

Good evening. My name is Bernard Weinstein. I'm the director of the Holocaust Oral Testimonies Project of the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. Sharing the interview with me is Stanley Freedman.

We are privileged to welcome Manek Werdiger, a survivor presently living in Union, New Jersey, who has generously volunteered to give testimony about his experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Mr. Werdiger, I'd like to welcome you. And I'd like to begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about your early life, and where you lived, and whatever memories you have of your youth.

Well, I was born about 65 years ago in Kraków, Poland. And as a youth living in a Jewish neighborhood and being a son of, I would say, a middle-income family-- not very Orthodox, but traditionally religious-- as a youngster, about three or four years, I attended what we called at that time cheder, which is a orthodox Hebrew school which, being frank about it, I didn't like it. But I was forced to. And for two years, I did.

And then of course, like anyone else, I entered into public school, which I attended for seven years. And then, of course, being a big smart fellow for my parents, they were looking for me to get me into some high school, which was very hard at that time. And being Jewish, we couldn't attend a public high school. And fortunately, in our town, which had about 65,000 Jews, we had about three or even four high school strictly Jewish, which were approved by the Polish government.

Of course, they were private, and they cost money. But somehow, everyone who was able to, had some ability, tried to get in. And so I attended a commercial Hebrew high school in Kraków, from where I graduated in 1939, just about two months before the outbreak of Second World War.

At that time, did you have any idea what you wanted to do, or what you wanted to be?

I know in public schools when I attended, and I was told by the teachers, that I am very good in math or arithmetic. So it was natural for me to go to some commercial high school. And being frank about it, I didn't plan. And I didn't know at that time what my plans would be after I graduated from commercial high school.

Yeah. What did your father do for a living?

He was in textiles. And we were considered middle income, but we struggled. I remember we struggled providing that. I had a older sister, about four and a half years older, and older brother who was nine years older. And we all went through private high schools, which put a big strain on my family. But we made it.

Were there memories of your childhood that you can still recall that are still very vivid--

No.

--to you?

As a child, of course, I think we were pretty happy children. Of course, at the same time, we lived in a strictly Jewish neighborhood. But there were times, like-- and we attended school six days a week. Now, we had always Saturday free, because they were Jewish or Hebrew schools.

And whenever we used to go into a so-called Christian neighborhood, we were very careful, because at the times, we were jumped up by other youngsters and beaten up. So we made sure, whenever we went into those neighborhoods, there were at least three or four of us walking together so we can defend ourselves. Or if we have to run away, we will know about each other--

Were you, yourself--

--when we get home.

--ever beaten or attacked?

Yes, I was. Yes, I was.

Yeah. Can you talk about any of that experience?

No, this was like-- we had a lot of parks in our city all around. And that's where youngsters, like usual, used to walk-- boys, either separate, or with girls, or girls separate-- where you could meet, or whatever. And those places were the ones where we always-- there wasn't a day where someone didn't get hurt by beating, or so forth. And--

Because you were Jewish, or--

Because we were Jewish. And there were not too much cooperation from the Polish police. Actually, they looked away. And the one thing was either to hit back or just to run away as fast as you can.

Did this kind of antagonism come only from your peers? Or did you see it in the adult world? Did you see it, for example, in the schools you went to, or among the adult population?

Well, the schools-- living in the Jewish neighborhoods, even the public schools, which I attended, was mostly attended by 95% Jewish kids. There were just a few Christian, because they were the neighborhood schools. Now, the same was with my sister. She attended a Jewish high school, private school. Now, my brother attended a technical school.

He became, later, an architect. And there were numerus clausus on the class of '34, '36. There were only two Jews. And that's why they only admitted two. Later, they made it one. And the last year, in '39, I think, it was completely numerus nullus. They didn't take in anyone. So that's how it was in our city.

Was there a point where you felt that something was inevitable, that something was going to happen before it actually happened? Or were you taken by surprise when the war broke out?

No, I don't think we were taken by surprise. Of course, there's always a surprise. But we always listened to the radio. And Kraków, being a few hundred kilometers from the German border, we listened to the radio. And we always heard it, very clearly, what's going on in Germany-- from German radio, not from Polish, exactly.

And we listened to Hitler's speeches when he took Czechoslovakia, Austria. And we expected something to happen. But till it does happen, you really don't know. Especially, we were young.

My brother was already-- he was in the army in 1937. And being graduated from technical school, he was admitted-- they had to admit him, although they didn't want to, to an officer school. And he came out from the army as a second lieutenant of the Polish army because of the-- as a student. I mean, after the studies, they took him in. And by us, they were taken to the army by age 21, 22.

Do you remember the actual outbreak of the war?

Yes, I do.

Can you talk also about that?

No. It was September 1, 1939. And it was on Friday. And we saw some-- I mean, we heard some bombardment. But we didn't realize what it actually is. But later, we put on the radio. And there were signal and codes like chocolate, vapor. And there were some codes, probably for the army, which we picked it up.

And I was riding around with a bicycle. And we knew-- I mean, the word spreads quickly. Although, Kraków was a pretty good town, 300,000-- that the main railroad depot was bombed. And we could already hear ambulances and the army all over. This was the first day.

And the second or third day, it was already-- they actually went so fast. On the second day already you

could see the army, which was withdrawing through Kraków going toward east. And it was everything in disarray. There was no command. Nobody know where they're going.

Soldiers were looking for their battalion, or company. They never found it. So this was the second or third day. And on Sunday morning, we saw that everything was running toward the east. And we decided with my father that I and my brother will go also.

Yeah. And where, specifically, did you plan to go?

East. East, as far as possible. We thought, if you go toward Russian border, we will be safe. And also, he had-- over the phone, he had a certain code where, being in the reserve, that he had to register to a certain battalion, or whatever they called it. And he had his uniform with him, as an officer. And we left Kraków going east.

And we were walking on the way. And we got more company. We're a group, maybe. There were thousands and thousands of people walking. But we had a group of six, seven men from Kraków. And we're walking east.

On the way, we had to be careful, because they were bombing and blocking the main roads. But we had a map. And we tried to avoid the main roads. And we were going toward Russian border, which was about 400 kilometers away.

They took away my bicycle. You couldn't run away. You couldn't drive, because the roads were crowded.

Was your mother and your sister with you also at the time?

No. My mother, sister, and my father, they remained home.

They remained home.

They remained home. And we went all the way, almost, to the Russian border. But before even we got there, we heard and were told that the Russian made an agreement with Germany, and they're going to occupy the eastern part of Poland. That's what they did. And they came over where we were.

But in the beginning, with the Russian, it wasn't the same as with the Germans. Of course, at that time, we still didn't know. We didn't have the experience with each other, because we didn't know the Germans. They were already in Kraków, but we were away, 200 kilometers to the east. And of course, there already we met some Russian Jewish soldiers, which were very nice to us.

But in general, it was like a war, a lot of-- hundreds of thousands people from the west and the east, and the food, and everything else. The houses were crowded. Whenever you got a Jewish family, they invite you. They gave you whatever they could. They, themselves, didn't have much. We slept on tables, on floors, because it's very crowded.

And after six, seven weeks, we got word from the west that it's not so bad. And in Kraków, still the Germans are there, but it's not so bad. And we came-- we started to walk back east. So within two months, we were back in Kraków. A matter of fact, we are going, and we were about 100 kilometers from--

Can I ask you one question here? Who did you get the information from that things were not so bad?

There's always somebody said. Now, you couldn't verify it. But during the war, there are rumors every minute that this, he saw somebody who said that they are coming here, he saw somebody. But it wasn't very-- you couldn't see it in the-- couldn't read the papers. There were no papers.

Somebody said. And there are all kind of rumors, which you felt that, if a few people said the same thing, probably this is right, or whatever. But we could never-- it's right as possible. But maybe it was true at the time, because in the beginning, actually, it was like status quo.

Nothing happened the first month or two when they entered Kraków till they got organized, and all kind of stuff. They later started with the arm band, and whatever. So even when we were closer to Kraków, sometimes-- I mean, there was German army already, because we were already on the German side going left, and right, and cars, and wagons. And even if they stop us, they didn't know that we are Jews.

They stopped us. And they took us for a 50, 60 kilometer ride toward Kraków. And they even gave us cigarettes and chocolate. And of course, we knew that we cannot tell them that we are Jews. And they didn't ask.

But later, the rest of it, we walk. And we came home. And of course, my parents and my sister were very happy to see us, because somebody told them already that when we started to walk at that time toward east, that they bombed a village called-- it was about 15, 20 miles away-- that somebody from us got hurt. I don't know how they got the word. But anyway, that's what they were told. And we got home.

And we got home. It was November, December. And we knew what was happening. They were walking on the streets, especially in the Jewish neighborhood, which was not hard, because whoever they caught in the Jewish neighborhood, they knew for sure that they are Jews. And they took out the first [? neighbor ?] some cause or were beating us up.

And we had a few-- I had a few high school friends who got together. And we said, no, we aren't going to take it anymore. We're going back. And we got some money. And we got our rucksacks, each one of us. And we went to the German-Russian border, which was on the river Saalach.

And at that time-- this was in the beginning-- there were a lot of Polish people on the Russian side and on the German side. And they had some kind of an agreement with the Russians. There was a railroad bridge there that they're going to let in, say, a few thousand people on this side. And they will let in a few thousand people. And we went one of the transport like this.

They didn't know at that time that we are Jews. We didn't have yet the arm band. And we went on the Russian side again. This was only me without my brother, just me and another four friends. Of course, my father didn't want to let us go. But I tried to explain that this is the way to save ourselves.

And then, of course, we went there. There was nothing we could do. Everything was expensive. Whatever we had, we spent in order to live. And we didn't see anything to-- a way of saving ourselves.

The Russian started to get tough and started already some people, which they called [INAUDIBLE], to move. At night, they used to arrest them. They had to send them to Russia.

Later, we found out they went down [INAUDIBLE] which, lucky for them, most of them later survived. But after four weeks or so, we started to go back. And we went back to Kraków.

And I remember, in Kraków, we [INAUDIBLE]. The family was very happy that we are together. And we were happy that we found them all right.

And then, of course, came out this-- all kind of stuff. You have to an arm band. And they are catching, taking us to work. Every other day, you have to report. And you had to have certain-- a few days a week, you must have shown that you are working for them.

And at one point, they started-- they called up the whole neighborhood. And they took away all the jewelry first. And they're shooting. They killed quite a few people.

And I remember my building on Saturday. No matter how, the Jews always found [INAUDIBLE]. On holiday, they got together. They made a minyan, and they were praying.

So in my building, we were all praying. Well, young people weren't. But still, we copied our parents.

We were praying, and came a-- how he came, I don't know-- an SS officer. And he started with a Polish fellow who had scissors. And they started to tell him to cut off the beards.

In the synagogue, in the place where you were?

No, no, it wasn't a synagogue.

It was inside the house.

The synagogues were out. You weren't allowed to meet. Actually, there was a law you couldn't meet more than four or six people in one place. And so it was one of the apartments we met. And the Jews, they always pray, even not religious.

And they took us in a basement where they closed us up. And the SS officer, he says, they is coming. A few hours later, he's going to shoot us all. But somehow, he didn't come.

And little by little, we start to run away. And we all went to some other houses in case he comes back. But he didn't come back. And that's how we lived still in our house till March '41.

Excuse me. What kind of work did they have do during the week?

All kind of work-- cleaning streets, shoveling snow. They have those private barracks or private houses where the SS lived. So we were unloading coal, and cleaning their buildings, and all kind of work.

We are lucky. If you have work, they let you alone. It was all right. But mostly, you had three or four people. They put one guard to watch you. And you couldn't stop for a second. Beside that, you are getting beaten left and right.

Were they using the older people, and the sick, and others as well to do these jobs?

I will tell you, most of the-- of course, they're looking for healthier younger people. But they always got somebody sick or old. And they made fun with him, because a man like this couldn't do much. And they were pushing him, and kicking him, and so forth.

So this way, we stayed there till March. And by March, we had to move. They established the ghetto. They called it Podgórze, which is also a part of Kraków, on the other side of the Vistula River. So of course, we tried to sell all of the furniture, whatever we could, because we had only one room for the whole family in the ghetto, which was not easy to get.

But my brother, being an architect, he got a job with the chief of the building, a German. He was a unterscharführer in Kraków. And through him, he got us a room in the ghetto.

Now, to enter the ghetto, you had to have a special pass. And my father, and my mother, and my brother got the passes. And my sister and myself didn't get it. So we couldn't enter the ghetto.

And we had family about 12 miles away. And we went over there. And we lived there for two or three months till my brother somehow worked it out. And he got the passes for us. And we came back into the ghetto.

Now, in the ghetto, in the beginning it wasn't too bad. We still had to go to work, but they let us alone. We were surrounded by-- a big wall was built all around us. And there were two entrances.

But still, we got, somehow-- they let us have our own little newspaper and post office. And they had the Judenrat, our own community, which was supposed to govern with us. And they brought some Jews from the little communities around us. And they put them all in the ghetto. And this was in 1941, in March.

And we came back with my sister in May, or middle of May. And then, of course, the Russian-German war

started in '41-- in July, I believe. It was very sad, because there was a man who was going through the ghetto. He was cutting it through. And there was a lot of army, German army, and later Italian army we saw going through our ghetto.

And even the Italian soldiers were very sympathetic. They told us-- they showed us to take off the arm band. And they were even accompanied by SS on motorcycles. But probably, they were afraid that they should run away, the Italians. They weren't the same way as the Germans. But we didn't have a direct contact with them.

Now, in '42, it started already getting worse and worse. And they called us all into a special office. And there was the German officers there. And they looked at you, or they asked you what you're doing. And they either stamp your pass, or they didn't.

Those whose pass were stamped meant that they could remain in the ghetto. Those who weren't stamped, the next day, they called them all on a special market. And they were to go with the deportation.

On what basis did they stamp you?

He likes you. He looked at you. And he said-- of course, supposedly, if he saw on the pass that you have some profession like electrician, or a tailor, or a shoemaker, he was more sympathetic.

If you were a bourgeois bureaucrat or something, or some professional like doctor, or a professor, or teacher, this was the best way to get rid of you. And you presented a pass for you and for your wife. So if you didn't get it automatically, your wife didn't get it, either.

And next day, early in the morning, they woke up everybody. And they had those Jewish police. And they were going to every house. And they were going from apartment to apartment. And whoever didn't have the stamp had to walk out.

And they gave them a separate appelplatz, they called it. And from them, they dragged them, some walking to the police station. Some, they put on their big trucks, or they threw them on the trucks. And they went. They packed them in the wagons, maybe 100 in each one.

And we didn't know at that time where they're going. But later, we found out where they went. So actually, my brother and my sister and myself, we got the stamp. And my father didn't get it.

And I took a chance. And I went, myself, with my father's pass where he had a picture on. And the German looked at the picture. And he noticed that I cannot be the same one.

And then there was-- he was born in 1890 something. But somehow, he looked at me, and he gave the stamp. So that time, I saved my parents. This was in May.

But four or five months later, it was October. We had, again, the same thing, but not with the stamps. They just told everyone to get out on the streets. And they checked the houses, that nobody should be in. And they made a segregation.

They had a few officers. And we were walking. And he told, this one over here, and this one over here, and this one over here. And we knew this one over there-- it was for the deportation. This one over here, in group, we are walking out from the ghetto.

Did you know at the time who was going where?

Pardon me?

Did you know at the time--

Yes.

--who was going where?

No. We knew, because we noticed right away they took the younger people, the healthier. And the olders and the women, they took them over there. But I knew what's going to happen. And I tried-- I shaved my father's beard, should look younger. But it didn't help.

Now, they put him on the side. And my mother eventually-- I was told later, because I wasn't together with them-- that she could remain. But she saw him, so she went with him.

Was that the last time you saw them?

This was the last time I saw them. Yes. Now, we went out. And of course, I did not. And we were out a evening.

In the evening, we were coming back, all those groups. So we came in the house. And on the way, already, we were told by people that they are gone. So we remained in the ghetto for another-- till March '43, where they took us to a concentration camp, Plaszów.

So we took whatever we could with us. And I was working there in [INAUDIBLE] shop. And we had a group where we were going out from the ghetto. We're going out from the ghetto. And sometimes, we go night shift.

We were working on those little metal pieces for the special orders they were making. They were sending to their soldiers-- it was winter-- on the east front with Russia. And at that time, we had to make certain amount on the machine.

So at one of the evening, I cut my finger on the machine. And I came back together. We had a few-- some own doctors. And they somehow healed as much as they could not to show the Germans that something happened, because they could try to get rid of me. And we were going like this for a few months.

At one point, even when we were coming back from the night shift in the morning, the commandant of the camp-- his name was Goth. He was waiting for somebody with his dogs at the entrance of the camp. And we were coming over.

And he had two dogs. I don't know if he told them anything. Anyway, they jumped at me. And they bit me over here.

And he had some pretty women with him, standing with them at the gate, which-- well, somebody said later that it was a Jewish girl. And she told him something very loud. And then he ran over. And he took the dogs away from me.

So I was bitten here. And I went to-- but somehow, I came out from it. And we were in the camp working off and on. We had shootings and hangings every other day till August 1944, where we were loaded, about, I don't know, 6,000 maybe on a train going-- we thought that we're going to Auschwitz. But we actually were going east.

And we stopped at Auschwitz. And we were staying there for half a day. And for some reason, they didn't unload us there. And they took us to Mauthausen. We were about two or three days.

Were the people on the train only from Plaszów? Or were they from other--

Only from Plaszów. It was a big train. And of course, people were dying, because we were loaded a hundred a day. And they didn't give us anything on the way.

They stopped us once in a Czechoslovakian town. And some Czechoslovakian, which were really taking a chance, they brought up some water. And they were very good to us. And we weren't going back.

And we wound up in Mauthausen, where we stayed for about six weeks, which was terrible, because there were beating us up a few times a day. And they had those few hundred steps going down for rocks. We were just carrying rocks up and down, just to make us miserable.

And finally, they were registering for some factories. And we all-- I mean, with our friends, we all told them that we are mechanics, which nobody knows what a mechanic is, just to get out and get to the factory. And we got-- they took us to St. Valentin, where they were producing the German tanks, the Tiger, the big tanks, a very big place.

They had five or six tremendous building. And they were all in the forest. So actually, probably you couldn't see a thing from the air, because woods were around a lot of it. And we were working there.

At the beginning, it wasn't bad. We were working with the Austrian masters. They told us what to do. Some [INAUDIBLE] was OK. So he brought us a piece of bread. And this was going on for a few months.

There was a funny thing there, because I noticed one day-- of course, we were all men and no women. I noticed there was a balcony. They were working upstairs also. And I noticed a girl whom I know from Kraków. And she was there as an Aryan, as a Gentile girl. And she noticed me.

Of course, she couldn't move her head, though, people should be suspicious. But she smiled to me. I smiled to her. And every other day, she threw me cigarettes from the balcony. People didn't know who it is, but I know who it is. And of course, some of them grabbed my cigarettes.

But I was getting a few cigarettes, which I could change for a piece of bread, or something else. This was going on for a few weeks. And later, I didn't see her anymore. She disappeared somewhere.

And then, of course, November or December, somehow they discovered the factory. And came one night a tremendous bombardment. And they lighted, with the rockets, the sky. And you could see like day time. And we were not nowhere. We were just outside.

The Germans, they had the air shelters. But we were outside. And we were just happy, smiling, seeing. But we saw planes by the hundreds. It was like birds, hundreds, hundreds of them, and tremendous bombardment.

Do you know what nationality the planes were?

English. They were English.

British.

Because I understand-- later, we found out-- that they had some kind of agreement, American and English, that the English were to bombard at night, and the Americans in daytime. But they were English, because they had those circles.

And during the bombardment, I didn't realize I was wounded. You see, I have a stiff finger here. And they took me there. And there was a Polish doctor, not Jewish, which he was a pretty decent man. But I don't think he was a doctor.

He was a medic, or something. And he tried to do the best for me. But he cut down [INAUDIBLE]. And since then, I have a stiff finger. And this hand was tremendous swollen. So--

How did you get the wound? Did you know how it was--

I noticed something. I felt something went in here. But I [INAUDIBLE].

Shrapnel or something?



It must have been a piece of metal. And after a day or two, the swell was tremendous. The whole hand was swollen, like this.

So when I was-- from Mauthausen, they sent me to St. Valentin. And then, from St. Valentin, we were living in those barracks near the big factory. So wherever people died-- and they were dying every day. And then people sick, like me, they were sent back to Mauthausen. It was their center. It's like Auschwitz.

And in Mauthausen, there were a lot of people. And they were in one barrack. It was the Jewish barracks. And all of the Jewish people were admitted there.

And I found there about six, seven, or eight doctors, Jewish doctors. They were all from Kraków. And a few, I knew. And they were in charge of the barracks. And they helped me out whenever they could. A few of them are here.

But later on came March of '45. And I could walk. I just couldn't do much with my hand. They took us to upstairs. There was a special camp there where they brought a lot of Hungarian Jews in the beginning.

There were also English and French prisoners of war, which they kept them separately. And we stayed there for two weeks. Here, they were playing around with us, or whatever. But they were bombarding us at night. And somebody said that they were German planes, and they were throwing bombs at us.

And it was terrible conditions, terrible conditions. You could find-- get up in the morning, you see dead people with cut off hands. People were cutting off their hands for food. They were eating the flesh. And it was normal, every day.

And later on, three weeks before the end of the war-- which we didn't know that the end of the war was coming-- they took us on a march to west Austria. And we're marching again two or three days. And over there, already, we didn't have to do anything. We were just dying and laying in the fields.

And we had no barracks. Everyone has a blanket. So we got together, and we sleep, four guys. We're laying on the blanket cover us with the blanket. Meanwhile, it was raining. It was sloppy.

And people weren't getting up in the morning. This guy didn't move. This guy didn't more. I mean, dead people. Over there, a lot of people died.

Till a few weeks later, all of a sudden, we looked around. And we see the guards are gone. And we started to hear some machine guns. And we had no idea. Nobody moved. We're still staying till somebody came and said that the Germans ran away.

And then, a few hours later, the first American patrol came. And they were very strict. They didn't even want to talk to us, because this was the first front. They're still shooting around, left and night. And next day, already, a lot of American army came.

What was your reaction to the American army when you saw them?

Indifferent. Indifferent. We hardly stayed on our feet. They came to camp. First of all, in the beginning, we didn't know that it's an American army, because we were used to the red star. And this is true, it was a white star.

But we thought, maybe they are Russian. Some of us started to talk Russian to them. And they didn't answer. They wouldn't talk.

They didn't talk at all, the first American groups. And then we started to walk toward west, because we know that when they are moving this way, that they're still fighting this way. So we were--

Moving away from it.

--moving away from it. And we were so hungry, and everything else. We took sacks with potatoes. And we hardly dragged it. But we had potatoes. We didn't need it, but we walked with potatoes. We were afraid that we're going to be running short on food.

And then we came closer to Wels. And we found a wagon with German uniforms. And we were all with lice. I mean, we were-- it took over the lapel here. It was white, white-- everything lice, all over, all over, because we didn't watch ourselves for months.

Were you dressed in the striped uniforms, the--

We were in the striped uniforms. But we went later to this wagon. And we threw out the uniform, anything, everything we had. And we put on the German uniform. So we were walking with the German uniforms.

Meanwhile, the American army, with the trucks, were rounding up the Germans. And they saw us in the German uniform. And they took us on a truck. And we didn't know how to explain it on the truck. And they took us to Wels, to one place where they were bringing the prisoners of war and all kind of people.

And then, of course, we started to say, Polish, Polish, Polish. And there was an American soldier from Chicago who spoke Polish. And he spoke to us. And he told us all this. And we explained to him.

At that time, he knew already there is some Polish DP camp near Linz. And he took us there to the Polish camp in Linz, which I didn't put it down there. I was there maybe five, six days.

Was that Hart? Or--

No. It was before--

Oh, before Hart.

--Hart. I was there six days. And I got sick. They gave me up already. They didn't want to take me to the hospital. There was a nurse. He says, no, take him to the hospital. He is still living.

When the Americans came, did they give you food? Did they give you any kind of nourishment?

You can have food as much as you can. But the more you ate, the worse it was.

Yeah.

And we did eat. Matter of fact, we found a truckload with German army food. A lot of them, they just put their heads into it. They were just eating. And a lot of them just died, because they couldn't take it. We did, also, but maybe not as much, not as much.

And anyway, I got typhus. And I went to the Linz hospital. I was there about four or five weeks in the hospital. And I got better. I didn't know what's going on with me was so serious. I had no idea. And I was laying there with German prisoners of war. We were all mixed together.

And then, later on, the last stages of my sickness, I got tremendous appetite. And they didn't give us enough to eat. So we were going out, which we're not supposed to. And we were going to the houses. And they saw. They saw, and gave us a little food, just a little food.

And finally, one Jewish fellow, whom I know, came to the hospital. He was looking-- he was also a survivor. But he was OK, and me OK. And he was looking for his brother. And I met him. And I was very happy.

And I told him where he is. Then I found out that there is a Jewish camp in Hart near Linz. So finally, they let me go. And they gave me some old clothing. And I went to the Jewish camp in Hart where I met already some people, which I knew, a lot of them from Kraków, another one from the camp.

But already, it was you were between your own. And I was very, very weak. But there was an American, which was stationed about maybe half a mile from the camp. And they were so happy.

There were maybe 70% Jews in the army, which was-- it was a battalion from around New York areas. And there were a lot of people from Brooklyn and from there. And there were a doctor and major, a American doctor. And he helped me a lot.

But I just already-- of course, I found out there my sister was in Bergen-Belsen, that she's not alive. And my brother-- I didn't tell you the story. When I was in Plaszów, my brother was shot with his wife.

Supposedly, they were bringing some food into the camp. And one day, he was waiting for them at the entrance. And they took the whole group of 56 people, and shot them. I even buried him.

Did your brother and sister-in-law have children?

No. No. My brother was married. He married in ghetto. My sister was married. And--

You found this out afterwards. Or you had seen him--

My sister, I found afterwards, because I met the girl she was with in Bergen-Belsen, because she went from Plaszów to Auschwitz, from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen. And my brother, I knew that he is dead. I was in Plaszów when he was shot.

So you are the only survivor of your immediate family.

Yes, I am.

Did you ever believe that you would survive?

No. No. I didn't believe it. And I didn't think about it. And I didn't look forward to it. I was completely indifferent. I was taking a day at a time. And they passed, and nobody hit me.

I felt OK. It was all right. I got up in the morning. I was looking forward to some other things, which might happen, either worse or better, and go to sleep again. Life was completely meaningful. I mean--

Meaningless.

--meaningless. So this is what we were thinking-- is about getting better portioned food to eat. That's what we were looking forward to-- for a few hours of sleep, where nobody disturbed you, nobody hit you over the head.

What happened after you got out? How did you get to the DP camp?

No, this was the DP camp in Europe, DP camp--

Oh, that was the DP camp.

--in Hart, which was part of Hermann Goering's work. This was-- during the war, I understand, that even the guards or the laborers were in a barrack there. They were working for the steel mill.

In Linz was a big steel mill they called Hermann Goering Werke. And so we lived there. We had a few houses and barracks there. And we lived there till the year of '46.

And then they took us to Linz. And they gave us also a block of building to live in. There were only Jewish survivors-- six, eight buildings, three-story buildings. And we had our kitchen.

And we were getting some Red Cross packages. And lunch time, we could go and pick up the soup with

something. And some of us already started to walk around, see if to go to some schools in Linz, because Linz was a larger town.

I think you mentioned that there was a Jewish doctor or someone who helped you.

I mean the major--

The major.

--in the American army.

How did he help you? Can you tell me?

First of all, he gave me some kind of pills, which did a lot of good to me. And I had to come to him every day. He was checking on me every day, which was just walking.

He was very close. Maybe it wasn't even half a mile. Maybe it was a quarter mile. And he had his-- in one of the building, he had his office.

Have you any idea what you weighed at the end of the war?

I have no idea. But it was just bones. I have no idea. He did weigh me. But I don't remember. I wouldn't remember how I weighed.

Yeah. How long were you in Hart?

In Hart? In Hart we were, I think, about six, seven months. And that's where I met my wife. She was liberated in Theresienstadt. And she lived for a month or two, I think, in Prague.

And then, with the Bricha, they organized a transport to Israel, which went through Austria. And there was some problem of getting to Italy with the train. So temporary, they let them out and Salzburg, Austria. And then she found some friends.

She was in camp together. And one of her friends was my friend's, whom I was in the camp with, sister. So she came to visit her girlfriend in Hart. And I got to know her. And I got to know her. Then a year, two years later, we got married.

Where did you go from Hart?

From Hart, we went to Linz, and [PLACE NAME], and then to Ebersberg.

And were those also--

Then over there--

Were those also displaced persons areas? Or were they--

Yes, they were all displaced persons.

Yeah.

And I worked in Linz as an accountant for American Distribution Company till I got the visa to go to the United States by the end of '48. And I arrived here in '49.

We're going to stop for a few minutes.

Sure.

And we'll continue this in a second.