My name is Dr. Sidney Langer, and I'm the director of the Oral History Project of the Holocaust Studies Resource Center at Kean College. I'm very pleased to have today as my guest Mr. Abraham Zuckerman who is a survivor of the Holocaust and who presently resides in Hillside, New Jersey. I thank Mr. Zuckerman for coming today to share some of his memories and insights during the period of the Holocaust. Thank you, Mr. Zuckerman. Mr. Zuckerman, could...
you tell me a little bit

13 00:01:08,310 --> 00:01:10,940 about the town in which you were born

14 00:01:10,940 --> 00:01:15,960 and the nature of the Jewish community in the town?

15 00:01:15,960 --> 00:01:20,820 I was born in Kraków, Poland.

16 00:01:20,820 --> 00:01:28,120 I think there were about 70,000 people, Jewish people, residing

17 00:01:28,120 --> 00:01:32,900 there before the war.

18 00:01:32,900 --> 00:01:39,310 And mostly where I lived was the center

19 00:01:39,310 --> 00:01:42,730 of the Jewish population.

20 00:01:42,730 --> 00:01:48,250 It was pretty affluent people.

21 00:01:48,250 --> 00:01:51,710

22 00:01:51,710 --> 00:01:52,980 A lot of synagogues.

23 00:01:52,980 --> 00:01:55,740

24 00:01:55,740 --> 00:01:59,110 Jewish life was flourishing there.

25 00:01:59,110 --> 00:02:03,500
You know, Friday came before the Shabbos.

The stores were closed shut.

Nobody would dare, even the few that were not observing,

leave a store open on Shabbos.

And, of course, as a child, I was going to my cheder, which was walking, constantly walking.

We didn't have no car.

But it was all within walking distance.

We walked five, six blocks.

It didn't really matter.

Holidays were very beautiful.

In general, Jewish life was very, very beautiful.
around there.

The kehillah, that was very organized?

The kehillah, yeah.

Organized, very much organized.

The kehillah took care of most everything that pertained to Jewish life, like the Talmud and Torah was under the kehillah.

The slaughter house.

Everything.

Even the kitchens for poor people were under the kehillah.

Very much organized.

And they had their own court.
That was the beis din?

What?

The Beth Din.

Yeah, the Beth Din, right.

The Beth Din was there.

Did you used to belong to any Jewish religious or cultural organizations?

No, I did not.

I was too young to belong.

I was about 14 when the war started, about 13 and 1/2.

So my occupation, preoccupied with my Jewish studies and the secular studies too.

That was constant.

In the morning and at night, constant learning.
And I learned a lot.

Did you come from a large family?

The family consisted of five people:

two sisters and me and the father and mother.

What was the economic situation of the Jews in Kraków at the time?

There was a mixed people.

But, generally, the people in Kraków were pretty well off.

There were a lot of poor people too, but in Kraków, generally,
by Jewish people there.

What did your family do for a living?

My father was a hat maker.

And that was his living.

Did you work in the factory at all?

No, no, I never worked.

I never worked.

My only preoccupation was to study the Talmud,

and that was it.

What was the relationship of the Jews and the Gentiles in the town of Kraków during your early years?

It was a good relationship.

I wouldn't say it was--
it was a good relationship.

Was there any evidence of antisemitism in the town?

That we always felt. That we always had.

You could always feel that it's in the air.

Although, even the Jews were in the higher positions,

like in the equivalent to the congress

here was the same, that has been called.

And then there were Jews in the senate.

There were Jewish generals.

So it wasn't that bad, you know.

Mm-hmm.

What changes took place in the
community in Kraków when Hitler came to power in Germany?

Well, the changes that took place was, first of all, all the education stopped immediately.

In the beginning, the rabbi had a class in his house for a while, just.

And that system existed because it was all done in hiding.

It was all done secretly.

And that ceased too later on.

What year was this?

That was in 1939, '40.

So this was just at the time of the invasion?
Yeah.

116 00:06:55,280 --> 00:06:58,850
That was the time
of the invasion.

117 00:06:58,850 --> 00:07:09,500
When we knew that the Germans
are marching in, the men hid.

118 00:07:09,500 --> 00:07:11,540
A lot of people were running.

119 00:07:11,540 --> 00:07:14,180
My father decided,
he says, he's not

120 00:07:14,180 --> 00:07:17,870
going to run with his family
because he remembered the First

121 00:07:17,870 --> 00:07:20,600
World War.

122 00:07:20,600 --> 00:07:23,210
They were running,
and it was a mistake.

123 00:07:23,210 --> 00:07:26,550
So he decided he's
going to stay.

124 00:07:26,550 --> 00:07:33,170
And what we did, the men
were hiding when they marched

125 00:07:33,170 --> 00:07:34,190
into Kraków.

126 00:07:34,190 --> 00:07:35,457
We hide up in the attic.

127 00:07:35,457 --> 00:07:37,040
This is the first
day that the Nazis--
First day when the Nazis marched in.

But later on, it sort of calmed down and things became normal, in a way.

So we thought maybe that's it.

How long before the Nazis actually marched into Poland were you aware of the fact that they were going to be coming in?

We knew maybe like a week later.

The news was on that they're taking town, city after city,

and we knew they're coming in.

Did many other Jewish families leave Kraków before the Nazis entered?
I wouldn't know that, but I presume some of them left.

I presume some of them.

I wouldn't know, really.

Was there any sense on your part--

you were 14 years old at the time--

as to what was going to happen when the Nazis entered Kraków?

No.

Nobody sensed that.

Nobody sensed what was going to happen.

Although, we knew that they were deporting the Jews from Germany.

They deported them, and a lot of them came to Kraków,

and they were housed.
They were divided between the Jewish community to house them.

We knew that much.

But the idea was that, well, they are German Jews of Polish origin,

so maybe that was the reason that they were deported from Germany.

But we felt we had Polish citizens,

so nothing will happen here.

Where can they send us?

Did you have a lot of information about what had happened in Germany between 1933 and 1939?

Not really.
Like I say, I was preoccupied with my learning, and we did not comprehend the whole scope of what’s going to come. Nobody did. A lot of people didn’t. The few that did, I guess their miracle happened. You know, we were a peaceful society. In Kraków, you could walk in the middle of the night. Nobody would bother you. Nobody carried guns. Nobody heard of murders.
what was going to happen.

But that the murders was going to happen, of course,

we didn't expect.

We never expected that, so that was part of the consequences

we suffered.

You had been aware, for example, of the fact that Kristallnacht

had taken place?

Yeah, we knew that they were burning books.

I mean, we read in the papers.

But it's like everything else.

It's the human mind always thought

that it's happening there.

It's not going to happen here.
And that was the tragedy.

That was the tragedy.

What were some of the first steps that the Nazis took when they entered into Kraków?

Well, the first steps they did is, first, they just grabbed people off the streets.

They were running with these open--

They looked like fire trucks.

And they grabbed people and just sent them off,

and nobody knew where.

So that was one problem we had.

Then, we had to all--
of course, we got
the ration cards.

Food started to get rationed.

And then, all the
Jews had to wear,
came orders we had
to wear armbands.

It was a white band with
the blue Jewish star.

Then, they started with
the clearing of the snow,
that everybody had to work
We had to clear the snow,
so we had to have certain stamps
every day that you went to work
and you cleared the snow.

Little by little, they
were squeezing, squeezing,
but we took it all in stride.
Well, this is what the orders are, and it’s a war,

00:12:12,650 --> 00:12:14,840 and we have to do it.

Then, one day, they had a new order

00:12:19,420 --> 00:12:25,272 that you have to give all the gold up.

Then, they had a new order that you

00:12:25,272 --> 00:12:30,630 have to give away all the furs, so you couldn't even

00:12:30,630 --> 00:12:35,055 be seen with a coat that had a fur collar.

00:12:35,055 --> 00:12:36,180 You had to give that up.

00:12:36,180 --> 00:12:38,820 Systematically, every day, new laws.

Then, they started with the ghetto,

00:12:47,710 --> 00:12:53,240 that they’re going to put all

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media. It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.
the Jews in a ghetto in Kraków.

And my father did not want to go to the ghetto, so he moved his family to the neighboring town.

Wieliczka was the name.

There's the salt mines there.

And we were there for a while.

It didn't work out, so he decided he's going to go to his father, to my grandfather, which was a town in Poland name of Dukla.

So he moved his family.

We went there.

Things were pretty normal.

They were normal, but we still had to do the forced labor.
But it was a little town, so they didn't get there yet.

Then, one day, before the war started with the Russians,

they deported us to the, it was the Russian border.

It was a town by the name of Biała Podlaska, near Lublin.

I guess the idea was that when the crossfire would--

when we would come to the crossfire,

they're going to be able to lose a lot of people.

People are going to get killed and that way is going to solve the Jewish problem.

But somehow, it didn't materialize
because the first day, when they invaded Russia,

00:14:40,940 --> 00:14:45,860 they went in quite a few miles there.

00:14:45,860 --> 00:14:51,440 And we were living with a Jewish family in a little house there.

00:14:51,440 --> 00:15:00,380 I did forced labor there for some kind of military base.

00:15:00,380 --> 00:15:12,220 And then, we were sitting there for a few months,

00:15:12,220 --> 00:15:14,680 and my father saw there is no end to it.

00:15:14,680 --> 00:15:21,860 My father didn't look much--

00:15:21,860 --> 00:15:29,660 You know, he was a redhead and stocky.

00:15:29,660 --> 00:15:26,720 So one day he got himself dressed like a Gentile

00:15:26,720 --> 00:15:29,660 and took the band off, the armband off, and went
on a train, and went back to his father

in the little town that we went before that.

The Dukla.

And he wrote us a letter, and soon we did the same thing.

We were ready to risk our life because we took the armband off and went on a train,

and we came somehow back to Dukla.

There, I worked in the quarry.

How old were you at that time?

About 14, 15.

That's all I was.
And I worked in the quarry, and it was very hard work.

So my father somehow arranged, and they gave me a job as an electrician.

And I was in charge of putting up the floodlights for the night shift. Taking care of the generator, putting up the floodlights, and climbing the posts, big posts, putting on the floodlights for the night. And that was going on maybe for about six months.

And then, all of a sudden, one day they came to all the little houses, to the houses that the Jews
lived, and chased them out

to the plaza.

By the church, there was a big plaza.

By the plaza, they took the young people, the people who worked for that quarry, put them on the side, and the rest of the people there were loading on trucks.

And my mother told me, you go there, because I wanted to go with them, and she said, no, you go there.

And I went there to the side, and they load up all the people.

They left the luggage because they were--
everything was left in piles.

And they were loaded up in trucks and they took them away.

Your entire family?

My entire family.

And that was the last time that I--

So you continued to stay in that town?

Yeah.

I continued to stay because they put us up in part of the town.

They put us up in part of the town, all the people who work for the quarry.

And there we didn't
stay too long anymore.

315
00:18:45,756 --> 00:18:47,820
Maybe three, four months more.

316
00:18:47,820 --> 00:18:51,360
And then, they liquidated
that and they moved us,

317
00:18:51,360 --> 00:18:58,480
and we went to a city by
the name of Rzeszów There,

318
00:18:58,480 --> 00:19:03,590
I guess we went into
the ghetto, in Rzeszów.

319
00:19:03,590 --> 00:19:06,340
We didn't do any
manual work there.

320
00:19:06,340 --> 00:19:11,920
We were just going around,
sitting around, loafing around,

321
00:19:11,920 --> 00:19:13,590
you know.

322
00:19:13,590 --> 00:19:23,230
And one day they were
gathering people again.

323
00:19:23,230 --> 00:19:29,230
And I had an intuition not to
go, and I went on my bunk bed

324
00:19:29,230 --> 00:19:35,330
and I hid under the blanket.

325
00:19:35,330 --> 00:19:42,130
And after it was
over, I got out,

326
00:19:42,130 --> 00:19:43,880
and there was a few people left.
Not too many people.

And the ones who were gathered up, were rounded up, they went to Auschwitz.

That's what I heard, later.

From there, they took me again.

You know, they kept moving the people.

And as they were moving, they were losing.

Bodies fell.

You know, people fell.

I was a young kid, but there were people, older people,

that just couldn't make it.
Just died.

A lot of people died from heartbreak,

So I went to Plaszów.

They took me to Plaszów, to the camp in Plaszów.

There, I only was for a little while, and they moved me again.

They moved you to another camp in Plaszów by the name of Julag.

That was Judenlager, they called it, abbreviated, Julag.

In there, I worked--

being that I always said I'm an electrician, that helped me a lot, and I worked on trucks.
I did, with another friend of mine who is here,

00:21:09,060 --> 00:21:12,900
we did the installation of the electrical work on the trucks

00:21:12,900 --> 00:21:16,470
and fixing the batteries.

00:21:16,470 --> 00:21:20,450
It was work and it wasn't work.

00:21:20,450 --> 00:21:23,970
I remember, at that time, I had the typhus,

00:21:23,970 --> 00:21:28,080
but I was afraid to stay in the infirmary

00:21:28,080 --> 00:21:30,726
because there, they grabbed you and they killed you.

00:21:30,726 --> 00:21:33,430
The typhus was very widespread in the ghetto, wasn't it?

00:21:33,430 --> 00:21:33,930
Yes.

00:21:33,930 --> 00:21:37,500
And so I was afraid to stay there, so I went to work,

00:21:37,500 --> 00:21:40,890
which I couldn't really hold my feet, so a couple of friends

00:21:40,890 --> 00:21:44,220
were holding me up in order to get to work.

00:21:44,220 --> 00:21:48,620
And when I got to work, I went into the cab and I slept there,

and my friend was watching out.

I don't know how long it took till I recovered,

but I recovered from it.

There, that camp was a treacherous camp.

From there, after a while, we were moved again,
or moved back to Plaszów, because they liquidated that again.

In Plaszów, I got a job.

I worked in the coal storage, coal yard, coal storage.

We were loading cars with the coal.
It wasn't pleasant work.

And one day, I remember, on Yom Kippur, a couple of people ran away.

What year was this?

This was 19--

That was in 1943.

They took us up.

And they round us up with a few other people.

They took us up.

In Plaszów, they had a
They called it [NON-ENGLISH], which means, it's not a nice expression in English.

And what they did, they shot the people and they fell over the cliff into the ravine.

And they took us all up there on Yom Kipper to get shot, and I was between them.

Somehow, we stood there, we stood, we stood. A long time we stood there.

And somehow, the camp police, chief of police, who was Jewish--

This was the Jewish police?
Jewish police, right—came by and he was yelling, I guess.

Maybe he made that up too.

He says, are you going to work?

Go back to work.

So I went back to work not too long.

Then, somehow, they were looking for people for Schindler.

And being that we were so beaten up from that camp

that we were before, in that Julag,

I guess they selected this group of people for Schindler.

And I really did not know where I was going.

Who did that actual selection?
The selection was done by the police, by the Jewish police.

That's where it was done.

Yeah.

And when I was in Julag, we had a commandant by the name of Miller.

He was always trigger happy.

And one day, in the barrack that I lived, they brought in about 60 women.

Where they brought them in, I don't know, but they shot them.

We heard the shots.

They shot them.

In the morning, we were walking and there was flesh all over.
Anyway, I wanted to bring this up.

So Julag was really a very terrible camp, terrible.

Circumstances and everything, with sickness and with food

and with everything.

How many people were in that camp, approximately?

I would say about 3,000.

So they took this group of people that were in Julag

and they were sent to Schindler.

Now, when we were sent to Schindler,

we came from hell to heaven, in a way, because this man,

I saw him, but it was unimaginable.
He wouldn't let anyone lay a hand on anybody. And he warned the Jewish policeman-- they were called the Order, Ordnungsdienst, which means "keep order"-- and he told them that they are not allowed to hit anybody. And if they did, he would send them right back up to the Plaszów camp. And there, that was a factory. They called it [Amalia. He, I think, was the trustees. What they did, the Germans, when they moved into the cities,
they put in treuhänderin what they called,

He wasn't a manager, but he was the trustee.

A trustee.

And this factory belonged to a Jewish man by the name of [? Banka. ?] And he went in there as a treuhänderin or he maybe went in partners with this man.

I really don't know.

They were making pots and pans and dipping them in porcelain, and baked them.

That's what we were making.

Besides that, we were making shells for the families.
They took the flat piece of metal and kept stretching it and stretching it to make a tube out of it. Whatever happened with these things, I don't know. And Schindler used to take loads of these pots and pans and sell them to the farmers and bring food for his people. So we were never hungry there. There was always piles of potatoes laying around, and you could always peel a few potatoes. The pot your had because there were plenty of pots, and put it at the edge of the stove which always used to be red hot.
And in a half hour, you had a meal if you were really hungry.

But he really made sure that his people were fed right.

And there used to be inspections,

and he never would let them in, the Germans

who came to inspect to see what he was doing.

And somehow, he got into his office

and they drank and whatever else they did,

and they forgot about [INAUDIBLE]..

And they always used to tell us that they're

coming so that we'd be on guard and everybody kept busy.

The word has it that never did anything go out
from his factory.

490
00:30:00,870 --> 00:30:03,780
It was just and
item that was done

491
00:30:03,780 --> 00:30:10,760
over and over and over and
over, just to keep his people.

492
00:30:10,760 --> 00:30:16,690
There, I was for about
a year, for Schindler.

493
00:30:16,690 --> 00:30:18,185
And I regained my strength.

494
00:30:18,185 --> 00:30:21,536

495
00:30:21,536 --> 00:30:23,110
I became human again.

496
00:30:23,110 --> 00:30:31,340

497
00:30:31,340 --> 00:30:36,440
So after a while, I
don't know what happened.

498
00:30:36,440 --> 00:30:42,740
An order came, and
they split up his camp.

499
00:30:42,740 --> 00:30:45,750

500
00:30:45,750 --> 00:30:54,740
They split up his camp, and
I was among the people who

501
00:30:54,740 --> 00:30:56,670
were sent out from his camp.
They took us to the railroad and put us in the cattle cars.

And we were sitting on the side of the track about a week, I guess, and Schindler--

You had no idea?

We had no idea where we were going.

Nobody know where we were going.

And Schindler came out to the--

he wanted to save some of his people, which I think he did.

He did save some of them, like this banker, because it was done while he didn't know about it.

So the cars were
steaming from the people

515
00:31:52,930 --> 00:32:00,300
inside, so he took
some of his men

516
00:32:00,300 --> 00:32:08,010
and sprayed water on the
cars to cool them off.

517
00:32:08,010 --> 00:32:09,630
That he did.

518
00:32:09,630 --> 00:32:11,220
And it was a great relief.

519
00:32:11,220 --> 00:32:15,150
Of course, we didn't get
any water or eat any food.

520
00:32:15,150 --> 00:32:18,880
And finally, we started to move.

521
00:32:18,880 --> 00:32:21,480
We didn't know
where we were going.

522
00:32:21,480 --> 00:32:24,900
And I think they stopped
on the way some place.

523
00:32:24,900 --> 00:32:26,820
This was 1944, right?

524
00:32:26,820 --> 00:32:28,420
1944, right.

525
00:32:28,420 --> 00:32:30,700
1944.

526
00:32:30,700 --> 00:32:31,510
August, I think.

527
00:32:31,510 --> 00:32:33,910
Around August.

528
00:32:33,910 --> 00:32:37,990
And we stopped on the way, and they gave us water,

529
00:32:37,990 --> 00:32:43,230
and there was a lot of
dead bodies in the cars

530
00:32:43,230 --> 00:32:48,650
because starved people
were drinking urine.

531
00:32:48,650 --> 00:32:54,520
And a friend of mine passed
away right next to me.

532
00:32:54,520 --> 00:32:55,530
And I don't know.

533
00:32:55,530 --> 00:32:58,638
I think they took
out the dead people.

534
00:32:58,638 --> 00:32:59,930
I don't remember what they did.

535
00:32:59,930 --> 00:33:02,450
Anyway, they gave us water.

536
00:33:02,450 --> 00:33:06,210
And I think a day later,
we wound up in Mauthausen.

537
00:33:06,210 --> 00:33:09,770

538
00:33:09,770 --> 00:33:14,640
On the way, when we
were going, a few people

539
00:33:14,640 --> 00:33:17,610
jumped out through
that little window
that the cattle cars have.

Whatever happened to them, God knows what happened to them.

And I wound up in Mauthausen.

In Mauthausen, we would sit there.

They told us to strip and started

to shave us through the head, a stripe, a shaved stripe,

and shaved us all over.

And they looked inside you whether you don't have anything hiding.

They gave us the uniform, the striped uniform.
It was the first time that I wore the striped uniform.

And in Mauthausen, we started to work at the quarry.

If you ever heard of the quarry, there was the famous 187 steps going down to the quarry [INAUDIBLE].

In the beginning, we didn't get the striped suits right away, we got uniforms from the Russians that they captured direct from the Cossacks, which was in the heat.

In the biggest heat we were wearing that.

We had to walk down the quarry, pick up a rock, put it on your shoulder, and walk up.

And that was going on for a couple of months.
Every day, the same routine.

And I guess something happened.

An order came out again, and were moved again.

And through the moving, a lot of people got lost.

A lot of people got--

Did you have close friends that were with you during this whole process?

Well, we had the friends, sure.

The ones that lived in the bunk with me, next to me.

It was one big room, the barrack.

So it was only the people who were next to me.
Those people, some of them are still here.

And they took us, and I went to Gusen. I don't know whether you heard of Gusen. It was not too far from Mauthausen. There was a Gusen I and a Gusen II, also a concentration camp. And I was in Gusen II. And the same thing. They were looking for electricians. And whoever said, they're looking for craftsmen, you know, people with a trade. And I said I have a trade.
And luckily, I wound up working in the tunnels.

They call that [INAUDIBLE].

There was a group who were building the tunnels in the mountains.

There was a group who were working already in the tunnels.

There was a, how do you say it, like they do the cars.

How do you say it?

One after the other, everybody had a job to do.

Mass production.

No.

Assembly line.

Assembly line.

It was an assembly line.
When I came to that camp, this is when they gave me the stripes uniform. And again, the same thing—shaving, and make sure that the stripe was shaved. We looked like—not like people. When your hair is up here and you have this stripe. But I guess that was done so you can't run away. You were wearing the number and the yellow triangle because we were Jews. And there, I worked on the rockets and on the airplanes,
fighter planes.

615
00:37:40,650 --> 00:37:43,005
I did the assembly
of the cockpit.

616
00:37:43,005 --> 00:37:45,620

617
00:37:45,620 --> 00:37:50,030
I didn't know much about it,
but you had to say you know.

618
00:37:50,030 --> 00:37:54,656
And somehow, the
foreman was a German.

619
00:37:54,656 --> 00:37:55,670
A young guy.

620
00:37:55,670 --> 00:38:01,670

621
00:38:01,670 --> 00:38:05,510
These guys were
not the real Nazis.

622
00:38:05,510 --> 00:38:06,680
So he taught you.

623
00:38:06,680 --> 00:38:10,080
He showed you.

624
00:38:10,080 --> 00:38:13,010
But there were
those kapos who were

625
00:38:13,010 --> 00:38:18,438
the real murderers, the ones who
were sentenced before the war.

626
00:38:18,438 --> 00:38:20,355
They became the kapos,
and they were ruthless.
In the middle of work, they could get you up, and you had to jump on you like a kangaroo, back and forth, because he wanted.

In there, I worked. Every morning we went by car, by railroad cars. They were open, the railroad cars.

And of course, you went and saw the mountains of the dead people.

And you came back at night, they were gone.

All burnt in crematoria.
The next morning, you got out, the same thing.

00:39:02,800 --> 00:39:08,890
So life was really, you're next, I am next.

00:39:08,890 --> 00:39:13,190
It was really without hope.

00:39:13,190 --> 00:39:14,720
Without hope.

00:39:14,720 --> 00:39:18,740
But still, day by day we hoped.

00:39:18,740 --> 00:39:21,250
We hoped some day it's going to finish.

00:39:21,250 --> 00:39:28,270
One day we had a lot of lice, bed bugs, and everything,

00:39:28,270 --> 00:39:32,930
so they decided they're going to make an [NON-ENGLISH],

00:39:32,930 --> 00:39:37,460
which means get rid of the lice.

00:39:37,460 --> 00:39:38,960
Yeah.

00:39:38,960 --> 00:39:45,130
So they pushed us all in a barrack, twice the size,

00:39:45,130 --> 00:39:47,870
from one barrack to another.

00:39:47,870 --> 00:39:53,120
And they looked you over.
You walked around naked and they looked you over.

If you had a little mark on your body, which a lot of people had because, from malnutrition, they developed sores.

And these sores, somehow, would not heal.

I had a few on my legs.

And they looked you over, and if you weren't perfect or you weren't to their liking, they had a couple of bullies from the camp hit you over the head and put you in the barrel head down, and that's how they murdered that night thousands.

They did it in every barrack.
And the next morning, they sent us off to the showers.

I think it was in January.

We were running in ice naked.

The winters in Austria weren't very mild.

And we went to the bath house.

At the bath house, there were again a couple of bullies,

and they used hoses, powerhouses, and that's how they washed you down.

And wet, wet, you had to run back to your barrack.

They gave you new clothing, new uniforms.
And again, we were going back to work.

In the later days, they didn't have enough food for everybody.

In the morning, you stayed in line to get your coffee, and they gave you a bread for 24 people to divide.

And when they have leftover, they called the people if they want to stay in line.

I did that once, and somehow, the people pushing to get a little bit of food, I got hit over the head with the rubber.

And of course, it hurt me very much,
and I later promised to myself, I would never go for more food,

and I didn't.

And I watched the flagging that went on in the morning, and the yelling, and the hitting.

And I stayed on the sideline.

I was always very quiet and very unnoticed because I saw the consequences of the people who were the opposite.

And so I said to myself, who needs that?

If I'm going to survive, I don't want to die at the beatings.

So I went hungry.

I went hungry in
order not to push.

Because, in the later years, the bread was like sawdust.

There wasn't any more bread, They had to put it in a plate, and they gave to one guy to divide it.

So there were a lot of stronger people than me who could grab it, so I went hungry.

I had, at work, the guy who, the German foreman, sometimes brought me a piece of bread, but he had to work with me in places that he doesn't get caught to give me the piece of bread.

And then, we worked.

And then, all of a sudden, the lights
went out because there was a fire--

00:44:07.905 --> 00:44:10.465
y they were bombing.

00:44:10.465 --> 00:44:18.490
So I sat in that cockpit for sometimes two, three hours.

00:44:18.490 --> 00:44:24.040
The later years, there were no parts,

00:44:24.040 --> 00:44:26.530
so they still dragged us to work.

00:44:26.530 --> 00:44:28.870
Came to work, sat there.

00:44:28.870 --> 00:44:30.460
Didn't do nothing, just sat there.

00:44:30.460 --> 00:44:33.040
And if a German passes by, we had

00:44:33.040 --> 00:44:36.675
to make believe that we're doing something.

00:44:36.675 --> 00:44:43.470
Then, in the later years, in the later time,

00:44:43.470 --> 00:44:50.580
we didn't go anymore to work as the war was coming closer

00:44:50.580 --> 00:44:56.382
to an end.

Did you know that the war was coming close to an end?

Well, we know something because they replaced the guards with the city guards.

I don't know what it was.

So we knew something is happening.

We sat in the barracks.

We didn't go out anymore.

We sat in the barracks and waited.

If we wanted to go to the bathroom,

we had to go in groups.

And food was none available at all.
So we knew that something is coming.

The kapos were very nervous. And I tell you, the Russians did a very good job on them. They kept an eye where they were hiding, because they were prisoners just like we were. They couldn't leave.

And one day, one day a couple of Americans came in with a jeep, and they had the turret, the machine gun on the jeep. Do you remember what date that was?

That was May 5, 1945. And within minutes, there was no sign anymore of a fence.
The people knocked down the fences.

And they rounded up all the guards, the soldiers, whatever.

Whoever wanted to run away, somehow they rounded them all up, and the Russian prisoners took care of the kapos.

They grabbed them from wherever they was, and they really took revenge.

The Jews were really weak, very weak. I mean, physically.

There were a few groups in camp that were the weakest people: the French, the Jews.

Physically, they couldn't take it.
But the Russians really took care of those guys.

They didn't get out alive out there anymore.

And we're stuck in the camp.

We really didn't have where to go that night.

What were your feelings like when the Americans all of a sudden--

Well, the feelings were, we were liberated.

We were no more.

Whatever happens now.

So the first thing we did, we were running to the kitchen to see if there was any food.

So everybody ran to the kitchen, and they...
found coffee and flour, so we were mixing coffee and flour,

00:47:53,420 --> 00:47:56,670
and that's what we were eating that night.

00:47:56,670 --> 00:47:58,850
And the sad part about this whole thing is that we were liberated and didn't have where to go.

00:48:02,630 --> 00:48:06,580
So we stayed there at night.

00:48:10,065 --> 00:48:11,230
We stayed there at night.

00:48:11,230 --> 00:48:14,373
In the morning, we started to walk.

00:48:14,373 --> 00:48:16,790
Did you have any contact with the Americans, the soldiers?

00:48:16,790 --> 00:48:18,748
Did they say anything to you when they came in?

00:48:18,748 --> 00:48:19,730
Not really.

00:48:19,730 --> 00:48:22,556
It was just two guys.

00:48:22,556 --> 00:48:23,860
They didn't have any contact.
They just went and were occupied with grabbing whoever was left of the soldiers, the Nazis, and whatever.

And they left.

They left.

So the next morning, we got up and we started to walk.

So this was the people who were sleeping next to me.

We walked.

And the Americans were already stationed every so many feet, and they guided us from Gusen to Linz.

Linz was the next city.

It was like, I think, about 15 kilometers or whatever.
And we walked that 50 kilometers a whole day.

We could not walk.

We walked a little, we laid down.

We walked a little.

How many people were together with you at that time?

It was almost-- the whole camp was just marching.

On the way, we stopped into a house to get a piece of bread.

We got that from the Germans.

And we were walking, walking, walking,
and the Americans were directing us
because we were all skin and bones.

Skeletons were walking.
Finally, we wound up in a bunker, in a bomb bunker,

and everybody came there, whoever came.

And there we stood, I think, the night or a couple nights.

And as they were liberating, the Americans, more and more people were--

camps.

More and more people were coming in.

So they transferred us to an estate not far from Linz.

And there, you got a little bit organized.

They fed us.

They gave us new clothing, the Americans.

They went to all these supply houses.
where everything was left.

And they were so bitter, the American soldiers,

from what they saw.

They were absolutely horrified at the tragedy that they saw,

so they were very helpful to us.

They brought us food and kept bringing all these necessary things that we needed.

In [INAUDIBLE], we didn't stay too long because also it was a matter of crowding.

People came more and more, so they moved us to a little town which they called Bindermichl.
That consisted of like garden apartments, and it was supposed to be built by the Belgian Jews for the wives and children of the soldiers. So somehow they got this emptied out from the occupants before, and we started to occupy these places. An apartment consisted of three bedrooms in a big hall, which was the dining room, the sitting room, the kitchen. Everything was in that one room. They accommodated two boys to each bedroom. In there, we already, the UNRRA was there,
and they built us a kitchen facilities

from tents, the Americans.

They built a shul.

We had a chaplain, chaplain to Americans.

And we lived like five-year-olds, in a way.

The mind was completely childish after we got liberated.

This is what nine of my friends and me.

I don't know how the other people.

But we lived without worry and without anything.

We're being fed and we're being--

in other words, it took us a while to get back to reality.

Did you feel that you were reborn?
In a way, yeah.

In a way we were, not reborn.

It was a new life, sort of, but it was a life--

no father, no mother, nobody tells you anything what to do.

You were a free bird, sort of.

You really did not--

like I say, we really did not comprehend the scope.

The only thing that bothered us, this mystery, what

happened to the family.

Because, you know, you live with this, and nobody lives forever.

People die and then you do your duty, what you have to do.
cry, you go to the cemetery.

00:54:27,830 --> 00:54:31,180
With us, it was a mystery.

00:54:31,180 --> 00:54:34,040
You don't know where
they are, where they
went, what happened to them.

00:54:34,040 --> 00:54:36,900
And this lives with
you, stays with you.

00:54:36,900 --> 00:54:48,920
So that was the only part
that really was in you.

00:54:48,920 --> 00:55:28,020
Sometimes, at night, you put
your head down, you know.

00:55:28,020 --> 00:55:35,380
But slowly, I took a ride
to Poland with my friend,

00:55:35,380 --> 00:55:40,650
maybe a month after
I was in camp,

00:55:40,650 --> 00:55:43,910
to go to see whether anybody
was left or whatever.

00:55:43,910 --> 00:55:46,760

Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

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It took us about a week to get there.

You went back to the original town?

Yeah, yeah, to Kraków.

To Kraków.

And I came back to Kraków, and in my apartment,

a janitor lives.

And I went to see my uncles, my aunts, because we were all living close.

Nobody left.

I picked up with my friend and went back to camp,

to my friends.

But, you know, as you get older, we finally got back to reality.
People were coming.

And one day, I think it was Truman had this doctrine signed for 200,000 or 300,000 refugees to let into this country, so we registered for that.

And little by little, you became a person again.

You went back to reality.

So there was a few girls.

There were all young men, all around 20, 21.

So we had a good time.

I mean, in camp, we lived in a displaced person camp.
Like I said, nobody had worried about what you're going to eat tomorrow or what.

And slowly, boy meets girl, you know. I met my wife there because she was the--

In the DP camp?

Because in that DP camp, I think there were only two or three full families, in other words, that survived Hitler.

And my wife happened to be hiding in Poland. She was hiding by Polish people.

Her and her sister and
her father and mother

00:57:52,820 --> 00:57:55,030
survived Hitler.

00:57:55,030 --> 00:57:57,700
And they arrived to there.

00:57:57,700 --> 00:58:03,960
And everybody was anxious to see what a family looks like.

00:58:03,960 --> 00:58:07,950
And somehow, there were young girls there,

00:58:07,950 --> 00:58:09,420
so boys congregated.

00:58:09,420 --> 00:58:16,160
You wanted to see because there was only single people that

00:58:16,160 --> 00:58:18,560
survived.

00:58:18,560 --> 00:58:22,880
And slowly, people came from other camps.

00:58:22,880 --> 00:58:30,850
And I met my wife there, and we got married in '47.

00:58:30,850 --> 00:58:31,670
In the DP camp?

00:58:31,670 --> 00:58:33,700
In the DP camp, right.

00:58:33,700 --> 00:58:34,680
OK.

00:58:34,680 --> 00:58:35,680
That's very interesting.

937
00:58:35,680 --> 00:58:37,870
Yeah.

938
00:58:37,870 --> 00:58:40,798
I think we'll stop here
now and take a break.

939
00:58:40,798 --> 00:58:41,794
OK?

940
00:58:41,794 --> 00:58:43,784
Good.

941
00:58:43,784 --> 00:58:44,284
OK.

942
00:58:44,284 --> 00:58:48,780

943
00:58:48,780 --> 00:58:52,290
OK, we-- yeah.

944
00:58:52,290 --> 00:58:53,500
Mm-hmm.

945
00:58:53,500 --> 00:58:54,000