

Good morning. My name is Bernard Weinstein. I'm the director of the Kean College oral testimonies project for the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Video Archive for Holocaust Studies of the Sterling Library of Yale University. I am privileged today to be speaking with Mr. Henry Yungst of Union, New Jersey, who is a survivor of the Holocaust and will tell us about his experiences before, during, and after the war.

Mr. Yungst, I'd like to welcome you. And I would like you to begin by telling me a little bit about your experiences and life before the war.

We was a town about 45,000 people. There was a third was Germans, a third was Polish, and the other third was Jewish.

What was the name of the town, and where was it?

Ozorków in Poland not far from the Łódź and that concerns the Jewish population. Our town was most textile, so everybody was well off. Let's put it that way. We had Jewish life. All the kind of organizations we had in our town.

Hashomer Hatzair, Gordonia, all the kind of Zionist organizations, socialist organizations. We have two orchestras in that small Jewish community from 15,000 people. We had Maccabi sport, anything you want. Our little Jewish community has everything.

And there were places for religious worship and religious?

Yeah, it was a beautiful synagogue. The synagogue was burned at the beginning, the first week the Germans moved in. And there was other smaller synagogues. In Yiddish, it's shtiebel they call it, but it's small. The tailors, they have their own little synagogue where they got together. The shoemakers their own, the textile people. So it was many such shtiebels of very religious Jews.

And we as youth, but I really can say I my youth was something because when I was young, that was 17, 18, and the war was just over in Poland when the Germans come-- that was in April 1st if I can recall-- they said all the Jews from 17 to 21 has to come to the movie-- there was a Jewish movie house-- all of you had to come there. And whoever isn't coming, we're going to send them to a concentration camp.

This way, you're going to go to a labor camp. You're going to have everything and that and that and that and that. So because I was the oldest from my family, I went there.

How many siblings did you have? How many brothers or sisters?

I have two younger brothers and one sister. I have a brother, Maher. He was two years younger than me. My sister was four years younger than me. And my youngest brother, he was born in 1930, so he was about nine years when the war broke out.

Yes, now prior to the war, what was the relationship between the Jewish and non-Jewish community in your town? Was there any signs of?

No, no, I can't say it was signs--

--antagonism or?

--because the factories, the big textile factories, they employed Polish people, the textiles. And that was run by Jewish people, so everybody, I think, has good life there. Every Friday, it was payday. People come and get their checks from the factories. It wasn't nothing that I can recall bad against the Jews was harmful that was lately. Maybe the beginning of '39, when you start to see what is going on.

The Polish people start to change their attitude towards Jews, and the Germans instigated the Polish people

against the Jews because we had the same amount of Germans in our town what Jews or Polish. And that means '39, there was already everything done that they could do, the Germans with the Polish together to intimidate the Jewish people.

We couldn't go here. We couldn't go there. We was afraid. Even I lived on a street that was a Jewish-- 300% Jewish. We was afraid to go from one street to another. That was shortly before the war broke out.

This was before September 1, 1939?

Before September, right, yeah. But before that, it was an average city. Everybody went off to work and to make a living or that was Gentiles or Jews.

So whatever danger you felt, you felt immediately before the events themselves.

That's right, in the beginning of '39, we start feeling it.

Yeah, and what happened on the outbreak of the war itself? What are your recollections, let's say, of the first day of the war or the first days of a war that was most important to you?

Most important was when the Germans marched in, and it was the first two, three, four weeks, the whole attitude of the change of the Polish people too, but it was our friends and neighbors, and that changed right away. Everybody was just out that we leave. The first thing that they say, Jew, why don't you go to Palestine, you know?

This way, we can take that you have. Someday we're going to take over everything that you have here, all the houses, all the inside that you have left, and that's what happened. When they took the Jewish people, they sent them to Łódź in ghetto. The Polish people waited already in front of the houses to go in, loot everything they could from the houses, and that was very painful.

You considered certain people friends. We have certain people that they work by us. And my father treat that persons very good, and they make a living-- the whole family-- because of my father supported them. And when that happened, they was the first one to grab everything that they could out, and we couldn't do nothing. We could just stay and look.

So you felt not only in physical danger, but you felt powerless too?

And they took us from-- that was not a ghetto yet-- they took us from our homes and sent us in other homes, the other side of town. They want put all the Jews together very close that in case they want to send them to Auschwitz or whatever, they have everybody together. They can't run away.

Was this, in fact, the ghetto already?

It was not a ghetto. It was open. It was open. One place in the city they sent-- took all the Jews. Because our city, as small as it was, it was wide. So they took the people from here, sent them over there. This way if they need them, they have all together. Nobody can disappear. Nobody can ever run away.

Where did you live when you were put together in this other part of the city? Did you live in an apartment? Did you live in a flat?

Yeah, there was flats. That put so and so many people in one flat. Let's say we have a nice home, our own. They took us out. And they sent in Germans, the Germans from Sudeten. You know that Sudetenland?

Yes.

The Volksdeutsche they used to call it, this put them here in the houses. And us, they took out from here, send us in houses where you have to be together, one room the whole family, one room. Before we had 10 full rooms.

One room, yeah, with no bathroom facilities, and no.

No, no.

Everything was.

We have already the taste of what is coming, but we couldn't do nothing. What can we do?

Was your father able to have any part of his business in the beginning or was he immediately?

No, they took everything away. They took everything away. My mother, she made a remark once to that German fellow that I told you he had everything by us. He worked by us. That time is going to change, not always going to be like that. We're going to stay and watch how you take everything out that you like from our possessions.

So he told this to the German Gestapo or whatever you call it at that time, the German police, and they come. They took my mother out. They took her to the police station, and they beat her up so bad, black and blue, and they send her back home because of what she said. We thought when they take her, we're not going to see her anymore. And that was our best closest associate that did that to my mother.

My mother sent me to another little town to buy bread because we couldn't get nothing here. So in the other town, my mother gave me money, you know? And I went to the bakery, Jewish bakery. There was still maybe the other town, Lentschitz, was easier to get bread than by us. By us, they squeeze us already altogether, and you couldn't get out.

You could walk.

You could walk, but there was no bakery. The bakeries was by us before where we lived in the other town, in the other place. So when I come back, so at that time we wear the yellow stripes here, Magen David. So I went, took the train, went there. It was just a half an hour. When I come back, I look around. I got the package with bread, the round bread.

And when I come back a Polish fellow told us the German that stays by the train, you know? Watch the train. You there, a Jew. You there. That is the first thing but I learned to say, you there And he took me, took the bread away, and beat me up very, very badly. The German SS kicked me all over, you know. And I saw that Polish guy staying there because the Germans know a Jew, but they could not recognize a Jew.

So they used the Poles to ferret out.

The Pollack could understand, could better recognize who is a Jew and who was not a Jew. And from that time, I really got so fed up I said, how can I get out of here? And I couldn't because I couldn't leave my parents, you know? We was a very close-knit family. My mother from her side, that means my grandmother that lived with us. She had 12 children. And they all was alive, and most of them live in our town, even in the same street. So it was very close, the family. And here, all of a sudden, the uncle went there, an aunt here, and everyone was gone.

They dispersed everyone.

That we no have the power. We can't make our decision what to do.

Yeah, how old were you in 1939?

19 years.

19 years. Had you already finished your schooling when the war broke out or were you still in school?

I still was in school, yeah. I went for textile engineering because that's what I needed, and then I couldn't. I went, I think, two years or a year and a half.

Was this in a gymnasium?

A gymnasium that was in Łódź.

Yes. It was not too many people from our town that went there, three, four kids.

Were you immediately forced to leave school?

I couldn't travel to Łódź anymore. You couldn't. You need to have special permission, so you have to go to a German, and he's not going to let you.

So your schooling was curtailed.

Yeah, finished.

What about the schooling of your brothers and sister? What happened there?

That was curtailed. They didn't finish. Maybe three, four years of public school. And my little brother, the youngest one, he didn't go to school at all, maybe the fifth grade.

Yeah, how long were you in this area of the city that you were sent to at first? How much time did you spend there?

Oh, I think about nine months till the order come that the young kids should go to the movie house. And we're going to send them to labor camps. We need the people. We need people to work and that, and you'll be all right. You'll be good treated. And that was the best thing, so we went.

You were among them.

Yeah.

Yeah, and then what happened?

Then from there in that movie house, we saw already the brutality is changing. They didn't talk to us like they talked to us beginning when we come in. And when we went to that train and waiting to take us on the trains and goes to Danzig, so we realized already that we're not in the same world. They kick us with the SS with the boots. I mean, dogs, up, up, up, and then we see everything is now different. It's not like they promised us or when we were staying at home.

Where any of your brothers or your sister with you well were sent there?

No, see we figured if I go, at least me, so I figure maybe I survive. I'm the oldest one, you know? So I volunteer because if I went, my younger brother didn't go. So my younger brother goes next time. He went with my father to Posen, Judenlager. It's a Posen concentration camp where they both died for hunger there.

Yeah, and what happened with your mother?

And my mother they took from that place that I told you they all were squeezed in, mother, my sister, and my brother, and they sent then to Łódź, in the ghetto, Łódź. It's a big huge ghetto, they send them there. And from there, they sent the parents, to-- my parents, my mother, my sister, my brother-- that sent them to concentration camp, to Chelmno, but we saw what has happened, gas chambers.

After you were sent to the labor camp, did you have an opportunity to see them again?

No, never again, no. Never again.

What happened to you in his labor camp?

We worked on the autobahn. They want to get the autobahn, close it, that the German panzers can go straight and test it to the Russian front in case they need them. Then we did the railroads-- the Russian railroads. It was widened, then European, then the German. So the tracks, we have make smaller. Leave all Europe, and here that can go from Europe straight on the rails to Russia.

So what we did, we was split about 100 people, only 50 people, and each 5, 10 miles, it was a small camp, and that's what we was doing. A part of us cut the trees, the big huge trees in the forest and to put them alongside-- "tartak" they used to call it there. I don't know how to call it in English where they put it through the machine. They come out certain sizes, and that goes across.

So some of our people did that job. First, I work on a tartak, as a machinist. Because that-- but I really was. That's the reason I went to school in textile, the machinery. And some of the people was lifting up them big rails, lug them alongside, and hit the nails in, one after another. That's the way that we did.

And you were all relatively young and relatively strong at that time.

Yeah, all young people.

Yeah, and how did they treat you during that period? Did they feed you? Did they?

Yeah, they feed us. Soldiers are better than the concentration camps because this was more like half and half. It was a labor camp. And that was the people that are on that camp was all OT they used it call it, Organisation Todt. They had such yellow uniforms. There was paramilitary. There was most-- there was in East there. And they was nicer than the SS.

There were no SS at the labor camp.

There was no SS. The labor camp was not SS.

Were they Wehrmacht?

Yeah, from Wehrmacht, but paramilitary. They have to do more with doing work for the military.

Mm-hmm, I see. In other words, these were civilians who were doing military work. Were there any cases of brutality or any cases of abuse?

I experienced a very bad experience. While we went there, there was apartments on both sides, you know? Here apartment, here apartment. And when you pass close to that apartment, the apartment of that old lady, throw you a bread because she know that that we need. So I got that bread, and some of them I ate there while at work, and the rest I hide, and I brought in camp.

And when you come back in camp, the officer that is in charge of that camp, he saw everybody, front. So I'm thick, and I shouldn't be thick, I had no place to hide that bread. What you have in here? That took out the bread. When he took out the bread, he want to know where I got the bread. And I was afraid to tell him. If I tell them from where I got that bread, nobody ever going to get bread from those people, you know.

So I figure whatever you do to me, at least you're not going to find out who give me that bread. So they give me because I didn't tell them from when I got the bread. I tell them a lie. Somebody pass by with a bicycle, and he throw the bread to me, but that was a lie, you know? But at least I didn't tell them I got this from that apartment.

That way they would go to the apartment and maybe they would do something to him. So what they did to

me, they say you're going to get now 25 over your behind.

25 lashes?

Yeah, and 12:00, you get another 25. And tomorrow morning, you get to 50 before you go to work and this way you have to go to work. And they have such a big, what they call it?

A whip?

Whips that was made from ox.

Ox hides?

Ox hide, right. And you have to lay down. And if you're going to move, then it's worse. They can hit you some other places. They most hit me on that place. And I couldn't from the time, I no feel here. My skin is dead here. It looks like crumbled. So the next morning when we come back, now I couldn't work because I was so swollen. So the friends, my friends was most from the same town, so we know each other, and we stick together.

So they hold me together, and that's the way I went to that camp. When I come to the camp, there was the foreman. He was a nice German man, but he was not a military man. They took him there to take care of the job that has to be done. And he said what they did to you? So I tell him. So the friends tell him what they did. So he said, OK, you're not going to do nothing. You sit down there by the fire, and I'm going to feed you.

Whatever I have of mine, I'm going to give you, and you're not going to do nothing. So that day I didn't work because he felt so sorry for me. And I was a good worker, you know? I was a machinist. They needed me. And that was my bad experience that I had in that camp. That was a labor camp they [INAUDIBLE]. And after two, three, four days, I feel better. But that numbness, I have up to date. It doesn't go away.

Yeah, it doesn't go away. I know. What happened to move you from that camp? What took place after the several months that you were there?

They had people coming more and more, and they had no place where to keep them. So we have already experience, so they send us in another camp. So you jump from one place to another. You left here. They send new people here, and you got another 10 miles. Then they didn't need it or something happened with the Russians, they bombed or what, they didn't need the people. They couldn't kill them because there in the East that was already Lithuania.

In Lithuania, then we was there. It was a nice camp, but they send in the Jewish people from Vilna, that was mothers with the children, the fathers, whole families. That's the first time in a year or two we saw families together, you know? It was very nice, peaceful, and that Lagerfuhrer-- that means the commandant of that camp-- he was a reasonable man too because there was no SS.

So all of a sudden, this SS started to take it over, come in big trucks-- big, big huge trucks in front of the camp. All of the kids, the women should give the kids up. So shortly, no women want to give the kids up. Some kids were small little babies. Some hide the babies, so the baby was crying because all of them, all of us has to go out from the barracks, then they come in and check. They took all the kids out, and they'd throw them. When we stayed there, we'd see, they'd throw them just like that. That means the kids are going.

Onto the trucks?

On the trucks, open trucks. That means the kids are going to be dead. We know it already. You don't treat little babies like that and children, just like that. So one woman, I remember she was from Vilna too, and she backed that assessment and told guy with them boots, please leave my kid. That kid was maybe about three years old, a cute little boy.

And he said no. So she said, so take me. You want to come with? So she said, yeah, I want to be with my son. They took her too. In about half an hour from there or an hour, there was Paneriai woods, the forest. Maybe had about the Paneriais?

Yes.

So they killed him. They dig holes over there, and they killed him. And then it was quiet for two, three days. They come again looking for sick people because there was no more children. And while that was going on, we have to sing because I was entertaining us when we had good times, you know? There in camp, we sing reminiscent about nice, old songs from the hometown and all that. And here, we have to stay and sing for the crying o women that they took the children away. You know how it feels?

Yeah.

They force you to do something, but your heart was bleeding. But just they were so stupid. What do you want to prove to those women that their hearts are bleeding? They took their little babies away. Our singing is going to help them? Is going to comfort them?

Yeah, the irrationality of it is mind-boggling, yeah. Did they take all the children at once?

Yeah.

Yeah, were they the very young, or were they teenagers there too?

Teenagers that didn't take. The kids, let's say till 12, 13 years, and the little, you know, what happen, mothers, the first thing that they hold is their little children, a half a year, a year, two years old. And from that time, the whole camp was the women went crazy. They were crying. They were screaming for no reason. After that, they took the women in the concentration camps because they have no use for them.

They just took them out with the kids to be a little bit together, then they took the kids away, then they took the women away. Selection they used to call it, come in the camp. Whoever was sick, they took him. That's the only way they get rid of them is take them at concentration camp, whether there's crematoriums or whatever.

So for these people, this was a transition point from, let's say, the ghetto to the concentration camp. And they separated the able from the disabled and the young.

And we was there as workers. They like to call it the we was there already months. We know everything. But that was new people, young people. When they come in there, they see how we look good and dressed in civilian clothes, so just to get them in not to feel bad. That's what happened.

Yeah, what happened to you after that? After these events took place? Were you allowed to stay there or?

Yeah, we stayed there another two, three, four months, something like that. And there they took us Palemonas. That is Lithuania, too. That was the first cruelty that we ever saw was in that camp. So when we come in that camp, they hang people for no reason, people that I know, people that I was within friends. We grew up together. For no reason, three people they shot, to scare us that nobody should run away.

Who did the hanging? Was it the Germans or the Lithuanians?

The Germans, the Germans, the Germans. We have the Ukrainian SS they used to call it, you know? They was doing it. I don't know. They were young guys. If you saw the SS-- the Ukrainians-- they're young people, 20, 22 years old, black uniforms, and how could they do such a thing? They was laughing. There was one guy, Peter. We used to call him Peter the Terrible, a tall young fellow. And he was so cruel.

He could do every day when we went to work, if he didn't like somebody, he put a cross on his back with

chalk. That means then he know who is going to be next. He took you in the woods because whenever we worked there, there was woods. We chopped off the trees. Killed him. Dig the hole he said, and then he kills him. Dig the hole and kills him. We was in that camp about 47 people, 50 people because they divide us some more. When we left there, there was 23 left, and I was between the 23.

Mm-hmm, in this camp, you said they hung people. Did they hang them for specific offenses or just?

No, no, just to scare us.

To scare.

Not to run away, listen to that and that what they have to do. We have to work in the morning. They give you a whole lesson of what. If not, it's going to happen like them. And if that wasn't good enough, if some people just ran away because there's woods. They figured maybe they're going to find partisans in the woods that they can take them and fight the Germans, but there is their lives.

And one, two, three had left away, the next day we have them here, dead. So they put them alongside when we went to eat, to get that little soup, that little water, there was laid out dead bodies in front that we see what's going on. You couldn't go into the kitchen for your food that they give you lest you see the dead bodies bleeding dead, so that's what happened.

So there was a kind of psychological torture as well as the.

Yeah, they didn't let you eat because they know we was hungry after a day's hard work. They give you-- in that camp, Palemonas, they give you-- put in that we know-- two pound of flour in 300 liter of water. That was our soup, and there was 22 boys-- 22 men-- got the small bread that was cut in 22 pieces. 12, one there and one there. Now, that should be enough for 24 hours.

Those were your day's rations.

Right, yeah, that was very, very bad. Worse than Buchenwald.

Yeah, we don't hear very much about this camp because--

Palemonas.

--there are obviously so many others that have taken prominence. Was there anything special about this camp that made it unique in your mind?

Because in that camp, they did to us things that they didn't do in other camps. If you mind your own business, they let you live. Here, from the commandant till the Ukrainian SS, it was the same. Those tyrants, they just were out to kill. You couldn't say nothing. You couldn't pick, nothing, just like that. If that Ukrainian didn't like you-- that Peter the Terrible we used to call him-- if he didn't like you, he just shot you, give you a bullet here to the head, and you was dead. And then he called me or you, dig a hole and put them in it now.

So the punishment here was totally irrational.

There was no such a thing. You couldn't complain to anybody, no.

Where did you go from Palemonas?

We went to Kaiserwald, Riga.

In Latvia?

Latvia, right. Palemonas was in Lithuania. Then I went to Riga, a big huge concentration camp. There was women in one side and the men in the other side. And we used to work in factories that I was to do in a big



airplane factory. I used to make-- we, a part of us-- used to make the wings of the planes, other people other things, you know? And there they assembled the planes in that plane, and I don't know what they did with that again.

Yeah, and how were you treated at Kaiserwald?

But something that happened there too. One night, we saw two airplanes coming-- they were Russia because that was the fabrication-- two airplanes start coming on that camp. And we didn't care or they kill us or not. We just want them to destroy that camp with all the SS inside. So and we see the flag artillery from the Germans. You know that was the middle of the night going up and up. Finally, one plane caught fire. They shot them down.

And the next day we hear that that man-- the other one went back to Russia. They couldn't catch him-- that man on top there with that plane that was on fire, he tried to bring that plane straight down on that big huge factory where we build the airplanes. And there was a big explosion here. We was on the other side because that was very huge-- Kaiserwald.

And there was a big fire for days and days. So they left those alone because they have themselves to do-- the Germans there. But that was the rumors we hear in the camp that that flier especially, figured he's going to be dead. They're not going to let him live.

It was a suicide mission in other words. Yeah, so he said let me come down straight on that plant and kill as many as I can and destroy the plant. That was what has happened there in Kaiserwald once.

So this was like a reprieve for you.

Right, and whoever was in Kaiserwald, he remembers that because there's something that you can't forget. We was happy. We were so happy when they got theirs, you know?

Mm-hmm, yeah, did they sense that there was relief and happiness among the prisoners?

We couldn't show them but inside, you know?

Inside, of course. Of course, and how long did you spend in Kaiserwald?

I think six month. I can't recall exactly when because it was so many years.

I know.

Yeah, that six month, then that took us-- the Russians start coming or they was afraid the Russians are coming. The Russians become stronger. Then they took us to Stutthof. So they took us by boats from Riga, Kaiserwald to Stutthof. There was two boats. One boat they sink themselves full of people-- of our people. And one boat come to Stutthof. I was one of those the boats that was not sinked.

Yeah, why did they sink the boats?

They didn't need so many concentration camp people to come back. It was too much.

Didn't it mean they would kill their own people too?

No, no, they have the balls to get out before the explosion goes off. They figured they don't need so many people. Stutthof couldn't absorb so many people. Stutthof was a big huge concentration-- it moves food too. And when we come in in that Stutthof, then it was the moment we start to walking in the gates, they start beating from all over. It's so brutal, I never saw in my life. I swear an animal couldn't be so bad like that was.

Yeah, this was this was before the actual period of the Final Solution when they had the extermination

camps with the crematoria and the.

And if I can recall, Stutthof wasn't only Jews. That was a criminal people there, but they couldn't send them-- the Germans-- they couldn't send them to what they call it?

The prisons.

The prisons, so they send them there. They were the ones that took care of us.

The criminals themselves.

Criminals, they were really criminals.

In other words, they unleashed them.

Yeah, on us like a dog, like a wild dog.

Yeah, and was there any particular suffering that you endured that you remember while you were there in Stutthof?

I got beat here and there, but I survived. I begged God every day, give me just one thing that I want, health, and the rest, I take care of myself. I don't want to get sick because the moment you get sick, you're finished. Just don't let me get sick.

Do you think your own will kept you strong?

Yeah, yeah.

Were you able to get enough food, enough?

If I didn't, but I'm even up to now, I was always a positive thinker. I didn't want to give in. I would think tomorrow's going to be a better day, maybe tomorrow, maybe tomorrow, and that part keeps me alive all the years. When you come back from Stutthof-- I wasn't there too long. They have nothing for us to do. So they took us from there to Buchenwald.

Buchenwald wasn't as bad as was the Stutthof. Stutthof was a bunch of criminals there. So if you don't bother nobody, they left you alone because there was thousands of people. There was nothing for you to do. Take rocks from here and bring them here. Then from here, bring them back over there, you know? It's nothing too much. From there-- from Stutthof-- I met my cousin. So my cousin was laying on top of the bridges they call it, you know?

You were able to recognize him?

Yeah, a skeleton like you see on these shows that you always see, the movies. So Heinrich, his name was Henry like mine because we're cousins. Oh yeah, but he's dying. He's dead, just eyes open. So I said, Henry, outside it was cold, and Buchenwald is on top, so I said but it's sunny. How about I take you down, take a blanket, I'm going to let you down and get a little fresh air. I was better off. I looked better.

So but them, they didn't get to eat for four months, just starving to death. So he couldn't-- no, I'm not going to live. I said, Henry, the Russians are not far. The Americans are not far. Hold onto it. You're going to be all right. What are you doing with the soup? He said I smoke. Whoever brings the soup, he gives me a piece of cigarette, and I give him the soup. So you no eat nothing. I said you're not going to do that.

I'm going to bring you-- try to do anything to bring you a little soup, but you're going to eat this. I'm going to stay here and wait till you finish it. Don't give it away for cigarettes. I tried to bring cigarettes, just from leaves, they make cigarettes. I have that, but don't give away your food. And he was all right. He survived. After the war, he survived. We met in München, in Munich, and he was all right. He said thanks of you.

He didn't care. I don't care. I'm not going to live. I'm not going to live. I said you're going to live. You're going to-- just think like me because it's maybe it's going to take a week, two, three, they're going to come here, and they're going for you. And he was alive.

Yeah, how were you able to recognize him when everyone was down to literally skin and bone?

I don't know. But still, he was tall. He was very tall, and the way he was looking to see people coming. If you walk, that means you're better off. If you walk by their beds, you were better off because you have a little bit of strength in yourself, not laying there dying. So Heinrich, yeah, Henry, Polish, Heinrich, yeah, OK. Then I took him outside.

And so long I was there, I think four weeks, so I tried to bring him something-- whatever I can-- give him that he start to gain a little bit weight that he can walk. Then I met an uncle of mine. He died two years ago in Poland, the same thing. I recognized him. He recognized me. So I said to him, Uncle-- and Uncle didn't look so bad. He come from a concentration camp, Dora. I don't know if you.

Yes, I've heard of that, yes.

So I said I gladly would help you but Henry is dying. He's laying there. He's a skeleton. He can't walk. I have to bring him down. He weighed maybe 50 pounds, you know? And I took him down, nothing but just bones. So I have to help him because I want him to survive, but you don't look so bad. And maybe another month, two, the Americans, the English, the French, they're going to come. They're going to free us, and you'll be alive, but him, I have to do something now. So he say, OK, I can understand.

Did you really believe this was going to happen that you were going to be freed or was it something that you feel you had to tell yourself at the time to keep going?

Keep going till you're free. I know such an injustice that was done to us because when I talked to us at that time, I only see the people that surrounded-- by surrounded with me what's going on. But that can't be on forever. Justice has to be paid, and the justice has to come out.

And that is it because I was positive always. Always looking for us for a better day. Like some people, when we was in a concentration camp that was in Rheinland. Bochumer Verein. So we worked all in the big, huge factories and build the cannons. So many of my friends was together. We sleep together, but when we was there day and night the fliers come and bombed. Let's say, days come the Americans, and night come the English.

They switched, and there was going up, fire all over. So if you have that little bread, like my friend who was to get it. I'm going to eat this now because they could bomb us and we'll be dead anyway. So I said, if I eat this now, I have to go tomorrow a whole day and work very hard and then complain, and I have nothing. So I couldn't do it, you know? Even I looked at that piece of bread, but I'm not going to do that. But my friend, but he's alive. He lives in the Bronx, Banach, he said, "I'm not going to wait."

Let me at least die with a fuller stomach, you know? Let me eat this now because tomorrow I'll be dead anyway. After that, the alarm was over. They didn't bomb nothing. We was alive. He didn't have more that piece of bread, but I still have mine, you know? I think that was-- some people ask me questions, even my own children, and I say that's the most reason because I always thought maybe tomorrow's going to be-- maybe tomorrow the war is over. Maybe something happen.

Did you did you hear anything from the outside?

No.

Was there ever any?

I'll tell you another thing. When I-- I skip, whatever comes to my mind-- when I was in Ruhrgebiet, in the

German Ruhrgebiet, The Rheinland. That was the Bochumer Verein I just mentioned. They come lately, they bomb day and night. The United States and England, they didn't let them for a minute have quiet. But there was something to bomb there, the biggest industry the Germans had.

So in that Bochumer Verein, they bombed the Bochumer Verein when we was there in concentration camp. There was no water. There was nothing. The German's population, they were starting too. So they come in big trucks-- like here the milk trucks-- and they stay in the line for a little soup or whatever. Now, we know if they have not too much, so we're going to starve here to death in that concentration camp because nothing. There was no water. There was no food too, no nothing.

They bombed anything. The whole city was on fire. Bochum, they call it. So lucky wise, I don't know it lucky or not lucky, but some German firemen come in in that camp, and they say who will volunteer to work with us outside the city, outside the camp? You're going to have enough food. You're going to have everything, and you're going to be all right, better than here because here, you're going to starve.

So me-- how many volunteers you had there? Six, that means three couples, three volunteers. Our couple was me and my friend. He lives in Atlanta, Georgia. He is very well-off. We both volunteered from all our other friends in from all the huge plant. There were so many thousands of Hungarian Jews in that same camp. So it was from all the camp, there were six people. We have to go to couples, two in one. So that means three couples-- six people from all the camp.

Me and my friend, we both decide. OK, they took us. That as it. They used to call it Totenkommando. If the Americans or the English, if they throw bombs-- they used to call it side bomb. They didn't explode now. They explode, let's say, in a day later in 20 hours or 10 hours or 15 hours. Purposely, they dropped such bombs. That means that everything is quiet. Everybody goes back to work. Here it comes off.

Because they're not ready for it. They're not expected.

Yeah, so if they know a bomb is here-- the Germans-- we, two people on each bomb, we have to dig and dig and dig till we come to the bomb and take that mechanism out from that bomb that doesn't explode. OK, the firemen tell us a little bit of it, and that's all then, who cares? So but who was doing that till now was prisoners, German prisoners, political prisoners, but they ran out of them too because they died while you was working on it, the bomb explode.

So they tell us-- the German fellow. They were nice, the firemen, you know? Nothing to do with the SS. And we was under their command. We had nothing to do with the outside world. But we were so hungry in the camp because there's nothing to eat. Here you come out in the city and you pass by stores, other things. You work outside.

The people are afraid. They're sitting in the bunkers. So we always have something to eat, fine, and that's what we want. If you have to eat, you can survive lest a bomb explode and we're not lucky, then that's it.

Yeah, but at least you've got a chance.

Yeah, so that one nice fireman said to us, look, seldom happened that while working on the bomb that the bomb explodes, but then there's nothing we can do. So it's such a good, easy death, you get blown up in thousands and thousands of pieces, so you don't feel nothing. But we didn't care at that time about that. But the main thing that our stomach is going to be full that we can survive another month, or two, or three, whatever it's going to be. And lucky wise, nothing happened to me and my friend. He did, let's say, so many feet. I did, and it was all right. No bomb went off.

Yeah, this was while you were at Bochumer Verein.

Bochumer Verein, yeah.

Yeah, now was this between the two times you were in Buchenwald, or was this?

That's right, from Buchenwald they sent us to Bochumer Verein. Lucky wise, they didn't send me to Auschwitz or other places. I was not there. I was in other places. And they send us there in that place. And we survived that we have enough food. A matter of fact, something to tell. We went to where they bombed a big place with herring.

The German has to have barrels of herring. The herring was all over. So in camp, you didn't care. Other places, we found potatoes, so we tied up here, and we put the potatoes in. But nobody control us because they feel sorry-- the SS-- that we are heroes to be going to do such a dreadful job, you know? So when we come into camp, so I have many friends, especially him, Banach from the Bronx. I said, Banach, open here.

And here the potatoes come out. Herring, salted herrings. Now, from that salted herring on my skin, I have such a fire, and my legs was red for a time being, but we tried. Me and my friend, we eat as much as we can outside, and the rest bring to our friends. We're still the closest because we grew up together, and we belong to the same organizations. So if we in such a need to help each other. If I am out, if I'm going to live, I'm going to live. But as long as I'm living and I can bring something to them, I share with them.

Yeah, this may seem like an odd question to ask you at this point, but in all of this while all this was going on, you seem so optimistic and so hopeful and everything, did you see a future for yourself beyond the war? Were you able to envision anything beyond--

No.

--surviving at that point?

Because we're so narrow-minded, we didn't think too much. Just we think to have our stomach full that we not starve.

From one day to the next.

Do that. That's the only thing that we would say.

Just one day at a time.

Because you was too weak mentally and physically to think about the other things. And if you think, then it's no good too. Surely when I lay down, the only thing what to do is cry. My parents, I never left home, and this is the first time. But still, you didn't think so bad about them. While I was thinking this, my parents wasn't alive anymore.

Yeah, of course, you didn't know at the time.

No.

And you didn't know about your brothers and sisters.

You always think maybe they're alive, you know. I always think the good things for to happen to them. I didn't think bad. The only time that I realized that bad happened is when I saw here that movie on the television two weeks ago, Shoah--

Shoah.

--and I so what really happened to the people that they took from the Łódź Ghetto to Chelmno because my mother and the brother and sister, they was there in Łódź, and they took them to there. And so at that time, I nearly break down because I went down in the kitchen and started crying loud.

Were they there up to the liquidation of the ghetto, up to the very end, your mother and?

I don't think so, no. My father and brother, they died in concentration camp in Posen, Judenlager. So he's a--

I have a friend here from the same town. His father died. He told me that my father died-- he was there-- and my brother, how he died there from hunger. But my sister and brother and my mother, I didn't know.

Mm-hmm, yeah, when did you begin to realize that there would be an end to all of this? That it would be over?

When we was a second-- when they start to take us out from the Russian front, away from the Russian front back to Germans, and we realized something is wrong. That the Russian probably going now after them. The whole front changed there because they wouldn't do that. They took us as many as they could. They'd build and do anything you want, usually highways and railroad, [NON-ENGLISH WORD].

Maybe they thought of it. If something goes wrong, at least they can come back faster through Germany. But when that changed, when we saw trucks going away, back and forth, while we were working there, there must be something wrong. Usually the trucks with the military, they go up to the front--

They go East.

--not back.

Now, they're going Westward.

So we had already '45-- then '44, '45, we know already that everything is changing now. It can't be for too long.

What did this do to the morale of the people when they realized this?

Then we start to hope it's going to be better, yeah. We want to live. I want to live, anybody. But before and whoever you was around, I know I am not going to live. I'm not going to live the day. I rather want to die. I want to die. And that's what causes it. If you don't care about food, you don't care about nothing, and then die.

The second time you were in Buchenwald, was it pretty much the same as the first?

Yeah, on Bochum, I want to tell you something. In Flossenbürg-- in what's the name of it?

Bochumer Verein?

In Bochumer Verein, when they start to evacuate us, a part of the equation were some people were many Jews from Czechoslovakia, politicians, so they want to hide in the canalization because they can't disappear outside because there was electric fences.

You ran to the fence, you'd get killed. Many people ran to the fence. You'd see them hanging. So but they did-- probably they know more than we know. They have contact mail-- that they went down in the canalization, in the what they call it? Where the water goes underneath.

Yeah, like a reservoir?

A reservoir and hide. There was one guy. He was a German. He was not Jewish. He was like big shot over us. And he went to the SS and told them that many of us are underneath, so they come with gas and whatever they had and get him out, and they killed him. So when we come from that camp to Buchenwald back again, they are waiting for that guy, and they lynched him in front of the crematorium.

That's what my eyes saw. Lift him up, down. Lift him up, down, until he was dead, and they threw him in the crematorium because he squealed the last minute. It was a couple of days before the English, the French, and Americans come to Rheinland, he squeal on them, and they killed him, see? So that's what I see, so everybody was happy about that. And we know that the time is coming because everything starts squeezing on the Germans.

There's no more open. It's closed. And then everything changed. Our whole attitude by us changed. We only talk politics. What's it going to be when-- we saw the second time in Buchenwald, we saw fire in the middle of the night far away. That means they're fighting there [? north, ?] so maybe they're going to come. And when Buchenwald was closed down, then they took us to Flossenbürg.

Flossenbürg was the same thing, a very bad, bad concentration camp. And from Flossenbürg, when the Americans start to come to Bavaria, they want to get 30 of us. They took us on march to--

Dachau?

--Dachau. And we was marching, and marching, and marching. Comes to Dachau, we're staying there, rain. Day and night it was raining. In the woods, when they say rest in the woods. So there was a German soldier with a big back of anything that you want. He has blankets, food, everything. And we constantly make 10 miles, everybody was resting, and he took us. So I said to him if you want, I hold your rucksack. And believe me-- rucksack is in German.

And believe me, I couldn't, but I figured maybe that way I'm going to live, survive because whoever couldn't work anymore, they killed. All over, you'd see people laying. So this way, I'd be a little bit more safe with him. And good enough, he give me that. Then we'd walk and then stop again. Then I'd give him the rucksack, you know, and sit down and eat. And I was laying there like a dog. I was so sick, skeleton. I think maybe he's going to give me something.

No, everything done, give me again. Then we walked again. Then finally, I got somebody by me-- I don't know what nationality or whatever-- and I said I have to make a move now because there's thousands of people walking. While he was walking outside with his rifle and everything, we slowed down. And he took out everything, the food that they have, and I remember Blutwurst, With can open, with the bread.

And we took this out, strapped the back and everything, and he didn't know what happened because there's thousands of people. Everybody look alike. It was cold at that time, so you cover yourself with your blanket, and we eat. We put to rest here in, you know how it is. And that I think helped us-- helped me-- to survive another 10 miles till the American Army come in, and they freed us.

Yes, we're going to stop for a few minutes at this point, and then we'll pick up with the narrative in just a while. Thank you.