

Good afternoon. My name is Joan Bang. I am a member of the Kean College oral testimonies project of the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at the Sterling Library of Yale University. Sharing the interview with me is Dr. Bernard Weinstein. We are privileged to welcome Mrs. Gladys Halpern, a survivor presently living in Hillside, New Jersey, who has generously volunteered to give testimony about her experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Welcome, Mrs. Halpern.

It's good to be here.

This afternoon, you've brought some photographs with you. And I know the first one, if you could describe it for us, took place when you were about four or five years old. Is that correct?

Yes, I was very lucky. Because I don't have any picture. I was very lucky to come upon a small photograph. That was on of my trip-- one of my trips to Israel. And my cousin showed me the photograph. She said, would you like to see a picture of a nursery in Zolkiew? And I said, yes, of course. And she showed me the picture. She said this one is so-and-so and so-and-so. I said, no, that's not so. This is Klara, and that's a picture of myself. But she said in that case, she's giving me the picture.

When I came home, I enlarged the picture. I gave one to my cousin. I also gave a couple of pictures to some people whose siblings were on that picture. One had a sister. Another one had a cousin there. So I gave them the photograph.

It so happens that that particular nursery was founded by my mother, by Klara's mother, and a couple of other ladies. There was no-- and the nursery was-- in the beginning, this picture was already taken in a home that they acquired for it. But in the beginning, that nursery was-- we were using our home, my parents' home as the nursery.

We were only a few children in the beginning. Afterwards, it developed into a larger thing. I come from a small town, the entire population of which was 12,000 people, out of which about five and a half thousand was populated by Jews. I come from a family of very observant Jews. Not Hasidic family, but very observant Jews, from sort of a diversified background.

We come from a line of rabbis. In fact, one of them is very famous rabbi, [INAUDIBLE] Ben Yehuda, the famous Prager rabbi, if you're familiar with that. And on both sides of the family, there were business people, there were physicians, there were lawyers, there were pharmacists. As I said, a very [? camis ?], very diversified family.

We lived in a small town. The rest of the family lived in Lwów. My father was one of eight children, and my mother was one of six. On my father's side, there were 13 grandchildren, of whom nobody survived. I'm the only survivor of the entire immediate family on my father's side. On my mother's side, nobody was married except for my mother, and I was an only child. So I survived, and then two sisters of my mother's who survived together with us.

Life in the small town was very-- of course I don't remember that much of it. So I can't give you a picture because I was young when the war broke out. I was all of 11-years-old, not quite 11-years-old. But life was sort of-- for children, it was normal. You went visiting. You went to school. We went to public school.

And in the afternoon, I went to Tarbut, which was Hebrew school from 3 to 5. In between there were piano lessons and there were language lessons. And life went on as normal. We went visiting. We had a family, large family. I mean extended family, cousins and so on in the small town.

Excuse me, Mrs. Halpern. We have some other pictures that you brought with you that we have in a montage there. And maybe you would like to describe some of them for us.

Yes, of course. I'll be glad to. Yes, this is-- these are pictures that we took about five years ago. Four years ago? Four years ago. We went back. We went to Poland, and we went back to my hometown, which is now

in the Soviet Union. And the pictures that you see on the montage there on the TV on the right left corner top is the home, is the house that we lived in. You can't see it very well.

I'm standing there with Susan Schmelzer who was with us on that trip, and a lady which was-- it would be take too long to describe it, whom we met there, who lives there in Zolkiew. And when she heard who I was, she grabbed me by the arm and she said, "Come, I'll show you where you lived. I'll show you everything, your house and everything." She was very excited.

The top center is in front of the house where my grandmother lived in Lwow. Where I lived during the war for a while. The left corner on the top is the synagogue in Zolkiew. You can't see it very well. It's not a good shot. It's a famous synagogue, which has its pictures printed in many books.

The stones for that synagogue were given by one of the kings, one of the famous kings in Polish history, Jan Sobieski. And the Jews of course built the synagogue, and it's like a fortress, that when they burned it down, it didn't burn down. It's still there, of course whatever is used for-- I think it's used for storage. It's closed.

The pictures on the bottom on the left, I'm sitting with a lady in the blue dress. That lady is the daughter of the people who saved my life. Actually, it was her father. Because her mother, he sent her and her mother out of the house when the Jews were afraid for their lives.

This was the time you were in hiding.

Yes, yes. The center bottom is the picture of where my parents had the store. Now there's some kind of clothing store there. And the picture on the bottom right shows the gate to the little house where I survived, where we were hiding during the German occupation in Lwów, on the outskirts of Lwów.

Thank you.

So.

Yeah. Would you go back to telling your story now? You were 11, around 11-years-old.

I was almost 11-years-old. I remember we went away. My mother took me to a country place. I had to have my tonsils out. So my mother took me to a country place, and then we came home on the first of-- we came home-- it must have been-- we came home two days before the war broke out. I think it was we came home on Wednesday. The war broke out on Friday.

And by the way, I never got my tonsils out. I didn't need them. I was so healthy during the war I didn't sneeze once. Which shows I guess the tension, what it does to a person. At any rate, the war broke out, and the whole thing went haywire. From the little, quiet town that everybody knew everybody and everybody was friendly with everybody, everything went topsy-turvy.

The Germans came in. They only stayed a few days, because our part was occupied by the Russians. And I remember it must have been the first two days or so, all the men of the building were somehow in our house. And they were in the bedroom, I think, which was the furthest removed room from the door.

The door rang, and my mother went to open the door, and a German soldier was at the door. And he said, "are there any men here? We are looking for men." And my mother said-- in German, she said "no. There are no men here. Would you like to come in?" And the man said, "no, no. If you say they're not here, they're not here." So the men left. A few days later, the Russians came.

The Russians came, it was a whole different story. We were nationalized. Because we were well-to-do, so they nationalized. I don't know if you're familiar with this procedure. My parents had passport 11. They couldn't work. I was still going to school. That was for one year. After that, my parents couldn't take it, and then they were afraid of deportation, so we went away to Lemburg.

And we lived partially by my grandmother. After that, we took an apartment. That was the picture that you

saw. That was the entrance to the building where my grandmother lived. I went to school there. Then we moved to another building, which belonged to my great uncle. And my father's sister lived there with her family on the ground floor.

And we were-- housing conditions weren't very good already at that. Time we had a sub-rental in a house. He was a Polish professor, a bachelor. He lived with his mother, so he didn't need so much room. And I guess the administration didn't allow him that much room. So they rented a room to us. And we lived in that room, and we lived there for about another year, I would say.

Were things relatively tranquil at this time?

Yes, I mean, other than we were displaced, but there were a lot of people who ran away from the West, where the Germans were. But people worked, and schools were there. I went to school. Things were pretty much normal, if you can call it that.

So you didn't feel any immediate sense of danger then?

Well, I personally did, because we were afraid. You know, because we went from one town to the other. But not so much.

I'd like to backtrack a little bit, please.

Yes.

Do you remember anything in your earlier life before the war broke out, any memory or recollection that you have of anything that might have prepared you or might have forewarned you for what was going to happen?

Yes, in fact, I never thought about that. I remember I was always a child with big ears. And I remember my parents speaking of going to Palestine at the time. You needed a certain amount of money. I don't know how much it was. It was \$2,000 or so per person. In order to enter without a certificate, you went as a private person.

And I remember my parents discussing that, that we could go to Israel-- to Palestine at the time. But there were two things that weren't in favor. Of course, number one, that they didn't want to leave the family. My mother had a large family, came from a large family. My grandfather was no longer alive, so there was just the grandmother with the rest of the family. They had married. There were daughters. There was-- the oldest was a son. He was a lawyer. He was already a practicing lawyer.

And the other one daughter was married to Holland. She also didn't survive. She was taken in January of 1945 from Westerbork, Holland to Auschwitz, and she never came home. So that was the main consideration. And then I believe there was some talk about not being able to take money out of the country. There was a law that prevented you to. But there was, yes. There was talk.

And I remember as a child, my parents listening to the speeches of Hitler. I didn't understand exactly what it was all about, but I remember that. So there were pre-warnings. There were. It was in the air.

And you sensed that something was coming?

Yes.

Even as a young child.

But of course a child doesn't--

Understand necessarily what was going on.

I understood. I understood. But not the real, you know, the gravity of the situation. I don't think anybody else understood that either, quite frankly.

Aside from being uprooted and having to go to Lemburg or to other places to live in these new environments, did your life at all undergo drastic change during the first months of the war?

Well, moving and so on. But the family was there, all the aunts and uncles and the entire family. I mean, you moved freely.

You were able to practice your religious tradition?

Yes, yes.

And celebrate the holidays--

Yes, yes. I mean, maybe there were some restrictions, you know, but I never noticed it that much. Because the Soviets are not pro-religion. So I think there was school on Shabbat and other things. I don't remember very well.

What was school like for you in these new surroundings?

It was fine. It was school. A child goes to school, makes friends. Even though that was also a change for me, because I went from one town to the other, but I was busy with schoolwork.

So basically your life pretty much continued, even though it wasn't-- you were not living in the same hometown.

Yes, it wasn't the same as it would-- let's put it this way. It wasn't the same as it would have been.

Right.

Had the times been completely normal. But life continued. There was family life and--

Were there any other members of your family? I know you've said that you were an only child. Were there any other family members living with you during this time?

Yes, my mother's sister. She lived with us before the war also because she was a pharmacist, and she worked in Zolkiew. So she lived with us and then during the war later on, one of her sisters came to Zolkiew, then later on she went back to Lwów. Well, actually I don't remember how this was. Or maybe she came from Zolkiew to hiding. She survived with us. So yeah.

How long did you live under the Russian occupation?

The Russian occupation was from September '39 till June '41. So this is almost three years.

Two years.

Yes.

And then what happened?

And then it was exactly just about the end of the school year. I remember going with my father from my grandmother's house. We were going home. That was a little walk. And there was-- I think it was Saturday night. And Saturday morning, we woke up to the sounds of the bombs. I don't know how many days. I can't recall anymore how many days it took to take Lwów. because we were in Lwów at the time. But right after that, the German army entered.

And the following day, they knocked on the door. And the professor came out. I can't recall his name anymore. And they asked me, are there any Jews here? They asked him. And he said, "Yes, there are Jews living here." So they came in, and they took us out. They took us out. It was a small street, not far from the Polytechnic Lwów.

And the Polytechnic is situated on a big avenue. When we got to that avenue, there were mobs of people standing on both sides of the avenue. And on the road there was-- it wasn't SS. It was Wehrmacht, the soldiers. And it must have been Ukrainian police. There were bleeding Jewish people here in a small group, there in a small group downtown, with the avenue downtown.

As we found out later on, they were leading them downtown where a very large pogrom took place. And whoever got there, didn't escape with their lives. They told us to take off our shoes. I was carrying, it was June, sandals in my hands. And my mother walked behind me. My parents, they pushed me forward.

And then my mother had this idea. She walked over to the soldier and she said-- in German, she said, "Do you take children, too?" And he said, "No, take the child and go out." So my mother went back and she said, "This is the father." He says, "Take him and go out."

Well, the boss had spoken, the German soldier. So we went out. As we were going out and we came to the mob in front of us, they had to let us through. My mother pushed me again in front of her with the sandals in my hands. And somebody spit in my face. That was my introduction to the German occupation.

But we didn't even realize that we escaped death that very day. But we were a few days still in Lwów, and then we saw the food situation was very bad. They took away-- the first day when they came in, they took hostages, prominent people. And among them they took my father's brother. Not the oldest, the next of the oldest. And he never returned.

Was there any reason why he was taken?

I don't know. They took a number of prominent people as hostages. You know, they had their-- and none of these people ever returned. At any rate, we had nothing to do there anymore, and we returned to our hometown.

You had no problems getting back there?

I don't know. We probably took a horse and wagon or something. I really don't recall how we got back there, but we did get back there. And of course life there wasn't what it was either, but at least you had acquaintances, you knew some peasants, you could get some food. It was--

As it turned out, at the same time that they had the program in Lwów, they had a program in Zolkiew. So when we came, it was after the pogrom. There was a number of people killed. I don't remember how many. I really don't know. And life started. Now they started taking people to work. First they came, they said all the gold.

I remember I had a little thing, so they came for the gold. My father said take off the little-- with the little green emerald shamrocks I had. Then they came for this. Then they needed that. They always needed something. They were taking people to work. Today they took you here. Today they took you there. And this went on until the fall.

Of course, there was no school for Jewish children. That was it. And again, our parents organized a small group of children for private lessons. We were about four or five of us. Klara [? Kramer ?] was also one of those. Unfortunately the others didn't survive. There were some professors. There were Hebrew teachers. So we had a combination of both, and we were still learning.

Then we had to move from our house. They were sort of pushing us. So we moved to my mother's sister's house. By that time, she was married. So she lived with her husband and we moved there.

Was your father allowed to work at this time?

No, no, no, no. They were taking people to-- there was no such thing as work. Nobody was allowed to work as you what you call work. But they were taking people to work. Today for this, and tomorrow for something else.

And your father was one of these people?

Yeah, they would take you to here, they would take you there. They took young-- they took me. Later on, they took me, too. They took me to work in gardens. They took youngsters they were taking. In March, we were still in our house. In March, before Passover, they made the first round up. And they said they were taking-- they took some people, mostly category B who did not go to work.

And everybody wanted to be category B, because that exempted you from going to work. So I should say that the work was not work for pay. It was work for whatever work they wanted you to do. They took to roads, to building roads.

Forced labor.

Well, of course, labor, whatever they needed at the time. And they rounded them up. And then they said that-- they went to round up the families, and they said there was a settlement to Belzec. I remember we had a friend that when they came for them, her mother sent a message to her sister saying "pack your things, because we are being resettled to Belzec. Let's go together." The sister packed up, and she went with Them Nobody imagined what would be Belzec.

A few months later, this was before Passover. It must have been during-- maybe it was May or June. We had-- you heard rumors. People were coming back. You know, Gentile people who were allowed to travel. Jews were not allowed to travel. And they were saying that the people who get to Belzec on those trains, they don't come there alive. They come there dead already. And they just bury them in Belzec.

Nobody wanted to believe. They said, "Oh, these are just rumors, vicious rumors." But of course, nobody heard from anybody in Belzec either. In the meantime, things were getting from bad to worse. In November, they had another what they call an action.

Action.

Yes, they rounded up more people. And then I remember in that action was my mother's cousin, who lived-- they had a big lumber yard. His wife was killed, and his oldest son was-- yeah he was taken away, too. My cousin was in a labor camp, but the youngest son was shot. And he was shot. And we were all taken into the ghetto, and he died in the ghetto.

He still died. Normal death. We were all taken to the ghetto. We lived together in a little room, my parents and I, my grandfather. In between my grandfather came to Zolkiew to live with us. My grandfather was there, my mother's sister and her husband and my mother's-- one of the youngest sisters that survived with us.

We lived in a little room. Everybody had typhoid fever. For some reason, I did not get typhoid fever. Everybody had it. It was a question of luck. At any rate, this was November. Things were getting from bad to worse. There was starvation. There was-- in the meantime, they were taking people from Lwów and other places. They were taking them to Belzec.

And they were taking them by train via our town. Somehow at this point, they were turning. And the train had to slow down. And that winter, people, whoever could, were jumping from the train. A lot of them were shot on the spot. A lot of them the wounded. And the Jewish community organized sort of a brigade with a nurse to bring these people into the ghetto. And of course, they were taken care of as well as they could. This was throughout the winter of '42.

Sometime in January, things were getting from bad to worse. And you would hear from here. You could hear from there. It was bad. And I guess my parents started to think about doing something about it. And then came one sent by the Ukrainians. They wanted to sell things still. So they did, and they would go into the ghetto and sell things.

A man came, and he was selling cheese. Not like a farmer cheese. The pressed farmer cheese. And he came. And my father was talking to him. And then my father came to me. And he said, the man said he is willing to take you and to hide you. And I took one look at the man, and I said, I'm not going. And I didn't go. I don't know if it was a week later or two weeks later, my father came and he said-- he didn't say he or she or whoever is willing to take you. You are getting dressed, and you're going now.

You were about 14 at the time, right?

I was, yes. I didn't say a word. What I can't understand is that I had a-- because when the Germans came, they took all the furs. They took a gold collection, another collection. There were consecutive collections. And they took a fur collection. And you were not allowed under the penalty of death-- that was the first winter that were there-- to have fur.

Somehow when we gave up the furs, my grandfather was wearing a little vest. Nothing important. A little fur vest. And we forgot to give this up. With mortal fur we burned that vest. And we were afraid they shouldn't smell the smell of burning fur. But that went on.

At any rate, when I went, when my father sent me out, I had a little-- I had a coat with a little fur collar. And under that fur collar, my mother sewed in some money. And my father bribed the police, because you walked in to the ghetto, from the ghetto through the Ukrainian police.

He took me out, and somebody was waiting in the dark. I never saw his face. I was told his name is Eddie. And I said goodbye to my mother in the house. I said goodbye to my father. I never saw him again. And the man said, "Hold on and don't talk." Hold on. Don't get lost, and don't talk.

So I went with him. It was dark, because it was curfew. And we went on the train. And there were mobs of people. And it was dark on the train, too. And we went. It took about an hour to get to Lwów. We came to Lwów. The streets were dark. We came there. We came to a house, which might have been even like my grandfather's house. I couldn't tell.

An apartment with big rooms, dark rooms. There was a woman in the kitchen. I remember today, she had-- a young woman. She was his wife, evidently. Big blue eyes, that I will never forget. And they slept in the kitchen with a hose.

From the gas they had a hose. It was burning, so they had it warm. And they pointed to me to a big bedroom. I'm sure it was one of those empty Jewish apartments with the tall ceilings, big bedroom with windows all blacked out. Cold, freezing cold. They told me to leave the coat in the kitchen, and they told me to go to sleep.

I was laying in that room, and I was saying to myself, what did I do? Why did I go? Whatever would have been, would have been. I wasn't given a choice. You go and I went. Anyway, I must have fallen asleep. In the morning, there was a knock on the door. "Get up." I got up, into the kitchen.

They gave me the coat. The money was still there. And they said, come. And again that man took me, and we walked. We walked to a house, to a small house. And I came in. On the ground floor, there was a lot of commotion. I think it was like an Underground communication center. And I was told to sit and wait. So I waited.

And then an older man came. At that time, I thought he was ancient. But I found out later on, I found out he wasn't even 60 years old. That was this lady that you saw in the picture, her mother. With a big beard. You know, not too prosperous-looking man, but somehow I had confidence. And we walked. We walked all across the city. Because he was afraid to take a chance and take the tram with me, so that we shouldn't be

stopped to ask questions.

And we walked in snow and such big snow, in and out, in and out, until we came to that little house there. And when we walked in there, there was a young woman there, a friend of this friend's. That's how I guess the whole connection was. And she went to school with this [? Yasha. ?]

And she was there. She introduced herself. She was, I think, 20 years old. She was already married at the time. And then there was a knock on the door. And he went to open the door. And we were told-- and she said we have to go into a closet. "Don't ask questions. Come to the closet and keep quiet. I'll explain later."

So we went into the closet. She was sitting in one, and I was sitting in the other. We didn't budge. The brother came to visit, but he left. He lived across the street, across the wall from here. It was like a little thatched house. It was tiny. Only there he had two rooms, and the brother's inside the house, the inside of that house I never saw

And we were explained that he's afraid that the brother should know that he's hiding Jews. To that extent, people were afraid. And then, slowly, one of my aunts came, another one of my aunts came. My mother came. Her mother came, this woman, this young woman's mother came. Her brother came. She had a brother. Maybe my age, a year older a year younger.

They are all dead now. They all died. And then, in March, we were waiting for my father to come. But there was another cleaning action, and we found out that my father was killed, March 25, '43.

Did you find out how he died?

No, nobody. There were no witnesses. Because sometimes somebody said, you know, they saw him die, but we didn't. We didn't. But I knew that he was killed on that particular day. And on that day, they killed practically the entire population of the ghetto with very small exception.

My mother's sister survived, and she went into hiding. Only to be betrayed by the man that took her in the night before. He took her money, and she was killed the next day. People saw her being led to the cemetery. She was shot there. My grandfather, I don't know how he died. Because somebody said that my grandfather was still in hiding when they took my father.

At any rate, the entire population that was killed that particular day was buried in three mass graves outside of the town. And when the war was over, the birds were still flying. We took whoever was left over there, the few people, we took a horse and wagon. In fact, we took two horses and wagons, I think. And we piled into these wagons, and we went there.

The place is called Borki. I was there when I visited. And there were these three big mounds covered with sand. And there was a head sticking out of the-- I'll never forget.

Out of the mound.

It was sticking out of the mound, just the tip of the head, with short black hair waving in-- the wind was waving. That sight I will never forget. And when I came to visit now, four years ago, I was looking for the graves, which at one time they put a fence around them, and they put flags on it. There was nothing left-- three big holes.

It seems that the population was digging for gold teeth. And they didn't want it done, so they took whatever was in these graves, all these bodies, they took them out, they burned them. They didn't take the ashes and put a monument. They didn't do anything. This is what the Russians did with it a few years back.

Just a hole in the ground.

Just three holes in the ground.

Can you tell us about your life while you were in hiding and what--

Well, we were in hiding. We couldn't do very much. We were left without money, practically without money. My father was dead. In June, my mother's brother, the oldest brother, the only one she had, the lawyer was taken to Janowska. In Lwów they had the-- that's a Janowska, and he was taken to Janowska. And so were some other members of the family.

The man that was hiding us was sort of a daredevil. He was hiding--

Was he Polish?

He was a Polish man. He sent his wife and his daughter out to live in town. He was working with the Underground. And when we heard that-- each day, he would come and bring some news. When we heard that they were liquidating the ghetto, my mother-- and he was a very good-natured man, so my mother said to him. [NON-ENGLISH] maybe you could go. Maybe you could take my brother out. Because they were transporting them.

So he went to the KZ there. And he came back, and he came back with my aunt. And my mother said, where's Yakob? And he said, no, he still wanted to get some clothing out from the ghetto. Because he was working, like in between. You know, it was a-- so he came-- went back. And when he came back, my uncle was already loaded on a truck. That was the end of him. He didn't come back. So my aunt survived with us. She lives now in Boston. She's married.

And after that, they started-- we were hiding on the outskirts of Lwów. And they had a place there, it's called Piaski, which means "sands." And as the name indicates, it's all sandy. And in there are dark holes, and they were burning the bodies of these people. They were burning the people there, some alive, some dead. Some they shot in there. And they were burning the bodies.

I can still feel-- because we were not far. I can still feel the smell, the specific smell. I can still feel it in my nostrils, that smell of these burning bodies. And there were tales of-- they were naked of course, but the clothes they were taking away.

Tales of people surviving, running out covered with blood and running naked, and being apprehended. Maybe somebody survived from these people. So I don't know.

Who did the burning? Was it Germans or Poles or who?

Whoever they used for it, I don't know. I don't think the Germans did the actual work. They did the actual killing, but I don't think that they did the work. I really don't know. And we were hiding in mortal fear of neighbors. There was a neighbor across the street, and he would say-- his name was Balitsky, as opposed to Halitsky, he would make jokes. Mr. Halitsky used to bring two pails of water every day.

Into the house?

Yeah, you know, to wash, to whatever. Food we didn't have. Because we had no money. People with money didn't have much, but we had no money, so we couldn't buy, and he had nothing. So we were selling everything that we had in order to buy something. At any rate, so he brought-- he was bringing this water. At least water we had.

So the man made such jokes. So he says every Sunday my wife comes and she makes the inspection. I have to keep a clean house. I have the dog and so on. The following Sunday, he took out everything he possessed, and it wasn't very much, I assure you. And he washed, and he scrubbed in order so the neighbors should see that he is scrubbing. That's what he's using the water for.

So that they wouldn't become suspicious.

Yeah. So things were getting-- things were getting bad, because there was no hope. There was one

offensive by Zharkov, and it stopped. Then it was in Kiev, and it stopped. And at one point, he even said, go. I cannot feed you. Mrs. Halitsky went to the priest confession, and she confessed. She said, you know, my husband is keeping Jews, and they're going to die there from starvation. What is he to do?

So he asked is there any danger, anybody knows that you know of? And she said, no, as far as I know, no, not yet. So the priest said, if they want to die there, let them die there. You can only do what you can do. So we stayed with this advice and nothing else in view. We stay there. And we starved. We sold everything.

Even whatever we had, nightgowns or whatever that was torn, we would make a big embroidered flower on it or something. And he would take it to the market and sell it. Then he came upon an idea, and he there's a paralyzed woman in my neighborhood. She cannot walk, but she knits.

So he would go to the market and bring sweaters that people wanted redone, and he would bring them. We would rip them open, do the wool, make the sweaters, and we would get-- he would bring them whatever, zlotys for it. And then with whatever little there was sometimes left from one sweater, another sweater, we would make maybe a pair of mittens or something.

And this would have to be enough for all of us once a day. If he could get, he would buy a small loaf of bread like this. It would be cut into even pieces. Everybody would get their piece, and this was at the end, and this ended. I remember it was summer already. And my mother said, Mr. Halitsky, maybe you could take the leaves from the trees, and maybe we could cook those.

Once he brought in a woman with milk. I guess he was a little tipsy. And we didn't have a chance to close-- he brought he to the one room. We didn't have a chance to go to the other room. And the woman next door came in. She also wanted to buy milk. And she said, now I'm going to see how you keep your house. And she only wanted to go into the room that we were in. And we didn't manage to turn the key, so we were pushing the door. She was pushing to come in.

Finally the woman left. That was the winter. All night, one of us was sitting. We were walking. The windows were covered half way. We never walked straight, just so, so the neighbors don't a head. But all night we were afraid.

So one, like two people over the night, we would switch. Somebody was sitting and watching the gate, if nobody is snooping around or coming or something. That's how afraid we were.

What was your living space like? I mean, how much actual room did you have?

It was a small room. It had two beds. We slept three in a bed. My mother and I and aunt in one bed, and the twins in another bed. And the other family slept on the attic, under the roof.

So there were approximately eight of you?

Eight of us. Later on, there was seven, because this young woman whom I described before, she had a heart attack at the age of 20, after she heard her husband was killed, and she died. Where was I?

Oh, then towards the spring, as the front came closer, Hungarian soldiers came. They were using Hungarian soldiers. And they were looking for quarters for Hungarian soldiers. So of course, everybody knew Halitsky is all alone in that house. Oh, so I was trying to describe you the room.

So there were these two beds and a little table. And there wasn't a cast-iron oven. It was made of tin, a little cooking oven. That was one room, living quarters. And then he was a locksmith by profession. So the other room-- so you can imagine the size of the room. This was the size of the room.

The other room was his working room, actually. So he had his working bench there, whatever and he slept there. So when these-- everybody knew that he's only one man. So when they were looking for quarters, we knew our goose was cooked. Because when they come, and we had sold everything, but we kept each of us a pair of shoes and a coat, in case we have to go out. Everybody go to bed, make sure, but we had papers.

In case, we have to go, we should be able to go. And we were standing all dressed-- or sorry-- to go out. And we couldn't go out. Because they were going up and down the street. We just couldn't go out of the house. And like it is almost like the story of the plagues, when that went over the house of Israel. They never came to the house.

We never managed to go out. Had we gone out, we would have been lost. And they somehow passed the house and never walked into it. And then it took another two weeks, I think. And we were still there starving. And I mean starving for a long period of time. This is a lot of starvation.

And when the front was already close and the bullets were flying, the neighbor that wanted to go in and see what the room looks like, how he keeps, she came in. They were Ukrainians. And she came in, and she asked him to hide her husband.

As I said, he was somewhat of a daredevil, very good-natured man. To hide her husband. And this was coming and going. So he couldn't very well put her husband together with us. Because what if the front reverses itself and then we will be cooked? And of course, his goose will be cooked.

By that time, his wife and his daughter had left for Poland today. And he was stuck with us he. Couldn't move. His daughter was engaged, and they left. So he kept him in a shack. He had like a shack in the garden. He kept him in the shack. He kept us in the house. Bullets were flying. And then in a few days, when the war ended, the people who lived there, till today, they don't know that he kept Jews.

He was afraid for them to know. And we walked out one by one. Of course my aunts left, and then maybe I left with my mother after an hour or so. And slowly, slowly he eased us out so that nobody should know.

Was this during the day or at night or when?

No, in the daytime. We walked out in the daytime, yeah.

As the liberators had come in?

Yes. I mean, you didn't see the-- you didn't see the soldiers. You didn't see. But you know, it was out on the outskirts. It wasn't like in the city that it was all busy. Occasionally, somebody would come. The real danger was from the neighbors. Because they would come, and they would tell. Because they would get a reward for betraying who kept Jews. Then we would be dead, and he would be dead.

Mrs. Halpern, why do you think he did it? His wife.

As I said, he was a kind of a daredevil. He did things. He was in the Underground. He was he was a person-- some people have it in them.

But his wife did, too. I mean, she was part of it.

His wife. Yeah, but his wife knew about it, yes.

Yeah.

Yes. His wife lived in town. She was working in a kitchen, I think. So he would go there, and he would eat there. So I guess he had what to eat. And his daughter, they used to come to visit us. We used to knit for them. You know, sometimes a sweater, [INAUDIBLE]. We were [INAUDIBLE]. We were sitting there for months. 18 months we were in hiding.

What happened then? You were liberated by--

The Russians.

Yeah, who were the--

The Russians. Oh, we couldn't have waited for the Americans. We were liberated in July '44. We wouldn't have lasted any longer.

And what happened then after you were liberated?

Then we came out of and we went back to our hometown. As unbelievable as it may seem, since nobody saw my father actually get shot, but that was the day that he was gone, we were still hoping against hope, maybe he was hiding someplace. So we went back to our hometown.

At any rate, we had nothing else to do. We went back to see maybe somebody would be there. We hitchhiked on a military car. And we came into town early in the morning. I remember we were-- we had to sleep in a bakery. There was another-- we met on the way also another hitchhiker, a woman with a daughter, a young married daughter. So we were doing the trip together. She was continuing to the next town.

And we were going with a horse and buggy. Because it turned out that the first car that we stopped was going in the wrong direction. So we went off. And then there was a military-- another military detachment that got lost. They were with horses, wagons, horses. They were [INAUDIBLE] or whatever with such beards.

And so they took us. We covered ourselves. The sun was blazing. With whatever it was there in the thing. I think there were towels or Something and we were going with them. And then when the night came, we were going into this small town. And you could see. The moon was shining. There were dead soldiers, people on the side, on both sides of the road.

And then we came to this town, this small town a few kilometers away from our town already. And the men let us into a bakery, and he let us sleep on a table. The four of us slept on a table. He probably gave us some bread to eat. I don't remember. And bright and early in the morning, we stopped another car, and we went into town.

And when we were passing by the town, I told my mother, let's go in. We passed Klara [? Kramer's ?] house, where they lived. And I said, let's go in. My mother said, well, you know, nobody's here. So because we had Polish friends, so we wanted to go into the town to see. Maybe we'll get something. Maybe. I mean, we had literally nothing.

So we walked in. It's a house that you walk in, and there was one apartment here, one apartment here. They all lived. It was like a family compound. And we walked in. So walked--

It's all right. Take your time.

And they started coming out, like from the woodwork. You know? From these two balconies. Klara with her parents and another family. They live in Canada now. Part of them, actually most of them, just one couple survived. Thank you.

Here, tissue.

And I asked about Klara's sister. You know, you start count--

Counting heads.

And then they told us the story how she perished. I always say whatever is meant to be. We survived. We just survived. You know, like you shoot at a flock of birds and nothing happens. And she was in hiding with them. And she was the one who didn't survive.

How old was she when she was killed?

She was also 14 years old, 15. 15-years-old when they took her out, yeah. There was a fire. And she ran out. She was scared they were all going to be burned. And somebody who knew her from school, a boy, recognized her in the street and denounced her right away.

And she was tortured, because they knew that wherever she was, the rest of the family must've been. And she never betrayed them. So--

We better pause.

And when we came back, of course my father wasn't there. From five and a half thousand population, there was only 52. There were 52 persons. Some people came back from Russia afterwards. Maybe altogether 100 people that survived. But that day when we walked in, there were 52 Jews in Zolkiew, some of them not even people from Zolkiew who had survived in Zolkiew. And we picked up from there.

We're going to pause for a few minutes.

And we'll come back and then we'll finish the rest.