

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with David Rynecki

July 6, 2011

RG-50.030*0628

PREFACE

The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

Transcribed by Brenda Pardun, National Court Reporters Association.

DAVID RYNECKI

July 6, 2011

Question: This is the United States Holocaust Museum, with David Rynecki, conducted by Judith Cohen, on July 6th, 2011, in Monroe Township, New Jersey. Let me start by asking you your name and date and place of birth.

Answer: My name is David Rynecki, R—y—n—e—c—k—i. I was born March 23rd, 1928, in Shedlitz.

Q: And can you give me the name of your parents and your siblings?

A: My father's name is Irving Rynecki. My mother's name is Szendla Rynecki. In English, they called her Shirley Rynecki. And my brother's name is Morrie Rynecki.

Q: And can you give me their names when they were in Poland, the spelling of the names in Polish?

A: The spellings for the name was the same thing, but instead of Irving, his name was Ezriel. And my mother's name was Szendla. And my brother's name was Mosche.

Q: And let's start by talking a little bit about your life before the war. Can you describe your father's occupation and the type of schooling and the family life you had before the war?

A: Yeah. My father's parents were bakers in Shedlitz. And he was born in 1900, also March the 23rd. But he didn't like the family because they were too religious for him, so when he grew up, he didn't want to be a baker, so he became a shoemaker. In 1923, he was trying to avoid the Polish army, he went to Berlin, and he worked in Berlin for four or five years, approximately, as a shoemaker. He was making fancy shoes there. After — in 1928, he came back to Poland, and he married my mother. And I was born in 1928. After 1928, I was one years old, my father didn't like living in Shedlitz, so we moved to Aleksandrow Kujawski. This was not far. It's in Poland and _____. The reason he moved there, because they found out over here he could make a nice living making shoes and selling them to people that was from Poland. So, when I came there, I was one years old. My father started a business _____ well, actually, a Polish lady, because he was in business with my mother, making the shoes and selling them. So, I was right behind most of the time, and I spoke Polish. We lived there 'til 1938. In 1938, after the Kristallnacht, most of the people were living _____ there was only 150, 200 Jews, not too many Jews living there. Most of them were Polk Deutsche living there. 1938 became very bad for us, so we had to leave Aleksandrow, and we went back to Shedlitz, came to Shedlitz. So, my father's went to work for a sports factory. They were making sport shoes for skiing, ice skating, and soccer, and soccer balls.

Q: And when your father was working, could you talk about the type of education, activities, hobbies that you and your brother had?

A: I had the same education like I had in Aleksandrow, because I was not used to Jewish life, because most of the Jewish kids lived, like, in a ghetto. They had to go to Jewish schools. They didn't play with Polish kids. They were afraid. They were beaten up.

They couldn't go to swim. They couldn't ride a bicycle. They couldn't play ball. But I was used to that Polish life, so I registered myself, and I went to a school, to a

Polish school for a year. In that school, I became very popular because I'm a very good soccer player and a ping—pong player, and a volleyball player. So, they kept me there good. They treated me good. Now, the war broke out in 1939. In 1939, when

the war broke out, was terrible. All the —— half of Shedlitz was bombed. So, all my mother's relatives, most of them, got killed. So, they all moved in with us. So, they all lived with us in the ghetto, like for —— like ten people living in one room.

Q: Let's move back. Before the ghetto was established, after the bombing ——

A: Yeah.

Q: —— do they move in with you before the ghetto or ——

A: Sure. They moved in before the ghetto, because they have no place left to live, so they slept in my house, over there. We slept on the floor. We slept on couches, because there was no mattresses in Europe. In Europe, a mattress was straw and a sack. That was your mattress. And in the ghetto, when it started, the ghetto, they took away all the men right away, they took away. So, they took my father away, too. So, where he went, I did not know where he went. Or how he went, I didn't know either.

Q: So, let's go back. Let me step back a little bit before. From the period of the bombing, that's September '39, and then the ghetto was the next summer.

A: Yes.

Q: So, that in—between stage, was your father able to work? Were you able to do anything ——

A: No.

Q: —— or life pretty much stopped?

A: No. My father didn't work nothing. He helped out a little bit in the bakery with my grandmA: My grandma had a big bakery. She used to bake the bread and the cakes, everything for about —— for the whole town, the whole ghetto used to go to my grandmother. So, my father used to help them out. Then they took him away. I was in the street, because I was not used to stay with the Jewish kids. I played outside. I had a special soccer ball my father gave me, so I played with the Polish kids in the street, and I was very popular with the Polish kids because I played a lot of soccer. We went to the school backyard playing because there was no school. At that time, there was noschools, nothing. So, everybody was free. You did whatever you could. Then they established a ghetto. When they established the ghetto, they took away my father. I don't know where they took him, but they took him away. I don't know where he got to.

Q: Do you remember the day your father was taken away? Was it SS who took him? Did you witness it?

A: Yes.

Q: Or just, one day, your father was ——

A: No. I was in the street that time. I remember when they took out the men, the men. They took out the men, and they make three lines. And the women on one side, that they SS men was standing on top, on spokes. There was a pharmacy there. I remember now that the names from the street was ____ ?Schutzki? 22, was a pharmacy, one pharmacy in all of Shedlitz. And the guy was saying, all the men go to the left, the women be kept in the middle and with the young girls, and down the —— the teenagers were kept to the right. And that's how we were sorted. And then I saw they took away my father. I heard from one of the SS soldiers where they take him to Sokolow, on a soccer —— on a soccer stadium. Where you think they kept the people? In the soccer stadium. And that's how they stood there for a week, two. And after this, I don't know where they shipped —— where they took him.

Q: So ——

A: At that time, I didn't know where he is.

Q: So, after your father left ——

A: Yeah.

Q: —— you were left alone in the ghetto with your mother ——

A: And my brother.

Q: And were the other relatives, were you uncles also taken away?

A: No. My uncle was sick because he was in the farming, he was injured. So, his wife died and the two girls died because, you know, they had no —— they had no medications from infection. They all died. And they —— all the kids in the ghetto, it was terrible. They had no medications for them, so they were dying like flies. And in the ghetto was bad, bad. And then they took me —— I was assigned from the Utenrod (ph) to go, as a teenager, they needed me for the German soldiers, for the cavalmitz (ph), as they called it, for the barracks, to clean and to bring down the mattresses, the blankets, and to take down. So, they used to keep us for a whole day, and then at night we used to go home, and in the morning we had to come again.

Q: And were you escorted by policemen to your place of work, or were you just able to ——

A: No, they took us. When we stood outside —— they told us how many kids to pull out, you know, the Utenrod (ph). So, they came with a truck, and they took us to the

cavalmitz (ph), to the barracks, when we worked. From the barracks, coming back, we did not go by truck. They told us to walk.

Q: And when you were walking, were you able to contact the Poles in the community? Or ——

A: No. We walked freely. They came. We walked into the —— sometimes they used to beat you up if they know that you're Jewish, you know, they used to beat you up in the streets. To a park, you couldn't go. You couldn't go to swim. You couldn't do anything. The only thing you were —— like a prisoner. But I, most of the time, used to run out from the ____ because I used to play with the kids in the street. I was a street kid. So, I used to play. And they know me. In that time, you know, the teenagers were not anti—semitic. When it came after age 15, 16, you know, the old teenagers, they hated you. They killed you. They took you to the Germans to sell you for two pound of salt, two pounds of sugar. But the teenagers at 12, 13 years old, they didn't know so much about anti—semitics. They were educated in the churches, they used to teach.

Q: And did you have to wear any identifying badge?

A: I used to wear, but I used to take it off when I went out on the street.

Q: Was it an arm band or a star?

A: Arm band.

Q: And you just took it off?

A: I took it off. I used to take it off and keep it in my pocket because I know that the kids not going to say anything because they needed my soccer ball to play ball with. And that's how we were in the ghetto. It was terrible living in the ghetto, because it was no food, nothing. People used to get sick. And the tanks used to run day and night. And the SS used to come in and check the apartment once in a while to see if there's any men hiding out. So, they used to look under the bed and this, but when they saw kids with women only, they still didn't believe it. They used to ask you, Where's your husband? Where's your father? So, we told them, they took them out already a couple months ago. But they still used to come and check.

Q: Now, let's go back to you working in the SS kaserne. Can you describe sort of the typical day? And I understand that at some point you stopped working there, so can you describe that a bit?

A: Yeah. When I came to work there, I worked there for a while, because right, because we used to run up and down the steps because there was no elevators, so we had to carry the mattresses out, the blankets. And then we used to change the linens. And downstairs was the laundry. So, when they cleaned that out, we had to bring up the fresh stuff upstairs. And then when we're finished with this, they used to clean the streets, the toilets. We used to sweep, you know, the gutters. And that's how we worked there for a long time. I would say I worked there for close to a year. And one day, I was playing

around with the kids, and I was laughing, so the SS men thought I'm laughing from him, so he run over to me with a rifle with a corbet (ph) they called it ____ the end side, and hit me in my head. He hit me in the head, and I fell down on the floor. I thought I was going to die. After this, I stood up. I went home. And I said to my mother I'm not going after this. They could kill me. After this, I didn't go back to work because I worked more than I —— it was already '42.

Q: And you mother and your brother, were they working also?

A: No. My brother was helping in the ghetto, working there, you know. And my mother, what can she do? She couldn't do anything. She couldn't do anything. So, she wasn't —— a housewife. There was no food. The only food I got when I used to go —— sorry. I used to go to my grandma, to the bakery. I used to take some bread, you know. So, that's how I used to meet them, when I used to go pick up the food. I used to pick up ____ because he was delivering ____, you know, the wood, the eggs, you know, the milk, he used to bring it.

Q: Was your mother's bakery inside ——

A: Not my mother's.

Q: I mean, your grandmother's, inside the ghetto boundaries?

A: Yes. Yes. She was the only baker. She worked to the last minute, she had that bakery. And the last minute they took her, Yom Kippur day, and the trucks, and they finished them off then.

Q: Describe —— so, the Pole who came and brought supplies to your grandmother ——

A: Yes.

Q: —— he could come freely into the ghetto. Were there other Poles who were coming into the ghetto?

A: No, not really. Only he came in because he used to bring wood or —— and this. And he used to —— he had a wagon, you know, with a horse. And he used to bring in the wood. And he used to bring in all that stuff. They way then, they used to give him flour. They used to pay him. She used to clean the bakeries down. And then, that's how I used to meet him and talk to him. Down to the last minute, when —— before I made a decision to go, I spoke to him, and I told him this and this time, you know, in the ghetto, I couldn't take it no more. So, I told my mother, when I came in from the street, and I heard Yom Kippur day, going to be the liquidation of the ghetto. So, I came in and I told my mother. So, my uncle says, Don't listen to him. You have a bed for to sleep. They're going to kill you. How do you want to sleep in the street? It's cold. You have no food. You have no money. Nothing. ____ kid. This is the time to leave, because they want to kill us, because —— don't you see what's going on? All the young SS and the storm troopers went to the battlefield. They took them out. So, at that time, wasn't so bad in the street, because you had just the occupation force. And the occupation force

was old guys, like 40 years, 45, that were not so bad, you know what I mean? They sympathize. Some of the sympathize, you know. They knew what's going to happen. So, that's how I find out. I'm going to — I told my mother the whole story, you go or not. If not, I'm going to him. I spoke with him. I said — and he says it's all right, I could go.

Q: Talk a little bit in terms of how much was known in the ghetto. Did anybody in the ghetto know of Treblinka? Was that word ever heard in the ghetto?

A: No, no. They didn't know Treblinka, and they didn't know Majdanek. The only thing they used to tell them in — the Utenrod (ph) said, Tomorrow, when a thousand people would go to the station, the trains are going to wait for you. Where you're going? To a better place, to work, you have better facilities to live, and you'll have a better life. That's how they used to go. And the minute you came on the station, you were finished. They put you in the wagons. They closed up, and they took you Plansber (ph), where you get transport that was going to Treblinka, Majdanek.

Q: So —

A: Yeah.

Q: Pause one second while you're —

A: You want me to pause?

Q: Just one second.

A: Nobody knew about Treblinka: They said it was a sickness. They take you to a better ____ field.

[Pause.]

Nice Wladek. Wladek was in love with her. He was telling her that this is the time. You have to run away from the ghetto, because in two weeks, it's going to be Yom Kippur day. He said, I know, a hundred percent, it's going to be the liquidation from the ghetto.

Q: You said your uncle didn't want to go, but did your mother believe you?

A: She had no choice. My mother didn't want to go either, because my uncle, you know, he talks her out of it. So, my mother says, I have to go with him, otherwise he's going by himself.

Q: And what about your brother? Was he —

A: He was a kid, a little kid. He was only, you know, a couple years old. He was — he was seven years old.

Q: So, describe how were you able to escape from the ghetto. When did you leave? Was it at night? Was it during the day? Did anyone see you?

A: No. Nobody saw us, because we —— my mother —— and you'll see the picture —— my brother, we all —— we didn't look like the typical Jews, because typical Jews, they could recognize you. But we looked different because we were raised in a Polish town at that time, Aleksandrow Kujawski. We lived in, as all Polacks did. So, that's why we didn't look like the typical Jews. So, we decided, told him we were going to meet him at this and this place, and he was waiting for us there.

Q: How did you leave the ghetto?

A: The ghetto, went out through the back, yes, through the back. We got really —— we went out through the back, and we sneaked out. You know, it was a rainy day, a ____ rainy day. So, it was just good for us. It was, I would say, around 5, 6 o'clock at night.

Q: And tell me a little bit more about the person who was waiting for you.

A: He was waiting for you. So, my mother says, how do you know —— my uncle says to her, How do you know he's not going to kill you? I said, What are you talking about? He works for my grandma, and he likes me. He told me to come. I went with him plenty of times ____+ took me to his house, and I stood with him there.

Q: And ——

A: So, he says, I'll take you. But I have to make sure that, you know —— that's why he took you at night, because it was dark. So, he'll come, it will be dark. I will take you in there. But, remember, he says, you cannot stay in the house for the time because I'm afraid, because nobody should find out. But it was a good location, so it was —— it was across the street from a church. His house was the last house at the end of the small town, you know, of the village, the end of the road. And one side to the other side was the church. So, not too many Nazis, not too many soldiers used to come to check them.

Q: How far away from Shedlitz was it?

A: I couldn't tell you. We went about two and a half hours.

Q: And what was the name of the man and his wife?

A: His name was Wladek, and his wife's name was StasA:

Q: And about how old were they?

A: Oh, they were old. Oh, how do you know, in Poland, how old they are because a person 65 was how many died. There was no medication, nothing. He was very old. She's special —— they were very old but very nice. Very nice. Because, you know —— but they were so scared. God forbid, if somebody finds out that I hide Jews, they going to say you are a Jew lover, they're going to burn my house.

Q: And describe your sleeping quarters.

A: The sleeping quarters was not bad. But it was terrible because he had to hide us certain places in case, you know, you see somebody walking or something, we had to

sneak out for the —— you know, the —— on a small town, how the rooms are? We slept over on a floor, on the floor, but we had —— you know, like, put down like straw, in plenty time, if he found out that somebody was going to come to check the small town, the soldiers were going to come, the Germans, or pass by, so he kept us in the barn, you know. He has chickens and had a few goats, you know, from milk he used to get. And there were chickens. He had about 50 chickens maybe. And then he had one cow. And he had two horses. So, we kept us there. Plenty of times we had to go in there to stay, but in the summertime, I didn't mind staying there. You know why? Because it was better than in the house, you know.

Q: I understand there were woods outside. How much time were you ——

A: In the woods.

Q: —— out doors?

A: It was a very good location, the woods, because his whole backyard was woods and swamps, so, in the summertime, we used to go to the woods and stay there. We used to enjoy ourselves because it was fresh air. You didn't have to sit in one place, you know, because she used to look out through the window to see if anybody's coming, God forbid, so we used to sneak out and stay in the wood. And then, if it was rainy or bad weather, we used to come back. So, he used to tell us when it's safe to come back.

Q: What was the signal to know whether it was safe or not?

A: Used to put on a few bricks there, you know, stone. If you put down, let's say, like three, four bricks, one on top of the other, that means it was safe. And —— but most of the time it was safe. I'll tell you why, because it was the last house, and not too many soldiers, Germans, came that time, because they were busy with the Russian front. So, they, maybe, since I was there, hiding, for the two years, maybe once or twice, I'd say, I heard them talking that they came to check the town, but they never came there.

Q: And did the neighbors ever stop by unexpectedly?

A: No, because people —— I told you, in our location —— first of all, they didn't bother with anybody. They were old people. They didn't have no children, which was the favor for us, because otherwise they were afraid for their children or their grandchildren, and they got rid of the dog. Why? Because the dogs used to bark, you know. So, he got rid of the dog, and he kept us there. He always begged us, even in they capture —— they'll capture you or they'll find out about you, don't tell them that I saved you. Don't tell them that I kept you here. Just tell them, by mistake, you went in here from the woods.

Q: And did you ever see any other Jews hiding in either the woods or ——

A: No. No. No. Nobody was in that village except us. Because this was a village, you know, with a lot of farmers. I mean, it was in our favor because they were not a village which was one house on top of the other. It was scattered around. Let's say —— I'll give you an example, there's 50 homes or something. It was far away, one house from the

other. And his location was in the woods, the last one by the woods, by the swamps. And he was across the street from the church, and nobody ever came to him.

Q: And during the time you were in hiding, did he bring you any news? Did you have any idea what was going on?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, always news. Because he was more interested about the news than I did, because he wanted to get rid of us as soon as possible. He told us that, you know, when — how he did, the Russians were coming close to this, that only says, Do me a favor, when the Russian comes, don't run out, in case the Russians come into that village. Wait 'til I'll tell you. Because he used to go to town and sell something, you know, little woods. He used to make little bundles of wood and sell it in town.

Q: Did he ever tell you what happened to the Jews in Shedlitz?

A: Oh, yes. He told me.

Q: What did he tell you?

A: He told us that when it was the liquidation in the ghetto, he told us exactly. And he told us what they did with them. He said he was sure — what you have the pictures there — they dig ditches and they throw them in and then burn them, the one which they couldn't take, the last minute, to Majdanek and TreblinkA: They burned them. He said he know that some of them escaped. Where they are, he doesn't know. He knows that some of them stayed with the Polish girls, they say. And then, when he came to the last time to tell us that the Russian are all ready in Shedlitz. He told us that he saw a few guys there. But he says, Don't say to any of these people where you stood. Because he was afraid, he was so scared because the Polacks were terrible. So, when he came — when he told us that the Russians came, we went out there at night, also, that nobody should see that, you know, stood there. And we went to Shedlitz. He told us where the committee is with the survivors. So, we went straight there. And we were not — and the door, they were afraid to open up. They thought, who was there? They thought maybe the Polacks come to kill them. So, in Shedlitz, we didn't stay too long.

Q: Let me just step back on to liberation day.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you see any soldiers when you were in your hiding place, or you just heard from him that he said he heard they were liberated and —

A: Exactly. Yeah. He said, they didn't come to this small town, the Russians. They didn't want to get killed, because they were afraid, in case the — because the Polish army, they had underground. They were against the Russians, you know. They didn't want to surrender even voluntary. I remember the ___ and ___. They were fighting for a year there. So, they were afraid. So, the Russians we didn't see come to town. He just told us that the Russians were in Shedlitz.

Q: And how did you get back to Shedlitz? Did you walk?

A: We walked. We walked. It took us about two and a half, three hours.

Q: And ——

A: We have nothing with us, so it was easy to walk.

Q: Did you see anybody on the road back?

A: We saw somebody, but they didn't really —— we didn't really pay attention to them. They didn't really knew the situation because they know all the Jews were killed, so how did they expect? They didn't expect. But that was when they came —— when we came to Shedlitz, the people in Shedlitz, the guys, they all had weapons, gun, grenades, so they gave us already. They gave us ——

Q: The Jews were back in Shedlitz?

A: Yeah. Yeah. There were some Jews already in Shedlitz. I would say about fifty or that. They all had weapons.

Q: Were these people you knew from before the war?

A: Not really, but they know me. They knew who I am, because they know my father. They know my grandm
A: But he told me, my grandmother —— Polack told me my grandmother, up to the last minute with her son, they were baking, with her two daughters. They were, the last minute, sitting in Shedlitz and making money. And what they did with the money, nobody knows.

Q: And so how long did you stay in Shedlitz?

A: Not too long, about —— I would say, six weeks, eight weeks, approximately, not sure, not much. More, more, more. Wait. We took —— I tell you, the Russians came in in '44, end of '44. We stood 'til 45, 'til the war as finished in Shedlitz.

Q: And where did you live?

A: I told you, in the —— we lived in, like was a _____, a cloak, you know, before, so they made the —— living quarters for us. And under the bruhat (ph) came in, they came in. They brought us money and food, you know. Was good, was not bad. But we were afraid for the Polacks. So, we stood there 'til May, when we heard, in May the 5th, was the end of war. And May the 19th was the capitulation, the Germans signed for —— from Keitel, the _____, and Zhukov _____. And the Russians were good to us. The Russians gave us food. They gave us a gun, whatever you need, and they gave us blankets. They were very good. The Russians were very good to survivors.

Q: I want to ask you two other questions when you were still in Shedlitz. One is that I understand you went back and visited your old home.

A: Not right away.

Q: Talk about when did you come back and describe what happened.

A: I went back to the home, let's say, beginning of '45. The guys didn't tell me to go right away. And they told me not to go by myself. I took two — there was a lot of Jewish Russian soldiers. I went to a Russian captain, but otherwise they'll think that you come to take revenge on them. So, he went with us, and even we went — I knew my grandma had a lot of money hidden someplace, so I went to her house also with a soldier. Nothing was there. But I didn't stay. I was afraid to stay there. In my house, when I walked in with them, they say to me, We did not take any of your furniture. We don't know anything about it. All from the small town, and they came, they, like vultures, they grabbed anything that they could, with, you know, with wagons and horses, you know. When the ghetto was taken out, the destruction of the ghetto, what do you think happened the next few days? They came like vultures from all over the Polacks. They told me that, was which I — he says to me, You wouldn't believe, that Wladek says to me, what they did. They came, like, grabbing everything which was not nailed down.

Q: So, when you went in your old house, were the people there using your old furniture? Was —

A: No, it was nothing there. There was nothing there. I didn't see any furniture.

Q: And —

A: Because they were smart. They used to give the furniture away someplace else, and they brought in.

Q: And so did you find anything that was left behind?

A: No. That's all. I find some — a few old things, you know, like my father's tools, was — how did I find? Because in the hallway was a closet, with a hole, like — like a — what do you call it, where they used to — we used to keep in the wintertime certain foods shouldn't get spoiled, potatoes, cabbage, _____. It's like a basement but a reach down. So, I knew we had something there. What, I didn't know. So, I went down there. I found my father's tools.

Q: And did the Poles say anything when you said, I'm taking these with me?

A: No, they didn't say. They were happy to get rid of me. The minute they saw me on the outer side, I saw they were screaming: I didn't take anything. We didn't do anything. Somebody came here and they took everything from here. Because that guy was telling me that. Everything was taken. The minute of the liquidation of the ghetto, they came like vultures, running. You know, they were digging for gold, for everything. They thought the Jews were hiding things in the backyards and in the walls, you know, under the streets, and so they were digging everything to look at, they could find something. Even they find the truth, they wouldn't touch them. What would they do?

Q: Tell me a little bit about who else was living in ____ with you. The other Jews who survived, did they also survive in hiding? Had any of them come back from concentration camp?

A: No. Most of them was from hiding, which they were hiding out by Polish women, in _____, you know. In the woods, a few of them survived. Two young kids survived in the woods. They came out with _____ they were _____ you know, you wouldn't believe it how they looked, with guns, with grenades all around. So, they told them, What are you doing here? They're going to kill you. He says, Us, they're not going to kill. We'll kill them first. They were wild kids, too. And they didn't stay too long in Shedlitz, those two guys. They left the next day. I don't know where they went.

Q: I understand they were registering people, survivors.

A: Yeah.

Q: Talk about how the registration worked and who was organizing it.

A: There was a committee already in Shedlitz. After a while, they came from all over to Shedlitz, because a lot of people that came from hiding places. They came from the concentration camp. So, there was a committee. And how they got the money, I don't know. They gave every person, they gave us 1500 Zloty at that time to survive. You know, we should have survive, in case we don't want to stay in Shedlitz. They advised us not to stay, you know. Most of the people, they were advised not to stay in Shedlitz. We should go with a Russian army, where they took, you know, was already occupied from the German territory, when they gave it to Poland, and Stolczyn, Szczecin, all the Jews arrived. It was coming there, flocks of people. You wouldn't believe it, like, it was showing the Ten Commandments. Jews came from all the side to Szczecin, Stolczyn, hundreds of Jews, thousands of them.

Q: And during this period, we're now talking end of '44, beginning of '45, your father was taken in August of '40. Had you heard any rumors about what had happened to him?

A: No. No. No.

Q: You assumed he had died?

A: We didn't know. Yeah. We thought he was dead. Everybody thought everybody's died. When he came to Shedlitz, they told him that we went to Stolczyn.

Q: And describe what the reunion was like with your father.

A: My father _____ my brother recognized him at the station. We used to go to the station to see who was going to arrive, because every time a train came, we went to see who's going to be on that train. So, my brother recognized when he come to the station.

Q: And then he brought him _____

A: Yeah. We couldn't believe it. But he know that — he know that we were alive, because they told him in Shedlitz, in the committee, that we are alive and we went to Stolczyn, because most of the people, all the survivors from all the time, from _____, from _____, from all over, they couldn't stay. They were afraid. So, they all went to Szczecin, Stolczyn, and other — all the towns which they were liberated, you know, from the Russians, which they went to this town was good, the _____ was there, with committees, with food. They give you — anything you want, they give you. We were like a new person when we came here.

Q: And your father, did he tell you right away what had happened to him these four years?

A: No. Later on, he told us that. He was mostly — I don't know how he wind up there, but Hungarian and Romanian Jews at that _____+ came.

Q: So —

A: In fact —

Q: Break off a little bit from the chronology, but what happened to your father during the four years you were apart? After he was rounded up, do you know where he was sent?

A: Yeah. Nordhausen. Over there, he was a — he was working in the factory 'til he was liberated.

Q: For four years in Nordhausen?

A: I don't know this. I don't know. I know he was liberated. A lot of Hungarian Jews — in 1943, '44, that was the end of the war, they brought in a lot of Hungarian Jews to that camp. So, that's how he survived, because most of the Hungarian Jews, they didn't take him in the beginning, because they were all home in Hungary 'til 1943. Then, in '44, when they shipped them — some of them shipped to Auschwitz. Most of them went to Auschwitz, other camps, to the labor camps, you know.

Q: And was it very hard reajusting to a life with your whole family, after having been used to being —

A: No.

Q: — on your own?

A: After the — after the way we lived, like animals, all the time in Europe, because, in Europe, was a very bad life for the Jews. The Jews didn't have anything. They didn't have no education. They didn't have nothing. Most of the Jews in Europe were shoemaker or, what do you call it, a tailor, this, and, you know, and the kids never went to school because they didn't have the money to send, and they were afraid to go to Polish schools. They only went to the Jewish school, malamitikof (ph), and they were teaching them, you know. And they were never going into the streets. That's why most of these people, I couldn't figure out how they could survive. They couldn't survive because they

were not used to a strict life. They were used to living in ghetto all the time. Actually, before Hitler came into the ghettos, you know, that they were _____. They never lived with Polacks. They lived with themselves. And that life was terrible. The kid didn't even know how to sign his name. He wanted to hide them, and that's it. And in the street, he didn't have a bicycle. He couldn't swim, because he was not allowed to go to swim. He was not allowed to go to a park because they killed you. And then they used to tell the kids, don't hit. If a Polish kid hits you or does something to you, don't hit him back, because if you hit him back, they'll come at night and they're dead.

Q: So, when your father came back, you're all together in Stolczyn. And _____

A: Yeah. And then we went _____ I told you, we went right away _____ in a few months, we went right away to Ziegenhain. When they made it _____ they made the transport to Germans to leave to Germany, because the Poles gave them an ultimatum, a date, that you have to leave the houses and everything. That's all you're allowed to take is two satchels. And they prepared the trains. You know what kind of trains? Like you had in the Holocaust, trains like that. And then they came to us, and they said to us, you go with them. You know, the Bruhat (ph) came and they said: This is your chance. We want you all to go, all the Jews. They took from Szczecin, Stolczyn, and they said, When the train comes, go on the train.

Q: How many people were in your group, your Bruhat (ph) group?

A: A lot of, a lot of people, because in Szczecin, Stolczyn, was not only from Shedlitz. They came from all over, so that _____ I would say a whole wagon. I would say about 150 people, maybe more, and they told us to sit still, mix in the Germans. And don't say anything, because when you pass by the Russian territory, because _____ you know, Germany was divided in four sections. So, the first section we had to pass by, the Russian territory, then the French, then the English, and then was American. We didn't go to the American, because we were only allowed to go to the English sector. But when _____ the first sector was the Russian, when you pass by Russian, the Russian soldiers saw the _____, the train, to look whose there, don't say anything. If they talk to you, don't answer. Don't make them look that you understand them. Then, when we arrived in the English sector, the Bruhat (ph) was waiting for us, and they took us off, and they all gave us clothing and food, and they put us up in German houses. And they kept us there for a while. And then they took us _____ they came and said, this is the time to leave here, because we were already free in the English sector. And they took us on the cattle trucks, and in the trucks they took us to Ziegenhain. And at Ziegenhain was where we were.

Q: Describe Ziegenhain. What did it look like?

A: Ziegenhain was a regular concentration _____ looks like a concentration camp, because it was with barbed wire with a tower where they watch you. What do you call them?

Q: Watch towers?

A: Watch towers. And it was barracks, you know, very poor barracks, was on cinder blocks built. Ready—made barracks. They put them on cinder blocks.

Q: What was your reaction? You walked in ——

[Pause.] {coughing}

So, you had just survived the war and walked into someplace and it's surrounded by barbed wired, with a watch tower. What was the first thing that you thought of when you saw that?

A: As soon as we saw all Jewish people, all our uncles, we were happy, because they told us it was called at time the UNNRA: You heard that organization? UNNRA: President Roosevelt's wife was in charge, was a commissioner. She ____ + to get it, person and thoroughly. They're the one which, you know, didn't allow us to come into the United States. After the liberation, I can't figure out why they didn't let us go straight to America, why did they have to put us into the DP camp. DP camp was actually —— what I was talking about, once again?

Q: That's okay. Finish your thought, then we will go back and ——

A: All right. I can't figure out why they didn't let us go straight to America, why they have to throw us into DP camp. DP camps was actually the first person which has no country, so they put us there. All right. They did the right thing. But they put in the Nazis —— you know, I'll tell you the whole story. A lot of Nazis which arrived in

America, they don't know how they arrived. The ones which working for the Germans in the camps, the Russians, the vice Russians, they worked in the camps, they were killing Jews. And after the liberation, they were afraid to go back to their country, so that's how they arrived in Germany and to the American sector. They arrived and they opened up DP camps for them, too. They put them in DP camps. Actually, they were not DP camps for them, because they're not a displaced person. A displaced person is a person without a country. They had a country. They were traitors. They were afraid to go back because Stalin would kill them all.

Q: And talk about your life in that Ziegenhain ——

A: Okay. When we came to Ziegenhain, it was good. The many —— I saw a lot of Jewish people, our kind, was good. They opened up schools. We opened up a club, the kid would sing. They opened up a school for kids. My brother went to school to teach him Hebrew. You know, they were teaching Hebrew because they brought in people which knew how to speak Hebrew, and they made —— maybe six kibbutz in there, kibbutz draw, kibbutz ____.

Q: Did you go outside to these kibbutzes?

A: Yeah. Kibbutz draw. I was with my brother. We stood in the kibbutz. I was a kid. What was I going to do with my mother and father when we need to, you know,

young kids. So, we went to kibbutz _____. They make Saturday night dances. We had a good life. And from America came a lot of clothing, you know, the clothing which they throw into the boxes, and, you know, for the poor people. This is the clothing they used to bring us. A whole truck of clothing. Food they gave us, as much as you wanted to eat you had. And they might teach you to cook the food. They gave milk. And they gave the children chocolate they used to bring and everything. It was a beautiful life.

Q: And what were your parents doing while you were busy with the other kids?

A: My mother worked in the kitchen, cooked for the people, but she couldn't cook, you know, and my father, you know, was walking around with the other people, playing dominos. They were playing cards. Some of them, you know, working. Some of them didn't work. They took him to work, you know, in the camp because they needed wood for the camp. They needed fixing, painting. They found some work for them. They used to be active. But the kids were good. There was schools. There was kibbutz. They had dances. They —— the kids had nights, movies they brought in.

Q: And were you going to school?

A: No. My brother went to school. I was too old to go to school.

Q: And what about the extended family? Did any other ——

A: Yeah.

Q: —— family come through?

A: Yes. Cousins survived, and they came, also from Shedlitz, but they lived in different camps. They ____ other camps, but one cousin came to Ziegenhain. She lived with a little boy. So, they lived with us. But we went, later on, and I would find out about my mother's —— my mother knew that she has relatives in America, two brothers. The sister she didn't know because the sister lived in Belgium. The sister survived in Belgium, and she went, in 1940, the last ship to America: That's how she arrived in America: But we didn't know. So, we were writing to Shedlitz —— I mean, to

America: My mother didn't know the address, so we were writing to Brooklyn. She knew she has one brother in Brooklyn and one brother in St. Louis, but she didn't know which is which, so she didn't know the address. So, she put down Brooklyn St. Louis. So, the letter came back and says there's no such a thing in America, Brooklyn St. Louis. So, now we wrote another letter. And they found a Yacovich (ph), a cousin lived in the Bronx, and that cousin from the Bronx knew about her two brothers and sister, and he went and told them. So, we received a letter from him right away.

Q: And about what year was it that she was able to establish connection with her brothers?

A: In 1947.

Q: And did they offer to sponsor you?

A: They didn't know nothing about sponsors that time, because that time we were registered in Frankfurt to go to America: Because we told the American government we had relatives there. So, that point came out, the quota was closed for the American — for the Polish people. Only the German quota was open. They were tricky, because how many German had left on the _____. So, the Polish quota was closed. So, we were the first ones on the list. We went to Frankfurt, and they told us, in 1946, you can't go to America: You have to wait for quota: So, we wrote them a letter that we need sponsors. So, they send us letters that they were sponsors for us. That's how we went. So, we waited 'til 1948, 'til Truman passed the quota for the Jews, vice president, that you could go to America or England or wherever you have sponsors. So, that's how we went, in 1949, beginning of the first months of the quota: So, we went to Bremerhaven. And in Bremerhaven, we had to sit for two months, because the weather was bad. We had to wait for army boat, 'til it comes, when the army boat used to come with food and ammunition for the American soldiers, their bases. And the way back, they used to ship, you know, the Holocaust survivors. So, you know, our ship was 1200 people going back. It was 200 Holocaust survivors. The rest was all the Nazis which had survived, working for the Germans.

Q: And was there any interaction between the two groups?

A: No. They kept their mouth shut, because most of them came on false papers. They didn't come under right papers. They get false names, and who do you think was the sponsor for them? The churches, from Minnesota, from Detroit. You know they arrive here. They were the sponsors. But, actually, they're — a lot of people don't know how they arrived here. But they were called collaborators. They were afraid to go back to Russia or to Poland because they worked with the German. Because, in 1946, when they started the war with Russia, the Second Battalion, you know, the Vlosov, General Vlosov, he surrendered to the Second Army, to the Germans, and he fought against, you know, the Russian army. The same thing when Stalingrad, when there was the battle for Stalingrad, you know, they send in from Romania, from Hungary, you know, armies to fight, and Italy, you know, they fought. And in 1943, the battle for Stalingrad, that was the biggest battle. After that battle, you know, the Germans weren't done. In 1944, that was the finish of them.

Q: So, to return to your story, so, from Bremerhaven, you took this ship —

A: Yeah.

Q: — with the Nazi collaborators —

A: Yeah.

Q: — and a small group of Jews. And the ship goes to —

A: Bremerhaven.

Q: From Bremerhaven. I mean, where did it land in the United States?

A: It landed in Bremerhaven ——— Bremen ——— I mean, from Bremerhaven, it went to Boston. Because that ship was from Boston. So, the name for the ship was General Haan.

Q: And did any of your relative come to Boston?

A: No, no, no. The hires, you know, the hires was waiting for us. They took us down, and they gave me two dollars, so I went and I bought a sandwich and a Coke. I was ____+. At night, we went with a train, because they know we don't belong there. Our relatives is in New York. So, we went to Pennsylvania Station. At night, we came. We came, our relatives was standing there in a line waiting for us.

Q: When was the last time your mother had seen her brother?

A: The last time? That was way before the ——— because they left, like, in 1912.

Q: Over 30 years?

A: Sure. Over 30 years. The sister she saw in 1939, when she came out visiting, '38, from Belgium, visit. That time ——— they killed them, because all the Jews in Belgium was killed. But she survived. She went to Casablanca: And from Casablanca, 1940 was the last ship going to America: So, she went with that ship, that's how she arrived in New York.

Q: And when you got to New York, you lived with your aunt and uncle?

A: We were there for a couple days, then they got us an apartment in New York. They got us an apartment and _____. You know, so, I signed up to go at night to night school from the Jefferson High School at night. And during the day, I used to go to work, and at night I went to school. So, that's how I worked. I got a job in the milliner at that time, but you didn't make money that time. I started at \$12 a week. And then I worked in a few places. Then I learned a little bit, so I quit, because they abused you. They didn't want to give you money. So, the next job I got I earned \$30. So, I worked in the millinery for \$30. Then I saw the guys that works in there, old timers, with me, and they get ——— the pay's 85, and I only get \$35. I went over to the guy, and I said, How come you're paying me \$35 and this guy gets 85? Oh, he says, he is working a long time. I said, But I'm producing more than him. He makes three or four, and I make ten, twelve. So, he says, no, no. So, I didn't say nothing. The next day, I left, and I went into another shop. And I told them I liked it in there. And I said, I'm working in this and this shop, you know, and I'm getting ——— He says, What are you doing? I says ——— what did the guy used to pay you? I said, He paid me \$85. I said, Try me. See how good I am. So, he put me down to the machine, and I started working. He saw the way I work. He says, Ah, you're hired. You're getting the pay, \$85. So, I worked nights. The guy which I left calls up my mother, and he says, How come your son didn't come to work? She says, Because my son called and told me you abused him. You paid him only \$35 or 32, and he got a job for \$85. Why should he work for you? He says, You know, call your son. She says ——— And let him come back to me. I'll give him the \$85. And my mother, she was

a smart cookie. She says, No, no. I know what you want to do. You want to take him off the job. He should come back to you and then you're not going to give him the pay. That's how I remained working for that guy. And I worked there 'til I saved up some money. I used to make good money there, because I worked — at the time they started to work on piece work. On piece work, I was making \$300 a week, at that time was a lot of money. \$300 in 1949. But the problem was — was sitting work. You didn't work that hard. But then I saved up some money, and I went with a partner of mine. We were —, and then put ourselves in line. And I bought a — out, already I was making money. Because, at that time, you know, \$150 a week, you know, was a lot of money, special cash. Then I met my wife through introduction.

Q: When did you get married?

A: We got married in 19 —

MRS. RYNECKI: February —

A: 3rd —

MRS. RYNECKI: — 3rd, 1959.

A: 1959. And then — no, no, when I met her already, I had extra money. Not only I bought a business, I bought a house. I had a house and a brand new car and everything. So, when we got married, we lived in east flat, gorgeous neighborhood. Then the neighborhood start to get bad, so we sold the house and moved into New Basin — New Basin area in Georgetown they called it. And both my kids were born in that house in Lennoxville. I'll never forget. April 6, Lennoxville — April 7, Lennoxville. That how they —

Q: And your parents, how long — when did they pass away? Were they living with you?

A: We bought a two—family house. They lived upstairs. And my father died in '86, and my mother died in '90, four years later. And then we lived in that New Basin area with my kids. They went to college, my both sons. I'm very — you know, successful with my son. My son is a very big attorney. And he's about number four attorney in New York City. He's got a big law firm, 52 people. He works on all the big cases. He used to — as a matter of fact, his name is in the newspaper, one of the four best Jewish lawyers in New York. And my other son, he went to pharmacy school and finish as a pharmacist and is a vice president of a big company now, pharmacy. So, very successful. And I've got five grandchildren, beautiful. Got a beautiful wife. What else can I ask for?

Q: Names of your grandchildren?

A: Yeah, my name for the grandchildren: Nicole is the girl for my lawyer son, and Nolan (ph) is my boy. He's named after my father. And my pharmacist son — and my pharmacist son with kids, two kids, twins, Tamara and Mikalia (ph), and the one of them

is Lee. One of them, Lee, goes to college from music. And my other twins are still in high school. And my lawyer's daughter is going now to Franklin and Marshall. She was accepted. She was _____. And my grandson is still going to high school.

Q: So, before we stop, let me ask, is there anything else about your time in Shedlitz or in hiding that you think we didn't cover? Or is there any aspects of your time that you feel shaped your decisions that either you or your children made after the war? Do you think about that time much or _____

A: No, no. We didn't make no decisions. We all lived happy _____ happily, you know. We all close to each other, and we have a lot of success. Like we say in Jewish, I clap when I see the success. As a matter of fact, I'll show you the newspaper.

Q: Thank you so much. And this ends our oral history with David

Rynecki. This is has been an oral history for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, with David Rynecki, on July 6.

A: One thing I forgot to tell. I was involved in politics, the Democratic club. And my wife worked as a secretary. And nobody _____ she works for _____+ for Glock (ph) Miller, Mel Miller, and his son, the speaker of the assembly, she worked for both of them. She was the secretary there for 12 and a half years.

Q: Thank you so much.

Conclusion of Interview