

Good morning. My name is Bernard Weinstein and I'm the director of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project at the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimony at the Sterling Library of Yale University.

We are privileged today to welcome Norman Salsitz, a survivor presently living in Springfield, who has generously volunteered to give testimony about his experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Welcome, Mr. Salsitz.

Thank you.

I wonder if you could begin by telling us something about your life before the war, the community came from, your family, and your background.

I was brought up in a small town, like you can call it a typical shtetl, a town like Sholem Aleichem, Mendele Moykher Sforim, like the Jewish classics described in their writings. It was a rural town. It didn't penetrate yet the 20th century. Everything was so backwards that we even didn't have a railroad. We didn't have electricity. It was a poor town. 10% of Jews were the rich Jews who made a good living. 40% made their living, but they struggled. And the rest were poor.

Our town had 4,000 people, 2,000 Jews, 2,000 Poles. The Jews mostly lived around the marketplace where they had their stores. And the industry in our town was only-- they worked at home, like making underwear, shoes, clothing. This was the main income of the working class.

The life was not very happy as whole because they didn't make a living. A lot of our townspeople immigrated to the United States. We had more people from Kolbuszowa in New York that we had in our town. And they had organizations in America. And the organizations were very helpful.

They had the Free Loan Society. They send in money and everybody who needed money could borrow. For every holiday, they used to send money. For the winter, they send money to buy fuel of wood. And the Jews themselves had all kinds of organizations, self-help organizations for the sick, for the needy. Everything was organized, even in this small, poor town.

For myself, I was very unhappy. The reason why I was unhappy, I come from a very-- from our ultra-orthodox Hasidic family. And my father wanted me to live the life that he lived and his father before him. I had different ideas. I wanted to study. I wanted to become a doctor or to have a other profession. For him, was enough to sit and to study the Talmud, to get married, to take over the business, and to go on the same way.

Did you have a career planned for yourself particularly?

Yes. My father had a career planned for me, what he wanted. He wanted I should become very--

A scholar, yes.

--learning and this. And then later, naturally, to match-- to have a matchmaker and to get married. And too, because I was the youngest in our family-- we were nine children-- and I was the youngest, so the youngest usually took over the business. And I started to work in the business, but my idea too for the future was not our little town.

I wanted to go in this time to Palestine. And I wanted to go to school. And my ambition was to become a doctor or to become an actor. And this was my ambition. Because we used to make shows in our Hasidic school. And I always participated. And also, we had a cantor who came twice a year. And I sang in the choir.

When I was seven, eight years, I had a boy soprano. And he liked me. And in general, our house was a singing house. Everybody-- I had five sisters and we were four brothers. Everybody in our house could sing. And when came Saturday, we sat down by the table. And everybody used to sing that Saturday this Murat.

So my life was different. Also, I wanted to go out with a girl, to speak to a girl. And as a matter of fact, when I was 11 years old I already fell in love with a girl. And I loved her from 11 til I was 18. When I was 18 was the first time that I spoke to her, from 11 to 18. And this was always within me. And I cultivated this love very much.

So I was not-- I didn't have what I wanted. Also, in school I always-- I was a very big Polish patriot. Because I said, if I live in Poland, I want to be the same. I want to have the same opportunities as my school friends had. When it came a national holiday, I wanted to march with a Polish flag. And when it was a national holiday, I wanted to sing together with them. But they didn't accept me. They didn't let me. Because I was a Jewish boy with side locks, with a kippah on my head, with a black jacket.

And this was very difficult for me. Because I envied them. When there was sport matches, so I wanted to participate. But they wouldn't take me because I was a Jew. And in school, I always had trouble because I was the one who spoke up. I was the one if I was beaten up, I didn't stay or run away, I always fought back. And the teachers didn't like it.

There were special, one teacher, his name was Vishnevskiy. And there was an incident when I was nine years old. And we made a show in school, the 19th of March. The 19th of March was a very important holiday. It was the names day of Yosefa-- Josef. Now, in Poland, you didn't celebrate so much birthdays as names days.

Now, why was Josef so important? Because the Marshal of Portland was Josef Piludski. So for this day, we called it the names day of Piludski. So our school made a little show. Now they needed a boy who could sing. And they had a new song about Piludski, a tribute to Piludski.

Now from all the Polish boys, my friends, there was nobody that had such a high range and could sing it the way the teacher wanted. So this teacher, Vishnevskiy, who was our math teacher and also our music teacher, asked everybody to sing. And he picked me out I should sing. Now he wasn't very happy with it because he was an anti-Semite. But he didn't have a choice so he picked me out.

And we started and we rehearsed the song. And it was a beautiful song. And then later, this day, it was the 19th of March. In the morning, we got up. First, my father was against it. He said, this is not your holiday. And this is not your place. You better go to the shul and study more Talmud. Why do you have to sing? It's not for-- you sing in the temple and the shul is all right, but this is not a Jewish trade.

But I wanted and I was the youngest child home. And everything what I said, my mother was happy, my sisters were happy and they persuaded my father that he should let me do it. After we rehearsed in the morning, I got up earlier, went to prayer because the boy had to go every day in the morning. And I remember, I came home. My mother put on my Shabbat, the sabbath jacket. And she took a velvet yarmulke and put on. And I remember, she even cleaned it with kerosene. Because once you clean with kerosene it has a luster.

And I shined the shoes. And I came up. I was very happy. My mother, my sisters went to see. And we came into the auditorium. It was a large auditorium. And we waited for the important people to come out from church because they went first to church. And then they came in to start the show.

In this room, there was a large room, the auditorium. And one wall, there was the Polish eagle. And one side was the portrait of Moscicki. He was the president of Poland. And the other side was the portrait of Piludski. Across on the second wall was a big crucifix with Jesus hanging. Whenever a class, was a cross with Jesus.

And when we started to go in to the-- to perform, a teacher took me by the hand. And she escorted me to the platform. And in the corner of the platform was a little divider. And she put me behind the divider. And I couldn't understand why behind the divider when everybody would perform in front of all the dignitaries.

And they started the speeches and everything. Then the teacher came in with his violin. And he said to me, while I was behind the platform, he said, now we'll start. And he started to play. And I right away understood-- I was nine years old-- what here was going on. I said they are ashamed to show this Jewish boy to perform. They picked me out because I was the best in singing.

They said this to you directly?

No, they didn't. But I understood. Why should they put me-- I wanted everybody should see me. Especially when my mother was there with my sisters. And also, I knew the girl that I liked very much was also there. But I was behind this divider. And he started to play.

And I said, I'm not going to sing. But somehow, automatically, I don't know why I started to sing. I cried and I sang. I cried. And then later, after it was finished, everybody applauded. And they made the show. I was still sitting behind the divider. I didn't go out.

When the people left, I was ashamed to go out. Why? I wasn't ashamed for myself. I maybe was ashamed for them. And after everything was finished, my mother and my sisters waited. And I couldn't look them in the eyes. And I said to them, you know, my father was right. He said to me this is not for you. And when we walked home-- so my mother said, you know the nicest things, the most beautiful thing was your song from the whole show.

But we didn't see it. We didn't see you, but we knew it's you. But I was very gratified when this girl came to me. And she said to me, I know that you sang it and it was beautiful. This is the environment that we were brought up. And this stands out in my mind, that they needed me, but they didn't want to share there is a Jewish boy who's doing it.

If you had not been so conspicuously Jewish, as you were, but they knew-- they had known you were Jewish, do you think they would have accepted you any more in that community?

You mean, if I wouldn't be dressed--

If you looked more assimilated?

Assimilated.

Yes.

Yes, They would. Doesn't mean that they will be-- we will be maybe accepted. Like for instance on the street when we went out from school, there non-Jewish boys maybe would walk with me a little longer on the street because I wouldn't look so Jewish. But to be friends, to invite me home, or I should invite them home, no.

Yes, the separation--

The separation--

--would have been felt under any circumstances.

--would be the same. Right. Yes. There was a friend, I had a friend. He was a doctor's son. But he didn't have friends, Jews, but he had friend non-Jews. But he was already completely assimilated. And he was accepted. Accepted to a certain-- in a certain way. But, yeah, this is very important. Because we were-- we stood out that we were different, that we were dressed-- we were dressed different.

Yes. Did you feel other forms of antagonism or other forms of--

The forms were-- the antagonism was that we knew that if we went out that night we were beaten up. And we didn't complain. Because this was the way we thought it should be. If a Jew went to the shul in the evening and it was winter nights, and a few hooligans from our town grabbed them and they beat him, they kicked him, he went the way. He didn't go to the police to complain. Because the policemen were the same few policemen that they probably didn't like the Jews either.

And it was not-- we didn't complain because this was the way that it went on year after year. Now if I was beaten up in school, if I was strong enough, or if I was-- like in Jewish, you say I was a shaggitz. I didn't let me-- I didn't let it go away. So I fought back. If they were stronger, they beat me up. If I was stronger, I beat them up. But this was the way.

We always were beaten up, the Jewish boys. The reason why, we had non-Jewish boys from around from the countryside. Now they were always two three years older than we were. Because they used to go to three years in the same class. They never passed the class. Where a Jewish boy was scholarly more advanced and he passed mostly from one class to the other.

Now if we were 9, 10, 11, and there were boys who were 13, 14, naturally they were stronger and they were bigger. So they had the chance to beat us up. For instance, we had games, sport games. So the teacher could say now we have a game the Jews against the non-Jews. They were always stronger. They would beat us up. In the winter when we started to throw snow, again in the school, also the teacher would say, let's see who is stronger, the Jews against the non-Jews.

So they always pitied the Jews against the others.

The others.

Yes.

But we were always the weaker because we were less and we were younger. And again, the same thing, we were weaker physically also. So this was going on always. If there was a Christian holiday, the Jews wouldn't dare to go out in this time, when it was Christmas or Easter. Because when they went out to church, the non-Jews and they found some Jews, they would beat them up.

And the whole situation, even in business, the Jew was discriminated. If I remember, my father was once-- my father was a very prominent man in our town. He was one of the 10% of the rich people. He had a big business. He had a wholesale general store where all the stores from the villages used to come in the stores and buy by us.

He was always involved. He was the deputy mayor. Couldn't be as a Jew, but he was always in the council of the town. He was in the Jewish council. He was a director of the bank from out of town.

So Jews were permitted to do certain things up to a point?

Well, they had to do it. Like for instance, take the town council. The town council also had 50% Jews because there were 50% Jews in our town, but the mayor was always a non-Jew.

Yes.

And they always picked out that the deputy mayor was a Jew. My father used to have a job, if somebody needed to have a prescription or he was poor and he had to go to a doctor, so the town paid for it. But they had to have a signed card that the council approved it. Now, my father was the one who gave out those cards. So the Jews and non-Jews came to my father. And he knew that the people are poor, he gave it to them.

Yes.

He was involved in everything, in every organization, in every philanthropic organization as much as we had. And he was involved. Also, he could give more charity than somebody else. But he felt-- I remember once he went to court. He took somebody to court that they owed him money. And he lost. So he came home. He cried. This is the only time I saw him crying.

And I asked him, why do you cry? He said, I'm not crying because I lost. I am crying the way they humiliated me, the way the judge talked to me. My father spoke beautiful Polish. It was a rarity that a Jew that had a long gray beard, this was very-- it was not the everyday you could find a Jew with a long beard could speak beautiful Polish and without a

trace of an accent.

And usually the judge, when he came to court, and had just started to talk. And with a Jewish sing-song he made fun of his language. And my father didn't have it. So he came, and he said, I don't-- I'm not sorry that I lost, but why did he have to humiliate me? And this was very much on his mind.

And he also was a person that he would speak up. If there was an unjust thing in the town, he would be the one that he would go to the head of the town, to the police. He would speak or be the spokesman. Maybe because he spoke so good Polish, where the other people were ashamed or they didn't feel comfortable to speak because on account of their language. And because he spoke good, and also he was well known.

We sold our merchandise to the municipality. They needed kerosene, they needed other things, they bought it by us. We sold merchandise to the parish. They needed a lot of stuff for the police, they brought it by us. And then so on, the schools bought the things by us. So he knew all those people. And he was very well-- very much respected. But still, when it came to humiliate a Jew with a long beard, he was not exempt.

Yeah. You and your siblings were-- did you attend a secular school as well as a--

Yes, we went--

A Talmud Torah?

Well, when I was three years old, naturally they took me to cheder.

Yeah.

And this was a very big thing when they took a child by three years. The first thing is they cut off the hair. Till three years, you were allowed to have long hair. By three years, they cut off completely the hair. They left some side locks. And my father covered me with his tallis and he carried me to the first teacher to cheder.

And the woman went after me. And they threw almonds, and nuts and raisins. It's a symbol of a sweet life. And also, in this time they smeared my fingers with honey. It was a tradition. It was a beautiful tradition.

And then when I was six years, I started to attend the public school.

Yes.

This was a public school for boys, Jews and non-Jews together. So till from 8 til 1, we were in the public school. 1 o'clock, we came home, we ate lunch. And I run to the cheder. Later I attended the yeshiva-- Talmud Torah, and then a yeshiva. And then until I finished seven grades. I finished [INAUDIBLE]. I was very unhappy.

I remember the day when we got our--

Diplomas.

Diplomas.

Certificates.

I came home and I cried. All my friends were so happy. They had special songs for this day, how happy they were they finished. And I came home and I cried. So I remember my mother said, why are you crying? And I had always very good diplomas, very, mostly excellent, excellent. So she said, why you unhappy? Said, well, this will be my education and this will be it. I will finish the seventh lesson.

Then later after, I want to go farther. But my father wouldn't let me go to a gymnasium. We had a gymnasium in our town, which is like a high school. But he wouldn't let me go because we had to go Saturday. And Saturday was unheard that a Jewish boy should go Saturday. You have to write Saturday, to carry your papers, which wasn't allowed.

Some didn't go because they didn't have the money to pay for it. It was quite expensive. My father had the money to pay for it, but because it was Saturday. So I dreamt to run away from home and to go there. But I was never too strong to do it. And I didn't do it.

And then a year later, I joined-- they opened a professional night school. Professional means for a business school, business courses and all that. So I joined it. And this took two years. And I finished it. And that's what I do. I started to work at my father's store. So I was very, very unhappy that I couldn't go.

And going to the yeshiva, going to Talmud Torah, I never liked it. I did it because my father wanted me to do. Then he sent me away to a rabbi. And I was there a year, two semesters, in a town, Tarnow. This was a big town. And he was a disciple of a rabbi. We called him the [YIDDISH], the rabbi from Jacob. And he had a yeshiva. And I went over there for two semesters. But I never, never was there with a full heart. I didn't like it.

And you never-- you never went to the gymnasium.

And I never went because we were in the store and we worked. And then in 19-- a year before the war I wanted to run away. And where do you run away from Poland? So I had family in America.

This would have been in '38.

This '38. I had family in America. And I start to write them. And I definitely did-- I make up my mind I don't want to be in Poland. So I wrote to my family to send me an affidavit. But from all my family, nobody did anything.

Nobody sent me-- the only thing they had to invest is a quarter, buy a quarter to go, and to make an affidavit, and go to a notary republic, and to have it notarized, and to send it to Washington. Now if they would go to a bank probably they would save the quarter. But they didn't do it. Even my brother didn't do it.

So I decided to run away to Palestine. I joined a Zionist organization, a huge Zionist organization which was Hanoar Hatzioni. And we decide-- legally, we couldn't go. You needed a certificate. And this time, the mandate, the English mandate, they didn't let in too many Jews. And I had the brother already in Palestine. He left 1933.

And I, with a friend, we paid in to a group in Romania that we had to go illegal from Poland through the border to Romania, in Romania to join them and to go illegal to Palestine. And this was in '39. And I already paid them the money. I remember it was 500 zloty to pay in. I paid in the money. The war broke out. I never got back the money and I never went to Palestine.

Did you-- by the time you had decided to go to Palestine, had you already sensed that there was danger?

We sensed-- yes. Well, this was in '38-- 1938 and '39. The minute that Hitler started to rule Germany, the Jews in Poland felt-- every time there were new orders in Germany, the Jews felt it. Officially, officially the government didn't put in the same orders, the same things they did in Germany.

But we knew that the Polish people don't have too much love for the Jews. And they adopted certain things. Also it got much worse the day Piludski died. He died in 1935. I wouldn't say that Piludski was the biggest lover of Jews, but he was not an anti-Semite.

He was considered a liberal in his time.

He was considered a liberal, yes. He was considered that. A lot of things that came out after he died, they would never do it when he was alive. He was a strong man. And he had-- the population liked him. Like, for instance, after he died,

there were people who started to in sejm, which means in senate in congress, to try to abolish ritual slaughtering in Poland. And there was a lady, she was a member of it.

And this was very prominent. And this couldn't happen in the time of Piludski. There was a town, a little town, Przytyk. And in Przytyk was a pogrom. The program was 1938, which this wouldn't happen. So the people started to feel that every time Germany advanced with their discriminations, and with the rules, and with their orders against the Jews, something, somehow we lived through with it.

Now our town, Kolbuszowa, which was a very small town, was distinguished in a lot of ways, but also was distinguished that we had a pogrom. Now we don't talk the pogrom in 19th century, in 20-- this was in 20th century. The pogrom was the 6th of May. This was one of the highlights of Kolbuszowa, which they went through, till the Germans came and they liquidated the whole town, which became bigger.

So in 1919, Poland received independence after so many years. So the Polish people wanted to celebrate. Now how is the best way to celebrate our independence after almost 200 years under foreign rules? Because they were under Russian, German, and Austria. We were under Austria, which was the best part to live.

So they decided to make a pogrom. Not a big program, a small program because it was a small town. If it would be a bigger town, it would be a big pogrom. They came in and they killed nine people. They plundered. They took away everything that Jews have. They wounded 400 people and they killed nine-- to enjoy themselves. Why? To celebrate--

This was pleasure to them.

To celebrate their independence. Now, if we lived through-- and the pogrom was the 6th of May, 1919. I was born on the 6th of May. But I was born a year later, in 1920. So always this day-- there were even songs made up for this pogrom. In the songs-- I don't know if I should tell you the songs-- which there was a Polish folk song and it describes the beauty of me because it was in May. And then later they changed the words. And they changed--

And the 3rd of May, it was Poland's biggest holiday, national holiday. Because the 3rd of May was the anniversary of the Polish Constitution. And we called this Konstytucji 3 Maja, the 3rd of May Constitution. So this song described the 3rd of May and the beauty of May. So they changed it and they said [POLISH]. It's like (singing) [POLISH].

It means, the 3rd of May, the 6th of May, break all the windows by the Jew, beat the Jew, kill the Jew, because for the Polish it's a blessing, it's a beautiful day. Now those songs were sang to us in the school-- even this was-- I was born later-- even later. The Polish people, you, the Polish friends, used to sing it.

Now, I remember my father, if he had an argument with a non-Jew, sometimes with a porter, somehow they had argument. So he used to tell-- and the porter threatened him. So he always used to say, what do you think? This is the 6th of May? It's not the 6th of May anymore? Naturally, this was something that he stopped.

But we always lived with the shadow of this pogrom. And the funny thing is that the nine people who were killed, about half were killed Jews who went through the whole war, the First World War, from 1914, and they came home in 1918. Now I always thought why where they killed more than other people? Those were Jews who fought in the Austrian army. And probably when they came to beat them up, so they resisted. And because they resisted they killed them.

Because they saw them as Austrian--

No, they didn't-- no, they didn't know that they were in army because they didn't have their uniforms. But the Jews themselves, they thought-- I know I would do the same thing. I fought for 40 years. And now we have our independence. And also, when somebody's a soldier for four years, who was on different fronts, he knows a little more to fight. So he resisted. So they killed him.

Yeah, so it was all the fact that they put up a fight.

Well, and this was the lives that we were. And then closer to the war, as we came closer to the war, more orders, more against the Jews, with taxes, with other restrictions in business. And this, we saw that something would happen.

Till we come to '39. In '39, it was the famous pact that Poland made with Germany, the non-aggression pact. Which in this time we had the foreign minister, Beck. And everybody accused him that he was a German, he was a traitor. But they made a non-aggression pact because Hitler wanted to take Sudeten and walk into Czechoslovakia.

And he-- and they were very smart, the Germans. In everything they were very smart. And they figured why should they have-- at this time nobody knew that the Germans are really so strong, why should they have an enemy right in the site on the border, Poland. So they wanted to make a non-aggression pact.

And they said to Poland, we will give you a sliver. We'll give you a piece of land from Czechoslovakia. And there was a small river called Olza. And this piece of land, we call the Zaolzie. It means on the other side of Olza. So they made a pact. And they said to them, you take this little piece and we will take the Sudeten. And they had a non-aggression pact so they knew Poland wouldn't do anything.

Naturally, when the German army moved into the Sudeten, the Polish army moved in in this little piece. And they wrapped it. And they took it over. And this was a very smart thing from the Germans to do it.

What was your first memory or reminiscence of the war itself, when war broke out in September of '39?

When the war broke out, this was September the 1st.

Yes.

1939. Naturally, in the morning-- we had in our town maybe three radios. We didn't have radios. We didn't have electricity. But there were people who had radios with the quartz, I think, or some crystals.

Yes, the old sets.

The old crystal sets. And we found out, everybody run. There was one radio in the Jewish organization called [INAUDIBLE]. And we find out there is war. In the minute we find out that there is war, we knew that this is something terrible for the Jews.

And we knew that the Polish army is not an army that could withstand the German army. Poland didn't have practically no motorization in the army, a motorized army. And they didn't have an air force. They had a few planes. So they couldn't fight against the Germans.

And we already knew about the German army because we saw on the news reels, we saw in the movies how the German army moved in to Rhineland, moved into our Austria, moved into Sudeten. It wasn't just the first one. So we saw the might of the German army. And every-- and the German army was very impressive, the way they marched, the way they had their equipment. Poland had a good cavalry, but cavalry was good in the 17th century, in the 18th century, but not in the 20th century.

A few days before September the 1st, they made a mobilization. And also the mobilization was so done very-- not professionally. They started to mobilize people. And they mobilized elderly people. From our town they mobilized over 100 Jews who were soldiers in the Austrian Army, Jews who were 40 years, 45 years, 50 years, with long beards, they mobilized them. And they had families. And they took them to the army.

So I remember this day. It was about five days before the war broke out. Trucks came in the middle of the marketplace. And at night they had to assemble. And they took them away and they send them to different sections. Now, there were a lot of young soldiers in the reserve. Those young soldiers were not called right away. And then later they said the reason why, because they wanted to keep them because they were sure that the army who is in the active army would resist the German approach.

And they were in the army. And then the first-- right away we knew that a terrible thing will happen to the Jews. Because what the Germans would do, they will have willing-- a nation who was-- who is willing to collaborate, who is willing to help anything what the Germans wanted when it comes to the Jews. We didn't have yet proof. But from the past, we knew that this could happen. In special, our town had already went through a pogrom. And we remembered the program.

A day or two days later, when the war broke out, we started to see already refugees coming from the Western part of Poland, mostly Jews. The war started and they started to run away to the East. And everybody thought that somehow the Polish army would stop them. The first day there were less, second day, more. Then it became so as through Kolbuszowa they came through thousands of thousands of refugees.

Why Kolbuszowa? Because there was a shortcut from Tarnow to go to Rzeszow, to go to the East. So they could go through fields and not to go to the roads where there were railroads and the Germans started to bomb the roads where the people were running away. So they took the fields--

It was back route.

It was a back route. And through this field-- and everybody-- somebody knew this road so everybody followed them. And there you could see streams, thousands of thousands of people. And they were from a village that they came through. And they came to Kolbuszowa to rest. And they had feet bleeding, people who took with them self packages and bundles. On the way they threw away everything because they couldn't--

They couldn't carry anything.

They couldn't carry it. And more and more every day were. Then we started-- we wanted to run away from our town. And we asked the people, what should we do? And all of them said, don't do it. We made a mistake. Because sooner or later the Germans will catch you. Because we go and they go faster. And they advance faster.

Yeah.

The third day, we started already to see splinters from the Polish Army coming through Kolbuszowa. And you could see the first-- the third day, units went through. This was the retreat. The fourth they, broke new units. The fifth day, you could see on this, single, mixed in every army. Once the army is in formation and the army goes forward, the army looks beautiful, everything. But once the army runs away and goes back--

In retreat.

In retreat, they look awful. No leadership, everything broken, everything-- everybody on his own. Even the German army-- I remember this in 1944 and 1945, when we took over the German army. And when they retreated, they didn't look better. They looked the same as the Polish army when they retreated.

They were in shambles.

They only were kanakas or big shots when they went for forward. So the Polish army started-- you could see-- you felt sorry for them. Here, especially with me, I was a patriot. I love Poland. Maybe I loved so much Poland because I was denied all those things.

Like for instance, my wife comes from a different world. She comes from a more progressive. She had everything. She went to gymnasium. She went to-- she worked in a big town. She doesn't have the nostalgia. She doesn't have the love for Poland as I have. She knew Poland was not for her. They wanted to emigrate.

But I loved it because I was denied all those little things that boys want to have. So when I saw this, I felt very bad. When the war broke out in the 1st of September, the same day I went to volunteer to the Polish army. There was a

recruiting office. And I came in. I was 19 years old. And I said, I want to volunteer. Because I had to go to the army when I was 21.

And he looked at me. And he said, what will we do with you? We don't even have uniforms for our draftees. What will we do with you? So naturally, my parents, my father didn't know that I am doing this.

So then later, you could see individual soldiers. And then, as the people went through, the Jewish population, somebody, everybody-- somebody had there a friend, a friend of a friend. And they could eat something. But then soldiers started to go through our town. They came into the stores and they started to plunder, to rob, to take away everything.

First, they were hungry, so they took away everything to eat. And then they took anything, everything. And we couldn't have-- we didn't have no protection. I remember one day there was-- in our store, there was a full store with peasants. They came in to buy, to steal, this. So a colonel came in with a horse into the store. And came in with a horse. And he said to the peasants, take anything you want because we want to empty all the stores. When the Germans will come in, they shouldn't find anything.

Naturally, when the Poles saw things like this, so they took what they wanted. And nobody could stop them.

So they had official sanction.

They had official sanction and we couldn't do anything. So one peasant came home and he brought something. And naturally, the rest of them came and also the Polish soldiers. But you could see that everything is breaking down. And then planes started to fly over our town. They threw a few bombs. And you could see that the end of the Polish army is very close.

And this took till Thursday. Thursday was the 8th-- it was a week later.

The seventh day of the war.

The seventh. So Thursday in the afternoon, a tank, a German tank, with a motorcycle came in to one of the corners of our marketplace from the West. And there were thousands of thousands of refugees in our town. I would say that in this time, in this day, there were about 40,000 refugees in our town. And most of them Jewish, because most of the Jews ran away. They were afraid for the Germans.

As they came into the corner of the town, there were Polish soldiers who retreated. They killed the three Germans on the motorcycles. There were three. I was standing there and I saw that they killed them. As the tank-- who drove the tank saw it, he turned around and he went back.

We started-- we were afraid because once three soldiers were killed, the Germans would probably accuse the Jews that they did it.

Yes.

And this was Friday afternoon, about 5, 6 o'clock. During the night nothing happened. And the Polish army, the Polish soldiers who were in this time in Kolbuszowa knew that they did something wrong. They killed the Germans. And they knew that the Germans will not just take Kolbuszowa without revenge.

So they left during the night our town. And the town was without soldiers. Which we were very happy, because if there are no soldiers there will not be a resistance and there will be no fighting. Because in fighting, we knew that the refugees who didn't have where to hide, that they will be the one who will suffer the most.

Yes.

As I said, Kolbuszowa was distinguished with a lot of things and always distinguished with something bad. Always

something bad happened to it. The next day, Saturday morning, a regiment of cavalry from a town, Mielec, also from the West, left Mielec and came to Kolbuszowa. This was about 9-- 8, 9 o'clock in the morning. Here we were happy there are no soldiers.

And they said that they're going to make a line of defense in Kolbuszowa. And they started to organize. In each house they put in soldiers to the windows to protect-- to stop the German invasion. And we knew that this is a terrible thing.

And about 3, 4 o'clock-- we had a two-story house. There were very few two-story houses in the town. There were maybe four or five. In our house, the back went out to the fields from where the refugees came. I went up to the attic. There was a small window. And I wanted to see what will happen.

In our house we had hundreds of hundreds of refugees. Who wanted to come in, we let them in. They didn't want to be on the streets. We had big basements. So everybody went into the basement, to the cellars where we had merchandise. And everybody was hiding there. And I was sitting by this window. And I saw from a distance-- through the fields I saw that German army approach.

First tanks, then motorcycles, and then infantry behind the tanks. And they came closer and closer. And I gave all this-- what I saw, I yelled down they should know what's going on. And they came in to the town. And then you could hear starting shooting from the tanks, from rifles, from other, from mortars.

And the Polish army fought back. Because they were-- in every house with the windows going to those fields there was them. Well, then they came closer and closer. And you could already hear German commands-- forwards, auchtung, and all those things, because they were already around our house. And they went forward. And naturally, the Polish army retreated. The ones who weren't killed couldn't do anything.

And they came in in every house, banged in the door, in with loud, raus, raus, raus. They didn't say Juden. They didn't know in this time if Jews are now Jews. Everything, raus. Always the same thing-- loud, and schnell, schnell, schnell, raus-- fast, fast, out.

And as we came out-- so there was a cordon-- a corridor with soldiers from both sides. And everybody ran through this corridor. On both sides were soldiers with rifles. In the four corners of the marketplace there were four tanks with soldiers with machine guns. And we run where they prepared this cordon with the soldiers to an empty place outside of the city, a very big yard. And they collected there all the people.

And there were thousands of thousands of people, and mostly refugees because they didn't have where to go. And what they did, they started to burn the houses. They threw in incinerator-- bombs and grenades and the houses started to burn. They burned a few streets and two side of the marketplace. And where we were around us were houses. So they started to burn those houses.

And then a colonel came in in a staff car without the roof. And he said to us because the Jews fought against the Germans, all the Jews who are here will be burned alive. On all the four sides there was a fire. Before we came into this place there were a few soldiers by the gate and we had to empty our pockets. They had big baskets. Everybody had to take off their watch, their ring. If women had some jewelry and from the pocket money. We had to throw it in the baskets.

And he said we're going to be burned. Naturally, the people started to cry. The women, the children, the Jewish religious people started to say their last prayers before death. And we knew that they will keep their promise. After about two hours staying there and crying, the same person came in and he said, we decided not to burn you. But he picked out five hostages.

And he took with him-- just picked out five Jews. And he said, we'll take the hostages. In case something will happen, they will be shot. Now this day, 65 German soldiers were killed. 185 Polish soldiers were killed. And they were killed about 100 civilians who were caught in crossfire, mostly of them Jews.

Also there were killed maybe 75 or 100 horses. Because as I mentioned, this was the cavalry. And the horses were standing and, of course, the horses were killed. And this was everything piled up in the streets.

Now they didn't let us go home from this place. They took us to the fields outside the city. And they surrounded us with the guards. And we had to stay there the whole night. And we could see through the whole night that the town is burning. And we were there with the children, without food, without water. We were there the whole night.

The next day, about 12 o'clock, they said that we can go to our homes. Now the reason why they wanted us out is because during the night and a half a day they came in and they took out everything what's valuable from the houses. Now we had our house, our house wasn't burned. But people who their houses were burned didn't have where to go. So naturally, people like us and others took in family, friends.

And this how it started the German occupation. This was the first day. And when we came to our house-- we had a lot of merchandise still left-- everything was gone. And the pillows, quilts, everything was ripped open. This is the first thing in a pogrom or something like this. I don't know why, feathers were flying. And we had to start to clean up everything.

Mr. Salsitz, this might be a good point at which to stop for the time being with the beginning of the occupation. And we will continue a little later with the rest of your testimony. Thank you.

All right.