

Good afternoon. I'm Bernard Weinstein, director of the Kean College oral testimonies project of the Holocaust Resource Center. Assisting me is Sidney Kruger. We welcome Zygmunt Gottlieb. Mr Gottlieb.

My name is Zygmunt Gottlieb. I come from Poland and I was born in a little Polish town which name is Kopyczynce. For me, it's very easy to pronounce but some people it's difficult. I was born in 1923. I lived there as a young man til 1939. I went to school. And in 1939-- end of '39 broke out the war between Poland and Russia, and Poland and Germany.

Poland was divided in two parts. I lived in the parts where there was occupied by the Russians. For two years, 1941 broke out the war between Germany and Russia. Then the Germans occupied our town, and then the thing started. We came from a--

Excuse me. Can I just backtrack a little bit? Can you tell us a little bit about the town itself. Were there many Jews there?

Yes.

Was it a--

I come from a town-- most of the center of town was occupied by Jews. The merchants, small merchants, they were very poor in general. The standard of living was so poor. If you really think about it, I don't know how people survived. We had no sewer, we had no running water. We had no heating, we had no garbage collections and all this. It's hard to believe that people survived.

In the last few years we had electricity, it's the only thing what we had. And in 1941 the Germans came to us. And they came to us. And the first thing what they start doing, you all know, they start killing Jews. This was their purpose. The first thing was they came in-- but I cannot recall things very well, you know. It happened 45 years ago. Main things I remember very well.

When they came to us in 1941, the first thing were they took all the young men, and they took us to a concentration camp. There was a camp in Ternopol They took us by train-- was beating before they load us up in those train cars. And we went to Ternopol.

We came to Ternopol. It wasn't bad. We stayed there a few months and they let us go. We worked on the railroad station. That wasn't bad.

And as we came home, it was in the middle of the summer, I don't remember the year quite well, the year was '42 or '43. And the winter came. The winter came, so they told us that we have to go and shovel snow on the roads which were going to the main roads, to shovel out the snow, to clean up the snow. As we came out there, they surrounded us all. They took us all the way to Chortkov, which was 15 kilometers away. This was a prison.

From there they took us by train. They load us up like cattle, and they took us by train to a concentration camp the name of Kamionki. And there I spent quite a long time. I don't remember the exact time till I escaped-- me and my friend, we escaped. Everyone which stayed in this camp to the end was liquidated. All the guys, we come from the town there were quite a few thousands of Jews, I would say 5, 6,000 Jews. They left 65. One of the 65 is me. And the rest of my friends which survived, they are mostly in this country here, or some of them died already.

You know, I am trying to think-- I'm trying to go one after the other what actually happened.

Zygmunt, what thoughts were going through your mind at this time? What were you thinking about? Did you understand what was happening?

There was on a Wednesday-- I never forget this-- There was on a Wednesday afternoon, I listened to the radio. You

know, in the market we had a radio-- loudspeaker, and I heard over the loudspeaker the Jews had been killed and the Germans come in. They're killing Jews. I came home and I said this to my father. I said, listen father, just said over the radio they're coming in. Then my father told me, after all I know the Germans from the First World War I wasn't a politician, why should I run, where should I go. He couldn't believe it. None of us could believe it.

This was before they came to your part of Poland?

Yes. When we lived in town which was 15 kilometers away they start killing Jews, we didn't believe it. We saw they did something wrong. The communication was so poor. We had no communication at all. Everything we saw there was just a reason. What do you mean to kill someone? For what? I come from a town, like I said before there were what 5,000, 6,000 Jews. From the 5, 6,000, they left 65. All the guys, every other was killed.

In 1900-- I'm catching one the other, in 1900-- I forgot the year what it was. I was called into the embassy-- to the German embassy in New York and they were discussing a man by the name of Pal, P-A-L, this was the name. I remember this man very well, I still remember him today. When I came to the German embassy and they showed me the pictures-- they showed me 10 different pictures, and they showed me the guy which I knew-- I knew him as a military man in military clothes, they showed me a picture in civilian clothes.

And when I pointed out the guy, the German ambassador walked in and he didn't know what happened. How could you tell? I said, how could I tell. How can you forget a murderer? How can you forget a gangster? And in about a year later, I went to Germany, to Mannheim, I testify in court for two days and naturally what happened to him, he later got a heart attack and he died. But he was actually a Romanian. I didn't even realize it.

What had he done?

I mean he killed-- he was taking guns and killing Jews like you go on a hunting spree. That was what he did.

This was in Kamionki.

No, this was in Kopyczynce, where I come.

Kopyczynce.

I came from Kamionki. I came back to Kopyczynce. I'm catching one, the other. From Kamionki, I came back to Kopyczynce. And this thing started. Then they started those pogroms.

What they used to do-- the first pogrom in our town was like this. They surrounded the town, sometimes if you go hunting you will know what I'm talking about. The town was surrounded all. Who wanted to leave the town was shot on the spot.

Then they surrounded the people there, and they put them in trains. It was the first, what we call it aktion. The Germans used to call it not pogroms. They give it a nice name, aktion. So they used to surround the town and whoever they caught on, they put everything on the train and they took them away. Where they took them? They took them to Belzec and then they died.

Then later on they had no time to load them up in train. So what they did-- I never forget this. One of my friends is still alive. His name is Jack Berman. He lives in Germany now. In the morning when this aktion started there was a hiding place, but somebody had to close him in. So what he did, his two brothers, his father, and his mother, he closed them all in. And he himself jumped in and went into the chimney. They caught him. They caught him in the chimney.

The story what I'm telling you now-- I'm repeating his story. Him and about few about 20 or 30 young boys, they picked them up and they took them in the woods. And they told them to dig graves. This was the first time. Usually before, this never happened. He thought that he was taken to a concentration camp. But that was not so. They took him out to the woods and he was digging a grave. And once the grave was finished, they told him to undress. And it turns out that's

when he knew that it was coming. What was coming, they were going to shoot him.

So how many guys were there? Everyone was killed but him. He ran away. They all start running, all were killed. Just him, he survived. He's still alive. He and his two brothers. So when he came back in the morning to his--

His brothers survived also?

Yes. When he came back in the morning, back to the house, so his father was saying Kaddish already for him. He saw that the guy was killed. Anyway, he is here and he has two brothers. One of the brothers is-- they're all together, they're all here. In some business, we are involved together.

Zygmunt, what were you doing at this time, the time of this incident, for example? What was life like in your village when the program had begun? Was it just this one day?

No. I gave you the story so far. So far the story is that it was the first program, and then the second program like I said they start picking up people and they start shooting them right there. And then they took them in the woods. And after this, what I told you the story what happened when they took them to the woods, they took all the-- first of all, they took all the women. They had to tie each other, and they went out to the woods. They had to undress to jump in the grave and then they were killed. This was first the women.

And then they took the men. Then you ask me my father and my uncle-- I had an uncle. Both of them-- they worked for the road department. So the engineer for the road department gave him a W, in German, you call it a wichtige Juden. He was an important Jew. So when he came to be shot to the grave-- my father when he was caught with my mother, this day when he was caught there-- I'm catching one and the other. But I tell you the story.

It was on a Wednesday after--

OK--

No, no. I have to go. I have to-- You see I forget.

It's all right.

It was on a Wednesday afternoon. We were in town. To surround the town, we heard shots. So when we heard shots, we start running. So we start running. My father, my mother was in the house, and I was the middle of town. Where we start running-- so we had shots. They knew right away they were killing Jews. So we started running. We ran out and we were lucky. As we were going out, we want to run out from the town the Gentiles were coming in from the church. And they won't let us through, they won't let us through.

But there was one guy, was a husky guy, I remember them today how he looks like. He was the leader. You know it's very hard for me to explain. If you go out of town, the farm houses-- each farm house had like a gate. We didn't know what to do, but we followed him. He was a older guy.

So he broke through a gate and we followed him. So one of the farmers caught me here by my hand, and I begged him, he should let me go. He won't. So I said to myself, this the end. In the last second, I don't know what happened. Immediately, he let me go. So in a minute then I ran away from him. I never forget this.

I heard a shot. And the shot went next to my ear you know. From this I got so scared so I fell down. And I even looked back and I start running. And this was on a Wednesday afternoon, the day when they caught my mother and caught my father. My mother was killed in this day. Like I told you, she was taken out, my mother, my aunt. My aunt's boy, a little boy said to her-- he was talking Ukrainian-- so my father said, why would they want to kill me, I didn't do nothing wrong. I didn't do nothing bad, in Ukrainian.

My father had this W, my uncle so the German asked him, then he came to the grave. What is this for? He said he is

working for the road department. So he said to them, let those men go.

When he let those men go, those two men were picking up the clothes, the people what they were undressed and jump in the grave they had to undress. And the clothes, they didn't waste there. Everything was done for a reason. They load it up, and I don't know they took it to Germany. Whatever they did with it, I don't know what they did.

Anyway, my father did this and my father and my uncle was released. They let him go this time. The next day I met him and we ran away. Where do we spend time? I'm giving you just the rundown what happened. I cannot remember myself day by day what happened.

This is before you went to Ternopol.

No, no, no. This was after Kamionki.

This was after. After Kamionki.

This is when this thing started, when they start cleaning up, killing people. When we came we spent all summer in the fields. My uncle knew a farmer, he used to come at night, he gave us some food. He knew but he was scared. So he told us, stay in the field. And one day we were sitting in the field, and as we sit we see somebody coming. So we're scared to death, so we start running and we ran away.

We came back to town, and the town was in the ghetto. Half the town was shot. There were very few people left in the ghetto. So when we came back and I looked at the whole thing here, I was scared, sitting in the ghetto. Sitting and waiting for death. And we ran away again. Another man knew another Gentile which used to be an officer on the Polish army. And this man kept us for a few months. He kept us, me, my uncle-- I have another uncle, my aunt which is here, and another couple. We were sitting in the attic for a few months, till it came in the wintertime. In the winter time somebody noticed that somebody is in the attic. So he told us we have to leave. So we left,

Where we had to go. My father had-- before the war, had a farm and he had people working there. He came over to my father-- my uncle said, what do we have to lose. We go to him. We didn't want to go. We were scared of him, but we had no choice. We came early in the morning, I never forget this as long as I'm going to be alive. There was a road going to the woods and a road going to-- we walked, we were going all night. We walked all night long. So one road was going to the woods, and one road was going to this man, to the farm.

So my uncle said, let's spend the day in the woods and at night we go to this farmer. And my father said, no let's go to the farmer. If he would have gone to the woods, they had hunting during the day, they would have killed us.

We went to the farmer, so we stayed there. We stayed by the farmer half of the winter. And all of a sudden his wife walks in one day to the barn and said-- in the barn was a cow. So one day his wife walks in and said-- I never forget this, it was very cold-- listen, she said, you have to die.

Why should I die? I have a child. She was scared, and I don't blame her. And we had to leave.

We went to another farmer that we knew we couldn't stay there even one day. So we had no choice. We went back to him and he said you stay here. It was a miracle that he told us this. She was scared. And we stayed there till March 1944. We stayed in this barn. Then the Russians came in.

And the Russians came in, then I was drafted in the Russian army. And I had been in the Russian army all over from 1945 to '44 to '45. I don't remember the exact dates.

And from there they let go. What happened is a long story, but I try to tell you what the story was. I was born in 1923, what kind of teacher could I have been. Couldn't have been a teacher for the war, how old was I. But at this time it came out a decree that you can-- a decree came out that you can be released from the army if you are-- if you were a teacher before the war.

I wrote a letter to my father. My father was in Poland. I wrote a letter to him and I told him, look I'm there and there. I was in [PLACE NAME] in Germany. The name of the town was [PLACE NAME]. And I said to him, come and see me. So he came. And then he came to see me, he said, you pick up and let's go home. I said, no, I'm not going. I went to war now I should run away from the army. If he should catch me, he should kill me.

So he went back, and the mayor of the town gave him a letter that I was a teacher. And he put this letter-- my best friends who were all those Russian officers. We were together all the war. And they released me. And I came back to Liegnitz which was important at this time.

From Leibnitz I went to Vienna, and from Vienna I went to Munich. And then Munich, I lived for five years to 1900-- in Munich I live to 1951, and then '51 I came to America. I lived here for five years to '56. And in '56 I went to Cuba, I met my wife, and I lived there five years, '61, and this is the longest time I'm here. So I have two sons-- I'm sorry. Go on.

No, I'm sorry. Finish, please.

I have two sons. And I tell them this story what I told you. Maybe I told then maybe 10 different times. And I tried to tell them, I don't remember myself, but everything comes back to me. Depends where I am.

How often I tell my wife. I lie in bed. All of a sudden-- or we go somewhere then of the sudden, it comes back to me. How can you forget this? You know, I told you my story. This is not well-- I'm not well prepared, but the only thing what I have to tell you, what I went through, I went through hell. If I'm normal today and I can tell you this story, it's a miracle.

You know, everyday has its own history. I don't remember it myself. Every day, we were sitting in this barn and sometimes you get a sentence. You sit the year in prison or two years. We were sitting and waiting for what?

Where was it worse for you? Was it worse for you in a place like Kamionki or was it worse to be in his barn and in hiding not knowing--

Listen, in Kamionki, I knew that I'm going to be killed any day. And in the barn was the same story, you know? Like this woman, this farmer's wife, walked in one day and said to me, "You have to die. Why should I die?" You know, sometimes you sit waiting for what? Sometimes you wait for-- you didn't even know when and what.

How did you spend the day, I mean?

Nothing. Sitting and-- now, my father had a few dollars. For this is they kept us there. So he used to give them the few dollars till the money-- one day, we saw the money's going to run out. What does he need us for?

And one day, he made the remark, you see. I never forget this. Everything comes back. You know, we had a hiding place there, and the hiding place had to have air. It was dug out of the barn. So he said, when I wanted to kill you, it was very simple for me just to close up the air, and that's it. You would be finished.

You were in an underground--

Yes, sometimes we use to go--

--like a hole.

--when we scared, when something was going on in the village, so we went underground.

Were you and your father together--

All the time.

--the whole time?

All the time. The only thing my father was not in the concentration camp, and I was.

And what about your uncle?

I have two uncles. Which one are you talking about? The one uncle was hidden in the same village where I was. He didn't know about us, and we didn't-- well, he is dead. He died.

And then I had another uncle which was survived together with us. He was traveling from one town to the other. It was after the Russians came in. And he disappeared. Till today you don't know where he is.

We had so many underground organizations like the Ukrainians. They call it vendetta. We suppose that he was killed by them. We don't even know where he is.

How do you explain the Christian farmer taking care of you and your father and your uncle? What was in it for them? Was there money? You mention your father had money. Were they just humanitarians and wanted to help?

I have to be honest with you. No one would be-- I have to admire those people that they did it. God forbid if they would have caught us. He is dying together with us. And I have to say there was more humanitarian than money.

How many people survived like this? I never forget I was walking in the middle of the night-- we were walking, and there was a light and were hungry. So you walked into a farmer, and we said to him, "Listen we are hungry. Could you give us some bread?" So he took out to give us some bread, and we left.

On the way back, when we survived the whole thing there. On the way back, we remembered this farmer and we walked into him. And he said, you know, we are those, and we survived. We come to thank you for the bread you gave. I can't remember those things. Every day was a different story.

Was there ever fear-- well, there must be fear, and I shouldn't say ever-- fear of being discovered, or being disclosed, that somebody knew you were there, and that they might tell the Germans?

We were afraid of anyone. We were not afraid of the Germans. We were afraid of everyone. Anyone would just point with their finger-- the Jews are there-- it's enough.

How did you find your father, after?

We were hidden, altogether, all the time, together.

But you said, he was not with you in Kamionki.

I came back home from Kamionki.

You came back to your own home?

Yes. He was home. And then the thing started.

Hiding?

Hiding, right.

Where was he hiding.

We were hiding together, me and my father. Me and my father till this-- right after this Wednesday-- I told you, Wednesday afternoon. The next day we met. And then we ran away-- me, my father, my uncle, all three of us. We survived, altogether. We were never separated.

Let's go back a little bit. Before the war, how were the Jews treated in your town, in your village? Was there animosity?

I don't come, actually, from a village. I come from a town.

From a town. The town that you were in?

Yes. You have to realize that the Pole hates the Jew, in general. The Pole, but I have to say, the only ones that helped us survive, is just the Poles, not the Ukrainians. We had the Poles. And we had Ukrainians. I mean, the majority were Poles, but part of it the Ukrainians, too. The Ukrainians, actually, together with the Germans, were killing the Jews.

Were the Ukrainians part of the population? Or originally?

Part of the population, right.

So they were there, before even the Germans came.

Right, sure. The population consisted of Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews.

Yeah, so southern Ukrainians were more--

They did the job, right

--Hateful to the Jews.

No doubt about it.

There were Ukrainian Jews, were there not?

Ukrainian Jews? What do you mean, Ukrainian Jews?

Were there not Ukrainian Jews? Who live in Ukraine?

I come from there. I'm one of them.

He was in--

This is Ukraine, today. When I was there, it was Poland. Today, if you look at a map, this is Ukraine. It's Russia, today. It's Ukraine. It's part of the Ukraine, where I come from. And I came to you-- I'm catching one, the other-- when I came to Germany, as a Russian soldier, I came to Poland, which is in the North Sea.

When I came there, I had a friend of mine, his name was [? Baker, ?] and he said to me in Russian, Zyg, he said, when-- he said that workers lived here. He said that Russian sounds beautiful. He told me, I remember his exact words, what he said, tell me, where the workers live, in Poland, and in the North. When I came from Poland, I opened my eyes. I couldn't believe how people live. It's beautiful there-- beautiful homes, beautiful apartment buildings.

We had nothing. And imagine where he comes from. He comes from Russia. Russia was 50 years backwards. When you come from our town, today, I'm thinking the country was, who knows how many years, backwards. But if you came to Russia, it's even further.

The Russians came in 1939. The Jews had little stores. They couldn't sell this merchandise, never in life. The Russians bought everything up. They ask him, tell me, everything? You have nothing in Russia? You're buying everything! They asked him another thing, but I don't want to say that.

You were about 16 years old, when the war started?

Yes.

Where-- did you have any schooling, before that?

Yes, I finished public schooling. I went to public school. Then I went to, you call it gymnasium. But I didn't finish. Well, instead of this, the Russians came in 1940 and '41, and I went to Russian school.

What were you planning to study? What was interest?

I have an uncle, which finished in Poland. He finished higher education, what you consider here, college. He wanted to go to university. He couldn't go. He was a Jew. So he went to Brazil.

He went to Brazil. And he wanted to study. In the meantime, he met, in Brazil, a Brazilian girl. So he got married, so forgot about studying.

To be in Poland, a young man who wanted to study, it was very difficult. You needed a lot of money. People were very poor.

I was asked once, in German court, I was asked, in Germany, he said to me, [NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING], a lot of rich Jews, where you come from? I say, yes, the difference, I see, between the rich one and the poor one was this, the rich one had something to eat, and the poor one had nothing to eat. This was the difference, where I come from.

Poor people are very poor. Poor is not enough. If you had a good friend, which lived in Americans, and you turned out \$10-- I repeat again \$10-- you lived on the \$10 all year. You lived very well.

\$10-- why? In the shack that you live in, the house, there was nothing there. The menu, repeat words. The menu consists of bread and water, or water and bread, or the potatoes and water, potatoes and bread. This was the only thing that you had.

We had very little. A man of 50 was just about finished. You know, the expectancy of life, people lived very little. And people had very little of life.

What I had, if I think about it, for my grandparents, where they lived, they were well-off. My grandparents had a business in one side, the other side they were-- the difference was, like I said, they had something to eat. They didn't have too much. My grandmother went to America, even before the war. Not many people could do it. She had a brother living in Brooklyn. So he sent that ticket. So she went for a trip to America. How many people did this?

When you were still a very young boy, did you plan on leaving the town--

I grew up with my grandparents. I didn't think about too much. You know, I tell you what we used to do. We used to go to public school from 8 o'clock in the morning, till one. At 3 o'clock, we went to Hebrew school. I used to speak Hebrew perfectly. I forgot.

We used to go till six. And at 6 o'clock, we used to have a helper, which used to help us to public school. And Sunday morning, we had a Rabbi, who was teaching us Yiddish, because we had to know, too. The only time off, that we had, was Saturday afternoon, and Sunday afternoon. A full day, we never had off.

What was your religious education? Were you orthodox?

You had to be orthodox, you know. Both of you ask me this question I used to get up in the morning. Friday morning, my grandmother used to bake all kinds of goodies, what you call knishes, all kind of stuff. She wouldn't give it to me. And I was the only grandson. I had to go to the temple, to pray. Then I came home. Then she gave it to me.

This was the-- you couldn't be the other way. If a Jewish boy would go out in the street on Shabbos riding a bike, or smoking a cigarette, they would kill the guy. You couldn't do this, or you weren't halal.

But you were brought up this way. Maybe some people didn't practice the religion. But outside, that's what you had to do.

Did you have to dress in a traditional way?

No, this I never did.

Was it a mixed community?

It was.

And was there anti-Semitism?

Oh, yes, all the time. It's a known story.

Overt, or covert?

Yeah, sure. Let me say to you now. If you went to public school, 99.9% were Jewish kids. Most Gentiles, they stayed at home. They didn't send their kids to school. But Jewish kids, they all went to school.

This reminds me of the Mr. Eban was once on television. He came back from Latin America. Should I say it?

Please. So I said to him, you know, the president-- one of the presidents of Latin America asked me, tell me-- they're talking about, Israel should be a power one day. He said, have you look at a map recently? He said, no. Israel will never be a power in the territory, but be a power in learning.

I have two sons. I came to this country. And the first thing that I did--

Take your time.

Yeah, the first thing that I want to do is to educate my sons. My wife-- I can't talk. [CRYING]

It's all right. You're doing fine. Take your time.

Thank you, very much.

The only thing I had on my mind is to educate. My two sons should be-- [CRYING]

Should be well educated. She always was made fun, she said-- [CRYING]

They were born, here, in the United States?

Yes. One is a doctor. And one is a lawyer.

Yeah.

And my wife always made fun. What are you worried about? I said I'm worried--

You wanted them to have a sense of security--

Right.

--And stability that you didn't have.

That's correct.

How old are they now?

Sorry?

How old are your sons?

My son is 31. One is 31. One is 28. One is married. He lives in Framingham. And one is single and lives in New York.

Your grandfather?

Ah, my grandfather.

That's nice.

Yeah. So you accomplished something for them. That's--

I'm very proud.

Of course.

So just to go back a little bit, you said you went to the German embassy?

In New York.

How do they identify you?

I don't know how they found me. They found me. They usually have-- in Munich, if you came to Munich, you registered right away. All the Jews registered. It's the only thing I can think of. They knew where I am from.

I was in Kamionki in the concentration camp. They didn't call me. They called another guy.

The guy-- the reasons he died-- he had no family. He died. They called him to Kamionki. He was never there. I don't know how they found me. They found me.

Based on your being in Kamionki.

No, no, no. This gentleman is asking me how they found me to testify about this guy.

Yeah.

They look for a guy, from the town, where I come from. This was a guy-- there was a different story. There was a guy, which was from the Gestapo, which was killing Jews, Jews in our town. They looked for any survivors. And they found me.

When was this, again?

This was a few years ago, quite a few.

What happened to him? Do you know?

He died. It's a funny thing-- I came to my --. You know, you come to the courthouse. Usually courthouses have the same big hall. And I see the guy walking. You know, he had a certain walk.

And I had a guard with me. I said, that's the man. I didn't see him for 20, or maybe 20, some years. But his certain walk, the way he walked-- I said that's the guy.

You imagined, they liked me so much, the prosecutor. If you come to a German court, it's a different procedure. You're facing about 10 jurors. Then you're facing three judges, and two prosecutors, and 20 some judges, from different courts, listening to the case. They can ask you questions.

The moment you testify in a courthouse, especially the courthouse, if you-- listen, can I forget my story? How can I forget it? I maybe, can be mixed up with the dates. And maybe I do. But I can't. How can I forget?

So when he said to me-- the two prosecutors took me out for lunch. And they said, you know, it's been a long time we've had a witness like you. Listen, I had nothing to lie to you, what I'm going tell you. If you want to lie? What is there to tell? You tell them the truth. I couldn't-- there was nothing else to tell them. What could I tell them?

How much time did you spend on those--

Two days. Two days, in Mannheim. And later, I was told that the guy died. But the prosecutor asked me the question, sometime you pronounce the name Paul, sometimes you pronounce it a Paul. You see, in English, and in Polish, you have L, and you have L. It's two different things. But in English, you would never say Paul. That doesn't exist. You would say Paul.

So when I said to him, I said to the prosecutor, my children was as pure as yours is, much purer. Yours is better than mine. That was the answer. What could I tell them? It was a real experience, you know, when I went to Mannheim to testify. Very interesting, very interesting experience.

Tell us a about that.

I was sitting there. I was sitting, and facing so many judges, facing the whole court. They asked me the questions, like you're asked me now. What happened? How all the things happened?

And I told them, listen, how can you remember, you told them the whole story, well, actually-- they knew right away to make sure that what I'm telling them is so. There's nothing here to hide. What is there to hide?

The whole town, where I come from, there were two streets there. You knew everyone-- what the next guys is eating, what the next guy is doing. This is not-- did you get lost?

If you live in America, you don't know what the guys next door is doing, where is he from, what does he do. You couldn't tell. Your people lived there, all together, very close.

I went, now, to Chile. I was in Santiago. And I remember a guy left our town, but before the war. I remember his first name. But his first name sounds different, here. It's all different in Santiago.

But it was him. I called him up. And he came to visit me.

After how many Years

We're talking about 50 years.

And you found him? By only his first name?

No, his last name. But I knew his first name was different. But I looked at the telephone book. So somebody said, I bet you have to believe -- is not a Jewish name. But his name was [? Gagnon, ?] They used to call him in Poland.

I said, this the guy, I bet. And he came to visit me. It was him. I didn't see him probably for 50 years.

Are others scattered around the world?

There's one in Brazil. There's one in Brazil, which survived. I didn't see him since 1945. I didn't see him. Some people saw him.

But the most, well they survived, were right here in New York-- from New York. How many survived? Some of them died. Some of them are still alive.

Like those three brothers, one of the brothers, but I tell you the story. When his father was saying college. He is alive. He lives in Germany.

And you said your father is still living.

My father is still living. Yeah, my father's 96 years old. When we came here in 1951, people, the problem, like I told you, my father always say this, this fresh air, for this he is now alive. He liked, so much, too-- how many people live to this age?

He is mentally OK. The only thing what he is, physically though. He hardly can walk, but mentally, I wish-- if I'm alive, I should be with him. [LAUGHTER]

Most of the people, that you knew from your town, were with you, in Kamionki, the ones who were--

Yes.

What was it like there? What can you remember?

I tell you. I remember this very well. There is nothing there now, you know. My friend went back there. And I asked him, the only thing that was left, he said, the farmers were very nice. They left the graves open. [INAUDIBLE]. That's all what you can tell, is a grave, a mass grave.

What it was, I tell you. It was on the top of the hill. There was a farm. And they made it from the camp. Imagine, the only thing that they did, they built a kitchen. They used to give us horse meat. It was very good. I liked horse meat.

This town was terrific, soup and horse meat, once a day. That's what they used-- then, they build, like, a shower. You know, they had typhus, though.

Everyone died. Nothing left there. And there's nothing there now. The only thing that he saw, he went out back to see it. And he said, you know, the farmers are very nice. They left unplanted-- it is not planted, the grave. They left it just open.

Then my mother is buried. And there are a few thousand people buried. It's a parking lot now. They don't even know what it is. But he told me, you better stay here. Don't go there. There's nothing to see. There's nothing to look at.

I wanted to go to see my mother, and the kids, everyone that's buried there. He said, there's nothing to see there. They

made apartments out of it. Go take a look at what's going on.

Where they left the open grave, did they put up any kind enough marker?

There is nothing there, just the grave. But my wife my wife was in Russia. She tells me, she went to Kiev. I've been in Russian, in the war. I won't go back. I'm scared to be out of it. You don't know the system. I know the system better than you, better than my wife. My wife still thinks that things change. Maybe they did. But I don't trust them.

You know, the system, it's very hard for me to explain what system it is. It was 19-- that I was there-- 1945. It's enough. Somebody pointed the finger. I knew there was enough.

This is hard to explain, the system that used to be in Russia. I mean, maybe it changed today. I don't think that it will. But my wife is claiming that it changed. She was she went there with her son.

How is the system different in Poland, when you lived under the Russians, and when you lived under that Germans?

Yes, I lived, you have to realize, I live with the Russians. I knew that one system, just in 1941. They came in '39. In '39, two years, they came into us, the Russians. Then I knew who I'm dealing-- to us, everything was strange.

In Poland, where I live, where I come from, if you had a few dollars, like I said, here \$10 in your pocket, and you lived all year. When the Russians came in, there was nothing there. We couldn't get nothing. There was nothing. Everything was sold out in the stores. That was it.

You had to stand in line, if you needed some bread, or whatever, any supplies. Everything was limited. There was nothing. In Poland, there was another problem. Problem where they had no money, but they could get anything he wants.

But your reluctance to go back to Russia, is it-- not fear of being identified, in any way-- is it--

Yes.

Really?

I always said to Lily, when I go back to Russia. And what do I do tomorrow, when they say, I the guy left-- he was in the Russian army, and he left rationale. For one reason, or another.

I was in Budapest, last year. And I was sorry I went. You know why? I know the system well.

Sometimes, if you deal with a doctor, and the doctor knows all the diseases, what can happen, it's tough, you know, he knows about it. I know the system so well. I know the system, what was. I don't know how the system works, today. I know the system from before.

And you're playing with fire. It's a very dangerous thing. You're scared to death by-- maybe me. Who knows what he has on his mind?

You're not scared here. He can say anything he wanted. And if you don't like it, you go to see a lawyer. You can defend yourself. There's something to do. There's someone to talk to.

Who are you going to talk to there? There's no one to talk to. Once they put a mark on you, or yes or no, this is it. Maybe things changed, maybe. I don't believe so. But maybe they are.

In my times, no. When I was there 1941, as a young man-- listen, nobody could tell me that there wasn't murder. People disappeared overnight. In other words-- you don't remember, there was a study, you read about, by Jewish doctors that were treating Stalin. You talked about the top echelon there.

You know the lower you were, the better, you were, off. We had in town, we had guys. There was one Jewish man who stole four roles. You know, he survived. You know why? For four roles, he got a few years in prison. So they took him out of Russia. So when the Germans came in, he wasn't there. So he survived.

The punishments were tremendous. You know, you have punishment. You know, sometimes you put a man in jail, like the one lady said, here, what do you think this is, the paradise, to go to jail? In Russia, yes. If you go there, you know, they don't put you in an paradise. They don't put you in jail. They put you in all kind of camps, they have. That's what they say.

They take everything out. They don't feed you for nothing. You have to earn what they feed you. This was Russia. But maybe things change. Maybe things are different now.

What we hear is glasnost.

Yes, and perestroika, right. Maybe--

Do you think that this is valid?

I don't believe them. You know, let me say to you now, I went through-- the system, what they have, cannot exist under democracy. I mean, anyone would say something of, there has to be a dictatorship. In my opinion, maybe I'm wrong. But since, maybe change.

You know, the people, even, are used to it. You have to realize, that the West has a double problem, now. You know, the Russians, the young Russian, there he's told all of them, look at here, what the West did to us, look what the Germans did to us. They did the horrible things, you have to realize. You know, what they did, this is amazing. And this helped them a lot. It's very hard to convince the young people, in Russia, in general. I'm not talking about some-- that what's going on in the West, Hitler was not the West. Hitler was just Hitler.

But there was a story. You know, young people go. They build all over the place, in Kiev. Then my wife tells me, it's those beautiful monument. When people get married, they're going right there. The first thing, they're going right there. You go to Babi Yar. Babi Yar, they were killed, you know how many hundreds of thousands of people there. How can you-- He said, you see what they did to us? Look at it here.

I never forget, it was the Russian soldier--

There's no reference to Jews at Babi Yar.

Oh, yes, I know. I know. I was a Russian soldier. As long as I'm going to be alive, I'm going to remember this. We were near Smolensk. Came in a driver. You know what he said to me? Look here-- you couldn't see a stone. Everything was ripped apart. People live underground.

Look what, he said-- I could repeat to you the Russian word that he said. The exact words, I remember, till today-- look who's going to be alive, who's going to survive. He said, do this, what they did to us. Take a look what they did to us.

I came through the first town, in Germany. There were cannons. This was near [INAUDIBLE]. Cannons. There came a young soldier, Russian soldiers, came over to the captain, to report that he caught 35 women and children. But he told them-- I'm trying to tell you who I am-- but he told them, [NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING], let's clean them up. It's Russian.

So I got called. But this was cruel. This is what I say. They gave them eye for eye. They came too-- this was a town, but the first biggest town was [PLACE NAME]. I wish you would see what they did.

They really suffered. You know, you can just do such things, if you suffer. And they really suffered, a lot. You know,

the Americans didn't suffer this. Even the French, if you came to the French, and they saw quite a lot. Eye for eye.

They pay them back.

Yes, they did. The British and the Americans were nice. [LAUGHTER] They didn't suffer.

Looking back at all this, I know you can't forget. And it's hard for us. I think we understand. Are you bitter? Are you angry?

No! The only think, you know-- you know, I am trying to forget all this, what I'm telling. I've been trying to forget for 50 years. You know, sometimes I lie down, it comes from no where. And I say to Lily, I say to my wife, I don't know, listen, I just dreamed about it. It's periods. It comes back. How can you forget this?

Like, the same thing with this German ambassador, who talked to me. He said, how do you know? How could you tell?

I say, how could I tell? I pointed out. You give me 10 guys, an I point out the guy. How can you forget a murderer? How can you forget him, his looks, his eyes? How can you forget him? How could you forget this? I give you this story periods. How can I forget this?

When you do remember these things, is it triggered by anything?

No. You know, sometimes I said to Lily, I don't know where it comes from. I just lie down. And the whole thing comes back to me. How can you forget it?

What the most vivid thing that comes back to you?

Everything. The whole war. Listen, I come from a town of about 6,000 Jews. From 6,000 Jews, I left 65.

65 men, you can imagine what we went through. This is a miracle. This is the [INAUDIBLE]. Sitting sometimes and talking, it's hard to believe. Every day had a different day. Every hour was a different hour.

Did you ever think that you would survive?

Never. But you know, human nature, I'm trying just to show you. When I went to this farmer, and I was sitting, waiting for work, sometimes you had the hope, you're waiting for something. How could you tell when this war was gonna end? And how it's going to end? Nobody knew who was going to be there. Who give a damn, but media paid attention if Zyg is alive or not.

How did you escape, in the first place, to be able to get to where you--

Ah, so many escapes, you know, there's not one. You know, this has happened, quite a few during the war. Every day, here we were, and here we were. One guy, then we went to another guy. And we went here and we went one place We didn't escape from the authorities. We were escaping just from one farmer, to the other, or from one guy, to the other.

I, mean when you ran away from Kamionki, did you run away? Or was it an impulsive act? Or was it planned?

No! But if you talk to this [PERSONAL NAME], he knows. He was older. I was a young fellow. You know, Sam Halpern? He survived. You know how he survived? He was a very neat guy. And his job was to clean everything for the captain from that SS, the captain from the camp.

He was doing work for him. So he always slept out of the camp. He survived. His brothers survived.

Everyone has a different story. Like I said, again, if I don't remember it myself, it comes to me. It comes when I sit and talk. All of a sudden this occurs to me, this occurs to me. Every hour, it was something else. Every day was something

else.

We were in this concentration camp. The head of the concentration camp was a German Jew. Its name was [PERSONAL NAME]. I remember that he really spoke very well German.

There was another, his assistant was a ex Polish officer. His name was Zuckerman. One morning, we hear, this Zuckerman disappeared. He was right. He ran away.

And this [PERSONAL NAME], in the old camp. Later on, I was told the story. And this whole camp was liquidated. He was taken. He was the last one to survive, so they took him, and took him to another camp. They kill him there, someplace else. But they took him in a bus, on a truck. And it took them to different camp. But he was the last one to-- his name was called [PERSONAL NAME].

Yeah, when you said he was the head of the camp, you mean among the Jewish prisoners?

Right, right, right. In other words, every morning, what the camp consist Of-- every morning, the prisoners, as you would see, the Jews, there was nothing there. He was standing. And he was reporting to the hauptsturmführer, to the guy from the SS, so many people, prisoners are here, this was his job.

When you talk about it, to your-- you said you talk about it to your sons.

They know the story quite well.

What do you recall the most?

I tell my son what I told you-- depends in the moment, what I'm thinking about. But they know the story. I tell them exactly what I told you.

The story is one, the same thing. It may be better organized, or better-- how do you call it-- step by step. Well, it's better done. But I tell them episode by episode. When I tell them, how can you forget it?

They've always wanted to know about it?

They better know. Listen to me. But I tell you the truth, I sometimes wonder, myself, how can you remember all those things? So many--

How can you forget?

How can you forget?

We just have a couple of more minutes.

It's OK.

Is there anything you would like to say?

The only thing that I'm bitter about, that I didn't do enough for the guy which kept me. The guy, I tried to get him, get maybe, his children there, to help him, and to do everything that he did.

He did a terrific thing. I don't know how to explain, but in one place where we stayed, the daughter, he has a grown up daughter. And I don't know how, she got in touch with my aunt. So at least we can help her. In Poland, \$200, \$300, you're talking about millions-- \$200, \$300. So she bought a house, now. And I wish I would find this guy, which I stayed, really, in the barn. I wish I could find him. And I would find his--

Is his name in Yad Vashem? Is there any recognition record?

No. You know what I did? Lily has a cousin, a doctor, a Jewish guy. He lives in Poland. And I backed him. And he went back, and put it in the newspapers. How can you find those guys, never read the Newspaper

I wish I could help him. Sam Halpern is helping a lot of those guys. I tell you what, there's no money in this world, to do something with those guys. They did they-- did that-- I cannot tell you. I cannot describe what they did. How many Jews would do-- would have done this? You know, they really risked their lives.

They gave everything that they had, even though those few-- how many did this job? How many would do this job? How could they do this job? They were scared-- scared one day, two days, three days. How can you live like this?

Like this woman walked in, and I'll never forget, was outside, it was cold, and snowy. She said, you have to die, but why should I die? What should I tell her? What could I say to her?

The fact that she could accept that you have to die.

Yes. That's what she said. I'll never forget her words. She said in Ukrainian, she said, you have to die, but why should I die?

And yet, her husband called you back.

The husband, the husband.

Beautiful story.

I wish -- as long as I want to be alive, the husband. He said to her, you know, they have to survive. And he said to her this-- you know, the winters are very cold. It's very hard for me to describe. A lot of snow, it's very cold.

Go. Go where? Go. Where are you going to go? But in summer, it wasn't so bad. You go in the field, and spend the time in the field. They went, where are you going to go?

Yeah. Thank you, very much.

Thank you. I'm sorry it wasn't well organized. But it wasn't--

You told us quite a bit.

But you know, I try to do my best. [LAUGHTER] Thank you, very much.

Thank you.