

When Yanek came over to me and he interrogated me, and he found out, he said, I'm proud of you. We will be happy to have you as a part of our organization. I found out that he is a man who was arrested and was in the hospital for political activities, and that he is a part of the Polish underground, [PPS] Armia Krajowa, Armia Ludowa, I'm sorry. There was AK and there was AL.

Was AL anti-Semitic too?

Yes, but not in a form like I found out later. Not as much as the AK was. However, I understand also that the Armia Krajowa had some Jews among them too. So there are always some talented people who will probably accept. And he said, look, if you by any chance will get out of here, I want you to go to Siemkowice, to a town not far from Bedzin, where I lived. And there's a fellow, his name is Staszek. And he will accept you to the underground and you will fight with us.

However, I thought perhaps the guy is just luring me in to say something or to make a mistake later on, because I heard many times that the Gestapo had tactics, had spies around to tell a guy, look here, I want to do this and this with you, later on, they catch him, you know? It's like that he's a spy for the Gestapo and wants to get me too involved.

Entrap you.

Entrap you. So I was just listening to him. But his face-- the manner he spoke to me was like an angel, like a person who shows compassion and love. And I was thinking all the time about him. And all the time when I was in there in the hospital, he was with me talking to me about other things, about Poland, about the way of life, and what kind of barbarism is happening now with the Nazis which came in, and the occupation of Poland. And he talked about poets and all kinds of things.

After I was healed up from all my wounds, I was good to go home. My director came to pick me up. And when he took me out from the hospital-- before he took that from the hospital-- I was interrogated by Gestapo again, by the chief of the Gestapo especially. And he told me, look Monka, don't you ever say a word to your friends, or to your parents, or to your brothers or sisters, nobody. Nobody has to know what happened here. Because if we found out that you talked about this incident here, you will be immediately killed, and your whole family will go with you.

The incident being the beating?

Beating, yeah. I came home with that [? Pishniak ?] director. He took me by car home. I don't remember being in car for a long time-- in a private car like that. He had tears in his eyes, that German. He felt very bad for me, and he was very happy that I am coming back.

But he told me one thing. Don't you ever run away from me. You stay with me. As long I'll have this factory, you'll be safe. He didn't elaborate. He told me, though, that he had to use great influence to get me out. And he said too that you're probably one of the very few in the whole area that ever got out of a prison. So I was grateful to him.

I was happy that I'm going to see my family. The reunion was very dramatic, tears, anguish. They really didn't know. They thought that maybe I went to a labor camp, and nothing happened to me. It took me many, many months and years until I told them that story, when I was good and safe. Because I was really afraid that if one of them will just open their mouth and say something what happened to me and how I got out, it will be--

The end.

--the end. This was very bad times. We're coming to times where the young people were almost all out of the city. The city didn't have any more 45,000, but had maybe like 25,000. All the young girls, all the young boys were sent to camps. Some went, some were shot, some were in prison, some ran away. But from 45,000 remained 25,000, and they're talking about a closed ghetto. And they picked Srodula and Kamienice

as a closed ghetto.

Later on, we got all cards that we have to appear in front of-- it's actually like a ball field, you know? One was called Sarmacja and one was called Hakoach. Hakoach was because we had our own team. We had a soccer club, and we had all kind of clubs. Because in a big town like this, you have all kinds of activities, sports especially.

I went to Sarmacja, because I went immediately from work to Sarmacja, not knowing my parents went to Hakoach. I went up to Sarmacja together with my younger brother, because my other brother was already away in camp. And maybe 20,000 people showed up, or maybe 22,000. The whole city was there, older people, younger people, children, babies. And we thought that this was just another registration. There were so many registrations going on.

But somehow, when we came there, it was like 8:00 in the morning. When the time starts going, like it's 10:00-11:00 and no movement. I didn't like that. And then I look out through the gates, and I see German police around. Before, there was only Jewish police. And the Jewish police actually helped the population to go to the ball fields. So let's say in our ball field it was, let's say, 10,000 or 12,000, and the other ones were 12,000. So it was two fields like that.

Towards the evening-- a whole day no food, nothing-- towards the evening, Gestapo men came, in uniforms and in civilian. Relatively young people. I would say in the 30s, maybe early 40s. And they pushed the whole group of the people towards one corner. And we saw already it doesn't look good.

And then they put some podiums like this, like these kind of situations. And they start pushing people front ways towards these stands. And there were several stands like this. And they start selecting people. This was the selection. This was a real selection. They fooled the people with registration, but there was a selection to be taken to concentration camps already.

And one group of people-- was about three or four groups-- one group of people was composed of people who were young, had no children. They pushed to one side. Then there were the young ones, very young like 16, 17. Pushed to another group. And later on, we found out this was designed to go to labor camp. And the third and fourth group was invalids, older people, and mothers and children. Later on, when mothers were taken in the first group with the children, some other mothers left the children on the grass and they went by themselves, because they wanted to save themselves first.

I went through, and I was put to the group of the young people, and my brother also. When we were sent out, me and my brother managed to push ourselves to the group of women and men who didn't have any children. So it means these are working people, and they will be free to go back home.

In this selection, 5,000 people-- excuse me. 5,000 or 6,000 people were sent back home, and the rest remained there. I understand later on-- when we went home, it was evening-- the whole group remained. The group who remained stayed at night. And next day, they were again selected and sent by trains away to Auschwitz.

I went ahead a little bit. When I came home and I didn't find my parents, somebody mentioned to me that they are on Hakoach. So I went to Hakoach. My mother went through and my sister went through. My father was pushed to the group to be sent to Auschwitz. When I heard this, my heart dropped. I loved my father dearly. I had not only respect for him, but the love to have a father with such good heart, with such compassion for the children.

I said to myself, I have to do something to save the life of my father. I said, I'm planning something to do, and here if they'll take me away my father, I'll be lost. I couldn't get into the Hakoach field in the evening. It was night. I heard shots going around already. I went home and I said, in the morning, I'll come back and see what to do.

That night, it's like God was punishing the Jewish people even worse. A rain fell down, a big rain. And the Germans played around. They told them all to lay down. And if somebody couldn't lay down because it was

wet and he got up his head, they shot him. On both fields, this one and that one. That night, I didn't sleep the whole night. I was dreaming what to do. I just didn't know.

In the morning, I got up early. I ran to Hakoach. I saw the whole field was surrounded with the German police and the Jewish police. I somehow managed to get an armband for male nurses. And I saw some guys wearing it and going back and forth, and taking out people, and taking out dead people, and live, and stuff like that. I ran in and I said, let it be what it's going to be. I'm going to try to save my father. If not, I go with him, whatever's going to happen.

I ran into the field with a band like that. The first thing I saw is a girl who I know. She was a neighbor of ours. And her name was Róska, too, and I said Róska-- she was a nurse. I say, I came here to take my father out, and tell him whenever I go for him, he should get up, and with all his strength-- he wasn't feeling good anymore, because after all the incidents, he lost all his appetite to live. Everything was not the same. He was not the same [? Hiram ?] Monka. And she probably told him that.

And the people from the Jewish committee saw me, and some say, hey, you have a nerve to come in here. They'll shoot you. You don't belong to this group. I said to them, look here, you don't dare to open up your big mouth. I have a gun on me, and I didn't have nothing. I said, I will shoot you first, and you all will go together with me. Don't say a word. I came here to save my father. So they became pale and stood.

I ran over to my father, and I told him, I'm going to do something. I don't know yet what. But when I give you a sign, you come running towards me, and you get out with me. If not, it will be the end of both of us. I go over to the Gestapo man-- a rough type-- and I told him, look, there's a mistake. I work here as a nurse. My father is there. He's a young man. Somehow, he got in there by mistake, and I want to take him home.

He says, who is your father? So I say, you want me to call him in? He said yes. So I ran over there and I waved to him to come. And he with all his strength ran towards the Gestapo man, towards where I stood. And he looked at my father-- and I really don't know if he really believed that I told him the truth or not, but he says like this to me.

He says, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] Jude to me. That means, you dirty Jew. Take your father. When I heard the words, I thought that God was with me. This was miracle number two. I took my father out, and I was crying. (CRYING) I was crying bitterly. But I was so happy. I saved a life. And I ran out.

When I saw the selection, when I saw the young children being taken away and driven to the trains, not to come back anymore, I said to myself, if I have the strength and I have the opportunity, why don't you take this opportunity in your hand? Are you going to allow your father and mother, the whole family, to get killed? Aren't you a man enough? I told them myself. I said, how can I live with it? And I decided at that time that I have to go to that Staszek to Siemkowice.

A few days later, I was going to work. And the weekend came. On Sunday morning, I got up early in the morning. I ripped the Star of David. And I walked 12 kilometers from my town through fields-- always through fields. I did not touch the town. And I knew the area. And I came with my heart pumping like--

And I knocked the door. I was not sure. I didn't tell anything to my parents. If it's a trap, then I can't help it. I told my younger brother. I said, look, whatever it's going to be, whatever the time is going to come that you have to go in a ghetto, don't allow to take your parents to the closed ghetto. By the way, we had also my grandma with us.

I then later-- when I knocked at the door, I didn't hear an answer fast enough. Later on, somebody comes to the door, and he says, who is this in Polish? So I say, this is Paveł Monka. I was sent by Yanek. Immediately, the word Yanek opened up the doors for me. I walked into this room, and he embraced me. And he said to me, in small words like this is Pavełku Instead of Paveł, he said in a nice-- Pavełku, we were waiting for you. We got news. They must have had contact with the prison and with the hospital.

And he embraced me, and he asked me all kinds of questions. He brought in a couple other guys. And I said, I would like to join the underground. I cannot take it. But under one condition. If you will save my family,

my father, my mother, my brothers and sisters. I say, none of them look Jewish. They were really all blond, blue eyes. They all had the Irish look what Hitler wanted that all the Germans look like this.

But unfortunately, a lot of Germans looked a million times worse than the Jews-- what they portrayed the prototype of a Jew. Or stereotype, I'm sorry. I was accepted with the idea that they were going to find a place for me. And they said they have safe places.

However, they gave me a function. Not a military function. They gave me a recruiting function. I was supposed to recruit people to the underground, but only good people, people who want to work and fight against the tyranny. They told me, however, that I must go back to work and work in that place. Because this is a place where it's better for me to be able to recruit people. Otherwise, I am completely gone.

Naturally, nobody knew about it, not my family, nobody. I came home. I told my father and mother that they are not going to go to a ghetto, that it will be criminal to go to ghetto, because they'll be killed there. Eventually, they'll take the ghetto. They'll surround the ghetto and then destroy everyone. And I have a place for them, and we will manage to save the rest of the family.

I cannot explain to you how difficult it was for me to bring my father, who suddenly, after the incident what happened, couldn't walk anymore. He just couldn't walk. He was so much [INAUDIBLE] with fright and with things what happened that he couldn't walk, and he was not a well person anymore.

My brother, myself, and four people from the underground walked with us through the woods and through the fields, and carried my father most of the time. We actually changed around, and we carried our father, who couldn't walk. And we had to be careful nobody should see us too. Because you couldn't take any transportation. If we would take a trolley car-- as a Jew, you were not permitted to go with a trolley car. You had to walk.

When we arrived to the farmer's, which was not far from Siemkowice. It was about 15 kilometers away from our hometown. It wasn't too far away, but it was in an area which only farmers live. One house here, one house one kilometer further. So one couldn't see what's in another's house.

And immediately, we built a bunker under the bedrooms. The farmhouses in Poland were one house. One big room consisted of everything, the sleeping quarters, and where you ate, and the kitchen and everything. And also, was a stable near. We dug a bunker underneath the house from the bedroom itself by removing some boards from the floor, and covered it up with a bed.

That means in case of danger, you could see a kilometer far away. If Germans come, they will all run into the bunker, and the farmer will push the bed over it. The bunker wasn't big, but it was good enough to take in maybe 10 people. Because we thought that we'd get the rest of the family there too. So we were prepared.

I again was running around trying to recruit people. I succeeded to recruit my friend the Pole, [? Slusaweck, ?] who lived across the street from us [INAUDIBLE], and also another fellow who used to be a boyfriend of my sister, who died in Italy. It wasn't an easy thing to recruit Jews, because there weren't too many young people anymore in the town. The only young people who were in town were the Jewish Militz.

And as God is a witness, I would never approach one of them, regardless if they were friends of mine or not. Because I really hated them. I thought that a Jew should not lower himself down to the point of helping an enemy. Because he may be saved. This was my crazy thing, but that's how I felt.

I worked for a couple months in Silesia, in the factory where I worked there. And I recruited there another few guys, and they were Poles. Tough, tough guys. They were fed up with the whole thing what they saw. I know what my wife was telling, that some of the Poles over there were not some sympathetic with the plight of the Jewish people in the Russian side. But in our side, I'm not sure that they were not-- maybe they were happy that things like this happened.

But they didn't like what was going on. They were scared themselves too. Because rumors were going

around, and they and they used to say, that first will come the Jews. Then will come the Slavs. The Slavs, I'm sorry. I made a mistake. I apologize for that. And I believed that. I believed that the Slavs would be-- if they would have won the war, the Slavs probably would have been the second to go. Because they took a lot of Polish people in labor camps in Germany [INAUDIBLE].

I went back to the ghetto to get my aunt and the two girls, and two little children. And I wanted to take also my grandma. But my grandma broke her hip, and she could not walk. And it was a tremendous job to be able to carry a woman out of the closed ghetto to safety.

The first time, I took my little niece. The older one didn't want to go without the mother. And we located them together with the parents. But after a few weeks-- or I think she was there months or something like that-- she longed for her mother, and she wanted to go back. And I told my parents that Minna is not to be allowed to go back, no matter how she cries, no matter what she is doing. I think she was about six years old then. And the other girl was about nine years old.

My aunt lost her husband. He escaped to Russia. And I understand he was a communist. And the communists didn't like him there, and I understand they got rid of him. So we found out this after the war. But my aunt was living with us during the war from the beginning. And I loved my aunt very much, and so I loved Eva, what this name would be in English.

And also, I had a girlfriend in the closed ghetto. It was a girlfriend-- she was an accomplished pianist. And I used to go there, because I myself liked to play the piano, and I learned a lot from her, you know? It was not anything of a love story like I had with my wife. But it was something that I felt very good in her company. We had something in common.

Naturally, the piano was confiscated. And later on, she was sent to the closed ghetto. And I tried to give her a chance to survive. I walked into the ghetto, and I come to her house first. And I begged her to come with me. And she had an aunt. I said, I'll take your aunt too, and a little brother.

But this was an unfortunate night. I come into the ghetto, and here I have all these things arranged with my parents. And I myself are joining the underground. And here that night, I came in this ghetto to take my aunt and the other girl with me, and the girlfriend, Bronya, and her aunt and the brother. They surrounded the ghetto, and they broke everything, all the houses open.

And I jumped together with them into a bunker like this. They had a big wardrobe, and they opened up one little part. They pushed it away, and you walked into a bunker. And we all were there in this house with maybe 20 people. So all the 20 people found themselves in a bunker. But unfortunately, that bunker was ripped open, and they start taking out.

In the meantime, I screamed to Bronya-- I said, let's jump back into the house. Let's see, maybe somehow, we save ourselves-- and to her brother. But it was too late. I jumped first. Because I opened up the door, and I jumped first in, and I found myself in the house. And a baby is crying in a crib. They left a little baby maybe six months old. And I didn't know what to do. And they took away all that rest of the people out of the bunker from the other side.

So I jumped behind a big commode. There was another commode standing. And I covered myself up with pillows. And I said to myself, that's the end. And somehow, the baby was crying. They took the people away. They were maybe so satisfied with taking 20 people away that they forgot about going into the house and checking it out.

And I slowly got out from under the wardrobe, and I saw a big line of Jewish people standing-- relatively young. And I watched them through the window, and then I sneaked out to the veranda. It was like a porch. And I pushed myself into that line. I knew that this line must be-- they make a selection either way.

Later on, Bronya came back with her aunt and with her brother, and another child of the aunt was taken away. And I said to her, look, if we can get out of the whole thing-- because we didn't know how long it would take till they will put all the people in the train. And that day, they shot the former mayor of the city of

Bedzin, which was Bendsburg in German. His name was [? Migrot. ?] He was the mayor there for at least 20 years. And they shot several other people.

They put in the train another few thousand people. The rest remained in the ghetto. Luckily, at that time, my aunt and my grandma were spared, because they were hiding someplace there in their bunker, and they survived. It bothered me very much. I couldn't get away. I couldn't do anything. I said to myself, it's bad.

And meanwhile, my little cousin, Minna, cried so much that my parents-- we had a woman who worked for us since her teenage years. She brought us all up when we were growing up. And she was the contact for us. When we were supposed to leave this town, she took a small apartment someplace. And she went to visit my parents, because she was like a part of our family. And her name is [? Vanya. ?]

And when I came to my parents, and my mother said, look, Minna is crying so horribly, we have to do something about it. I don't know what to do. She wants her mother. And she's afraid, in case the Germans will come in. So [? Vanya ?] said, I'll take her to my house, and I'll bring her to the ghetto and I will take her back, let her see the mother.

The second time-- meanwhile, let's talk about what happened. In the meantime, things were getting worse. Trains are going. Every week, they decimate the people. They take them out from the shops where they work with the uniforms. And they were talking about Judenrein. Judenrein in German means clean of Jews.

And one night, due with all respect to Mr. [? Pishniak, ?] I asked to be transferred for a night shift. I felt very uncomfortable to be working yet and to know that the ghetto is surrounded at nighttime most of the time. And I wanted to do something in the factories themselves. I worked one night in the office, because the offices were closed at night. And nobody searched me. The offices were inside the factory, which was surrounded by [INAUDIBLE].

And I stole 500 documents, cards and the stamp, [NON-ENGLISH]. That a person-- let's say, [? Jiswaf ?] [? Yachinsky ?] works in Silesia for the Wehrmacht, for the Third Reich, and he should be helped in any occasion to go to his work. When I had the 500 documents, in the morning, I took them with me and the thing. My heart was going out, just in case, if the God would decide to check me. But I knew that I am carrying a treasure with me. Because 500 documents meant 500 lives. I managed to take these, and I gave it for safekeeping to [? Vanya, ?] to our girl. She became like a--

Courier?

Courier. And I said to her, the first thing, you go to the parents, bring it to them. And I went into the ghetto. At that time, I already had received a gun. I had a German Mauser with 50 bullets to spare. And I was already a mensch. I said to myself, now if I go against a patrol of German soldiers, I can defend myself. I'll be able to defend myself.

And I walked into the ghetto for the last time, begging my aunts. And I see that Minna is there, and I didn't believe my eyes. I said, who gave anybody permission to remove her from the safe place? So my aunt jumped at me. She said, you are crazy. You want to kill us all. We don't want to go no place. Our place is here. We somehow will survive or not. And I begged her, trying to tell her that this the last chance you have, that it's better to die in a battle than be killed like that. I went. She didn't want to go.

I said goodbye, and I said, I cannot stay. I cannot stay a night in the ghetto. I feared it. I went over to my girlfriend, Bronya, and begged her and her aunt to go with me. I said, let somebody want to go with me. She noticed my gun. Somehow, I must have moved my jacket. This was not a jacket like this. We wore different clothes. And she chased me out of the house.

I know she did not survive. I know that her aunt didn't survive. They must have been taken to Auschwitz eventually and been killed. I always felt that for many years that I couldn't save her. Because it's a pity. This would have been something important, [INAUDIBLE] the people to have such a person.

You never found out what happened to them?

She never came back. Never found out. I inquired after the war. She didn't. I cannot find her cousin-- who, I know is alive-- from Warsaw. And she is in Australia. And I was in Australia, I still I couldn't find her, and I don't know where she is. It's so difficult, they changed their names. But I know that Bronya did not survive. And other of my friends did not survive.

I went further on to do all I could. I was defeated, in a way. And I did certain things in the underground which were important for us. We wanted an underground to praise tremendously, you know? We could not even attack trains in this matter, but we tried to do damage. We tried to attack some police stations. We tried to do sabotage. In one of these actions, well, we went to Udetfeld.

What time? 25 to 9.

We went to Udetfeld in a air force base for the Germans, and we wanted to mine the whole air force base. We went in as workers with old carts. We had artists to do the kind of work. And my sister went with us, Róska And consequently, one of the Poles thought that he knows her and that she's Jewish. He told the Gestapo. And the Gestapo beat her up tremendously, collapsed a lung on her.

Somehow, we all escaped, but we came back with two people with a bicycle, and she lay down. When the chief of the Gestapo came in, he did not believe that she is Jewish. He let her stay there under house arrest. And she escaped on the bicycle. Her lung was no good. She contracted TB from this lung, somehow. It went to the other lung. And she died in Italy in '46.

And of course-- I will make this a little bit shorter now to cover up that story. In short, my father got very sick. And he was saying the Psalms of Solomon, the tillim. And he says he would like to see my son, [? Oisa. ?] [? Oisa ?] was Alexander Alek.

That was the oldest brother?

Yeah. We decided to send a group of guys in German uniforms to Markstadt. He was in a camp. We knew that he's Markstadt, because in the beginning, he was letting us know. It was not a concentration camp. It was a heavy labor camp. After we got him out of there, it was changed into [INAUDIBLE].

We sent four uniformed guys, and they came in with a recommendation to take out Aleksander Monka for interrogation, because his brother's in the underground. And the stupid commander, instead of calling up Katowice, believed them, because they looked real. They spoke German beautifully, the same like Germans do. By the way, we spoke German and Polish in our area.

They looked Nordic?

Nordic. My brother is still very blonde and blue eyes. And the brother who was in camp was also Nordic-looking. And they got permission to take him. They said they're going to bring him back. They want to find out. When they came close to him, they hit him. The four Gestapo men, the ones who we sent, hit my brother and let blood come out a little bit, you know?

He was shocked. He did not recognize my brother. He did not recognize anybody. The others, he didn't know. When they got out, my brother says to him, don't you know that I'm your brother, [? Mark? ?] And he couldn't believe it. He was in shock.

When they brought him back, it was just two days before my father died. He got gangrene in his leg, and it traveled all around. We couldn't get him to a doctor. We didn't have any doctors. And the only thing we had sulfa, it didn't help. He died in my arms on a Sunday-- a Saturday, actually.

Before he died, he said the prayer of the death. They call it Vidui in Hebrew. He knew he was dying. Many times, he wanted a cigarette before he died.

We had to bury him Sunday at 12:00 at night, because we were afraid that no one should, God forbid, see

from far away. We took him from the house to a wooded area, and we marked a tree. We dug the grave, and we put him in there, and we say a few-- whatever I knew to say by heart.

After the war, we brought him back to the cemetery in Bedzin. And later on, when my mother died in the United States, we brought him to the cemetery here in Woodbridge, New Jersey-- his remains. There's so much to tell. I know that your time is--

Do you want stop now, and we'll continue another time?

You want me to finish later? OK.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

OK.

OK.

Then we're going to stop now.