

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Chiel Rajchman
December 7, 1988
RG-50.030*0185**

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Chiel Rajchman, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on December 7, 1988 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

CHIEL RAJCHMAN
December 7, 1988

Q: Would you please state your full name.

A: My name is Chiel Meyer Rajchman.

Q: Did you use this name during the Holocaust?

A: At the time of the war with my friend of mine, a Christian, who worked in the Polish underground, provided me with a document under the name of Henrik Romanowski. This is the document. As long as I remained in Poland, I used the name Romanowski. After I left...leaving Poland, I used my real name again--Rajchman.

Q: What is your wife's name?

A: We got married in 1946...'46. My wife's name is Lela Klayman. Lela Klayman. God blessed our marriage with 3 sons; and they gave us, in turn, 9 grandchildren. We pray and hope for some more, God willing.

Q: Where do you live now? What is your profession?

A: I live in South America in Montevideo, Uruguay. This is one of the best democratic countries in the world. Uruguay is the 3rd country to recognize the State of Israel in 1948.

Q: What is the nature of your business?

A: I live in Montevideo. I work in the textile industry. I am an industrialist. I always have new activities and new enterprises. My latest initiative is to develop a cotton industry in my country. At this time, I am negotiating with the Israeli government asking them to send me some experts to help my country develop the cotton plantations. Hopefully, this will have beneficial results for Uruguay. It will help create jobs and save us from spending foreign currency to import cotton. It will save, uh, the visas.

Q: What connections do you have in America?

A: I have many good friends in America. I visited this country in 1980, when I gave a deposition to the officials at the Department of Justice about my experiences at the time of the incarceration at Treblinka. Also, in 1981, I came as a witness at the trial in Cleveland. I want to thank the Department of Justice of the U.S.A. for their help in making known to inform the American people of the suffering of my people during the Holocaust.

Q: How old are you, Mr. Rajchman?

A: I was born in June in 1914, in _ód_, Poland.

Q: How long did you live in _ód_?

A: I lived in _ód_ until 1939. On September 1, 1939, World War II started. Sadly, Poland lost the war and after a few days, the Germans occupied our city. Germans came in and surrounded us...to the city of _ód_.

Q: Tell us something about your life before the German occupation.

A: My mother passed away before the war. She died a natural death. My father and the rest of the family and my three sisters and two brothers all perished.

Q: What about your sisters.

A: Yes, I had a sister and the three brothers. Only one escaped and survived. He survived, that he escaped to the Soviet Union. I received a traditional Jewish upbringing. My father was a former Yeshiva student, and he tried to raise us in the Jewish traditions. But we were not very orthodox. We observed...observed all holidays. My father instilled in his Jewish spirits and will power.

Q: What did you do until '39?

A: I started, sadly, very young; because the economic situation in our home was such that my father himself was not able to provide for us the needs and support. He did everything possible to sustain us; but until '39, I worked hard helping to support my family.

Q: When the Germans came to _ód_, what happened to your family?

A: When the Germans came in on September 1st, 1939, they annexed the City of _ód_ in the Third Reich. Life in _ód_ turned into a hell for our people. They grabbed us on the streets, tormented and humiliated us. We were driven to degrading work. Beatings, robbery and insults became a daily occurrence. Since my oldest...I was the oldest son, I asked my younger brother to escape to Russia, but many Jews escaped at that time to Russia. And thanks to my advice, my brother survived. As I said before, he lives with me in Uruguay. The rest of my family all perished. My sisters perished. Everybody perished. Out of 6 brothers and sisters, just I and my brother survived.

Q: What did you do after your brother left _ód_?

A: But if...in the beginning of October '39, I took my younger sister and went with her--the other ones were married already--and I went with her to a small town called Pruszków, a small town 18 kilometers to Warsaw. I had there some people I knew. This was the Polish protectorate and the regiment there was not so severe as in _ód_. I planned to bring all my

family there, but my goal was to transfer all of them there. But the situation in _ód_ deteriorated so...it was difficult and dangerous to bring them there.

Q: What kind of work did you do in Pruszków?

A: In Pruszków, in the beginning, the system was still bearable. And we lived in a ghetto, but the area was not closed. We could go around and move around freely. Three times a week we were have to taken to the railroad labor camp, and we worked there without pay and we were harassed and beaten. After awhile they liquidated the ghetto, and transferred all men to the railroad camp. The women and children were sent to the Warsaw ghetto. The men continued working there at the railroad. We slept there and worked there. Yah. But the remainder, like I said, they sent to the ghetto of Warsaw.

Q: What happened to your sister?

A: Yah. My sister also went to Warsaw. After the liquidation of the railroad brigades in Pruszków, they marched us to Warsaw, and I was reunited with my sister.

Q: Please, tell us about the conditions in Warsaw upon your arrival there?

A: The situation was very, very sad. Hunger...children... people were laying in the street...swollen with hunger.... bodies covered with sores. It was very bad. I looked aside immediately to find a way to leave the ghetto. I obtained some travel document and left Warsaw. I got a permit to a town called Ostrów Lubelski, in the Lublin area. Lubelski. It was a place away from the main road, 7 kilometers from the nearest railroad station. Life was there so much easier that we lived by selling our belongings, our clothes. We were not hungry. We exchanged things for food. We did not suffer. We did not suffer any hunger there. But unfortunately, in October '42, yah, the German decided to liquidate all remaining Jewish communities in the area. And marched us off on foot to a small town called Lubartów. In Lubartów, they assembled all Jewish from Parczew and other towns. They packed us on the cattle wagons...in cattle wagons, they took us in a transport of 12,000 Jews...were taken to Treblinka.

Q: How long did it take the train ride to Treblinka?

A: (Long pause) It took lot more longer than normal, because this was not a regular scheduled transport. It frequently stopped to wait for the regular trains to pass. The road to Treblinka was already . They hurried us in the cattle wagons, flogging us with whips, squeezing 150 people into a wagon. We had to do things, you know, natural things in the place where we were...in the wagons. The Ukrainians who were watching us took money to get us water, but was no water...yah...or valuables...and never gave us the water. Many times they took away our valuables or whatever we had, but they never gave us the water.

Q: Were they only Ukrainians who guarded you or were there others?

- A: I believe that the only Ukrainians were the guards who helped the liquidation of the Jewish communities in the area where we lived. Yah.
- Q: Please, describe to us your arrival in Treblinka.
- A: (Long pause) Before I will answer this question, let me tell something that bothers me 'til this day all my life. I can't forgive myself for something I did. On the train to Treblinka, my sister begged me to give her some food. Because we had very little food with us. They cheated us. We were told as they are taking us for work in Russia and it will take many days until we will reach our destination. I did not give my sister, Anna, which she accepted my reasoning and was willing to suffer and hold off her thirst and craving for food. "Alright, I will do without the food as long as we will come to a place and survive." She was so weak upon arrival that they dispatched her to the gas chambers as soon as we arrived. (Long pause) The train arrived at a station called Treblinka. The transport came to a halt and was taken to the forest 4 o'clock in the morning. We were staying there a little less than two hours. Then we saw that...what...what our destiny is. The door opens. Yah. We looked at each other, and we realized that it didn't take long. We came through the forest and we arrived at the real camp, Treblinka. The doors opened, and we were ordered to get out with screams, "Schnell! Ausschsteigen!"--"Hurry! Out! Men to the right! Women and small children to the left!" The men on the right ordered to this rope to bind our shoes in pairs. They later send the shoes to Germany. In a hurry, we had to undress. They selected the young among us and ordered us to collect in a hurry. All the clothing and belongings of the people from the spot where they undressed, and take them to a large place where they pointed out. Yah. It was a receptacle for mountains of shoes, clothes, bags, and suitcases. It was terrible. We were...we were working in a chain, running from the undressing spot to the receptacle...all day long. After we finished with the men's belongings, we were hurried to the barrack where the women undressed upon arrival. Then the marched us to the left where the women and the children were. We undressed in the field, but the women and the children were inside the barrack. When we came to take their clothes, nobody was there any more. Just a heap of clothing that we carried to the same place we delivered the men's belongings. Yah. We have to leave it there. And all it was done in a hurry. We did it running...back and forth, back and forth, we were running. While running back and forth, we heard the German calling, "Who is a barber?" I thought what did I have to lose and I said, "I am a barber." They had already four men chosen. I was the fifth man. A friend of mine that followed me was rejected. I...I called on him to come close but it was too late. The Germans did not want any more barbers. He took the five of us to the clothes magazines barrack and ordered them to give us a pair of pants, a pair of shoes, and a shirt. The Germans ordered all to perform all works. He said that we will be...will be sorting clothes, and then in addition will be..are...he is giving us an assignment as a barber. I did not know what mine...what mine assignment is. I knew how to work there from another man who worked there. He said, "Get yourselves a pair of scissors." We were also warned by one of the men who belonged to the barber work, that we must work in bent down positions. If not, we will be constantly beaten. The Germans walked around us with whips, constantly beating us. As soon as I start to work, I got a beating and

was bleeding from my head and face. I find some water, washed away the blood and returned to work. This is the place where I worked. The first work was sorting the heaps of clothes, separating the shirts, pants, coats, and eyeglasses. Not just sorting, but also checking to see if jacket collars, cuffs of the pants, or the shoulder pads were hiding anything of value. If you found money or a ring, we put it in a designated place. People hoped that they can save it. And we had to control that. And I worked at the sorting barrack. We looked...diamonds separate, rings separate. There I worked for about 2 days.

Q: Did you have any idea what happened to your sister?

A: (Long pause) On the second day, while separating clothes, I recognized my sister's dress. The same day the new transport arrived and a German came up to called us. The new five barbers join the five old ones. The five barbers of the old ones and the five new ones. Yah. I had my scissors, and they marched us to the gas chambers area. The gas chambers was in an open place with two entries. The gas chambers consist of 2 chambers. On the open door they rushed the victims with yellish, yelling and screaming. They had to go through that open gas chamber. They forced them to sit down, and we cut their hair with five cuts. We removed the women's hair. This was a...one of the most terrible times for me in Treblinka. My last contact with living victims. I had such moments...a woman came in and grabbed my arm...my arm and asking me if the young will stay alive. I couldn't tell her otherwise. I said...Yes, I...I will...the young will survive. The women then said to me, "Now I can die assured that my son who...who came with me will live and take revenge for our misfortunes." We collected the hair in valises and suitcases. The hair by the...the Germans are using the victims hair for the military industry. This is material to strengthen the military and the German industry. I had some ghastly periods at the barber place. A mother came to me begging not to cut her hair in such a hurry. She should like to die together with her daughter who is blind...with a few people behind her. I wanted to help her. I slowed down cutting of her hair. Then a whip came down on my face and head. I asked my friend to help the daughter to come closer, but he couldn't do it. Yah. He couldn't do it. Another I had, the girl came to the gas chambers area, shouted, loudly shouting hysterically, laughing and screaming, said, "Don't cry. Let's show the murderers that we are not afraid to die. Don't give him the satisfaction to see you sad." She didn't want to give him the pleasure that they should see us cry, dying.

Q: How long did you work with the barbers?

A: This...this disdainful work, I worked for 3 days...2 or 3 days. After this, after I worked the 2 or the 3 days, then nobody...it was a fact sorting the clothes in the barracks. From there, they selected 30 men--myself among them--and marched us to Camp 2.

Q: What kind of work did you do?

A: Treblinka was divided in two camps. Lager No. 1 was a place for sorting clothes and belongings of the victims and cutting their hair, and so on. In Camp 2, the other camp, we were in contact only with the dead. This was the devil's factory. In the first 2 days in

Treblinka, we still hoped that maybe we will be able to escape and we saved some food, scraped up some underwear and a coat for this eventuality. But in Camp 2, we realized that they will search us. I got rid of the coat and all other things, because if they would find other things on me, they would have killed me and the other 30 men. I saw that they will search us...and if they would find something, they would have killed me.

Q: Who is the "they" you constantly talk about?

A: The SS men and the Ukrainian guards.

Q: How did they behave toward the victims?

A: They were police units. (Long pause) Among them, there are bad people. So...so much worse than the Germans. Let me give you an example. In 1945, '44, while hiding in a bunker in the destroyed Warsaw, I described my sufferings in Treblinka in a notebook. I didn't know then if I will survive and the world will not know what happened to us. In my notebook, I wrote about Treblinka. When I wrote then, I referred to the men there...we were treated by the Ukraine guards. There were a few Ukrainians...three of them...one's name was "Ivan the Terrible." I was a witness at a court proceeding of Ivan [NB: John] Demjanjuk. Once in the United States, and now in Israel. I knew him as "the devil Ivan. I didn't know then that his name was Ivan Demjanjuk. Yah. We called him "Ivan the devil." He was working as a mechanic blacksmith who leaked in the gas into the gas chamber. Yah. He was gassing the people. He was a sadist, taking pleasure in his work. He liked what he did. I remember one day, he brought our food rations from Camp 1 to Camp 2. In this moment, he stopped his horse driven car, picked up an iron...picked up an iron bar and started hitting the people with this iron pole. The screams of the people were unbearable. He kept that long piece of iron and continued, the people who were waited there, keep beating them...beating them...hitting them with that piece of iron. And he had the joy doing that. I...I can share with you another example of his cruelties. I worked for awhile with a dentist group, yah, removing the false teeth from the victims...after they brought them out from the gas chambers. The dentists were close to Ivan's workshop. It was very close nearby... where he kept his motors running, so that I saw...I saw him very often. One day, by cleaning...washing the bloody teeth with a friend of mine. His name was Finkelstein. He was from the town of P_ock. Yah, I don't remember exactly. I think he was from P_ock. It took him...took a drill...that was used to drill holes in wood and stick the drill into Finkelstein's backside. In the backside...in laughing, continually laughing. He screamed, "Gevalt!" Finkelstein then was crying. Even told him that if he will not stop screaming, he will...he said...he had so much joy doing that. He used to take one, grabbing people and cutting off an ear. When the victims was bleeding all over, he ordered them to undress. He shouted. The sadism of that Ivan was so enormous that you find it difficult to speak about.

Q: Yes.

A: It is impossible to repeat it. The other evil guard was Mikolai, his helper. The third man was

called [Tsicktsark (ph)]. All the time they walked around beating the people. Murdering the victims was their enjoyment, their pleasure. The foreman of the dentists group was a Dr. Zimmermann, and the guard tolerated him and he had influence on the Ukraine [Tsicktsack (ph)]. He had some influence on him, and he intentionally involved the guard in all matters of conversation in order to keep him away from beating us. We explored Dr. Zimmermann, please, keep him busy with conversation so he will not have the time to so brutally badger us. In Treblinka, we were not allowed to walk, but always run. We continually had to be guard that our faces are free of injuries and show no marks or scars of the facing. Whoever had a bloody face or scars was taken out in the evening, line up and shot. They looked if we can still pick up our legs. If not, they took it out and killed us.

Q: Who did the shooting?

A: I think...we think there were about 100 SS men and 40 Ukrainians. You keep referring to SS German Ukrainians.

A: (Long pause) They were able every day (pause)...they killed every day about 15,000 people...all Jews. One time I remember a gypsy transport of 500 people. Transports kept coming from all over...from all over Europe. And the people were so abused, victimized, went through such a hell and severe beating that they wanted to die. The nurse stood there...only beating...constantly beating...constantly beating and killing.

Q: If the people were so resigned, rather willing to die than to suffer, whose idea was it to rebel and organize the uprising in Treblinka?

A: (Long pause) Let me tell you certain things before I answer this question. I saw personally a mother holding an infant in line for the gas chamber. Yah. She had a small child with her. The German tore the child from the mother's arms, hit the child, and holding the infant by its legs, he shushed the head against the wall. This was one of the daily scenes we saw in Treblinka. Then you ask me, "How come about rebellion?," I can say to you the same thing I said to the judge when I was in Cleveland. I said, "Your Honor, I was blind." The Judge understood what I said. But Ivan's attorney kept pressing the question, "How can you claim you were blind when you can see?" The judge interrupted him, interrupted the attorney, "Why do you keep asking this man such questions? Any human being facing such atrocities becomes blind." We saw everything and perceived nothing. We become inhuman, incoherent. Our vision was overcast. We did not know what was happening to us. We hoped...we always kept asking, maybe someone will survive. Maybe a miracle will happen, a plane will come and bomb Treblinka and free us from the misery. We worked. We worked there for many months. The whole world forgot about us. Our lives were worthless. The whole world forgot about us. For this reason of hopelessness and broken spirits... (Long pause) Let me...let me tell you. Yah. Treblinka, if we would have not have made this...the uprising, (Long pause) they warned that there would not be a sign that there ever was a death camp in Treblinka. They had graves, mass graves, that were about 200,000 people in them. They brought special machinery to dig deep...deep, deep holes. All those people, all those

bodies, we..we put them there--one head to the feet--in order that there should be more place for the people. One on top of the other, tens of thousands of people. When they discovered...you know, they discovered of the victims of Katyn and massacre, the mass murder of Polish officers. Also the Germans defeat at Stalingrad, [on] their retreat, they started to worry, "Would the world discover the murderous deeds in Treblinka?" The deep pits, mass graves, will be proof of their atrocities. They started to remove the bodies of the victims and burn them. The same big machines which excavated the ground before started to remove the corpses, the remains...bloody parts of the people. They built a crematorium, but it was too small for their purpose. This crematorium was not enough. It wasn't satisfactory for their needs. There was not enough results by just burning them. Then they arrived a specialist in the field, a man who [was] called [Wait (ph)]. He was a specialist in his trade. He did the following. He did a simple thing. He took 5 or 6 railroad tracks each 30 meters long. Around it, he built a brick wall. He laid the tracks 15 centimeters apart...centimeters apart...and one and a half meters above the ground, up to one and a half meters. On those tracks, he covered them with the corpses of the victims. The first layer were a woman, yah, their stomachs on the tracks. Yah. We loaded 2,000 (pause)...we covered them with 2,500 corpses, counting... How did we count those people? We counted only the heads. Each head was...had one number. And we set them...when they were in a certain order, they set them on fire. Yah. In the beginning, they burned the victims in daytime. But the flames were so immense that it was impossible to stay close to the place. All day long we kept putting bodies one top of the other. So they changed the system. We worked all day from 6 in the morning to 6 in the evening. Only an hour before, we stopped working at 5 PM, when the mountains of corpse were in place, yah, we worked with rough hand tools wracking the bodies in their place. We took the branches and dried up bushes, and we put them under the tracks and set them on fire. This was dry bushes we set. And this was a half a meter high. And we set it on fire. And the flames were so strong that we were unable to stay any closer than 50 feet from the blaze. After a few hours, even the 50 meters close, we wouldn't be able to stay there. And this was burning night after night. The fires were burning all night. And in the morning, we were extinguish it, there'll still smoldering skeletons. A specially organized ashes brigade, the colony...was called ash brigades to remove the bones. We removed the ashes with wooden sticks, beat and remained it into thin ashes. After this was done, yah, we had to sift the ashes in special screen boxes. Yah. We beat it with those pieces of wood. We had to beat the ashes. If we found pieces of bones, we had to beat them again until it became thin like cigarette ashes. Whatever it was it left. After that again we have to beat. Like...like flour, it was this thin.

Q: How long was this going on?

A: This...this process continued all the time I was in Treblinka. They wanted to cover up the deeds, so that..so that no trace was...would be left. The ashes were later buried in the ground from where they excavated the bodies. One layer of ashes and one layer of dirt. Yah. When the graves...their crematives close to the surface, they did not use any more ashes, only soil, so that no trace can be found. There was also a group they called Knochen colony. Their task was to find any remains of human bones, little bones...burn them again so no signs

whatsoever can ever be found. Absolutely, absolutely nothing be left.

Q: When did this?

A: This was going on until the uprising on August 2, 1943. If this would take a little bit longer, in a few more months, the world wouldn't have never know that there was a camp, Treblinka, which covered up their deeds so much that two kilometers from the original camp they established a Obus Kari (ph), a penal camp, for smugglers and criminals. Yah. That camp...they also called Treblinka. They wanted this camp as a coverup for the future. If someone will discover the real Treblinka with their gas chambers, they will have a place to show that this was a place for criminals. Very few of us survived. After the war, when I returned to Treblinka and I found Poles digging...digging the land, looking for valuables.

Q: I want to ask you again, who were the people who organized the uprising?

A: The uprising was planned by Camp 1. The clothes sorting camp with 700 inmates. They organized the uprising. As..as...yah...they wanted to punish someone in camp 1, they used to send them to us. They sent to us some people...among them were 2 officers of the Czechoslovakia army, one adult and one Jelo (ph). And they brought the information about...of the conspiracy and about the preparations for the uprising. And they stayed in contact with the first camp. The schlau (ph) who was there leading to the gas chambers...was leading to the gas chambers was regularly cleaned of blood marks. They had to clean it every day, and the inmates assigned to the cleaning shared information with our group in camp 2. We took...we spoke loud to each other about other things, but we shared information. Originally, the uprising was planned for May 1943. They prepared gold to bribe the guards, to pay for food. We had duplicate keys to the arsenal, but the same day a train load of soldiers arrived, and the plan was postponed. The rifles and ammunition taken from the arsenal were returned so that the Germans did not notice there're missing. The Germans did not notice it. Now when we saw that the time passed and nothing had happened, we informed camp 1, if they will not do something, we will not wait any longer and start a breakout ourselves. We had our own conspiracy in camp 2. A small group of disciplined people...we were afraid of too many people will know about our plans, we will be discovered. So we decided that the uprising will start at August 2 at 5 PM....Yah...in 1943, 5 O'clock. Everyone in our group is given an assignment. My role was to get the people out of the camp, urging them to leave. We shouted.

Q: What was your assignment?

A: Like I said, I had to urge the people to leave. We shouted that there is a revolution in Berlin. Because of some mixup, we had to start a half an hour earlier. Yah, because they started earlier. The signal was if we hear two shots, then we will start. And it started a half an hour earlier. Everybody was in their place. But it was not successful. It was not fully successful. We wanted to destroy the gas chambers. But we set on fire the garages, the warehouse chambers. Our plan was to get out of there and free the...the penal camp, but we were not

able to do it. It became so chaotic. Many people were not in their places. After a few moments, the...the Germans starting shooting and killing. They kept shooting, and we were running wild. In the shouting and confusion, I was screaming, "People, save yourself!" Some of them, uh, chose not to run, and then went back to the barracks. I was one of the last ones to leave. When I left a many was lay, already dead, killed. They opened fire with machine guns.

Q: How many people were in the group?

A: Yah, there were Ukrainians and SS men who were shooting and killing us. And we were running in groups. I was...I was...I chose a road--not a main road, a side road, to run. And when I arrived a few kilometers in the daylight, I saw that we are too many people. We are 20 people. So I decided that we should divide into...in...in...into two groups. This was still daylight. This is August, middle of the summer. So we decided to hide...yah... in a field among the bushes. We...we stayed there for awhile. We saw the Germans are coming close...and also the Ukrainians coming close. We were hiding in the bushes. One of the group...one of our group is in few minutes they open fire on them, and they killed them all. Yah. But they did not notice us. No, the German soldiers that killed the groups. so they departed. They withdrew and departed. Next to me was laying a friend of mine, a Czech by the name of Masaryk. He was related to the former President of Czechoslovakia. He come to Treblinka because his mother was Jewish. Yah. When they saw...when he he saw the Germans came near the field, he cut his veins. He did not want to...want to...the Germans to take him alive. Yah. I bandaged his arm. I grabbed his arm and stopped the bleeding. As soon as the Germans retreated and it got...and it got dark, we started to roam...bypassing the open. We don't know if he survived. After a few days with the group, I decided to part. I was with a friend of mine. They said I have a good face because we look like Christians. And we decided during the night to go to a farm, to a peasant and ask for food. Some decent people helped us. Some not, saying, "Get lost, Jews!" I saw...I realized that this is no way out of our situation, and I suggested to my fellow fugitives to walk in the direction of Warsaw--a distance of somewhere 80, 90 kilometers. I knew some Christian friends in Warsaw who were active in the Polish underground. No one wanted to follow my advice. So I said to them, "Friends, sooner or later, some peasant will sell you to the Germans for 5 pounds of sugar." It was a time for 5 kellogs of sugar, they sold a Jew. So I parted with my friends. I said goodbye to them. And through side roads, I started to walk in the direction of Warsaw. It's a long, long road. Then I arrived in Warsaw. The first night I was sleeping in a field. It was raining all night. I rambled toward a farm house and started talking to the peasants. At that moment, we heard shots and shouting. The peasant crossed himself and started to shake. "Please," he urged, "run away! If they will find you with me, I will be killed." He was afraid that maybe someone noticed me. I hastened back to the potato field, hiding...hiding in the rain all night. At dawn, I returned to the peasant, asking him for directions to Warsaw, to a side road. "How is a good road to Warsaw away to a regular highway?" He gave me some food and told me where to go.

Q: What kind of clothes did you wear?

A: I was wearing ordinary clothes. They smelled...stinked terrible. I didn't have anything except I was wearing. I looked like a living skeleton. We all did. When I wandered from village to village or from one village to the other, I met a man. He comes close and I greeted him in Polish, and said to him, "May God be praised." Yah...Yah. The man paused and asked me, "Are you a Jew?" I said, "Yes." Then he said, "Are you of the people who scorched Treblinka?" I said, "Yes." This Christian man, who was walking in the opposite direction from where I came, turned back, and taking...taking my arm said, "I am taking you to my home." When his wife saw the way I looked, his wife looked at me...she ordered me to take my soiled shirt...to take off my soiled shirt, and gave me a clean one. You know what she said to me? "This is my husband's only extra shirt." They gave it to me. They gave me a healthy meal, and inquired about my plans. I told those two honest good people that I want to go to Warsaw. They ask me, "Are this...are those your plans?" They were good people, and they advised me against it. I said again, I insist, because I know people in Warsaw. They said, "Don't go. They will kill you there."

Q: How long did you stay with these people?

A: I was there two weeks. But I realized that no good will come by my staying there any longer. When I...when I came to that peasant, they helped me when I...he said to me that I should go into hiding in the fields. Yah. At night, I came to the house and they gave me some food. Yah. One night I came there and sit down and start eating; but suddenly came in a neighbor and started to hit me in face shouting, "Come with me, Jew! Get up! Come with me!" To the women, he shouted, "They are criminals! They burned down Treblinka! And you will hide the Jews," he said to the women. "Let me take him to the Germans. I will get a premium for his head." And he didn't want to let me go. The woman cried, begging him to let me go. But he was holding on to my arm. When the woman saw that he was not giving up, she grabbed him from the back with both her arms and yelled to me, "Run! Save yourself!" And I run away. Because it was darkness and the peasant was afraid to run after me, thinking maybe I am with more people. When I was running in the darkness, thinking of this fine, brave woman. Such a beautiful soul! You cannot find anywhere. And they gave me so much help. I...I went back to the field, and laid there until midnight. Because at night, in the evening, you hear every movement. I...I noticed how they extinguished the lights in the houses. Crawling on all four, I returned at midnight. Traveling on my knees I returned to the stable and fell asleep there. One night is also good. Yah. And I slept there. And in the morning, the farmer found me in the stable and asked me to leave. "My God, they will kill you! They will kill me! They will kill all of us, and burn down the house. But he said, "You know what? Stay here 'til the evening, and leave in the dark. Yah. But you leave during the night. Tomorrow is a Catholic holiday, and my relatives will come here. And they will sleep here in that barn. There is no other place for them. I want you to stay here all day, and as soon as it will get dark." He brought me during the day some food to eat. And I left; but every night after that, I still came back. He used to give me some...a little food and I disappeared. Almost after 2 weeks coming back and forth during the night, give me...give me..I asked him one day, please, give me a razor that I can shave off my beard. And he didn't even have a razor.

So...so he had a...some kind of a knife and I cut my beard off. Yah. I cut my beard, washed myself, and I thanked him for all the help, for the food, and his kindness. And at dawn I left in the direction of Warsaw to a station called [Kostki (ph)]. No...when it got...it started the daylight, I started to walk in that direction. There is a little train goes from there. Yelp. Good. I thanked him and thanked her for the kindness again; and as soon as it got light, daylight, I started to walk in that direction. I asked some peasants that I met on the road, I asked if this is the direction to [Kostki (ph)], and they said yes. I met a guy who was a smuggler. I said to him, "I also a thief, but I had no packages of my own." Yah. He said, "I would like to help you the load." When I arrived at the station, I saw a woman and that you are holding a child with some bundles of clothes so, yah, I had some money with me so I gave it to her and asked her to buy me a ticket to Warsaw, toward a station near Warsaw called Piastów. You know what I said to her? "I will help you carry the packages, but you help buy me a ticket to get to Warsaw." She believed me, but she could not buy me a ticket. But they had no tickets to Piastów. But also to write the ticket, he had no time so I had to buy a ticket to Warsaw. Yah. We traveled on the train. I covered my face like I had a tooth ache, and I arrived to that station in Piastów. I rested for awhile in a field and then I walked. There was a tramway, a street car going in that direction, so I took the street car...I took the street car. It was too early for the tramway, for the street car, so I walked in the direction of Piastów. When I arrived in Piastów, I slept on...on...on...and rested a little bit because it was early. And then I went to the door of a friend of mine that I knew from . When he looked at me, he did not recognize me. So he wanted...he gave me some money like I am a beggar. When I didn't want to take the money, he realized who I am. He said, "You have... , he said, "You are alive. You have to survive." My friend, his name was Jarosz Wac_aw Nowak. And this was...he is the one who made...give me the meaningful help. This is the man who provided me with this document, name Romanowski. Yah...that I am a Pole, that I employed of the railroad. Yah. He saved my life, and this is the document. This is the document. This document saved my life. I used it all the time. This Polish Christian was a honest man. Physically very weak, he wasn't able to sleep or eat because of fear that he is hiding a Jew. Everyday his wife felt that he is losing his mind, because there were stories in the paper about people getting killed because they were hiding Jews in their homes. And he was so scared. And then I tells them, I said, "You don't have to sacrifice your life for mine. I can not blame you for being scared for helping a Jew. I am thankful for all you did for me. Yah. I am so thankful to you." And on Sunday morning, I left his home and started searching for another place.

Q: How long did it take for you to find another hiding spot?

A: I came to another Christian I used to do business with before the war. And I left with him some things when I went out, when I ran away from Warsaw. In fact, from after I left my friend, I went to him. I came to that Christian. I asked him to help me. The woman has...was a strong-willed person. She said she has only one room in the apartment where I can stay with them under the bed. After a night of discomfort under this iron bed, I was ready to give myself up to the militia. Yah. But I tried again, and I stayed in this place for several months. Yah. Yah. I adjusted to the routine of 18 hours under the bed. Only when they left the room, I locked the door, crawled out from my...from under the bed concealment, did my things in

the chamberpot...they removed. They had to carry it out in packages. One day I was forced to leave this place. A German officer was slain in the area, and as a punishment they expelled all inhabitants of that neighborhood. Again, I started to look for a place to stay. I find a coach driver, a simple honest soul. Yah. He told me, "I live in a rented shack. One room is still liveable. The other room is falling apart. The shanty has no windows. If you are satisfied to live in it, I will rent it to you." I said, "Yes." I packed that chamber. This man had a little girl. She knew that I was hidden there. There was no windows. Always darkness. Everything was closed in. I never saw the daylight. I almost turned blind. Only through a small crack, a split in the wall, I was able to listen of what was going on on the outside. And from there I had to run away too. Then...from there I had to escape, because the woman who owned the shack had a pig she wanted to slaughter. And my landlord, the coach driver, advised her to hold the pig until Easter. Yah. In the meantime, the pig was stole. The woman accused the driver of stealing the pig, and was ready to denounce him to the militia. Yah. It became dangerous to remain there any longer, and I escaped. Again, I returned to Pruszków to a man I knew was making illegally vodka. I asked him to help me. He gave me lodging in a warm place and let me taste his brew. But in the morning, his mother came. When he made that vodka, he needed somebody to help him and he hoped that I can stay there and help him. All night I felt warm and I had enough to eat, but in the morning his mother came, and she recognized me and asked me immediately to leave and if I don't leave she will report me to the militia. But he said to me...he wanted to help me...He said my wife passed away. The apartment where I lived is no...is unoccupied. I will take you there. In this place there are two more apartments. I walked around without shoes so he took me there and so no one can hear my steps I walked up there and I slept on a straw mattress. Yah. After a short time, he came to me and asked me to leave. "It is bad," he said, "a friend of his was registered in this apartment in order to get employment, in the factory Tudor." The friend knew that the apartment is vacant and he insisted that I allowed to move in, and that he will not give him his permission voluntarily, he will force him to give it up by going to the militia." And then he made me another offer. I have a girlfriend, a school teacher. She has an apartment in Warsaw. She stays here with her sister in this area. She is asking 3,000 zlotys monthly rent, and 10,000 zlotys key money. I still has 3 metals piece of material, more than the amount she asks. He gave me the address in Warsaw and I went there alone, and he followed me later. He was arrested by the Germans, but I made it. I...I had...what do I have to lose? I arrived there at the apartment on January 13, 3rd floor. I gave her the materials, and the teacher and her sister were already waiting for us. But they both were worried when Wacek (ph) did not come. He...because he gave me the address that I should go by myself. But he was...the Germans got a hold of him and put him to work. When I got there, to that...to that apartment, on January 13, and she was...and the sis...like I said, the sister was waiting for me already. But after awhile he finally arrived. They were very upset and nervous. The Germans made him to do some work and let him go. I rented their place and remained there. This apartment was the Garden of Eden for me, with running water, a wash room. The apartment had an advantage. The neighbor was deaf. He could not hear the water running. I lived in the apartment until the Polish uprising in August 1944. One day through the window I noticed unusual movement. People were running, building barricades. I heard bombs bursting in the air and gun fire. The houses were shaking. I was thinking of what to do? Where to go? I was

out of food and the water was cut off. I decided that there was nothing more to lose. I locked the door and went outside. Every home, every building was controlled by a watchman, a patrol on the lookout for unfamiliar faces. Yah. When they saw my strange face they wanted to know who I was. I told them that I live on the side of the Vistula River. I am a friend of the teacher who lives upstairs. She wanted me to keep an eye on her apartment and her belongings whenever I visited Warsaw. Unfortunately, today I was caught in the middle of the battle and the bombings and I can't return home to Praga.¹ The watchman became friendly with me, and I became his assistant and his helper. I was his assistant. After several days when I saw that I am dealing with an honest man, I confessed to him. I said, "Listen friend, forgive me for not telling me the truth. But I want you to know, I am a Jew. You know our condition. We are forced to live in hiding." I was moved...he was moved by the words, and told me from now on, I must join him in his home and eat with his family. I knew, he said, that you have no food. Knowing how little he has, I refused to go and eat at his home. But he insisted. He sent one of his children to call me home for dinner. "You will eat what I will eat," he said, "you will share our rations." He was a poor man, honest and generous. Yah. I became his assistant watching the side entrances to the building assigned to us. There was a tunnel from one house to the other and I was helping him. Yah. There was a bakery in a nearby building that belonged to a Turkish family. And I was...became friend with that baker. I played chess with that baker. He was a man my age, and he became a good friend. One day I confessed him that I am a Jew. He embraced me and kissed me. Why didn't you tell me this before? From now on, you must take 10 loaves of bread. Ten loaves of bread at the time were like 10 pounds of gold. People were starving for a piece of bread. Why do you want me to have so much bread I ached him. Go find your people and feed them. Sorry, I told him. I have no contact with any of my people here. We became such close friend that when neighbor...neighbors needed bread, they came to me. One day they declared a cease fire. All foreigners leaving in Warsaw were allowed to live..to leave. My Turkish friend decided to leave. He gave me the keys of the bakery and told me, "You are...you are now the owner." But I decided to join the Polish Party Liberation of the Polish Workers Party. This was the Polska Partia Socialisticina, the Polish Socialist Party. Yah. I was assigned to the fire arm brigade. Our tasks was to save the people still buried into the ruins at the destroyed buildings. Some families were still living under the bomb-wrecked dwellings. And we were able to save a lot of people. There I found another Jew among the firefighters. After 2 months of ferocious warfare, we lost the uprising against the Germans. All the Polish population was forced to surrender. And I abandoned the city limits of Warsaw. I decided not to leave. Myself and seven more people constructed a hiding place in a bunker of the burned-out buildings between Ponska and Sliska Street. We lived there in misery until we were liberated January 17, 1945. It was so terrible there we could hardly survive. We almost did not survive. We were hungry, cold, despondent. But one night, a man discovered our hiding place. He asked, "Jews, are you hungry? Have you any bags?" We said, "Yes." "Come with me," he said. He carried an iron hand saw. We followed him in an abandoned warehouses, homes..homes of people who their forced to leave Warsaw. We could open the

¹ Suburb of Warsaw.

gates and locks, and we carried off a couple of hundred pounds of food and clothes. It lasted us until the day of liberation. We find good clothes and good food...food that we did not have til then. After liberation, we..the Polish units liberated me.

Q: After liberation, did you remain in Warsaw or did you leave Poland?

A: I remained in Poland. I went back to _ód_, and I was offered a high position in the new Polish Administration.

Q: Did they give you this position because of your participation in the Treblinka uprising or your serving...?

A: Yes. Both. I still have the documents of recognition given me by the Polish government. The new Polish administration gave me all the support. I was director of a, big, uh, company. But they insisted that I remain under the name Romanowski, and I remained under that name...what you see here..until I left Poland.

Q: When did you leave the country?

A: I left Poland at the end of 1946. I realized that there is no future for us in Poland. I was married a half a year before. Leaving...I left Poland in the illegal immigration organized by the Brichah, the Jewish underground. We pretended that we are citizens of Greece returning home.

Q: How long did you stay?

A: Finally, I arrived in Munich, Germany; and there we received permits to travel to France. We got...lay there...waiting a little while in Germany, we got a permit to go from Munich to France.

Q: And from France?

A: And I was in...for a little while in France, for a year and a half. We were, with my wife, a year and a half in France.

Q: When did you go to Europe?

A: In France, we received...from an uncle we received...from my wife's uncle...these travel visa permits to Paraguay. Yah. On our stop in Uruguay, we planned to change our planes and go to Argentina. But it was the responsibility of the American Joint Distribution Committee, but when we arrived in Uruguay, the Joint...we were the responsibility of the Joint Committee...yah...but we did not want to stay in the wagon, so we crawled out through the windows, and we were arrested by civilian policemen. He asked us, "Where are you going?" We did not speak Spanish. So he took us to the police station. The police chief...he did not

know Polish...so he called in a translator who spoke German. The woman was a door watcher, and she wanted to know why did we escaped through the windows of the train. So I told them I cannot understand why we...they locked the wagon doors. Today is August 25. It's a national Uruguayan holiday. We are not criminals. We just wanted to share in the ebullitions with the Uruguayan people. So he started to apologize. It is not you...you are doing that...the Joint wants to send you somewhere else. He saw that my wife was pregnant and he continued. "You are in a new and a free country." Yah. "Where else do you want to go." We said, "To Paraguay." "Why did you need to go to Paraguay," he said. "Remain here and you will have a Uruguayan son." We are really...really fortunate and thankful to the Uruguayan government and to the people for their friendly reception. We are now proud Uruguayan citizens. Our government helped us with everything we needed. We are now part...we are now part of the Uruguayan nation. A beautiful people and a good government! We are honored with visits to our home by the Vice Presidents of the Republic. Yah. We have the high...high people in government visiting us. We are helping our country develop new industries, and we are very happy in Uruguay.

Q: Are you also active in the Jewish community?

A: Yah. I give a lot of time and donate of my resources to Jewish education, schools, and to help the State of Israel.

Q: What made you decide, a man of your age, to travel so far and share with us this painful experience of your past? Why are you doing this?

A: I consider this an obligation. I speak for those who can speak no more. I am their voice. I want the whole world to know what happened to our people. I pray and hope that this will never, never happen again. Not to us and not to other people anywhere. I want to thank Dr. Linda Kuzmack and you for the fine reception. I came to Washington. I want to thank you, Dr. Kuzmack, and Herman Taube for your friendly reception you gave me. My , Herman Taube, on behalf of my wife and myself, I want you to continue that holy work of keeping the memory of our people should never be forgotten. (Long pause)

Q: Mr. Rajchman, we thank you for sharing your life story with us.