Good afternoon. My name is Bernard Weinstein. I am the director of the Kean College Oral Testimonies project of the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University. Sharing the interview with me is Jody Frank.

And we are privileged to welcome Jola Hoffman of Mountainside, a survivor who has generously volunteered to give testimony about her experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Mrs. Hoffman, I'd like to welcome you. And I'd like to begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about your family and the place where you grew up before the war.

I was born in Germany in 1931 in Leipzig. My father was in business in Germany. And my mother went to Leipzig when she was a young girl of 17 to study music at the Leipzig Conservatory. And she met my father, I think, before she went to Leipzig in Łódź, Poland. That's where my mother came from.

And actually, my father's family came from Łódź also. And she met my father. And they started dating, apparently. And they got married, after my mother finished her conservatory, four years later.

What career was your father in?

My father had a fur business. They were fur skins. He was not-- he did not make fur coats. But he sold fur skins wholesale. Before that, my father went to university. And he studied sociology. And he actually wanted to become a physician.

But he couldn't go into medical school, because it was during the time that the depression happened in Germany. And my grandfather died during the First World War. My grandmother couldn't carry on the business. And they lost all their money. And my father had to go to work.

And there was a sister who went to university and finished law school. My father helped her. And there was a younger brother. My father had a younger brother, who also finished university, and worked for the Diplomatic Corps.

And your mother, did she have a career?

Did she have--

A career outside the home.

Career. Yes. My mother was a concert pianist. She concertized. She also worked with singers and dancers. And she led a very interesting life. They both did.

And even after I was born, my mother continued with her career. We did have a housekeeper who looked after me while my mother worked. And we had a very fulfilling and a very nice life in Leipzig, Germany.

What did being Jewish mean to you at that time?

Well, I was a little kid. We did not have a traditional home. And I did not really think much of myself as being Jewish or non-Jewish, except when my mother took me to Poland when I was-- we used to go to Poland at least twice a year to my grandparents' home, my mother's parents. And they had a-- we used to have Hanukkah there and Seder there.

And then, in 1936, when the Nuremberg laws came, I didn't know anything about the laws. I was in kindergarten. But I do recall that I had to leave the kindergarten I was in and go to a-- I was bused across town to a Jewish kindergarten, where the other children in my neighborhood didn't go to, maybe one or two others. And also, the housekeeper that we had that I was very fond of in our house-- she had to leave our employment. And we had to change and employee a Jewish housekeeper.

Can you recollect feelings that you had as a child engendered by these Nuremberg laws?

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I was shocked when the housekeeper left, because I missed her. I loved her very much. And I was shocked that she had to leave us. And also, the change of school jolted me, because I had to leave my immediate friends and start new friends. And it was a long trip to the other school.

That was in 1936. And I just started school, so that was a jolt. Otherwise, I really didn't-- I was not aware of too much happening in Germany during that time.

Do you remember experiencing any kind of personal expressions of prejudice or racial hatred or bigotry?

No, I did not, not as a kid at the time. No, I really didn't have any. I didn't experience any among our neighbors and my parents' friends.

And that means, in 1936, that was a time when I became aware that something was different. And I had to leave the school. And I had to go to a different-- and I had to change my school environment and the housekeeper. But besides that, I don't think I-- I don't recall having any.

I also was aware that my uncle and aunt left Germany. I actually only met my uncle and aunt-- my father's sister, who lived in London-- when they came to visit us. It must have been around that time. And she left Germany-- that, I do recall being told-- because she felt it would be safer in England. But still, I was too young to really take it all in and all the ramifications of why and what the cause was.

Were you aware, when you left the school, the reason why? Were you told any of that?

Yes, I was told that, because I was Jewish, we had to go to a different school. There were special schools, Jewish schools, for us. But the school already existed that I went to. It was not just built for that purpose. But we had to go there.

Yeah. That, I was made aware of. But it really didn't affect me all that deeply, because I still had a home, the same home. It was a very nice home. And I still had my parents with me. And we still had a-- the lifestyle did not change in 1936 for us.

When did it change? Or when did you sense that you were in danger?

Oh, it changed in 1938 when we were-- my father was away. My mother and I were alone in the apartment, and the housekeeper. In the middle of the night, there was banging on the door. And

Mother opened the door. And there were SS people-- German soldiers, SS people-- standing in front. And they told us to leave the apartment right away, and the housekeeper, too.

They wouldn't let us take any things. I wanted to take something with me, even a toy, or a-- we had no time. Schnell, schnell. had to be very quick. My mother grabbed a hat box, which I never forget, why she grabbed the hat box. And this is how we were literally chased outside.

And my grandmother lived on another floor. She had a room. My father's mother had a room in the same apartment house, but in another apartment. And she also had to leave. And the four of us were chased.

We met a whole group of people. And we were moved on very quickly into trains. And it was in the middle of the night.

As a matter of fact, as we were being moved, a woman was carrying a baby in front of us. And the baby fell. And the German would not let her pick up the baby. And I don't know whether the baby ever was picked up later. But the woman who dropped the baby could not pick up that baby.

And then we were chased to the trains. The trains were close. And we didn't know where we were going. And the rumor was that we were sent back to Poland, because at that night, they deported all the Polish Jews who lived in Germany without any warning.

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There must have been thousands of us. I don't know how many, but thousands of us. And we traveled for at least a day and a night, a night and day. Then we got there the following night to the Polish border.

And the Polish government did not know that we were coming. They didn't expect it. So they weren't prepared to take us on, to take us in. And we had to spend the whole night-- and I think it may have been more than a night-- at the border.

And I remember it was cold, and it was raining, and it was frightening. It was very frightening. And the Polish peasants who were there did help out. They gave us some soup. They gave us some tea. They gave us some hot stuff, because it was cold. And it was horrible.

And then what happened was that we were distributed and sent to different cities where we had relatives. And my mother, of course, had relatives in Łódź and in Warsaw. So we went to Łódź to her parents. And we arrived there. And that's where I stayed.

And in the meantime, my father-- who was in London during this, because he was there on business-- decided to go back to Germany to see if he can retrieve any of the things that were confiscated, because everything that we had was confiscated, the business, the apartment, the car, everything. The bank was closed, the bank account. So he went to Germany.

And that was the day, the night that Kristallnacht took place. So my father was hidden by German Gentile friends for two days, two nights. So he couldn't be found. And then he came to Poland.

In the meantime, too, when we were in Poland, a few days later, one of my parents' Gentile friends, German friends-- [Personal name] Schmidt, who was a lawyer, who knew my aunt very well, the one who was in London and went to law school with her-- she came. She actually broke the seal on the apartment. And she took out some clothes, my mother's and mine. And she brought a couple of suitcases with her to Łódź to give it to us.

And I remember my mother wanting to repay her fare. And she wouldn't take a penny. She said, of course not. And she went back.

And they may have been the people, too, who hid my father. I'm really not sure. But I know there were Gentile friends, German friends, who did hide him for two nights.

So at this time, even with this rupture, you still had a sense of family and friends coming in to pitch in to help out to--

Yes, I did.

--shelter.

To help. Yes, I certainly did. In 1938, I started Polish school. And I didn't know a word of Polish. And I was there-- maybe I knew a few words, because my grandparents were Polish. But I went for a year to Polish school. And I started picking up Polish.

My mother was, at the time, in Warsaw, from what I gather, trying to make some money, earn some money while my father was in London again, seeing if he can get us over to London while he was waiting for the American quota to come through, because now I realize-- I wasn't aware of it then-- that they did register in 1936 to come to the United States. But they were on a Polish quota. The Polish quota was very difficult and filled. So their number didn't come through.

So in the meantime, my father was trying to see if he can get us into London. And as far as that goes, it was unsuccessful, because in England, you could only come into England-- the English government would take in the Jews who were in immediate danger, who were in concentration camps, or were told if they leave they would not be exterminated-- I mean, exterminated would be the wrong-- would not be put in a concentration camp, because Hitler really wanted all the Jews to leave. And he would-- that was the whole

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idea.

So the English government did take in a number of German Jews. But they didn't feel that we were in immediate danger. So therefore, he had no-- he didn't have a chance to get us in.

Did one need a visa at that time to go to England?

I don't know. I really don't know if you needed a visa. I don't know if you needed a visa or not. You probably needed some kind of-- they probably made allowances. They probably were political. They were political refugees, and that's how they came in.

So you were spending time from, let's say, November 1938 to when in this--

I was there from '38 to '39, till September '39. What happened was we were-- in the summer of '39, we were in Zakopane, which is in the southern part of Poland, Carpathian Mountains, because I was just getting over the whooping cough. And my mother decided to take me over there. So we were there for about a month.

And as a matter of fact, while we were at the hotel we were staying at, there was a very famous writer, a Polish writer, Polish Jewish writer by the name of Tuvim who stayed at the same hotel. And I was very much impressed by it. And I came up to him. Finally, I took my courage, came up to him to ask to autograph a book for me, which he did.

And then, in 1939-- it must have been August-- we went back to Łódź. And who was waiting for us, but my father. He had just came back from London. And my mother was horrified when she saw him. She was so disappointed. And she says, why did you come back?

And my father felt that, first of all, the war would not break out yet. He didn't believe it. And I guess he wanted to be closer to his family. So he-- you see, it was a combination. And he was there in 19-- he came back August 1939 from London.

So she hoped that, by his staying there--

He could save himself.

--save himself.

Right.

Impossible.

Yeah.

What are your recollections of the beginning of the war?

Well, my recollections were-- I don't know how we got to Warsaw. But we were in Warsaw during the Warsaw bombing in 1939. It was awful. That was-- I talked about being scared. I was petrified.

And the Germans bombed the city fairly systematically, even in 1939. And the mayor of Warsaw gave a directive for the men to leave Warsaw in order to escape the Germans, also maybe escape the army. Maybe they would have to be drafted to go east. So many men, including my father, went east to Łódź, or further to other towns, while we remained in Warsaw. And we heard that people who were even brought-- these people who were escaping, the Germans would bring down their airplanes and bomb the people who were trying to get out.

So we were there in 1939. I think it took-- I don't know how many weeks it took to take Warsaw. It didn't take very long, a few weeks. And that was the first time that I really was scared. The bombing was awful.

And I remember, I always had to go to the bathroom. As soon as it started, I had to go to the bathroom. It must have been fear that made me want to.

How old were you?

I was eight. And then, when the Germans came in, shortly thereafter-- it was in 1939. Shortly thereafter, my mother and I and a relative-- and I forgot which one it was. The three of us went to the Łódź. And we did this-- I guess some people must have been paid off, peasants. But we went through illegally to Łódź to join my father.

And I remember going through villages in Poland and staying overnight in one cottage. And it was like the Middle Ages. There was no electricity. And it was cold. It must have been late fall. And there were animals in that.

There was one room. And there were people and animals. And everybody slept on the straw. And there was one stove, a tile stove. And the old man slept on top of it, because I guess that was the warmest place. And then, in the middle of the night, you would see a black cat running. And you would say, the devil is here, it's the end of the world.

And you realize that you're just in a-- even as little as I was, I was petrified. It's a different world entirely. And this is how the peasants lived in 1939 in Poland. It was an entirely different world.

So then, as I said, from there, we went to--

Was your mother with you at the time when you were there?

Yes, my mother was with me. Sure. I didn't go by myself. And when we got to Łódź, we were reunited with my father.

And my father could not find a job. My father had a hard time finding a job. My mother was working. And my mother got a job in the Russian opera. She was coaching, and she was working. And my father-- I don't know. He must have had some odd jobs, odd businesses.

And I went to school. And I went to a school, which was Ukrainian. And I did quite well, as a matter of fact, in that school. If I had another year, I think-- I went two years. If I had another year, I would have gotten a gold medal. And I would have had a trip to Moscow for that.

And I also went to the conservatory, the Russian conservatory. And that was a hard one to get in, a very hard one. We had to audition to get into the conservatory. And then, when you were there three months, you had to-- every three months, you had to audition to play. And-- sorry. And there was a-- it was an excellent conservatory.

I hated going to theory. I remember that. I used to cry when I went to theory. My father would take me every week. So I had to do it. He always was very ambitious for me.

Were you the only Jewish child in that conservatory?

Oh, no way, no way. The Łódź conservatory in [INAUDIBLE] had a number of very, very fine, very fine Jewish pianists and musicians-- not just pianists, musicians. It was one of the best conservatories in that area. And unfortunately, after the war was over, there was only one young Jewish pianist who survived. All the other ones perished.

I can't tell you what an interesting musical life Łódź had. A lot of Jewish musicians were there. As a matter of fact, Łódź must have had a fairly active Jewish intellectual life. This has an old university town, just like Rakow had. But the conservatory, in particular, I remember.

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And as far as the kids were concerned, well, I don't know how many Jewish kids there were. But I'm sure they were more than myself, because the Jewish families always had a very strong emphasis on music in Poland, because when you think about it, there are quite a few musicians who came from that area.

My grandmother used to play gin rummy in Łódź with Arthur Rubinstein's sister. So my mother knew Arthur Rubinstein. And my mother-- there's another very well-known pianist, not as well known as Arthur Rubinstein, but a very good pianist-- Artur Balsam, who also comes from Łódź. And my mother knew them.

The Polish conservatories have been-- and my mother was a pianist. My mother's only sister-- who died, by the way-- was not only a pianist. She went to the Warsaw Conservatory that had a lot of Jewish musicians, but also to the Warsaw law school. And she finished both law school and conservatory.

And there were a lot of Jewish law students in the Warsaw law school before 1939, because in my family alone, there were a lot of lawyers. We had a lot of professional people. And lawyers and medicine were very high up in that category.

To the extent that it was possible to do so, were you able to recapture any of your former life in Leipzig when you were a child?

Oh, yes. Before the war, yes. It was a wonderful life. It really was, because when I think about it-- and I knew it then, too-- it was a middle, upper middle class family, my family. We were assimilated. But we didn't ever deny the fact that we were Jewish.

And my grandfather, for instance, did go to temple, to shul on Friday nights. And the holidays were observed. But even my grandmother already finished gymnasium-- which was highly thought of at the time-- and spoke French, and German, and Polish.

Her sister, my grandmother's sister, was a pharmacist. Her brother was an engineer. And this is my grandparents. So education was always held very highly in our family.

And my own parents-- my mother went to conservatory, had a career. My father had a business. But they traveled when we lived in Germany, at least once a year, twice a year. My father was an avid skier. And he enjoyed sports. And he had a full life.

And they had a full social life. I remember them going to Dresden. They had the opera season in Dresden, which wasn't too far from Leipzig.

Oh, as I mentioned it before, too-- that my father went to Berlin to listen to Dr. Prinz speak, because Rabbi Prinz had a tremendous following. But that was not only because-- that was not just because it was religion. I'd say it was an association to Judaism. And I think Rabbi Prinz was already very much involved with Zionism in Israel.

And the same thing was true with the Polish family. I used to come. I used to look forward to it. It was fun to come home. It was considered coming home to Poland, because there was a lot of-- my father's family was there, too, because my father's father was the only one who left Poland to go to Germany. The rest of the family stayed in Poland.

And he went to Germany, because he a leather business, which he opened in Germany. And my father was two years old at the time when they went. My aunt was born there. My uncle was born there.

Now I'm going to go on ahead, because my uncle-- who was in America, with whom I stayed with, who invited me in 1949-- he was my grandfather's brother. And he was the only other one who left Poland, because he studied medicine in Switzerland. And when he went back to Poland in the '20s, he didn't care for the way medicine-- the facilities that they had at the time for the Jewish doctors, the hospital facilities.

And he had a friend here in Newark, Dr. [? Rados, ?] who was an ophthalmologist. And he suggested that maybe they should come here and work here. And this is how he came to Newark. And the family thought

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that he was off to come to the United States. Whoever heard of anyone coming to the United States?

Thank God he did. And he did come here. And his family is here. And he helped a lot of us during the war and after the war.

How long did things stay the way they were in Poland for you?

In Łódź? For me-- oh, for me? Well, things started changing in 1938. In '38, already, things were not normal, because things were happening. We were not the only ones who were deported to Poland, the Jews.

Also, Czechoslovakia Jews who were in Germany were deported back to Czechoslovakia in 1938. And of course, was it-- the Anschluss came, the Austrian. Was it '38? And then Sudetenland in '39, and things were closing in. And there was a feeling that things are closing in.

There were very few people, like my father, who believed that it will not happen yet. I mean, they were just not optimistic the way he was. So there was fear in Poland in 1939 that things are happening. And surely, even at '38, when we were deported, and maybe even before that. I'm not sure.

I will say one thing-- that except for a handful of people in my family, nobody left. There was one-- a few of them left to Israel, went to Palestine in '37, '38, very few. And really, they waited till the last minute. And in our case, except one or two, it was too late to leave.

Yes.

You needed an awful lot of money and connections to be able to get out in 1939 and '40 out of Poland. So I can't-- it's also very easy now to say, it's not so difficult. It's easy now to say, why didn't they leave?

It was very difficult to leave for people. They had everything there. They didn't know the language. Some of them were older. The ones who were younger had families.

Was there a sense that things could not get worse, so they might as well--

Well, I don't think, in 1939 when we were in Łódź-- in 1940, when we were in Łódź, there was no sense really of things being as-- that they would get to where they are at, that it would be-- I don't think this was beyond people's-- well, why should they even think it could be like this? It's beyond somebody's imagination.

OK, for instance, in 1940, the Russians have asked if anyone Łódź, any of the people who came to the Łódź would like to go back to Warsaw or rejoin their families who were in Germany, to register. If they want to go back, they should register. And the Russians will make it possible for us to go back to the German occupied territory, Poland. And my mother told my father not to register. She felt that there was a trick to it. So we didn't register.

Now, what happened subsequently is that all the people who registered to go back to the toward the other way were deported inside Russia in 1940 and '41, because the Russians suspected them of being German sympathizers. So they were sent inside Russia. And there were quite a few thousands who did. Now, my mother said, well, see, I told you it's going to be a trick. That's why they asked at registration-- which it was, because it turned out to be, for the ones who were sent to Russia, a saving, because unless they died of--

They were [INAUDIBLE].

--hard labor, they did survive. But again, it's hindsight. But that's what they did ask. It's interesting. There's quite a few thousand who did want to go back to Germany-- I mean, to Poland, which was occupied by Germany-- because I don't think anyone really knew that this is what's going to happen.

Nobody that I knew had this thought, that this is what's-- well, we didn't. There's no sense even dwelling about it. We didn't. We were in Łódź.

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And when the war broke out between the Russians and the Germans, the Russians ran. They were not prepared, at the time, for the war.

We're talking about '41--

'41.

--June '41.

'41. As a matter of fact, we were at a concert, an outdoor concert, a wonderful concert. And we heard some shots being fired. And we thought somebody was joking. The war broke out between Germany and Russia. And the joke turned out to be the truth.

And at that point, it didn't last long because, as I said, the Russians seemed to be completely unprepared for this. The Russian army was in-- not in shambles. They looked-- I remember, when I saw the Russian soldiers in 1940, '39, '40 in Łódź, they were sad.

They looked so bedraggled. Some of them didn't even have boots. They had burlap. They were really in very sad shape.

So when the Germans came in, as they took no time at all, then my father decided to go back to Warsaw to be with his family and went inside the ghetto, even though he could have stayed outside the ghetto. My mother and I and a cousin of ours followed. And we took a regular train. Now, I like to tell the story, because it tells something how spunky my mother was.

We went into this train in Łódź. And it was a train that was being used to transport German troops to the east, to the Russian front, and bring them back from the Russian front. So this train went from the Łódź, to Krakow, to Warsaw. But Krakow was a stop over night.

So we were sitting there in this train. It was one of those second-class trains where you have compartments in the hallway. We sat there on a suitcase. And then a German gestapo got up and asked my mother whether-- he offered her a seat. And he asked my mother where she was traveling.

And my mother, in her very good German, really, because mother speaks in excellent German, told him that she was meeting her husband who was in the German army in Warsaw and that she's traveling with her daughter and the nanny for the daughter, who was our cousin, because she did not speak any German, so she was just a Polish nanny who was traveling. So he gave my mother his seat and somebody else's seat. So we sat comfortably till Krakow.

Excuse me. Did your mother look Aryan?

Well, she looks the way she looks. But she got by it.

I see.

And she spoke very well. And she was very vivacious and, I'm sure, quite attractive. I wouldn't realize it when I was a kid, but I think she was. And anyway, so we sat there.

And before we got to Krakow, he asked my mother whether she had a hotel room, because she had to spend the night there. So Mother says, of course not. How could you have civilians that were in a hotel room? So he says to her, well, they are staying at probably the best hotel in Krakow-- whichever it is, I don't remember-- and that he would get a hotel room for us and for the governess. So off he goes and gets us a hotel room.

And my mother and I are staying in one room. My cousin is staying in another room, [Personal name] And I don't know. He's whispering something to my mother. So Mother gets me into bed. And then the door-- somebody knocks on the door.

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So then Mother says something to the effect, she cannot do it. After all, the child is here. And the father is in the army. But she will make arrangements with the governess so she'll be able to see him or meet him at 8 o'clock in the morning, whatever, early in the morning. So he left.

In the middle, it must have been-- for me, it was middle of the night, but Mother says it was 5, 6 o'clock in the morning-- she quickly woke me up. And we dashed to the station with [Personal name] And we boarded the train.

So we sit on the train. And they come and inspect the tickets. And my mother did not have a ticket. Oh, she did have the ticket, but they wanted to check the passport, the papers. So the conductor comes up to my mother. And he wants to see the passport.

And my mother looks at him. And she has three suitcases on top there. And she says-- the luggage thing. And she says, she thinks she has this passport at the bottom, the bottom suitcase. And it's just so difficult with a child and everything to get to it. And she puts on a very good act. And he lets her go.

He says, women, you can never trust women, whatever, they're so impractical. And he lets her go. And this is how we got to Warsaw first class, or second class, and we drove all the way through. And this really shows a great deal of ingenuity on her part--

A great deal of spunk.

--that she was able to do this at this point. So when we got to Warsaw, and my father was already in the ghetto. And my mother was very unhappy about that. She really was, because she felt that this-- there, my mother had a premonition that this was not a good thing to be behind the wall.

See, this part of this-- the building of the wall, and the formation of the ghetto, we were not in Warsaw. We were in Łódź at the time. The Germans took the part of-- you probably know, they took the part of the city, which was predominantly Jewish, and used that as the ghetto.

Parts of it were not. There was a big ghetto and a small ghetto. The small ghetto really was not-- there were a lot of Jewish people living in the small ghetto. But it was an integrated area. And it went right into the center of town.

So my father went in. And we followed, because the grandparents were there, and other relatives were there. And my father went in because-- as I realize now, it's because he thought that he could really help his family, which he did.

And he got a very good job there for a man by the name of [? Schultz, ?] who was a client of my father's before the war. And he went bankrupt somewhere in '35, '36. And my father never pursued the loan.

And then, during the war, the Germans had factories in the ghetto. A few of the factories were manufacturing fur jackets. They weren't really manufacturing. I think-- well, some may be new. So maybe they used old furs and made jackets for the soldiers who were fighting on the east front. And they needed experienced furriers.

My father was one of them. So he hired my father. He was a foreman. And as a result of it, he was able to give employment to the family who would not have been able to get it because of age, or women.

They didn't employ certain age group or women or children-- not children, but older children, let's say young teenagers. And without work, one could not have work papers. And we needed work papers to get food rationing-- I mean, food stamps. And without food stamps, we could not get food. So it just followed.

And also, when a Jew was captured on the Aryan side, they would bring him into the ghetto and have a public hanging, a public shooting, whatever, and bring the people out to show it to them. So the relatives would get scared and started to-- insisted that their other members of the family come into the ghetto to be

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safe and to be together.

Did you ever witness any of these?

No, I never witnessed that, but talk about being scared. I think this was the most horrendous experience of the war that I had, was the Warsaw ghetto. It was a unbelievable sight. And that's when I think one became aware of the-- that it could be the end, that it was meant to be.

That it was, in fact, a point of leading to--

Yeah.

--the end.

The realization became that it really would be finished, because you saw so much death all around you. I will have to qualify one thing for myself. And then I'll continue with the ghetto and everything else.

I was very lucky in one aspect, because I had my mother with me all the time, except brief time when I didn't have her. I still had grown-up protection. And that makes a big difference, because as horrible as things were-- and they were, they were unbelievable-- there was always somebody that I could touch, and who would explain things to me, and who would be by me. And I think this was my saving.

For myself, I was scared. Seeing the people starving, dead bodies that were-- there was, every day, new bodies. And they went, really, by [INAUDIBLE]. My mother would suddenly point out the beggar and say, well, he was a student with her in the Leipzig Conservatory. And people who were not ordinary people, who led normal lives-- to be in such condition.

There was a beginning of, in other words, a recognition that people knew and your mother knew were among--

Yeah. Were among those who have--

Until then, it seemed--

--deteriorated.

--more abstract, or more--

Yeah. Well, in Łódź--

--depersonalized.

--it was. Certainly, it was. In Łódź, it was, because we were not faced with it under the Russians. We really weren't. The Russians did not discriminate, as far as the Jews or non-Jews were concerned, in Łódź. And in 1939, the bombing wasn't. Yes, in 1938, when we were deported, we were deported because we were Jews.

But it still was not the-- the realization came when the child was dropped and he told the woman to leave the child. But it was an incident and something that didn't even register till afterwards in my mind. The ghetto-- no. The ghetto was the-- it was brought home. It was there.

I think the scarier part of it-- I think the scarier part of the Warsaw ghetto for me was when they started liquidating the ghetto, and they chased us out of our-- in other words, what they would do is they would close up a street, a block. And they would empty out the houses, everyone who was in the house, and take us downstairs, go downstairs. And then they would take some of us.

Some of us would go to-- they said they would resettle us. They put us-- were sending us to another place. And some of us would stay. And the relief of staying told us something, because even the ones who were

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told-- in other words, we were told that these people were going to be resettled.

We didn't want to be resettled, basically. So there was an indication that there was-- more than an indication. There was a--

A real sign.

--a real sign. It was a moment-- it was a terrible fear of being sent away, and to an unknown, except that we knew we would be resettled. And the first people that they took were the old people. They started with the old people, and then the children. And that was-- I'm sorry.

But going back to the beginning of the ghetto, when I came into the ghetto, first of all, we did not live with my family, with my mother's parents, because what happened was we had a room. My grandparents had a room in an apartment. The apartment had a few families. Each apartment had a few families living there.

So you had an apartment, let's say, that had three rooms. In the three rooms, there would be three families living. Each one would have its room. And they'd share a kitchen and a bathroom. And we had to live on another street, in another apartment, in another room.

And the rooms were filthy. The sanitation was very poor. There were bed bugs, infested with bedbugs. And we would have to wake up.

We would wake up in the middle of the night. And we have to kill these bad bugs, because they would be itching us. We couldn't sleep.

How many people to a room?

Well, family, pretty much. Now, in our case, it was my father's mother and my mother, my father, and myself-- four. And in my grandparents' case, which is my mother's parents, there were just two of them, but very small rooms. And they're filthy, a lot of lice. I've always been pestered by lice.

I did go to school. I went to a school in the ghetto. They did have schools in the ghetto. Obviously, they were Jewish schools. And they were a half a day long, half-a-day schools.

And there was a normalcy. They were trying to-- which is the marvelous thing of it. They were trying to make the life normal in this very abnormal environment.

But I would see children, my own peers, running across the wall or across barbed wire onto the Aryan side to get some food. And the Germans would see that. And they would shoot the children. And I saw that, the kids who were going for food being shot.

And then they had, in these old houses-- I don't know if you know. In Europe especially, in cities, they have a middle. They have a court. The houses would go around. And in the middle would be a little courtyard.

In the courtyard, some of them would be somehow made into a little park, kind of an idea. They would put a few things there. And they would take us there, just to have an idea of play and freedom. And they had the children theater, to which I was taken a few times to see children plays. So there was this trying to bring a normal kind of thing, still, for the children.

I always felt that my family-- and I'm sure it's true with a lot-- were very child-oriented and wanted the children to have a so-called normal life, even within this awful environment that we had. So there was a lot of love given to me and through my family.

Well, my mother didn't work in the ghetto. I don't think so. Maybe she did, though. My father did the work at the time. And my mother really wanted out.

At one point, we had to leave the street where we were living, because it was pretty much empty,

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liquidated. And we moved into another street. And when this happened, my mother-- well, my mother had a contact with two Gentile friends, who my parents knew before the war. And they kept in contact through-- as a matter of fact, when we went to Warsaw from the Łódź, we stayed at their house. It was a studio apartment.

And these friends of ours did not want my mother-- did not want us to go inside the ghetto. And they also didn't want my father to go inside the ghetto. They wanted us to stay out with them. And they kept in touch with us. So there was contact with the other side through radio-- through telephones that were still in the ghetto, and also through a courthouse, which was in the ghetto, which was used by the non-Jewish population in Warsaw and had an entrance from the Aryan side and from the ghetto side.

And there was a rotunda where people could meet. And this is how my mother was meeting with those two women. So they must have made an arrangement when I was going to leave and how they were going to meet me.

So one morning, my mother-- that was at the end of the summer '42. My mother took me to the gate. It was early in the morning after 8 o'clock. And there was still some troops working on the Aryan side, some Jewish troops working, groups working on the other side either in factories or in little farms. And they used to leave in the morning under strict security and come back in the evening. And I left with such a group.

And it seems that a security guard must have been paid off as we were passing the wall going through the opening. And then, on the other side, [? Krystyna ?] waited for me and took me into her-- again, there must have been a payoff-- took me into her apartment. It was studio apartment, one room. And I stayed there with her for a few weeks in hiding till the papers were processed.

And she was working, and so was her sister-in-law, [? Zosia. ?] They were two women who helped, who saved us, and saved me. And [? Zosia, ?] too-- she also had a studio apartment on the same floor. So either I stayed with [? Krystyna ?] or with [? Zosia. ?] And as I say, not only did she take me out and try to provide papers, but also had to sell for me and get clothes for me, because I didn't have any, except what I walked out with. She was involved with the underground.

And the underground made the provisions for the papers. There were some parishes, some priest who cooperated with the underground. And they used to build the false papers on a birth certificate, somebody who is deceased. And then the whole papers, everything was built on it. Once I have the papers, I was able to walk out and live a so-called normal life. And I even spent some time in the country that summer with some of their friends' houses.

My mother was supposed to follow shortly thereafter. But she found herself in a automobile-- a truck pushed her against the wall in the factory in [? Schultz. ?] And she had broken ribs and a broken shoulder. And she had to remain in the ghetto another few months.

And while she was in the ghetto, she was taken to Umschlagplatz. That was after I left. And my father heard about it and went with one of the-- maybe [? Schultz ?] himself, one of the officials from the factory, and was able to get her out of there and brought her back, which is the most amazing story, because she really was on her way. And he was able to save her.

And this is the famous picture I have of her in this group, which she recognized years later at an exhibit here in the States. The Germans were always very thorough. And they made a lot of pictures, as we know, and documentation. And this is how this picture survived.

It's amazing that German thoroughness is, in a sense, responsible for the evidence that we have. That's a great irony.

That's right. That's right.

Jody, you wanted to ask a question, didn't you?

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I don't even know.

How long did you spend in the ghetto?

I spent, in the ghetto, a total of about eight months. And the eight months were the most unbelievable months of my war years. I have to-- let me start this.

Actually, when the war was over, I didn't talk about my war experiences. I really felt that I was better off to just move on and not to dwell on it, because I thought it was too destructive for me. And I didn't come to it till a few years ago.

I will go into that a little later, to why. And I think one of the reasons was the Warsaw ghetto. I actually had to pinch myself when I was in the ghetto to think that I was-- maybe it was all a dream, a bad dream, and it wasn't happening for real, because it couldn't be.

For instance, so an orthodox-- it must have been a rabbi. But it was an Orthodox Jew-- on a Friday night, kneeling by a dead horse on the street, and taking a piece of meat, cutting meat from that horse and take it home for food. I mean, this is something that you just can't imagine.

Or forget.

Yes, you do try to. And I think that people who-- you can't very well-- you have to look into things and say, well, you want to live a normal life. The reason why you survived the war-- there must be a reason for it, and this is the reason.

And you want to do things the right way. And to go back to it is very-- was very destructive for me. So I didn't. I pushed on. And only many years later was I able to do it.

And actually, the Warsaw ghetto-- I was asked at a Holocaust observance a few years ago, which commemorated the uprising of the Warsaw ghetto. And I was not in the Warsaw ghetto during that time. My father just got out of it, by the way, just as it started. Just before, my father got out of the ghetto.

And I participated in this observance. And after the evening, that morning, I got sick. I was really very sick. I ended up in the hospital. I had some kind of a thing that got hold, whatever it was. But I was really-- it ran me down.

So it's not easy. It becomes a little easier as you go on. But it's not something that you want to dwell on, for me-- also, my children now. I have four sons. And my children did not learn from me about the Holocaust. They learned it from religious school, which was great.

They studied it while they were members-- we were members of Temple Emanu-El in Westfield. And they went to a religious school there. And that's where they studied the Holocaust.

And then they came. And they ask whether it's such, and such, and such, and such. And then I was able to talk to them about it. But they were the ones who--

Initiated.

--initiated it. Now, maybe I didn't want them to know about it from me. Who knows? There must have been a reason behind it.

Also, my husband is not a Holocaust survivor. If my husband has been a Holocaust survivor, maybe it would have been different. They would have known already if both of us were. But he was not. He was born and raised in Newark.

So he wasn't, which may be another way I used to function, because I did not go out with people who came from Europe, my own background. I was going out with American fellows. And my social life was with

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American young people, rather than with people like myself. So this was also a form of trying to get into a normal situation, as I felt it, or stop-- whatever it was something. Normalcy was important.

We're going to cover that in the next segment. But we have gotten our signal to take a short pause. So we will take a few minutes, and maybe get out of the lights, and continue--

Yeah.

--on then.

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