

Good afternoon, my name is Frances Farber. I'm a member of the Kean College oral testimonies project of the Holocaust Resource Center. Our project is affiliated with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at the Sterling Library of Yale University. And sharing the interview with me here is Dr. Phyllis Zimon Tobin, clinical coordinator of the Yale project in the New York area, and associate clinical coordinator at Kean.

And we're privileged to welcome today Mr. Aba Praver, a survivor, who is presently living in Springfield, New Jersey, and who has generously volunteered to give testimony about his experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Mr. Praver, would you tell us something about where you came from, your early life?

Yes. I was born in Miechów, Poland, January the 1st, 1922. And my family is a religious family. My background is religious, and very good parents, not rich like, usually, people in Europe. And we make a decent living. My father dealt in wheat-- buying wheat business with three more brothers, three uncles of mine.

I went to public school. And I went to a Hebrew school after public school and help out at home whenever I can-- whatever. That's the way of, kind of, life was in Europe, to help out family. I was the oldest one. I have two sisters and two brothers. None of them survived. My youngest brother, Isaac, died in Garmisch Partenkirchen in Germany, after the war, in 1945. 1945.

I found out two friends, when we were liberated, and we were moved from Buchenwald to Landsberg am Lech, near Munich, Germany. I don't remember exactly how many days, but, I think, in a few days, I met some friends, who know me, and they knew my brother. And they told me this story that my brother is in Garmisch-Partenkirchen And he works with the American Army, helping out in the kitchen or whatever just to make a living, to have some food and not to collect, or do something and get something for nothing.

The following day, I went on the road. It was very difficult transportation. And somehow I got to Munich, took a train, took me almost a day, and I went to Garmisch-Partenkirchen

I found out that my brother passed away. He had a heart attack, going bathing and some kind of, you call it over here, sulfur water, like mineral water or whatever it is like, and Sharon springs, similar to this kind in places. They-- they're suspicious of my brother came, and I was already in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. And I have an address, where he's supposed to be.

Took me two hours, I was near the building, in the street. Somehow, like, I was, like, blind. Somehow my feeling, feel-- felt that, like, something happened. Something's was wrong. I got the others, and I'm here.

I met some of my it's not friends, but I notice he's from a concentration camp, the way you wear the suit with lines, you know?

Stripes.

Stripes. And I ask him if he knows Isaac Praver. He's supposed to be here, in here, and he works-- he lives in this building where yeshiva was, from Lubavitch or from somewhere. And he works with the army, daytime. And he takes over at night, and just whatever it is.

He says, oh, yeah, this kind of guy, I know his name, but I think he passed away. I said, it's my brother. And he was buried in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

How long before you got there had he died?

Pardon?

How long before you got there had he died?

Well, I don't know. It was-- there was maybe days, because we moved from-- because the American and the Russian exchanged territory. So they had to go-- the other States in America, got other States to exchange. So they evacuate whoever wants, voluntarily, go with the Russian or to with the Americans. And we were just -- it took us about four or five weeks, till we got, more or less, to this destination, Landsberg am Lech. And this could be another few days or maybe a couple of weeks. As a matter of fact, I have papers, where he was buried in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

The following day or so, I went to Feldafing. This was a Jewish camp for survivors, under the supervision of HIAS. And I went to the rabbinical department. I told them what happened, my brother. And I-- my brother should be removed from non-Jewish place. He should be buried, at least, in Feldafing. And they did it, and I was there.

You had gone in search of the only person in your family you thought had survived?

Yeah, because I found out that my father was killed in Austria, days before the liberation. And they told me in Graz by Judenberg in Austria. I've been there. I especially went to search for my-- when I told you, I think, that I traveled some countries, to look, search for my relatives, whatever I was going to find. But it was difficult, because I found out this camp-- nobody survived in this camp.

I found out about my father and my three uncles went to a camp called Skarzysko, in Poland. And I went to a camp maybe 50 kilometer from Skarzysko called Pionki, P- I- O- N- E-- no, P- I- O- N- K-E, Pionki, or I-- K, I. Also munition work, we call munition work. But we have no connections.

But we found out from people, non-Jewish people that worked, also, in those camps, supervision, and so on, informants, what they work in the past in the same munition work. And they told us that we get this from Skarzysko, and so on. So I found out from people that the people, whoever worked in Skarzysko particular department, didn't last long, didn't survive, because the chemicals they got [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] This is the yellow--

Fever, spotted fever, or yellow fever.

Yellow fever, something. They turn yellowish. And it doesn't take long to-- they couldn't survive. But I was surprised, because I know my father and my uncles worked very hard, physically, in the old country. Like, we have to load the wheat from wagons into the warehouse, and on steps, 100 kilos, over 200 pounds, they just picked up, like nothing.

Plus, we have people working for the kibbutz, like, a Jewish kibbutz. And we have also non-Jewish people working. In market days, when there's a market, so much wheat comes in, so we always hire people. And to them, because pushing for make-- more business, in and out, coming and going, they work physically also hard, and so do I. Sometimes I took off, from school, a day and help out.

And to make money, I remember that I went to the place where the horses were, there at the wagons and people would know us. As a matter of fact, my father's name was Meyer, they called me der kleine Meyer, and they give me a nickel or a dime-- a nickel for one horse to give them water to drink, before going home, and a dime for two horses,

How old were you, about this time?

Well, I was born in 1922. The war was in 1939. Well, I was about 10, 12 years old, maybe nine, or all those years, because, I mean, a nickel was a lot of money. And I didn't get the money. I returned it to my parents, so far, because we were five children. And whatever my father made, have to split with four-- with three more partners.

So you were a teenager then, when--

I was a teenager, of course.

When you knew that the danger was about to break out, how did you know?

I mean, the danger, it was when the German invaded Poland.

But how did you personally know?

Well, when I personally knew, it was at night, we had shooting. First of all, the people moved from town to town, to run away, to save life.

Did you know that, then? Did you know why you were running?

Oh, because the Germans are coming, I mentioned. Sure, I was-- listen, we-- it was maybe [INAUDIBLE] the whole town. But we know what's going on. We listen to it.

And did your family also leave town?

No, we didn't, because we weren't so young, and it was grandparents from my father's side and mother's side parents.

They lived with you?

Pardon?

They lived with you?

In the same area, and we didn't want to separate. And I was too young to run away-- to go away and leave my parents, because the love to parents in Europe, it was so great, that whatever is going to be with them, is going to be with me. Whatever is going to be with me, it's going to be with them.

We sacrificed for each other. What was wrong too, we should fight back, and be individual, and think, not to leave the parents away, but work together. And it just, like, the teachers-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] eye for eye. But the Jewish people, most have brought up, you know, forgive, forget, and try again. And that's the way we were brought up. And that's why we stick together.

So you stayed in your town?

I stayed in my town till the Germans came. I came out at night. And we met the Germans-- the first Germans, they were very good. They gave us bread. They don't know the difference, in those few hours, Jew or non-Jew.

How old were you then?

Well, 17, was it? 18, 19, 17, something like this. And we had fun. I thought I speak German, it was Yiddish. I said, it was a beautiful night. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. It means that the moon shines in face. And [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] is in Hebrew and punim is face in Yiddish, so.

But they understood some, because we talked with hands, you know. This was the first night. And the second day, the people that start going to Jewish places, then the things changed overnight.

What did they need people for?

To work-- hard work, to clean up the places where they live. And I remember, the following day, the Germans came to us, because we have wheat. And they want, for their horses, hop, do you call it?

Hops.

Hops? Hops. And they give us a paper in German, you know. They took so many meters, you know? It's like 200 pounds.

And I helped my father, because I didn't want to leave them alone, and my uncle. And that's where I start learning-- they were very nice. They were the people.

This was the first few days, there wasn't too bad. And whoever they took to work, well, they start the Jude, we didn't know much. We didn't pay too much attention. But they give us bread. They give us potatoes, the first day, the second day, nothing, and so on, and so on.

When did things begin to change?

Oh, weeks later, when they were way up-- way out of our town, and they went continuing, pushing for more territory to go to the capital, Warsaw, because I live in Miechów, near Kraków, this was close by there, maybe a few hundred miles, I don't know exactly the distance. But they went so rapidly that you can hardly think that they came from far away, like a neighbor, like, from the next town, because they are motorized. You know, they have-- and then they got all the horses in the beginning, but the first motorized motorcycles and trucks.

What did you feel?

Frightened. I was frightened, because I was secured in my hometown with my own non-Jewish people. That changed overnight, because some of them were followers from Germans. What do you call it? From their precedence, you know, like, their parents, grandparents, maybe, are Germans.

And I remember the name, [? Omar ?] was my best friend. I went with him to school, together. And a few days later, suddenly, he got a uniform, one from the family. And we were neighbors.

They do sewing for my mother, for my sister. And their parents were good to us. As a matter of fact, they eat in our house sometimes, the kids-- as kids. And suddenly, he chased me after work, when I work with the Germans. And we cannot go, no more, so many streets free, because after six, you have to be home, or seven.

And he says, you have looked Jude and so on he says, [Personal name] certain movies, [INAUDIBLE], we were just friends-- my age, he was my age. And he picked up the revolver, you know. And I ran away from him. And I came home, and I told my mother. But I didn't know about, that they were from Germans.

Their brother-- his brothers, he got two more brothers, were very good. He got one sister, which she did the sewing. She was very nice. There was the same block almost, just around the corner.

And then I realized how bad it is. And they took me out to do labor work and all kind of work for the Germans. But it didn't bother me. I was young. And from every parent's-- from every family, somebody had to go out, one person. So I was the oldest one, so I went. Instead of my father, I went there.

What kind of labor did they?

Any kind. Well, it wasn't bad. They were just army, good people. They did know much too much. The SS were the worst. They were always afraid of the SS. But I didn't know the difference between the SS and the army.

Matter As a matter of fact, I worked-- after, years later, by the Air Force. And they were nice to us. They were nice to me. They were nice to us.

They were our guards. They didn't do harm to us. They were under the rules of SS. there was the main man was an SS man. He was in charge of our camp. But he didn't bother too much. He didn't care, because the Air Force was with a rifle and watching at night, so we didn't run away.

Who was thinking we'd ran away? It was-- there was danger, when you can't go on a train, you can't go on a bus, and if you were on the road, the people say, it's a Jew, well, let's kill him. We'll get a pound, two pounds sugar, whatever they give for a head.

It wasn't so bad in the beginning. But it started to get worse, because the people were hungry, not only Jewish people, even the Polish people didn't have enough to eat. It was everything rationed and then you don't get enough to survive. So you did anything, what you can, to help yourself.

But it started getting worse. But first I went out working on the railroad, unloading cars. And then I met the man, he was working on the rail road, and he was living in the same place, where I used to live, in the same house. It's a three--

When did you leave your home?

I came back every night-- went in the morning, came back at night. This was daily work. The Jewish community has to give so many people, every day, to work.

And your family was still intact then?

Yeah, my father-- the reason why I did this, because my father used to deal with wheat, and his brothers. And he got caught by the Germans. And I remember, like now, when they brought him from out of town, and the road, you know, they've been buying [INAUDIBLE] they went, let's say, by a farmer that used to deal with them. And we bought, on the road, from wheat. What they brought to the town, we bought it there, we sent it to the mill.

And he was caught. And I remember, like now, he was brought in-- I don't remember-- it was a truck, a military truck with military police. And he said-- he stood, and another guy was there with him, help us. And they brought us to town. And the news already came out in town, that Meyer was grabbed by the German police.

And I saw my father there. And I changed completely. From this minute on, I started to hate the Germans, because my father just went out to make a living. I did my job and went to work. I didn't get paid for it.

This is why? Why? This is a war, but why do it like this? Because, I heard already, they killed some people. They killed one of my cousins. They shot him. He was he was peddling all the tools to help out his family, his wife. Just happened, he got married during the war.

And I went there. I remember, like now, with his brother, with [INAUDIBLE], we picked up, from his brain, the blood, when he got shot. It was ghetto already. And we buried him, because by Jewish law, you take everything. You bury everything together. There was several people was caught in there.

But my father, luckily he was released, because we paid for it. We paid for it through connections. It took a few days, he got out. And then they moved us to the ghetto.

Also in Miechów?

But I worked everyday. But I make a living, because I deal and wheel. I try to help myself, buy stuff, and bring in at night, or whatever it is through the ghetto, and sold there, just to survive. And I was checked by the police, while I was working, because they were stealing from trains, which I didn't do. We have no connections with trains. I bought stuff. I don't know where they got it from.

It happened, this one knows my family. And he was a German, not a real German, but he was made, by the Germans, as a German, because he lived in Poznan as Volksdeutsch they call it. And he knows the [INAUDIBLE] as a kid. When he grew up, he moved to a bigger town to make more money. And he was intelligent man. And he was a police or whatever it was there, I don't know. He was working for the government from Poland. But he spoke fluently German.

And the same day, when I was-- no, there was a few days before I got to attend the police in my hometown. We call a note. And the Jewish ghetto police came to me, because I didn't-- I was afraid to go there, because I know what will happen, because they've been shooting people. If we went there, nobody came back.

This particular day, a policeman came in and said, Aba, you got to go there. You have a note, you never arrived, and, you know, that's danger. You got to do it. This day, every Jew in the ghetto has to attend and be registered. And they need people to go to out of town and stay out of town in a camp-- working camp.

When I passed by the streets in the ghetto, towards the police headquarters, with a Jewish policeman, I heard people whispering to themselves, who-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], who is better off? We're staying here, we don't know what it's going to be. But we don't-- but we know what's going to be with him.

And my best friend mention it I don't want to go details, whoever else was there was so close to me, said the same words, maybe cried the same time. And I know what will happen. But I took a chance. I have no choice to help, that my parents wouldn't be called in, replacing me, or my brothers.

But luckily, this guy, after I talked to him, I says, yes, I was every day there, at the railroad station. I unload railroad cars. I worked.

And then he showed me pictures. And it's you? I said, yes, how did you get my picture? He said, well, none of your business.

I remember I wore clothes made from rags, like, coffee rags, you know. It was dying of all kinds of, clothes, sacks. We couldn't get any more clothes. And it was dirty work, with unloading stones. What do you call those-- not triangles-- it's made from cement, eight corners.

Bricks?

Bricks, they made from cement. And they wanted to make roads in Poland. Improve Poland, and keep people occupied. But in the same time, I helped myself financially, because I bought goods there, and brought it home, together. How much can I get? I bought-- the main thing I bought, coal to cook. It was no available in the ghetto, except you break the foliage, and you burn.

And, you know, when I paid for this, the guy who brought this in. But the guy mentioned Prawer, Prawer, Prawer, Prawer, I know you. The name is familiar. I said, I don't know. You're not from here. You're not from-- you were from Poznan, from the other side.

He says, yes, but I live in this little-- in this little farm. You call it-- a little community for farmers. And he said, I know your parents. I know your father. I know you brother, your uncles.

How do you know? Well, we used to deal with them, when I was a small kid. They used to bring us candies or whatever it is, and by the wheat [? pass. ?] And this man saved my life. While we were talking, I heard shooting at the yard. They shoot, right, people, in the yard.

And they put them where, you call it [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. The name-- they killed people. And if they kill them there, at the yard, they brought them there with horse, and wagon, and buggies. And whoever they didn't kill there, they went to [INAUDIBLE]. And then over there-- they've been shot there, because there was a place, like a valley. And they buried everyone there.

A pit.

Yeah, we call it a pit. And he says, you heard it, that's where you belong, there. And he asked-- he didn't ask questions. But he told me the questions. Like, he told-- he went, because-- I found out that he knew me, you know my family. Maybe I will survive.

He said, that means you work there, at the railroad. And whoever gives you money, you help unload-- whatever, load, unload. I said yes. Whatever he said, I said yes.

And he made it as a question and an answer for me-- that I-- somebody came to me, he says, OK, load my truck with things from the warehouse. I don't know anything about it, because I have time between. So look, I did my quota. I load my rail car. I wait for the next one. It wasn't only one man per car. It was a few people.

So I went there. He says, whoever gives you money or bread or something, you help load or unload. He says, yes, I don't know what's behind, to whom it went. He says, no, I don't know. So he actually guided me. And this man saved my life.

And he says, OK, sign the papers. And he prolonged my timing till it got dark, you know, between, like, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], not light, not dark. Go home, register to go away, because they're registering today-- he knew, already, this-- to go away to Kraków for labor work, to work in the camp. We call it arbeitslager.

So the next day, I volunteered. And I went there. Probably there, I figured, that I was dead. I was shot. But I went there, I will tell you, I remember, it was 100-- 100 or 50 men from my town. This I remember exactly.

And that's where you left your family? Or was anyone, with your family, with you?

I left my family. But I didn't hear the story till this happened, because I worked as labor every day. Before this happened, I worked till I got the working job and was going to Kraków, at the Luftwaffe, at the-- you call the Air Force-- German Air Force. I worked-- I was-- thank God I was a good worker, a good horse, you say in English. I was-- because, you know, how the Germans are smart, how they took out from you, your blood, your energy. And we didn't realize it, because I was a good worker.

So we worked on streets, making highways. And we get-- they give us-- you got to make this much, so many meters. There was a truck, came in. It throw those stones-- small stones. And we loaded that wheelbarrow with a shovel or fork, whatever it was.

And we were young, what, 16 years old? I was young, strong. I didn't care much. So long I know I go home, in the morning, get up, it was fun to me. Sometimes we walked. Sometimes we went by truck. It depended how far we have-- the place was.

And we make our job in no time at all. And said, 48 hours? We made it-- let's say, let's go gradually, in seven hours. And the Germans were thrilled. Besides, we load it, we have to take a rake and make it smooth and level. You know, like, a highway goes like this, more or less. What do you call this? 45, 90 degrees, I mean, whatever it is, a little bit straight. And down a roller came, rolling. And we put sand.

The next day or so, we made it in six hours. But we couldn't go home. We were frightened to ask, why don't we make [INAUDIBLE] and then go home, do our job and go home?

So the Germans says, finish up. We'll see. They couldn't, because they have higher authorities. And if inspectors will come, they'll see no Jews, no workers, what's going on here? What is it, a paradise?

How do I know? Later, if you get comfortable with those supervision, you know, you get more friendly with them, and they feel sorry, some of them, of you, or pretend to go to us. Or whatever it was, we don't know.

But after I finish-- but that's the way we did it. We made it. They let us go away, to farmers, doing. I start cleaning-- excuse me-- I start cleaning the steamer with the roller that rolls the things there.

He was a murderer. This guy, I know his first name was Willie. He was dark complexion. He was hair-- after he even shaves, he has hair around, from here on. He was from Tyrol, Austria. That's what I remember, Willie.

The reason why I remember him, because we used to go by truck to work, because you start at seven kilometers out of town, it takes two, three hours to get there. You get tired, you can't do no more. So they give us transportation. And they use their foremen and so on.

He used to-- while we're driving, used to raise the truck. And people fell out, and they got killed by the following trucks. It was just-- we couldn't understand. It what [INAUDIBLE] they do this, even to someone nice.

But they were inside the truck. He was the driver from the tractor, or from the truck. And you couldn't say nothing.

But not all the time, just when they got-- they feel high, let's say like this. Now I know what it means, feeling high. I don't know, but I understand what's going on. Or the drink, or whatever, the fun of it. That's what they did.

I was a good worker. And then I cleaned his steamer. And he came to me, kicked me. And first day he said, this is not the way to clean a steamer, because I have nothing, but to clean with schmattas It means with rags. You don't clean with water, because this is-- it works on diesel. And from the dust and sand and diesel, it accumulates, makes, like, a film. You can't take it off. You got to use kerosene, a solvent, or diesel to clean it up.

So he give me-- he says, go ahead and take some diesel from there, all of a sudden. So I took more than I need, and I clean up his roll. And the diesel that was left, I went to the farmers, and exchanged it. I took eggs, butter, cheese, whatever I could.

And I brought this back. And I went to him. He wasn't there, because he went out to eat. They went out to eat, there were Germans.

When he came back, I put in his place. So he gave me some, and he took that. He says, where you got this-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] got leftovers [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] the farmer's. He gave me cheese, butter, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] you know.

He says, good. He liked it. But he gave me, too, a big portion-- nice big portion. So then he said to me, whenever you want to go to the farmers, go get some diesel and exchange.

So I start to go almost every day. And I was a good worker. I finished my job way ahead. Instead of finishing in eight, seven, six, I made it in five hours, four hours. I was free. And I got up a little protection.

And I deal with him. But this kind of murderer, Willie he liked me. And he brought me food. He gave me his-- he didn't go out to eat anymore. His lunch, he brought to me. Whatever it was, wasn't bad, because I was hungry. I ate everything. I didn't ask questions.

The first time I didn't want to eat, because it was [INAUDIBLE]. And I remember it was with kummel You know what kummel is, with the bread?

Caraway.

Whatever you call that. I don't even know, till now.

Pork with caraway.

Yeah, the seeds.

Caraway seeds.

Nice and brown. They're beautiful, smells so good. So I took the potatoes and the macaroni and vegetables. And I got two friends of mine, [Personal name] was the name. I hope I can go see them in Israel, next month.

And this was in a-- what the German-- they got this-- I don't know what you call this-- in a special aluminum--

Tin.

Tin can. It was made like the army gets.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Keeps the steam, it keeps warm inside. You call it [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] in Polish. I know the Polish army had the same thing. It was a--

Canteen?

Canteen, correct. It's a canteen, covered up. And when you want to eat, you eat it with the canteen. You put it on, [INAUDIBLE].

He says, give it to me. I said, I can't eat, it's [INAUDIBLE]. Give it to me. So I give him, gladly. I said, if they can eat, I can. They were more religious than I was. I was more on the modern side, because I belong to the organizations, you know, orthodox and unorthodox.

Also like [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Between my age kids, for the parents, I went to the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], for the orthodox, too, because parents come first, respect.

But on your own, you were more liberal?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--belong there, because I know what I went through, with the girls there. I know I got embarrassed and so on. But that's OK.

Where were you embarrassed?

Well, because my father hit me. He wants me to learn with him. And the [INAUDIBLE] organization, the Zionist organization was just across my street. And my-- I lived in [Place name] He was-- Zionist organization.

And here, we lived across the street, on my father says learn. I said, I don't feel like to learn, now, it's so hard. We learn later. He says, no, here, one, two. He asks me what I learned. I said, I don't know, because I was watching there.

They were waiting for me, because we went scouting. You know, my father didn't know I belonged there. But my father knows I belong to the [INAUDIBLE], which is the more orthodox organization. And anyway--

So you gave him your food. And then you decided that--

Yeah, but I give him-- the next day, I didn't get him no more of the food. We shared. And then the same man taught me how to make the roads, rolling it with the machine.

Willie?

Willie. This kind of [? mirror. ?] And my supervisors name was Brown. He was from Vienna, I think. He was nice. He gave us to do work, seven hours, six.

But later on he couldn't, because we finished in four hours day, instead of eight hours. And he couldn't send us home, because he'd be in trouble. He says, you can't go home. Work slowly, but play around, we got to make the hours.

But we did the job. But we prove to them, the Jews can work, too, if they have to. There's no-- there's Jews only-- whatever they think about us. We proved to them-- and every Jew had the same thing in mind, without sharing why we are doing this.

We were anxious to finish the job. We were anxious to do the job. The pay doesn't begin, and very little. They give us, paid a little bit. Little by little, less, less, and less, but they give us other provisions, food, or more bread and soup.. It's better than nothing.

But when we found out, more and more, what they do with the Jews, what they do with our parents, what they do with our kids, what they do with our wives, what they do with our mothers. You know was-- they lost our faith. And we hate them for it.

But we had to do the best we could to survive. And this guy, I work for him, I think I made 14 kilometers, 15 kilometers, we made. Like, seven miles towards SÅ,omniki seven miles to towards another town, from this part of the city. I forget the name-- Chojnice, in Yiddish Chojnice, near [? Vladislav. ?]

So I walked there. When I finish this, I went back to ghetto. But I always survive. I always mingle between supervision. I always mingle between doing it better than they think I can do it. And I was more, like, taking care of the tools, where there's connections, where I can exchange a tool for bread, with a Jewish guy, you know.

Of course, we work with Gentiles, too. We're on good terms-- nobody-- no harm, except one incident. I had in Rabka when I was there, just like a resort with one guy hided there. And he stole the tools. And I was responsible, because, matter of fact, this company took me with them-- took me with them, four Jews.

Where to? To Rabka, [INAUDIBLE]. This is just like going in the mountains, to make highways there.

This was from KrakÅ³w?

From my hometown. This is everything before I went to this concentration camp-- before I went to the Ehrfurt this was between. I jumped the story, because we are asking there, but this is where it started.

And they made me papers. But I remember my name is Prawer, my friend was [Personal name] went with me, and two brothers of [Personal name] are still in Chicago. My age, only the one [Personal name] was older, they're in Chicago, Illinois. [Personal name] don't live anymore. I couldn't hear about him. I search for him. He was my age. And--

So they took you to this, sort of, resort like mountains.

No, to work there. Just to-- no, because the company moved.

Right.

They liked me, because I did business with them. And I worked good. I give them eight hours work, 16 hours for eight. I was honest.

And how long did that go on This--

This went on about a year and a half maybe, or so, till I went back to the ghetto, of course. Now, going to work-- I go back now, to the old story. I went to Rabka, Zakopane. They were-- they shoot-- they took all the Jews from this town, Rabka, and they killed them there in this valley, whatever you call it, the pit? And I was on the way to go to work, on the truck, with my men, not on the truck, with the people there, in the cab, because I was with them already.

They made papers for me-- somehow, maybe they didn't make papers, but I went to the same name Prawer. But I was more like a warehouseman. No working on the road, but warehouseman-- giving out tools, be sure there's enough kerosene, and oil, and stones, you know. I was helping out another supervisor there.

If anybody knows, from the main office, that we were Jews, I don't know. But I know I was approached by these men in brown that he took us with him. Matter of fact, I don't lie, because it's four Jews went-- three more Jews went with me. I was the fourth one.

But when I saw this incident-- because we saw the valley from far away, and I didn't know what happened. This Willie told me, see, they're killing the Jews over there. I said, well, where, how? He knows I'm Jewish, because he-- I was working from the first day there, I was assigned to this company.

And he says, yes, they're liquidating the town from Jewish people. So anyway, I went home, I talked to my friends, and I told them, I said, this place is no more, for me, because someday, sooner or later-- because it was, all the non-Jewish people from my town, they knew I was Jewish. Nobody knows, but I know, except a few guys, the older good workers, and the older warehousing. And they mentioned to us, you know, we Jews, and what are you doing here. Never know, today your friend, tomorrow you may be enemies.

The reason why I remember so good, I couldn't eat the cheese made from sheep milk, you know, from the sheep-- it was a different odor-- it has-- whatever it was, I didn't like it. So I always give it to them, whoever likes it. So in exchange, I got something else. And I wasn't hungry. I had how much I need, how much I wanted.

Plus, I did business going home when we moved from Zakopane, Rabka towards Miechów to my hometown, liquidating the [lager, liquidating the warehouse, the equipment, and so on, and so on, furniture and so on, you know. So I always make-- they treat me good. What we bought there, what we have sheepskin from the mountain people, like hillbillies you call them here, and exchange for flowers or clothes, whatever it is.

And so for this reason, I stayed with them. So long they need me, they got me. And I didn't mind. I don't know, I was prepared for everything. But when I had the shooting, I went home. I said, one thing, I would stay, if I can bring my parents over her-- so my mother work in the kitchen, my father work with me, my brothers work with me. So this, we cannot do it. They told me --

Who said that?

The supervision of mine. They found out. And they want to search to take into this-- he says, no, they were afraid of results. It was good Germans. They want to work with me. They need me. We-- they didn't lose anything on me, they gained. I did good work. I was honest. I worked good. I made my quota, what they needed. And then-- this is why they make me in charge of the equipment, tools, and so on, and so on, cement, so. Here I can do what I want, and they trust me.

And I share with them, if I made something for them, so they give me something. So it was one hand washes the other hand. They didn't wear no guns. I didn't see them wearing guns.

And plus, he took me professionally to make highways. He trust me. He never came back. You come in the morning, I never see him, till the next day. He went drinking or to have a good time somewhere. My-- his meals came to me-- assigned to him. Came to me care of [INAUDIBLE].

And so I couldn't complain too much about the beginning. I was lucky. But I said, let's go home. All the four people-- all of the Jewish guy went home, including me. This, when we start liquidate, the place, he went to a ghetto.

That's when it started, to have to go away. This when they caught me doing dealing, while I was in the ghetto, I have to go to work. And that's when I work at the railroad station at the business buying, selling, and working. First, I have to do the work.

Then I know the people who have no coal. I bought coal from the locomotive man. I'd give him maybe \$1 or \$2, he'd give me a few pieces. It wasn't tons.

So when I was in ghetto, I was called into this place, what I mentioned before, and I was saved by this man that took my information about myself, about my work. He showed me proof, what I did. There was proof, I don't deny.

But it wasn't-- I didn't do it on my own. I was-- he pay me-- say, OK, unload this truck, load me in the Warsaw wagon. I

don't know what was it. I didn't get nothing. He gave me \$1 or so, whatever it was in Polish money. So I was happy.

When I went away, we came to Kraków, a 100 boys, I think.

From your town?

Maybe 50 from my town, 50 we pick up in Slomniki. And it was there, men only. And we were under the supervision of the German Air Force.

Anyone from your family?

Pardon?

Anyone from your family?

Just me.

Just you.

I have to go, because I exist-- like I am not survived anymore. I went down to the thing. Whoever went down, never came back. Those-- all the people, what I deal with them--

Went down where?

To the police, to the headquarters there. Nobody came back. I buried them. They took our people to bury them after they got shot. Those-- all the people-- what I got from the railroad, from work there, what I bought from them, and their small there, to the ghetto. They bought it up from us, not only from me, from other people, too.

Who did you bury?

Yes--

Who?

The people who bought-- [INAUDIBLE] this merchandise, [Personal name] There was another guy, I forgot his name. They were in colonial business. They're called colonial It means, like, variety stores.

Whatever we can, we got it. I mean, the-- what you call it, the people in headquarters from the railroad station, he says, OK, you want to buy some envelopes? What envelopes? Whatever it was there. It doesn't matter. You want to buy cigarettes? Buy cigarettes or just what you can carry. More than you were-- you got somebody with a horse and buggy, smuggle into the ghetto.

And those people have still-- there were still stores, postal business. In beginning it was everything, like, legal. Little by little, they squeeze you more, and they took away more, and less and less people. This way, they control it.

What year was it when you got to Kraków?

When I got to Kraków, I stood in the line. And I remember, I stood near Rhinestein. He's still alive in Canada. near Meyer Greenbaum. Next to me was not Jakob. Eisenstein. He's still in Canada, matter of fact, they are some relatives of my wife's-- my wife's side. They married cousins of my wife.

One was lagerfuhrer means the eldest of the camp, he should take care of. One was his assistant. Rheinstein was in charge of the kitchen. I was his assistant.

This was in Kraków?

In Kraków at the Air Force camp.

What year was this?

This must be 1942, '43. I will find out those details. Write down notes there, what I don't give. Details, I could find out. And unexpected, this is just plain luck. I didn't dream about, to be a cook. I was happy to go away to a safe-- and then I was hoping someday we'll see our parents, my brothers, my sisters, because it was a good place.

Matter of fact, after a few months working, or so, we make trip home--

This is with the Air Force in Kraków, or near Kraków?

In Kraków [NON-ENGLISH], you call it. [NON-ENGLISH] is a [NON-ENGLISH] It means it's the Air Force territory-- station, with planes there. I didn't work at the plane station. At the plane-- we straighten up the-- level out the ground.

It wasn't like over here, there's a lot of cement and highways. But over there, there's more ground with grass, you know. But it has to be leveled out with dirt. And there were some cement roads. But this was very little place-- one as big as 747 or 10, 11 or 11, 10, whatever you call it-- the McDonnell Douglas, or Lockheed aircraft, or Boeing. But it was--

It was a small airport?

Small. It was a big airport. It wasn't the biggest airport, but the place was small. So the ones were heavy, like today, they with 300, 400 people per plane, you know. It was probably-- I think, the propellers, probably, you know, because I remember once I was there, the pilot, for fun he would start the plane, and blow us away in the air. Somebody got so hurt. You know, him, I was with him.

For fun, you know? They were the good people. So anyway, when we were at the airport, I was selected to be in the kitchen. And Einstein, he was in my hometown. All the four were in my hometown. All of us survived.

And I enjoy it there. I work hard, because I have to get up in the morning, cook. We got, for the military, those big kitchens-- steel ones, you know, aluminum or steel or whatever it was. I don't remember. I know. But I remember one thing, down we got-- the following day or so, we got girls, the same amount of girls.

There was-- not the ghetto. It was a fence. There was the barrack. The barracks were together, but not open. We see-- we have to go around to see, and when we open up the door in the middle, because they were very good to us, the Air Force, very good people. They didn't bother us. We didn't bother them.

There was only one man-- just-- just performance, just to show, because the management-- the whole thing was always SS, above even their line, watching them too. But we have not to do with the SS. They came occasionally, once in a while.

Why one man only? Because he was in charge. When did he come? When we would like to make a trip home-- to home. So we went home-- a group only, selected group. It cost money. It costs whatever it is. But we know we're going home to parents, [INAUDIBLE].

It was a tragedy. Because we always arrived late at night, we brought with us whatever we can clothes, food, some money, whoever has.

And while you were in Kraków, were your parents still alive?

Yes. Yes. Were they alive? Yes, in the beginning, yes. Not later on-- the second trip, I didn't see no one.

Can you tell us about that?

Well, yes. And it was a tragedy, because they give it away-- while I was there, we give it away, to Polish friends, some clothes and money to hide for us, in case we survive to come home, we have something. But we went home with a guard from the Air Force. And they supplied their truck-- an open truck. We give them for it, like, [INAUDIBLE], whatever we have to make it good for them, for the SS men. But he looked away. He don't mind. So we went safe. We went home.

And following weeks, another group went home. We exchanged to give a break, somebody else too. And after a while, I would like to go out and see how other people are doing. I see the work they did. We have vegetable-- vegetable-- we grow vegetables, not for us, but for the German Air Force.

But we never were hungry, because we had sheeps. We have horse meat. We cooked.

That was in Kraków?

In Kraków we were free. We made salami for us. We give it away to the Jews.

So you were not hungry there?

We weren't hungry. I told you this. I was never-- thank god, I had-- not bad. I wouldn't say good.

And your first trip back, then, to your home?

To do it-- well, this was tragedy, because, you know, crying and the same thing. I see my parents.

Was everyone else still alive at that time?

Well, I don't remember exactly. I don't want to exaggerate. I don't want to lie to you. But I think, at this time, they were still there. My brother went to work, like I used to go out, but just commanders-- daily work. And then was evacuation, means eliminating the ghetto.

Between the first and your second visit? This was in '42?

Well, yeah, every time it was less people. Then people start to run away, because they know the liquidate-- they give quotas to go to Auschwitz. They say-- they didn't say Auschwitz. But they said go for labor work, like you saw in that, you know? Excuse me.

And every time, it was less people. The parents weren't there no more, when I go the second time. My brothers weren't there anymore.

Your sisters?

My sisters weren't there anymore. Mother and sister went to Auschwitz. My father went to a camp-- working camp with his brothers-- that mean my uncles-- with my two brothers. While I was at the Air Force, my father was away, by the ghetto from Kraków. You call it by [Place name]

The camp was [INAUDIBLE], because I went to visit him-- visit him with the soldier. Whoever else, I have there my three uncles, my father, and my two brothers. This was in Kraków. Their work, they make bricks for houses-- for housing. And this was built before, but this was part of the continuum to building houses and so on for Poland.

And I went to visit them. I took with them everything I could, because I wasn't hungry, they were hungry. I wouldn't work physically hard. They were.

But it was my father and my uncle. And I was there a couple hours. Like, there was a limit, because it takes a long time to get there, because he has a [INAUDIBLE], but nobody stopped me, because they have the permit. This is like, somebody cut me, you know. Just like this is illegal. It wasn't legal. SS wouldn't let it go, but they looked away, because it was-- we were so good. We worked so hard. We did for them everything.

Even if there was SS there-- the management, the top-- the top was SS, like generals. They were, they were in the office. But they didn't mingle with them. They-- they-- they looked for peace. They want money, they got money. They want food, they got food. They got working at their offices. They got what they wanted. They got-- you name it, they got it.

So what happened after you went to visit your father and uncle?

Well, we cry. It was tragedy. But we get adjusted to live like it is, because we hope for the best. We believe that someday we survive. And we'll get-- be together again.

But my father didn't know about mother-- didn't know that they took her away-- they took away for working camp. So like, we did-- the father went, and my uncle. So we thought mothers and the sisters went there. But it wasn't like this. They went to Auschwitz. They went there-- to the railroad station, to be taken away.

My older-- my younger sister ran away with a cousin. And they went to the farmers, to the people we deal with, the wheat.

We have to take a pause now.

Yeah, OK.

We're going to stop to take a breath, a pause. And then we'll come back in about one moment.

OK.

Intermission.

Have an intermission.

All right.