

My name is Dr. Sidney Lang, and I'm the director of the Oral History Project at the Holocaust Studies Research Center at Kean College of New Jersey. I'm very pleased that Mr. Aron Grynwald, who presently resides in Newark, New Jersey, has come to the college today to discuss some of his insights and experiences during the Holocaust. Mr. Grynwald, I want to thank you very much for coming.

You're welcome.

Could you tell me a little bit about the town you were born in, the date you were born in, a little bit about your family?

I was born in Bedzin. This is a town on the border between-- before the war, before the First World War, this was like six miles from the border. Sometimes, this town was Germany. Sometimes, it was Poland. Now, it's just Poland.

What year were you born in?

I was born in October 21, 1904 in this town. This town was a Jewish town, they call, because the town was 50,000 residents. From this 50,000 was 35,000 to 40,000 Jews. The rest was Poles.

The whole economic-- there was the Jewish. The factories in this town was Jewish, the stores, everything. It was a Jewish town.

My father was a very religious man. He was president from the orthodoxy, from the Agudat Yisrael in this town. He was president from the Talmud Torah they called this. He was president from the Jewish-- I suppose not like a hospital, but it's called [SPEAKING HEBREW] in Hebrew. He was president.

He was over there when a poor woman has to be born a child, she come over there. This was on the cost for this [SPEAKING HEBREW]. But the [SPEAKING HEBREW] was also an old age home. It was a few poor people. And he was used to have a [INAUDIBLE]. You know what is [INAUDIBLE]?

No.

When they circumcise a boy.

A sandek?

A sandek.

That's right, yeah.

Yes, sandek -- The men would hold this -- he's sitting on the [INAUDIBLE]. And for this, he gift. Sometimes, he went to home to the poor people. For why he did it? He give them for the party money for-- as I said, for the honey cake, for vodka, for drinks, and so on.

I tell you I curious. One time, come a man and told him that his wife has born a boy. He needed to prepare for the party. He take the address.

OK, he give him the money. And he-- I invited you for the Sunday to be for this he gave the money. Then, the day he come over there, nobody was [LAUGHS] there. Sometimes also so.

He owned a factory, wire. Wire dooring, wire fence, wire cloth, everything made from the wire, can say, he had the factory. The factory he established in 1903, at this time.

I was the second. Before me was a sister. We were ten kids. When I was three years, he took the tallis around me and took me under arm to the cheder. They told me so. I don't remember this. I am three years.

He provide just like they say. By five years, I started Chumash. He made a big party. And I get a gift from my grandfather, three silver [INAUDIBLE] in this time. And I had these--

Kiddush cups.

I had these till the Germans took this me away, kiddush [INAUDIBLE].

That's silver kiddush cups.

Yeah, kiddish cups. And he, by five years, like he said in the Mishnah [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. This is something I forgot. [Hebrew]

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

And now, I am [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

[LAUGHTER]

I learned in the yeshiva also after the cheder, Gemara, first -- I learned in the yeshiva. But I was, in this time, looking in conspiracy Yiddish literature. And this was forbidden to read, something from parents. Sholom Aleichem --

Your father forbade it.

Yes, my father forbid it.

Why?

Why? This was orthodoxy. This was traif, traif.

Right.

Not kosher. One time, my father come, when I learned in the yeshiva. He said that I am not learning. I fool around. And the Rabbi told him so, that I don't want to learn.

Then, he said to me, that you don't want to learn, I will take you to the factory. And you will be a shoe -- a shoemaker, I will make. He took me in the factory. And he said to the foreman, you treat him like everybody, not like my son. So he was angry.

He finally sent me to the school. I learned. Then, he sent me to Germany. And I finished over there in [? Brig ?] by Breslau, not far from Breslau.

What year did he send you to Germany?

This was after the war, after the First World War, 1918 or 1919. [INAUDIBLE]

So you were about 15 years old when you went--

Yeah.

--to Germany. You went to yeshiva in Germany?

No, no, no. To a technical school.

You went to a technical school.

This was a [SPEAKING GERMAN], they call this in Germany. I finished over there. He said, when you won't

learn he has no other choice. I finished, and I practiced in Germany over there in a factory. I practiced a certain time. And I come back home.

I was at home. I have my diploma-- like a technique--

Technical Diploma.

Technical Diploma. And I was employed by my father in the factory. After, my sister, what was before me, she was in the university. She finished university. And she finished also she has the title doctor.

The other sisters went to the schools. They finished high school. They finished the -- And about the brothers, all to the cheder. This was all in Poland. The orthodoxy, the women to these general schools, but the boys to the cheder.

But the one break out. Nobody in this time won't learn in the cheder -- The second brother after me don't want ; the third the fifth. He learned. He was younger.

1927, I met my wife. Then, I started--

So you were 33 years old--

Yeah.

--when you met your wife.

Yes. And I started to build me a factory. I [? was-- ?]

Your father was still alive at this time?

Yeah, he was alive, of course. I build myself machines to this what I can. Some I bought. And I moved with these machines to Kraków.

I give this not my name like an owner but under other name, Kraków Wire Factory. In the register, by the court, there was my name, that I am the owner of this. And I feel that I have ground that I can-- this became prosperous, this.

Then, I married. We married in 1939 in Kraków, where we lived in Kraków, at this time.

Were there any changes in Kraków between 1933 and 1937?

Changes like when you see there wasn't the same like in Bedzin in home. But in 1933, when Hitler came to power, before Hitler came to power, even Hitler came to power more, the Polish government started antisemitic limits for the Jews. You cannot do. This you cannot-- Some limit.

Like my sister cannot go to the university to study, I give you example, to study what she want because this was numerous clauses for the Jewish students. They hit the Jewish students. The Polish students hit Jewish students.

The Jewish students-- this was a law in the universities-- the Jewish student has to sit on this bench, a ghetto they made for the Jewish students. And the Jewish students don't want to sit. And they stood. They always were standing because this protest that they were standing. There was a thing.

And they hit them because why you don't sit down? The professors was antisemitic. A few were more liberals, progressives. And we feel this in the business too, mostly in the economic.

My father's factory, this was where we lived. This was our town. The whole state, this is called in Germany, Oberschlesien. There was the miners. They sent them from the coal miners. They sent them from the steel

industry. We have orders from them. This was for the industry and some for the agriculture too.

They came the director from the big steel industry. He said to my father, Grynwald, I want to give you the orders, but it's not allowed. Do something.

Then, my father sent a Polish man. The Polish man took his name the order and give this to my father. A middle man, the Polish, he must be. For this reason, I not give my name in Kraków.

On the business.

For the business. This is [INAUDIBLE], Kraków Wire Factory.

So you married your wife, you said, in 19--

'39. On March 8th 1939. And we lived near the factory. On the 1st September, 1939, in the morning, the Germans bombed Kraków in Poland. They start the war. This was Friday. Sunday, they--

Did you know? Or did you have any warning that Germany--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

No, nothing. In the morning, Friday, in the morning, we hear a bomb. Then we take the radio. We hear this is--

Did you know what was going on in Germany though between 1933 and '39?

Yes.

But you didn't think that anything--

Did I tell you that they pushed out from Germany the Jews what was born in Poland--

Right.

--or their fathers was born in Poland. And they come to us, to Poland. And this was collecting clothes and other things. But they come naked.

They come to [Place name] This is a town where the Poles don't let them in. And the Germans don't let [? them. ?] There was a no man's [? land. ?] Under the skies, they was living.

They collect the money from the Jewish people, the Jewish community collected, in the whole Poland, clothes and money for them. And we feel that the 1st of September, this is war. We know what is Hitler. But we didn't imagine this will be so [INAUDIBLE].

Because I was in Germany. I lived in Germany. I studied in Germany. This is other. People was cultured and people, were very friendly.

Sunday, in the morning, all Jews go out. Not only Jews, but Polish people also from Kraków. They said we go out to the east, everybody. And over there will be the Polish resistance against the Germany, the army.

We went to a town-- Szydłowiec it was called.

Did you go with your wife?

I with my wife and our neighbors, all we go. We come over there in the evening. The day later, they said we have to go across the Vistula, the river. This is the biggest river in Poland, Vistula.

We have to go because over there will be the front. We [? want ?] fight the Germans. They said, all men have to go over there. My wife said to me, go. Everybody going because the Germans will kill all the men, they said so also.

I went with my neighbor where I lived. We went. But after four days, the Germans catch us. The Polish army was running retreat and we with the army.

And they found there the Germans catch us. And then we were staying in a small village, a very small village with one Jew was only over there. We went to this Jew because we see we are -- it's nothing. The Polish army is not able to fight with the Germans.

We stayed. by the Jew. they said, we will wait a few days till the front will go. And then we go back to Kraków. This was near Kolbeshev. I don't remember the [? small ?] [? things. ?] We stayed over there over Rosh ha-Shanah.

After Rosh ha-Shanah, that day, we started to go back by foot to Kraków. On the road, oh, Jews, Jews. And the Germans catch us to work. We have to work.

I come back to Kraków. I come back to my house. My wife was waiting. The Germans give for the Jews a limit. You have till 7 o'clock curfew. You have to stay home. From 7 o'clock till the morning, I don't remember what time in the morning. But the evening, 7 o' clock was not allowed for Jews to go out.

To buy bread-- this was at Jewish bakeries. Mostly it was Jews in Kraków. But the owner can do nothing.

This was a line for bread. When I stand in the line, the Poles called the German police, [INAUDIBLE] Jude.. There's a Jew. He pulled me out from the line. Jews had not the right to get bread.

I remember the wife on the back said, what I can do? Jewish. She was Jewish. I am working. And they denounced everybody. This was the bakery what I bought every time by her bread. She said, I hide bread. But they come. They find. This was terrible for the Jews because the Polish people were very antisemitic.

Then come also contribution. The Jewish, like you said, Judenrat, must pay so much and so much money, so much and so much linens. The German give -- we must give to them.

Then, every day, people to work for them. I work a lot of days. One day in the week or something. Mostly Sunday because I was working in the factory. The Sunday I was free, I went to work to clean the streets in Kraków from snow, from ice, so to clean.

Sometimes, they send me to the military Kaserne to clean. But I remember when we went to the Kaserne, we work over there in a hospital. We this time, it was a few Jews. We made sabotage over there.

The Kaserne is the--

Well, it's military.

The military headquarters?

Like here, Fort Dix.

OK.

How you call this?

Military camp.

Military camp. That's it. What we can do to damage them, we did. I remember we transferred bandages for the hospital. We put in the middle that something for the horses, what we find. so that they cannot -- This

was not a big damage for them. But --

Sometimes, they beat us. This belonged to which place we came to work by the military. Sometimes, they beat us. And sometimes, it was that some people come no back from the work also.

In this time, they divided us from our parents. The towns where my parents lived and the parents for my wife, the family for my wife, they add this to the Third Reich to Germany. That means that over there was German. Bedzin they call Bendsburg. And Zawierce for my wife, Warthenau This was not possible to have communication like before.

Yes, the Germans gave an order that they have to wear bands with the Star of David, every Jew. It was who will not have the band, they will shoot.

Do you remember what date that was?

I don't remember this. But this was in the beginning some--

In this time, on the street where we lived, was many Jews from Germany, what they come in 1938. They come to us, their neighbors. They said to us, Mr. Grynwald, you are with Well -- You have a nice apartment. Here is a couple.

This couple was going to Russia in this time because Poland was divided between Russia and Germany.

Right.

And they catch them. And the Germans catch them. And they sent him back. So they come back to Kraków. They were from Oberschlesien. But they cannot go back because this was a new border.

And they come. The neighbors take this couple in. We took them in. We gave them a room. We live very nice people.

I work in my factory. This man become a gardener by the Gestapo. And he worked by the Gestapo like a gardener.

In 1940, they come an order oh, there's too much Jews are in Kraków-- this was in this time. 84,000 and still was coming from other, from the Third Reich, they pushed out Jews to Kraków. The Germans come, too much Jews. We have to transport them to the east. And I also get a paper to come to this in this place, to go to the transport.

You yourself, not you and your wife?

No, this me and my wife too.

And your wife also.

Yes. My wife went to the Chamber of Commerce. This was a whole history with her, they catch her that she hid the band from the star of David because it's not allowed to go over there Jews.

And this chamber of commerce where I was a registered because I had a factory-- there was my name over there, not the name for the factory. They said, did you have a commissaire? You know, the Germans, they took over every factory was belong to Jews. They called this the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. I don't know what in English I can-- this is the headquarters for all Jewish industry, all Jewish stores, big stores.

My wife had no. You have to have a commissaire, a German, then we give you the permit to live here in Kraków. They give us a commissaire, a German, Mr. [? Ertel ?] from Wien, Vienna. And one time, he came to me, to my house, in the morning. He said before, I be -- I will come.

He came and took me to the headquarters from the, I -- Arbeit -- This is like--

The work--

Labor--

Labor force. Department of--

Of Labor. The Department of Labor. Over there, it was forbidden for me to go with a car. And this was in the German section from the town. He said to me, you sit in the car. He went out and looked. This was in the morning-- 8 o'clock. They started to work 8 o'clock. This was before 8:00.

And then he opened the door. He said, [INAUDIBLE]. Right away, in. Because on the sidewalk can be caught somebody from [INAUDIBLE]. Over there, only police, military men, only Germans. He went me to the office. And he gave my papers.

I had the diploma from the German school, technical school. I had from the factory what I practices. And I was staying. And the man, I remember his name, what was the head from this Labor Department-- [Personal name]

He said, look, to the other people. Look-- a Jew is the wire doing. A Jew, wire fence, wire weaving. This was not a Jewish--

It was an unusual occupation.

Occupation for Jews. But I was for this because my father has this, and I too. He said, he is the one in the whole general government. One Jew from this profession. And he right away give me the permission that I can live here in Kraków. And I can work in the factory.

This was 1940. 1941, and there was a ghetto come to life. I get from the Judenrat-- I show them that I'm working. I have the permit to be here from the Labor Department. And I am working. They give me in two rooms three families.

Which ghetto was this?

Kraków. Ghetto Kraków.

Their man what was living, this couple, with me, he was privileged because he worked by the Gestapo like a guard there. And the Gestapo worker has a special house. All people were to work by the Gestapo-- the tailors, the shoemakers, the furriers, carpenters, mechanics, and so on. And he got two rooms, he and his wife.

Then, he said to me, Mr. Grynwald, I was living by you for 1940 near a year by you. Over a year. Over a year. Some 14 months. Now, when you want, you can live with us. And you have a choice what you want-- the kitchen or the room. We shared this two-room apartment. We was living over there.

How many people were living in the ghetto. Do you know?

In the ghetto? I think in the beginning, it was like-- exactly, I cannot tell you. But I think 10,000. 12,000, maybe.

How big was the ghetto?

What I can tell you? I don't have the measure from the kilometers, the miles, the miles squared or something.

But 10,000 people were concentrated in a--

But I have the plan. I have the plan from the ghetto in the book what I show you. This--

10,000 people were concentrated in very small areas.

Yeah, we were squeezed. And the ghetto started there March 20, '41.

The head, I must say to you, from the Judenrat, was Professor Biberstein. He was a professor in the Jewish gymnasium, high school. But he was not for the Germans. He was chairman from the Judenrat. But for the Jews, he was working.

He refused them. Then, they took him. And they give him in the prison. And they finished him. And they nominate another head from the Judenrat, Dr. Rosenzweig. I don't know the name. But he was also a fine man. And finally, they give him the transport.

Intelligent people for them was not good. Then in 1943-- that was in 1942. I only give you about the chairmen from the Judenrat. They give chairman from the Judenrat a man not intelligent, nothing.

And this was good for them because he listened to the orders more for the Germans than for the Jewish people. I only knew about the different from Professor Biberstein, from Dr. Rosenzweig-- I don't remember. Dr. Rosenzweig, and the third was Gutter that was from these Jews what was coming 1928 from Germany, he was.

And 27th of December 1941, there was an order to give all fur coats everything, gloves, hats, for the German army. And the Judenrat has to collect it. And who will not give, right away, death. Everything was right away to shot.

Many people, they burned their things. Many people. But they was wrong because we could see in the chimneys. This is going. the camp people said, don't do this because they are looking, the Germans. IWe give up the fur, i give up my fur coat. My wife give up the fur coat, everything.

I still was going out. I had a permit from this Arbeit, from the Labor Department, to go out to the factory. In the evening, I come back. And when I was over there, I can buy me food. And I bring me in this ghetto.

I had family in Warsaw. My father was born in Warsaw. He has, over there, a brother, a sister, uncles. My mother write me that uncle [Levin and the tante is in Warsaw, in ghetto over there. It was 1941.

And you can do something because there wasn't a Third Reich Germany. But I was in Poland. I can send. But a Jew cannot send.

I took my worker from the factory. And he sent this. He went in the post office. He sent that package to the ghetto. You can send five kilo. What you want, only five kilos.

I sent my wife's melt fat in a bottle. I sent a kilo of flour. This a kilo, this a kilo, kasha and other things.

One time, I bought by a peasant. Outside when I went to the factory. Over there, I came. I bought a bottle of honey. That was something--

Special.

--extra. And we said, we will send this to our uncle Levin. We get back a letter from the tante. Every time, the tante was writing.

And the uncle was writing in Hebrew. And my wife was the secretary. She was writing to our home, to her family. And she write that she get a letter from the tante that from the whole packages what you sent, butter, schmaltz, fat, and other things, the [INAUDIBLE] is not eating from this because it's not maybe kosher.



But the honey was kosher. This is not special. Thank you for this because I only keep this for him.

She write this. My father answered her. You know what you have? A [INAUDIBLE] that uncle Levin write to you a letter. Keep this letter. And she keep this till Auschwitz. Till 1944, she keep this letter.

In Auschwitz, they took off everything. 1941, I must say who was that uncle. 1941, when we wasn't still in the ghetto, before the ghetto-- 1940 this was. 1940. They get a Rabbi. You hear about him.

He was in Kraków. He was from Warsaw. He was coming to Kraków. And even Kraków, he was going-- the Gestapo took him to Italy and from Italy to Israel in war time. He has the right to take with him 10 people. One from the choices--

Was your uncle.

--was my uncle.

Why did the Gestapo let him go to--

I tell you. I tell you. The uncle, they call him the in the ghetto --

[INAUDIBLE]?

The [INAUDIBLE], the prime minister from the [INAUDIBLE]. He was related with the Rabbi. His brother was a brother-in-law from ghetto rabbi. His brother.

But he refused to go with the Rabbi. He will stay with his wife and children. He has nine children. He chose to stay in the Warsaw ghetto with them, with the wife and children.

And his place went [personal name] Levin, his nephew, a nephew from him, [Personal name] Levin left his wife and two kids. He went with the Rabbi.

Did the Rabbi take his own family?

Yeah, own family. This cost a lot of money. This meant the agency from the Agudat Yisrael in London, in Switzerland, they made this business with the Gestapo. They paid a lot of money for them, for the Rabbi with this [INAUDIBLE].

I give you a story. [Personal name] Levin, when he come in the other side, he sent papers for his wife and kids to take them out, that they are citizens for some other [INAUDIBLE] country. But she wasn't. She was taken to Treblinka this time. And she lived.

For my uncle, the uncle, the tante and the nine kids what he has, only two daughters saved after the war. One was running away from Warsaw Ghetto to Bedzin, where her sister, older sister, was living. And they went to Auschwitz. She was a nurse in the hospital in Auschwitz. And she saved her sister. She hid her.

After the war, they went from Auschwitz. The Russians took them because they said that they are from France. Then, the Russians took them to Russia, to Ukraine, to Odessa, and over there, with a boat, to Marseilles.

Then, they was coming to Marseilles, the two sisters, Levin. They went to the Jewish Committee. And they said, we are here, our name. Give to Meir [INAUDIBLE] Levin. You hear about him? He was minister. [INAUDIBLE] and the independence declaration from Israel, he signed it, that we are here.

Then come back right away to the committee. Give them what they needed because they were in their stripes still. Giving them what they needed. I will give you back.

The oldest one, the sister, married a cousin, [Personal name] Levin. He replaced her father. She moved to Israel. No, [Personal name] Levin died maybe four or five years ago in Israel. This is one. The other sister was living in Paris.

This was 1940, he went to Israel. 1941, my wife smuggled to her-- she went to see her mother. She made it to the borders. She risked her life. And she came back 1941.

That was the one time she went out of the--

Yes.

--out of the ghetto.

Yes, she came back. 1942, the life in the ghetto between the Jews was good. But outside, we feel in every-- I was going to the factory. The Poles knew the Jews.

In June 1942, on the 3rd of June, the 3rd of June 1942, they closed the ghetto. Military, police, SS, everything. And they made a selection.

We have to bring our permit what I was going out from the ghetto to the factory. Everybody has to bring this permit. When they give the stamp, then it's good. No, they took away. And they collect the people in a place. This was around with military.

I went over there. And I showed them the papers. This was good. I had German papers. And they said that this is not false because this was from 1922, 1923. He gave me the stamp. And I was permitted to be in the ghetto.

In this day, they took 6,000 Jews to the railroad. And they sent them away. They said, in this time, they'd sent to the east under Ukraine to work under the front for the army. Nobody knows what this is.

Men and women or just men?

Men and women. Men and women.

Where do you think those 6,000 people were sent?

Please?

Where do you think those 6,000 people were sent?

I'll tell you after. You will hear the story. I will tell you.

After this selection, after this in June, they cut the ghetto smaller. The street what I was living with the German couple. They moved this couple in other house. And I must go in the other apartment. Well, it was for two rooms. Again, rooms, three families.

It was no good. We have no room, a corner, because the families was with youths. It was one family four persons. One family was three persons. We was only two.

In the ghetto, I made money, in this time, in the factory. Everybody what has a product, they made money. I sent money to home. I transferred money.

I give you an example. I went, at that time, Saturday, Sunday, was a Rabbi over there. He was the brother for [INAUDIBLE] rabbi. And I went over there. And he has his Hasidim in Bedzin, in [INAUDIBLE], over there. And they won't give money for him. Then, I give them money. And they give back this to my parents.

My parents don't needed the money. But I was here alone in Kraków. We have my wife. It, for me, was

better than -- I sent dental [INAUDIBLE] I bought for the money because I was not sure if I will live. this better than this is in our house.

Over there, I have brothers, sisters younger than me. I was sure somebody will live. I sent over there. I sent to the family for my wife also some jewelry, diamonds.

How were you able to send all of this out of the ghetto?

How able I was how to get -- By my father was working a Polish man. And he has a permit to come to Kraków. He come to me, and he took this. By her family--

Your wife's.

Yes, it was the commissaire on her brother's business. He came and took. And for me, was good because I have nowhere for where to live.

My father was the factory. This was our house. He was living in our house. By her was also they have a house, [INAUDIBLE]. They can keep this someplace in the house. And I was in a rented apartment.

In 19--

I'm going to stop you for one second.

OK.

They're changing the tape. Charlie, we just stop, OK?