

--Langer. And I'm the director of the Oral History Project at the Holocaust Studies Resource Center at Kean College of New Jersey. I'm very pleased that this is Sally Levenstein of Hillside, New Jersey that's come to the college today to talk with me about some of her experiences during the years of the Holocaust. Mrs. Levenstein, thank you very much for coming.

You're welcome. Nice to meet you, doctor.

Nice to meet you. Can you tell me a little bit about when you were born, where you were born, the town, the country?

I was in Poland not far from-- usually, we was living in Kraków. But my parents had, too, all kind of land, properties. It was Kazimierza Wielka. This is from Kraków, a suburb of Kraków.

That's the town you were born in.

Born in, that's right. All my life and school, we went in Kraków. It was not far.

What year were you born in?

Beg your pardon?

What year were you born in?

I was born in 1909. I'm a old lady now.

No, you're not. You're a young lady. So you were born in a suburb of Kraków.

Of Kraków, Kazimierza Wielka.

Can you spell that?

Beg your pardon? Kazimierza Wielka-- K-A-Z-I-M-I-E-R-Z-A, Kazimierza. Wielka is W-I-E-L-K-I-E.

How large was this town?

This was a town of-- Jewish people was living, maybe 200, 300. It was a small suburb. But all kinds, it could be about maybe 150,000.

It was a big place. It was over there. And a lot of very-- there was a factory from sugar, a factory for sugar. It was a very nice place, a comfortable place.

And what did your family do?

My parents-- my father, when he was alive, he bought acres of land. He was a buyer and a seller. I cannot express how it is in English. But in Jewish or in Polish, it's like a Yiddish [INAUDIBLE], port. You follow me?

Yeah.

It was hundred of acre land. In 1918, he passed away. And I have-- my family was eight children. I'm from five sisters and three brothers, I have.

And when my father passed away, the brother took over. And he was take care on the business. A little later, he get married. All the children get married. And my mother couldn't care everything.

It's a style in Poland-- some people take 5 acres of land, 10 acres. There was a factory from sugar that took 50 acres of land. And they preserve sugar-- not potato, they're sugar carrots.

Right.

Sugar-- carrots to make sugar. So this time was a time only for vegetables to make sugar. And this was-- and they was carrying. They paid every month so much money to my parent, and paid even to the government. What are they paying? The tax.

Right.

Yeah.

Your father passed away in 1918.

1918.

He died of natural--

He died. He have diphtheria. He became-- just winter, he came back for now. In the spot where he bought, again, land. And he caught diphtheria. You know how diphtheria is.

Sure.

In Polish, it's the same in English. A little later, he had-- in the morning, he passed away.

So you were nine years old--

I was eight-- nine years old. That's right.

--when he passed away. You have very vivid memories?

Oh, yeah, I have memory of him, but not so much, because I was a young kid-- not a young kid, but still, I remember his face, how he looked.

You said you had five sisters?

I'm the youngster. I'm from five sisters.

You're the youngest in the whole family.

Youngest in the whole family. And nobody-- only two sisters survived the war. And [INAUDIBLE] survived the war. We came to the States, and a normal death, all the brothers and other sisters. And all my nephews and nieces, they was killed by Hitler.

And now I'm alone. And my sister took us away. And I have two nephews. One is a doctor. He lives in Houston, Texas. And one is a builder, because his father was always the builder.

From generation to generation, there was a builder. And after he came to the States, he said, I show you plans, and I will teach you, and everything. He became a builder. He started building the same building.

We took two, one nephew from my husband's side, Maury Ponteera. And one man was Zuckerman. [INAUDIBLE]. It was a comfortable life. He made a business.

I'd like to ask you a little bit about that later on. I've interviewed Sam Halpern and Abe Zuckerman before.

Yeah, you know these people.

Yes. Very, very nice people.

They're nice people, yeah. But our partners is Zuckerman and Maury Ponteera. And he's a nephew to my husband.

Maury's-- yes.

Yeah.

OK. If we could, go back just for a few minutes to the time when you grew up, when you were a little girl.

Yeah.

What kind of school did you go to?

I finished high school, gymnasium.

You finished all the way through gymnasium.

All through gymnasium. We had a gymnasium at home. And a little later, I went away to Kraków, which is switched to Kraków for higher.

You went to secular public school the whole time?

I went public school till seventh grade. In seventh grade, we went to second gymnasium.

Right.

And I finished all gymnasium like lycee. You know what I'm saying? First was matura in Polish. A little later, they make lycee. And I finished in Kraków.

OK. Did you have any Jewish education?

Oh, yeah. We had a private teacher. We were to learn, to pray, to everything. We had private teachers, because it was not a-- it was a cheder. If we didn't go to the cheders, we had--

My father, a little later, when he passed away, my mother took a teacher in the house, three or four families. And they teach Hebrew. They teach the davening. But you're not using all that. If you come to use it, you'll remember this a little bit.

How was the town from Kraków?

Not far, just by train about two hours.

About two hours by train.

By train.

It was really a very small Jewish community in the town.

Yeah, it was a small Jewish. We was over there living, because we had over there the--

The land.

--the land. And with a lawyer, we did everything with a office. It was everything, this place. But what you needed, we take the train. It went only to Kraków. A little later, I married my husband. He's from Kraków. He said he was living in Kraków.

Going back again in the town, did your brothers go to cheder in the town? Did you have a cheder in the

town?

There was a cheder. But my father didn't-- he had private teachers. So the boys, it's the same to the girls. Yeah, a private teacher. Matter of fact, one brother was a rabbi. He never was a-- a [INAUDIBLE].

[INAUDIBLE]

And he was a business man. And the other brother was also a business man, and the other brother, too. But everybody knows perfect Hebrew and everything. Oh, yeah, we had teachers to learn a lot of times. When my father was alive, the children was not involved in nothing, only the studies. A little later, he passed away, and we have the business.

One brother the-- when he was a rabbi, he was living in a different place not far from Kazimierza. He was living in a place. It was Wislica, called this. And the two brothers was home with my mother, because only two children were-- three children was married. And my father passed away.

How old was your oldest--

My older sister--

When your father passed away, your oldest was a boy or a girl? The oldest was a--

It was a girl.

And she was how old?

She was married. She had two children. A little alter comes a brother. It was the rabbi. And a little later comes another sister.

So they were in their 20s.

Oh, yes. That was in the-- three sisters was married. It was more than good friends. One brother was-- I remember the last time. He was in 1901. He was the man what arranged everything to do it with all what we had it. And the other brother was at 1904. And I was the youngest in 1909, [INAUDIBLE].

So you went to the school. And then you said you went to gymnasium.

To gymnasium, yeah. We had a gymnasium at Kazimierza Wielka, too.

Also. You went in Kraków.

I was-- I went to Kraków later, the last two years, before I finished matura.

OK. What was the Jewish community like? It was a very small Jewish--

For what, in Kraków?

No, no, in your town.

Not too much.

It was very small.

Small. Small.

You said 200 people.

200 families. I don't know even how many--

200 families.

--families. Yeah.

There was a cheder, but you had--

There was a cheder. But we went only private.

You had private--

Yeah.

And the other children went to the cheder?

No. My brother?

No, no, the other children, the other Jewish families.

It was cheder. Yes, it was cheder. We had a synagogue. It was cheder. A little anti-Semitic. It was in a small place. But in Kraków, we didn't feel nothing, like Israel.

Right.

Yeah.

I was going to ask you, in your town, what the relationship was like between the Jewish--

With the gentile, very good.

It was very good.

Very good. Of course, when some president in Poland passed away and come a new president, they went to the stores and took away materials, but not killing. And two days was, everything, quiet.

Yeah. It was anti-Semitic, but we didn't feel the anti-Semitic. Maybe some people, yes, but we didn't feel it, because a lot of people make a living from us. Yeah.

Who were your friends? Were your friends Jewish? Were they not Jewish--

We had Jewish friends.

--from school?

In school, all the time, mixing. When I wasn't at home, at the public school, it was Gentile and Jewish. And it incorporated very good. In gymnasium, the same. It was a co-ed. Some days was, together, boys and girls. A little later, when I went to Kraków, it was complete separate, girls separate and boys separate.

There was a shul in your town?

There was a shul in our town. Of course, there was a shul. It was orthodox people, religious people. One was not a full, was not conservative-- orthodox, one way.

Right. There was only one--

One shul.

One shul for the town.

One shul in the town. Some people, very Orthodox, made a private meeting at home, but only in the high holidays. Yeah.

Hasidim?

Hasidim, more-- you know about Hasidim? They make a meal from 10,000 people in a place by themselves. All kind-- you know, all kind. Hasidim sometime has different ideas.

Everybody's a Hasid in their own different way.

All different way, yes. I was living there with the neighbors. We have gentile neighbors. We went to school with the gentiles.

Matter of fact, when I was living in Kraków, I have a friend. We went together in gymnasium. And he went-- a little later, he went in Kraków. He was-- at the university, he had the [INAUDIBLE]. He had [INAUDIBLE]. And he came to us visiting.

One day, he came to me and said, oh, Salcia-- Sally, Polish-- I had such a good day today. Oh, why was it a good day to you? I hit so many Jewish people today.

I said, you hit Jewish people today, and you're coming to me, and you're telling? Please-- I opened the door-- go on from here. I don't want to see you anymore. What kind of friend you are? I'm a Jewish girl, I told him. After this, he didn't ever show up.

But he knew, of course, that you were Jewish before.

Beg your pardon?

He knew that you were Jewish before.

Of course. We were living in the same sub town.

How old were you when this happened, when he came over and told you this story?

Oh, he was, at this time, 20, 21. He was at university.

And you were how old?

I was married at this time, 22. I married at 22 years old. And he can visit me in the house, brought a very nice box of candy, and start to talk what he did it. I say, if you did it, and you're coming to me-- I opened the door.

My husband was sitting. Out from my house. No more coming again. It was a good friend of me. You see this? It's anti-Semitic. This shows a gentile.

What year did you go to gymnasium? Do you remember?

Yeah. When I went--

Seventh grade.

--seventh grade, I was 12 years old, 13 years maybe. A little later, we went to first class of gymnasium in Kazimierza.

So you--

And I finished six classes a little later, then to Kraków.

So about in 1922.

1922. I married in 1931. This was before. Two years, I finished school.

OK. But approximately, if you were in the seventh grade, you went to Kraków.

No. No. Seventh grade, I went-- we had, for us, a gymnasium.

Right.

But a little later, my mother changes. Maybe over there is better company, different. And we change to Kraków. And I was in Kraków. Two years I went.

Oh, so your last two years of school--

Last two years of school.

--you were in Kraków.

Kraków, yeah.

OK. When you went to Kraków to school for those last two years, you lived there in the school in a dormitory?

No.

The whole family went to Kraków?

No, no, no, not the whole family-- but friends, but friends. I have girlfriends from my house. Every Shabbos, we went-- I went home just a few days.

So you went there. And then every weekend, you came home.

We came home, yes.

You took the train. OK, so you finished gymnasium in what year?

That's all, no more.

You finished school in--

1930, 1929 maybe-- so long, I really don't remember. I have no documents, because everything took away from us. If I am not American, nothing where I was born.

And your experiences in the gymnasium were very nice.

Very nice. Social life was very nice. A little later, I had a friends, my cousin. She had a boyfriend, how we come to my husband. She had a boyfriend from Kraków. And I went with her. And he introduced my husband. He comes to me every week at home.

And he is-- oh, OK.

And we get married in 1931.

You get married in 1931.

1931, 1939? Yeah, 53 years, I've been married.

OK. That's wonderful. 53 years. So how long did you know your husband before you got married?

Oh, about a year and a half maybe, no longer.

A long time.

Yeah. This is long this time. I was young. He was young at this time. We had time.

So actually, you got married a few years after you finished gymnasium.

Yeah, for another few years. I married in 1930, and I finished gymnasium in 1928.

OK.

That's right. Doctor, maybe--

No, no, this is--

Maybe at that time, I'm a year older, or a year younger. I don't remember--

sure.

--exactly what this is.

No, of course.

We had five paper. Now we have nothing to show, nothing papers. We're not finding nothing yet.

Did you stay-- after you finished gymnasium, did you stay in Kraków? Or did you go back to--

No, I'm back home.

You went back home.

I stayed in Kraków since I married. Yes.

OK.

We went home.

Where did you get married? Did you get married in Kraków?

I get married in 1930.

Where?

In home.

In the town.

In the town where I live. Yeah.

Do you remember your wedding?

Oh, yes. It as a very nice wedding. We had a lot of people, our family. My family was maybe about 30 people, own family-- sisters, brothers, uncle, nieces, nephews. And now, I'm alone, only two nephews.

And what you can do? You have to be happy that, thank God, my husband is alive. And that's all. And matter of fact, I never dream about this. Two years ago, we had our 50th anniversary.

50th.

Yeah. And doctor, this is unusually after such a war. We cannot find the first couples before they war get married.

True.

Yeah.

Just out of interest, did you get married in the shul?

No. We get in a hall. We had a hall. We had a hall of tremendous-- like here in a hotel. They cater it, and everything. It was a very rich wedding.

After you got married, you moved to--

We went right away to Kraków.

--Kraków.

Yeah.

And what business did your husband go into?

My husband, before, he was in manufacturing business, wholesale. A little later, he met with one woman, Mrs. , Mr. Huckerman. Matter of fact, this couple also survived the war. And he made a factory for metal, a metal factory. And we had a very nice living.

Matter of fact, in Poland, there's only two factories was for metal. One factory was in Warsaw. You know about Warsaw. And ours was [NON-ENGLISH] metal. And these people also survived. And I had two children.

Could you tell me a little bit--

About what?

--a little bit about life in Kraków after you got married?

After I got married, we had a very nice life. We lived in a nice apartment over there. And my husband did good business, thank God.

I had a maid that stayed there. And it as very nice. I had friends, a lot of friends. We went out. We had a good time.

We enjoyed-- summertime, we went on vacation to the nice hotels. Some went to the bungalow. You took a maid with you. You know, we was ladies.

And what was the Jewish community like in Kraków?

In Kraków, it was 70,000, 80,000 Jewish people. There was a lot of-- very elegant, very nice. It was also-- it was orthodox, and one temple. It was only-- not reformed. They're conservative, nothing else. And the people-- only special people want to believe in conservative [INAUDIBLE]. But mostly, Krakóws are only orthodox people.

Shabbos was terrible. People were dressed up with the [INAUDIBLE]. You know, a [INAUDIBLE], silk packages, and walking, and going for a walk. It was complete different. It was a very social life. We miss this. Only, we don't miss this.

Sure.

And I miss very much my home, my family. But you have to live. you have to get used to this.

Were you involved in any Jewish organizations in Kraków?

At home? Yes. For us, we're Jewish National Fund. I was involved. We maked parties, raised money. And [INAUDIBLE], if it was something in a day, we make such a small blue and white. And we say in the streets. We had the police give us-- we can do this. We raised money with boxes.

And was this--

We belonged to organizations, Zionistic organizations. We have leaders. We sent money. People went to Israel by donates of land.

Oh, yeah, we was very involved, not like here. We didn't have UJA. We didn't have Israel bond. But we had-- Jewish National Fund, we had and Zionist organization.

Every house had a box at home. Every month, we went to pick up the money from the boxes, like here now. But they have a different way.

Was there any conflict, tension, between the--

Parents and the children?

No, no, between the ones who were involved in Zionism, Jewish National Fund, and--

Yeah. One time, there was a-- not a fight. One say this.

And you had [INAUDIBLE].

Some-- yeah, Agudah was separate, not with us. Agudah didn't believe in Zionistic too much. And sometimes, we had discussions. Sometimes somebody have this, we didn't like this. But we had an organization.

We had nice leaders. They know Hebrew perfect. And have all the songs about the singing, and dancing, and everything, the whole-- not here, now.

I can tell you, States is a gorgeous country, beautiful. But we had at home a very nice life. I can never forget this life.

That's wonderful.

Yeah.

You mentioned before that you had two children.

Before I married, I would-- after I married, I moved to Kraków. And I was born a girl in 1932, and a boy in

1937. Yes.

Matter of fact, in 1949 when the war started-- June, July, and August-- we rented a bungalow. We went outside in a nice place in the mountains. And we was over there.

My husband came home two days before the war started. The war started in September the 2nd, 1939. And we had trouble to get home, but he went home.

Let me take you back just a few more years.

Yeah.

Your daughter was born in 1932. And then you had a boy in--

And my son born 1937.

--1937. OK. Did they go to--

My daughter went to school.

Your daughter went to school.

To school, but she was a young child, eight years. She went for seven years at a public school. My son didn't go to school, because he was young. This is the way.

You say, when the war broke out in 1939, you were at a bungalow--

When the war-- June, July, and August, we rented a bungalow. We went with the family.

Every summer?

Every summer. And we went even, matter of fact, with our partners, Mr. and Mrs. Huckerman. We went together. All of a sudden, my husband says-- he went home, so he have to take a look what's going on in the factory. He went home a few days before.

A little later, all over a war, start a war. And you want to go home. The trains didn't took you. You follow me? We rented wagons with horses, and we went home.

Let me ask you--

Yeah.

Not to interrupt you, but between, let's say, 1933 and 1939--

Oh, yes. It was quiet. It was a nice, quiet life.

Well, were there any different laws passed in the town against [INAUDIBLE], against--

There was some time in--

Did you feel--

I didn't feel any--

--any anti-Semitism between 1933--

I didn't feel it.

--and 1939?

We was living in a very beautiful section with Jewish people. You did everybody what wants to do it. I didn't feel the anti-Semitic so much in Kraków. Even in Kazimierza, when I was younger, I didn't feel either. But--

But you knew that--

But I will tell you later, when the war started, I had a sister. She was also living in Kazimierza, very good off. And the Gentiles came in to buy her material, because the factory was intelligent people, was director, was [POLISH word]

You know what I mean, a [POLISH word]? A sir, or a [INAUDIBLE] there. And everybody bought by her. She had the best quality for material.

When the war started, came to her two people. She was Mrs. Doula. If you want to live, I say, Hitler is not good for you. Come on, take the material to us. Take everything, what you want. And we hide you till the war is finished.

And my sister believe it, because they was good friends that buy it. And it was eight days, took us to carry the materials to this lady. A little later, it was terrible in this Kazimierza. They take away the Jewish people. They're sending here. They're sending here.

The Polish people came and picked up all my sisters with her husband and three children. One boy was killed in the army. He was in the Polish army. And he said, Mrs. Doula, we will hide you, and you will survive the war.

She survived three days. After they had all the material, they had all the silver, the gold, what she has with her dresses, with everything, she called SS. Come on, I have your Jewish people. And everybody was shot like nothing.

This is anti-Semitic. You follow me? For [INAUDIBLE], they did everything. Then there was the poor. They will not kill, because they have the rich. They want to take away everything.

A neighbor came to me. He survived. He was in the forest. He passed this street in this place. He knew my sister. And he tell me-- after the war, I met him. He said, your sister was killed like the dogs. This is anti-Semitic.

When they lived, not anti-Semitism, what's going on. It was-- more people survived. We had Jewish people who were also kapo mans. And they picked up the Jewish people. And they went of the SS man and told, because this man believed, if he would do everything what the SS man told him, he will survive.

But it was a very big mistake. He didn't survive. He was shot a little later like everybody. This was the very bad living by Hitler, very. A little later, my children--

Did you know, between these years, 1933 and '39-- did you know what was happening in Germany, for example?

Yes. We didn't believe it. I had a nice apartment in Kraków. I explained it-- two bedroom, dining room, living, everything. And they came [INAUDIBLE], the Jewish people-- from Germany, people.

Hitler, when he start to be the leader, these Jewish people was born in Germany. There, they shoot-- they was living German. But a lot of people were born in Poland and settled in Germany. He throwed them out. Like we came from Poland, we live now in America, he throwed them out.

When they came to Kraków, they didn't know where to go. There was a big Jewish community. And the Jewish community gave a couple to these people, to these people.

He called up. You have a nice apartment, I know. You have to take these and these people. You have to take these people. We took in.

I had a couple. I had one couple with a child and with a sister, with one sister. And they came to us. I gave them where to sleep, and everything toe at.

And she said, Mrs. Levenstein, when you are smarter, run away all over where you want to run around, because you don't have idea what the SS man, what German people, do. They cut the breasts from the people. They're taking away all the fortune. They take all the money, take the-- we didn't believe it.

I said, this is true? Is this true? We didn't believe it. We were sitting, again, in this Kraków. My husband was working in the factory. Even the German came in. We didn't believe it.

But a few years later, he showed up what he can. He throw out the people from the factory. He took away everything, what you had-- your clothes, watches, jewelry.

And one time, he came in, in the house. It was not ghetto. And we say, nobody goes out. I took my children by hand, and holding their hand. And took away everything, what was in the house.

You stay in a robe, you live in a robe. You stay in a dressed up, you live in a dressed up. This was do in 1941.

We started in 1940. Till '41, we didn't-- they do everything, business, and factory. Nobody believes that it can be something happen. A little later--

This incident that you described with your sister where they were supposed to be saved by that family, and then they were killed after three days--

My sisters came later to us when I was in the ghetto. They still was in Kazimierza.

No, no, no, the incident when you were telling me that your sister and her husband--

My sister was-- well, I never saw her.

Now, the ones-- your sister--

Never saw her, because I was living in Kraków at this time. She was in Kazimierza. When the war started, she was in Kazimierza. I was not this time.

Right. But when they were killed, you said, after three days--

They was killed. I didn't see them.

No, I understand.

A friend tell us this.

Yeah, I was just wondering. That was in 1941?

No, this was after the war. After, completely, when I met this man in 1945, after the war was finished.

That's when you found out about it.

Find out about this.

I know. And--

Before, I didn't know nothing, what's going on. Yeah.

Do you know what year they were killed?

They was killed in-- they went in 1940. And they was killed in three days later how they settle. This man tell me that. And this man is still alive. He lives in someplace north, Lakewood. And this man told me this story about this.

Can we go back? You said that, for the summers, you used to go--

On vacations.

--on vacations, June, July, and August. And you said that your husband--

My husband--

--went back to Kraków.

--just went back to Kraków a few days before the war started. [INAUDIBLE], we have to change the men. Huckerman was spending this weekend, and he went home. And the war was-- when it started, he came back, and Huckerman goes home to take, because we left only strange people.

And so what--

He came only for the weekend.

What happened when he--

No, he wasn't happy. He was waiting till we come back. And after, the men start to run away. You follow me? Because what the people are saying-- they're taking the men, et cetera, et cetera. But a little later, [INAUDIBLE].

They came back to Kraków. Maybe my husband mentioned it. Maybe he forgot about this, to mention it. A little later, we went to the ghettos. You could take your furniture. You could take nothing else.

Which ghetto? You went to the ghetto in--

The ghetto Kraków.

--Kraków? Yeah, this was possible. And I had the children at home. And I went to work. I went up in the morning, come home in the evening. And my husband didn't work in his own factory, because the factory took over-- the government, the German, took over.

And they have different people to work. And he was working someplace else. And I was working in a place where making stockings for the soldiers.

Can you describe what life was like in the ghetto?

There was no good life-- 10,000. We had to eat. We had it, because I had a-- we had a superintendent where she takes open the factory, close the factory. She brought me in food, because we had-- money was not object. We had plenty of money. You follow me.

But you could not-- people was bringing from other places, was stolen so -- In the ghetto, it was not so bad. But a little later, they started, the ghetto, to make it smaller.

They arranged all over and the SS man is coming, and taking away so many people, send away. And these

people, they never came back. And all the time, they make selected. You know what selected.

Always, they're taking people from the-- who lived in the ghettos. Everybody has to go together outside, and taking away 500, 600, 700. Usually, every month, something else.

The selection was made. You had a Judenrat Jewish council in the ghetto?

Yes, we had. But it could nothing do it. But a little later, a lot of Jewish became the police for the German. They came by the police.

And this was kapos. And that was no good, either. We have to hide in the-- we have to watch these people, too.

What kind of feelings did you have--

Very bad feel.

--feelings toward the Jewish policemen, the--

The Jewish policemen--

--the Judenrat?

--they wanted-- the Judenrat was good. The other wants to help it. But the police, the Jewish, was terrible. They want to show up to the gentleman that they're bringing a lot of people who were hiding, they're bringing a lot of people who had a business doing something.

There, it was very-- some people was good, some people was bad, now, usually. But everybody knows that they do nothing. We didn't have [INAUDIBLE]. We didn't have-- my husband didn't own business, nothing, just went to work. I went to work.

Now, during these years when you were living in the ghetto, how many families were you living with?

I was living with my partner, Mrs. Huckerman. A little later, we came and took-- I went way.

In the same Apartment?

In the same apartment. She had a room, and I had a room in the kitchen together. A little later, they came. It get smaller, smaller. They took away another. And they put a doctor to my apartment. And I went to the kitchen. You follow me?

The whole family went into the kitchen.

All people went to the kitchen. A little later, my people-- my friends, my brother, my sister-in-law-- came from Kazimierza Wielka, come to us, to Kraków. And we was sleeping together on the floor after that. We squeezed it.

A little later, they was calling to go and make concentration camps. And I was working. You know concentration camps. And everybody has to go out from the ghetto. This was Plaszów.

What year was that?

This was in year 1943-- no, 1942, maybe '43. Maybe, exactly, I cannot exactly say exactly the year. And I was working--

I just wanted to ask you one other question about when you were living in the ghetto.

Yeah.

What kind of work were you doing? You were working--

When I was living in the ghetto, I was working in a factory. I was making stockings for the soldiers.

The factory was outside of the ghetto.

Outside the ghetto, but not far.

Somebody was standing guard at the entrance to the ghetto?

The guard, the SS man is. We work every day. In the morning, we have to go to work. If not going to work, is no good. And every day, we came home. But the last time, I remember like now.

A doctor was living by us, with us together. He said, Mrs. Levenstein, I heard tomorrow you will have nothing. All non-Jews supposed to be in the ghetto. If we find a Jew in the ghetto, we will kill. It has to be complete Judenrein.

And I said, what do I have to do with my children? Finally, he said idea. My husband, with the other partner, had an idea. We make to hiding five floors down, gone five floors then. He prepared this.

And Friday morning, I remember that now, I went to the factory. And a little later, five people went in there. We went-- here, SS man, here, SS man. Something, but not for everybody. Every three or five SS man.

And I see that we're not going to the ghettos. And I saw, oh, something is cooking here. And I was very sure-- I don't know about sure or not sure. I was lucky. But I go in between the five people together.

I looked down. And I said, let me down, let me down, let me down. And I came to the end. And I have the courage to do it, because I was young. I runned away from the SS man so much I don't know how I have [INAUDIBLE].

And I saw somebody runs after me. But I went to the ghetto, because it was not far, the ghetto. And I went in the house where three streets entrance. You understand what this is? And I was hiding behind some place.

And he didn't find me. I was sitting half an hour. After a half an hour, I was afraid to go out from this building. Meantime, I just go-- one was to go to the ghetto. And two entrance was to go to outside, where not the ghetto was.

And I went for outside. And I went up to a gentile. And I said-- Polish, he spoke perfect. He didn't spoke Yiddish, only Polish. And I said, I maked a mistake. I want to go here and here, and I meant I came to you.

And she said, oh, yes, come on, you can sit here. I said, come on, show me where this is, because I don't know. I get mixed up. I don't know where to get here. She went with me.

She went with me. I should pass the ghetto. I ran home. And I was pain. My heart was beating. I said, Isak, it's no good. Tomorrow is Judenrein. I saw they're taking the children. What are they doing with the children?

But some people had children. They take away the children. And what are they doing with the children? He said, don't worry. I had a bunker prepared by Dr. Schlenger. He was Schlenger. I remember that now. He told me this to do, and I did it.

You can imagine. In the morning, 6 o'clock, Saturday the morning, Judenrein was all written. If you find one Jew, we kill them. You know why I did it?

Let me ask you a question. How many Jews were left in the ghetto that Friday, in other words that day before the ghetto was--

It was a couple hundred Jews. It was-- I cannot say exactly how many population was.

No, I understand, of course.

But it was a lot of streets. The ghetto could be about 2,000 people, maybe more.

So when the ghetto was first opened, there must have been how many people in the ghetto?

When they open the ghetto?

First opened.

First opened from us, from Kraków, it was maybe 1,500 people, maybe 2,000, maybe more. I don't know exactly. They took all the-- and this was from Kraków out. It was [INAUDIBLE].

You know, Kraków and [INAUDIBLE], you can say-- you have this-- they threw a bridge to go through. they divided, the water divided. This was [INAUDIBLE]. This made the ghetto over there.

I don't know exactly. But it was maybe about 2,000 or 3,000 people. But it was not so less, [INAUDIBLE]. But all the time, they send out people, because they took only three or four streets.

And you knew, of course, every time somebody was being sent out of the ghetto.

Oh, yeah, we knew it, because we had blue [INAUDIBLE] cards. We supposed to stay, because we have business. Other people supposed to--

I'm sorry. You had what kind of card?

They gave you a card. You're allowed to stay in the ghetto, because we have occupied their business. Other people didn't have nothing. They sent out.

It was a little later, after the [INAUDIBLE] cards, it was a yellow card, they give blue cards, smaller, the less card. We can't stay in the ghetto. But come a time, when 1942, nobody could stay in the ghetto. Everybody goes to a concentration camp. It was Plaszów.

The Judenrat handed out these cards, didn't they?

No, not the Judenrat. Maybe they give to the Judenrat to do with this.

Right.

Yeah. But we were sitting outside, complete outside, like in Auschwitz, outside in a big city, Kraków. The ghetto was-- in the middle was, all around, houses. And this was an empty place. Could stay, maybe, 3,000, 4,000 people. And he calls somebody's name. You can stay. Another goes away.

Did people pay money--

Nobody knew it.

No. Did people pay money to the Judenrat to--

Somebody, maybe they paid. We didn't pay money. I cannot say what people did it. We didn't pay money, because we was [NON-ENGLISH], because they need our [INAUDIBLE].

But only this, when we went to a concentration camp, my husband was throw out from this. And different working people was working. I don't know if my husband mentioned this. It's not such a good talk.

Your husband's a wonderful man.

Thank you. Yeah.

I don't have to tell you.

Yeah. I lived 53 years with him. I [INAUDIBLE]. A little later--

Let me just ask you one other thing, if I could. You came back. And you said, Isak--

Isak, it's no good.

--tomorrow--

Tomorrow will be Judenrein.

--was Judenrein.

Everybody have to go. What are we doing with the children?

So what did you do?

[INAUDIBLE], I put [? electric ?] down, five, six floor down lower, to the bunker. And I took down quilts, covers. And I took down, what I have, food in my house.

Was this beneath the building?

Building. No, no. I was living on the first floor. And this was three floors down. And nobody could see it, because it was only from the toilet you have to go down.

How long did it take your husband then--

To make it?

--to make it?

Three days. He prepared before I said. He prepared before, because we know that something will happen. Let this be. You follow me?

And Saturday morning, I went down with my children. And I took-- matter of fact, Maury Ponteera has two brothers with one sister. She had no place where to go. She stays with me, mostly. And when I went down to the bunker, I took these children. And I took my children, too.

And my sister, she said she don't want to go without me. What will be with me will be with her. She went down with me, too.

Let me ask you. The rest of your family--

Went to concentration camps, to Plaszów. The rest of the family, who was over, they went to Plaszów. Went to Plaszów, my husband, and--

No, before, before this time-- your sisters, and your brothers.

My sisters and brothers, they came to the ghettos.

They were not in the same ghetto as you were.

No, they was in Kraków ghetto, because Kraków to Kazimierza was very close, like it was one. They came to ghettos, too, and they was living in the ghettos.

Did you have any communication between--

Yes, we can go around to the other place. In Plaszów, in the ghetto, you can walk. You can go all over around. You can walk.

Everything, you can do like normal. But we could not go out, because the SS man was outside. Nobody is to go out.

But you had brothers and sisters in the other ghetto.

I have, in the ghetto, only one brother.

In your area.

Yeah. One brother was in the ghetto, and two sisters, nobody else. Everybody was sent away to separate, different places. Before the ghetto came, they sent away from Kazimierza. They made it complete Judenrein.

Somebody was killed. Somebody was different. Somebody was working in other places where the Germans sent-- only two sisters, and one brother-in-law, and one brother. And everybody went away to Plaszów, the concentration camp.

Before Plaszów, you went down into the--

I went down to the bunker.

You said, with your two children.

I and my two children and my--

Isak?

No, Isak went to the ghetto, to the concentration camp. And Isak was over the-- was not here. Isak went to concentration camps. Saturday morning--

Saturday morning.

--we went out from the house. But on Saturday morning, about 6 o'clock-- I remember that now-- I took my two children down. My sister went down and took them, my nephews, two brothers and one sister.

We went down to the bunker. We closed it covered. And my husband went away. You can imagine what kind of feeling. He went away, and I left here.

And I heard that, in the morning, they came to my house with the feet like this, the SS man. [NON-ENGLISH]. They went to this room. They went this room. We weren't here. And outside, I was hearing, [NON-ENGLISH]. He is screaming.

And believe me, I was sitting in the corner holding my children, because I was afraid, maybe they are coming to us. We were sitting so almost maybe 10 days. My husband said, you make to make a name in case my husband come into the bunker. Say, example, [NON-ENGLISH]. I say, I'm alive. If I am not alive, I don't answer nothing.

One time, my food is finished completely. Mommy, I'm hungry. Mommy, they start to fainting. I say, well, I have to do it. I'm alone, no place where to go.

You know, I did it. 3 o'clock, maybe 2 o'clock in the morning. I said to my sister, you stay here. I open the bunker. I was living in a six-floor apartment. And I took a small candle, and I went.

I said, if they kill me, they kill me. I don't care. Anyway, they're dead. Will be, by us. We cannot finish them like this. And I went room to room, 2:30 in the night-- I can never forget this-- with a candle.

And I picked up a apron and what somebody left in the house. I took everything in my apron-- a little carrots, a little bread, hard bread, but something bread. I found here an apple. And I came down.

I came down to the bunker. And I said, children, don't cry, I have food for you. And I start to give them to eat, to give them a little water. And three days later, my husband comes, because he maked up if he can go to the SS man and tell them. But somebody complains in the factory.

They came to my husband, to Plaszów, and complained that there's not enough material making. So he said, so if you give me two SS mans, and they give me two Jewish kapo mans, I have in my house-- in the ghetto, I have a tremendous, big machine. And this machine, I will bring to the factory. We can make the material how much you want.

And to the Jewish other man, my husband said, I don't go for the machine. Listen, I'll give you 500 zlotys, like \$500. And shut your mouth, and don't say. If you say, I have no machine, I have something else, you have children, you get shot, and I get shot, and children get shot. He promised by God he will not say nothing.

He came, my husband. He knocked. And he say, [NON-ENGLISH]. I say, I'm alive. My husband's friend-- the SS man's outside, and the Jewish police was inside. And the SS man said-- he was going back and forth, smoking cigarettes. I don't know what they do.

And I went up. We took all the quilts, what I have it. I put, because other man's children was in the concentration camp, free. And we said, we cannot live like this, because anyway will die. He tried.

He went to the other man, to the oldest. And I said, I'll bring my children. You will keep them. I said, Levenstein-- they know us, everybody. Bring the children.

We will keep them. We will not kill them. We will not send them back. We took quilts. We took pillows behind the box.

I'm sorry, I-- one thing, I didn't understand. I'm sorry. Who said this about your children?

The oldest man, what was in the concentration camp in Plaszów, in the Jewish police.

He said?

He said, bring the children. They can stay.

But nobody else knew that--

Nobody else knew, only him. Nobody knew, because he said, how you will bring them? My husband told the story. I have a lie. I have a machine, not to--

I understand.

--bring the machine.

So Isak, your husband, was in--

My husband came after a week, maybe after 12 day. He came, and knocked and said the [INAUDIBLE] word. I said, I'm alive. And he said, fast, we have to do it fast. He took a big box, because he brought a box from Plaszów, from the concentration camp.

We took quilts. We took covers, pillows, and we closed our mouths with a kerchief. My daughter, she was a girl for eight, nine years. She said, listen, if you need something to do, do it here. Don't call Daddy, don't call Mommy, because everybody gets killed. She understood. And to the little boy, we said the same.

And I had a number to go out to walk to my place. So when my husband went away with the children, took me a Jewish policeman to the factory. And I went free. I was free.

The children were hidden in boxes

The children went away with my husband, with the SS man, with the to other mans. And one other man, before he went away, the SS man took me to the factory. The factory was three minutes to go over. And I came over there to the factory.

And the man said-- Mr. [PERSONAL NAME] the oldest one, he said my God, how you come here? You was on the list to go home today. You follow me? Because went out 500 women to the concentration camp. You have at list.

500 went out, and 500 has to come back. If not, the ones not come back, he is responsible for. Where is the lady? You follow me? I don't know if you can understand what I mean. It's this way.

No, I understand. I just want to make sure I understand one point.

Yeah.

Your children went with your husband. Your children were hidden.

The children, with my husband, concentration camp.

They went. And the name of the concentration camp they went to--

And I didn't know nothing. Did they survive? Nothing. And I went for my walk. I have a number on--

To the factory.

--to walk to the factory.

But now you had not been in that factory for 10 days.

I was not in the factory 10 days. That's right. But he took me back. But he knows me. He took me back. But I was not on the list to go back to the concentration camp, because he had so many, so many men.

He said, Mrs. Levenstein, I will leave you here in this building, but not with the machinery. But I will leave you upstairs, because none SS man comes upstairs, because if comes the SS man, what are you doing here? I'm hiding. You follow me?

And he went home with his people where he had the list. And I was standing over there, one person, alone in a tremendous roof, on the other attic, maybe three times bigger like this room. And I saw, 8 o'clock in the morning, nobody's here. I say, I'm finished. I'm finished, finished.

The people didn't come back. Who knows what's happening in the ghetto? It happened, because nobody went out to work. It took away from people where they have dresses, what they have again jewelry, something. It was everybody till 5:00.

Everybody was sitting in the block. And the SS man's with everybody what they have. No? I didn't know about it. I was sure this is the end of my life, the end. Nobody will come back.

Next thing, in the morning, he comes back. And he opened the-- is you alive? I say, I'm alive, but almost-- what do I have to do, to jump down from the roof? He told me this. Now I have you on the list. I have you on the list, because I have-- I'll die, this, this. And I have you on the list.

And I went home to the concentration camp with everybody. And everybody came, has a list where to live. Not everybody can go in one building. I had a list to live in bunk, bunk 11. And the name was-- the leader from the bunk was Mrs. Mancini Rosner. I never knew her.

I never knew her. And I came. I introduced myself. And I said, oh, Mrs. Levenstein? Yes, I know you. I just said, maybe you know me, but I don't know you. And I said, Mancini.

She had a son for 10 years old. And her son was free. But her husband was working by the oldest men in Plaszów. And he was a violin player. And he a player, they give you son. You can have the son by you.

He said, Mrs. Levenstein, what do you want to do? Your husband was here. He told me you have two children, but they're still not here. He's hiding in my husband's block.

He took a risk. The children could be killed. And my husband could kill. But he said, I have nothing to lose. If I don't have-- the children get killed, I want to be killed, too.

I came over there. It was 6 o'clock. And I explained. I talked with her. She said, oh, I see you are so nervous. I say, of course nervous, because I don't know what is going on with my children.

She said, I'm going to bring your children. She brought my children. And there was bridges-- one floor, second floor, the third floor. She said, I give you on the third floor. And you're going out.

You put the quilt. You put the pillow. Nobody's on the bridge, on this barrack. But every day, in the morning, we went out 6 o'clock. And every day, in the morning, came the SS man.

And I salute, heil Hitler. Everybody went to work. Nobody's sick. If sick people, she has to go and call up. She has sick people. You have to take to the hospital. And she kept my children 14, 16 months.

The children were living in the same bunk with you?

In the same bunk with me. We were sleeping in one bunk, three people.

And Isak was--

Isak was the men, with the men. And not supposed, the men come to the women, the women not supposed to come to the men.

Did you see Isak during that time?

I saw him sometime, on the far. Some day, he took a risk. He jumped over. You follow me? He jumped over. He's very-- and he said, I don't care for my life. I care to see the children, to see you. And he came for 10 minutes. He went back. He was afraid.

And this lady, Mancini Rosner, she took care of my children 14 month, and she didn't took from me one penny. I can say now I can give her thousands of dollars. She didn't took nothing. And she survived the war, too.

And she-- this girl needs to have-- I don't know what to give her, everything from now. She lives in [PLACE NAME], or something, or someplace else. And she-- but a little later, after--

Let me ask. Were there other children also being hidden in Plaszów?

In Plaszów? Only the other man's children. Only mine children was. Only two children was hiding. Nobody knew. They was on the list. They have the children. You follow me?

Lived there, one time, in the ghetto. They was not on the list like the other man's children was on the list. They have so many boys, so many girl. My children was no mention, doesn't exist.

Did they stay the entire day upstairs [INAUDIBLE]?

At night time, they're sleeping upstairs with me together. And when I went out 6 o'clock in the morning, 6 o'clock in the morning, I made the quilt. We had-- not the-- we had quilts, the warm quilt. And I covered the children and everything. Maybe they're opening the side to get fresh air.

And after the SS man came, she salute them. Everybody went to work, no sick people. And a little later, he went away. She went, come on, children, down. She washed them. And she gave them breakfast. She dressed them, and everything.

Unusually-- it's one from the millions. You mean it. She took from me five pennies, she didn't do. I never forget that. I'll always talk about this. I'm visiting her sometime. She comes sometime to me. We're the best friend.

But she's not lucky. She has one son. After, the son married a Jewish girl. A little later, he divorced her and made her [NON-ENGLISH]. And she's asking me, [NON-ENGLISH]? You understand?

Yeah. What kind of work did you do in the concentration camp?

In the concentration camp, in Plaszów, I did still the same, by the same factory. Where I did it, it was in the ghetto, working by socks for the soldiers. You have to give so much, count again-- so much pair of socks I have to make in a day. We did it.

There was also a Jewish [INAUDIBLE]. But he was not so good. But he didn't let nothing-- but he survived. A little later came a time we have to, the concentration camp, Plaszów, get liquidated. And from time to time, they're sending away people to Auschwitz.

I supposed to go in August. My children was not there. One time-- listen to this, what they made it. In May the 14, it was Mother's Day.

We didn't knew it, nothing. We was calling up everybody-- rouse, rouse from the barrack. And everybody will stay in a place, 3,000 people, tremendous place.

We didn't knew it, what's going on behind the back. Everybody went out, the ladies separate, the men separate. Put out, in all corners, machine to sing songs-- microphones, you call this? Yes, microphones? And this time, they took away all the children, because make a week before, they make the children go to a kindergarten home, and all the people who cannot work.

And we were sure that this will stay till the end. We asked him, the other man, what's going on? Your son is the-- we don't know nothing. We don't know nothing. But this Sunday, in Mother's Day--

1943?

1943. All the children, all the people-- men, and women, everyone went outside. He stays in five. The SS man run by you.

You are a human being. You need to make it some day. But I have to go to the lady's room. Do it here. You cannot-- you're not supposed to go out for a minute. If you go out, we shot you. We were standing since

6:00 in the morning till 7 o'clock in the evening not move, 25,000 people.

Matter of fact, my sister-- one sister, just went out. She couldn't take it. She almost fainted. Came an SS man and give you 25. They have such a-- from leather, 25 on her tooshie. And she was so swollen she could move for three weeks.

So he punished her, 'cause she went out for a few minutes. She wants to run to the lady's room. He said, if you make, here. She couldn't make it here.

And we're here, we're here singing and singing, all songs from the English-- not the English, everything Germany, Germany, German. Nobody know what's going on. You're talking to my-- the next girl says, what's going on? Nobody knows.

6 o'clock, 6:30 to 7 o'clock, everybody went out home to the barrack. I ran to the kindergarten. My children went out-- not my children. All the children went out.

Only one boy was free. I told you, Manc Rosen's son, he took him back, because he went to him. He said, see, I play by you this, this, save my son. OK, he called him up, and he was saved.

This was the end of concentration camp in Plaszów. A couple months later, I went to-- my husband was lucky, because he was a metal worker in this document. They took him to Brnenec, to him, to Schindler.

Maury Ponteera, I don't know how he went. He went, too. Because my husband said, when he went to concentration camp, he made in for metal factory. He is also in the metal. He went also to Plaszów, to Brnenec. I went to Auschwitz, to Birkenau.

I was such a fool for me. I believe it. If I came to Birkenau, maybe I find my children. You follow me? I came to Birkenau. Where are children? No children.

And then, a little later, a lady in the block said, you want children in here? Children? It's not the place for children. Children-- you see the gas chamber? I see, over there, the children.

Do you remember the day when you came to Auschwitz? When I came to Auschwitz, it was maybe September the 15th, the 20th, between September, the middle to the end. We came to Auschwitz, to Birkenau, first Birkenau.

First Birkenau.

First Birkenau. Oh, don't ask. Over there, I was dressed in a dress and everything. Everything, take away from you, everything. We came in a place. They take me-- the shoes, stocking, everything.

You stand-- I am ashamed to say-- complete nude, complete nude, like you got out the shower. Came Mengele in. Mengele is the doctor who he selected who has to go to the--