Continue, please.

OK. I was just talking about my father's death. And it was a bitter pill to swallow. Because it was just a few months before the liberation. The situation at that time started changing dramatically. The German troops were retreating towards the German border. And we saw in our area they dug trenches all around. And we were very afraid that they shouldn't dig in the area where we buried my father.

However, the trenches they dug were not even used. Because the Russian troops broke through near Lublin, and they started an advance toward the German borders. As soon as the movement of the Russian troops started, we got out of our area, and we moved closer. We moved east, so we should be on the side of the liberation, the Russian troops.

We left my mother and my sister and the rest of the family in the area near Siemkowice. The trenches were dug not far from the house where my family was. I was very concerned about it. However, I couldn't do anything about it. The peasant friends, well, the sons fought with us, decided that it's too dangerous for my mother and my sister to be close to the trenches.

They told them that the best thing is if they can start moving towards the city. Because over there, at least the war won't affect them as much. And they left to Dabrowa GÃ³rnicza, which was a nearby town where we used to live. It was the worst week. Because the fright of being caught the week before the liberation was enormous.

You knew the liberation was coming?

Yeah, we knew, because you heard the artillery already from far away coming closer and closer. So I was liberated a few weeks before my family was liberated. And I went up in Lublin. Lublin was a provisional Polish government set up. Because with the Russian troops, the Polish troops came too.

And they set up a provisional government, because Warsaw was not liberated then. The front was uneven. Later on, when Warsaw was liberated, the Polish government moved from Lublin to Warsaw. In Lublin, I met many future leaders of the Polish government, military and political. And they greeted us with great respect and love. We all really didn't know what we're going to do now. We all were really like not in an army, you know? We were was just unwanted.

However, when for the first time, I met General Zawadzki's wife, who was a friend of my family. She was a daughter of a watchmaker who lived in our building in Bedzin. And she recognized me from before the war. Because she escaped to Russia, and she met this fellow, General Zawadzki, who comes from Dabrowa GÃ³rnicza also, a neighboring town. And he became political general of the [? KoÅ›ciuszko ?] Army, one of the foremost people in the Polish liberation movement.

And when she recognized me, she was so happy, she was crying. And she was asking about her father, and her father was not there anymore. And she was asking about Bedzin. And I told her what happened. And I said, I am away from Bedzin for several years, and I'm away also from this area. So she introduced me to General Zawadzki, and he said to me, well, we need guys like you.

And I was at that time given a position that soon, the liberation of Silesia would take place, and Zaglebie Dabrowskie. I will be working for the security office. What position, I didn't know at that time. I was very happy, and I also was very anxious to know what happened to the rest of my family. Perhaps they are still in the village. Perhaps they went to another town. I really lost contact, you know?

Well, finally, when the Russian troops broke through completely and they started entering the German territory, Silesia and Zaglebie was liberated. We ran immediately towards my city of Bedzin. And as I came to my city, I found out that my family is in Dabrowa GÃ³rnicza with Polish people, and they are doing very well, and everything is OK. I was very happy.

The reunion was very emotional. You can imagine. Being in a war, and all of a sudden, you are liberated. The feeling is just undescribable. You could sit here for hours and describe the feeling, the tears, the stories. That we survived the Holocaust, that we survived the worst catastrophe in the world--

Both your sisters were with your mother? Both of your sisters?

Yeah, both my sisters.

Yes.

Two sisters. One sister was in the United States. I don't know if I mentioned that before. But when I entered Bedzin, and I saw the city, I couldn't recognize it. Before the war, this was a bustling city of people, 60,000 population, and 45,000 Jewish people, as I explained in beginning. And when I came in, there was empty streets.

It was sad to go into a town like that, knowing what a town it was. No businesses, everything was closed. It was a frightening experience to go to a city where you were born, and to see the devastation of people. No Jewish people. Finally, the next day, I found one family who survived with Polish people.

Excuse me, that neighborhood that you went through-- was that entirely a Jewish area?

The neighborhood? Yeah, it was--

The part that you went through?

No, mostly, the whole city was like a Jewish area. And very few Polish people lived there. But combined with the whole area of Bedzin, mostly, the Jews lived in the town. Out of town lived the Polish people. Because they had farms, and all kinds of houses that they had. I met a lot of Poles I knew. And some were very happy to see me, and they embraced me and the cried with me. And some asked me, do you still live? The question was not proper.

But when I brought my family a few days later to the city of Bedzin, we could not go back to our apartment anymore, because somebody else lived there. The better apartments were confiscated by the Germans when the Jewish people were moved into the ghetto of Srodula. And the other apartments were taken over by Poles.

So being that we had a choice, we found an apartment in the blocks like this, a beautiful area, with furniture. We just moved in, because the Germans just vacated it maybe a week before. And we established a residence. Once I established a residence, I was waiting for further instructions to what is my function to do, what am I supposed to do. There was no Jewish life anymore in the city. I was not used anymore to anything else but fighting, and trying to establish a little feeling of victory.

And I used that time to go to the city hall and find out what happened at the day when they burned the synagogue and the surrounding area. And documents were showing that some conspirators-- people who worked with the German Nazis-- conspired at that time to burn all the houses around the church so the church will be more exposed to the beautiful area. And they suggest at the time to say that it's enough with a Jewish presence that they have to burn this area and destroy so many people. And this story I told right in the beginning.

We found the conspirators. They were Polish citizens of German descent. And actually, they were very happy, probably, to do this thing to become heroes. And when I became security chief of Silesia, my first action was to notify the Russian authorities that we have collaborators in our town who are guilty of murder. And they were arrested.

They were brought to a trial. It was a short trial. And they got death penalty, and rightfully so, because people who without mercy can take the life of 800 people and make the rest of the town as miserable as possible deserve not to live. I'm not an advocate of capital punishment. But in those times, I think that was the proper way of doing it.

And they were executed exactly in the area where the burning took place, in front of many people. The Russians were not very lovable people one way or the other. They had very strict orders. And they had strict orders to destroy collaborators, and especially any SS men they could put a hand on.

This was almost like the first function I had. I arrived in Katowice, which was the capital of Silesia, January 20th. The liberation of Auschwitz took place, I think, three days later. Because the front wasn't going even. The southern front was going a little slower, and the western front was going a little bit faster.

It was not an easy task for me to take over a position like this. I had no idea. I had no experience how to run that. The experience of my fighting during the war was minimal, as far as securities are concerned. We had only one way. We can kill the enemy, or we can fight them, or we can run away and try to hide in order to plan other actions. But they say that experience is a mother's teacher, right? That you learn on the job a lot. And I have learned a lot.

The instructions came from General Zawadzki to know that Silesia is an area where a lot of Volksdeutsche lived. Volksdeutsche were actually Germans who lived in Poland and were citizens of Poland during the time when Poland was free. But after, you had a lot of collaborators, people who were Nazis, and you had a lot of Germans or Volksdeutsche who were not Nazis. So you had to be very careful in dividing your work in such a way not to try to hurt somebody who is innocent.

My entrance to Katowice-- as to describe-- it was not a very pleasant one, because you saw the city was somehow not completely destroyed, but destroyed in certain areas. You saw tanks which were not functioning. You saw broken up vehicles. You saw a lot of bodies in the street. And they were already not bodies of Jews, but they were mostly bodies of German soldiers.

This had to be cleaned up. And special units came in. The cooperation between the Russian government and the Russian troops and the Polish troops and the HIAS was very good at that particular time. And I introduced myself to the Russian general. And I said that I'm going to be a Polish [? functioneer ?] to do the work. And I would need their help, because we have nothing to work with.

Soon, when Auschwitz was liberated, I went there. I saw with my own eyes what a destruction machine was built in order to destroy the Jewish people. My heart was bleeding. I was crying. My eyes were red a whole day from seeing the bones and the ashes and the broken up crematoriums. Because they bombed them, they dynamited. And the burnt cabins there where people lived. And you had a pretty good picture.

And I saw people who wandered around without knowing what happened to them. Some Jews survived Auschwitz all the way till January 23rd. And you saw some of the people who looked like half people, you know? Skin, skeletons walking, and their eyes bulged out. The whole form of a person, you couldn't even look at them.

Were these Muselmann?

Muselmann, right, yeah, exactly. I forgot the name already. Muselmann. And I really didn't meet anybody. I didn't see anybody of my friends, because it was such a [? callous. ?] And I at that time understood that the march took place. And some of them who came back a week or two or three weeks later told us that there was a death march, that 80% or 90% of the people in Auschwitz were taken out in the last moment before the Russian troops came in, and they were walking hundreds of miles towards Germany. And in the march, many of them were shot, or just dropped dead because it was winter. And Poland has a very severe winter. And that winter was a severe winter in '45.

So I hadn't been there. I didn't see what happened with the march. But the first witnesses came to me. And whoever came to Katowice-- and I invited a lot of people. I said, if you get a little better and you get a little bit stronger, you come to me, and I'll give you jobs. I had enough jobs for everybody. And it so happened that a lot of people who came back, I gave positions in the security forces, or in other positions, like in commerce, or whatever they could handle. It took many, many months for people to come back to reality that they're alive, and to eat a little bit more decent in order to gain some strength and weight.

And among them, I had a friend of mine, a woman. I'd like to mention that, because there's an article about it written in a magazine in California, where they describe this woman-- her name is Lola Potok. This woman received a position from me as a warden of a prison in Gleiwitz. Gliwice was also a neighboring town in Silesia. It was already a part of Germany before the war. But it was incorporated in our area.

And this Lola Potok had 10 brothers and one sister, or nine brothers and one sister. There were 11 kids at home. And she was a survivor of Auschwitz. And she was in the death march, and she came back. She escaped from the death march. And she came back through all little towns, and she wound up in Katowice maybe a month after.

And when she came to me and she wanted revenge, I said, the best revenge is I make you a warden of a prison. And mostly, what we sent to the prison is SS or others, so you'll all the opportunities to do whatever you want. We really were not concerned about the lives of the German people. We felt that they deserved the worst treatment in the world.

But unfortunately-- and I have to say that-- unfortunately, they were treated much, much better than we were treated. Because they were guilty of murder. We were not guilty of murder. We were guilty only that we are Jews, that we were Jews. But there were guilty of premeditated murder.

So life in Katowice in Silesia-- in a way, we started to see the influx of the Jewish people coming from Russia back home, coming from concentration camps, coming from hiding, or from other survival. But you didn't see too many of them. You didn't see that influx like you would expect. Most of the people who were liberated later on by the American British, and French forces remained in Germany.

I tried at that time to somehow straighten my life. I was not sure what I really wanted from my life. I really didn't know exactly. I had the problem bothered me that my father is buried in the woods there. And it also bothered me too that my sister got very, very sick from the beatings she received in Udetfeld at that time. And there weren't too many doctors around.

First, I decided to move the body of my father to the Jewish cemetery in Bedzin, which still was existing at the time. And I took a squad of soldiers, and I went to the area, already in a uniform. And I don't know how it happened, but all of a sudden, when we came with trucks-- we had two trucks-- and with the soldiers, the villages around all of a sudden find out that somebody is coming, and the rumors came out that the Jews came to take out the gold from the-- they buried gold there.

And I said to the fellows there, let's dig. Naturally, my two brothers were with me at that time too. So we start digging for the body. And it was only maybe six months or seven months when he died, so it was no problem to take out the box from the earth. And all of a sudden, we see hundreds of peasants surrounding that wood and with all kind of knives, with all kinds of instruments. The Jews came to take out gold.

How many of you were there?

We were about a dozen. So I said to the soldiers, set up the machine guns. And if they want to go close, then we will have to teach them a lesson. But don't shoot at them first. And we tried to call them from far away, that this is not gold, that this is a body we're taking out of here. But they came closer and closer, so I gave the order to shoot in the air. As soon as we start shooting in the air, they start running.

So I mention the incident because the influence of Hitler was so spread that even after the war, when they knew that there were no Jews alive, they still were trying to have-- they thought that the gold-- that they collected gold with Jews all the time, which was a terrible thing to say, but a terrible feeling. We took the body out, and we left in peace. We were happy that nobody got hurt. We were happy that this incident was not really a bloody one. But we were ready, we were ready.

And we buried our father in the cemetery. At that particular time already, we had 10 men for a minyan. That means that it was a great honor for my father to be buried with a minyan. And this was like memories came again. We went through the same feeling that we went through when we first time did this.

And life was going on. I did not like the behavior of a lot of people in Silesia-- the politics around. Right after the war were all kind of politics. And the politics came from a lot of Polish different political groups, like the Armia Krajowa, who was much against the Russians. And they were also against the Jews. And the temporary governor of Silesia was a colonel who was not a very liked person.

So at that particular time, I called Warsaw, and I said that the situation is Silesia is very difficult to handle, that we need special instructions what to do. I suggested that it would be a good idea to bring General Zawadzki to Silesia, being that he has the experience of handling cases like that. And as young as I was, and as little power I had, I convinced the government of Poland to bring General Zawadzki, who became the governor of Silesia.

And being that I was instrumental in that, and I knew them from Lublin, he accepted it. And he came to Katowice. And the first thing what he said is, I'll accept this job if you will be my advisor. I accepted it. I said, with great pleasure. This will be my pleasure to do. As a matter of fact, I designated the nicest mansion left in Katowice untouched-- the chief of the Gestapo lived there during the war-- to become his residence.

And naturally, he took over the job, which was much easier for me then. Because he brought with him a lot of experience, and he was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces of Poland. And he knew how to do the job. And he did the job of cleaning up political rivals, made sure that everything is in order. And my job was to make sure that the area was peaceful, and that the people have food, and that nobody is looting and robbing. And I will help the commander of the police and the other police to do the job as best as they can.

Then naturally, I got involved with Major [? Yokovski, ?] who was the chief of the [? Ubear. ?] [? Ubear ?] is the organization who handles criminals, and political criminals especially. And I tried to situate a lot of survivors, who came home without families, without brothers, without sisters, single people mostly, and tried to give them positions, whether in the Polish milic, or was it in the police, or in the [? Ubear, ?] and in different other locations, like commerce and schools, whatever was available.

And then I became very involved-- how am I going to save my sister? My sister was to me like a part of my life, like a part of my body. I loved her dearly. I knew she's not well. I knew she suffered a lot, maybe because of me, in a way, that if I would not get involved in this work in the underground organization, maybe this wouldn't happen. So I had a feeling of guilt. I tried to get advice of some doctors who came from all kind of Poland to our area. And they told me that Poland has no facilities right now to save anybody with a situation like this.

What was her specific illness?

When the Gestapo beat her up, they collapsed one lung. And because of all the situation, she got TB in both lungs. How it came about-- is it from the beating or not? And she was at that time in a hospital. Actually, it was a hospital for TB. And she was in bed. She was bedridden most of the time. And all the doctors advised me that the best thing would be to send her to Sweden, or maybe to Italy or Switzerland.

Switzerland wouldn't extend a visa. It was very difficult at that time to get any visas. And it was very difficult to get any place at that time. It was chaos in Europe yet. The German troops were still fighting to the end. And it's very little I could do, so we tried to do the best we could at that particular time.

When I straightened out the area and things were getting a little bit better organized with General Zawadzki I was thinking about other things, saving my sister, go back to school, do things like-- what am I going to be, a military man? Am I going to wind up to work for the Russians? The Russians particularly were not my favorite people. I was not a communist. I wanted to do something different. And before the war, I wanted to become engineer, and I couldn't. Here I am young and with a lot of experience, but still lacking certain education, which I would have to get.

And I have contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw to try to do something for my sister, and they promised that they will do their best. I went to the American embassy in Warsaw, pleading the case, telling them that I have a sister who is very sick-- consequences of the war. I would like her to be able to go to the United States to save her life.

And we promise that we will sign an affidavit that as soon as she gets better, she'll come back to Poland. Being that I have a sister in the United States-- and at that particular time, I didn't even know where my sister lived, because we lost contact with her when she left Europe. And they told me that they will discuss this and they will let me know. A few weeks later, we get their reply that they cannot accept her to come for medical treatments. Although we signed everything, and we feel that we are not going to be a burden in the United States, they still cannot approve that.

Did they offer a reason?

They didn't offer a reason. They said that they don't accept any TB people in America. I was a little bit upset, but I thought that maybe this is the law, and that you cannot press it very hard.

I met many people after the war who survived, who were luckily here. I offered many positions again. I met a friend of mine, a daughter of my father's good friends, who lived in the neighboring town of Sosnoweic. And her name was [? Lusha ?] [? Frankel. ?] Her uncle worked for me. And he was the chief of the police in Katowice. His name was [? Paternovski. ?] And we went out for a while.

We had not-- it was difficult for people to meet other people at that time. The only thing which binds me with her was the fact that I took her to a party that we had of survivors, people survived the war. And on the way back driving the car, I was hit by a Russian truck.

He was supposed to drive on the right side, and he drove on the left side. He thought he's in England at the time. And unfortunately, we both wound up in the hospital in Katowice. And she was almost-- I found her about 50 feet away from the car, so the impact was tremendous.

And I must have lost my conscious a little bit at that time too, because as I understand and I remember that I stood-- when they found us and they brought us to the hospital, I told the surgeon to operate first on her, to do anything to save her life. Because she had a cut across the face, and I thought that she lost an eye. But luckily, they saved the eye and they sewed her up a little bit. And then one leg was broken, so she was badly hurt.

And at that time, I understand that I lost my conscious then after the operation, and they put me-- and I was about two weeks in the hospital. And I came back to myself little by little, and the consequences are here, all beaten up. This is an episode which maybe don't mean anything with survival, which I had, but it's also part of-- I could have gotten killed right there.

After all you did.

After all what I did. Understand too that I had about two bodyguards all the time in the hospital. They must have thought very highly about me, if they decided to put special police. And I came out. I'm telling the story, because this woman-- and her name is Feiner now-- she married her fiancee, who she went out-- he also survived the war. And she finished medicine in Germany. After the liberation, she went back to Germany.

It seems that this accident wasn't very good [LAUGHS] going out business. And she lives in Great Neck, Long Island now. I tell this story because after I came out of the hospital, I had a tremendous desire to leave that whole business of being such an important member of the Polish government with such a position. I thought that I have to devote a little more time to my family.

And at that time, I went to Warsaw. And I spoke to General Zawadzki, who gave me all kinds of instructions, and whom shall I meet and whom shall I talk to. And they gave me permission to leave Poland with my sister. There were two choices, to go to Sweden-- they accepted that my sister should come to Sweden for medical treatment-- or Italy. Italy had no choice in that, but Sweden had a choice to accept or not. Because Italy was a conquered country at that time.

This is already December 1945. I got the permit to go to the zones. Because the occupation of Europe took place, you had to have a permit to go to the Russian zone. You had to have a permit to go to the English zone, the American zone, and through the Italian border. I decided at the beginning that I will take a car and drive all the way through. But everybody told me that it's not a very good idea, because in case something breaks down, you will never get parts. All Europe was devastated, everything was impossible to get.

So being that they talked me out of it, I decided to go by train. I got a passport for myself, for my mother, and for my sister. I was the first, probably, Jew after the war who got diplomatic passports for my family, with permits of the Americans to go through their American zone, with permits of the Russian zone, and with permits of the French and British. And being that I was a little bit scared to go by myself, with my mother and my sister, being she was bedridden and difficult, I got permissions from my brother-- not a passport, but a permit-- to go with me to Vienna, to Austria and back. And he decided to go with me. And that's the brother who was chief of the police in Bielsko at that time.

And just before-- two weeks or three weeks, I don't remember exactly, but it would be about three weeks before Christmas-- December-- we left Katowice to go by train to Chechen, Czechoslovakia, Moravska Ostrava towards Bratislava. The first crossing of the border with all my documents was easy. A little search. Then we went to Bratislava by train. It took about, I think, two days or three days to get there, which normally takes only a few hours.

In Bratislava, there was no communication to go to Vienna. So somebody told me that if I contact a few Russian soldiers, truck drivers, there's always on the market Russian troops who go to Vienna. Vienna at that time was occupied by the Russians, and also by the Americans. It was divided the same like Berlin.

I went to that market, and I offered the Russians vodka, which I took with me. And I say, I have a sick sister. I have to take her to Vienna to a hospital, and I need their help. So they agreed. But as smart as I was, I wasn't smart enough to know that it was very unsafe to go with Russian trucks without the authority to know about it.

And they put my sister in the first truck, and then they put me and my brother-- no, my sister was with a truck driver, and my mother was on the top of the truck, and me and my brother on the other truck on the top of the truck. And we were driving towards Vienna. All of a sudden, the first truck went a little bit faster. And the second truck approached the first truck, and we see my sister, who couldn't walk, standing in the middle of the road. And we see a few of the soldiers with the guns in hand, shooting at animals, or whatever. It was like wooded area.

And I said to my brother, I don't like what's happened here. I said, first of all, she does not have to walk, and she was pale. And I said to Oleg, you know what? There's something we have to do. We jumped off the truck. My mother was on the top of the truck. And we pulled our guns.

We didn't separate with our guns. And we took the driver from the second truck. We pulled the guns in back of them. We told them ruki vverkh. You know ruki vverkh in Russian means hand up.

We had pretty good experience in doing things like this, but we were afraid. And the other guys didn't know what to do. And everything took a minute, because right at that scene, a car with Russian officers came down that road and stopped, and came running with the guns, and said what's happening here?

And I told him we felt that something is wrong. We told him the story about how we got to go to Vienna, and that they wanted to attack us. Because the way they were carrying the guns against us was proof that they wanted to do something.

Naturally, they disarmed them. And they told us that they are going to go ahead of the convoy, and that way we came. We found out later in Vienna that a lot of people got killed in the woods between Bratislava and Vienna right after the war, because soldiers were robbing these innocent travelers and killing them. So this was--

It didn't matter who they were?

No matter who you were. They didn't ask you if you were yevrey, Jew or not. It was not a matter of me being Jewish or not. They couldn't even believe that we were Jews. But the idea was that they did things like this.

So when we came to Vienna, the officers asked me where we would like to go. So I told him we would like to go to the

Red Cross or to any hospital, because my sister is very sick. So they brought us to the American zone, where the Red Cross was. I was so happy. It was another miracle of survival. This is almost a year after the liberation, and we already were exposed to brutality and stuff like that.

And in Vienna, because of the incident what happened, we stood about a week, because she was taken to a hospital. And from there, we traveled again by train to Innsbruck, Austria, through different zones. In Innsbruck, we stood a couple of days. There was no trains going to Italy. And there was no transportation. I couldn't get any trucks. I was afraid already with trucks.

And there was a train going halfway into the Alps, into the mountains. I don't know if you know Italy or Brenner Pass? We're going towards Brenner Pass. Can you imagine a situation that we stopped for the night in a lodge like this, and in the morning, we hired sleighs. And we had to push sleighs up the road towards Brenner Pass. We're talking about a lot of height to make. And we put my sister on the sleigh, and we pushed. And this was a sleigh with a horse, you know? But the horse had difficulties to make that mountain.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

So me, my mother, and my brother, who luckily went with us always towards Italy, pushed that sleigh up to the Brenner Pass. And soon we came to the Brenner Pass, and we saw that Italy's on the other side already. We were surrounded by Polish military, who were the Poles who were in England, on the other army, who fought together with the Allies.

But they were people who didn't want that the Russians should liberate Poland. They wanted to be the one to liberate it. So when we showed the passports, they arrested us, saying that they don't recognize the present Polish government, and that they have to bring us to the authorities.

Excuse me, we have to stop for a few minutes, because we have to change the tape.

Oh, I'm sorry.

OK.