Good morning. I'm Joseph Preil, Co-director of the Holocaust Resource Center here at Kean College of New Jersey. This morning, Friday, April 23, 1993, we are privileged to have with us as our guest, Mr. Paul Gast of Verona, New Jersey, who is kind enough to come down and share with us some of his experiences during the course of World War II. Mr. Gast, could you tell us when and where you were born?

I was born in Łódż, Poland.

In Łódz.

Yeah. L-O-D-Z.

And when was that?

November 16, 1926.

Łódż is a large city.

It's a textile-- was a textile city.

Textile capital--

Right.

--of Poland, to say the least. What did your parents do?

They have owned a textile factory in Łódż.

A large factory?

I do not know. I understand it was in two locations. How large, I really don't know.

And your family consisted of what, in Poland?

My father, my mother, and myself.

Yes.

That was the immediate family.

They-- you were in Łódż Was most of your family in Łódż, or were you spread out-- extended family?

Most of it was in Łódż that I knew of. There were some families of my father's-- from my father's side that lived in Kraków. Some of them well before the war moved to Argentina. Some of my mother's family moved to Germany before the war.

That's-- for the purpose of recording the events of the war, your own family consisted of two parents and yourself.

Right.

You had grandparents?

I had grandparents from my mother's side.

You had two grandparents on your mother's side and--

And a grandmother from my father's side.

Where did your grandparents live?

My-- in Łódż, one of them. And my grandmother from my father's side lived in Kraków.

Of these six people, in other words, three grandparents, two parents and yourself, how many survived the war?

Just one, me.

You.

Myself.

Now, of the extended family in Europe, in continental Europe, at the outbreak of the war, you mentioned uncles and aunts in Łódż, in Kraków, and in Germany. About how many people are we talking about here?

You're probably talking close to 18 people-- 18 to 20 people, including cousins.

Including cousins. All right. Of these 18, 20 people, how many of them survived the war?

Out-- those who lived in Poland, none. Those who lived in Germany, four of them survived.

Four people who were in Germany when the war broke out survived.

Right.

That's rather amazing. How did they survive?

One of my cousins left in 1938 for England with the Kindertransport, what they call. My aunt, my uncle, and one of my cousins left Germany in 1941 via Portugal to the United States.

So they went from-- they were allowed to leave Germany to go to Portugal. And then from Portugal, they went--

And they went to the United States.

--to come to the United States. All right. So of the total family of something like 26, you are the only Polish survivor, and the four German relatives managed to survive.

Right.

OK. What happened to your parents, did you ever learn-- yes, you probably do know.

My father was killed at the very beginning of the war. Was taken to a park in the City of Łódż, because-- I assume because we have been employing some people that were of German descent, and being that we were Jewish. For some-- for those reason, I guess, they have taken a number of Jewish manufacturers, prominent people of the city, from the very beginning when the Germans invaded Łódż, and they shot them in the park. One of them was my father.

Was this after the Jews of Łódż were put into a ghetto?

No, that was right in November. September-- I think, we were invaded sometime September 10 or 15, it's ten days after the war was declared. And that must have been about 10 days subsequent to that, I would say.

And what happened to yourself and to your mother?

We have moved in with our grandparents-- to our grandparents.

That was at the beginning of the war.

Beginning of the war.

How long were you with your grandparents in their apartment?

We were forced to move into the ghetto.

When was that?

I would say probably April or May 1940.

Were all the Jews of Łódż moved into the ghetto by that time?

Yes.

That was a large population.

Right, it was.

Do you have any idea how many people we're talking about?

I would say it had to be 150,000 to 200,000 people, maybe more.

What were the conditions in the ghetto?

Awful. As a matter of fact, I have-- I went back to Poland three years ago the first time-- the second time, really, and I went to visit the place where I lived in the ghetto with a family. I showed it to my wife and my son could not believe it that we have lived there in the condition, and the size of the room that our family has lived in.

When you say the condition and the size of the room, what are you talking about?

The size of the room, the condition of the building, the circumstances, just-- if you look at it today after so many years, it is unbelievable that what could live in such destitute and poverty, and dirt, and filth.

You lived there how long?

I lived there since May 19-- April, May 1940-- 1940 till August 1944.

Over four years.

Yes.

Under the circumstances, that's a very long period of time.

Yes, it is.

How do you explain that you were permitted to live in the same place for such a long period of time? I think elsewhere in Poland that didn't happen.

Well [? frankly, ?] I must say, I guess I was lucky. My grandparents died in 1941.

Naturally.

Naturally. My uncle that lived with us died in 1940-- about the same time, 1941, 1942, I believe.

What was the cause of death?

Hunger, starvation.

What about your grandparents?

Hunger, starvation. I could relate to you how my grandfather died, but that's the way you want to say that. I walked into the room and he was sitting on his bed. And I pushed him, and he was dead. He was sitting-- he died sitting. How-- and how-- that's the only thing I really remember about my grandfather.

Sitting in bed.

I tried and he was dead. And then I called in a neighbor and They said that he was dead.

Where was your mother at the time?

Working.

So you were home alone.

Yeah. Well, I came back from work. I don't know what a situation was.

You all-- so you and your mother went to work.

Yeah. That's the only two that were working.

How did that come about that only you two worked?

Well, my grandparents were elderly people. And that was all before 1942. I have lost all the family by-- with the exception of one uncle that stayed longer with us till 1944.

You mean your extended family of Lódz was all together at this point?

That is correct.

All together in the one room?

All together in one room.

And the one room served as kitchen, dining room--

Kitchen, dining room, bathroom--

Bedroom.

--bedroom, recreation room, if you can call it-- if that is such a thing. That's all what it served. If that room was 12 by 12, it's a lot.

And others were living the same way in other rooms.

Others were living the same way.

What was the mood in-- among the population in Łódż at this time? You were there for 4 and 1/2 years.

Actually, these were years when you were growing up from about 14 to 18.

This is my own conclusion. I assume that it was my passive outlook to life that whatever it was, I accepted it. Maybe that was one of the main sources of my survival, even when I went from the ghetto to Auschwitz, to Ravensbrück, to Watenstedt, to Ludwigslust. I think I have more or less accept it for what it was.

I have-- whatever rationed, whatever food I got, this was as I accepted it. That's my interpretation of my survival. I did not fight for anything more or less. Whatever has happened, it happened. You follow me?

Did others fight?

Yes.

How did they fight?

In many, many, many ways. Some people were struggling to get a larger piece of bread. Some people were struggling to get another bowl of soup.

Some people were stealing. Some people were doing everything possible to survive in their own way. But that was their way.

I had-- I had my way, but it was a premeditated way of doing things. I guess it may have been my bringing up, may have been my way, that I didn't know any better. Maybe I wasn't this courageous. Maybe I wasn't this arrogant.

Maybe I did not require more. I don't know. I have lived with whatever I had. At least that's how I look at it.

And your mother?

My mother was not aggressive, either. We have tried to survive the best way we could in the ghetto.

With whom did you have dealings during these years?

Very, very few. Occasionally, we would get in touch with some people that were in higher positions in the ghetto, in Łódź ghetto, that knew my father, hoping to get a better employment for my mother and myself. I think we have succeeded in that in some instances. My mother did not have a heavy manual job in the ghetto.

She was a cashier, bookkeeper, saleslady in the provisions, though, where they used to give out the rations. I was working in a factory metallic filing, what they call it. I assume I was a pretty good worker. The people appreciated what I did.

Also, it's possible that they may have remembered my name, or my father's name, and that's why I had the job. And I accepted it for whatever it was. And I continued that way till August of 1944.

Those business dealings you're talking about--

Right.

--with whom did you-- when you came home from work, did you socialize with anybody?

No. No.

You woke up, you went to work--

To work, and you came home. You waited for that slice of bread that you had the [? whole ?] [INAUDIBLE], whatever it was.

Where did you-- the slice of bread, where did you receive it?

It was a rationing out in a provision store. Not in the place of work.

And you brought it home.

We brought it home and we kept it at home and came dinner, we had dinner. If we could get some vegetables, some potatoes, we cooked in the same room whatever we could. And we try to survive that way.

How did you cook?

There were-- as a matter of fact, amazingly enough, there was those little stoves that you use coal and wood. And I guess we have collected on the outskirts of the city, or whatever with, some woods, and that's how we warmed up whatever we could warm up, whatever there was to warm up on that stove.

So you didn't just turn the gas jet and--

No, as a matter of fact--

--the flame would come on.

Certainly not. As a matter of fact, I have visited Poland in 1990 or 1989, and I visited the apartment that I lived in during the war. The same stove was still there.

Are people living there?

People are living there.

And they're still using wood to--

Yes, and wood and coal. That's right.

In Łódź.

In Łódź. And they still have the outside--

Which seemingly is a modern city.

It is a most dilapidated city. It was most upsetting thing that I have seen.

You're talking about 1989, '90.

That's correct. It was something that is unforgettable that a thing like this could exist in 1989, '90.

So you went to work in the morning. You came back at night. You tried to get some food into you. You tried to get some food and then you tried to get it into you.

That's right. And we slept four, five people in one bed.

Yeah.

And in the morning, we got up. We walked across the bridge, all I did to go to the factory where I work, and walked back, which took us quite awhile. And that was the life.

And what did people-- what did your people think was going on in the world at the time? We're talking about '40 to '44, what did you know?

Frankly, I think very, very lucky. Only I would say the last half a year, there was some information being spread. And how true it was, we didn't even know that, that most of the people that had being sent out from the ghetto are going to Auschwitz. People still did not believe it.

During 1940, two years where there were constant shipments of people out of the ghetto that were-- we know it now that was sent about 60, 70 kilometers away where they were gassed. And people did not believe it. People did not know.

I only got to know it-- got to know it and I didn't want to believe it. My mother certainly didn't want to believe it, in 1944, that we are going to Auschwitz and there is a crematorium there, and that people being gassed. As a matter of fact, I have-- as young as I was, I have urged my mother and one of my uncles that was with us to hide in the ghetto, not to go.

We did hide for several days. We also probably had an opportunity to stay with the factory that I was working with to go-- and there was a rumor that we would stay in Łódź. But then there was a change and they said that everybody has to report to go for work to Germany, whatever it was, which was Auschwitz.

And of course, being a young man, my uncle at that time, and my mother, did not listen to me. And we went to Auschwitz. And of course, at which point we were separated in August 1944.

Do you know now how it is that yours was the last city to have its ghetto broken up?

Yes, I do know.

What do you know now?

In what respect do you say that?

Well, more so for example, 1942, 1943, was not Warsaw as far as the Jewish population was concerned.

Well, according--

You lasted until almost the end of '44.

Well, historic-- according--

It was after D-day.

Right. According to the information that I have is we were a productive bunch of people working for Germany. There were factories, tailoring, metal workers, leather workers, shoemakers-- god knows-- and I think they needed our productivity. I need it, then you got the product.

And I think it was also a-- probably, a very profitable organizations for the Germans. So I guess they kept us as long as they wanted, or as long as we are useful to them.

The person referred to as the King of the ghetto was Rumkowski.

Right.

That he-- well, do you think his role was significant in delaying the demolition of the ghetto?

There are many interpretation and opinions of it. I would possibly say, yes, he was instrumental in prolonging the existence of the ghetto. I would say so. Many people don't agree with me.

I had many discussions on that. Being however a fact that that was the last ghetto that was liquidated, I feel that he had to be instrumental, as much as he was a puppet to the Germans. But he had to be instrumental somehow, some way. I feel that way. But that doesn't mean that I am right.

Did you sense any change in your conditions 1940, '41, '42, '43, '44. It's a long period of time. Was it that same dull routine of--

The other thing was that--

--what was it, seven days a week?

Seven days a week.

Seven days a week--

12 hours a day.

--get up early, go to work, starve, come home, go to sleep.

As I--

Nothing else.

As I mentioned before, possibly-- and I'm not sure-- that passive attitude made me what I am today. I'm living. I survived the ghetto, the Holocaust, Auschwitz, Ravensbrück, et cetera. I interpret it that way.

I'm not a passive person today, but I think I was extremely passive and timid then. I was very timid and passive after the war. I took everything as it comes without questioning things.

Was it right? In my perspective today, no. But I think that what helped me to survive.

I was not looking-- I knew that I have a slice of bread today, and that's what I have. I'm repeating myself. I did not fight for another slice of bread.

Maybe I was young, maybe I was skinny, maybe I was small. And I did not require any more. I don't know, maybe that was my life. I don't know. It's very difficult to say.

Was the population being decreased gradually through these years where people have been shipped away, or were they shipped away all at once in '44?

No. Throughout the years people were shift. There was a tremendous hunger in the ghetto. There was sickness in the ghetto.

There were tremendous-- a lot of people were dying daily because of hunger, sickness, lack of medicine. Then you will have very frequent movements of people out of the ghetto, supposedly, to other work camps. Some of them probably did go.

But I think most of them were sent to gas chambers before Auschwitz to the city that I know now Chelmno where they were burning them in trucks. We did not know it. None of us knew it.

We are all hoping that some of the people who went to work somewhere in Germany was whatever they did. But we haven't had this like-- there was ghetto, the large ghetto, was completely sealed from everything. We had no papers. We have no information coming in, only what you have around was rumors.

And being as young as I was, being as passive as I was, I guess I was not involved in it, and I didn't want to know it. My daily routine was to get up in the morning, go to work, come home, have that slice of bread, go to sleep in a dirty bed with four people, or five people, whatever the case. But again, I'd say maybe that was because I survived, because I was passive, and of course, a little bit of luck.

You were among the last to be shipped.

Right.

How were you notified that your turn had come?

I was no notif-- I did-- we were notified that this location has to go now. However, we did not go at the time when we got the order to move for the transport. We have-- we went to another place in the ghetto where we hid in the attic for several days.

And then again, under the influence of my mother and my uncle, there was fear that we would be shot if they find us. And they were still under the impression that we would be-- that we are going to go to another labor camp. So they decided to go on the transport. Of course, I went along.

So they thought that obeying was the wiser course of action--

Because we were threatened--

--for survival.

We were threatened if some-- if we are found, we would be shot.

So how did know to report where and so on? In other words, when you were finally shipped to Auschwitz, I gather--

Right.

--how were you notified to get ready to go?

You just went to the wagons that were waiting at the station at that time.

And it was announced that your group is going to be shipped.

Right.

And then you went.

Then I went. And--

We went.

--what kind of wagons did you go into?

It were the cattle wagons we are pushed in. 80, 90 people in the wagon.

80, 90.

Right. 100 people.

There was room for how many?

Probably 20.

And how long was the trip?

I think it was all a night only. 10, 12 hours, no more, maybe less.

How did you manage on the cattle car? There is no light.

There was no nothing.

What do you mean by no nothing?

There was no-- there was no facilities, no toilet facilities, no nothing. People did whatever they had to do at the spot where they were. But that was only a 10 hour trip, or whatever it was.

There were trips that-- I was on the transport that I was seven days in the cattle car, and without any movement, 80, 90 people in the car.

Same conditions.

Worse condition. Because we were going from one camp to another. We are traveling in-- I guess, in 1945, it had to be already.

From which camp to which camp you talking about, seven days?

Watenstedt to Ravensbrück.

That must have been a long trip.

Well, we have stopped a number of camps. They did not want to take us because the American-- the Allied forces were moving in, so they moved us to a number of camps. We were in Sachsenhausen. We are in Oranienburg. We stopped and eventually we came to Ravensbrück.

They accepted us in Ravensbrück. And then the Allied forces moved closer to Ravensbrück, so they moved us. to Ludwigslust.

So you had these many days of inhumane conditions. How many people-- did everybody survive of 80, 90 went on?

No, there were many, many, many dead people, corpses in the wagon. It was unbelievable.

Would you say that was as bad an experience as you had during the war?

No. I think-- I guess as I was growing older, I guess I understood things a little different. I think the worst experience that I had in my own way was probably Ludwigslust, the camp that I was liberated. I think that was very-- had tremendous effect on me. Still has.

And the only thing that I don't even talk as much about Auschwitz where I spend-- where I went through selections to go to the crematorium as much as I bear in my mind the Camp of Ludwigslust.

How long were you in Ludwigslust?

Not too long. Probably did not exceed 3, 4 weeks.

Really? But what were the dates that you were there, in general? Maybe we ought to get some dates clear. You were in Łódź from 1940 to 1944--

In the ghetto.

--in the ghetto. When were you shipped?

To Auschwitz? In August.

In August '44, you were shipped to Auschwitz. How long were you in Auschwitz?

Till about November.

August to November, about three months. Then where were you shipped?

Braunschweig.

To Braunschweig. And Braunschweig sounds like it's a German camp.

German, it is Germany.

Yeah.

Yeah Near Hamburg.

So the Germans were--

Near Hamburg.

--the Germans were fleeing from the March, probably, of the Russians.

Russians, Yeah.

Yeah.

I think so.

And you went from Auschwitz to Braunschweig?

Right.

And how did you move? Also, a cattle car?

Yes. Yes.

And how long did that trip take?

I don't remember. Three, four days, probably.

That was under the miserable conditions that you had described.

Right.

So you arrived at Braunschweig in November, and you remain there until February-- again, about three months.

February, March.

February, March. So you're there a few months.

Yeah.

All right. From Braunschweig, you went to?

I believe to Watenstedt.

Oh, Watenstedt. So you-- how long were you in Watenstedt?

Not long. Three, four weeks-- five weeks.

Three, four weeks at--

We were bombed and we had to get out of there.

So you probably meant from February 1945 to March 1945.

About.

Yeah. From Watenstedt, you went to?

Ravensbrück.

Ravensbrück. That's March 1945, the war is ending already. How long were you in Ravensbrück?

Not long. As a matter of fact, in Ravensbrück, where we came to, I was told amazingly enough, there was a tremendous amount of women in Ravensbrück. And we were told that there are woman from Łódź. And there was a contact with the Red Cross, Swedish Red Cross at that time.

And I've inquired whether that-- whether my mother would be there. Of course, I didn't find any. At that time, the Red Cross, the Swedish Red Cross told us that we would be shipped to Sweden. And they gave us each a Red Cross package of food.

We were taken to a train. They put us in the train. We stayed in the train for 12 to 15 hours. They took us off the train.

Did the train move?

No. We were going to Sweden at that time--

Oh.

--supposedly. They took us off the train and back to the camp. And this rumors were that the railway was bombed and we could not go. But there was a transport of women who did go to Sweden from Ravensbrück at that time.

However, subsequent to that, there was also a very large transport of men and women who were drowned in Ravensbrück. They didn't know where to move them, so they drowned. They were on a boat somewhere next to up sea. I don't know which one it was, but that was a fact which I found out later. Hundreds of men and women were drowned in Ravensbrück.

Then they made a boat sink.

Right. Right. And we got-- what helped us a lot in the last few months, really, is the package-- couple of packages that we got in Ravensbrück from the Swedish Red Cross. Of course, a lot of people got sick because they were not accustomed to some of the foods. But I think that was a savior.

From Ravensbrück, we went to Ludwigslust. And that was a savior, those packages. Otherwise, you could not survive in Ludwigslust. It was unbelievable.

Which camp did you say was the worst?

In my opinion, Ludwigslust.

The last camp.

Last camp.

In what respect was it the worst?

The barracks, or the houses, the buildings were all-- there are no walls on it. It was all open.

You were out in the open?

With accepting of a roof. The floors were all sand, dirty sand. There was no floors. Dead bodies were laying all over the place.

There were Russian prisoners there. There was a camp of Russian prisoners. It was awful starvation there. As a matter of fact, they were-- we at that point, which I mentioned, Ravensbrück, those Red pack-- the Red Cross packages that we had was a little sugar, sardine, or whatever it was I -- That helped us a lot in the process of going.

And the Russian prisoners of war were cooking human from dead bodies meat.

Flesh.

Yeah, flesh. And trading for whatever we brought in on the packages from the Red Cross. It was something awful, unbelievable. I think that was something completely beyond one's imagination what has happened in Ludwigslust.

The chaos of defeat for the Germans--

That's right. And the starvation of the people and the-- and you have to accept it. I would assume--

Was the worst of hells.

Yes. I think that the people, the prisoners, or the [INAUDIBLE] that were in Ludwigslust from a number of weeks in the condition that they lived under worse than animals. It was just unbearable, unbelievable. And then of course, one night we were again set on a transport in wagons, and they took us off again.

Which camp--

That was Ludwigslust.

Ludwigslust was the last camp.

Last camp.

This is the end-- the very end of the war.

That's the very end, May 2nd, we were taken off the trains. We are put back on the trains. And they told us while we are the second time [INAUDIBLE] on the trains, wagons to go somewhere else. They couldn't take us anywhere.

At which point, we knew that the American Army is coming in. And we are liberated on May 2nd. We are just coming off the trains now.

What was your physical condition at this time?

Not bad. [LAUGHS] not bad. My friend and myself, we walked-- we walked into the city. Next day, we left the camp immediately.

After liberation.

That's right. The very same day we left the camp.

Who is your friend?

My friend, very close friend. He lives in England today. His name is Jerry [? Hersburg. ?] He is an extremely well educated young man.

He was a-- he is a professor of mathematics in London. He went to King's College, very brilliant man. Then he started in England, and he got all the facilities to study in England. And he is in England today.

And we are I think in constant touch with each other. We see each other. And he went through all the way and then--

When you say all the way, from where?

From Ludwigslust.

You met him in Ludwigslust?

No, I met him in Braunschweig.

Which was the-- of the five camps you were in, that was the fourth camp.

Right.

So you were with him in the fourth and the fifth camps.

I was actually with him. He comes from Łódż too.

But you didn't know him in Łódź.

No. I met him closer in Braunschweig. Then we are in Braunschweig, we were separated. He could not-- he went to Watenstedt a few days before. Subsequent, I went to Watenstedt. They send me to Watenstedt.

In Ravensbrück, we went together already. From Ravensbrück all through way to England, we were practically together.

What language did you use when you spoke to him?

Polish.

And today?

English.

Naturally. Very interesting.

We don't speak Polish at all. I don't speak--

That's a question of feeling.

Yes, in a way it is a question of feeling, yes. As a matter of fact, when we first came to England in 1945, probably the second or third day, we have gotten Polish, English dictionaries. And we have tried to memorize English words.

And we have tried to speak English and English alone. As a matter of fact, I have an article, which I didn't

bring it with me, that was written by the two of us from Łódź to Windermere, which is England, probably within three weeks of being in England, with the help of some of the teachers, of course.

The teachers and the dictionary.

And the dictionary. As a matter of fact, when I attended school in London, started going to school, what we called a day continuation school where we started with, we used to write together with English boys and girls. There was no separation. Our essays, writing in school, probably used very, very long words.

And the teacher would tell us, where do you get those words? Well, we translated from Polish into English, but they were not fitting into those sentences.

But you learned.

But we learned. Just to give you once silly example, we didn't want to put our farm, we put down a fief, F-I-- F-I-E-F, which is a large landlord's estate. So the teacher, it was the English teacher, he said, where'd you come with that word for? The English boys and girls don't know that word and you do.

Instead of in prison, we didn't want to put out imprisonment. We put out incarcerate. But it did not fit into our sentences, you see. But there were--

That's not too bad.

Not too bad. But it was amazingly how hard we have tried to acquire the English language. And most of us were very, very successful in that respect.

You-- you're very fortunate that after the horrible conditions that you describe your health seemed to be--

Yes.

--reasonable. To what do you attribute that?

Who knows? I guess it's possibly-- again, it's like acceptance of things as they were happening, not fighting, and not encountering any problem if I come back to a matter of survival, and being passive during the war. I used to stay at the lathe in Braunschweig, the factory. And I had lice all over me.

And I used to pick them out and put them in the oil on the machine. Other people were fighting with it. You know what I mean?

I guess that they were all [INAUDIBLE]. You follow me? Maybe they knew what it was. Maybe didn't-- to ask, maybe it was a matter of fact. That's the way what it is.

Maybe that helped us. I don't know whether I am right in philosophizing this way-- you know what I mean-- explaining it that way. But it's possibly.

Let's consider something before we move on post-war. You came to Auschwitz with your mother.

Yes.

What happened when you came to Auschwitz?

We were separated.

And?

She went to one-- she went wherever she went, I assume she went to the crematorium. Why, I don't know. She was a young woman. And I was sent to Birkenau.

What's the difference between Auschwitz and Birkenau?

Birkenau was a extermination camp. People that went to Birkenau, generally speaking, in the year of 1944 when I went, in most cases were sent out to work to different places. At least that's the way I believe.

Auschwitz was a more permanent place where people worked in the area of Auschwitz. Birkenau was-- and those who were not healthy enough or fit enough, they went through what they called selections ever so often. And those who were-- and whatever occasion there was they felt like, the Germans, they have selected people to go to crematoriums.

And there were transports that were going out to Germany, whatever it is the fact. From Auschwitz, I went to Braunschweig to work. I was in the camp there.

I was lucky. I went through a number of selections in Auschwitz. Again, I was lucky that I did not go to the-- I was a very small. But again, it's luck. I haven't done anything about it. Do you understand me?

A lot of people will tell you, yes, they have done this, and they have done that in order to survive. I cannot say that. I have done nothing to survive.

A lot of people I talk to say also luck, nothing else. They refuse to think it had anything to do with them. Why am I better than and they--

It was my personal opinion--

--list the people who did not survive.

--it was sheer luck. I have done nothing to help me to survive. If there was a selection in Birkenau, I was at the selection. If there was a selection in Łódź ghetto in 1942, and I was standing next to my mother, and people were selected. 60,000 or 80,000 people at that time. And they were sent to Chelmno for gassing.

I sat next to my mother. The [? assessment ?] saw me next to my mother and let me stay there. Didn't say nothing. Left me with my mother.

Two rows further down, they took boys and girls that were taller, bigger, nicer than I was, and they selecting them for the-- to go to on the transport. I consider that sheer luck nothing else. But that's my interpretation.

What happened after liberation?

I was liberated--

You were finally liberated by--

By the American forces.

--the Americans, yeah.

We spent a few days in Ludwigslust. For some reason, Jerry and myself, my friend-- we have met some other friends, too, but I guess we somehow clicked-- we decided to go back to Poland to look for our family, still hoping-- of course, at that time not knowing that my father-- my mother was dead. I was hoping that maybe my mother is alive.

He was hoping-- he had a sister-- that maybe his sister is alive. I think his father passed away before the war. We decided to go back to Poland, and we did go back to Poland.

We have walked, we have used busses, we have used Red Cross, we have used any means we could. We went through all of Germany through the Russian zone and to one of the cities on the border the German

Polish border. Then we took a train back to Łódź.

We traveled on the roof of the train. It wasn't a very nice journey. One thing I want to point out, which I-- in a way, I feel bad about it and I'm trying not to. When we arrived in Łódź in late May of 1945 at the train station, the train station was full of people.

But there were comments being made here are the Jews are coming back to Poland. And they said it very loudly in Polish. It was very, very upsetting.

What was the message?

The message is that Poland was what it was. No matter what the Jews suffered during the war, the Polish people-- or some Polish people were still very antisemitic against the Jews. No matter what it was.

And it was right after the war. It was May in 1945. Very [INAUDIBLE]. And that actually prompted us to leave Poland as fast as we possibly could.

And you did.

And I did.

And eventually, where did you go? This is 1945.

Right.

Quickly, what happened to you until you settled down in the United States? Where did you go?

I went-- and from Poland, I went to Czechoslovakia, Prague. We had a very hard journey through Poland. We need passes so we couldn't get them.

We got them. We are imprisoned as spies. We came to Prague--

It was the Russian zone.

The Russian zone. We are in prison at the Czech border, because we wanted to cross the Czech bord-- the Polish, Czech border. We are released. They came in, the Russian soldier, a high ranking officer, who somehow, somewhere-- at which point we have learned certain Hebrew Jewish words.

And he asked us where-- we are the youngest in the prison on the border of Czechoslovakia and Poland. It's amazing [? not ?] what Jews are. And we had a feeling that he was Jewish, but he was with a office at-- that was from Mongolia.

And he said to us, [NON-ENGLISH]. And we said, yes. We said, we are Jewish and Polish. We are from concentration camps. We are traveling to look for our parents.

And he said, [NON-ENGLISH]. And we knew what the word [NON-ENGLISH]. I'll relate to you in a second what has happened, how we learned the word [NON-ENGLISH].

And two hours later, he came into the prison and he said to us-- to us in Russian, go, you can cross the border now, they let you through. He has a piece of paper. And true enough, we passed the border with his piece of paper which was a pass to cross the border because he was Jewish.

When we left-- coming back just a little bit farther back, when we left Ludwigslust, the American Army sent us to the next city to get transportation. They wanted to go to Poland. We came into a city of Prenzlau where there were hundreds and hundreds of survivors-- Polish, Russians, whatever there was.

In the-- it was already under Russian zone jurisdiction, and people are walking miles, miles to the train in

order to get the train to go back to their cities, to the countries, to the towns. There was a number of, again, of Russian officers who are walking around in that area, and were saying, [NON-ENGLISH]. And when they did, the Jewish boys and girls, whoever survived, when they told them to go to the site, they put us on Russian's Red Cross ambulances, and they took us to this train station about 30 miles away.

And there was a complete-- you could see it, because the people that were not Jewish. It was unfortunate. In a way, it was really. Of course, we were happy about it.

And they were pointing out, you see, the Jew is taking care of the Jews. It was amazing, really. And they put us on. The rest of the people that were waiting for transportation to the trains had to walk for miles and miles on end. And we were taken by a Red Cross-- Russian Red Cross ambulances to the-- because there was a number of Jewish officers--

In the Russian Army.

--in the Russian Army who recognized--

What had transpired.

--what has transpired. As a matter of fact, it was--

I've heard stories all along. This is the first time I hear this kind of--

There was-- as a matter of fact, we have stopped in one village-- a couple of villages. I want to tell you about the Jewish people.

I think we'll take a break here. It's up and we'll put it on the second tape.

All right.