

[MUSIC PLAYING] Good afternoon. My name is Bernard Weinstein. I'm a member of the Kean College oral testimonies project of the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. Sharing the interview with me is Jose [PERSONAL NAME] and we are privileged to welcome Sonya Oshman, a survivor presently living in Hillside New Jersey, who has generously volunteered to give testimony about her experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Mrs. Oshman, we would like to welcome you and we'd like to ask you if you begin by telling us about the town or city in which you lived in your formative years.

Can I start?

Yes.

My name is Mrs. Oshman, Sonya Oshman, and I was born-- I was born December 17, 1922 in the town, I would say today's a town what years ago maybe was one of city of Novogradok in Poland, and the name was Navahrudak. It's the northeastern part of Poland. I come from quite a traditional family, Jewish family, of course. We were a family of five children. I had wonderful parents that were very-- they were traditional but also, they brought us up in a very modern way. At that time, I was quite fortunate because I could go to school from my whole family. And then, and I could do a lot of things what I liked.

Excuse me, were these public schools you went to?

I went to public schools. And I went also to higher education, which is they, you can see them studying with gymnasium, which was, at that time, it's like if you compare with our education, it's public school plus. It's like two years of college, I would say, because we had all kind, we had two languages there, and Latin for 4, 6 years.

And so then after I finished my gymnasium, I wanted to go for medicine. But since we had quite a difficult situation because at that time, we had the Soviet Unions, the Soviet Union had occupied our territory, and my parents did not want to send me to a medical school out from this territory. So I had to be satisfied with the schools that we had over there.

And I went then to study languages. And then one of the languages was French. And I was studying until the war started. And the rest of my family, we were five. They were all in the age of schoolchildren. I mean schoolings. My parents, they had a business. My mother and father, they worked together. At home I was fortunate to have my grandparents from my mother's side. And on Sunday my mother had help we lived a quiet comfortable life.

What was your father's business?

My father had a store from a quite big, from motorcycles, and bicycle, radios, electrical appliances, plus people they worked for him too and also my mother was very active in the business. As a Jewish family, I would say that we were all quiet, I mean, fortunate because my father was a businessmen.

But of course, in the same town, there were Jewish families that they did not have the same opportunity that I had. Because in order for the Jew, there was not-- we did not have antisemitism like in the open. But there was always a hidden inside, whether it was education or no matter what it is that Jewish children, they could not reach exactly what they wanted like any kind of profession or whatever, unless you had influence by parents, you had money, and you had capability. Which you had to be very capable.

Do you remember that any things that were ever said to, let's say to you or to other Jewish children that you knew of that indicated that--

That I'm Jewish?

Yes, that you were--

Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, we used to, we lived in, on the street and cross the way I had a-- it was a family. And family are very influential. And then I had a friend and he used to play with me. And we went to schools together, we were very good friends.

These were non-Jews.

So we are --

These were non-Jews that you--

Non-Jews. Yes, non-Jews. Of course, we used to go to school together. And we used to socialize and everything. And he was a boy. And I was, of course, the same age.

We played together. We used to go to each other's houses and everything. So he used to always tell me that he'd say, like they used to say, he used to joke and say, they used to say, like [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. What does it mean? That we don't like the Jews. But the Jewish girls, we like them.

So otherwise, you could see it. Also, there was in there lots of-- I mean, we know from everyday life, nobody said anything. I mean, whatever. But in schools, for example, when they used to accept children, so there was this, of course, we were a minority. But with percentage was very small from Jewish children going into the gymnasium or going to other high -- universities.

Now, if a Jewish boy or a girl, they wanted to go into university, was quite very difficult. You had to have money, influence, and be very bright. But you see, in the war, other children, they couldn't afford to do that. So then, after you finish, you have your education, whether [INAUDIBLE], whatever it is, so you go into trades.

And so they used to go for whatever. They used to go into mechanics or be a carpenter, or they used to go into other things. The same thing like the Jewish people over there in our town. And it was not only our town that the Jews, mostly, they weren't even farmers because they did not have a chance even to purchase. And they didn't have enough money to purchase land and work on the land.

Yeah.

So what did they do? They used to settle in the small towns or the bigger towns, big cities, and they used to do trade work. And this was mostly the work that the people they did. Also, there were lots of merchants.

Right.

There were small people there. They had smaller stores and bigger and you know very big ones And that's how they grew. But of course, it was, they used to say, and this is true, maybe that's our obsession. But it's not. They say, no matter when the Jew came, so with him, in the [INAUDIBLE], he brought a little bit anti-Semitism.

Yeah.

And then eventually, as the war started, and we had, then, when the Germans occupied our territory, so we saw it very clearly that the population turned against us. And they went hand by hand with the Germans. And when we had these actions and the killings in the ghettos, the Germans, they did not have to have their army there. They just had the militia that was formed from the population that used to live over there.

And they had two or three German soldiers. And the action was done. And the killing was done. So as I say, I'm not prosecuting. I mean, I'm telling you exactly what it was. But there were also Polish people that they were very good friends. And they worked together with us. And they helped us. That was a percentage also, of course. But the majority, like you could see, it was not pro. It was against.

Yeah. Before we get into the war years, were there any early memories that you have of your family or of your life before that are particularly important to you that you would like to share with us?

Oh, yes. I would like to share. Why not?

Please.

We had a wonderful, beautiful life at home, very respectful. Yeah, I come from, a traditional home. I remember that always we had dinners together. And then-- Including your grandparents? Including my grandparents, of course. There wasn't much of love and devotion. And of course, all the children, we used to come, never ate alone. There was always morning of course, before you go to school. It's natural.

But at night, after my father used to come from , with my mother from the store, so the whole family got together. Never nobody missed. Ate together, we joined together, we celebrated holidays together. Beautiful.

Every Friday night, it was a Friday night with candles and prayers and a beautiful dinner, of course. Holidays, high holidays, always going to the temple, to synagogues. Saturday to synagogues. And it was a beautiful like that. We had a beautiful life. Of course, yes. It was very nice. And we'll never forget it.

Also, I was really fortunate because my parents, they supported us all the time. We never had any problems. Yes, they were very supportive, maybe because they were young people. In fact, when my mother was killed, she was 43. And my father was 45 years. And they considered this as old people. So they started a family very young. And my parents, they were young.

So we had together then. They grew together with us. And the whole family was a very happy family, except that in the town where I used to be, we had a lot of the youth-- except for the education that we used to have, there was something else in us because we had some kind other aspiration. Since we felt a little bit maybe that we are a minority or whatever.

So there was all this thinking about-- it was like in back of your mind that you were thinking about our tradition, about our forefathers, about a land that we had, and that about the Jews that were slaves. And then we were then liberated. Then about this-- that we never had our own land. And we were chased from one place to the other for years, always. We learned, and at that time, I didn't experience what I read. And I learned.

And everybody knew about it, about all the pogroms that they used to do on Jews. It's-- well, Poland-- it was not exactly at the time in Poland. It was Russia. It was Spain. So we learned about all the prosecutions, that's everything against our people. And always, their scapegoat was the Jew.

So in the children's minds, there was always something left a little bit that we should think about our homeland. Maybe there will be some day when we're going to be able to accomplish something for our people, that we shouldn't be chased, that we should be also have our own land, our own army, and our own freedom, that people, they shouldn't make pogroms on us.

So what did we do at that time? Since Israel, at that time, was under a mandate from-- England had it. And they did not let in Jews into Israel at that time-- it was not Israel at the time. It was Palestine. And so the youth, lots of us-- not all of us, but a lot of the Jewish youth, they used to belong to parties. Zionist parties. What was their aim? The aim was how to get someday, when we grow up, to go to our country, and being and live there together with all the countries in the world.

Because Poland was a country that you had only Poles. The Jews, they were only a minority, but except-- and gypsies, excuse me. Gypsies, Jews, and the Poles. There weren't another nationality. It's not like we have today. We're living in a beautiful democracy like we have United States. This is a masterpiece. Something for the world to see in the future.

And by the way, this is the reason why I came today after 40 years, to come and tell something and tell about my experience, not looking for vengeance, not looking for pity, but just to teach the world and the future generation there

should never have been something what happened with us because this was something outrageous. It was just you cannot even think about it.

After so many years, what I went through, and I'm sitting and thinking, what happened to me? And how people, they could be cruel and do with human beings-- it's just unbelievable. I just don't-- sometimes, I think whether it's true or not. It's just unbelievable. Animals, they just don't behave like the Nazis with their ideas, what they did to us.

First to the Jews, gypsies, and then they conquered the other the people. They did, also, atrocities to other people also. But then, the other people, they fought a war. But we were prosecuted for nothing.

For what? Because I was a Jew? What did I do? Yeah. I didn't do anything wrong. I was fine. I was good. I respected my friends, my Polish friends, who were very good friends. I used to eat in their house. I had a friend who used to come to my house. It was a beautiful situation.

But I was a Jew. So we tried to into some organizations. And there were Zionist organizations.

Your whole family or you alone?

No, the youth.

Yeah.

I'm talking about the youth.

You and your contemporaries.

Yes, with my contemporaries. I mean, at my age, it was going on like that for years.

Sure.

So there were two organizations like Betar, and Hashomer they called it. They were pro-Zionist. What do you mean pro-Zionist? Their aim is to come to Israel one day and be independent. This is all what was.

So we used to make meetings and talk about it, how beautiful would it be. And we did support how much we could, a little, Israel, not being bad citizens to Poland. We were in Poland. We appreciated it. We paid our taxes.

We were good citizens. But except that we had something else in our mind. It's like that we have something else to support. And this was also very beautiful.

Yeah.

It was really very beautiful, just we lived with ideas. Our minds, they were always occupied. There were aspirations that I wanted to be something. I wanted to do something.

And I would say in my life, for example, I wanted to be a doctor. And I thought by being a doctor, I should help other people. And I should accomplish my studies and become one. And I felt that I would be a good one also. But unfortunately, at times, they weren't with me. Things they worked out. So--

Was it generally accepted in the setting in which you grew up for women to become doctors?

A woman should be a doctor?

Yes.

Well, I'll tell you something. Yes. Yes. You see, when people, they're talking about the old country, we are forgetting that the old country, it means it's years ago. When somebody says, that was the old country-- so there were times years ago.

But as the time goes ahead, everything was going ahead. So my generation, when I was born in 1922, it was Poland. It was an independent country because there were times when Poland and the situation, the territorial, was that people, these countries, they used to occupy this poor territory. That's true.

You see that Germany used to grab a piece of Poland, or Russia, they used to take. On the top, Estonia or Lithuania. So, I lived in times when Poland had her independence. They were modern times. My parents, they were young people. And they understood, intelligent.

And so why not? I could become a real one. I changed gymnasium. And I couldn't go for studies somewhere else. But I took whatever it was available. And maybe, if the war wouldn't start, we wouldn't have this operation, I mean, the German occupation and everything. So possible that I would be today-- I'm an old woman. I'm a grandmother. I would be maybe an old doctor helping people a lot.

Yes. Yeah, I had beautiful memories. We had very, of course, I say it was. But they are beautiful memories. Of course, they are sad also.

But as I say again, you cannot live with the past. You have to go forward and continue. You don't forget it. But you have to continue. And we have to be very-- thank God I'm a happy person.

Why? [? After, ?] I'm as happy as I can be because I cannot be a very happy person, whatever I went through, and what's left behind me cannot make me very happy. But, under the circumstances, I'm thankful to God that, first of all, I'm in a beautiful country that I live in, in a beautiful democracy. We are all freedom loving people.

And I brought up a nice family, not too big one. I have two children, two sons. Thank God, they are both lawyers. Very respectful people. And I have two little grandchildren, maybe on the way another one.

And I'm very happy. Thank God, my husband is with me. I have a very nice husband. And I mean, as possible, under the circumstances, I'm thankful to God the way things, they worked out. Of course, there are lots of different and difficult times ahead.

And also, right now, nothing is smooth. Every day or something else, there are some health problems and other problems.

Yes, of course.

And when we came to this country, we had lots of problems. It was very difficult, very difficult. I did things, believe it or not, I would never believe in my life. My mother would get up and say, Sonya, hey. What happened here? You doing this and that? It's impossible. Yes, I did.

But work? There's nothing wrong with it. I worked very hard in this country. And I accomplished a lot, thank God. It's a beautiful country. If you wanted to work, you could work up your way.

Let me ask you a question.

Yes.

When did you first feel that you were in danger? Was it at the time of the outbreak of the war, or did you know anything before that maybe--

When I was in danger?

Yeah.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

When did you when did you first sense this?

You mean after the occupation, or even before then?

Before. Before.

Yes, I did. Yes, I did. For example, I felt a time we were in danger when my whole family was in danger.

What sign did you have?

What--

What sign did you have of this?

What sign? I'll tell you what kind of a sign I had. It was in 1939 and 1940, when the Soviet Union occupied our territory. Physically, they didn't abuse you. But they took away from you so many things.

And then, we were afraid maybe whether we'll be able to stay in this place where I was born, or maybe I'm going to have someday finish up in Siberia. This I did worry about because when they came in, except they nationalized everything because they are the form of the government. It's a socialist country, whether it's communist or whatever it is.

But they took everything away from my father. For example, they confiscated-- they chased us out from the house. They made us very tight. They put in some other people, which was all right. But they didn't kill us, thank God, because it could be worse.

But at that time, we didn't know the danger of killing that could be worse. I mean, everything you could establish accordingly. So comparing to killing, it was beautiful. But when we got out -- from a normal life.

And then my father, he owned this. We owned the house. It was my house, for example, not my parents'. So anyway, this was yours. And then, when everything was taken away from you, and you don't own it anymore.

And then it was there were some families that eventually, some day, they came and they told them to pack up. And they took them. And they displaced them into Siberia. And these families, of course, they did not survive. They died there.

As a matter of fact, I had a very good friend. And they came in middle of the night. And they told them that have to pack and get ready.

Why was this done? Political reasons?

It wasn't political. It's just because they wanted-- you see, this particular family, for example, this father had a pharmacy. He was a pharmacist. But all that they wanted was to get rid of that, of the more influential people, of the more intelligent people.

The professionals?

Professionals, exactly. Professionals because-- that's true and also the educated, the students because who could revolt? It's the professional person or the student or the person that understands something.

Was your father's business appropriated by the Russians?

Well, they took away everything. And my father was with our businesses. As a matter of fact, we-- together with our five children, we were on the list to also should happen to us something like that. Somebody very influential who knew my father, he came and told us, be careful because this night, they're going to come. And they'll take all these families and displace them.

So you see, the other family wasn't informed. My father was informed by this influential person. And they told him, make sure that this night you're not going to be home with your family. So my father took all the five of us with my grandmother, grandfather, and my mother. And it's not that we escaped. We went to somebody else's house so we weren't home when they came to get us.

Otherwise, we would be there maybe. But look, there are other atrocities happened. I mean, this is whatever it is. But yes, this was the first time when I was really very afraid. And also was a second time. When I had finished, I was at the end of to get my affidavit from gymnasium. And then, we were under the Russians at that time. Soviet Union occupied our territory.

I mean, it was at the end already, when I got my affidavit. And I was called to, it's like the FBI here. [SPEAKING RUSSIAN] they called it in Russia.

NKVD.

That's right. NKGB.

KGB, too.

That's right. KGB, right. And I was called. And how? I was in school. And when I got my diploma, the principal called me into his office. And he said to me Sonya, you should know that you have now an appointment. You're not going home, but you're going over there to this building.

How old were you?

At that time, it was 1940. I was born in 1922. I was 18 years old.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah so, they said they called me into this building. So I said to him, are they calling me in to the NKVD. He says, yes. I said, what did I do? He said to me, I really don't know. But you should be there after school. After you've got this, they say, with the affidavit in your hand-- don't go home, he said to me.

I was scared to death. And of course, I took my affidavit. I had to go because there was no escape. There was no escape. I couldn't-- or I kill myself, go home. I cannot escape.

So I came into this building very first day. I was scared to death. That's true. I'll never forget it. So after, when I walked in, the door behind me just locked. I tried to open it. You could couldn't open it. I walked into the second room. The same thing.

And then, the third room, I walked in. There was a policeman standing and showed to me the room that I should walk in. It was a small room. After I walked in, exactly the same thing, the door was locked on me.

And there was a little desk and a chair. And I sat down. The only thing what I saw something. They weren't very careful, though. There were two names, two other names from two students from my class. And it was on the paper.

And I read it. And I knew exactly. I never mentioned to these people that I knew that they were there, OK? So when I

walked in, and this general, he was a general. He walked out with me. I saw everything.

And he walks in. He says to me, hi. I say, hi. I know that you have your affidavit, and you have finished school. I mean, you're accomplished. I said, yes.

He says to me, do you know why I invited you here? So I said, did I do anything wrong? No, I don't know. No, he says. You didn't do anything wrong. There is one thing that I want from you.

There is purpose that I wanted you should come. And I picked you, he said to me. I said, why me? He said because I feel that you are the right person for that. I said, would you please tell me what it is?

He says to me like that I don't want nothing from you. The only thing what I want, since I know that you are between intelligent people, and you go out to all your friends are very intelligent. He said to me, you are between the Jewish people and the Polish and this and that. All I want you to do, if you go somewhere, or if I send you somewhere, you should just tell me what was going on and explain to me and translate to me since I know that you are well, you are a good student. You know French. And you know Latin.

Exactly, that's what he told me. He knew all the history of my life. And he said, you would be a perfect person for this. So I said to him, well, how do you expect me to do that? He says, why? I said, look, I'm sorry, but I have other intentions.

He said to me, what kind of intentions do you have? I say, I have intentions to continue my studies. He says to me, what kind of studies? I say, yeah well, I want to become a doctor.

So maybe, if God willing. And I was -- And by that time, when I finished, I sent out my applications. So I already was accepted to medical school in Smolensk. Smolensk is a city in Russia.

But this is very close to the Polish border. So this is the first place where they had a medical school and the closest to the Polish border. I mean, closest to home. And I told him that. I said, look, I have an acceptance for Smolensk University to go and study medicine.

And the second thing I say, if I'm not going to be able to go over there, so I'm going to go. Possible, I said that my parents, they wouldn't let me go because my mother wouldn't like I should leave, stay away from home. So possible that I would like to go over here. And there was in Bialystok.

Bialystok, it was not far away from the local [INAUDIBLE] city. And they had that university that had all the, they called it, from foreign languages. So I said, if not that, I'm accepted here to study and continue my studies in French.

So I said, I don't think what I would be able to do that. I say, I would love to do that, I said. But I don't think if I could do that. The minute when I told him, so with his hand, he knocked with such a force over the table. And you know what he said? And he cursed in Russian. And he said to me, what the hell is going on? All of you, you want to study.

Meaning the Jews?

None of you want to have some such easy life and everything. It seems like, what I understood, that these two people that were ahead of me, the two names, and I know. So also, they had the same excuse. So I said, I want to go to study. And I want to go this.

So he said, if so, OK. But he was very angry. And I thought, maybe he's going to put me into jail or whatever. But then, he walks out again. And he says to me like that, don't you dare ever tell your parents that you were here, that you were invited because if I find out that your mother and father they know that you were here, it's going to be like that. That's exactly what he showed me.

So I said, no. I'm not going to tell anybody. This is all what I know, and I will know myself. So then, came out a soldier.



He told me to let me out. And I walked out. This is number two scare.

And it was really very scary because otherwise, they wanted me into spying. They wanted to engaged me into spying. I know you start with them with a little thing with translations. And then, I would go on and on and on and on and on. And this was very scary, very scary. This is number two.

The third one was 1941 in June. Was also very scary moment when Russia and Germany, they finished their friendship by dividing Poland. And they started fighting between the two of them.

And then, before they walked in, of course, so they paved their way with bombs. They bombed our city. This was the first thing before they walked in. And they demolished everything.

The very first bombs fell into our house. And we were very lucky to survive. My sister could get killed. She was hurt. But I don't know. At that time, it's a miracle that we survived.

Everything was demolished. And everything was gone. And practically the whole city was demolished, ruined from all these bombs. And in no time, the Russians, the Soviets, they escaped. And they left the city. And it was still stand for a day or two.

And then, they walked in, the Germans. The very first thing when they walked in, the first step, everybody was hiding, of course. So they gave an order-- this was the number one, the very first day-- all Jews professionals, they should come into that center place of the city because we had an old city around the Polish old cities. They were built as a marketplace like and all these streets that go in all directions.

So they said, the first, all the Jewish intelligentsia, OK? All the educated, I mean, the doctors, the lawyers, the influential people, they should come. And of course, they thought, who knew that they would come, and they are going to be killed instantly? They thought, maybe they want representation sometime. They want to give some advices or whatever. Who could think of it?

So 50 people-- the most prominent and educated and intelligent. They came in. I mean, they were present. And the minute they came-- it didn't take five minutes when they were all laying dead. They killed them--

They shot them?

Shot them instantly.

Did you not see this?

I didn't see it because I was hiding. But I know about it because then, whoever did-- I mean, there were Polish people living in there. They killed them. The following then [INAUDIBLE] dead people decide.

I didn't. I'll tell you why. My parents, they saw. The minute they walked in, also, this was the very first day. The second day, so these German soldiers, they grabbed some Jewish girls. And they raped them.

Now, one of the girls that I knew, a very good friend of mine, apparently-- it was not normal times. Maybe she was curious. She wanted to see. So she jumped out from the house.

And here, a couple of soldiers, they grabbed her. She had-- she never survived. They all raped her. And she was dead after that. So of course, my grandmother also, she insisted. She said, the Germans are getting in.

And she had some, not experience, but you know. She said the children, the young girls, they have to be not on -- whatever, to hide them. So of course, my mother took me and my sister. And they put us in -- somebody behind that lived in the suburbs there.

It's not like suburbs. But it's a town. And in the back of the town, there were smaller houses. And the people there that we knew. So I was hidden there for a couple of days until this situation did clear up. But it didn't clear up. Absolutely not. In a very couple days, it was like two or three days.

So what did this do? They gave orders. They gave an order that everybody, the whole population from Novogradok, young or old, whoever is alive, they should come to this courthouse where we have the courthouse. It is like about a mile and a half from our house where we used to be.

This was only Jews or everybody?

Only the Jews.

Only the Jews.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Only the Jewish population. This was just--

What was the size of the Jewish population?

We were approximately from 15,000, something like that, yeah. Or maybe even more. From 15,000 to 18,000, something like that. And they gave an order that all the people, they should come to this courthouse.

Of course, the courthouse was very huge. It could put in a lot of people. But of course, not everybody. Not everybody. Some people, maybe they were smart. They did not come. They escaped. They ran away to the little towns there.

So these people, they survived. But later on, they got caught anyway. But the majority, we didn't know anything. So everybody came to this courthouse. Courthouse and courtyard, it was filled up with people you could imagine, whoever was alive.

Except that also, it was summertime. So lots of people, they used to be away some other places, like vacations. So more likely, they did not escape from that. So they died later on. They were killed, whatever it is. But for the time being, just the population that they were present at this time in Novogradok.

So of course, everybody came. And now, they came all these soldiers with -- all equipped, its army, and it's wartime. And they started to segregate all these people. You go on this side. And this one on this side. This one on this side, and the other one on this side.

And what did I see? And what did we notice? And we saw that the young people, they left on one side, the elderly people and the children on the other side. And that's what happened. They segregated, and they divided us.

So they told these people that they put on this site to go away and stay over there. And in about, I would say, in about a half an hour, there came a long line of trucks, army trucks. And all these elderly people and the children, they told them to get into the trucks.

Soon they started to cry. And there was screaming and children crying, little infants. You know month or two months, one year old. Mothers with little children. And by the way, the mothers with the kids, they left together, OK? So they said--

Were the mothers and the children put on separate sides originally?

Yeah, the mothers and the children. Yeah, but then what they did-- they'd said then eventually-- first, they told the mothers with the children to stay together. But then, they took away the children. And the mothers, they told to go on the other side. Could you imagine the cruelty?

And the mothers wouldn't go.

The mothers wouldn't go. They were beaten. And some of them, they were killed instantly. But what happened, what they said, that they're taking all these people to work, to put them in special places where they're going to work. They'll give them food. They will dress them. And they'll live over there.

And people, when it's like that, when you're were desperate or whatever, and somebody tells you something, so maybe you believe that it might be like that. And as a matter of fact, I'll tell you something, it was about a year or maybe two years until we found out. We were still believing that maybe, that our grandparents-- I was thinking, maybe my grandparents, they took them away, maybe they're still alive. Maybe they still work because you could not imagine that they're going to take the people that didn't do anything and just kill themself.

So at that time, they took away all these-- you'd see all the trucks. It was a whole line. And they put all the elderly people there. Imagine elderly people. My grandmother would be at that time maybe about 59 years old. My grandpa maybe was 60 years old. Now, you could imagine, OK?

And so, they were put it into these trucks. And the kids. Now, the mothers, they did not want to separate with the children. So they forced them to get away. But if not, they were beaten. And some of them, they were shot also. But the kids, they used to throw them like rocks into the truck.

I'm talking about it now. It's after 40 years. And so time does a lot. Time cures. And in the beginning, I would not be able to talk about it like that. But time does-- it cures. You get used to it and this and that.

But it's really-- it's terrible. Terrible. It's just un-human. It's like you cannot even [INAUDIBLE]. I have no words even how to express it.

Where were your parents and your brothers, your older brothers?

At that time?

Yes, we were all together.

Your parents were with you?

Yes, my mother, my father, our five children, and also my grandmother and grandfather. So my grandfather and grandmother were separated immediately. They took them away.

Yes.

We, for time being, remained together as a family.

Even your sister?

Yeah, my sister was nine years old.

She was nine years old.

She was nine years. She was a big girl. She was a big girl. She was a big girl. And so she could get away for more than nine, like 12 or 13, 14. As a matter of fact, she was alive until 1943. So you could imagine the way she looked and how she was beautiful developed that she stayed with us until 1943, until she was killed.

So when my grandparents, they took them away. And I remained with my family. And this was the very first horrible scene, horrible [INAUDIBLE]. The horrible scene with the little kids, how they used to throw them into the trucks like

rocks, like bones. It's just-- it's unbelievable. And of course, they would get killed instantly.

There was, I remember, the rabbi from our town. He stood up against all these atrocities. So he was instantly shot on the place over there. And that's how it started. These elderly people-- they took them away. Of course, I thought that maybe they are working somewhere.

But then, eventually, we found out that that very same day, they were all killed. And as a matter of fact, they were-- not this particular group-- but in some other places also, the graves, they were ready already. And they told them to get into the graves. And they got killed instantly. They didn't have to push them in, though, because they were in it already. That's what we were told by friends, Polish friends, that they saw that, after the war. This happened to the very first group at the very first killing. And this was, I guess, around December 1941.

Now, what did they do with the rest of the people? OK, you see, their plan, it was, of course, to destroy all of us. We should be clean of Jews and gypsies, but there weren't too many gypsies. But you see, they left us for a reason. They had a reason.

First of all, they needed us. Work, manpower. They needed working hands. So every day, first of all, this group that remained, so they put us together. It was also-- in the back of this Novogradok, there was a certain place that there were houses, small little houses. The gentile people, little farmers, they used to live over there. It's a little way, about two miles from the city.

So they put all of us over there. So they put all of us there. There were about 50 families in one house. We slept one in the top of the other one.

On one level, or [INAUDIBLE] story?

We put those little like the, maybe like a bunk--

Yes.

--bed. But we had to build it because there was no other reason, I mean.

Yeah.

No clothes. The way we left the house, that's how they let us stay. And we were put right away in this place. They put a fence around.

So it was a ghetto.

That's right. And this was, they initiated, they started a ghetto from the Novogradok. And this started at the end of 1941. Immediately, after they got rid and these people, and they started a ghetto from Novogradok.

And we lived over there. We stayed there. As I say again, we formed our own community because they had to communicate with us. They couldn't communicate with everybody. So they formed the Judenrat. The Judenrat, it was formed from a couple of people. They represented us.

This was the Jewish Council?

That's the couple. Well, I wouldn't say couples.

Council, council.

Council.

Yes.

Yeah, it was like a-- Yes, it was a council, right.

Yes.

It was the representatives-- it was like a little-- they managed also everything, all the [? affairs ?] that they had or they wanted from us, something from the Jews, so they could communicate. And also, they had another part. It was like people that took care, they took care of the work part. So they used to send out people to work and appointed everybody what kind of work and where you should go.

And be surprised, they were very busy. They were on the go 24 hours a day because the Germans, they demanded. And if you didn't do it, there was nothing left but a bullet. They had to cooperate.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

What kind of work?

Pardon me?

What kind of work?

Well, I'll explain to you. There were all kinds of work that they used these people like they used to put in an order. I need 100 people. They should come and work for the army in the barracks. And there, where the army was stationed.

So for the army, they needed cleaning and whatever, washing. They needed women and men, carpentry, whatever, you know? The army was based behind Novogradok, the German army, I mean. They occupied this territory. They did all the occupation. I mean, so they had to stay somewhere. And it was an army.

And I'll tell you something, to beat the Soviets-- they stepped out. And they ran away. So they needed a force, believe it or not. And they had it.

So it was the army there, when they were in there, the air force-- there was a navy, but the air force was there. They had their planes that they used to send out from this territory. And so they needed men, they needed people to work for them. And that's what they did. They took the Jews to work for them.

Now, the Jews, they had to clean up the whole town from the rubble and from the ruins that-- it was bombed. Then, people they had to live and eat, and the Germans themselves. They had to feed an army.

So things, they had to come in from the farmers and everything. They used to make markets. And the farmers, they used to come and bring all this dairy and milk and this and that. Like you said, like before, they had to feed an army. And they needed all this help. And so we worked around them.

And except that, they needed also trades people. And they needed very badly. They needed mechanics, right? They needed even a watchmakers. They asked people, who is a watchmaker? Who is a carpenter? Who was a smith, a blacksmith, or a silversmith, a goldsmith, or whatever.

They needed all the trades. And where could they get all the trades? Between the Jews in the ghetto. And for the time being, things, they settled. And they did not settle. They did not settle like to get out 1, 2, 3, from this territory. They planned on to stay many more years, you know what I mean?

They planned on the invasion to go to Stalingrad and, I mean, to Moscow. They wanted to conquer the whole world. So they needed this base. And in order to keep up this base, they needed human hands.

So the children they didn't need. They killed them. They got rid of them. The elderly people they didn't need. What? They didn't have any use of them. Out.

So who they left? They left the strong people that could do something. And we were there. And we were placed into the ghettos. And every day, everybody had his place where he had to go to work.

This one had to do carpentry. He was appointed for carpentry. This one had to do some other work. He was appointed to this work. This is a watchman. I mean, for watching or fixing jewelry or something-- they needed everything. And they needed jewels also. They had plenty of gold that they took away from Jews.

So what did they need? They used to come to each of us, say, hey, why don't you make me a nice bracelet or a nice ring or a brush or something? If not, I'll kill you. It was done. They made it. They did it.

They didn't have a choice. They did as good as they could. And they did it because they could pay with their lives.

What did you do?

I was-- I'll tell you what. Since we lived in this little community-- little. It wasn't that small. There were thousands of people. So within the same community, we needed in-site work. So I was working-- we had a hospital within the ghetto. You needed everything.

OK no, so we had a hospital. And I worked as a nurse in the hospital next to a doctor. There weren't too many doctors. We had just one doctor that survived. So he was a doctor in the hospital. We needed him because people, they used to come every day.

This one was hurt. This one was shot. This one was burned. This one couldn't walk. The other one had this. And what did we get? Nothing. Nothing. We did have nothing.

Was your family together at this time with you in this particular area?

Yes, yes, yes. In this family, in this time, we were all together. My mother, father, and five children, we were all together. And we were all sent to work. OK, explain how. And we were all in this house. There were 50, maybe more than 50 families.

So we slept one, me, my father, and mother, we slept one next to each other like herring. But we were happy that we are alive. No clothes. The only thing what we had. And food, just a piece of bread. We used to get one slice and water.

That's all. And you had to survive on it and live on it. But we were young. A drive to be alive could do lots of things. You could survive even worse things than that.

And so I worked in the hospital as a nurse, OK? My brothers, they were sent, all of them, to work. They were kids out from school. What could they do? But still, they did something.

So one of the brothers, they put him to work as a mechanic. And then the other one was a carpenter. But young children, they pick it up 1, 2, 3. The other one, they took him to clean the streets.

And the same thing with my little sister. So she was working with me. I took her into the hospital. And she worked with me and said, hey, I help. So she helped with me.

And my mother also was sent to clean for the Germans. And my father also. Sometimes, for days, she used to clean their houses. And the ladies to wash their rooms, they were stationed there.

We're going to have to stop--

Yeah.

--for a few minutes so they can change the tape. And we'll continue momentarily.

Sure.

OK.