the survival—you know, to get to the point we are now was another struggle—but that had to do with the Holocaust directly, anyway.

CP: And the rest of this is really up to you. What would you like to talk about that you think maybe relates to the Holocaust? I know that your wife is a survivor and you two were able to meet. And just—how do you feel about the Holocaust now?

JR: Well, my wife can tell you her own stories maybe on some future time; but she is even younger than I, of course, and we didn't know each other in those days. Our parents may have, but we didn't. And she was given into hiding as a child with a Catholic family, and that's how she survived the war. Her parents hid in the forest and partitions and this kind of stuff and they reclaimed her at the end of the war. And they made their own way to New York and then we met. The rest is history.

CP: When you met, did you know that each other had survived the Holocaust?

JR: Well, obviously we survived. If we hadn't survived we wouldn't have met. (laughs)

CP: But that you both had been through that?

JR: Oh, yes. Yes, yes.

CP: How do you feel about the Holocaust now at your current age, now that you've had a life to reflect on it? How's it informed how you live today?

JR: Well, what I think is, you know, that when Hitler came to power, he did not want to necessarily kill all the Jews. He wanted to have a Germany free of Jews, you know, *Judenfrei* German Reich. And he wanted—he made the life of Jews miserable and he

wanted them to leave. The problem is that nobody would take us. I mean, the Jewish—the German Jews, you know, they had no place to go. Palestine was run by the British, and the British were caving in to the Muftis and the Arabs and they wouldn't let the Jews come to Palestine. And no other country would take the Jews. Roosevelt wasn't really interested. He convened that Évian Conference in France, where he sent a very low level representative, and everybody commiserated. "Yes, Jews have a problem, and we should—they should be able to leave Germany. But not in my backyard! Okay." And, a few countries took a token number of Jews, you know, like some Latin American, you know, South American, Brazil, and maybe Argentina, Cuba took some, and Australia and New Zealand. But nobody in Western Europe would, and the U.S. would not.

The story that I heard was that the Cuban ambassador or consulate in Europe there was selling the visas to Cuba to the Jews. So, when the first boat came, you know, they came aboard. And whoever was the Cuban leader at that time found out about it. So, when the next boatload came, he said he wants his share of the loot and they didn't have any money to give him. So, they say, "We have no money." "You don't come in!" and he turned the *Saint Louis* back. The *Saint Louis* back came to, I think, Miami, and the U.S. government refused to let the passengers disembark. So, Hitler came to the inescapable conclusion that, "Well, if nobody wants them they must be bad. They must be dispensable."

And, you know, you only had about half a million Jews, maybe even less, in Germany; but when he invaded Poland, there were another three million. And when he invaded Russia there was another three million. And, you know, there were Jews in France, in Belgium, in Holland, and Italy, Hungary, and all the other countries. He ended up with something like six or seven million Jews, and he wanted to get rid of the Jews but they had no place to go.

So, he came up with his "Final Solution," you know, which to me means that the existence of the state of Israel is indispensable, because when you have your own state where you can go to when you are being persecuted, you have a place to go where you will be welcome and not killed. So, this has really reinforced the need of the Jews to support the state—the existence of the strong state of Israel, which kind of assures us our safety should anything happen, 'cause you can never tell. You know, the German Jews, just like the American Jews, were extremely assimilated. They were—that's when the Reform movement started, for the most part. They were not particularly religious. They felt that they held responsible positions in society, in business, in government, in the army. I mean, you know, Anne Frank's father was an officer in the—he's a German—Austrian army, if I remember which, you know, and they felt as German as anybody else, you see. But Hitler came and decided that being Jewish wasn't just a religion, it was a racial, ethnic problem. So, conversion did not save your skin. You know, if one grandparent was Jewish, you were Jewish, period. And there was nothing you could do. So, that was a sudden shock, and that's how we needed a strong, strong state of Israel.

CP: Are there any other stories that you think missed or anything else you'd like to talk about?

JR: No, I think that I'm all talked out.

CP: Okay. Well, the last question I'm going to ask you is what message do you have for future generations that view this or that want to learn about the Holocaust?

JR: Well, to learn about the Holocaust, you can just study the material. What you really want to do is to prevent something like that happening in the future, and even though the world says, you know, "We won't allow this to happen," it happened in Darfur. It happened in Cambodia. It's happening now in many other countries, which maybe isn't so much publicized, but discrimination and ethnic killing keeps on happening. It even happened in Yugoslavia with the Kosovo and the Muslims there. And you know, the Muslims blame the U.S. for siding with Israel, but we, the U.S., were instrumental in saving the Muslims of Kosovo. It wasn't the neighboring European countries, France, England, and Germany; it was us who led the effort. But we don't get recognition or credit for it at all. They hate us just the same. I think the U.S. is about one of most—more ethical countries in the world. You know, at least they have a moral standard and they live by it, whereas the Europeans are much more pragmatic. They do what is best for them and the heck with everybody else.

CP: Well, thank you very much for your time. I really appreciate it.

JR: You're very welcome.

***Part 2 ends; part 3 begins***

CP: Okay, this is Irene Rinde, John Rinde's sister, and we've invited her to speak to some of the issues that she wanted to talk to and to fill in some of her own stories from her experience.

IR: Right, it's just some of the things that I was more involved, or some of the things that John talked about that I remember a little differently or have a different take on.

CP: Yes, thank you very much.

IR: One, I think of how did we come to go on Aryan papers. As John said, it was my mother's idea, because my mother would—I guess, given her a-religious background, would not accept being a second-class citizen. She always suffered about that. And whereas my father felt he could wheel and deal with this ghetto situation, she wanted out. And as I remember my parents talking, she gave my father two choices. One was to drug the children and piggyback them across the border into Russia at night, and my father said, "You're crazy! I'll never do that." And then the second one was to go on Aryan papers, which he also said was, "Wild," and he would not accept to do it. Except, what he did say, he said, "You may do it by yourself, if you wish. I will not stop you. You may do it alone, with one child, with both children, but leave me out of it."

How did we take the name Kroczykowski? The factory that our grandfather had, back in Przemysl, had a chauffeur whose name was Kroczykowski, and I understand that they were very good relationships between the chauffeur and his wife and our parents, and they offered to sell their papers to my parents, except that at the last minute he—the chauffeur decided against it, which was fine with my father because he wasn't interested. And Kroczykowski came to Lvov to deliver her papers, which was essentially her birth certificate, to my mother, and at the same time she offered to take me for the duration of the war, for safekeeping. And so, I left with her. The trouble was that when we arrived in Przemysl, it was right in the heat of "action."

JR: A "round-up."

IR: Of a "round-up." And we had been a known family in Przemysl and her neighbors recognized me, and so she was threatened to be denounced and get rid of this Jewish child. And she went to see my uncle, who gave her money and said, "Take her back to her parents." I was returned to Lvov and reunited with my parents. My mother took her birth certificate to the counterfeiter, and I guess—and I think without our father's knowledge—had papers made for both of them. When I asked them, many years later, my father, I said, "What made you change your mind? Initially you were so against doing this, and then you went along and played your role so beautifully." And his answer was his parents' suicide, that he thought the idea of going Aryan was so wild that it was not likely to succeed. And he couldn't bear the pain he would cause his parents that he would perish and they would survive. But once he knew that they were gone, then he didn't care and he was willing to go ahead.

The way we left the ghetto was the day before my parents were to leave the ghetto, they first wanted to get the kids out. And from the Russian days, my father had established very good relations with the principal of a private girls' school—I believe he had worked briefly there as a bookkeeper. So he asked her if she would take the children, so that they would not be encumbered with the kids when they went out of the ghetto with this assumed new name. And she said, "No, I can't take both children." She was a single woman living in an apartment, and she said, "I'll take the older child. He can be trusted to keep quiet during the day when he's alone. I can't trust both children together." But one of her teachers had a daughter my age and she agreed to take me, and I would live in the open as a friend of her daughter's. And that was the trouble because her dear neighbors said, "Aha, here is a sudden new child that appears; she's probably Jewish," and that threatened her. "If you don't get rid of this child, we will report you to the Gestapo."

Now, the next day, when my parents woke up, the ghetto was sealed. During the night, the Gestapo surrounded the ghetto. Like John said, we lived by the railroad tracks and there was a bridge because, as I remember, the railroad was sort of elevated.

JR: So there was an underpass.

IR: There was an underpass for the—yeah, and so that was exit from the ghetto and that was blocked. And you could not walk out. There was still a tramway running between the ghetto and the outside, but you needed a pass. A cousin of my mother's had one of those

IDs with that important stamp, and my mother went to her cousin and said, "Lend me your papers. I have to go and get our papers." She still did not have her papers. They were still at the forger's. And it's unbelievable that the cousin gave her papers. My mother grabbed the papers and she said the photos didn't look anything alike—I mean, they were—but she took her papers and jumped on the trolley, left the ghetto, went to the forger's. And she said, my father says in his memoirs, it was bedlam. So many people were harassing him, and she sat there waiting until he finished the papers. I think the finishing was making Father's—

JR: Kroczykowski.

IR: To match hers. In the process, he misspelled my father's last name, so where my mother's name was Kroczykowski, his was Korczykowski.

JR: She reversed two letters.

IR: Yeah.

JR: He reversed two letters.

IR: Right. So, by the time the papers were ready, it was fairly late in the day. My mother didn't dare return to the ghetto, and she paid the forger to go to the ghetto and deliver the papers to my father. Now, it couldn't have been that late in the day. It had to be earlier. Anyway, he came back to the ghetto; he gave my father the new papers. My father took them, took off his armband, jumped on the trolley, and left the ghetto. He met my mother at the forger.

Meantime, back on the farm, the teacher under threat with me took me to the principal's apartment saying, "I can't keep this child. Take her." She says, "No, I can't. It's too dangerous. Take her back to her parents." So, she walks me back to the ghetto. By that time, my parents are gone, and she comes to our apartment and the apartment is empty. The apartment is locked, closed, because my parents aren't there. As she stands there sort of wondering what she is going to do, the couple with whom we shared the apartment—John said that we had to share the apartment—arrived and she said, "Take her." Well, they didn't want the responsibility of taking somebody else's child and so they refused, and she said, "Well, if you don't take her, I'll turn her over to the first Gestapo officer I see at the exit at the ghetto," upon which, they said, "Okay, then let her in."

And I went into the apartment and it was—oh, I don't know, twenty minutes, half an hour later. The Germans are banging on the door. "Everybody out! Everybody out!" They marched us out into the street, you know, and how naive and foolish people were even under such circumstances, because the Gestapo took—I don't know if it was the Gestapo or the SS—

JR: Same difference.

IR: Same difference. Took the keys to the apartment, and the man went up to him asking about the keys, you know, how was he going to get back into the apartment? And all he got as an answer was a good kick in the rear end. He went tumbling down the street, and his armband slipped. So, now the terrible crime of not having the armband on, and he's told that he was going to be the first one to be executed upon destination, because he doesn't have his armband. And so, when we were lined up in the streets, somebody had a little square of cloth on which a Star of David had been embroidered, and they pinned that on his arm so he was kosher.

And they made us march down the street, and the woman tells me to run away. How? To where? She told me to run away, so I ran away. And you asked about proof of the Ukrainians: they were guarding the line-up, because at the end of the line they caught me. And they brought me back to this couple and bawled them out and told them to keep me with them. (laughs)

We were loaded on trucks and taken to a police station, whatever it was. It was a pretty ugly scene. But the saving grace was that this man was a physician, and he was working in a hospital. He went up to one of the officers, who was a little bit more responsible, in charge, and presented his credentials. He said his wife was a nurse and that I was his child. They called the hospital and verified that yes, indeed, he was on staff and was expected, yada ya, and in great style and elegance we were driven by horse and buggy and delivered to the hospital. I spent the night sharing the bed of a nurse, who fed me bean soup. I wouldn't eat bean soup for years! (laughs)

And we had two aunts living in Lvov. Now, one was the widow of the chief rabbi of Lvov, and for some reason my father could never answer, she did not live in the ghetto. She was still living outside of the ghetto, and had a telephone. And the other aunt was working in the uniform—sewing, she was a very good seamstress. She was working in the, I think, factory, making uniforms for the soldiers. So, anyway, the doctor called the *Rebbetzin* to tell her that I was with him in the hospital, to get in touch with my father; he should come and fetch me. She called her sister to tell her, "Hey, where is our brother? Tell him where Irene is."

Now, in the meantime, when my parents (laughs) got out of the ghetto, they did not anticipate having to find lodging that night. They thought they would be able to come back, originally. Not knowing where to go, they went to the principal's apartment to beg a night's lodging before they could get him themselves situated, and that's where they learned that I had been taken back to the ghetto. So, the next morning—it had to be the next morning—the janitor of the school went to the ghetto to look for me, and he came back saying, "Nowhere to be found. The entire building has been emptied. No one knows what happened." And so my father, in desperation, not quite knowing what to do, went to see his sister the seamstress. And he arrived there just as the other sister called to say where I was.

CP: Wow.

IR: And so, once again, the janitor went to the hospital to get me and brought me to where John was, up at the principal's. So, that's—I think that's—

JR: I'd like to add a couple of vignettes, how you had to have your head on your shoulders. One of my aunts got caught, you know, in a round-up in the street by Ukrainians. They were loading them on the truck, and she tried to bribe her way out, you know, and that SOB took her ID card and wrote in the corner, "She tried to bribe me." You know, that was a definite death sentence when you go to the Gestapo, and then there is proof you are trying to bribe the guy. She knew her goose was cooked. So, what would you do? Well, she threw her ID card on the bottom on the floor of the truck and stepped on it—you know, full of mud—and tore the corner out. When she came to the Gestapo she said, "You know, in that turmoil, my ID card fell out and people stepped on it, but when I retrieved it was torn." (laughs) So, the incriminating evidence disappeared and she talked her way out and she was let out.

IR: Right.

JR: I mean, you really had to use your wits. But also, I forgot to tell you that when Lublin was liberated—I call that "liberation" in quotation marks by the Russians—they opened the concentration camp Majdanek as a museum open to the public. Now, that was in 1944, you know, so I was about nine and a half and my parents took me to have a look. The sights that we saw were unbelievable, unbelievable.

IR: So were the odors.

JR: Huh?

IR: So were the odors!

JR: Yeah. Open trenches with rotting corpses, the crematoria were still having fragments of bone in the ashes. The barn: the barns of passports, the barns with suitcases, the barns with shoes, with hair. And the conditions, you know, which those people lived was just unbelievable. I mean, just horrible. And they caught five or six of the guys who run the camp. They put them on public trial, you know, they were condemned to death. They made appeals, (laughs) and they filmed all that and the appeals were denied, and they were hung publicly in the camp itself. That I didn't witness; my parents went to witness that.

IR: Yeah, right. Yeah.

JR: And anyway, so we went back to Poland—I don't know, about fifteen years ago—my wife and I, and we visited Majdanek. And it was so sanitized it was not recognizable. The

only thing that impressed me was looking at the grounds, you know, it was like this—wavy, and I couldn't understand why so I asked. They said that's where the bodies were buried, and when the bodies decomposed the ground sunk, so that's what the valleys are.

IR: One of the things to supplement what John said for the success of our survival:

With the children, now we had—in 1942, we went on Aryan papers in September of 1942. I was five years old, so you were seven and a half. We have new names, and I remember my father saying, “This is your name now. Don't you ever tell anybody what your previous name was. You don't know where you came from. You don't know what I did before the war,” which probably in my case was safe enough. I probably didn't know. But John certainly could have spilled the beans.

That first apartment that we had in Lublin that John talked about, which was a former ghetto, there was another family—real Poles—living there, and they had a child my age. And I went there to play with her, and they started pumping me for questions—for answers. I just ignored it and I just sort of played more intensely with the toys and did not answer the question. So, we had different ways that we were supposed to knock on the door if we were alone, versus if we were accompanied by somebody. There were all these elaborate living—

JR: Schemes.

IR: Schemes that were developed that we had to abide by, and if we didn't, we were brought to task very quickly and very severely. So—

JR: You know, we had to memorize the prayers, *Pater Noster* and "Our Father who are in heaven," in Polish. (IR laughs) Luckily, most of the masses were still in Latin in those days, so nobody knew anything but some of the major Polish prayers. We had to learn them.

IR: To learn, right. And learn the carols and all the things.

JR: You know, I kind of understand now the difficulty that our undercover agents go through (IR laughs) when they try to infiltrate a gang or a Muslim group. To play the part, it's not easy.

IR: Easy.

JR: Not easy.

IR: Okay.

*Pause in recording*

CP: Okay, this is tape three with my interview with John Rinde and his sister, Irene Rinde. My name is Chris Patti. And before we get moving, Irene, I was hoping you could tell us what your birth date is for historical record.

IR: August 22, 1937.

CP: Okay, thank you.

IR: You're welcome.

CP: And then you—there are a couple of other pieces that you wanted to help us with.

IR: Just sort of to fill in some of the story that John told you pertaining to how wonderful and decent our father's boss was. I mean, you know, what you commonly hear from us and from most Polish Jewish survivors is what a rotten bunch the Poles were. There were a few who were really decent. And what I think John said and what I feel very strongly about, I don't think that any human being has a right to expect or demand that another human being should endanger his life for you. But I think we have every right to demand that no human being should actively participate in your downfall. And this is really what is beautifully illustrated by our father's boss, who quite early on was told that my father was Jewish, and I believe he was told because one of the employees in the factory felt slighted.

We told you that my parents didn't socialize, for the obvious reasons. And this employee felt slighted that he wasn't invited. I don't know whether it was he or his wife who was instigating and was spreading rumors that my father was Jewish. Because I think in general the belief at that time was that my mother was Catholic, because as John said, she was blonde, blue-eyed: she did not look Jewish. My father was—eh, he could be, didn't have to be. So he was spreading these rumors, and so my father sort of went to his boss and explained. I think that was when he told him that he was sheltering his brother and his entire family, and that put him in this very precarious situation. And his boss says, "Well then, why don't you send your brother away?" And my father said, "I can't do that, because that will be certain death for him. I cannot do that. Please help." And I think John believes that this employee was then relocated to—

JR: To another office in Warsaw.

IR: Right. So, that was number one. One of my father's sisters looked Jewish. She spoke good Polish, but her looks were not very good. She was separated from her husband who crossed into Russia and when she tried—she and her daughter tried to follow; she couldn't do. And so she was left behind with her daughter in Poland. Her daughter looked

100 percent Aryan: blond, good, nice straight nose, and she behaved like a Pole. My father would say every Jew would take such immaculate care of his false papers. She just shoved it into her purse; it was wrinkled, it was dirty, it was messed-up. And so when their safety in the suburbs of Warsaw started getting shaky, my cousin came to Lublin and my father introduced her to his boss, and it was never like a direct relative. You know, it wasn't like "She's my niece." "Oh, she's a distant relative," or she may be a friend. And so, the boss found her a very nice position as a nanny to a family that he knew.

So, then when my aunt came to Lublin and my father then asked his boss, he assumed she would be as Aryan-looking as the daughter was. And at that time, he was looking for a maid, so he said, "I will hire her." And when my father brought her to his apartment, he treated her with such respect. He kissed her hand, you know, the way he would someone his level. He did not treat her like a maid. But after a brief period of time, a week or two weeks, he came to my father and he said, "I can't keep her. I have an open house and a lot of visitors come. I don't want any unpleasantness to happen to her under my roof." But he was helpful in finding another position for her where she would work as a cook in a tavern, and she was behind the scenes and she would not have to meet the—

JR: The customers.

IR: —the customers. And it was safe. This is what I mean about a decent human being. You know? And, unfortunately, they were very few and far between. This boss had a daughter who was six months older than I. She and her husband came to the United States many years ago, but many years after the war, and when she came to visit me she still remembered that incident. She remembered the family crisis that this situation presented and how her parents were debating what their responsibility was towards my aunt, towards their children, and what a difficult decision it was for them. And so, I think I am really so happy and proud that these people are one of the Righteous Gentiles, because they really put themselves out.

The same way, as John said, we were being blackmailed at the end of the war. After whatever the last one—second or third visit by the blackmailers, when there was nothing left for them to take and my father told his boss what had happened, he arranged for us to leave our residence, our home, and go into the countryside. Now, my father stayed, because he had to keep working. You were sick at the time. You got sick after the first bombardment. And so I remember it was Mother and I who went to the country first, and then you joined us with Father, so that we would not be exposed to the blackmailers should they come back again. And we were in the countryside when the Germans ran away, and that was a sight to—that's how I know that you were not there, because I was with Mother and, I guess, the farmer's wife that we were staying with.

We went walking in the field, you know, going for a walk, and then suddenly we see clouds of dust on the horizon. We're kind of perplexed and scared. What's happening? And the Germans were driving their cars and trucks down the unpaved road and we realized the Germans were running. I guess it was dangerous because the three of us formed a circle and started dancing. "The Germans are running away!" (laughs) Still very arrogant, because they stopped and my mother, in her weak German, spoke with one of them. One of them picked me up and put me up in the tree so I should pick some cherries

from them. When my mother spoke with them and asked them who's going to win the war? "Oh, we are." Still very arrogant, very cocky.

JR: Well, I'll tell you another little vignette. You know, when the Germans were closing the ghetto and deporting the Jews from Belgium and Holland, my father's boss had a friend in Holland, and they were fed the same propaganda, you know, that everybody else was. So, the friend wrote a letter to my father's boss and said, "The Germans are relocating us to Majdanek, which I believe is close to Lublin, and we'll be arriving there. Please rent me a nice apartment with so many bedrooms. I have plenty of money, so don't worry, I'll pay you back. Just let me know what you can find for me. Help me out." And the boss showed it to my father and said, "What the heck can I do with this? This stuff is censored. If I answer him what is going on they will come after me." He just took it and threw it in the garbage, you know.

IR: Boy.

JR: That's how people were deluded and misled and believed that they were being just relocated.

IR: Yeah. One thing that impressed me enormously when I read my father's memoirs was how, with all the trouble, all the worries, and all the concerns, how he managed and made it a point to stay in touch with his siblings. Everybody knew at any given time where everybody was, so that at the end of the war they knew where to go looking. And when my father was—he would usually send the mail when he was on a trip, when he was out of town. And he had a cousin who was a prisoner of war. He was drafted—he lived in Palestine. He was in the British army and he was taken prisoner on Rhodes [Greece], I think he was? He sent a postcard to tell him where he was and where everybody else was. There was no return address, of course, and the Germans questioned him and he just played dumb and didn't know anything. That's the cousin who lives in Netanya [Israel].

JR: Who, Beran?

IR: No, Beran was a Holocaust survivor. It's—yeah, his oldest sister, the *Rebbetzin*. She was hidden by some Poles, still near Lvov, and it was—well, there were decent Ukrainians as well, because that was Perski—

JR: Perski, yeah. He hid Father's fur coat.

IR: That's right. When we left Lvov, my father left some of his more important valuable belongings with this Ukrainian, and when we were settled in Lublin and my father needed his fur coat and what have you, the man came to Lublin and delivered them to my father. He was paying the Poles who were hiding Anja, and I think Anja was there with her daughters—both of them, I think.

JR: I don't know

IR: And when he ran out of money he wrote to my father for some more money. My father didn't have any and so he—

JR: He gave him, like, an IOU.

IR: Right. He said, "I will pay you after the war. If I don't survive, my brother in the U.S. will pay you." After the war, the man came to the United States, presented the I.O.U., and my father paid him off. You know, so we were very fortunate that my parents found decent people to help out. Anyone who survived thanks to the occasional, few decent people—and I don't believe that anyone could have survived without help. And so by extrapolation, if more people had been decent, how many more Jews could have survived?

JR: Now, you know, you said that the Germans are so arrogant and that they were going to win the war? That story—you know, assemblies were forbidden during the war. I mean, you couldn't in the streets have more than two or three people together; otherwise there was reason for an arrest. So, there was this big crowd in Warsaw, you know, and the Gestapo pushes his way in and says, "What's going on?" So, the guy says, "Well, we are tossing a coin to see who is going to win the war." And the Gestapo guy says, "How can you do that? The coin only has two faces and there are so many powers fighting." He says, "Very simple. If it's heads, it's the United States. If it's tails, it's England. If it stands on the edge, it's Russia. If it stays to spin in the air, it's Germany." (all laugh)

I think we are finished.

IR: I think we're done.

CP: Well, thank you so much.

IR: You're welcome.

CP: Thank you.

*End of interview*