

OK, this is a test for the camera. Now we have a channel one. No, channel two with the level here. And we will be checking the TV and stuff. The TV's on.

Now the monitor is no ring set. This looks like it's manual. OK. Manual. Now we have it.

OK, now point it down to here, see the dollies and cup. Now let me plug in the microphone, which is number-- the channel one mic. Hello. Hello, number one, number two mics. Now we have two mics.

And we are doing this just to show what we need to show. OK, [? [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] ?]

OK, fine now. [? [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] ?]

This is [? automated. ?] [INAUDIBLE] here focuses. [? [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] ?]

This is it. Zoom in, one, two, three. [? [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] ?]

This is a United States--

Give me a sec. [INAUDIBLE] OK.

Could I come closer to you?

No, no, no, no, no. You have to stay where you are.

Because of this, uh-huh.

OK. I will speak louder. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Frank Hyde on May 4, 2013. Thank you very much, Mr. Hyde for agreeing to meet with us and talk with us about your experiences.

Well, it's a very long experience. We were literally children when all these happenings started. The bol--

So I will start asking--

Go ahead.

--some questions.

Go ahead.

And we'll go from there. And I'll start at the very beginning. Could you tell us where you were born, when you were born, and if your name was different at birth?

Yes. I was born on August 8, 1921, which is now 91 years ago. And my Czech name was Pekarek.

Pekarek.

P-E-K-A-R-E-K. Pekarek.

OK. OK.

That was my father's name. Naturally, it was my name. And should I continue?

Yeah, what was his name, first name?

His name was H-U-G-O, Hugo Pekarek. And the whole family was Pekarek. I can show you some pictures of a cousin of mine, Pekarek. And we changed it only after the war.

OK. When you were born, what town were you born in, or what place were you born?

The capital of Czechoslovakia, which was Prague. I was born in Prague. I was raised in Prague, until the situation has changed.

Can you tell me what part of Prague, what section of Prague?

I was born in the old section of Prague, which was very similar to what we call in New York the Lower East Side of New York. Remember, that is was 1921 when I was born. So the buildings were usually four flights up. The more modern building at the time had an elevator, not the building I was born on. You had to walk the four flights up. We were living on the top floor.

Mm-hmm.

Why we were living on that top floor? Because when my mother married my father, her mother was living in that apartment, and in those days, people were living together. So we were born in that apartment where my actually grandmother was already living.

So tell--

And that was on the fourth floor.

Do you remember the address?

Sure.

What is it?

I have to say the way it sounds in Czech.

Sure.

The number was 11, and the street was called Bilkova. That's B like in boy, I-L-K-O-V-A, Bilkova Ulice. Ulice is street.

And was it in the center of town then?

Very much so, yes, in the old section of Prague.

Was it near the cemetery, the old Jewish cemetery?

There was a Jewish cath-- I wouldn't call it cathedral. There was a Jewish section very close, yes. On the next street, so to speak, we had to go say Jewish holidays. In particular, we used to walk with my father, I remember very well, to the temple.

So the temple was, you would say, like you cross the Main Street, which was called after Paris, the town in France. So the street was Paris--

How do you say it in Czech?

Of course in Czech, it sounded different than when I say it in English. But the name was still the town, Paris.

What was the Czech version? How do you say it in-- what was the street name?

Parizská. Pariz. Paris in English is Pariz in Czech.

OK, so it was Parizská.

Parizská Ulice, yes.

Parizská Ulice.

And when you cross that street, there was that old section which was the Jewish section with a Jewish temple, Jewish synagogue, and very small cemetery, because we was in town.

Mm-hmm.

So the cemetery was not bigger than this room where we sit. But that's where usually the Jewish people congregated on holidays. I don't think were exceptionally Jewish or religious, no. But there were holy days where my father, whatever, he wanted to show his son or whatever. So we went to the temple and spent some time in the temple. When I was 13, I was-- I had bar mitzvah.

Mm-hmm.

But then because of the circumstances which unfortunately started, you were not so proud to be Jewish. It was always a handicap, so to speak, in my life.

Even in Czechoslovakia before Hitler came?

No, before Hitler came, everything was normal. Nobody cared whether you are Jewish or Catholic or-- at my age. The only question-- we used to play soccer, because soccer was the sport in Europe. So the question was only, what position did you play? Nobody asked about religion or where you came from or-- it was not a subject to talk about.

You were Czech, the Czech name, and Czech as anybody else. And no, that was not an issue. As much as I remember, it was not an issue when you were growing up.

In your life, it wasn't.

In my life, yes. I'm talking about my life, yes.

OK.

Very gradually, the situation has changed. May I continue?

No, because I'm going to ask questions. In the beginning of the interview-- I want to establish the world you were born into. So I ask about the people that you knew. And we've talked a little bit about your father.

I want to know more about him. I want to know about your mother, any other siblings. So if you will allow, I will ask questions--

--I clearly tell you. Well, I had a sister who was three years older.

What was her name?

[? Mariva. ?] We were calling her Mimi, M-I-M-I. There was a brother who I have never met. He passed away of some kind of a child disease.

My parents-- my mother was born in 1892. My, father 1878. They were 14 years apart. But in those days, people were at home. My mother was always at home cooking.

What was her name?

I-D-A, Ida.

Ida. And her maiden name?

And actually in Czech, that was her name.

Yeah.

And the way I remember my mother, she was always cooking. The main dish was lunch, not like in the United States. The distances were different, so people were eating lunch at home. And in the evening, it was always something which they either warmed up or something special, some sausage or something, which was the thing which people ate in Prague at that time.

My father was-- he was representing a factory which produced sweaters, cardigans and stuff like that. Prague, Czechoslovakia is a in reasonably cold setting. If you wanted to really get warm, so to speak, you had to-- not fly. There was no planes. You had to travel down to Italy through Austria, and that's where the warm weather was existing.

But coming back to my family, so my father came home usually in the evening. We had dinner-- I mean, what we had for dinner, he had for dinner. And everything was normal. It was a very normal life.

My mother-- now it might sound strange here, because everything is pre-cooked and pre-packed and stuff like that. But one night, I remember there was a bed in the kitchen. And I was a very sick child somehow, so I was very much staying in the bed during daytime.

And I remember my mother when she was making pasta, where the pasta had to be made from scratch. Eggs and butter, well, she put in. And I only remember, but it was on a plate, and she was cutting it.

And what did you call it in Czech?

The pasta?

Uh-huh.

It escapes the word. How would you call pasta? It will come back to me.

OK.

Somehow lately, when I want to say something, I miss the word and then it comes back.

Yeah.

But that's how she was making the pasta which went into the soup.

Yeah.

And well, that's how I remember my mother. Then--

And now it's a delicacy.

That was--

Homemade food is a delicacy.

The grocery store was downstairs, but to buy pasta in a grocer's-- [CZECH] Couldn't think of the word. Well, it's something you didn't hear for--

Yeah, yeah.

[LAUGHS] I'm out of Czechoslovakia since 1948. So we're talking about 52 plus 13, 65 years. So to remember all of a sudden a word which you have not heard for--

So many--

--60 odd years is very difficult to remember.

Yeah.

But this is how it was. And I remember my mother after lunch, everything had to be spotless and cleaned. And God beware if something was on the floor. It had to be polished and was a--

Did she have any help at home?

Sorry?

Did she have any help at home, or did she do this all herself?

She was doing it by herself. It was non-existent. In the afternoon-- we were kids, like I said. So in the afternoon, we went to a certain spot on the mountain. There was a mountain near by.

The boys played soccer, of course. I don't remember what my sister was doing, whether she was there too. But she was three years older.

What do you mean-- by mountain, do you mean a hilly area? Would you be talking about--

Well, yes. It was not really a very hilly area, but there was-- yes.

Is this Vysehrad?

Sorry?

Is this Vysehrad?

Vysehrad, no. What I'm talking about was Letna, L-E-T-N-A, Letna, now Letna.

OK.

And there was a coffee shop in this, where the women gathered. They were talking. Whatever they were talking about, I don't know, but we were talking about soccer, playing soccer.

Of course.

Then we went home, evening, and then you had the dinner at home. That was summertime. Wintertime, well, wintertime, you went somewhere to skate. Now in those days, we didn't have a ice skating stadium, but because it was a cold country, the tennis courts which were used-- they just put water on it.

They froze because of the cold weather. And then during the day, you went to skate on a tennis court. Now it was not tennis court for us. We were calling it ice skating rink.

Of course. Of course.

But that's how life used to be.

Your parents, I'd like to know a little bit about their personalities. What kind-- was your father outgoing, an

extrovert, an introvert?

No. I think he was-- I remember the place where he used to go, what they used to call coffee shop. And I remember at that time, that coffee shop, when he took me to see or whatever, it was so terribly full of smoke. It was in those days people were smoking. Irrespective of health or whatever, they were smoking.

So when I went with my father to that room, the thing what impressed me most, my memory, was the terrible smoke. And you know, he introduced me to his people who were playing cards with him and stuff like that. And then most likely, my mother picked me up, and we went wherever we went.

Did--

No, he was not a extra-- he was a regular father, in my opinion.

Uh-huh.

Unfortunately, what happened later, naturally-- I shouldn't say split. The circumstances split us, because I got married very young. Can I dwell on the subject?

We'll come to that. We'll come to that. Were you closer to one parent or the other?

Well, I think as a boy, I was closer to my mother, yes.

OK.

I remember very distinctly as a little boy, we used to go shopping. The Main Street was called Václavské náměstí . I don't know if you heard it from some other person.

I've lived in Prague.

Oh, you did live in Prague. Well, then you know what I'm talking about.

Yeah, Václavské náměstí.

From Václavské náměstí when somehow a small street, and there was a butcher store. But he wasn't selling raw meat. It was more like a salami type of a place. And I remember with my mother, I stopped there with her of course, and we bought pork, which was spec-- the Czech-- one of the main dishes in Prague was pork.

And pork was not like here. People don't eat pork, and I don't eat it now either. Every day I have fish. But that changed over the time.

But back at that time when I was maybe 13, 15 I remember that I went with my mother. Whatever she was doing on that Václavské náměstí I don't remember. But we went down south, and there was that butcher store where we stopped by, and we had some bite of whatever and go to head back home.

So you would--

So she was closer to me than my father.

But if you ate pork, that means that your parents didn't observe the dietary-- your parents didn't observe the dietary laws.

Not at all, no. No, no. We were born Jewish, yes. But it was not like that we had a Jewish household, no.

OK.

It was a regular household. Nobody asked these questions. That's how everybody was living. When you

came to the buil-- call it, building house on a regular day, but especially Saturday, the house smelled like a restaurant, because everybody was cooking the same thing.

We were doing the same thing like our neighbors, whether they were Jewish or Christians or whatever. That was not a subject to-- nobody cared about this.

Did--

I'm talking about when I was a small boy.

I understand.

I don't know it developed later on.

Of course. Well, Czechoslovakia was a new country at--

Yes.

--the time.

It was originally 1918.

And was there a great feeling of patriotism because it was fin-- was there a great feeling of patriotism because it was--

Oh, definitely.

Because it was a new country?

Definitely. Not only that, but our constitution was identical to the US Constitution, because the United States President at the time, Wilson, was very instrumental of carving out Czechoslovakia. You would have to know more about the history, but Europe was occu-- no, I shouldn't say occupied-- say, ruled by the Austrian Hungarian Empire.

Yes.

And that was the house of the Habsburgs, king of Habsburgs or whatever he was, emperor. I don't remember that part. And anything-- the language was much more German, because the Czechs were part of that Austrian empire.

But then one of the principal politicians of the time, Masaryk, he petitioned. He came here, and he petitioned Wilson and, I don't know who came after him or before him, to give the Czechs the self-determination right.

Yeah.

So they carved out of that Austrian empire after World-- during World War I, Czechoslovakia. There was no Czechoslovakia before. The state was called Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. Those were three states which were, so to speak, the bone of Czechoslovakia.

So when apparently, here or there, when they realize it's too small to be independent, somehow they attached Slovakia to it. And that's why it became Czechoslovakia, the original three states--

I see.

--and then another two or three states to the-- when I say to the left--

To the east a little bit.

To the right, to east, so to speak.

Yeah.

So the very eastern part of Czechoslovakia was very close to Russia. And that's why also, later on during World War II, Czechoslovakia was ceded to the Russian sphere of influence.

We'll come to those things. We'll-

Well, that's the truth.

So tell me a little bit about school life. When did you--

The schools?

Your school life. What kind of school did you go to?

I went to a German school, because in Czechoslovakia at that time, there was no Czechoslovakia. So when Czechoslovakia was founded, just like here, you have a better chance to get a position when you speak Spanish and certainly English. So then my mother, I remember her saying all the time, whatever you want to do in life, you have to talk Czech, which was our language, but you have to learn German. So I went to a German school.

Did you speak-- at home, I want to establish, you spoke Czech with your--

Czech-- sure.

OK. Did your parents know Yiddish at all?

Not at all. The first time I heard Yiddish, you would not believe it, when I was going to Auschwitz. I never heard of Yiddish. There was Czech or German. Now if you didn't speak well German, maybe had some kind of a mishmash of German, but not Yiddish. My friends they was all Czechs. I mean, who spoke anything else but Czech?

Did you know anything of your family history beyond your father and mother and--

Yes. Somehow my father used to say that his family came from-- that would be west-- from the southwest of Bohemia. And he thought that his ancestors were Catholics, but there was all kinds of reforms going on under, not Martin Luther King here, but the original Luther.

Right.

And there was also somebody in Prague by the name of Jan Hus, H-U-S.

Yes.

So there was a certain split in the religion.

And certainly within Catholicism.

That's correct.

In the middle ages.

And he thinks that instead of choosing the sides between the two split Czech Catholic religion, that they chose the Jewish religion. This is why our name is not Jewish. Our name-- the Jewish, let's say, names in



Prague, they were the Feldmans, like my wife's single name or the Schwarzkopf, just like here.

They were like more Germanic names.

Exactly. Now we look here, if somebody's called Schwarzkopf, you know he's somehow Jewish.

Or German.

Or German.

That's right.

Well, that was exactly in Prague. So to know somebody by the name of Pekarek and be Jewish, that didn't exist. And I will tell you a small story when I was a kid and I went to the German school not speaking German. But I remember that my teacher-- that was the first grade, second grade. I was, what, six, seven years old. Somehow there was some question about religion, and she assigned me to the class-- or to the time to have religious schooling to the Catholic class, because of the Czech name.

Well, I didn't speak any German, but somehow I objected to it, and I said that I was Jewish. So she sent me to the Jewish class or whatever. But I remember, the name, that was not a Jewish name at all.

Now we were Jewish. We were born as Jewish people. But then, unfortunately, what happened-- I told you, I was not a very proud Jew, no. Because everything what happened was because of the Jewish faith. And lots of things have-- maybe we come to it.

Yes. We come--

But so--

I guess--

The name I changed for a different reason.

OK.

If you want me to tell you now--

Yes--

--I tell it to you now.

Let's tell it. Tell it just once.

Well, we were-- my name was Pekarek.

Pekarek.

I married Georgine. She was Pekarek, of course. And then what happened-- that was 1947, '48. At that time, the influence of Soviet Russia was tremendous. Why? Because that goes to politics.

The Czechs always felt that the West let them down. The West means England, not the United States. The United States was out of this world. But England, France, Russia, Italy, that instead of helping the Czechs, so to speak, maintain their identity, freedom, they let them down.

And then in turn, Hitler marched in, and the whole situation has changed. So the Russian influence was very strong. With Georgine and me, we didn't care for it, because we have seen what happen when you don't have freedom.

We both survived Auschwitz. We came back in 1945, and we were living in Prague as best as we could have done it until '47, '48. But when the situation became very, very difficult, we didn't like it. We thought again, we might have to go through the same thing, maybe not the extremes, but hardly the freedom which we've been hoping for.

Well, we decided to get out of Czechoslovakia, which was 194-- late '47, early '48. I couldn't get out because I was, quote, "military age." So I thought that if we somehow split with Georgine, that by myself, I will be easier to get out than two of us with luggage and all this stuff. That's how we thought of it.

Well, I met somebody by the name of Hyde. His name was Walter E. Hyde. Through him, I got a English passport. So Georgine left Prague in February 1948. I couldn't get out that quickly.

In the meantime, she went from Prague to London, stayed in London for a while. From her mother's side, they were here surviving the situation in Ecuador. Now out of all these countries, I'll tell you why Ecuador.

That was Georgine's uncle from her mother's side. He was a dentist. But he didn't care for dentistry. He was more like a businessman, sitting on the board of directors here, sitting on the board of directors there. And somehow he became consul general of Ecuador.

Well, how he got Ecuador I can't tell you. But that's how it was. So then unfortunately, the situation became worse, before Hitler and all that stuff, he was trying to convince Georgine's mother and father to go to Ecuador, because he was able to give them the visa to go to Ecuador.

Well, my mother, they were in a different situation. They had a house like a house. Those days, there were no mortgages in Prague. So to leave your house, to leave your business, this was unheard of. Why should I go to Ecuador to live in those Indians down there or something? This is my home.

Well, unfortunately, that didn't work out in the long run. But since they survived in Ecuador in Quito, they came after the war here, like most of people usually do. So when Georgine was in England, she heard, of course, of her aunt and uncle that they live here. They were living in Ecuador at that time. But they-- no, they were living in Ecuador.

They came here. And that uncle of hers had some earlier connections to somebody who was a manufacturing person. And because of the Cold War, which existed already at that time, somehow the United States government was pumping much more money into Puerto Rico as a prevention that Puerto Rico wouldn't go too much left, like some of the countries did.

So he was offered to build a factory in Puerto Rico. So since that uncle who was a dentist representative of Ecuador, he told him, well, if you just came from Ecuador, you speak Spanish, you want to manage my factory from Prague? So they settled to Puerto Rico for some time.

So Georgine, not having any other family, from England went to the United States, went to Puerto Rico. So we stayed. Of course I was in Prague, not divorced. That was not a question. It was not. But I managed to get out of Prague by myself. It was easier than together with Georgine.

So when I got out of Prague, naturally I had nowhere to go. But the train took me to Paris. Well, I have to say something in favor of the French, irrespective of their view today or that view. The French at that time were extremely helpful. They tried to reunite families who were split. You didn't know where your-- last time you saw him here, last time you saw him there. So it was very difficult, but the French were helping.

And they were helping also all the people like myself who, all of a sudden from Prague, was in Paris. We were called DPs, Displaced People. And I got to Paris a couple days before July 14. I'm sure you know about July 14, yes?

Well, at that time, of course the time was different. That was 1948, and De Gaulle was still around. And he was running down Champs-Élysée, I remember like today. When I did go to France, to Paris, I was supposed

to see somebody who knew somebody who knew somebody in Prague, and I was supposed to see those people. So those people took me to that celebration of July 14.

Now splitting now that story which I'm just telling you, my sister-- or rather, my mother had a sister who had married a Viennese person, all Jewish. But she didn't like the situation as it was. And before Hitler came in, she decided with her husband to go to, at the time, Palestine. There was no Israel. You had to take the boat, which was very difficult, because Prague is right in the middle of Europe. There is no ocean.

There's no Czech navy.

No Czech navy, no nothing. But she managed somehow, through some others, to get the documents, and she survived the Hitler years in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. I don't know which town she survived. But she was there.

So when she came back to Prague looking for her family, there was no family except us, my sister, me. But she didn't like it, because she said exactly what we have found out later on, that it's too autocratic, too left wing-ish, and she thought there was no future for Czechoslovakia to survive again. So somehow, she had some friends in Australia. So she convinced my sister to go with her.

Incidentally, the husband of my aunt passed away, and he's buried on the mount. What is the name of the mountain in Israel? I forgot the name of the mountain.

But he's buried there.

Yeah, he's buried there. But she came back by herself, and she convinced my sister to go with her to Australia. Now my sister, she was very much into languages. So for her to speak English, French, Italian although she was born in Prague, she spoke all these languages. So for her to go to Australia was no problem. She spoke English.

So they went to Australia. But the trip to Australia by boat, that's a long distance. This is not around the corner. So when they arrived in Australia, I was in touch with them, or they were in touch with me. They help me to get to Australia. And the French--

From Paris.

Sorry?

From Paris.

From Paris. But from Paris, you had to go to Marseilles, and they shipped us there. It took 60 days.

Oh my goodness.

Well, that's how it was. So the 60 days, I got into Australia in January '49. I left July '48. I got into Austria January '49. So when I got to Australia, of course Georgine, we were married. She took the first plane, and she came to Australia, and we were living in Melbourne for a few years.

OK. At this point I want to find out, when did you become Frank Hyde? Was it--

Because Georgine was-- she had a passport in the name of Hyde.

Ah, so the--

So I didn't like to be someone else, so I don't-- the name-- at that time in Australia, to have a Czech name was-- they couldn't pronounce it and--

OK, so my point-- my question is, is did you get that passport when Walter Hyde provided you with the-- and

you chose Hyde as your name? Or did you change your name when--

No, I changed my name only after we got the passport in the-- if the passport would have been in the name of McDonald, I would be McDonald.

Excuse me, but what I don't understand is when you got that passport, while you were still in Prague or when you'd gone to Australia?

No, we got it in Prague. That's how Georgine got out. She got out as Georgine Hyde.

OK, so you chose--

I chose because of her name.

--because of the gentleman who provided them. At that point, you changed your names.

Not at that point, but eventually, yes.

Yes, OK.

And since she had the name Hyde--

Excuse me, but I don't understand, where is eventually? Is eventually when you got the passports in Prague or when you were in Australia?

No, I got that passport in Prague.

And it had your name, Frank Hyde, in it.

Well, I was still Frank Pekarek.

But she was Georgine Hyde.

But she was Georgine Hyde. So she got out as Georgine Hyde, and she was living in England as Georgine Hyde--

Ah.

--because she had a British passport.

And when you got out, you still were Pekarek.

Sure.

And then when you got to Melbourne is when you changed it.

I was still Pekarek, sure. I have to show you, if you want to come to my office-- I have a certificate that I passed an accounting test as Pekarek.

I see. OK.

So it was very difficult.

And then in Melbourne is when you changed your name.

Here. I changed the name here.

In the United States.

--United States, yes.

I see.

When we were living in Queens, I don't remember the name of the lawyer who did it. But my legal name here is Frank Pek-- Frank Pekarek-- Frank Hyde.

Got it.

I kept the P from Pekarek. It's not Peter. It's the P I kept for sentimental reasons for my father's sakes, shall I say.

OK.

So I'm Frank Hyde, and John, my son, of course, was born as John Hyde. Everything is back to John Hyde-- I mean, Frank Hyde, Georgine Hyde.

OK. So let's go back to Prague and the mid to late 1930s.

Sorry?

Let's go back to Prague. It's the mid to late 1930s, and you're in school.

Sure.

And it's a new country. It's not even 20 years old. What happens in the political atmosphere?

No, you see what happened-- when the situation is gradually changing in Czechoslovakia--

Before the Germans come in?

Before the Germans came. Well, that was-- I don't know how much history you know, but there were negotiations somehow, the influence of Hitler.

OK.

There was a story the other day in The Wall Street Journal, exactly what I'm telling you. If the Allied forces at that time would have done something to stop Hitler, that would not have happened. But they were not interested. Maybe the interest was somewhere else.

So he became too powerful. There was also a recession in that world. Was a recession here. We call it whatever they call it here.

Depression.

A depression, that's correct. So he promised jobs. And he promi-- he didn't say how, but what he did-- again, I'm talking about history. After World War I, the French and Germans were not always friends.

Excuse me, I'm going to interrupt. What I am interested to know is, did Hitler have an influence before he marched in the country, before he marched into Czechoslovakia and took it over? When you say, things changed gradually, was it such that internal life in Czechoslovakia changed for the Jews even before Hitler came? That's what--

Not really.

Not really.

Not to my knowledge, no.

OK.

No. What changed was, like I said, there were negotiations. He had certain demands. The border countries of that old Bohemia, which was somehow created by this government here to give the border, that was occupied by German minorities. But since the Constitution was like here, everybody was alike, and there was no anti-German feeling or anything like that.

But let's go back to that recession which we had. So when that was-- all over the world was a depression, and Hitler promised jobs. Now how did he deliver the job? Because, like I started to say, after World War I, the League of Nations, which was the forerunner of the United Nations, they told Germany, not Hitler-- there was Hindenburg, which was a president.

Right.

They told him, you cannot go to this area of Europe and in this area of Europe. It was called the Saar, S-A-A-R. And another place goes by-- which was something like, say, our Detroit with the factories of automobiles and all that stuff.

The Ruhrgebiet.

So he invaded those two places, and nobody stopped him. If they would have stopped him, maybe he wouldn't have been so powerful. But because they didn't stop him, maybe they didn't have the power to stop him.

Yeah.

He has grown. So there was no antisemitism in Prague or anything of that nature. Everybody was Czech, and on the contrary, if you didn't speak well Czech, you were-- somehow you were not liked, if I can say that word. And in that connection, I would also like to tell you, into my house where I was living, somebody moved in from Poland, what we used to call a Polish Jew.

His name was Edelstein. Well, the name tells you already, German, Jewish name. He became a leader of the Jewish population at that time, because somebody has to represent the Jews in connection to the Czech government and what followed, the German government. So he was appointed to be leader of the Jewish community.

Since he moved into the house where we were living, spoke poorly Czech, German was not liked, because we are now all of a sudden enemies with the German, my mother had his wife to go shopping and all that stuff. Now that played a role down the road why we stayed in Prague longer than other people who were already deported in camp, number one.

OK. Let's come to the point where-- I'll speed ahead a little bit. OK, if it is so that life didn't change in the late 1930s for you--

Not until 1937, 1938.

OK.

It was the same.

All right, what happened in 1937?

Well, the Czechs were forced to give up some of these border countries, so there was a resentment against

the West, because officially, Russia was-- "officially," they were not doing much, but officially, they were. So the negotiations were primarily between Germany, France. I can't even tell you the name of the prime minister of Germany who was negotiating at the time. He was a [NON-ENGLISH] was like a--

Mm-hmm. Yeah, he was an aristocrat.

Yeah, aristocrat. His name was Ribbentrop. Well, somehow the name came back to me. And on the Italian side was Count Ciano. And those people were pushing-- well, at the time, they were negotiating with Prime Minister Chamberlain.

Now naturally, in those days, when you gave your word, you were supposed to keep your word. So Hitler, through Chamberlain-- through Ribbentrop and Italian Ciano, Hitler promised the demand on the Czechs to give up those border counties is his last territorial demand. Chamberlain believed it, because in those days when you signed something, you were believing it. So he went back to-- Chamberlain went back to London where he came from and showed a piece of paper. And this piece of paper is a guarantee of peace in our lifetime.

Well, he didn't realize whom he was dealing with. But coming back to the Czechs, so there was a certain animosity, of course, because all of a sudden, instead of having the country like this, it was like--

Sliced.

Sliced and undefensible.

Right.

And the attitude towards German was all of a sudden, they were not our citizens. They were our enemies, because they wanted to join Germany, primarily because he promised jobs, which we couldn't deliver at the time. So now all the European continent really turned pro-German.

The Austrians, we want to be German. They were German speaking people, but they were so different from actually Germany that it was not thinkable. But he promised jobs, and he delivered the jobs, making his armed forces, making all these weapons what he developed.

But your life, it didn't change?

Sorry?

Your life and--

No not at that time, no. We were still playing soccer like everybody else. Religion didn't play any role, no. It really started much later when he came into Prague, which was in March 1939. Well--

Let's talk about that.

--Czechoslovakia ceased to exist.

Yes.

And they named it the Protectorate of Bohemia Moravia, had something like what we call a governor or something. And the Czechs were represented by a figurehead. Then it started to change, yes.

Tell us how.

Antisemitism to a certain extent, because they were always connected to-- the Jewish were looked at German speaking people rather than Czech speaking people. The names were German. So it started to deteriorate. To what extent? Not that much, but then started the transportations.

Well, how did-- my question is much more personal than that. It is, when did your life, your father's life, your mother's life-- how did things happen in the family? Hitler marches in, and by what point--

It's changed primarily because young Czech pe-- young Jewish people, we were forced to go on certain labor. We were-- single men. That's why we married. The single Jewish people, well, they were told to meet somewhere, and that's why-- something what I would call like Madison Square Garden. We don't have Madison Square--

What was the square?

--in Prague, but something like Madison--

What was the place?

We had to report, and we had to do certain work for the Germans.

Tell me-- excuse me, though. Do you remember the place you had to report to in Prague?

Well, it was-- no, I don't remember the name. But I have to tell you, before that started, when they marched in, March '39--

Correct.

--I was 18. I was working for a Jewish firm. The Jewish management was thrown out, and a German administrator was sent in. I was still working when he came in in his black uniform and red--

Arm band.

--swastika. And we were-- the location was just across from the Gestapo headquarter.

Ah--

But they didn't-- you didn't do anything, so it didn't bother you, but you saw the changes which gradually occurred. At home, I don't think I had seen so many changes. Maybe I didn't pay attention to it.

I was a young man. Before Hitler came, we still went to dance. And there was a resentment, but there was still freedom enough to go and enjoy. Don't forget, I was, what, 18 years. So what did 18 years do here? The same thing they do over there.

We went to dance. I remember the place where we used to go. It was called coffee shop, but not the type of a coffee shop what we call here a coffee shop. It was much more elaborate. It was more like a, I would say, really full blown restaurant with a dancing--

Place, yeah.

--little spot where you could dance, and the young people were dancing. We were dancing. But that gradually has changed--

Did your father lose his job?

Sorry?

Did your father lose his job?

No, I don't think he lost the job at that point. I think he retired. He was forced to retire. So he was home. My mother was always home. I don't know how they were making a living.



But I remember, the first salary which I got when I was working for that Jewish firm, naturally, my obligation was to bring it home. That was understood. It was never thought by me or by the parents that somehow I would take it and spend it somewhere.

That was ex-- that was anticipated and expected from me. Life was very different in those days. But this has changed. I lost that job because ultimately, he found out that I was Jewish or whatever. And it was, how could I work with somebody with a swastika, and all that stuff. So--

What was his manner, though?

--it became worse.

OK. The manner of that person who ended up taking over the firm with the swas-- was his manner arrogant? Was he--

No, no, but that was his mentality. But the life has changed. What has changed? The laws have changed.

So when you were playing that soccer, everybody-- there was no restriction, no nothing. But gradually, the non-Jewish population was put on such pressure not to socialize with Jews that all of a sudden, your friends were afraid to be your friends. So the relationship has ceased. Everything became a separate society.

The Jewish people were-- we had to wear Jewish stars. We had to be home at 8 o'clock. So there were certain restrictions which were put on the Jewish population, which became like what they call here salami tactic. It didn't happen overnight.

But it was-- the first thing, for example, what I remember, as a kid, I used to play the violin. Well, don't ask me what day, what year, but all of a sudden, we were supposed to submit all those musical instruments to a certain place. Well, but it's not that I didn't agree. You were afraid not to agree. So you did what you were doing, because the Catholic population, they could not help you because they were afraid themselves.

So the hostilities or the violence increased so that there was a distinct difference between the Jewish population and the non-Jewish population. And the very first transport, as I remember, a cousin of mine-- he was much older than I was, but that's not the issue. The only reason I'm saying it, because with his wife, somehow they had no children. She lost the child and she couldn't have more children or whatever.

They were one of the first ones to be deported to a Polish ghetto which was called Lodz, L-O-D-Z, the town in Poland. They survived there until a certain time when that was also liquidated and he wound up in Auschwitz. Lost his leg in Auschwitz and everything else, but they came back after the war, because so few people survived.

I was reasonably close to them at one point, even though the age was different. He was born 1900, and I was born 1931, so 30 years different. So when we came back, I was only 22, 24, and he was already close to 50.

Right.

So there was a difference. But eventually, they also left for Australia. Australia was very helpful.

OK. Let's go back, then, to life gradually changing, and there's the separation between the Jews and the non-Jews and a marginalization, from what I'm seeing. You're put on the margins of society where you're not allowed to do things that you were allowed to do before. When did-- let me go back even before that. Did you know Georgine by that time?

Yes.

How did you meet Georgine?

When we were kids, we were dancing in the same group of people.

So you were friends from childhood.

Sorry?

You were friends from childhood?

Well, not from childhood, but when she was maybe 14, 15, and I was four years older. Now what the Jewish people did, or at least our group did, there was somebody who, the father had a wholesale business. And the wholesale business was in a building which he owned in the old section of Prague, not far from where I was growing up. And we used to go to that house to dance. But remember, in those days, we're talking about zillion years back.

Not a zillion. [LAUGHS]

You had a gramophone, if you remember, and that had to be hooked up. And you put the disk on it, and that's the music we used to have.

Yeah.

If you remember "Pennies from Heaven."

Yeah.

Well, that was the thing which was in [INAUDIBLE]. But also at that time, why did it change? Because lots of Jewish people who spoke German, very little Czech, Czech nationals, they were living in those border countries.

So when those border countries had to be given back to Germany, because they gave back-- so naturally, they were Jewish, and we were Jewish. So somehow there were more of these girls who came back from these countries. So we were, all of a sudden, instead of six people, were, say, 12 people or 14 people.

And we used go to dance. I remember his name actually, but that's not important. We went to that house, and in those days, you had-- I think Georgine had it-- was an electric gramophone. So you didn't have to crank it up. You had to plug it in, and that was the music we used to dance to.

But this, gradually it changed. It was very difficult. It was dangerous to go and be found out that you do these things, which were--

Normal things.

--normal things, but they were not normal under those conditions. So it has changed. And then also, the deportations started. The deportation didn't start in Auschwitz. It started in the first ghetto, which they said will be a model ghetto.

What was it called?

Theresienstadt, Terezín in Czech.

Yeah.

Now Terezín was--

Excuse me, before that, when did the deport-- how did people find out that they're going to be deported? There's still a gap between when life stops being normal--

Well, for example, her parents, because they were wealthy, they had a house--

Uh-huh.

So number one, they had to move out of the house, and the house was given to some German family, a lieutenant or whatever he was. So it started gradually. It was not that there were mass transportation or deportations, no. But limited amount of people were sent to Terezín.

I want to-- excuse me-- interrupt and finish one thought before, which was you and Georgine were in the same group of friends, and you were dancing. How did your relationship develop? How did it develop that--

Well, that-- I don't think I remember how it developed. It was the same group of people who used to go to dance. Now how--

Yes, but at one point you're dancing, and then you married. What happened?

Well, no, no, it was-- [LAUGHS]

[LAUGHS] You know.

No. Used to go to dance, like I said. The marriage didn't happen that way.

How did it happen?

Marriage happened because all of a sudden, the edict came. Don't hold me to the numbers. 500 men, 5,000 men, we had to report to be deported when you were single. So everybody who had a girlfriend got married. We didn't get married because we thought we'd all have children in the United States.

[LAUGHS]

We got married because once you were married, you postponed the deportation. Now under those circumstances which existed at that time, everything in your life at the time was to delay the deportation, because you knew where you were, but you did not know what will come once you go. So you did anything to delay the deportation. So if you look at the calendar, you will remember that in 1941 when we got married, Pearl Harbor happened.

That's right.

So we thought, oh my gosh, now the United States will go to war. It will be over before we go.

Yeah.

So everything was done to delay that thing. Now since you were married all of a sudden, whether it was this girlfriend or vice versa from the girl's point of view, we got married. Now of course the circumstances were very, very different already.

Number one, we had to wear a Jewish star. Transportation, there was hardly any in place. Now the street cars which we had at that-- remember, we talk about 1939, 1940, so different now, no doubt.

But at the time, we had street cars. And the street cars, the engines was in the middle. So there was a front part and the rear part. So the Jewish people had, naturally, to be in the rear part.

Of course.

So when we got married, well we had to go to the rear part to-- I don't know where we went. No, I know where we went. Her sister married a non-Jew-- the life in Prague at that time, there was no difference between I told you Jews, non-Jews. People got married.

So her sister got married to a Czech person, not Jewish person. And they were living in a certain place. I can't remember the street anymore, but I remember where it was.

What's the neighborhood?

Sorry?

What was the neighborhood?

It was called Liben. L-I-B-E, and on the N was like a little something, Liben. And I don't know if it was her house or an apartment. I don't remember that, but I know it was supposed to-- that's where we had our, quote, "wedding" and celebration, if you want to call it.

But all this was in a very, very limited way, because the circumstances were not there to allow you to do something ostentatiously or something, no. But we got married in October 1941. And like I just told you, because so many young men were supposed to report, let's go to Madison Square Garden for work. Now, once you were married, you still reported, but you were not deported.

Now the deportation were already taking place. Now if I may inject something--

Sure.

--what I was doing when I, quote, "lost" my accounting job. You had to work. If you didn't work, you didn't get your stamps which you needed to buy food. So we had to work. So actually, you had no choice what you would like to do for work. You were told what to do.

Now you have to realize, then, some of these Jewish people, including her father, mother, when they were deported, they left behind this, let's say. So that had to be emptied, because the landlord wanted to rent it so he could rent it when all the stuff was there. So I was assigned to a unit which was emptying out sewing machines.

[HONKING]

My ear?

No.

Oh, that's over there.

It's a car outside.

The sewing machines in those days were heavy clunkers. I don't know if you'd remember them. They were big stuff, iron, not like now, plastic and you put it on your table. So mirrors, pictures, and sewing machines were taken out from those apartments, and they were stored in a large synagogue in a suburb of Prague. I was in that unit which was doing this--

Work.

--work. Now since we had pictures from the Jewish family, at that time, if you remember-- maybe you don't remember because of your age-- west Europe was already under the attack by British, maybe American planes. So some of these planes hit German households.

So the German government gave these bombed out families something what we have here, what we call food stamps. Now they were not having food stamps, but they had stamps to buy certain things to re-establish them in Prague or wherever they were living. Now naturally, I'm talking about Prague because that's where I was active.

So when they came and they had these stamps, coupons, or whatever it was, that they could buy two paintings. Now naturally, they didn't pay for it. They gave you the stamps in return. But there was no gallery, like really in a gallery. There was a pile of paintings, and it was segregated between certain items of paintings, animals, or flowers, or whatever. In German they call it stilleben.

Stilleben, yeah.

So I remember that when these people came in, they wanted to have a stilleben for the dining room. So I had to hold it, because they wanted to look at it. So when I was holding it, that's how you hold [? it. ?] Why do I mention it?

So when we got married in October 1941-- and I was still working for that Jewish organization assembling the sewing machine, pictures, and all that stuff. So when we had to report to, quote, "Madison Square Garden," there was naturally an SS guy who directed people, the traffic, where you had to check in, where you had to go. Somehow he remembered that he was buying-- "buying"-- a painting which I was holding.

So he called me out from the deportation, and he say, you stay here. So naturally, when-- remember, I spoke perfectly German. I had German schools, and then you improve it because everything was German. So I was telling him that I have also a wife here. So somehow we found where Georgine was, and they'll delay. Again, everything was always delay, delay, delay.

What about your parents? Where they--

My parents, they-- that was a different--

We'll come to that.

I'll tell you. So we were delayed, not by a long time, no, but it was a delay, a week or something, whatever. You talk about my parents. My sister worked for the Jewish government, the government, which was connected to the German government.

Don't forget, the Germans didn't do any orders. They gave the orders through the Jewish government. So there was a Jewish police, there was a Jewish this, everything-- not everything, of course, but within circumstances. So my sister was working for that Jewish organization, call it the Jewish government. And that was primarily because, if you remember, I told you that person who came into our house where we are living, so he knew my mother. He knew my sister.

This Edelstein.

Edelstein. So he was delaying their deportation. So they stayed [? vested ?] in Prague much longer than I and Georgine or her parents.

Got it.

How long? That I can't tell you, how long. But eventually, they also came to Theresienstadt, just like my sister. But my sister, from the job in Prague, she had the same job in Theresienstadt, because she was working for the Jewish government.

What was the job?

Office.

Office work.

Don't forget, they had statistics. They knew how many people they killed. I tell you, they knew exactly how they killed.

They had system, and if you read back the papers what I have here-- I will have to look for it to show it to you. They knew my transportation number when I was, well, with Georgine when we left Prague for Theresienstadt. The transport had a name. The transport had a number. We had a number. I don't remember the number, of course, but I have papers here to show you.

So my parents were actually deported later. They perished, of course, just like everybody perished. But they later-- they lived a little longer, let's say, before they got into Auschwitz. And Auschwitz was, of course, the end of it. Because when you were in Auschwitz and you came with the train, and in front of you stood that doctor, whatever his name was, and he decided whether you go this way or that way, naturally.

Now you have to realize, I like to tell you, we know now when we say the word Auschwitz. We know what it is. But you have to go back to 1941, when we got married, to '42. So when we were living in Theresienstadt, our clothes. We didn't have any prisoner clothes. It was horrible. But it was a paradise compared to what happened.

Why do I say it? Because Theresienstadt is an old town named after Queen Theresienstadt or whatever she was--

Theresa. Mm-hmm.

And naturally, those were barracks for the Czech armed forces. Now there was not that much space, not that many beds or anything. So they constructed bunks, three on top of each other. So there was a terrible shortage of space.

When you went to the bathroom, you had to have your container for soap. You went there. It was not a bathroom in a sense like you go here. So it was very difficult. The crowds, you had to wait in line to get your food. So when you come from a normal atmosphere like here-- and I don't mean my house, per se--

Yeah, yeah.

And then all of a sudden, you have a regimented life. You have to be there at 7 o'clock or 9 o'clock or whatever. And then you slept three on top of each other. Which one are you going to go, on top, in the middle, or down below? So there were arguments among people, Jewish people.

But don't forget there were not only Jewish people. They were also Jewish people from some other places, because it was supposed to be a model ghetto, and Hitler was winning the war all over. So it became extremely crowded.

Now in that Theresienstadt, the first x months-- I can't tell you how many months. But I was assigned to distribute coal, because I was working in a coal firm, so I was assigned to a coal job. What was the job? Well, all these people who were living in these places, they were assigned boxes with two handles here, two handles over there and that you had to fill this up with coal, and they took it in wherever they were staying. The houses were conver-- houses-- they--

Barracks.

Not houses like-- shacks. But that was converted so that some people could have lived there, either mostly men or mostly women. And they needed heat, so they were getting the coal. So at one point-- when the coal normally was sold or delivered, there used to be a little hut with a scale outside. So because of my coal connections, I was given the use of that thing. So Georgine moved back in with me in that--

Hut.

--hut, the coal-- in the public scale--

So you had your own private place in the hut.

I had my private scale. [LAUGHS] But like I say, it was awful. But it was wonderful to what has happened. So in September--

Hang on, before we get there--

Sure, sure.

Because there's some gaps here. The last we knew is that the SS officer pulls you out of line, and you have a delay.

Couple days more.

Ah, it was a couple of days.

Oh, yes.

It wasn't like a month or two months or something like that.

A couple of days. I had to re-appeal, whatever you want to call it, yeah.

Oh, I see. And so no--

And then we went, naturally, to Theresienstadt.

I understand. But here's-- you don't remember that gathering place that you call Madison Square Garden. Do you remember the name of where you were told to go?

No. I would lie if I tell you I remember. No, no. [? Velatric, ?] but I don't know what-- well, [? Velatric ?] means like--

Was [? Velatrisnic-- ?]

[? Velatric ?] means-- a huge-- we have something in New York City, Javits--

Center.

Something like this. It was, of course, much smaller. Everything was smaller than here.

But it was called [? Velatric? ?]

[? Velatric. ?] [? Velatric ?] is a name like you would say--

I know. It's a place, however.

Yeah. Yeah.

All right.

Yeah.

And was it near the train station? Was it near--

I would not know.

You would not know.

I would not know.

OK.

But from there, there must have been somewhere close with train station, because we got deported by train.

OK.

No, I don't remember very well. Certain things disappear from your memory.

That's OK.

Don't forget that what you're talking about happened 70 odd years ago.

I know. I know. I know. It's amazing what you're able to tell us from--

Well, I remember these things like if it had happened yesterday, yes.

Yeah.

Certain things.

Certain things.

And certain things you don't remember.

So here's another question, before we go back to Theresienstadt. Life changed after Hitler marched in.

Yes.

And that was in March 1939.

That's correct.

And then the war starts September '39.

Well, that was because Hitler didn't keep his word that the Czech territory was his last territorial demand. He had a demand on Poland, and he marched into Poland on September 1, 1939.

My question, did life change even more when there was an actual war?

Of course. Of course.

How?

Well, again, we had to be home by 8 o'clock. You couldn't go out. You couldn't do this.

So it was like a--

--restrictions. Musical instruments we had to give up, the star and-- that all happened.

But is that because of the war? Or is that--

That happened between them marching in. When they marched in, nothing happened. You were living like you were living before. But slice.

Slice.



Slice this, then-- look, we used to go to play cards with that friend of mine who was, of course, Catholic. He was my-- playing soccer, I was the right wing. He was playing next to me, whatever we used to call it. So we were friends. So we used to go-- they were living very close to where I was living, and we're talking about Prague.

Yeah.

So in the evening-- whatever, during the day, he was working. I was working. So during the evening, we went to see in his home, such an old house, I remember like today, and we were playing cards. In the evening, there was no television, of course, in those days, so we played cards.

The mother divorced, his mother. And she was dating somebody who was German, but he was very-- not every German was a Nazi at that point.

Of course.

But that deteriorated. Then it came that we could not stay longer than 8 o'clock. We had to be home. So we had to go from his house to my house to go home, because we didn't like to take a chance if somebody would catch you on the street. So it gradually became worse and worse and worse. And then all of a sudden, you couldn't see him anymore because he was afraid if he was-- if somebody will see him with a Jew that he will have a problem.

Yeah.

But talking about the German language and all that, Auschwitz-- and I was comparing it to that here, 9/11, when we had that World Trade Center coming down. I know where I was. I'm sure you know where you were.

Yeah.

And I saw the first plane hitting that thing. Well, at that time, my assumption was that the guy lost his bearing or something happened to the plane, and he hit the building. So the same was with Auschwitz, when you don't know and you are confronted with these unknown things, what happened.

So coming back to Theresienstadt, we got there in March '43. And from March '43 to September '44, everything was Theresienstadt, OK.

Ah, so you actually were in Prague until March '43.

Yes.

Living under--

My name, Prague-- Pekarek. And I was working for the Jewish government, removing--

Stuff from--

But it didn't happen right away. I was still working under the German guy.

Yeah.

And then when I lost that job, if you want to call it, then they assigned me to this thing, and then I was assembling the sewing machines, paintings, mirrors.

Things like that.

And then in March '43, well, we had to go.

OK. OK. So in Theresienstadt, you're there from March--

March '43 to September '44. What happened September '44? September 28 is a Czech holiday. So we were told that we have to build a new camp, always the new camp. I can't-- what I don't know, I'll tell you. I don't remember if it was 500 or 5,000, or anything in between, men.

So we were assembled, and we had to go to these open boxcars which were full of coal that had to be taken out, the coal, and we had to go in. And then they took off March-- September 28, eastward. Now we knew that the American Ally soldiers were coming westward, but they didn't get far enough for us to get out, whatever.

So when the train was full of people, open boxcars, well, you know what people do. People have to go to the bathroom. There was no food.

I have to interject here something, because my friend out on Long Island, he always says, well, what about food? And I always tell him, Fernando, there were no dining cars. [LAUGHS] But there's something else.

So after we were traveling east, northeast, there was somebody-- I remember it like today-- in a stripe-- remember, Theresienstadt, we had our clothes. So that was also where you put it and all that stuff. So there was always a shortage of space, and you intermingled stuff. It was a source of trouble.

But when we were traveling east, there was a guy in a striped uniform. And veered out of those boxcars, where are you from? Because we wanted to know, what camp is he from. And he said Auschwitz. But that didn't-- that's like if you will say something. Didn't mean a thing.

Well, we continued traveling for, I don't know how many days and finally got into something which was called Auschwitz. But again, the Germans, what they did, they tried to intimidate you right from the first moment you entered this whole area. The train didn't-- it stopped, yes, but not that everybody had to get out of the train. It took, I think, two days before they finally sent everybody out of those boxcars to get out.

And the train was going around, around. And you had no idea, because there were no signs. You didn't know how come that you go around. Nobody was there to tell you anything, of course.

So finally when we came to a stop, which was, I would say, a couple of days after, October 1, 2-- I don't know for sure. Well we had to get out, orders in German. And we were together, her father, the two uncles, the two doctors, and also some other relatives from her mother's side.

Were you tog-- was Georgine with you?

No, no, no, no.

Her father. Was only men.

OK.

So well, we had to get out, and then you were confronted by that top German guy who was, call it, welcoming you or whatever. And my father-in-law, he was saying that-- he was not old, but in his mind he was old. He was only 50 years. Exactly 50 years. But he lost his house. He lost his business and everything else, so he felt he's old.

So he was telling him in German that he's an old man, so he had to go this way. Well, the two brothers, the doctors, me, and some, went this way. Well, once you are split, you try to find out what happened to the people who are the other way.

Well, they told you, here is gas chambers, crematoriums, and the only way out of here is through the chimney. So you find out what happened to him, and well, then we were in Auschwitz. First the shoes had to

be disinfected, so they put it into water. Well, this was intimidation.

So now you had your shoes wet, icy cold. Auschwitz is in a very cold area of southern Poland. Standing in those freezing temperatures, wet shoes, no clothes, no nothing. They give you pants. But those pants were like his pants were ill-fit-- I don't mean your pants what you have on. But for me, it would be obviously-- you know.

Yeah.

But then you were assigned to a barrack. Those were stables for the Polish armed forces for horses. Don't forget, at the time, it's still horses. So if you had a heavy equipment, the horses had to pull it, not a car. Gasoline was very difficult.

So the stables, they had cement floors, of course, and there were contraptions for the horses. What contraptions? The size was just about like at the table, not high. I don't mean the size. And that was on the floor, and the edges were a little higher.

Mm-hmm.

So think of this on the floor, but the end was a little higher. Why was the end higher? Because the people had to put oats into that contraption so the oats were not all over. The horses ate the oats or whatever as they were eating.

Now for us, the height was good because we put our head on it. There were no beds like in Theresienstadt. We had be-- we had beds-- we had bunks. But there was still--

Still a a space--

A regular-- you know. So that was that stuff on the floor, cold as it was. It was awful, awful. So--

When did you find out--

--uncles of Georgine, doctor, he said, you cannot stay here. But that's easier said than done.

(LAUGHING) Yeah.

Naturally. So he came up with this story that if it's do nothing, they will not survive, because the cold weather, the food, no food, nothing. So he said that the best would be for us to say that we are locksmiths. And I always say that's the only lie I lied in my life, because I said I'm a locksmith. So but he figured that if he said we would be locksmiths that they would send us into some kind of a factory, and it would be inside rather than somewhere outside digging roads or something.

Right.

Well, he was right. They were always counting, how many are there alive and all that stuff in Auschwitz.

When did-- again, I'll go back a little bit. In Theresienstadt, what was the mortality like? Were there a lot of people who--

I don't know.

I mean, did you see people die--

Of course, old people. They used to call them [GERMAN]. Of course, the old people were dying, but they were buried. Sure.

I see.

And I think they started with Auschwitz from Theresienstadt because I think really the Germans were concerned that maybe some disease or some uprising might happen of the multitude of people. Now, of course, they had their weapons. We had nothing, of course. But they would have to shoot.

Yeah.

All that blood and all the mess which would probably happen. So they started with the deportation out of Theresienstadt. I think that was the main reason, apart from getting rid of the Jewish population.

And you didn't know where Georgine was.

Sorry?

At that time, you--

No. No, no. We left Georgine and her mother behind. They followed, because the excuse was, we want to follow your husbands, your brothers. You can go tomorrow. So three days later, she went with her mother the same way. Of course she never saw the mother again, because again, the age. But Georgine was shipped to a Russian camp from Auschwitz.

Where was she shipped?

It was called Gross-Rosen.

Ah, to Gross-Rosen, OK. Mm-hmm.

That's where she stayed until the end of the war. But she was always sick. Women are very different, in case you don't know. The women bodies are very different body than a man's body. So she came back. She was sick from day one.

Of course she came back to Prague where I was. First thing, hospital. She had to be put back into a normal stage, which she wasn't.

So--

But Auschwitz, then with that-- locksmiths.

Yeah, locksmiths.

And remember my name was Pekarek.

Yeah.

So at one time, we had to again assemble to go-- there was no travel agent. They thought you have to get out of the thing, and you were standing there, and then they told you will be transported someplace. So they called their names.

Now lots of people changed their names, not legally. Why? Because they were afraid in case they would be punished or beaten up or whatever that it might have ramification to their family somewhere else. So lots of young men changed their name from A to B or B to C. I didn't change mine. I was still Pekarek.

And but the transportation, the first transportation, stopped at K. And because I was Pekarek-- they were F, Feldmans. They left, and I stayed behind, because there were only so many empty on the train to go wherever.

So we met only after the war with those people again. They survived and I survived, as the locksmiths, but

not in the same place. Reasonably, you would say, I was in [? Muncie ?] and they were in Warnau or something like that. Of course, you couldn't travel freely. That was out of question.

But I stayed behind, unfortunately. And because I stayed behind, you always have to do something, what they told you to do. So for maybe about a month or six weeks or so, I had to-- I was assigned to a group which was taking out the dead bodies from the gas chambers, which had to be taken to the crematorium. You didn't like to leave the bodies in the gas chambers. You had to go to the crematorium and burn them, and then the ashes was nothing.

So the transportation took place on a-- I don't know how you would call it. It had two wheels on each side, and a piece of wood was like this. We were not so strong. I can't tell you how many we had to push always to get to the gas chambers, take the bodies out, put them on that stretcher to go and transport them to the crematorium. Well, that went on for some time, I would say maybe about a couple of-- maybe about a month or so.

Wasn't it a shock?

Well, sweetheart, that was life at that time. Then it finished, and the transportation then again was through that arrivals as a locksmith. If you have a huge map of Germany, you probably would've found the town on the map. It was called Meuselwitz, very close to where Uncle Bert was with his brother, but not in Meuselwitz. It was a very different place. And you were working there from 6:00 to 6:00.

And what did you do there?

What I did after that?

No, no, no, in--

What I was doing, it was a huge machine, and we were producing casings for the German navy. You had a machine you put-- remember, I was a locksmith. So you pressed it. That thing was about this big, not that--

Yeah.

Maybe bigger but narrower. And you had a bucket and that you had to fill up the bucket. I can't tell you how many buckets a day or whatever, from 6:00 to 6:00. Well, then you went back to where you were supposed to be housed, but it was a temporary shelter, really. Was no bed. Was just one thing big from there to here.

And you just came. You slept here, and tomorrow you slept there, boys, of c-- or men only. And in the morning you did the same thing, 6:00 to 6:00.

Now I have to tell you how I got out, because really, that was what people always say. Well, who liberated you? And I have to say, I was not liberated in that sense. Remember, what I was telling you is the truth. The only not truth is locksmiths. So we came back or whatever. It was April 7.

You came back to where?

To where we were sleeping.

Ah, so at Meuselwitz. You're still--

From the factory, they took us back to where we were sleeping.

OK.

But instead of sleeping, we had to empty a tray of briquettes. You know what briquettes are? Briquettes are about this big. So we had to empty that train from the briquettes. Well, then when the train was empty from the briquettes, they chased us in.

So again, you are in a train. Like my friend always-- what about food? Well, what about food? First of all, we were already dehydrated. The body was not like you sitting here or me sitting here. I don't know how many pounds we had, but the food was not really the item which bothered you, so to speak.

So they chased us back into the train. And the train took off east. Just like from Theresienstadt east, this one from Meuselwitz, Germany east, away from those upcoming American soldiers.

One point here I just want to establish. So if I understand properly, you were in Auschwitz for about two months or so?

No, I was there longer than that. I got in Auschwitz in September 28. So we got there like, I would say, October 1 and out of Auschwitz somewhere around Christmas time.

OK, OK.

So I would say about three months.

Three months.

And then from Christmas to the, quote, "liberation," what I'm trying to tell you, in Meuselwitz.

In Meuselwitz, OK.

Now, the Meuselwitz didn't have any accommodation, like I just said. It was-- you know why? Because the German people, they were already all either on the east front or west front. And they needed the manpower, so they were interested in producing. Anyway, so when the order came to get inside those boxcars east-- but you have to realize that was not Germany of the 1940s. That was Germany of a defeated country.

The railroads were ripped up from the bombing of United States. So the transportation wasn't like that you hop in here and you wind up there. No. It was very difficult. Not for us. I mean, we were just prisoners, and they had to do whatever they were told, but it was not so easy for them either.

So we've been traveling for two days eastward. Then we came to a place in Germany, or maybe western Poland or something. Next to us was a train with German soldiers. They were heading west. We were heading east.

It's like that, OK. I was like this. We were on this side. So my particular boxcar, we were told to get out of the boxcar so that they could count how many are still in the boxcar leaving, because some people are die out of hydration, age, malnutrition, sickness. So they are always counting.

So while we were standing alongside our railroad car, next to us was a German car, right-- I mean, train. British bombers came by, and they started to dive and started to shoot. Now you know when you're up there and you started to shoot, you don't shoot like this. You shoot like this, so that you kill as many opponents you can kill.

So there was a panic at that moment. We were out of the car. So we were-- quote, we were, if you want to call it free. That's not the right word, but no supervision at that moment.

So there was a hill, and I always call it the same like here. You have a hill behind you, and you had to run up the hill, because you wanted to get away from the shooting. So we were-- remember, I was-- 1945, I was, what, 24 years. So you had a different stamina to run than you would have now when I'm 91.

So we were running up. When I say we, there was always somebody who was closer to you. I remember one guy, his name, but I don't remember the other two who were running, Czechs, with us. So we got up on top of the hill. Now we were realizing that we didn't have any German guard watching us, right. We were free, free without any passport, without any papers, striped uniform. So free is a different thing for free.

And the train, which I told you the British bombers started to bomb-- eventually they hit the train. So there was a tremendous commotion. But we wound up on the top of the hill. So now what are we going to do? Are we going to stay here, get organized, or go back or whatever?

So we decided, four of us, cold as it was, that we would stay overnight, and then we will think what we will do the next day. So we decided one day to stay up on the hill, and maybe two nights. I don't remember for sure anymore.

But we decided to go back, because we thought, we have no papers. We have nothing. Where are we going to go? Not that we had anywhere to go down there, but at least we were not fugitives from where we were.

So we went down the hill. And as it were coming down the hill, believe it or not, our train took off. So we really lost the train. We were prisoners who were still there. We're talking only about one car, which was where we were. The rest was [INAUDIBLE].

So we left the train. So when we saw the train moving, we ducked a little to be sure that they don't start shooting, and they left. And we went back to the hill. So we were on that hill. My friend, Fernando, what about the food? I said, Fernando, there was no food. There was no service, (LAUGHING) that's for sure. But anyhow, we went back to the hill, and we stayed there another two days--

No food--

--thinking where to go, how to go, what excuse.

Yeah.

The roads were all occupied by what we have here, National Guard or whatever we call it here.

Yeah.

So we knew once we get down, that we will be confronted. The only thing, we spoke very well German, and we came up with a story that we will say we were Czech workers on the train apart from prisoners from Auschwitz. So we were different. We thought we are different from--

Those.

And that our papers-- in that commotion, we lost our stuff which we had, and that would have shown that we are Czech workers. So finally, we decided we take a chance. We have to do it, because we cannot live indefinitely on top of the hill.

So we went down. Sure enough-- distance, like you would say, to maybe further down, maybe that square. Sure enough, there was a station with soldiers, with three, four soldiers with guns. So we put our hands up right away so they don't start shooting.

And as we approached them, we told them exactly what I'm telling you, that we were Czech workers on work in Germany in that factory where we were and that our clothes was damaged in that attack. And that's what we say. This is what we have on.

Well, we have to put you into jail, and you have to see the magistrate the next day. So we were now in a regular jail. Well, if you ever were in a jail-- I hope not-- [LAUGHS] nicer where we were. But it was the first time a regular jail.

There was discarded clothes. So what we did, we took-- instead of our prison clothes, we took the discarded clothes, which was left there by whoever. So when we saw the magistrate the next morning, we had ill-fitted clothes, but it was not--

Stripe.

--stripe. And the story was that we are Czech workers, that we were-- of course, we spoke German-- and that we were caught on the train which was bombed by the British, and we were trying to get somewhere out of where we were.

Now the most unexpected thing happened. The magistrate said that you suffered enough. You are free to go wherever you want to go.

So he didn't believe your story.

Well, he let us go. So we were free. So then coming back to Prague--

Well, did you I then a paper or a stamp--

We had nothing.

So you could have been stopped the next town over.

Yeah. Well, we were not stopped. The situation was like here after 9/11. It was not so rigid anymore.

It was chaotic.

It was [INAUDIBLE].

Yeah.

Now I would like to also tell you at this point that the cars which existed which were allowed to travel didn't use gasoline. What they did-- the Germans are very inventive. The cars which were allowed to take what I'm telling you, they had to cut out the passenger seat. The driver was the driver, but the passenger seat was taken out, and they put in something like you would say, a contraption with wooden chips. And the wooden chips had to be put on fire, and they produce a little bit of a steam, and the steam produced the car to go.

So when we tried to get to Prague-- hi-- not hijacking. [INAUDIBLE]-- how you call it here when you--

Hitchhiking.

Hitchhiking. So we tried to get to Prague hitchhiking, because we have, of course, no money, no paper, no nothing, four of us. So a truck, which was something I remember like today, like a pickup truck, he stopped. Where do you want to go? Of course we said Prague.

And he said he goes to Prague, too, but his truck-- where we were, it was a very hilly country. So he said, most likely, the truck will not make it. You will have to get out and have to push the thing to get over the--

Hill.

So it took several days to get back to Prague, because he had only that thing on the side producing the steam. But we got to Prague April 20, Hitler's birthday. And they were still celebrating it. [LAUGHS]

[LAUGHS]

This is [INAUDIBLE].

My god.

It's the truth.

April 20.



Well, her sister was in place where we thought we will meet. So since we didn't eat anything since that left, April 7, April 20, 13 days.

You hadn't eaten anything for 13 days?

Who should have to feed us? So she gave us, I remember like today, tea. Well, I said, as me, we have been somewhere else. And shower, bathroom, because we had lice, if you know what lice does. They grow all over you. So naturally, she was afraid that we bring the lice into her home. So first was the bathroom. Stay in there god knows how many hours to kill the lice, and then a cup of tea.

But you couldn't get out of that house because we didn't have any papers. So we were afraid if we get-- well, I was afraid, if we get out, that somebody could stop us. And then what? Don't forget the hair, the hair. But during the camp, they shorn it, so people knew that you are from somewhere else.

So we stayed inside until May 5. And the, quote, "famous" Czech revolution started May 5. And in May 9, it was horrible, because people take vendettas. Because you did this to my family, I did this to you. Was very bad, very bad.

What did you see? Or what did you hear about?

People found out where the Germans were hiding and they killed them, of course. But if they would have killed them with one shot, it's one thing, but that was not the case. It was awful. Those are the unfortunate results of war. The people who depress people, that comes out.

But then April-- May 9, it stopped. The nation came back to order. There was police, real police. So gradually, things came to order. And I have to again see the French, they were having all kinds of ways to reunite families. Don't forget--

They came to Prague?

--where Georgine-- Did you know where she was? Of course not. But they had, like we have here-- not here in New York city, stands where you could have bought newspapers. So those places, they hung up signs that you're looking for somebody last seen in this camp in September or something, that he should report to this and this address and stuff like that.

So it took a little while to get it back into order, but those who survived, well, they had some arrangements, like I told you about these two doctors. They all were supposed to meet in her sister's house. And they did, one at a time. Well, once they came back, and then, who survived? Who didn't survive?

Wow.

Well, there's not much else I can add to it.

Well, there are more questions, but--

Somehow-- I don't know how I got the apartment, that it was given to me, whether I could occupy it without a lease or whatever. I don't remember. I had an apartment in the old section of Prague, new building, no elevator. But it was on the second floor. I don't remember whether I-- I don't know how I maintained it. I didn't have any money.

But eventually, I got a job. The one Jewish firm, one of them came back, naturally demanded his firm to be getting back. And eventually, I started to work for him.

This is--

Sweetheart, that's just about it.

Well--

Anything else what you want to know, I'll gladly tell you the dates, the details.

There's a lot I want to know. Maybe we-- I don't know what time it is now. Let me take a look. Maybe we break for lunch or have a little bit of a break, and then we'll continue--

Well, I have to tell Georgine-- not Georgine but Tammy and Elise.

Yeah. And then--

What time is it?

1 o'clock.

Oh, really?

Yeah.

Today's Saturday, right?

That's right.

Let me find out where they are.

OK. Hang on. Let me go, because you still have a mic on you.