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# George Turlo oral history interview by Tori Lockler, November 30, 2010

George J. Turlo (Interviewee)

Tori Chambers Lockler (Interviewer)

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[Transcriber's Note: This interview contains graphic material. Researcher discretion is advised.]

**Tori Lockler:** Today is November 30, 2010. Our interviewee's name is George Turlo; name at birth, George Jerzy Turlo. My name, as the interviewer, is Tori Chambers Lockler. We are in Palmetto, Florida, in the United States. The language of the interview is English, and our videographers are Jane Duncan and Richard Schmidt.

Could you start by telling us your name?

**George Turlo:** Hello, my name is George Jerzy Turlo, and I was born in Wilno, otherwise known as Vilna [Vilnius, Lithuania], in 1934, March 13. My mother's name was Olga; my father's name was Michael. My background is really very unique, as far as the family is concerned, because several nationalities or languages or religions, even, were taking place in my education. And really, during my young years, I was educated exclusively by my mother and by my father.

My father came from a peasant family from Latvia; my mother came from St. Petersburg, Russia, where it was a big family. My great-uncle Oscar Schlumberger, who was French, he immigrated to Poland in 19—in, excuse me, 1871 after defeat of France by German Army [in the Franco-Prussian War]. He was very much disappointed that his homeland Alsatia [Alsace] was taken by the Germans, and he decided to settle in eastern part of Poland and, after, in St. Petersburg. He have about six daughters and one grandson. One of the daughters, Maria Schlumberger, was my grandmother.

TL: So Oscar Schlumberger was your great-grandfather?

GT: Okay, yeah. This was the great-grandfather from the French side. And from my Russian side, this was a general of the Russian Army, Viacheslav Vilovsky, whose son Vladimir Vilovsky married my grandmother. Vladimir Vilovsky was a colonel, a commander of Russian cavalry officer school in St. Petersburg. My mother survived the revolution in St. Petersburg—her sister died there from hunger—and after, she immigrated to Poland, to Białystok, with her mother, who always we called Madame Vilovska because she was very strict Victorian lady. My mother and my father, they met in Wilno. They both were avid sportsmen. My mother was a champion swimmer. My father was the president of academic/athletic club in University of Stefan Batory [Vilnius University], from which he graduated with law degree. And after graduation, I was conceived; he married my mother and I was conceived. My mother was Orthodox Russian religion; my father was a Roman Catholic; my grandmother was Lutheran, and frankly I would call her atheist. So in home we spoke several languages: French, Russian, Polish, and German sometimes.

My father was nominated as a district judge by president of Poland and we settled in Domachevo, what is small town on the River Bug. Domachevo was mostly populated by Jewish population; about 80 percent of population was Jewish. And my father and my mother, they have very well established relationship with lot of friends of Jewish decent in Wilno, where my mother learned all the delicious cooking: kosher cooking, Jewish cooking and so on, you know, what I love very much. And we were living happily in this Domachevo. My father sometimes take me for a trip to Warsaw. I was driving there, even a car in Warsaw Zoo: this was my good times. And he loves hunting, and so very often, he was hunting there in Domachevo and kayaking with his friend, a Jewish doctor. And very often my father and mother were inviting guests, like this Jewish doctor with the family, to our house, and other people—my uncle Peter Turlo, who was a military cavalry officer. That's what I remember.

TL: Would you be willing, please, to—

GT: And the war of September 1 [1939] found me on the courtyard in Domachevo, where they announced through the speaker that German planes attacked all Polish airports. And we children, we have been dismissed from school to go home; parents rushed to get us. This was big chaos and panic. What to do? My father, as a judge, according to the law was to protect all the court matters, so he was not called to military even [though] he was the officer. And somewhere around September 15 the Germans troops start to cross the River Bug and we packed all our belongings, the most precious belongings and court matters on the carriage—was horses-drawn carriage—and try to escape to the east. Unfortunately, on September 17, Soviets attacked Poland from the back, from the east.

So my father decided no sense to escape more to the east, so we returned back to Domachevo.

TL: Mr. Turlo—

GT: And around September—I would say twenty-seventh—my father have to give up his court to Soviet authorities: there was a Soviet committee there. I have even in possession protocol of his surrendering this court to Soviets. And after, shortly after, the NKVD, what is precursor of KGB, came and arrest my father, took him to Brest-Litovsk, and for whole months they tortured him, tortured him unbelievably that everybody—you know, they doing by blackmail, they do something to the wife and children and they gave me [*sic*] salt fish to eat first when he was hungry and after no drop of water for several weeks. And he have to sit on the chair with special raised fronts, so this cut the blood circulation in his legs. But he didn't divulge anything; he didn't say any words or names of friends to help the NKVD.

Meantime, this friend, his friend Jewish doctor, he collected signatures from the Jewish population in Domachevo, about 1,000 signatures, and he sent it to authorities in Brest-Litovsk. The NKVD let my father out. He came like a ghost, he have to drop all his clothes because it was full of lice and ask my mother to burn, and he said, “Tomorrow we have to escape, because I was declared an enemy of the state and I cannot live closer to 100 kilometers to the border”—border between Soviet Union and the new Germany, border who had been established before the war already because [Joachim von] Ribbentrop, who was the minister of Deutsches Reich, and [Vyacheslav] Molotov, who was Foreign Minister of Russia, they make the pact of non-aggression—not only non-aggression but also partition of Poland. So this was in agreement: when the Germans who come to Bug River from another side, Soviets advance with tanks and take this part of Poland.

So we packed overnight, and again we escaping in carriage away to our friend Ralski, who was like a forester. And after—

TL: Before you go on to the escape, may I ask you first the town you lived in, Domachevo, can you spell that for me?

GT: Town? Domachevo?

TL: Mm-hm.

GT: Domachevo, I don't know how to spell. I can write for you.

TL: Okay, I'm just looking for—maybe if you could just write it, just so that I can get a sense of—I'm trying to follow where we are in the borders and as the borders change.

GT: All these towns in eastern portion of Poland, majority of population was Jewish—about 70, 80, 90 percent sometimes.

TL: And Domachevo?

GT: Yeah.

TL: And then my other question before you go on to the escape is, when you were in school in Domachevo with the large population of Jewish families that you had there, do you remember any specific events of anti-Semitism against the Jewish children of your town?

GT: No.

TL: Okay.

GT: No, I don't remember anything like this. Probably there was, because in my memoir—in the memoirs of my father, who wrote in Austria in 1951 and published in some Polish newsletter—I lost my thought. He—

TL: In his memoirs, he was talking about some amount of anti-Semitism in the town?

GT: The Jewish people loved my father, because, according to these memoirs, he—several times he saved them from pogroms. This what was said; I never have seen any of this action. But the Soviets, they manipulated Jewish population. They manipulated the Byelorussian, Polish, anybody, Latvian, to make fight with each other, to hate each other. This was one of the purpose of their policy, of the Soviet policy, to create this kind of hate of each other that nobody was—stop trusting each other. Before, this was like one family. We never distinguished who is Polish, who is Jewish; they all the same human beings. Okay? But the Soviets did this stuff, and anyway, when I was—I don't

remember any pogroms. But I remember this doctor. I don't remember his name; I lost in my memory his name.

Anyway, we escaping from the Soviets. The next day they came to arrest our family to send to Siberia. Mostly people who have been sent in November and December, they perished on the way up; they were throwing the bodies out from the railroad cars. So we knew that this is our choice, between the dead or escape. So my father escaped on the skis to city of Slonim. We was able, with the help of this Jewish doctor, to get a *propiska*—I mean, this was a Russian (inaudible) permission to travel on the train. Nobody could travel without permission of the committee of particular town. And we escaped to Białystok, to my grandmother. Over there was not safe, too, because some Byelorussian who were police cooperated very well with—I'm mixing this stuff now.

TL: It's okay. So you were saying that September 27 your dad—your father had to give—surrender the court to the Soviets. And then the precursor to the KGB—so, what, the organization prior to the KGB—took your father to prison.

GT: It was not KGB then.

TL: No.

GT: It was NKVD.

TL: Okay, NKVD. Okay.

GT: Okay.

TL: They took him to prison. It was about a month, you said, that they tortured him before the Jewish doctor received the signatures that got him released, at which point he decided that your family needed to escape. So you were telling us that you packed overnight and you were escaping to your friends, to your parents' friends, which were the Ralskis. Is that where we're going, right?

GT: Yeah, to Białystok.

TL: Okay, okay.

GT: By train. My mother forbid me to speak any Polish. She put around me a big handkerchief and if somebody asked, “*Eto moï rebenok; on zubnoï boli,*” saying in Russian that “He is my son; he has a pain in the tooth”—teeth, you know.

So, we got safely to Białystok. Yeah. I don’t know who, but anyway some nosy people—I don’t know, Byelorussian police—were start to looking for us. Or the Russian police; I don’t know, don’t remember. And my father wrote letter from Slonim in French to my mother that we are going to meet him on the rail station on certain day and certain hour, and we met him. He came dressed up in NKVD colonel uniform. He loaded us to military train with other Russian officers. And my mother and my father spoke fluently Russian between each other and everybody was saluting my father. And safely we got close to Slonim, and just before semaphore, then my father told us to get out and we get out. He removed his uniform, put carefully in the package, and he said, “Well, my Jewish tailor will make the repairs to the uniform for the rightful owner.” (TL laughs) I don’t know. My father was resourceful and he was so courageous person, that he was taking any kind of risk.

Anyway, in Slonim, we, of course, live under different names; I don’t remember now even what names. My father was working as a *rabochiï trudovo triada*, what means “the third ranking laborer.” He was working in some kind of automobile workshop there. We lived in one room with one bed and one chair, I remember. It was very difficult to climb out from the bed to go to do regular things at night, pee or whatever, because the outhouse was outside and it was no electricity, no running water. And you used to have to take a spade with you, especially in winter, to cut the icicle who came out from this hall to be able to do this. Anyway, we lived somewhat happy because we have been together in one bedroom, in one bed with one chair. My father was working every day except Sunday, and Sunday was our outing day when we were going out to the woods or to the church, whatever.

And then came 1941, and this when the all hell broke loose. I was—my best friend was killed by the shrapnels of the bomb, and his brain tissue and blood coved me. My father after, when he found me, he thought I am dead. But I was deaf. I lost my hearing and I still don’t have good hearing. Okay, this is from the time of the war. My father, because his knowledge of the German, Russian, and Polish, he became translator in municipal government, whatever it was then. We able to get apartment after former Russian officer, and there was electricity there. This was a big deal. I was able to read my books, and I was very heavy reader; sometimes I read three books a day. And I used to go with my father fishing in the Shchara River, who was floating to Slonim. And one day when we were coming back from the fishing trip—I beat my father. I caught more pikes, fish, than my father, and I carrying proudly that I have beat him and he congratulate me. “Well, my student became better than the teacher.” (TL laughs)



And we met on our way a character who was a vestryman in our church named Moiszewski. The kids call him Moses because he has exactly like the feature, like this—depicted in the Bible, so you know. And he say, “*Pan*—oh. Mr. Turlo, Mr. Turlo, do you know the war?” And my father said, “What war?” “The Germans attacked the Soviet Union.” It was June 1941. And my father asked me to give some of the fish to this Mr. Moiszewski, what I reluctantly gave.

Next day already plane, German plane, especially Stuka bombers, dive bombers, and the Messerschmitt: this is—the planes were attacking a railroad station. We living very close to railroad station and the bombs were hitting railroad station, and transports of Russian soldiers were rushing to the front: they trying also to bomb the bridge of the railroad. And the house we are living got fire, and we have to rush out into the field with the rest of our belongings, whatever we had. And after, the Russian soldiers were running through the field, and there were massacres from Messerschmitt fire. Like I mentioned before, these heavy bombs were falling, you know, killed my good friend next to me.

And after the fight was over I was recovered, but our place was first—(inaudible); this mean root cellar—where I would stay for probably a couple weeks. I develop high fever. I don’t remember exactly what was going on after, when I recover. I found that my father got apartment after—back in the apartment after some Russian officer. It seems to me that I am going in circles now.

TL: Nope.

GT: No, no?

TL: No, you’re doing fine. You just kind of went backwards a little and told us more detail about the story, so you’re doing wonderfully. So now, once you were in this apartment—so now we’re looking around after June of 1941. So after the bomb had hit and you had been in this root cellar, you had this apartment that you were in, that was of the Russian officer. So can you tell us from there what happened forward?

GT: Okay. Like I mentioned, my father got the job of a translator because the knowledge of the languages. And working closely in the German office, really, because he knew pretty well German, he captured certain information about the transports, what the Germans were going to the Russian front, and he was convening this information to the Polish underground. Sometimes he entertained some people who were coming from Warsaw, some couriers between Warsaw and Wilno or whatever. Our house was a safe

house. Then, other activity that I notice, that he and our priest, Gerhowski, they were initiating creation of false birth certificates and various certificates for Jewish people—I mean, Christian certificates—so they are able to change their identity and able to survive. I don't know for how many people my father did, and Priest Gerhowski.

And we supposed to go fishing one—and this was the June already of 1942. And suddenly Gestapo came at night and arrest my father. Majority of what's happened to him and how he survive in prison is from his memoirs, what I recovered after his death in 1981. So this is not exactly my observance, but this was his testimony, what was written there. And when he was in prison on July 1, 1942, the Germans—I would say their—there was action against the Jew, but mostly this was carried out by Latvian, Lithuanian SS under command of the German officers, and Byelorussian police dressed in black.

The ghetto was in the middle of the town of Slonim, surrounded by the River Shchara from both side. It was, I remember, a road going to ghetto, but it was all barbed wire and so you cannot communicate with anybody there in ghetto. So they decided to liquidate ghetto, and these noises of explosions and the fire wake me and my mother and we are looking through the window on a big fire over the ghetto. It was like half of the town in flames. I said, "Where are the fire trucks?" Nobody heard the fire trucks. The answer came in the morning. My mother and I were looking through the windows, and here in the front of our house, who was located only about two blocks from the prison, start marching columns after columns of Jews bringing out from ghetto. Some of them have been wounded, in blood, barely able to walk. These who followed had been bayoneted or shot by the guard, and behind them there were like carrying carts, some people with yellow Star of David. And everybody who died, they were loaded, loaded, and all this moving. And the Germans screaming, "*Schnell, Schnell! Nicht zurück sein.* No looking backwards. Further, further."

And here came this picture what I never forget; every time when I see this in my mind I have tears in my whole eyes. It was a woman carrying a small little baby and holding a hand of a four year old boy. Boy have a bandage over his head full of blood, and he was limping; he was, like, making this moving of this convoy slower. Then the guard in black uniform—I assume that this was Byelorussian police because they cooperated very well with German, because liquidation of the ghetto was done by Latvian SS troops and Lithuanian SS troops. And this woman was walking slowly, and then guard in black uniforms jump to her, grab the boy away from her and bayoneted him. The mother, trying to rescue the son, he shot her right in the mouth; and after, when she fall down with the baby, he took this baby, small little baby, lift up in the air, and he insert this on the iron fence who was surrounding this mini park across our house. My mother took me away from the windows and said, "This is the most horrible thing we're witnessing, and we should never forget this."

Next days—this is from my relation, not from my father—these Jewish people who have been brought to the prison, they have been searched there, whatever. In the beginning, they was not even searched. They loaded them on the trucks. They told them to take all the clothes off, so the people were laying down in the trucks half naked in underwear or something, this was out underwear. How I know? I climbed on the roof with my friend Frank, and we are watching, because watching from the windows was forbidden because they will shoot anybody who was watching from the window. And we saw on the corner of each truck was sitting the guard in black uniform, and the people laying flat half naked on the platform of the truck. And these trucks were driving just in front of our house from the prison, and they were going about two kilometers outside of the perimeter of the town. Over there were digged [*sic*] graves already, massive graves, and all day you can—I can heard (makes machine gun noise) machine guns, and after single pistol shots. My mother forbid me to go on the street because of the safety, and I have to watch my small little sister. And she was trying to go before the prison with other women to find out if their husbands are alive, or maybe they accept some food for them.

Meantime, according now to the father memoirs, after this first days without any making selection, after the Germans start to make selection. So they selected people who have certain skills—like cobblers, tailors, dentist, pharmacist, doctors—to spare them for whatever, and the rest were undressed on the yard. And my father was jumping to the crated little window in his cell which he share with sixteen people; there only was standing room. And he saw that these young people, especially young people—saw like one *kapo*—twenty, sixteen, and twenty, eighteen, were all very nice and handsome they were smiling each other, hugging each other, kissing each other. They knew that they would be dead in next couple hours. And the doctor we knew returned down on the floor. He was tell his fellow prisoners, “It’ll be great if we can die so heroically like these Jews are dying.” I was very anxious. I have some Jewish friends who were in hiding and I was trying to contact them, to find them.

Oh, I forgot to mention: During the first several months of the German occupation, the Einsatz commanders, who were allocated to each army group, they consisted from Waffen-SS, police, other different. And their role was to kill every Jew and every political commissar, Russian commissar. And my father got an alarming letter through Priest Gerhowski, because my father never disclosed his name and address to anybody, that they are begging for help because probably they will be the next—because they survived then also for a while because he was a doctor. So my father told them, whatever the German mayor was there, that he can fetch him a very good Steinway piano, but he need a big military cart and horses. And this was granted, and the German soldier came over with his horses. And my father—my mother, I remember, was begging him that it is enormous risk because helping the Jews—any help, especially hiding the Jew, was a death penalty immediately by the Germans. So he’s risking all our family. But my father said that he have a plan, and he always was very smart.

Anyway, he went to Domachevo, and because he was afraid that somebody recognize his face, he came at just before curfew so nobody was on the street. And the family of this doctor, they hide in the cellar. And he was banging, banging. Finally when he scream, "This is Michael," [they said] "Oh, Michael!" They came out from the cellar, terrified, and grateful that Michael came to rescue them. And Michael gave them false certificate, of marriage certificate and everything. They loaned two pianos: one piano for the *Bürgermeister*, whatever, and one small piano was for me.

TL: Okay, and this—

GT: What intermission?

TL: In just a moment, we'll take—we'll switch over to the next tape. But before we do, this incident where your dad went and got the Jewish family and picked up the pianos, was that before or after his imprisonment? So is it before—

GT: This was before, before, before. I already mixed sequence.

TL: No, no, no, that's fine. But now we have it again.

GT: Yeah.

TL: Because—so this happened and then he went to prison?

GT: Yeah.

TL: And then—okay. So then, what we'll do is we'll take a break and we'll get started on the next tape and we'll pick up from now his imprisonment forward. Okay?

*Part 1 ends; part 2 begins*

TL: Okay, this is tape two. We are with George Jerzy Turlo. Mr. Turlo, you were telling us about your father's imprisonment, so if you would continue with your story?

GT: Yeah, okay. I was sitting anxiously in the home because my mother told me some about—I was very worried about some of my Jewish friends with whom I get acquainted before, and also about Priest Gerhowski. And I found and I heard that Priest Gerhowski was arrested by Gestapo also. So I figure out that probably my father's friend the doctor who Priest Gerhowski arranged apartment and private practice in his parish also disappeared. So I start to wandering on the street, and I encounter a scenario, scene. I see a black uniform policeman, probably Byelorussian, convoying young Jewish boy, not so much older than me. And he was carrying on the top of his head jar of something liquid—might have been the pee, you know; this probably was honey. And I figured, oh, they probably captured him in the cellar somewhere, because a lot of Jews were still hiding, you know, before they escape to the partisan, to the woods.

And I was so defiant, so defiant against any black uniform. I was just trying to do something. So I said, "Well, I am going to trick this black policeman." And when they were passing me I wink to this Jewish boy and [with] another eye indicate fence. White fence was running, and behind them was a garden, an apple garden or something like this. And when I passed him I fall down and start to scream, "Oh, my leg! Oh, my leg! Oh, my leg!" And policeman, distracted by my screaming, turn his head, and meantime this Jewish boy took this honey and hit him over the head with the honey. But this guy was cool. The Jewish boy jumped over the fence and start to run, zigzagging through the garden. This policeman wipe his honey from the face, kneel down, put the rifle between the fence, and start to shoot. Well, third, maybe fourth bullet hit him, the Jewish boy, and he fall down. And this policeman climbed the fence to fetch him, and I was paralyzed, seeing this stuff, didn't move.

Finally, when I decided to move, I went to move and, suddenly, hand on my shoulders. "*Bleiben sie hier*. You stay here." And I look, and here is SS man officer. I didn't notice him; he was across the street, probably. "*Herr officer, Ich will nach Hause gehen. Meine Mutter—I want to go home, my mother—*" [The officer said] "*Nein, you're bleib-ing here. You're staying here.*" And after, when this black policeman brought this Jewish boy to the gate of the prison, he was holding his stomach: his intestines were coming out. He brought me under the gun also, this policeman, and he start to swagger—I mean, talking quickly in the German to another guard there, pointing at me. And I was saying, "*Ich bin nicht schuldig. Ich bin nicht schuldig*. I'm not Jewish; I am Polish. I'm not guilty, I'm not guilty."

"*Nein, you be schuldig*. You help the Jew. You are not Jewish? Take your pants out." So, I drop my pants. "Ha ha ha, you really are not Jewish. Get on this truck." And they throw me on this truck together with the Jewish boy. There were already some people laying there; this was already end of the day, so probably this was the last transport for execution. And I was mad at myself that I was allowed to be caught. I was worried about my mother, what—how she will be crying. And what I can do? You cannot move. You have to lay down. I remember how other people were laying down. They

sometimes throwing some jewelry, some watches with messages: somebody may find and somebody know what's happened to them, or whatever. I have nothing to throw. And I felt—well, I have about twenty minutes to live, I would say. That's how long it will take to drive up.

And the truck start to drive. And I'm laying and I see some kind of blue head, like a monster, blond and blue, beaten up to pulp. I couldn't recognize who this person is. And suddenly, this head start to talk to me. "It's me, it's me. Jerzy, it's your priest." And this was Priest Gerhowski, this who was helping to save so many Jews. And he reached me with a hand and touch me, and said, "Pray with me. Shepherd"—whatever. "If it's fate that you lose your life, this is the fate, but maybe God grant you life. So I pray with you that you survive this."

And they brought us—it's already red, sunset, I remember. All the graves have been covered already with sand, whatever, except they left the corner portion for the last transport. The trucks with machine guns and two SS man laying there behind machine guns; an officer with pistol, whatever, in commanding, and also very old commando with spades to bury after the last victims of the day. And they put us kneeling on the edge of the grave together: was this boy, and I saw two little girls, some Polish family, two man and wife, and after another Jewish people and this. And the officer said, "Fire!" Opened fire and (makes machine gun noise), and everybody was falling to their graves. And a guy who was standing to me, he was falling like almost first, whatever, but he push me and I fall like a fraction of a second before him and thus he fall half on top of me. And then other people were falling on me and I was choking for lack of air, and I said, "God, please don't let me die just because of the lack of air."

Suddenly I heard the voices, because the people were screaming like the last greeting to their god. "Oh, my God. *Eloheinu Eloi, Eli, Eli.*" Suddenly there is change of the voices, and I heard the Germans. "*Zurück, zurück!* Partisan are coming." The partisans are coming through the woods, so they quickly drop everything, jump on the trucks and rushed away, not covering the graves with the sand, because this was—this time the partisans own all territory outside of the towns. The Germans could only live in the towns, like in the fortress; nobody ventured, whatever, outside.

Anyway, coming to me, I—immediately when I heard this stuff, I knew that there would be an evacuation of all this stuff and I start to try to crawl out, because everybody was moving. The German commanding officer was shooting with the pistol every moving body. So finally I was crawl out of these bodies (makes breathing sound) and was able to breathe. But I lay still. I was afraid to move because I didn't know what was going on. But no noise, no voices, so I figure I have to escape from this grave. When I came to the corner, no way I can climb out the grave. I have to build a ladder. And I start to look for small bodies, about—well, I bring this stack bodies, including this Jewish boy, this two—

not two, one daughter, because one was covered by the father and I only saw the blond hair under her father's body. I couldn't move.

So I finally collected about four bodies—children, more or less, teenager. It's very hard for me to drag them over the dead bodies to this corner, and any attempt to build the ladder to climb was futile because this was soft. Every body was giving up under the weight, even though I didn't weigh too much. So I decided, well, I'll wait in other corner till—I know from my father and so on; he was teaching us about rigor mortis and all this. You have to wait about six hours or more before the bodies start to get stiff.

And when I laying there and watching the stars above me, I saw some yellow eyes looking down on me. I said, "Oh my God, it's probably wolf who's going to devour me after, when I climb out." And I said, "I have to; if they find me, they will just shoot me." So I finally, again, try to put these bodies on the top of each other and I finally—this was already almost sunrise time—climb out from the grave. And immediately when—this was like a little lake there, and I remember that in wintertime I used to go with my father secretly to cut a Christmas tree there because this was forbidden by the Soviets. So I wash off, because I knew that the Germans, when they see this, they will put the dogs, and scent of fear, and also scent of blood, this is indication what the dogs will go for. So, ice cold water already in the pond, I wash off completely, wash my head off. And after I walk to this pond for a long time till I found the entrance to the brook, and walking the brook I got to the woods, under some big oak tree, cover myself with leaves, and fall asleep.

Well, this was my different odyssey now started. I was nobody. And everybody, looking at me, half naked, obviously you'd be thinking that I am escapee Jewish boy. So, several nights and days I tried to find out—going on the edge of forest to one village to another. In one I found the laundry hanging, and I crawled there on the ground to steal the pants and some potatoes had been collected. And somebody saw me and they start to sic the dogs after me. "You Jewish—blah, blah, blah," I heard in Byelorussian, and they sic the dog after me. And I start running towards the woods and the rock was almost hot on my feet, when suddenly a big growl, growling, came out from the woods. I look on this, and this was big animal, half mastiff half German shepherd. I call him immediately Monster, and he was savior for me; but I was afraid to enter the woods again because of him, so I slept in the hay sack. I got an allergy from there. And so, this animal was following me.

Finally, I found a village who have a little better houses with clay roof, and was a church: on the steeple, regular Christian cross, not Byelorussian. So I feel good: it must be Polish, maybe these people will help me. But when I walk into the village, all the dogs start to bark. I was banging different doors; nobody answer. Finally, about the third door or fourth door, I don't remember, was open. There was little old woman looking at me. "What you want?" I said, telling the truth, "I am son of Judge so and so, and I seeking

help, some food.” So she let me in and she gave me milk and piece of bread. Boy, what a feast this was. And after the family came back from the church, and everybody was surprised, looking on me with suspicion, you know, who are you? And I explained to them, truthfully, everything what had happened to me.

Okay, this guy was saying, “Well, you’re a truthfully speaking boy (inaudible). And we’ll help you little bit.” So first, I have a good meal. And they make me the lantern, what I can use as a fire source. And lantern—the boys in the pasture over there, they making. It was a regular can: they make the nail holes on the bottom, attach the wire to the top so you can swing this and put the cow manure inside to light this stuff. So you can swing this in the air during the day and you can have a fire all day and night. So this was very—they said after, when I was leaving—at night, they told me to leave so nobody will see me. And the girls found big bones, and they said, “This is for your Monster,” this big huge bone.

So, I came back to the woods. I heard him rustling nearby. I have finally some kind of tarp to lay down, so I said, “Monster, come in. I have food for you.” And he didn’t, so I throw this bone in the front of the bushes. His mouth came out and he grabbed his bone and he went back. Okay. I went to sleep and was cold, and suddenly I felt warm on my back. I said, “What the hell is this?” I turning my head, and here was this dog laying next to me, warming my body. I couldn’t believe it. This was a godsend animal, you know. So we survived this way for many weeks. I taught him—maybe he knew how—to catch the rabbit, you know, because I already forgot how—I didn’t have implements to make this kind of device to catch the rabbit. And he finally caught [*sic*] the rabbit, brought me, and I roasted this rabbit on the fire—oh, this was some unbelievable food!—and ate it.

So finally, when the snow fall down—I don’t know, this must be November or December. I lost the day count. I didn’t know what day is today, what day of the week is day, what the month: just survival was counting. And suddenly at night, or early in the morning, the barking of the dog wake me up, and here in front of my provisional tent they were standing, bearded men with their rifles. They was Russian partisans who were blowing up the railroads or bridges, the same like the Polish partisan—Polish Underground Army. So they took me to the Russian partisan camp. There was next camp was Jewish, mostly escapee from ghetto. And I met—they ask for some people, escapee from ghetto in Slonim. And he said, “Oh, yes, we have here a doctor.” I was ready to see a familiar face, but is coming suddenly a different person. And I recognize in him Abraham—I forgot the last name now.

He was the one who was in prison with my father, and he was without any food, anything. He was like on starvation, ready to die, almost, ’cause the majority of the Jewish people died there and they brought the bodies to execution place. And once, my



father saw through the peephole from his cell red beard of Abraham. This was his friend during the Russian occupation; he was a pharmacist. And Abraham ask my father, “Michael, if you can, please help me. We are dying.” So my father said, “Well, be here tomorrow at a certain hour, because we are going to get the water and the crate. I’ll try and throw you something.” And my father, whatever he had—because all the guards, they liquidating all the food what my mother was bringing, eating themselves, so only like an onion or apple or piece of bread they let go.

So my father knew that this man is on the verge of dying, and he took his bread what he saved for himself and find an onion and an apple. And when he was getting the water in the yard, he throw through this crate where Abraham stick his—this—and he grabbed this stuff. And this situation was repeating several times. And he saves Abraham’s life this way because after, when the typhus blew up full force in the city, they let Abraham out in disinfection column and, according to my mother, he came several times to our home bringing some flours and different vital products, or whatever he was able to find out. So, helping each other.

Anyway I met in this partisan camp a commander—his name was Maxim—and I told him. “Oh, you are son of the Michael”; they already knew the Michael. (laughs) And I ask him if he could help me some way to get to Białystok, to my grandmother. I said I knew that I cannot use the railroad tracks or highway, because this very much guarded by the German patrols. He said, “*Ne volnuïtes’, mal’chik*. Don’t worry, young man.” And he gave me some kind of map showing where these German post are, how to go, how to avoid this and that, you know. And they gave me a little supply of food, and from there I start my odyssey with Monster to the west towards Białystok.

It took us quite a number of days. I decided not to walk during daytime, so only walk during the wintertime—I mean nighttime, because it was so cold that you shiver all the time in nighttime. So it’s better to walk and sleep during nighttime. So we made good progress, with my dog. I call him my dog Monster. We have some very unpleasant episodes, from Polish peasant this time; they wanted to kill me with the forks in the barn because they suspected that I have money. Christian cross on the top: there were no difference, I found, whose religion, whose nationality, no. This is depends on the human being. If somebody is tolerant towards each other, toward other human being, it’s great; but lot of people are—I can only pray for them. They not better than animals, including the Poles.

So, it was a problem with crossing the border. I learn that this district, Białystok, all this was by decree incorporated to German Reich. Ostpreußen Gauleitung, they call. So this was not more any territory somewhere in Russia, no more any territory in Poland. So you have to have documents to [be] able to cross. I came to observe the crossing section, and it was (inaudible), you know: there is the machine gun and there is all the guards,

whatever. I knew I cannot go through. The water was too cold to go through; already ice was forming. So, I figure I will try to go through the railroad bridge with my dog Monster. And we pick up in the night when it was snowing, heavy snowing; it was the best cover for us. And we crawling along the railroad tracks opposite to the hut where the guard was. But first, I made the observation they changing the guard every four hours, and there were two guards. They were coming out from the hut when the trains were coming by with the flags and, after, going back.

So I was lucky, crossed the bridge and (inaudible) was almost crossing this guard from another side, and one of these guard came out to peek. And this was like five feet from us and he saw us. Before I was able to move or anything, the Monster jump out and went after his throat. This guy shoot Monster a couple times from his pistol, but Monster crushed his—another guard run out from the house, and this was the first time that I used a gun and shoot another person. I shoot this other person, disabling him, and after, I figured he is now like a prisoner of me. To kill him will be abandoning a witness, liquidating the witness. And according to my code or morality, taught by my father, you never kill your enemy when he's wounded or disabled. If you commit this for your convenience, this act of murder.

So I ask him in German to show me his identity papers, everything. I made him to swear, because I found his wife and children—they are somewhere in Austria—that he will never disclose that he saw me here; that he will report that he killed the dog because he attacking his friend; and his friend shooting the dog by mistake and shoot him, too, from the same pistol. So I unload the pistol, unload the rifle, and I told him, "You can call for help ten minutes after I disappear from here." I said goodbye to Monster, kiss his dead body. I was still sentimental, crying about him.

And after, I went in the snowstorm further, further, further, till I was completely exhausted. And I got to some kind of village from the other side of the border, and I fall on the steps of a house and I lost my conscious. Well, I wake up in this house after, later. A *kapo* took me in. I have pneumonia. It was Christmas time, and I stay with them a while. He was teacher: he was teaching in regular school, young children, and also gave the auditions of teaching high school students secretly, because this was forbidden by the German, to teach any Pole over fourth grade. They supposed to be slave, and they don't need the knowledge whatsoever to be slave.

So I stay with them till probably March. And they got me a driver with the cart and horses, and they brought me to Madame Vilovska apartment again. And my mother was not there, and my grandmother told me that she went to Warsaw, to my godparents. She already lost—she knew that I survived the execution because the member of this Polish family who gave me help, I asked them to convey the message to my mother in Białystok, from there in Białystok—in Slonim. But they waiting all winter and it was

very severe winter and they knew that I must perish, perish somewhere. So she went to the godparents of mine in Warsaw and I said, "Well, I will go to Warsaw, too, right now," till she is there, because my grandmother said she may go further to Litzmannstadt—this was German name; it was Łódź, Polish city—because my relatives in Austria, they own some factories there in Łódź, and she may get some kind job there. Okay. So, I rush my mother (inaudible) with *dorożka*, what is called *dorożka*; horse-drawn cart, it's a taxi. Okay, use as a taxi. And I got to the train.

On the train, during the first portion, train was stopping very often on the rail tracks, and putrefied smell, stench, was coming from the outside. And I saw the German soldiers pouring the gasoline on some bodies along the track. And somebody told me this was the latest convoy from Białystok ghetto to the way to Treblinka. People who tried to escape through the floor or other ways either lost their life under the rail, under the wheels of the rail, or they've been shot by the guards sitting outside. So after was liquidation group; you know, they were burning the bodies.

In Warsaw, I was gypped by the *dorożka* driver. (laughs) They took about four more (inaudible) that this was water for the trip to my grandparents, and landed in their house. So they told me three days ago my mother left. So I figured, what in hell, there is no security. Just to be together doesn't create security; you survive on your own, if you are intelligent enough and pragmatic and of good heart, trying to help other people, these people who help you back. But I decided to stay in Warsaw.

The rest was not so much of the Holocaust survivor in there. I was watching liquidation of the ghetto in April forty-three [1943]. And after finding that my grandfather and godmother were members of underground, the same like my father was, I asked them if I can participate, and they gave me some indication means. I was in a *Szare Szeregi*, what is the Boy Scouts in Warsaw during the war.<sup>1</sup> And my assignment was: find the traitors. I was like a counterintelligence. Is to find the people who are preying on the Jewish people, trying to ask them bribes for keeping silence and after giving to Gestapo. And I got a watch, and my task was to follow this particular individual to get their routes, where they often eating, where they this, that; and after a special organization was liquidating these people. But this was nothing heroic on my part.

During the uprising in Warsaw, I was messenger boy, and I was heavily wounded and I was in hospital. On October 2 [1944] insurgents gave up the fight and surrendered to General [Erich von den] Bach with condition that we not [be] supervise by any nationality, not German, like Ukrainian, or Russian. There was a Russian division of

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<sup>1</sup>This was the code name for the Polish Scouting Association during World War II, which contributed to the Polish Underground movement.

people who came on the side; they were criminals, mostly, and they massacre Polish people during the uprising. They—I don't want to even say what the horrors were there.

Anyway, the Germans found in my pockets several ammunition pieces for German part of this pistol, and I was declared a combatant and I was taken unconscious from hospital to the train and, after, to some German hospital. I never know where the German hospital was. I was mostly unconscious because I was several infection, ready to die, and the German doctors trying to save me. So they gave me an injection after one operation and removing another fragments of bullets. So, I was very, long time in German hospital. After, I beg the doctor to let me go because I am underage, and so he let me go. This was somewhere in December, or whatever, I don't remember. I have a very bad memory from this time because I was malnutrition, also, at the time.

And I found my mother in February 1945 in Łódź with my sister. We were starving, but I remember I was going through all garbage places where the people dump their garbage, looking for potato peels where it be not rotten. And we are hunting for rats. I was dissecting the rats, and my mother, from the legs of the rats, can—she have a little handful of flour. She make so-called *zurek*—soup, Polish soup. This was our mainstay in the food. We finally cry for help to my grandmother in Białystok. She came, she got some bread from Russian soldiers—this was a big feast—and after, she got the permit to occupy some Baptist church in Aleksandrów and the position of the teacher in Aleksandrów.

TL: If I can have you pause right there, we'll switch to the next tape and then we'll pick up the story there. Okay?

GT: Yeah.

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

TL: This is tape three with George Jerzy Turlo. Mr. Turlo, if I can take you back for just a minute to your father, if you can tell us something about your father's fate, coming from his imprisonment.

GT: Okay. Mostly what's happened to my father I haven't witnessed. I only learned from his memoirs, published in 1951 in Austria. And this testimony on his part was something who motivate me, after, to look into my soul and try to write something about the Holocaust.

Okay, after I disappear from Slonim, anymore I was not there. My father was taken for interrogation by Gestapo. There were several Gestapo officers. First the older man, who was sitting behind a desk, tried to persuade slowly and gently to my father that it is better if you confess everything, and say this is better for your wife and family and this and that. And my father said, “No, I didn’t belong to any organization. I didn’t know anybody there.”

So finally, this guy scream, “Enough of this game!” He took the page, what he have a metal ball on the end, and he hit my father over the head. My father, trying to protect himself, had two fingers were broken by this page. And my father furiously jumped out and start to push a desk on this SS officer; then he was hit from the behind and he lost the conscious. They pull him to sidewall, and there they still were kicking him, breaking his ribs. And after there was no response anymore from my father, they called the doctor and the doctor said that is shock of the brain, whatever they call it in Germany—anyway, I forgot the German word for this, that he is completely like—he cannot say anything or think anything, he’s worthless.

TL: Unconscious.

GT: Unconscious, have unconscious. They brought him unconscious to another cellar when he was laying on the floor, cement floor. And after, in the evening, a German guard—German, not any Ukrainian or whatever, Latvian—ask my father if he can stand up and to go, and my father puke, whatever, and he get up. They sit on the bench outside of Gestapo headquarters, and this German soldier gave little flask, and my father smelled this was vodka and have a sip. And he went back to prison. Most of his acquaintances have been murdered. He, because he was very stubborn till the end, he never said any word. The Germans couldn’t find any evidence, any words what could indicate he is guilty to belong to conspiracy. They decided to let him go—not out of prison, but go to concentration camp in Germany. That was not really was the concentration camp; this was labor camp. This what my mother found about my father. We didn’t know about him at all for a couple years after the war.

We couldn’t survive. Now I’m coming back to the time when my grandmother came to help us in Łódź. She got the job of the teacher in Aleksandrów. We got apartment where we could live. But the major problem was starvation: this was not enough food for four mouths from poor teacher salary. So my mother decided, “Well, we will go to my father’s family,” who are peasants, and they living somewhere in (inaudible), what is village not so far from Czarnów.

So we pack our belongings, whatever we could, and together with Grandmother, four people of us. We get to Warsaw, and from Warsaw you have to—I don’t know how we

did this. Oh, yeah, we have to hire again a man with the big cart and horses. There were no bridges connecting Warsaw, Praga in Warsaw. And we drove through the streets, what I remember still from uprising, all rubble everywhere. We get over the Vistula River to Praga District, and over there was a railroad station—Dworzec (inaudible), they call— from where the trains were going to Czarnów, where we could get close to my uncle. He promised to wait for us on the railroad station, with horses.

And during the first night of travel, the train would stop in the middle of the field, stop by the Russians. The Russians told everybody, “Get out from the train,” and if everybody will be running, they will shoot. And they took all the money, all the documents, all valuable from every passenger on the train. And they robbed my grandmother, too. So after her return trip to Aleksandrów she have to get from police bureau in Czarnów special affidavit that she was robbed on the train to be able to go back.

We were welcome by the family of my father. This was his sister, my aunt. She married somebody who was without one leg, and they managed a small little place, you know, in the countryside. This was a short ride, really, there, because the next winter his own family throw us out. “You are too many mouths to feed, you don’t have any more sugar, you don’t have any money, you are useless for us”—typical peasant attitude. And we found again a root cellar. We helped to construct. There was somebody was living there before, and they kept planks and wooden platform that we could sleep there. In the bottom of this root cellar was standing water. The rats was climbing every time at night; you have to fight the rats down. I said, “This isn’t good survival,” after the war.

And finally, in 1946, the first letter from my father arrived. He came addressed, of course, to her sister, my aunt, so they came running to us with sorry words and this and that. And my father, when he found that we are alive, he start to send packages with food and some money; it was like (inaudible) packages. And we’re able to more out from this root cellar to a one-room apartment somebody rent to us.

And this was a civil war in Poland. The owner of this house was murdered, killed, and was hanging on the wires next to the house. My teacher in the school also was beaten up to the pulp by Polish underground, who was against the communist, because he was helping establish the communist thing. And this was going like this for the next three years. My mother finally, to the help to my father, was able to move to city Czarnów and get a job as a teacher. So we get apartment—again, what we have to share with other people, but this was okay.

My father, he was in American zone of Austria. And he was working closely with American organization who was precursor of the CIA, SOS [Office of Strategic Services], they call. He was instrumental bringing refugee from the Russian zone,

occupied Russian zone in Vienna, across the border, very often using the same trick that he used before: colonel, NKVD uniform, commandeering a Jeep and rushing through the gates with full force. The KGB—I don't know what is KGB or NKVD; I don't know when they change—they three times try to kill my father. They sent assassins. And my friend—his friends said, “Mike, we cannot protect you. You better be off immigrate to United States.” So Father did, in 1951. He was first, as usually immigrants are, working some menial job in the hospital, pushing dirty laundry and all this stuff. Finally he got some teaching position in Emmanuel College in Boston. And after, he got position in Brown University, teaching Russian, Polish and so. So, this was his career here in United States.

Myself, I finished the high school in fifty-one [1951] and enrolled in polytechnic institute in Gdańsk [Gdańsk University of Technology], where after seven years of studying I got master's degree in architecture and master's degree in city planning. So I became master of everything. (laughs) Anyway, I was working in Poland for eight years, became very known architect. I build some very interesting hotels in city of Kolobrzeg. After, in another place, in Słupsk, I design a whole big district, about 24,000 people, and a big new expansion.

And when I was trying to ask for passport, Polish passport, my mayor came to me and say, “George, you see the green grass will grow from my hand if you go to United States.” And he was the former secret police officer, major, or so and so. He know everybody in this ministry, whatever. So I wrote my father the situation is hopeless, there's no way I can get out, and he fix it. I cannot even tell now how he fixed it. I'm mostly suspicious how he fixed it. Suddenly I got the passport, Polish passport: there in writing in big letters how he's grateful of my participation of building this city of Słupsk. I'm boarding Sabena Airline and am flying directly to New York. And I kissed the ground when I landed here. And every time when I visit it, Poland, like eight years or ten years or—I used to go every five years to visit my sister—I kiss the ground in American airport that I'm lucky be here.

And also I was telling, especially the students when I was teaching about the Holocaust, you don't know how great and how good you have here. You don't know how precious it is. You are feeling depressed about what? That you are alive? You should smile and scream from joy. The same way here, I wish all the survivors of the Holocaust, *mazel tov!* And *shalom!* Thank you for your stubbornness to survive. Yeah.

TL: Thank you very much for sharing your story with us. I appreciate everything you've told us about. Thank you.

GT: Yeah.

*End of interview*