

My name is Dr. Sidney Langer, and I'm the director of the Oral History Project and the Holocaust Studies Resource Center at Kean College of New Jersey. I'm very pleased that Mr. Mayer Lief, who presently resides in Elizabeth, New Jersey, has come to the college today to discuss some of his experiences during the Holocaust. Mr. Lief, I want to thank you very much for coming today to the college to talk to me.

Can you tell me, first, when you were born? The month, day, year, the town that you were born in, the country, and a little bit about life in the town that you grew up in?

I was born in Lemberg.

Lemberg?

In 1908, August 18th.

Lemberg was a big town?

Lemberg was a large town, yeah. There was about a quarter of a million people.

Quarter of a million people?

Many people. There was a big percentage of Jewish people.

But what percentage was that?

I would say it was about 30, over 30% Jewish people.

Did you come from a large family?

Yeah, a large family. My father, we were seven brothers.

Seven brothers?

We were seven brothers.

No sisters.

No sisters. No.

And --

Yeah, seven brothers. And so far, I mean, now I'm only one left. That's another thing. And one of my brothers was also in this country. And--

What brother were you? One, two, three?

I was number three.

You were number three. OK. What did your father do in Lemberg? And your mother?

My father had a, you would compare here, like a creamery. Like a milk dairy business. And we used to ship all the products from around the town, from the distance, even by train, it was 50, 60 miles, kilometers. It would come in the product, come into the train. They used to-- people would pick it up.

And we had a creamery we used to whey processing. Make it from the milk, cheese, and cream. That was the business of my father. And then we have, also, a retail store, and it was a pretty big operation.

Did your brothers work in the business? Did you?

Yeah. My brother worked in the business, and I was learning a trade. My other brothers, I was learning locksmith.

Let me go back--

This actually helped me, just by the surviving, that trade.

That you were a locksmith?

It was very useful, because it happened that the Germans or whatever-- even the Russian-- they was needed in mine specialty. And they was privileging me and giving me chances to--

Because you had skills?

I was skilled. I was happened by the Germans, I was very privileged, because they taken Jews from all over. And I had a pass signed by the SS, and as a needed unembellished Jew. I was needed for their thing, and nobody should touch me, and I was going around from one place to the other, freely.

And I see what's going on, what was going on at the time. But you know how they catch people, how they shipping, how they did everything. And in fact, one time I was going from one place to another. I met a rabbi with the name of one of the sons of our rabbi in Lemberg. And one of his sons was Luza. Luza. And he was going with his wife, and with also his four or five children.

They was driving to the train. There was going thousands of people. They didn't ship them. They would lock up certain streets. They just opened the way to the train station. And I met him about five blocks away from the station, and I talked to him, he says he's going to work. You never know what happen. And he hope that he's going to be all right.

And he went to his death freely with his wife and children. Till the station, I walked with him. Till the train. And when the train, I just didn't go in the train, because I had first thing, I had to go to my job. And then they let me out. And they wouldn't let me out, then I would been just the same one, like any other Jew.

What year was this?

That was in 1942. The beginning of 1942.

OK. I want to just bring you back, and then we'll come back to the story over here. I want you to tell me, if you don't mind, a little bit about growing up in Lemberg. What kind of school you went to, whether you were active in any Jewish organizations, Jewish youth groups. Did you go to public school? Did you go to yeshiva in Lemberg?

I was going to the public school in Lemberg. And we also go to, after school we used to go to a cheder, like a Talmud Torah, you know, to learn. And you learn Jewish necessary thing, like [Hebrew] and then. Then we start to learn [Hebrew]. And then, well, I became 13 years old, and then I went to learn the trade. That day that actually-- I could say that that trade helped me to survive.

And what was the relationship between the Jewish community in Lemberg and the non-Jewish community? When you were growing up, as a young boy. When you're in public school, six years old, seven, good relationship?

There was always anti-Semitism, in Poland, you know, against the Jewish. But it was pretty decent. You lived comfortable, and we had Polish people working for us. And was the relationship, well, was not [INAUDIBLE], but it was not bad. It depended with whom you was in touch.

And then it was all right when we were grown up. And it was also time, in Poland, it was time like the Senate, and there was Pristerowa, one of the senators. And she was very much anti-Semitic. You know? And they--

What year was this?

That was in the '30s. That was when PiÅsudski used to hold that thinking, that level, to be the leader of the Polish people. And they were Jozef PiÅsudski. He took over Poland. The Jewish had pretty good. He was Hasidic, and the Belgian Hasidic was his believers, and he protect them. It was very, pretty good relationship.

Well, when he passed away, that was in 19-- maybe '34 or '35 when he passed away. I don't remember the exact year. And they came in, his assistant, Rydz-Åmigly And he hasn't got no more, you know, the friendship, this feeling, like this. And they start being more into submitting, and with the schools. The index, they called it. The college, they called. They used to go around on the streets and hit Jewish people.

This is already in the mid--

That was already, we're talking in--

The mid-1930s?

The '30s. After PiÅsudski's death, that thing happened.

OK Let me, again, I'm going to come back. We're going to come back to that time. I want to go back, so a little bit further. Your family was an orthodox family?

An orthodox family, yeah. We lived in the center of the city in Lemberg, in [Place Name]. And the number was 31. And we also have the business in that street. And with our business was very known almost in Lemberg. The business, my mother's name was Kensche. And her name, the business was known Kensche. Everybody in the city, if anybody says Kensche, they know that this is a kosher place. They could buy a kosher milk, a kosher butter, kosher cheese. That was the reputation.

And right next to us was Blachoska street. Named Blachoska There had been [INAUDIBLE] there, and now a rabbi Lemberg, was Rabbi Ziff.

Ziff?

Ziff. And he had a son, a doctor, also his assistant. A very highly orthodox rabbi. And it was a very big orthodox dayanim.

Judges?

The judges. There were [Personal Name], the family [Personal name]. There was a man, at that time, must have been 70, 80 years old. He had sons. He got four or five sons. There was very high. There was the dayanim and the beth din, you know, by Rabbi Ziff.

The judges in the Jewish court of law?

The judges in the Jewish court. And right around, in our neighborhood, was shuls. There was a shul, a very historical shul. They call the golden shul. [NON-ENGLISH]. That means--

The gold Torah.

The golden Torah. But that was the name of the shul.

Who was the rabbi of at that shul?

Rabbi Ziff. So he was also the rabbi. It was not that here, the rabbi. Well, the rabbi, he was a rabbi for the whole city, you know. He was not--

How do you spell, do you know how to spell his name? Ziff?

Ziff? Z-I-F-F.

Rabbi Ziff. OK. Did you belong to any youth organizations when you were growing up in Poland?

When we were growing up, we belonged to Zionist organizations.

Zionist organizations?

We had it and, that was right on our street. Also on [Place name]. Number 50 was a Zionist organization where we belonged.

What age were you when you joined this group?

Maybe 18? 18, 19? There was a few years, you know. Till I entered the army, and then I came back from the army.

OK. I'm going to bring you back again. You started trade school, you said, when you were about 13?

About 13, yeah.

OK. And you went to trade school and you learned--

I learned--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

This was a locksmith. They called him a locksmith. He did all kinds of work, all construction work, gates, cellar doors, sliding doors. All kind of work. But also specialize in locks. They call [INAUDIBLE]. In German, the [INAUDIBLE], like [POLISH] Polish.

And then, that was the thing when I--

That saved you later?

I have to be thankful, because maybe this helped me to survive. Because who knows why I survived more than any other one.

You went to vocational school from what ages? From 13-year-old to--

13, four years was we had to work without paying for four years. Your parents had to support you.

You were going to school and working at the same time?

That's not school. That's a trade.

Yeah, well, a vocation.

We work full day work, and then, in the evening, you go into school for the details. But during the day, you work just like a worker in the shop.

So when you were 13 years old, you were working in the shop?

Working and learning the trade. You do everything.

OK. Now you said something about going to the army.

And then, when I was 20 years old, I was going to pass the examination. And I hoped I wouldn't pass, but I did pass. And I went to the army, and I was 19.

Did you have to go to the army?

You have to go to the army. I was not volunteering. You have to go.

You went to the Polish army?

I went to the Polish army and I was in the city Kolomea. I was there for two years. In 1929. In '30, I was in the army.

What was the name of that city?

Kolomea This is not far from the Romanian border.

What were you doing in the army for those two years?

In the army I was, training for just the regular things. I also would ski in the ski brigade. And I was picked at the ski brigade. And then I also was working fixing the tools for the army. Like the carbine how would you call it, the machine -- you know.

Machine gun.

Machine guns. And it was working and this called [INAUDIBLE]. This means the name of it is whatever the army needs to be repaired, or whatever happen. I also was for that. So most of it has to do with my trade.

Were there many Jewish men in the Polish army with you?

In the Polish army? Yeah. Many Jewish people. A lot of Jewish people. In my company was at least 12 Jewish. A company was how was about 150 men. Platoon. A platoon had 12 people, and it was about 12 platoons. I had boys from Krakow with the name Lefkovitz, one and there was from Tarnow, near Krakow, with name of Spiro. There was and then was [Personal Name]. This is [Personal Name]. There was all kind, and they was from the nearby Lemberg, also, was lots of people, Jewish boys.

Was there a good relationship in the army between the Jewish soldiers and the non-Jewish soldiers?

Was good relations. Was no problem. Only one thing, it was Sunday when the Polish people went to church. So they used to pick up the Jewish people to clean whatever has to be cleaned. you know.

Well, were you able on Saturday to have any services?

Saturday, Friday night, they sent you to the synagogue. They sent you. They organized for the whole company. Even if you want, if you don't want. Was picked up Friday to go to service to the city.

So even if you didn't want to go to the synagogue--

Some people that was Jewish, you get to get all the Jewish people, all the officers would bring them down, and then later bring them back after the service. And Saturday, the same thing.

That's very interesting.

They was very decent. Yeah.

What year did you get out of the army? 1931 or '30?

Must have been 1931.

1931. OK, what happened when you got out of the army? You went back to Lemberg?

I went back. I went back to home.

To home?

To home. And then I was working in the business. I was with my mother and my father working. And like I said, we had many people working. A very big operation. Because we had all those farmers, what they send us is their milk. And every farm, we kept a man who worked for us to watch that the milk is going straight from the milking place to the cooler under the supervisor from that man what he was picked by us as a [INAUDIBLE].

As a supervisor.

And every place where we got the milk, we had Jewish men to supervise the kashrut. And they used to be shipped. Everything shipped then under the [INAUDIBLE]. We really had and everything was approved. Definitely, our place was, anybody that was a very religious people. And there was a lot of religious people. The rabbi, and those judges, they was buying both.

And a fellow named Haberstatter. Very big. They still have two sons. I think one is in America and one is in Belgium. They used to buy both definitely. From far away, they lived. They came down to shop with the milk and the products.

Now Hitler came to power in 1933.

No, no, but he didn't--

No, I know.

Still, our business was going on till 1939.

OK. Did anything happen, though, any changes between 1933 and 1939? Were there any changes in your town? Any changes in the relationship between your family, your friends the rest of the town? Were there any changes in laws? You were telling me before about Piel, the Polish leader.

The Polish leader, PiÅ,sudski.

OK.

So when PiÅ,sudski died--

He died in what year, you think?

I think that he must have died in 1934. But then so long he was living, was and later, after Hitler came into power, start

the bigger anti-Semitism in Poland.

In your town?

In the town. That was the attacking day, the college students start to get organized against Jewish. And there was even a going -- if a Jew was going on the street. He was attacked.

What year did this start?

This start after Hitler come to power.

So it started '34?

'34, '35, '36. It was going on till 1939, Hitler started the war and the Russians came in. When Hitler started the war, he didn't come in exactly to Lemberg. He made a deal with the Russians. The Russians walked into Lemberg without war.

OK, I'm going to stop you again for one second. OK? Before 1939, so there are changes taking place in town. You were saying in the college, for example?

And again, the streets. It was not sure. It was a boycott. They agitated, don't buy by Jews. It was start very--

Did any Jews leave Lemberg?

No. I wouldn't say so. Just to halutzim In fact, my brother left.

[INAUDIBLE]?

My brother left in 1936. My brother left to Israel. One of my brothers.

So he was part of the Zionist movement in 1936?

'36, he went to Israel. And he was there working, whatever he did. And he's supposed to, already, my mother was here in this country, because it was 1938. She came here to visit. You have this already. I told that already. And then she went to bring him from Israel here.

Yes. Your mother came. You have to repeat it again.

In 1938.

She came to the United States?

For a visit. For a year visit.

She had no difficulty getting out of Poland at the time?

No, no, she had no difficulty. She got papers. She had no difficulty to get out. Anybody could get out, especially in 1939. Everybody could go. Whoever want to go, because here was the World's Fair in 1939.

There was, I'm sorry?

The World's Fair was here.

The World's Fair.

And everybody who want to go, who has only some security there in Poland, a house, whatever, could go to this country. And our friends did go here, to this country. Like was a family, Fish who lived, our neighbors. She went to visit the World's Fair, here to this country. She left there the husband and the three children.

She left her son a doctor, and two grown up girls. And they all disappeared. She survived here. When I came to this country, I still saw here here. I visit her. Yeah, she went in 1939. For the World's Fair. And then I came here in 1945.

Let me stop you again. I'm sorry. You're not getting mad at me, are you?

No. Whatever is necessary, you know. I'm here [? to get ?] out the right thing.

Let me ask you something. Here there is a World's Fair. So a lot of people are coming to the United States. It's easy to get out of Poland. Did anybody-- obviously some people did-- I mean, you were, at the time, you were probably around 30 years old, 31 years old.

Was there any discussion? Did you have any discussions that, well, we see what's happening in Germany. This could happen in Poland. After all, there were some changes in Poland. Maybe we should go to the United States. Maybe we should go to the World's Fair and not come back.

We didn't think about the World's Fair. But we did had already passports made for the whole family. The reason is that we was waiting to go is only there was a Polish quota. And the Polish quota was slow. And we was waiting for our things. We had every one of us had prepared papers. If we would knew that this is going to happen, we could go to the World's Fair and remain here. I mean, whatever would happen.

But we just hoped we're going to go legal with the regular immigration. With immigration you're allowed to take certain things, you could shipping, whatever it is. But if you go to World's Fair, you could go only with your hand baggage. And we were only waiting for the time to go ahead. To tell us to go ahead.

Everything was in the American consul. Reported. Our family was there, already on the list. But the American had the quota for the Polish Jew, it was slow. German Jews had more speedy quota. An amount they let in. So and our was mislead because the quota don't let us go over. We did had plans to move to the country.

Now, let me ask you. Did you have those plans to move here because you thought that what was happening in Germany might happen in Poland?

We had this in mind. Plus, we had here a large family. We had here a brother, and then my mother had a brother and a sister here. And then the situation started changing, and we did think about it. But it was too slow. And we just didn't make it.

OK. In 1939, you said that the Russians came into your town. Do you remember the date?

Yeah. The war started September 1st. They must have come in, I think, at least a month later. I would say in October, probably. Still was not winter, but they came in peacefully, you know. The German had already did the whole job, and they just walked in without that shot.

OK, what do you mean the Germans already did the whole job?

The Germans fight with Poland. And they made a deal with the Russians, and the Russians gradually occupied that territory. Still our city. It was more than our city, you know. They came all the way down the whole Ukraine. They come down the Tarnow. They come down from Russia. They took away the whole Galicia. They took it over.

Without the war, the German exchange them, the Germans gave them, peacefully, Poland, till 1941.

OK. But before 1941, we have two years. '39 to '41.



So we lived with the Russian people.

Right. What changes took place in those two years? Any changes? Your family still had the business?

No. We tried to run the business, but we finally, luckily, get out of it. Because as a business, the Russians are against you. If you are worker, they're with you. But if you own a business, they are against you.

And they have also a Jewish man, a leader in the tax department. His name was Chaikin. As a guy from Russia, he was one of the occupants. And through a friend, we get in touch with him. And he says, if you save your life, you better get out. Because the taxes, where they put it on a business, was three, four times as much as the business you made.

Right.

But that was their system to get you out of business. We was in business maybe another two months, but it was impossible. Every month you have to pay so much that you didn't get in this much money. So we liquidated it and we closed it up.

So what did you then until '41?

I was working for the Russians. I did the same thing. They need me just as the Germans need me. They gave me work to do. I was working for them. Also my trade. Safes and this and that. I had a very decent living.

The Russians didn't set up any ghetto or anything in Lemberg?

No, no, no. The Russians didn't set up no ghetto. Was free life, except business people. They're after them. And then if somebody revealed to somebody that he was rich, they just take him away, but nobody knows where or when. Everything that happened, happened during the night.

Everybody disappeared never during the day. During the night, you get all the information from those people. In the night, they came down and they clean away families.

Who?

The Russians. They take away everybody who was reported as rich.

Jewish and non-Jewish?

Jewish and non-Jewish. Makes no difference. There was a factory for chocolate in Lemberg. It was Baranka. Was very big chocolate factory, no on, maybe, in all the world. And they took away the owner. And they took away, from the beginning, they let them be there. Like to take it all, eventually. Once they took it over on their own way, then they took away, didn't know where he went. One night. Not in the daytime.

Did anybody during those years, between '39 and '41, did people try to escape from Lemberg? Was it possible?

It was possible. I knew people, rich people, like one of our suppliers who they had farms. She had a few farms. She was, they call it a graf in Jewish, you know. Nahos --, The name was Nahoska and she went through Finland, and somehow she came to the United States. During the Russian occupation.

Somehow, you know, smuggling things. Not legally, but she did arrive, and she visited my mother here. We gave her the address for My mother, she did see mother. She did arrive in this country safely. I mean, she was not straight, but she did it. There was ways. If anybody would take a chance, was a way to, also through smuggling.

Did you think about leaving, yourself?

No, we didn't. We didn't think about leaving. You figure, all right, they let you live, so what's going to happen? We never know that Hitler was going to come in the 1940s. But then, you could live. Once you start working, and the people, that they work for us, they have to help us to say that he was good to them. And then they accept you as a worker. Then you was all right already.

When they accept you as a worker, you was already protected. They make you a member of their party, and you could live very all right. And not exactly from only what you got from them, but you had a way to live very comfortable, and where everything was available. No difficulty getting anything.

So you didn't feel, in particular, danger during those years?

No, not in the Russian's time.

No. And you didn't feel, there was no--

A lot of very friendly and nice, especially if I was working for the leaders, for the big guys. you know like -- was there, those safes. Only those big institutions had it. Private people don't need no safes in Russia. If they save something, they couldn't save in the safe. They had to save on the ground some place. So those people treat me very well.

Food there was in the town?

Food was for everybody. One thing was when the Russians came into this country, we had stores, warehouses, loaded with manufacturing, with anything you want to think of. With food. Anything you want to know, everything was filled up. And within two weeks, everything was empty. Was nothing available. You want something, you have to stay in the line. Bread, you have to stay in the line.

When?

After two, three weeks the Russians occupied our city. You know what a black market [INAUDIBLE]?

Yeah. You said there was plenty of food.

Was plenty of food, yeah. On the black market. And they also have food in the stores, but somehow, Poland never saw a line. But when they came in, immediately, they make magic. The lines for them, they're specialists. They make lines. And now, I think everything was in a line.

And then there also was people that used to buy in the line and sell it in the black market. Everything was enough, but you could go through them. Was no problem with food, especially if somebody could help himself.

Now, when did the Germans come into your town?

The Germans crossed in the 22nd of June, 1941.

Did you have any warning that they were coming?

No, we were at war.

I know that. But I mean--

We saw that the Russian was attacked unexpectedly. They hadn't got the chance even to, a lot of them was caught because they went with the blitzkrieg. They went above them. They have hard time even to escape.

You weren't married at this time, were you?

No, no. One of my brothers was working for the Russians in a creamery, because he was a creamer. He was working as a director. He escaped. Two of my brothers escaped their offices to Russia. And one brother got returned in 1945 when the war was over, and one brother he was killed during the Russia. He was working. He also was a tradesman, and he was working in a shop and was bombed by two in Russia, and he got killed.

One of my brothers. So I lost one brother in Russia, and that brother, when he went in 1936 to Israel. Also not legal, but he went down with the tour, with a tourist group to Egypt. And he died in 1941 by sickness. Malaria.

June 22nd, 1941, the Germans come into your town. Do you remember what happened the first day they came into the town?

When it happened the first time, they catch me the first day.

First day.

First day. We was in the place where we were working, all kind was an organization. And that time we was working in-- the Russians provide the people, the specialists, the actors, somebody was playing in theaters, so they had a place to eat. But a private restaurant was impossible to exist. But they provide every institution with a place to go in and have dinner on their own price, not on the black market. And I was working in that restaurant.

So when I the Germans came in, so they went every day to the restaurant, and then those Ukrainian soldiers come up and picked up whoever was Jewish in that place.

And the Ukrainian soldiers were told by the--

They knew, the patrollers. They came down to check out. They were told by my other friends. You know, there was a crime, but the city was a lot of enemies. You know, they tell you to go over there, and they took me down from that place and they took me straight to that place where they dig out those people that the Russians left dead, plus what they was killing.

They were killing people that they just like-- and I don't know how to say it. Not like animals, but just like, who should they put it in a death spot, they're sending in people, they was killing them, which had guns that fire from the distance. And then the roof, they got the cameras set up, and they made film, because they announced later that the Russians did that, but that was their job.

Plus, the Russians left a lot of dead people in the jail. Locked up with bricks, you know. They was closed up. Rooms with dead people. And all those people--

The Russians killed a number of people just before they were defeated?

They were defeated. That must have been maybe weeks before they--

Who did the Russians kill?

The Russians, they brought in from their country, here. Like Mongolians. There was a lot of Mongolian people there.

They didn't kill anybody from Lemberg?

Lemberg, they take away there. And the other one they brought here, and tested their system like this. If they took away somebody from Lemberg, or they killed them, they don't kill them off officially. They take them away and they kill them where nobody should see it.

The same thing, those people from their country. They brought him here and they killed him here. And that's the way

they--

So the Russians brought people from Russia? Brought them to outside the town, let's say?

They brought them outside. Even to the occupied country, like to us. To Lemberg, from Russia, and Mongolia is thousands of miles away.

Killed people?

They killed their people and they locked up with bricks. Filled up the rooms. And to kill those people there, they must have sent them in there alive. Because it's impossible that they should be that sealed up, all the way down to the ceiling. They couldn't store them this way. They have to walk in on their own, by terror, or by hitting, whatever they did.

They had the same system like the Germans had. When the Germans were shipping people to the death camps, they had people open the door from the train, and they put the board over to walk over. And whoever walks lower, they got dogs biting and hitting, and they should go. They had the same system. The Russians had the same system as the Germans.

They must do this way, because those people were so filled up--

It's no way they could have filled up the area?

It's only possible that somebody should bring them in there. Accept they're alive, they have to go in there, and they probably, whenever they kill, they kill them. But I don't see anybody. Even, was no shotguns. When we pulled them out, we didn't see no-- they must be just dead by--

Now, you say the Germans came. They shot a number of people that first day. They had cameras.

They got the cameras over the roof. And they have the people sending in, like I said, like three rows.

Who did they shoot? The Germans, when they came in?

Anybody who was in the street. Anybody was in the street. They took about 100 people able to work on that work, and the rest, whoever they catch, whatever was on the street, and they brought them in to that spot. And they showed them, used to make cameras, to make films, and they put those dead people who they killed together those people--

That the Russians had killed?

--that the Russians had killed, and shipped them all down to the cemetery that was digging mass graves. And they had a group of people where they catch them to dig those graves. And I was one of them, first in here to dig them out, and then later to dig the graves. And I, that day, was working until 11 o'clock at night.

And then they brought us back to the city, to the center of the city, and they gave us the password that we should be able to go home. Because there was a curfew. It was wartime, and they just occupied the country. So with a password, we were able to arrive back home. And they also say, tomorrow, all of you should report back to the place.

But whoever report, I don't know. I didn't go. I didn't went back that second day. We was hiding.

All right. So the second day, everybody was told--

To come back to the same thing that they did the first day. So I had enough the first day, so I decided not to go.

OK.

But whoever went, probably a lot that did go. In if they didn't go, they catch. They got enough, you know? They used to pick up people. They had no problem.

How many people, when the Germans came in, were living in Lemberg? Was it still a few hundred thousand people?

I would say it was at least maybe 150,000 to 200,000 people in Lemberg.

All right. So that first day, where did they pick you up? You were walking down the street?

No, no. First night, they picked me up from that place, from that restaurant.

Oh, that's right. I'm sorry. OK. All right.

They picked me up from the restaurant, and the street was so organized, locked up, that you had to go only to the direction to that jail. And that's where I went, and more of us, whoever didn't expect the first day is going to be such a tragedy to hide yourself.

And they got hundreds, hundreds of people killed that day, and hundreds working to dig those graves and take out those dead people, shipping in trucks. They load up trucks, big trucks, and bring them to the cemetery. Oh they cleaned out the rooms from the Russian, and plus their own with fresh additional people.

Now, you said the second day, you were told to come, but you went to hiding?

No, I didn't go up there.

Where did you hide?

Oh, we was hiding that time, in the first day, in the house. There was a cellar. We were locked up from the outside. But the women they didn't bother yet the first day. So I was living with my sister-in-law and my brothers, two children, and we were locked up in the cellar. There still was another man with me. And I took him to our house, and we was all day long sitting and then night they let us out to hear what is it so far.

Till soon enough, I would find out for them to, as a needed person, somebody tell them somebody is available. You know, people would know me. They also were working there. Even not Jewish knew. And they told them about me. They gave me that job.

Did they set up a ghetto right away?

No, they set up a ghetto in November. But they made it a special ghetto. There was a whole section was a city. Our city was a bridge. They called it the dead bridge. You have to go to that ghetto. You have to go under that bridge, they called Beltevna the street was Beltevna. And that street, you have to pass that gate to go to the ghetto. They give order to go to the ghetto.

And everybody who went was screened before. And when they went over the bridge, on the other side, they were selecting immediately.

Well, what was happening-- I'm sorry, I jumped a little bit-- between June and November, between, what was happening?

Gradually, they give order to where armed mens to walk around and Jewish would have the Jewish star. They would have to have the Jewish star on your left arm.

Were there actions, [INAUDIBLE], that were taking place?

And then, as a Jew, you worked. And wherever you worked, and they feel they want you, they know you are a Jew. And they gradually take you all to work or to kill, whatever they do that then they make groups. Like 500 people should report. They make up.

And that was their way. Gradually, automatically, they had a system. Every day, somebody lost somebody. Till they organize the ghetto, there was already a lot of casualties. And then by the ghetto, to go into the ghetto, they made thousands not to pass. Because whoever they have to walk into the ghetto, the whole ghetto alone was very big. Because it was a lot of people to fit in.

And then they make it smaller and smaller, and then the ghetto was gradually cut down. That seat was taken away, that seat was taken away. Till they make it very small. And then in the end, they liquidate the ghetto.

How long were you in the ghetto?

I was in the ghetto-- they give us our room in the ghetto. And it was me, my brother went to the Russian army, and he got in the German prison as a prisoner, and he never came back. And I was me and my sister-in-law and two children, and her mother. We got a room in ghetto to live there.

Your father?

Well, my father was already-- my mother was America, and before my mother was in America, my father passed away.

Natural?

Natural.

Natural death. Was he old when he passed away?

No. He had a problem. An accident. But he was passed away, he was already in his 60s.

All right. Now you were in the ghetto from, let's say, November 1941?

First, we were still free living in the city till the ghetto. Then we're moving in the ghetto. And then the place what I was working, the army provide us a living space that we should stay. We had the room in the ghetto for the family, and they kept us like [INAUDIBLE]. So later I was working for the army, and they gave us rooms to live there, and they feed us also.

There was a Judenrat. In the ghetto?

No, no, no. In the ghetto, there's a Judenrat.

Jewish police?

The Jewish police, everything, everything Jewish. Jewish, they organized. If they want so many people, the Jewish supply them. The Jewish police supplied them. They want today 500 and whatever that is, so that's why the ghetto became smaller, gradually. They milked out the people.

And you were able to survive during this time because of your profession?

I was able to survive, because I was allowed also to go to the ghetto, also without permission when I had--

To go outside the ghetto?

Outside the ghetto. I was allowed to walk around, like I told you. I was going from one place to the other freely, because one place was here, one place was a twenty streets away, you know. They used to lend me out, one institution to the other.

What were you doing specifically? I understand you were a locksmith.

Yeah. What I was doing is they had the Russian left safes locked up. I was able to open them, and to set up keys back to function. That was my most privileged profession. They liked it.

You could have been a bank robber.

Yeah, I was maybe a bank robber. They used to rob banks in a different way. It takes quite a lot of time to open a lock, and not to damage too much the safe. A bank robber is another way to do it, and don't care for a rebuilding back to work.

How long did you live in the ghetto?

I told you, I was living outside the ghetto. I was living in the facilities from the army.

Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were going in and out, in an out.

No. I could go in and out, but I was living in the facilities from the [INAUDIBLE]. When I was there, they treated me very well. I was very decent conditions.

And how long were you living here?

I was there till about June '43.

Really? That's about a year and a half.

And that's because later, they came out a rule that they're not allowed to keep no more people out. They made it unified. So they shipped us off.

So you were living from 1941 November to June 1943 in the German--

The first thing I lived, till November '40, they allowed us to live in our home.

No, I know.

Then time from the ghetto, then I moved into the ghetto whenever we did, and the rest I went later when they give us privileged to live in the quarters from the [INAUDIBLE].

How many people were privileged like you to live--

They had a group of 35 people for all kinds of services they need. To put up signs and which way the army should go, and fixing up in the place. They got about 30 people cleaning up the premises. They give about 30 people. They had 35 people. They got their privileges.

Except I was the one that I could walk freely. And whatever they want to do, they was under escort to go out.

And you knew at this time that, as you mentioned before, that the ghetto was slowly but surely--

I saw everything. I was going. I was in the ghetto at least every week, weekend, whatever. I was going to see what happened. There was a lot of people.

OK. June 1943, the Germans made the ghetto unified.

They don't allow no more to keep the army the Jewish workers by then. They kept the worst and -- They send them to the no more ghetto. They send them to the Janowska lager in Janowska.

Where did everybody go from the ghetto?

Nobody goes. They took them. Took everybody from the ghetto, and they liquidate the ghetto.

In June of '43?

In June of '43. They start gradually. They didn't do in one day. They do that for weeks. They brought the people from the ghetto to the Janowska camp. There was a concentration camp, remember, they called Janowska.

Y-A--

Like the street, J-A-N-O-W-S-K-Y. Janowsk-- oh, I said the y.

A.

A. Janowska.

Janowska. This was a street. There was fields above the thing. There was acres of land in the concentration camp. There were barracks there, where they got 36,000 people on premises.

And this was the concentration camp of Lemberg?

I think they called the concentration camp of Lemberg. And they brought people to that camp from all over. From Czechoslovakia. From France. From Belgium. And they wired around about five or six acres of land with barbed wires, and whatever transport abroad, they used to bring them into that field. And they was there with no food, with no substance to live.

They were there for two, three days. Then they made the an Aktion inside. And the rest was people who arrived there. A group of 100, and they have to walk to the field where they used to shoot them. It was like valleys. And those people, they filled out the valleys in Janowska. I wouldn't even be able to go and to the places where they filled them up.

Let me make sure I understand this. The field was directly--

They put barbed wire, they brought him into that field, and later, everybody had to get undressed complete.

In the field?

Naked, in that wired field. By walking out. Everything was there, and then their clothes. Was a group of people from the camp, every clothes was searched. [INAUDIBLE]. They took into the clothes, and everything they find gold, whatever anybody had in his clothes. And if they have actually they have to take off everything. There was a pile, and there was a special brigade for that, to search that clothes.

And those people had to walk to that, about at least a mile, to the valleys. And they were shoving in, they were putting them on the edge like a group of [INAUDIBLE]. Whenever they make 12 a row, and whenever they walked this way, and every time a row stepped up and they shot them, they fell down, just like here. They filled up that valleys.

How did they decide who they were going to kill and who they were going to--



No, they didn't, they'd kill everybody. Everybody was in that barbed wire. Everybody was accumulate when they brought them. It was people from all over the country.

I'm sorry, I thought you said that--

I told you that barbed wire was from people from the ghetto, and people that they brought in from all other countries. There was thousands, hundreds of thousands.