

Good morning. I am Joseph Preil. I'm privileged to serve as the director of the Holocaust Resource Center here at Kean University, in Union, New Jersey. And this morning, we are privileged to have with us two of our distinguished survivors, Mrs. Elizabeth Suzie Wilf and Mr. Erwin Fisch, and they are also going to be talking about their heroic mother, Mrs. Miriam [? Link ?] Fisch, of blessed memory.

Mrs. Wilf, you brought some pictures here today, and you want to tell us about them. And Erwin you'll join in when you feel it appropriate. All right.

Well, this is a picture of our mother, Miriam Fisch, that helped us survive the Holocaust through her efforts, and this here, he made it through.

And we'll hear about her heroism shortly, but I want to point out for non-family members that this wonderful lady in this picture is how old?

Oh, maybe 96. She passed away at the age of 97. So this probably was done a year ago.

And I understand she was driving her car.

Almost to the last--

She lived [INTERPOSING VOICES]

About the year. Yes, yes she lived.

All right. Now, this next picture.

This is our father, Marcos Fisch, in our lumber yard, Lwow, Lemberg.

And that lumber yard was passed down from father to son?

All right. Yes, yes.

Whom do we have in this picture?

In this picture is our mother, Miriam Fisch, my brother Erwin, and myself, and walking on the streets of Wolf, it must have been just before the war started.

Do you remember this picture?

Of course, and I think I was maybe five years old all the time or something like that.

We'll have an interesting time later talking about which one or two pictures are we going to keep for the publication. Whom do we have here?

These are our parents, Miriam and Marcos Fisch. And this was made in Augsburg on our way to America. He left Poland, he stayed in Germany before we emigrated to America.

Augsburg was a DP camp in Germany.

Augsburg-- No, this was already outside the DP camp in the private the apartment.

This was taken probably in maybe--

Just before we came to America.

48, 49-- 1948 or 49.

And you came here in 1950.

1950, yes.

Now we're getting to other members of the family.

These members.

Can you see it?

Yes. This is my mother and I, my grandmother, my mother's mother, my mother's oldest sister, Á»enia, and her two children, Lila and Marcel, and they all perished in the Lemberg Ghetto, in the Lwow Ghetto.

In the ghetto.

In the ghetto. Yes, yes.

Do you remember them?

The, Germans, yes, of course, they took--

The little boy, Marcel, went to a soup kitchen and never came back. They rounded up all the children. It was a terrible blow all the time to the family. Of course, they all later perished as well, but then my mother and I here in this picture are the only, from this picture, surviving.

That was in the same ghetto that we were in, and, fortunately, we were able to escape from the ghetto later on.

But this picture was--

That's how we survived by escaping from the ghetto before the Germans liquidated it.

But this picture was done much before the war started.

Another family picture.

Another family. This is in the resort place. My parents, my father holding me. Again, my mother's older sister, Á»enia, her husband, Dolek. And they had two children, Lila and Marcel. They perished.

These look like familiar people.

This is my brother, Erwin and I, in the DP camp Ainring near Reichenhall Berchtesgaden area in Germany. 1957.

No, '40s.

'47, '48.

Yes. Yes.

See, we'll help you on the dates. Even I can help you on that one. And this looks like we're in--

In Forrest Hills. My parents, my oldest son, Ziggy, and I.

And we'll hear about Ziggy's birth later in the interview. All right, thank you very much. All right. Now at the outset we'll start with you as the older child. When and where were you born? Tell us something about your home background.

OK. I was born in Lwow, Lemberg, Poland and what else? I don't know what to say.

Well, that was a big city.

Was a big city, yes.

How large?

I would say I just don't know that the population number. I wouldn't know.

Would you have an idea of the population of the total population and specifically Jewish population?

The general population I think was maybe 200,000 people. It was a large city.

The total population? 200,000?

The Jewish population, I don't know.

I'm not sure. There's the total population or the Jewish population? Not 100,000.

Well, I don't know exactly.

Yeah, we don't know. I should have come prepared better with that.

It's all right. What kind of a city was it?

It was a very vibrant city.

Vibrant, modern. At that time, it was a modern city. What did people do? Commerce, business commerce. Was a very advanced city for the '20s and the '30s at that time.

In what respect was it advanced?

Well, from what I know is obviously there were the large population centers like Lemberg, Krakow, you know?

Warsaw.

Warsaw. And outside of those centers, the other parts of the country were a little bit more not as advanced as the centers. We are talking possibly culture, medicine, those were the centers that those advances were going on and Lemberg was part of that.

So in the Russian zone, Lemberg was the largest-- or Lwow was the largest city.

I would say so.

Because you mentioned Krakow and Warsaw, they were in the German zone.

This was before the war. Talking about before the war. Before the war we were all in Poland. When the war started, Poland was divided So we were in the part that Russia took over.

And in that part, I gather Lwow was the largest city.

Was the largest city.

Taken over, yes.

Yeah, of the Russian zone.

Right. Right.

OK. And it was considered to be a modern, up to date city? Yes. Yes.

As Warsaw and Krakow considered to the modern, up-to-date cities. But the smaller towns, the shtetlach could be 19th century communities.

Exactly. Exactly. They were the communities without the infrastructure, maybe the electricity or maybe the water resources that the cities had already and so that's to that aspect

Before the war did everybody have a phone in Lemberg? Or Lwow?

No. No.

No.

Not that modern.

Not that modern?

No, no. Not that. You're talking modern for 1930's, not for the '90s.

Oh, OK.

Exactly.

You said your father had a lumber yard. What do you remember about the lumber yard?

What do you want me to--

Evidently, it was a good business that--

Good business, yes.

--was going from father to son.

Delivering lumber to the places that were building up homes and businesses and houses and so.

Now let's see. You were born in 1932. That means you were already in school when the war broke out. Certainly.

Yes, in the beginning.

Even when the Germans invaded in '39, you were seven years old and it really came to your part of Poland in '41, June '41.

When the Russians came back, they moved our grades back one year because in Russia they started school I think at 7 or 8 and in Poland they started earlier. So when Russia took over Lwow, children were pushed back one year.

What do you remember of your life until the war? What kept you going? What did you look forward to?

Playing with other children, having fun, doing homework. Doing well, hopefully, in school. And I remember my cousins. That with Sam we were close, and Sam did not live in Lwow. It was not so close.

But life was pleasant?

Very pleasant, yes, yes.

And what do you remember? For you it's more difficult but do you remember something?

Well, it's a little more difficult, but to the extent that I didn't go to school, I don't remember going to school. But as a toddler or a young four, five-year-old I remember playing and I remember the streets and the few friends that we played with and with my sister, of course. So I do remember that part and it was pleasant. We were very comfortable, had a loving family.

What do you remember of Jewish life?

Jewish life? There was a synagogue around the corner, holidays, and this is what I remember. My grandmother coming over and so.

And you?

Same. Well, not as much as my sister, but I remember those happy occasions of course.

What do you remember in terms of comparing first to the Russian takeover, and then the German takeover?

Well, the Russians came over, they were not a threat to our lives. Of course, the Germans came, then that was it. Because all the neighbors that were Ukrainian or non-Jewish were happy that the Germans came and screaming in the streets that it will be bad for the Jews. They were glad about it.

Was that the impression that you had, that the population saw the events of 1941 as a turn against the Jews? Was that the whole thing?

Well.

That they--

They were not in danger.

--were pleased with this development?

Yes.

We did feel that.

Yes.

We did feel that. We had to have--

I don't think in the other population, the others were in danger of their lives. And there's not--

Anti-Semitism reared its ugly head when the Germans came in. It was just Carte Blanche and opened everything up.

You mean they could help themselves to your belongings?

They certainly did.

Eventually they did. They eventually did.

And one of the first things, of course, we know the Germans did is create and form the ghetto and the orders went out to the Jewish communities that everybody had to move into the ghettos. So we had to leave. So when Jews family's businesses left, whoever took it over, whether it's the Poles or Ukrainians or Germans. Just like my father the lumber yard, who knows who took it over? But we certainly didn't see any benefit of it.

So that that's the sense and it's not the sense. It's in the reality, that's what happened. We all know that during the actions that the Germans had, let's say even in the ghetto when they would come in and take our children or elderly people, different times, different segments of the population they wanted to take out, there was always some Gentile Poles or Ukrainians with the Germans and they were the ones who--

Rounded up Jews.

--helped more than anybody else to round them up and take them out.

Would you say that what the Germans did was-- while Poland was really a defeated country, a vanquished country at this time, the Germans succeeded in blinding them to what was taking place with them by giving them the Carte Blanche to do what they wanted with the Jews?

Right, right.

I would agree with that general statement and of course, I would also say not the entire population. I'm sure there were good people and people were helping us and even in our own case, there were some Gentile families who helped us get out and survive. And so it's not everybody, but--

Excuse me, Erwin. To get out from the ghetto nobody helped us.

Well, but the one time, for instance--

That they took me over.

--somebody took you for a few days, you know? They were Gentile. They were Gentile. But generally speaking, they were not unhappy with the situation with the Germans coming in and doing what they were doing.

Even though they were defeated country, your view of it is that this made their defeat more than palatable for them?

Yes. Yes. The Germans didn't need to do much the work at liquidating Jews. Well, they had the plan and everything, but they had tremendous cooperation with the Gentile, Ukrainians, and the Poles.

All right. Let's consider now the members of your family. You know, your father's family, your mother's family. We were talking about this a little while ago. Let's go to your father's family first, may we? Your father's family consisted of what?

Of a brother and sister.

Brother and a sister. What happened to them?

The brother perished with his family. The sister survived in Russia with her family.

OK, so they were married and they had children?

Each had two children.

All right. So you're talking about two families of four?

Right.

One family of four escaped to Russia--

Of three. My father was one of three. There was another--

Oh, no I'm talking about his brother and his sister.

Right.

So the brother escaped to Russia?

No, the brother perished.

The sister.

The sister in Russia.

So the sister and her husband and children--

--two children survived.

--left, fled to Russia.

And survived.

All right. That's the sister. The brother and his wife

And two children

Perished.

Perished. You don't know where?

Stanislav, but I don't know how and what.

You don't know if it's a ghetto or if it's a camp. You just know that they weren't around after the war.

Right.

OK. Now your mother's family was a larger family.

Larger family, she was one of seven and only she and her sister survived. Your mother survived with her husband and two children.

Two children. The sister survived with a daughter and a ex-husband, which was in a different part of the world.

OK. And now five siblings, and that's-- they perished.

Perished, yes. Different part of the world.

With their husbands, with their wives--

Children--

--and with the children.

--wives, with their spouses. Yes.

So that's where the the losses were greatest.

And of course, my mother's mother perished.

Grandmother.

She was the only member of that generation who was still alive?

Yes, yes, yes.

Now you were in the ghetto in Lwow.

Yes.

What happened there?

Well, daily life was very tough from day-to-day, but of course, worse was the aktion that were rounding our people, and there was no place to hide and whoever was open were taken away and never heard of again. But at one time we were hiding in a attic and we survived that aktion. Other aktion were hiding other places, and eventually my parents decided to leave the ghetto and to take that chance.

To escape.

Now, all the Jews of the Lwow were rounded up and settled in the ghetto?

Ghetto, yes.

What do you remember of what the life consisted of in the ghetto?

I think struggle from day-to-day. I remember my parents, my mother was able to get out from the ghetto and bring food inside because food was a shortage.

Shortage of food, shortage of medicine. Shortage of everything.

But I don't remember ever being, or you being hungry because mother always were able to go out and bring bread, potatoes, and all kinds of things.

Was everybody in the ghetto able to do it?

No.



How did she manage it?

When she was going out, she pretended to be not Jewish and she had the look about her that way. So she was able to mingle with the non-Jewish population outside the ghetto and to just get things. With maybe some money we had she was able to buy outside the ghetto.

So people didn't know her outside the ghetto?

She was always afraid that somebody will recognize her, a neighbor. Which at one time, it happened and she miraculously escaped that person that followed her. A non-Jewish neighbor saw her and followed her all over town, but mother did manage to escape her.

That was a frightening experience.

That was a frightening experience that people will-- that's why when we did leave the ghetto, we had to go out outside Lwow because it was always a danger that someone will recognize. A neighbor, a mother of a school child will eventually give us out.

I believe in your mother's writing we have a number of incidents that took place while the family was still in the ghetto, but the way I understand it, you were outside the ghetto--

Just for one aktion. For one aktion I--

You were in the ghetto.

Yes.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

And the other aktion, you were out of the ghetto.

One aktion was outside. Mostly I was in, just one aktion was out.

When did you leave the ghetto? There was a rumor that the Nazi is coming up and my mother-- I don't remember if somebody came to get me out from the ghetto. Mother took me out to family.

Family from before the war. Yes. They took me--

Polish family?

Polish family, yes.

A Gentile family?

Yes, Gentile family. Yes.

A Gentile Polish family, and they sheltered her.

Yes, for the time of the aktion. Then they took me back.

So basically you were together the whole time?

Yes, yes, yes.

Except maybe for two days, let's say.

Exactly.

Exactly, right.

OK. And at a certain point-- so you'll live through and the family lived through, survived several aktions in the ghetto, and then the family left the ghetto. How did that come about? That's the key to your survival.

Leaving the ghetto?

Yeah.

Yes. Well, mother writes in here that the decision came when my father was injured while being transported out of the ghetto to a work outside the ghetto. And it was a big incident that some truck fell over him and he was badly injured. So while recuperating back in the ghetto, my parents decided there's the time. Because nobody will be missing him at work knowing that he's recuperating. And we decided to leave. We obtained some-- partially, mother obtained Aryan papers, which were not so--

For you two?

For herself as an Aryan person. And so at least she had something to show if caught outside.

And what about the two of you?

But those papers were only for her and for my sister and myself. Not for my father.

Not for my father.

Why was that?

Well, the papers were for a woman--

From a separate family--

--her age.

--that they gave us.

They gave you their papers?

No. No. The papers were not so--

Legitimate?

--legitimate They were very safe, but were safe in the packet. Once they had to be shown and if they will just follow all the details of those papers, wouldn't be good. But for the first glance, the papers were OK, let's say.

For a family of a boy and a girl and a mother.

Mother and my father was just--

Who prepared the papers?

We had somebody that did it for us. This was from a deceased family, they got a copy.

Oh, these were real people. These were real papers.

Real paper of people that if you would really look through, they were non-existence, partially existing. I'm not sure how, but they were not from people that were alive and that they gave up their own papers. Were just false papers, false-- maybe one was in the K-paper, but for the two of us maybe it was a little bit falsified.

Well, I can understand it because if the people weren't alive, that means they were dead. And you were children who were just born within the past decade.

I don't know how exactly which paper was the right one. Probably mothers. And the two of our papers maybe were falsified or just made up for.

And your father had no papers?

No papers, no. Just went out on a chance.

And in the film that was in the video for--

Stern.

--Stern College. Your mother was very clear with the statement "here we have no chance to survive. Outside is 50-50. I'll take the 50-50."

Exactly.

So it was her decision?

Yes. Yes. Yes.

She was very strong, yes.

Do you remember her always being the decisive person and making moves?

Never came to our mind before the war how strong and how decisive she was till the occasion came for--

In those

--emergency like that.

--moments of crisis and everything, of course she discussed it with her father, I'm sure, and so forth.

With her father? Oh, you mean with--

With our father.

--your father.

My father.

With her husband.

With her husband. But she really was the strong force in getting things accomplished that had to be done.

And first of all, she didn't look Jewish. Which quote, unquote, whatever "Jewish" for the non-Jewish population a Jew looks like. And being a woman was easier to get around than for a man, which could be, of course, for a Jewish man, male was--

Could be dangerous.

Right, could be proven immediately. So mother had the ability, of course the strength, and everything else that she could maneuver easier than a man, which was my father.

After the war, when you came to America, did you always see your mother as being that decisive person? Because evidently she played that key role in your lives.

Yes, she did. Yes. Yes.

You always saw that?

Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

She was a good guide for us, different decisions, where to live, settlements, so forth.

She was involved all the time.

She had a good sense about what's right and it's proven that she was right in all her decision making. So she was really quite a personality?

Yes, she was.

And in the sense that in her case, you could see where the decision was made that saved the family.

In the ghetto In the ghetto.

And most people can't do that. They will throw up their hands and say it was luck, they can't understand how they survived.

And mostly people in the ghetto. Mother used to tell us that people said, whatever happened with everybody else will happen with us. Of course, not thinking that such a final thing will happen.

They couldn't absorb it, what was taking place.

Couldn't. Even if they knew somehow, said, well, it would not maybe happen to us, maybe soon it'll end, maybe just part of us will perish, not all. I don't think they thought that it's--

This is probably one of the most puzzling things from the whole Holocaust, just to my mind anyway. How millions and millions of people just either didn't know what was going on, which is quite possible and they always thought of, well, if we resist we'll get killed immediately. So let's go along.

Where was the resistance? There was some, of course, we know, but generally speaking we were just led to believe that everything will be all right. I still don't know how it all went that it just-- if was even full resistance, if we knew all the facts, what was going on. Maybe half our population could have been saved. It's hard to believe.

You know, Wiesel said when he was here, how do unarmed people resist the mightiest army in Europe and the greatest army until that time? With what?

That is true. That is true. It's hard to fight with bare hands guns and tanks.

The population was hungry, scared, and just not organized and just not believing that--

Not organized, we didn't have backing. We didn't have countries, nations, saying this is wrong. We have to do something. We didn't have it then.

Now your mother made the decision and the history has proven that she was right and she was original and creative in how to save the family. Did she talk to others that you know of about what was in her mind? Or she only kept this within the family?

That was her decision. It was very hard to advise anybody else without-- you can't tell people, let's get out from ghetto. She had the will, the opportunity as far as the papers she had. If somebody didn't have papers, how do you go out?

Have you heard of other people who escaped the ghetto?

Probably. Probably, yes.

Of the Lwow ghetto?

We did not hear or know of anyone.

Yes, no.

Yeah, you haven't come across anyone?

We haven't come across anyone, but hopefully some did. But on the other hand, it was not easy to get out of the ghetto either. You just didn't decide I want to get out. That was not the Germans plan.

Even according to her paper here-- we had somebody that was in the Jewish militia and he helped us. He was our neighbor--

So we needed a lot of help and planning--

--and he helped us to get--

--to get out.

--through the gate.

A lot of help and planning?

A lot of help and planning. The timing, so forth, and so on and when this particular man was near the guard, near the gates to help us get out.

She had spoken to him?

She had spoken to him, made arrangements so that--

He didn't make it. He himself perished, but he was in the militia, in the Jewish militia of ghetto. And when we came up to the gates he told the one that was guarding the gate, also Jewish militia, to look other way. Not to look this way or

that way, and he shielded us with his back and said, go.

An absolutely--

So we went through the gate.

--remarkable story, how she saw what was going on and saw how to save her family.

Just exactly how she stated, that she would take her chance on living outside, because inside she could see that nobody will survive eventually.

We have here quite a few incidents that she talks about I think what we decided was that you'd begin to read them and we'd see if we can get some clarity as to what took place, when it took place, and so forth. So if you'll be good enough, would you read the first one?

I'd be glad to, certainly. These are some remembrances and thoughts and things that my mother at one time a few years ago decided to put down and she wrote it in Polish and she asked me to translate it, which I did, into English. And being sort of a perfectionist that my mother was, she didn't like my translation.

In some instances some phrases weren't quite the way she wanted them to be. She edited my translation in English and of course, then we typed this up and these are a few remembrances of the Lemberg, Lwow ghetto in Poland. This is my mother's story and I'll be glad to read it for you this morning.

"In the ghetto they had a kitchen for children who came with their own container to receive a little soup and bread. My nephew, Marcel, he was six years old, went one day to this kitchen with our children and never returned or was ever seen again. Tears are swelling in my eyes and I cannot write anymore. Further remembrance--"

Wait, is that the first one?

That's the first one.

All right, let's talk about that a moment. Tell us about Marcel.

Marcel was the youngest child of my mother's oldest sister, Á»enia.

Actually, he was close in age to you.

He was.

Right, right.

He was my age.

So was her sister closer to my age and Marcel was closer to Erwin's age. But in our case, we never had the need to go to the soup kitchen because always mother was able to provide food for us and we really never went hungry, even in the ghetto. But that family, somehow my mother's older sister didn't have the strength or the ability to go out of the ghetto to get the food for the children. So the children were forced to go to a soup kitchen and that was the plan, I guess, to round up all the children from that soup kitchen and then take them away.

They disappeared.

They disappeared. This was our first shock for the family, for our family, that he didn't come back.

That was right at the beginning of the German occupation then.

Exactly.

Yes.

Exactly. Many times they would have people gathering, receiving some bread and soup and so forth and trucks would come up and take 20, 30 people and out. So it was just like they were there.

You saw it?

I don't remember seeing it, no.

No, I didn't see it.

Because you never went to the soup line?

Never went to the soup line.

Right, but my mother and father, they talked about. They knew that's how things were going on.

Right. OK, let's go onto second one.

Further remembrances and dates, unfortunately I do not remember so I wouldn't put them here any dates. Her second point is "they announced aktion, which means to take hundreds of people to the camps and thereby shrinking and reducing the ghetto. I took my daughter, Zuzia Elizabeth, to my former neighbor who lived in my former neighborhood in Lemberg.

She hid Zuzia in the basement so that her father, who was of German origin, should not find out that she was hiding a Jewish child. Me and my little son, Erwin, who remained with me in the ghetto. Next to the house where we lived was a barn, so I and my son Irwin climbed into the attic of that barn to hide from the Ukrainian militia. We covered ourselves with straw and lay still, barely breathing.

The Ukrainian militia came and were taking people away. My husband, who had working papers for the railroad work which was considered essential work, was outside the ghetto. Some Ukrainian men raised the ladder to go up and look into the attic where I and my son were hiding. Erwin was seven years old at the time. As one militiaman was climbing up the ladder, another one said to him, can't you see that there is a roof up there?

He climbed down and my husband took the ladder away and we were saved. From the same hiding place, I saw through a little opening how they took my older sister, Å»enia, and her daughter, Lila, and how the brutal Ukrainians took them for the last walk. I can't write any further. Tears are swelling in my eyes."

This was probably in 1942 because you were seven. Wait a minute, you became seven in--

In 1941.

--November '41. So it was probably sometime in '42.

'42 I would say.

In the first year of the German occupation.

Probably, yes.

Yes.

And this is the one time that you were not in the ghetto.

Right, yes. Yes. Yes. But it was maybe only for two days because the aktion didn't last that long. I mean, it was long enough but then I came back.

And when you came back, what do you recall when you came back?

To tell you the truth, just mother telling us that her sister and mother and niece were taken away.

In the first aktion?

Yes. Yes.

This was the first aktion.

One of the first ones, right.

That's the first one she's talking about.

Right, yeah.

There may be smaller ones before she put this main one up, but this was--

Do you have any recollection of this aktion?

This particular incident I do have because I remember being in the barn, in the attic with her and just stands out in my mind. But of course, it was reinforced by after the war and so forth. We always talked about these different pockets, different incidents, and that I do remember, being up there with her.

And of course, being a small child, we were always admonished to be quiet and still and all the different things that we needed to do in order not to give ourselves away. So war creates this type of situations. You just know instinctly what to do, seems to me like. We had to do all the right things.

All right. Let's see what else Happened Over here and see if we begin to see any kind of a pattern. What's the next one?

She continues, "Another time you could hear screaming and crying to the heavens and we knew that someone was being tortured and murdered. It was then that I and my husband decided that I with my son Erwin would leave the ghetto and try to go to the outside. Because if they came to our house, they would take us away."

Is that the end of it?

No. "I was able to obtain a passport from a Ukrainian woman acquaintance and that of her small boy which fit my son's description. With my knowledge of the Ukrainian language, we set out to go out of the ghetto for the time of the raids, which lasted one or two days. I held Erwin by the hand and we started walking toward the outside gate. But before we could cross this large field, a band of eight 8 10 Ukrainian youths with sticks and razors along with one Ukrainian militiamen and one Gestapo officer approached us. My fear was unbelievable because all they were interested in was beating and killing Jews.

One of the youths shouted, no! No! No! Meaning that we might not be Jews. I showed my passport to the Ukrainian militia, conversing with him in Ukrainian. He looked it over and returned the passport to me and told us we could proceed and go ahead. I held my son Erwin's hand tightly so he would feel secure and that is how we left the ghetto this time.



A few days later when the situation in the ghetto was calmer, I returned with both my children, Erwin and Zuzia. I picked up my daughter, Zuzia, from the woman who hid her in the basement. Upon my return to the ghetto, my beloved mother, Branja, was gone." That's my grandmother. "They took her away during those two days of raids."

So this is the aktion that you were away?

Probably, yes. Probably.

Didn't we say when he was in the attic with the mother, you were also away then. Sounds like you missed two aktions.

Possible. Possible. This I don't recall. This I don't remember if it's one or two.

And she only talks about holding his hand.

Yes.

And then afterwards she picked you up.

Yes. Because during the time that we were returning, she picked her up from when she was away for a couple of days.

So the aktions were going quickly at this point? You were away for a short time and she's talking about two aktions here.

Yes. They were going on quite often.

Yes. Yes. There was a story my mother told us that where some people were hiding out and there was a woman with a little baby and they said that they cannot take the baby because the baby will cry. So she came up and left the baby downstairs. Of course, the baby was gone after the aktion. There was another incident, another woman had a baby and she took the baby up with her. But when the baby started crying, she put a pillow on the baby to be quiet and--

That was it.

--the baby never cried. I think mother writes about it here. And after that the baby never cried again.

Was she rare in the sense that she could speak Ukrainian and that's what saved the family?

Yes, I did not speak Ukrainian but my mother did.

She did, she spoke Ukrainian.

Yeah.

About what proportion of the Jewish population was able to speak Ukraine? Do you have any idea?

I would say not too many. She just knew it. I don't know how she knew the language.

But that saved you.

Saved us.

Well, each step was a different situation that--

Her bearing and her able communicate Ukrainian seemed to be what saved the family at this point. And your father was working? He was in the labor crew.

He was in the labor crew on a daily labor work force.

He was considered an essential worker?

Yes.

Right, right.

He would go out every morning, come back at the end of the day every day. Of course, we mentioned it earlier that he was hurt in an accident one time outside working.

And that was right before--

And there was a period of time that he was able to stay in the ghetto to recuperating and during that period is when we got out.

Do you have any idea as to when you crossed outside the ghetto? In other words, when--

The last time?

--the date.

Do you have an idea of a date at this point?

Could have been 1943. Could have been 1943. We were liberated 1945.

'45? That's pretty late.

Yes.

Yes.

1945.

Yes, we were not in Lwow. Lwow was liberated before, but we had to get out of Lwow--

We were near Krakow.

--to a village near Krakow.

Oh, so you were in western Poland.

We were liberated 1945, January. January.

Beginning of '45--

February.

When they were already out of Auschwitz.

--by the Russians.

What do you mean out of Auschwitz?

That's when they left Auschwitz already.

Well, yeah. Because the part that we left, Lwow, was liberated a year or half a year before us.

And I know the people in Krakow, that talk about '44.

Right. No, no we were about a year later. Different approach.

Winning the war, the Russians and the Americans, there were different parts of the-- you know? But we were one of the later ones.

OK, so this was an aktion. Now I guess what's the next one? Is the next one where the decision is made to leave?

She says another instance, another time. "One evening my husband and the children and I were at home in the ghetto and my brother-in-law came to visit. I wondered why he came so late and I asked him, where's Minka, my younger sister? He told us that she and their four-year-old son are far away. Upon hearing that, I had a premonition and started crying out her name. Minka! Minka! And now I lost you too.

My brother-in-law didn't say anything upon seeing my despair, but looking at him, I knew what had happened to her. We said goodbye to each other and he left. From a former Catholic neighbor I found out how my younger sister, Minka, and her four-year-old child and her sister-in-law died. My sister, Minka, and her sister-in-law were working as cooks in a German officers kitchen together with a third Jewish woman.

One day they let the third woman go because they apparently didn't need her. This woman was caught in a roundup and they put her on a train for the camps. She somehow escaped from the train, returned to Lwow, went to the police, and told them the story of my sister and little son and sister-in-law, that they were working in the German kitchens. The Gestapo immediately took them away.

My brother-in-law found out too late to do anything about it. And the night before he found out, they took all of the people from the police station to the Janowska cemetery and shot them all. I now know how my younger sister, Minka, and her four-year-old baby son died."

Do you understand this whole story?

Yes, sure.

Maybe you can explain it.

The woman that was dismissed from the German kitchen--

A Jewish woman?

A Jewish woman. Out of revenge when she escaped the trains to the camps, came back and out of revenge, told the police that there's some other Jewish people working in the kitchen by the German officer and that was probably not allowed. And it was not an official--

But I know it was the German officers who were satisfied to let them stay if nobody would say anything?

Right. For a while, I don't know for how long. It wasn't a long situation.

But they weren't taking any action?

They needed--

They needed the cooks.

--my aunt, the cooks, the cleaning and people. They probably would not be there for very long anyway because with a small child-- but the woman made it sooner. Out of revenge she spilled the beans that--

Well, what was the revenge against the remaining Jews? In other words--

Because she was dismissed from that position. It's very hard.

It didn't bring out the best in all of our people.

No, sometimes not. Sometimes not.

It just happened that way. It's an incredible story. I mean, it's not easy to-- you can't understand it.

You cannot understand it, but it happened and it participated in liquidating--

Somehow mother didn't--

--her sister.

--want to write about the incident, but she wrote it.

It wasn't easy for her to write this particular thing because it is something that's casting some aspersion against another Jewish person. But it just somehow happened, so she wrote it.

OK, let's go on to the next one.

Another time. "My neighbor, a widow, lived with her daughter, Rivka, for many years. Rivka worked as a bookkeeper in the ghetto and they lived in a small apartment not far from me. One day when they announced an aktion raid, which meant that they would come and take many people to the Janowska camp from which no one ever returned, Rivka took a few neighbors and her mother and locked them up in a separate room and stood watch herself.

When the Gestapo came, she showed them her working papers, which were in order. When they asked her was there any people here, she said no. Unfortunately, someone in the hidden room coughed and of course, they pushed her aside, broke down the door, and pulled out all these people, among them Rivka's mother. One of the Gestapo pulled out his pistol and shot Rivka on the spot. Rivka's mother begged them to shoot her too, they refused her and took all of them to the Janowska camp of no return."

Which eventually they were killed.

Did you you have something to say about this?

No. Only were incidents that mother remembered from ghetto and talked to us after the war, you know? And then she put--

So Rivka was a--

A neighbor.

Just a neighbor.

A neighbor that she knew lived in the ghetto nearby.

She's just relating a incidence, just an incidence.

Of which these were happening constantly.

Of course, but this--

She saw it, she knew about it.

She lived this, she knew about it. So that's why she put it down. Nothing to do with our family or anything.

But this is what life or not life was like at the time. I'm still disturbed by that previous story about the woman who came back and spoke about the cooks in the officers mess. That woman was being sent away to a concentration camp and she got these people--

Taken away.

--taken away and killed.

What happened to her? I'm sure she didn't make it. I'm sure she was--

We don't know.

Yeah, I don't know.

But it's not said over here.

No, mother doesn't relate about her.

I'm sure she didn't make it and she probably knew herself she's not going to make it.

OK. We're coming down to the tail end when we're going to get out of the ghetto, I think so.

I would say so. Another incidence my mother writes about is, "A raid was announced. Myself and my children along with many other people, some of whom I didn't know, went into a cellar to wait and hide until the raid was over. There were between 10 and 15 people all huddled together in the pitch dark. There was one mother with her child we did not know. When the Gestapo came together with some Jewish militia, we could hear the opening and closing doors and lots of banging going on.

At this moment, we could hear the child cry out in the cellar and at that same time, one Jewish militia in Polish said out loud, I hear a child crying. The mother in the cellar, fearing discovery and the lives of many people were in danger, did put her hand over the child's mouth and the child never cried again."

So that's the story. Exactly. I didn't remember if it was a pillow she put over or her hand over the child's crying mouth.

It's hard to relate things like that, but when you're in a situation like that it's to save maybe 10 or 15 people. And I suppose if the mother didn't do it, maybe somebody else would do it. It's hard to imagine today that those decisions and choices probably had to be made routinely, maybe. I don't know.

Actually there were no choices.

No choices. But my mother relates the story that she saw--

That she knew about.

--she knew about.

She saw, she knew.

I mean, the decision to choke the baby is not a choice.

Maybe she didn't realize she was choking it till just to quiet it down.

She kept it quiet for a while--

Probably consciously she didn't think she'll it'll happen.

You'll appreciate this. Our speaker this year writes that they were choiceless choices. You choose to do something, but it's no choice.

There were no good choices.

OK, now I think now we're getting out of the ghetto.

I don't think so.

Might be. Another time. "We realized that no one would ever leave this ghetto alive. As time went on, everyone knew that on a given day they would come and close down the ghetto and take all the people out and that will be the end. I feverishly thought about how to get out and leave certain death behind. We waited for an opportunity, but this was easier said than done. On the other side, we had no one.

One accident that befell my husband helped a decision on how to get out. One morning my husband was packed into a truck with other men who went to work on the railroad. One of the truck's side racks opened up and some men fell out, with my husband on the bottom. They took him to a drugstore and treated him for his injuries and militiamen came to my house and told me about the accident and told me to have a few zlotys ready to pay for the treatment.

So we went to the drugstore to pay for his treatment and to take my husband home. The militiamen told us that my husband didn't have to report for work for two to three weeks and it was during this time that we prepared our plan to leave and escape from the ghetto. The accident turned out to be a blessing in disguise. I told my husband not to return to work afterward, as they will probably shut the gates to this working camp with all the people in it with my husband and that will be the end.

At this time there were less people left in the ghetto and we came up with our escape plan. My husband met with the Gentile fellow who used to work for him in the lumber yard business before the war on Krolowej Jadwigi street." "Jadwaga?"

Jadwiga.

Jadwiga. "This fellow agreed to hide us out for two days, a short period of time, if we got out of the ghetto until we located elsewhere. When my husband recuperated from his accident we decided to leave. By now, the gates were completely under the control of the Jewish militia. We could only leave in the early morning together with the workers who went outside from the ghetto every day to work.

They were checking everyone's working papers and it was not easy to leave. We had a good friend, who was not afraid of the militia, he told us to meet him by the gate on a certain morning. On a cold, rainy, freezing day in a December, I went to the gate with my son in my arms, as he just got over an illness, and my daughter holding my other hand.

We were at the gate when a Jewish militiaman said to me, where are you going with the children? They have no

working papers. Children don't work. Our friend went to the militiamen and said to him, look away the other side and let them by, because if you don't look away you will never be able to look again.

This is how we left the Lemberg ghetto, Lwow ghetto, to a new location, eventual survival, and life. Our friend wished us good luck in saving ourselves. Unfortunately, this friend was not saved and perished with all of his family--"

We'll continue later. It just went off. Finished?

That's the first hour.

We'll just have a few minutes now.

Oh, so now I can relax.

Yeah, yeah.

Well, this--