

Interview with JULIUS DRABKIN
Holocaust Oral History Project
Date: 1/27/90 Place: San Francisco, CA
Interviewer: Sue Siegel
Transcriber: Yvonne Fenner

Q: WE ARE HERE TOGETHER ON JANUARY 27, 1990, AND WE ARE GOING TO TALK TO JULIUS DRABKIN, WHO WAS BORN IN --?

A: Maritopa.

Q: IN MARITOPA.

A: 1918.

Q: MY NAME IS SUE SIEGEL. I WAS BORN IN GERMANY, AND I LIVE IN SAN FRANCISCO.

THE CAMERAMAN: And the date?

Q: AND THE DATE IS JANUARY 27TH, 1990.

THE CAMERAMAN: And we are in San Francisco today.

Q: YES, WE ARE IN SAN FRANCISCO TODAY.

THE CAMERAMAN: Anytime you are ready, you may begin.

Q: OKAY.

JULIUS, I WELCOME YOU HERE AND VERY MUCH LOOK FORWARD TO TALKING TO YOU.

A: Thank you.

Q: I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU TO TRY TO REMEMBER AS EARLY AS YOU CAN, FROM YOUR CHILDHOOD AND EVEN FROM WHAT YOUR PARENTS TOLD YOU, THAT MIGHT LEAD US INTO YOUR STORY.

A: I will try the best.

Q: JUST GO AHEAD.

A: My first memories are going very far. It was 1921. I was two years and eight months when my parents and my two sisters -- one is killed during the war by the Nazis in Riga. Another sister who lives now in Israel is six years older than me and returned to Latvia after my mother, who told me -- said appointment by (Dajinsky) -- (Dajinsky) was interior minister of commissar. Nineteen hundred, nineteen hundred eighteen, until he died in 1927 -- but it was 1921, to get a permit to come here, back, and (Dajinsky) was a very rude and Cheka, was in KGB. And my mother told all us so when -- his eyes would have the power to kill, so were his look. And she got a permit, and then I returned to Latvia. And it was my first memories.

spelling →

counter=
0275

spelling →

counter=
0360

I remember the train was going. And the parents told me that now it had come to the last station. (Toocooms), it was a small town in Latvia, where the parents of my mother lived and had a house and --.

Later the memories -- three, four years -- I remember father was a dentist, and he opened his own practice. And I was going to the school, the German elementary school. I finished the school in 1932.

Q: WAS LATVIA GERMAN AT THE TIME?

A: No. It was not German, but there was a Latvian school. We were Jewish. Depends. We were -- spoke Russian, but always my parents spoke German, because my mother had a German-French education before the Russian times. French was very -- the second language.

Q: UH-HUH.

A: And I had two sisters. One sister, she was six years older than me, and the oldest, ten years older. But the oldest sister was not a real sister, but half-sister, because my father's first wife died when my sister was one

year old. And then he married my mother. But she never knew it until 12 or 13 years that she was his stepdaughter.

And my second sister who lives, now, she was going to a Russian elementary school, and then it was a Latvian (gymnasio). And I was going to the Latvian (gymnasio) school. There was also a Jewish school, but -- I don't know why -- but the Jewish school was not so good organized. But maybe it was, but I hear always, at home, my parents were speaking that the teachers were not so good prepared, and you can't get such a good education.

spelling →
counter =
0525 →

During my childhood I was very involved in sport. When I was very young, my favorite sport was table tennis and soccer. Here it is soccer; in Europe, it was football. And I had some success in the table tennis. I was always one of the best. And later, when I came to the Latvian high school, I was the best of the small town. And then I came to Riga; it was the main town of Latvia. And I was one of the five, ten best of Latvia. And I was always playing with other cities, and we are going to sometimes to Lithuania, Estonia, to play.

Then I finished the school, the high school. It was 1937. 1937, yes. And then I -- my father was a dentist during the 1926 until 1930. My mother also makes the dentist exams. She was learning before, and she was twice in Germany to make higher her level and to study. And then they had two rooms for practice. The practice with two cabinets, and they were considered very wealthy, but it was a small town. It was only some dentists, and they had a good living.

And, but I -- there was opinion to study, but I couldn't come into the university, but I could that tell there was numerous (classes).

classes? →
counter
0755

Q: CAN YOU EXPLAIN?

classes?
counter
0755

→ A: Yeah. There were numerous (clauses). In the main population, Latvian was 74 percent, and then the Russian 10 percent from the population, and Jewish was 5 percent. And when they go to get the dentists to come to study, there were only 20 places for a dentist. Five percent, it is only one, and sometimes two. For the whole republic it was two, unless they extended for more, for three and four. I couldn't pass. I was not very good because I always sport and sport and, you know, it was --.

counter →
0825

Yeah, but the (?name?) the last years--it was 1934--took over Latvia. He was a right extremist, nationalist, because before it was democratic -- oh, I can't say it, it was a -- there was a, you know, like a Congress. And there were a lot of parties: Democrats, Latvians, Defense party, Socialists, Communist party. 1934, before they feel that the left maybe can take over and it was a little uprising. And the Communists take over the power, and it was more to the right.

Jewish properties, Jewish big properties, big factories were -- the government took over. They pay for this, but they don't allow to -- they don't allow the owners -- the owners were Jewish, you understand me, yes? And then you feel that the Jewish population, they don't, they don't got high positions. You know, lawyers -- very few. It was very difficult to pass university, the same as a profession, so therefore more is in a business.

And you know, some, some other specialities, but you can't say that somebody on the streets attack you, that you were Jewish. But later, later we got the news from Germany that it was happened.

And people were wondering, because most of the Jewish population were very, very good related to Germans. They remembered World War I,

and Jewish people had a good living in Germany. But then came the first refugees to Latvia from Austria, from Germany. And then the people started to think about it, and very rich people could escape, escape to Sweden and to the U.S.A. It was difficult to U.S.A. because it was a -- you had to get a permit; you had to get a guarantee. It was not so easy.

Now, in 1939 my two sisters were -- one, both sisters were studying in Belgium, also because they couldn't -- they couldn't reach university.

The one sister was dentistry; the other also, but she -- the oldest sister couldn't finish because she married in Belgium, and she stayed there. But her husband was one from the -- he was escaped from the Russian revolution and was a -- studied chemistry, has his own business, but earned a good living. But he escaped from her.

She took her son and came to Latvia, and it was, unfortunately, she came 1939. And the war broke out, and during the war she was taken to the -- from the Nazis. My little nephew was involved in anti-Nazi organization. He was 13 years old. And she was typing some proclamations against -- and in this moment, somebody -- they announced, came in with Gestapo, and arrested him and my sister. And later I heard she was killed in jail in Riga.

And my younger sister -- she is older than me -- she was in Belgium. She married from Poland a doctor, and they leave Europe because they were also afraid the Germans will occupied the whole Europe. And they emigrated to -- first to Uruguay and then to Argentina and later, after the war, my aunt who lived here called the children. My cousins, they were stationed in (Cortex in Saltston). My aunt invited her to San Francisco, and my brother-in-law makes the doctor here, and then

counter
1225

they live the whole time in New Jersey, until two years ago they emigrated to Israel.

Now, when I married my first marriage, unfortunately I married very young. I was 21 years old. Before I was in the army, in the Latvian army. I can show you a photo when I was a soldier in the Latvian army.

[He shows photo to camera.]

Q: THAT WAS '39? YOU WERE 21?

A: Yeah -- no, no, no -- yeah, 1940. The tenth of March.

Q: DO YOU WANT TO HOLD IT UP?

THE CAMERAMAN: Why don't you hold that against your chest there for about 30 seconds.

A: There I was in Latvian army clothes. No, it was --

THE CAMERAMAN: Which one are you?

A: [Indicates the one on the right.] It wasn't very easy to be a soldier in the Latvian army --

THE CAMERAMAN: Okay, I got it. I got it, thank you.

A: -- because you know all the officers, and the others, they were -- because you were always the second. And you had always -- the job was not something to do, a chore, but I was, fortunately, drafted in Riga. But I can see that it was not so a choice from the government, because we had some Jewish, more like deputies, who are related with the highest strains of the government. And for money, what you spend for the synagogue and so you could stay in -- a couple of hundred zlotys, hundred dollars or so, and then you can stay in Riga. It was more convenient. You could go once in two weeks, once a month, visit your relatives and my wife.

And I had to -- I was drafted in for once for 15 months; but it came out very unfortunately because 1939, the tenth of May, I was drafted.

And in '39, 1940, the Soviets occupied the Baltic states.

Q: THAT'S RIGHT.

Counter 1450 → A: Yeah. And then it was election. And in August we were a Soviet republic. And it was, you know, back from (Edtentrop and Molotov), that you know, was Poland, all this is occupied Poland, and free, free -- you could do here in the Baltic states. But it was done so that the elections, so that the Latvian population asked the Soviet Union, take us and come into the Soviet Union. It was not right.

It was -- I remember when we were going to the election. We had to go, and they gave us a letter to sign. You could not sign, but then you know that something would happen to you. Not Siberia, but you would be always, you know, everybody would tell that he is against the Soviet.

And so it was a Soviet republic, and then they extend it one and a half year, and then we were drafted two years. And then the time was very nervous because it was so, that we from Riga, we had to go more to the east because it was -- everybody knew that the Germans were started the war.

And 1941, the first of June, we were -- they make us free, because they don't trust the Baltic, the Baltic population. They knew there would be a war and the Latvians who lived here would be in the armies, would be against the Soviets maybe. Maybe. Fortunately for some but fortunately for some not, because a lot of people who were in the army they are today still alive. And those who came later to the concentration camps, only a small part survived.

Then I came -- in June, I came home. And the 22nd of June broke out the war. And the first of July, the German army was in Riga. Now I can tell you how was the direction of the Latvian population. The Latvian,

population, you know, before the war broke out, the 13th and 14th of June, 1941, the Soviet government and the KGB, and then it was not KGB, it was

counter → (??); it is the same.
1625

They arrested a lot of Latvians who had big businesses, houses, big lands, and also Jewish rich. Always it was the first category, second. All the first category, big stores, houses, and they were all arrested, and they were taken all to Siberia.

Therefore the Latvians were very angry, you know, so that the Soviets occupied them. They lose their liberty, and when the Germans came in, they were happy. Everybody was happy. And I remember I was standing -- they laugh when the war broke out. Now in Russia there was nothing. Immediately was half-empty stores, whatever food enough, but then less and less and big lines.

And it was the first of July; it was a Tuesday, I remember. It was in the main streets, in the bakery, and across the street, where -- it was interior ministry, Cheka they call it, the black house, the Latvians (??) -- and came out the Latvian Nationalists and the red and white flag here on the hand [indicating his arm]. Now the liberty is coming. The German army is going over the bridge -- Riga is on the River Dvina -- over the bridge, and we have some liberty.

counter →
1720

And threw all the Jews out from the lines. They can't eat our food because they had taken so much the whole time from us and, you know, with the panic. And I was standing with my older sister, but she was not looking like a Jew, so she told, "You go immediately home. I will stand here and bring you the bread and rolls home."

And then it started. The second of July. The Germans allowed the Latvian Nationalists and the extremists all to do anything. And they are

the same day in the afternoon, we hear it all on the radio. All Latvian Nationalists, all former soldiers, officers -- it was a very, like a Hitler

counter
1800

→ organization (??) -- all form of such, bandits, you know, came to a

1805

→ lieutenant so-and-so (??) to clean up the city from dark elements. It was mostly Jewish population.

Q: SO THESE WERE THE LATVIANS WHO WERE FINDING THE JEWS?

A: Yeah, yeah. Because, because they had -- the Germans have nothing to do; the Latvians will do it for them because they were angry before the deportations of the Latvians and Jews, too, but that comes then for the Latvians at that time.

Q: THEY TURNED AGAINST THE JEWS INSTEAD OF THE GERMANS?

A: Yeah. The Germans came, and the Germans promised them liberty, and they would guard their houses and, you know when the Russians came, all the houses were liquidated. No private houses. Now they lose all the houses, all the properties. And the Germans promised everything: you will get your flags, your national anthem, and your houses.

And the second and third, July, they arrested about 10,000 Jews. And they were all taken -- a lot, I know, some doctors and some other people, they were taken out from their apartments and then down in the back yard they were killed. And the others were taken to the jail, central jail in Riga, and also in two or three weeks they were killed.

Until the fourth of July. And then they stopped it, because they need people to work, to clean up everything. And the fourth of July, I was taken. Came the, the, you know -- who maintain all the houses always,

who keeps, maintains the houses, and everything in every home -- they came the --

Q: JANITORS?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And there were some from the police, from the new police, now Latvians more, Nationalist. And he had to show where Jews are living. And then they came in and said you had to come in to work. And I was fortunate that they took me the fourth of July. The third of July I would be killed immediately.

Then they took us to some work, you know, some terrible work. We had to clean up all the places where the Russian soldiers were standing, you know. It was, it was -- they were going away fast. Everything was dirty, and the same places where I was a soldier, I came now to clean up.

And then I met a sergeant who was with me during the -- when I was in the army. I remember, and the Russians came in 1940; it was so false -- oh, you see, Drabkin, liberty's coming, the Russian is coming, the liberty, there will be liberation. And then, and -- but see he was very anti-Semitic. But he had to take it because it was now Soviets, you know. And later, then I met him on the street. He came so, the Jews can't go on the pavement, has to go on the middle of the street. And then I don't see him more.

And then the fifth of July, the fourth of July, I was, fortunately, I could go home. They said: Tomorrow you have to come again here. And there was two ways to go, one way was go through the city. There was a
 counter
 2035 → (peter, a gogish, a schuh), a temple. The biggest, very, very old temple, Jewish temple. And the other was through, around. It was shorter, but you have to go outside the city. I thought, I will take this way. And these

people were going through the city. They were stopped near the temple, maybe four, five hundred. I can't tell you, but it is somewhere it is precious.

And everybody inside. They close it, and they burn all. All the 400 people were burned. I was lucky, you know.

Q: YOU DECIDED NOT TO GO THROUGH?

A: Yeah, yeah. They died--

Q: WHO DID THAT, THE GERMANS OR THE LATVIANS?

A: I suppose the Germans were also. But as I said, the first days they allowed to do it, but there were some Latvian, also Nationalists. Because a lot of officers -- you know, I think the Russians was do terrible things, but it was a wonder why only the Jews had to suffer. It was before the war started, but I was home then -- but an officer who escaped told me and

counter 2100 → didn't I really say (??) but I read it in (??). It was the Russian (??).

But they were taken. It was in east Latvia, and they got a paper that the 14th and 13th of July all officers have to come to, to some meeting without weapons. And maybe a couple of hundred highest ranking captains, and lieutenants, and then they were departed to the outdoors, to go into the wood, and there would be some lessons. And when they come out, here were machine guns, here were machine guns, and everybody was killed.

You know you have to understand that it was terrible to know in such-and-such-a-time, the Jews were guilty. They couldn't take revenge on other people. They come, they couldn't defend themselves. And, therefore it was not, I can't -- it was all right, but understandable. Now you understand this. Then we don't know all the details, why, why, it was such an anger, terrible.

And this was -- then I was working one place and another place, and people were killed, and then, you know. My sister was taken to the jail with the nephew. And then I was taken to (turf, turf) -- how is it in English? Turf, what is on the -- you use turf for the oven or something?

Q: CLAY, YOU MEAN?

A: Yeah, yeah, no.

Q: WHAT IS THE GERMAN WORD?

A: Turf, turf.

Q: I'M SORRY. IT DOESN'T RING A BELL.

A: It is not like bricks, coal bricks, but it is turf. It is in (zumpf). I had to go to the store to a place to work there. And there the circumstances terrible in the city.

You had some Latvian, you know, good people, and you got some more food, because the Jewish couldn't go to the store for food. It came out Jewish have to have coupons, maybe third what other people could buy. And (turf) was, hungry, people you were killed, and I was fortunate, too. I came to Riga, and I got a permit to stay here with the family. More then was also in the newspapers, the Jewish people couldn't go on the pavement. They have to go in the middle of the street, the David star here and then the David star there [indicating his chest and back].

And then I was working some different places. One winter. I was -- fortunately, I was working like a dentist, but in the Latvian university. The Germans also had the hospital for the soldiers.

You know how much could do some small sabotage, and there was people who were coming from the front, and they have to get fast. And then, you know, some people organized to make it not so fast, two or three

counter →
2175

counter →
2225

same
word as
above →

times. And it was a little dangerous, but so they couldn't reach the front so fast.

No, there was some -- there was very terrible some people, but you were inside, warm, you was working. The work you used was not so terrible. Later on we lose this, and then I had to go to shipworks and so on.

But during the 1941, the 25th of September, they close. They was -- also, all Jews has to live in a small place of the town.

Q: A GHETTO?

A: Yeah, ghetto.

Q: EXCUSE ME, WAS YOUR WIFE WITH YOU AT THAT TIME? YOU WERE MARRIED WHEN YOU WERE 21.

A: No, the wife -- yeah, she was my first wife.

Q: SHE WAS STILL -- WAS SHE WORKING ALSO AT THE TIME? WAS SHE TOLD --

A: She was -- yeah. She also finished an English college. She was working in a foreign auto shop, BMW.

Q: WAS SHE JEWISH?

A: Yeah, she was Jewish. Here is she. [Shows photograph]. I can tell you some here. There was my grandfather, the only picture I have of my grandfather. He was also killed by the Germans. He was 88 years old when they took him (??). My mother was also. They took (??) all later in 1941, in the late autumn, in October. They took them.

counter
2400 →

And here also a picture from my youth. It's my parents and my sister who lives now in Israel.

[He indicates picture, close up of photo.]

Now they were -- what happened then? It was everything to remember. It comes -- I can't tell you all sorts in the following, because then you remember something more important.

Q: THAT'S ALL RIGHT.

A: And then there was -- the ghetto was closed. Twenty-fifth of September the ghetto was closed, and we had to change. And this part of Riga, it was the suburbs, the Russian suburb. It was, you know -- the poverty was more then.

They don't give us castles to change. We had a two bedroom apartment because the mother of my first wife lived. And we have to change and we change in the -- later it was a ghetto. We got one room and one kitchen, but not for us alone. There was a family, a daughter who has a mother, and husband from the daughter was -- he was -- the first days they took him away, and he was killed also.

Then we were five in one room, and one kitchen, and I was with my wife in the kitchen, and the three, my first mother-in-law and the one mother with the daughter in the room. It was terrible all the circumstances. And water was only outside, and you know.

counter →
2500

It was not the (??). And then in the ghetto, we could go in only with the 25th, only with the star. And you couldn't go in the streets without a permit or someone has to go with you from German or Latvian who was going with you.

Q: WHAT YEAR WAS THAT?

A: Pardon me?

Q: WHAT YEAR WAS THAT?

A: 1941.

Q: STILL '41?

A: '41, yeah.

counter
2535 →

And then I was working , called (Chalstazion) 280, the Latvian university and the German hospital. And then it was everyday, it was something. They in the gate, they control the bread, there some butter, or they was beating you, and it was, unfortunately you find, for nothing.

And there was a commandant of the ghetto, Kraus, terrible, such a small man, eyes like glass, you know. And he was in the ghetto, you know something, something will happen. I remember a little later when we were coming from the work and march columns, you have to sing a song, you know. We came through the gate and everything is okay. And

counter
2590 →

then we saw upside was the commandant was Kraus was (opstenfuhrer). And they took a gun, and he was sitting maybe five, ten yards from me, was killed. They don't like him, they killed him.

Or once found a pound of butter, they took him to the cemetery and Kraus by himself, killed. Not -- everyday it was something.

Then came the, the 30th of November, 1941. Always we were going out to the gate. All the, you know, maybe 30 or 40 commandos. Commandos working here, drives autobahn, or in the airport, or in the, in the port, you know, the navigation, and by soldiers to clean up, commandos from women, from men, or mixed.

And then we were -- one who take us from the commando, a German, or Latvian. And then they counted one, two, three, four, five, six, out. And this time everybody was standing, nobody was going. And then they told that the men can go and the women will stay here. And this evening everybody was so nervous in the city. Something happen, and they wouldn't come back or couldn't come more to the families. It

counter
2690 →

was making a fence from (stahltrat).

Q: BARBED WIRE?

A: Yeah. And we were all in this small for 4,000 men and they take who came first and took apartments. There were nine people in two small rooms, a kitchen and a room. There was a kitchen, and then in two, in flats, beds.

Q: BUNK BEDS?

A: Yeah. And the ladies were -- all the families were in the big ghetto. There were older men and younger men who don't work, they were holding in the ghetto. And at 4:00 o'clock in the morning, the

counter 2730 → commandos, Gestapo and the Latvians, the (shutzmanz), and everything was broken in and everybody out. The 4,000 who were workers were not touched. And everybody out in five minutes, take in five minutes what you can take and out to the street. It was in big commandos. And then they were going up the street. And there was a bigger holding in another hospital. They -- everybody, somebody couldn't go from the windows, they threw them out. And there on the street, maybe 40 or 50, they were killed immediately. And then all the commandos were going up the street. Then the first word I saw is that somebody was killed was on the 30th of November, 1941, in the morning.

counter 2780 → I saw that an (oberstruf), a German, was taking an old lady out from the line, put on the white wall and put the gun in just here [indicating the back of the head] and then started shooting. Mothers were going with little childrens in their arms, and they shot at the children. And the same day were killed in the ghetto almost, more than 500.

counter 2800 → And then 12:00 o'clock daytime they took the (roust) every man out and take away all best people, was lay on the pavement. They were lying and had to go. It was cold, it was maybe below zero, 32, maybe. No, below

zero, it was 20 Celsius. It was very, very cold winter. It was winter. It helped the Russians, the Germans were freezing there on the front. And we had to go with the sleigh to the cemetery, and there we have to put them out, not in the graves, so, on the cemetery.

I remember I had two wool gloves. Then came two young soldiers, 18, 17 years old, a little drunk. Give me the gloves, it's cold. They took the gloves. I gave the gloves, you know. Somebody don't like, they kill them also. Brought the dead with the sleigh and one says, you don't make it like, not so fast; don't you like work; you're lazy; and they shot him, too.

It was a one Sunday and then it was Saturday. And Sunday were all men going to work. And the 7th of December was the second action. And also were about in both Sundays, 32,000 people and they were going maybe 10 miles from Riga, (??) a place, and there were graves open. And they had machine guns. They killed everybody. They have to take off the clothes and put the shoes. But then some people escaped from there. I think the last she died, I think last year, I think she was in, one person maybe San Francisco, told how she escaped. She was not shot dead, and she escaped through the wood and one Latvian family gave her a place where to live. And so she was hidden during the war and she escape.

Then I had a -- Ella Goodman, she lives now in Israel, I think. She also moved three or four years ago from Latvia. She was -- and my sister -- they were going to Latvia school. The name Ella Goodman, like Latvian, she was looking like a Latvian. When she came to put away the clothes and put away on the grave, she saw that machines guns and people were falling in. She said, "Oh, I'm a Latvian. I'm a Latvian," it was she said.

"I'm a Latvian." And she had very good friends in (Toocooms), and I

counter →
2890

counter →
2960,
also on page 2

don't know how she make it, but she told that she's Latvian and so she lived. But she told everything after. Oh, my goodness.

Q: IT WAS TERRIBLE.

A: And there was again a little quiet. And then we were working and the 19 -- it was December the 8th. And in the week came the first transfers from Germany. You know of this? No?

Q: NO, I DON'T.

A: No, no, no?

And you know Hitler, he don't like that in Germany that somebody says in Germany Jews were killed. There were concentration camps, Dachau, also other place. The most concentration camps, also

counter 3000 → Sachsenhausen, (??) and Auschwitz, and the others and Ravensbruck. It was all in Poland or Czechoslovakia, like (Dresenstadt) and other places.

counter 3010 → (Stuthof) was an institution where I was. And therefore there was big transportation to take Germans out from the homes. And you will go to the east, and take a very far, and very nice.

counter 3030 → Have you seen (??), the movie? It was a concentration movie. It was so typical. I saw the movie. I thought it was my life. It was concentration, yeah. It was so --

Q: NO, I KNOW ABOUT THE TRANSPORTS, BUT I DON'T KNOW SPECIFICALLY ABOUT THAT ONE.

A: Yeah. Latvia was the best place, you know, because it was cooperating with the Nationalists, they were good helpers. And they came in the empty apartments. They brought -- it was (strausdebeuger) where the sorted the trains. And then they came out from the trains. There were three or four days, and it was half days. And they give us a little food to the helpers -- to the right, to the left, to the right, to the left, to the right, to

counter 3050 →

the left, it was. They took them in autos and then out in the woods and killed them. It was full. It was maybe more than a 100,000.

To the right, they brought to the ghetto, and they occupied all the empty, empty apartments with the Latvian Jews. They were all dirty, cold, and they had no food. They had nothing. But there was a lot of thanks for the Latvians Jews. But I can see the Latvian Jews helped a lot.

Because we lived here, and people who worked in the city, they stole from the Germans some food. And they gave them, and so it was a good relation. But you could go without -- a lot of people were shot to death, to escape to go to the German ghetto.

It was a fence between the Latvian ghetto and the German ghetto and the house where the Latvian women were. Between was my sister-in-law, the sister from my wife. She was in the jail, and then they put her in the house. There were three or four hundred Jewish women in the house.

Q: SO YOU WERE SEPARATED FROM YOUR WIFE DURING THAT TIME?

A: Yeah. My wife was taken also from the transport. The 8th of December she was killed, but we don't know then.

Then they make special false letters that we lived there and there, there -- special, to quiet the men. And they were afraid maybe some unrest, you know. And then -- but anyway. We were -- it was a hard time the whole time and every time only bad news. And good news only you hear from the front, from the Russian-German war, but all the first two years was from Stalingrad. There it was a little easier then, news that is going maybe better.

And then it was a big action, was the 30th of October, 31 of October, 1942. And because it was in small resistance in Poland; in Warsaw was a big resistance, in the Warsaw ghetto. But in Riga, too, there were people who was working with weapons. And they brought in under -- they were at risk because sometimes they look, everybody naked, and they look what you have everything.

But you know, it was luck. And they brought parts of weapons and they fixed it. And it was -- and they make in the cellar somewhere, and, and -- but, you know, there was always somebody who, so, they got somebody who couldn't be quiet and told a friend and the other friend. Broke out, but you know, it was between Jews, and also in such a time you see how not everybody was good.

Q: OF COURSE.

A: To get a little piece bread more they were doing everything. And then we were going to the jobs -- the 31st -- it was a Saturday -- we were working. And we feel there was something not good. We came home it was written that there was inside the Latvian ghetto was a police (omo) hold you, you know, the Jewish police. And they help to make the commandos to clean up, you know, they were helpers. They were very good boys. Everything they told us, what maybe something will happen today or tomorrow. They were maybe one or two provocateurs, but then there were 50 or 45.

And then we came home, there was written: Today at 12:00 o'clock the whole Latvian police were executed, because they helped to bring in weapons, they help to escape from the Riga ghetto, Jewish, to the woods to join the partisans.

counter →
3355

And it was happened, so they were coming. They were told that they would have some lessons on the big square and have to march. And they march from four corners machine guns. Only two escaped and one was hidden a month and the other, two years. And everybody, nobody from the police, very good boys. My age, they were.

Q: THEY WERE LATVIANS THEN?

A: Yeah, Latvian Jews, police in the ghetto.

And the German police, you know, from Hanover, from Bremen,

counter → from (Wien) from the (Wienstrasse, Bremenstrasse) and every transport
3325 that came had the street's name.

No, so it was going away, and then one -- it was 1942, in the summer also we were coming. I was standing at 6:00 o'clock in the

counter → morning and with the razor, shaving. (??) It was in October. It was cold.
3345 No, it was the same. Thirty-one, it was another day, yeah, it was the same as 31 of October. And the police were killed. And they told that here you have weapons. Give up the weapons. Then we find one weapon in this house, everybody will be killed. Everybody standing in the front of the house, they don't found, fortunately.

And then the commandos start going out to the gate. And there

counter → from every command, (come rouse, come rouse, come rouse), and they
3375 took 125 people. Some were good friends, from the elderly, and they killed them and the jail.

And then was summertime, once, they came again. And there was out and they found the weapons. Somebody told. Maybe organization, maybe make like a Jew, like undercover, you know.

Then in 1943 they close the ghetto, liquidate it. And everybody has to move to concentration camp Kaiserwald. It was a concentration camp.

There was -- we were living in blocks, men and women separated. And from there we were going to work. No, the food was very bad, but you know, in Latvia something changed and you don't, was not starvation from us --

Q: WHAT KIND OF WORK DID THEY HAVE YOU DO?

A: I was going to ships, loaded. Sugar and, fortunately, it was going to the fronts and some food, good food, chocolate. And then we stole, you know. You know, butter, marmalade, and so.

They don't feel it, because in '43 and '44 until it came to the front that the soldiers were killed the Germans. The war changed, you know. The front was coming back. In 1940, then came transports from Lithuania, because they feel the front was coming nearer.

In 1944, came a transport, Hungary, Hungary ladies. They were in Hungary, very fortunately, in 1944 until -- no, (Ashma). No takeover because they were almost free in Hungary. And then one night they broke in Budapest and everybody needed transport. It was terrible. They came here shaved, without hair. And they came to Latvia, a thousand, five hundred.

counter →
3475

Then he -- when it was (staufenberg) out of Hitler in 1944, the 6th of July. You know this?

Q: UM-HMM.

A: And then everybody was out -- selection. And who was older than 26 years had to go to the left. There was autos, the autos was then modernized and inside was gays. It was gays; it was special B-1 or --. And they came to the woods, also, and were all dead. Maybe they took from concentration camp 14,000 people.

counter →
3495

And then came the 25th, and the food was -- no, we had better, because you could go sometimes we were working, and they gave us some soup and bread.

And then came the 25th of September and take, what you have, what you have in a bundle, and we came to the Pier 2 in Riga. And there was a big ship (Homhofen), same ships as we loaded with munitions or with food, and they shipped in, down, and to Germany.

counter →
3556

It was the 25th of September because Riga was liberated '44, the 13th of October. And they feel the front is coming nearer (??) and was so happy, and the Russians attack Riga. They were going to the bunkers, you know. They were happy. They were laughing.

counter →
3570

And then I remember that it was Stalingrad and it was devils are speaking German. (??). Today Jews were laughing; tomorrow nobody will laugh. Because was three days before the flag was down, because started no Stalingrad with Poles a thousand soldiers. Then there were more the oppressions after, but then --

counter →
3585

Q: SO WHERE DID YOU GO?

counter →
3600,
also
page 18

A: (Stuthof?)

Q: (STUTHOF?)

A: (Stuthof?) It is east Prussia, not far from Danzig. And they came with the barge. And there was no food, and then we feel a real hunger. Then came the barge from Danzig, and, then -- Danzig was the ship, and from Danzig through canals to (Stutthof.)

And we came in (Stutthof.) There were beautiful houses, villas, with the roses. And later I know it was for the officers. And around the corner you see a fence and there was a big concentration camp.

My number was 80 -- 96,817. In Riga I had my number 07476. That was terrible. And there was a lot of *carpos* from Poland. There was really, really all killers or thieves, you know.

Q: CRIMINALS?

A: Criminals, politicals less. We hate them because politicals were not so bad. Oh, they were worse than the Germans sometimes.

The first jobs, the first day we had to go to the bathes and change all our clothes and nothing. And one on the gate -- oh, it's cold -- one told us something or something, I will give a little bit and some of them they had a little, some gold, and later he almost kills them. And they asked it back, you know.

And the first job was have to go to a wood and take big, big trees, cut trees. Then you make a big man then first, then small in the middle, they couldn't reach, and then big in the behind. Then have to go only of the two -- all they have in this -- go to the camp. And then you know, when you don't work, you see the way something is done, you have to take away and bring back.

Such work. There was no food, only a little water, some grasses and the morning a little coffee, and one piece of bread for the whole day. And others sleeping in such a small -- three, two in one direction, and one in this.

counter →
3125

And every time when we have arise and we say the (knipper) was out, out fast. And you got the food and you were running. All in the street. And you always cold, winter; and people good tired first. And when you were sick, then you broke down and they killed you.

And there was a fence with electricity, and somebody will go in there, and they put on the electricity on the fence.

Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK KEPT YOU ALIVE DURING THOSE TERRIBLE DAYS? WHAT MADE YOU SURVIVE EVERY DAY?

A: I'm -- my nature is optimistic. And what is the good news from the front -- we got news. And other people who from Poland some -- and there was barracks, some from Holland, not Jewish. There was Latvians who escape and they got packages from the Red Cross, you know, and they informed us and I hoped and hoped and it was --.

But you saw so much. There was in (Stuthof), was also gas ovens, and every day they were going through the days chambers, three, four hundred, and most elderly or women who were powerless. They could nothing do, you know, and every day, every day, in the hopes that they know they are going to the (clausin), you know, take everything.

And they told, no, you put on something warmer, I remember one mother told the daughter, the daughter had typhus. She says, no, I don't need it. Yes, you need to have, it's very, very cold. They said some people from us have to go to heat the ovens. It was down there for a few weeks and they were killed.

And then before we leave Latvia they were killed a hundred thousand people. The Germans don't like to leave all this, then they have to take them out. And every Wednesday came to the ghetto and you, you, you, you, and you have to go out. We knew it.

And then they worked a week and then they killed them. They killed their own, sometimes executed commanders who had to kill the big shots.

Then came the liberation. The liberation came the (??). They were -- the front came nearer -- had to go somewhere else, but I thought that I

Counter →
3790

Counter →
3840

would go. And then they brought us to a place and a big room and more empty, it only -- nothing was there.

And I was three weeks. I was sick and then survived. I asked the doctor, why, how it come, how long do I have to live. And he told me two, three weeks. And because I was always in sport and I don't know.

Counter
3875 →

People after that were in this room, they were all from (??), were 120, and after I survived, only 12.

Q: TEN PERCENT?

A: Ten percent. People died. Also I remember people died and then after they died, after they survived, the red army came the 10th of March, '45. And they brought us, you know, ham and bread and everybody said don't eat it, but I knew that you have to starve. And died in a couple of days, dysentery.

Q: YOU WERE WISE.

A: Yeah, a little wise. Because the family of my mother was also educated in medicine and I knew also something.

Q: SO OPTIMISM AND INTELLIGENCE HELPS?

A: Oh, I think, yeah. A little. A little.

Q: AND LUCK?

A: And luck. And I think it helped me after they amputated me to here because it was frozen. It was healing very fast. And the doctor, French, told them it was always helps you that you are active in sport. Maybe it helps me now that I had heart surgeries and all this after the war. But this is my angina, I think it is only after this --

Q: WHAT DID YOU DO AFTER THE LIBERATION?

A: After the liberation I was so -- I had not to go back because I knew that my parents, my mother, was killed, and my first wife and all my relatives. But I was so weak I was going with the stream.

counter →
3940

There were people -- I know very good German I could say (??) -- because I had no documents and they were liberated and the people who told, they are from the west, and they brought and sent them from the west.

They told me, they took me and then three weeks -- for three weeks we had time to -- more, two months. There was food enough in the empty German houses.

And then in June, the 5th or the 6th of June, now you can go home. And they brought us to the border of Poland and the U.S.S.R., Brestov. and then also was a captain from KGB told us to go right, left, right, left, right, left. And I came -- a fence -- concentration camp. I said, what? Yeah, because they don't trust. Why you are leave? Why your parents were -- you say were killed? Maybe you are a provocateur.

And so I was six, seven days, and the only thing is a good friend had a lot of spirits and wine, had two bottles. And the captain of the KGB was big drinker. And then he brought him something, he told that I like to go to the interview, you have to spend 24 hours to go on. And then he called me and told me and yeah, I think I would have you sent to Siberia. No, I will give you the permit to go to Latvia, to a small city, but I'm very -- and tomorrow you will get the answer, and in the evening at 10:00 o'clock he called Drabkin, Julius. Yeah, you know, come to me. You know, I'm very thirsty. You will get the permit. I think you have the permit. Okay, tomorrow morning you will get the spirit. But in the morning at 6:00 we

were transported to the station, railroad station, and then we came to Latvia.

Then I found here some relatives and I got very fast married. I got a work place, employed by a dental technician, some friends before the war, they were also in the army, they took me in.

And after the war so, you know, in Russia life was not easy, but to compare what it was in the concentration camp, and before when I was, before liberated, I thought when I would be after the liberation, I will only eat white bread, butter, and a little cocoa or something, you know, something sweet and then you had the bread, butter, you had some meat and, you know, it's a human being.

And I met my wife. And now I show you --

Q: SHE WAS RUSSIAN?

A: She is from Latvia, from Riga. This is in the, '57. [Shows photograph].

Q: OH, SHE IS BEAUTIFUL.

A: Yeah. And now --

THE CAMERAMAN: Would you hold that up for a minute?

A: She finished also English institute.

THE CAMERAMAN: Okay. All right.

A: And here I have one photo of now. This is the my family now. It was 70 years old. My sons make me a surprise party -- the last year.

Q: HOW NICE.

A: Yeah. [Showing photo]

THE CAMERAMAN: Okay.

Q: LOVELY FAMILY. SO NOW YOU ARE HAPPY?

A: Yeah, I'm happy, happy. After the war shortly, I will tell you, it was after the war. I am with my wife and work. And we had two sons and I was very, always, very busy. Not only with my work, I was in the workplace.

I was always the minister of cards, organized parties in the working place, and sports. I was president of the table tennis federation 27 years. I was on the team of Latvia after the war. I was the champion of Riga a couple of times. The team of Latvia was going to festivals and sometimes to Yugoslavia. I was the coach. It was only helping, didn't get paid for this. I was coaching later the team of Latvia, and it was going off into more school, to Leningrad, to championships. In '68, '66, we go the first time to go to Poland, Czechoslovakia. It was very difficult.

In 1968 I got a permit to visit my sister. And that was here in San Francisco, and everywhere around, Las Vegas, and I did nothing, only to travel. This is a good investment in yourself. And then we came back, some people started to go, to emigrated. And then came the '60 war and they stopped in '71, in '72 started again.

And the boys were, you know. My son, my oldest son was a good engineer, but he couldn't get promotion. He was German, Russian, and Latvian and English. And he was only a simple engineer. People with less education and less knowledge, he couldn't come up. He was also -- he was young. It is nothing, only words.

And then thought about to emigrate. And in '75 it was difficult. They allow him to emigrate and the youngest son was three years a dentist. And he was electronic engineer. He finished in Leningrad, the institute. And the youngest son a doctor, but no. He had to work three years after then because it was for free. And you had to give up to the

government and then they started to go. And he was emigrated, but then they was also emigrated.

In '78, '77, I got a heart attack. I was until I was jogging every day and playing a lot of tennis and skiing with my wife and so. And then I thought something and in Russia, you know, the bypass is such thing they don't do. In '78 or '77 I took the decision to emigrate. And I prepared a little, and in '78 we got the permit, the tenth of October. We emigrated. And you feel that you are a -- the Jewish people, they feel it in Russia. Nobody is Jewish, Jewish, to beat or so but you always feel second class. No positions and no -- I had, because I was in sport. With my sport I was always friends, a lot of friends, Latvian, and so on. But the son also, the youngest, couldn't get a job and some were far away in the country, in Latvia.

Q: WERE THERE ANY SYNAGOGUES?

counter →
4275
A: One synagogue was all, the (Peter Schul), and you know, it was (??) but it was all not official, it was not so you can get in jail but --

Q: NO BAR MITZVAH?

A: Oh, yeah. Bar mitzvah, yeah. At home. At home, yeah.

Q: AT HOME?

A: Yeah. You could, invite the private assemble, but at home. The speech and prepared speeches and so. But it was difficult to be a Jew, you know. It was very difficult. And we were very religious, you know.

And the teaching, they were sent in jail -- a lot of Jews, you know, dissidents, and, you know, it was not the Jewish -- you remember it was in 1950, 1951, it was the Jewish doctors who started, that they liked to kill Stalin and later then Stalin died, fortunately.

We were, all were standing trains, 1952, in February, ready trains to deport all the Jews. And you know what? To defend, official, to defend the Jewish, the Jewish doctors, they had to kill Stalin. And joined the Zionists and the biggest enemies of the Jewish population. Such ironical. And to defend them there would be such official notice where to send them to Azerbaidzhan in the Jewish republic. They would be there safe.

Counter →
4345

But unfortunately he died and then came the (??), Khrushchev and opens about Stalin. It was also difficult liberation. It was again, you know, Breshnev, it was, he was not a killer, but corruption.

Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WHAT'S GOING ON WITH GORBACHEV NOW? DO YOU THINK THAT THE ANTI-SEMITISM --

A: I am also for him, you know. I am for him.

Q: OH, YEAH, ALL OF US ARE.

A: Because I think that he changed the whole world.

Q: THAT'S RIGHT.

A: He changed who could think that, you know, Wiesenthal, you know, Simon Wiesenthal, you know what is told. Who I would, in the face, I would spite him. He told me 20 or 15 or 10 years ago that I would pray every evening for the head of the biggest Communist party, and I do it. Because he changed Hungary, in Poland, in Romania, now they can't be clear now in Romania, but, anyway, in Czechoslovakia, Germany, in -- in Germany, you know, it is everybody's happy with unification. But the fact that the Communists lose their power, and they lose their power in the Soviet Union, I think, or so that they don't go so far in -- and Russia, the Baltic states. Now in Azerbaidzhan and Georgia, it is very bad for them.

Q: BUT SOME OF THE NEWS ABOUT ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE SOVIET UNION, IS THAT NOW WITH *GLASTNOST*?

A: Now, yeah. They came out permit, a permit, a member of the Nationalist league, you know, because anti-semitism was always, but it was --

Q: SUPPRESSED?

A: down. Couldn't official, but now and then came the anti-semitism from up. Can't go to the university, but now it come from down. It is more dangerous. You know, they make meetings I read in the (??), but is a very good leader and he to survive has to everything is gone. Oh, the meetings and Leningrad was no meeting from writers and they throw out all the Jews and official up. And Gorbachev can't defend. He even say a good word and, oh, go with the Jews. But I don't think that he subsidizes.

Q: NO?

A: No, no.

Q: BUT SOMETHING HAS TO BE DONE ABOUT IT?

A: Yeah, something. It's terrible. And you know when something, there will change but blood will be there.

Q: YOU ARE AFRAID OF THAT?

A: Oh, in Russia. And you know that we came, we don't escape. We emigrated, we were refugees, it was more or less what we could take. We had no money because I take all with me, all the furniture and everything and pictures, everything. Now is escape. You know, I read letters, it is terrible to read what people are writing. Because no positions and they don't like them and officials say you are a Jew, so they don't like you. We don't need your help, or something like that.

Q: MORE OPEN NOW?

counter →
4420

A: Open now. A permit -- maybe it is not a lot, but they're allowed. They made meetings in the Red Square. Nobody could make their meetings sometimes.

Fortunately we are here. God bless America.

Q: GOD BLESS AMERICA.

A: Oh, yeah, such a country. You know, it is really, really --

Q: AND YOUR SONS ARE HERE?

A: Oh, yeah. My son, the one is a dentist. He has his practice in San Leandro, he lives Alameda, and the other son is a manager of a big electronic firm here in downtown, has 40 engineers. And he lives in San Mateo.

Q: AND YOUR WIFE IS A TRANSLATOR YOU TOLD ME?

A: Yeah. She works. She is 66 and only one year more, she'll work. And I get disability and I'm happy. So what our goal -- our goal is that our sons are okay, and we have the opportunity to travel. And I would like the opportunity to see the world, and it's fun.

And I'm -- I told you I'm at home cooking, and singing around, and satisfaction making other people happy and so.

Q: YOU LOOK WONDERFUL.

A: Yeah. I have a good wife. She takes care --

Q: YOU CAN TELL. SHE'S BEAUTIFUL, TOO.

A: Yeah. Beautiful and sons and the grandkids, yeah.

Q: THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

A: Thank you.

Q: IS THERE SOMETHING ELSE YOU WANTED TO ADD?

A: No. You have a very beautiful view. It's a dream.

Q: IT IS A DREAM.

A: And you are, excuse me for the question, you are, what are doing here?

Q: I'M STILL WORKING AND --

A: What kind of work?

Q: I MANUFACTURE WOMEN'S CLOTHING, THAT'S WHAT I LEARNED AND DONE IT ALL MY LIFE.

A: And you are here involved to socialize, but why you are, you choose to --

Q: I CONSIDER MYSELF A SURVIVOR, ALTHOUGH I DIDN'T HAVE ANY OF THE TERRIBLE HARDSHIPS THAT YOU HAD TO GO THROUGH. I FEEL THAT I ESCAPED JUST IN TIME AND LOST A LOT OF FAMILY IN THE HOLOCAUST AND I -- IT'S VERY MUCH A PART OF MY LIFE. I THINK ABOUT IT A LOT. AND I FEEL THAT I WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT IT WILL NEVER HAPPEN, THAT ALL YOUR STORIES WON'T BE FORGOTTEN.

A: And what I like to add, I have two sons and I try to involve also in this because I'm a member of the Survivors from Riga and it's a special. Every year there meetings, but this year I will go with my wife, the 6th of May, 45 years. These are people who I have not seen in a long time, almost five years ago. And there are some sons also, because when we will die, who will remember this, who will tell the stories, and I try, but hopes that I give them stories to read and hopes they will also be involved.

Q: NOW YOUR STORY WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN BECAUSE YOU WERE ABLE TO TELL US ON FILM.

A: No. I could add more but oh, it's a long time, one and a half hour.