

So when you grew up, you experienced antisemitism among-- was it mainly Polish children? Or you experienced with adults, your teachers in school?

OK.

What was it like for you?

The antisemitism in Poland was overt and covert. Poland, before it was came to be-- it used to be under the Russians. And they used to have pogroms, as you know, and all this. So the antisemitism was instilled in the population. And when-- we felt it in-- you can call it, maybe in the beginning, in a subtle way, like being assaulted and getting sometimes beat up-- not me, but some of the Jews. They discriminated. They constantly used to be called [POLISH] and something like that. But they did allow-- this time, it was under the Marshal Pilsudski, who was [INAUDIBLE] Poland. They did allow Jews to have property, you know?

But it was a very uncomfortable feeling. Parents wanted their children to-- eventually, to migrate. They would have liked to migrate, too, but they wanted their children to grow up in a free atmosphere. And until Pilsudski, the marshal, died, it was still OK. They loved him, the Polish people. And we felt more comfortable. And then when he died, it was tragedy to the-- everybody cried. And then a new leader came in, Smigly-Rydz. And he was the disaster for Poland.

First of all, they don't even know where he-- how he came to be in the head of Poland, but as you know, that Poland gave up, after eight years of resistance to the Nazis. And when he came in, it became much more difficult for the Jews. I don't remember it myself, experience, but I remember tell-- reading that Jewish students-- they only took in so many Jewish students, the universities, and they would tell them to sit in a certain place. So it became more and more known.

My father and my uncle and my grandfather were very assertive people, and didn't-- they wouldn't let anybody push them around. And they were very-- the people know it, like if he-- somebody would do something which is wrong, they would speak up. Like I told my family the other day, my father came to a post office one time to pick up something. And it was 10 minutes before closing time. And the master there says to him, well, I'm sorry. It's closing time.

And my father says to him, no, it isn't. There's still 10 minutes to go.

He says, no, well, I am not going to wait on you.

My father took him to court, which is a very unusual [INAUDIBLE]. And he won the case, because he had no right to refuse service. They wouldn't do it to Polish people, but they pushed the Jews around. I'm just giving you a little sample. But my father and, I said my uncle, they were assertive and very proud of themselves. And they weren't meek, you know? They could stand up.

Plus, they-- all the people there needed us, too. They were poor. And they would come to us and say, would you do something, for-- like, make flour out of the corn? But I don't have money to pay now. And my uncle's-- my father said, don't worry about it. Go ahead. So we did a lot of favors for them. Sometimes, they would bring a chicken to pay for it, but basically, they depended in some help on us too. When they came and stayed on our farm for a while, until everything was done for them. They slept down there, too. Was some quarters, I don't know. But we were very good to them. And that showed later during the Holocaust, that they-- some of them helped us, and-- when we were hiding in the forest.

In fact, my father had his own rifle from-- given-- he traded something off with another family. He gave something, and they give us a rifle to-- so-- which is very unusual. You didn't see a Jew hiding in the forest with a rifle. And so it's a mutual sort of codependence, you can say, between the people there. They also-- they worked on our farm. They helped with the growing things and whatever had to be done. They were help, tending to the animals, or something this.

Did you do things with your father by yourself? Did you go for walks, or did he read to you?

That was an honor, when my father would take me with him, because he was a very busy man, and he wasn't-- what you call it? I knew he loved me, but he wasn't, as I told you, overpowering. And he would take me sometimes to show me the horses or take me into the place where they made the fabric out of the wool, show me-- he-- how they do it, you know? So he was, in a different way-- yes, I adored my father. I adored my father. And, well, if he had the time to take me for a walk or take d show me how the old industrial things worked, I was very, very happy, yeah. Because as I said, as much as I loved my mother, this-- being so overprotective, I would [CHUCKLES] just take off, you know, somewhere and play somewhere else, yes.

And did your mother take you for walks or read to you?

Oh, yeah. My mother--

She did.

Yes.

[INAUDIBLE]--

My mother would take me with her shopping, "shopping" meaning you go to the center of Malyn'sk where there-- they had a store to buy products. And she'd take me, yes, and-- because they wouldn't let me go alone, God forbid, you know? So she would-- yeah, I was very happy. She would take me or visit-- something, you know, had to do, seamstress or something. Yeah, she-- it was different. My father was more intellectual, you know? Bringing up things and telling me. And it's amazing how different in personality they were.

And they got along well? As far as your recollection, they got along well?

They got along well, as much as marriages can be. There was always some friction in the family, you know, because they had different ideals. But the family ties were very strong. To give you an example, when the Russians came-- no, when the Germans came to-- invaded Poland in 1941. You know the Barbarossa and he-- and all this thing. A lot of Jewish men left from Malyn'sk or anywhere, and they followed the Russian army, because we were told that the Germans kill-- take away the Jewish men, and they kill them, or something. So a lot of the men, including the very religious shochet, they all ran and left their families and children all alone.

And I cried. And I said, Daddy, are you going to leave us and also go away with [? everyone? ?]

And he says-- Daddy says, no, I'm not going to leave you. I will stay with you no matter what. And he stayed. He did. And my uncle stayed, also. But those others decided they're going to follow the Russians, because they felt much more comfortable with the Russian army. The Russians at least did not tell you-- they killed them. They had their own problems. So, yes, he was very protective of us, too. Very protective.

Did you hear a lot about Germany when you were growing up? Because you were born in 1929 and the Nazis take over in '33, and you're still a little kid. But by the time 1939 comes, you're 10 years old. So in between '33 and '39, do you hear things about what's going on in Germany, or--

We heard a little bit. My father used to subscribe to a Jewish paper. This was a big thing. And whenever the paper would come once a month, my father would sit at the table. It was Yiddish. And he would put-- sit me on his lap, and my mother, and he would read to me all the happenings in Europe. And I remember him talking something-- my mother cursed this guy. She was saying Chamberlain-- was it Chamber--something? Something with the umbrella? I didn't know, as a child, what his-- this person's title was. But my mother was cursing. And I knew he was probably antisemite or something.

And he would tell me what was happening in Europe, that, I think, the Germans came into Czechoslovakia or something. And then I think maybe Austria, too. And we always were-- felt very insecure and unsure of ourself. And as a child, I was very curious about the world situation. We didn't know how far the-- what this is going to end up. Will the

Nazis just take over part of Czechoslovakia, some-- well, we didn't know where it was going to go. But this is how the Jews always lived, in fear and never knowing what-- we would always say when a new-- some official would come into power, would-- the first question was, are they going-- is he going to be good to the Jews? Does he like Jews? Because they had the power to do what he wanted.

So we-- the only thing I had, the-- we-- I didn't know about Hitler, but I knew that the Germany-- we knew, was expanding in Europe. This was maybe in the-- well, in the middle '30s, never thinking that they would come to Poland, or even take over the whole world. This was--

Were you worried about war? Did you-- did--

We were always-- yes. We were very apprehensive about war, because we were unsure where Poland-- what's going to happen to Poland. Poland was shaky. The government was shaky. And when-- we didn't think that they would come to Poland. Maybe they were just going to-- the fascist concentrated the central Europe. We didn't know. But yet, when you're a Jew, you're always apprehensive. You didn't know where-- how far they will go and what we'll-- and where the Jews were beaten up, where they were-- burned synagogues. We used to hear about that, burning synagogues in Germany, and maybe beating up. But yes, we were never, never secure in Poland.

Did it affect your sleep?

My sleep? No.

It didn't?

No.

So you didn't have bad dreams?

No. At this time, we didn't know anything about-- what you call it-- concentration camps. Of course, they didn't exist yet, but even ghettos, so nothing. It was just the beginning of the fascist rule. And we knew that Jews were discriminated or beaten up. At that time, we didn't know-- and in fact, I, personally-- our part-- we, in-- around Poland didn't know about concentration camps until after the war. We knew that the Germans were putting people, Jews, in ghettos, and they were shooting them. They told them to-- [CLEARS THROAT] excuse me-- to dig ditches, and they would kill them, like [INAUDIBLE] [? here, ?] because people would run away, come and tell us.

But as far as concentration camps, we didn't know until after the war. So Jews were never secure in Poland. This is why they wanted their children go to Israel. This is-- we wanted to migrate to America for-- first of all, because my mother had two brothers and two sisters who came to America to Washington, right after the First World War, with the idea that as soon as they get settled, they'll bring us over. And it took, as I told you, 10 years to do, because then my mother got married and all, and until-- America didn't open the doors so easy to everybody. You know, they took you to-- what do you call it? In New Jersey, what was this called? The-- well, anyhow, you couldn't come in so easily to America, so we just stuck it out.

But we-- everybody wished to leave Poland, or even the-- Ukraine, particularly, was very, very antisemitic. They carried this-- my mother used to talk about the Cossacks and the pogroms. But she used to call the Germans, before the war, the good Germans. She says, those were the good Germans. You know, after First World War, they were the good ones, because they were persecuted, and all, and all. Now, the ones became-- this was already became, of course, the bad Germans. And it was just serious-- a whole lot of events that took place. It was-- put us on guard. We could feel it.

And you felt it as a child?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I grew up with antisemitism. But I was very protected by my parents, by the family. We were sort of clinging together. And we started to make an attempt to come to America.

Right.

I had-- we had wonderful family here in Washington who came. And they were relentless in trying to bring us to America. And we got, finally, our visa. And we missed the boat by three days. But we-- my mother's family was-- the two brothers and two sisters were already established in Washington. But one uncle of mine, [? Asca ?] [? Rosenski-- ?] he was the elected leader in trying to bring us down there. It was very hard. Roosevelt, you know, was not very too keen about letting-- in general, letting people-- to come to America, before the war, you had to have-- who would vouch that you will have a job waiting for you. You couldn't come to America and become a burden to the country.

Right.

So-- even after the war, you know? Which is-- maybe you want me to tell you later about if. We could-- we stayed for three years in Paris waiting to get a visa to come to America, because we thought maybe they'll honor our first visas in 1939. No, nothing of the sort. You had to show-- the family here in the United States had to show that when we come there, there'll be a job waiting for my father. And was a lot of work. And finally, my parents came in '48, and I came-- then they brought me over 1949. So--

But before the-- was it before the Germans attacked Poland, September 1939, that you were on a boat and the boat had to turn around?

No, I'll tell you. In 1939, we finally got to rid of our-- whatever property we had and packed up our things. And we were heading to Gdynia-- Gdansk? Was it Gdynia or Gdansk? One of the Polish ports, to take the boat and to come. We never got on the boat, because we were on our way to the port, and the-- as you know, the Germans came in the first of September. There was no point going. They were bombing, there, the ports, and even if we got on it, who knows if the boat would even be able to take off? So nothing.

So you went back?

We went back. At least our home was still there. My aunt and uncle were still there. There was still family in here, so we just, regretfully, had to pick up where we left off.

But your father didn't sell the property?

He gave it to his brother.

He gave it to his brother. I see. So when he came back, did the brother give it back?

We came back-- our property was confiscated by the Russians, you know, in 19--

Oh, because they had an agreement--

Yeah, but then the Russians came, as you know, in 1939, and they divided up Poland. We were under the Russians, and the Russians do not allow personal property. So we were allowed to leave-- still live on the farm, and this. But the mill and all this, this was no more. So before leaving, my father turned over the-- his share of the mill and all to my father. Plus, my mother had a sister, because she couldn't come to America because as a child she had-- she was brain damaged. And then-- so she had my uncle and aunt-- took her in and said they'll take care of her.

So it was a lot of things, why our delay was-- you know, [INAUDIBLE] didn't want to leave her unless they found somebody who really can take care of her. Her name was Rivka.

And did you know her?

Oh, yes.

You did.

She was wonderful.

Was she?

She was wonderful. When I was born, she lived with us. My mother was her only sister who was left in Poland. And she lived with us, and she used to sing songs for me, and she-- I mean, a very warm person, very, very warm. But of course, because she had brain damage, her-- she could do things in the house. She wasn't any threat to anyone. But all she could to remember was, like, singing songs and children's games or something. But she was very protective of me, too, all the time. And, don't go there, you're gonna, you know, protect the younger. You want to fall here? You'll scratch your knee.

Made you a little crazy?

Yeah, yeah.

All these protective--

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

So when the Germans-- do you remember the Germans taking over part of Poland? Or was-- because you were on the Russian side?

Well, I-- we were with the Russians only one year. In 1939, Hitler and Stalin were pals, and they divided Poland. Because we were near the Eastern border, near the border, we were under the Russians. And this lasted one year. And then Hitler decided to-- he wanted to take over all of Europe. And he launched the-- called Barbarossa, if you-- and he went into-- going east. And it didn't take very long until they came to Malyn'sk, too.

We knew that-- we had people staying, sometimes, with us who ran away from Poland, per se, Warsaw, something. And they told us the horrible things that the Germans do there. But as long as we were still under the Russians, we were-- felt more secure. The Russians weren't killing us, at least. But this lasted only one year. And then in 194-- I think it's '41, yes-- Hitler decided to go east. And they took over. They went east. They went to Rovno, and then they came to [? Ostroh. ?] And that was the beginning of our--

Let me go back for a minute. Do you remember being under the Russians as a kid?

Yes.

And what--

For a year, from 1939-- or from 1940 to '41 we lived under the Russians. I went to a Russian school.

Oh, you did?

Yeah, but we didn't have any more-- we couldn't run the mill or the-- I mean, the property was no longer ours, because the communism doesn't believe in private property.

But your father ran the farm still?

No, we could use the farm just for ourselves. But my father got a job. And he was in charge of some kind of dairy that's making milk. The peasants would bring the milk. No, he had a job. No more mill as private property. No more-- I don't know who took over. And probably, nobody even took it over. So for a year we lived with the Russians, and--

Was this bad for you? Do you remember it being bad, or--

Bad being with the Russians?

Yeah.

No, because-- well, it was out of the two evils. We were-- felt lucky to be with the Russians. The only threat we felt in the beginning is that the Russians used to-- if somebody was well-to-do in Poland, comfortable, they would come in the morning, knock on your door, and say, pack up. You're going. And they send them to Siberia, because you were considered what they call the Russian "kulak." Kulak means the-- you know, the wealthy one. Wealthy by their standards, you know? So we were always afraid that maybe they will call us the wealthy ones, and to expatriate us, too, you know? Come in the morning. Some people were sent in-- to Siberia. I don't know. They were suspicious of them. They didn't trust them, something.

So-- but it's still, I could go to school. Nobody called me Jew under the Russian. And this was sort of like a temporary arrangement. We never knew that the Germans are going to come in a year later and invade us, too. So we-- given the choice, we would have preferred staying with the Russians.

Yes. Do you remember when the Russians-- when the Germans came into Malyn'sk?

Very well.

What was it like?

We knew they were going to come any day now, because they were coming from the west. And I remember our shtetl Malyn'sk only had one road going across. And then we hear motorcycles, people-- soldiers on motorcycles coming in. We never saw motorcycle in Malyn'sk, you know? We didn't-- and they came in, and the people in Malyn'sk-- I don't know who they were, whether they were Ukrainian-- anyhow, sympathizer, Nazi sympathizers, were standing alongside the road with flowers and greeting them and applauded. We stayed tight in the house hiding. We didn't know what they were going to do. They were just passing through this town, city-- city, whatever. The village. And just to let them know that they are now in power.

I may say another thing, is what used to scare us all, is the time when there's a change of the guard. When one country leaves, like the Russians have been away from the Germans, because they knew they were coming. And until the Germans came and really showed-- say that they are now in power, there was this-- like, it's not normal. It's like nobody was in charge, and anybody could go ahead and do anything for somebody, set fire or something, because there was no law. It became lawlessness. So when, finally, the Germans came, as bad as it, at least they could control the population.

And that's what happened. As soon as they came, they didn't make us move from the house, but the first order they gave is for the Jews to wear patches, the yellow. And Jewish children couldn't go to school. We could still stay in the house for a while. They would come in sometimes and order something-- cook something for me, or beat up a Jew, like for the fun of it, or something. But we could still stay in our house. This lasted not very long. I regret it very much, not being able to go to school or something. But the young Jewish girls-- they used to be hiding and wear little scarves, not to look young, because they're afraid maybe they will-- you know, the Nazis would, you know--

Rape you?

Yes, something. But this was just for a-- they came into us, I think, in June or something. And then shortly after, in 1942, the order came out for-- and they put us in Berezne, in the ghetto. They took all the Jews from all the small places scattered and put them all in one place. Like, we were close to Berezne. They put us in Berezne. Some other people were, I think, in other ghettos.

So our stay in Malyn'sk under the Germans was very short. We still were not hungry, because we had our home, and we had still our garden, which helped us with food. And they-- other than just the laws not to go out late at night, we were not really yet persecuted until they took us to the ghetto.

You mean persecuted in a hard way?

In a hard way, yes. They didn't--

Because clearly you were persecuted some.

Oh, we were, yes. That is right.

Yes.

We knew it. They were not-- came here with very friendly intention to us. But they were not going around to get out and something. They just left it for a while. It was all hanging. And if we didn't have any food, we had a lot-- well, some Gentile friends who used to come and bring us some food. Some would be a gift. Some would be bartering. I'll give you this. I'll give it-- and my mother, my parents would give something from their clothes, or something like that. So we were not really hungry while we were still in Malyn'sk, until the--

OK. We're going to stop the tape.