

Mr. Urbach, continue, please.

So as I stated, in Kraków, this was my saddest moment of my life, not knowing what to do next. I was still-- this is 1945. That makes me 19 years old with the full realization that I have no one to turn to, no family member, not even many of the old friends that I would remember from the past. So I was totally on my own.

With the ability to have a place to sleep now and that students' home in Kraków, I began to think about my future now that I was free, and I also recognized that staying in Poland would not be the most desirable thing to do. Now I knew that this is all-- to begin with, it was anti-Semitic, and we felt it as children. And now that it is occupied by the Russians, it didn't make it any better. It's worse. And at that time, I already discovered that other people have left and have gone west, but still, totally on my own, I did not know of any organizations helping me.

Excuse me. Can I ask you one question?

Yeah.

When you returned to Kraków, were you recognized by anybody, neighbors, non-Jews?

Only by this one fellow whom I have worked for as a furniture maker. The other people in the building that were there before were not there. No one was there, and it was also not very comfortable as a Jewish person, a survivor of the war, to roam around the Polish population and make inquiries. It was not a very easy task. You were not totally welcome back home by the non-Jewish population.

So it was sort of a situation that you did what you had to do, and already we heard stories of other people getting into trouble by trying to reclaim their old homes or their own possessions. So it was not my intention to spend much time there looking for anyone because it was not very comfortable. The non-Jewish population did not welcome it.

So I realized that I must get out of Poland, and I began to travel to Czechoslovakia, or I took a trip to Czechoslovakia. Somehow I did not fully realize yet that Czechoslovakia is also in the Russian sphere at that time, and from my memories of the Czechoslovakian people through the travels during the war there and during my time in the concentration camp, I sort of thought of Czechoslovakia as a beautiful country to live in, and I wanted to settle there.

So I first went to Czechoslovakia with another friend of mine, and we settled for a while in Czechoslovakia. Upon the realization that this is also communist and it will not be a good place to stay, we smuggled ourselves through the borders of Poland, Czechoslovakia into Germany, and we arrived in Germany sometime in September of 1945.

I moved to Bamberg only because I heard of a friend living there, and that's where I went to a-- I stayed in Bamberg. In Bamberg, now, the American forces were occupying that area, but still not much guidance was provided by anyone. You sort of had to make your own life. You had to figure out what you want to do.

I began my studies, which were interrupted in 1939. I managed to get a German teacher who was spending time with me and getting me through what would be the equivalency of high school with the hopes that one day I would be able to apply to a college. I worked as a radio mechanic. I started learning a new trade, radio mechanic, and I was part of a DP contingency that was hoping since 1945 that we will be able to get out into the United States, Australia, or Canada, or any other country. So that was [? how ?] it was.

But the wait became a long one, and from 1945, we lived in Germany. And I lived in Bamberg, working as a radio mechanic, working for UNRRA organization occasionally and studying until 1949. A family of my mother's, who lived in the United States, was also making inquiries if anyone of his family survived, and somehow he located me through the organization that was active in Kraków. And we began to correspond with one another, and he sent me out an affidavit that would help me get into this country.

He was not a person of great means, but he secured it from a friend of his who would have been able to employ me. He secured an affidavit that would eventually permit me to come to this country. But as it happens, this process was very slow, and we finally were permitted into this country when President Truman permitted 200,000 DPs from Germany to come to this country in 1949, that part of the 200,000 that began to leave for United States. And I was among them.

And in 1949, we came from Bamberg, Germany. We were shipped to the United States, or we went to United States. The United States I have-- as I stated, my uncle, and aunt, and their children were living in Passaic, and they were waiting for me at the ship, at the port in Boston, where we arrived to. And I went to live with my uncle and aunt in Passaic at that time, from 1949.

Excuse me. Did you have any dealings with the Joint Distribution Committee?

The Joint Distribution Committee I have-- I only knew of them during the war of trying to ship some food into the camps. I did not personally have any dealings with them, but I knew that they were trying to ship some foods into the camp. Other than that, after the war, it was UNRRA who distributed food to us. It was UNRRA that employed some of us, and I worked for UNRRA for a while.

In Bamberg?

In Bamberg, right, in Bamberg. They were also helpful with preparing us with some trades if we wanted to learn a trade, and as it happens, I went out and secured a place of employment of my own and learning to be a radio mechanic.

Then when I settled, finally, in Passaic with my uncle and aunt in 1949, this was also days that getting a job in this country was very difficult, and I really didn't know where to turn to, what to start with, where to-- we were driving around daily looking for a job. Once again, I was pretty much on my own. In other words, there was no super organization that came in and said, well, we will help you. If there was, I was not aware of it, and I didn't know how to go about getting it.

So I was strictly on my own trying to locate work and earn some money. I tried to even-- and I located a job as a enamel worker in the pots and pans factory, and it appears that it was much more difficult to work in an enamelworks factory now than it was during the war. When they opened these ovens with the high temperatures during the summer months, it was a very difficult job, and I began to look to possibly maybe getting some work in furniture making, which I had some experience. And I finally located a job in furniture making in Patterson, and that's when I started a new job.

Were you already married at this time?

No.

This was 1949. Then in 1950, I have been keeping company was Eda, maiden name, Birnbaum. We met previously in Germany, in Bamberg, and upon arrival here, by both of us, we continued keeping company and making plans for our marriage. And in 1950, we got married, and we settled in New York, both of us. Eda's parents and the rest of the family lived in New York, and we both settled in New York, got an apartment. And I continued a job that I had with a furniture maker in New Jersey, so I traveled to New Jersey.

Eda began to work in the garment center as a seamstress, and we both were earning a comfortable living now, living in New York and both being fully employed. In 1951, Eda's family decided to move to Flemington, New Jersey, where her father was contemplating operating a chicken farm, a poultry farm. And when he moved to Flemington, New Jersey, we also picked up, and left, and moved to Flemington. That is in 1951.

It was a struggle. We did not have it very easy. At this time, Eda did not work any longer. I was taking on any odd jobs I could lay my hands on, which included building chicken houses, digging basements by hand, get under houses that already existed. Anything that I could pick up I would take on. \$0.75 an hour was the

wage at that time.

But we began to make plans for a family, and I also joined-- in 1953, I became a partner-- it was another friend of mine, and we started a building business. It was the experience of the furniture making and some carpentry experience. I thought I was qualified to enter into a building business.

We began a struggle of a partnership, earning very little but, nevertheless, hoping that there was a future in this. And in truth, we did very well. We managed to buy some tracts of land, and we built homes and sell homes, and we did rather well.

In 1952, our first son was born, who is now a cardiologist and lives on Cape Cod. In 1955, a baby was born, and a baby girl, and she is now a lawyer, lives in Fort Lee, and has her own family. My oldest son has a family with three children, and the daughter has a family of two children. And the third child was born in 1955. In any event, he's now 26 years old, so that'll make him born in 1960. He is a graduate of Princeton, finished one year of Columbia Law, and then switched to architecture and is presently on the second year of architecture at Columbia.

In the building business, I continued very successfully and became one of the largest builder in my area eventually. And judging myself on the scale with others, I did rather well. I live now in a very comfortable home. All the kids have been educated well, and we don't lack anything. So we're very happy.

When your children were growing up, did you share with them your experience?

Yes, my oldest children are fully aware of our past, as well Eda's as mine, and some of them could recite it fairly well, what went on in our lives. If I may, I would want to go back to the time of the ghetto and when we entered the ghetto in 1943 and the difficulties that came with living in a ghetto.

This was like a giant waiting room that people were compacted into. As I say, the sanitary conditions were horrible. Food was very difficult to come by. But nevertheless, the whole thing that kept us going is the hope that this can not last forever, that somehow this situation is going to break, and we will see a change where the Germans would eventually leave.

But this was not happening, and in 1943, at the time of the liquidation of the ghetto, the barbaric Germans entered the ghetto and began shooting on the spot, killing, throwing people out of windows in the ghetto, people from hospitals, from other buildings. It was just a horrible scene.

Later on, when the whole ghetto was silenced, I was transported to a concentration camp in Kraków-Plaszow. The Germans were still clearing-- with the help of Jewish forced labor, they were cleaning, and cleaning the streets of the ghetto, and loading the bodies that were killed during the massacre and the liquidation of the ghetto. They were loading the bodies onto trucks and bringing them, in fact, to the same camp that I was now in, in the concentration camp.

Mass graves were prepared for those trucks to unload the bodies. Whether my whole family that was lost at that time suffered that fate of being killed in the ghetto or whether they went to Auschwitz I will never know, but they died in that liquidation of the ghetto. Or I have never heard from them again.

Later on, in a visit to Auschwitz after the war, I went to the archives to look if there was any kind of a listing of my family members, and I gave them the names of my family members, beginning with my father, and they could not find any evidence of him coming to Auschwitz. I gave them all the other names of my family members, and they could not find anyone at all as having come through to Auschwitz.

So I finally thought of an idea that I'll ask for myself, and I gave them my name. I gave them my name as Solomon Urbach. And lo and behold, in the archives, they had me. They had my name. How it got there, I don't know, and in the archives it also showed that I have survived in Brännlitz, in the Oskar Schindler camp, and also showed that I was in Czechoslovakia during that time.

So I ask them how this is possible that no other member of my family is listed but myself, who survived, and

the explanation was that the Germans felt fairly obligated to keep some records of people that left the borders of Poland. But those that remained in the borders within Poland-- they had absolutely no records. They did not feel obligated to keep any records, so therefore the archives did not have any people that travels from one city to another, from a ghetto to a concentration camp.

The life in Kraków-Plaszow, which was the concentration camp headed by Amon Goth, was actually a very brutal camp. In that camp, there were daily beatings, hangings. The hangings were most generally supervised by Amon Goth, who seemed to enjoy every moment of hangings and killings. He had a nasty habit of calling an assembly of some 40,000 people at times, of people that lived in that camp, and select many people for beatings randomly, without any reason or cause. He simply selected people.

And he had the habit of walking amongst those assembled and pulling out a little revolver, which was totally silent. And if he felt like it, he just shot people at random, just as he walked by and looked at the assembled people. With the hangings, beatings, and shootings that were going on inside the camp, there was such a fear instilled in the inmates there that if there was only a word out that Goth is in the neighborhood, you actually didn't hear people breathe anymore. Everybody held his breath out of fear that if he made a wrong move or seemed to say something, he simply would be shot on the spot or could be taken out for beatings or a hanging.

What happened to him?

Amon Goth was captured by the Poles, and then in 1945, after the war, was hung in Kraków by a-- was convicted and hung by the court of the Polish government already after the war.

We had many incidents there. The fear was enormous in that camp. At one time, a SS officer marched into the barracks in which I was sleeping, and the SS guard yelled out, Urbach. Well, as it happens, in the same barrack there were two people, one by the name of Auerbach and myself by the name of Urbach. And since he didn't know whether he's being called and I didn't know whether I was being called, we both stuck out our necks from the triple-decker berth in which we laid.

And now the SS guard was also confused as to which he really wanted. He didn't know anymore whether he wanted Auerbach or he wanted Urbach, so just to be sure, he took both of us with him. They took us down to a little guard house which was operated by a Ukrainian who was the head of the guards of the camp, and it seems that the man that was really wanted was this fellow Auerbach, not me.

And as I stood and watched, they took him in. They took Auerbach in and tortured him, which I could see. They hung him by his wrists on the wall, by his wrists on the back, pulled him up on the wall on a rope. And when he couldn't stand it any longer, they dropped him and beat him severely. When he was unconscious, they would dump some buckets of water on him to revive him again, and this went on and on in my presence.

Later on, we discovered that there is a potential that somebody referred to him as a communist or made a statement as the Red Auerbach. He was a redhead, and that's how the rumor started. And that's why he was called out and being punished. Oddly enough, while I watched all this and observed all this, we were both freed later on without me going through any tortures at all. But it was a very difficult moment to observe a fellow inmate being tortured as he was.

Kraków-Plaszow-- this was a camp of-- most of the people came from the Kraków ghetto, but there were also people there herded in from the outskirts of Portland or smaller towns, the smaller towns around Kraków. Postwar, in 1971, I went to the site of this camp, and I saw-- I knew exactly where it was. I drove up to it and found a giant monument standing about 200 feet away from the road so that you actually couldn't find it unless you knew exactly that you're looking for something, that there was a site of a camp. You couldn't find it.

Also, it was a giant monument of potentially 30, 40 feet tall showing six figures carved out of stone and showing that those Poles suffered in this camp.

## Poles, not Jews?

Poles suffered in this camp, and next to it, evidently by way of a disagreement between the Jews and the Polish government at the time in which the Jewish inmates were not exactly happy with the monument, they erected a small monument that looked almost like a microscopic monument with relation with the other one.

But on that it simply stated on this site they were tortured, beaten in the years 1943 to 1945 30,000 Jews herded in from Kraków and surrounding towns. So the small monument next to the giant one told the story of what really happened in that camp. The large one did not speak about Jews at all. In fact, only Jews were in that concentration camp.

And as I mentioned before, in 1971, I undertook a trip with my family, my wife, three children, and my daughter-in-law. We went back to Portland in 1971, and that was not to look for the beauty of the country but simply to go to a place where I come from which I, at present, considered at a cemetery. And I simply was going on a nostalgic trip to look at primary cemeteries. I did not undertake this trip for the purpose of seeing anything else, and we didn't. We went simply from one cemetery to another one.

Since I don't know where my family was buried, all of it was a cemetery, and that's how I viewed it. In Kraków, we discovered a Jewish cemetery which was still in good shape, operated by a Polish woman. Snails were being farmed on that cemetery. I was told that they sell those because of the coldness of the stone, and all the snails were roaming all over. And it was in bad shape, but still, there are signs of a Jewish cemetery there.

We went to Kalwaria, where I was born. We also located a Jewish cemetery there, and we discovered some of the stones with my mother's maiden name of Bollinger. We went to Nowy Sacz, where my wife comes from and her family came from, and the Jewish cemetery there was practically totally destroyed because in that town they used the stones from the cemetery for paving some of the streets. So that cemetery was practically gone.

On the other hand, in that town, we located a magnificent giant structure of a temple, which simply indicated what type of Jewish life existed in that small town of Nowy Sacz. And this temple was simply not maintained, not improved but simply permitted to stay there because they wanted the Jewish population from United States to visit the country and become tourists in that country. So the Polish government didn't do anything to destroy it. On the other hand, they didn't do anything to improve it.

What did you find in the popular attitude of Poles toward the Holocaust or toward Jews [? when you talked--?]

With the contact that I had with a few people, all of it was fairly uncomfortable. We always walked around with the feeling of not being welcomed there. We better get our act together and move on. It was never comfortable. When I arrived in the small town of Kalwaria, where my grandfather, and grandmother, and their families lived-- I knew of this little town because I spent some summers there with my grandfather, and I knew that my uncle was the head of a religious school, a Talmud Torah. I knew where that was located.

So I went straight to the Talmud Torah to see if there are any signs of mementos or anything of a Jewish background that I could have possibly picked up and taken with me, but there were no signs. The whole Talmud Torah was converted into communist offices of one or another sort, and the only indication you had that this was a Jewish house of prayer was the many places that you could find the markings of a mezuzah that was removed but the marks were left.

Trying to make any conversation with the people that were there-- we began to grow a little uncomfortable because no one was sympathizing or trying to help. It was simply a well, what are you doing here, this kind of a thing. So we really had to move on. We did not dare ourselves staying there too long because of fear, whether some of it was imaginary or not, but we certainly had felt that we better move on. So we spent as little time, really, as we had to in order to take a look, possibly a last look.

I have also located my grandfather's and family home presently occupied by non-Jews, and they vaguely

remembered the Bollingers but did not express any eagerness to talk about it, not try to make us comfortable or anything. Also, this was my grandfather's home. They lived in this house, and any presence of mine there seemed like an intrusion to them. So they really made the conversation very short and looked for me to leave. This was the best answer to their player.

We went also to Auschwitz where-- as it happens, my father was born in the city of Auschwitz, which was known as Oswiecim before the war. And it happened to be a very large Jewish community that lived in that city. My father came from there. A giant cemetery again was located in the middle of the city, practically, a Jewish cemetery, horribly neglected.

But what one, myself and my children, particularly, got out of this-- by viewing all these cemeteries of enormous sizes in almost any small town in the country of Poland, you simply got the feeling of how many people lived there and died there. You could almost assess the enormous Jewish populations that lived in that country by viewing cemeteries in small towns and large cities, Jewish cemeteries in those cities.

And this was our trip through Poland. We spent as little time as we had to. It was an enormously educational trip for the children who already knew of our backgrounds, but being there and seeing it really was a lifelong experience.

Did you meet any Jews who still lived in Poland?

No, we met-- I should say, no, we did not meet many Jews. We knew of some people that lived in the city of Kraków that were Jewish, and we tried to locate them desperately, but we didn't. We met one Jew in a city of Nowy Sacz, where my wife comes from, and he was not too excited about going on with this conversation with us. He was not comfortable working amongst the Poles and not bringing up the Jewish issue anymore, and he didn't want any contact with us.

The same thing happened in my hometown of Borek Fałęcki where we located one Jewish man. And he was now married to a non-Jew, and he was not very interested also. He could have shed some light on my family. He simply let us know that, look, I'm here. I'm stuck. I have a non-Jewish wife. I don't want to get back to talking about it. So we did not have much to learn from them.

A interesting episode happened to us while in the town of Nowy Sacz, where we went with our family, where my wife comes from. My wife could not remember where her family lived. When she arrived in Nowy Sacz-- before she went there, she thought she knew the town real well, but when she got there, it was all gone. She just couldn't remember which street to go for.

I stopped the first older gentleman that was walking towards us, and I told him exactly what I'm doing here and who I'm looking for. And I gave him my wife's maiden name, Birnbaum. I'm looking for that family.

So this Pole started speculating, is it Joe Birnbaum. I says, yes, Joe Birnbaum. He said, is that the Joe Birnbaum that brought himself a bride, a pharmacist wife from Vienna? I says, that's exactly who I'm looking for.

Oh my goodness. Amazing.

He led us to the former home of my wife's family, and he also pointed out all the Jewish homes that were occupied before the war by Jews and now were occupied by Poles.

That's an extraordinary story.

Yeah. It seemed like I had wrapped up the war in a very short time. It was a long, horrible experience, and at times, it seemed like we will never make it through the war. It seemed to have gone on and on and on, and we just simply went from a difficult time to a more difficult time. There was never a end to it until the final liberation in 1945.

You were liberated by the Russians?

By the Russians, in Brännlitz.

What was your impression of the Russians at that time?

Well, the Russians, as I remember them now, as I recall it, came in as one individual man, and I am being told now that this was a Jewish officer, actually, of the Russian army that simply decided to look for possible liberated camps. And he was the one that marched in, opposed to any unit. And I saw him myself.

I did not know at that time he was Jewish, but those that were in the know at that time had conversation with him and learned that he was Jewish. My memories go back to this one solo Russian army man arriving with our hearts practically dropping out on the-- we already were warned that we will be free people, but with a Russian soldier marching in, this was driven home that we are potentially free people.

He seemed to have marched in and walked alongside of a horse that looked more like a donkey than a horse. Either it was in my mind that he was so tall and so big and the horse looked so small, but there could be that, psychologically, the picture was distorted because he looked like a giant to me at that time. Again, the tears, and screams, and cries, and not knowing where to go next-- it would have been an unbelievable ending to a story if it could be captured.

But it is in my mind that-- I remember vividly the people crying, and how we did that crying and laughing at the same time is beyond me. But that's what actually happened. We were crying and laughing at the same time.

You were how old when this happened?

When the war broke out--

Liberation.

The liberation-- it was 1945, so I was 19 years old.

Is there anything else you'd like to say by way of conclusion?

The most important thing of this totally horrible experience that would seem to be very important at this point is that this somehow not be written off into history books and be read as one would read any other history books, that that's what happens during a war, but, in fact, that we somehow be able to project and teach present generations and future generations of what can happen to a minority group when no one comes to the rescue.

What happened to us is simply, where 90% of our people vanished into the European theater, it is because the other people did not come to the rescue of us. They simply thought, well, as long as the picking is on the Jews, why not leave it alone? And that's how our people vanished.

So the important lesson to be learned, in which I would like to help with, is to teach the younger people that this really happened. This is not a story as many stories that you find in books and you tend to disbelieve. This actually happened. People were killed, shot just because they practice a different religion, as we did.

Thank you very much, Mr. Urbach.

Thank you.