

[MUSIC PLAYING] Good afternoon. My name is Bonnie Kind, and I'm a member of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project of the Holocaust Resource Center. We're affiliated with the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale. Sharing the interview with me is Dr. Bernard Weinstein, Director of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project and Professor of English at Kean College. We are privileged to greet Mr. David Kempinski, a survivor presently living in Union, New Jersey, who has graciously volunteered to give his testimony about his experiences during and after the Holocaust.

Mr. Kempinski, perhaps we could begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about your date of birth and the country and town in which you were born, what things were like?

Yes. I was born July the 27, 1921, in the town Praszka Poland, near-- on the border line Germany-Poland till September the 1, 1939. After I was five years old, my parents moved. They had their business about 12 miles west from Praszka excuse me, east from Praszka to the town of Wieluń. There was there a county town, a bigger town, and my parents, my father, had their business, a mill [INAUDIBLE], and he build it up.

This started in 1927. But I saw on the wall-- it's still existing. I was there for a visit just 18 months ago, in 1985, it's still existing. The monument on the wall, on the left side from the factory, in 1927 my father built. In 1929 and 28, we moved to Wieluń.

How old were you at the time you moved?

They were the seven years old. And there I started, and I was there till September 1, 1939, and the war started. And approximately 4:30 PM-- excuse me, AM-- they all of a sudden came, German aeroplanes, and they leveled off the town 95%.

Did you have brothers and sisters growing up with you?

Yes. Two brothers and my parents was home at that time. My brother came for vacation from vacation from Palestine, at that time. He was in Polytechnical. And our neighbor next door was the rabbi. And I went into the neighbor, to the Rabbi Yustman, and I was hiding there and they bombed. And my parents and the two brothers went down the ground floors.

And I didn't saw him, but when they bombed, we were holding the door with everything-- the house was shaking. We saw our part where we was living was leveled off. We couldn't go up. No stairs. Nothing. I was screaming this to the Rabbi Yustman. And now we came out and we went down with a pile of bricks and everything. It was very dusty, you know.

And people was afraid there's gas. They were calling this gas, but it was dust. It was not gas. And we had no clothes. We were in the pajamas, no shoes. We came-- jumped from the beds. And we started to go east. We left to the exit roads from the town of Wieluń. And I was in the school in Piotrkow, and I had some stuff, some clothes there. And it is about 65 or 70 miles away from Wieluń, and I was walking. It was a Friday.

About when we was walking, there was bombed on the roads. We had the Polish army that put mines on the bridges and this, we had, say, farmers with cows, and the cows went on the mines, so there was explosions. People got killed. Cows got killed. Horses got killed. I was walking, walking day and night till I come to a place-- I passed the river. Warta is the second biggest river in Poland after the Vistula [INAUDIBLE].

And I come on Saturday to the town of Piotrkow, but that was also, at the time, bombed. I couldn't, then, went into the town. We passed the town and we continued to go the direction east.

Was your family with you at this time?

No. I was lost. I was myself.

You were all alone?

I was all alone. No. We was-- we came, and the town Sulejow was a big woods there. It was Sunday already, we started to resting. And we met a few people from our town, sometimes with their families. On the afternoon on Sunday-- this was the 3rd of September-- there was heavy bombing there. And we saw soldiers, civilian on the roads. So many killed. We started to leave the woods, we went direction east to direction of Opoczno, a town, and Radom.

And we came to Radom. This was bombed, but still the people was living. And we continued to go east, we walk. And then we was in a barn at nighttime, and all of a sudden we so Germans on the road. We said, where are the Germans? We started to go back. We went back to the town of Radom and there was the holiday Rosh Hashanah. I went into like a synagogue [INAUDIBLE], but the midrash, besmedresh.

And we were sleeping there. Over the Germans come and took it out, we had to do work like take the weapons from the Polish army to bring in the place. And they were beating, and one time she come with no food. And it was waiting 'till the holidays got over and we started to go back.

I wasn't found approximately, I would say about 250 miles from my town.

Let me ask you, Mr. Kempinski, did you expect that any of this was going to happen?

No.

Was there any warning? Was there, did it just--

No. No, no, no. Good we expect that the Germans are bad [INAUDIBLE] from November the 9th or the Kristallnacht. Well we was in the school, and the director, [Personal Name] came to us and said, the Jews came to [PLACE NAME], and we have everything what's possible to donate it or the morning the pennies.

Or that we have our underwear, or everything to give it. We sent this to [PLACE NAME]. But we cannot visualize. But when I come on vacation and this was Hanukkah there at Christmas, and my mother told me that all the meetings in the town of Wieluń. And one lady, a wife from the doctor, Dr. Schreiber. She ask to the ladies, who will be helping us?

And I remember my mother told me this. I think no, I didn't expect it. I couldn't expect it. And I started to walk back. 'Till I come exactly a day before Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur was on Saturday. And I cam on Yom Kippur Friday. I don't remember the day. I know to remember that Yom Kippur was Saturday.

And I had a friend also from the school in the town, Bełchatow On the maps, I can show you. It's near Piotrkow. I passed Piotrkow back and Bełchatow And we was there, I was sleeping then waiting after Yom Kippur. I go back to Wieluń.

And it had all just going about 45 miles. And Yom Kippur on the morning, we went to the attic to prayer. It was there about seven people that had not dominion. And all of a sudden came a German with his bayonet in the hands and he find us. And we have to come out to the square they had marked for us.

And I saw all the Jews they bring from all over, and this was Yom Kippur. We have to go a town I was the first time the town I was passing with a pass to go from Wieluń before the war when I was school when I vacation, no? I don't know what the town was, only the people.

They took us to every place where the Jews was praying or that synagogue, and took me with another few people to a place to like a shtiebel. We have to take it out all the shebichtav Torah. We have opened the shebichtav Torah.

We have the books, they put it as some as Bibles and Kimoras and all kinds of books. And we have--

All the sacred books?

[INAUDIBLE] we have that, you have to walk only on the shebichtav Torah. There was a roll up with other

people rolls up. And we have to bring this to the market platz the square market platz we have to put in one place. Again and again, and again and again, was hundreds, maybe thousands of from the books in one place.

And after we was finished, we have to roll it up again, the shebichtav Torah and put this on the pile. And they took Jewish man with a beard, I don't know who he was. I was not from the town. The beard, with the tallis and tfillin and put him on the middle of the pile and they put fire on the fire.

Everything was, and it was around soldiers, around. It was not SS. It was an yellow arbeitsfront with the yellow armbands. And there--

Were these German or Polish soldiers?

No, no, no. Germans.

German soldiers.

I saw them later in other town the same people I recognize him, the German. And there with bayonets and with [INAUDIBLE], they put us to the fire, near, near, and near all day Yom Kippur. And I hear a sound, there was screaming, today's the Roosevelt's birthday, Roosevelt's geburstog.

And all day after in the evening I don't remember what has happened with the Jew over, they bring down, how I can't remember. I didn't know it then. I was some religious Jew and they put them on the top with the fire.

They let us go, and I went back.

You were about 16 years old?

17 years old. Yes. And I went back. And the next day, in the morning I came up and I want to go home. And I come in the market. I saw a autobus was belong to Wieluń to our town. Or there was took from the German.

Well, the driver was a Polish. And I said, listen, take me home. I want from Wieluń. Can you pay me? I don't have. He want two zloties. I don't have money. I am convince him from the mill. Oh, I know from the mill. OK, you come home. You pay me.

I say, OK, my father pay you. And this was autobus, a red autobus, what the name from the company was SAN, S-A-N. And was two SS men and their black uniforms with the red arm under the black swastika.

And I was sitting, I was looking not in direction from there, but I hear the conversation from that. How they do to the Jews? In all kind of cities when they come in to Poland. And were laughing and this and that.

I turned around, and listen, I was very dirty from the fire. And I come from Wieluń. Took me about maybe two hours to come with the bus to Wieluń. And I come in and my father, the house I know I was bombed. I went into the mill to the factory that they are.

So my father they came in and father didn't recognize me. I [CRIES]. There was two SS men, there was the Treuhänder they call, they took care for the--

They took his business?

His business, yeah. One was from Sudetenland he had I say the small mill in Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, not Czechoslovakia in Sudentenland. And one was Luszczow. And they wanted my father be working for their need some information.

My father was working the office, and some workers from the mill was mobilized the Polish army. And there

was, we had about maybe six, seven workers. Well, there was after Volksdeutsche-- one day there was a release from the prisoners of war and they came home.

We had one and name Moscow. He was one professional miller And we all machines-- we had general machines from miag, M-I-A-G from Raszyn imported to Poland in 1926 or seven when my father built those.

He even spoke with my father, German. And when he was released, he came back in the short time he saw with the swastika. And I look him on, I couldn't believe he was just an MP in the Polish army, a Sergeant, and now he has swastika.

I didn't say what I looking. He say, what you're looking? So what you are wondering so? I was still there, was the beginning and they was nice to my father, more or less. I don't know what to make of it to say hello to him at least, no?

Sacred, and after 10 or 11 months, we was living in the office. We took two room for the officer we was living with them at the house. You couldn't go to the main office through was the main entrance, we had to use in the back yard the window.

We jump and we make like a stump, a 2 by 4 stump. And we walk into the window and out from the window.

Is that your father, and your mother, and you?

My parents, yes, and my two brothers. And after, that was how they was living good friends took us and give us a room. We put a small kitchen, it was living.

So they let you stay there for 9 or 10 months?

Yes.

But then--

Oh, yes, yes. After came--

--Forced you out?

--Yes. But they changed. The two SS, I would say about the January or December 1939, they were gone and they send us a Treuhänder from Breslau today, Vratislav. Fritz [? Kinor ?] was his name. Yes, I mean he was, I would say not a killer.

Say sometimes had a solid conversation with my father. And I would hear on the telephone was in next room when was a bad weather, and he was calling to Breslau to Vratislav. Always say to his wife, we have a Churchill weather, he said bad weather.

He said the bad weather is a Churchill weather. Because I remember it, when my father told us, he said Churchill weather. It's bad weather. And I was in Wieluń. During the time, they took us to work to clean it up the demolished houses.

And we were joking, I hope they send us to Berlin, we do the job for them. But that time didn't bomb Berlin, it's too late. They come. We was hoping and dreaming as the war be a very short one.

And my father know it that's the war, the German, first war, that one not so bad. Maybe they can us to war. They cannot expect it that's what we--

That was just hard to believe?

--What's happened. And my older brother, he get them a tutor, a student. Then he got a work in the library

in the main school. There was about three libraries with I know of.

Polish and from the gymnasium, and they brought us everything in one place. We couldn't go out from the houses in the evenings, not Sunday. I would say, I was stealing books and my brother gave me the books to bring the books home that we can read.

I was a lot of reading that time. And everybody, but the night was so long. And at one time he gave me three books, and I brought them. And I had this in my jacket over, and I have their books here under my arm.

But all of a sudden, came a Gestapo man. And he had a bike with a flat tire. He told me, Juden, come help. We had stars on the front. We had stars on the back, yellow stars.

So they could identify you?

Yeah. We couldn't work. It was forbid, to walking on the sidewalk, we had to walk next to the curb. And we was walking next to the curb, there comes with the car or the motorcycle and that. We have to take it off and bend the heads for them.

For each German, we were civilians or we are not. We don't do this, we by mistake don't saw him, they beat us up. And I have to take them back, the books for me out. He took me to the Gestapo house.

I was there now with my two sons and I show him, I make a picture here, stop my arrest. I came in the office and I said, he talked to me. I don't understand German. I understand. Why you say I don't understand? OK, he said, turn around.

He told this to his secretary, bring them Dolmetscher. How to say that?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Translate.

Interpreter.

Interpreter. She brought. She knows what [INAUDIBLE]. She brought the big [? weight ?] they hit me in a cut here. And I was so lucky. Tell you, tomorrow you know it. The Jews have to come in the school on the back yard there, all Jew.

You stay home. You don't go. I come and pick you up. And he told me, I went there, and they took the Jews. This was August 19 on Tuesday. And 1941. And the entrance to the school was a gate with a tunnel, and there was from both sides all kinds, SI, SS, high up, at the aim what kind police.

And every Jew came in, they beat with weight. We get, came in--

Was this in Aktion? Was this--

This was our public school.

--Yeah, but was this a rounding up of--

A rounding up, yes.

Yes.

And they pick it up. I don't know how many hundreds. They took us from there to the other school about two miles from Wieluń and they give us shots and they make a selection there too. And there was also a Jewish community, and they know me one from they said, Kempinski, come. I release you.

I say, no. My younger brother is here. Release him, I have to go, but the Gestapo looking for me. I took him, put them under the window and I push him out and he got released.

But they don't need so many people like we was. I don't know how many hundreds. Were maybe about 300 or over 280 they sent away. And from there, we had to walking, running to the train station.

And they put us in train station. This was the last time I was in Wieluń This was August 19, 1941. And they brought us to Poznań after five hours. I was sitting on the floor on the train.

And that's what full of, call was wagons for person. There was too many people, we had not on the, not with civilian, with a special train.

What were the conditions on the train?

On the train, they gave us not food. But not special, we didn't go, we went to Poznań and we come in the night. And they brought us with trucks in a camp. This was the name was Łubowo In German, they call it Lubów, near Poznań.

There was like in a radius from Poznań 10 kilometers. There was a camp in Poznań for Regensburg was a big camp, I remember. And they had the all the radius from 10 kilometers approximately.

There were the camps most from RAB. It's that Reichsautobahn in German. This is the Autobahn what we have in all Germany going on. We was on the [INAUDIBLE] on the [NON-ENGLISH] Frankfurt Oder and Poznań.

And we hear from there meisters there was most from Kozlow. Oswaldo was his name, he say yeah, we build this to Vitebsk, Moscow and anyway, this was in 1941. Conditions in camp, they sent us from one camp, and after we was there about three weeks, and sent us Poggenburg.

Probably another four weeks and they send us to Kreising. And there, it was very bad. They started to people dying through hunger. And I don't know calorie what to tell you, but we were very low.

We couldn't work. We had to work there in swamps in the water. And we were jealous when somebody died. We was really jealous.

What kind of work did you have to do?

With a shovel, take out the top soil, we clean the top tile soil, then we put this on the wagons. We piled it up. This was the work. And other work was also, they make like they put the thing concrete or prepare for bridges, so the sound of mine work.

We was digging this top soil, we put this on the wagons. And the wagons was moved, and the turn the rolls, and it was piled up at the dumpsite.

At this point, you were by yourself? You had no member of your family with you?

No, no, no. But we get from time to time, we can get a card from, and my mother wrote me that this guy, the general that borrowed the books, he visit us. He's visiting us. The Gestapo, he's looking for me.

And I was lucky. Were not he underplays, keep me would take me to the woods and kill me. I was lucky he told me go, don't go. Stay at home. I come pick it up and I went to the camp. And was there and the camp condition was very bad.

We had snow, we get the soup. We pick it up in the bowl. We going to say, we had to make our laundry in the bowl. We have to wash in the bowl.

We have to pick it up the snow to clean the back, the yards with the--

With the same bowl?

With the same bowl?

Yes. Don't call us this name. We had for [NON-ENGLISH] the organization, todt. T-O-D-T. He came and visit us. And he was looking on us. We was in two rows, no?

And they don't call names, they know no name. But they call us, idioten and ober idioten. Younger, good looking, better, was idioten, you know. The older one, the weaker one was call him ober idioten. And sometimes he took it out every fifth.

We didn't know where he going. He took them out. They come back after a couple of days, did some work. And we had hungry. We had already the lice.

We couldn't even wash our shirts. We get no shirt, nothing. We only the clothes what we get from home. We when my parents wrote me they come for the train, he was already waiting. Come with them packages, it was not away.

And hung it in lice. This was this worstest thing. It was the winter we couldn't work. There, they took us out to clean the roads for their Germans went in 1941.

In winter the road was not far from the camp, and there was heavy snow. The Germans columns with the trucks, went East we sometimes they were slippery. We had to push and to clean. And we build it up very high walls because it's windy from snow.

You can stay when we had a couple of minutes rest. We can hiding from the road.

What was you own physical condition during this time? How did you feel? Were you were hungry?

I was hungry always. I was hungry always. But we get from time to time from the home, they let send us a piece bread a kilo sometimes the lager master that was responsible, he took the old bread and threw it in, in the kitchen. And with the soup and everything. This before everybody.

OK, and this was the winter. They took us once for to take a shower to Poznań. We was walking for three hours and there was a shower, this was really something what we didn't expect it, or something.

But when we put again something, the clean wash was the same. The lice was in the skin. I don't know. We had the same problem.

But this was still 1942, April on spring there was rumors the Germans need workers in the factories for the war, for their war industry. And so was, they took us to the train to Poznań. And they brought us to a town.

Direction in Berlin, where we stopped, the town was Rzepin near Kostrzyn. And we was there working in zawalidroga the--

Watch, clock maker?

--No, no. zawalidroga They were you know what? From trees you make a lumber that you cut.

Oh, a lumber mill.

A lumber mill.

Yes, thank you. A lumber mill was working there and they was looking, you know who was working in the town? I saw the [NON-ENGLISH] on the wall near the township. And Juden is [NON-ENGLISH]. And some

people know, we saw the German tanks.

There was, I don't know. There was thinking we are the targets. The German talk about, you know what this is? I said, no I don't know it. I don't want that.

I don't know, I was looking around us or whether I was sorry, but sometimes they happens that was naive questions asking, no? And from that day, they concentrate from all kind of camps. Jewish men and they brought us to their camp.

Name was it Britz. And there was camp and there was not only Jews there. We was only separate only. There was Belgium, and there was French prisoners of war with Russian prisoners or war.

There was Russian prisoners of war and different skin and lowest stage condition. But maybe worse or like us. And the woman, a Russian woman also what they had their, with the OSD on the market.

What did that stand for?

[NON-ENGLISH] from east.

From the east?

Yes. The blue and white letter. We had the yellow with a Juden. And I come the first day in the factory. The factory was about I would say, about four kilometer from the camp.

Was walking and there was a watchman. [? Velkor ?] police or something up. And they brought us in. And I came in, and they give me some German to teach me how to work the machine. We had to work, we had the produce 150 millimeter of shells for the [NON-ENGLISH].

[NON-ENGLISH] for guns was on the trains. And I had to produce the bottom of the shell when you close it up. I don't know when you fill it up, the bottle or something. Or they don't fill it up in our place, this and that.

And the first thing, his name was Sigfried [? Ebil ?] and the first question, he saw my star and say to me, Mr. Juden? Yeah, [GERMAN]. So little with chutzpah You were proud.

A little defiant?

Yeah. What's going on? I know what's going on, we don't know about Auschwitz and other places. He told me, [GERMAN]. I want to-- lucky to for Bolsheviks and Jews to hang. This was his prayer for [INAUDIBLE].

OK, we started to work. I catch very fast. And he was satisfied. And I spoke I would say German not bad. Not like Goethe and Schiller, but less or more he could understand me. And he see this, I am normal.

He wouldn't reading the Der Stürmer of [NON-ENGLISH] by Jews have this difference opinion. Said, [NON-ENGLISH]. I'm different.

You're like everybody else. He saw you're like everybody else.

Yeah.

He was a young man also?

He was maybe 38, 39. With a long nose, blond. I had blue eyes, he had not blue eyes, no. And he said--

You were more Aryan looking than he was?

Yeah, I was more or less. And we was working about the 'till end of 1942. And I know what to do the job. I



don't need more.

But all of a sudden, he comes and he want to help me out. And he started playing around. He cut his finger. Almost hanging on the skin. He do a job that don't belong to him.

But I know it what the purpose was. There he told me after. They took him to a hospital after two weeks. He's coming back with a big bandage. Say, I have to go to east Russia no? To on the front.

I was very afraid. But I come back, before I go, I go and see you. And he came back with a nice piece of bread. I was really-- I don't know, maybe it was my birthday, I think it's something year.

And in July there's something and he invited me to the washroom, call it. Say he gave me his hand. He tell me, Kempinski-- now, Kempinski was very famous was near Berlin there's a very famous hotel there, Kempinski.

So they heard the name Kempinski, I had a better uniform I get from a jacket from a German also. But he told me, I wish you'd come to your family home. And I have to go, I have three children. He give me his hand, with tears in his eyes, and this was the reason I want the captain not to go to the army.

Was he putting himself at risk to help you? Was he in danger himself by doing this?

He put himself in danger, yes.

And he was willing to risk something?

Yeah, he brought me something was not working. Suddenly he brought me papers. I was know it exactly what's going on.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Newspapers?

And who the general in [? Narvik, ?] and who was the general in [? Kratov ?] that it was North Africa, when the Americans came to in November with Eisenhower in North Africa. I had all as the-- and the P -- that Kennedy was landing in 1942.

And August and summer. And he told me, [NON-ENGLISH]. They don't had the success. I know what's going on. Know the names and know the places exactly.

Whether it was in [PLACE NAME] whether it was in Crimea whether it was in Stalingrad. Whether it was by Leningrad. So I'm thinking know what's going on.

When they bomb West or South Germany, yes. Help me out and brought me books, also.

Why do you think he did this? Why was he willing to do it?

He changed maybe his mind. He said we suffer. We suffer, we was very angry. And I exchanged also with him. We get sometimes for Christmas a little bit sugar, or the marmalade.

He said, maybe we can exchange. I give you bread, and give me for my kids little sugar, no? I give them to him. I was not smoking and we get Yugoslavian package of tobacco smoke.

I give to the cleaner miner was a Russian prisoner of war. Nikola, and he, I give him, he was smoking. But they I saw they taking newspapers and where they find the leaves and they smoking.

There was very, very bad shape. And we had the master was Schultz. And when we get our meal in then 12 o'clock was water.

We'd get together with the Russian prisoners of war. And once the Russian prisoner of war took the bowl with the soup and put this on the floor. See what we were eating, they give us water to eat.

We are prisoners of war. Schultz beat them up and told them, you know what? In World War II, I was eating in prisoner of war in England, everyday rice. And was a special man, we call him the boxer.

I don't know what the name. When somebody would serve him. Somebody broke, somebody, they call that sabotage. They took him to washroom, he beat him so up that you couldn't see his eyes and you couldn't see somebody still alive.

They call him boxer, very strong man, young man. And he was the man when you come in his hands, that-- he was working one night, one week night and one week day time.

He was there 'till August 1943. By the 22nd, or 23rd. We figured that all of a sudden we see police, about seven police with machine guns. They came we, find it out from Potsdam near Berlin.

We pick it up, the last meal. That the piece bread and the soup. And when we pick it up, we had the carts. We get the soup, we get the coupon.

Yes.

We saw one German, and German woman was working about in the kitchen. For we have a half hour after they come to Belgium's come the French, the Russians, not prisoners of war. Russian prisoners are separate.

But civilian Russians. She was so crying, one on the German woman's was crying unbelievable. I couldn't understand. I saying maybe something, some maybe even some prisoner [INAUDIBLE] no. She was crying.

And we left, we came the next day in the morning, it was in evening. Police took it out, they open the [? carbon ?] they ready to show them everything what do you have, money or the some, other food, potatoes we had in the pants potatoes. And carrots, everything out and in came Gestapos, civilian.

And they took a hat from somebody and we get paid there about 10 mark a month or the eight mark a month. And the rest they say they send to the ghetto. But that was not true.

They put us on the train. They brought us, we was walking with our stuff. We have a wooden box. And took the train to Abersfelder. We was about 203 men.

Who was there once about 700. But the 500 couldn't, were able to continue. And they sent them back where? I don't know.

And we was on the train. It was about four wagons. One was for person for the police. And--

Did they tell you where they were taking you?

No, no, no.

Did you?

No. I hear this the police something, rumors was they hat that letter and they had to open this after three days. Where we going, they find it outgoing. They by themselves, no [INAUDIBLE].

But the Gestapo that when you come on the place, you'll get back everything but we taking you away from you. And we came after four days. And one on the way in the night was crying, screaming in wagon.

They got us put us in fire. They was going to kill us. We don't know there's something wrong with him.

Were these only men?

Men, yes, yes.

No women, no children?

No women, no, no, no. And we find that out that's the German woman, he was working in the camp. He would then went to the war. Go back, he was cleaning the barracks. He lift about two or three men in the camp.

When we were out to the work to clean the barracks. And he maybe had some connection with the kitchen. Or he had with potatoes, he was there, there was some [? cow ?] the same. And no German, and maybe the German woman some things mentioned, where you going? Where are you going?

He was screaming. We didn't know it. I was thinking something wrong with him. And we came to Birkenau, Auschwitz. This was think on Sunday.

How long had you been traveling? How many days?

Think about four days. This was near Berlin. I hear the station [? Kotpost. ?] I know the Silesia near Poland, near Katowice. And we was looking through the small windows.

We saw by the train, the working Jews. There was something screaming, we didn't understand them. We came to Birkenau.

We heard screaming, out out, shnell. With dogs and don't let us-- we had some bags there, they don't let us take nothing. From there, there was a ramp.

We jumped from there on the train. We came in to Birkenau. We went to the gate. On the right side, we saw on steps bent only girls, womans and Navy uniforms. And all instruments was violins and all kind sizes and all kind.

But I'm, not an a musician, cannot mention of, but was a type of violins, yes. I would say, but there was 50 or 60. And we move it, they was playing.

And we came in and I hear somebody calling me. He recognized me. And I didn't almost recognize him. He is longer than, he had I would say another 24 hours what he had. I was too late. And I met my cousin there, [? Olzer ?] Kempinski.

He was there. You couldn't recognize the people. And you was so tight that so many people was there. On your [INAUDIBLE] we saw the running I know that 15, 18, 20 men's with the barrels with soup, hot soup coming out.

They had two 2 by 4's and they're holding from both sides. And every five, six feet, they stopped, it was so heavy. I know what maybe 200, or 250 gallons of soup. What was so hot, they was afraid to spill it, no?

And we get and as they brought it in, in the barrack and this, we find that out this was a stable once for the Austrian army that was in World War I. They were displaced and Birkenau was the Austrian army, the camp.

And it was stables. We saw the floor. Floor was some bricks were loose. We started to pick it up, the bricks. We find the letters, addresses, pictures, gold, rings, diamonds, money.

We decided we don't know what's going on. Some people started to pick it up. Some gold, rings, and put this in. All of a sudden, came an SS man. I was thinking some traitor.

And come out with a pistol in his hand, he said, everybody who took something, or find some, don't put the one second. Out, get shot. We have take it off our clothes. And they open the door, the gate.

We have to walk it out, single, naked, we have open our mouth. We have spread out our fingers. We have nothing. And they look in other places also.

OK, and they took us in other barrack. We was all time naked was warm. We saw next to them fence, woman, girls, they had only also-- they had no dresses, nothing. They had only a cover, a blanket from the bed, no that was.

After this, I had for the shower. And they prepared us to get the numbers. To get the number. They make like with a pen. It was bleeding a little bit.

Wash it up and the number. Last thing to take. This was my name. This was mine.

That was your identity?

Identity for 'till April the 29, Americans came in. OK, and they put us in other barrack. They cut the hairs also. We washed up. Before, and they took us near the crematorium.

Showed us-- can I take it off?

Sure. Please. Please.

Excuse me. Thank you. It's hot. And it was in the night time. And they put us between Greek people, what they didn't spoke with our language. We couldn't come have a conversation.

But they know that a few German words, and they show us the smoke that is my father, my mother smoke. We still couldn't understand.

Didn't understand?

And the transports start to come at night. We didn't know from where. But daytime we was waiting. We was a small transport 'till we get free, go on the gas chamber.

In the morning, I saw come also a transport. People coming in trucks. And in the end was two trucks with stuff, what is left for the boxes from, there was addresses is on them. On [INAUDIBLE] understand, they come from Belgium. And the convoy in the column the last, was-- the last car, the last truck was an ambulance.

I was on the right side. So the SS man and the white coat sitting. And I saw the ambulance, a very simple like the American ambulances on the windows [? cans, ?] [? cans ?] and this was a guess. Even the door was not closed was like with the wire on the lock around.

I know what these were whether was broken or what. You could see that the [? cans ?] on one on the other one. They let us go in the other barrack. This was block 7.

We had a block elster Mr. Miller. He was a doctor from Slovakia. And he said, you are all professional. You know what to do. This I'm sure they sent us to a factory back. But you know how to work. You was working [NON-ENGLISH].

And the block was already a regular block, it was a old SS ex stable. And there was like a stove built the long ways in the barrack, and the opening was where you put the woods or the coal in the [INAUDIBLE]. And the night we had a watchman.

We had a bucket, we had to go down, so you couldn't go out to the toilets. We had to use the bucket. And I don't know what you fall asleep or do something. All of a sudden, I hear and so from far away, he fall asleep somebody took an SS man, put his head in the hole where they put the woods to the oven, and push up and they beat him up.

He was crying and calling in Polish, [NON-ENGLISH]. Jesus, Mary and so. Jesus, Mary in Polish. Understand he's Polish guy, he fall asleep. This was and I was sleeping no straw, nothing. Only on the no, lumber.

Just a wooden?

Wooden, yeah [INAUDIBLE]. And we had a wooden shoes. And you have to watch them. I mean, you lost, you don't get to the shoes. We put this under the head and this was our pillow.

And they really, they took us over a week, they took us in the next camp, [? Reischall ?] we was there maybe a day two. And they took us to the main camp, Auschwitz. This I would say maybe a mile away or a mile and a half.

And we was in the barracks. We was there only for five days. We come in the gate, we see, Arbeit macht frei but I now in '85, I saw the same gate and same writing.

I explain to my sons and from there, they send us to the camp IG Farbenindustrie, that's at the headquarters in Frankfurt.

IG Farben.

IG Farbenindustrie with the Eisenhower at his headquarters.

Yes.

And I was working there with from September, beginning September, through January the 17 1945. They evacuated the camp. And I do construction work and the all come.

And we have in the camp, this was lucky was a camp from between 10 and 12,000 prisoners. We have the-- I think every two weeks, a shower we put the block by block, block. I was next with Elie Wiesel, not the same. I was 55. He was in 57.

I find it out with him. I spoke him, I know he was in Buna I was reading the ninth and the fifth zone and from the camp from the books.

Was it your picture that recently appeared in the paper alongside him? Because there was somebody--

No this was a picture from Buchenwald when he was living there. I was not in Buchenwald. In Buna, the [PERSONAL NAME] I was with him.

He came in--

This was in--

--1944 in May or June.

Yes.

He was already old prisoners at that time. We know, I know that what's going on to believe.

Did you learn what was going on slowly?

Oh, yeah, we know it by the gas chambers and the town, yes, yes. Because they make a selection, they came every couple of weeks, and they checked us up. How we were looking and they mark it us or sometimes they mark it with a number.

And they took it out, the next day they disappeared. They took him to Birkenau.

And people, I assume tried to stay as healthy as they could?

Healthy as possible. Not to go in, there was a hospital like a KP. [GERMAN] they call it in German. And I was for one day when they, I remember by there I saw the paper that's fighting from the invasion from June 6 in 1944.

And there I find it out [NON-ENGLISH] like The New York Times is the name [INAUDIBLE] from Stalin. I remember exactly what the red line.

I said thank God this. And if they bombed down from July 1944, they came in and they bombed the factory. And this was for us a big release.

And why didn't do this before? Why the leaflets? Why there some papers?

And I was working there. We had contact with the British prisoners of war. They came from Tobruk from North Africa.

These are military?

Military, yeah, we was working--

They gave you information?

No, we did give to him information. They had that paper from the paper, with the reading they want from us the information. But we had to contact [PERSONAL NAME] and get some paper. Or there some a German what he left or forgot.

We find it, and from the German paper, we translated to English. And we wrote up and we had the young rabbi from Holland in the [? Teris. ?] He know perfect English.

I brought him the papers. He translated and we had one time was working and come two SS people. We had to take it off of our hats and to bend.

And he had them there, and had and they fall down. And we always in 12 o'clock, we brought him the news and we get the barrel with the soup from them. It was a delicious soup compared to our soup. And they put them in the camp immediately.

I come in the camp, and I was 100%. Sure, they beat him up, and he give my name, others as I helped him out. But I come and he had a big red point on the white field that's been [NON-ENGLISH] in German. That's an escaper.

They took him away, and I never saw him again. But the British, they took him to the bunker for a few days, he get bread and water. He told me, and you can see on his face. They feed him only with water and bread. And Charlie's come back, and we stop.

But we had a Polish and Czechish, Yugoslavian, and all kind people. And the language we talked with them. And we could exchange with them, and do something, something additional to our food. Or they that Germans when they brought the people to the camps, no clothes.

Sometimes we had a connection with somebody who was working, and we took it out to civilian clothes. And we were selling them to get bread. When I tell you the story, they had not more uniforms.

So many people, that when they come from Hungary in 1944 there was no more, the uniforms for prisoners. And it started in 1945, we had the coats to get. Where they cut it out, the pockets that we cannot put anything.

And I tell you, they usually in the beginning, on the civilian coats, they put a red pass on the back.

What did this mean?

A paint, the red?

Yes.

This say you are a prisoner. What do we do, that we took bricks with water, red bricks, we make paint from this. And we paint it, civilian.

We paint with somebody want to escape, we paint it, this dry out, we clean it out. There was clean. Was no paint, or nothing. Now you see we are-- we learned to be criminal. We will learn to cheat.

We did, but they would get smarter, and they cut it out. We call it the windows, a square. And they put it in a piece from their uniforms. This was out but We had to find other ways, in other ways.

Was escapes, when the escapes, they couldn't find it, they pick it up, everything and to bring him away. Where? There was on October the 9 in 1944 was they find it out as underground. And they find it some scissors they say.

[? Pfeiffer ?] they want to put this on ice for this is meant and to open. And to get at least we know it. This is Poland almost-- I mean it's going to Warsaw. the Russian not far away. And not far away, 250 miles.

We was hoping everyday. Between time, July the 20 like [INAUDIBLE] they tried to kill Hitler. We had the papers. We had them.

I have to pause in a moment. If you want to finish what you're saying. And we'll pause for a few minutes and then continue.

Another minute?

Yeah, if you want. Yeah, another minute.

And this they took the three prisoners, three Jews, and I remember one that brought the diamond, his brother in Los Angeles is here. His brother say, [NON-ENGLISH]. We are the last. The other one, [NON-ENGLISH]. This the, freedom be alive. And the third one won't say something, but they put him down. And he was saying for many hours was a really heroes.

Maybe this is a good time to pause for a few minutes, and then we'll finish the questioning.