

It's not too hot for you, is it? My name is Dr. Sidney Langer, and I am the director of the Oral History Project of the Holocaust Studies Resource Center at King College of New Jersey. I'm very pleased that Mr. Isak Levenstein has come to the college today to talk to me about some of his experiences during the Holocaust. Mr. Levenstein, thank you very much for coming.

Should I spell my name, too? Should I spell my name, too?

Sure, if you like.

My name is Isak Levenstein. I reside 890 Westminster Avenue in Hillside, New Jersey, for the last 30 years.

OK. Can you tell me a little bit about when you were born, the country you were born in, a little bit about your family?

I was born February the 11th, 1906, in a little town in the neighborhood from Lublin. But unfortunately, I lost my mother when I was four years old, and I lost my father when I was 11 years old. And later, I moved in with a family. I moved into city of Kraków in 1918.

Your mother and father died of natural causes?

Natural causes. She was a young woman, was only 29 years old. My father was 43 in the First World War. Then we were four orphans-- two brothers, two sisters, and personally myself. I moved to a family-- to the city of Kraków in 1918. Yeah, '18, yes. Since that time, I was--

How did you come to this particular family?

It was an uncle of mine. And I was living there all the time, till I got married. December 29, 1931.

Did you go to the family with your other three brothers and sisters?

No. My sister came, but the other three, they remained in the little town.

And they were taken care of by--

They were taken care of, because I was the youngest in the family. My oldest sister, which was Murray's mother--

Murray Pantirer?

Yeah. Murray Pantirer's mother. She remained there. She got married in the 20s, and she had a husband, and she has quite a few children. But in 1930, '32, I brought her over to Kraków. And she lived there too, till the War broke out. They had seven children, and that's the way it is.

Then the War broke out it was [INAUDIBLE] in the-- 1940. That's right, '40. They had to leave Kraków and go on the-- in the place they were called [PLACE NAME] which was a border. But they couldn't stay there anyway, and they came back. And they couldn't get-- in the meantime, the ghetto was built in Kraków, and they couldn't be together. They were living a little suburban from Kraków.

Let me take you back just a little bit before 1940. When you went to Kraków, you were how old again?

11.

11 years old. And that was 19--

--18.

1918. Can you describe the life in Kraków? The Jewish community in Kraków?

Life in Kraków was excellent, just excellent. Naturally, there were rich people, middle class people, and there were poor people. But the life, my personal life, was excellent. Excellent life. Because I was a [INAUDIBLE] at a textile store, and I was employed there. I was there. And I can't own it, because the other family, they were childless. They no children. And I was their child. That's it.

Now, you didn't start working in the textile factory until you were probably--

[INAUDIBLE]. I started doing it when I was 17.

17. So between the ages of 11 and 17--

I went to cheder.

You went to cheder.

We had a tutor. I was taught-- I mean, I was taught mostly Hebrew, and Polish, and German, because there was no private school to force in those years. A that's what I was taught. Then later went to cheder. Same thing was happening here in those years.

Right. How many Jews lived in Kraków at the time?

70,000.

70,000.

Yeah.

And the Jewish community, as you said, in terms of their economic situation, there were some--

There were actually there was -- I'm going to tell you, like all over, all over the world, there were high class people, middle class, and there were people that make-- but everybody make a living.

Did you yourself belong to any Jewish organizations when you were young?

Yeah, I belonged to the Mizrachi. And I belonged also to the Hechalutz, like youngsters. And mostly I belonged to the Mizrachi movement. You know what I mean, the Mizrachi movement.

Sure.

Till I got married. And God help me, that's my-- first wife survived with me together. And we're still together. We are married over 52 years.

Did you know anything about what was going on when Hitler rose to power in Germany? Any information coming to you in Kraków?

We start to, We started to find out in the '30s. When Hitler came to power, in January, we find out. But not like-- in all the country, it didn't look so serious, because we don't live in that country. We were free. But later, in '35, and '36, antisemitism start to come in to Poland. There was a [INAUDIBLE]. She was a-- like here, a councilman. Mrs. Prystorowa was her name. And she submit-- here, they call it the same here today. Like the same, Washington, Like the commerce to forbid to slaughter kosher.

This was in 1935?

In '35 and '36.

And at that time, you were how old?

'35, '36? I was almost 30 years old.

You were 29.

Yeah. 29 years old.

So between the ages of 11 to 29, the relationship between the Jewish community and the non-Jewish community in Kraków--

Was excellent.

--was excellent.

Excellent.

And there was no sense or feeling of antisemitism?

No. Especially in Kraków, was excellent. And I got married in the end of '31.

How did you meet your wife?

I met by coincidence. I went to a restaurant. I saw a young lady from a little town. And I introduced myself, and that's the way it was. It was a coincidence, and we got married. That's all.

It was very quick.

No, we weren't that quick, It took us two years.

Oh, it's not so quick.

She was from Kraków?

No, she was from a suburban from Kraków. It was only 40 kilometers away from the city. It was not-- here, today, it's nothing. From here, you go into-- anyplace, and go to the islands, it's not such a big deal.

She came from a very excellent family. There were also eight children. Well, five girls and three boys. Nobody is here. There were two survivors. Two sisters. They were here-- one sister was living in Kent, Ohio. But she passed away, a natural death. And the other sister passed away just seven years ago. The other sister was living with us. She was the oldest. My wife was the youngest in the family.

And from the boys, nobody survived. The whole family got wiped out. That is the history.

What did you do when you got married?

I got married. I had a factory from sponges to scrub dishes-- pots and pans, at a factory with a partner. In the other side from Kraków-- the name was Podgorze. Now, it's like, here, going from the George Washington bridge to Fort Lee, over the bridge. Now, they had a partner-- matter of fact, my partner survived till he's older than I am. He survived and he lives in Brooklyn.

Are you still in contact with him?

Oh, yeah. I see him very often because I know that man all my life.

He survived his wife. They were lucky they survived with a daughter. The daughter was older than my children. And they lived a quiet life.

You said that in 1935, 1936, this was the time when you began to feel some of the antisemitism.

But we didn't realize so much.

The first law, you said, was against shechita, against--

That's right.

--ritual slaughter.

-- against shechita.

What was the response of the community when that happened?

The response-- they gave us-- you can not eat the upper part, the bottom part. But people helped themselves. Then we had chicken. That's all. Like advertising. Eat chicken.

Did the community-- were they aware of the fact that this could be the first step in a number of--

Exactly. They started it. They started it, but actually, Poland was not so bad. But later, when the war broke out, started to be bad. Because mostly Polish people-- you could say 99%, they were working with the Nazis together to get rid of the Jewish people. Because they could help. They had, in Poland, places which no Germans stepped in. Because they were afraid for themselves. There were villages that were forced out.

But only one thing-- the Polish people, maybe they were from the 35 million, maybe there were a few of them, which they got good pay and they saved them. Matter of fact, my family and my wife's family, was the older sister-- my wife's-- had grown up children. We-- growing up, we're talking about in the '20s. And they went in a hideout, and they gave away all their wealth. They were very wealthy. And a few days later, they had everything in their possession. They called in the SS and they killed them. Otherwise, they would live. I wish they were here to day but they would but they would live.

What year was that?

This was in '43. '42, I'm sorry.

So let's just go back again, to '35, '36. So what happened between 1936, '37? Were there other laws enacted against the Jewish community?

We were on the [INAUDIBLE], and nobody-- everybody can say whatever they want to say, nobody realize they're helping the German people, the most advanced in education in Europe, in those years-- today, we don't talk about it. Nobody realized that the German people can do make a Holocaust like they did.

I'm not a youngster. I know there were-- in Russia, there were a pogroms. They came in, they looted, they killed maybe a few people, but not to wipe up the whole-- mostly, think what they wiped out. Children. Over 1,200,000 children. Which they didn't know from any [INAUDIBLE], only they were born to Jewish people, to Jewish parents. That's all.

Nobody realized that it could happen to a German nation. We were fooled by that thing. We were fooled. I had the opportunity to go to Russia. Matter of fact, in Russia, 250,000 people survived. They were living like the Russians. They didn't have, every day, steaks or ice cream, but they didn't they didn't get killed. They came back. Some of them, they died natural death, but nobody got killed.

But nobody realized that thing could happen to our country, the most advanced, educated country. And I'm telling you, professor, and we should not fool ourselves. Nobody knows what can happen in the 21st-- I mean, the next-- who knows? Nobody knows. People live in Germany like kings. I remember after the First World War, 1920, '21, '22, people lived very, very well. And who realized? Even few today wouldn't say, that

thing could never happen.

What about when Kristallnacht happened, for example?

Kristallnacht happened November 8, in 1938. They were all the right, they came in-- there were a bunch of hooligans, young people. And they went out and they burned, they looted. It was like crystal night.

And I have to tell you a story about the Kristal night. This is what happened. In 1978, they opened up, in Jerusalem, a hospital-- the Shaare Zedek hospital. In 1978. I am one of their founders. And we had to over there quite-- it was dedicated November the 7th. This date I will never forget-- in 1978. And then in November the 8th, they make a big party in a big hall-- they call it the--

[INAUDIBLE]

[HEBREW PLACE NAME] Yeah, they make a public hall. And so they had to make concert. And the men from the-- the headman from the concert was staying in the kippah the conductor. And there were over 2000 people. And myself and my wife we were crying. What happened 40 years ago, in 1938. Now we're staying in a Jewish state in the city of Jerusalem, and a young man, a conductor, conducts. And this was real-- the experience, in 1978.

But who ever could realize that it could happen? Nobody. Otherwise, you see, the German Jewish people got saved. Because he gave him the opportunity in the '30s, '35, '36, to leave. They take even the furniture with them. They left for-- mostly, they came to the United States. Another of them came to Palestine. They're still there.

And they survived, but whoever got hurt the most is the Polish people. Because the Polish nation worked with the Nazis to get rid of the Jews. I know everybody is-- can tell you, but I know Sam Halpern, he got saved by some Polish people. But for some 35 million, there were maybe five or six or seven of them. That's the way it is. Even [? Eve ?] Zuckerman survived. She was saved. This is-- but--

I had-- it's just interesting. I had the occasion to interview the daughter of the woman with whom Mrs. Zuckerman stayed with--

Yeah, Helen.

--in Poland. And she was here a few weeks ago.

How you spoken to her?

Abe was the interpreter.

She has a daughter.

She has a daughter. She was the same age as Abe's wife.

As Abe's wife. That's true. I'm telling you, the same thing is Clara Kramer. Clara Kramer, Sol Kramer's wife, was also in a safe place. Matter of fact, today, Yad Vashem today, they consider them and they honor them. Who was lucky?

I did many-- going back when the World War starts, September 1, 1939, my wife's family was, as I mentioned to you, 40 kilometers away. And we took a truck, took the children and the baby from two years old-- the other child was seven years old. And she went-- she say, let's be together with the rest of the family. But if didn't work. September the 7th, Kraków was occupied by the Nazis. And I told my wife-- her name is Sally-- we cannot stay here. Let's go back. We can't expect so bad.

Did you have any warning that the Germans would actually invade, come into Poland?

Sure. Listen, I was-- I saw them invade, and they came with the-- the places [INAUDIBLE] the September fires. I know it.

Were there any plans? Did you think about escaping, running away?

We run away, but how far you can run? You went on foot and they were-- with motorcycle-- they were running faster than I was running. But it's just-- we should run, take the families and run away. The best place was to run to Spain. Spain saved people. Everybody can see what's happening in 1495 was a different story. But now people from France-- I was in Spain. I met a lot of people. If they went to border, and General Franco say, you can not touch those people.

Did you know many people who went to Spain?

Oh, yes. Quite a few thousand. From only on the border from France to Spain, maybe, and they were saved. Not many people which went to Italy. Italian people saved people. But not Polish. And nobody expect nothing. Nobody expected.

We had a family from my wife's side. It was a big family all the night in a bunker. Thirty people-- uncles and nephews-- and if they find out, they find out, listen. You have to go out and you have to ask for food. You cannot stay in the hole. You have to -- it turns out that they caught somebody, and then they just took him out and they-- and they shot everyone. And they couldn't-- they didn't have to do it. If their [INAUDIBLE] were decent, they don't have to do it. Let me stay there. No German would go up there whatsoever.

Where was this bunker?

The outside from a little town, as I mentioned. Outside a little town from Kraków. It was a bunker. Matter of fact, one cousin, she survived. She was in the camp. She lives in Israel. It's history. There's a history.

Now, I'm going back. You want to know further from 1940s.

Yeah. I'd like to know, if you don't mind, when, the day the Germans entered, exactly what happened?

It was not bad.

You had two children at the time, in 1939. You had a seven-year-old.

I went back to my apartment. Because I left it, I went back almost-- I came back September the 10th. It was not attacked. I went in. And we were all living, I would say, till quite a few months there. Till they built a the ghetto on the other side of the city. They were building-- we went to the ghetto exactly in March of '41. Till March of '41, we were still living in the city.

So from '39 to '41--

Exactly. We went out. I could make a book. And I was working by the Germans at in a garage and they-- just had just every day, we working from a day, a day, a day, a day. And then later, from March of '41, the ghetto was built. I'm telling, the other side, like here, from the George Washington Bridge to Fort Lee. Like if Fort Lee was built up to here.

And we went in, 20,000 people, to that ghetto. All of them very squeezed. You had a two-bedroom apartment for three families. We didn't mind. We're sharing one with the other.

But later, the soldiers, the German soldiers take-- if still alive-- then they said to the Judenrat -- which is there was a Jewish government, you have to give me 3,000 people to send away. And they went. And they went to other places, all the way to Treblinka, or they went to Auschwitz.

Yeah. What was the attitude of the Jewish community toward the Judenrat?

You had the Judenrat. They worked with them together. And they had to listen to the Germans and the orders.

Was there hostility? Was there understanding? Did their--

They knew it-- matter of fact, there was one-- one man. He came from a very Hasidic house, but he became-- a bastard. Excuse my expression. And later, the Germans took care of her. Killed him and whole family. They said -- but we were living there till [INAUDIBLE] they built a concentration camp.

Could you describe a little bit more about life in the ghetto?

Life in the ghetto, we were living in the ghetto. I had permission to get out of the ghetto. Because I worked in a garage by the Nazis. Anyways, I couldn't go with the trolley car. I had to walk. I had to get up in the morning, 6:00 in the morning. The walk took me half an hour to go there.

And I was walking from-- and I bought my food. Matter of fact, some of them, they gave me food to take it home. And we ate. And we were counting from day to day.

Were you paid for your work?

I didn't get paid. They didn't pay you. They didn't kill you, they didn't pay you. That's all. But I was very-- I was walking very-- I mean, I got-- was assisting everything what they told me to do, and I did. I was--

Do you remember-- somebody was standing guard at the ghetto when you walked in and when you walked out?

They were Polish guards. Polish guards, a few dollars, you can buy them off, to hold-- you can buy the police. We [INAUDIBLE] with everybody. I went in and out well free.

What was the religious life in the ghetto? Was there davening, was there Shabbos?

Whoever wants to daven was daven. Whoever-- whoever wants to daven, they would daven. They assembled in only private owns. The same thing was in the camp. Whoever wants to do the service, they did. Whoever doesn't want to do it, they didn't do it. Same thing here. Whoever wants to go shul, goes.

We were all living together exactly two years. They were-- but there were times, every six months, they say, we need so many people. They reduced it, automatically. The ghetto was reduced to a minimum. One day-- and I'm very good in dates.

Now, the selection process was made by the Judenrat, the Germans--

Selection process, but they were staying on the square. They took them away to the railroad. And the same way, you never saw those people anymore.

Did you know where they were going?

We know-- nobody knew it. Everyone was looking for themselves. When they make the selections, I always had the habit to hide myself with the family. That's the way-- I came, they came in to my apartment, but they couldn't find nobody. Because I make myself a bunker in the basement, and they could sit on their head. They wouldn't find me.

So this was already from a day or two, this was over, and we went out from the bunker. We went back to the apartment. And that was the same like anybody else which remained.

So you had a little bit of warning before they would come?

I didn't have warning, I was running myself. I want to always be the last. Not the first or not in the middle. I

was alert.

Were the Jewish police involved in coming to homes?

Oh, yeah. They were -- well they came in to take you out. I got an order to take out this family. So you had to go. You had to go. You had to take a bond with yourself, but didn't have anybody, and that's the way-- they did it systematically. To liquidate, this was their-- this was to get their solution, to get [INAUDIBLE] systematically.

That's what they did. Not only Kraków, matter of fact, it was all over. In Warsaw, in other-- in big cities, Lodz, and all over. The little towns, they took them and they liquidated them. It's nothing new. You know this. You know the history. The final solution.

But indeed, I'm going back to Plaszow. Everybody had to leave in '40-- March '43. Friday, all the women had to leave. My wife came to the gate and she saw it was happening. No child has been allowed to take with them. Then she ran away. She came-- I don't know how she did, but she did.

And she came back and told me, Isak, it's no good. And then I took them down to the bunker. And I told her, I have to go. I went the next day, Saturday. If everyone had been in the bunker, we all got lost. Because we had, we wouldn't have no communication between each other.

Let me interrupt you, I'm sorry, for one second. In 1943 everybody was called?

Everybody. They get they had to be for free. Judenrein.

Now your wife went with your two children?

She-- wife went, but she couldn't-- they didn't let anybody talk with children. Children had to remain in the ghetto. Then she ran away--

Did she know, did your wife know, what was happening? Did they know--

Yeah, everybody knows, but we didn't know other choice. Because you had to leave. Otherwise, we had to leave-- let's get to it. And later, she came back. I tell her, Sally, you stay here, was the bunker, I prepared water, prepared food, I prepared something to sleep on it, to have-- and she was tired. She went down with Morris, brother, a sister, all the Pantirers. Went down with another family, with her sister. And I said goodbye to her next day. And I went to the camp. Because if I will be not in the camp, then everybody will get lost. Then this was the--

And Poland was occupied by the Germans. They surrounded a place where mostly 80% of Jewish people used to live there, called Kazimierz. It was like a section. And they came in the morning, at 2, 3 o'clock in the morning. And knocked the doors. Everyone had to get up. And they took away whatever-- [INAUDIBLE] possessions mostly. In every Jewish home, that had a candelabra. A candlelighter. They took off all the foils that everybody had-- the silver, and also the brass from the doors, and they looked in the thing if they find any money.

And then later, a young shnook maybe was 20 years old, he asked the woman in the house to get up on the table, and took a flashlight, and he looked at-- in the place that was the biggest embarrassment for a woman. Can't be any bigger. This-- that's the way they were taught in Germany to do it. And I can witness it. That tradition from 1939.

OK. We were also talking about the day when your wife went to the gate of the ghetto. And she saw that--

Saw what happened. She [INAUDIBLE] maybe some people that took the children with them, and they didn't let her talk, and she went back, and I told her, Sally, you're going down to the bunker with the children. And she took Morris's brother and sister, and my wife's sister, and somebody else. And they went to the bunker. I went-- next point, I went up to the concentration camp which was built. And by Saturday, Sunday was a

slaughterhouse, a slaughter.

Can you just describe a little bit of the transportation to the camp.

We walked.

How far?

About 7 kilometers. 7 kilometers, I would say, is almost five miles.

Did you know where you were going?

Sure, we knew what they were building. We knew it was-- the ghetto had to be Judenrein. Only remained were the Jewish kapos, the police, and the Judenrat remained there, to liquidate it. Next day, it was a Sunday, was a slaughter. Who they ever found, they just didn't ask, no, they just wiped them. They got killed.

Whoever was left in the--

In the ghetto.

In the ghetto.

[INAUDIBLE]. Then Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, I'll say I didn't have no patience. Because I know it. But I have it in the bunker. I went to the high command, to the SS. I haven't got nothing to lose. And I told them, I have-- I didn't tell them I have a wife and children in the ghetto. I tell them I have a factory which I made pots and pans, which is very useful. And I want to bring it up. It's a wholesale value. bring it up to the factory, this metal. Sometimes they will listen to me.

And they gave me a guard, a [INAUDIBLE]. And we walked down the street, it was for five miles. When we came to the gate I gave the men a bottle of vodka. I gave them 500 zloty at that time. You stay here. I'm not going away, no place because everything is closed. You stay here and I I'm going inside.

Where did you get the bottle of vodka from?

I had it in a pocket. A bottle of vodka, you could get in the camp. Because we had some people smuggle in. I gave it to him, and he was standing at the gate. And I went back to the bunker. We had a code. And I told him, you stay there, I will take you out.

I took the horse and wagon-- a Jewish fellow, and we packed in packed in children to boxes. The girl in '43, she was almost 12 years old. And the boy was seven years old. Look, but don't talk. We're going in, and the horse and wagon, and the men-- like he was carrying merchandise to the camp. He went up in the camp.

And later, I took my wife on the [INAUDIBLE]. I went through the gate, because [INAUDIBLE]. There was a place where they were working only women, like dresses, all type clothing. I took her up there. And I took the girl. I said, now we can go back. And I said, where are the machines? Machines, I send it out to work. And this was the children.

Went up, and I was holding them. I was hiding them in the camp 14 months.

14 months?

14 months. One night-- it mostly was-- they were my wife's, because we were separated in the camp. There was a women's camp and a men's--

How were you able to hide them?

We were hiding-- we had the woman, which was running in the camp. A very fine woman. Matter of fact, she lives in Queens. Very fine lady. Jewish woman. And we were hiding-- nobody came into the camp and look at-- they were hiding in the top. There were like three bunks. One, two, three. They were always in the third bunk, we were hiding them. And food, I brought it in, because I went out to work in the outside. And we were hiding them for 14 months. But the last May, we couldn't do anything.

Let me ask you a question. Were any other children being hidden in the camp? Were there any other children?

Oh, sure. There were more. I'm telling you, there were 369 children. And they took out all us-- there were three-- I was sure I'm the smartest, there were more people like me. Even children which, they belonged to the Jewish police, they had to go, too. There was no exception. It has to be liquidated.

And they went out to us, and a big mike, on this big field, was playing, in German-- I don't know if you understand German. [GERMAN]. It means mother, mother, your children goes to heaven.

And this, you said, was on Mother's Day.

This was on Mother's Day. If you're looking back, it's May the 14th, in 1944. Sunday was Mother's Day. This year was May the 13th. And that was pretty much every year, is a different date on Mother's Day. But this was May the 14th, 1944. This day, I will never forget. But this was the day when we lost-- they took them on trucks, and this was the final. Was 369 children. And I'm coming back to you, and I'm saying, the Germans couldn't do it by themselves if they were never any help from the outside. I'm talking from the local authorities. But nobody cared.

It's true that 5 million Poles got killed, but no children. Only men. They revolted. But Jews did not revolt. Children, a year or two, or even six months, they didn't know about. Because that's-- I mean, this is the story.

Then in October, for the fall, Schindler built a factory in Czechoslovakia, in Brnenec. And he selected people with a trait. I was called. I had the identification card. I had the identification card-- [GERMAN], metalworker. The same card Murray had. And that's the way-- this identification saved me.

I went to Czechoslovakia. I went to [PLACE NAME] for three days. [PLACE NAME] this was hell. Not heaven. This was hell. Three days. We will sleep on the floor. In a big room, with 700 people. 700 men. One pushed to the other. That's the way-- on the floor, sitting. One went to the other. That's the way. That's how we spent three days.

And everybody-- when we came the first day, you have to take a shower. And after the shower, well the one in October was called the showers [INAUDIBLE]. And then they went to get clothing. I had the right shoe. Two right shoes, and the other guy had two left shoes. That's the way they were-- you had to change it, one with the other. And then you went to bring it, [INAUDIBLE] til we got liberated by the Russians.

But Schindler was a Nazi, but he was a human being. He knew it, I think, will not be forever. I'm not going to details. What happened was he had a factory in Kraków. There were thousands. 1,000 people working for him. Was not so easy, but I did not work for him. I worked in Plaszow, then I worked on the outside.

But since my card was identification, I'm [GERMAN]. I was chosen. If you want to know, I have the original list in my house, which I gave to Robert [PERSONAL NAME]. Which we went from Plaszow to Brnenec. The original list, which was made by one man, and-- that's right.

I had another thing which I had in my life. May 1, in '44 we were standing in Płaszów. 500 people had to go. Only men. I was the first five, and [INAUDIBLE] long. I was the first five, and I went out with the men to make the list. I knew it from home. It say, [? Tomanec-- ?] his name was [PERSONAL NAME] in Polish. And he'd get a neutral language expression. And I cannot help. OK. And that was the first five.

I don't know where the man came from, a man with a machine gun. And he said, just, in German,

[SPEAKING GERMAN]. It means, turn around. Automatically, I was the last five. Just turn around. And I was the last five. What I did-- I saw what's going on. My mind was [? floating ?] very fast. In a split second, I ran away. In the camp. And I came up to my wife and said, this is-- I just run away. I say, don't stay here. Well, then, everybody knows my name.

Then I went out [? translate, ?] like Dr. Lange. I say I want to stay with you in the barrack for a day or two, and I will be safe. And that's the way I was saved. This is split seconds I had to go out. But I did everything which was possible to do. But I couldn't do it. I couldn't save the children. My wife came home--

Can you tell me tell me a little bit about how it was like with Schindler?

Schindler started off with a man-- what was his name? I forgot his name. He started off-- you know, there were very intelligent people within the Jewish people. And he started off, Schindler, I-- Stern. His name was Isak Stern. And it was [INAUDIBLE]. Because he is a man he cannot be a Nazi. But he remain his humanity. And then he took over the pots and pans factory in a place. And that gave me the idea-- why don't you take in-- make yourself a little tiny camp and have people stay with you?

And that's the way it was. He started with 200, then he came with 200, then he came with 500, then he came with 1,000. And he was a wheeler and dealer. He make them black market. And he was arrested twice. But he got out of trouble from everybody. And that's the way he did it. Because he wasn't in Kraków more than two years.

Later, when they had order to-- the Russians came close. Kraków had to be liquidated. Then he built himself a factory in Czechoslovakia. The book will tell you everything. Every item. But he was very short. You know where Schindler has been buried? You know where?

Yes.

Where?

In Israel.

Schindler was buried in Jerusalem on Mount Zion. On the--

[PLACE NAME]

Not [PLACE NAME].

Har Etzion yeah.

Har Etzion is [INAUDIBLE].

[INAUDIBLE], right.

And he was and the Catholic cemetery, flat stone. And you're certain the most righteous person-- in Hebrew, in English, and in German-- because his wish was to be buried in Jerusalem. Can you imagine? A Nazi, a Catholic, a German.

If it would be only-- between the Nazi party, it there were only 100 people like him, they would save a lot of people. There's only one which-- he understood that thing could not be forever. That thing had to come-- matter of fact, in his birthday, which was the end of April, he came in the last day before the war was over. He called us-- he called the people [GERMAN]. It means, "my children." Made them a birthday party.

He came down and said, the war's over. We lost it. And he called the people-- we didn't know how to use a machine gun, a rifle. And he had prepared 30, I would say-- you don't move out from here. You will be free in a matter of days. And that's the way we were free. The Russians came in May the 8th and opened up the gates. And we were free. That's how I was free.

And my wife, she went to Auschwitz, and from Auschwitz-- when Auschwitz was liquidated-- she went to Bergen-Belsen. And in Bergen-Belsen, she came in to the kitchen, and she find my girlfriend, from the old time, from a Polish city, and she [INAUDIBLE] say, Sally, you work in here. If you're in the kitchen, you're done. You're done-- you're feeding yourself whatever you want.

In that way, she survived, and the other woman did not survive. Can you imagine? It's a matter of luck. And then, she find out, after the war, she find-- she met somebody, she find out that I'm alive, and she came home. And we took off from Kraków. We took off right away.

We went to Austria. We spent, in Austria, three and a half years, till we immigrated to the United States, because I had an uncle here. My father's father was-- my father's brother was here.

So you went from Schindler back to Kraków?

Yeah.

And your wife, she went from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen.

No. Then later, from Schindler to Kraków, then later I took Murray with me. And we went to Germany, back to look for relatives after the war. I was in Berlin. I was in Magdeburg. I was travelling around.

Matter of fact, in Berlin, you wouldn't believe the young boys. On July the 4th, the four zones were separated-- the Russians, French, British, and the US. And we were-- and I went with Murray. We went in the most famous place-- Unter den Linden. Like here, the Fifth Avenue. And we spoke very loud Yiddish. And came over to me, a soldier, in a helmet and a machine gun and a rifle.

And he asked me, [SPEAKING YIDDISH]. Yeah, we are Jewish. I'm a Yid, too. The soldier, American from the Bronx. American soldier, he gave me a pack of Camel cigarettes and a pack of Hershey-- a bar of Hershey candy bar.

And Murray said, I have got nothing to look for, because I know my family's not alive. But I was stubborn. I went and I was looking further, until I land up in a jail by the Russians, in the other side. The Elbe. But I got out. I went back. And my wife find out that I'm alive. She came home. And we went all the way back to-- went to Austria. Because I couldn't-- [INAUDIBLE] in Kraków, I couldn't see it to be there.

Were you helped by any Jewish organizations to get from Kraków to Austria?

No. We went to the train, and we we went. It was free. In those days, everything was free. You didn't need anything.

What year was this, now?

Hm?

What year?

'45.

'45.

It was free. I went-- I went in Germany in July. I went all over-- all over Europe. I went to the train. I say, I've got no money. One thing, you have to give credit to Czech people. We came. I went to the train. From the camp.

And was sitting-- I mean, I was standing. The Czech people got up from the benches. Say, you sit down. You just got out from the camp. But not the Polack. He wouldn't do that. The Czech people, in the time

when we were by Schindler, they brought us food. Everything was-- brought in the salamis and bread and butter and food and everything.

Besides this, Schindler fed us very well, very well. When I went out from the camp, I was healthy. And I went the same day. And as soon as it opened up a gate, I went to Theresienstadt and see what's going on up there. I went to the Theresienstadt. I saw we were in a convalescent home. They were in that camp. And this is the story. I did-- we could sit here for hours. Can I have a tape?

Sure, we're going to make--

[INAUDIBLE]

We're on tape now.

And you kept remain together. This was happen--

This is a special ID card?

ID card, yeah. It was happen-- everybody went in that set it up. They said I'd like in-- [INAUDIBLE] in German. It was in Jews. And they say-- they looked at you, if you are all right, you could-- I mean, there was-- I worked in a pair of overalls. I told them who I am, that I was young, healthy.

And they gave me the OK. They gave me a Green Card. I have a Green Card, and I walked out. If they don't accept it, then you went back to a backyard-- at the same time, we had a family there. They brought you your family, and you-- and those people, they never saw alive anymore.

This was in '42-- '42, '43, I don't remember the date. But this was happening. You have to be lucky, and then you had-- you could remain-- in the ghetto. We maneuvered back and forth, and food was not a problem. Food was no problem whatsoever.

How long were you separated from your wife, between Schindler-- you were separated from your wife--

By 10 months.

10 months.

From October to August. Because she find out, since she it was very hard for her to travel-- couldn't travel from Bergen-Belsen to Kraków. It was very hard to travel. But also, no money. She came in-- same like I said-- two left shoes, two right shoes. And as soon as she came in, a few days later-- so I mean, it's not a place to stay, because every walk is soaking with Jewish blood.

We cannot stay here. Let's get out. Anyplace. We took a train. We went over the rail to Czechoslovakia, to Prague, and from Prague, we went to Vienna, and from Vienna, we went to Austria.

Did you ever think about coming to Israel, or going to Israel, rather than--

No, because I had an uncle, my father's brother, was here. And when I was [? linked-- ?] the first Pesach, there was an order from the chaplain. [INAUDIBLE] has taken two soldiers to the Seder. And we had to-- took two soldiers.

And I told him my name, and they told my uncle's name is Julius Levenstein. He's a [INAUDIBLE] in the Bronx. But they told me, Levenstein is a common name. But he gave me the name from the uncle-- from my grandfather, which, he was here, too, but he passed away a long time.

And he put it in the newspaper. In the Forward, in on the journal. And somebody came over to say, Julius, this must be your nephew. Isak, so and so. He said, yeah. And he sent me a package from the family here. And he sent me \$1,000 [INAUDIBLE]. But sent him back a letter, then I had the right address.

She also sent me an affidavit. Then Family. then Murray came. Then Murray got married. Then Murray's mother. But later, two months pass, we don't need any affidavits. Every DP can come free to the United States. And we decided-- and the state of Israel was already-- from the beginning, was not so [INAUDIBLE]. People had to go to Cyprus before they could reach the-- but I was-- already in Israel about 25 times.

Let me ask you, did you ever sit and wonder, where was the world during the whole time? Between when Hitler came to power, through the entire period of the war-- where was the Jewish community in the United States? Where was the non-Jewish community?

The Jewish community in the United States, they didn't do anything. I'm going to tell you, even the American government didn't do anything. You saw what happened to the boats, which arrived up in Cuba, and had to go back, and their boat was sunk at the same time.

I have a friend who was a pilot. He lives in Union. He lives in [INAUDIBLE]. And he was begging, give me a plane, and let's bomb the tracks, the gas chambers. They said, no. [INAUDIBLE]. Can't do it. We haven't got no planes for that.

And he was-- he didn't care for his life. Just drop a bomb on it, and the gas chamber, and the railroad tracks. Nothing to it. That's the way. That's the way-- we said we didn't have no hope. Nobody cared. England didn't care, because if they would care, they would save children. Could take them out from Poland, somewhere. Or to-- nothing happened at [INAUDIBLE].

You know who did good? I find that Portugal gave passports to people and they could stay there. Portugal or Sweden. But a lot of countries didn't care for us. Maybe they're much-- [INAUDIBLE] What happened-- what was happening a few years ago in Bangladesh? How many millions of people got killed? Somebody cared for it? Nobody cared.

How did you-- just since we're here in New Jersey-- how did you come to New Jersey?

We came to New Jersey. I was lined up in Washington Heights. But Zuckerman lived in New Jersey, and the idea came with the building line, because my brother-in-law in Canton, Ohio, was a builder. And he gave us the idea to go into building business. And since Murray's a good friend to Abe Zuckerman, they both went to cheder.

And we were lined up in that business. And the first building we built-- the first house, we built on a hillside. The years came and we started. And that's the way we lined up. I lived inside this state 30 years.

I understand many of the towns where you build, you've named streets after Schindler.

Oh, after Schindler, we have all over. Go to New Providence, and go in South Plainfield, and New Brunswick, in [? Brick Town. ?] We have all over. Schindler Drive, Schindler Place. He deserved it. But he's dead, but he deserved it. But he only-- one thing-- he liked three things-- he liked women, vodka, and money.