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Oral history interview with Albert Alcalay, 1979 January 17-October 19

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Transcript

Interview

Interview with Albert Alcalay
Conducted by Robert Brown
At Brookline, Massachusetts
1979 Jan. 17

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Albert Alacalay on January 17, 1979. The interview took place in Brookline, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview with Albert Alcalay in Brookline, Massachusetts, January 17, 1979, Robert Brown, the interviewer.

I'd like to begin by asking you about your childhood and your family. Can you talk about some of your earlier memories, things that you think were significant for your future in your early years?

ALBERT ALCALAY: Well, I was - let me start from the point that I came to this world. I was born in France, in Paris, during the First World War in 1917. And Paris at that time was bombarded by the first big gun that was called *Grosse Bertha*, that they were shooting from Germany straight into Paris. And it was shooting every hour. And during the daytime, I was mostly in the shelter, and during the nighttime, I was always brought by my mother to the shelter at night.

A significant thing that is interesting is that when my mother was in the hospital as being pregnant, waiting for the delivery, she had a desire, like pregnant women have a lot of desires, of strange desires, she had the desire to get a pad and a pencil and to draw. And she did draw, all the hospital nurses and all doctors, very beautifully. And after that, I was born. She never drew. She never drew after that at all. And it's a very interesting thing. We had that pad for a long time at home and - well, [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: Yes. Had she been an artist or had some -

MR. ALCALAY: No. She never was an artist. She never drew before. My mother was a - coming from a very poor family, had to go to work when she was 12 years old already to support half of the family because she lost the mother. So she was quite a mother to the small kids. And -

MR. BROWN: Where was she from?

MR. ALCALAY: She's from Belgrade. She was born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

MR. BROWN: And your father, too. Right?

MR. ALCALAY: And my father was born near Belgrade.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: But they're both from Yugoslavia. They moved to France during the war because that was Serbia before it was occupied by the Austrians, and my father worked for the French bank. So as the government moved to France, so also the most important institutions moved to France, too. And they stay all the way till the end of the war, and then, after, they came back. So by 1920, I think, I came back.

MR. BROWN: To Belgrade?

MR. ALCALAY: Back to Belgrade. And my father resumed his job in the bank. And I knew only French in that time, and I went immediately to the streets with little kids and shift back immediately to speak Serbian.

MR. BROWN: Serbian. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: What was your early childhood like? Do you recall?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, I have been mostly taken care of, was going always with my parents. And so my young - when I was very young, going to school and playing with kids, being, you know, a gang leader sometimes. And, you know, like all kids, playing around on the street.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. ALCALAY: Mostly on the street. And until I was about - and I became a Boy Scout, and learned all the things for - that are very important in childhood - you know, writing Indian language and throwing tomahawk and building fires and so on.

MR. BROWN: Did you like that?

MR. ALCALAY: I loved that. I just loved that very much. And when I was 10 already, I became a - this whole group of scouts, of Boy Scouts, somehow - they were Jewish. We joined the Zionist movement and became a Zionist organization, with ideas of preparing young people to go to Israel to live in the kibbutz.

MR. BROWN: Did your family support this idea, too?

MR. ALCALAY: No. Not while I was very young. No, they didn't want - they were afraid that I will really go to Israel.

MR. BROWN: And they wanted you to be in Europe?

MR. ALCALAY: They wanted me to become a doctor or something like that. Although my family is already very much in the Zionist movement, but, you know, the real Zionist is - the main - the definition of a Zionist is a Jew that tells to the next Jew so that the third Jew can go to Israel.

[Laughter.]

MR. BROWN: Turns to the -

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. In other words, they talk a lot, but they don't do to much.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Yes. And there was a great deal of talk at that time.

MR. ALCALAY: There was a great deal of talk, but there was a great deal of a movement also to move - to renew the idea of Zion, to go to - to change the situation of the Jewish people that become normal. In other words, what is the abnormalcy of the Jewish people is that they have a lot of intellectuals but they don't have peasants. They don't have anybody on what is called primary or secondary production. So it's like a pyramid upside down.

If you think about a pyramid, on the base in every country, in every nation, there are peasants and then tradesmen, and slowly you come to the intellectuals - lawyers and doctors and a small group of people. But the Jewish people is upside down. There are no peasants, there are no tradesmen, but there are all intellectuals because they all are going in different cities, and that is a trade. So the idea of Zion is to transform this. And they chose Israel so that the people would shift and go and work the land and become real people.

MR. BROWN: Do you think this was very appealing to you as a young boy?

MR. ALCALAY: That was very appealing to me as a young boy, and I stay in this organization till I was 26. Became head of the organization. I was trained for collective life. And I was - all my friends, my friends of my youth, are in Israel in the kibbutz. It's Yugoslav kibbutz. It's kibbutz of these people that we were all trained.

MR. BROWN: In Yugoslavia at that time, then, were you Jewish children more or less to yourselves, apart from the Serbians and the other peoples in many ways?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, yeah. It is - it was a kind of - Jews are living with Jews, and very hardly. It was a mixture, but on a very high level of intellectuals somewhere. But not so much. There was still - there was an anti-Semitism, hidden anti-Semitism, but there was an anti-Semitism. And I remember when I was a kid that I was fighting on the streets with other kids with stones, throwing stones and so on. I was very proud, and whoever would call me "kike" or something like that, I would break his head. And these things were happening. There were assimilated Jews that did not have that kind of a thing, but we who were proclaiming more and more that we have our own values, you know, we did that.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] And your father, although he was a banker, also was a Zionist. I mean, he -

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. My father was also a Zionist and was participating in World Zionism. And my whole family - my father had about 10 brothers, and they were all working in Jewish organizations, although there were some of them - one uncle was head of a state bank, a top bank, and he was also kind of a - he would go to the court of the king and the varieties of other things that not - few Jews could do. And he didn't want - after the war, he did not want to go to Israel as others did. He stayed and died in Belgrade very recently.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yes. Now, in your schooling or your scout activity or Zionism, were there any outlets for your artistic tendencies?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, when I was -

MR. BROWN: Did they reveal themselves very early?

MR. ALCALAY: When I was - I started when I was, I think, about 8 years of age, I started early to draw and to copy. I remember that I copy a very beautiful painting of Napoleon. I was 8 years of age, I remember. And I was doing these kind of things as much as I was interested in drawing. And when I entered into the Zionist organization, there was always varieties of things to do - make posters and displays and things, whatever is always outlet that would be called to do these kind of things.

And when I was about 13, my father really realized that I had tendencies for being a painter of some kind. And that is, you know, a nice upper-middle-class Jewish boy that is always sent to do some other things, extra-curricular activities. I was sent to - you know, to play the violin. And also, I was sent to a studio to be apprenticed to a painter.

MR. BROWN: Oh, were you?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. And his name was Bora Baruh, and he is a well-known painter in Yugoslavia.

MR. BROWN: Is that Ba-r-u?

MR. ALCALAY: B-a-r-u-h. He was a very intelligent painter who was schooled in France. He was a lawyer and a painter who left law. Belonged to a very poor family of three brothers and three sisters that were all intellectuals. The other two brothers, one was a philosopher and one was an engineer. They are all - they were all very leftist. They were all Communist. As a matter of fact, that was a kind of a - in Yugoslavia, one of the Baruh had always to stay in the prison for any eventuality. If one is released out of the prison, another one was put in the prison, just for the sake of keeping them quiet.

And I remember my teacher, Bora Baruh, whenever he had an opening of his show, he would have been - he would be put in the prison.

MR. BROWN: Why?

MR. ALCALAY: Because they were scared. They were afraid of them. And they are now - they are considered heroes of Yugoslavia. They have a street in Belgrade because they were all killed during the [inaudible], during the war.

Now, Bora was a wonderful person for me and I enter his studio. I washed dishes. I washed brushes. I learned the trade. I was a babysitter. I was shopping, doing all kinds of things for him. But at the same time, I learned the man, his private reactions to his child, to his wife, to in his own life, and it rubbed off to me. It became contagious. And I learned really how to paint. I really painted really good.

MR. BROWN: How did he go about this? Do you recall?

MR. ALCALAY: He painted - he came from a Cézanne-ish school, and he painted a lot of landscapes and painted a lot of interiors and portraits a lot. And I was watching him painting while I was working in the studio. And then I was painting, too, with him together.

MR. BROWN: You began directly by painting? You didn't go through a drawing stage?

MR. ALCALAY: No. I was drawing all the time. He was drawing also. And I - no. I didn't - I was drawing all the time, and it became immediate - I started immediately painting. And I acquired the quality of color, especially the brightness of color, the cleanliness of color. This man was watching carefully the color he's getting. No muddy colors at all, but very beautiful, clean colors.

MR. BROWN: Did you keep mixing of colors to a minimum?

MR. ALCALAY: Yes. I was taught by him how to mix colors that he was telling me how Pissarro was teaching Cézanne how to mix colors. And I really still use the same method of mixing colors, of applying the brush stroke just once and then coming back and not picking up the same color, but touching something else inside of the color so that the next stroke is just a little bit different than the first one. So by this way, it creates an incredible vibration of colors.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. ALCALAY: And using small brush and short strokes, which was Pissarro's ideas for Cézanne to use. And I really learned how to be an Impressionist painter really good. As a matter of fact, one day came that - we all used to have to lean our paintings backwards toward the wall. And my teacher was invited to exhibit in some exhibition, so he picked up one of the paintings. And he looked at the painting and he says, "Gee, Albert, when did I paint this painting? I don't remember I painted this painting." I said, "You didn't. I did." And then he found out and says, "Well, Albert, there's nothing more to learn here. You better move away."

And then he had troubles. He had to move. He went back to Paris and lived in Paris there. He really was a liaison for the civil war in Spanish - for the Spanish Civil War. He was in Paris by taking people, as many people for international brigades, to send them to Spain.

MR. BROWN: Oh, he got involved in that through his political -

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. Yeah. He was political all the time. He was always working in politics.

MR. BROWN: Did you enjoy this method of applying paint patiently with small brush strokes?

MR. ALCALAY: I enjoyed very much that. I enjoy very much, and I realize that he was a painter's painter. He was a painter's - he really reacted without any kind of a doctrine or theoretical things. But he was just an instinctual painter. And that's what really made me become the same kind, as I really am an instinctual painter. I react to colors, to light, to forms, as completely by instinct, not thinking of any kind of formalistic explanations and so on. And -

MR. BROWN: How old were you when you were with him?

MR. ALCALAY: I was from 13 till 17, about.

MR. BROWN: Through the high school?

MR. ALCALAY: Through the high school, yeah. Through the *gymnasium*.

MR. BROWN: The *gymnasium*. You had the classical education, then, in the *gymnasium*?

MR. ALCALAY: I have - yes. I have a very good - I had a very good education through the *gymnasium*. I studied Latin for eight years. I studied French for eight years, German for eight years, and studied history a lot, geography, varieties of things. Besides, this movement that I was, it's a very - it's a movement not of the masses of people but of the very few people that can compete by their intelligence. The movement, Zionist movement that I belong, it trained leaders. It did not train masses.

And therefore, while - when I was 16 already, I was already a leader in that movement. And I had a small group of people that I was taking care of, younger people that I had to give twice a week a lecture to them on subjects from sexuality to the history of education to the astronomy to the explanation of the Dora's *New World Symphony* music. So it was a very - I think it was one of the most modern schools that I have been through, being in this movement, because I was constantly reading and studying and transmitting to other people.

MR. BROWN: As you look back, was this education of these younger people by you and then originally of you by others, was this intended in any way to counteract the education you would get in the normal school system?

MR. ALCALAY: No. It was only to fill more than the normal school system, to fill more in the sense of a structural because the *gymnasium* is a very large - it's a very large curriculum because it gives you a vast view of the world from - I don't know, from biology to psychoanalysis, philosophy to genetics. But this one was mostly directed towards the - towards the social sciences, toward the understanding the world, understanding the social structure of the world, understanding economic forces that are leading. It was based on the Marxist - on the Marxist sciences.

MR. BROWN: You mean your *gymnasium*, you're talking about? Or the Zionist -

MR. ALCALAY: No, no. I'm talking about the Zionist movement.

MR. BROWN: I see.

MR. ALCALAY: The *gymnasium* was in the vast knowledge of, you know -

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. ALCALAY: - you study astronomy and you study philosophy, you study chemistry, and varieties of things. It's very vast, so that when you are 18, you don't have more [inaudible] to think because there were no colleges, anyway. You have to go to the university. So you are ready. You know so much of any kind of things that there's no more for you to wander around, to make choices like the kids in college do. They don't know - till they're 24, they don't know what they're going to study. Here you are 18 and you have to go - there is only university waiting for you. So you have to go the university.

MR. BROWN: And university, you've got to make your choice there.

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Because you specialize.

MR. ALCALAY: Sure. I went to - I went - when I was 18, I went to architecture. And in four years, you finish architecture, there's nothing more to go more. That is, you are finished. My wife went to medicine. By 25 - no, by 23 - five years medicine - by 23, you're a finished doctor.

MR. BROWN: Right. Right.

MR. ALCALAY: So it's - somewhere here is another extension of four years of schooling that is not necessary. I don't know where does it go, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: But I think is because the high school is very shallow and very -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: And there's a lot - the tendencies here is towards comfort, toward not working, not toward working.

MR. BROWN: Whereas in the *gymnasium* years -

MR. ALCALAY: That is tough work. It's very hard work.

MR. BROWN: - you worked very hard.

MR. ALCALAY: Eight years of hard work. We have 10 subjects to work. And it's just - it's six days a week, you know. So it was a good education. It really is a good - very good education. As a matter of fact, people who get from *gymnasium*, they enter as advanced students even at Harvard.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. So it was - I had a very good education, besides that I became very curious on varieties of subjects so that I really studied almost everything. I was - as a matter of fact, when my other teacher in painting much, much later, when I was in the concentration camp, saw me reading theory of - Planck's theory and Bohr's theories of atoms, he was surprised. He says, "What are you reading that kind of things?" I said, "I'm interested." And Heisenberg, too. He says, "What the hell are you interested? You're an artist. You have to think about art." I just can't help it. I am very much curious. And sometimes I ask myself if I'm a painter or I'm an intellectual because I am very curious person.

MR. BROWN: In the *gymnasium* system, you worked very hard. But evidently, the way they taught you didn't make you resent any of those subjects. You came to enjoy them.

MR. ALCALAY: Well, I enjoyed some. I did not enjoy all. I am not cut for science, really, so I hated chemistry or botany or zoology. I hated those subjects. But I loved mathematics, for instance, especially when calculus came in. It was almost philosophical. And then I loved philosophy. I loved languages, literatures, history very much, astronomy, and those things. Yes, I did.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Why did you - when you went to the University of Belgrade in 1936, why did you decide to go into architecture?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, you see, I belonged to this Zionist organization that did not allow anybody to go to a university because the idea is that if you go to kibbutz, where is a very hard life, you have to stick to that work. And if you have behind you a diploma, then you can be a little bit in temptation and you can quit the kibbutz and go and pursue your diploma.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you mean as a professional, say?

MR. ALCALAY: Right. So what they really wanted is that you are dedicated fully and that that is no other choice, that you have to burn your bridges behind you.

MR. BROWN: So you in effect broke with them at that point?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, I broke with them at that point. And I had to leave the movement for two months.

MR. BROWN: Why did you do that?

MR. ALCALAY: I was very much attracted by architecture. I was very much - I was painting then, and I was very much attracted to - I was very good in *gymnasium*. I was an excellent painter and draftsman. In *gymnasium*, you have to study art no matter what. There is - the *gymnasium* is such that there is no choices. You can't make like here in high school. At 14, I want to go to humanities or I want to go to sciences. Is nothing there. You've got to study everything.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. ALCALAY: And art, too. I painted every - every year was the drawing course or painting course. And so I wanted to go to architecture. And then I had to - my best friends denounced me - not denounced me, proclaimed me in the movement that I have to leave the movement. I can't because there is no - there are no compromises. And since I was already a head of the movement, then they decided that I could go back to architecture to study architecture, with an idea that I should go to kibbutz and build in Israel for kibbutzim.

MR. BROWN: As long as you would turn it to practical -

MR. ALCALAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: - collective aims.

MR. ALCALAY: Right. Right.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: So I went to architecture. I studied architecture.

MR. BROWN: How was that? What was that like, in Belgrade?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, it was very good. But you have to understand now that Belgrade is considered the most progressive university in Europe after it was called the Moscow of the Balkans. The government was very, you know, bad, conservative, Fascist, and so on. So the young people were rebelling all the time. And there is - there are laws on the constitution that the university is extraterritorial. The police can never enter into the university. And so that -

MR. BROWN: You say it had become one of the best universities in Europe.

MR. ALCALAY: No. It was not. One of the reddest universities, one of the leftist -

MR. BROWN: Oh, one of the reddest. Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: - most leftist universities. And the students really rebelled. And there was rarely that I have finished a full year of school because there was always strikes and -

MR. BROWN: I see. You rarely finished - yes.

MR. ALCALAY: - and machine guns, yeah, and machine guns and, you know, varieties of imprisonments, and so on. Every year.

MR. BROWN: But were you able to pursue to curriculum very well?

MR. ALCALAY: I was able to pursue for a long time. But I was not - I did not finish completely because I had - I had to - I decided that I should get out of Yugoslavia as soon I can because I smelled that there was - the

Fascists are coming more and more. You know, the Nazis came in 1932, and we had about one and a half million Germans inside of Yugoslavia, which has called the *Volksdeutsche*. They were born in Yugoslavia, but they were Germans.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. They were? And then weren't assimilated very well?

MR. ALCALAY: They were, but they were holding on Germany all the time, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And there was a feeling that Yugoslavia is going to join German bloc one day because we really have tremendous separatistic fights. Yugoslavia is an artificial country. Is not a country of one nation. It's - the progressive people are always saying "the peoples of Yugoslavia." The king was saying Yugoslavia. You know, it was made in Warsaw Pact. But Yugoslavia is made out of seven different countries - of Serbia, of Croatia, of Bosnia, of Macedonia, of Slovenia, of Dalmatia, and it's a very - each one has its own history, has its own language, has its own religion.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: So it's very hard to put them together. And now it's a federation. Now can only hold as a federation.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And so there was all this fighting between the Serbs and Croats and the -

MR. BROWN: So that the leftist activities of you students, then, was just another -

MR. ALCALAY: Another, yes.

MR. BROWN: - thing that annoyed the government.

MR. ALCALAY: Very much.

MR. BROWN: Because the government had a very hard job holding the whole federation together as it was.

MR. ALCALAY: Right. Right. Right. Right. So it was very, very hard. It was very tumultuous, very -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: There was a lot of fun. I mean, there was never quiet, quiet place.

MR. BROWN: It was fun for you?

MR. ALCALAY: I mean, it wasn't fun. It was very dangerous. I mean, this is not like this country. If they put you into the prison, I mean, they even don't ask your name. They only cut your hair. And they put you down in the dungeons and you sit there for six months without even uttering your name. They don't even know you are there. Then they start to - and besides, they beat you up so badly that it's really a bad scene. But I have never been in -

MR. BROWN: You were never -

MR. ALCALAY: No, no. I was not.

MR. BROWN: Well, in fact, you say in 1937 -

MR. ALCALAY: I never belonged to any conspiratory organizations.

MR. BROWN: And Zionists weren't singled out?

MR. ALCALAY: No, no. Zionists were -

MR. BROWN: They weren't singled out for -

MR. ALCALAY: No, no. No. No.

MR. BROWN: The government tolerated them?

MR. ALCALAY: Oh, yes. Yes. That was a very - it was a very - kind of an official movement. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Well, you say that in 1937 you went to Paris with some fellow students.

MR. ALCALAY: Yes. In -

MR. BROWN: Was this in the midst of your university years, or is this [inaudible]?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. That was just the beginning of my university. That was a kind of a - my father gave me, as kind of a prize that I finish *gymnasium*. When you finish *gymnasium*, it's called *matura* [phonetic]. It is a big exam after you finish *gymnasium*. They don't just let you just finish. It's a really heavy exam, which I did. And so my father let - gave me to go to Paris on a world exhibition or world exposition there. It was in 1937.

MR. BROWN: Yes. And you went with some friends?

MR. ALCALAY: I went with a group of students. It was a student organization that I went there. And I met my teacher there, Bora Baruh -

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes.

MR. ALCALAY: - who was there, and who was a liaison to bring people. As a matter of fact, from our group that was about 50 people, about 25 people didn't come back.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MR. ALCALAY: They went to Spain. I was very progressive in those - I was tempted. I was tempted because I have - what I saw in Paris, it was not funny. I've seen, you know, the Spanish were beaten up so badly that - Franco was advancing more and more. And all the Spanish soldiers were coming - especially wounded soldiers, were coming to France. And then I heard *La Pasionaria*, the famous leader who just came back from Moscow.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Recently.

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. I heard her. And there were movements to defend the culture from invasion of Fascism. Well, varieties of very progressive writers, like Illya Ellenburg [phonetic] and Stalin and varieties of other people were there. Then I went to the opening unveiling of *Guernica* in the Spanish Pavilion. There was - President Companys was there, the only left from Catalonia. So there were - and, you know, we were running through the streets and yelling, "*des avions pour l'Espana. [Inaudible] pour l'Espana*." planes for Spain and guns for Spain, because nobody was giving, you know. America didn't, and Russians were only supplying whatever they could supply, the Republicans.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: And in the meantime, the Germans took us, and the Italians were just destroying the whole country. And the country was falling apart, in '37 or -

MR. BROWN: Yes. Yes. So you were very - you were probably more aware of these political things than -

MR. ALCALAY: I was very much. And there was - in France was a *front populaire* of Léon Blum, which was also very, very progressive. That was the last one that happened. After that came Daladier, and there was -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: - there was everything gone. You could feel that the Spanish Civil War was kind of a prelude for the war. It was really a prelude for the big war. So I was tempted, but then I was too much nationalist. I was thinking too much of Israel. And I decided to go back to - with my friends.

MR. BROWN: Did you see any - meet any painters or see any paintings that were notable while you were in Paris?

MR. ALCALAY: I was. There was the - that was an incredible shock for me because I lived with Cézanne and Impressionist painters, with Pissarro, Sisley, and so on. And I went to the Museum of Modern Art in Paris and I saw the first Picassos and the first Brachs [phonetic] and the first - I was - you know, I was with Bonnard and those people. But when I saw the Picassos, the destruction, the think [sic], it really struck me incredibly and I started really to think in terms of modern art much more, as a matter of fact.

MR. BROWN: What was your -

MR. ALCALAY: I bought books there, and it was a disorientation. It was - I could not make up what was all about. I just couldn't figure out if those were paintings or those were jokes or - I did not know too much about theoretical things. I was still painting on the basis of my instinctual things.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: And especially, I was in love with Bonnard. I was in love with [inaudible]. But that was the end. That was at the end of my development.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: I think I was already playing around with German expressionists, with Otto Dix and with Corinth and with - I mean, the group - *la seccession group* of Berlin, I didn't get. I didn't get to the real expressionists, Nolde and Kirchner, yet.

MR. BROWN: But the [inaudible].

MR. ALCALAY: But I was there - I remember that I was already - I was painting in Belgrade, and I had friends, and I was discussing with some friends what is this kind of paintings.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] But that still didn't prepare you for Picasso and cubism?

MR. ALCALAY: No. It didn't prepare me. Not at all. Not at all. And absolutely -

MR. BROWN: And what was your reaction? Did you like it, or were you just very [inaudible]?

MR. ALCALAY: I was disoriented. I was just very disoriented and puzzled, the same kind of a puzzle I had as I came to - when I came to this country and I saw the first Jackson Pollocks and de Koonings.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: It was that kind of an - but I was much more prepared for when I came to this country than when I was there. I was painting landscapes and -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: - you know, very nice landscapes, but enough free that I could feel myself that I was free. But it was a real shock to me to see the *Guernica*. First *Guernica* was an incredible shock to me. And I was just there on unveiling it. I just talked to [inaudible] and he was there, and he built the pavilion for that.

MR. BROWN: And what was your - did you think it got his point across very graphically? Did you feel it, feel what Picasso was trying to say?

MR. ALCALAY: No.

MR. BROWN: No?

MR. ALCALAY: No, I did not, no.

MR. BROWN: It was too disorienting?

MR. ALCALAY: It was too disorienting. It was too evocative that I could - that I could place it in the frame of references of my own world, that it was too disruptive, as the painting is, you know. It's much more evocative than it's descriptive. And so I couldn't take it.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] What was the -

MR. ALCALAY: But I was shocked when I came back to Paris. Then I started to look more and more and buy more books about it. I started to look more things. And I was - in a year or two, I already - I wish I had brought Baruh with me, but he - he was in Paris.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: And I -

MR. BROWN: So you were -

MR. ALCALAY: And also I had an incredible - I saw the J.D. Palme [phonetic] or Algerie [phonetic], all these - I saw

a lot of expressionist - impressionist painters and a lot of Monets.

MR. BROWN: Expressionists, yes. Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: And I went very thorough to Louvre and saw all the [inaudible], Rembrandts, and varieties of other people there.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. ALCALAY: But they had passed - they passed by. They did not really register so much. They became a part of culture, I believe -

MR. BROWN: I see.

MR. ALCALAY: - a part of buildup, but nothing that I could find actual for me to work up.

MR. BROWN: So you were - what you were - when you got back, you were working up - you were reading a lot and looking at pictures? You were no longer - you were moving away from the instinctual approach that you'd had till that point?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, yeah and no because I was still painting and I was studying architecture. And in the school of architecture, we had classes of painting and especially of watercoloring.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: And I was doing very beautiful watercolors on an Impressionistic way. And it did not register yet that I would be much more and painter. It didn't register that I would be a painter at all. I was just doing these things for love of doing.

In 1938, I already built up a little group of paintings. And the Jewish community in Belgrade, which takes care also of culture of people, gave me a little studio inside of the community building. And then I became a full-fledged painter of some kind. I had an easel, a big easel, and a palette and all kind of things. And I was going every day there and paint. And I painted a lot of paintings of people, of Gypsies, of street scenes, these kind of things.

MR. BROWN: Not from a picturesque point of view?

MR. ALCALAY: No, no, no. It was - there was real paintings. They were paintings. And as a matter of fact, in 1938 already, I started to exhibit. There was a spring exhibition and fall exhibition in Belgrade, like independence. That was independence in Belgrade. And I was - I exhibited twice. I was very happy to be accepted. It was a big jury, and I was accepted to exhibit in this exhibitions, and it was quite fun. And I met other artists and started to move a little bit among the artists. It was - you know, it was very fulfilling.

MR. BROWN: You weren't very acquainted with other artists till that point?

MR. ALCALAY: No. No, no. No, I was not. But I had a friend - Bora and I had one studio, and there was another couple that had another studio. Both were artists. They were friends for me from school. And he - one is - his name is Celebonovic. He's still in Belgrade now, and he's a critic of art now.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Could you spell his name?

MR. ALCALAY: Aleksa Celebonovic. Aleksa, A-l-e-k-s-a, Celebonovic, C-e-l-e-b-o-n-o-v-i-c. He wrote a nice book that was published by Abrams about kitsch in art, and got a very beautiful review by Hilton Kramer [phonetic]. He started painting with me, but I could have seen that he didn't have a grip as a painter. As a matter of fact, I met him in Rome while I lived in Rome.

MR. BROWN: After World War II?

MR. ALCALAY: After the Second World War.

MR. BROWN: He studied with you before the war. Is that right?

MR. ALCALAY: He was in school with me. We were in school together. But he had a studio, he and another boy, Ivica Ribar [phonetic], who became a hero of Yugoslavia. He was a very - his name is Ivica, I-v-i-c-a, Ribar, R-i-b-a-r. He and his brothers are big heroes of Yugoslavia. They were fighting the Nazis. They were the heads of the partisans and so on. And they were very progressive people. And these two boys were painting in the other studio. We had these two studios. And -

MR. BROWN: Was this in 1938 or so?

MR. ALCALAY: That was in 1938. Right. 1938-39.

MR. BROWN: Yes. And you continued going to university, though, at this time?

MR. ALCALAY: I continued to go to university.

MR. BROWN: And you continued being active in the Zionist organization?

MR. ALCALAY: I was very much, yes. Right.

MR. BROWN: And was that beginning to send people to Israel?

MR. ALCALAY: Oh, yeah. We were sending people to Israel, and I was already working for the illegal emigration. I was learning how to forge passports and varieties of other things that was happened because they already - the amount of Jews that were coming from different countries through Yugoslavia, especially Austrian Jews and Czechoslovakian Jews, in '39, you know, when Chamberlain [inaudible] -

MR. BROWN: Yes. In Czechoslovakia.

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. So it was really quite an active life. I was rarely at home. My parents already conciliated themselves that their son is going to go - reconciled themselves.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Because how were they behaving at this time?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, they were - they understood, and they liked, first of all, I became a leader of some kind, you know. And they already - it was much easier for them that I was chosen by - to be a leader. And my uncle was a big leader of Zionist. He was the head of the Zionist movement in Yugoslavia. And so he supported me, too. They didn't want me to go to Israel, still. They didn't want me to go to. They wanted me to be very active where I was.

And then I went to - I had to go to some kind of - in an agricultural situation. We had an agricultural situation in Yugoslavia that was a replica of a kibbutz.

MR. BROWN: I see.

MR. ALCALAY: So that you passed through that first because the question is: Can you sustain in a collective life? Because kibbutz is a very, very collective unit. You don't own. You don't [inaudible]. You are completely part of the community there. And there are about a hundred people, mostly, 120 people maximum when the kibbutz is full-grown. And can you sustain yourself, not having any private property? Which is not such an easy thing. So you go through this process of passing through this - through this station.

MR. BROWN: It was like a training center.

MR. ALCALAY: It was like a training center. And they - you know, yourself you can feel if you can do it or you can't do it. You know, not only that, you have to, you know, to go into dirt, and you have to do varieties of things. Agricultural thing is not such a - it's easy, you know, to talk about while you are in a city. But boy, when I had to take that junk that - all the stuff, the dung of the horses and things like that, to wash horses -

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. ALCALAY: - into a very kind of a distillation to check up whether can you - you know, how much can you sustain that?

MR. BROWN: Well, what did you conclude?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, I concluded I wanted to work. I really was working very well. I had some jobs - to clean latrines, oh, boy. I smell for a week. All Chanel made [laughs] - with all the Chanel, you know, Chanel 5, the perfume, it didn't help.

[Laughter.]

MR. ALCALAY: I was smelling. So it was - you know, it was an excellent idea, you know, to check you up. And I have been through that.

So that - the activities were all over the place. As a matter of fact, on that - in that time, we decided to really get out of Yugoslavia fast.

MR. BROWN: When was this? About -

MR. ALCALAY: It was about '38, by the end of the '38. '38, yes. Yeah, '38, '39, somewhere there.

MR. BROWN: And why did you decide to get out fast?

MR. ALCALAY: Because it was getting hot. It was getting hot, and we really did not have anything more to do. There was a younger generation already picked up that movement, was holding the movement, you know. What you do is you perpetuate.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: You train a younger generation, and - as I was trained by the older generation.

MR. BROWN: And you were trained, and you were trained to go to Israel. Right?

MR. ALCALAY: Yes. Yes.

MR. BROWN: So it was time to go.

MR. ALCALAY: So we trained - right. So we trained the other generation. They already started to - they were running the movement, you know. And so we were ready to go. Now, you can't go out of Yugoslavia without making a military service. So we had to wait first military service.

MR. BROWN: So you went into that?

MR. ALCALAY: So six of us applied to go military service, and we all got in. And we were all in the one place, in [inaudible], Bosnia.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: You go - you know, you are intellectual so you go to a school of - for officers that is the reserve officers.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Yes. And how - what was that like?

MR. ALCALAY: Which is a nine months, nine months' service.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] And what was that like? Fairly -

MR. ALCALAY: That was horrible. That was absolutely horrible. I couldn't bear to be degraded so much by a sergeant, by a corporal, that can drive you absolutely crazy. And Yugoslav army is, you know, a very backward army in those days.

MR. BROWN: In what way? You mean -

MR. ALCALAY: Well, like the corporal could kill you and no one would have no - any responsibility. Can do any kind of things to you. Anything. And it really - to adjust to that kind of thing was awful, really awful. If I didn't have a girlfriend that I could write to her every day - and then I found another girlfriend in the town that we go every Sunday out so that we could enjoy a little bit the good life. It was just terrible.

And I use all my tricks because even with my - I know how to paint. I know how to draw. And they look for somebody because they needed to illustrate the history of this school. And they hired me to - so I didn't do varieties of other hardships. I was working in the office. And I would from time to time tell them I need a new pen so I would get out and go to town to buy a pen and spend half a day there, you know, having some fun.

But it was awful. It just was a hardest time I had.

MR. BROWN: Were you being trained in any way to be an officer?

MR. ALCALAY: Oh, yeah. I was training to be an officer. First you have to learn how to obey and how to respond. And it was - I have never studied so hard in my life because I was in mountain artillery. So I studied ballistics. I studied physics. I studied statics [sic]. I studied history. I studied all kind of things that was - then I have to study also, you know, riding horses. And we were doing all kind of things on horses, jumping from a horse like Cossacks, you know, from one side to another side.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Had you done some riding before?

MR. ALCALAY: Never did riding in my life.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: Never. And it is one of the coldest areas of Yugoslavia. Cold, incredibly cold. I had always to carry with me a bottle of -

MR. BROWN: Brandy?

MR. ALCALAY: - cognac, like brandy, yeah, so that -

[Laughter.]

MR. ALCALAY: Take a sip. It was very bad. It was very bad, and it was dangerous. If you fall - if you flunk, then you stay another five months in the army and you never become - you can never become an officer. You become a sergeant, maximum. But I made it. I made this effort. I knew I had to get out, and I just -

MR. BROWN: So having done those nine months, you'd satisfied - you were prepared for the reserve army?

MR. ALCALAY: I was prepared. I was already - yeah. I was a lieutenant -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: - for reserve army. And I could get a passport then to get out.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you couldn't even have a passport till then?

MR. ALCALAY: You couldn't get even a passport before. Young people were very dangerous to give the - they gave the - I have a passport to go to France when I was 18, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, with the student group. Right?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. Yeah. But it was related also to get a certificate that you can go to Israel only with a certificate that was issued by the British Empire. You know, that was a mandate.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: Now, unless you go illegally to Israel, which was very dangerous, too, very hard. I used to help a lot of people.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: But it was very, very hard.

MR. BROWN: And how would you get that certificate?

MR. ALCALAY: You get the certificate because you're a Zionist. You get through the Zionist organization.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: You get a certificate that you go to Israel. They were issued -

MR. BROWN: Did you [inaudible]?

MR. ALCALAY: - they were issuing varieties for young people. But they would always - the British Empire was always checking up very carefully how many people enter into Israel, you know, because they were - the British colonialism was on the basis of *divide et impera*, which means divide and then rule.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Right.

MR. ALCALAY: So they were putting a lot of Jews - not a lot of Jews, amount of Jews - to satisfy the world. But they were also allowing some Arabs to get in so they would always keep the balance. If they give - if they see a Jew, they were forbidden - the Jews were forbidden to have any arms in Israel. But they were giving arms to Arabs so that Arabs would attack the Jews. And the Jews, they have arms. Illegally they kept arms. So they were fighting, but then the British army come in and would arrest, you know. So they would make noises and they would keep quiet at the same time.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. BROWN: Now, in this Zionist activity, your parents supported you. What was their attitude these years during - to your becoming a painter, your interest in art? Did they share much of that?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, my parents were - you know, in Jewish tradition is always an idea that sons should always have much more than their parents had. And always there is this idea of sending sons to become doctors or to become intellectuals, to become - to achieve certain kind of a thing because being Jews, being always, you know, persecuted, that was the only affirmations that they could have to become doctors, to become some kind of contributors to the culture of some kind.

And since my father was - all his life was dreaming of becoming a journalist and was a poet, right, wrote a lot of poetry, was interested a lot in theater and knew French literature by heart. But unfortunately, he became a bank director because he had young brothers that had to go to school and had older brothers that were enrolled in university. They have to be supported in some way. So there was not room for all of them to go to - continue to go to school.

But then when I came, it really thought that there would be perpetuation somewhere of his dreams into my dreams. And so he supported me very much to do any kind of artistic endeavor. He paid me the whole trip to go to Paris the first time. He was always giving me money for any kind of artistic things, buying me all materials and so on. He would make jokes, for instance, sometimes because the art material was always very expensive. And he would always say, "Why my son didn't choose to be a poet? He would just need a piece of paper and a pencil instead of all that kind of" -

[Laughter.]

MR. ALCALAY: But he was very generous.

MR. BROWN: But he felt that by becoming an artist, this would be a contribution to the cultural and intellectual life?

MR. ALCALAY: Yes. Yes. And it would be also something very different from the family tradition because there was in the family - they were all intellectuals. There were - he had about 11 brothers, no sister. There were two doctors, two lawyers, one engineer, two diplomats, and three bankers. So there was no - you know, there were not any merchants. They were not working in some kind of a bis things. They all finished some schools.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And they were pretty intellectual in the sense of contribution, they were doing all these kind of things. So my father thought that it would be - I believe he thought that that would be something different in the family Alcalay that happens. And as a matter of fact, even my uncles were telling me, "Well, we didn't have an artist yet in the family."

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] And they didn't mind how you painted or -

MR. ALCALAY: No. They didn't mind anything. They didn't mind anything, how I painted or whatever. There was no - they were very proud, and my uncle bought me two paintings to encourage me. And then my other uncle worked in the Jewish community that they bought a couple of my paintings, too. And I'm sure that he was someone there when they gave me the studio. There was a very nice feeling about that. They supported as much as I - I did not know I'll be an artist. I did not know at all. I didn't even think about that. I was thinking, I will finish architecture, then go to kibbutz and work as a worker.

MR. BROWN: And they supported that as well?

MR. ALCALAY: They did not support that. They did not. They were real Zionists. They did not. They wanted me to talk to other guy to go to Israel, but not me, you know [laughs].

MR. BROWN: I see. Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: But there was a clash there. That was already a clash there between me and my parents, and my uncles, too.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] But when you finished your military service -

MR. ALCALAY: When I finished my military service, the situation became hot. You see, I learned a lot from my father. I really learned. I learned the love of music a lot. I was always with music. We always had music at home. And my father was always taking my mother to theater, to opera, and so on. And he encouraged me. I went already - well, by '38, I already have seen any opera possible, and music. I was a whistler. I can whistle a lot. I only stopped playing the piano - the violin because my finger didn't work. I have a broken finger. And I have a

very good pitch.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And so they changed my violin to the right-hand side. I was playing with the right hand the violin. But it was going for a while. Then when I had to move my bow fast, I'm not a lefty so I couldn't do that. I stop it.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And I concentrated on doing paintings and doing designs, of all kind of designs, of architectural designs, renderings and this kind of things. But 1939 already became real hot. The war started. The refugees were coming by hundreds into Belgrade. You see, Belgrade is on a cross - what do you call it -

MR. BROWN: A route or route. Right?

MR. ALCALAY: Right. The Orient Express goes to Istanbul -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: - and the other one goes to Athens. And it was - it's a very big kind of a cross -

MR. BROWN: Crossroad.

MR. ALCALAY: Crossroad. Right. And Danube is there.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: So the refugees were just coming from all paths, especially from Czechoslovakia and from Germany a lot, and then from Hungary, and then from -

MR. BROWN: Did your friends and your family - were they pretty aware of what was going to happen?

MR. ALCALAY: We were very aware. We were very, very aware. Especially my father was very much aware.

MR. BROWN: Because of his connections in banking?

MR. ALCALAY: No. Because he was - he was seeing in different organizations what was happening to the Jews that were coming. He was very much - he was very much in the public life, and he knew what was happening a lot. Besides, he was also - he was working on the stock exchange, on an arbitrage, which is called arbitrage, that is - I never could figure out that. He was sitting on the - with four telephones on his desk. And he would call Sydney, Australia and check up how much is a dollar there. Then he would call Milan and check up how much is a dollar there. And he would buy in Sydney and sell in - and there was never any transaction or any material.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And yet the money would have come. And I could never understand how he was making money.

[Laughs]

MR. ALCALAY: So he understood, you know, market [inaudible] to the crisis, and so on and so on. And we were listening very carefully radios. We understand German and so on. We were listening to Hitler every day on the radio. And, you know, he was yelling against Jews more and more. And the Jews were coming and telling their stories and so on. And I was working in the organization for the refugees, and taking care - I was working in the center for Jewish communities of Yugoslavia, all Jewish communities of Yugoslavia. It's a very large organization that took care of varieties of things. But we were also working on illegal things, illegal sneaking of Jews by boats to Israel.

MR. BROWN: To Israel?

MR. ALCALAY: By boats, by trains. We knew all the routes, especially route from Istanbul going to - Taurus Express, that goes through Asia Minor.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] The Taurus Express. Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. It goes through Tehran. So I was very active in that organization and work. And I will tell you stories when we get later on in - when are we getting in -

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. BROWN: So you were very involved with these refugee organizations?

MR. ALCALAY: I was very much involved with refugees.

MR. BROWN: You were interviewing and also arranging for illegal -

MR. ALCALAY: Arranging, right.

MR. BROWN: - immigration?

MR. ALCALAY: Arrange also living, and helping them hygienically, and bringing doctors, and varieties of things that were [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: This was all happening by late 1939?

MR. ALCALAY: That was - this was all happening by late '39 because then the war started, really. And we knew that Yugoslavia is going to be neutral for a long time. But we were also very much afraid that Yugoslavia might join the Axis because the king was not there. King was young. He was still not of age. And he had an uncle who was - who was a tutor who was taking care of the country.

MR. BROWN: Yes. What were these uncle's leanings?

MR. ALCALAY: His uncle's leanings were towards Germany. But it was still holding. Yugoslavia was still holding neutral. And there was a hope in between all of us that it would stay neutral for a long time. At that time, Yugoslavia had to - it's a very interesting element there that you should know. Yugoslavia had a - that was the only country that did not recognize Soviet Russia because of the relationship between the king, the dynasty we have with the king - with the czar. And there is - through the whole history, Yugoslavia - Serbia was always with Russia. You know, it's a Slavic country.

MR. BROWN: Slavic.

MR. ALCALAY: But they could not recognize it. And in '39 they were really compelled to ask Russia for trades and so on. And Russia said, we'll establish the relationship only if you leave a few leaders of the Communist Party out of jail. And there was one man by the name Moshe Pijade -

MR. BROWN: How do you spell that?

MR. ALCALAY: M-o-s-h-e P-i-j-a-d-e - who was the head of the Communist Party and who was a painter also, who was about 15 years already in jail. And they released him. And the reason I'm mentioning is that he was a man that really started the partisan role. That was not Tito. He organized the whole partisan role when the Nazis came in invasion in 1941. And he is the brain of the whole movement of the partisans. Tito was far away.

MR. BROWN: But in '39, he was released?

MR. ALCALAY: He was released. And [inaudible] there was his show. There was his show also. They allow him to have a show because he was painting. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Oh, because he was painting. Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: And he was Jewish. And he was a very, very - man of incredible culture, who knew about 14 languages and was translating and so on. And that was some kind of an element that was somewhere balancing inside of the country that the Communists were still very strong on one side.

MR. BROWN: Was this cause for hope during the - in late '39 and early '40?

MR. ALCALAY: There was a hope, yeah. There was some kind of a hope. The people were thinking in terms of that there is some organized element that is part nationalistic and part is international, international.

MR. BROWN: Because you were - otherwise, the ties with Western Europe were severed, weren't they?

MR. ALCALAY: Were very much severed. Right.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. And again, the national government, though, was maintaining its neutrality?

MR. ALCALAY: Right. It was maintaining neutrality but was leaning toward Italy and towards Germany.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And towards - he only broke a pact with - when Czechoslovakia - we have a small *entente*, which was called Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. But it was - Czechoslovakia was gone already. Then we had another *entente* with Yugoslavia and Greece, which was still holding. But then in Hungary was already a Fascist government, Horthy. In Romania was a Fascist king also.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: In Bulgaria was also a Fascist king, Boris. So Yugoslavia was surrounded by Fascists, all around except Greece. And so it's - and Albania.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And it was very hard. It was very hard. Yugoslavia is a country surrounded by eight countries.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: It has complicated border. So it was - it kept neutrality, but it was boiling. It really was boiling inside. And people were very, very edgy. And I was trying to tell to my family, my father, to transfer the money, all our money - we had quite a bit of money - to Israel. I could have done that because we had a lot of people that were sent from Israel to work, and so it can be done.

MR. BROWN: Oh, there were couriers come back?

MR. ALCALAY: There were couriers. Right. And my father just - they were all so - you know, so sunk into Yugoslavia - you know, they were born and their father and grandfather - they could never believe that something can happen. They says, all right, will happen something, but then government will return the money back. What happen in the First World War, you know, everything was destroyed by Austrians, but the government went to France. France was an ally and help, and everything was restored after the war - money, you know, accounts. Everything was restored.

MR. BROWN: Even though your father was interviewing and meeting all these refugees -

MR. ALCALAY: Still didn't believe. Still - he believed. He believed. But my uncles didn't believe at all. My uncles didn't believe at all. And I had to be - I had to interrupt studies. There was no more studies because also the strikes started. The university was interrupted and closed and so on.

MR. BROWN: What were they striking at the university about?

MR. ALCALAY: They were striking because they wanted to get more freedom. There was less and less freedom. The university already started - there was already what is called [speaks in Serbian], which is they were counting how many minorities can enter into the universities, especially not the Jews, already in '39. As a matter of fact, when I entered the army, I had to make an exam if I know Serbian enough.

Because I entered the army, the second day the commander came in and says, "All right. Raise up whoever belongs to the minorities." So I got up. There were about nine Jews and other minorities. There were other minorities, Hungarians and Germans and so on. But they were afraid is they didn't want people who are not close to the Serbian soil to become leaders to run the army. And you have - Yugoslavia is constructed in such a way you have a lot of Germans. You have a lot of Hungarians that don't even speak real Serbian, good language, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: So we had to make an exam in evening. Me, I'm an academic. I have to make an exam, and the guys ask me, "What do you write better, in Cyrillic alphabet or in the Latin alphabet?" Because in Yugoslavia, you use both.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: It was ridiculous to me. I said, "I write one or another the same way."

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: So we had to make these exams.

MR. BROWN: But you proved to them that you were perfectly fluent in Serbian?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. Right. But my name was Alcalay. You have to understand, there are two kind of Jews,

Sephardic Jews and Ashkenazi Jews. The Sephardic Jews were those that lived a long, long time - or I think we are earlier on Balkans than the Serbs. And so we are close to the country. But anybody who is called Bernstein or Weinstein or things like that -

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: - they are suspicious in Yugoslavia because they are newcomers. They're coming from German stock some way.

MR. BROWN: Right. Right.

MR. ALCALAY: And so they all didn't let them finish to become officers. They rejected them as officers.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: They had to go to be - they can be sergeant, maximum.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But you, from a Sephardic family -

MR. ALCALAY: Oh, yeah. I was Sephardic. I didn't have any problems. But it started to be very edgy, you know, with the anti-Semitism. And as a matter of fact, I remember that I was giving speeches, a lot of speeches, in those days. And even Jews started to assimilate, to get around. And I gave a big speech once that I almost was killed. I said, when the ship starts to sink, the first that are escaping are the rats. And I was just pounding on those Jews that were starting to get Christian names, that started to change their names and get religious and so on. They were just afraid that the Nazis would come. And they thought they would save their property by being - you know, having a Serbian name. They didn't know that the Nazis were checking up four generations back.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: Well, anyway, I had to go to make a military service another time, reserve exercises.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Was this about 1940?

MR. ALCALAY: 1940. Right. I went to make exercises back in the same place that I was studying to be - and I had to do it twice. Twice I had to go there and to become - to see - that they can see that I'm an officer, that I can lead a battery.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. How did that go?

MR. ALCALAY: It went very well. It went very well. It was boring, you know, doing nothing, more or less. You live in a hotel and just being an officer.

MR. BROWN: Were you concerned about the army's being prepared or anything like that?

MR. ALCALAY: I didn't care.

MR. BROWN: You didn't care?

MR. ALCALAY: I didn't care less. I never cared - I never [inaudible]. I never had a Serbian friend. I don't - I didn't think that was my country, to tell you the truth. I never was associated with Yugoslavia or with Serb. My ideas were always either to get out to Europe somewhere, to live outside - I was thinking - I was on the margin of culture. It was a lot of culture then, but I was already thinking of higher cultures - Paris, Rome, you know. And I was speaking already French and German. I knew a lot about the world. I was reading always French papers and so on.

MR. BROWN: Yes. So you weren't really too concerned about the fate of Yugoslavia?

MR. ALCALAY: I was -

MR. BROWN: Except that you were still there?

MR. ALCALAY: Yes. I wasn't considered [sic] as part of - no. I was considered about the fate of Yugoslavia. But I wasn't considered in minuscule - if the army is going to work or whatever it is.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: I was reading things like, you know, whatever, what was going to happen. And I knew that I would have to go to the war if I have to because I already became an officer. And - but I really - I was detached. I was

much more involved with the Israelis. I knew the Israeli geography, the Israeli - I know everything that in Israel is happening. I knew Israel more than I knew Yugoslavia. And I was participating even mentally just what was happening in Israel. Oh, and I speak Hebrew, too. So I was reading Israeli papers and so on.

Well, that was 1940. You know, '40, those days were tough. All the meeting - friends were meeting. And it - we smell the war is here. We really smell the war is here. And in one moment - well, that was - that was March 27th of 1941 - I woke up in the morning, I look through the window, and I see two machine guns is just straight looking into my house, and with army behind that. I open the radio. The king proclaim.

What happen is two days before, the king's uncle join the Axis. Yugoslavia had to join the Axis. Hitler push it so hardly, so Yugoslavia had to join the Axis. And it was terrible. We were sold. In other words, Yugoslavia became a Fascist country - Rome, you know, Berlin, Tokyo, and Belgrade. And it was just terrible. The people were just crying, and it was a terrible tragedy. And it was a terrible tragedy, I forgot to mention, when Czechoslovakia fell. The university closed, and I remember we were all crying.

But that time, two days later the reaction became so powerful that was a revolution, that when the guns were looking - it was 27 of March. It was a revolution. The king took the command, threw his uncle out of the power, and proclaimed himself a king, cut out the council, the Axis.

MR. BROWN: The Fascist council? Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: The Fascist council. And a whole country went to the street. And it was incredible to see clerical people and Communists together running on the street and yelling. It's better - [speaks in Serbian], which means it's better the war than pact with Germany. It was an incredible revolution. It was an upsurge of people all over the country. I ran like crazy through the streets, and I ran with my camera and I shoot a lot of pictures. As a matter of fact, in one moment I almost was lynched because I went to a huge square where there was a - the center of German activities, the tourist offices and all kind of things there. And the - you know, the people entering and started to throw things out of - dismantled all these offices.

MR. BROWN: The offices.

MR. ALCALAY: All Germans were thrown out. All Germans were thrown out. And they were all throwing down this, you know, furniture and typewriters, all kind of things. On top of all that, they throw the German flag and Hitler's portrait. And the crowd was incredible. And I was on top of the monument of the horse, of the man on the horse. I was shooting photographs all around because I wanted to do it for the students, for the student press.

At one moment, somebody from the mob was incredible, started to yell, "There is a Nazi! There is a German photographing for the German press!" Boy, that brought me down. And the crowd was just wild.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: I thought I will be killed. Finally, the police appeared. They were tearing me apart. I couldn't even reach my - to tell them that I'm Jew, first of all.

[Telephone rings, tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. ALCALAY: I couldn't even reach my pocket to pull out my ID to show it to them. Finally appeared a policeman there, and he's one of the - you know, policemen are real peasants. He says, "What's the matter with you? What is it about?" Push the crowd around. So he didn't even ask. He took my camera, which is a beautiful Leica with big telephoto. He put it on the floor with his boot. Zoom, he just flipped it up complete. Then he start to ask questions [laughs].

MR. BROWN: He just reacted from [inaudible]?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. And then I show it to him and I said, "I'm a photographer for the students and I wanted to" - the crowd already understood that they - I was shaken completely. I really was shaken. I thought I would get killed, really. And then I continued to yell around. The whole night I was yelling through the streets. It was a jubilation. It was an incredible jubilation. And I already accumulated such a hate for Germans that it was beautiful to see all Germans leaving the country.

MR. BROWN: This didn't include the *Volksdeutsche*, though, the -

MR. ALCALAY: It include the *Volksdeutsche* more than anything.

MR. BROWN: Oh, so millions - hundreds of thousands were -

MR. ALCALAY: Hundred thousand. The crowd, that was already a chaos. On the [inaudible], on the roads, was

already chaotic. People started to leave. And not only these people, but rich people started to leave. It was quite a day, 27 of March.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And we knew. They put up a big pile of these things on the square, and then they put a fire. And they -

MR. BROWN: Yeah. The bonfire, yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: The bonfire. And they burn this. And that was something that we know that Hitler is going to - is going to punish Belgrade by some reason.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: That never happen before.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And we knew the war is coming fast. I told to my father, get move out. I told to my uncles, move out, as there was still possibility of moving.

MR. BROWN: Did they have some faith that the young king could -

MR. ALCALAY: They still had some faith that with king, that would be organized. And there would be - if they escape, it would be organized like in First World War, you know.

MR. BROWN: Did they have a fairly good idea, as you look back, as to how strong Yugoslavia was or how weak?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, it was not bad. It was strong. It had a lot of army. It had a lot of ammunition.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: But what we did not know is that it had a fifth column that was very developed by *Volksdeutsches*. You know what fifth column is?

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. ALCALAY: It's a -

MR. BROWN: Sure. On the inside.

MR. ALCALAY: It's inside. Right. Right. And I will tell you this just in a second.

And so I went home and I knew something is coming. And sure enough, in two days I already got a card for - what you call it?

MR. BROWN: For the army?

MR. ALCALAY: For the army.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Calling you up?

MR. ALCALAY: Mobilization.

MR. BROWN: Mobilization.

MR. ALCALAY: Calling me mobilization. And I - my house is - I have an apartment, and I have to open the - you know, I take an elevator. And the elevator is made out of those doors that are, you know, closing and opening the door.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And I was so much already thoughtful, I got this card and I was reading the card. And I open the door and I was neglecting too much, and I put my finger in. And here the door breaks - close my finger. And I was already wounded before even the war started.

[Laughter.]

MR. ALCALAY: Naturally, I was immediately called, and everybody was called. Three of my uncles were called. And I had idea of the war, like the First World War. You know, I saw that. I thought I will sit in a ditch for long time and so on. So since I was an officer, I put up a big trunk, you know, with a lot of things - another camera, a lot of films, all kind of things I thought will be a - you know, for a long time, and I will sit in a ditch.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And sure enough, I had a long time to find out I was sent down to south, to Macedonia. That was my unit there. And it took me about three days to find the unit, which was already 5th of April. And I was then in the bivouac, outside of a small town which is called Shtip.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Bivouac, you mean?

MR. ALCALAY: Bivouac. Bivouac.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And my commander was a Croatian, and all my soldiers were Macedonians, almost not knowing how to write or to read.

MR. BROWN: So you two were the only - you were the non-locals?

MR. ALCALAY: No. No. The battery is composed of a commander that is a captain -

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: - of lieutenant. No, something between the lieutenant and the captain.

MR. BROWN: A major?

MR. ALCALAY: No. There is something - we have an over-lieutenant. We have an over-lieutenant and lieutenant. There was an over-lieutenant, and I was a lieutenant. And there were sergeants, and there was about 120 people of the battery and about 60 mules and horses and - it was a mountain howitzers. You know howitzers, what's called the guns that are -

MR. BROWN: The howitzers. Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: Howitzers. Howitzers. And so we were there, and at 6th of April we wake up in the morning and there's an incredible amount of airplanes with - in air. They were all going to Belgrade to bombard Belgrade. It was an incredible bombardment of Belgrade. It was a declaration of war. They killed about 30,000 people on the bombardment.

MR. BROWN: In the bombing?

MR. ALCALAY: They destroy half of the Belgrade. And commander comes to me and tells me, "The war is starting." Next thing that we hear it, we get a call on the telephone. We have to go to the - immediately to the Bulgarian border, which is about 18 hours of forced march. And I already started to think intelligently, how the hell we have to go? It is - first of all, artillery goes only by night. It doesn't go by day because it's a long line on the road. The airplanes can bombard us. And I tell this to my commander.

He says, "No. The order is the order. We got to go." And it was terrible, just a terrible march to get to this border there. And when we arrive there, the general sent us back. Already started the fifth column confusion.

MR. BROWN: The fifth column did this?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. The fifth column did that.

MR. BROWN: That general was part of it?

MR. ALCALAY: The general was not part of it, but somebody was giving an order in his name.

MR. BROWN: I see. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And that started the confusion. Now, I would stop here because that is the beginning of the war.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. BROWN: This is the second interview with Albert Alcalay. This is January 26, 1979.

Okay. You were telling me last time, Mr. Alcalay, about the first days of your involvement in the war. Can you maybe continue this? You just explained how, very early, there were signs of sabotage of your munitions. Can you explain that? And then tell me now what happened next after this.

MR. ALCALAY: Well, what happened was that we had to return back to our own position. And it was another forced march with the whole battery already disrupted by the varieties of bombardment from the air and disruption from the - seeing the other parts of the army turning back. There was kind of a confusion on the road. One army was going ahead. One army was returning back. It was just terrible. I remember in one moment I saw an army general, wrapped in the Yugoslav flag, sitting and crying. And that was just so demoralizing for soldiers that it - we knew that something is going to happen inside of the army.

So we returned back to the position, and it was around this town, which is called Shtip - it's in Macedonia - which was burning completely. And in one moment my commander, who was a Croatian, gave me an order to go and find a position to place the whole battery. And I went with my horse to one area, and it was about 3:00 in the morning. I looked around to see where I can place the whole battery, four guns. And one moment a soldier came and started to yell on me, "Get out! Get out! This is an ammunition depot! Is just going to blow out!" And boy, I just hit my horse with all my might and started to gallop as fast as I can.

In one moment, the explosion was incredible. I think I - I thought I was in the air, flying. I caught by the lamppost and was holding the lamppost, being on the horse, together. And then it passed. And then I came back and I just objected to my commander that he should have known where he sent me because I could have really gone.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. And what did he say?

MR. ALCALAY: He didn't say anything. He says, "It's a war. We don't know what's going on," and so on. So then I placed my position of my battery in one - we got direction from where the enemy is coming. We already were getting some shellings from the enemy. So I made my - I put my battery on the position, and we started already to organize or get informations by radio where the enemy is. And so I already started to show my skill in ballistics and strategy.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And started to make calculations and to send to the - to start to shoot. It was just on the road, around the corner, were coming things, German tanks. And I was letting them come in, into the road, so that few can come. And then I was shooting. And I really hit six tanks before they discovered - before they sent a - there was some kind of a tiny little light we saw in the air. And we were watching light that was coming bigger and bigger and bigger. In one moment it just lighted, and lighted the whole battery. And they really discovered where we were.

And the next moment, the barrage was so dense that it was impossible to stay on one place with the battery. And that moment, it happened something really bad. My commander disappeared, who was a Croat. He was a captain. A lieutenant, higher lieutenant, disappeared. He was also a Croat. And the battery was composed mostly of Macedonians, who immediately took their hats, and they - which has a white lining, and they turn it upside down and they surrender. They just went to surrender to the Germans because they didn't want to fight. They were belonging mostly to the Bulgarian section, which Bulgaria or which Macedonia already was eyeing to get with Bulgaria together.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Which was with Germany. Bulgaria and Germany, yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And Bulgaria - which was with Germany. So they surrendered. And I was seeing that I'm remaining along with about 10 Serbs, 10 or 12 Serbs. That was all. And down the hill I see the Germans are already climbing up the hill to get us. So I just gave an order to soldiers, to the Serbian soldiers, to destroy the - there is one element on the gun that has to be destroyed so the gun cannot be used. So they took that and put through in the big mud so it drowned in the mud.

And I said, "Let's escape now. There's nothing we can do." And that was a terrible escape march. We were climbing up this mountain, and the Nazis were behind. We almost heard them yelling on us and shooting.

MR. BROWN: You were armed, were you? You had small arms?

MR. ALCALAY: We were armed, yeah. I had gun. I had my own, my own revolver, and the soldiers had their own guns. But we escape somehow too much to abysses, to varieties of earth formation. We somehow escape. It was still night. And we thought now we'll see if we can cross some lines and find our way to join our unit somewhere. We did not know that we were already occupied, that all around us were Germans. So we arrived to a main road, which was already filled up with tanks. But it was night, very deep, dark night.

So we sneaked out. There was no - there were just tanks going. We had to cross the road to be able to get into the river there - there was a river - and to cross the river, and somehow we thought we will get into the - into some of our units. And what happened was that we were just going along the tanks, one by one, and then slipped from the other side of the road and then run down into the ditch. And we succeeded to there. Then we had to go to the river, which was Bregalnica River, which is a very, very deep and fast river. And, you know, it was just to our throat.

MR. BROWN: To your chins, nearly?

MR. ALCALAY: To our chin.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: We were going slowly, holding the guns. Almost looks like those people who almost in the western movies, you know how -

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. ALCALAY: And then we moved to, and finally we were so exhausted until we found a peasant's house where we enter and ask for some hospitality.

MR. BROWN: And they gave it to you?

MR. ALCALAY: They gave us to we could sleep there, rest and sleep.

MR. BROWN: Were you still in the Macedonian section?

MR. ALCALAY: We were in Macedonian section. That was just - we move a few kilometers only. Then what happened was that next morning, we had to move to - we wanted to go to a city, to a town, where we knew that our arm was. We thought. We thought.

MR. BROWN: You thought they might be there? Right.

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. And so we asked for a carriage and some kind of transportation from this peasant. And peasant didn't want to give us anything, was really, you know, watching his property. And that was the first time that I have to take my gun, and I put my gun on his head. I said, look. I blow your head if you don't give me a horse and a carriage. And finally he gave me. I told him, he'll come with us and take it back after. It doesn't - we are not going to appropriate it. We're just going to use it, and he can come till a certain point and transport us, and then come back.

And he did that. And we went to the road. And finally, in one moment, we just hit the German patrol, which was patrolling and blocking the road. And that was it. We were caught as prisoners of war. And we were immediately searched. My camera was taken from me. When I had values, it was taken from me. The only thing that it was not - they couldn't find it, it was those Napoleons that my father gave me.

MR. BROWN: Yes. The gold coins, yes.

MR. ALCALAY: The gold coins. I had them in a big here, close to me, and they didn't see that, and my watch that I had. They didn't see that.

And so we were just caught as prisoners of war and brought back to a town which is called Kumanovo.

MR. BROWN: How do you spell that?

MR. ALCALAY: K-u-m-a-n-o-v-o, where I really was - when I was making exercises as an officer, I was called hr. So I went back to the same town.

MR. BROWN: You were familiar with it?

MR. ALCALAY: Yes. And we were brought into a big school where there were a lot of other prisoners of war there. So I immediately adjusted myself to being a prisoner of war, and I knew that I had the friends in Kumanovo because there were some Greek friends with whom I have lived while I was in exercises. And I made somehow connection with them, and they came to visit me. Naturally, I was inside of the fence and they were outside of the fence, which what was very interesting is that the population is - was very friendly and wanted really to help all these prisoners of war. We were soldiers and officers. Everybody was together in this - in this school.

And the population from outside were trying to throw food and bread and things to us. But the police was so

hated in Yugoslavia that even when they were prisoners of war with us - there were policemen also, not only soldiers but also policemen -

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. ALCALAY: - the population, when it was throwing - when they were throwing this food, they would say, "Don't give to the policeman. Just for soldiers."

Well, it was really very bad in that - well, I wouldn't call it camp. It's not a camp. It was a big, huge school with grounds where these -

MR. BROWN: The Germans were the soldiers who were guarding you?

MR. ALCALAY: Germans were the soldiers, yes.

MR. BROWN: Were they very brutal?

MR. ALCALAY: They - well, I will tell you what happened to me, especially. It was very brutal for me. We lived in very bad - under very bad conditions, hundreds of us sleeping on the floor, one on top of the other. The Germans were holding outside. They were guards for the outside. The inside guards were Bulgarians, and they were worse than Germans. They did not even allow us to go to the bathroom at night, and it was just terrible.

Then we got officers together somehow and immediately, you know, the officer corps started to organize itself. We made some - you know, some units, and we had the command there. Everything - it was all army, but now it was army prisoners -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: - so prisoners of war. But we still had our units and the command and -

MR. BROWN: but you thought you needed to do this to be able to -

MR. ALCALAY: We thought we needed to do it to be able to present ourself to the Germans and to have some kind of a privileges.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: There were generals. There were varieties of - you know, of officers of all kind. And so we sent a delegation. We asked that the Bulgarians were removed and that the Germans come in and they be the guards inside of the camp, too. And so they removed the Bulgarians because the Bulgarians were really wild. They were absolutely wild. They didn't respect any Geneva conference, didn't know anything about.

And in the lifestyle that would go on in that camp, the food was terrible, the hygienic conditions worse. And I was trying always to hide my gold and my watch. And also already, I had very beautiful boots. One of the Germans already eyed my boots, and one day came, took my boots, and gave me some bad shoes, three, four numbers bigger than I had. They didn't care less.

I started already to make some sketches - people cleaning themselves, taking the fleas out of themself. You know, it was a lot of varieties of pictorial situations there that I could really draw.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: I got some paper and I do this things, this scenes that -

MR. BROWN: Did you do this to keep up your morale, do you think, or you were genuinely curious?

MR. ALCALAY: No. I was interested. No. I had a pretty high morale because I really was, you know, grinding my teeth and I was just holding very - I was just mad that they caught me.

MR. BROWN: Right. You [inaudible].

MR. ALCALAY: And I was just thinking very actively how to get out in some way or another. At one moment, it looked like the Croatians that were also some officer inside of the officers is an *agent provocateur* inside. It looks like one denounce me, that I was Jewish. And in that moment, I already knew I met several Jewish soldiers. There were about six, seven of them, of officers of some kind.

I was called to the office. I knew something is going to happen to me. And on my way to the office, I met Michael Mandel [phonetic] of the unit, who was a completion from Belgrade. I gab in one moment that gold, those 50

coins of gold, and I gave it to him. I said, "Keep it. It's better for you than for the Germans." Because I had a promotion hat something is going to happen to me. And he took those 50 coins of gold.

I enter into the office there where there were a lot of Gestapos inside, and there were three of our army generals, Yugoslav generals there. And there was on the floor a lot of broken or - I don't know if they were broken but, you know, machine guns, varieties of ammunition, lots of weapons that were - you know, hardware was - the one German grabbed me -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: - and hit me, and then started immediately to take all my stuff that I have, to search all my pockets. I was so smart and also so connected with myself that even in that moment, I pick up my watch and I hold it in my hand. And I was showing them all from my pocket where it was, but I was still holding my - then I move into my other hand then, and showing from my other pocket. And then when they were finish, I took my watch and I put it back in my hand - in my pocket.

They didn't look that if I have some tattoos around my hand. And then they started to beat me with butts, and threw me down on those machine guns. And they hit me in my kidneys. And it was just terrible. It was so abrupt and so immediate that it took me a little while until I got back to myself. They put me up in the - I was already bloody and so on, and they took me to some basement. And they open the door, and it was complete black, complete pitch dark, and just they threw me in. And I didn't know where I was. I was searching around slowly. Couldn't see one damn thing.

At once I hear some voices inside. Then I started slowly to walk through, and I met these. There were three people there, three persons, but they were from the - they escape from the prison. They were murderers. During the war, when it happened, they escaped the prison. They caught them and they put them back in somewhere until they find the prison. But they're going to put them in the prison. They were real murderers, on their own life.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Real criminals.

MR. ALCALAY: Criminals, right. But they were very nice to me. They approach me: "What's the matter with you? What's happening?" And so on and so on. And I told them the story. And it was really pitch dark. And we were sitting and talking there. There was no food. Cold. Dark.

MR. BROWN: This was April, wasn't it?

MR. ALCALAY: This was in April, yes.

MR. BROWN: It was still cold?

MR. ALCALAY: It was very cold because it was snowing. Yes, as a matter of fact, it was snowing. It was strange. It was snowing. After the war, after I think some April was the war, in about 10th of April it was snowing.

So at one moment the Gestapo came, two soldiers came in, and came straight to me with a big flashlight going straight into my eyes, shooting into my eyes, one guy. Another guy had a stick and was hitting me and was yelling, "Loss! Loss! Loss! Loss!"

MR. BROWN: Meaning what?

MR. ALCALAY: Meaning there is some word - I forget what it is. But it's something very bad. And I was trying to protect myself from the light on one side and from the hitting on the other side. And they were coming every two hours. Every hour, every two hours they would come back , beating me. And that took about 10 days, giving us only water and bread.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. ALCALAY: - put some cold pads on me, you know, tried to help me as much as they can. And I was feeling that my eyes were bothering me very much from the light to the dark, from the light to the dark. It was powerful light.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: Then at once, after 10 days, they came. They pull me out. They brought me on the plain sun. It was 12:00 noontime. And they just put me out on the sun, threw me out on the sun. And I fell. I fainted. The sun hit me so badly that I fainted. And then I got up, and they immediately told me that they are going to send me now to some other camp, to a labor camp of some kind. And they put me with another ten - no, 100 other

soldiers together. But at that moment, I already saw that I was joined by another six other Jews who were also officers. But they were doctors. No, three - four other Jews. They were - three were doctors and one was also in an artillery.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. ALCALAY: I forgot to tell you that in one moment when I went to the office there, the man - one policeman came, one Gestapo came, and put a gun on my head and said, "I'll blow your head unless you tell me how many Jews are in this camp." I knew there were about six, seven of them. I told him, "I don't know. I have no idea that there are Jews. I didn't meet anybody." And that's how I remain. And he didn't shoot at all.

Then they found these Jews there. And so we were going to some labor camp. They sent us to labor camp. So what happened is all these were officers, these Jews, so we decided to take all our insignias so that we will not show that we are officers so that we will pass as soldiers. What the destiny of the soldiers will be, it will be ours. If we were officers, they would immediately see why the officers were sent here and they would know that we were Jews. And so we thought we'll hide somehow.

MR. BROWN: I see.

MR. ALCALAY: And whatever the destiny of the soldiers will be ours, too. Whatever. We will be workers and so on.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: So we did that. We were put on the truck. And what happened, just before we left, my commander came and told me, "Albert, I save your money. Here is the money back." And he gave me my gold coins. And he took two for himself. He says, "Albert, I would borrow two coins from you because I don't know how long the war is going to go, and I'll pay you back in Belgrade when we return," which took about five more years.

MR. BROWN: He wasn't in danger by coming up to you?

MR. ALCALAY: No. No. No. No, because we were already outside soldiers. And what happen is they pulled me out - I heard this later - they pulled me out only for the reasons that - out of this prison, out of this darkness -

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: - because the Red Cross Commission came to check up the camps, and they were afraid that if the Red Cross Commission sees an officer under that conditions, that they would, you know, be punished or something. So they pulled me out.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: Usually this was not happening to Jews because they were prisoners of war as anybody else. But it happened like something to me because there was some Croatian who denounced me. And he denounced me to the Gestapo and not to the -

MR. BROWN: Army.

MR. ALCALAY: - to the army. And so we move. He took two of the Napoleons. As a matter of fact, after the war he paid them back to my uncle that I wasn't going back to Belgrade. I found out that he was a clerk in the bank that - where my uncle was a director.

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.]

MR. ALCALAY: And so we moved. We moved toward the Bulgarian border. And we arrived to a camp that was really a scary. It was a real camp like you see, I mean -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: - in the movies, with turrets and -

MR. BROWN: Watchtowers?

MR. ALCALAY: - watchtowers and machine guns and lines of wire, you know that was bent over there. And policemen - there are soldiers all over the place with machine guns around, in full helmet and so on.

We were pretty scared. But we thought nobody will know we were Jews because we will be like soldiers.

MR. BROWN: You'll blend with the others?

MR. ALCALAY: We blend with the others. So we arrive there and we were immediately called on a PA, whatever is called, that we all have to line up in front of the general there, that he would give us a little spiel, a little talk about the camp.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And so we all lined up, the whole hundred of us. And the commander immediately ask who are the higher level than soldiers here, corporals and sergeants, to come out. So some corporals and some sergeants came out. And then one soldier said, "There's five officers here." "Five officers? Who are they?" So we had to come out.

The commander was about 55 years of age. He was an older person.

MR. BROWN: Was he a German or a Bulgarian?

MR. ALCALAY: He was a German. No, he was a German, and he was also fighting in the First World War on the Balkans. And he was from the Wehrmacht. He was from the German army. He was not from the Gestapo.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Yeah. A career man.

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. He was very nice. He asked us why are we here? We said, "We don't know." We said, "We are Jews. That's all that we can say." He said, "Well, you know what kind of a cause we have toward the Jews." But he did not say anything - you know, didn't show any hate or anything of that nature.

The he asked us what do we do. And the doctors said, "We are doctors." "Then," he said, "all right. You're doctors. I need doctors badly here in the hospital." He sent all three doctors to the hospital. And then asked two of us what you do. We said, "We are artillery officers, but we speak German." "Wonderful." So he took us as German translators.

He treated us as officers, which was very beautiful. Each one of us got a soldier to take care of him. What's called that?

MR. BROWN: An orderly.

MR. ALCALAY: An orderly.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: To take care of. He gave each of us one room. He treated us - and he invited us to the officers mess to eat, to eat there. He treated us as officers. And it was beautiful. It really was wonderful. The camp was huge camp, and it was called a transition camp because from that came they were moving toward Germany.

MR. BROWN: And this is a prisoner of war camp?

MR. ALCALAY: Prisoner of war camp, yes. And so we started everyday life. The doctors were going to the hospital there, and I was translating from German into Serbian for the commander whatever was necessary. The soldiers were fantastic soldiers. And they were mostly peasant, and they are so much attached to the nature that they really knew exactly from stars, whatever, how to escape. It was awfully hard to escape. It was, you know, six lines of wires, electric wires, whatever. Every night somebody would escape and would never show up back.

What happen is that I met in that camp a German sergeant who was a poet, a real poet, and we started to talk. I knew a lot of German poetry. I told him I'm an artist. And we became pretty friendly. He was an anti-Nazi, didn't care less for Nazis. He was just a sergeant has to do his duty. And he was trying to do as best he can.

And the things are going pretty good there. We felt pretty secure in that camp until we heard that all the officers from Kumanovo were coming there, too. And then we became very apprehensive because - and then we told to the commander what happened to us in Kumanovo. And we were really afraid, not so much of the Germans, that we were afraid of those -

MR. BROWN: Croatians?

MR. ALCALAY: - Croatians they might be there.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And he said, "Don't you worry. I'll take care of everything." And these Germans - these officers came, and there were even generals, Yugoslav generals. And he put them all in those long barracks that were made out of metal, you know, round metal barracks. And he kept us in our rooms. And it was really beautiful to see that.

In the - so - and then one moment he just called the whole camp and declared that now it's time to start to move. We are moving toward Germany. And we should start to prepare. It would go by convoys. Every two days, one convoy would go.

Now, I look at the map. I saw where my - where the camp was, and I saw there is 18 miles to the first railroad station in Bulgaria, which was called Kustendil. And I thought now we are going to walk 18 miles to get to that thing. But I knew that they are not going to let the higher officers walk. They would prepare some trucks. Maybe the troops would walk.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. ALCALAY: So I propose to my friends, "Let's try to get with officers. At least we can have some truck, on the truck to go." And I was thinking always - I always kept in mind Dostoevsky walking when he was walking towards Siberia, you know. And you walk. If you don't walk, they shoot. They kill you.

While I was talking to my friends like that, this sergeant, this German sergeant, came and says, "You are going to go with the last convoy." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because that's an order." I saw something was happening there that I did not know. I was trying to get out of him, but I couldn't.

MR. BROWN: But you almost - you sort of trusted him?

MR. ALCALAY: I didn't trust him. I never trusted the Germans. But I felt very apprehensive and very uneasy. Now, the first convoy left with officers. The second convoy left, also with officers. And then I started to be really jittery. At one moment came a - they called the doctors from the office and they told them, according to the Geneva regulations, doctors have to be released to go home. And here three doctors are leaving to go home. And the sergeant knew that, and therefore he kept us because he knew - the note came but did not reach - the note reached him. He read it, but it didn't reach the commander yet. So he kept us, not letting us go with the first convoy, because it took a few days that the note from his office goes to the command office. And he kept us so he wanted to save these doctors.

And so here we see our three doctors, friends that we suffered together so much, are going home now, and two of us are remaining. It was really terrible. It was awfully hard on me emotionally, and I did not know what's going to happen and so on. And so they left. They say goodbye and the left. And for two days, I remember, I was lying on my mattress and trying all kind of things to think, reason with myself. I said, Albert, you're an intelligent person. You read Bible. You read Marx. You read the Talmud. You know varieties of things. Now, can't you invent something here to be able to get out of this place? At the same time, I was whistling the prelude by Rachmaninoff, day and night. And my friend was already mad, couldn't stand me. And I was just intensely thinking.

Finally, I came to the conclusion that I have to do something. I can't just sit like that. I would owe to my conscience all my life if I just don't do something in this short period of time. Now, what to do? That was the most important problem. And I started - I study a lot of dialectic. And I started to use logic and to start thinking logically. I said, I am here a man, a human being, that probably will be destroyed if I would go to Germany. Now, I have to do something. There is another human being, there is a commander there, from whom everything depends. Now, he is a human being or he was a human being. I don't know.

Then I said, well, he's 55 years of age. Hitler doctrine is about 10 years of age. All right? So that when he learn about Hitler, he was 45 or he was 40, which is a full grown-up man knowing what a human dignity is, knowing what a human life is. Probably had a family, and so on.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. ALCALAY: It was a very crucial moment. I decided to go and talk to this man, this commander, because he was approachable. And I was some kind of an officer there. And so I decided to talk to him business he knew what the human dignity is, he knew what human life is, and he knew all the values there. And maybe I can reason with him. I thought, I have nothing to lose. I was in a prison. He might get mad and pull out the gun and shoot me, or he can put me in the cooler. I always think dialectically. If I think in a positive way, I always think in a negative way what can happen to me. And I found the priorities are, well, I can get killed now or I will be killed two months from now if I get to Germany. It's not a big difference. But it might - it might - something happen.

And so I went to this German general. It was about 4:00 in the afternoon, and it was raising cats and dogs

outside. It really was raining badly. So I enter in, and I spoke German. And I told him that I'm a young Jew, that if I go, they would put me in the mines to work somewhere and I would be kaput. I would be killed in months. I'm not able to work hard. And I had a lot of plans in my life. I wanted to finish architecture. I have a girlfriend that I want to marry. I wanted to build bridges and build cities. And I was an artist, that I wanted to express myself. I was thinking of being a positive member of the community.

And then in one moment I look him straight into his eyes and I ask him, "What would Germany gain or lose if I get killed?" Boy, he didn't expect a question like that. He became so pale, he probably saw in a split of a second whatever things he did. He couldn't pronounce a word. And I was just looking at him and not saying a word more. After a few minutes, he reconcile himself and he said, "All right. You go home. But I don't know if it's going to be better for you." And he made me also a false document that I am a doctor.

He said to me - actually, it was very surprising to me - "Our truck goes tomorrow morning to Skopje," which is in the middle of Macedonia, "and can take you." And I said, "No, thanks." I thought, night is a very mysterious path of human life. When you are in bed, you start turning around, having remorses. You didn't right. You did wrong. I better move out now. And so I said, "No. I can find my way out." He said, "Okay, fine." And he made me - which is called *ausweis* [phonetic] in German - a permit that I can cross the lines. I had to put a red cross on my left arm. And in five minutes, I packed up myself, a whole thing, and I was already at the gate to leave.

At one moment I see the commander is coming - in his leather coat is coming toward me. And I thought, he probably change up his mind. I knew I had those 48 coins with me. I knew I can buy a town with that money, not a truck or not a car.

MR. BROWN: It represented a great deal of money?

MR. ALCALAY: A lot of money. And not only money, power. Because you show gold, that's power. So I knew I can get out. So he came to me and look into my eyes, shook hands with me, and said to me, "Do not think that I like Jews. I only appreciated your civil courage." Shook hands with me, and say goodbye. And so I walked out of the camp. And sure enough, I found immediately some kind of a dilapidated T Model Ford -

MR. BROWN: Oh, a Model T?

MR. ALCALAY: Model T, right. And so I paid a guy and he took me to the railroad station. And from the railroad station, you know, I could travel. And so I traveled to a place which was called Nis. Nis is N-i-s. This is a crossroad, is a real knot of all railroads that are going from west to east, passing through Nis. The Simplon that - not Simplon, the Orient Express, is coming through, going to Sofia and then Bucharest and Istanbul.

And so I arrive there, and it was an incredible crowd of people. And that was about six days - no, four days after my doctor friends left. And I met them there. They were still waiting there. The trains were not leaving. It was a tremendous crowd of people, refugees from all cities with all their bundles. The trains were passing through going toward Greece because the Nazis were only fighting in Greece. And the Greeks were very tough in fighting, and so there were a lot of hospital trains moving from [inaudible] through Nis going to Belgrade.

MR. BROWN: With German soldiers?

MR. ALCALAY: With German soldiers. Now, these refugees just wanted to get up to Belgrade. And all they wanted is to attach two freight cars to any train that would go up. And no train was stopping. And there was only one German soldier that was keeping order of all these things there. And then when I arrived there, I saw, well - I became bold now. I have - I'm a doctor now. I became bold. So I told to that crowd, "Take all these bundles, put on the rail. So we're going to stop the train and see what happens."

The soldier didn't like that. He was mad, pick up the machine gun. But he saw that he was only one. There was thousands of Serbs that would eat him up. So the train stop. The next train stop there. And all the German officers that were doctors came out and started to yell why it's stopping. They have, you know, wounded people and so on. They needed to go fast up to Belgrade.

And I came in and talked to them. I told them - and they respect doctors, you know. They saluted. And I told them, all what I want is to attach two freight trucks [sic] to their train. Would take 10 minutes to attach them and continue. And they agreed. And I was almost killed another time by the enthusiastic crowd. They were so enthusiastic. Everybody was pushing me, pulling me, to kiss me, to help.

[Laughter.]

MR. BROWN: But no one had thought of that before?

MR. ALCALAY: No one thought before. there was no - they were scared. And so this is how we arrive in Belgrade.

MR. BROWN: Now, why did you want to go to Belgrade?

MR. ALCALAY: Belgrade is my city.

MR. BROWN: And you thought it would be safe to go there?

MR. ALCALAY: I thought - well, I didn't know wherever else should go. That was the only place I could go because, first of all, all my friends were there, my father and mother, my sister, my uncles. My whole family was in Belgrade. Now, I thought I should start from there and then see what happens. And that's how I arrive in Belgrade.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: Now, I was in a uniform, lousy, dirty, hungry. I walked out of the railroad station, and the first thing I saw some Jews with a yellow star already -

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: - carrying shovels and walking as a unit, marching, going towards some rubble where they have to unravel, you know, the rubble and so on. And that broke my heart. That really broke my heart. I did not know anything about. And it was just terrible to see that sight. And I was afraid even to go see if my house is there or not. But I slowly walked, and on my way I met a friend from school. And I ask him and he said, "No, your house is nice and sound. It sits there."

And so I went to my house. And that was a German sign on my door which says, "*Beschlagnahme*," which means "Sequestered." And I ring the bell, and they open. And I told them that I was the owner of that place. I see still my coat hanging there and my suits. And I only - all that I wanted is that if they can give me one suit, something to change into something decent.

It was janitor of my house that lived there. All janitors in Yugoslavia were Volksdeutsche. And so when the bombardment was at the 6th of April, they ordered denounce all the Jewish houses. And so the airplanes were bombarding most of the Jewish houses in Belgrade. But mine was missed. So he lived in my apartment. He just heard me and just, "Shh," blocked the door, I mean, closed the door.

MR. BROWN: Shut the door.

MR. ALCALAY: Shut the door. And I couldn't get anything out of him. And that's - I have to adjust now to live in Belgrade. I went to some of my uncles. I found a room where I can rent a room. And then I immediately - I was avoiding to wear the - I bought some clothes. I get into civilian clothes. My friends came all. They thought I was dead in the war, and they all came to see me. And so I met with them and I met with my uncles. There were three of my uncles still in Belgrade - one was still under the uniform; he was a doctor, and he was an official doctor - and two others. The other was a doctor, but he was operated by [inaudible]. He was in the hospital. And the third uncle. And I was avoiding to wear the yellow band.

MR. BROWN: But they were wearing it?

MR. ALCALAY: Everybody was wearing yellow band. And there was a curfew. And there were varieties of regulations for Jews that were awful. The Jews can go to the market only after 11:00 when there was nothing to buy. They cannot ride the streetcar. They cannot - curfew, it was already May, of 5:00 in the afternoon. If you go on the street, you are a Jew, you have a yellow band there, any Nazi can pick you up and take you to anyplace to work without pay at all.

And so I was avoiding to put a yellow band, which was very, very dangerous because Belgrade is not such a big place and there's a lot of Volksdeutsches running around that knew me, that were in school or so on. But I was trying to avoid to work. And I went back to the center of the communities, Jewish communities, where I worked before, and there was a lot of, you know, activity there because all kind of refugees were coming and passports were made and varieties of things to - permits.

MR. BROWN: They hadn't closed that down?

MR. ALCALAY: No, no. Permits and so on. No, the Nazis were doing very nicely. They were slowly closing all the rights but not all at once, just very slowly, so that the Jews were adjusting just to one, losing -

MR. BROWN: One at a time.

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah, and then the next one and the next one. So I adjusted somehow. And in one moment I found some work. I invented some work for myself to do. I put a band, but I went to the work. The Jews have to

meet every day on one place where the Nazis were coming and picking up them to go to work. They would do all kind of dirt work, whatever. And there was always a doctor there who would also check up these people, if they are good for work or not good for work. Somebody would be there, but would complain that he's not so good, he's sick today, so the Nazi would know if he's sick or not. The doctor would check him up.

MR. BROWN: A Jewish doctor?

MR. ALCALAY: A Jewish doctor. As a matter of fact, that doctor was later on my father-in-law, Dr. Ishkenazi [phonetic]. And I see that they are waiting to go there. So what I did, I invented - I bought a little table. I put it in front of this - of his office. I put a chair there. And I employ myself to write the list of these people who was to go to the doctor. I invented the whole job. Just I didn't want to do any dirt work, so -

MR. BROWN: You were going to make the appointments for the doctor?

MR. ALCALAY: I would make appointments for the doctor. That was one job I invented until they found me and they close this thing. It was not legal. And then I went to something else. I went to the Jewish hospital and I saw that there is a lot of activity - there was a Jewish hospital - and there was a lot of activity. Doctors all over the place were looking. And I saw that no doctor has sign of any kind. So I went to the fifth floor of that hospital. That was where I had my studios before. And I put a desk there and I start to make signs of names of all doctors, to organize this hospital at least with signs. And that took a long time until I - I did this, so I avoided to work. But in one moment I was caught by the Nazis in the group and I was brought to work some very dirty work. I had to carry shit with my hands. And that was really very demeaning and terrible.

At the same time, I was in the - I had to save - the janitor of the building where my studio was told me that a Nazi saw my studio and is ready to move into my studio and take all my stuff, my material and everything.

MR. BROWN: You mean this was your - you had a studio, the studio from the past?

MR. ALCALAY: Right. The studio from the past. It was untouched. The apartment, the house, was taken, but the studio was not since this was in the Jewish building where the community was still working. So that was there. And so overnight I had to move my whole studio because this Nazi would come in. So I moved the whole studio. And then next day I have these two doctors, uncles, who have big offices with varieties of, you know, paraphernalia, you know, all the apparatuses of, you know, microscopes and so on. And I had to move also that to escape - not to give to the Germans.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] You moved it for them?

MR. ALCALAY: Right. And then we organize ourselves. All my friends, we got back together, and my organization that was Zionist organization. We got back together and now we became really underground.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And we started to work with partisans because we were very leftist organization, and we thought now here are Fascists. You have to fight them. So we joined the partisans together.

MR. BROWN: Now, what were the partisans at that time?

MR. ALCALAY: The partisans were two kind. One were partisans of Mikhailovich, which were Chetniks, which were very nationalistic. But they were not so - they were against occupation but not against Nazis so much. The others were the Communists that were organized by the Moshe Pijade, the painter there.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: And they started activity of sabotage. Everywhere possible, the sabotage was happening. The truck would blow up. A couple of Nazis would be killed. The price was very high in Yugoslavia. For one German, they would kill 100 people. And in one small town, in Kragujevac, which was one of the reddest town of Yugoslavia -

MR. BROWN: How do you spell that?

MR. ALCALAY: Kragujevac? K-r-a-g-j-u-v-a-c [sic]. At one moment they kill 26 Nazis. And that is a town of 5,000 people. They waited for trains to arrive. They pull out everybody from the train - whoever, children, all. They collect 2600 people, and they shot them. The price was awfully high. But Yugoslavs are very proud people. They could not stand that invasion, that occupation. So every day was happening something.

Now, one day it happened something terrible. I was working then already in the Jewish organization in this center for the Jewish communities, and we were really working on passports, varieties of passport permits, and

so on. We had a commissar who was a German who was taking care of the whole Jewish community. He was a commissar. He was getting orders from the high command, and he would do them.

And he was a student of medicine in Belgrade before the war, and nobody knew that he was the head of a fifth column. His best friends were two Jewish boys. He came in this - in the offices of the Jewish communities, was pale, and he said, "Give an order all Jews have to be tomorrow at 11:00 at this place," which was a bunch of tennis courts together, a big area there. And the telephones were not, you know, working, all the telephones, so we had to go by foot and tell to all the Jews to meet tomorrow. We did not know what happen, but something terrible happen.

What happened was that one friend of ours put a bomb under the truck and blew up five high officers with the truck together. And the Germans had to punish the Jews. They knew that he was Jewish and they have to punish the Jews. But he was a member of the Communist Party. And they knew they have to punish the Jews, so they brought all Jews in this area. And I was going around to tell to people, and I thought, well, my uncle was still in the hospital. I said, what the hell, I'm not going to tell him anything.

MR. BROWN: And it was supposed - every Jew was supposed -

MR. ALCALAY: Every Jew was supposed to be there, male, only male. So we got there, and there was a lot of Gestapos all over the place. They divided us in professions - teachers, lawyers, merchants, businessmen, and so on. I went among teachers, I remember. And then they started to pull one, two, three, four, five out. One, two, three, four, five out. So they pulled 109 people out of that group. And they shot them.

MR. BROWN: Right there?

MR. ALCALAY: Not like that, no. They took them and they released us. And it was just terrible. The women were outside crying, and it was - we did not know what was happening. It really was - that day we did not know. But tomorrow morning when I went into the center of the Jewish communities, we already knew that - they already brought the belongings to give back to the family. It was a terrible, absolute terrible, shocking things. Doctors were trying to help as much as - they give shots to the women and so on. But I already smell that was the end. That was the end of the Jewish community. It starts to be the end of the Jewish community. And I was already frantic.

Now, I forgot to tell you one little episode that would give you a nice idea how Germans treated Jews. I was caught in one moment while I was trying to avoid to work for the Germans. I was caught with nine of my friends together by one Nazi, who put us in a truck to do some job somewhere. We arrive in a school which had big classrooms, very greasy old classrooms. You know, they put oil on the floor. And there was millions of pieces of paper on the floor. He ordered us to collect all this paper with our tongues, just licking. We couldn't believe it. We started to laugh. We just couldn't believe the guy has this ideas. He pick up his machine gun and we thought, we really thought something terrible is going to happen.

Now, I have a friend who is really - I call him always a Doric column. He's small, stout, but like a rock. And I see his neck is bulging with excitement, all his veins. The blood went into his head. In one moment, he just couldn't stand more. He just grabbed that soldier, a whole soldier with machine gun and everything. He lifted him up and threw him on the floor like a sack. The soldier almost couldn't believe it. He just jump up and tap my friend on the shoulder and told him [speaks German], which means, "Slow down, friend." But he was scared. He was scared because we were nine and he was only alone.

With all machine guns - Germans, they get only courage when they are in two. When there is only one, they are coward, as coward as they can be. So he was so scared, so he released us. I just wanted to put this as an example how they treated us. There were other kind of things that were happening in Belgrade, but I can't go into these details because it's -

MR. BROWN: Well, you say you were getting frantic. Were many people at this point? They must have been.

MR. ALCALAY: Everybody was getting frantic. Everybody was getting frantic.

MR. BROWN: Your family was gone [inaudible].

MR. ALCALAY: My family was gone. I didn't know where was it. My family was gone the first day of the war. When the bombardment started, they went down into the basement, and my father just thought, "I'm going to my bank to pick up all my gold and I'll be right back." So he went to the bank, pick up his gold, close the bag. Had 5,000 gold coins. He filled up all his coats, or my mother's and so on.

And somebody appears in the - appeared in the basement to pick up some other lady to take her out of the town because was bombarding. My father says, "Could you take me and my wife and my daughter? I'll give you 1,000

dinars immediately," which was a lot of money. The guy says, "Only if you are in five minutes ready." My father says, "We are ready." He didn't even have time to go upstairs to pick up his stuff, anything, to his apartment.

So they got into the car and they got out of the town and then they escape. About them I'll tell you later because I met them somewhere on my way.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And I didn't know anything where they went. I really did not know. But I knew that was a time to get out.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And I had one of my best friends who was working with me together. His name was Shalom, S-h-a-l-o-m.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: We started to devise idea to go south toward Macedonia where we will meet Italians because Italians were already occupying the south of Macedonia.

MR. BROWN: And you reasoned that Italians would be -

MR. ALCALAY: We reasoned Italians were better than the Germans. We could not go - we wanted to go to Italy. The proper way to go to Italy is to go from Belgrade to Zagreb, and from Zagreb, Croatia, go to Italy. But that was all Croatia and we were afraid to cross Croatia.

MR. BROWN: Because they were so -

MR. ALCALAY: They were worse than the Nazis. But we didn't even have passports. We didn't have any documents.

It appears that a friend of mine sent one document to the office, to the office where we made documents. He sent an Italian passport so that it can be used somehow. I took that passport to my house and I made two replicas of that passport. It took me 15 days to make these replicas. And I forged a passport completely. My name was Alberto Alcala. I was an Italian from Dalmatia, from Split. And I was going just back to - because Dalmatia was freed now, I was going back to Dalmatia. And I made for my - I forgot the name I made for my friend, too. And so we decided to get out. But we didn't say it to anybody because everybody was really very frantic.

Now, to get out is not such an easy thing to do when you have a band, a yellow band. So we choose one day which was cloudy day, so we put raincoats on top of these bands. And slowly we approach the railroad station. And we sneaked into the train, and then we went into the bathroom immediately, took the bands off, and just sat in train waiting the train moves. And finally the train moved. And we took off, and we went south. We went south. We stop in Nis back there, and we thought we will leave with some Jews there for the night or so because we had to pick up another train. The Jews were so scared they didn't want to take us.

I remember we split. I went with Gypsies. I stayed with Gypsies. They had encampment somewhere outside. And he stayed with some other people. Then we met tomorrow and we continue our -

MR. BROWN: You met the next day?

MR. ALCALAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: But you were going to go by train?

MR. ALCALAY: We were going by train, by bus, by whatever we wanted to go. Our itinerary was pretty long. We have made a plan that was very ambitious. We said, we'll try to get to Italy somehow illegally. From Italy, we'll find - we are both mountain climbers. We'll find a guide and we will climb the Alps and we'll descend into Zurich. In Zurich, we'll get our certificates for Zionist made I told you about to go to Israel. Once we get those certificates, we will fly from Zurich to Lisbon because we couldn't travel. France was already occupied. We will travel to Lisbon. From Lisbon, we will take a boat and go around Africa because there was no traffic on the Mediterranean.

MR. BROWN: On the Mediterranean.

MR. ALCALAY: We will go around Africa to Angola, to [inaudible] in Angola. From then we will take the Trans-

African Railroad to Cairo. And from Cairo, we will go to Israel. It was a $40,000 trip, but we thought we can do it. We only have one passport. We had only one lousy passport to take us to Italy. That was all.

So we have to pass through some very, very dangerous situations where the borders were. There was first old Serbian border, then another border. Finally we arrive to a place which was called Prizren. It's in the middle of Macedonia. We arrive about 6:00 at the evening.

MR. BROWN: By train? You'd come -

MR. ALCALAY: By bus, by train. Right. We arrived there, and it was a headquarter of Italian army. They were fighting the revolution which was in Montenegro, a small little country.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But they were - you mean they were revolting against the occupation [inaudible]?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. They were having a real revolution there, and they were revolting against occupation. So the Italian army was, you know, suppressing the revolution. And the headquarters was just in Prizren. So everything was very dangerous. There were these Fascist black shirts all over the place.

We descended the train - the bus, and they immediately search us all over the place. And I was really scared. I really was scared to death that these people would - you know, they're saluting like, you know, Fascist. And I said to my friend in Hebrew, I said, "Here they are going to cut our throats and nobody will even know. I cannot stay here." I had such a tremendous sense of urgency. I smelled a big danger here.

And I said, "I'm not going to stay here. I won't sleep here." It was 6:00 in the evening. And then I thought, what should I do? And I did something crazy, absolute crazy. I said to my friend, "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to hire a taxi and I'm going to cross a country, a whole country, by taxicab."

So I went to a taxicab. I had those Napoleons. I knew they can work. I pick up two Napoleons and I play with my hands with those - I cling them, you know, in my hand. And I went to a taxicab. I said, "I would like you to drive to Tiranë," which is a capital of Albania. He looked at me and says, "Are you crazy?" I said, "No." He said, "First of all, this is another country." I said, "I know." "Secondly, it's a high 10,000 feet mountains, no roads, with a lot of brigands." I said, "I know. Would you drive to Tiranë?" He looked at those gold coins. He says, "All right. I'll drive to Tiranë." For two coins we sat in the car.

MR. BROWN: Your friend went with you?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah, sure. And we just went all the way to Albania, a whole night traveling, you know. Nothing happen. Everything was fine. We arrive in Tiranë. It's a dead city in the middle of the mountains. There was nothing moving there. We wanted to see there is another big lake that joins Albania and Yugoslavia. It's called Shkodër Lake. And we thought there was a ferry that would take us on the other side. But the ferry, because of that revolution, did not work. So nothing was happening there.

MR. BROWN: And Albania, was it occupied?

MR. ALCALAY: Albania was occupied by the Italians. So we decided to go to Durazzo, which is a harbor of Albania. It's a big harbor on Ionian Sea. And so we did. We came to Durazzo. We picked up a hotel there, which is not a hotel. It's called han. It's one of those big huge wards that you have 50 beds lying down there.

MR. BROWN: How do you spell it? What -

MR. ALCALAY: Han, h-a-n. And that's where we went. And we checked up to see if maybe a boat goes from there up the whole Adriatic. Used to go all the way to Trieste. As a matter of fact we found one would go in 10 days. So I said, "All right. Let's wait 10 days. There are no Germans here, nobody." It was beautiful. The Italians built Albania very beautiful. Durazzo looked like Nice, a really very beautiful town. And so we relaxed. We stayed for -

MR. BROWN: They weren't checking your passports or anything?

MR. ALCALAY: No. They check passports. We have regular passports.

Something happen very strange here. We were enjoying ourself, and I walked through the street. I didn't know one word Italian. One word Italian I didn't know, and I didn't know one word Albanian. But we were walking around. We look, and I see names of stores. I read names of stores. I see some Jewish names - Abraham, Samuel, and so on. So I said, you know, Jews always help Jews in the times of stress. They're very tight. There is that kind of a sense of destiny that connections them together somehow.

So we enter this store. We try to talk. Finally they spoke French, so we spoke French with them. And here something happened very strange. They told us that there is a concentration camp 18 miles from that place,

from Durazzo, in a place called Kavajë. And they said that a lot of Yugoslavs came there. And I was bold enough with this passport, I don't know why really I - I maybe suspected maybe my parents - I didn't know where my parents were at all.

My friend didn't want to go. He was scared. I took a bus and I went there. And as I descended from the bus, it says there - on the sign said, "Do not approach 100 meters. This is a concentration camp." And I was - I'm far-sighted. I take a look and I see through the wires, inside of the camp, my sister, my little sister, who saw me.

My father describes this all very beautifully in his diaries. My sister ran immediately back to tell to my father, who in that time was giving lectures, lessons in English, to some other people. She just opened the door and said, "Daddy, come out. I got to tell you something." My father - this is really uncanny - my father opened the door and said, "Where is he?" He already sensed it.

And so I met them in that camp.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you went into the camp?

MR. ALCALAY: I went into the camp. What really happened was my parents escaped and lived in Dubrovnik. We used to spend summers in Dubrovnik. They rented a hotel room there, or a suite, whatever it is, and they thought they will stay the whole war there. It was kind of a forgotten corner. But when the revolution came in Montenegro, which is very close -

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: The Fascist government came and picked up all Jews that were all - the whole coast of Dalmatia, picked them up, put them on ships, and moved them to this concentration camp, and took all their money. Now, my father was so smart that he took all those gold bags, threw them under the couch, and left them there. The owner of the hotel found that gold, kept that gold for the whole war, was changing - he took 50 coins for himself - was changing all the time and was sending money to my parents in one direction, to me in another direction. And after the war, my uncle went there and pick up the rest that was left. And he was a Croatian, even. It's incredible how you can find people like that.

So I stay for 10 days in - I'm going inside and outside in that camp. I was like a nephew of my father. So they really arrested them not for any reasons. I mean, they just put them in that camp.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: Maybe the Fascists wanted their gold. Maybe they - for some other reasons. But they did. They were not molested at all. They were kept under very bad hygienic conditions, but they were not molested at all.

MR. BROWN: But you were allowed - they thought you were an Italian?

MR. ALCALAY: I was - yeah. I was an Italian that was a nephew of my father. They didn't bother too much. I was coming in and out, talk to them, and so on. My father asked me if I want to join them. I said, "No, thanks. I was already in one camp. I don't need another one. I'll be much more useful being outside." And after 10 days, I left with an idea we'll keep in touch and so on.

And so we arrive in Split, where another big Jewish community was there, all escaped from different parts of the country, and they were sitting there. And that was very different kind of a thing because here that was a lot of people that were really splurging money. It looked like last days of Pompeii. And it was very demoralizing. On the other side, you have seen youth still without money, without means of - it was very bad. But I said to my friend, "Look. Here is going to be some deportations. Let's get out as fast as we can."

And so now our passports were not worth more anything. We had to look for something new. So we already -

MR. BROWN: Why weren't they worth anything?

MR. ALCALAY: They were - that's what - that kind of a passport was just - a day after we enter into Split, they were just -

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Obsolete.

MR. ALCALAY: - Finished, obsolete. Yeah. They were re issuing something new. So we already learn how to do this kind of things. We were going around the town hall and were looking for the shabbiest clerk there who probably needed money. And we'd approach him and with some, you know, luck, he would make us new passports. And he made us two new passports, and so we took a boat from split and we cross Adriatic to Ancona.

MR. BROWN: Ancona, in Italy?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. Now, this is something really very strange also. We got out of the boat, and we were in concentration camps, persecuted, Nazis all over the place - you know, you have tremendous bad memories carrying with you and so on. We get out of the boat and I see a big sign: *Biennale di Venezia*. That big art exhibition, Biennale Venice?

MR. BROWN: Sure. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And like mesmerized, like magic, we buy tickets to go to Venice to see the exhibition. And so we did. We were traveling very light. We didn't have anything. So we took the train and we went to Venice and we looked at the Venice Biennale.

MR. BROWN: What were they showing?

MR. ALCALAY: They were showing all kind of paintings of the Fascist era, pre Fascist era. And then I already got so much enthusiastic for that I said, "Wait a minute. If we're in Venice, I remember I studied that somewhere around we can see Giotto, Giotto's paintings." Look in the map, Padua. Ah, Padua. It was about three-quarters of an hour from Venice by train. So I said, let's take a train to Padua. So we went to Padua and we went to this *Cappella degli Scrovegni*, it's called, where these, you know, frescoes are.

We got out, and we were just walking on the main street. Somebody yell at me, "Albert! Albert!" In the middle of Padua. I really was surprised. That was a friend of ours from the same organization who was already interned in that place. His name was Gary Weiss [phonetic]. He said he was interned. He approach us, told us how beautiful it is to live in Padua, how wonderful, there are a lot of other friends of ours in Padua, and so on.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. ALCALAY: - to go to [inaudible] and to see to go to Switzerland. By the way, the same time we were looking if we can find some passport of, you know, Honduras, Panama, or something like that to buy.

As he was talking to us, two plainclothesmen approach him, ask him, "Are you Gary Weiss?" He said, "Yes." "Would you please come with us?" And I have never seen him again. What happen is - you couldn't believe it. Thirty years later, in 1970, I'm traveling through Negev in south of Israel. I'm going to a kibbutz, to a Yugoslav kibbutz. And I'm entering just kibbutz to visit, and who is coming to see me? Gary Weiss. He says, "Albert!" And I start - I was so surprised. I ask him, "Gary, what happen?" I connected 30 years before. And he said to me - he continued to talk. He said, "Nothing much. They find me I had false document. They put me in the prison. They sent me to the islands of Lipari" - which is south near Sicily there - "and I escape and illegally came to Israel." Incredible.

[Laughter.]

MR. ALCALAY: And so we decided - we met other friends. We decided to stay in Padua. But my friend moved to Milan, and I was in Padua. The only thing I made a mistake is to mingle with Jewish refugees because I had an Italian passport -

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: - and I was with Jewish refugees in the *pension* and so on. Padua was beautiful. My family already moved to south of Italy to another concentration camp. I had plenty of money. I got all these cards, ration cards for food, for clothing, for everything. I was studying art and language. And there were friends. And it wasn't bad at all.

But one moment and my friend was in Milan looking for a passport of some kind. As a matter of fact, in one moment he called me by telephone and he said, "Albert, can you get married in 24 hours? There is a passport for a married couple." I said, "Yes." There was a lot of refugees. A girl would marry me. But until I got her, started to talk, make all kind of talk, my friend called me back and said, "Albert, it's late. The passport was sold."

And so he was still on the watch looking there, and I was in Padua. And one moment the police came and he saw me there. He suspected something, took my passport, took my card, ration card, told me tomorrow morning to come to the police. I came one day to the police. They told me - they were very polite. They said, "You present yourself every day here until we get news from Split about this verification of the passport, if that is real passport." Well, I didn't have - I didn't have courage to come next day. I packed up all my stuff and I escaped to Milan.

MR. BROWN: With no passport?

MR. ALCALAY: No passport, nothing. And it was already October. And it was real bad. You can't pass - Milan was much, much more watched. There was already Gestapo there around. The Nazis were around, making raids.

MR. BROWN: The Germans had begun to come in?

MR. ALCALAY: The Germans were already there.

MR. BROWN: This is 1941?

MR. ALCALAY: It was 1941. But they were suspecting. In the north Italy, they were still - they were there.

My friend was very, very scared. He said, "Albert, I don't want to know where you live. You don't know where I live. We meet every day at 4:00 in the [inaudible] library." I couldn't find any food. He was bringing me some food. I couldn't buy even on the black market food. There was nowhere to live. I couldn't pass by concierge to any place to stay. So I had to sleep in public places - in railroad station, in the movies, in the garden, public garden. And it was becoming really very difficult.

In one moment I just was demoralized. My nerves were - I couldn't stand it more. And I thought, well, if the Nazis kept me here, I'll be kaput. I better do something. The Fascists were asking me - were searching probably - in Padua were searching for me, too. Now, there was not too much choice where I can go. The trains already started to be controlled, so there was not too much - I thought one moment to pick up to take a *Wagonlit*, a night sleep train, where they don't check. I could take a passport of somebody else and go into the - into my cabin to sleep, and give to the conductor the passport, and eventually get to Trieste. But it was very dangerous.

I really lost my head in one moment. And then I decided, well, why don't I join my family in concentration camp? I know that Italians love to join the families. But now how I'm going to get in a concentration camp? My family is in that camp there.

MR. BROWN: Isn't it down south?

MR. ALCALAY: Down south, very south, in Calabria. So I decided - I said, well, the Nazis would find me. The Fascists would find me. The only place that is secure that nobody would look for was a prison, an Italian prison. And so I decided to get into the prison.

And so I go to a place called Vicenza, which is very close to Padua. Go to the police there. I present myself. I said, "My name is Albert Alcalay. I just crossed the border three days ago." That's the first time I pronounce my name. "My name is Albert Alcalay. I crossed the border three days ago. I would like to join my family that is in concentration camp." The guy look at me and says, "Where were you three days?" I said, "I was one day in Trieste and one day in Venice, and here I am. And I thought the guy would just grab me, put me in the prison.

The guy look at me and said, [speaks Italian]. "All right, my son. Come tomorrow." I couldn't believe it. So I take a hotel and I stay there. And while I was in the hotel that night I thought, well, maybe this guy is so nice, maybe I don't have to go to the prison. Maybe I can stay in Vicenza in some hotel as I was in the prison, but not be physically in the prison -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: - and wait for this permit to go and join my family. So I go tomorrow and I know that with Italians, you can reason. You can talk. So I go tomorrow and I tell him the same story. And he says, "All right. We'll send a telegram to Ministry of Intern, and a few days you will be shipped to concentration camp. But in the meantime, you have to go to the prison." I said, "Look, don't send me to the prison. I was already in so many prisons. I was tortured by Germans. And so just I can stay in a hotel. I have plenty of money. I don't want to escape. I can present myself every three hours if you want to. I denounce myself. You don't think I will escape. Why would I escape?"

He said, "Yes, that's true. But, you know, the regulations are there. I can lose my job. And I have a family." And, you know, he started to complain to me. And it was really very funny, almost he had to convince me that I should go to the prison. As a matter of fact, he could not convince me. He had to call a couple of other clerks and said, "Look. If you don't believe me, ask them. There are regulations. We will lose jobs. You will just have to go to the prison. Don't worry. Everything will be all right." So I said, "All right. If that's the situation, I'll go to the prison."

And then they ask me, "Do you want to eat our food or would you like to open an account?" I said, "I'll open an account. What the hell." [Laughs.] So I enter the prison. I got the nice cell for myself. And here I stay for - instead of three days, I stay three months in the prison. But I was safe, and I ate a lot because I was ordering every day. The guy was opening little door, you know, and was giving me a menu of the restaurant. And I was opening - I

was, you know, eating. I gained 18 pounds while I was in the prison.

MR. BROWN: But you'd been pretty run down before that, weren't you?

MR. ALCALAY: I was - yeah. I was reading a lot. And that's all that I was doing, and whistling because I was along. I did not have anybody to talk for three months. And so I was whistling to keep up my spirit.

MR. BROWN: You were waiting, of course, for the order to come through.

MR. ALCALAY: I was waiting the order to come through. And finally the order came through and I moved to the camp. And that was also some funny stories there.

MR. BROWN: You were - yeah?

MR. ALCALAY: While I was traveling, you know, the agent had a strict order to watch on me, to deliver me there, because I had traveled with - I have to travel with an agent. But in Rome there was a bombardment, and the sirens spread everybody around, you know. So we escape. When there was a clearing and the train was leaving, so I jump back into the train, go south, there was never - no my agent around.

MR. BROWN: Oh, he had disappeared?

MR. ALCALAY: [Laughs.] Until he found me. He found me somewhere around Naples. Boy, he kissed me, embraced me, hugged me, that he would have gone three years in jail.

And finally so I arrive to the - in the concentration camp where my parents were, which was a huge camp. It was called concentration camp but it was not a concentration camp. It was a camp - it was an enclosure where the Jews were kept because the Italians really wanted to save the Jews. And they would say to the Gestapo, "You torture your Jews, we torture our Jews." And so they never gave up the Jews because Gestapo was asking for all the Jews.

MR. BROWN: But were there Germans down that far at that time?

MR. ALCALAY: They were not down at that time - no, they were. Yeah, they were all around. But -

MR. BROWN: They were there? And they stayed clear of it?

MR. ALCALAY: They stayed clear because that was a Fascist - they were kept by the Fascists. And Count Ciano, who was a - is a son-in-law of Mussolini, who was a minister, he really wanted to save the Jews. And he took under his jurisdiction the Jews. Didn't give Jews at all. He always told the Gestapo, "Oh, we know how to torture our Jews. Don't worry about it."

And so that camp was a beautiful camp. That's where I met my teacher, the painter. He had a studio there, and then I got a studio, too. And they treated us very well. There was no food, but - and there was no freedom. I mean, the camp was great, huge, and there was all kind of things - you know, soccer games and concerts and varieties of things were in the camp. As a matter of fact, people from outside were coming inside the camp to buy stuff, food and so on.

And it was - the only thing was that, you know, hygienic conditions were bad. But there was not - in relationship to what the Jews has passed through in Poland and Germany, it was nothing. It was a joke. First of all, everybody was saved, you know. We were kept by the militia inside that was holding us, and so on.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Were they all Jews in the camp, or were there -

MR. ALCALAY: There were Jews and there were - oh, boy, I don't know if I kept -

<[>[Tape stops, re-starts.]</[>

MR. BROWN: This is another interview with Albert Alcalay in Brookline, Massachusetts, and the date is October 19, 1979.

In our last interview you were talking about the concentration camp in Calabria, Italy, and mentioning various amenities you had there - how the Italians were in charge rather than the Nazis, and also the fact that you were, I believe, given a studio. You also mentioned that there was another painter there -

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: - a person you've described as a great German painter with whom I think you studied or at least

worked.

MR. ALCALAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: Could you go on a bit about that?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. Well, when I entered the camp, I immediately - somebody handed me a list of inhabitants of the camp. And I looked through the list, through the names, because they told me these are *crème de la crème*. People arrive from all over Europe, intellectuals of all kind. And since I was kind of an intellectual myself, I tried to see if I know somebody there. And I look at the list and I discover the name Michael Fingesten. And since I knew this name very well as a painter, as knowing painting, and I was especially interested in the paintings of the German expressionist group, so it appeared to me that being here, I could really see him and see what happens. I didn't know that he had a studio or not.

And when I arrived there, it looked like everything was going fine. People were singing, and there was a choir, and there was cafés. There was varieties of things that I could never expect in a concentration camp. Now, it was called concentration camp, but it was just an enclosure where people were living, having their own freedom inside. They couldn't have freedom outside because of the reason of the Gestapo that was watching.

And they were watching very carefully because there was one of my friend who was friend from my childhood who was a Communist, and who unfortunately - and is a cousin of my wife, who unfortunately was going by his right name all the time. And Gestapo was searching for him from one country to another, and found him in that concentration camp and requested him to get out. And we try all kind of things. We even gave him typhus injections. He was in hospital. But they waited and they took him. Finally they took him. So it was dangerous to get out of the camp. It was much safer to be inside of the camp.

So I arrive and I started to adapt myself to the camp. And as a matter of fact, I already medically got a commission to do portrait of two little children, which I did. And then I met this Fingesten, and I was very much surprised. He had one whole barrack for himself. And he was drawing and painting inside of that barrack.

MR. BROWN: Where had you known him from? Just his reputation?

MR. ALCALAY: His reputation, and reproductions of his work. He belongs to the Expression, which is a movement that was in the beginning of the 20th Century in Berlin. And so he was very much - he was very much known to people who knew, not people who don't know. Even here I rarely can find somebody that knows him. But in Europe, he was very well-known. And so I approach him and ask him if I could like - I would like to work with him.

And it just happened that some combination happened in his life. He had a young son my age, and he was originally Jewish and he was converted into another religion.

[Tape stops, re-starts.] **[Note: there seems to be a chunk missing here.]

MR. BROWN: These men in khaki were -

MR. ALCALAY: Well, these men in khaki were Allied forces.

MR. BROWN: I see.

MR. ALCALAY: And Germans were Germans. Now, I started to make signs to these British people, and they came. They came to my place. But they were not British. They were not even Polish. They were Italian. What happened was, first of all going Italian brigade, behind that was going Polish brigade, behind that was going British, and then behind that were coming American. That's how the war was going on.

So these kids were very, you know, bold kids that these Italians - I told them the Germans are coming. He says, "When they're coming, come on, I'll shoot." I said, "Take it easy. There are a lot of people here." And I said, "Look. We are going inside of the house. And now you make your strategy. But the Germans are coming."

Now, another miracle happened. Just incredible thing happened. We were inside the house waiting. Some shooting would come. It once started to rain and started to hail. It was so bad - and very short - but so bad that when we get out, there were no Italians. There were no Germans. Everything was cleaned up. [Laughs.] Honest to God, this happened.

MR. BROWN: They'd gone?

MR. ALCALAY: They'd gone. Well, what happened I don't know. But from that time I said to my father, "Now, this is the last time I'm taking a chance. I'm going 30 miles behind to join the Allied command. I mean, I can't take it more to be in the middle of two forces." Because we were - you know, the Americans were stuck in Cassino,

Monte Cassino. And for about four months, we were in the middle. You know, all the ammunition was going over our heads.

MR. BROWN: The shooting [inaudible].

MR. ALCALAY: Shooting, we were in the middle. And I couldn't take it more, really. So I decided to move, and I moved 30 miles in the back, and I joined the Allied command. And I went to the commander and I told him, "My family is stuck there. I have a sister appendix. For four years we are just waiting for you. We are exhausted. We don't have money. We are hungry. We have nothing."

Well, the guy was - British guy was fantastic. He said - called the mayor of that city. That was another city, Alchevia [phonetic], where the command was. He said, "Get the best clothing, the best lodging, the best vehicle, and bring these people immediately here." So I went back, pick up my family, and brought them here in a [inaudible]. Put them in a hotel. We started to eat, to live life. And all day long we were sitting on the sidewalks and just watching Allied armies. That's how we were liberated. That's - we were staying there for several days, you know, to recover.

And after that, the change of the command, the British changed, came an American who didn't want to pay for us more the money that we were supposed to - he called us and said, "Who's supposed to pay all these bills?" I said, "Well, Allied command." "Why?" "Because they told us to do that." "Well, do you have anything written?" I said, "I don't have anything written. But that's what they told us." "Well, we can't do that more."

So they send us back to Pergola, and we arrive back in Pergola. Now our apartment was taken. Our apartment was taken. The Italians are telling us now, "No, you have your Allieds to take care of you." But the Allieds were telling us, "We are not helping civilians. We haven't got time for civilians. We are fighting the war. This is a front." And you wouldn't believe it. We were liberated. We could live very freely in Pergola. But we were starving. We were exhausted. We didn't have one cent more. We were formally starving. We found an apartment and we could not - we were eating - for six months we were living on cooked cabbage. There was nothing.

Achille was helping us. Then Victoria's father, Mr. Camerini [phonetic], also made us a loan. We gave him something to give us a loan. But it was very hard. We couldn't move. All the communications were broken. The trains were broken. You can only have a private car if you have to move. And we really were absolutely -

MR. BROWN: Stranded there?

MR. ALCALAY: - stranded there. And I was trying to make some money by going to the bus stop and being a porter, transporting suitcases. Well, I was trying first to sell some of my watercolors, exhibiting at the butcher shop, at the stationery shop, you know, varieties of these shops. I was trying to sell them for 50 cents, 75 cents. Who the hell wants to buy art in a small agricultural town?

So the only money I could make is by being a porter. And here comes two American Air Force colonels with those heavy, fat suitcases that falls, you know, in two, heavy like lead. I lift it up. I just fell almost down. I couldn't do that. And they realized that and they asked me, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I'm a painter. I got to make some living." "Oh, you are a painter? Can we see your art?" "Sure."

They came to the house and they look at my paintings. It's another miracle. They look in my paintings and they saw some drawings, and I made paintings on plywood. So they wanted to buy. Now, I knew I needed a lot of money because my family was just falling apart. And I really wanted to get to Rome where all the recuperative agencies were.

So they asked me how much was about five paintings, little paintings, on plywood and five drawings. Now, I really don't know and it's still puzzling me now. How did I pronounce $700? They pull out of their pocket and they counted me $700. I fainted from the emotion. I couldn't believe it. And I got $700.

Now, for $700 I could have buy a truck for myself. So I went next day and looked for a taxi, something, some vehicle, to take us to Rome. And, now, everybody knew I was - day before didn't have a cent, until have to produce these dollars in front of them start to believe me to get me - to get a truck. I rented a truck for, I think, $40. I went and brought a lot of food, of all kind of food, because in the country still there was a lot of food - you know, [inaudible] and sardines and whatnot. I fill up the car with food. I put my father, mother, and sister. Tell to the chauffeur, "Rome." And that's how we arrive in Rome.

MR. BROWN: When was this? Late -

MR. ALCALAY: That was in 1945, end of 1945. We arrive in Rome, and I said to my father - immediately there were other organizations, varieties of different - America Joint [sic]. So I said to my father, "Now, you go to a sanatorium, and I don't want to see you for six months." To my mother, to another sanatorium, to my sister, to

another sanatorium. And they stay for six months, each one of them in a sanatorium, to recover.

And I found a big, nice apartment. And that's how I started to - I adjusted myself for the six months period until my father came back. And he said to me, "Now what do you want? Now let's organize what we're going to do now. Are we going to Israel? Are we going to stay?" I said, "I'm going to - we're going to stay." I said, "I would like to be a painter. I would like to paint." And my father said, "All right. You would like to paint. Rome is here. You are here. Paint. I'll take care of it." I was 26, and he supported me until I was 32.

MR. BROWN: And he was able to draw upon funds when he got to Rome?

MR. ALCALAY: My father was able. He was working on a stock exchange, so he went back to stock exchange. And then he became an executive of the American Joint. That is an American organization for refugees. He was a chief cashier, was paid in dollars. We had a very beautiful apartment in Parioli, which is a beautiful section of Rome. Across the street Ingrid Bergman was living with Rossellini in those days. It was very nice. I had a big room that I used for a studio. All what I had to think was painting.

MR. BROWN: And what kind of paintings were you doing?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, I was an expressionistic painter. I became a painter - for me, Soutine was one of the painters that really was kind of a mentor to me because I suffer what is called Jewish anxiety. I was very anxious. All that quietness that was while I was in the - you know, during the war, now started to come out. I was very - I was ready to scream, to bite, to hit, because I realize what happened to me. I lost five years, the most beautiful years. And I accumulate such an energy. And I wanted to save so much time that I was eating fast. I was doing everything fast in order to save time. And I was awfully nervous, and you could see a portrait downstairs. It's exactly replica of how I was in those days.

And obsessed, really obsessed by work and by my own growth; and by also another thing that I had a big dilemma. My kibbutz, my friends, all my friends learned I was alive. They sent me money and clothing and everything from Israel. And they started to ask me when I'm coming. Now I had a big dilemma. Am I going to live on an agricultural, with people who think of cows? Or am I going to stay here where the culture is?

And there was culture because after the war in Rome there was a renaissance. You know, all the free spirits united together - the writers, the painters, the poets, the musicians, the architects. It was a real renaissance of arts. Magazines were coming , and political situation. It was very alive, and I was immediately accepted among the intellectuals, among the painters, among the writers.

And I couldn't make any decision. I really couldn't make any decision. For two years I couldn't make any decisions. But I was painting, really becoming what they call an expressionist painter. I was very wild, very uncontrolled, and an incredible energy. I was painting five, six paintings a day.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah, and making a lot of drawings, all day long. Listen to music, reading, learning Italian good, mixing with people. It was a full intellectual rebirth.

MR. BROWN: Well, you were exhibiting very quickly, too, weren't you?

MR. ALCALAY: I started to exhibit immediately. Right. As a matter of fact, the second day I arrive in Rome, I exhibited in the University of Rome and University bought the painting, which was fantastic for my - a booster to go ahead.

MR. BROWN: I'm sure.

MR. ALCALAY: And that is how in 1947, by the end of 1947 or '48, I think - I made my first show in 1946, my first one-man show, which was written by a very prominent critic of art, the most prominent critic of art of that day, those days, in Rome, Virgilio Guzzi. Then in 1948 I had another show, a big show. And then I met Kokoschka, and I ask Kokoschka, "What should I do? Should I go to Israel or not?" And Kokoschka told me, "No. You should not go to Israel. Israel is periphery of art. You should go to New York." That's what he put in my head.

MR. BROWN: To New York? Why?

MR. ALCALAY: To New York. Because New York was a center.

MR. BROWN: Did he think that even Rome was -

MR. ALCALAY: No. It was still provincial.

MR. BROWN: Provincial?

MR. ALCALAY: And Paris was nothing more. It was - as a matter of fact, I had two shows in Rome in '48. I had a one-man show that was written by Kokoschka and Carlo Levi. The catalog was. They liked my work so much, but they did not want to write a review, a presentation, because they were afraid it would build up a precedent for other people to ask. So they write me like a letter with the permission to publish a letter. And that's how it's written, as a letter.

And then I had a - and there was another show of all refugees, Jewish refugees, in Rome. There was this American Joint that was helping us. And it is called American Joint for Distribution, and it really is -

MR. BROWN: American Joint Committee.

MR. ALCALAY: Committee. Right. And it's a very big organization, international organization.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And they were helping us a lot, to buy materials or - and they made a big show in Palazzo Barberini one day. And the whole show was sold. And I acquired a lot of money. My 15 paintings were sold. So I decided to go to Paris for a while.

And I went to Paris, and it was just dismal.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MR. ALCALAY: In '48, Paris was as dismal - I couldn't take it. It was existentialist. I was always on St.-Germain-des-Pré, moving among intellectuals. Youngsters were suicidal. There was closing stores. Nobody was working. There was a defeatistic [sic] kind of a - I couldn't take it. I just couldn't take it. After a month and a half, I left with an ulcer and came back to roam.

MR. BROWN: Because you were brimming with [inaudible]?

MR. ALCALAY: I was just much more alive, much more vital. It was just terrible. And that's how I - you know, I grew up in Italy. I made in 1948 a big show. And I was developing more and more, having more problems with abstract art. That was already - the factions were already built up in Rome.

MR. BROWN: The problems remained?

MR. ALCALAY: Remember we had even a fight, a street fight, between abstract painters and figurative painters. And it was - it was very alive. And in 1950, 1949 or '50, there was a big show of Kandinsky in the museum in Rome. But my show, 1948, the Museum of Modern Art bought one of my paintings for the museum, which was very nice. And in 1949 to the beginning of 1950, there was a big show of Kandinsky. And when I saw that show, it really hit me, really changed my whole way of looking. And I was very much influenced by Kandinsky.

MR. BROWN: In what way, would you say?

MR. ALCALAY: In the way of thinking of that the painting was not to represent anything. The painting emanates its own value within itself, with its organization, with its luminosity. And it doesn't have to report anything that is visible from our point of view or visibility that we have reference of some reality. It has - it can suggest varieties of things, but doesn't have - it can't evolve. He doesn't have to describe. And that was a big revelation for me.

And then I learned about the color, an incredible luminosity that Kandinsky created. And that a whole lot in my way of painting.

MR. BROWN: How could you then thereafter relate to, say, the precautionary?

MR. ALCALAY: That was an - I was doing still an expressionistic painting. But I started to destroy my reality. My reality started to fuzz out, to be - you know, I use a lot of watercolors that I can use water and so on and running and so on. And they were making patches, and they were all kind of things that were really not controlled fully. And yet I could see in those patches some other, you know, figurations, some other things that would eventually give me a feeling that I would build up a new imagery. I had first to destroy my imagery in order to rebuild it back.

MR. BROWN: Did you hang onto - what was your feeling about Kokoschka? Was he fairly - a friend of yours, then?

MR. ALCALAY: Oh, he was a very - a friend, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Did you hang onto that after you changed?

MR. ALCALAY: No, I didn't, because he was moving. He came and he went to Salzburg back, and then to London. He came because there was a big show, the Biennale in Rome. And in that time, was also very interesting: Picasso came to Rome. And I shook hands with Picasso. I met him where he met - he came to visit al the artists. And I remember in [inaudible], in the newspaper, came an article by Virgilio Guzzi, the same that - he said, from now on, the history of Italian art will have two periods, a period before shaking hands to Picasso and a period after.

[Laughter.]

MR. ALCALAY: Because a lot of people were painting, trying to be like Picasso painting because they all became members of the Communist Party. And Picasso was a member of the Communist party. But Picasso had an independence from the socialist realism that these other guys did not have. And they became all very much socialist realist painters. And it destroyed, really destroyed, their talent.

There was a painter by the name of Guttuso, Renato Guttuso, who really could have replaced Picasso. He was powerful. But as Virgilio Guzzi said, the drama entered into his head, the drama of mankind, and so he started to paint socialist realism and really watered down very badly.

MR. BROWN: But for yourself, you [inaudible]?

MR. ALCALAY: I never was in that area.

MR. BROWN: Your own momentum going enough that -

MR. ALCALAY: I was - I had a momentum of - I was always - since my architecture was very important to me, the structure, I was intrigued by the city, by the light, by the reflection of lights, of varieties of protrusions, so the speciality of Rome that's Baroque has an incredible amount of light and darks and shadows, and it's red in itself, and so on; so that I found an incredible amount of material there already to use it.

And then I - Luigi tell you I got - he introduced me to Kafka. And Kafka's books that are also very expressionistic were helping me a lot in that way, so that I was really - when Kokoschka is a representative of the expressionistic art, and he really identifies myself with him in a way, I mean, my paintings he liked very much because reminded him of his paintings, too.

But I was moving into abstract expressionism of some kind, not knowing anything about Jackson Pollock yet or anything.

MR. BROWN: No?

MR. ALCALAY: I have seen a little bit, but not being able to understand him at all.

MR. BROWN: Were you part of a circle of artists or -

MR. ALCALAY: I was a part of a circle of artists, a bit circle that was called Art Club. And we were exhibiting all over Europe. It was just wonderful. It was a circle there. You go and meet people and so on and so on.

MR. BROWN: And you were prospering somewhat?

MR. ALCALAY: I was prospering in a way, but was not being able still to live on my own. I couldn't work. All what I was doing was painting. That was all.

I stay with my family, but I already met my wife. Already 1946 I met my wife and we're going steady for four years already. And in 1950, we married. And we married on capitol there, on top, in the building, the Michelangelo Building -

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes.

MR. ALCALAY: - Palazzo dei Conservatori. We made a civil marriage when we married. And then we came to this country.

MR. BROWN: She, too, had been a refugee. Right?

MR. ALCALAY: She was a refugee, and she studied medicine in Rome. And I knew her from Belgrade. Her family and my family were very friendly, friendly families. Both doctors. And so 1950 we married, and then by 1951 we decided to come to this country. There was a big - I had tell to my friends in kibbutz that I could not go there. I

explain to them for reasons that I could not go there. They accepted the reason, but they didn't justify them, because they -

MR. BROWN: You mean they didn't find that they justified?

MR. ALCALAY: That they are justified. Right. And they stopped with me any kind of a correspondence, any kind of a thought. And only when I got the Guggenheim in 1959, they read in *Time Magazine* that I got it, and they realized that I am still a very positive, productive person. I didn't go to any business of any kind. And we reestablish our contact. And in 1970, I went to visit them, and I'm like a member of a kibbutz. They consider me. They are waiting for my retirement and they believe I'll be going there. My sons are out there now -

MR. BROWN: Oh, are they?

MR. ALCALAY: - and they keep in touch with them. Yeah. And when they come to this country, they come to visit me. So the contact was not lost at all.

And so we decided to come to Boston because we were very much afraid to go to any city that needs an American background. We thought Boston is representative of, you know, New England, where the tradition of England, eventually of Europe, is still around.,

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. ALCALAY: And then here - and since Kokoschka told me to go to New York and I read a lot about New York, especially if you are poor then New York is not a city to go, I had enough of cockroaches. I had enough of varieties of - you know, of poverty that was during the war. I was a well-to-do person, and I just could not take it more.

To people in the kibbutz, I explain why I didn't want to go, not too much because of art because even they allow to work only half a day and half a day to paint in the kibbutz. They really wanted me. But I really was very tired of living in promiscuity [sic]. I could not take more to live with people, to eat with people, to sleep with people. I really wanted my own bed, my own privacy, because I did since from '41 till '45, and that was plenty for me.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And we choose Boston because it's close to New York. It's cultural city. It has a lot of universities. And I thought that one day I will find a place to teach somewhere.

MR. BROWN: Did you know much about Boston? Could you have known [inaudible]?

MR. ALCALAY: Yes, I'd read. Yeah, I read. Yeah, I read a few things about it.

MR. BROWN: So you came here in 1951?

MR. ALCALAY: I came in '51. But I was very much afraid of American - our American society. I really did not know too much. I thought I'm going to a wilderness of some kind.

MR. BROWN: So that's what made you afraid of it?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, yeah. Maybe afraid of that because I really wanted to be in the culture. Rome was very cultural. I always live either in Paris, in Rome, in Belgrade - always was a lot in culture. And they're reminding - the memories of reading *Babbitt*, you know, and things of that nature was giving me feeling that I will go to a lot of people that don't know anything about art, that don't know about aesthetics, and so on.

MR. BROWN: Just in business and agriculture and [inaudible]?

MR. ALCALAY: In business, right. Right, in material things. And therefore, we choose Boston because Boston was just a little bit different because of Harvard and MIT and so on. But for every eventuality, I learn in Italy - I went to a potter and I learned out of pottery, so that I thought that I would make at least a little living by making pots or making plates and selling them somewhere, which really I did. That was the first thing I did when I came.

MR. BROWN: When you came, you weren't - you had some money, but you were -

MR. ALCALAY: I came with $200. But the Jewish Combined Appeal brought us here, so they were responsible.

MR. BROWN: How did that work? If you expressed an interest, they would see that House got money?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. The American Joint would - you know, there was a Truman bill for 100,000 refugees. And so

there was a lot of refugees that came to this country. So we had to go through a process of six months, varieties of camps.

MR. BROWN: You had to go through - yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: Six months of camping, of checking up all the, you know, health centers and so on. So we went to Naples. There was a big camp, Bagnoli, of refugees. And finally we were, you know, accepted, and then we had to go by train to [inaudible], to Bremenshoffe [phonetic] in Germany, where we stay for another month there in that camp there and then on their liberty - one of the liberty ships, how we came to this country.

And when we came to this country, I was chosen - the moment I entered into the ship, I was chosen to be a chief of welfare on the ship. Because everything was run by refugees. There were about a few sailors just to run the ship, you know, technically. But everything else - cleaning, everything - was run by refugees. And I have to organize schools and news. I speak several languages, so I was giving news to Crimeans, to Czechoslovakians, to Romanians, and so on.

You know, we arrive to New York City, and next day we came to Boston. And when I arrive in Boston, Christian Science Monitor and another paper - I forgot which one - already had articles about my arrival.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: How had that been done?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, I think through [inaudible] were related to Jewish Combined Appeal. I don't know to what kind of organization. That a painter is coming to live in Boston, known painter in Italy, and so on, which helped a lot.

MR. BROWN: Did you then - was it some time before you got a permanent position?

MR. ALCALAY: Oh, that was a lot of time. That was a hard time. Oh, I couldn't get any position anywhere. I was not able to do anything. I came here with a lot of paintings, but my paints were all stuck on the Custom. I couldn't get them out. Jewish Combined Appeal could not make decisions. Took them three months to make decisions to get them off the Custom. Finally I got them, and we're living in a studio apartment down in Clarendon and Beacon Street. And I started to show to the galleries, and nobody wanted to accept me because they thought that I'm too European. And my first gallery - my first show was organized by my friend Luigi [inaudible] in Chicago. I had a nice show there in that big gallery. I forgot the name of that big gallery, but Main Avenue and -

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. ALCALAY: And I sold quite a bit, and so they learn here. They heard here. And I sold in Chicago, and then I got a gallery here. Swetzoff Gallery was my gallery.

MR. BROWN: Swetzoff?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah, which was a very good gallery. And I grew up with him for a long time. I had about seven shows there. And I was exhibiting around. The Institute of Contemporary Art had a show of five younger New England artists, and I was chosen. And then I got a prize, you know, on the Boston Art Festival that was there.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: And I started to move around. I was work very hard. Then in 1954, I had a big show at the DeCordova Museum, and that really did it because in that show, there were so many people that discover that I am a good painter. So they wanted me to teach them. And I was really afraid to teach anybody.

MR. BROWN: Well, now, this was quite a breakthrough, then, the show at the DeCordova. Was this chiefly owing to its director, Mr. Walkey, Frederick Walkey?

MR. ALCALAY: Right. Right. Right..

MR. BROWN: He saw that - he liked your painting?

MR. ALCALAY: He liked my paintings very much.

MR. BROWN: Were your paintings quite different from most of what was being shows?

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. They were - yeah. They were expressionistic. They were still paintings from Rome. And I could still adapt myself to this reality. Here is everything vertical -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALCALAY: - and everything is concrete, straight. There's no protrusions. There's no - you know, any kind of a - anything on a building. It's flat. Windows are flat. And the scale is completely different. It took me quite a bit of time to start to paint, and I started to pay the United States. I mean, I really started to paint American city.

MR. BROWN: The scale of the American city is -

MR. ALCALAY: Is completely inhuman. It has nothing to do with a human being. It has to do with a car. And so it took a lot of time on me to adjust to see how I can figure out this. And I started to point American city. By 1954, I already produce some good paintings, and I became more abstract. I was more evocative and less - all what I wanted to produce is paintings that would show the noise, the scale, an incredible amount of non-reference. A man is a tiny little ant that walks. He's unknown, disappears in the house. So the man was not important for me at all.

What was important is those huge structures that look like canyons of some kind. The light - I was spending a lot of time in New York - the light that reflects from the glass to the next building, especially in Park Avenue. So I paint a lot of paintings that recall lights, city lights. And then I paint a lot of paintings that I call suspended castles because the skyscrapers on buildings such a way that you don't have room to see the whole skyscraper. You look a up and you have a feeling it's suspended. And if you look down, you haven't got an idea how far it's going. So it has this sense of suspension.

I spent a lot of time on Times Square. That was one thing that I spent an incredible amount of time in - maybe if you count the hours, it would be months - studying all the lights and the wonderful kind of a wonderland. It's called *The Wonderland of Times Square*. And in 1957, there was a big show of - a competition show of "Drawing: USA." And there was about 5,000 entries from all - both hemispheres. And I sent one of my drawings of Times Square, and they accepted it. It was - they accepted only 200 people and, I mean, the catalog is sold.

MR. BROWN: Was this very important [inaudible]?

MR. ALCALAY: That was very - that was the most important. And I enter the - and they send me a ticket to go to open, to get into that. When we came to this country, it was 13 of July 1951. The only visit I made in New York was from the boat. I went straight to the Museum of Modern Art to look. And I made a note to my wife: "I got to hang here one of these days." And it took me about six years.

And I was waiting to enter the opening of this show, and I was so bold and so enthusiastic. And I was sitting in front of the door, the first when the doors opened, to get in to run to see where my painting is. And I went. I look at it. I saw my painting. And there was a red star already underneath. Now, nobody could have bought it. I was the first to enter. I went to the secretary to check up, and the museum bought it. So that was a big booster for me.

MR. BROWN: And this was '57?

MR. ALCALAY: '57. And then I was exhibiting around and I was trying to get a dealer in New York. I couldn't get a dealer in New York. Nobody wanted to show my work. Twice -

MR. BROWN: Why do you know say that?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, they were afraid. It was strong. They were afraid. It was European. You [inaudible] European art too much. And I was twice with my wife carrying paintings through the galleries, and nobody -

MR. BROWN: Why did they not want European?

MR. ALCALAY: I don't know. I don't know. They didn't want. I was unknown. They were afraid to get into something. So I couldn't get it any dealer in New York, on any dealer. And it was very demoralizing. It was really very demoralizing because by while we're carrying paintings, nobody wanted even to spit on us there.

Came back home. Next, another time. After the second year, I said to my wife, "That's enough. I'm not going more. That would kill me. I'm just going to sit and work here. It might take me 30 years, but they're going to knock on my door."

And I started to work, and get these magazines, and see the shitty paintings are all over the place exhibiting and so on. And it eat my liver. I got another ulcer from that. And I didn't know what the hell I can do. Then finally one day I got so real mad. I woke up. I wrote a letter to Whitney Museum. I said, "How the hell a young painter can

make - can show to somebody his work?" I was recommended by the Fogg Museum to [inaudible] Galleries, to varieties of people, and they looked.

Who liked very much was the one dealer - I forgot his name - who died, who left all his work to the Museum of Modern Art. He liked very much. he was a European dealer. And he pronounce himself - see, these people even don't pronounce. They won't say that they like it or not because they commit themself. This guy, pronounce himself, told me that I'm a good painter, but he cannot exhibit because he says, "Look what I exhibit." And there was Braque, Modigliani, you know, Picasso, this kind of things. And I really understood it.

But it gave me a lot of - a lot of satisfaction. So I wrote a letter to the Whitney Museum and I asked them, "Well, how the hell can one show his work?" So they ask me - they told me - wrote me back. They said, "We have viewing for unknown artists every six months. Why don't you come and show your work. Send a few work." So I send a few paintings, and a few days later I get them back. "Thank you very much. We view your art." That was all.

But nine months later I get another letter. "One of your paintings was chosen for the National Show of American Art." Ah. And they put up a catalog of the national show of all our American painters. They put 10 photographs, and mine was in. Wow. That was something different. When I got to the - the show was there, and everybody was admiring it, and - then a started to get letters from dealers from New York. "Mr. Alcalay, when you come in New York, why don't you drop in and say hello," and so on. And that's how I got my dealer in New York City.

MR. BROWN: Who was that?

MR. ALCALAY: That was Krasner Gallery for a long time.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: And then in 1959 I really felt I'm strong now. I know what I'm doing. And so then I sent to - I made an application for the Guggenheim. And sure enough, I got a Guggenheim. And that was really a big booster because my prices jumped up immediately. I became internationally known, then nationally known. And that open all the doors. Then everybody started to offer me jobs to get to teach. Before that, nobody wanted to get me to teaching job. I went to Brandeis, to Boston University. Nobody.

MR. BROWN: Had you wanted to teach?

MR. ALCALAY: I wanted to teach.

MR. BROWN: To make a living?

MR. ALCALAY: Right, to make a living. Nobody. What I did, on my show at the Calder Museum, the first show meant so many people to ask me to teach that I was really afraid. I didn't know if I know how to teach. Nobody taught me. I was never in any art school. I said, I'll give you - I'll take you in a couple of months. I told you, "I'll take you in an accelerated course in learning how to teach." But this guy - these people appeared the next day and they wanted me to teach. So I had a private school. I had a big private school, about 70 people. I was teaching for almost 10 years - no, eight years. And -

MR. BROWN: Did you have it in your house or have you had a school studio?

MR. ALCALAY: I had first in my house, but then I had to move to - I opened a studio. I had a big, even, waiting list of people. I was acting as a therapist, as a teacher, all kinds of things. But it was not rewarding at all because, you know, you only give. You don't get anything. These are very - you know, people that wait, and so - most amateurs and so on. And then Mirko was killed, who was a big sculptor, you know, who was my friend from Rome.

MR. BROWN: You had known him in Rome?

MR. ALCALAY: Right. He was the first one that saw me in Rome. He was a friend of Luigi [inaudible]. And he really gave me a lot of encouragement when I came with a portfolio from concentration camp. He really gave me a lot of encouragement, and always encouraged me in Rome, while I was in Rome. And then he came to teach at Harvard, and so he didn't know one word of English. And he really needed somebody to teach with him. So he invited me to teach.

MR. BROWN: When was that, now?

MR. ALCALAY: In 1959 and '60. And now, just now, is the 20th anniversary of my teaching, and we will probably have some celebration.

And that is how it went. From then on I'm teaching at Harvard. I'm enjoying very much because I know a lot about. I'm teaching design, which was related to my architectural training. And this combination of, you know, my cultural background, which I think is very strong - I read a lot on many different languages - and I combine the knowledge of - I know music quite good and so that I combine all these things. And I'm very successful in teaching. And my classes grow all the time and -

MR. BROWN: You developed your own way of teaching?

MR. ALCALAY: I developed my own way of teaching.

MR. BROWN: You never went to a school?

MR. ALCALAY: And they are asking me now to write a book already. For several years they're writing me, Harcourt Jovanovich. Grace Jovanovich is asking me, and that other that write the Hall - what's called that?

MR. BROWN: Oh, Prentiss Hall.

MR. ALCALAY: Prentiss.

MR. BROWN: Publishers. Yeah.

MR. ALCALAY: They want me to write a book about design, teaching design and so on. I'm ready to retire soon, you know, in three years.

MR. BROWN: How do you go about that teaching? Could you give a brief description?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, I teach - I tell the students that I teach by contagion, that I don't talk so much, that I show, that my way of - that the thing that you - there is a theory of art, but there is a practice of art. And the practice is you have to show. You cannot describe. Because you can describe history but you cannot describe - if you ask somebody to show you how to make shoes, he has to show to you how to make shoes. He can't talk to you about how to make shoes.

And I give the students - I approach students very friendly. I talk their language. I say freaks me out or things like that. They like that very much. I call them by name. They're very flattered when I remember each name. And I show love for them, and it's a gratification when I see that they open their eyes that there is a revelation in them. And I think I have a natural way of approaching. Since I have suffered so much, I know their problems a lot. I advise them a lot. I saved three students from suicide at Harvard. And I use my own intellectual capacities relating to - I always ask the student in which field he is, and then I use from his field some examples to render for him -

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. ALCALAY: - retain a lot of knowledge. And I can pull it out very easily. But I try to teach them. I teach them mostly to learn how the world is rich visually and how is poor so that they make their own judgment. And how they can also - I teach them the visual grammar. I'm telling them they're not artists; being an artist is something very different. It is to have a passion of some kind. It's not a talent. A talent is not enough. It needs a sensibility, a certain sensibility on which you will react and which you absorb, it does form into a new energy that makes art. And so that you have - how the fantasy is created by that energy. And the talent helps you to render the fantasy as best as you can.

But that everybody of them has a potential, and if they dedicate a lot of time, a lot - they should understand that these are serious business, that you don't do it with your left hand. And I always tell them, more you stick on one project, more the mysterious becomes. More the mysterious becomes, more challenging become. More challenging become, more challenging become. More challenging become, more engaging of you become. And you feel an incredible dialogue between what's happening between you and the project. And then you feel the creative process a little bit more, a dance away.

And I feel like I'm very confident in what I'm teaching. I learn a lot from students.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you do?

MR. ALCALAY: Oh, yeah. All the time.

MR. BROWN: Unlike those [inaudible].

MR. ALCALAY: Oh, yeah. I learn a lot all the time. And I learn, you know, being with young people, it's wonderful. And I trained a lot of assistants of mine that were - that became teachers now. So it's very rewarding, and it was

the best thing that could have happened to me, I think I was the happiest guy when I got a job at Harvard and it was something that, you know, very simple. I went in. There was a dean there and he said, "Albert, wait outside." And then he said, "Now, do you agree to teach 12 hours a day on a salary of - you'll be an instructor, of $6,000?" That's how I started. I said yes. "Okay. You are in."

Jeez, it was some kind of a - I was missing something. I thought that a storm should happen, you know. You get a job at Harvard. I know something has to fall on me on something. Nothing happen.

[Laughter.]

MR. ALCALAY: And, you know, Harvard is very unassuming in this kind of things. And I feel very good because it's an intellectual community that I fit very well. And, you know, most of my friends are intellectuals and not artists. Bob Newman was only - you know, an Ivy League hire him because he was a closest friend. That's the best way to teach, when you have closest friend.

MR. BROWN: He was a close friend because of, what, intellectual interests that were shared?

MR. ALCALAY: No. No. On an intellectual interest, we are much different. I mean, he comes from art schools and he doesn't - he's not a reader. He doesn't read. You see, what I was - I learned when I was very young that to be a cultured man, you have to keep open eyes and open ears 24 hours a day. And that's my religion. And I do read all the time. And I don't spare myself on a comfort of any kind. I do absorb - any room has an amount of books like this, any room. I was trying to think of moving of this house. I only get scared if I have to move the books.

MR. BROWN: Move your books? There are thousands of them.

MR. ALCALAY: Yeah. Thousands are around. And I came with nothing. It was just acquired.

MR. BROWN: Now, Mirko, was he - what interests did you share there?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, we have interests in mostly that we have been through war together, that we had a lot of common hate of Germans, and that we had, you know, a set of - we organize values in a very, very solid way; that we have been through, you know, lack of all kind of things through war, and so that we have values that are very similar to each other. He's not intellectual. He's not an intellectual. I find very common connection with Motherwell when Motherwell was here, I used to talk with him. Good, because he has a French tradition and I have French tradition. And it's a very different kind of a thought.

But with Mirko, there's so much - he has so much interests about the varieties of things. And I'm so much interested in Italian tradition and Italian culture, civilization, that I could always gain by being with him.

MR. BROWN: What do you think the fascination was for you in Italian culture?

MR. ALCALAY: Well, I am interested in an culture in which I live And the moment I come to a country I start to read newspapers, the first thing, to know what's happening around me. Italian is very rich. Is tremendous rich. I'm a student of history for a long time. And it's a very [inaudible] people.

MR. BROWN: But when you came here, it's an entirely different scale. And then at some point - I think maybe it was doing your Guggenheim - you mentioned that you wanted to go see more of these cityscapes and the landscape of America -

MR. ALCALAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: - because it was so disconnected and the like.

MR. ALCALAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: Disorder t it.

MR. ALCALAY: Right. Then I started to study American civilization. And especially I'm specialized in now in American present life, present scene. I read everything, you know, from existentialist till today. I know why that normal male - I read everything. I'm subscribe of all magazines. And I kept connections with other - and I know exactly how American breathe, how American reacts, how much American life is related to American painting, how, you know, American culture is related to American lief. And, you that is - when you live - you know, a painter is - well, what I do, I register the reality. Now, I have to know the reality in order to be able to register it.

You know, you use your instinct, instinctual forces. But that's not enough. That's still a certain point. That's where you can figure out - you see, there are painters like - well, let's - I don't want to criticize. Of course, Bob is a terrific, terrific friend and painter. But his paintings are somewhat limited somewhere in the sense of

worldliness, you know, because he's not worldly. He tries. He had lived in Barcelona. He lived in Germany. He has this. But he's still a painter, an American painter, coming out of an art school, which is a little bit different than the painter that was brought up on a wide cultural level, you see.

MR. BROWN: That is -

That's - you know, he's a powerful painter. You know, that's what I feel I am, and that's what happens because I have no - now I have no fatherland, you know. I'm not a - I'm a what is called *déraciné* in French, upended. I have no country. I'm not American, you know. I'm not Yugoslav. I never was Yugoslav. Although I lived in Yugoslavia, I always wanted to get out of Yugoslavia. I was not French, although I was born in France. I feel Jewish mostly because of my sense of destiny because of persecutions, of Holocaust, of that thing that binds me together.

And I really feel very close to Israel, to tell you the truth. And I probably will go to Israel to retire, to live. I speak Hebrew, and I know Israeli culture well, Jewish culture. And, you know, that way I'm kind of an international. I'm very international. I can speak seven languages. I listen to my trans-oceanic radio, you know, all kinds of cities of the world of news. And, you know, that emanates around.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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