

Good afternoon. 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 Testimonies at Yale University.

Sharing the interview with me is Freda Remmers. And we are privileged to welcome Mr. Morris Bergen, a survivor presently living in Jersey City, who has generously volunteered to give testimony about his experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust.

Mr. Bergen, I'd like to welcome you. And I'd like to begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about the place where you lived before the war, your family, and some of your early memories.

Well, we lived-- the town was called Tarnobrzeg. It was a major railroad station. It was a link between East and West of Poland, of course. It's considered Galicia before World War I. And it was between Krakow, major town, and Przemysl, the other major town. It was 80 kilometers east of Krakow and about 150 kilometers west of Przemysl which was two major towns.

And I lived there. My family and, I guess, my ancestors lived there for a long time. I don't even know how far. But we all lived-- I never went out of town. Never had a chance to go. We didn't have enough money to go to travel around, so we lived in this town. For most of the-- it was 65,000 people in the town, and 10,000 Jews. Almost 40% of population.

And most of the Jews were poor, really poor. No plumbing-- hardly any plumbing in town. And most of the people were tradesmen-- shoemakers, tailors, carpenters. There were maybe a few richer Jews in banking or manufacturing. But most of us were very poor.

What work was your father engaged in?

My father was just a daily worker, just carrying stuff or anything. When we had breakfast in the morning, the bread was locked up. That's all we could have. We couldn't have any more bread during the day. That's it.

It's the kind we lived in one room. Sometimes seven, eight people in just one room. No bathroom. No toilet. Everything was [INAUDIBLE]. Most of the time we had to go outside to do our things.

Twice a year we took out all the furniture, whatever we had, and of course kill the bedbugs, the lice with hot water, with naphtha. For the holidays-- for Passover and for the High Holy Days that's what we did.

How many people were there in your family?

In my immediate family we lived with seven people. For the wintertime, we slept three in a bed with store sacks. This wasn't a good time. And mostly we had to go to Hebrew school, [INAUDIBLE]. It was obligatory almost. And then at seven, we started public schools.

Public schools, if you had-- if you were Jewish and you had no money, you have very little chance to advance in school. If you are Jewish who had a little money, you could buy the teacher. Teachers were considered almost like gods. Not like in here-- a lot of respect for teachers.

We had to shave our heads. We wore like paramilitary hats to school. And we also had-- we learned a lot.

We belong to different organizations, mostly Zionists or socialist organizations. Communist Party was out of law. There were some communists. And before May the 1st-- before the May the 1st holidays, they always arrested the known communist. They kept them in jail until the holidays were over.

But most of us belong to mostly either socialist or Zionist organization-- different-- small splits. And over there we learned a lot. We discussed books. We learned Hebrew. We had sports. What else can I tell you?

Did you experience any kind of anti-Semitism or bigotry?

Of course. Like for example, the Passover holidays really built up. The reason wasn't just because one was that religion. It's kind of a way of life. You didn't know any better, in a way. We were young, small. We're told this-- if you eat a non-kosher-- something non-kosher, you die. You choke or something. That's what some of us believe, when we were young.

And like-- and that's why we have to go-- when there were the three days of Passover, we had to go to school. And like non-Jewish kids was to push like a [? bus ?] into the mouths, you know, like sausages, which we never ate before. And we had pictures of-- religious pictures, Christian pictures, always like Jesus.

But we were excused for religious hour. There was religious hour we had to-- if you want to participate. But most Jews, we had to go to a different school for once a week for religion. This was like for public schools. We had to have a different school. A Jewish teacher was teaching religion. This besides the-- we went to Hebrew school. This was something private.

Did most of the attacks against you, when they happened, come from your fellow classmates or were they--

Yes, fellow classmates.

Teachers?

Neighbors.

Friends, adults?

Well, some teachers. I happened to be lucky. For three years I had a teacher which was very good. A lady teacher. A very fine woman. Then we moved. We had to pay, like, less than \$1 then. We lived in a place, we couldn't afford it anymore. So we had to move to public housing, which was called barracks actually. So there we didn't have to pay the rent, but was horrible.

And so I changed school also. It's a different neighborhood. So the teacher-- I had a male teacher. I remember his name. You want to know the name? His name was [Personal name] He was-- he had like a carpenter's pencil-- a big pencil. And he was hitting us over the knuckles and going like this with his fingers like this over the head-- our bald heads. And he hated Jewish kids.

And so since I had him as a teacher, I start failing. I was good. I knew I was good, but I start failing and just didn't care. And I finished the seven years school so I could finish. And then I had to go-- oh, there was a saying in my town, it's kind of a joke. It said, if you are not going to be a human being, which we call a mensch at the time, you're going to be a tailor. So it seems I picked a [INAUDIBLE] to become a tailor.

So you became a tailor?

Yes. This was

How old were you at this time?

When I started-- when I finished my so-called bar mitzvah, I had to go to work already. Learned to be a tailor three years I had to learn. And the learning was like we had to clean the house of the one who was the boss. So we had to clean the house. We had to clean the children. We had to take out all his things outside because there was no toilets in the house. So they did it in the house, and then we had to throw it out.

Was this considered an apprenticeship or were you paid?

This was apprenticeship, yes. This was apprenticeship. No pay until maybe after a year, a year and a half, he started putting you-- maybe teaching you something. And he gave you a little money. And also then when I was 15, 16 years old, I want to go out with girls, but I never have money.

So I had to tell-- we worked on actually maybe three months a year, a month and a half before the Passover holidays. And we had to work sometimes 24 hours a day. So I was cheating a little bit because my parents, my mother, used to take my salary. I wouldn't get a salary to bring it home. So she went and took it, but I begged my boss to give me a little few pennies extra that I could take my girl to the movie.

And this was the life. We weren't unhappy. We loved the country. We love Poland. Most Jewish people love Poland. And-- but we were considered second class citizens in there. Jews had to pay more taxes. I didn't pay any taxes because I had nothing to pay. But most Jews had to pay more taxes. Compared to business, they had to pay more taxes.

Like the Hasidim had to go [INAUDIBLE] into office. They had to take off the hat and they didn't believe in taking off hats. So they always harass. And yet the Jews love the country. And many Jewish heroes who fought for Poland.

What members of your immediate family were living with you at the outbreak of--

Well, my mother and my father, two sisters, one brother who is still alive. And then another brother who was from not the same mother-- from the same father-- he lived with us. In fact, during the war, he married-- he married a stepsister of my mother. And he had a child. And they lived with us too in the same one-room place.

If I can come back for a moment to what you were just saying, Mr. Bergen. Why do you think that, in spite of everything that was done to the Jews, there was so much loyalty and identification with Poland?

It was our country. We were born there. We didn't know any better. I never went out of my town. I-- this way my-- I love my town. I, personally, maybe felt a little less because I was what they call progressive, in a sense. I wasn't Hasidic. I--

Oh, we went to park. There was a public park, for example. I forgot the name of it. Maybe I remember, I tell you. If we went to the park, we had to have-- we tied up rocks in handkerchiefs to defend ourselves because people throwing rocks at us. We went to school together does of course there was a lot of people who dressed differently the Hasidim dressed differently and they had more problems. But we had a little less. Not all the time we were recognized. Some of the Jews didn't speak Polish at all. They didn't just-- they never went to public school, just to Hebrew schools-- yeshivas, Hebrew school. But we had less problems, in sense. We more progressive.

Did your experiences, your-- these negative experiences strengthen your Jewish identity or--

Yes.

Did it make it--

Definitely. Definitely.

How?

I am not a believer, but I-- well, if you want to know what I think, I tell you what I think. Anybody who has to do me harm to make me believe what other people want, I just don't go. I think it's something wrong in there. If you tell me, you got to believe what I believe because otherwise I'm going to hurt you, then I wouldn't believe it because there's something wrong with your belief. How-- you know, why do you have to hurt me? Why can't I believe what I believe? If you have to hurt somebody to believe what you believe, then something wrong with your belief. That's what I think.

What direction did your Jewish affirmation take? Were you a Zionist? Were you--

Not really. Not-- I wasn't much of a Zionist, no. Now I am, in a way-- I mean, a Zionist, it's easy to say a Zionist. A Zionist-- I should have been in Israel. But my heart-- I'm mostly a Jew.

I'm mostly a Jew, and this is the main reason. In fact, it's a paradox because I am married to a Christian. I'm married to a Catholic. My brother is married to a Catholic. He's married for 40 years. Even my son is married to a Catholic. This is the paradox. I don't know why. I wish I could examine it, why this is so to find out why we're all married to Catholics. And we get along fine. My wife goes to church. I go to synagogue. She goes with me if she wants. If she doesn't want, she doesn't go.

And-- but Polish people-- I, for example, I saw the movie Shoah, OK? The Polish people they say that today they live better because she used to say-- this one woman say-- that she lives better because she used to sell potatoes, now she sells eggs. Now, if she lives so good in Poland, why do all the-- so many Polish people-- which I go-- I'm a messenger in a bank, so I go to Wall Street area, and every day at 3:00 I see maybe tens of Polish women going cleaning hotels, cleaning offices.

If it's so good Poland, why don't you stay in Poland? Why don't you stay there if now it's so much better without the Jews? Of course they have a little better because now they have-- they took away all the homes from the Jews that Jews have and so they feel little better now. But I don't think it's better because a lot of Poles want to come in here. I would like to come back to-- I would like to go back to the country because my language would be easier, I have more friends. But how can I go back? I'm hated in there.

When were you first aware that there was an impending war or that you might be in danger? What were the first signs?

I was young. I really didn't-- I never felt like danger. Actually, I didn't even care. We were so-- how would you say-- we let fate be whatever happened. We didn't care. We came-- in fact, in the beginning when the Nazis came in, the poor people-- especially the working people were kind of glad because we had to work for them. And we figured, the working people figured, we had to work anyway, so what's the difference?

There was scarce bread, scarce potatoes. But in the beginning, they used to give us bread. They used to give us potatoes to take home when we worked for them in the barracks or in the office I mean, mostly for cleaning. Or we worked for shoveling coal or--

I remember in the first year, when they came in 1940, we were collecting oil from their campaign from the old tanks, the broken up items. And it was the harshest winter in Poland at the time. It was 4 degrees Celsius below zero. And the Nazis, the soldiers stayed on the trains, And we were-- some people got stuck and their skins came off and they were just throwing snow in our-- making jokes with us. And was throwing snow into our [INAUDIBLE] and the trains and we were collecting all the metals that went back to Germany to recycle.

Were you aware of what was happening, what Hitler was doing in Germany in connection with the Jews?

We didn't believe-- we didn't believe it. We didn't believe this. Like I said, we thought we were going to have to work. The war would end, and that's it. We have to work. We had to work anyway. We were working class. I belong to the working class. So most of my friends and the people of this town, 90% of the people are working people. So they didn't mind.

In the beginning, they used to go out and grab people. Just grab them on the street, anybody. So like a man, a person who had money, he could buy and survive. Went to the -- they made a Jewish like a Jewish officer, Juden las they call this. So whatever they wanted they went to this people. To ask like this. Someone who had money, and he couldn't go to work, or he didn't want to go to work. He gave some money and they sent us. And he went home. This was at the beginning.

We had to clean hospitals because they bombed hospitals. We had to bury people. But we worked and we ate in the beginning.

Let's backtrack a little bit for a moment. At the time the war began you were still working as a tailor.

Yeah.

Yeah. And that was the job you had after you had left school. What are your memories at the very beginning of the war, let's say of the very first day when the Germans invaded Poland?

When the Germans came in, the town was empty, completely empty. Somehow-- I don't know. We were the kind of close family. And my mother and father didn't, because most people left. They went east. Some went to the Russian side. Some, I guess, they were caught anyway. Everybody escaped. My town was almost empty. We were very few. And they, with the planes, going over.

In fact, I remember from my house we went to the house of this one sister, which was my father's daughter. And we stayed in her house. We all-- and this older brother, he was so scared. He hid under the bed because the plane was becoming very, very low.

They bombed after they occupied the town already. They bombed the hospital. In fact, the street was called Szpitalna which means the hospital street. There was two hospitals, but they bombed one hospital. People died, wounded-- sick people already. This what we had to bury in the cemetery because the cemetery was on the same street. This was when they-- after the occupation already when they-- the town was occupied. Many, many Polish soldiers we saw them running back naked, I mean, without shoes, without food, asking for some food. There was no food just for the soldiers, the Polish heroes.

And then a few days later, they got organized. They established this Judenrat. And they asked for people to work. Some people they just grabbed on the street. Just took them on the street and brought them any place to work, beat them, and harass them. This was at the beginning.

A little while later, then they start-- I remember they first start taking-- shooting-- the first time they shot people it must have been around December in the same year where they took out a group of people who were soldiers in World War I. They were known soldiers. They must have records. Somebody told them.

These were all Jews?

Yeah. So 40 people in my town shot at the time. And why I remember this fact because one who was shot his name was Pacher, P-A-C-H-E-R. And he was the administrator of this section where I lived, so I remember. He was shot that's why I remember. In fact it must have been around Christmastime.

Why were they shot?

Because-- I don't know. Because they were all soldiers from World War I. They served in the German army. One was like a sergeant.

And what effect did this have on you and on other people who saw this?

I really remember that fact, I mean, we just lived like we didn't care one way or another. We know it's going to be-- we are going to die. We know it.

Some of us-- some who could afford it, who had more college, got false papers and got out of the area. There was not ghetto yet. They got out of there and they lived in the Aryan side, what they called, with false papers. And the rest of us, we went to work.

I was working then in the beginning for a outfit. It was called [NON-ENGLISH], which we made a tar paper, tar paper for the German effort. And we had to go to work every day with the police, and the German police, and dogs. And the

factory was, like, enclosed. There was guards in there too. Very hard .

They got-- it must have been in '41 then because they got cisterns, which they got from the Russians with tar because the tar paper you made with tar. And it was very primitive. The factory was a very primitive factory. We had to throw the sand over like this and the tar, you know, the tar-- there's paper, and the paper goes through the machine, and it wets the tar. But we had to chop the tar. We stay 24 hours a day inside the cistern chopping the tar into barrels. In 24 hours, we had three.

And I remember the tar, the pieces, went in like into the-- and we had to clean it with naphtha and it came off. It was a pain in the neck. But we got a little food. They gave us some food. And this is the time when-- it must have been '42-- when they made the ghetto. So they hid us in this factory. It was out of town. The owner of the-- I mean the boss was a Nazi. And he knew what was going on.

So when we came back, we stayed three days in this sleeping on coals because there was no facilities. But we came back to the town. It was-- I remember it must have been '41 or '42. 25,000 people we saw-- they had like trucks, but by horse-drawn trucks, like platforms. We saw dogs, and cats, and children-- all like garbage into mass graves. Trucks full of people of anything were on this truck covered with like a piece of [? black. ?]

And one of the Nazis, who was like an assistant, he was in town. And he came back he cried. He told us what he saw. He didn't want to tell exactly what, but we didn't know what was going on. We were about 200 people working there from the same town in this factory while they were killing. This when they killed 25,000 people in this town.

So one of the Nazis-- his name was Matusik-- there are certain names I can still remember. He was like a Volksdeutsche, they call it. You know what's a Volksdeutsche? No.

One of the German nation. He could be Polish but maybe he came from Silesia. so, of the German nation, so they called them Volksdeutsche. So he saw what was-- he went to the town. He saw, and he came back, he cried. I saw him cry when he saw what they did.

They had shot the people?

They killed them any way, not just shot. Shot would be a minor thing. Children, they tore apart children-- horrible things this was. Somebody say they were on drugs. They drugged the soldiers to be able to do this.

Those are the things I remember, but this happened later. But before this, I was in-- we were in this Pruszk³w camp, which I doubt if very many survived of this. I doubt. I don't know. I was there in 1940 to '41. I don't remember how long.

Were you in Tarn³w when Tarn³w became a ghetto?

Yeah.

Can you describe that for us? What that--

Well this when they killed the 25,000 because they claimed they couldn't make a ghetto because there was not enough room to put us all. We're 40% of the population. So they killed 25,000 people. They made a ghetto.

To depopulate.

I lived in an area where it was mixed. So I had to move. When we came home-- when I came home from this place, there was five barracks. In each barrack there may be some two families live together in one-- two strange families in one room live together. This was before the war.

And they came, and they took out-- it must have been-- maybe 100 Jewish family because there were five barracks.

Most of the people were dead when we came home after those three days. So those who remained, we had papers because we had certain papers. They give you a stamp if you worked. We worked for a Nazi firm, so we had papers.

So me, my brother, and a few other kids who survived, we had to move out of there to where they made the ghetto. A very small part of it was ghetto-- in fact they made a ghetto A and a ghetto B. The working people stayed in the ghetto A. The older people who still remained alive, the children-- all the people stayed in this ghetto B. So they could-- whenever they were ready, they came and they just took them out and shot them any time they want.

So families were separated right from the beginning?

We had no families no more. There was no families. I remember I had a girlfriend which her family was killed too. And she lived in this place where the ghetto was going to be. So I asked her to go if she would so I could come to her only if all my friends we're about seven people all the one room. And we all came there, seven young kids-- boys and girls. And we slept two beds all together like a bordello.

In fact, my sister was still alive at the time, the sister who was 17 years old. Beautiful girl. And then they-- they made other times they came and liquidated the rest. And I think the ghetto completely liquidated they still left a few people to clean up and I guess they needed the services but I think the ghetto was liquidated-- I wasn't in the ghetto when it was liquidated completely.

You were in Pruszk³w?

I was already in Plaszk³w. No in Pruszk³w I was before. We didn't mention Pruszk³w This is before.

Yeah.

This was not concentration camp yet.

Tell us about Pruszk³w.

Well, I was working at the time, this was-- I was in town for the for SS group. We were nine boys and cleaning horses. They took over the Polish barracks. This was the cavalry, the SS cavalry. They treat us very good. Very good. We had food. They gave us a lot of food and bread. And there was no bread to be had, but they gave us bread. And if a known Jew would bother us, they would kill him because they want to take away the bread from the Polish people. If they saw a Jew holding bread, we had to go home. That was before the ghetto. So some Polish wise guy was going to take it. A German, he would kill him for this.

This few months if you work there we thought we going to be there steady. It was a good job. We worked hard. We had to clean the toilets. We had to clean the horses, the stables. But we were treated decently. And then they opened up this Pruszk³w thing and they took us to they grabbed whoever they could on the street. I don't remember how many people-- maybe 200 people.

And they took us all to this place Pruszk³w because we were building-- I thought it was building a base against Russia. It was all in the woods, underground. So we're building. They brought in the fabricated barracks. But we had to go home every night because there were no barracks for us yet. So, like, we had to be on the train, like, 5 o'clock in the morning. And we came home 11 o'clock sometimes.

And we worked very, very hard. It was killing the people, throwing them down from the trains-- from the wagons because they're tall wagons. And if you didn't work-- in fact, I have my hand over here. I was-- in the same thing, in the same place, in this Pruszk³w, I had a job. I was putting in ovens in the fabricators. I had pipes we put in. These were all like-- it wasn't fancy stuff-- plain ovens with pipes coming up. So I had to put one pipe into the other, and I hit my hand. And I still have a mark in here, like, almost the bone cut in half.

So when I came home after work, after 12 hours work, they needed somebody. A train of fabricated barracks came. So

they just grabbed people. So I was hoping maybe I show them this. I was still bleeding. I showed this Nazi. I said, let's look what's happened. I have a-- he hit me over the head with a-- he took a branch from there and hit me a few times. And I had to go to work till 1 o'clock in the morning. It wasn't the work which we was all -- the way they harassed us, the way they beat us, the way they-- this was the most dangerous place. In fact, finally, they built like a certain places where we could stay in there. For a few months we went back every day back and forth, then they built--

Barracks?

--certain facilities, a few pieces put together. So the name-- the head of this camp, his name was Joseph Schmidt. He was a captain, a Nazi captain, an SS. And one night we were there, he accused a woman that she was coming in and stealing-- a Jewish woman from a town Mielec because Mielec was a few kilometers out of this place, Pruszk³w was like a little village, Mielec was a town-- that she came and was stealing blankets. He just made up.

And you know what he did? He took the soldiers. And he took all the people in this barrack, and put this woman on top of-- what you call it-- at the top-- desk. And he had-- first of all, he took-- one of the Jewish boys had to do it.

His name was Herzberg. He was a short little guy. Took a branch from the roots, and he had to put in her sexual organs. And he had to have sex with her in front of everybody. In fact, what's happened the Nazis themselves were so ashamed what he did. This is in the [? front. ?] They dismissed him from being the head of the camp.

This was Schmidt?

This was the Schmidt. He probably died. I assume so. I don't know. The Nazis themselves were ashamed what he did in there. So this was Pruszk³w and thousands of people died in there. But died not by shooting you. Just by not eating, by hard work. We had to push up trains because the locomotive couldn't work. There was only one rail. And we had to push up all the trains.

And I remember when I came, it must have been my birthday July the 1st, it was very hot. I took off all my clothes, I mean my shirt and everything. And I start pushing.

So the head of this branch where we were working was a Czechoslovak Nazi from the Sudeten Gebirge. And he didn't dislike the Jews. He happened to be nice to the Jews. He hated the Poles because the Czechoslovaks hate the Poles for certain political reasons because they occupied the part of Czechoslovakia before the war.

But he was nice to us. And I was lucky at the time because he treated me good for let's say, for a little while. And sometimes, if we had no work, we were waiting like the trains to come in so we had to move rocks from one place to another, just to do something-- not to sit, not to rest. So like there was a group of Jews in here, a group of Jews in here. Like we throw the rocks in here so we threw the rocks in here so the other Nazi would say-- he would beat his Jews. So he said if you beat my Jews, I'm going to beat your Jews.

How many Jews were assigned to each Nazi?

Sometimes 10, 20-- depends. Different groups. This I can't remember exactly. Like to push a wagon maybe 10, 12 people pushing the wagons up. It was up a hill.

Were you fed anything? Were you given any nourishment?

I didn't think so. I think we had to take from home the little bit we had. Nourishment was not-- we were just living hungry. People died from hunger. People just die from starvation. If the war would have lasted two more days I would have been dead. This was in Ebensee. I went to the bathroom every eight days.

But this wasn't in Pruszk³w, this one I'm talking. I guess we still were in the house. You know, the mothers somehow they scrimped. They begged.

In fact, one day, it was a Yom Kippur and a Shabbos on a Saturday. It was the Yom Kippur, and they had to get gas or diesel for their trucks in my town. So we came once-- this is memorable because it was a Saturday, and it was Yom Kippur. You know Saturday-- Yom Kippur doesn't come on Saturdays.

So we came, a few boys, to the town. And we were going to stay over the weekend but when they heard in town that we are coming from Pruszk³w to the station, so my mother came there with my little sister. They were still alive at the time. So they had-- the one who was in charge of us, he came over. My sister came over, so he said, who is this girl? This is my sister. This is your sister? He gave me a kick in the behind because he say, Jews can't be so beautiful. Very beautiful sister. She was 11 years old. So--

So you saw your mother for the first time in how long?

No-- maybe in three months because this was still, like, we could go home. A lot of people escaped. They got other people. Sometimes if somebody escaped, they didn't like it. So they shot a couple of-- to punish, they shot a couple other people. It is very hard to describe, to remember details, you know?

So how long were you in Pruszk³w?

How long I was there?

Yeah. From when to when?

Maybe, probably six months. I don't really remember. It must have been around six months. I remember we went in the winter too-- oh, because my father died. He died of natural causes, my father. I think he died of scare because my father was a healthy man. He was only 60 years old. And they took us to Pruszk³w. In fact, I was saying Kaddish on the train. Going back and forth I was saying Kaddish. I remember this. I can only remember little details like this.

They're important details.

What else? And then we stayed in the ghetto. After we finished Pruszk³w, we stayed-- oh-- yeah, then I worked in-- in the ghetto I worked in a tailor factory. The head of this tailor factory, he was a decent-- he was a Nazi, but he was a decent man. He treated as best as he could. His name was Blache, B-L-A-C-H-E. Those details I remember.

And then when they finally started, when they made the ghetto, then we had to go. We had to be sent to concentration camp. So they shot whoever they-- most of the older people. Oh, at one point they took the children, all the children-- whatever they could find-- and to shoot them.

And the paradox of it all-- there was a funny thing because the place where we're waiting three days before we went-- we are shipped-- because they were shooting people-- they take them to the cemetery or shoot them in bed. So the place was called Plac Wolnosci. In Polish means place of liberty, place of freedom. This where we stayed for three days. It was at the end-- must have been the end of September when the nights were very cold.

In fact next to me was a gentleman who was-- yeah, when the mothers and fathers say to the children, escape, get out of the ghetto because they're going to shoot them. So they just mowed them down like this in front of the-- where ghetto was made. Mow down all the children except those were hidden.

Then next to me was sitting a man. His name was Stein. He had a child in a knapsack for three days. His child must have been 3 and 1/2 years old. Mr. Stein, he was a professor of Hebrew in this school called Safa Berura. But, I guess, knowing people, they gave him-- he was like the manager of the shop I was working-- tailor shop. So I guess they want to protect some intellectuals too.

So we stayed there just three days. Finally-- oh, and then there was another guy. Remember I mentioned this guy, this administrator who was shot? That was his brother. He was a presser, but we called him, like, a sissy. He was really a very mild man. And when they liquidated the ghetto and they were shooting the children, he had this child. He could

have been saved because he was a presser, a very strong man. He was like a very mild man. You can call him a sissy, really. So the Nazis-- this head, his name was Goeth. He was hung in Poland after the war. He was the head of the--

This was Amon Goeth the--

Amon Goeth, yeah. He was-- anyway, so he said to this man if his wife was here, and he was here, give up the child. He was holding the child. It was a little baby, maybe two years old. Give up the child because he was selecting-- you were here, you go here. And strong men he still wanted for work. He wouldn't give up the child, so he shot the child right in his arms. OK, this was one.

There was another man too. He went with the child. His name was Greenberg, Herschel Greenberg. He was tall, six feet tall man. Excellent tailor. And he could have survived. He went with the truck. It wasn't immediately, he had to go to the cemetery with his child to be shot. He didn't want to give up the child. Because I'm mentioning this because people who say we went like--

Like sheep?

--sheep. We didn't go like sheep. There was many, many heroes. And in fact, I just called in Canada. I used to go with a girl, like, when we were kids. And I wanted to call some friends of mine in Canada, which I have. So maybe a month ago I called up. I didn't even know her number, but I knew the name. Her husband's name is Alban. He's also a tailor. His brother, who was maybe more than six feet tall-- this was in the ghetto when the Nazis came out to take him. He would have survived. So he spit the Nazi in the face. They shot him of course. A young boy, beautiful, handsome man. Intelligent and had everything to live for.

So to say-- to bring out this-- we didn't die, even just to live in this ghetto and not to commit suicide. Why did I survive? Because I want to know what's going to happen. Really, curiosity. Many people committed suicide. I mean, I have to skip from one to another. This is the problem I can't say in sequences because--

That's all right.

I remember one-- then there's Mr. Stein. So we waited three days when they took out all the old people. They killed the people. They killed all the children they could. And then there's Mr. Stein with his child in this knapsack. For three days the child didn't make one-- he didn't open his mouth even because they would have taken it. Then we finally-- the survivors of this liquidation went to the station-- It was maybe a couple of kilometers-- to go to Plaszew. Just before we went to Plaszew. And this Mr. Stein went-- we only could take a knapsack and whatever you had on, he had about four coats on.

When we came to the station he had his child under his coat. So we had to go up on the train-- this was animal wagons. So he had to take out the child. There was a Nazi, a Gestapo man. He was from Silesia. I remember him. I don't know his name. He was in charge of us, not he alone. There was other people. He helped this man, that Mr. Stein, to put the child on the wagon. He helped him, but it didn't do any good because after they sent the Jewish man-- in fact he was a friend of mine, this man. He was like an [INAUDIBLE] man, you know they established a Jewish police too.

So he came up on this wagon. He was-- he say, send them up. His name was Zimmerman, and they killed him too. So he said, you son of a bitches-- just like this-- if any of you have any children, you better give it up because otherwise they're going to bomb the whole thing. There must have been 2.000 people.

So Mr. Stein gave up the child in the knapsack. And they took the knapsack, and they threw it in another wagon because we had to give up. They say when we come to concentration camp they're going to give us back the knapsacks. This child was in the knapsack alive. And he wasn't the only one. Other children hidden like this. This was before we went to Plaszew.

So--

What else can I remember?

So you went to Plaszów after that, is that it?

Yeah, after they liquidated the ghetto. It wasn't completely liquidated. There were still some to cleaning up. And I guess some people, maybe a couple of doctors which they needed. In between, they always used to go up to the Jewish committee, to this Judenrat, and ask people-- to ask the Juden to give them like today they want to shoot 50 Jews, tomorrow 100 Jews.

So one day this guy, his name was Reiss, he was a German Jew. He was a big, handsome man, very distinguished. He was a furrier from Germany. But when the German Jews were sent to Poland, some of them settled in different cities. They settled-- they must have come originally from Tarnów, so they settled in Tarnów. So he was the head of the Judenrat. He asked him for 50 Jews or something. "I can't give you any Jews. I can only give you my life." I don't remember if he shot himself or they shot him-- the Nazis.

When the ghetto was liquidated, how many members of your immediate family were still survivors then?

My brother was alive, but I didn't know that he was alive. He was in a different place. He was in a place called--

So you had lost contact with him?

Completely. In fact, it's also a story, my brother. He was in a camp called Szebnie. This was more east of Tarnów. It must have been a small town. There's a book about it. And when they liquidated this camp Szebnie, many they killed. And some of them they sent either to Auschwitz or even to my camp, to Plaszów, when I was in Plaszów.

So I asked when they told me this-- I knew that he was in Szebnie, so when I asked people, they said, oh, your brother got killed because he tried to escape from the truck, and they shot him. And it's true. They did shoot him, but he survived. But I didn't know that he was alive.

I met him in Italy after the war. He was working, and you know-- ever go to Italy? The Spanish Step? I was-- we were selling cigarettes, black market cigarettes. The street was called Via del Babuino, in Rome. There's a side along the Spanish Step, the street is called Via del Babuino I always thought from this other.

So I went with this cousin of mine who lives in Arizona. He said-- they called me Marcello at the time. He said, isn't this [? Lel? ?] It was him. He said, just like this. [INAUDIBLE] my brother.

So until you met him you thought you were the only survivor of your family?

Yeah, but once I had a funny experience when I was alone. I saw a advertisement, big advert, for a theater-- Hannah Berger. And my sister was Hannah. But it was not. It was nothing like this.

But let's go back then again-- on the trains, of course, when we went to Krakow, even though it was only 80 kilometers, it took three days. And we couldn't-- many people died on the train. We were 90 people in one wagon. No water, no air, nothing. Then we came to Plaszów. Of course it was "Arbeit macht das Leben schön." It was the German motto. You know what I mean? "Arbeit macht das Leben schön."

Yeah. Work makes life sweet.

Yeah, this what we saw when we came in after we almost starved to death. Didn't eat for three days. They had in this camp delousing. And then they had in big like 50 gallon-- or 50 liter-- no, 50 gallon, yeah, 50 gallon-- some kind of a white stuff. It looked like rice. I never knew what it was-- horrible, horrible like a glue. It tasted like a glue. And we grabbed it by the hand and eat like this. It was a horrible thing. It looked like rice. It was white like rice.

And then when they liquidate the ghetto, me and this cousin of mine, we just leaned against a tree. And we found a

watch, a golden watch with a chain. It was called a Schaffhausen. They probably will be worth-- an antique. It was a Swiss watch. And we brought it to the camp somehow. I don't remember how we hid it. No, we-- I think we sold it. We sold it maybe. I don't remember how.

But when I came to the camp, we had some money. And there was a friend of ours, who still lives in Rome in fact, and he was already in the camp, so he already made deals with the Ukrainians. You could buy, if you had dollars or gold, you could buy bread from the Ukrainian guards. There were Ukrainian guards. So he brought us [INAUDIBLE] for this watch. I don't know if I gave him the watch. I think it was I gave him money. I must have sold the watch before because I hid the money in my hair. I had a big head of hair.

So the people who survived the train then-- do you have any idea how many people, what percentage of people actually survived the trip?

This trip? Well, the trip big percent [INAUDIBLE]--

The three days.

--it was only three days, so I would say 98% survived the trip. But then most people died anyway within the camp.

Were these by and large men or were there women and children among them also?

Women and children. The children weren't there. The children were-- whatever children were left, they were on the other wagon where they were suffocated.

So tell us about Plasza³w.

Well, we came to Plasza³w and I got a job as a tailor in a tailor shop. There was two different tailor-- one was civilian clothes. The men of the-- you probably heard of him, Madritsch was his name. You ever heard of the name Madritsch? He saved hundreds-- thousands of Jews, I would say. And he was a friend of Goeth.

They were two Austrians. The most handsome man you ever saw in your life, both of them. But Madritsch was a human being. He smuggled in breads. He smuggled in everything he could for his people.

I worked in the other. It was called [INAUDIBLE]. We only did military work. Most of the work we did was like patching up old uniforms. So you came back from the Russian front with holes and all sorts of camouflage-- green and white for the snow. So we painted them over with calcium. And this was our job.

And one Yom Kippur-- was it '44-- it was on Yom Kippur, this I remember. They came in, a group of Nazis. One, his name was Jan and he was like a little cripple. He was an officer. He came in and we were just sitting shaking in there. And we didn't face him.

The machines were facing each other. And he was just from the back going like this. And within five minutes he took out 50 people. In this place there used to be, before the World War I, there used to be like trenches. It was like-- they had a funny name in Polish. It's like-- it's called [INAUDIBLE]. I don't know if you know what it means. So--

Translate it please.

Well, gorka means mountain-- little mountain. Penis-- penis [NON-ENGLISH], penis mountain.

Yeah.

I guess it was built-- this was man-made for-- you should know it because everybody knows about this. It was a famous place. they killed-- they shot 50 people. Just took them out on Yom Kippur. And then they came back and took up another bunch which I was among them too.

We had to make fire, wood, and put the people on the wood. And it was just burning. And I remember this woman naked. They had to undress. And this woman-- beautiful woman, still warm. I'm not sure if she wasn't alive yet. And I had to pretend I'm and another man with me. I didn't know who the man was. And we put on the fire. It was just burning. The smell was horrible.

Then we kept working. Like at night, in the evenings, we worked. We didn't always work in the tailor. When they needed any other work they just took you and get to work. And Goeth was living down, and we worked in top of the hill. He used to come up with this Great Dane. His pleasure he'd had the Dane eat people, you know, bite them. And then he was shooting them for mercy. Of him we were scared.

We're going to have to stop for about a minute to change the tape. Do you wanted to take a rest?

Yes.