

We are rolling.

OK. So this is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Eugene Chmielowski, or Eugeniusz Chmielowski, on January 31st, 2015 in Chicago, Illinois. Thank you very, very much Mr. Chmielowski for agreeing to meet with us today, and share some of your experiences.

I'm going to start our interview by talking an awful lot about pre-war life to get a sense of what the world was that you were born into, who are the people, and what were the forces that helped shape you before we come to the war years. So we'll start at the very beginning. Could you tell me what was the date of your birth?

March 5, 1929.

And where were you born?

In Lublin, Poland.

And what was your name at birth? Same as it is now-- Eugenius.

Do you have a middle name?

Alfred--

Alfred Chmielowski.

--the middle is.

What was your father's name?

Adam.

And your mother's?

Sophia.

And her maiden name?

Dopkiewicz.

Dopkiewicz.

[CHIME]

Did you have brothers and sisters?

I had a sister.

Is she older or younger than you?

She was older by 16 years.

16?

Yes.

Wow, that's a long time. So what was her name?

Lillian.

So she was born in 1913?

Something like this.

So your father, do you recall when he was born-- what year he might have been born?

1898.

No, if your sister was born in 1913, your father must have been a little older.

I looked at the documents, and it was 1889.

1889?

'89, yes.

So it was 1889-- that would make sense then. So he was about 23, 24 when your sister was born?

Yeah.

And your mother, do you know when she was born?

In 1892.

So you-- I mean, they were quite-- not elderly, but they were older when they had you.

Yes.

Tell me about what your father's profession was? My father was the officer in the Polish Army, and he retired real early at the age of 47, because at that time, they wanted more younger people in the army. And he was a graduate of the so-called Russian West Point with the number one location.

And so he was-- he retired. And I had a great time with him-- is to walk in the park every Sunday in Kovel where I used to live before I was deported. And he was always teaching Jewish universities something like ROTC.

At a Jewish university?

Yeah.

Really?

There was a Jewish university.

What was it called?

Pardon?

Do you remember what it was called?

Not the name itself.

So you say you were born in Lublin.

Yeah.

Did you live-- did you spend your childhood there?

Probably-- maybe-- if I remember, in 1935, I was still in Krasnik, which was by Lublin. I was born in Lublin, obviously, in a hospital, but we lived in Krasnik where my father was some kind of official for the Polish army or so-- Krasnik. So in '35, we were still in Krasnik, so probably from '36, we moved to Kovel.

And is that far from Lublin?

Oh, probably a couple hundred miles.

So within-- was it still in the same part of the country?

Yes.

And what was Kovel? Was that a village or a town?

No, that was a town.

Of about how many people? Do you know?

Offhand, probably 100,000-- maybe-- but that I'm not sure of.

Did your sister play a role in your growing up, or had she moved out of the house when you were born?

When she graduated from high school, she moved to Warsaw. So she was studying there, so I had a very brief relationship with her. And of course, with the age difference, so little brother.

[LAUGHS]

Well, in some ways then, did you grow up as an only child?

Yes, I did.

Did your father talk about his military experiences as a young man to you? Did he tell you about what his early military career was like?

Yes, he was talking that-- he was a-- got first lieutenant when he graduated from that-- I call it Russian West Point. And then when Bolsheviks took over, they escaped to Russia-- escaped to Poland, and his parents lived there. Also he had a brother, so he lived in Kovel, but he was a doctor, so Russians didn't bother him.

I want to go back to the time-- the Russian West Point, was that within the tsarist empire?

Yes.

Was it outside of Poland?

Kiev-- it was in Kiev.

So he was at first inducted-- or-- into the imperial tsarist army?

Yes.

And did he fight in that army?

I don't believe that he fought in that army, because he joined the Polish Underground and so on.

During World War I?

Yeah, correct.

And your mother, was she from Lublin as well?

My mother, I don't know exactly where she was born, but probably around Zhytomyr or Kiev, in that area. And she was a registered nurse. And of course, during the-- in Poland, she didn't work because my father was an officer-- made very good salary.

As a matter of fact, we had a full-time servant, and he had-- and we had a part-time servant, and he had orderly. Later, it was discontinued orderly, but at one time, each officer had--

Had an orderly?

--yeah, that's right.

How do you say orderly in Polish?

Ordynans.

Because another interview that I had this week, somebody was talking about an ordynans, and they couldn't think the word in English, and I didn't know what it was, and now I know. Thank you.

[LAUGHS]

So to go back, your mother was born in the territory of today's Ukraine if it was Zhytomyr or Kiev. And your father as well?

Yeah, that's right.

So they all came from the east then?

Vinnytsia or something like that. As a matter of fact, his parents probably were deported by Stalin, because a lot of people from that area of Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Kiev were deported.

You mean before World War II?

Yes, in '30s. In early '30s, they were.

Did he have any communication with his family, because you were in Poland--

Not really. The only communication-- he was writing the Polish consulate, and asking about some of his papers. But I didn't see any postcards from his parents. So of course, when Bolsheviks took it over, if you were sending letters, they probably threw it in round file, a circle file.

So did he talk much about his underground activities during World War I?

Well, he wasn't the bragging type. He just mentioned here and there he took part in a fight against the Bolsheviks in 1920 when Poland defeated them. And--

So he was part of that battle.

Yeah. And he really-- important-- somehow, government didn't like people who got education in tsarist Russia. They rather lean toward the people who were in Austria or Prussia.

Why?

And he was he was a graduate of the--

Russian West Point?

--yes, the number one--

Certificate?

--yes. Well, like in many politics, they didn't like to-- those people were too smart.

[LAUGHS]

Yeah, that's true. Do you know the name of this military academy that was in Russia?

Not really. Probably Kiev military academy or something. I probably could dig out from some of the papers that I have here. Because at one time, I was thinking about getting a lawyer and trying to, because my grandparents had a-- big landowners that were around Vinnytsia. And one of the guys from Siberian society, he went to Ukraine about 5, 10 years ago, and they paid him for his house which he had over there, except he couldn't take money from Ukraine, so we had to live it to his aunt or something.

So you're thinking about reparations about--

As you know, it's getting late. I'm 85 now. Another month, I'll be 86.

Well, congratulations. Happy birthday.

[LAUGHS]

So your grandparents were landowners?

Yes.

And they had two sons, your father and his brother?

Yes.

And so did both of them finish higher education? Well, the one was the doctor, so evidently, he did.

And he got to finish it in Russia.

And did they have girls? I'm sorry, I interrupted you. Were there only two boys, or were there more children in that family? Not that I'm aware of, because I haven't discussed it with my father.

But I know for sure that him and his brother, because he lived in the same town. And when the Russians came, he didn't visit us for obvious reasons.

Of course. Tell me a little bit about your mother's family. Were they also landowners? I don't know too much about my mother's family.

But evidently, they were well-to-do, because she graduated as a registered nurse. At the time, it was at the university at that level. So if they could afford to send her for higher education, evidently, they were doing OK.

And was her family also in this Vinnytsia/Kiev area?

Evidently so, because when my father and they met-- so that they had to be someplace in the area.

Which, to me, suggests that-- did you know any of her family members? It sounds like you wouldn't have had the chance to do so.

No, there was an elderly woman that used to live with us. She was a part of my mother's family, but I don't know what was her relationship to my grandparents there. But she lived with us. She was about 95 when she died.

I see. But this is also unusual for the people that I've talked to, that so much of your parents, families were on the other side of the border, and that that border was closed during the 1920s and 1930s. Most people had their families around them-- the larger families.

Before World War II, did you visit with your doctor-uncle much? Did you see each other often?

Oh yes, he used to come over to our house, we used to go to their house. And by the way, we were doing much better than he did as a doctor.

Well, if your father was a high ranking officer, that would make sense.

But yeah, we were visiting quite often-- I mean, at least once every couple of months.

Did he have children? No, they didn't. He was in a concentration camp, as was Lillian, my sister. But she came back to Poland and got tuberculosis, and she died from that.

Tell me a little bit about her story. Before we go into your own story, Lillian lived in Warsaw?

Yes, because she was attending the university.

And that was when-- that was in the late 1930s?

Yes, '38, '39.

She would have been then 25-26 years old?

Something like that.

And what was she studying?

I thought she wanted to be a doctor.

And what happened to her when the war started?

Well, war started on the 1st of September. My mother didn't feel too good, so she came over to Kovel. And she was in Kovel on the 29th of August.

And my father was begging her-- says, listen, stay here-- war is going to break out any time. She says, they need me over there-- I belong to many organizations there. They're going to need me there, and she went back to Warsaw.

I see. And then what happened to her?

And then after they destroyed Warsaw, she wound up in a concentration camp.

Well, do you know what kind of activities she was involved in?

Oh, those-- for example, free Poland and stuff like that.

Was she part of Armia Krajowa, or you don't know?

That, I don't know. I don't want to give something that I'm not sure of.

Was she involved in underground activities then-- resistance activities?

Well, we didn't have too much correspondence during the war.

Of course not. I'm talking after the war when-- did you find out her story? Did you find out about her story?

Well, we were looking for her through Red Cross and everything. And Warsaw was destroyed 80%. But finally, we found her, and she lived in the same household she lived before the war.

My goodness.

In Zoliborz. Zoliborz wasn't destroyed that much, so she lived there. And she was working in the bank at that time under communist Poland. She worked in the bank.

When you found her, what year was that? Probably, it was '47.

Did you see her? Did you visit her?

No, in those days, you couldn't go to Poland.

So did you ever meet her again?

No.

After 1939 when she left Kovel and went back to Warsaw, no one ever saw her again?

No.

Did she ever have the opportunity to write in a letter what had happened to her? Did you ever find out details about her story, her life?

Well, she didn't talk much about her life in concentration camp, but she said that it was tough. And of course, then she was working in a bank as a clerk because being the daughter of an officer, this new so-called Polish government didn't look at those people--

Very favorably.

--very favorably, right.

Which concentration camp was she in?

I really don't know.

You don't know-- OK.

There's a bunch of letters of hers. Maybe in one of them, I could find out. But I just-- after she died, I didn't want to read those letters.

That's understandable.

What year did she die? '52 or '53-- something like that.

So she was a young woman. She was 38 when she died.

Very young woman.

As a matter of fact, her friend sent us to England to get penicillin, and we sent something, but it was too late.

Oh. And your uncle, you say he was also in a concentration camp?

Yes, then he came back to Poland. As a matter of fact, she was buried at Powazki.

Your sister?

Yeah. And I'm sure that right now, it probably costs \$10,000 a plot over there. But I'm sure during the '50s, it was still-- so he buried her there.

Your uncle took care of it?

Yeah. And he wrote me a couple of times, and then asked me, why don't you come back? And I wrote him back-- I said listen, I don't want to come back to a country which killed my father.

And so then I got the reply-- he sent those letters with English stamps do me lot of harm. So our correspondence stopped at that.

Oh, dear, oh, dear. Were you able to find out more about what his life had been under German occupation?

No, not really.

And so you wouldn't know what concentration camp he was in?

No, I wouldn't know. But the letters, they said that they were in a cattle car, something like that, like we to Siberia. And sometimes, they were standing in the water up to their ankles and stuff like that. So there was some horror stories about his life.

And it's also-- I mean, that is a tragedy, but it is also a tragedy that you could never meet and talk about these things, that you were so separated and you couldn't correspond.

Well, of course, back in the '53, like any young man, I was not interested in those things. I mean, I was always patriot, stuff like that, but young people take a different-- for example, even here in-- I joined the Siberian society about 25



years ago. Before that, it was playing cards, bridge, poker, stuff like that.

You were enjoying your life.

Yes, I don't have any complaints. I'm retired for 20 years now, and now I'm doing OK. And my daughters are doing OK, my grandkids are doing OK, so.

Well, then, let's go back a little bit. Let's talk about your family-- your immediate family-- your mother, your father, yourself. Pre-war Poland, you said that your father earned quite good money, or must have had a very good pension if he retired from the military. So that you had both a maid and other household help, and he had an orderly.

Correct.

Can you describe your home to me in Kovel?

Well, we never owned the house. We always--

You had your own house?

--rented.

Rented. OK.

Yes. And as I mentioned, for example, when my father was arrested, he was in prison Kovel.

Let's not talk about the war yet. I want to just talk about what life was like beforehand.

Oh, peachy.

Peachy.

[LAUGHS]

Yes. As I said, we used to take a walk in the park every Sunday. We used to go to the cemetery and visit this-- and my mother said-- I believe that she died when she was about 95. And--

Did you have conversations with him as you were taking these walks?

Oh, yes. We were talking about different things. But he never talked about his military service and stuff like that. He would say, oh, look, they're building a new park here.

And I used to enjoy it. Even as a little boy, I said, well, the town is going someplace. And--

Did you spend as much time with your mother as with your father?

Probably, yes-- yes, with my mother. Both of them were pretty strict.

Really? Tell me about that.

[LAUGHS]

Tell me about that.

Well, for example, I didn't go to the first grade. My father was tutoring me. That wasn't--

It wasn't fun, huh?

[LAUGHS]

--best year of my life.

[LAUGHS]

And my mother, she was strict, but if I asked for something and it was within reason, she would say OK. My father was - when he was at home, he was engrossed in his books about military even though he was retired. And he was a big stamp collector, and this type of thing. And as I said, it was pretty nice.

What was-- why was it that you didn't go to first grade?

Well, my father says, why you should go with all these people there where you can do it at home? As a matter of fact, I only went to second and third grade. And then from that, I jumped to the high school. It wasn't easy.

I can believe it, I can believe it. So which of your parents did you feel closer to?

Probably mother, as is usually.

And what kind of a personality did she have? Oh, well, if my father had the personality of my mother, he would be general.

Really?

Oh, she was tough. Sometimes, she was sick-- had a heart condition and so on. And my father had a military doctor. But those military doctors, they didn't think much of that. So he used to call the private doctor. Even though my uncle was a doctor, but he didn't bother him. So sometimes, this guy would come and say something to my mother, and my mother says, get out of this house.

[LAUGHS]

She didn't like the diagnosis.

No.

[LAUGHS]

So later, I will tell you how she was handling KGB and NKVD at that time.

Good. I will want to know about it. And so she was a strong personality.

Oh, very strong.

Well, was she someone you felt safe with?

Oh, yeah. And like my father, she spoke fluent German, obviously fluent Russian, and fluent Polish.

Multilingual.

Yeah, multilingual.

Were you studying any of these languages as a little boy?

Well, when I went to high school, I took English, because at that time, you needed only one mother language. When my sister went to school, she needed two classical languages, which was Greek and Latin, and two modern languages, which was French and--

And Polish?

--German.

Oh, French and German. Well, that's quite well-rounded. That's quite a classical education.

Because English wasn't very popular before the war in Poland as it is now.

Then--

My mother, later, when she was working as interpreter, I was talking to one woman, and she said, well, she speaks German like she just came from Berlin, and she didn't use the language for 25 years.

Wow. That shows a talent.

Yeah.

A real facility for language.

And she spoke three languages. And later, she tried to learn English when we're in India. And some people here, they come and they spend 40 years and they don't even learn English.

And she learnt it there?

She had a rough time. At that time, she was in her '50s, so--

It's harder.

--it's harder, yes.

What kind of a personality did your father have?

Well, as I read some of the opinions of his superiors, that he was pretty easygoing, but didn't have much confidence--

In himself?

--even though he had good education and so on. But he wasn't pushy, let's put it this way. And like in any area, you have to be pushy to really succeed.

And did you sense that from how you knew him? That he was more reserved--

Exactly.

--he was more a quieter person?

Yes, that's right.

Did you feel that you were close to both of them, though? Were you a close-knit family or?

Yes. Of course, I was the only one at home. And my father, for example, when I was-- I don't know-- 8 or something--

[PHONE RINGING]

Let's cut.

She picked it up.

OK, we have scene.

OK. We were talking about--

When I was 7 or 8 years old, I was riding a bike, and another boy hit me with something. And as it happened, he was the son of a doctor, so my father took me to that doctor and says, listen, who are you raising--

[LAUGHS]

--are you raising a bandit?

[LAUGHTER]

You know, kids.

Yeah. And what did the doctor say? Do you remember?

Oh, he said, well, I'm going to discipline him. Did he treat you for whatever wounds you'd--

No, it wasn't big wound, just a scratch.

Were your parents very religious or not so much?

Not so much. They believed in God, but my mother very seldom used to go to church, and my father right before the war, I think he went to confession and so on. And of course, my mother was running the orphanage, and she was running the home for the old people.

This is before the war?

Yeah, before the war. So she says, oh, that counts more than going to mass service Sunday.

She had a point. So she was involved in such activities?

Oh, yes. When she was secular, president's wife sent her a letter.

Wow. So she was quite well-known-- she was quite prominent?

Yeah, she was in that association of the women for whatever.

So she ran an orphanage in Kovel and also an old people's home?

Yes. Of course, non-profit.

But was it like a full-time job?

For her, it was.

[LAUGHS]

And as a matter of fact, the president of Kovel, she was involved there as well, but later, they found that she took some money. So there was a trial behind a closed door--

Really?

--in those days, when somebody had a big position, they used to get every break possible. So on the other hand, my mother is to take some stuff from home and take it to the orphanage, and my father says, what are you doing? Says, don't worry, it's enough for both of us.

So she was not somebody who was very bureaucratic in that sense.

Exactly.

And what was the outcome of the trial?

Well, she had to return whatever she took, and that's it.

Did you have--

[PHONE RINGING]

OK, let's cut.

We're rolling.

Did your parents talk about politics at home?

Yes. My father was pro-government. He subscribed to a newspaper like *Polskas Zbrojna*, "armed Poland" in English. And of course, everything was rosy in that paper. My mother was reading so-called *Dzien Dobry*. They had differing opinions.

Who was reading *Dzien Dobry*?

My mother.

Your mother was reading *Dzien Dobry*.

Yeah, "good morning." That was like-- well, it wasn't a very literary paper. But as it turned out, they were right-- then the armed Poland, because armed Poland followed the government line. And of course, everything they said, we're not going to give you the button from our coat. And we lost the war in 30 days, except France lost in 10 days.

[LAUGHS]

So did your parents belong to different sort of political points of view-- different political positions?

Yeah. My father was blindly following the government line, and my mother was rather realistic about the things.

I see. And the government was headed by whom at that point?

Moscicki.

Moscicki. OK.

He had a lot of patents about fertilizers.

Did they talk also about international politics-- that is, what was going on in Germany and what was going on in Russia? Do you remember such conversations.

Well, of course, they were talking about Bolsheviks-- how bad they were and so on. But as far as Germany, England, I don't think they discussed it very much. Of course, my father thought that after 20 years, the Bolsheviks became more human. As it turned out, they weren't.

So did they talk about Bolsheviks more because they were from the east?

Exactly.

Let me think. You mentioned before your sister came to take care of your mother a little bit in August of 1939, and your father begged her to stay. And he said the war is coming, the war is coming. Did he have some sort of inside information, or was this something everybody felt?

It's everybody felt it-- it's a matter of days. As a matter of fact, he got the letter from the army inducting him back. He was being mobilized.

Mobilized-- right. And he became the chief of anti-aircraft defense of Kovel, except they didn't have any aircraft.

So at that point, he was 51 years old?

Yes.

Do you remember the day the war broke out?

Oh, yes, I do.

Tell me about it.

Well, listening to the radio, right away, they used to say this plane is crossing our border, this plane is doing this. And Warsaw was bombed, another town was bombed, and so on.

How did-- what was-- when your parents heard this, and when people in Kovel heard this, how were people behaving? How are they reacting to this news?

Well, I think they took it in stride. For example, where we lived-- we lived close to downtown. And on one occasion, we went to where there was an army headquarters. And they had an army mess over there, and we went there for lunch with my father and mother.

And as we were having lunch, all of a sudden, the planes came over. You could see the faces of the pilots. And one of the lieutenants says, oh, those are Polish because they had the Polish insignia on the planes.

Did they really?

They did. And as he said they're Polish, they started shooting. So we ran away from the building, and there were some planes over there, so we hid in there. So that was probably 3rd and 4th of September.

Amazing that they were so close you could see the faces.

Well, there was no aircrafts. And later, my father got a couple of those aircraft guns, so then they were flying very high. Evidently, they had some space on the ground.

So those first few weeks, you're-- was that as close as you got to someone from the German military was this person in the plane?

Yeah.

Or did you see soldiers on the ground?

Not German-- the Russians.

But before we come to the Russians, those first weeks before they arrived, what were people doing? What was happening in Kovel?

Well, they were going to work, and I think schools were closed because they made the hospital out of schools. And I was going to go to the fourth grade, but never happened.

By the way, were there Jewish people in Kovel?

Quite a few-- yeah.

And what professions did they usually have or jobs or trades?

Running businesses, running businesses. What else? [LAUGHS]

OK. Did your family know any? Did you have any interaction?

Oh, yes. My mother had a good relationship with those Jewish people, because she was running that orphanage, so she needed some funds. So they were--

Supporting it.

Of course, they we relieved the owner of this house was a Jew too. And I was talking with his son-- his son was 6-7 years older-- and I was telling him that we're going to beat the Germans, and this guy says, no way-- he says, they're too strong. Of course, he was 15 or something.

So two military experts having a conversation.

Exactly.

[LAUGHTER]

So people still continued going to work even though there was no school. What was the talk that was going on?

Well, really, we didn't interact with the outside world. Just my mother, father, and myself, except for that trip that we made to that military mess over there. Cassino, you could call it Cassino. So I never finished that lunch.

[LAUGHS]

No, I guess not. So you stayed at home.

Yes.

Did you do any preparations? Did you expect the Germans to arrive at some point?

Well, we as a military family were given the gas masks because at that time, everybody was expecting that they are going to gas, but it never happened. So we received those high-tech masks, because the old ones, you could choke in them. The new ones, they were really comfortable, but we never used them. And later, we cut them to pieces because we didn't want Russians to take them over.

So how did things progress throughout September? What happens?

Well, September 17, Russians enter Poland. And they were marching, and we lived in that house. And by that house, there was a water pump.

And as they were marching, this soldier-- I was outside-- came by me and says, can you give me a cup because I want to get some water? So that was my first interaction with the Russians. And he was very, very polite, very nice. So that was probably on the 18th of September.

Was Kovel close to the border?

Yeah, very close. I don't know how many miles, but yes, Kovel was pretty close to the border-- Russia.

And so, of course, my father's pension ended. And when the Russians came, they were getting men to shovel the snow or something. So we were selling some different things to survive.

But that's already in the wintertime.

Yeah.

Before that happens, did you see many soldiers after that?

Oh, they were-- there were whole columns of tanks and everything else going through Kovel, going east.

Or west? Or were they going west?

West, right, yeah. Going west.

Did many stay in Kovel?

Don't know how many, but at one time, we had a lieutenant living in our home. They took one room from us, and he was living there.

That was pretty early on?

Yeah. Army lieutenant. And, by the way, he was a very nice guy. Of course, a lot of Russians were OK except for the government.

Was there any interaction between your father and himself, because both of them are military men?

No. My father was already arrested when this lieutenant moved in.

Tell me about this arrest.

Well, it was the second day of Easter in 1940.



So it's half a year later.

It was probably in March. Knock on the door. Three NKVD guys enter, and there was one civilian who sort of sided with the Russians. He was a Polish citizen.

So they look at the big radio. So they took that radio-- they said, there's no way a private person could have a radio like that-- it had to belong to the government. And then he had a leather briefcase-- they took that one too. And they took him away. And he told my mother that he would be released in a couple of days which, of course, never happened.

Did they say why they were arresting him?

No. They arrested all the officers.

So was he expecting this to happen?

Well, probably. But he got a chance to go to Romania-- that was still when the war was on-- because the people were going from-- part of the government, they were going through Romania.

So they stopped, and they say to him, listen, let's go with us. Go to Romania. And my father says, no, I have to take care of my wife and my son. So he didn't go, otherwise, he would have survived. That was still in September, of course, that he had the chance to go to Romania.

Do you think he fully-- do you think he expected he'd be back in a few days like they said?

Probably not. My mother went to the NKVD and says, well, we're going to process him and so forth. And she says, where is the radio? Oh, you'll get it back eventually.

[LAUGHS]

She didn't care about the radio, she cared about him. But they made her an offer. They said, we're going to release him right away if you give us some information about a lot of people in this town. And of course, my mother turned them down for two reasons. She was very patriotic-- second reason, she knew that they were lying.

How long did this take when they came to your home and they banged on the door? Was it a half hour, an hour, all day?

Oh, at least an hour and a half probably. They were searching the house for guns, some reason. Stuff like that. So hour and a half.

Do you remember saying goodbye to him?

Oh, he said goodbye to me, and he said take care of your mother.

Oh, my.

Never happened to me before. First time.

Well, these aren't easy memories-- these aren't easy memories.

So what was it? 24th of March-- that's six-- three weeks later. Another knock on the door-- again, three NKVD and a private person.

Same private person?

No, different. You've got 30 minutes to pack.

Did you recognize the first or the second person who came by or not?

No, I didn't know him.

Oh, he really was a member of Communist Party before the war. So half an hour. And pack-- my mother started arguing with those people-- with those NKVDs. Probably, Germans would have shot her on the spot, because she was telling them that Stalin killed his own mother and so on. And I started to pack. And this NKVD man was helping me packing because my mother didn't pack.

She was busy arguing.

She was busy arguing with them. And they also admired her language-- that they were just probably, great education, and she was a college graduate. So half an hour passed, hour passed, five hours passed.

Were you still in the house?

Still packing.

Packing-- what did he help you take? What did you take.

Everything. Like, I have pictures here on that wall-- they're my pictures from before the war. So finally, the truck came-- lorry or whatever. What was happening, they were deporting so many people in the day that they ran out of those trucks. So when the truck came, we loaded the truck all the way to the brim.

Oh, my goodness. How unusual.

I even took a dog with me.

You took a dog with you?

Yes, I did.

What was the name of the dog?

KacuÅ, or whatever.

What kind of dog?

Oh, mongrel. So then, we go to the station, those cattle cars, all the stuff, and the dog. And of course, we thought-- we used to sell the stuff later in Russia.

But you were able to take a lot of things with you?

Yeah.

But does it fit into the wagon and there was space for it?

Yeah.

So tell me some of the things that you took.

Linen, the towels. I took some stamps from my father's collection. I took a lot of pictures. And by the way, this lieutenant comes with the-- before the war, there was a jam in about maybe five pound cans.

So he brings this sugar, and he says to my mother, take this because they keep telling you everything is in Russia, but there is nothing there.

So this lieutenant who was in your house--

Yeah.

--Soviet lieutenant.

He was living there, because they took one room.

After your father was arrested for those three weeks, here was this lieutenant in one of those rooms.

He was there all the time. And he brought that sugar, so we took that sugar. And he was a very nice guy. Quiet and everything else. And of course, he didn't discuss politics, because he would be afraid to discuss politics. So there were-- I don't know how many-- 50 people in that car.

Did your mother quiet down at some point? What happened?

Not really. She was arguing with them all the time.

[LAUGHS]

She was arguing and you were packing?

Yeah, with the--

With the NKVD fellow.

--NKVD. Yeah, right.

[LAUGHS]

He says, take everything you can. But originally, they get half an hour, but it lasted five hours. So we took a lot of stuff.

Did you take food?

Not really food. Maybe a little bit of food, because we used to dry bread before the war. We figured just in case. So we took some of the dry bread. And of course, that was in February-- April 13. So the weather wasn't as bad as February 10 when the first people were deported.

Did you know about those first deportations?

Oh, yes, we did know. Yes, yes, yes.

Did you know anybody who was deported on February 10?

Over here?

In Kovel.

No, from Kovel, they didn't deport February 10, because they were deporting people who had parcels of land.

So February 10 was a different category of people?

Oh, different, yes. That was people who got the land as a prize for fighting the Russians in the 1920 war. So how come your father didn't get any?

Well, we didn't need it. He was an officer.

But he fought in the 1920 war?

Yeah, but he--

He was fine as an officer?

Exactly.

Work on land is hard work.

It's true.

It's not easy. And by the way, that's how my parents treated help. This woman that worked for us, when my father was in prison, she took parcels to him. So evidently, they were good employers.

That means something, yes.

Except one thing I couldn't reconcile, because she wrote to us in Russian letter in 1940 in December-- she says that she took the parcel to my father. And at that time, he wasn't there, so evidently, those prison officials took the parcel and told her he was there, but I'm sure he wasn't there because it was December of 1940.

And when was Katyn?

It was in May. So the--

But when you were taken to the train, did you think your father still was in prison locally? I thought so because they screened the windows in prison. They put the screens over there.

So they didn't want-- of course, that was April. They didn't want to see those-- that people were being deported. But that was in April. They probably went to Katyn later that month or beginning of May, because the order to execute those people was signed on my birthday, March the 5th.

Really?

Yeah. And Stalin died on March the 5th. Good present for me.

So you get to the train-- tell me how many people were in that cart along with your things?

About 60.

In that lorry or the train?

In the car-- in the car train.

So what did it look like inside?

[LAUGHS]

There was no toilet. There was a hole in the floor of the back end of the car. And--

Where did people sleep?

Oh, the-- oh, on the-- [NON-ENGLISH]. It's like wooden floors.

Like platforms or something?

Yeah.

Like bunk beds?

Not beds, but yeah. So that was a three week trip.

Well, tell me about those bunk beds first. About how many people would be on one platform?

Oh, probably eight or so. And there were like three story deep. And--

Three levels high? So there were three of them?

Yeah. About eight or nine. And there were about four of them that way. So it's about 60 people, I guess. I never counted them.

Did you know anybody who was on that train? Did you recognize them?

[CHIME]

Yes. There was a-- my father's friend-- so after my father was arrested, and this guy was arrested--

[COUGHS]

--excuse me.

It's OK. So his wife and his daughter moved with us. And the daughter was about a year older than I was, I guess, and we were pretty good companions.

But later, they moved out, but somehow, they got deported the same day too. So the officers' families were deported on April the 13th. So that was the category for that deportation?

Yeah. Policeman, officers, and high government officials. That was the 13th. Later, there was another deportation in June. That was from towns again. About February 10, it was strictly from villages.

I see. So where did all your things go? All those things that you brought with you, did they go in the middle of that cattle car or something?

Yeah. And did anybody take them? I mean, did people steal it on the--

They couldn't steal it. The doors were locked all the time, so [LAUGHS] no way to steal them. I don't know how they-- I don't remember how they treated my dog over there, because there was a dog, too.

[LAUGHS]

Was it the only dog in the cattle car?

Yeah.

[LAUGHS]

And did the dog survive the journey? It did, but didn't survive Siberia. Those big Russian Huskies killed him.

Aye, aye. So tell me about the beginning of the journey? Did you see anything-- were you near a window? Were there any windows?

No windows. They would open the door once a day and give some hot water and cloths. On February 10, they were opening more often to throw out the dead bodies. But weather was pretty good in April, so it took about three weeks. Then, we got to the station there.

I still want to talk about the journey a little bit. Do you remember leaving Poland? Did people know when they were leaving Poland?

What do you mean-- what people?

Well, the people in the train. You were on a train, the doors are closed.

Oh, yeah, they knew because we had to change the cars because Poland had wider or not narrower rails. So they had to switch the cars.

I see. So also there was a delay, and that's when you knew you were leaving Polish territory.

There was Shepetivka. That's as far as we went on the Polish, and then they switched to the Russian cars.

The place was called Shepetivka?

Yeah. That was where the rail would stop.

And were the doors open during this time, or were they still closed?

Closed. All the time, they were closed. They opened them when we were moving from one car to the other.

And did people react to this? That is, when they realized they were leaving Poland or not?

Yeah, they were singing religious songs, and patriotic songs, and so on. That's about it.

How was your mother on the train? Was she quieter, was she still angry, was she--

Well, she didn't have anybody to argue with. There were [INAUDIBLE].

[LAUGHS]

So yeah.

But you said her health wasn't that great?

Well, she had a, I guess, heart condition. But maybe part of it was in her mind too, because what they say-- that a lot of people when they went to Siberia, all of a sudden, they got well.

[LAUGHS]

We were going to the doctors all the time in Poland. When they went to Siberia, the sickness disappeared.

[LAUGHS]

And what about you? Do you remember how you were feeling?

Well, as I said in-- from the very beginning-- for example, after my father was arrested, I used to go with this girl and play, and I didn't think much of it. I mean, I was sorry they arrested him. I didn't think he'd be killed.

But all my life, everything I've took in stride, because I figured, well, it's not going to help me if I am going to despair and stuff like that. It's going to make things worse. So I was on the train doing nothing like most people. They were singing and so on.

Was it that you were trying to keep yourself from being sad?

No, as I said, usually I take things in stride. I lost my father when I was 11, mother when I was 17. And--

Let's go then further on the train. Do you remember what you ate-- what kind of food there was?

Well, some of the dry bread we had with us. And maybe occasionally-- I don't know-- the train stopped and I don't really remember much about how was the food situation. But I know we had that dry bread. So we used to eat that. But I don't know what the dog was eating. It was three weeks.

Yeah, it still had to have something.

[LAUGHS]

Yeah.

Did they ever let you off the train?

Not going there-- not going to Pavlodar.

Where did you finally end up?

It's Pavlodar, which is the [RUSSIAN].

Oh, you've got to repeat that. I didn't catch all of that. Say it slow.

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

[RUSSIAN]

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

So from sovkhos, I know it's some collective farm.

Correct. Yeah, full of wheat.

But what part of-- was this within Russia proper, or in another--

Yeah, I think it is. Or was it a part of Kazakhstan? I don't know. But Pavlodar was like a capital city of the Pavlodar--

Pavlodar.

[NON-ENGLISH] Yeah.

Of the region, or the district.

So we unloaded there, and from there--

What did that look like? Was it a town that you unloaded on or?

It was probably outskirts of the town-- to the trucks, and from the trucks to the [RUSSIAN]. And at that time, you could buy anything there. Everything was in the stores.

Really? There were things to buy?

Yeah, at that time. When the war broke out with Germany, then everything disappeared. And [RUSSIAN]. We came-- there was a big house. And in that big house, there was one room there.

And in that house, there were probably 200 people. But waiting for the lorry or truck, my wife-- my mother struck conversation with one lady over there. And this woman, she was a wife of the landowner in Poland, but when they were deporting her, the administrator of this estate volunteered to go with her to Russia.

Really?

So every time, says listen, I am volunteer here. So they gave them this room over there-- she was-- this woman that her probably boyfriend and two little kids, 6 and 7. And this woman says to my mother, why don't you move with us? So we moved to that room, my mother and myself. So there were six of us there.

Was that a better room than other people had?

There were 200 people on the big house.

[GASPS] In barracks then?

Yeah. It was like a gymnastic hall or something like that. So there were like 200 people.

See what volunteers get?

That's right, yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

And yeah, but evidently, they got something going, because he volunteered. And eventually, he died in Russia in the army, I guess.

So you moved in with them.

Yeah, over there. But eventually, we moved to the house over there. When we came, they gave us Russian Constitution and passports.

Russian passports-- Soviet passports?

We threw them away.



Did you have any documents that you took with you-- Polish documents when you were being deported?

I don't think so. Not mine. There is some stuff of my father and so on.

[CLEARS THROAT]

So we threw away the passports, but we lived in that house. And my wife-- my wife--

[LAUGHS]

--my mother went to city hall, and said she wants radio.

She wants a radio?

[LAUGHS]

Yeah. And they say, well, they used to call us [RUSSIAN].

What does that mean?

Special deportee. And they told her, special deportee can not have a radio. And she opens this constitution, and says all residents may have a radio. So they said OK, what kind of a radio it was?

It was the loudspeaker. There was a main station, at that sovkhos, and they were choosing the station, and you just listen to whatever they chose. But sometimes, very early in the morning, they would say something.

For example, one day they said, [RUSSIAN].

Former marshal of Poland escape to Romania. But 5 o'clock in the morning, they said only once. That's it. at that sovkhos, there was a chief of the sovkhos, and they have a guy from the-- whatever-- he wasn't a member of KGB, but close to it.

Secret police?

Pardon?

Was he a secret policeman?

Something like that. So he used to write bulletins-- don't buy anything from Polish people, don't sell them anything. And he was our best customer.

Was he really?

Yeah.

[LAUGHS]

He had a kid who was six years old. I've never seen such a smart kid. He would send him to our house to ask him if he wants this or that. So he would come, and he saw some of the [? stretch ? ] over there. They ask him, what do you want? He says he came to play with me-- that kid-- 7-year-old. So--

And he really had come to purchase?

Yeah. He even bought-- I had some broken watches, so he even bought those watches, because at the time in Russia,

there were no watches. So we told him, listen, they don't work. He says never mind.

[LAUGHS]

So what was happening, we had this loudspeaker. People were coming-- was that the radio that she got from them-- a loud speaker?

Yeah.

So what-- excuse me-- what did it look like as a loudspeaker? A little box?

Yeah, that's it.

And just a loudspeaker on it?

That's all.

With a little knob?

Yeah.

Louder and softer. They would set the station at the central-- wherever they--

At th central, right. But people were coming to our house and discussing politics. So somebody snitched.

And this guy, Bochenkov-- that's secret police-- came at night to us. He says, listen, there is a grievance against you people that you're involved in politics, so I have to deport you. If I don't do it, I will wind up in jail.

So deportation was the place where there was only one house. They call it tochka, which more or less a period.

Oh, it means the end sort of.

Yeah. So he says, but listen, don't worry-- occasionally, he'll come bring us some supplies. Of course, not for nothing-- he would get something for it-- and you will survive.

So was this in the sovkhos or a different sovkhos?

It was like 40 miles from it, but it's only one house. And the water well, outside, it was 90, and in the morning, you had to break ice in that well it was so deep-- probably-- I don't know-- 75 meters. And there was a bucket which weighed about-- I don't know-- 300 kilos.

So you let this thing go to break the ice to get some water. Because that place, only during the summer that they were grazing the ships over there during summer. But we were deported like in October.

But fortunately, November, Polish government signed a treaty with Russia, and they let us out. So the [RUSSIAN] came over there, says, listen, you are free. You can go anyplace you want to.

So this is way-- this is towards the end-- this is towards the end of--

'42.

Let's start talk-- but still go back to when the beginning is. When you first arrived, did anybody come and tell you why you had been arrested, or make any kind of speech or a declaration?

No, no, no. They left us alone.

So did anybody have to go to work? Did you have to go to work, or your mother have to go to work?

Oh, yes. During the summer, they were working on a field.

What were they doing?

Picking up the wheat or something like that. And my mother said, I'm a nurse-- I want to work as a nurse. And again, they told her [RUSSIAN] cannot be a nurse because you're going to kill our patients.

So with her fluent Russian, they made her a supervisor for that whole group of people who were working there--

My, god.

--during the summer. But it's only the summer. In the winter, nobody was working.

What did the of sovkhos grow? What did they--

Wheat, wheat.

Wheat.

And when we came, the first job was to-- there were stacks of wheat over there that we had to burn because they had rotted. And you know they had this big famine in Ukraine, and there were thousands and thousands of kilos of that stuff sitting there.

So we're burning this stuff. And in the wintertime, it's nothing. Just sitting around and burning a furnace. There was no coal, but I don't know how to explain it-- it's cows--

Oh, cow dung, what the cows make?

Yeah, mixed with the straw. They dry during the summer, and that's--

Fuel.

-- you buy it. In the winter, you use it as a fuel.

Wow.

Yeah. And we lived with my father's friend's wife and her son. He was arrested too same day with my father. But he was arrested two weeks before that, and they let him out.

And he was walking in a Polish uniform. He says, well, I'm safe now. But when they arrested other officers, they arrested him.

Again.

And this woman came to Russia with nothing on-- just as she stood.

So really, we had a lot of stuff, so we were supporting those two people all the time.

Now, the-- were you still living in the same room as the woman and her manager of the estate?

No, we moved to the private house over there. I don't know how it happened. Evidently, my mother went to the city hall and got this room over there.

I don't speak much Russian-- just a few words-- but when you describe your mother, there is a phrase in Russian that comes to me, which is [RUSSIAN].

[LAUGHTER]

What a woman.

What a woman.

Yeah, that's right. So I didn't-- she went over there, and they gave her this room in this. But next door was some guy from Asia-- I think Uzbek or something. It could be Kazakhstan that's part of Russia. I don't know.

Oh, do you remember what the house looked like? Was it-- how it was built? Was it wood, was it stone, was it mud?

Well, it was more or less wooden. But there was electricity, and thankfully so because my mother went someplace, and that storm came-- that snowstorm which really-- she had to crawl on the ground, but she saw the light in our window over there, and she crawled all the way toward that house. But for example, one woman who lived in a different building, she went to buy milk for her daughter. That storm caught her. They found her in the spring clinging to the telephone pole.

Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Fortunately, she had the mother with her, so grandmother took care of that little girl.

Did many people die in the sovkhos of the deportees?

Not too many. I know this one coroner's wife, she died on Christmas Eve, and they were joking that they were making Wigilia.

Christmas Eve dinner, yes.

--dinner, and she's supposed to get some mushrooms from the suitcase. And she leave to get us mushrooms, and she drop dead. So they said probably, she was sorry for those mushrooms--

[LAUGHTER]

--that she has to give those mushrooms. But yes-- and later on, when we moved to Uzbekistan, another young man died. But not too many died over there. And for example, in the sovkhos, I never saw a Russian soldier.

I was going to-- that was my next question. How much was there interaction with any authorities-- any Soviet authorities?

Chief of the sovkhos maybe. But when I was two years in Siberia, I never saw a Russian soldier-- never. And I read those stories in the book that I gave you.

Some people say they were guarding them and stuff like that. Didn't happen to us. Probably that Bochenkov, he was a politruk--

Yeah, political officer.

Yeah. But he was a nice man.

The one who did business with you?

Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

These things are so interesting. There's the official stories, and then there's what really happens. I hate to say, but we had all this stuff that we took from Poland, because sometimes, you couldn't buy anything with money, so we had to trade-- barter.

But as I-- other people's stories-- hunger and so on-- I cannot say that about us.

You had enough to eat you think?

Yeah, most of the time. I think I was hungry maybe two days out of those two years. But when I explained that my mother did so good over her lifetime, so maybe somebody was watching over us.

You never know, you never know. Then tell me, what was the hardest part of being there?

Hardest part of being there-- it was pretty boring. Boredom.

Was there school?

Yeah, there was a school. But my mother didn't want to send me to Russian school. She was afraid they may convert me, which would never happen.

So she told them that I don't have shoes. And the board of education says they don't have any budget money to buy somebody shoes. So I wasn't going to school, which was a big mistake because I could have learned something.

They had a good level math in Russia schools. And then, of course, I learned Russian at home because a lot of those Russian officers came to Poland after Bolshevik revolution. As a matter of fact, we lived a block and half from Gagarina, who was a princess.

They said that Gagarin was her nephew or--

Oh, you mean the astronaut-- the cosmonaut was her nephew?

She had a big estate in Kovel, I used to go there and ride her dog. She got the dog-- I don't know.

Like a horse?

Almost like a horse.

[LAUGHTER]

And I used to date her daughter. I was 10. She was 10.

[LAUGHTER]

Wow.

So they used to come to our house, and of course, they didn't speak Polish. But my parents spoke Russian, so they were talking in Russian all the time. An 8-year-old, 9-year-old kid picks it up like that.

So my parents realized that I understood everything, so if they wanted to say something that I wouldn't understand, they switched to German, because in Russian, I understood everything. Even now, I understand everything in Russian. If I took a brush up course, probably that would come back to me-- the Russian language.

So did you have to work as well, or were you considered too young?

Oh, when my mother was supervisor there, so one summer I worked there, and I earned like 46 rubles.

That sounds-- I mean, I'll tell you, it sounds like nothing if you compare change, but that sounds like a lot of money for a child.

Yes.

[LAUGHS]

How did you earn the money? How did you earn that 46 rubles? What were you doing?

Doing nothing.

Oh, god.

[LAUGHTER]

Politics.

Politics, politics.

Then they do this wheat. They used to-- how do you call it-- process that wheat. And there was stack of those wheats, hundreds and hundreds of kilos and so on. We used to play in the wheat.

And they were loading to the cars and sending it to Germany. And that they had a problem in their own country. And even if Germans started to bomb them, they were--

Still sending to-- so you knew the transports from the [RUSSIAN] were going to Germany with wheat?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

How ironic.

Yeah.

How ironic.

And talking about the quality, at one time, we went on a vessel on the Irtysh river, and at that time, they were evacuating some of the people from Moscow. Not the top government, but the middle one.

This is after the war starts?

Yeah. On that vessel, you could buy anything for kopeiki. Not rubles, but kopeiki, everything. When you got out of the vessel on the ground, nothing. But they're evacuating people from Moscow.

The elite.

Yeah. So some equal, others are more equal.

Some of us are more equal than others.

Exactly.

That's right. But it also was like a duty-free cruise ship. That's where you can buy things without taxes.

[LAUGHS]

And sometimes on sale, you can buy cheaper than tax-free.

That's right.

[LAUGHTER]

So you spend-- I don't want to say an easy two years, but I want to say not as hard as some other places.

Exactly, exactly.

And your mother is in charge of these people who are working in the fields.

Yes.

And is she well-liked? Do you remember?

Oh, yeah, they liked her. Yeah, they liked her. I mean, it was a simple job-- pulling the wheat and so on and the--

But somebody informed. You said people came to your house-- the room that you had in this wooden house-- and there was some political discussions.

Yeah, exactly.

And I have to say, I was surprised when you said that, because from some of the other testimonies I heard, they said people were very careful about what they said, but they didn't talk with one another.

Not our house. And by the way, the woman president of Kovel-- president's wife-- was in the same [RUSSIAN] with us, and she lived with a policeman's wife. And they arrested this policeman's wife, and they took her to the prison.

And my mother went to that prison and asked them why she was there. And they said, well, somebody reported something on her. And she asked, tell me who. And the guy says, listen, I cannot tell you, but I write it. And he wrote Zavadskaya, the wife of the president of Kovel.

[GASPS]

So comes Christmas or something-- she comes by our house with candy. And I open the door, and my mother says, what do you want? I brought some candy for your son.

And my mother says, do you want to take candy from this woman? I said no. And she says to my mother, I'm going to report to you. She says go ahead-- do it fast.

Wow.

Yeah. That's kind of people. And when Russia take over, her husband, president, and his assistant vice president, they

put them on the truck-- they were emptying the latrines. You know like in the old days, there were the trucks that were emptying the latrines. So they were working on the truck, and she was snitching on people.

Wow. So it's still-- it went on.

Yeah.

The people who had come, what kind of things would they be talking about-- the politics that was being discussed?

Well, that we have a Polish government in London. Eventually, we're going to go back. My mother said always, well, we're going to go back to Poland with our flags and stuff like that. Never happened.

Was there any talk about what had happened to the arrested military officers or any news about them at the time?

No. We found out after the Germans discovered the graves. But my mother wrote a letter to Stalin asking him where is my father? And I don't know if I have this letter or not, but he answered her-- maybe his office or whatever-- to get in touch with the Kiev NKVD. Those are the people that were killing them.

Oh, my goodness.

So he told my mother to get in touch with Kiev NKVD.

And this is while she's in the [RUSSIAN]?

Yeah.

[RUSSIAN]. What a woman. Did she-- did she write a letter to the Kiev NKVD? That, I don't know. I'm not sure.

But she was surprised to get answer from him. But later, we knew that he knew what was going on. Of course, he knew what was going on.

Of course he knew.

But directed her there. But that was in '42, so two years after.

That's right. So tell me how you found out about that you-- how did things change? First of all, your life goes on. You're in this-- your [RUSSIAN] has to deport you to the [RUSSIAN], which is this one place, this one house, in the middle of a field. Is that right?

Correct.

And you're there alone with your mother?

Well, there were a couple other families.

Ah, OK. And then, what happens? Well, we didn't live too long over there because it was called, which I disagree with the term, amnesty, because amnesty is for a criminal.

We didn't do any crime, but they called it amnesty. That Stalin, says OK, you can go where you want to go. So then we started to move, and we went to Irtyshsk.

What's the place name?

Irtyshsk.



Irtyschk.

As I said beginning, [RUSSIAN].

That's right.

And there was a town, Irtyschk.

And did you still have items to barter to be able to get there?

Yeah. And over there-- I don't know-- a couple thousand people-- Polish people-- maybe more-- and there is this guy-- lieutenant-- in a Polish uniform talking to us. And all these two years, they were telling us [RUSSIAN]. There is no Poland.

[SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

And now, this Polish officer in a Polish uniform is talking to us.

So translate, please, what it was that they were saying. Poland doesn't exist, Poland--

Will never exist. That's what they were telling us all the time. And this officer started talking, and there were like-- I think probably two or three thousand people. Everybody this crying.

And I still remember his name, Reginya.

Reginya?

Yeah.

Wow.

Was young officers, lieutenant.

And had he'd been released himself, or had he come from--

Probably, yes.

I see. So what happened after that?

Well, after that, we went to Uzbekistan, and my mother--

And what was the reason for going there?

Climate.

Really?

Closer to Polish-- not embassy-- consulate, whatever--

Representation of some kind.

Yeah. So my mother was sick on the trip. But she had this fur coat, and I suspect she had typhoid, but she survived.

And then we went to Uzbeks. And by the way, I don't have too many memorabilia because on the trip from Irtyshsk to Yambol. Somebody stole one of our suitcases, and those are the people were going to join Polish army. So then, we went to the Uzbeks.

Excuse me, your dog, was he gone by then?

Yeah, those [RUSSIAN], they killed him. Yeah. Once, he fell into the well, so my mother, gave some kids five rubles to get him out. But later-- so we went to-- that was kolkhoz, not sovkhos, but kolkhoz in Uzbekistan.

Those Uzbeks were very friendly. They invited us. Of course, everybody is sitting on the floor. There is one big dish, everybody dipping in the dish.

[LAUGHS]

And so at that time, we had to work. And this friend of mine that lived with us, my father's friend, wife, and him. So he goes to work, and in the morning, I take that shovel, put it over my arm, go in front of the supervisor house, go around, go home.

Comes Friday, he gets half a pound of-- or half a kilo-- I get whole kilo.

Oh, my goodness.

Because this guy goes to worker early.

[LAUGHTER]

When it was-- I was 13 at the time.

You knew how to game the system.

[LAUGHTER]

Pretty clever.

And then my mother-- there was Lugovaya-- it was a small town. So my mother was in charge of a hospital over there. There was not even a single doctor.

She was in charge of 200 beds over there. And first, she had to clean out those corpses that were sitting in garages there. And--

What corpses-- from where, from what?

Those patients who died? And I went-- I didn't feel good, so I went to the hospital for observation, and they didn't find anything wrong with me. Then, I came back, and I got a high fever.

And sure enough, I caught typhoid at the hospital. So did that friend of mine. And I had temperature of 41 Celsius.

Wow.

If my mother wasn't there, I wouldn't have survived, because she took care of me-- gave me some juices and stuff like that. And then there was a Polish representation there, so she wrote them a letter that she needed for the patients. So they gave something.

And so we lived there I don't know how many months, but in August of '42, we moved further with General Anders'

army. I was too young to join the army, but as a family, of course, my mother would figure out how to do it, and we went to Persia. And--

Well, tell me about a trip from Uzbekistan to the point of leaving the Soviet Union.

Krasnovodsk. By the way, in that kolkhoz, we had two carpets-- big ones. So we sold them to the Uzbek for 40,000 rubles.

Oh my god. These were carpets from home?

Yeah, I took those carpets.

[LAUGHS]

Oh my god. So everywhere you went-- so when you had been deported because of that snitch back in the sovkhos to tochka, did you go with all your things?

Yeah, sure. Well, the police--

You had a police escort?

He took care of us. And so that 40,000 didn't do me much good. What happened-- we took the train to that Krasnovodsk. So whole train was eating because we could buy peaches and stuff like that, and we had money to burn. But of course, they said you cannot take money, you cannot cameras, and--

Those are the Soviet authorities?

Yeah. Nobody would take a chance to be caught, so I threw that 40,000 rubles into the Caspian Sea.

[GASPS]

And in a suitcase, about another 8,000 rubles, so I sold it in Persia. I was buying cover for it.

[LAUGHS]

We didn't know about that money in the suitcase.

Oh my goodness.

Yeah.

Oh my goodness.

So that's [? how it was ?]--

So by the time you left the Soviet Union, how much had your-- how much had your luggage shrunk?

Oh, it was to nothing. Because at Pahlavi, you had to-- they had those--

What is Pahlavi? That's from Krasnovodsk, which is the port city on Russian side. Pahlavi is on the Persian side.

What's today Iran.

Yeah, today, Iran.

So Pahlavi was the first stop. And from Pahlavi, we were to go to different places. But in Pahlevi, we had give all our clothes, and they had those-- I don't know you call those-- those big boxes with the fire underneath that they put the clothes there to--

Sanitize?

Sanitize.

By the way, were you ever deloused in the Soviet Union? Did you have to go through a delousing process?

No.

Did you have any lice?

Oh, yes.

[LAUGHS]

Yes.

[CLICKS TEETH]

Oh, good god.

Well those Uzbeks. That's what they were doing. They were sitting and--

Oh my god.

Uzbeks. Next to us lived that Uzbek. He didn't work-- I think he was sick. And he had a sister-- I think Mother-- and then I went to their house-- I'm 13 years old-- and he goes by his sister, throws her on bed, and says to me, come have sex with her.

[LAUGHS]

So I ran away.

Oh my god.

Oh, those Uzbeks, every night, 50, 60 of them drunk, singing, going through that [RUSSIAN], and swearing, and--

Oh, not very pleasant for women.

No. Women meant nothing-- zero.

So in some ways, those items that NKVD fellow back in Kovel who helped you pack during those five hours helped keep you alive?

Oh, exactly. Yes.

Can one make that conclusion?

Yeah, sure. Exactly. Because like that wife of my father's friend, she claims that she stood. So if it wasn't for my mother, she would perish.

Plus she-- her son was left behind, and he died from a heart, and she almost got crazy [INAUDIBLE]. But--

That means left behind in the Soviet Union.

No, he was left in Poland.

Oh, I see. He was left in Poland.

They were already grown up. One of them was an artist or something like that. But that's not the subject. But they were going to high school, and they flunked the year, but this artist made up this certificate that they passed, so the father bought them bikes.

[LAUGHS]

And next day, they go to the same class, so father said, what's going on?

[LAUGHTER]

And his brother was in the post office. He worked in the post office after the war.

So there you are. You're in Pahlavi. And you hardly have any of your items left. You have a little something. What is it that you have besides the 8,000 rubles?

Oh, I had a whole suitcase of still some stuff, like shirts and stuff like that.

Did you have any photographs or--

Oh, photographs I had. Like on this wall, there is a bunch of them. I took them.

But another thing that nobody got it-- but what happened when they were deporting us, the soldier says to me, let's get the witness here. So half a block from us-- maybe a block-- lived a teacher who used to teach music in grade school. So I went over there-- it was 2:00 o'clock in the morning-- she saw the soldier, she got scared. So he came over as a witness. I don't know what for. But in some time, we're getting a check for 1,300 rubles from the auction of our belongings there.

No kidding?

Yeah. I'm the only one who ever got that. I've never heard of such a thing.

Yeah, I got 1,300 rubles. So they auctioned your items, and you got-- I've never heard of something like that before.

So this professor was at that auction, and they sold it. And of course, one item would be like 800, 900 rubles, so the 1,300 rubles wasn't--

Didn't mean much.

--much for all those things.

But anyway, they sent a check. And I never heard of anybody that got a check. Now, was it the same soldier who was helping you pack who told you to go get the witness?

No, another one.

And they were--

There three of them--

--there were three of them, and they were there together?

Yeah. So this one went with me, and I brought this professor.

I find that so unusual, because other stories people have told me that when the other two soldiers would go away, the one who was left would try to be nice. But if the other two were there, they wouldn't do it because they afraid of each other.

But in your case--

As I was packing, and those others were standing listening to your mother.

[LAUGHS]

Well, they probably didn't have many people react to them the way she did.

[LAUGHS]

And this guy went with me and brought this professor. And he was so scared.

Oh, poor man. So there you were in Pahlavi. What happens after that?

Pahlavi, we went to [PLACE NAME], which is another refugee camp. And then we went to Ahvaz, which is another refugee camp.

All in Persia?

Yeah.

And did you stay in either place long?

No. I think in Persia, we stayed no more than maybe eight, nine months altogether. In the meantime, my mother got sick. She was in the hospital, and I had to make a choice where to go. I had the choice Africa, Mexico, India.

For both of you-- a choice for both of you.

Yeah. So I chose India. In the meantime, my mother got out of the hospital.

What was she sick with?

She had some kind of a rash, and they put her in a bed with violet stuff and--

Oh, ultraviolet of some kind?

Yeah. But she recovered from that one. So you were there for 8 or 9 months, and then you went to India?

Yes. In '43, we reached India.

Now, the Germans had, of course, attacked. When did you find out about Katyn? When was it that you first heard that there was something--

In Persia in '43 when Germans discovered the graves.

So what did you find out?

Well, there were bulletins. There were no newspapers in that town, so the bulletin says, well, Germans discovered bodies of the Polish officers. So that was it.

Well, how did you know that your father might be there? He could have been in one of those camps that released Polish officers to join Anders' army.

Not too many. I know one, Pyszkowski, that was a priest later on. 400 of them, they were routed someplace else. 400 out of 20,000. 400 only.

So were there names that were published of who was discovered--

No, no, no, no, no, no names was published, no.

Did you ever have any confirmation from any other source besides those--

No, I didn't check even the Katyn list. One of these days, I have to do it. But I'm sure he was there.

So it was in Persia-- it was in Persia that you and your mother discovered this?

Yeah, exactly, yeah. That Ahvaz we lived, 100 degrees. There was a canteen where they had a fan over there, so my mother used to take me there to buy some soft drink. And that felt so good, that fan.

And we lived in a-- there used to be horse stables-- we used to live in that.

In Persia?

Yeah, in Akfass, yeah.

In Akfass.

Yeah.

Well, that's not very good--

When we went to India, there was like a Polish town over there. We had our own police, we had our own everything. 5,000 of us over there.

In place was this?

Valivade.

Valivade?

Near [PLACE NAME], Valivade, 5,000 of us were there. And high school and doctors. My mother first was a nurse over there, and later, she was-- because they got some German doctor who didn't speak Polish, so she was interpreter for the--

[BACKGROUND NOISES]

--doctor.

Can we cut for a second? Yes.

[BACKGROUND NOISES]

OK. So you're in India, and do you start going to school?

Yes. And what grade did you have to-- what grade did you go into? Well, first year of high school, which I started over in Persia in Teheran.

As I said, I finished second and third grade. And then my mother put me in the high school in Persia. It was terrible.

It must have been really tough.

Yeah, but she hired me some tutors for Latin and for-- so we went to India. I went to high school-- for the first year of high school. And I was struggling a little bit, but somehow, they passed me. But by the fourth--

[BACKGROUND NOISES]

OK.

OK. So you were talking about your mother hired some tutors for you.

In Persia.

In Persia. It wasn't in India. Oh, in India, she hired some-- my English teacher. So he would give me some lessons privately. And I was supposed to go 5 times a week, but I think I went about three times. The rest of the money I spent on cigarettes.

Oh, my goodness.

[LAUGHS]

You were smoking at age 13, 14?

Oh, yeah-- no, I was-- it's '43-- that's--

You're 14 years old.

Yeah, 14 years old.

Well, it was in style in those days.

I know. But by the time I was a senior in high school, I was on the top of the class, especially in math and physics.

Really?

Yeah.

Wow.

And I went to the junior college and--



Still in India?

Yeah. Liceum, you know. And I was kind of a rebel over there, and fighting with teachers and--

So how many years did you spend in India?

5-- '43, '48. Five years-- yeah. I left after Gandhi was assassinated in '48, I believe.

Did you know much of what was going on in India in the country itself while you were in this town, or was settlement pretty closed?

In India?

Mm-hmm.

No, that was closed settlement. We knew about-- because we had a library-- and they had the radio in library, so they were listening to London, so we knew about international politics, but not on local.

Not directly.

No.

So you spend five years in India. How were things with your mother? What was going on with her?

Well, she worked in a hospital, and then things got worse, and she died when she was 55, I believe.

Of what?

Heart attack. Now, she'd be living another 30 years because of the implants and so on. See, in those days--

So she actually did have a heart condition when she was in Poland.

Oh, yes.

She really did.

But between Poland, '39, and '48-- she died in '48 or '47 I believe-- '48 probably. So--

Was that very sudden for you, or were you kind of prepared for it?

Well, I used to visit her every day for not too long, but every day. I felt it's my duty. And of course, I was crying at the funeral and so on. And they had those four the doctors-- it's not important-- they were all Jewish and some German-- and my wife-- [LAUGHS] my mother had a feud going with one of those doctors.

Was she teaching them how to be a doctor?

[LAUGHS]

Probably.

So at her funeral at the cemetery, he steps up. And I go by him-- I say listen, uh-uh. And he says listen, what I had with your mother, that's between me and her.

[CHIME]

So he said, what was between your mother was between me and her.

Yeah. So I let it go. And boy, did he give a speech.

Did he?

Yeah.

A wonderful speech?

Oh, yeah.

You had to write to Liliana and let her know-- didn't you-- about your mother?

Yes. At that time, I knew her address, and I sent some parcels to her from India.

Was there any chance or any talk about returning to Poland after the war was over?

Well, some of the people from India did return. But being son of the guy who was killed in Katyn, there wasn't much room for me over there. So even my uncle asked me, why don't you come?

Which I would probably do quite well, because at that time, I already knew English quite well before picking bad habits in this country.

[LAUGHS]

So you were alone then after her death?

Yeah.

What did you do? What happened?

Well, from India, after the camp was closed, there was choice-- to go to Australia, to Canada, and some people, to England. But you had to have somebody in England to go there. But they put me on a list as an orphan of the Polish officer, so I went to England.

[CAR ENGINE]

Can we repeat that? So what were England's requirements?

To go to England, you had to have some relative in England. But there was a list for people who could go in England, and they put me on that list somehow. So I went to England.

As the son of a Polish officer--

Yeah.

--as an orphan.

And in India, you were getting allowance in money, so we could buy stuff and so on. As a matter of fact, it was sort of like government welfare. And you had a servant in India.

[LAUGHS]

No-- really?

We used to pay him 5 rupees a month. And his father who was a policeman in India was getting 10 rupees a month.

[GASPS]

So the kid was doing well.

Not bad.

I sent him to buy bananas first time, so he brought me some onions. But after about 6 months, he spoke fluent polish.

Oh, my goodness.

[LAUGHS]

So where did you land in England?

In England, small town-- forgot the name of it. But that was like more or less camp. And--

And you were 17 years old?

Yeah. And when I came to England, there was this Polish officer interviewing people. And he says to me, what the heck-- you came here-- you don't have anybody here.

I said, I came here to see idiot like you.

[LAUGHTER]

That's what I told him.

[LAUGHS]

17 years old. No, that was '48-- I was 19 at the time.

19 years old.

Yeah, so I told him see idiot like you.

And how did he respond? Do you remember?

[MUMBLING]

[LAUGHS]

And how did your life develop after that?

Well, I went to school.

In England?

Yeah. There was a Polish government-sponsored junior college. I went there for two years, and I graduated. And then--

Was this in London?

No, that was in Bottisham, backwoods, small towns. And--

Bottisham-- how do we say it?

Bottisham.

Bottisham?

Yeah. That was a small town. Backwoods. And I was living there like a student just to live there. And I got into a fight with some professor, so they kicked me out from that.

So I was going to go to Cambridge, but we were playing bridge, and a friend of mine says, listen, come to London. So he took me to London. So I went to London, and then I met my wife in London because I went to school with her brother-- late brother. And we lived there for five years, and Dorothy was born in London.

So you got married in London?

Yeah. We lived there for five years. Dorothy was born there. And then we came to America. They wouldn't take her on a ship because she was seven months pregnant--

Your wife.

--so she flew, and I took the ship because I had some belongings. So I ended up in New York. And most of the passengers, it was-- I came on the United States. It was fastest from South Hampton to New York, 4 and 1/2 days.

Wow.

Yeah. So most of them were Germans on that ship. As a matter of fact, there was a guy who was translating. He was a vice admiral in the Polish Navy, and he says, look, we used to fight them-- now you have to translate for them.

But anyway there was immigration, and this guy was so rough with these people who didn't speak English. And finally, I come to him, and then I started talking. And he says, where did you learn English?

And I say, none of your business. And he says if it was up to me, I would send you back. I say, fortunately, little people like you don't have much to say. Right now, they would send me right back. But in those days, you could do those things.

Your mother taught you well.

[LAUGHS]

That's right. So then from New York, I came to Chicago, and--

And what was your career? In brief, what was your career here in Chicago?

Well, first of all, I worked-- I had this Polish junior college of liberal arts, so what I was going to do with liberal arts? So I tried to get a job like Polish National Alliance. They were paying \$40 a week.

So I went to do some physical work. I was making \$120 a week. So then I went partly to night school, partly to day school, and I majored in accounting. But I worked only six months in accounting, because the boss came to me and says listen, you're too smart to work in accounting-- go to statistics. So I worked in statistics for about 30 years.

Wow.

At a private company?

Yeah, Kemper Insurance. And by the way, I speak with the accent. Of course, 20 years ago, I had a better vocabulary.

So I used to represent company in New York once a month. There were intercompany conferences, and there was a guy who finished Yale in our department. And he says, well, send in the guy who speaks with the accent. And the boss says, listen, he's very logical and he's a good fighter. That's what he is going.

Well, you had a school. You had a school to learn in, and that was not just the business school and the junior college.

And I did quite well. 32 years, I worked there, and I get a small pension from them on top of my social security.

Have you ever been back to Poland?

Twice.

First time in '77. I took my cousin to Victoria Hotel, which was the most prestigious hotel in those days--

In Warsaw?

--yeah-- for a dinner for the two of us, and I paid \$4. And about five years ago, I went to look at my sister's grave [INAUDIBLE]. So I was coming from the cemetery. I stopped at Marriott, and they had a smorgasbord there. And I go up there and said, how much? 142 zloty, which is \$42.

Still not bad.

[LAUGHS]

So obviously, I didn't go there.

So did you ever go back to Kovel, or is that--

No, that was Soviet Union and now Ukraine. No, I stayed in Warsaw most of the time, and the Carpathian mountains and Nowy Sacz. I got friends over there, so I stayed there for a while.

Did you talk much about your experiences to your children and to others as-- here in the United States?

Well, they know more or less Lillian. Lillian is more interested than Dorothy. She's interested, but Lillian wants more details. So I talked with Lillian, and of course, there are those books that I wrote some articles there about myself.

What would you want other children-- those who don't have much exposure to this history-- what would you want them to understand about these events and what their significance is?

Well, unfortunately, they don't teach this in school. They teach about the Holocaust, but mostly about Jewish people. Here, who have three people in Chicago who were in Auschwitz. One is 96, other is 96, and the third one is very sick.

So this one who is 96, he goes to Skokie, which is a Jewish community here, and he talks in high school to the young Jews, and explaining to them, showing them his number that some other people were there besides Jews. So he is spreading this thing.

And we published a couple books. And there are a lot of books in Polish, but for example, Adamczuk, he wrote a book about Siberia. And of course, his book was published by University of Chicago. It's about 4,000 copies he sold

[INAUDIBLE]. But I understand he sold 32,000 copies in Poland.

That's wonderful.

That's wonderful, right?

So what is your message that you would want more people to know about the deportations-- the Siberian deportations. Sure-- I'm willing to go to schools and talk about it. Of course, as I get older, I have more time, and most of my bridge partners died.

[LAUGHS]

Well, I'd like to thank you for sharing your thoughts and your experiences with us today. They've been very interesting, very intriguing. You've painted a wonderful picture in words of at least a little part of what you had been through.

And I'd say that with that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Eugenius Chmielowski on January 31st, 2015, in Chicago. Thank you again.

Thank you.