

You were talking about when the Germans came in, and eventually you had to leave Malyn'sk and go to the ghetto. Is that correct?

Berezne correct.

Berezne ghetto.

This came about the time when the order came up, and all throughout Europe it was I think August something. Heinrich came out with the villa, when he they got together all the Nazis and decided they're going to exterminate all the Jews. And Heinrich was the mastermind of all this

Heinrich Himmler?

Heinrich, Heinrich.

Heydrich? Heydrich? Is it Heydrich?

I don't know. Maybe I'm pronouncing it wrong.

It doesn't matter.

I know how to write it, but not to spell. Anyhow, the order came out throughout Europe that all the Jews have to be exterminated. What they did ghetto, Berezne was a bigger place than Malyn'sk. They already had maybe about 3,000 Jews or something. They were already all put together sort of in like a ghetto. So they brought us from Malyn'sk-- in comparison, we were a small group-- into the Berezne Ghetto.

Do you remember that day?

I remember one thing. Yes, they had horses pulling buggies, so the people who couldn't walk-- it was about 20 kilometers or something. And I think I was sitting there right in one of those too, where people could sit on it, and the man would walk next it. And there were horses pulling the buggies and the carriages. And we got to Berezne.

What was it like for you? Was it frightening? Were people nervous? Were people upset?

Very nervous. The people were apprehensive. The people were afraid, leaving your own environment, no matter how bad. But your family, you have people who came to see, gentle people. When they're grouped together we knew it's a bad sign, based on the rumors were heard from other people that this is no good. Whenever they bring all the Jews together, that something is going to happen.

So they brought our whole family, everybody who lives they bring to Berezne, and they had-- maybe just they were packed two families in one room or something. But they put this all together in one area. And they delineated the area, which was going to be Berezne Ghetto.

My father and my uncle and some other men were sent to work outside of the ghetto in a place called Polany, because they could work. There was a farm there. But also they were doing something with trees, whatever. They were working outside of the ghetto. And I begged, can I go and be with my father, and I will help on the farm.

I feel more secure with my father than be with the women hysterical and yelling and this and that. And there was more freedom, because you were out in the open. So they let me go. And I stayed with my father on that big farm. And I supposedly worked in the field. But my father was there and my uncle.

And shortly after, we heard the rumor, somebody came and told my father that there is an order came out in Berezne Ghetto that all the Jews must be gathered in the ghetto, must stay, and that also they saw that a lot of police was coming

to Berezne and also the-- I don't know how the German word is-- the troops , German troops do.

So they were closing up the ghetto, wouldn't let people out, so we knew that things are bad. My mother was still left there, my aunt uncle in here. And so we never went back to Berezne regardless they said you all have to. We just stayed.

We were fortunate to be near a forest that would save a lot of Jews from our area, that we were in the forest. We were not stuck in a ghetto like in the big cities or something. We could only sneak into the forest. So we never went back to Berezne.

And the Germans didn't come there?

They didn't come to get us. There was just a few of us. They were too busy rounding up people in Berezne. How my mother got out of there is a story of it itself. I had a cousin, a year older than me, and he was there in Berezne, Benjamin, and he was very shrewd. He would go up and down the street and see what's going on.

He came back to the house, and he says to his mother, and my mother, and to his sister, we're getting out of here. And he could see that something's happening. You could see the preparations. So how do you get out of the ghettos of Jews? So my mother and and my aunt, they put a kerchief on their heads. They looked like peasant women.

And they had on the shoulder to carry the thing that you dig the ground hose or something. And they all looked like they were Ukrainian or the native peasants. And they started leaving. Nobody suspected them as being Jews, because they looked like they blended in with the others.

And they ran in the forest. It didn't matter who, or what, just be in the forest, because they knew that in the forest, at least they were safer. We didn't know if my father didn't know a thing that my mother ran away from the ghetto and all us--. We went to right away in the forest too. We stayed alone, my uncle, my father, and me. And we thought that they were all killed. We knew that they were killing people in the Berezne.

And you knew this?

We knew it.

You knew it?

We knew it already after this. We knew what was going on because people, peasants, would tell and to bring us the news. So when we were in the forest, there was interesting story. My uncle, we thought that the whole family was dead. So my uncle picked 10 trees to represent a minyan. He put on the Tallis-- he always carried the Tallis.

And he put it, and he said Kaddish for his family and for us because we thought that they're probably dead by now and they'll never come out. And he said Kaddish for the family. We will for a little while just along going for sometimes to a farm. And then we heard that my mother and my aunt, they did survive, and they were hiding somewhere, so we had a reunion in the forest, a very happy reunion.

At least they were alive, and all this because my cousin, who was only a year older than me, had enough sense and enough presence of mind to say, we're getting out. If they would have stayed overnight, they would have had to dig their own ditches and would have been shot like everyone, all the Jews in the ghetto.

When you were older, did you ask your mother, why did you listen to this little boy? Because he was 11 years, 12 years old or something.

No, she listened. She went. She followed my cousin. Why did she listen? Because nobody was smart. He could have gone out of the ghetto and then stabbed by the police or shot on the highway. There was nothing foolproof. But you live in the ghetto, you got out, you were taking a chance. And when you're still alive, you say maybe it's just a false rumor. Maybe they want-- we lived by the rumors.

Maybe they just came to relocate us, maybe something. Nobody right away wanted to accept the fact that this was it. So once we were reunited, we stayed together, my uncle, and his wife, and his three children, and my mother, and father, and us. And we were going from farmer to farmer. Some of them were very kind and would let us stay, spend a couple of nights in there of hiding in hay. What do you do? The barn.

And then at night, they would come out and they would give us some food. They were taking a chance of their lives, because if a neighbor's child would come over and see us there, they could tell on us. And they would kill not us, but also kill the people who were hiding us. Life was cheap. For a pound of salt, anybody could turn in to do. Salt was a big commodity.

What did they care? Got the Jew, they give them a pound of salt. So they would let us stay sometimes for a few nights, until they felt it was dangerous. And I recall one thing as a child. I was sitting in hiding in the barn in the hay, and I made a little opening to see what's doing. This was daytime. And I see all the chicken running around.

And I said, God, why don't you change me into a chicken, because take a look. They can be free and run around, and I have to sit in here. God, make me one of the domestic animals or something, the wishful thing. But we would stay in one place, then go to the forest and stay a few days, then go somewhere else. But basically what we tried to do is go east. Maybe we'll still catch up somewhere.

We wanted to be on the Russian territory, pre-war Russian territory, because they were not so anti-Semitic. So we would stay in there. Some other people would come and join us, the survivors, stay a little. We'll hear the stories. And they will go away, hoping they can find some relatives in the forest. So this was an ongoing thing.

What we needed the most for survival in the forest is two very important things, is to have an ax, so we can chop wood and then make a tipi or something, and also a shovel to dig a hole, so we can have water. So those things were essential for survival.

So you made something like a tent?

Correct, yeah, we had it like this. We put all the trees and just left an opening to in. The fire was always in the center. And it would come out through the chimney. So we were laying with our heads to the fire. And then to eat, if we didn't have food, there were always mushrooms. There were berries. And then at night, the grown ups would leave me and my little cousin alone, and they would go into the fields to look for food.

They could dig up potatoes. They could dig up corn, because at night, they felt secure. And if they knew somebody who would be sympathetic to the Jews, they would go in and then the person give them maybe some other food. But you had to be careful. You never knew even who's going to turn you in.

And then all these people who all stay together, they would come back when the sun would come out. You had to return to the forest before the sun-- before it was daytime to get out of there. And then we'll all sit down and told rumors. So what did you hear? So where is the front now? So where is this going?

And then we also used to-- it's silly, but we gave a lot of credence to dreams. We'd get up in the morning, and we would say, so what did you dream? And this person said, I had a dream of this. That's good. That's a good sign. Jews have this capacity of always we survived so many wars that to interpret it, something will be for good.

That's a good sign. If you dreamed about this and this and this, it's going to be good for us, or maybe we won't be caught, or maybe we'll get one. So we also would exchange stories about dreams. We had the food.

And at night, when all the grownups went to look for food, and I was left alone with my little cousin, who was maybe about four years younger than me, we sat by the fire, just all alone, and we could hear the bears howling, because they saw people in the wood. But they never came in, inside. They were there. But could see them all running.

And we had to be very quiet while we were in the woods, so nobody would find, because anybody, shepherds who were tending to cows or whatever, if they would see a Jew, they can come home and tell. And the minute we saw that somebody saw us, we had to change the place, run, because the chances of them telling us were very great.

So we just walked, and we decided to go on Russian territory, Russian pre-war territory, which meant to cross the River Sluch. To cross the river, there was no bridge. There was just a very narrow railroad, because the Polish people used it to transport something from carriage. They were building fortifications. They thought they were going to fight with the Russians.

So the river was very wide. And we had to cross it. And to go from one of-- what we call this thing in here-- to another, you could see the water underneath. So if you missed and you didn't step right--

Was there stones?

No. There were just two tracks, and there were ties. Is that what you call them?

So you had to walk on these?

We had to walk on the ties, make sure not to miss, because if you missed it, you would fall into the river. My uncle carried my little cousin on her back.

So wait a minute. That's above the water.

Above the water.

So you could really fall and hurt yourself?

We could have, if you don't fall.

This was little. It was a very narrow. This was the little tracks, and there were just ties going across. It wasn't meant to walk on. They used to push little carts with sand, the samples they were building. Until we crossed the river, we felt already being on Russian-- so-called Russian, it wasn't Russian anymore-- territory, we were relieved, because we knew the people will be kind to us, that they will not turn us in.

And they were, after all, former Russian citizens. So they were not buddy buddy with the Nazis. So once we came there and we sat , down, the Germans did know more that there were a lot of Jews hiding in the forest.

They knew?

They knew it. They did, yeah. They knew it through the Ukraine and whoever used to tell them. They knew the Jews, there were a lot of Jews hiding. But there used to be a rumor saying that Germans are not country people. They're city people. They will never go into a forest to look for people, because they don't know how to get around.

So if anything, they relied on sometimes the plane would fly over our heads, because just looking in. And sometimes you could hear troops, and we hear this going on, we knew it's time to move to another place. And once we came, as I said, on this Russian territory, some person told us that if you go in this and this house, there are some Russian partisans and to meet them, and maybe they can help your or whatever it is.

We were elated. Anything Russian felt good to us. It meant that the Germans were left way behind us. They were on the other side of the Sluch River. And we didn't even think that they were anywhere around here. So my father and my uncle went into this house, and they met with the partisans. They were-- I don't know who the exact people. That were just Russian, just local people who worked for the partisans.

They were keeping guard to let the partisans know the Germans are coming or something. So when my father and my

uncle came and asked could we join the partisans, they took us in, because we were a three member family, my parents and myself. First of all, I was not a baby anymore. And my father had a rifle, or a gun. So he knew how to shoot. My mother knew how to cook.

So we were really a help to them. So they took us in. But they wouldn't take in my uncle, because they didn't come to save the Jews. They took us as more if we can help them for something, which makes sense. So once we got into the partisan, they were just elated to know that there were some people here who actually came from Moscow. How much can you ask for? We just absolutely couldn't believe the good fortune.

And this is what happened once we got there. There was still a very small group of people, because the Medvedev partisans were just beginning to form, maybe about 50 people. And we were also anxious to help to them. So my mother cooked. My father had the rifle. And whenever the people were going to look for food or whatever they wanted, he was going with them.

And I worked with sick people. They called it [INAUDIBLE]. And what I used to do is we didn't have bandages. Whenever somebody was hurt or wounded, you take off the bandage, you wash it by hand, you put it in a pot where the bandages would boil, sterilize them, and dry it, and roll it up, and reuse them over again.

So I was helpful in this way. I would sit with the sick people and change the bandage. I used to know how to do [? cupping ?], as I told you, [? banki ?], as we say in Russian, all out cure for everything. I also you'll have to take a rifle apart, to take a rifle apart, clean it, and put it together. So I learned that too.

And then, just before leaving for Moscow, I remember I was trying to learn how to ride a horse. And it didn't go very well. But the idea was we were so grateful that they took us in, and they protected us after all, they were in touch with Moscow. They had a few people who were in constant radio contact with Moscow and taking orders what to do. And we were not alone anymore.

Out of gratitude, we didn't know what to do more. So I felt very good too. I was needed too, even as young as I was.

You were 12 by then.

Let's see in 19-- I was about 12, yeah, 12, 13, something like that. And then I remember I learned-- it was on the job training. They even taught me once, I remember, to give a shot. But we didn't have any penicillin. We didn't have any of the latest thing. Sometimes a plane would come in at night and land and bring us some-- I don't know if maybe-- I don't think penicillin even existed then, but bring some medication.

But we relied on ourselves with the people. We had two doctors on the premises, one doctor who flown in from Moscow, Dr. [? Sasarki. ?] He was handsome tall man. He was an artist in private life. But he volunteered to go ahead and be in the path to help. They called it the Motherland. So he was parachuted in.

Then we had a Jewish family with us, Dr. Martin. And they took him in with the two tiny children, two or three years old, because they needed him. He was an all round too. He could do operations. He could do whatever was needed, to amputate legs. He could do abortions. He could do everything that was needed. It was a makeshift little place, where they put branches along.

And he didn't even have any instruments. They used the saw that you use for sawing wood or something. And they sort of wiped it and sterilized it. They did have maybe some alcohol and maybe set a match, and anyhow to try to-- and they amputated the legs for one guy I know very well. I used to change his bandages below the knee, because he got gangrene. And if he didn't cut off the legs, and he survived.

They sent him later to Moscow. God knows how this happened. But we had no medicine. People did get sick. They had scarlet fever. They had typhoid fever because of the dirt, the water. And if you had anything, like I remember, I had a scratch or a sore on my leg. There was no bandages too.

But by word of mouth, my father told me you took certain leaves that have medicinal properties, and you put that leaf on it and just cover it up, and by God, after a while, the sore would disappear. I still see that leaf in front of me. But my parents living on the farm knew, and my uncle, certain things about vegetations and all on their property.

So this was the medicine for sores. This guy survived. As I said, I used to take off this, and his bandage, take it off, wash it, and dry it, and another one, and then put it back on. The only thing I was told to do is take cotton dip it in alcohol or something and just wipe the wound and put it back on.

And he had a sense of humor. The reason why this happened to him, because one time the Germans did find out where we were. And they start closing in on us. And we, the partisans, started to run. He got, for some reason, detached from the group. He got lost in the forest. And he was a radio operator. He carried his radio on his back.

He got lost in the forest. For about two or three days, he couldn't find us. So he got frostbitten. He legs got frostbitten. By the time he did find us already, the rest of the group of the partisans, he was already had gangrene set in his legs.

And they had to, as I said, they amputated his legs. And he survived. He used to sit and tell some jokes. And then he was sent to Moscow later on with some other wounded people. Would you like to talk more about the partisans or am I going too fast?

I'm going to go back a little bit to the ghetto, just for a second.

You said that the women were hysterical, so you didn't want to stay with them. That's why you wanted to go with your father and uncle. What were the women like, versus what the men were like, as far as what you saw?

I'll tell you, because men had more strength. They were stronger. They were more logical. And they were more like presence of mind. Women, they were helpless. The men knew the area or something, then I had confidence that no matter what, I feel more secure with the men.

The women were always, as I said, they were crying. They didn't know what's going to happen. They just weren't strong, psychologically, to handle something like that, presence of mind, and whatever it is. And I felt that my father was the stronger between the two, and he would be able to protect me or take care of me until they're all together.

Was your mother upset when you decided you didn't want to stay with her, you wanted to go with your father?

No, no.

She wasn't?

I must say one thing. We had an agreement just when the war started, and the Germans came that we are not going to cling to each other. Suppose the Nazis come, and they want to go ahead and kill us. We had agreed that we're going to have everybody run for himself. Don't say I'm waiting for Mama, I'll wait for your sister. Run for your life.

So she knew that whatever my father decided, what I did, is probably the best for me, because she knew that my father would be there, my uncle, so she didn't protest it. She wanted me to live, like all parents. And if I felt this was better there for me, by all means, I could go.

But you made the decision.

The decision was with me and yes, I asked my father there. I wanted to be out near a forest. If anything happens, we can just run in the forest. Once you were in the ghetto, you were in the city, they closed in all the streets or something, and then what do you do?

There's nothing.

But once you're outside and you're close near a forest, you were like half liberated, can you see? Because you can go. The forest in Poland was so-- it would start in the Ukraine, and it was so deep, that you can go all the way through the forest, all the way deep into Russia, and never see a human being. That's how thick and heavy they were.

So I felt much more secure with my father. And when I left, at that time, we didn't know that it was going to be so soon the Holocaust will take place. I thought we were just temporarily there. There wasn't much really. Yes, my mother let me go. She didn't hold on to me. She felt it was I was happier to be there.

Stop the tape.