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AN INTERVIEW WITH SIMON CHILEWICH
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PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Simon Chilewich on November 26, 2003 in New York City with Kurt Piehler. And could we begin by [asking] ... where were you born, and where were you born?

CHILEWICH: I am born in a small town called Bialystok, which at the time of my birth was Poland—since then it is part of Russia. I was born on April 25, 1919. And the reason that I was born in Bialystok was because my parents, through Russia ... arrived, in the course of—in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, and my mother couldn't hold on to the pregnancy so she stopped at the first ... village where she had relatives which was Bialystok.

PIEHLER: Which was then Poland at the time?

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: So, but for the fate of a few months you might have been born in Russia?

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: Um, could you—what were the names of your parents? The names of your parents ...

CHILEWICH: My father was Aron, which spelled A-R-O-N, and my mother was Bronia, B-R-O-N-I-A.

PIEHLER: And where were they from in Russia?

CHILEWICH: Ah, from a town called Pskov, P-S-K-O-V. It is a old historical Russian town ... between ... Saint—then Leningrad and ... then St Petersburg, and Moscow.

PIEHLER: And um, do you know how your parents met?

CHILEWICH: Yes, my mother was a singer at ... Stanislawski ... ballet and opera. And my father saw her perform and sent her a note behind stage, and they started dating and married within a few weeks after they met.

PIEHLER: You know ...

CHILEWICH: That was in 1918.

PIEHLER: So you ... were born shortly after they were married?

CHILEWICH: I was born ... less than nine months

PIEHLER: Um, your father what did he do for a living before ... going to Poland, before fleeing to Poland?

CHILEWICH: He was working with his father in [the] hides business, which consisted of exporting hides from Russia to Germany, England, and also United States.

PIEHLER: And so his father, how [far] back does your family's involvement in the hide business go?

CHILEWICH: My father married the younger daughter of a very known hide dealer, Jewish hide dealer in Russia. And so he assumed this trade and cont—and worked in the family business.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. This was your ... grand ...

CHILWEICH: Grandfather.

PIEHLER: Your grandfather. So, that's ... where it started?

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: ... How old was your father and mother when they came to Poland?

CHILEWICH: Well, my father was just over 18 and my mother was ... I believe 17 and some months.

PIEHLER: And did the rest of the family make it ... over to Poland or did they stay in ...

CHILEWICH: No, my father's parents flew to Estonia from Russia. His older brother went to Hamburg, Germany. And their two—the older sister went to Berlin to study medicine, and the two younger sisters went with their parents to Estonia. My mother's family stayed in Poland. They never went to Russia as my mother did in her youth.

PIEHLER: So your mother came to Russia in her youth when Poland was still part of the Russian empire?

CHILEWICH: An independent country ... right.

PIEHLER: The town that you were born in, where did your family—where did your mother and father settle in the end in Poland?

CHILEWICH: Well, it's—at the time that I was born, my father was not present in Bialystok, as he was arrested on the border while fleeing from Russia. He was only—he only came to Bialystok to see my mother and his newborn child when I was three months old.

PIEHLER: So it took him three months to get out?

CHILEWICH: And we stayed in Bialystok for a few months and we—I celebrated my, or my parents celebrated my first year already in Warsaw, because they moved as quickly as possible from Bialystok to Warsaw.

PIEHLER: So your parents settled in ...

CHILEWICH: In Warsaw.

PIEHLER: And your father went into the hide business?

CHILEWICH: Correct.

PIEHLER: Without your father?

CHILEWICH: Eh?

PIEHLER: Without your father? Was your father, did your father and your—did your grandfather and father go into business together?

CHILEWICH: No, because my grandfather was in Estonia, my father was in Warsaw, and his brother was in Hamburg. Yes, they were all in the hide business ...

PIEHLER: But separately ...

CHILEWICH: ... but separately. Because ... to do it together in three various locations was almost impossible in those days.

PIEHLER: How did your father get the capital to start his business?

CHILEWICH: Well, the capital was very limited. It was primarily the knowledge of the commodity and knowledge of the ... suppliers as well as buyers. And in those days there was no big slaughterhouses that produced major numbers of cattle hides. There were usually smaller slaughterhouses operated by ... private owners, and one had to arrange the collection of this raw material and conserve it to be used as a commodity.

PIEHLER: Could you talk a little bit about you earliest memories of life in Poland? In a sense, anything that comes to mind, like what are your ...

CHILEWICH: Well I could—I don't remember anything about Bialystok, but I do remember my years of three, four, five years-old on (Pavia?) street, which was a former Polish ghetto, a Warsaw ghetto.... And I think I have some memories which I will keep all my life, because they were very, very ... difficult days, not only for us, but for the entire community.

PIELHER: When you said there were some difficult days, could you talk a little bit about those difficulties?

CHILEWICH: Well to begin with, the population of this ghetto was ... very poor. And ... the income was mostly the physical work which they performed. My great grandmother, my mother's mother ... I met her and remember her all the time as sitting in a wheelchair as she was paralyzed and looking at the window. And we were living on (Pavia?) street, which was a very active street on which merchants, and couriers, and the population—the whole population was practically on “Jew” street. And it was very active. And my grandmother, if she told me this once she told me this almost every time I saw her, “Look! Look at the people. Look at the activity. Each and every person, Russians and old ... [people] going. Each and every one has an objective. Each and every one carries a burden, but yet every one has somewhere, somehow, a soft pillow.”

PIEHLER: And how old were you when your [grand] mother told you that?

CHILEWICH: ... I would estimate that—about four or five years old. And this continued until she passed away, which was shortly before we left Warsaw—before I left Warsaw, which was 1936.

PIEHLER: It's a very poignant thing to say, because that world is completely gone that you grew up in.

CHILEWICH: Well, I used to have a book of photographs ... oh, I forgot the author ... The Vanished World. And quite frankly, I disagree with the title “Vanished” because this world did not vanish, and I don't think it will vanish as long as there are people who remember it and who can tell the story. To me it is a world which had such a tremendous impact on the lives of the population that one talks about it forever. And I presume that today there are three or four generations who are acquainted, or understand, or have been a part ... of that—may we call it—mystery of life.

PIEHLER: Since you've said—I like how you say it's not a vanished world because it still impacts, how do you—when you look back on that world, how does it shape your life when you think of growing up in that world?

CHILEWICH: Well ... it took stamina, it took determination, it took hard work, but it took a lot of belief, not necessarily religious belief, but ... belief in the relief of things. And ... as we know, history proved that this Polish ghetto was only a small beginning of what was later a massive Holocaust involving millions of people. So the things didn't improve but, were worse yet. This notwithstanding, there was enough stamina, enough will, enough determination, to survive.

PIEHLER: Your father's business, how succ—he started with very little capital ... and he had fled from Russia, how did the business go in the 1920s and 1930s?

CHILEWICH: Well, hides is a very—in those days, was a very ... necessary commodity, a valuable commodity, because all footwear plus other leather goods were made out of the raw material which was the hides of cattle. There were few people who knew this product, and

there were few people who knew how to preserve and maintain ... its value for what was then a very important part of clothing. Shoes were almost essential, more essential than a suit. And so my father having from his childhood being exposed to this trade and industry has also had the opportunity to establish contacts with the producers of this raw material as well as those who have converted this raw material into leather. And these were people usually in the so-called industrial countries, like Germany, like England, and the United States.

PIEHLER: Now how would your father make contact, would he travel to these ...

CHILEWICH: No, in those days contact was made without e-mail, without ...

PIEHLER: I know, I think for students reading this, they'll think well he just sent an e-mail message.

CHILEWICH: Right. (Laughter) No, it was occasionally by hand-written letters, mostly by typed letters, and very occasionally by telegram. And the telegram was both expensive, very expensive, and coded, so that ... there would be a decisive saving in the cost of communication.

PIEHLER: But how would your father, in a sense, establish a relationship with ...

CHILEWICH: Well, I cannot tell you how he established—but he did know from his father presumably, and also because he was interested in this thing there was some publication there was some ... [telephone rings] sorry. And ... by word of mouth ... the participants of the trade and industry became known. So one wrote a letter introducing ... himself and describing the raw material which one could supply, and a business contact emerged. Afterwards they had to be dependent on the credibility and reliability of what was promised, described, promised, and undertaken by the sale or purchase.

PIEHLER: The networks that particularly your father sold to abroad—how much of that network was Jewish and how much was non-Jewish?

CHILEWICH: What?

PIEHLER: The networks he would sell [to], these contacts in England, Germany, and the United States ...

CHILEWICH: I would say that ... in Europe the trade was in mostly in Jewish hands. In ... England less so, and in America tannery ... was in mostly non-Jewish hands.

PIEHLER: So these networks were not just—they ... were both Jews and non-Jews, that he would deal with?

CHILEWICH: In Poland and in German it was mostly—in Russia, Poland, Germany, and in Eastern Europe as a whole it was mostly Jewish hands.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. How succ—at one point your father was able to send you to the London School of Economics, so it sounds like your father became quite successful over time, is that a fair ...

CHILEWICH: Yes, just to give you a characteristic. It was, in Warsaw, Poland there were two major competitors in the hide business, which was my father and Mr. (Kowalski?), his competitor. And both had primarily the export of the raw material from Poland and surrounding countries to abroad. And because they had a history of—because of their education and tradition etcetera, their contacts were developed ... rather quickly.

PIEHLER: And ... your father's a leading—what did that mean in terms of, what—how big was the house you lived in?

CHILEWICH: Well, yes, ultimately I remember in Warsaw we were quite successful. Both me and my sister went to private school. We lived in a nice apartment.

PIEHLER: So you lived in an apartment?

CHILEWICH: An apartment. But it was a nice apartment with bathrooms, and ... with help, and an elevator. And, then the first telephones came.

PIEHLER: Your family had a telephone?

CHILEWICH: We had a private telephone at home. So yes, ... we were quite well off.

PIEHLER: 'Cause, you mentioned earlier when we were having lunch, in fact, ... when the Munich Pact came out your family was on vacation, I think you said.

CHILEWICH: Pardon?

PIEHLER: Your family was on vacation abroad ...

CHILEWICH: Oh, oh, Munich ...

PIEHLER: Yes.

CHILEWICH: Yes, so this was 1938. I was studying in London and my mother and father were in ... Warsaw, and my sister was in then Palestine with my grandparents.

PIEHLER: Your grandparents had gone to Palestine?

CHILEWICH: From Estonia they came to Warsaw for a while, and then from Warsaw in 1928 went to Palestine.

PIEHLER: And where did they ...

CHILEWICH: And so, my father wanted to retrieve the family, or rather to arrange a get-together of my mother, himself, and the children primarily. And so he arranged a two weeks vacation in a luxurious hotel in Nice, which still exists, called (Negresco?). And we came there for a two-weeks vacation. But the vacation was forced upon us to be extended because of the Munich crisis. My father ... took this as a ... major undertaking, because the cost piled up rapidly, and the outlook for the settlement of Munich was still in doubt.

PIEHLER: This was—I'm jumping ahead a little in the story, but this was significant, your mother's reaction to Munich was quite—you told me over lunch.

CHILEWICH: My mother was very—my mother suffered emotionally from the anti-Semitic ... heritage in Poland, but Warsaw particularly, much more than my father because he traveled and he had contact with people. But for a woman coming from a reasonably religious environment ... life, was subject to pronounced anti-Semitic ... and my mother hated Poland. And now with the possibility of war, which the Munich crisis represented ... she was determined, or at least wanted to take a firm stand, that she would not go back to Poland, so she never did. From Nice she went with me to London.

PIEHLER: And your father went back?

CHILEWICH: And my father promised to go to Warsaw for six months to liquidate things and join us in London, which he did quicker than expected. He was in London about four months later, after Munich.

PIEHLER: After the Munich—so before 1939 even?

CHILEWICH: Yeah, before 1939, he came to London and immediately applied for an American visa. And he got the visa in 1939 in April, which was a remarkably quick time. And I was under twenty-one so—and did not intend to be going ... to America, because I was a very happy young fellow in London. And my father invited me for a dinner, for first time we had dinner one-on-one, and he explained to me the advantages of me ... going with him to the United States, getting the green papers, and having the option and in time to go to the States. Well, as young men can do I had the chutzpah not answer him that evening, but I said I will let him know tomorrow. (Laughter) And ... you can see what my answer was. And so I—well, I remember going to the American Consulate with him within the next few days to get personally examined, and went as a minor child, being under twenty-one, on his visa.

PIEHLER: You had mentioned earlier, which I think is very significant to put on tape, that your father, in a sense, had found the loophole in terms of getting a visa to the United States, the fact that if he had applied as Pole he probably would never have got a visa.

CHILEWICH: No, no you—the immigration quotas were based in those days on the country of birth. And so he, he knew that ...

PIEHLER: So applying as a Russian ...

CHILEWICH: No. He had no alternative. He—being born in Russia ...

PIEHLER: Russia. That's how it counted.

CHILEWICH: That's how it counted. But he never—he knew that it would be a quicker process, because people from other countries had to wait three, four, five years ...

PIEHLER: Oh yes.

CHILEWICH: ... for a visa. But he knew that it would be quicker. So as soon as he came to London—he didn't want to apply in Warsaw for confidential reasons, so as soon as he came to London, he applied for a visa, expecting that he would get it within a year or two, which would have been fast. But he got it within four or five months.

PIEHLER: Before we leave Poland, I want to ask you a little bit about—how religious was your family growing up?

CHILEWICH: How what?

PIEHLER: How religious was your family? How observant?

CHILEWICH: Well let me say, as long as my grandparents were alive, all my—I never met my mother's father, so I only knew one grandfather, because he passed away before my birth, but I knew very well my parents, my grandparents from my—the parents of my father and the old lady, the mother of my mother. Well, at one time, in Warsaw, the grandmother lived with us, so that was a prerogative that we would have a kosher home. And when my grandparents—when my grandmother passed away, in honor of my grandparents, I think, as long as we remained in Poland I think we maintained basic religious requirements.

PIEHLER: So you would, for example, on Friday night light the candle?

CHILEWICH: Yes. Yes.

PIEHLER: How often did you go to services?

CHILEWICH: I would say ... when my grandfather was alive almost every Friday night and Saturday, and later on it was less.

PIEHLER: Were you Bar Mitzvahed?

CHILEWICH: Yes

PIEHLER: You mentioned that your mother felt the sting of anti-Semitism more in Poland, is there any specifics, [or] stories that happened to her that you remember?

CHILEWICH: Well. One day I had—I had to walk to school and one day I didn't come home for two or three hours, and my mother tried to find me, and I was stopped in the park by hooligans and beaten up. She considered it an anti-Semitic situation, I'm not sure that this was anti-Semitic or just hooligans.

PIEHLER: But she took it very ...

CHILEWICH: But she took it very serious, and was very disturbed by this particular incident.

PIEHLER: Is there anything that happened to her that was ...

CHILEWICH: Yes, that was—she wanted, she was a singer, at a pretty good theater in Moscow, and so she wanted to pursue her career, and she couldn't do that in Warsaw.

PIEHLER: There were no opportunities?

CHILEWICH: There was no opportunity.

PIEHLER: What about your parents' social circle? Was it just in the Jewish community growing up in Poland?

CHILEWICH: Mostly, except that my father had a partner. While developing his business he interested—he succeeded to interest an investment house, a Polish investment house, in partnership, or backing his efforts. And so he did develop a personal relationship with some of the executives of that investment house, and they were not Jewish.

PIEHLER: Now did they, for example, come over to the house for dinner?

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: And *visa versa* you would ...

CHILEWICH: Yes. This particular ... segment of people they were the so-called “enlightened Christians” or enlightened in that, to us, they were not anti-Semitic.

PIEHLER: Well, and it sounds like it was more than just simply a business relationship if they were mutually entertaining each other?

CHILEWICH: No, there was some social relationship as well.

PIEHLER: In terms of your education, could you talk a little bit about the first school that you went to? Eventually you went to the European gymnasium in Warsaw but before ...

CHILEWICH: The same gymnasium had a kindergarten.

PIEHLER: So you stayed at the—that was the ...

CHILEWICH: I was eleven years in the same building in the same school.

PIEHLER: And this gymnasium, was it a Jewish school?

CHILEWICH: Yes, this was the only male Jewish school accepted or accredited, so that the certificate from this gymnasium was as valid as a certificate from a non-Jewish school. But this was the only male Jewish school that had this accreditation.

PIEHLER: And if you hadn't gone to this school, where else could you have gone?

CHILEWICH: Oh, to any university. I mean universities ... in Poland had a quota, a Jewish quota, I forgot how you call it, but within the quota you could apply based on the grades ...

PIEHLER: On the grade.

CHILEWICH: ... to a better or worse university.

PIEHLER: But in terms of the gymnasium you went to, was it an option to go to another gymnasium?

CHILEWICH: To another, a non-Jewish?

PIEHLER: A non-Jewish, or ...

CHILEWICH: Well it was the same thing, there was a quota. And my father would [have] wanted me—my parents would want me to go to a Jewish ...

PIEHLER: They wanted you to go to this ...

CHILEWICH: I'm quite sure, yes.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, growing up when you were a small boy, what did you do for fun?

CHILEWICH: Well, there was very little fun. Because (Pavia?) was not conducive to sport or to any other fun. Yes, we did play football. That was the only sport or fun that I remember. But, let me tell you, I had the duty, right after school, immediately, right after school I had to spend half an hour to an hour with my paralyzed grandmother. There was no excuse for not doing so.

PIEHLER: And you stayed with her, in a sense to keep her company or ...

CHILEWICH: Yes. This was one of her bright moments of the day. My sister had a very similar duty, another hour.

PIEHLER: And this time you spent with your grandmother ...

CHILEWICH: No the grandmother stayed with us.

PIEHLER: Yes the grandmother. Yes. What did you talk about?

CHILEWICH: Well.

PIEHLER: You had that wonderful story.

CHILEWICH: Yes, I remember very little commonality of something, “How you feel?” and, “What did you eat?” or some kind of a story. Very little dialogue conversation.

PIEHLER: So she didn’t really tell you stories about her youth growing up?

CHILEWICH: No

PIEHLER: No?

CHILEWICH: No. She told me some stories about old days, or the synagogue or.... There was very little—well let me put it this way—I was trying to figure out how much older was she. She was—my mother was the ninth child, so she must have been married when my mother was born at least twelve, fifteen years. And in those days, I would say, when I was born she must have been fifty-years old or more. And in those days fifty-years old was pretty old.

PIEHLER: Oh yes, yes.

CHILEWICH: I mean, my grandfather passed away when he was sixty-four and he was sick for four years. And he was considered as living for a ...

PIEHLER: A long time ...

CHILEWICH: ... a long time.

PIEHLER: Now I just want to sort things out, because you said that your grandparents lived with you in Poland.

CHILEWICH: Yes, when they came from Estonia they were waiting for certificates to go to Palestine ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm ...

CHILEWICH: ... and that took about a year, and that year they lived with us.

PIEHLER: But they eventually did make it to Palestine?

CHILEWICH: To Palestine.

PIEHLER: And where did they live when they got to Palestine? Were they on the ...

CHILEWICH: Tel Aviv.

PIEHLER: Tel Aviv?

CHILEWICH: Right. And they lived in the same apartment in Tel Aviv for many years, or rather my grandfather passed away in '35, '34, my grandmother continued staying there for many years thereafter. I even remember the address: (133 Rothschild Boulevard?).

PIEHLER: In Tel Aviv?

CHILEWICH: In Tel Aviv.

PIEHLER: Now, did you ever visit them in Tel Aviv?

CHILEWICH: Oh yes, several times.

PIEHLER: When did you visit them in Tel Aviv?

CHILEWICH: Where?

PIEHLER: When. When was your earliest visit?

CHILEWICH: Thirty—my grandfather was still alive so it must have been '31, '32. I was then sixteen-years old, or fifteen-years old. And periodically we were going to see the grandparents every year or so.

PIEHLER: Were your grandparents committed Zionists?

CHILEWICH: My grandfather was. When you say, “committed,” Zionism was an important aspect of life.

PIEHLER: For your ...

CHILEWICH: For my grandparents and for most of Jewish—particularly Russian Jews.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

CHILEWICH: Who already experienced fleeing from one country. So the idea was to ultimately get to Palestine.

PIEHLER: So it's no accident your grandparents end up in Palestine?

CHILEWICH: No, no, no. They worked on this for some years.

PIEHLER: What did your grandparents—when they settled in Palestine—what did your grandparents do for a living?

CHILEWICH: My grandfather was already retired.

PIEHLER: Retired?

CHILEWICH: Right. And he made some investment ... which supplied the cash flow.

PIEHLER: Could you—do you have any recollections of Palestine during the 1930s, during your visits?

CHILEWICH: Yes, a little bit.

PIEHLER: Anything that you remember about these?

CHILEWICH: Well, I mean my grandparents lived on the street which was connected to the street where there was a theater called (Haviva?), the first Hebrew theater. And ... they had a very ... close relationship with many of the members of this group. That was one. Another one was, my grandfather had a friend who was his partner in some investments—an orange grove was a particularly common investment, and so they both bought an orange grove to which, periodically, I went along on a visit.

PIEHLER: Now, I guess, that you mentioned earlier that you had wanted to become a director.

CHILEWICH: In the theater.

PIEHLER: In the theater. How influential was it that you met this theater company in Tel Aviv, in terms of the development of your interest?

CHILEWICH: I think it has—I had met many actors. And ... I went to many ... shows produced by (Haviva?), even though I didn't understand the language, it made ... an impact on me. But also in my school years in the gymnasium we had a theater with a director. A full-time theater with a director who produced two shows a year or something, all within the school. And I remember playing Sacco and Vanzetti . . .

PIEHLER: In the theater? In your school in Poland?

CHILEWICH: Right?

PIEHLER: So you knew ...

CHILEWICH: I played Sacco.

PIEHLER: So this was a real cause in Poland, in your school the Sacco and Vanzetti case?

CHILEWICH: Yes. The director of ... this effort in school was also the director of the Jewish Experimental Theater in Warsaw. Jewish—Jewish Socialist—Jewish Socialist Experimental Theater.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like your family was definitely, in terms of the Jewish community, would it be fair to say part of the, sort of, Zionist socialist tradition?

CHILEWICH: It would be fair to say, yes. It would be fair to say.

PIEHLER: But also it sounds like, particularly your grandparents, were very religious though.

CHILEWICH: My grandfather was religious.

PIEHLER: Yes. So he was a Zionist, but not a secular Jew?

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that you played football, and you mentioned particularly the one year of having to stay with your grandmother, but I'm curious for example, did you have any playmates or friends growing up, particularly when you were very young?

CHILEWICH: Yes. I went to kindergarten with the son of my father's competitor. The first time the competitors met eye-to-eye because ...

PIEHLER: (Laughs) Because of ...

CHILEWICH: ...because my—both mothers brought their geniuses to enlist in the kindergarten and waited for them to come out and introduce themselves. And it meant nothing to them, but only in the evening when they told their respective husbands about it did they ... (Laughter). And so (Anotol Kovasky?) ... was my buddy from kindergarten and he continues to be my oldest friend here in New York.

PIEHLER: So you've still remained friends after all these years?

CHILEWICH: Yes, and there are many many stories about it.

PIEHLER: Well I'm just curious, 'cause I feel we could spend a lot of time—what happened to his family?

CHILEWICH: Well ...

PIEHLER: Because we already know a little but about what happened to your family.

CHILEWICH: Okay. I told you my father took me ... in 1936 to England. His father took (Anotol?) to France, because he wanted him to go to the art school. And while I was in London and he in Paris we did keep touch with each other, and my parents also kept in touch, my father kept in touch with him because of business. And once we moved to America we lost touch. The next time I met (Anotol Kovasky?), was in 1945 after the liberation of Paris, both in American uniforms.

PIEHLER: So he's also a veteran? He joined the American Army?

CHILEWICH: Yeah. Right. He was a cartoonist in the Yank magazine in America.

PIEHLER: Oh, Yank magazine?

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: Oh, and he's still alive?

CHILEWICH: He's still alive.

PIEHLER: He's someone, I think, I want to interview too.

CHILEWICH: He would be delighted.

PIEHLER: Oh, that's just wonderful. And did you just ... run into him on the street?

CHILEWICH: Ran into him on the street. We stopped both and looked at each other.

PIEHLER: Oh, it's a great—it's just a great story.

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: And you've been friends ever since, the friendship has just ...

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: And did he become an artist when he came here?

CHILEWICH: He is an artist.

PIEHLER: Oh, it's a just wonderful story.

CHILEWICH: (Anatol Kovasky?). He was the cartoonist for the New Yorker for a time.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. So you ...

CHILEWICH: He gave up cartooning as such. He left some cartoons but in principle he's a painter. This is some of ... (Points to artwork)

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. So some of the art in your house is his work? What ... languages did you speak in the household? What was the primary ...

CHILEWICH: That's a hard question. What was my mother's tongue? It was either Yiddish, or Russian, or Polish.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And your father ...

CHILEWICH: Mostly, very little—my parents talk Russian when they didn't want me to understand. (Laughter) But this is one of the first languages I heard.

PIEHLER: Was the Russian when your parents spoke?

CHILEWICH: Quite. And the Yiddish of course, and the Polish, naturally. As I grew older, we had a nanny who was a German. And so I was learning German. By the time I graduated the gymnasium, I was fluent German. And the language in the gymnasium was also German.

PIEHLER: So instruction was in German?

CHILEWICH: Right, because my uncle was in Germany and my aunt was in Germany.

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE-----

PIEHLER: ...The tape had just cut off, but you were saying your aunt and uncle were in Germany ...

CHILEWICH: ... and my uncle were in Germany. So in the '20s, before Hitler, there was talk about moving from Poland to Germany.

PIEHLER: So before '33, Germany might have been where the family might have ultimately ...

CHILEWICH: Yes. Well, before '33 and before the Reich, my father developed substantial business with America from Warsaw, because America became a major leather producer in the world.

PIEHLER: Now, had your father traveled to the U.S. before '39?

CHILEWICH: To U.S.? No.

PIEHLER: No.

CHILEWICH: But he had Americans come to Warsaw and go with him to Russia to buy Russian ... hides.

PIEHLER: And this was in the 1920s and '30s?

CHILEWICH: This was in the 1920s and 30s. And the Russians would never let my father in, but it was important enough for them to ... sell to America that they tolerated it.

PIEHLER: That, I guess, for people reading that interview, I guess, it would be hard because the image, I mean this was a communist regime.

CHILEWICH: A communist regime in Russia.

PIEHLER: That needed the money.

CHILEWICH: But, but they had always a major effort to export for hard currency.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. What did your father say about these trips? Did he ever tell you about these trips?

CHILEWICH: Oh, yes. I knew quite a bit about them and I have also quite a bit of correspondence between him and the (Allied Kit?) company, the American company who was his major supplier ... major buyer.

PIEHLER: So some of your father's correspondence survives for the ...

CHILEWICH: Yes, I have some.

PIEHLER: You mentioned being very taken by the theater. How often did you go to the theater in Poland? And it sounds like you went to ...

CHILEWICH: Oh, in Poland? Very often.

PIEHLER: And you went to—you mentioned you had a unique drama teacher.

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: Did you often go to his ...

CHILEWICH: Yes, oh, I would say probably four or five times a week, in the evening.

PIEHLER: And would you go ...

CHILEWICH: That was the ... main occupation outside of school.

PIEHLER: Was going to the theater?

CHILEWICH: Right. Was going to this particular group.

PIEHLER: This particular group. So did you go ...

CHILEWICH: But other theater as well, I was interested in theater.

PIEHLER: Now did you go just to Yiddish?

CHILEWICH: No, no, no.

PIEHLER: You went to Polish ...

CHILEWICH: I went to Polish. And there was very good Polish theater. Very good. My father knew about my ... theater interest. And when we came—when we traveled to London he told me, “You can do one of two things. You can either become one of two things. Either make a trade in ... business, or make a drama out of theater or out of business.” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: How often did you see films, motion pictures?

CHILEWICH: Very seldom.

PIEHLER: Very seldom?

CHILEWICH: There were very few. I remember seeing Al Jolson, which was the first ...

PIEHLER: Talking ...

CHILEWICH: ... sound.

PIEHLER: Sound.

CHILEWICH: Yeah, for which we waited for hours to get a ticket.

PIEHLER: In terms of, sort of, ... the rituals of the year, did you family have a summer place growing up?

CHILEWICH: In Warsaw? In Poland?

PIEHLER: In Poland.

CHILEWICH: No.

PIEHLER: No? So generally you would go on sort of long vacations?

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: Well it strikes me, the fact that you'd been to Palestine several—where else had you traveled growing up?

CHILEWICH: I would say, we went to Germany once or twice. Well my parents—grandparents lived in Estonia, 'til 1928, they lived in Estonia. We used to go there once a year to a sea resort and spend two or three months with them ... on the Baltic.

PIEHLER: On the Baltic. Just so I know, [and] I make sure I get it on record, what were the names of your grandparents that ultimately immigrated to ...

CHILEWICH: My grandfather was (Mordecai?), and my grandmother was (Yeta?).

PIEHLER: And this is the Chilewich ...

CHILEWICH: Chilewich right. And interestingly my mother's parent, [her] father, was (Modhelewich?).

PIEHLER: I'm curious, 'cause you had seen—you'd been in this play on Sacco and Vanzetti ...

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: ... and you had seen The Jazz Singer ...

CHILEWICH: Huh?

PIEHLER: And you had seen The Jazz Singer growing up ...

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: And you father had a lot of business contacts with Americans. What did you think growing up as a small child, not what you would later know, what did you think of, say, before you were even a teenager, ... what was your vision of America?

CHILEWICH: I had no vision then.

PIEHLER: But you knew about Sacco ...

CHILEWICH: Oh, yes I knew about this was a developing country and everybody with any sense was dreaming of going to America, and the first labor laws and, yes, but no ...

PIEHLER: Even ...

CHILEWICH: But not—there was no even idea of going to America, ... because it was too far away, too—[it] was impossible to reach.

PIEHLER: I guess, it's interesting you say that because your family has some financial means to travel compared to a lot of families.

CHILEWICH: Well ... this was out of reach.

PIEHLER: It's just interesting, because I think I understand it as a historian, but I think students reading this, now, in a sense, you can just get on a plane and be in Poland in a day.

CHILEWICH: Right. Sure.

PIEHLER: But for you ...

CHILEWICH: Well, it required a two-day trip to a port. No, maybe, yes, to a port that accommodated international vessels. I don't think Poland had a port in Gdansk ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, or Danzig then.

CHILEWICH: Danzig then. I don't think it accommodated international passenger vessels. At least I knew the French line, I knew ... the British line, the Spanish line, I don't remember there was a Polish line. Anyway, so you takes—let's say, to go to Hamburg from Warsaw is a twenty-four hour trip, if you do it nonstop. And then you have to go ten days on a boat, or twelve days on a boat, or maybe longer. So it's a major excursion. In this regard, ... Palestine was a matter of four days on a boat from (Cotanza?), and from (Cotanza?) another day. So it was not a ...

PIEHLER: It was much more ...

CHILEWICH: Huh?

PIEHLER: It was much easier to get to?

CHILEWICH: Right. And besides, ... my father had ... four great uncles and one great aunt in America.

PIEHLER: That they had immigrated before the ...

CHILEWICH: But they immigrated around 1912.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. That the family had stayed in touch with?

CHILEWICH: Pardon?

PIEHLER: That the family had stayed in touch with?

CHILEWICH: Very little.

PIEHLER: Very little?

CHILEWICH: Very little. Very little, until we came to this country. When we came to this country, all the family came to the pier ...

PIEHLER: To meet you?

CHILEWICH: ... from various parts of the country. From St. Louis, from ... Philadelphia, of course, [and] from Austin, Texas.

PIEHLER: How did the one make it to Austin, Texas?

CHILEWICH: How they made the travel? By train, I guess.

PIEHLER: But you didn't know why they picked Austin?

CHILEWICH: Huh?

PIEHLER: You don't know why they picked Austin as a place to live?

CHILEWICH: Oh why they went to Austin? Yes. One of them got into the rubber business, and somehow there was a rubber factory ...

PIEHLER: In Austin?

CHILEWICH: ... this is hearsay, something I know very little about.

PIEHLER: ... Your father had a lot of business contacts in Germany, particularly before '33. When was he, or when were you, or when was the family conscious of Hitler?

CHILEWICH: As soon as Hitler came, 1933, '34.

PIEHLER: What did that do for your father's business contacts and dealings in Germany?

CHILEWICH: I realized that maybe ... that was the stimulus to seek other buyers and, therefore, he broadened his effort ... like developing contacts with the States.

PIEHLER: So, in some ways, the contact with the States developed more in the 1930s?

CHILEWICH: Right. Right. Not before.

PIEHLER: Not before? What was your sense—your mother was very alarmed at Munich, but what was your sense, and, I guess, it's hard because we know how it turns out in the '40s

and particularly when the camps are discovered and fully understood there's no denying, but what was ... the thinking ... in the '30s about what this all meant? Because a lot of Jews ...

CHILEWICH: I think there was an expectation of some annihilation. I mean Polish Jews had very very often talked that someday they will be wiped out.

PIEHLER: You ... had that sense that ...

CHILEWICH: Not I, personally.

PIEHLER: Not you?

CHILEWICH: I think, having lived or having remembering, there was a fright. There was an anxiety about the future.

PIEHLER: See I've also read memoirs, and I've just read a memoir of a—I'm trying to think where I read this, of a Polish Jew who was trying to get certain family members to leave, and they said, "It's not going to be that bad." Not that it's going to be that good but that ...

CHILEWICH: Absolutely true, this is the same subject I was talking about. There was a fright, and there were some people who believe and talked themselves in, and were also—their circumstances justified ... that they ... did not see this ...

PIEHLER: See it coming. But you also said that some did.

CHILEWICH: Yes. No question, no question.

PIEHLER: ... Before we leave Poland, is there anything else about Poland that you remember, particularly about the Jewish community, that you remember?

CHILEWICH: Hmm.

PIEHLER: It's such a broad question.

CHILEWICH: It is a broad question. What would you like to know?

PIEHLER: Well, I guess ...

CHILEWICH: The Jewish community in Poland was a suffering community. Uh, it was a community which had to work for a living from morning to night. It had to justify its right to exist. It had to do a lot of things in secret against the law. I mean, for example, a storekeeper had, of course, was closed on Sabbath, but he had to also be closed on Sunday. Well that was more than economically he could stand. So illegally he operated on Sunday.

PIEHLER: And how does he get away with it? Was he ...

CHILEWICH: Because, the store was closed, the wife was walking up and down in front of the store, and they had a code. When she knocked on the door (Makes knocking sound on the table) he could open the door, there was no policeman, and the customer could go in.

PIEHLER: So that was how you kept your store open?

CHILEWICH: Or how you did some business.

PIEHLER: Some business, yes.

CHILEWICH: Because this was vital, they couldn't afford ...

PIEHLER: Oh no, I know.

CHILEWICH: It was not a game or a luxury, it was a necessity. This twenty zlotychs (Polish currency) or whatever they did on Sunday, if they did not have them they would be a little more hungry.

PIEHLER: In terms of your family, were they involved in any organizations outside of work?

CHILEWICH: Sure, the Zionist Organization, ... there were charitable clubs, or charitable agencies. A major thing was to ... on (Pavia?), at the end of (Pavia?) there was a jail called (Paviak?). And in that jail were many Jewish people because it was for this region for such violations as being open on Sunday. So there they got hardly anything to eat. So there was an organization that supplied food to jails. I mean, as an example, come to think of it.

PIEHLER: Was one of the things.... So your family was very involved in the Jewish community?

CHILEWICH: You couldn't help it. They were not unique. You couldn't live in that society without being involved unless, at least, I don't know if anybody converted to Christianity, but there were some people who wanted to get rid of the Jewish religion, Jewish influence. There were some. Few.

PIEHLER: But your family, it strikes me, was very much—there were limits to your assimilation, would that be ...

CHILEWICH: Very slow assimilation, but not in heart. Assimilation in, say, wearing clothes but not in conviction, not in ...

PIEHLER: Yes, well the fact that, it strikes me, with the activism your family had in the Zionist movement, you were ...

CHILEWICH: Oh yes. Well, most of the Jews in Poland or Russia were Zionist at heart, or Zionist by necessity, or Zionist ... by seeing a ray of hope. Not that they knew that much about it.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Now you mentioned over lunch, your father wanted you to study abroad.

CHILEWICH: To study abroad, yes, because education was a major objective.

PIEHLER: And why the London School of Economics? I mean you had said to me earlier off tape, but ...

CHILEWICH: Economics, because he was—he told us economics, in business, was an essential tool, and the London School because it was considered in those days, and still is, considered a ... major school. And he wanted it abroad, so I don't know that there was a specific German—no but then already Hitler was in, so we would not go to Germany in '36,

PIEHLER: Because you finished the gymnasium in '36, and you started the London School of Economics ...

CHILEWICH: The same, within two months.

PIEHLER: But in other words, if this—if you had been just a little bit older, you might well have gone to a German university?

CHILEWICH: I doubt it because Hitler was in ...

PIEHLER: But let's say you had finished by 1930 [at] your gymnasium.

CHILEWICH: Oh yes.

PIEHLER: But by 1936 ...

CHILEWICH: Oh, if I was born earlier?

PIEHLER: If you were born earlier, yes.

CHILEWICH: It would be quite possible.

PIEHLER: But, I guess, one of the things I should ask is how much English did you have?

CHILEWICH: Very little. But you know, as a youngster one picks up a language, and I had a tutor right from the start. I told you I enlisted in the RADA. And I made a double effort to try and learn English.

PIEHLER: Just so I get it on tape again, you enlisted in what? In terms of the theater in London ...

CHILEWICH: Royal Academy of the Dramatic Arts, in Aldwych.

PIEHLER: And you did that—you were involved for a year in the ...

CHILEWICH: Yes. I had an exam to be accepted, I had an exam, and I played (Rascolnikov?) in Polish.

PIEHLER: And you were accepted?

CHILEWICH: I was accepted, only on the basis of this exam.

PIEHLER: ... And were you involved with the Royal Academy the same time you were at the London School of Economics?

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: That strikes me that you were pretty busy back then.

CHILEWICH: It involved a tremendous effort, but greater in the Royal Academy ...

PIEHLER: Than in the London School ...

CHILEWICH: ... than the London School of Economics

PIEHLER: That you were at the Royal Academy, ... what was the routine? What did you study?

CHILEWICH: Well, mostly Bernard Shaw and Shakespeare.

PIEHLER: And you were trying to become a director? I mean, that was your goal?

CHILEWICH: No. Look that was one year, so I—there were sections, so I was in the section of more hours as a director than an actor because it was much easier for me language wise and accent wise. And that was why I quit, because my accent was so pronounced. Now today I have a very heavy accent, now imagine what it was forty years ago!

PIEHLER: That you had a sense that the theater wasn't going to ...

CHILEWICH: Correct. I had a sense that this is—some people do it, ... but I used to stay for hours in front of the mirror trying to say R.

PIEHLER: The letter R?

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: In terms of the Royal Academy, what memories—I mean, you mentioned what part you played to qualify ...

CHILEWICH: To qualify.

PIEHLER: What else do you remember about that year?

CHILEWICH: Very little. Except we had a woman teacher who, without fee, stayed an hour or so longer every week to teach me diction. Without fee.

PIEHLER: Without fee, which was very.... Now I asked you earlier, but you had very strong recollections that you studied in a class with Harold Laski and you have very vivid recollections about Harold Laski. Could you talk a little bit about them, particularly his custom of inviting every student to his house for dinner?

CHILEWICH: Well, he was a very—I would say he was an unusual character. Meticulously dressed. Meticulously dressed.... Spoke with—every word had a meaning. The word must have cleared the mind before the lips. Um, he was very sure of everything he said.... And a revision of paper was—let me give you an example—he'd put little red dots next to a line, never crossed anything out, and made a general comment, "The essence is correct but your presumptions are wrong." I mean, I'm not quoting him directly ...

PIEHLER: But that's the gist of it?

CHILEWICH: Right. "The essence is correct but the presumptions are wrong. Look at the dots." And then you could make all kinds of ideas what this dot meant. But he was, primarily—he was worried in my opinion about the Empire.

PIEHLER: In what sense was he worried about ...

CHILEWICH: He saw the Empire crashing.

PIEHLER: Because you said to me over lunch one of his lines he said about—could you repeat what you said about him and ... His Majesty's ...

CHILEWICH: "His Majesty's fleet is very powerful. There is no equal. But economics is more powerful than His Majesty's fleet."

PIEHLER: And that—I mean it's interesting you say that, because he really understood how fragile the Empire was in the 1930s.

CHILEWICH: I am convinced, but we never talked about it.

PIEHLER: Never talked about it.

CHILEWICH: He was convinced that the Empire is breaking up.

PIEHLER: How aware—I guess, politically, Laski was along with Churchill.

CHILEWICH: That's right. Churchill had a table at the Savoy, at the grill at the Savoy Hotel, which was given to Churchill, and he could come there at any time. And I remember from London School of Economics, we had twice a group, or I was twice in a group, that came at the end of lunch to hear Churchill in the Savoy Hotel.

PIEHLER: In the Savoy Hotel.

CHILEWICH: Right. But Laski and Churchill. (Phone rings) But Laski and Churchill were very close friends. They both worked for the Evening Standard. I think, he was much more left [politically], Laski than Churchill. Right? He was much more socialist. I don't think Churchill was socialist. (Laughs) But they were good friends.

PIEHLER: You sensed it was a genuine friendship.

CHILEWICH: Yes. Well look, I never saw them as friends but ... having read and heard ...

PIEHLER: Well, it's interesting that Laski would be able to bring his students to meet Churchill at the Savoy. And you were one of these students.

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: What was your impression of Churchill? This is a Churchill who was out of power, and if you look at him from his career it looked like his career was over. I mean, what was his ...

CHILEWICH: No. No. No. No. No. No. To me at that time, this was 1938 ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

CHILEWICH: ... to me at that time he was a very important leader of the opposition.

PIEHLER: So you saw him as not as, as ...

CHILEWICH: He was not a politician. He was a leader of the opposition.

PIEHLER: What's his—any recollections of what he said to your students?

CHILEWICH: No. No. I don't remember. I don't remember. I don't remember even what subjects he ... discussed. Well probably we, at least I, was so absorbed with the persona, because the persona was something—his head, his ... way of sitting, his way of holding the cigar, his banking the cigar and cognac.

PIEHLER: So, he did—the images we have of him in history books, you can testify that they ...

CHILEWICH: Absolutely correct, yes!

PIEHLER: It's interesting, once a veteran said to me, I was interviewing him, and he had been invited to meet [Lord Louis] Mountbatten as a sailor and was just—they needed four sailors to meet him at this event and the man just reeked of charisma. And I'm just curious what you say of Churchill, that even in '38 he just—there was just something about Churchill that just ...

CHILEWICH: There was a tremendous impact as a persona.

PIEHLER: Yes, and you didn't even remember what he said?

CHILEWICH: By the way, you mention Mountbatten, I met Mountbatten's sister.

PIEHLER: When did you meet her?

CHILEWICH: During the war. I went to her house. My cousin ... was a colonel on Mountbatten's staff in India, so he knew her. And we were one day in a restaurant, a bunch of us, and my cousin saw her and went over to the other table and they hugged each other, because he was directly on the staff of Mountbatten, and so she invited us over to her house! And we had Nescafe! And she was so embarrassed that she didn't—so I was on the assignment to go and get coffee spoons, little coffee spoons. They had a big staircase going up, and on the side of the staircase there were drawers. There must have been 200 drawers. And she told me that the third step or the fourth you will find spoons. So I open, and I find big spoons, I finally I get little spoons (Laughs). So I take the out these little spoons [and she says] "Simon! You brought spoons not for coffee, you brought spoons for grapefruit!" (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Since we're on sort of etiquette and—one of the things you first sort of said to me when we were talking earlier when I first got here, because I've come here in a coat and a tie, you talked to me about the dress in your circle in London and how formal it was.

CHILEWICH: In every circle.

PIEHLER: That you would wear a jacket and tie to class ...

CHILEWICH: To class, of course.

PIEHLER: But also, you said, during the day you would wear a jacket and tie and at night you were expected to wear ...

CHILEWICH: At night, unless you stayed home and read, you put on a dinner jacket.

PIEHLER: A dinner jacket? And that was expected?

CHILEWICH: Because otherwise your access is limited. You can't get invited to somebody's home, you can't get into a cinema. There were some cinemas that allowed—but few.

PIEHLER: So in other words, even to visit someone's home it was expected you were to be in a dinner jacket?

CHILEWICH: Be in a dinner Jacket. You had to stay formal, it was expected.

PIEHLER: You also said when you got back to Poland that first year that the sleeves of your dinner jacket were worn out and your mother said ...

CHILEWICH: "What are you doing in London?"

PIEHLER: I guess, how did that compare to Poland and dress?

CHILEWICH: I never had a dinner jacket in Poland.

PIEHLER: In Poland.

CHILEWICH: No. I was young also.

PIEHLER: Yes.

CHILEWICH: But I don't remember my father in a dinner jacket, maybe once or twice in all the years. And here we went to a tailor to make dinner jackets for us and a coat and tails, but the same pair of pants.

PIEHLER: Same pair of pants. (Laughter)

CHILEWICH: The same pair of pants. I did wear in London the tails a couple of times because for tails, that's when it said, "White Tie."

PIEHLER: That's when you would wear your ...

CHILEWICH: ... tails. And many clubs said, "White Tie," or a personal invitation to some wedding, "White Tie."

PIEHLER: At the London School of Economics, your major was economics, I assume?

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: What else—what do you remember about your studies? Obviously ... [Harold] Laski, you remember him very, as a ...

CHILEWICH: All together we had three—I mean, the whole course ... together was three years.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm, yes.

CHILEWICH: And we had three teachers, basically. I would say, every year, one full-time and two auxiliary. Now, we had a course of—well if you could call it—a computer. And applied mathematics for business. In other words percentage of ... gross margin, net margin, expenses, etc. How to react in percentages, which normally one does not need, a doctor does not need it.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

CHILEWICH: Well that was a course, a specific course.

PIEHLER: And other courses that you ...

CHILEWICH: I mean, there was Freight and Communication for goods that have to ... move. Obviously the stress was mostly on cocoa, coffee, that England had to import. So how, or what role, does transportation play, and how does a bag of coffee—how is it created and how is it ultimately distributed in the package. That was a class. Not in coffee, coffee was among other things ...

PIEHLER: But a trade.

CHILEWICH: Right. But this was primarily called Freight and Transportation or Transportation and Cost or something like that. This was not the main teacher. This was the auxiliary teacher. Classes were very small.

PIEHLER: Yes, you mentioned that.

CHILEWICH: Sixteen to twenty.

PIEHLER: Was the average class. And was it done, how much tut ...

CHILEWICH: Homework?

PIEHLER: How much tutorial was there any tutorial, or was it?

CHILEWICH: What do you mean tutorial?

PIEHLER: You meet one-on-one with the professor.

CHILEWICH: Very little.

PIEHLER: Very little. So it was much more sort of a ...

CHILEWICH: Oh, wait, wait, wait. The exams—or such tutorial meetings were more like exams.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

CHILEWICH: They were not—She never taught you. Or maybe you could say that by correcting you ...

PIEHLER: By correcting you ...

CHILEWICH: She taught you. But this was kind of exams. You had two hours with the professor and you knew the subject. So you had to prepare for the subject.

PIEHLER: The circle that you—your friends at the London School of—I guess, who were your friends in London?

CHILEWICH: Very few friends in school. Now in the boarding house where I stayed—and I stayed in the same boarding house for the entire three years [for] two and a half guineas a week, fifty percent of my stipend ...

PIEHLER: You mentioned earlier, so we should stay, your father gave you a stipend.

CHILEWICH: Of five guineas.

PIEHLER: Five guineas a month.

CHILEWICH: A week.

PIEHLER: A week. Which at that time was a fairly ...

CHILEWICH: Well, I'll tell you, I paid for the boarding house.

PIEHLER: Which took half your ...

CHILEWICH: For bed and breakfast, two and a half. So I had two and a half guineas left for dinner—I didn't have to buy clothes—for dinner and entertainment.

PIEHLER: And where could, where could you ...

CHILEWICH: I brought clothes with me from Warsaw.

PIEHLER: And how well could you eat on that?

CHILEWICH: Reasonably well. There were lots of restaurants, fish and chips.

PIEHLER: So lots of fish and chips?

CHILEWICH: Fish and chips you could buy on the streets for, I don't remember, three pennies, or four pennies. You'd get a good plate of fish and chips you don't need anything ...

PIEHLER: No, no, I've had fish and chips in London and in Ireland and it's probably not the healthiest thing you could have. (Laughter) But you also ...

CHILEWICH: Also little sandwiches, you'd get three little sandwiches for a shilling or two shillings.

PIEHLER: But you also mentioned you occasionally went to nicer clubs.

CHILEWICH: As a student, you are automatically accepted in a series of clubs, where you can walk in, you can spend an hour or two, read, use the bar that was relatively expensive, but I don't remember, but for a shilling and sixpence you got a good whiskey.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And these were private clubs that, that ...

CHILEWICH: Those are private clubs I'm talking about.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but by virtue of being a student

CHILEWICH: By virtue of being a student you get automatic membership, with no fee as far as I remember.

PIEHLER: Now you mentioned that the boarding houses where you had ... some close friends. The boarding house you were in, ... were these ... students at the London School of Economics, or were they ...

CHILEWICH: No. They were there in some kind of schooling, or even on some kind of job. But the boarding houses had maybe twelve or fifteen single rooms that were rented out to such single men.

PIEHLER: And how—where were they from? Were they ...

CHILEWICH: All over the world. All over Europe.

PIEHLER: All over Europe.

CHILEWICH: There was an Indian, I think, otherwise they were all Europeans.

PIEHLER: All Europeans. Any, how many Jews were there in the boarding house?

CHILEWICH: How many?

PIEHLER: How many Jews were ...

CHILEWICH: Don't know.

PIEHLER: Don't remember?

CHILEWICH: Don't remember, or I didn't pay any attention to that. I know I went to the synagogue occasionally ...

PIEHLER: What neighborhood—do you remember what neighborhood were you in London?

CHILEWICH: Yes, Campaign Gardens. It is, not Forrest Hills ...

PIEHLER: Did you say Covent Gardens?

CHILEWICH: Covent Gardens? No, No. Covent Garden is the opera. This is Campaign, Campaign Gardens, Northwest Thirteen.

PIEHLER: Oh, so. Okay. So you remember the address?

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: And um ...

CHILEWICH: But they were boarding. The woman owned the house, and she had eight or ten or twelve rooms and in every room was such a single man. And the price ... varied a few shillings depending on the room. And you had to put in money for heat.

PIEHLER: That was separate?

CHILEWICH: That was separate.

PIEHLER: ... Your interest in being a director—how often did you go to the theater in London?

CHILEWICH: In London, very often.

PIEHLER: ... Do any performances, or actors, or actresses stick out that you saw in that period?

CHILEWICH: I can't tell you. All of them were fantastic.

PIEHLER: Yeah. I mean, 'cause ... this is ... the era when Lawrence Olivier is on the stage.

CHILEWICH: That's right. Fantastic, all theaters were fantastic. And I always preferred the serious plays rather than the—well London as a rule had many more plays than shows.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.... While you were in London ... did you ever detect any anti-Semitism aimed at you?

CHILEWICH: No.

PIEHLER: And ... what of in terms of being from Eastern Europe?

CHILEWICH: That was a major, major distinction, and a major relief.

PIEHLER: That in a sense that ...

CHILEWICH: I did not have an occasion where somebody stopped me, or questioned me, or refused something to me because I was a Jew. I did never encounter this. Although, I had a job later when I quit dra ... RADA, I found a job that was completely non-Jewish owners and very English, and they knew I was Jewish. I did not feel it.

PIEHLER: So you even worked for non-Jews in England?

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: And it didn't matter, it was—it never came up?

CHILEWICH: Never came up. I was invited to the boss's home, which he didn't have to do.

PIEHLER: And I'm curious, how often—how long did you work at this, after you ...

CHILEWICH: Over two and a half years, ... two years and a few months

PIEHLER: And how many hours a week would you work?

CHILEWICH: Six. Six hours a day.

PIEHLER: And that's in addition to going to school?

CHILEWICH: Right. At school was not necessarily in the morning only. School was very often, two in the afternoon to six in the afternoon. So, however I was going to school, I could arrange my hours, because I was doing filing jobs, looking over whether everything was replied, coding, in other words I was ...

PIEHLER: You were doing office work in this ...

CHILEWICH: I was doing office work, ... not trading work.

PIEHLER: And he was—the British company you were working with, they were traders?

CHILEWICH: They were hide traders.

PIEHLER: Which traders?

CHILEWICH: They were customers of my father.

PIEHLER: They were customers of your father? Okay, so they were hide, ... I'm sorry I didn't [hear you]. I'm curious, before you worked for this company had you worked anywhere else before?

CHILEWICH: (Coughs) No.

PIEHLER: Had you worked for your father at all during Poland?

CHILEWICH: No, I was under the table.

PIEHLER: Um, you mentioned you were in Nice on vacation when ...

CHILEWICH: In Nice, right.

PIEHLER: ... when the Munich crisis broke out. I know your mother's reaction, what was your reaction to Munich?

CHILEWICH: I was sure that—I thought that [Neville] Chamberlain succeeded.

PIEHLER: You thought it was going to work?

CHILEWICH: I thought it was going to work. Living in England, you had a feeling you were pretty secure.

PIEHLER: So you thought that, one, you were much more secure in England and this was going to work?

CHILEWICH: Yes, I was prepared to stay in England.

PIEHLER: And what was the feeling of your ... classmates?

CHILEWICH: I think there was a sense of security. In England there was no—the population was not sensing a war.

PIEHLER: Because, I guess, the image, I mean, one image I've got is how precarious it all was. Another image I have of reading about England in the '20s and '30s up until the war started was, in some sense, trying to be very normal and secure, that it was trying—and you're sort of describing that.

CHILEWICH: And nothing changed in London, even though the war broke out a few days after we left, three days after we left.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

CHILEWICH: I would say, people expected there would be war, but not the Britisher.

PIEHLER: Not the British?

CHILEWICH: Not the British. There were long lines to get tickets on passage to the United States. They were not British.

PIEHLER: They were other nationalities.

CHILEWICH: They were all nationalities, but the British—well, if they had wanted to go and had means to go—they didn't even have to stand in line either, there were ways of getting it. But there was no movement, there was no recorded immigration from England to ...

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO-----

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Simon Chilewich on November 26, 2003 in New York City with Kurt Piehler. And as we took a break and you were saying that we had only got to London, let me, I guess, talk—you mentioned coming over to the United States, your father got papers, you've decided, [or] your father had explained to you over dinner what he had planned and you said you needed to think about it. Because you had mentioned that you had thought of staying in England.

CHILEWICH: Yes

PIEHLER: You liked England quite a bit.

CHILEWICH: I liked England, I liked my job, I was loved, I had all kinds of fun, and I looked forward to establishing my life in London.

PIEHLER: You hoped London would be your home?

CHILEWICH: If not for this dinner, I would have stayed in London and they would have gone.

PIEHLER: And they would have gone. But your father really convinced you to come to America?

CHILEWICH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: I'm just curious, if you don't mind me asking, you said were also in love in London.

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: Do you mind if I ask how that came about or ...

CHILEWICH: This goes back to Poland.

PIEHLER: Really?

CHILEWICH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So someone you had known from Poland from the community?

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: And she had followed you to London? Is that ...

CHILEWICH: She followed me to London, yes. Oh, much later, she came to London two years later.

PIEHLER: Two years later? As a student?

CHILEWICH: As a student? No. She came to teach at the (Elysee Francaise?) in London. Because she graduated from the (Elysee Francaise?) in Paris.

PIEHLER: So, that just sort of added—you had strong ties—you were developing strong ties to London. You had a circle of friends, I guess.

CHILEWICH: Yes. I love London, even today.

PIEHLER: I guess, moving ahead, I really like to keep in order, but you'd really gotten to know a certain part of London very well, both the London School of Economics ...

CHILEWICH: I knew London very well at that time, I knew London very well.

PIEHLER: And fast forwarding, how had the war changed the London you had known and actually liked quite a bit?

CHILEWICH: And you know there is such a song about Paris, “I like Paris in the ...” “I like London any way it was,” and it changed very little.

PIEHLER: It changed very little? Even with all the G.I.s and British Empire troops there?

CHILEWICH: Oh look, during the war I was in London also.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

CHILEWICH: I was stationed, not in London, I was stationed in Broadway, which is an hour out of London. So I came to London during the war very often. And also our missions from Europe ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. So the London you knew before the war was not completely erased during the war? You didn't ...

CHILEWICH: Of course, downtown London, the business section of London, was what we would call [the] Wall Street neighborhood ...

PIEHLER: The City of London.

CHILEWICH: The City of London. That was pretty, pretty ruined.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

CHILEWICH: But it was refurbished in no time. When I say no time, I mean a few years.

PIEHLER: And you didn't feel the G.I.s had ruined the place, that the London you had known was just, you know, overrun by G.I.s?

CHILEWICH: No. No. No. I will tell you a story. In Broadway, there was a pub, of course, like there is in every town. And there was rationing. So everybody who came in could get a drink. So there was no line, but they knew exactly who got it and who didn't. And I remember it, and I went up for a second. “Sorry sir, we will start giving seconds ... after everybody who wants a drink can get one.” And there had never been ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. And that was a shock to you.

CHILEWICH: I mean, this was such an expression of discipline, born discipline, sincere discipline.

PIEHLER: Now you heard about—it's a remarkable story because you leave London, and you remember the date, because you arrive in New York on Labor Day, September 5, 1939.

CHILEWICH: Correct.

PIEHLER: And you leave London when?

CHILEWICH: 29th of August.

PIEHLER: So you are leaving, just as the Polish crisis is ...

CHILEWICH: Right. On the 1st of August we got, by radio, the news that England had declared war ... [as a result of] Poland.

PIEHLER: In September.

CHILEWICH: September 1.

MRS. CHILEWICH: A couple days after you were out at sea ...

CHILEWICH: We were at sea.

PIEHLER: When you heard the declaration of war? Any fear of submarines at that ...

CHILEWICH: Sure. Yes. The captain made us all aware that we may be late arriving because we will be, how you call it, maneuvering, no, criss-crossing. And the Champlain, the same boat, got sunk on the way back.

PIEHLER: The boat you were on got sunk?

CHILEWICH: The boat, we were on the boat Champlain.

PIEHLER: Champlain?

CHILEWICH: And that was the first passenger boat that was sunk ... but this was on the way back.

PIEHLER: On the way back from New York?

CHILEWICH: On the way back to England.

PIEHLER: On the way back to England from New York?

CHILEWICH: To France and England

PIEHLER: And was this an American liner [or] was this a British liner?

CHILEWICH: No, French.

PIEHLER: French liner. Did you have any—your immediate family, your grandparents had moved to—had immigrated to Palestine ...

CHILEWICH: My grandfather already had died.

PIEHLER: Had died. But your grandmother was still in.... And your sister was with you and your father and mother?

CHILEWICH: Correct.

PIEHLER: What about your extended family? Did you have an extended family in Europe?

CHILEWICH: Enormous. Over 140 people. All except two perished in the Holocaust, or as a result of the Holocaust.

PIEHLER: That begs the question, out of 140 only two survived. Who did survive?

CHILEWICH: Two cousins. One cousin came through Siberia—Japan, etcetera, to this country. That was David. [TO MRS. CHILEWICH] I think you've met him once, and he lives in France. And another one I found in Belgian Bergen.

PIEHLER: He survived Bergen-Belsen?

CHILEWICH: No, *she* survived Bergen ...

PIEHLER: *She* survived?

CHILEWICH: And she notified my father here of her existence. My father told me and I went to Belsen-Bergen, because of my position.

PIEHLER: Yes.

CHILEWICH: I got special permission to go to Belsen-Bergen to bring back a refugee, which I succeeded.

PIEHLER: And your two cousins who survived are they still alive?

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: Are they in the States or ...

CHILEWICH: Yes, one is in France, one is in, I believe, Seattle.

PIEHLER: So even though your immediate family was, particularly when you arrive in New York is very safe, this must have—the war must have really been ...

CHILEWICH: Eh, shocking. I have some correspondence ... cables from my late mother's brothers, and, eh—but there was nothing we could do. We did try to send affidavits, but that was too late. There was nothing to do.

PIEHLER: ... Obviously the idea of war is very fearful for [your] family, but what—did you have any sense in 1939 that Hitler would really try to exterminate the Jews the way he would do.

CHILEWICH: Well, I was in London. And as I told you, in London, the fear of war, in my opinion, was minimal. The foreigners who was in London, the refugees from Germany already, because this was after ...

PIEHLER: Kristallnacht?

CHILEWICH: Kristallnacht. After all these things, there were many refugees from Germany in England already. They wanted to get out of Europe as soon as possible, and to America for sure. And difficulties were endless. But, the British did not fear war and or expect war. I think it was—it took everybody by surprise that “Peace in our time” did not work.

PIEHLER: Now, you mentioned earlier that ... the family you had in America greeted you at the docks. And how did your father re-establish himself in America?

CHILEWICH: I don't know, how did he establish himself? I will just show you. On [the] boat steamer, we got the Western Union telegram, which I have, the original telegram, which said, “Welcome to America,” (Coughs) signed (Benjamin Thurmond?). But the next day, literally the next day after the arrival, I had a copy of the letter that father wrote on [the] typewriter thanking (Benjamin Thurmond?) for the telegram. So he was in business the day after coming ...

PIEHLER: After coming here. And did he remain in the hide business?

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: ... Was [he] able to keep any European clients, or did he reestablish himself?

CHILEWICH: There were no ...

PIEHLER: There were no ...

CHILEWICH: No. Much before America got itself into the war, America got itself prepared for economic war. And America created a War Production Board. That was before entering ... and hides was considered [a] strategic commodity, because it provided leather, shoes. There was no substitute in those days, so the Army needed shoes, just as important as carbines.... So there was no possibility to trade in hides. It was the War Production Board [as] the only buyer and seller of hides. So my father, who started already in this business, it

was obvious this business cannot maintain it, cannot function. So then I decided to look for a job. And I found a job in Andrews, North Carolina. My father stayed here and did a little business which was under license. And his sister was married to one of the big trading firms called (Gorolitz?). And ... since they were very active in the sugar market and the sugar markets was driven by futures, and because of father's arriving in this country, he was on the board of the exchange and they started a futures ring in hides, under the War Production Board. In other words, all the trades were for account of the War Production Board. And so that gave father an entry to the industry at large, to a trade in industry at large. When I left the Army he was already pretty well established and known.

MRS. CHILEWICH: He was the wonderful.

PIEHLER: That's just a remarkable story.

MRS. CHILEWICH: His father was so special.

PIEHLER: You're showing me a picture of your father. When did he pass away?

CHILEWICH: 1985.

PIEHLER: So he was—he had a very long life and ...

CHILEWICH: Eighty-five.

PIEHLER: Eighty-five?

CHILEWICH: Not quite eighty-five.

PIEHLER: Not quite eighty-five years old. Um, you mentioned over lunch, I asked you how you got your first job, and you said it was an advertisement in the newspaper.

CHILEWICH: No. The trade magazine.

PIEHLER: The trade magazine.

MRS. CHILEWICH: Is that where you took the wrong train?

CHILEWICH: What?

MRS. CHILEWICH: Is that where you took the wrong train?

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, because you mentioned you were the only Jew in Andrews, North Carolina.

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: Could you talk a little bit, in a sense, repeat what you told me over lunch of what Andrews, North Carolina was like in 1940 to take your first job in America?

CHILEWICH: What was it like? It was a small American village. A little bigger than a village. It had two—it was driven by two industries, the tannery which employs 160 people, and the extract manufacturing, chestnut extract manufacturing, which employed about 250 people. So these 400 people create 400 families. So there were about 1500 people. Right?

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

CHILEWICH: There was the baker and the candlestick maker. (Laughter) Maybe about 2000 people. There were three churches, and there was a bank, and there were stores. And one day I was given—two weeks after my staying there, I was given a payroll to be signed and I was aware that there was a minimum wage of forty cents an hour. And I see here people as low as eighteen cents, twenty-three cents, thirty-five cents. Very few forty and above cents per hour. I did not sign the payroll. And I was invited to come to breakfast with (Mr. Culver?)

PIEHLER: The owner of the ...

CHILEWICH: Right. Which, I thought he called me to be fired. It was a nice breakfast prepared and he said, “Why did you not want to sign the payroll?” “Mister (Culver?), I am a young immigrant. I want to become a citizen of the United States and I don’t want to break the law because then my chances of becoming a citizen will be diminished.” “Get back.” I go back. Two hours later, like me, he was walking with a stick, he was really lame, he pointed the stick at me and says “Hey! Sign the payroll, everybody signed the payroll.” (Laughter) He thought I was sent by the IRS!

PIEHLER: (Laughs) That you were a government spy?

CHILEWICH: That I was a government spy.

PIEHLER: So he wasn’t following the minimum wage law?

CHILEWICH: No.

PIEHLER: And you were ... saying that your reason was partly ...

CHILEWICH: My reason was—I would never have thought of writing to IRS or the government, this is my business. My reason was I did not want to have on my record that I broke the law.

PIEHLER: (Laughter) Oh, it’s a wonderful story.

CHILEWICH: But you know, the next day, you couldn't get a toothbrush in town. You couldn't get a pound of bread in town. The whole—everything in town was sold overnight.

PIEHLER: Because?

CHILEWICH: Because people got double their money!

PIEHLER: Which was just the minimum wage?

CHILEWICH: That's right.

PIEHLER: It wasn't ...

CHILEWICH: No. But their income doubled, or thereabouts.

PIEHLER: You told me over lunch, which I'd love you to repeat, this wonderful story about when it became the High Holy days and you wanted to go to services and you had decided—you told your boss that you wanted to ...

CHILEWICH: That I am going to the synagogue. The asked me why I am going, "because I want to go to the synagogue." "Synagogue, what is it?" They just did not know.

PIEHLER: Well you said they even called it, you said over lunch, a "Jewish Church."

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: And they were skeptical to a point, can you recount that they ...

CHILEWICH: Then I became a functioning human being.

PIEHLER: But you said they actually sent two people to go with you.

CHILEWICH: Yes, because they wanted to see how this Jewish church looks, what did they do?

PIEHLER: Did they actually come in with ...

CHILEWICH: No. They actually came with me but they, no, no, because they wanted to check on me, they were curious.

PIEHLER: They were curious? Did they actually come into the synagogue?

CHILEWICH: They did. That was the daughter of (Mr. Culver?), and the daughter of the banker. No, the girlfriend of the banker.

PIEHLER: And did they stay for any of the services or any of that.

CHILEWICH: No, I don't remember.

PIEHLER: You don't remember that?

CHILEWICH: No, no.

PIEHLER: Well, I just—because I live in Knoxville, and based at the University of Tennessee, and you would occasionally, besides going to Ashville you did come to Knoxville ...

CHILEWICH: Yes, several times.

PIEHLER: Any memories of Knoxville that ...

CHILEWICH: No. No. Usually at the most two days. I used to go to Knoxville, to Atlanta ... and to Asheville, you know, for entertaining. To live in a village of 2000 all the time, it's a relatively different thing. I told you I had friends in Murphy, who were also Jewish, in the lumber business, and that was twenty miles apart. So we used to meet once or twice a week for the night or so.

MRS. CHILEWICH: Where did the story occur that related to you taking the wrong train?

CHILEWICH: When I went for the interview of the job, to Penn Station. And as far as I know, I told the girl I want a ticket, a coach, to Andrews, North Carolina. They gave me a ticket and told me train number so-and-so, car number so-and-so. And I got in and I slept a little on the bench—for a young man that's not such a problem. At six, seven the next morning the conductor goes by "Andrews Next," Okay that's me! So I go up and I say, "I would like to go to the tannery, (Colver?) Tannery." "(Colver?) Tannery? Doesn't exist such a thing." I said, "What are you talking about, here is my letter of invitation." And they take this letter and go "Oh, mister. You are in Andrews, *South* Carolina, you want to go to Andrews, *North* Carolina." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you had a ticket ...

CHILEWICH: I did not know that North Carolina, that ... Andrews, South Carolina exists. But she just—the train was going up to a certain point together, and then certain cars go to North Carolina and certain Cars go to South Carolina. And for some reason or another she placed me in the car for South Carolina by error, or—by error, of course. And so I took a taxi to go from one Andrews to another, driving about twelve hours. For a price of 120 dollars, which was ...

MRS. CHILEWICH: In those days ...

PIEHLER: That was a huge sum of money.

CHILEWICH: That was seventy-five percent of what I had in cash. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: But you got the job.

CHILEWICH: But I got the job.

PIEHLER: And before, again because I want to also ask you what you did besides signing for the payroll, that your boss really wanted to keep you out of the draft ...

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: Could you recall that story, 'cause you told me ...

CHILEWICH: Well, I was challenged by the job, I liked the job, it was very interesting I was very young I didn't mind working sixteen hours a day. Literally I'd work three shifts because they would supply mostly sole leather to the army. Sole leather, yeah, it's even more important leather. No, because you could have a linen upper.

PIEHLER: Oh yeah, the soles are, yeah, yeah.

CHILEWICH: The soles are absolutely essential. So I loved it. And we had a contract with the Army and the quartermaster officers came to take—and only the rejects, which they did not take, could we sell at the open market for a regulated price, a higher price than the Army paid. Which was a stupid mistake, a blunder because it meant, it often gave an incentive to spoil the product. Anyway, I enjoyed it very much. And I was in a managerial position. And then I find out, there comes a lieutenant to interview me. I thought he had come in connection with our deliveries of leather. He wants to know what I am doing, and why I had asked for a deferment. I said, "I never asked for a deferment. What are you talking about?" And yes, (Mr. Colver?) applied for a deferment, unbeknown to me. So I told (Mr. Colver?), "Look, if it happens again, better tell me because I will definitely denounce that I knew about it." Six weeks later I was drafted, because there came a notice. And I went, logically, to Camp Lee, Virginia. The quartermaster called, which was very ironic. Right after basic training, I was awakened to report to the commanding officer with full gear. Wow, what happened? What did I do? Oh yes, that is, I became a citizen already.

PIEHLER: By joining the Army?

CHILEWICH: Yes, we went to Washington. All those who were not citizens went to Washington and became citizens. So I was very happy at everything. But now with the full gear would they throw me out? What did I do? Anyway, I come in and it's not the commanding officer it's a captain. And he gives me—"Here are secret orders. You are going by train to Washington. You do not open these orders until the train stops in Washington D.C. End of story. But I will tell you, I would trade you my Captain's bars for these orders." (Laughter) So obviously they'd made me a Major! (Laughter) So, I went to Camp Ritchie. And I had no idea what Camp Ritchie is, but I had no idea what the orders said either. Why? Because before be stopped at Bethesda, a knock on the door. I was alone in that

compartment reserved for Private Chilewich. So [I] thought they might [have] made me now a colonel! And so two MPs [said], “your secret ord—your orders please.” I have orders which are not secret printed and proceeded to show them. “Come on. Don’t fool with us, give us give us your orders.” I said “What are you talking about I don’t have orders.” But he was a little stronger, and he convinced me that I’d better give him the envelope. And he looked at the envelope, by then it was open, he looked also that it was opened, “Come with us!” And we went in a jeep and went to Camp Ritchie. And Camp Ritchie looked exactly like Camp Lee to me. I said.... (Laughter) The next day I went on Kitchen Police, the same thing I had done at ... (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So your life did not, at least initially, become dramatically better? (Laughs)

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: So you did ... when did the Army let you know ... that things were different in Camp Ritchie?

CHILEWICH: Well, the sergeant of this barrack was a Jewish fellow called (Isaac Bogin?), who I approached right away to tell me, “What goes on here?” “You will find out.” He wouldn’t tell me. He was a sergeant, and I was a private first class. And on KP next morning, and while on KP I find out that this kitchen—this ... dining room is only for field officers, that is lieutenant colonel and up. And here you sign a paper that you volunteer, because it is only for officers—you volunteer—they don’t draft you. But for every day of KP, for every two days of KP you get a day off! So that’s a good deal, I signed such a deal and I learned very quickly that this is an intelligence school. And the only reason you are here—you wait for a class to end and a new class to start. So I was in class six and [waited] for class five to finish their course. It was a six-weeks course.

PIEHLER: Before we sort of go on, I just want to go back and follow up on a few things. And this is going before the Army. You said you were very happy in the tannery and you worked very hard, and you said you were managerial. What was, other than the payroll, what were some of the other duties that you did, the things that you were involved with?

CHILEWICH: Everything! Production, schedules.... There was no purchase of hides, because the War Department gave you hides. So you traveled with (Mr. Colver?) to Washington we described our facilities, how many hides we could process, how many hides we could do, how many men—then we got a quota for so many hides. Obviously, we wanted to get as many hides as possible. All kinds of such things to manage the production of—to manage as efficient a production as possible. In an old fashioned tannery, to produce a piece of leather took a minimum of two months, sometimes three depending on the end product what you want. Today it is done in three days. Just to ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean that’s a revolution. One of the things you said about London was that, in many ways, the English, in a sense—you had no sense that war was ready to break out, there was a real sense of ...

CHILEWICH: Security.

PIEHLER: Security, and life as normal.

CHILEWICH: ... Most Londoners I came in contact with—the Londoners were not afraid of war. They did not see war as imminent.

PIEHLER: What about Americans in, say, particularly in, say, Andrews, North Carolina in 1940?

CHILEWICH: Well now you're talking about a year's difference ...

PIEHLER: Between, say, 1940 and '41. How did Americans in 1940—before Pearl Harbor—what was your sense of Americans' ...

CHILEWICH: That they knew they were going into war.

PIEHLER: You got a sense that even in this small town ...

CHILEWICH: Oh yes. I mean look, the production of the whole town—because the chestnut extract was for the tanneries in the region. And we were one of the major customers. So the workers knew that most of the production goes to the War Department so obviously we know—American people knew that war is coming, or they were in a war except for soldiers, American soldiers, being killed. The draft was there.

MRS. CHILEWICH: I have to leave, much as I ...

PIEHLER: Oh, it was very nice meeting you and good luck tonight.

MRS. CHILEWICH: Thank you. I'll see you later.

PIEHLER: Bye.

CHILEWICH: The draft was there. Rations were there. Price controls were there. And ... gasoline was rationed.

PIEHLER: Now when you—had you thought of volunteering for the ... for the military?

CHILEWICH: I did. But I did not do it, because somehow I was interested, but we were processing hides for the War Department, so I said, "Ah, let's wait until I'm called."

PIEHLER: So your sense was, "I'll wait to be called."

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: And your shock was the ...

CHILEWICH: But I certainly did not want to avoid ...

PIEHLER: Avoid it. And in fact, as you said, were quite ... shocked when you learned why you hadn't been called.

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: You weren't interested in joining say the Air Force or the Navy?

CHILEWICH: No.

PIEHLER: You were just waiting to be ...

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: Your basic training was at Camp Lee?

CHILEWICH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Could you talk about ... your initial impression, you know, about Army life, American Army life?

CHILEWICH: Oh yes, I did have school army in Poland.

PIEHLER: At the gymnasium?

CHILEWICH: At the gymnasium, we had once a week in the later classes ... three hours or four hours of army program.

PIEHLER: What did you learn in those programs?

CHILEWICH: How to march, how to salute, how to take orders.

PIEHLER: Did any of that come in handy when you reported to camp?

CHILEWICH: Oh, it was too long and too different. Here was mostly physical ... exercise to make your body stronger to be able to overcome obstacles on the road. So—oh yes, there were rifle tests, there was nothing very sophisticated. But the sergeants behaved like a real sergeant should behave.

PIEHLER: So, I'm curious, did you have any old-time sergeants?

CHILEWICH: Yes, yes, with all the words and, "This is not a university, here you have to think!" (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I'm curious, on your barracks, when you first—at basic training—you are officially from North Carolina, who—your barracks mates, where were they from? North Carolina?

CHILEWICH: North Carolina. No, North [and] South Carolina.

PIEHLER: So mainly from Carolina. So you—did you, in a sense, stick out from this group?

CHILEWICH: Yes, no question. And my friend Isaac. Right. In Lee, Camp Lee I recollect very little. Because it was very fast, that only lasted six or seven weeks then basic training was over.

PIEHLER: Now did you finish basic training yet?

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: So you had finished basic training ...

CHILEWICH: And we had got the certificate, ... Private First Class.

PIEHLER: So you'd gotten Private First Class. And that's when you go the orders to ...

CHILEWICH: No. No. No. Oh yes, then we got the orders to go to Washington.

PIEHLER: When you got the ...

CHILEWICH: Secret orders.

PIEHLER: But your departure, in a sense, was not with the rest of the group?

CHILEWICH: No, I was alone.

PIEHLER: And it was only later that you learned what Camp Ritchie was? That it was an intelligence ...

CHILEWICH: Yeah. Only two, three days after being there. And nobody told me this, it was, you know, I had to put it together.

PIEHLER: And you had never applied for this?

CHILEWICH: No, never.

PIEHLER: Or even ...

CHILEWICH: Yeah, but, of course, they knew that I speak German, I speak Polish, that I have a background in Russian.

PIEHLER: And this—they learned this when you first were inducted, that you ...

CHILEWICH: Well yes, the induction.

PIEHLER: You told them you were ...

CHILEWICH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Could you talk—you finally did get into a class at Camp Ritchie, and can you talk a little bit about intelligence school at Camp Ritchie, what you learned?

CHILEWICH: Well, this intelligence once we got into the class.... That was the most important and most efficient educational course you can imagine. First of all, there was not a free hour. Secondly, you had professor after professor after professor, all military, to talk about a subject, mostly the German Army. How the German Army was constituted, how it was operating, how the commands were. It was first class! Everybody knew exactly the topic. And then the class [on]—specifically—how to interrogate [and] how to behave. And then we had one week where we had—supposedly, though we were not parachuting—they brought us, without knowing—they had blankets over [us], and they brought us to some place and told us, by such and such an hour we had to be in that certain place. But you don't know where you are. Then you find out that there are other soldiers that would act as Germans.

PIEHLER: Who were trying to capture you?

CHILEWICH: Who were trying to capture me, or confuse me, or whatever. And that exercise took one week. It was not an easy exercise, but most people were able to do it. We got excellent training, excellent!

PIEHLER: So the training, you thought, was really ...

CHILEWICH: Excellent!

PIEHLER: Who—who else was in your class? Who else—what were the backgrounds of ...

CHILEWICH: There were all ... new Americans. All in—mostly from Germany, some from Eastern Europe, a few. I was the only one speaking or understanding Russian. There were some who spoke Polish. But Italians, Germans, Dutch, all drafted and became citizens.

PIEHLER: These were all draftees then?

CHILEWICH: All draftees.

PIEHLER: And did you get a sense they were similar to you, ... [that] they were as surprised to be here as you were?

CHILEWICH: Yes, yes. They were completely my generation, my experience. There were a few much older. But a generation older. In other words, we were in the early 20s, there were a few in the middle 40s. And they were not draftees, they were ... volunteers. Oh and yes there were some from the Air Force, not from the Navy, but there were some ...

PIEHLER: There were some Air Force?

CHILEWICH: Huh?

PIEHLER: There were some Air Force?

CHILEWICH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And you ended up being assigned to an interrogation team?

CHILEWICH: Yes, right after the end of school.

PIEHLER: End of school. What happened to others in the school?

CHILEWICH: They all got assignments. Some got individual assignments, some got—there were three units formed like ours.

PIEHLER: Yeah, there were—what other assignments did people get besides interrogation?

CHILEWICH: Many. Many assignments. I mean, for example, preparing a plan ... of strategy that are based on the fact that the intelligence produced this and this and this, we should do this and this and this and this. A group commander or a commander had such two or three advisors depending on how many troops he commanded, had such two or three advisors who created for him a map. That was a very important intelligence function. Several were shipped to such various commanders. This was most.

PIEHLER: Did anyone do any espionage in this group?

CHILEWICH: Undercover? No.

PIEHLER: No? This was, in a sense, interrogation on our side of the—or development of maps.

CHILEWICH: We did not have undercover or—how did you call it?

PIEHLER: Espionage.

CHILEWICH: Espionage.

PIEHLER: You did not—that ...

CHILEWICH: No, no.

PIEHLER: The interro—I guess, one thing I should ask you, you recollected over lunch, you decided you did not want to become an officer.

CHILEWICH: Right.

PIEHLER: Could you explain why?

CHILEWICH: I was not too fascinated by business. I wanted to be in the Army as long as I could be useful in the Army, but I did not want to be in the war after the war is over.

PIEHLER: Because you were concerned, you mentioned earlier, you were concerned ... that an officer, in a sense, served at the pleasure of the government. You were concerned that after the war, if you were an officer, you couldn't get out.

CHILEWICH: No, I had to sign. There were some who got for combat, the promotions. But otherwise—mostly you had to sign an obligation to go to officer school. Most officers had to go to officer school. And when going to officer school they say six months, and that is at the cost of the government. But for this course, you had to sign to the fact that, "Because I'm getting six months free training etc., I will be two years an officer, or two and a half years an officer, or three years an officer."

PIEHLER: And you didn't want to ...

CHILEWICH: Pardon?

PIEHLER: You didn't want to obligate ...

CHILEWICH: No.

PIEHLER: You also said in terms of pay ...

CHILEWICH: Also there was a pay difference. I told you, I as a master sergeant, totally was getting over a 100 dollars more than a second lieutenant.

-----END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE-----

PIEHLER: You were saying over lunch, ... there probably was a pay difference partly because of the dependency allowance to your mother.

CHILEWICH: That was fifty dollars.

PIEHLER: For an officer, and seventy-five for ...

CHILEWICH: For enlisted men.

PIEHLER: Seventy-five for enlisted men.

CHILEWICH: So here was a difference already of twenty-five dollars. And then there were other things. My basic salary was 100 dollars—no—my total package was 100 dollars a month more than a second lieutenant.

PIEHLER: But you also said earlier when we were having lunch, that your good friend that you had met at Camp Ritchie became ...

CHILEWICH: Quite. He became an officer. This [is] (Isaac Bogin?) that I mentioned. The sergeant of the barracks became—like many others, became an officer upon graduation. He had to sign that they will be two years an officer, regardless of whether or not—I mean, of course, there was no obligation for the government to keep them as an officer, but they will at the pleasure of the government serve as an officer.

PIEHLER: Then he becomes your officer, though you said ...

CHILEWICH: Right, because he was so named. He was the commanding officer of my little team or not my, our little team.

PIEHLER: Now could you—this little team, you would stay with them for the rest of the war?

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: Could you describe the six members of this team, since you probably ...

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: Who they were, their names ...

CHILEWICH: There was this man who was the commanding officer. There were two more second lieutenants ... and there were two more sergeants. So there were three sergeants and three officers. But one of them was the commanding officer.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. So there are no enlisted personnel in this unit?

CHILEWICH: No.

PIEHLER: You all had some rank.

CHILEWICH: We all had some rank.

PIEHLER: But you also—and it's sort of an important point, because I know in other Army units in counterintelligence units did this, you didn't wear insignia.

CHILEWICH: No. Normally we didn't wear insignia. Because normally we would have to have our, that is to say, I would—let me correct here, the lieutenant wore his insignia.

PIEHLER: He did?

CHILEWICH: Why? Because he [could] just take one thing out and put another thing in. It was like a broach.

PIEHLER: So he occasionally wore it.

CHILEWICH: Yeah. But if we wore it, it was sewn in so how could I ...

PIEHLER: (Laughs) It had stitching.

CHILEWICH: So, therefore, we in principle we wore no rank. I had a uniform with a rank. But this uniform I wore when special situations demanded it, like a parade or something where I knew that I am Master Sergeant Chilewich, right?

PIEHLER: Could you talk a little bit about the backgrounds of the people in your [unit], ... and their names?

CHILEWICH: The background? All Europeans.

PIEHLER: All Europeans.

CHILEWICH: All Europeans. All speaking some language, mostly German. I mean, that was the most important.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.

CHILEWICH: All—most in my group age, let's say twenty-two to twenty-eight. A few much older, in their 40s. Usually with some business or professional background, like architect. There were several architects. Look, I didn't meet them long time. I only met this group in this entire thing for about nine weeks, six weeks of class and three weeks of waiting for us.

PIEHLER: But your actual interrogation team, do you remember their names?

CHILEWICH: Yes. Mr. Fox, Mr. Grizzly, and (Mr. Bogin?), those three I remember. Oh by the way, two out of the six were not killed, but were, in the course of things, taken out and somebody else was bought in for reasons which I do not know.

PIEHLER: So your team changed during the war?

CHILEWICH: Pardon? This team twice changed by ... one person each.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

CHILEWICH: Some could probably request, for one reason or another, that they would like to have a transfer. That was possible.

PIEHLER: I only have a few more minutes because I know you have to leave ...

CHILEWICH: Yes.

PIEHLER: ... But, I guess, after your team was formed, how long did you stay in the States before you were sent overseas?

CHILEWICH: Less than—no, we were told on such and such a day, we go on such and such a ship, and we are free the twenty-four hours before, which means we have to report in Brooklyn for ... a ship that leaves 6 p.m. on such and such a day. We came to New York and spend a few days with my parents. My father organized a family dinner in a restaurant which still exists.

PIEHLER: Oh, the restaurant still exists?

CHILEWICH: Yes

PIEHLER: What's the name? Do you remember the name?

CHILEWICH: (*Le Veaux D'or?*) We still go there occasionally.

PIEHLER: And it still exists.

CHILEWICH: Yes. No, the restaurant exists over 100 years. (*Le Veaux D'or?*).

PIEHLER: That's—'cause so many restaurants just don't make it.

CHILEWICH: Well, yes.

PIEHLER: I'm going to do this more systematically when we do the next interview, but one thing, I once asked a historian, you know, is what's the question you'd ask every veteran? He said you should always ask them, "What's your most vivid experience in the war?"

CHILEWICH: Most vivid experience?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

CHILEWICH: Most vivid experience? Vivid? Tell me exactly what you mean on the “vivid”?

PIEHLER: Well, I guess, one vivid is what was your closest call ... in terms of personal danger?

CHILEWICH: The (Gend Bureau?), when we were in France, just after the Battle of the Bulge, the (Gend Bureau?) that’s the undercover intelligence, French intelligence, bring us a man who is bandaged, heavily bandaged. He hears, but claims he cannot talk. So he only writes, and breaks ten pencils before he writes a word. But he claims he hears, but that’s the first thing we do we ask the medics, “Does it happen to your ears?” “It happens often the other way, but occasionally it happens that you can hear and not talk.” But there is nothing wrong with him, but yes the man is burned—has a slight burn. He does not need to wear this bandage completely, but he can have bandages, ... he likes to be bandaged. Anyway, my buddy and I interrogate him, but can hardly get any information except that he was in a fire and got burned. We were there near a major POW [camp]—a POW which held 5,000 prisoners. So it’s an organization, it has—you understand, Americans hold 5,000 Germans.

PIEHLER: Yes.

CHILEWICH: So we go to the commanding officer—really commanding officer, or the intelligence colonel. We tell them what we have, and we think this guy has to be observed because something is not kosher. It’s late now. We are tired, he is tired, we’ll start in the morning. But where do you keep this guy? So there was this special ... [setup] that you build a tent. Around this tent you have wire. You then have a guard walk around. And then you have another wire. So there is a guard that walks around between two wires. And one is going in one direction and one is going in another direction. So, there is total coverage, theoretically. There comes the next morning, the tent is there, the guards go around, and the fella isn’t there. (Laughter) But, that confirms our suspicions that [he’s] an important [prisoner] is correct. So we tell the commanding officer, “Tell me, how does this happen? Where did the guard look, where is ...” etc. We learn that one of the moments, one of the guards pissed on the tent, so that created a noise. And this noise was enough to allow him to escape without alerting the other guard.

PIEHLER: And he was never recaptured?

CHILEWICH: Wait!

PIEHLER: Oh. (Laughter)

CHILEWICH: We two say, “Hey, we’ve got to find the guy.” So, where would the guy go? The guy would probably go to a POW camp. He wouldn’t dare to go to this POW camp, [it was] too close. So where’s the next POW camp? We are told, “Here.” “How long a drive?” “Two-hour drive.” We go on the jeep, we go to this POW camp, we tell the commanding officer why we are here [and] we want all the troops out. “Why so anxious about one

prisoner? We catch plenty others!” The fact that he may be a dangerous individual who may cost our—well, let’s find out what the guy does. Anyway, he follows our instructions, and we call the highest ranking German, said “Colonel you have to organize them.” You know, Germans fill out orders when they get orders, “We want fifty men at a time to come out and stand in position.” There is a special expression. And then we will examine each. We will go between the ranks, and we will smell this guy out. And we did.

PIEHLER: You did catch him?

CHILEWICH: We did catch [him]. So we took him to our headquarters. It was the most cruellest thing I did in my career. I had the guy get naked. And I told him get in the snow and roll around. And then he started yelling, “Mama.” “Really? Oh, so you talk!”

PIEHLER: So you had him roll in the snow to see if he ... could talk?

CHILEWICH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ‘Cause when you had picked him out of the line-up, he still was pretending he couldn’t talk?

CHILEWICH: Doesn’t talk

PIEHLER: Doesn’t talk.

CHILEWICH: But here, but “mama” is a word, this is working. “You better answer the questions or else you are going to the war crimes commission, and your life is very, very much at stake.” So he told us the story. He was organizing escape routes for prisoners, POWs. His interest was majors and up. So he wants to contact as many of them as possible and tell them how to escape and come back to headquarters. A pretty interesting and damaging job for us. You can understand that he didn’t accomplish his mission. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: It’s a really good—I mean, it’s a great story.

CHILEWICH: This is one of the most vivid.... And the other one ...

PIEHLER: The closest call ...

CHILEWICH: The other one is the (Vicky story?).

PIEHLER: But were there any times when you were in great personal danger?

CHILEWICH: No.

PIEHLER: No? Never fired on?

CHILEWICH: I mean one could say theoretically going to Leipzig we were in great danger because we were ahead of our troops. But it was—so there was no resistance, from a distance a fella without a leg is just shooting, so him—the bullet hitting me would be a miracle. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You never were, say, particularly when you were in England, subject to an air raid?

CHILEWICH: No

PIEHLER: Well, I want to—I'm looking forward—I just want to say for today's interview, thank you for your hospitality.

CHILEWICH: I appreciate your understanding.

PIEHLER: Oh, no I fully understand ...

CHILEWICH: Only because my wife is—let me show you ...

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

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