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Salomon Wainberg and Sandra Wainberg oral history interview by Carolyn Ellis, January 6, 2010

Salomon Wainberg (Interviewee)

Carolyn Ellis (Interviewer)

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Carolyn Ellis: Today is January 6, 2010. The survivor I'm interviewing is Salomon Wainberg. My name is Carolyn Ellis. We are in Tampa, Florida, in the United States. We're using English, and the videographer is Jane Duncan, assisted by Nafa Fa'alogu.

Let's start with you telling us your full name and spelling it for us.

Salomon Wainberg: My name is Salomon Wainberg. S-a-l-o-m-o-n W-a-i-n-b-e-r-g.

CE: And then, could you tell us your complete name at birth and spell it for us?

SW: When I was born, my name—I was named Shalom, which is Hebrew for “peace.” In Polish, it was pronounced Szulim, S-z-u-l-i-m. Wainberg was spelled W-a-j-n-b-e-r-g.

CE: Okay. Are there any other names that you've gone by?

SW: Yes. I had a nickname first, Mieteck, M-i-e-t-e-c-k; that was while I was in hiding. And then when I came to Costa Rica, I was named Salomon, S-a-l-o-m-o-n. When I lived in the States, I went under Sal, and sometimes S-a-u-l.

CE: S-a-u-l?

SW: But I settled on Salomon.

CE: Okay. All right. And could you tell us the date of your birth?

SW: April 15, 1936.

CE: Okay, and your age right now?

SW: Right now, I'm seventy-three, I guess.

CE: Seventy-three?

SW: Yeah.

CE: Okay. And the city and country where you were born, and how to spell them?

SW: I was born in Zelechow, Poland. Z-e-l-e-c-h-o-w.

CE: Okay. I would like to start back to your youth, and I know you were very young when the Holocaust started, but I would like for you to tell us what you recall or have been told about the community you began in.

SW: Well, Zelechow was a typical shtetl. I found out later that it had approximately 4,000 people, of which probably 90 to 95 percent were Jewish. That was before the war. It was a very, I guess, antiquated little town: cobblestone streets, no running water or sewers, very few homes had electricity.

I remember water would be delivered once a day, in the morning. A very old man had a horse and buggy; the buggy had a wooden barrel on top of it. I don't know where he got his water, but he would go around town, and he had regular stops where people would

have subscribed, I guess, and they would get two, three, five buckets of water. During the day, there were at least one that I used to see a lot, an old Jewish man with a long beard. He had a wooden yoke across his shoulders, and hanging down from it were two wooden buckets. Again, I don't know where he got his water, but he would sell the water by the bucket, and I think sometimes by the cup. I'm not sure.

Our house was probably one of the nicer homes in town. It was located right across the street from our store. My mom's family had been in Zelechow many, many years—I was going to say centuries, but I really don't know. Many years, and they had the sort of regional wholesale store, where, I understand from what my mom used to tell me, that we had like the monopoly for sugar, cigarettes, and herring, and I don't know what else. Besides that, we had a retail portion, where people would just come in to buy whatever they needed. And, like I said, the house was across the street.

We had electricity, but no running water. I remember my dad had made a little sort of tank, like a half moon—it was painted blue—that hung by the door of the kitchen, and underneath had put like a vase or a pail or something, with a sort of tube, copper tube, running outside through the wall into the street. It had a little spigot that you could turn on, something that you filled with water, and there you could actually pretend that it was a modern appliance. We had—electricity consisted of a bulb in each room.

We had three bedrooms: my mom and dad's, my two sisters had a bedroom, and my brother and I had a bedroom. To the side of the kitchen, there was a little room that was for the maid; we had a maid; her name was Chwa.

CE: Chwa? How do you spell Chwa?

SW: C-h-v-a—w-a, I'm sorry. There was no V in Polish.

CE: Okay. C-h-w-a.

SW: Yeah.

CE: Tell me the names of your parents.

SW: My dad's name was Chaim Meyer, and my mom's name was Perla.

CE: Can you spell your father's name for us?

SW: C-h-a-i-m. Meyer is M-e-y-e-r.

CE: Okay. And your mother's name?

SW: Perla, P-e-r-l-a.

CE: Okay. And then your siblings?

SW: I had—my oldest sister was about four years older than I, Riwka. R-i-v—R-i-w-k-a. And Sara, S-a-r-a; she's still alive and well. And my name, Salomon, and my brother was Abraham.

CE: Okay. So, the four of you plus the maid lived in the house. Okay. And your mother, then, had the store. And did your father—what did your father do?

SW: Well, my mom's parents died very early. As a matter of fact, in Orthodox Judaism, you don't name a person after somebody until after he dies, and I was named after my mom's father, and my oldest sister was named after her mother. She died when my mother was about sixteen or seventeen. She had an older brother, three younger sisters, and a younger brother. My understanding is that when her father passed away, sometime in twenty-eight [1928] or twenty-nine [1929], somewhere around there, there was a *schidech*—you know what that means? A matchmaker, that matched up my father with my mother.

CE: How do you spell that?

SW: (laughs) S-c-h-i-d-e-c-h.

CE: Wonderful. I'm glad you spelled that for us.

SW: Anyway—and this is not [something that] somebody told me, but that I deduced myself. One of the reasons was that he would come and run the business, because all she had—her older brother had married and had went into his wife’s business, which was the custom in those days. Her younger sisters couldn’t run the business. Her youngest brother had left for Palestine then. So, he [SW’s father] came in and he actually ran the business. Of course, my mom helped, and the younger sisters helped. One of the younger sisters, Sara, later on went away to what’s called a *gimnazjum*, which is like college. But the business and everybody that knew the business, that knew the people, was called Boruchowicz, which was my grandfather’s name. When sometime they referred to my father, they also referred to him as Boruchowicz, because that’s his—

CE: Could you spell that for us?

SW: B-o-r-u-c-h-o-w-i-c-z.

CE: Thank you.

SW: The store was, like I said, across the street from the house; the house was across the street from the store, so that my mom spent a lot of time there. Chwa, the maid, took care of everything, except my mom would come in to prepare the cooking or whatever it was.

CE: I have some questions, and it’s kind of difficult, ’cause you were so young then, to talk about what you remember from then, and what you’ve been told, because you were—so, what’s the first thing that you remember of significance?

SW: You know, that question has been asked of me many times. Strangely enough, I would say that the major things I remember, and my mind has gotten a lot clearer since I started telling my story.

CE: That’s wonderful.

SW: My wife is a docent to the museum, and every now and then I am the speaker when she is the docent, so she must have heard my story a hundred times. Especially in the beginning, many times we would drive home and she would say, “You know, you said so-

and-so today, but I never heard it before.” And my explanation was that as I’m talking, as I’m telling my story, some things pop into my mind as if they were in front of me. You know, they’re just—the mind has a lot of hidden things, but as you pour it out, you remember.

I remember one thing in particular. The farmer that hid us, his name was Sokoł. He was the brother-in-law of Mr. Edward Turek, who had made the connection for us to hide in there. Mr. Edward Turek was an angel. He had a brother who was a devil. As a matter of fact, a couple of my aunts—he had finally agreed to hide them for a while, and then—we don’t know for sure, but the assumption is that he gave them away to Polish bandits and they got killed. For the longest time, I could not remember his [the brother’s] name. All I knew was Turek. And then, one day at the museum as I was telling the story, I said, “Władysław Turek.”

CE: Wow.

SW: It just—and this has happened to me in a lot of instances. I really can’t put a screen on what I remember and what I heard, but I think that most of my story I personally remember. The fact that, you know, about my mom’s marriage and all that, that was stories that I heard later. But from my life and what I can think of, most of it I do remember.

The first thing that I remember, as far as the war, as far as living and all that—it was September 1, 1936—1939, I’m sorry. During the month of September is when the Jewish New Year comes, Rosh Hashanah, and usually winter starts in Poland, so you get new clothes and everything. The thing I remember was that that particular day, I had gotten a brand new outfit, like satin shorts, black, and a white shirt; it was linen, and it had a satin black vest, sort of. Of course, I got new shoes, with a buckle, and the socks were knee-high. I had run out, and my kid brother, who was then—let’s see, I was like three and a half, so he must have been about two and a half. He ran after me. I ran out to show off. We were just trying on these clothes, but you know kids, you have to show off.

And then, as I was standing there in the street waiting for other kids to come out, the sky got black, and that was the first time in my life that I’d actually seen an airplane. Immediately, Chwa the maid came and dragged me back in, because we don’t know what was happening. That was actually when the Germans first attacked Poland. I remember telling my sisters about it. I remember using the word “There are millions of planes.” And that is probably the most outstanding memory that I have pre-war.

CE: Okay. So, your family was pretty well-off with the store.

SW: Yes.

CE: And what were their attitudes about Judaism?

SW: Oh, everybody that I knew, everybody that I know of, was Orthodox. The only one that (laughs) wasn't was my uncle who ran away to Palestine. He was apparently with the Bund organization, which was socialist. I think they were called communists. But I really didn't know what that was.

CE: And how about their attitudes towards education?

SW: Oh, wow. Education was, is, always was number one. My parents—after the war is when I really remember it. They would go without food, but make sure that we were getting the proper education. It's very important to Jews in general, and, if I can say so, my family in particular. My uncles—I had two surviving uncles—that was the most important thing.

CE: So let's go, then, to the beginning of your having to be hidden. I assume some of this you remember, and some of it you've been told by other relatives.

SW: Well, we were in a ghetto. Zelechow was created as a—sometime in the early forties [1940s], in early 1940, Zelechow was made into a ghetto. Unlike the other ghettos that you see so much and know so much about—Warsaw and Lodz with the walls, barbed wire, Zelechow was too small for that. So, they had imaginary gates and imaginary borders, and that was it. They outlawed school for the Jewish people, and that's when—talking about education, that's when the Jewish people, on the sly, started having schools in private homes.

We had a sort of—I guess now it'd be what you call a family room or playroom that was facing the street. They blacked out the windows, and I remember that early in the morning, somebody who was a teacher would sort of sneak into the house; and then, later on, as time went by, kids would come in one by one. I understood then that it was a

kindergarten class. And the same, from what I later on found out, happened in literally tens and tens of other homes.

Of course, they had the Jewish police and the Jewish Judenräte, which was the commissioners. I think they knew about it, but they just pretended like they didn't. As far as the Germans were concerned, it didn't exist; or maybe they also knew, but it wasn't something that they wanted to make an issue.

CE: So, people continued living in their own homes inside the ghetto?

SW: Sort of. What happened was that when they created the ghetto in the first place, they cut down the size of the city, of the town, by approximately one-half to two-thirds. And then they decreed that any gentile living within those limits had to move out, and any Jew living without those limits had to move in. So, you can imagine immediately, people were not living in their homes. We received a family of four that lived with us. So, you know.

CE: Do you remember that? Do you remember the four people?

SW: Yes. I remember the people—I couldn't tell you their names or anything like that—the thing that I remember was that all of a sudden, I didn't have my room.

CE: Yes, okay.

SW: So, that is the part that I sort of remember. And, all of a sudden, when we sat at the table to eat, we had to eat fast because then they had to eat, and things like that.

CE: Do you know what the relationships between gentiles and Jews were at that particular point in that community?

SW: In general, the relationship was not of trust. The reason I know that was that Jews could never go out of the ghetto without a special permit. The gentiles could come in to the ghetto—not whenever they wanted, but certainly Tuesday was market day. Forever, there was a big marketplace in the middle of town, and the farmers would come in from miles away. And the thing that I remember was that you had to be very careful what you

said, because maybe one of the Polish people understood Yiddish. I only spoke Yiddish; that was my only language. But you had to be careful what you said. And when things started getting bad and we started talking about going into hiding, I remember Mom and Dad sort of *tsootski*-ing, you know, talking among themselves, trying to say something without us understanding. But what I do remember is that certain gentiles were trusted, but the majority were not.

CE: And had that been true before the war began? Do you know?

SW: I would think so, yes. Poland—this is from history, not from my memory—was known as being anti-Semitic, and they had many pogroms in the old days. This is why the Jewish people were sort of keeping together in shtetls, not going out of it. But there were a lot of—that I do remember. There were a lot of Polish people that were trustful, were good. We had a Shabbos goy. Jews could not turn on the lights on the Sabbath, or put a fire on, and those who had electricity, there was a man, a Polish man, who would come in at a certain time on Friday nights and turn off the lights. So, he was called a Shabbos goy. “Shabbos” means the Sabbath, and “goy” means gentile. The one that we had actually spoke quite a lot of Yiddish, and he was very much liked—in our family, at least. And there were a lot of those. And, of course, Mr. Turek, who in fact saved our life. But the majority of the Polish people, and that—history verifies that, were anti-Semitic—more than anybody else, any other non-Jewish population in Europe.

CE: So now, let’s get to where you’re living in the ghetto and things start to change.

SW: Well, things started to change almost immediately. No schools, no jobs. People didn’t have anywhere to live, because there were just so many people that couldn’t be accommodated, especially towards the end of 1940 when the Germans started liquidating other villages in the surrounding area, because they didn’t want to have an outpost everywhere. So, they would bring them into Zelechow or other places like Zelechow, which I’m not familiar with, but I presume Zelechow was not the only one.

So that, almost on a daily basis, living space became tighter and tighter. Food became scarcer. They had a ration system that kept on reducing the amount of food you were allowed each week. This was also something that I found out later on, that in the beginning the ration allowed for something, the equivalent of 1500 calories. Towards the end, the calorie count was 750. Can you imagine? People who couldn’t somehow supplement their diets on the black market, or if they couldn’t grow something or whatever, literally died from hunger, the lack of hygiene: because of no running water, no hygiene. The latrines got filled. You can imagine how that is.

We had one pandemic, what they would call nowadays; it was typhoid fever, which was very contagious, very deadly, in those days without penicillin. I know that for a fact. I was sick with a fever, I was hallucinating, and the only reason that I survived was because of the family that took care of me, fed me. But many people just died in the streets. And, of course, that increased the contagion: people just walking by. Winters are very, very cold in Poland, and last long, and there's a lot of snow. People would die in the streets and sometimes not get buried for weeks.

CE: Let's talk about your family in particular. Again, I know some of this you will recall and some of it you will have been told, because you were four at this point, right?

SW: Almost five.

CE: Almost five. So, what happened? You're living in the ghetto. There are people living in the home with you. What happens?

SW: I don't know what you're referring to. What family?

CE: Well, you end up having to hide, so how do you get—

SW: Oh, no, no.

CE: Is that later?

SW: That came later.

CE: Okay. So, how do we get to there from here?

SW: In the first place, to get there we have to say, first, that in the beginning of 19— towards the middle of forty-one [1941], beginning of forty-two [1942], they brought in more refugees from Holland, France, once those were occupied. So, that little town, reduced by 50 or 60 percent, of 4,000 people now housed 15,000 people. You can

imagine what that's all about. Things got worse food-wise, dying-wise, sickness-wise: all of that. And then, what continued was that every Tuesday, the farmers would still come in. They weren't as free to trade, because the money used in the ghetto was not usable outside, but you were able to trade food for clothes, for whatever you had.

And then, what happened was that rumors started going around. Although we had seen a lot of migration into Zelechow, a lot of times when towns were evacuated, they were not taken to other towns. We only knew about Treblinka, but they were taken to Treblinka. And how did we know that? Well, these farmers that used to come in on Tuesdays, some of them lived near Treblinka, and they would tell these stories that wagonloads of Jews go into that encampment, and the wagons come out empty. They couldn't imagine that camp being able to hold so many Jews. In addition to that, some would say that at night, they would see the sparks coming out of the chimneys, and they would smell the burning flesh.

We heard these stories again and again—I didn't; my parents would. I sometimes could overhear my parents. I didn't understand what they were talking about, but I knew that they were preoccupied. But they couldn't believe it. It's hard to believe that one human being would do something like that to another.

In the beginning of 1942, something very lucky for us happened. We were asleep at night, and somebody was knocking very loudly on the door. Normally, if somebody was knocking you would be worried this was the Gestapo; but they would be banging, not knocking. So, my dad finally went and opened up the door, and in comes a cousin of his by the name of Yitzhak Bialabroda.

CE: Could you spell that for us?

SW: Yitzhak is Isaac. Bialabroda is B-i-a-l-a-b-r-o-d-a. He was a second cousin, my dad's second cousin, from a town whose name I do not remember: not too far away. Apparently, his town had been liquidated, or evacuated, and when they got to—on the wagons, when they got to Treblinka, he—I guess they had heard some of these stories, too. But he looked out, and he saw the piles of clothing, the cadavers being wheeled on wheelbarrows, and he could actually smell the burning flesh. So, I guess all of a sudden, it hit him that what he had heard was true.

Instead of walking off the platform, he fell off, purposely, and he fell underneath the train. He grabbed on to the axle, and this I did hear myself. When the train left, he left

with the train. They had to go through a lot of wooded areas, and the train had to slow down to make the turns, so on one of those he let himself down. He waited until dark, and then he went into the woods, and he made his way to Zelechow, because he remembered that he had family there. And as far as he knew, Zelechow was still viable. So, that's when he knocked on our door.

(clock chimes)

When he told my dad his story, Dad, all of a sudden, realized that everything that we heard was true. So, what do you do? This is where I mention that we had a lot of clients in the store that had been clients for a long time: some of them, Dad felt that he could trust. So, the following Tuesday, he approached Mr. Edward Turek. That's who I refer to as the angel. And he asked him, point blank, would he risk his life to hide us? Because any gentile that hid a Jew, if they found him, they would burn his house and family and everything. Mr. Turek's immediate reaction was, "I can't do it. You know, Mr. Wainberg, I'm a widower. I have a teenage son, and he is very Nazi-inclined. I'm sure if I brought you to my house, he would immediately run to the Germans."

Dad was very disappointed. I guess he knew about him being a widower, he knew about his son, but I guess he didn't know his son's feelings. He was very disappointed. The reason I know—I remember when they came home that night after closing that store, he and Mom were talking frankly that—this was before the other family came; they were still out someplace, because once the other family came, everything quieted down. What to do next? Dad and Mom sort of started going through the process of elimination: whom else can they ask? I don't know whether they actually found somebody to ask or not.

But the following Tuesday—and I remember this very well, because when Dad came home—he always came home for lunch, because there were no restaurants, no McDonald's or anything like that. When he came home for lunch, he was very up. I guess I didn't understand what it was all about, but my oldest sister, Riwka, said to him, "How come you're so enthused today?" He said, "Well, Mr. Turek came back." "Yes?" she says. He said, "Well, he said that he couldn't hide us, but his sister and brother-in-law agreed." At that time, that was all to me. But what had happened was that Mr. Turek had spoken to Mr. and Mrs. Sokoł, who had a farm not too far from his, and it just so happened that they had a cellar underneath their bedroom. And they agreed to hide us.

So, almost immediately, Mom and Dad started sending over things to the Sokoł house on Tuesdays. Mr. Sokoł had two sons. Zsizsek must have been about eighteen, nineteen; and Jaszek was about fourteen, fifteen. And he had two daughters, Pela and Mietka, and

they were about—probably eight, ten, something like that. So, Mr. Sokół and Zsiszek, mainly—sometimes Jaszek would also come—would come on Tuesdays, and they would come into the store, supposedly to buy something. But really, they didn't have any money to buy anything. Mom and Dad would give them—they had the used burlap bags that you would use as shopping bags, and they would fill it with whatever. Unfortunately, there weren't that many non-perishable foods then, but whatever, they would send some sugar, some salt, which we sold. And then they started sending some of our goods, like whatever items that we had of silver, precious stuff, and some of the dishes. I remember—Mom later on told us they couldn't give them like silver candelabras, which are strictly Jewish, because they couldn't. But this—the idea was that these would be used to sell on the black market.

And this went on for quite a while. I guess it must have started something like in June, maybe May, summer, until September of 1942. By that time, the Jewish population of Zelechow was over 15,000. This was after so many had died already, but there were still that many. This I remember. It was right after the holidays, the Jewish holidays: a sort of festive time. The Germans, the Gestapo, had a habit on Tuesdays coming into town en force, and they would pick maybe ten, twelve, fifteen what looked like Jewish strong men, and they would take them to a place called Wilga, which was a work camp. Dad had been picked twice, and this was the third time that they picked him up. I said September—beginning to be winter already; must have been like September 15, 20, something like that. I never figured out—I should—the date, because I do know the Jewish date, which was 23 days of Sivan.

They picked him up, and when somebody—this was in the marketplace; Mom was in the store. Somebody came to tell her that Dad had been picked up to go to Wilga again. So, she ran home and took out a coat, a heavy coat—it was getting cold—and whatever bread or whatever she had, and she handed it to him. And, as she handed it to him—the Gestapo was all around, so he couldn't talk freely, but he did say to her, "I want you to take the girls and send them to Sokół's tonight. And tomorrow night, I want you to go with the boys." I have asked my dad many times after, "Why?" and he couldn't give an explanation. I mean, why then?

Anyway, my mom, when Jaszek came in on his regular visit to the store, she told him; they made up that he would come after dark, on the other side of the ghetto's imaginary line, and she would make some kind of a signal. Mom went home and packed some stuff for my two sisters, and when it got dark she took them there. I remember saying where they were going. "Oh, they're going to sleep with their aunts." And then, she came home, and she started packing some stuff. I was asleep by then. The following night, we were supposed to go. But that never came.

The following morning, it was still dark out. We were awakened by bullhorns and shouts. “*Raus, raus*, everybody! Go to the marketplace! You’re being relocated.” Mom panicked. She woke us up. We hardly got dressed. Whatever packages she had prepared for us to take, we left them. All I remember is she had made—you know what a babushka is?

CE: Yes.

SW: So, one of those red kerchiefs that she put some stuff in. I don’t know, bread or cookies or whatever. I grabbed that, and we ran out. We were walking the wrong way, and one of the Jewish policemen stopped her and said, “You’re going the wrong way.” Although she had panicked, she had a mind, and said, “I’m looking for my two girls.” Apparently, he knew that I had two sisters, so he let her go.

And where we went was—at the time, I didn’t know anything about it. But apparently, one of my aunts, my mom’s sisters, had been engaged to a gentleman who, with his brother, had a repair shop for bicycles and sewing machines. They had invented and had actually done a prototype of a new spool for a sewing machine. The old sewing machines went up and down, and this sewing machine was the zigzag. When the Germans came in, they were afraid it would be taken away from them, so they created an attic above their workshop.

And this house—I found later, when my dad and his cousin spread the word, everybody started preparing hiding places. So, they had that attic that had been prepared, and they put everything away and they put up some bread and some water, some empty buckets. And that’s where we went. The only thing I remember is climbing up this rickety ladder that went up to the attic.

CE: And this is you and your mother—?

SW: And my brother. My brother. We climbed up, and it was still dark. I went to sleep. I don’t even know where. But when I woke, it was already the middle of the day. I knew how to count, and I started counting. There were thirty-nine of us in that attic that was probably about the size of that room, with a reclining roof, metal roof. I don’t know how thirty-nine people fit in there, but anyway, we were there. Most of the people I knew, and some of them I didn’t. And we sat there, basically sat there all day.

CE: Was there enough room to sit, for everyone?

SW: That's all you could do. You couldn't stand. A funny thing happened. They decided that the kids—I don't know how many other kids there were; I don't remember. But the kids would sit in the low part, you know, where the roof was. And we went to sleep there. My brother was a very active sleeper, and he hit the roof and made a noise. So then, the kids were brought in, that made noise. Whatever bread, whatever water. At night, a couple of men would lower the ladder and empty the buckets. And we just sat, literally just sat there. There was nothing we could do. You could hardly move or anything.

A day, two, three went by. They were waiting, basically, for the Germans to be finished with the looting so that we—I don't know what they planned to do, but basically, I guess they figured they could go out and hide someplace else, or go into the woods or whatever. Day three, day four, day five, finished all the food we had, finished all the water we had, and the Germans were still out there. A couple of the men—one of them was (inaudible)—snuck out at night trying to find some food. They found very little food, because whoever left took the food with them. But they did find water, because you can't take water with you. And this went on like this for sixteen days. I remember many times my mom would cry.

But on the sixteenth day, two of the Jewish policemen were walking by the side of the house. Apparently, they had done this on many sidewalks. They knew that people were hiding, but they didn't know where. So, they just went all over town and repeated the same story very loudly in Yiddish. They couldn't talk outright, because German is very close to Yiddish, so they were afraid some of the Germans might understand it. I found out later that whereas the Jews could understand German, Germans couldn't understand Yiddish.

But basically, what they were saying is that the reason it's taking so long—because most of the other liquidations of towns took three, four, five days—that (a) the Germans found a lot more to loot than in other places; but (b), more importantly, Zelechow was about seventeen, eighteen miles from Sobolew, which was the nearest train station. So, they had to transport everything with horse and buggy or whatever trucks they had. That's why it took so long. But that was like—they told us that not because they wanted to tell us that, but they wanted everybody's attention. And that's when they told us the real thing was that they had overheard the chief of the Gestapo say that he believed there were a lot more hidden treasures in the walls, and that tomorrow he was going to start burning houses.

So, we knew we had to leave. Fortunately, this was like the beginning of October already, or the end of September, and the nights in Poland become very long. So, probably by about four, four-thirty, it was dark already, and everybody started leaving by twos. Mom took the two of us and we left, and we were going to Sokoł's house, which was in Wilczka, probably something like seven or eight miles away. I guess Mom had known where it was, and she had probably done this trip before, because it was near Turek's house. But she couldn't take the regular paths, the regular road, because somebody might see us. So, she went sort of through the woods.

CE: And you walked?

SW: We walked, the three of us. Well, my brother had to be carried a lot. Somehow, my mom got waylaid, and it started getting daylight, which was probably somewhere around eight in the morning. She was afraid to continue in daylight. When we were talking, you asked me a question about the gentiles. We didn't trust them. So, she found a barn with a hayloft, which we climbed, and sat there until dark. Fortunately, the day was short. No food, no water, no bathroom. And we just sat there. People many times ask me, "You were a young kid. Didn't you cry?" Well, by then, we had lived through the ghetto. But the sixteen days in the ceiling had taught us a lot of things, and one of the things was not to cry.

It got dark and we continued, and we finally got to the Sokoł farm. My mom left us sitting out in the bushes, and she knocked on the door. Mr. Sokoł opened it and was surprised and elated to see her, because he probably had expected us two, three days after liquidation. Mom came and got us, and we went down into the cellar. There were three separate doors. We went down. The only thing I remember is I expected to find my two sisters there, period. You can imagine my surprise when, in addition to my sisters, I found my aunts there, my three uncles, my cousin—cousins, I should say. Actually, the only cousin that I really remember was my little same—my namesake; he was about six months younger than I. And there was another family there. That night, we just went to sleep, but the following day, we found out in this cellar that was approximately eighteen feet by eleven, five feet high, there were twenty-four of us.

The only air was through a little hole between the roof, or the ceiling, and one of the walls that went outside. It wasn't a window, it was just a hole, and outside there were some bushes that we couldn't really see. The other thing that you couldn't do is you couldn't have a light, because somebody might see it. In the morning, there were a couple of benches on each side, each long side, that we sat on. In the middle, there was a

crate that served like a table. And basically, the first few days, all I remember was talk: to my sisters, to my cousins. You know, “How was it?” and “What’d you do?” and so on and so forth. And then it got to be boring.

The other family was a family of a mother and a father; a son, who was in his twenties; four daughters, from a teenager to somebody in her twenties; and there was the fiancé of one of the daughters and the fiancé’s father. And they had a nasty habit of smoking: in a place like this, with just a little window. And the father, Peter Popoński was his name, suffered from tuberculosis. He was continually smoking and spitting up blood. I remember this very, very well, because my dad used to argue with him constantly. “Why don’t you stop smoking? We’re all choking. If the smoke goes out, somebody might see the door.” But they just—you know, nowadays when I tell this to the kids, I tell them not to start smoking.

CE: That’s good.

SW: Because of how bad it is.

CE: Is it okay if we stop now, and then—

SW: Sure.

CE: And then pick up this story on the next tape?

SW: It’s a good thing that we stop now.

CE: Okay.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

CE: This is tape two with Sal Wainberg. So, we were talking about your life hiding in the cellar. Would you like to pick up on that?

SW: Yeah. Well, besides the problem of being bored and not having enough to do, not having enough food, not being able to go to the bathroom when you needed to, we had a problem with the other family. The interfamily relationship was pretty strange, because the Popońskis were what was called in Polish the *intelligentsia*. They were not religious, and they sort of looked down on us who were religious. Of course, the smoking was the biggest problem. The side problem from the smoking was that you run out of cigarettes, and Mr. Sokoń did not smoke. So (a) there wasn't enough money to buy cigarettes. Cigarettes were very expensive; you had to buy them on the black market. But (b) Mr. Sokoń could not buy them, because everybody knew that he didn't smoke.

So, the solution that they found is the two—the son and the fiancé would sneak out every once in a while at night, and they would be gone sometimes for a week, sometimes for two. There were all kinds of speculations what they did. They came back mainly with cigarettes; and one time they came back with guns, which my dad detested, but there wasn't much he could do about it. I remember sort of Dad speculating that they probably went out to be with women, you know. They probably robbed people to get the money to buy the cigarettes; they probably stole the cigarettes; all kinds of things like that. And yet, there was nothing you could do about it. And this went on.

The next event that was of significance was in April of 1943. Mr. Popoński passed away. He lacked the decency to pass away anytime, but he passed away on the Thursday before Good Friday. And the reason that's important is that Polish Catholics celebrate Easter from Thursday night through Sunday afternoon, where they don't go to work. All they do is go to church, and family comes to the house and you go to family. Not being able to know when there would be nobody in the house, we had to stay in the cellar for three days with a dead man laying there. I guess for the adults, it wasn't as traumatic as it was for us kids, because I remember talking about it for years later, how that was bad.

Anyway, finally came Sunday night. Everything was at peace, and the men went out and buried him. You know, every bad thing has a good thing. We had one mouth less to feed, one less smoker, less spitting of blood, and additional room. Because, if you figure we had twenty-four people, eighteen feet, and at night, to go to sleep, we would sort of pick up the benches and sleep one next to the other. So, that gave approximately nine inches per person. If one had to turn over, everybody had to turn over. So, with one man less, I guess we had ten inches per person.

But this didn't last long, because come June, one day Mr. Sokoń comes back from—during harvest time, June, July, August, the family was all out. There was no school. The family was out in the field working all day. Usually, they came home when it was real dark. And this time they come home, and the first thing they did that time is open the

cellar doors, and they introduced us to a new man. “This is Sergei Yalinko.” I think was the name. I have it written down. He’s a Russian prisoner of war who had escaped from prison, and he was hurt. How Mr. Sokoł came upon him is still a mystery. “But you take him, you make sure that he’s cured, and you make sure that he is all right.” Now, I understand—afterwards, I understood more what this meant, because by that time, the Russians were winning already. So, the idea was that the Russians were going to liberate us from the Germans. Therefore, if Mr. Sokoł, in addition to the Jews saved, saved a Russian prisoner of war, he would have a lot of brownie points. So, that’s why he brought him.

We literally knew nothing about his wound. He had a leg wound. We certainly had no medicine or anything. But, fortunately, he was a young, very strong man. By just keeping him clean, after a few weeks he was well. As a side, he was very much resented, because he was an additional mouth to feed, an inch taken away from your space, and so on and so forth. In addition to that, nobody understood what he said, ’cause he spoke Russian. The man was a very intelligent man, and a very nice man, and he figured he wasn’t going to accomplish anything with the adults, so he started playing with us kids.

CE: (laughs)

SW: And he started out by teaching us Russian songs. He progressed to, somehow, convince Mr. Sokoł to bring him in some wood pieces, little pieces of wood, and to bring him a piece of metal. Nowadays, I understand that it was probably a broken axle. And he brought him a stone. He was able to fashion a knife out of that thing. He and I made a chess set out of the pieces of wood. In addition to that, he made a set of cards, playing cards, out of pieces of paper and cardboard that Mr. Sokoł gave him, which he never would give us, because by that time Mr. Sokoł resented us very much.

His family was very uptight, of course, and he really—I think when Mr. Sokoł first took us in, just like us, he thought it would be a week or two and that would be it. But as time dragged on, we had no choice. He must have many times considered what would happen if he turned us over to the Germans. Probably he and his family would be killed. He also must have thought about what if he gave us over to what was known as the AK, they called it, Armia Krajowa, the folks’ army. That basically was the Polish army in exile. But what we knew even then, and we found out later, is mostly they dedicated themselves to find Jews and kill them, because the anti-Semitism in Poland is very well known.

Anyway, to this Russian he gave things that he didn’t give to us. That was a known fact. But little by little, we were able to—the kids, at least, my brother, my sisters, my cousins,

were able to be entertained for the first time, have something to do. My uncle (inaudible), my mom's brother, started writing a prayer book. I found out later he had a store and he had a lot of receivables, so he had a book that he carried the accounts. He figured the accounts were worthless by then, so instead he started writing a book, which I think you should take a picture of, too.

CE: Oh, yes!

SW: Okay? I have a copy.

It got to the point where I, more than my sister and brother, was able to have a Russian conversation with him, because I was the one that made the chess set. I was the one that he taught how to play chess, and we played chess almost constantly. In doing so, he sort of ignored everybody else, which there was some jealousy to, but I was his kid. This went on.

Another problem we had was one day, Mrs. Sokoł's mother passed away, and they had the wake in the house. I don't know if it's the same here, but Catholics there, the wake lasts two or three days. They cut it short because of us, because while the wake was going on, we couldn't exchange waste buckets with them, because they couldn't open [the door]. We couldn't get water, we couldn't get food. But the worst part was not being able to go to the bathroom, because the buckets were full. You're talking about those problems.

CE: Wow.

SW: Every bottle we had, we used—the men, that is. And, a mystery that still preoccupies me: the youngest daughter of the Popońskis was able to do it in a bottle.

CE: (laughs)

SW: All these are things that make life interesting. Anyway, things continued this way until sometime in June of 1944. The whole family was out in the field, and we were basically sitting, waiting for Mr. Sokoł to come home, give us new water, take out the bucket. In the summer, the days are very long in Poland, so this must have been about four, five o'clock. The sun was still up and everything. We heard some noises, and we

figured maybe something had happened and the family came home early. But then we heard boots, and none of the Sokols had boots. So, my uncle started praying, my mom started crying, and everybody—but were still calm.

And then we heard one of the—the first door to get down to our cellar was in their bedroom, and it was hiding two boards of a false wall. There was an armoire, like a closet—there were no built-in closets—on wheels, so he was able to move it away. That closet had never been moved in the daytime. So, it was still daylight, and we heard the closet move.

Everybody panicked. The two—the son and the fiancé grabbed their guns and stood by the last door. And I don't know. I guess my brother, sisters and I just cried. There was a lot of praying. And then, when finally the last door to the cellar opened up, the two started shooting, and bullets started flying all over. It seems there were like eighteen or twenty Polish bandits. They had tried to pull my kid brother out in the hall. He was grazed by a bullet, and we pulled him back in.

I must have blacked out—I don't know why—because the next thing I remember it was very dark, which meant it must have been a few hours [later]. We were all sitting lined up against that wall where the closet had been moved. There was blood all over. I could see the fiancé and the son laying sort of on the—where the ladder led up to that false wall, full of blood. The other one, the fiancé, was laying in the bedroom, actually, in a pool of blood. And there were these—what seemed like five or six or seven, these big Polish guys with guns. They were just asking, “Where's the money? Where's your jewelry?” That's all you could hear. “Where's your money? Where's your jewelry?”

I guess Pop was the leader, and he kept on saying, “Whatever we had, we gave Mr. Sokol to take to the black market and buy food. We have nothing left.” And they insisted. So, finally, Dad had an inspiration, and he said to them, “You know who we are?” [The bandit said] “Yeah, we know you're the Boruchowiczs.” He said, “You know that we were very rich? Unfortunately, whatever we had is gone. But”—and that's when they perked up—“if you let everybody else go, I will go with you to Zelechow, and I will show you underneath my house, where I have buried some jewelry and some gold.” Well, they immediately jumped at him. “Let's go!”

Dad was never a poker player, but he really started playing poker, and he said to them, “We can't go before we bury the dead and clean up.” So, what looked like the leader had this little conference with two of the other guys, and they agreed. We started cleaning up and carrying out the two dead people that we saw. That's when I found that my last

remaining aunt and my oldest sister lay outside, dead. A dog had started chewing away at my sister's arm. I didn't even cry, but I helped clean up. The bandits helped dig the graves, and we buried everybody and we cleaned up. They were ready to go, except it started being daylight. Daylight gets to be early. So, they were afraid to go into town, because they were bandits.

Dad of the bright ideas had another bright idea. He said, "Why don't you leave us here for the day, and you go wherever you spend the day? And at nightfall, come back and I'll go with you." I don't know whether Dad actually expected them to agree, but they agreed and they left. So, immediately, we left: my family, the Popońskis, with two daughters—the third daughter had disappeared—and we started walking. Basically, what we did that first night is—I don't know; we must have walked till it started getting daylight. Dad found a rye field, and we went into the rye field and we hid there. We stayed there all day.

What we didn't count on was the sun started burning us. We basically had no clothes. The walk had punctured some of our feet, because of walking in the fields. It got to be night, and Dad said we must move, because we can't stay in one place because of the birds, you know. I don't know where my dad got all that knowledge: he wasn't a farmer, but I guess he had been with farmers enough. The Popońskis said—there were three women. They said they couldn't; they were just going to stay there. We found out later that they went back to Sokoń and begged him, and he agreed to let them stay in the barn. Three days later, somebody—Mom and Dad suspected it was Turek's brother, Władysław Turek—had given them away to the Germans. They came, and because the Popońskis insisted that they had hidden there without the Sokońs' knowledge and Sokoń agreed, they killed the Popońskis and Mr. Sokoń, but they did not burn the house and the rest of the family.

CE: They killed Mr. Sokoń.

SW: Mr. Sokoń. And we continued. The way it was at night, we would march from one place to another, and on the way we would stop at farms. Again, I don't know how Dad knew this, but every farm had a barn—a well, because they had no water. Every farm also had like a cave, or a ditch, where they put away food. If you dig a cave deep enough, it keeps food cool in the summer and it does not freeze in the winter. So, we would sneak in there, steal some of the food, take some water from the well. Every now and then we'd get chased away by a dog, and we would go a day without food, but food wasn't a problem because we could always eat the kernels from the rye. It's not too good for you. But water, if we couldn't get water, that was—I remember one day we were chased away (clock chimes) from two different farms, and finally Dad decided he would

fill our buckets in what looked like a river or something. The water tasted funny at night, and in the morning he filled the buckets. It was full of worms and weeds and stuff, and we had to drink it, because—you know. Especially, our faces were this big from blisters.

This went on. It was probably week four we settled there, and as soon as it got to be a little daylight, we heard movement outside. Dad picked up his head, and he saw a farmer was harvesting the rye. A very, very quiet discussion ensued between my dad, my uncle, and my two older cousins, my uncle's two sons—I forgot to tell you something else. Should we run for it, or should we stay in the hope that the farmer is by himself and he won't get to us? My father prevailed, and we stayed. And sure enough—but what do you do the next day? I don't know how my dad knew this, but he said that wheat doesn't get harvested till six weeks later. The problem with wheat is that whereas rye grows about five, five and a half feet, wheat only grows about four feet. So, we couldn't even sit up; we had to lie down all day. But that's what we did, and this went on from sometime in the middle of June to the end of July.

I think it was July 31 that we heard a lot of movement: tanks, artillery, machine guns. I don't think there were airplanes, thank God. And we're afraid to move. My dad and one of my cousins snuck out and stole some water someplace, but we just lived on the kernels of wheat. The second night, the same thing. We didn't know whether it was the Germans retreating or the Russians advancing.

Finally, on Saturday, August 2, 1944, everything was quiet, but we could hear the trucks and men marching. We still didn't know who it was. I guess it must have been somewhere around ten, eleven o'clock. I recognized one of the songs that the Russian soldier taught me, and I started jumping up. I said, "It's the Russians! It's the Russians!" and Dad started questioning me. My sister chimed in. She could sing the song, too. So, we got up and we walked out, and we greeted these Russian soldiers. To look at us, they didn't believe that we were human.

Dad went over to one of the trucks that stopped, and I guess he was hoping somebody spoke Yiddish. No answer. Polish, German, nothing. Finally, I know my sister—after my older sister died, my youngest sister was never the same. Still isn't the same. She spoke Russian as well as I did, but she didn't do anything. So, I went up. Dad was trying to talk to him, and I went up and I started interpreting what he was saying. You can't believe the face of these Russians. Here's this little kid—dad—and he speaks Russian. Finally, he picked me up, one of them. They didn't give us chocolates, but they gave us bread. The American army gave chocolates; they gave us bread. He wanted to know how come I spoke Russian. So, I explained to him. "Where do you want to go?" "We want to go to Zelechow." We didn't know anything better.

So, we went back to Zelechow. They took us to our house, and Dad knocked on the door and a man answered. Dad thought he recognized him, and he looked at us. He looked at us, and finally, Dad started talking to him in Polish and the man answered in Yiddish. He was our Shabbos goy. He had bought the house from the Germans. And he says to Dad, “You know, I always figured that you were going to come back. The house is yours, because I paid almost nothing for it. In addition to that, I have a present for you.”

That’s when he went up in the attic, and he brought down the Torah. Apparently, the day of the liquidation, when they burned the synagogue and they started burning all the books and everything, that particular Torah slipped out to the side, and he was able to pick it up and hide it in the attic in case we survived. I mean, if that man wanted everything we had then—we didn’t have anything—Dad would have given it to him, because my uncle, his brother-in-law, started writing a prayer book thinking that if we survived, there would be no prayer book left. Okay. And here you find such a treasure. We actually—he actually didn’t look at that Torah till days later, which is when he realized that it was a Torah that my great-great-great-grandparents had given to the shul, because their inscription was still in there.

Anyway, we settled down. That’s when we found out that Dad’s leg was about the size of an elephant’s. I guess human nature says that, while you’re suffering, you don’t know that you’re suffering, but when you can relax—he couldn’t walk. So, he went into the bedroom, and he lay there. I was the man of the house. What are we going to do? Well, my mom was a very good cook, so she decided that we were going to open up a restaurant for the Russians. Don’t ask me where we got the first supplies, because I’ve never figured it out. But we somehow got some supplies, and I remember the first thing that Mom did is she made a borscht. You know what a borscht is?

CE: Mm-hmm.

SW: Out of beets. And the Russians that came in just loved it, and they would give you any money you wanted. One of them even gave her an advance so she could buy some more stuff. And this went on for a couple of days. Then, as I was serving one of the tables, there was a guy with a lot of medals and all the stuff. He started asking me questions: who we are, what we are. And he said, “Did your dad survive?” I said yes. “Where is he?” I told him, “He’s in the other room; he’s sick.” By that time, the Polish doctor had come around, and he’d said that his leg had become gangrenous and had to be amputated, and Dad refused. Jewish religion required that when you’re buried, all of the parts are with you, and he didn’t know if it was amputated he would have the leg.

So, I told this man, because he asked me. He said, "I'm a doctor. Let me go look." I didn't know—you know, he had been seen by a doctor; what was he going to do? He went in and he looked and he looked, and he comes out and says, "We're going to take him to our hospital." They had established an army hospital. I found out later on, from the Russians, that he could have been court-martialed for taking a civilian in there. But after six weeks, Dad walked out on both his legs. He later on suffered from it, but he was able to walk all his life: just a miracle.

Anyway, this went on. I used to go to the market on Tuesdays and did some marketing. I remember I was lucky enough to one day get a hold of a barrel of beer, which was nonexistent, and the Russians—they had what was called bimber, which was a very crude type of vodka made out of beets. So, when I got this keg of beer, they would give anything for it, except I had no pump. So, what do you do? One of them got me a rubber hose, probably from gasoline, and he taught me how to siphon out. Of course, that was the first and last time in my life that I got drunk. It was a good lesson.

Until my dad got well that he could do something, I was, in effect, taking care of the house, and Mom was the cook. This went on from the beginning of August through the end of the year. I remember it was the first Tuesday in January, very cold—

CE: In which year? Is this now forty-five [1945]?

SW: Nineteen forty-five. The war was still on. Dad and I went out to the marketplace, just like we always did. But by that time, there had been 250 Jewish people in Zelechow. Not all of them were originally from Zelechow; only fifty-three were original Zelechow people that survived. Only three children: my brother, my sister, and I. But there were 250, and it started being a community, and then it started thinking about making a shul, you know, and all that stuff. We went out that Tuesday to the market, and the farmers, instead of coming in with chickens and potatoes and whatever else, they came in with guns, pitchforks, and axes. There was a popular song—I don't remember it, but it was a popular song that they sang that "We have to finish Hitler's job." There were nine killed, thirty-six wounded. I don't know how Dad and I got home, but he immediately went out, hired a horse and buggy, and as soon as it got dark, we left. We put whatever we had on the horse and buggy and left. I remember my brother and I had started a—

(to CE) Thank you.

We had started a stamp collection; it was the only treasure we had. Everything was packed. We got to daylight, we got tired, so Dad found—it wasn't an inn, it was somebody's house that we laid down to rest [in]. I don't know whether we were able to sleep an hour, two, three, whatever it was, but we woke up. There were some bandits tried to kill us. I don't know. We hid, but they took everything we had. The only thing I remember they took was my stamp collection. It was the only thing I had.

Anyway, we got to Lodz, which was then the fourth largest city in Poland. It had just been liberated, and we had heard that there were quite a few Jews there. It was still—the Russians were still dominant. Since I spoke Russian, I was privileged. We found a couple of Russian soldiers, and they liberated an apartment that was occupied by German sympathizers, and we moved in. It was a beautiful apartment, Jagoszewskiego 12. It had an upstairs and a downstairs, and a lot of hallways. And that apartment sort of became the gathering of the Jewish people that survived. They would come, and we had a bulletin board and they would mark down the relatives they were looking for, the relatives that they found. There were three weddings performed, including my uncle, whose wife had survived. There were—out of the clear blue sky, my mom, who had gone through menopause, got pregnant.

CE: Wow!

SW: And so, my kid brother was born in September of 1945. This couple that got married there, they had a daughter there; and a distant cousin of my dad's, who survived with a woman, they got married and they had a daughter there. They now live in—well, they're dead, but their kids live in Canada. For the first time in my life, I went to school, and I went to third grade. It was a Yiddish school.

CE: And you're how old then?

SW: In forty-five [1945], I was nine, I guess. I went to third grade. My brother went to first grade, because that's the only thing they had. My sister, I think, went to sixth grade; I don't remember. And life seemed to be normal. Dad actually found a store that he was able to buy, and started doing business. His brother, my uncle that survived, he also got married. He got married to a cousin, who survived in Auschwitz as a gentile.

CE: Wow!

SW: Okay? Her last name was my dad's mother's last name. And they had a girl, in our apartment. Everything was fine, and my uncle worked with my dad in the store. The war was over, and the communists—Pollacks, Polish government—took over. And the anti-Semitism was very—it wasn't as obvious when the Russians were there, but it became very obvious then. Anyway, price controls were all over.

One day, they walked in, and my uncle was there and he sold to somebody a kilogram of sugar for fifty-three cents. The official price was fifty cents; we paid fifty-one cents for it wholesale. But they closed the store and they put him in jail. Dad had to borrow and beg and whatever else to bribe I don't know how many people to get him out of jail. And he started talking about leaving, to go to Palestine—except they'd closed the borders. Whenever you can't leave, you want to leave, of course. Dad saw that he could not smuggle across the border with four kids.

Another miracle happened. The Polish government, at the behest of its—it's called HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society]; the organization is still in the States. I don't know what the letters stand for: Hebrew Israeli something or other; American. And they were helping refugees in Europe. At their behest, the Polish government agreed to allow a trainload of 500 Jewish orphans to embark for France to take a boat to Palestine. How my dad got the three of us registered as orphans is a mystery, but we were orphans. I guess bribing did everything. Orphans, and we got on that train. It was a trip that should have taken probably three, four days; it took six weeks, because of all the passport controls and the train changes and so on and so forth.

We stopped in Czechoslovakia, a place called (inaudible), where I learned how to say "ice cream" in Czech. And we arrived in France, in a little town in the southern part of France, in the Alps, called Aix-les-Bains. We settled down there in an abandoned hotel, waiting for a boat to take us to Palestine, because by then the British had blockaded Palestine; you couldn't get in. So, we were waiting, and in the meantime we had school there. That's the second time I went to school. We did performances. I was in a play, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, and the reason I was in it was because I was the only boy that could sing lying down.

CE: (laughs)

SW: It was a lot of fun. On Friday afternoons, we used to go out and ride bicycles. We had fun. It was a very small town. And then, I guess it was like July or August of 1946, we get a notice that the following Monday, we were going to embark on a train to go to

Cannes, France, to embark on the *Exodus* for Palestine. I don't know whether five minutes earlier or five minutes later, we get a telegram from Paris, from Mr. Bialabroda. That's the fellow that warned us about Treblinka. He's now living in Paris, France. He got a telegram from my parents, who had successfully smuggled across and were in Strasburg, Germany, and would he please contact us so we don't go with the orphanage?

We joined them in Paris. The intention, by then, was not to go to Palestine anymore, because it was dangerous, but to go to America. So, we did. They put us on a train; he met us at the train. We spent about a year and a half in a one-room—one hotel room, the six of us. After a while, through that same organization, my parents were able to send my kid brother away to a farm in France. The first spoken language he ever spoke was French. I was able to go to a seminary in (inaudible) which is a little town—actually, not a town, a little village about fifty, sixty miles outside of Paris. So, this was more doable already for my parents, with the two kids.

We were waiting to get a visa to go to America. The visa didn't come, because we were in the Polish quota, and that was very long, although most of the people in the quota were dead. The State Department, which was—and in some instances still is—was very anti-Semitic. They decided not to eliminate the dead ones, but to give the dead people visas in order, and so and so. So, we didn't get a visa to the States. I don't know if you remember, but in November 1947, there was the Berlin Airlift. You familiar with what that is? In the States, from the history I read before, all the papers that were sent and the media was how the great the U.S. Air Force. For seventy days and nights, they supplied West Berlin with food, gas, water, coal, everything.

In Europe, we didn't know of that miracle. All we knew was, "Here comes World War III." Einstein, who had then migrated to the States, was asked the question, what was going to be World War III? His answer was he didn't know, but World War IV was going to be with stones and axes. Everything was going to be eliminated.

CE: Right.

SW: I guess he knew that the bomb was coming. Anyway, Dad—everybody, not just Dad; we were desperate to get out of Europe. Dad for days parked himself at the displaced persons bureau. "We want to go to America. We want to go to America." Some days, when he could, he brought me or my sister along to get their sympathy. Finally, one day—I was there—a woman called him. "We have a visa for you and your family." Oh! Dad was elated. "You're going to Costa Rica." "Where's Costa Rica?" "Why, it's in America."

Dad was so happy. We came back to the hotel, and though we weren't leaving for days he started packing and saying goodbye to everybody. "We're going to America!" This must have been like February. April 1, we took a train to Cannes, where we embarked on a Polish ship called *Jagiello*, run by an Italian crew. They fed us spaghetti and stuff, which we had no idea what it was. By then, we had learned what raw tomatoes were, in salads. I remember at first Dad thought it wasn't kosher, even though it was a vegetable.

CE: (laughs)

SW: We learned, but never heard of cooked tomatoes. And with the sea motion and the food, we all got terribly sick. We must have spent about four or five days in the cabin just retching. When we finally got better, it was a very nice day, and we went up on deck. Dad brought out his English/Yiddish book, because we had to know English when we came to America. Another immigrant, going to Uruguay, had somehow gotten to know Dad; I don't know how. He says to him, "Didn't you tell me you were going to Costa Rica?" Dad said yes. He said, "They speak Spanish there." So, that's how—

We couldn't get into Costa Rica, because Costa Rica was going through a mini-revolution, so we landed in Panama. Fortunately, there was a Jewish family there from Zelechow, that had left like in the twenties [1920s], and they somehow found out that we were on that ship. They came and they took us, and for the first time in my life I had a Coke.

CE: Wow!

SW: Yes, that was something. And they gave me ice cream, and I was in heaven. I learned what mangoes were. In Poland, a pineapple was called *ananas*. It was so expensive that only when you were deadly sick would you have a piece of pineapple. And I remember they just cut the pineapples and I could eat as much as I wanted. It was—Anyway, the revolution in Costa Rica only lasted a few days. After two weeks, they somehow got us on a one-engine plane over the mountains, from Panama to Costa Rica. I had never been on an airplane. And that's when we came to Costa Rica.

I think this is a good place to stop.

CE: Okay. That's good. Thank you.

Part 2 ends; part 3 begins

CE: This is tape three with Sal Wainberg. Sal, could you go back and talk about your aunt and daughter—her daughter—who were killed, and then we'll move to Costa Rica?

SW: Okay. When I told you that my mom and my brother and I got lost, sort of, and we had to spend the night—a day—in a barn, apparently, my aunt (inaudible), my mom's brother's wife, and their daughter Sara, who was then probably about twelve or thirteen—she was the same age as my older sister. They were also walking, independent of us, and apparently they also did not make it by daylight. But, unlike my mom, they decided to continue. We didn't find that out until about six weeks later. They were discovered by some Polish bandits, who robbed and killed them. So, of course, I guess my mom at various times questioned herself, whether she should have continued or not. That gave her the definite answer. We were very lucky.

I was talking last night to—we were at the (inaudible) I told you about—talking to a doctor, my doctor. He said, "Life is such that we don't know when we go. You gotta do whatever you can." I said, "I firmly believe that when my time comes, I will go, no matter what." And proof of this is throughout my life. There were so many times that I should have gone, and I'm still around. So, obviously, my time isn't there yet. I'm a firm believer in that. I don't know whether you'd call it religion or—whatever it is. But that's what it is.

CE: Can I ask you, when you were in the attic and in the cellar, can you remember what that felt like? Was it hopeless?

SW: Well, you're talking about two very different conditions, yet, they're exactly the same. When I was in the attic, I was bewildered. I really didn't know whether I was going to be there a day, a year, or a month, and I didn't know whether I had been there a day, a year, or a month. The days weren't days, the nights weren't nights, because it was almost always dark. It was snowing, so whatever light there was coming in was covered. And I guess I was also a lot younger, although you might be talking about just a month, but I was a lot younger.

In the cellar, I realized more of what was happening. We all—my dad said it many times: if we had known beforehand that it was going to take that long, I don't think we would

have even attempted to go through it, because the pains, the sufferings, the lack of everything—everything!—was such that you really didn't want to live. But yet, life is such that as long as there's hope, you continue.

I remember when we found out that my aunts had been killed, Mom was just—she would faint at the drop of a finger. And besides that, she was not well to begin with. In 1942, my mom, who was about—I don't know, 5'3", 5'4"—weighed 100 kilograms. That's over 200 pounds. In 1944, my mom weighed thirty-six kilograms. That's about seventy-five pounds. So, you can imagine. She would faint, I mean, constantly. Every time she thought about her sisters, she would faint. We didn't have any smelling salts or anything, so Dad would press on her temples to revive her. It had gotten so that her temples were really sore, and she would say, "Just let me die. Let me die."

And this—I used to dream about it. My dad would say, "What am I going to do with the kids if you die? Who's going to take care of the kids?" And this is the way—I still wonder a lot of times where my dad got his strength, his wit. I mean, some of the things that he knew that nobody else knew: about the farms, about the wheat, the rye. Who would know? And he wasn't a farmer; he was a store boy. Yet, he held all that, and thanks to him, really, is why I'm here, why we're all here. So, yes.

CE: I know this is probably very painful, but—your sister, when she died, can you talk at all about that?

SW: Well, I don't know how. Obviously, she and one of my aunts, the only remaining aunt, were running away, just like everybody else tried, and they didn't make it. One of the Popoński girls made it, and we found out years later that she was living in Australia, of all places. My mom and dad, who were visiting Israel, happened to run into her on the street.

CE: Wow!

SW: The only thing I remember—when we buried her, of course, I remember that. I participated in the burial, yet I definitely—I mean, this I definitely remember. For the first, like, two or three weeks that we were running at night from one place to the other, many times, many times, I would look around to see whether my sister could keep up with us. My mind still hadn't grasped the fact that she was gone. It was very, very painful. She was—I shouldn't say that, but she was my favorite sister. My sister Sara was only about a year and a half younger than me. She would have been—she was more

inwardly. But my sister Riwka, she tried to teach me things, tried to do things for me. During the ghetto time, when she went out someplace, she would want to know if I wanted to come along and stuff like that. I really loved her, and she was gone. I don't know whether it's normal or not, but for quite some time I didn't—I couldn't settle myself to the fact that she was gone.

CE: Is there anything else that you want to say about that time before we move on to Costa Rica?

SW: No, I guess—I guess there's a lot of things to say, but I can't think of any particular thing that I want to say now.

CE: Okay.

SW: Anyway, so we got to Costa Rica. I remember—like I said before, it was the first time I was on an airplane, and it was on a very small plane. If you're familiar with the topography between Costa Rica and Panama, it's all hills. The plane was—I don't remember, but I'm sure that I got sick.

When we got to Costa Rica, I don't remember who met us at the plane, but in those days the only Costa Rican airport was at the Sabana, which was right in the middle of the town of San José. I guess somebody—I was going to say my two cousins were there already, but I don't think they had anything to do with it. It was more than likely other people from Zelechow that had gone there before the war. When they found out that we were coming, they had gone out and rented an affordable apartment; they knew we didn't have much money. It was—I remember the landlord's name, Gazel: a Turk. It was a nice house, and this was like in the cellar. We had three rooms: my mom and dad and my brother and I and my sister. They had prepared some food for us there; still, I don't know who.

Then, my dad had some discussions with a fellow from Zelechow that had gone to Costa Rica in the twenties [1920s], and the advice was that he should become a peddler. In Yiddish it was called a *klopper*. You know what a peddler is?

CE: Mm-hm.

SW: Basically, what that involved was he would buy some goods—pens, shirts, blankets, and some piece goods—and he would go out to the farms and sell it to the farmer, one item at a time. The idea was if he bought something for ten colones, he would sell it for twenty colones. But the catch was that he'd go back every week to collect one colon. So, it took twenty weeks to collect it. But that's the way almost every Jew that came to Costa Rica got started, and they advised him to get started. The problem was that he didn't have any goods to sell. So, they told him to go to the different merchants. Some of the Jewish merchants, when they found out who he was—we had a pretty good reputation among the Jews from Zelechow that were there—they would give him whatever he wanted.

Dad came back very surprised. There were two wholesalers: one was shirts and one was general merchandise. One was called Barzuna y Hermanos, the Brothers Barzuna. And the Amuni—they [Barzuna y Hermanos] had a shirt factory. The Amuni were general merchandise. They were both Arabs. At that time, Palestine was—you know, 1949 Palestine was at the big. And yet, these two merchants said to my father, "You take whatever you need, and you've got thirty days to pay it. And if you can't pay it in thirty days, come back and talk to us." So, my dad would go and buy as little as possible and sell it, and he started making a living.

School in general in Costa Rica would have started in February or March, I don't know when; I forgot already. But because of the revolution, it didn't start till April. And here we are, three kids. By then, I had been to school—I was in third grade in Lodz, and in France, I was in no grade, but I was learning something. They tried to decide where to put us in school. Well, they decided that I should go to sixth grade, because sixth grade—the schools there are boys separate from girls. One day, the boys go in the morning and the girls in the afternoon; the other day, vice versa. So, there were these three Jewish kids in sixth grade; that's why I should go to sixth grade. My brother, the younger brother, they put in third grade because there was one Jewish boy there. No rhyme or reason. My sister, who was older and who in Poland had been to sixth grade, they put her in fourth grade, which was the only grade with a Jewish girl in there.

And we went to school, one day in the morning, one day in the afternoon. They had uniforms. I remember every now and then I had to skip school, because from all the walking, my dad's leg started acting up. So, he had a (inaudible) a Costa Rican fellow who carried stuff that he was selling. He knew where he had sold the stuff. So, I had to go with him to collect, because if we didn't collect one week it was gone. I had to go take off a couple of days when Dad couldn't. Fortunately, they weren't contiguous. When school was over, I passed everything except Spanish. It turned out that the three Jewish boys didn't speak a word of Yiddish, so they were no help. I had to do it all on my own. I had a very good teacher, and she decided that she was going to give me

lessons during the summer and then give me a test, and I passed. Sixth grade there is like the end of grade school. Seventh grade is already in high school. So, I had to pass, otherwise—

But then, something else happened. A rabbi, Rabbi Hirshberg, who was at the seminary I attended in France, in (inaudible) he was now living in Chicago. They had a seminary in Detroit, Michigan. So, he came to Costa Rica to fundraise. When he recognized me, he came to Dad and he said, “What are your kids doing here? There’s no Jewish school or anything.” Dad said, “I can’t afford anything else.” I don’t know how long they talked about it, but before Rabbi Hirshberg left, he had promised him that my brother and I would get full scholarships and a visa to come to the seminary in Detroit, Michigan.

In April of 1949, my brother and I boarded an airplane—the second time in my life; this time it was a two-engine plane—and we flew to Miami Beach. Rabbi Hirshberg was there, picked us up, and we spent a couple of days in Miami Beach. He introduced us to some people that he wanted to fundraise with, to show that he’s helping these poor kids. And then we took a train—he had a sleeper; my brother and I were on benches—and went to Chicago. He took us around a couple of places in Chicago, and then he put us on a train for Detroit. We were picked up in Detroit.

The seminary in Detroit was self-contained: it had dormitories and stuff. The only thing was that we were the youngest kids there, my brother and I. The morning through four o’clock was strictly religious studies. At four, they had four different teachers come in for secular studies, and basically it was history, current events, English, and math. And they started at eighth grade. So, my brother and I, here we are. Don’t speak any English at all. I had finished sixth grade, my brother had finished third grade, and we were in eighth grade. They had a tutor for us, a fellow by the name of Tibor Hollo, who turned out to be later one of the biggest builders in Miami. But at that time, he was a refugee from France. But he spoke English, except that he spoke English with a very French accent, and he would say this: “You don’t say ‘duh,’ you say ‘*de*.’” You know, he couldn’t himself pronounce the words.

Somehow, we made it. I was very—as far as the other kids were concerned, I was very advanced in the religious studies, so I was at the top grade in religious studies and the lowest grade in English studies. But I was doing fine. I learned English and read a lot of comic books.

CE: (laughs)

SW: That's how I learned English. In the meantime, Dad was peddling. He bought a little store and started doing a little bit better. In summer of 1950, he decided that—no, I think fifty-one [1951]. He decided that he could afford to bring one of us for vacation. Since I was the oldest, I went, for two weeks. I returned, and the airline said, "You've got to get a new visa." What's wrong with my old visa? Well, a new immigration act called the Walter-McCarran Act had passed Congress, and my visa was no longer good. I had to wait for eighteen months to get a new visa. In the meantime, my brother surpassed me.

When I finally came back to Detroit, it was January 20, 1953, the day President Eisenhower was inaugurated. At that point, through correspondence with my brother, we had decided that we had to finish high school, go back to Costa Rica, and apply for a resident visa to the States. He was on course, because he had been there a year and a half longer than I. I wasn't. I remember I met with my math teacher, Mr. Pleasant. He's the one that made me become an accountant. With his help—I attended, of course, every class, and I signed up for an accounting course by correspondence from the University of Florida. I found out that Detroit Central High School, which was about ten blocks away, had a night course in English that I was lacking. So, we were finished with classes at seven and had dinner. Classes at Detroit Central started at seven-thirty, so I would have to rush, run ten blocks, and take the course.

When I finally graduated, Mr. Rosenberg, who was our principal, allowed us to graduate instead of January 5 or something, on December 15, so we could go back to Costa Rica. The last days of December were very good for business, and we had to help out. So, we actually got our diplomas, high school diplomas, December 15, 1953, and we worked like horses, the two of us, because the week before Christmas, the stores were open till like three, four o'clock in the morning, and we had to open at eight, nine in the morning. But we survived. On January 3, which was a Monday, we walked into the U.S. consulate and signed up for resident visas. We didn't get them until February of 1959.

CE: Wow.

SW: Again, we were under Polish quota, and the fact that we were in the quota in France didn't count. So, on March 2, 1959, we came to Miami Beach. We rented a room in somebody's house on the beach; Hillman was their name. We went out looking for a job. I had a recommendation: a friend from Costa Rica had a friend in Miami Beach that was an accountant. I went to see him, and he laughed at me and said, "You haven't even gone to college. You expect to get—you won't get a job. Better go to New York; on the East Side you'll find a job." I just didn't want to.

So, the very next day, my brother and I went out and—we were looking, really, for a place to have a cheap dinner. On Washington Avenue, there was a place called the Governor's Cafeteria, sort of a Jewish deli-type place. So, we're going to go there for dinner. Right next to it was a store called Jackson's Department Store, and they had a sign: "Salesman wanted, Men's Department." So, I said to my brother, "Wait here," and I walked in. I met the manager, Mr. Rothschild, who was about seven feet tall. I remember I had to stand like this to talk to him. Somehow, I convinced him to give me a job. He said to me, "When can you start?" "Right now." He said, "All right, go to work." I said, "I have to go tell my brother not to wait for me."

When I started working, he paid me a dollar an hour, and he put me in the men's department. Unfortunately, the men's department—the manager of the men's department had his wife working there with him. So, we got paid a dollar an hour plus a commission. I didn't get any commission, because I was sent to do what they called stock, to put things in arrangement, and whenever a customer came, either he or his wife would handle it. I remember one day, they were both there, they were busy, and in walks this couple. "Cabana—where are the cabana sets?" I guess they figured they wanted to buy a towel or something. "You take care of them." I walked over, and they hardly spoke any English. I spoke to them in French, and they walked out with over \$400 in goods. The husband and wife, they couldn't believe it. I mean, they wanted to fire me, but they couldn't.

By that time, school started at the University of Miami. I spoke to Mr. Rothschild about getting hours that I could go to night school. Mr. Sinai was the manager. He insisted no, I couldn't do that. In the meantime, my brother had walked into a savings/loan, and got a job there. When he wouldn't change my hours—and I had to go to school, that was the main thing. So, I went looking for a job, and I found another savings/loan and I got a job. When I went in and told Mr. Rothschild—I didn't talk to Mr. Sinai. I told Mr. Rothschild, and he wanted to give me a raise. By then, I was doing good. I just figured school was important.

So, I started working as a teller-trainee and going to night school. We would—the bank would close at three, we were finished by three forty-five, four o'clock. My brother and I would meet at the apartment—by then we had rented an apartment—and we would have dinner, whatever it was, and drive out to the University of Miami. It was about—in those days, it was about a twenty, thirty minute drive. Now it's about an hour and a half. Anyway, this went on, and I went from teller-trainee to teller, and then I became head teller in the main office. They had a habit: every six months, they would give a \$2.50 raise. I wasn't satisfied with that, so every three months I would go in and resign, and

they would give me a raise. They would give me a raise. I was working—by that time, I was head teller of the main office.

There was a CPA that worked in Miami, but he had a few clients in Miami Beach. Every second Friday, he would come into the bank to cash a check, which they wouldn't do for him because you could only cash a check if you had an account there—except if an officer authorizes it. I was an officer. So, he came over, and usually I would tell him, “No, I'm sorry, we can't. Open up an account.” But I saw the check was a payroll check from a CPA firm, so I okayed it for him. Two weeks later, he came back again, and again, and this went on.

Finally, I dared to ask him for a job. He said, “I'm not the boss, but I'll talk to my boss.” And he was able—I don't know how, but he was able to get me an interview with his boss. I went to see him, and at first he told me, “You've only been one year in college. Why do you want a job?” I was able to convince him. So, by that time, with all the raises I was working thirty-three hours a week in the bank, making \$125 a week. He offered me a job, \$60 a week. Probably that first year, I must have worked at least sixty, seventy hours a week. I was very happy, because that's what I wanted to do. And this is what I did for five years. I was the first staff person that lasted in this post for five years, because he was very mean, yelling; there was all kinds of stories there.

Finally, in sixty-four [1964], I took the CPA exam. I graduated in sixty-three [1963], but then you had to be a citizen to take the exam, so I became a citizen in sixty-four [1964] and I passed the exam. He and his partner used to promise me when I became a CPA, they would make me a partner. They had their three other employees that had taken the CPA exam before. One of them had taken it eleven times before he passed it. And I passed it the first shot. They were very unhappy, because they didn't want to make me a partner. By then, I had met Sandy. So, in 1965, we got married.

CE: Should we ask Sandy to join us now, for this part of the story?

SW: If she wants to.

Sandra Wainberg: I'm here.

CE: Okay.

Pause in recording

CE: We've asked Sandy to join us, and we would like to hear from you, Sandy, as well as your husband. So, he was starting to talk about meeting you and he was going to fly through that, so I want to slow him down a little bit.

SW: So, in 1965, we got married, and I expected to become a partner in the firm. When they didn't do anything for me, I went out. That November of sixty-five [1965], I joined two other fellows and we opened our own office. I guess my ex-boss didn't give me a lot of credit, because he thought I wasn't going to survive, and it was tough. Fortunately by then, Sandy was teaching, so we had her salary. Little by little, I built up a firm. At first, it was just the three of us; then we hired a couple to help, and then we got in some more partners. In 1973, there were six partners, and by then we had like eight or ten employees, and we moved to a brand new building, very nice building. And we were doing very nicely.

In seventy-nine [1979], we were approached by an international accounting firm to merge with them. We didn't negotiate too long, but we did merge. They were, at that time, number thirteen worldwide in accounting firms. I became the manager of their Florida practices, which consisted of Miami and Fort Lauderdale. I was on their management committee. Life was really nice. We did a lot of travelling: a lot of it on our own, a lot of it on business, because we used to have meetings all over the United States, and sometimes all over the world. We really had a very good time. In sixty-nine [1969], our son was born, and in seventy [1970] our daughter. For a while, that hampered us a little, but then we found babysitters, or whatever you want to call them. We did a lot of travelling, really did.

This went on until 1998, when I decided to retire. By then, my daughter had finished college at Tufts University, and she decided to go to medical school at [University of Florida], because her then-boyfriend was going to school at Florida. She graduated medical school, and he got a job in Clearwater, so she got her residency at USF. They decided to settle here, and I was retiring.

By that time, Miami had become very Spanish. Although I speak Spanish, too, I just didn't—so, we decided to move. We wanted to move, probably, to Jupiter; we had some friends in Stuart. We actually spent a lot of weekends there looking for a place. Then, one day we get a call from my son-in-law, and he says, "Hi, Grandpa." That was sometime in September, October of 1998. So, we decided to move to Tampa. We found

this house, moved here in January of ninety-nine [1999]. Our granddaughter was born in March.

I was reading the [*Tampa*] *Tribune*, and they had an article that the Museum needed volunteers as docents. I had sort of decided that I was going to do volunteer work, because I wasn't in business, I was retired, and I didn't want to just do fluff, just sleep away. So, I answered the ad, and I attended class for six weeks. I became a docent. Some people said I was a good docent. Until—oh, probably about six, seven months later: somebody decided to read the homework I did during the class. Like most teachers.

CE: (laughs) Watch that!

MW: (laughs)

SW: Anyway, they saw my timeline and saw that I was a survivor. So, they invited me to speak to the kids at the Museum, rather than do the docent work. I did. It was very difficult, because up until then, I had really only told my story once, like about ten, fifteen minutes in my niece's class. But the real time was when they interviewed me for the [Steven] Spielberg Foundation. I found it very difficult, for many reasons. It brought up old memories. I used to break down when I started telling the story. It showed some bad parts of humanity. Many times, I was asked, "Oh, you're a survivor? You must tell me about it." Then, if I started saying something, they would start telling me about their golf game or something like that. Nobody was really interested. But the worst part about it was that I really didn't think that anybody would believe me, because I felt that I probably wouldn't believe it.

CE: Wow.

SW: So, the first few times that I spoke at the Museum, I actually cried many times. And I didn't give up my docenting. I kept on, because I had a job. And then, I guess the thing that made me give up docenting was because one day, I was scheduled to speak and they were a docent short, so I had to docent. The interaction between me and the kids during that—the chemistry just wasn't there. So, that's when—and then she became a docent, so I was able to quit. Then, of course, after 9/11, a lot of the schools couldn't come because of security, because of budgets, whatever else.

One day, I was asked—Lori was her name; I forgot her last name. She was in charge of that. Would I be willing to go to a school? I said, “Why not?” and I went to my first school in Pinellas County. Don’t remember which one it was. It went very nicely. Since then, it seems there are very few survivors that are able to drive to all these places, so I very seldom go to the Museum. In addition to that, the Museum, because of the time limits, wanted me to cut it down to like thirty minutes, which I feel if I drive out so far, I want to get my full story. The last school season, I think I only spoke at the Museum three or four times, but I must have visited at least thirty schools.

CE: Wow. Let’s go back and let Sandy pick up—

MW: Yeah, because you kind of zipped through that.

SW: I’m sorry.

MW: (laughs)

CE: No, that’s all right. You did fine, but I would really like to hear Sandy talk about meeting you and her experience of you telling your story, not telling your story, what you told the children, what you tell her. Could you talk a little bit about all that?

MW: I could talk a lot about it. (laughs)

CE: Okay, well, go for it.

MW: The way we met was I had a date with a young man—not my husband. We doubled and went out with another couple, and Sal was half of the other couple. The young man that I was dating was Sal’s roommate. It was interesting, because when I broke up with —

SW: Cliff.

MW: Cliff—who is our friend to this day. When I broke up with Cliff, he asked—Sal asked Cliff if he could take me out. Anyway, that’s how we met, and that’s how it started.

Most of our dating was long distance, because I was up in New York finishing my master's degree. One interesting story about that was he had some relatives in New York, and there was a bar mitzvah in the family and he was invited to this bar mitzvah, and I was in school in New York. This cousin said, "If you want to bring somebody, you can," so he brought me. I thought, "This is weird. Why would he want to bring me to a family bar mitzvah? Okay." But little did I know! He was, at that point, ready to marry me.

SW: But what you didn't tell is that my brother Alan and I—

MW: Oh, okay.

SW: —drove up to New York in twenty-two hours.

MW: That's true.

SW: Without the Turnpike.

MW: See, I wasn't aware of this. (laughs)

SW: And took her out to the bar mitzvah, left the bar mitzvah on Saturday night, probably about three o'clock in the morning, and drove back on Sunday straight.

CE: Wow!

SW: Because I had to get back to work on Monday.

CE: Wow!

MW: He's showing his good side there. (laughs)

CE: Yes, indeed.

MW: Anyway—

CE: Did you know immediately that he was a survivor? Did he talk about it immediately?

MW: I don't think it was immediate, but it came out during dating. I don't know how you told me.

SW: I don't remember either, but I didn't tell you anything about it; you just knew that it was—

MW: No, when I was dating Sal—

SW: You probably asked where I was born and when I came to the States.

MW: Yeah. But when I was dating Sal, it was more that he lived in Costa Rica. I really didn't know his background beyond that. I don't think he told me, and I don't think it was a conscious omission. I think he just set on it in Costa Rica. But I did not—I detected something in his accent that was different, and when we finally talked about it, he then told me he was born in Poland. I could see that it wasn't something that he wanted to talk about freely.

So we never went there. I knew who he was, I knew what kind of person he was, I was falling in love with him, and his background beyond that didn't—we didn't go into depth. I felt like either I was intruding or he just was not ready to disclose everything about his background. So, we were married in sixty-five [1967], and what year was the trip to—

SW: Nineteen seventy-three.

MW: In 19—I thought it was seventy-one [1971].

SW: Seventy-three [1973].

MW: Okay. In 1973, we went to Israel, because—

SW: Seventy-one [1971], we went to Israel, but seventy-three [1973] is when we went to Poland.

MW: Oh, so it wasn't in seventy-one [1971] when you told me. Okay. All right. So, in 1973, we went to Poland, and it was on that trip. It was to be a trip to the communist countries. We were going on a trip to Russia, Poland, and Germany. They had just opened up travel to these countries. The Berlin Wall was still there, and we were—

SW: But you could go.

MW: We could go through. And it was—we were one of the first people that actually travelled in that way, on that kind of a trip. So, we were going to stop in Poland, and Sal had another agenda, which I didn't know. I was going as the idea of travelling to part of the world that I hadn't been, and being one of the first people to do that, of people that we associated with. It was a very exciting cultural trip for me. When we got on the plane, we were on an eight-hour flight from the States—

SW: New York.

MW: —from New York over. Sal could not read on an airplane, so we were—I was a willing ear, and he was obliged at that point to tell me what was on his mind. He told me the story that he just told you. He told me much more briefly.

SW: But more detailed.

MW: Well—

SW: In description.

MW: Maybe. Yeah. Okay, okay. In more detail in some ways, but not as long a story. He told me the facts of his survival.

CE: Were you shocked?

MW: I was totally shocked. I was absolutely shocked. What I had known about it before this was the word “Zelechower,” which I heard when we were with his family. His parents didn’t speak English, and so—I speak a little bit of Spanish, and my broken Spanish and their broken Spanish got us through polite talk, but we couldn’t get into serious discussion. So, whenever we were in conversation or in the company of his family, the conversation always was in Yiddish, which I don’t speak. I could glean a little bit about what they were talking about. But I would hear the word “Zelechower” all the time, and I didn’t know what that referred to. So, now I learned what that referred to, which is people from Zelechow. And he told me the background, so I knew what we were getting into when we got to Poland.

He told me he wanted to actually visit the place where he was hidden, and visit the family that saved him. And—wow. (laughs) All of a sudden, this was a different—here I was on this cultural jaunt, and now we’re going into something that is truly personal and very, very emotional. Neither he nor I knew what we were going to see or what we were going to—how we were going to be greeted, or anything. But in his description of what the farmhouse was like and what the cellar was like, I had a good idea of what it was twenty-five years before this. Okay? So, twenty-five years ago, from the time, 1973, when we were travelling.

Anyway, we get to Poland. Sal very briefly described to you his rise to success in his business life, but he didn’t truly tell you how proud I was of him, or what a strong, vibrant, sociable figure he was in the business world. So, here I was, travelling with my strong, vibrant husband, and getting off the plane in Warsaw, he became a different person.

CE: Wow.

MW: He became—I can’t even explain it. He started to grip me, hold on to me.

SW: I was mainly very afraid to be back in Poland, because you had heard all these stories about the communists and stuff, and I was afraid that if they found out that I was born in Poland, which they would see in my passport—I was still of army age. I was afraid they were going to draft me.

CE: So, that was your main fear?

MW: He didn't tell me this.

SW: That was my main fear. And the other thing was that in those days, to have a dollar was against the law in Poland. A tourist was supposed to go to the bank and cash his dollars out. And I didn't plan to do that, because the difference was—you can't even believe the difference. So, all that scared me. And actually, while I was in Poland, I abided by the law. Most of it had been prepaid. Whenever I needed money, I would cash it legally, because I was afraid to.

MW: There were people that you could exchange dollars for on the street; this is what he's talking about, doing it illegally. And most people did that, but he would not do that. He was—

SW: I did it in Russia, but not in Poland.

MW: Yeah. He was above and beyond the call of duty in being proper. But what I'm trying to describe to you is, all of a sudden, I saw my husband as somebody that I had never seen before: somebody totally scared, somebody totally not in control and not with assurance. It certainly frightened me. At first, I said, "What's wrong with you?" but then I realized what it was, and I was really taken aback.

We got to the hotel, and we asked the concierge if he could get us a driver. And you can tell the story of why we couldn't get a driver.

SW: I had reserved a car to go around myself, at Avis. It turned out they had some kind of convention, and my car wasn't there. There was no drivers or anything. If you had asked me the day before if I could speak Polish, I would say no. But being there two days, I think, I was able to, and I was able to talk to one of the bellmen, and I found out that he has a brother-in-law who lived in Canada for two years.

MW: And spoke English.

SW: And speaks English. And he has a car, so I hired him to take us out to Wilczka, actually, and Zelechow. The funny part about it was I didn't remember exactly where it was. So, finally, I was looking this way, and she's looking that way.

MW: Wait, I had told you that he had described in detail what the cellar looked like.

SW: And the house.

MW: But he also described the people to me. He described the husband and wife, what they looked like, and he described the children. He said the woman would wear—always wore a long skirt, to the floor—

SW: A black skirt.

MW: —a long tunic or some kind of long-sleeved shirt—

SW: And a babushka.

MW: —and a babushka. And this is the way he described her. Now, this is twenty-five years later. We go up to this—the area where he thought the farm was, or where he thought the house was. He was looking in one direction and I was looking in the other direction, and I saw a woman, just exactly as he described. And it was her, and it was twenty-five years later.

CE: Wow.

MW: And I said, “How in the world could this be?” There was no electricity in this farmhouse—

SW: The house was exactly the same.

MW: It was exactly the same as he had described it. This shows that the place where he was at that time was very, very rural, and still remained that way to this day. We saw power lines just beginning to come to the area. Poland was still very backward, and as he describes it—and I'm not talking Poland entirely, because of course in Warsaw they were modern, and in the major cities. But in the area that we're discussing, it was still as backward as it was when he was there, with the outhouse and the—

SW: The door between the kitchen and the bedroom was a burlap bag.

MW: It was a burlap bag.

SW: The same bag was still there.

MW: Yeah.

CE: (laughs)

SW: It was amazing.

MW: The only thing that appeared different: we saw the stove in the kitchen, and he had described that to me on the plane. On the top of the stove, there was a transistor radio.

CE: Wow! That's wonderful.

MW: And that was it. The people were, to me, from a different era. They were just so backward. Very, very, very nice people. And they were the children. These were her grandchildren?

SW: Yeah.

MW: Okay. So, the children that were there—there were four of them?

SW: Three. Three children.

MW: Yeah. They kept coming up to me and just touching me. They had never seen anybody with dark hair. They were all blond.

SW: Their younger son Jaszek had gotten married and had the three kids, and then he died digging a well.

CE: Oh, okay.

SW: And Zsiszek, during the war, had been captured by the Germans, and he was living in Germany, working for the U.S. army in Germany. So, there was just the widow and the two daughters, and the daughter-in-law with the kids.

MW: And the two daughters had maintained a—or, one of the two daughters—had maintained a very brief correspondence with Sal's sister Sara. This went—it was through this contact that we were able to make contact with them.

CE: So, they knew you were coming?

SW: Yeah.

MW: They knew.

CE: And what was it like to see them?

MW: Oh!

SW: Oh, I still can't imagine it. They looked at us from a different point of view. They were still in the same poverty they always were in, maybe worse, because they had no man to work the farm or anything. And here we were these rich Americans.

I've got to tell you this story. We're sitting there outside, on the patio, and they serve us lunch: very nice.

MW: It's not a patio. We were sitting under a tree in the front of the farm, and there were chickens and pigs and everything walking around, and so forth.

SW: Yeah. And we're talking, and one of the daughters says that their roof is over fifty years old, and it's falling down. They need a new roof. So, I very innocently say, "How much would it cost to replace the roof?" She gave me a figure in zlotys that, in my—I calculated it immediately, and it was like over \$100,000 to replace the roof. So, I sort of—the driver, who saw me, he said, "But if you give her cash, that's only \$500."

CE: Wow.

SW: And that's the difference. Okay? So, I said, "I don't have cash." He said, "Traveler's checks are good." In those days there was no MasterCard. So, I had \$500 in traveler's checks. I signed it over to her, and they had a new roof.

CE: Wow.

SW: We're driving back, and I agreed with him to pay him \$80 in zlotys. The rental car was going to cost me like \$50 in zlotys. So, he says to me, "Can you give me dollars?" I said, "You know that's against the law." You know, I was afraid. He said, "But there's nobody there but us." I said, "How much dollars?" He said, "Twenty dollars."

CE: Oh!

MW: But he was so afraid—

SW: So, I pull it out like this (gestures) and I gave it to him like this, and he was so happy. When we got back to Warsaw, he said, "I'll take you around the ghettos."

MW: He wanted to take us for a tour of Warsaw.

SW: So, you can imagine the difference in money.

CE: Yes. Let's stop here and change the tape, and do just a few more minutes.

SW: Okay.

Part 4 ends; part 5 begins

CE: This is tape four. So, you were going to tell the story of some of what you've observed today.

SW: Well, I was finishing the story with our trip to Poland and everything with Sandy. What comes to mind is how the anti-Semitism in Poland is still there, just the way it was in the twenties [1920s] and thirties [1930s] and forties [1940s] and fifties [1950s]. I was telling the story: My sister lives part in Israel and part in Miami Beach. About—I guess it was about three, four, five years ago; I don't remember when. She started the process of declaring the Sokols—there was only two sisters left. Now there's only one sister left—the eldest sister died—but then there were two. To try to declare them, have them recognized as Righteous People, and as such they would get a marker at Yad Vashem and get a pension. It's a very lengthy and exacting and arduous process, especially since my sister was only there six months a year: it made it even more so.

When she finally got to the point that they were—all they had to do was accept it, and they would be paid a trip to Israel to be recognized there. They begged my sister to stop, because they were afraid of their neighbors.

CE: Wow.

SW: So, that is still there today. My sister and her husband went back last year or two years ago to Poland.

MW: Two years.

SW: They went to visit them and everything. They wanted to see the cellar where we were. I wanted to see it when we were there. And they told us, "It's not there anymore." I cannot imagine how it cannot be there anymore. I mean, you don't take a cellar of that proportion and just bury it. But they were afraid that the neighbors would—and this has gone on forever, and it's still there. When I was there with the March of the Living two years ago, I had some interactions with the guide and stuff, and I could see that even though they very willingly accepted our money to be guides and all that, inside they still hate us. It's something that it is unconceivable. But, at least from my point of view, it definitely is there.

CE: Do you ever feel anti-Semitism here?

SW: (laughs) We did; we have not lately. We have a story here. We had these friends that we used to go on vacation together; their kids were the same age as ours.

MW: Oh, my goodness!

SW: And we went to this place in North Carolina near Blowing Rock. We checked in; we found a motel, checked in at night, and we said we're going to stay for two or three nights. I get up very early in the morning. I went out and I started hitting the ball, tennis ball. Then, when we all got up, we were getting ready to go out for breakfast. The owner of the motel called us in. "You're going to have to move today, because we made a mistake. The room is rented." And Bob, my friend that traveled with us, couldn't understand. He had registered Zucker. My car was a white Cadillac with a red interior, and the front of the car had this tag that said "Shalom." Obviously, they realized that we were Jewish and they didn't want to have us there. We used to do a lot of car trips, and we used to have a lot of that in Georgia, Alabama. Very seldom did we ever encounter it in Florida.

MW: When you asked the question, I think you were referring to here, meaning in Tampa.

CE: That's okay. United States, really, I meant.

MW: Okay. Because we have not felt that way here, and we have not felt that way recently or lately anywhere.

SW: Right. That's what I said; it was back—

MW: This was in the seventies [1970s].

CE: We have a second home in the mountains of North Carolina—

MW: Okay. So, you know.

CE: With some of the locals, my husband does not say that he's Jewish.

MW: No, but we have found in North Carolina more recently that there is a thriving Jewish community there.

CE: In Asheville and other places.

MW: Oh, absolutely.

SW: Asheville's wonderful.

CE: It's just when you get out into the hinterland.

MW: And this is the same in—I have to sort of edit what we were talking about with Poland, too. It's the same—Sal likes to say there's a lot of anti-Semitism in Poland, and there is, but it's not widespread. It's not everywhere, and it's certainly not rampant in the cities as it was at that point.

CE: Do you want to say anything else about what you've noticed, given Sal's decision to start talking about this and giving talks, how that has changed him?

MW: Oh, gosh. (laughs) It has opened up a world of discussion. There is no more—I don't want to say dark secret, but it was a dark secret for a long time. And it felt like—I

knew there was a deep part of Sal's life that I knew nothing about. I couldn't discuss it with his family; I couldn't discuss it with anybody, because there was a language problem. If I could address it to somebody in English, you don't want to talk about it. You don't want to talk about that; it's something that we don't talk about. And yet, it was discussed always, almost on a daily basis, with his family in Yiddish, but I was unaware. I could not participate.

SW: My sister still has not told her story to anyone.

MW: She won't.

SW: About seven, eight years ago, I was invited to speak at a junior high school in Miami where—my sister-in-law was a teacher's aide there.

MW: This is not the same—? Okay, sister-in-law.

SW: My sister-in-law. I decided to go down to Miami anyway, so I'll see the family when I went to speak there. I had a date for—I went down on Sunday, and Monday morning had a date at the school. I show up there, and there's my nephew, my sister's son, who lives in North Miami. His wife was the daughter of survivors. They have six kids. Four of the kids were there; the other two were too young. They wanted to hear the story. They had never heard the story—

MW: From their parents.

SW: Neither had my nephew's wife, the daughter of two survivors, ever heard their story.

(phone rings)

SW: This is true

Phone: Call from Central America.

SW: This is true with many survivors, and it's a shame. But it takes something to bring out the ability to tell, and unfortunately, in some people it never—

(phone continues to make noise)

CE: You can just hold—

Pause in recording

SW: And there, you know, I found out that—not that I knew a long time—that there's a lot of people that can't. That's the only thing, is they can't talk about it, can't think about it. Most of them is with the same problem that I had. Fortunately, I was able to overcome it. The biggest problem is to start out. It hurts. The second problem, as I said before, is it's unbelievable. People are afraid they won't be believed. But the biggest problem—and I'm going to say something that I probably shouldn't—is the lack of interest. In all my talkings in the last ten years, I've found that there's a lot more interest among the non-Jewish population than there is among the Jewish population.

CE: Why do you think that is?

SW: I have no idea. I have been thinking a lot about it. But I see at our synagogue, there is a religious school. And for the last, what, seven years, I've been asked sometimes in January, February to come and talk to the fifth grade class, the highest class. There aren't many kids: usually about ten, twelve. Yes, they're a little younger, I guess, but I can see that they're listening to me because they've been asked to sit and listen. Whereas when I go to the Museum, when I go to schools—I was out there at Apollo Beach Elementary. I had like five or six fourth and fifth graders, I think. They were rapt. You couldn't tear them away.

MW: And the questions are so relevant and cogent. Some of them are really good.

SW: The most frequently asked question, and I always laugh about it: Did you ever meet Hitler?

MW: Yeah, from younger ones.

CE: (laughs)

SW: But some of the questions are very, very deep. Unfortunately, from these Jewish kids, I never heard a question, and I don't know why. I've thought about it a lot. I haven't discussed it with anybody, but there seems to be—a lack of interest is all I can say.

CE: Is there a pushing it away?

MW: I think it's a pushing it away.

SW: Yeah.

CE: Yeah, or maybe their parents are saying—

SW: Whatever it is. But if it is their parents, they ought to be whipped.

MW: But you felt the same way about our friends in Miami.

SW: Absolutely. They're Jewish.

MW: Yeah. With our Jewish friends in Miami, they would want to know, they would ask the question, they would seriously want to know, but they wouldn't want to listen.

SW: They didn't want to wait for an answer.

MW: They didn't want to hear the answer.

CE: Or they couldn't handle the answer.

MW: That's another thing.

SW: Whatever.

MW: It was hard.

CE: I assume that was very true back in the fifties [1950s], sixties [1960s], and seventies [1970s], that people really didn't want to hear.

MW: Mm-hmm.

SW: I wouldn't know, because I wasn't involved with it much.

CE: You weren't telling.

SW: But whenever I did, I remember one time in particular I was sitting with a group of CPAs, and somehow it came out. They asked me. "You must tell us about it." I don't know that I actually wanted to tell them or not, but they immediately started talking about their golf game. So, I felt that they really weren't interested, to say the least.

CE: So, talking brings you relief, but it also sounds like it brings you some pain.

SW: Absolutely. It brings me more than relief. It washes my soul. I feel many times that the reason I survived is so that I would let people know what happened, so it's not completely lost. I'm reading a book now called *The Book of Abraham*, and basically it goes back to the first century B.C. Throughout all these generations—I'm now in 1830-something—this family kept down this book: so-and-so begot so-and-so, and so-and-so begot so-and-so. And the importance that they give for each generation to read the book and to add theirs—I sort of feel vindicated in what I'm doing. I'm doing that! Unfortunately, I only started now. I don't have any—you know, I can only go back basically two generations. I don't know what happened; whatever there was then, it doesn't exist anymore.

So, there is a little bit of a loss there, but I feel that at least I will make sure that, if nothing else, at least this story's there. This is why, whenever somebody asks me to talk, I go. If somebody asks me for an interview, I'm here. I've been offered money—you know, expenses for stuff. Never accepted. Thank God I can afford it, so I don't need to. But it's like my mission in life, and I'm glad I'm retired and I can do it whenever somebody asks me.

CE: Do you want to say anything else about that?

MW: Well, you were saying about how it has changed, our relationship and how it has changed Sal. It has made him much more open, much more. The secrets are not there. I think the most important thing about the telling of it is each time he tells—I didn't listen to this whole interview or how you told it, but each time he tells, there's another thing, another detail that comes out. And I'll say, "I've never heard that before. Oh!" And he isn't even realizing it, and it's amazing. Like I said, the first time he told me on the plane, it didn't take—he told this whole story, but it didn't take that long. It was full of details, but not—I guess not everything. He didn't tell me everything; he told me just about the —

SW: It mainly was about the Sokols and about family.

MW: Yeah, about Poland.

CE: Do you find the telling therapeutic, in addition to your mission—to being part of your mission?

SW: I don't know whether you would call it therapeutic—it definitely is therapeutic, because this story, if I told it ten years ago, I would have broken down at least four or five times. Today, it really didn't happen. I hesitated a couple of times. So, that definitely is from telling. But, more importantly, it has cleared my mind. Things that I never remembered I now remember, and I remember them sometimes like it was yesterday. I think that in itself is very important.

CE: And is that in itself therapeutic, to remember?

SW: Absolutely. Absolutely. I don't know if I told you this or not: Turek had a brother. Did I tell you about his brother?

CE: Mm-hmm. You did, a little.

SW: And that's something—I had been trying to remember his first name for years.

MW: He mentioned names today that I had not heard before.

CE: You know all the names and the dates.

MW: Because he's telling it over and over again and things come out. And he knows more about his family than I do about mine, and my family—there was nobody that we know in my immediate family that was lost in the Holocaust. My grandparents came here running from the Russian czar, so it was in the 1800s. But I know very little about the extended family. I know, in fact, nothing. I know about my own grandparents, and that's it.

SW: In the beginning, some people, adults—I remember at the Museum—I forgot her name now. See, I remember what happened a long time ago, but not what happened yesterday.

CE and MW: (laugh)

SW: Asked me, “You were so little. How can you remember all of that?” And I thought about it for a long time, and my answer to that is that these things didn't happen to me, they were etched into my memory, because it took so much to live through it that I could never forget it.

MW: You asked a very good question: you asked how it felt to be in the cellar and how it felt to be in the attic. Nobody had asked him that question before, and he answered it today, and he said, “It's because I was younger.” What does that mean? “I was only a month younger.” But, you know—when I dated Sal, when I started dating Sal, I must have written to my girlfriend or something about what a boring date he was, and he never

lets me forget this story. But what that really meant was, he's not a kid. He was never a kid. He was a young man, but he wasn't a young kid.

CE: Yes, and that—

MW: He didn't have that childhood.

CE: And that month, given everything that happened in that month, was the equivalent of five years.

MW: Oh, you couldn't put it in our lifetime, because we haven't experienced what he has.

SW: Somebody once asked me, and I don't remember who it was, "What is the most precious thing that you lost?" And, of course, when you really think about it, I would say, "My sister." But my answer then was, "My childhood."

MW: And it is.

CE: Yeah.

MW: It is. It's the most lasting.

CE: So, if you could change anything now, or have something that would make you feel better or that this was all—your mission was more successful—what would it be?

SW: You mean, change now?

CE: Now, yes. Like, if you could tomorrow make something happen.

SW: I guess I wish I could stand up and yell to the whole world, "Look what happened, and watch out it doesn't happen again." When we saw the movie *Defiance*, I wasn't too

favorable to the movie, because I think there is a lot of exaggeration. One of the things that—this book I’m writing, one of the conditions that I told the woman that’s helping me with it is, “The truth. Nothing but the truth.” But yet, I feel if I had the opportunity to do a movie, even if I had to exaggerate, even with committing that sin of exaggeration, I would do it if it meant that the world could see what happened and could realize it.

CE: Yes, because it would be the truth, then. It may not be factual, but it would be the truth. It would convey the truth of the experience.

SW: Right. Right.

CE: And, to end, would you say a few words about this book that you’re writing?

SW: (sighs) I have always been told, when I tell my story, “You should write a book.” So, finally I decided that maybe I should do that. The woman that first interviewed me for the Spielberg Foundation—I don’t know how it came about. She offered to help me write a book, and she actually showed me that she helped some other people write a book. I thought it would be a good idea, since I am not a writer. I’m a numbers man. I worked with her, I think, about three, four years.

MW: More. It’s been a long time.

SW: And we went through at least twenty rewrites. I was never satisfied, because it was very dry. It was all facts and nothing else. Finally, I guess a miracle happened. Back in 1994, I had borrowed a book from the Holocaust Museum. I did not read it, because I put it away with my other books and I just never got to it. I found it about a year and a half ago. It’s called *The Hidden Children*. The first conference of the hidden children was in 1991 in New York City.¹ Sandy and I went there, and we took our daughter with us. Was Andy there, too? I don’t think so.

MW: No. And Robin was not there. It was Sara who was there.

SW: Robin was there.

¹The conference’s official name was the International Gathering of the Hidden Children.

MW: Robin was there? I don't remember.

SW: So, I attended this conference. Apparently, this journalist, Jane Parker, was there, and she interviewed some of the survivors. And she wrote eleven stories of the survivors—not mine. Very short; the whole book's like 200 pages. I read this book, and I couldn't put it down.

CE: This is called *The Hidden Children*?

SW: *The Hidden Children*. Jane Parker.² I went on a rampage trying to find Jane Parker, and I couldn't. After about four months, I picked up the book again, and at the end of the book was a postscript by some professor [Nechama Tec], University of Connecticut, who helped her with some of the research. I wrote a letter to this professor at the University of Connecticut. I don't know whether it's a male or a female, because the name is—

MW: (inaudible), or something like that.

SW: Yeah. A month or two went by: nothing. I got a letter. The envelope had my return address glued on the front. My letter was inside the envelope with the return address torn out, and all kinds of lines and stuff. But basically, what he/she said: "I have not heard from Jane Parker in I don't know how many years. The last knowledge I have of her is this email and this phone number." I picked up the phone, and I said, "No, I better not call. I better write her an email." So, I sent her an email telling her exactly what I just told you.

I don't think half an hour went by when I get an email back. She said, "I picked up the phone to call you, but I decided I better write to you." (all laugh) "My name is no longer Jane Parker; it's Jane Marks. I'm retired, and I would love to see your story." She gave me her email. I had the drafts of my story on my computer, so I sent it to her. It took about—what, a week?—and I got a letter in the mail from her, apologizing profusely. She thinks it's a fantastic story. She thinks I should write it myself, because she's retired and she cannot undertake this. I still don't think I could do that. I can't do it.

²*The Hidden Children: The Secret Survivors of the Holocaust*, published in 1993 by Jane Marks.

MW: He was really lost at that point, devastated.

SW: I was devastated. I didn't know what to do.

MW: We were so hopeful.

SW: In the meantime, I hadn't spoken to Bonnie—Bobbie; that's the one that helped me with the book. I haven't spoken to her for months. We get an invitation to a bat mitzvah of one of our friends in Fort Lauderdale. By the way, that woman—her daughter is a freelance journalist, Debbie, and whenever Debbie wrote something special we would get it in the email, and we liked very much the reading.

We get an invitation to the bat mitzvah of the mother, so we decided to go, and we meet Debbie there. She tells us that she's basically unemployed. Her husband is unemployed, because he was in the PR business and they laid him off. So, I said, "How would you like a job?" and so on and so forth. We must have had at least twenty interviews by phone: started at eight o'clock at night, when her kids went to sleep, and once it didn't finish till about twelve-thirty.

CE: Wow.

SW: Email was about at least fifteen or twenty pages of questions. Of course, she read the stuff that I sent. Beginning about two months ago, she stopped talking to me. She stopped calling me. She's writing! She wants this to be her first novel. So, I really have my fingers crossed.

MW: We're hoping for the best here.

CE: Good, good, good!

SW: And I told Carol Bast at the Museum that when the book is out, she gets as many books as she wants. The first books that she sells, she has to contribute 50 percent of the selling price to my costs. After my costs are all paid out, she gets all the books that she wants and she can sell at the Museum.

CE: Wonderful!

SW: So, I have high hopes.

CE: Wonderful! I have high hopes, too. Any final statement you want to leave with your audience?

MW: No, it's his story. It's his story.

CE: You have any final statement you want to leave?

SW: Well, it's the same statement that I leave to the kids when I talk to them. Number one: if you don't smoke, don't ever start. If you do, drop it now, because it's easier now than later. Number two: Elie Wiesel said that there were basically three or four characters in the Holocaust: the victims, the perpetrators, and the bystanders. And Elie Wiesel, that's his words: the bystander is the most guilty of all, because had he or she not stood by, things wouldn't have happened. So, I tell the kids, "Whatever you do, don't be a bystander. Be proactive. See that if there's a bully, that you do something about it in class. If somebody does something wrong, don't hide behind." That's basic.

MW: In the ten years that we have been associated with the Holocaust Museum, we have seen the emphasis of the Museum, the charter emphasis, changing from teaching the Holocaust per se to teaching tolerance. And that's what it's all about, and that's what we're doing.

SW: Tolerance and coexistence.

MW: And that's what you're doing, and that's what we're all hoping for. That's the message that we want to bring to the world.

CE: Okay. Thank you both very, very much.

SW: You're welcome.

MW: Thank you.

End of interview