

--college in New Jersey. I'm very pleased Mrs. Clara Kramer is here with me today to discuss some of her recollections and insights into the period of the Holocaust. Mrs. Kramer, thank you very much for coming to talk to us today.

I'm glad to be here.

Thank you. Can you tell me a little bit about when you were born, where you were born, what family life was like in your town?

I will try. I was born April, 1927, in Zolkiew. But you can call it shtetl. It's near Lemberg, Galicia. I went to Polish school.

How big was this town?

It was 12,000 population. Roughly almost half were Jews-- less than half. We had a beautiful Jewish life. First of all, we had a synagogue that is still standing because the Germans came and put fire into it. But it is like a fortress. As a matter of fact, in our book about Zolkiew that is the original permit from Jan III, the one that saved Europe from the Turk-- he gave the permit to build it. And also it's very interesting, that page because it is also permit for shkhite and all these things.

Do you have any idea what year that permit was made?

I'm ashamed-- I went to Polish school. But it must have been in the 1600s. That's when he lived. I have the book at home, so it can be verified. We weren't orthodox. If you compare it with here, we were. But orthodox were the ones with payess But my father was a Zionist. And I know he belonged to the Zionist organizations. And sending me, a girl, to Tarbut, which was the Hebrew school, as opposed to Beit Ya'kov that was because he was a Zionist.

I had the uncle, a Zionist, who wanted to go to Palestine, but they didn't let him in the family. And that, I remember. I remember the fights home because when my grandfather wanted to enlarge the factory, and he wanted to take this money, go to Palestine, they yelled at him. So he used to be mad at them and come to our house. But he's now in Israel, after being in Russia and everything. And typically for him, he went [INAUDIBLE].

Really?

Yeah. That's --

What kind of factory did he have?

We pressed oil from-- vegetable oil. And then in the '30s, we brought engineers from Germany and built a refinery because that oil was dark-- a refinery to make it in the color that you see now. And he said, take this money, because I remember the fights. And I was always a listener. I read books. I didn't play with dolls. It was at that time, Abyssinia. And I remember him yelling, the whole world is going to be on fire. And why don't we do something? Well he was proven right later after my--

When?

--half of the family is dead. And my grandfather perished in Russian graves because we were rich.

When do you recall him yelling that or saying that?

Oh, that was-- I must have been a big girl. It was in the late '30s.

In the late '30s?

It was in the late '30s.

How large is your family, brothers and sisters?

I had only one sister. She was killed by the Germans.

Younger than you were?

A year and a half. And she was already with us in the bunker from November till April. And that's a big story. We had a fire.

Let me take you back.

And I don't know if you want it now. That is right in the bunker. We were already in the bunker.

Let me take you back a little bit.

Back before the war?

Right. A very vibrant Jewish community.

Very vibrant Jewish community.

You went to Polish schools.

I went to Polish schools. I did very well. Poland was a very feudal society. When I look at it back now, because of we were rich, I was treated well. I was [Yiddish phrase] And that was it.

You went to Hebrew school in the afternoon?

In the afternoon for two hours. One hour was the language. And one more hour was the Tanakh, the Torah. Taught to us like a history.

This is boys and girls together?

Boys and girls together, yes.

What was the relationship like between the Jewish and the non-Jewish population in your town when you were young girl?

You see, I happened to have a lot of Polish friends because your friends were the ones that went with you to school and walked with you back from school. The Jews mostly lived in downtown, what you would call the Ring platz It's like you see all these old towns in Europe, they have a square in the middle of town, because that's where most of the stores were. Because of our business, we lived toward the outskirts. And that's where the Pollaks lived. So I had mostly Polish friends. But my best friend, like you have one in your lifetime, she was Jewish because she lived not far from me.

So most of the Jewish population was concentrated toward the center of the town. You live near the outskirts of the town.

And even if you-- I had Jewish friends. Of course, I had. But you just didn't walk by yourself downtown. You just didn't. And there was no time. I went to two schools. And vacations, everybody went away.

You didn't walk them by yourself because--

You just didn't. You didn't say, Ma, I'm going downtown. You didn't.

What was the distance from where you lived to downtown?

It must've been 1 mile, not more. But you just didn't-- I went there to the Hebrew school. But you went straight home.

So the Polish school was also downtown, and then you--

Polish school was closer to me.

It was closer to you?

On the way. Yeah, Hebrew school was on the other end of the town.

How many children or students were in the Hebrew school?

Our class must have been a dozen. And there were three or four classes, if I remember correctly-- not more.

So you say that your father was a Zionist.

He was.

He was active in Zionist organizations?

Yeah, he was. He belonged to the Tzionim whatever-- I know what it means. But that was one of the parties, center. That I also know from talking later, not that I remember that or Daddy went, daddy went, you didn't ask.

But it was a place, they called it [PLACE NAME], and that's where all the meetings were. But how much active you were. You had to [NON-ENGLISH], and we had in Hebrew school, you used to paste in stamps, and then you filled it out. You planted the tree. We were encouraged anything. Of course, my father-- for my father, this was a lot because he was the only brother with all the beard and payess. He grew up as a [NON-ENGLISH] And he ran away from the yeshiva. And he taught himself--

He came--

--everything.

He came from a large family?

My father? Yes.

And your mother?

My mother also. There were six.

They were six?

They were six.

Was there any 10-- your father's brothers and sisters, did they live in the same town?

One of them lived in the same town. But I knew he's my uncle, but we didn't go too much to each other's places because of the [both talking].

Because he's [both talking].

Yes. And then my father was-- at that time, it was a crime. He went every Shabbos to shul. And we had a strictly kosher house. But it wasn't the way he was raised. He ran away from the issue.

So there was a little tension then within the family itself?

There wasn't tension. But I wasn't as close with them as I was with my mother's family.

But generally, the Hasidic Jews pretty much--

Yeah.

--were [INAUDIBLE]--

And my father since went to the Hasidic shul, not to the big shul.

Oh, he did?

Of course.

Old habits die hard. That's where his brother went. And that's what he went. And then I never remembered my grandparents. And this is because my grandmother died when my father was only 9 years old. And my grandfather died before my father married. So I also never knew-- and here, I lived in the house where my grandparents lived.

This is on your father's side?

On my mother's side.

On your mother's side?

Yeah, I lived in the same house as my grandparents.

And on your father's side?

As I said, my father lost his mother when he was 9 and his father --

Right, OK.

So I only knew this one uncle. Then I knew an aunt that used to come. They lived in a different city. And we didn't travel that much.

I think I missed something. Your grandparents on your mother's side--

Lived with us.

Lived with--

Not with us this. Was a two-family home.

It was a two-family home?

I grew up with them. And on my father's side, I knew only one uncle and one aunt who used to come, his sister-- two aunts that used to come. The other one I never met.

How was the general economic situation of the Jews in the town?

They weren't very poor, no. I don't know what you-- there was a big fur industry-- enormous-- to the extent that if you find any people from Zolkiew in America or South America or someplace else, it's because they started exporting. And they had that link with the outside world. Otherwise, like here in America, my husband's society, there are a lot of people who he knows and his parents know. From my hometown, there are people who know my great grandfather. They're not alive anymore. When I came to the society, hoping to find somebody, no, because in between the two wars, apparently they weren't that poor. They didn't go to America. See, that was a sign of people who found employment. And one pulls another one.

So it seems that you're describing a very vibrant Jewish community some Hasidim.

Right, because when I hear my husband talking about his hometown, and others when we sit down, I know that we were more advanced-- what you say-- maybe because we were 30 kilometers from Lemberg. And there was every hour a bus. Now find many shtetls that had every hour, a bus to Lemberg.

So you traveled?

Oh, even I was in Lemberg with my mother many times-- several times a year.

Do you remember discussions taking place in your home when Hitler came to power in Europe? I know you're a very young girl at the time.

No.

let's see, in 1933, you were--

I personally, I was always with my nose in the books. My sister, she rest in peace, she knew everything. She was younger. I always minded my own business. That's how I was. I cannot tell you that I heard on the newspaper side-- I had my children's newspaper.

When is your first--

And then I do, I'd listen to music and only what they permit-- there were certain programs for children.

Do you remember, were there any laws enacted in your town, which against shkhite.

In the '30s, there was a lot going on with the anti-Semitism. That you couldn't help but hear but the --

Is that something that you felt as well?

Oh, I heard. It was a small city. And they were horrified that they were-- in Lemberg, in the university, they were beating up Jews. And you knew about it. That, I remember.

1935, '34, '36?

I remember before the war. I couldn't pin it down. But I do remember when it started with the anti-Semitism. And hearing that, you could hear that they called you a dirty Jew.

And you --

That was a way of life.

What were your feelings as a young child of--

I felt like I'm a privileged child. I just had it good-- simple.

Did your--

The only thing I remember when it came after six grades, or seven, if you were good in school, after sixth grade, you had special examinations. And you went to gymnasium, which is junior high here. But that was the system, four years gymnasium, then four years lyceum and then you had the matriculation. And in 1939, I was in the sixth grade.

And there was the talk that maybe because there's already anti-Semitism in our town, in the gymnasium, that I should go to Lemberg for the Hebrew gymnasium. But then it was decided against it because I was carsick when I went to Lemberg each time. So my mother said, how can you live in Lemberg and commute at least once a week? So then my mother says, if you will be good-- I'm remember this-- if will be good, you will be good. And the truth of the matter is, I went for examination, I was so good, that I didn't even have to do the oral thing. I was accepted.

There was a dormitory school in Lemberg, and you would have gone there and stayed there for the week?

Yeah. And that's why I didn't. But they considered it maybe because of the anti --. Then again, I was rewarded. Then I said to myself, I was good. So it doesn't matter that I'm Jew.

But you did feel-- and you did hear about--

Later there was a lot of talk about anti-Semitism. There was. And then there was something with the shkhite also. Presterova, I remember the name even, that there was a whole I mean they were talking about.

Did your father talk about it or your mother talk about it or did--

They talked between themselves. You heard it. They didn't talk to me about it. But I know about it.

Did you yourself-- let's say when you were 11 years old, 12 years old-- so we're already in 1938, '39, did you feel a certain distance from some of your friends?

Never.

No?

Never. They wanted to go with me. They wanted to work with me.

You're a nice person.

That's why and a Germans came, that's why you felt terrible. All of a sudden, your friends didn't know you.

Do you remember when the Germans came?

Of course.

Can you--

At that time, I was already 14 because first we had 2 years, the Russians. In 1939, we had the Germans just for a week or so. And they didn't--

In '39?

Yeah. And they didn't really harm nobody. They were the soldiers. And on the contrary, my father spoke perfect German. And they came around the house. And they asked questions. And then they left. And then the Russians came. And we didn't have it good with the Russians because we were rich. And my grandparents were taken. My grandfather was arrested. My grandmother, my uncle, and then my aunt with her family, who ran away from deep Poland because the Germans were there-- so she came here to Galicia. And they took her too. And we all had knapsacks with warm underwear in case they take us too. So the Russians, were nothing to be sorry when they left. Of course, we didn't know.

Did you know where they were taking the members of your family?

We did not till they wrote. I was at that time, that night when they took him--

You remember the actual night?

I wasn't home. I had the operation-- I had appendicitis. I was in the hospital.

You remember the date?

It was April. But I don't remember the date.

1930--

It was in April, 1940. They were taken. I was asking-- I mean, why aren't they coming? And you couldn't help being in the hospital and not hearing that they took our people. So they told us that-- Mama told me that they ran away to Lemberg, their whole family, because I was asking why aren't they visiting? My grandfather perished in the Russian year. And my grandmother survived. In '45 she came back from Russia when they repatriated everybody.

But this is one thing I always remember. My mother was once-- when I came back home, and Mama was crying, she was sending packages to Russia. She was going and sitting all night long by the jail in case she would find one policeman that would take a piece of bread to my grandfather. So she was crying. And that, I will never forget. My father said to my mother, Sarka, don't cry. The war only started. And there might come times that you will envy them. The times came when we envied them.

So in that time then, in 1940--

I went and keep up the school because they announced that the parents are responsible-- the Russians.

If the children don't go to school? What were your feelings? What did you have then?

Terrible, because I was even more religious. Everybody was religious. But I had a very religious friend. And my mother told me Shema, the short shema. And once I slept over in her house, she says, you're finished? And she got me. We were 12.

And so the way I believed, the Germans came, and they took the cemetery. They made roads from it. So the way I believe that time, God should just strikes his hand-- strike him dead-- the way it's in the Bible. And then you got busy surviving. All you looked is for a hole to crawl in. Like my husband says now, I couldn't survive two years in the hole. I said, you would be so quiet, that you would hear a mouse because that is one thing-- we were 18 people in the crawl space.

Let me go--

[both talking]

Let me go back a little bit because I'm not sure exactly what year you went into the space and exactly where--

The Germans--

Let's go back--

--came--

Let's go back just to 1940 for one second. So a number of your relatives were taken away to Russian jails.

Yeah. The only reason we weren't taken away, because at that time, my father-- that night-- was now a factory they were working 24 hours. And his name-- I grew up Clara Schwartz. That's my name. Then in 1939, when I had to go to the gymnasium, I had to have my birth certificate.

And all of a sudden my name is Gottlieb because my grandparents-- my father's parents-- never got married except by the rabbi. There were I mean they were too orthodox. And my father should have been a bastard. But under Franz Joseph nobody bothered taking papers, there was freedom.

And I didn't know about it. Now I need my birth certificate. And I'm Gottlieb. And I had to explain to all my friends why-- now when they came, the Russians, on the list, whoever denounced us-- because somebody, some communist gave the list-- they were looking for Schwarz. Everybody had a passport because everybody had to take out by the Russians, the passport. And the passport said Gottlieb. Now they had already one Gottlieb family, who had a factory of [? blocks ?] that they took. So that's why it was just by a fluke we stayed.

By a fluke, sure. So then you remained with your mother, your father, your sister?

Till the Germans came.

Until the Germans came. Do you remember the day that the Germans came into the town?

Of course, I remember. It's one thing I remember. I don't know-- my sister was so scared. You had heard already stories. My aunt, who came from the other side, she came in '39. she already said how they came, and they burned the shul, and they hit people, and stories. And my sister, she was-- we lived on the Main Street, main thoroughfare.

If you wanted to go to Lemberg, that was the Lemberg strasse. And my mother's youngest sister lived on a side street. So she went to her to sleep because she was afraid of the Germans.

But they came, the soldiers. And they asked for water. Or they're asking for something else. And then the Gestapo came. First thing when they came, and you probably heard that thing many times, they locked up the whole khilh And they said that they want so much-- I don't remember how much, but there wasn't an enormous amount of gold, silver, and money. If not, they will kill them.

They locked up the men?

Only men. The whole khilh and very respectable people. Rounded them up in the city. And the money was found. And the gold was found. And then they released them. Then that khilh which was the khilh from before the war, they were managing. So what were they managing? They had the list of the Jews. And if the German came and wanted the list, you gave them. You can only be could be killed. From my hometown, I don't remember any mean policemen. Everybody had to work. So some people went and they're policemen.

My father worked the same thing that he worked before, because these were sophisticated machines. And your workers were peasants. So they couldn't operate. So they told the Germans that they don't know how. So my father was lucky because that was food. He also made buckwheat, grits, barley on the first floor. That was small. The peasants used to come with a sack. And they used to pay. And you did it for them.

When the Germans came, we fed half of the Jews of the city with that because they were black marketeers. They came.



And they paid in flour. And my mother used to cook-- my mother took such a big pot, that you boiled laundry, that's what she cooked soup in. It wasn't enough.

You say people assumed other occupations became police, et cetera?

You had to-- I worked in the garden.

There was a Jewish council in your town?

Yes. So they had a vegetable garden to cook in the kitchen soup. So as a young girl, it was 13, 14, I went work there in the garden. Whatever they told me, I did. Everybody had to work. So furriers had an enormous amount of merchandise prepared, still from the Russians. They had to work. The Germans took it. And you worked for nothing.

So school stopped completely, obviously?

Not for me.

It didn't?

My mother was your typical Jewish mother. My mother-- you know Gladys Halpern?

Mm-hmm.

She's my second cousin. They were some refugee teachers in our city. Professor, he was from Warsaw. And you wouldn't believe it. You will believe it because I tell you. I learned Latin. It's unbelievable. I learned Latin. I learned Shakespeare. I learned math, physics-- privately. We were three, four girls, and my mother paid with flour or with barley because they -- or oil -- or whatever. Whoever could give what-- and we had a Hebrew teacher [INAUDIBLE] because I don't know how they finagled it. As I said, I was too young to know these things.

But there was some Gestapo who used to come once a month from Lemberg. And before he came, they prepared for him in furs, and money, and God knows what, and he kept our city out of debt Judenfrei. Our city was Judenfrei relatively late in comparison with the rest of the Galicia. And our ghetto came very late. Our ghetto came in November, 1942. That's when we went to [INAUDIBLE]. We never went to the ghetto. In November--

So is it--

--1942 was the big-- first there was one-- how do you call these [INAUDIBLE] Aktion.

Aktion.

That's how they talked. The first Aktion was in March.

Let me just ask you one question. Sorry to interrupt. There's is one Gestapo officer then who came from Lemberg?

I never saw him. I knew that the Gestapo was coming. Everybody went off the streets. We had the star of David from the first minute.

From the first--

That you know. Every shtetl had the same, the star of David. We had to relinquish all the radios. Every piece of fur that is bigger than 10 centimeter, that we have to had to -- But then we were left to ourselves, die, starve, work-- everybody worked.

Let me ask you, during the time, was there any interaction between the Jewish community and the non-Jewish

community--

No.

--when the Germans were occupying-- no?

I lived on that street where I lived all my life. So the Polish girls who went with me to school, and they saw me, they crossed the street. All of a sudden, you didn't have one friend left. And then you didn't look for friends.

Did you understand it?

I went to the-- I was hurt. But I was just busy-- a German shouldn't see me. And when I saw it, I came home and thought to myself, oh, that's it.

I'm just wondering if you--

I'm Jewish.

--if you ever came home, and you said to your parents--

Oh, yes, I told them, of course. [both talking]

I don't understand this. What is happening?

I understood it. I was Jewish. And she was she was privileged. And that's all.

Do you remember how many German soldiers were in your town?

I don't know. They kept out of this, you know out of --

You kept outside as much as possible?

First of all, we had-- I don't know what you call-- not barracks, because they were buildings, but we had a certain unit-- I don't know how many before the war-- Polish cavalry. So there were big caserna You know what's caserna?

Caserna. No.

Yeah, Caserna, they were buildings for the soldiers in the camp.

Right.

So the Germans were there. But that was very far from my street. And Gestapo, you didn't see. There was one Gestapo living on my street. So when I had to pass by, I went across the street just in case.

Just in case?

Just in case if he walks out of there. But the Gestapo only came for the killings. You didn't have stationed Gestapo in the cities-- not in my city. That was the Ukrainian militia. And they were pretty mean. When the Germans came, you had what you had in every city. They set fire to this. And the Ukrainians went on a rampage.

In your town also?

Of course. And then it was over. And they didn't look at you. You didn't look at them. And they didn't look at you. You went only-- you didn't go for a walk. And most of the-- in the backyards, yet we took out from the fence, a piece, and we

used to go to each other through the fences. We tried not to go in the street.

So actually, you--

At 5 o'clock, it was the police hour. You couldn't be seen after 5 o'clock. They would kill you. A friend that went with me to school forgot her arm band. And they took her away and killed right away. That was in the beginning before they killed anybody.

They stopped her on the street? They asked her where her armband--

That's right, they shot her.

Were you with her?

No. But I was-- you hear about it right away.

Right.

Small city. I just went to, for my lessons, wherever they are-- they were in private homes. One's in my house. One is in Gladys Halpern's house. And you came. And you rushed home.

Were you a little bit more insulated from the Germans because you lived on the outskirts of the town, rather than living downtown?

No, but the Germans-- you see, they didn't walk around too much in the town either. That wasn't attractive to them. They had that street. But they had the caserna. And I never went there. I don't think any Jew went there when he go in. But--