

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Henry Shery in Manchester Township, New Jersey on the very last day of July, July 31, 2015. Thank you very much, Mr. Shery, for agreeing to meet with us today and to talk with us today.

You're very welcome.

As I just mentioned to you off camera, we're going to talk a lot about your life and your family's life pre-war to get a sense of what was the world you were born into, what was the world that was lost. And I will start with the very simplest of questions. And the very first one is can you tell me the date of your birth?

December 3, 1929.

December the 3rd, 1929?

1929.

And where were you born?

In Lodz, Poland.

And what was your name at birth?

Hirsch [? Gundsher. ?]

Hirsch [? Gunsher? ?]

Mm-hmm.

OK. Did you have brothers and sisters?

I had an older brother.

What was his name?

His name was Yonah.

Yonah?

And I had two sisters.

And could you tell me Yonah's date of birth?

No, I don't remember. I don't really know.

Or his year?

He was about four years older than me.

And your sisters?

My sister-- I had one older sister. Her name was Dora, Dvora. She was born in the year, I think, 1927. She was older. And then I had a younger sister. Her name was Bela.

Bela?

She was born, I think, in 1930. She was the youngest. She was like a year and a half younger than me.

Tell me a little bit about your parents too, starting with their names.

My parents-- His name was Jacob.

Gunsher?

Right.

My mother was Golda.

What was her maiden name?

And her maiden name was Kochanski.

Kochanski? And was she also from Lvov?

She was from Lodz.

Excuse me, Lodz?

Lodz. I don't know much about my father's background, because we were very close to my mother's background-- my mother's family, because my father's family I didn't know much about. I know he had a sister that came to the United States. And he used to get pictures from them. Everybody that comes from the United States sends pictures over there, they're always in front of a car.

That's true.

And to me, it was a novelty, because we didn't have that many cars over there. We had dorozkas. We had the buggies.

What's a dorozka?

Horse and buggy over there a lot. We also had the public transportation. We had the trolley cars. But I know I had an aunt that came over here. But I didn't know her name over there, because all the year-- all the pictures we had over there-- there were letters over there-- was all this destroyed in the ghetto.

And I didn't know her married name. I didn't know when she came to the United States. So I really never pursued to find them. But my mother's family, we were very close.

Before we go to your mother's family, your father's family-- I just wanted to know-- do you know if they were from Lodz as well?

I think so. I think so. I know my father was in the Russian Army-- the First World War. And I think he was stationed in Poland.

So was he part of-- was Lodz in the part of Poland that was controlled by the Russian Empire?

I think they were fighting against the Austrian Army that time. That I know. And he was something in the purchasing for material for uniform materials over there. That's what he told me. That's what he did in the army. But that's all I know.

OK. So his family is more of a blank slate?

Right. My father's family is really a blank thing over there that I don't know much about.

OK. So the Kochanski family.

My Kochanski family I know. My mother she had two brothers, and she had two sisters.

So five kids?

She had two sisters. One was the youngest sister. Her name was Esther. I know she married. She got married over there. And they had a restaurant. It was a bar and a restaurant. And he had a salami factory. And during the war, they went to Russia.

They escaped that way?

They escaped. They went to Russia. They join the Partisan. Then when they came back, some other people came back, and they told us that the Russian underground killed them. They both got killed, because they were in the Jewish underground, in the Partisan. And they were killed by the Russians.

My other-- one uncle I had, my other uncle, my oldest uncle over there was Uncle Avraham. He left in 1934, I think. He left for Palestine. He and-- he has three sons and two daughters over there. They all went to Palestine.

OK. So that's two of your mother's siblings.

Right. One aunt, they had a grocery store in Lodz. And they all went to Auschwitz. And you never saw them again over there.

What was her name? Do you remember?

No, I don't. I don't. All I know is I could see them. They were all redheads.

And that leaves one brother.

One brother, my Uncle Leon. He had the ladies' clothing factory. Not a clothing factory, but he had a store in the center of Lodz. And during the war--

First or Second?

The Second World War. The Second World War. The First World War was only I'll tell you about my father. But this uncle over there, the Germans came in and confiscated all his-- He only had ladies' coats. They took everything away and closed the shop over there.

And where he lived, he lived in uptown over there. And of course, they closed uptown over there, and they start moving everybody down to the ghetto. So they closed his thing up over.

And for that matter, he had a couple of bulks of clothing, of material. He brought it over to my father to hide it. And we hid it over there. And somehow the Germans came, and they said-- because we had four-room apartment over there. And one of the rooms over there, he hid his material over there. We put the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], the closet in front of it.

And apparently the Germans knew that there's a lot of room over there. So they say, "What's in the back of this over here?" They know. They moved it out and took all the goods out of there.

So it didn't work?

That didn't work out.

What was the name of his ladies' coat store? Do you remember?

It was Kochanski Store.

Kochanski Store. OK.

So that was his. And that was the end of his business over there.

We'll come to the war year and what happened there in a little bit. Right now I want to concentrate on your very earliest years in the interwar, before--

Before the war, we--

Tell me about your mother and father and how your father supported the family. Tell us that.

My father was a manufacturer of children's clothing.

So he manufactured them?

He manufactured only children's clothing.

And did he have a store as well?

No, no, he didn't have a store. He was--

A wholesaler?

He was-- I would call it [INAUDIBLE]. He would manufacture for other stores. He had like six sewing machines over there. He had pressers and everything else over there. And that's what he made a living over there. He wasn't an orthodox person, but he was, I guess-- Let me say that there was nobody in Lodz-- or in Poland, I guess-- somebody that you weren't necessarily orthodox, but you were religious.

Friday afternoon, my father's shop was closed. I know he went to the barber to get his beard-- He had a very short beard around. He had his beard trimmed and his hair done over there. It was Friday afternoon and that was it. But Sunday, the factory worked.

Was it a large factory?

No, just small. I don't know what this is large. To me, it was large.

Yeah, but you were a child.

To me, it was large. He is, I know, six sewing machines. He had a pressing room over there and all this over there.

So would you say you had a handful of workers?

Yeah, he had people working for him over there.

About a dozen or less?

No, less than a dozen, I guess. Whatever.

So it wouldn't be a large place.

Yeah. Some of them were Jewish or some of them were not Jewish that worked for him over there.

Sewers and things like that?

But he made a living. And then in the summertime, we used to go-- my mother used to take us down to the like a summer home. We didn't have it over there, but we rented the room by farm over there. And that's the way we got out of the city in the summertime.

Was it far from Lodz, this summer place?

Yeah, we went-- it was public transportation.

Oh, so it still was within, let's say, the larger--

Yeah, well, my father would come down on Friday afternoon.

OK. So it wasn't that far away?

No, it wasn't that far. No. It was maybe an hour away over there, something like this. I don't remember exactly. But I know we got there by public transportation. And then the farmer would pick us up with his wagon over there. And that's where we spend the summer, a couple of weeks over there.

Always the same place?

Well, you know something, to me, they all seem to me the same.

OK. I know I'm asking you questions in some ways are really ludicrous, because how can you remember whether it was the same farmer? It was 70 years ago.

I don't remember. I know we went to farm.

Yeah.

And we always had fresh [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

Sour cream.

Cream. Sour cream. Fresh one over there. And we had fresh milk over there. I mean, fresh eggs over there. That was a great thing over there.

That's what you remember.

Right from the farm we had it over there.

But was this a Gentile farmer?

Yeah. But they used to give up--

Part of their home.

--part of the home over there. This was extra income for them over there. And a lot of people-- It wasn't just our family did it. We used to get together over there, and all the kids used to play together.

It's fun.

The farms over there, that's the way the farmers used to subsidize their living too.

Tell me a little bit about Lodz itself. When you were growing up, what kind of a city was it?

Lodz itself was a very big city. It was the biggest industrial place in Europe. It was the biggest textile industry over there. As far as the Jewish life, we had Jewish day schools, Jewish Gymnasiums, which was high schools. They had a Jewish hospital.

We had our own Jewish theaters over there. My mother was an avid theater goer over there. She used to love to go to the Jewish theater over there. And right now, every time she came back-- That's how I learned the Jewish songs-- from her. It was a very lively city.

Was it a pretty city?

Very pretty.

Really? Even if it was industrial?

Industrial, but it had parks over there. And it wasn't the smokestacks. It was textile industry. Textile industry was very clean. They actually produced all the textile for most of Europe.

That's a lot.

Yeah. Lodz happens to be a very, very industrial-- I mean in textile-- city. And then life was very complacent over there. Everybody was--

Was your family-- would you consider that you were well-to-do, or were you middle class?

I really don't know, because I didn't know any better. I mean, I felt I had everything I needed, everything I wanted, because I didn't want much. I didn't need the-- Radio we didn't have.

You didn't have a radio?

No. There was one radio in our apartment complex over there. One person had a radio, and everybody listened to him. That was until the war. Then the Germans confiscated it.

I'm going to ask a lot of questions to get a picture of where you lived-- and I mean physically. So can you tell me whether you were in the center of the city or in a residential area?

We lived in the Jewish section, which wasn't the center of the city.

It was or was not?

No, it was not the center of the city. We lived in-- well, actually, the street that I lived over there, it was called Zydoska.

Zydoska? Jewish Street?

Jewish Street, right? We had synagogues on the left side. We had a synagogue on the right side.

Was it a city street?

City street. All city street. It was for apartment houses.

All right, and those apartment houses, can you describe what they look?

Well, each apartment was a courtyard.

Inside?

You had a courtyard in the center. And each apartment house had the caretaker that lived on the premises. At night he used to close the gates in the front. And then it was like-- I don't remember-- it was three stories, I know.

Three stories.

Three stories. On the left side, in the back, and then the right side. So at each house it was a courtyard.

Did people have their own transportation, like horses and buggies that they kept in the courtyard?

No, no, no. We had the little car just in the front over there, which was called like the taxis. They were parked on the end of the street.

And was that what you call dorozkis?

That's right. For that, by then, my grandfather, which I never met. He died I think the year before I was born.

Your mother's father?

My mother's father. He was a horse trader. He used to go out and buy those horses. They're the special type of horses. They're not work horses, but they're horses for carriages. They're not very big, and they're not very small. He used to go out in the-- that was his business.

He used to go out. He always had a couple of bodyguards with him, because he carried a lot of cash with him. He used to go out to the farms. He will go away for two days or three days and bring back a bunch of horses. And then he would-- he had the stable. His stable was actually across the street from where he lived. And he used to stable the horses over there. And then people that had all dorozkas would come to him to buy it.

To buy the horses.

To buy the horses, right.

I see.

So it's like a car dealer.

Yeah.

It's just like a car.

When you think about it, it is.

It's just like a car dealer, because most of the transportation was done with the-- instead of cars.

With a little bit less pollution.

Yeah. And they used to go with dorozkas.

When you would walk out, let's say, in order to paint a picture for us-- when you'd walk out of your apartment in the morning and be on your street, what would you see in front of you?

We saw a deli across the street. One of them was a deli that only sold the salami, pastrami. Then there was another store over there that only had dairy products-- milk, cheese. Then there was another store that had groceries. Everything was in barrels over there. You bought them.

That's the way you shopped. So my mother used to go shopping every day. I mean, we didn't have refrigeration. So every day you went to shop. She used to go out and shop every day. We used to go with her over there.

Not so far.

We used to carry the bottles back.

And did you live on the first or the third?

On the third floor.

On the third floor. Walk up.

Yeah, we walked up. We didn't have any problem walking stairs.

What did your apartment look like? Describe it to me.

It was a little four-room apartment. It was a kitchen. One of them was like a we call it a parlor. Then there was bedrooms. I slept with my brother over there. And we slept on the-- you know, I don't remember really. But I know everybody had a place to sleep. My parents had one room over there. The rest of the rooms we used to use.

OK. So you and your brother had a room, and your sisters?

We had one room together. My sisters had a together room.

And your parents?

And parents.

And then you had the parlor and the kitchen?

Right.

Now, we didn't have central heat.

OK. So how did you heat the place?

It was in the middle of the apartment was-- It was a heater, I guess. It was tiles. And you had to put wood into it over there.

Would you heat by wood or coal?

I think it was wood. We used to put the wood into it. And then it would produce heat all around.

And it was a tiled oven?

It's not a cooking oven.

No.

This was a heating thing over there. So each apartment had their own heater-- had to heat alone over there. Cooking was separate. I think it was coal at that time over there.

OK. But this was one kind of unit that was tiled for the whole apartment or for one room?

That's for only one. So if you want to have in wintertime more heat, you just move closer to it.

And did you have electricity?

Yeah. Electricity we had.

Did you have a phone?

Phone?

Phone.

I didn't have a radio. How would I have a phone? How would we even know what a telephone was?

Yeah. OK. I'm trying to get a sense.

I didn't even know what a telephone was that time over there.

And you said very few people had cars?

Nobody in my neighborhood had a car. I mean, we saw car going by the street over there, it was a novelty. Uptown they had some cars. We saw cars going around over there. But on our street, when a car went by, it was a real novelty.

I've heard of people saying when a car would come by where we live, we chase it, because it was so--

No, when a car went by over there, it was a real novelty to see a car go by. But most of the transportation was done by horse and wagons. They delivered everything.

And so it sounds like you didn't have to go far in order to buy food every day.

No, no, we didn't have to go far. No. Far, no. You have to go. And the synagogue, we didn't have to go far either. It was either to the left or to the right. School, you walked to school. It was, I don't know what, 20-minute, 30-minute walk to the school.

And did you go to public school?

Yes.

OK, so you went to a school where there would be Jewish children and Gentile children.

And Christian. It was a public school.

OK. I'm going to ask you in a little bit more about the school. Right now I still want to find out about things at home.

What about your father's factory? Was it close by? Did he have to travel far?

He had it downstairs in the same place over there.

Ah, very easy. Very easy. So he had his workshop?

He had downstairs in the same complex over there. He had his shop over there.

Did your parents own the apartment or did they rent it?

No, we rent it.

OK. And did you know the people who did own it?

No.

No. Sometimes, they live in the same place. Sometimes, they didn't.

I think I know who owned it. He was my next-door neighbor, but I wouldn't know their name. He was an importer of smoked fish. He used to import smoked fish in those wooden crates over there, because every time he brought in his fresh things over there, he used to give it to my mother.

Tasty.

It was very good. I think he used to go to Gdansk. And that was the port city in Poland over there. That's where he used to bring it from over there.

Did you used to when you were a kid-- and I'm talking already school age-- did you used to wander out beyond your neighborhood streets much?

Oh, yeah.

Yeah? Did you go to the center of town?

Yeah. We used to go down. We used to go down. I had no problem going around anyplace over there. I was never afraid of anything.

Did you go by streetcar?

We went by streetcar. We went down like two blocks down over there, picked up the streetcar over there. From there, we went.

Did you go to the cinema when you were a kid?

Yeah. Not too often, but we went. We went to see cowboy movies.

Yeah? Did you go see them like kids over here did on Saturday afternoons?

No, no, no. I didn't go Saturday. We used to go whenever. But my brother used to go out. My sister used to go out more. But I didn't go that much over there. But my brother, he was much older, so he was already like an adult.

To your eyes.

And so he would go. But I used to go with my grandmother. She used to live across the street.

The grandmother who was the widow of your grandfather the horse trader.

Right. She lived across the street over there. And the stable was closed, but she lived over there. Until my uncle bought the big apartment house uptown. It was with all modern things over there. He sold-- he or whatever, I guess all of them-- they sold my grandmother's house over there. And he gave her an apartment uptown over there. So then we used to go visit her. Up to her, we had to take the trolley car already.

OK. And did that apartment house look different from where you lived?

Yes. It was central heat. It was completely different. It was a very modern building.

Did it have an elevator?

No.

No.

Elevators.

Did it have balconies? Did your apartment have a balcony?

No. No. We had windows. In wintertime, we use it as a refrigerator.

Yeah.

We used to put the stuff outside over there, and we kept things cold. But we didn't know any different. And to us, everything was just the way it was supposed to be. I mean, life was simple. But we didn't look for anything that--

You didn't feel anything missing.

I didn't miss nothing, no, because I had my friends. We used to go out and play soccer. We used to play on the streets over there. We used to play. We used to go to park, play.

Did your family keep the traditions, like every Sat--?

Saturday night my mother lit candles.

On Friday night, I meant.

Friday night my mother lived candles over there. And Friday, me, my brother went to the bakery, which was next door. We lived at number 18. Number 20 was the bakery. Friday afternoon, the bakery closed up over there. We used to bring-- I don't know if you know what the heck I'm talking about-- a cholent. No.

Tell us. What is it?

A cholent is a-- How would they say?

Casserole?

My mother would prepare a-- Saturday, you're not allowed to cook. So how do you eat Saturday a hot meal? You bring it Friday to the bakery. She used to put-- a stew. A cholent is like a stew. You put the meat, potatoes, carrots, with beans, whatever you want to put in.

And then you wrap-- the pot gets closed up, gets sealed up. You wrap it up with newspapers. You put your name on it and bring it down to the bakery. And they'd put it into the oven. On Saturday afternoon when my father was finished with services-- if I go, I went too, but my brother went with me over there-- it was my job and his to bring the cholent home, the pot home.

It's an important job.

Everybody else's pots were there too. They had loads of pots over there. Everybody had their name on it. You took it home. And my mother opened it up over there. And that's why we had a hot meal then, Because Saturday, they wouldn't cook.

OK. That's how you dealt with that.

That's how we dealt on a weekly basis.

And was that the same meal every Saturday? Pretty much?

It was pretty much the same. I don't know, whichever way she prepared it over.

And it was called cholent?

Cholent.

Cholent.

Cholent it's called. And that was a tradition.

Was it tasty?

It's-- I guess so. Nothing was left out of it. Nothing was left out of this. And you do wouldn't go shopping for nothing on Saturday until after the Sabbath. So when the Sabbath was over, you can go to the deli and buy something over there and take home.

OK. And would that be like Saturday afternoon?

Saturday evening.

Saturday evening.

Saturday evening after--

The Sabbath is over.

After the Sabbath is over. Sabbath is over after sundown over there. In the summertime, it's later. In the wintertime, it's earlier. That's when the stores opened up. All the stores were closed on Saturday. Friday afternoon and Saturday, all the stores were closed. All the Jewish stores.

Were there any Christian stores there?

Not on my street. They didn't have any. The only Christians that they had was the caretaker. And his family lived over there. Because I think most of the people that lived in that apartment house were Jewish, if I can recall. Although, we had a monastery in the backyard.

In the backyard?

Yeah, from my window, I could see the nuns over there all the time, because the monastery was right over there.

So it was a convent?

Right. A monastery-- convent was there. It was all nuns over there.

OK, then it was a convent?

Yeah. They were right-- I mean, from our window--

You could see it.

Yeah, I could see them. So it was mostly a Jewish neighborhood, but it was--

Well, Lodz is a city.

--mixed with others.

Yeah. What language did you speak at home?

Yiddish.

Yiddish. Did you learn Polish?

Yeah. I speak Polish in school.

OK, but before you went to school, did you hear any Polish at all?

Yeah, I heard Polish, because this was the language that you used over there. But at home, my parents spoke Yiddish all the time. And the adults spoke Polish, but they spoke primarily Yiddish.

OK. Now let's go to school a little bit. You said it took you about 20 minutes to walk there?

About 20 minutes to half an hour. I don't remember how long, but that's what it took.

Do you have any memories at all from school?

Well, the school was mixed. But I didn't go to school that long over there, because as soon as the war started, the Jewish kids weren't allowed to go school no more. As soon as the Germans formed the ghetto, the school would have been in the ghetto.

Oh, I see.

The school would've been where the ghetto was closed in. So the Polish kids had to move out. And they brought in all the Jewish people from different places had to move in over here.

But how many years had you gone before the war?

About three years.

About three years. So you had finished your third year. But then the Germans say the Jewish are not allowed to go to school anymore.

They can't. Yeah, they're not allowed.

The school was closed.

Let's talk about before it was closed. Do you remember any of your teachers?

No.

No. What about any of the other classmates?

I don't remember them. I don't know them. I really don't know them now.

Did you remember learning about Polish history?

Yeah. But this was elementary school.

Yeah, that's right. You wouldn't be learning a lot.

So we didn't go into history or anything like this. It was primarily learning the ABC, learning grammar, you're learning how to count. So this was--

Yeah, you're right.

--basic.

Basic things.

Basic things, right. So we didn't go into that thing, because that I never went that far.

Yeah. Did your parents read newspapers? Did they get newspapers at home?

Yiddish.

Yiddish newspapers.

Yiddish newspapers.

But they get those.

All Yiddish newspapers, because there were so many different Yiddish newspapers over there.

Was there any in particular that your parents subscribed to? No?

I wouldn't know, because I didn't--

You didn't read them though.

--know how to read Yiddish.

Yeah. But do you remember seeing your father--?

I remember seeing the Yiddish paper over there. I know they had the Yiddish paper over there, and that's what they used.

And now I'd like to learn a little bit about what kind of people your parents were, what kind of personalities they had. Tell me about your father and your mother. Were they outgoing? Were they more reserved people? Tell me a little bit about them.

My father, he wasn't, let me say, very close to children. He was more reserved. You had to look up to him. Not that he spanked anybody or anything. You just showed respect because he was your father.

And my mother in turn was a different person. She was more close with children. And she was close with nieces and nephews and everybody else. She was more a social butterfly, like I would say. So that was the difference between them. He was your father. So you respected him and you never said anything--

You didn't argue with him.

If he said something, this what it was. Your mother, you could--

Negotiate?

Not negotiate, but she would say you want to do this, and go ahead and do this. She was more flexible, let's say.

OK. Did your father ever take you to his workshop with him? Did you go down there much?

Yes.

Yeah? Did you learn some of the ins and outs.

Well, I used to observe. I used to observe. I was too small to get to the machine, but I went down to see what was doing over there. And I spent some time over there.

Did your sisters or your brother ever work there with him?

My brother went down there with him. My sisters, I don't think went in over there. But my brother did.

So would you say you were closer to your mother because she was more outgoing?

Yeah. Well, I was close to my mother because she was my mother.

OK.

And it's not that I wasn't close to my father, but your father was sort of-- you put him on the roof or whatever. Today, we live in a different world. Today, you treat your father sometimes like your friend. But your father wasn't a friend. Your father was your father.

Sounds like he was an authority.

Well, yeah. You didn't argue with him. It was his opinion. What he says, went.

What about your parents? Did they ever tell you how they met and married? No?

Well, yes. How they met, I don't know. But I found it out later that my brother was actually a half brother. Apparently, what happened, his mother died in childbirth.

With him?

With him. Then my father married my mother. But he considered her the mother, because I found this thing out later in

life. When I was an adult already, I actually found this thing out from a cousin in Israel.

Really?

Because I didn't know it. But his mother died in childbirth.

OK. So your mother was your father's second wife?

She was the second wife.

Was there a great age difference between them?

I guess it was.

Yeah?

I don't know how many years different. But there was an age difference. It's not that he was an old man. But there must've been some age difference. I don't know exactly what.

But if you found this out when you were an adult, it doesn't sound like it made a huge difference.

To me, it didn't make any-- he was my brother anyway.

Yeah. Were you closer to any of your siblings, any particular sibling in particular you were close to?

Well, I was close with all--

Of all of them.

--of them, with all of them.

And how would you describe your family life? Would you say it was a warm family? Do you say we really wouldn't get along?

It was a normal family. We had everything that-- my father provided. He was a provider. My mother in the house.

Did she have any help?

No. She used to go to the-- When she wanted to go to theater, she went to the theater. My father didn't go. Maybe he did sometime over there. I don't remember whether he went or not, but I know that she used to go. She used to go to all Jewish plays over there. Any time a Jewish play came out over there, she was there.

Is there anything in particular you think that you learned from your father that stayed with you? And the same question applies to your mother. Any sort of values or any sort of habits or ways of thinking or things like that?

I guess things rub off on you without you knowing.

Sometimes, yeah.

I don't know if I have any trait that I learned from them over there. I really don't know. But I guess I am who I am. Maybe it's because of them. I'm sure it must be because of them, otherwise I wouldn't be here.

Well, the first years of life everybody says are the most important ones. They found the foundation of how a child will develop. And how that child, whether they'll be resilient later on as life goes on or whether they won't.

All I know is I learned to, from them, respect for others. And I am who I am.

Yeah. Were the children treated with respect?

Yeah.

They treated you with respect as well?

Absolutely, yeah.

OK. So it was a two-way street. It was not only that you respected your father because he's your father and your mother because she's your mother, but they also showed it.

Right. I never had any problem like this. No.

OK. So your father, Did he go to synagogue every week?

He went Friday afternoon, yeah. Friday evening, Saturday morning, he used to go.

Let's turn a little bit to the wider world then. You mentioned that there were times that you were in a mixed environment that is not only a Jewish environment.

Right.

Did you ever experience any kind of negative situations because you were Jewish in the larger Polish world?

Not really. In school, I didn't have any problems. We didn't have any problem over there. But we went out over there to play football--

With other boys?

We played with others. So over there we had no problem-- until--

Things happened.

--war broke out. So I didn't feel any animosity against me from anybody. But I didn't have many non-Jewish friends, because most of my friends were Jewish. When I went out to play ball, I went out with the same kids that were supposed to go to Hebrew school.

So instead of going to Hebrew school, we played hooky. We played ball. And then my grandmother, she paid the rabbi over there to teach me. And she was mad-- why I didn't go to cheder. So told her I like to play ball.

So when was cheder? What time of the week was cheder?

Cheder, it's small. It's learning only Hebrew, only prayers actually. But we were like four or five boys over there in that thing. And he wasn't very nice to us, because if you didn't repeat after him, he would spank you right now. So we didn't like to go.

It was a bit old-fashioned.

Yes. So instead of this, we get in, we run out, and we play ball.

So when you would go, would that be after regular school?

After regular school, right. After regular school.

So it was five days a week?

Well, whenever we were there.

Which means that whenever you weren't playing ball you went.

When we were there, we were there, because we liked to play outside better. So it wasn't an easy thing to do. It's a complete different language over there that you--

Yeah, a completely different language.

And those people-- that rabbi over there is supposed to be a teacher, wasn't necessarily so compassionate to you. So most of my friends were Jewish.

So I'm going to widen the circle even more. First, I wanted to find out about home, and the street, and the neighborhood, and school, and then the non-Jewish community. So you didn't have that much contact.

No.

Now I want to make it even a little bit wider. And that is, at home, did anybody ever talk about political events that were happening? Like did that ever come into discussions?

Not that I can-- nothing that I can recall.

OK. So even Polish politics, like when Pilsudski died in 1935, do you remember if that was an event?

Yeah, that was an event over there. We knew that he passed away. And everybody was a mourning over there, because he was the president at that time. So those things came to play. But otherwise, politics-- if it was discussed, I wasn't involved with it.

Of course not, you're a child.

I wasn't present. I'm not saying that my parents didn't discuss the thing with their neighbors over there, among themselves, or whatever. But--

It didn't touch the kids.

We weren't touched by it over there.

OK. So if that's the case, then when Hitler came to power in Germany, you were four years old.

No, no. Well, when he came to power, yeah, that's different now.

Now when he came-- that's in 1933. And Germany is not Poland. So it's another country. Do you remember any talk about him and about what kind of things were going on in Germany?

Yes, yes. This I remember, because my uncle, my mother's older brother, in 1934, he wanted my father-- He said he was going to go to Palestine. But Palestine had the White Paper. You couldn't emigrate to Palestine. So he sold his business to my other uncle.

Your mother's other brother?

Right. He sold his business to my other uncle. He bought property in Palestine. He bought an apartment house in Tel Aviv. So he was able to get-- The British government gave him an allowance as a capitalist to emigrate to Palestine with his children, with his five children.

So that was a way because he had money.

So he came over to my father. He says, "Why don't you go too?" My father says, "What am I going to do? Sit down on the sand bar over there? It's all sand over there. There's nothing for me to do over there." Here, everything was normal over here in '34. But my uncle took his family, and they went to Palestine at this time.

And why? Why did he do that?

Because two of his sons were Zionists. They went to Palestine illegally, because they smuggled themselves in over there. And they wrote to their parents, come down, come, come. And my aunt says, "I got my two sons over there. And I'm not going to stay over here."

What for? Why should I stay?

So they decided he was going to sell everything over here and go to Palestine. And so they're the only ones that left alive. And they settled over there. And my younger cousin, which he didn't to go yet over there, he went to Italy to the Naval Academy to become a naval officer.

Italian Naval Academy?

In Citta Vecchia. He went there. But also he had a British passport, because he went there and then he came back, and he went to Citta Vecchia over there to become a naval officer. But the rest of the family stayed in Palestine.

So this is one of the two sons, you're saying?

Right. That's one of the three sons over there. He had three sons and two daughters. But they went. And he said to my father, "Why don't you do the same thing?" Then you already knew what Germany was like. You had an inkling of what Germany was like.

But you're saying the reason they went is because their children went. And they were Zionists.

Because the children wanted to become Zionists over there. But they knew that in Germany there was a red flag out over there.

So even though it's a different country, it was enough to help them say "let's get out." They knew something was brewing over there. That's why they went over there. So whether it was this or just because they were Zionists, I don't know. I couldn't say that definitely that this is what influenced them. I don't really know, because that time I, I think, was-- in '34, what was I-- six, seven years old at that time, right?

But I remember them coming over, talking to my father. And my father says, "Look, nothing is going to happen over here. We have everything over here that we need. Why go ahead and up with everything and go to Palestine over there? What did you buy over there? Apartment house on the sand over there. There's nothing there. Sand dunes.

Well, at that time you could think that it seems a lot riskier to go to a place that isn't even a real country yet--

Right.

--and where you have difficulties getting in.

Right. You couldn't get in. You couldn't get in over there, because the British had put the embargo. You couldn't go.

But what prompted this was a question that I asked of when Hitler came to power, was that discussed?

Not that I remember.

Not that you remember.

Not that I remember. I knew there were the Polish politics was involved, yes. But the German politics, I don't remember anything of that.

OK. Now as we go towards the later 1930s, all around Europe, there was a sense of insecurity because as Nazi Germany grew stronger, they started having interests in expansion. Whether this was annexing Czechoslovakia, whether this was annexing the Memel territories, the talk about Gdansk and Danzig, the same place, and what does that mean, the Corridor. And did any of these types of wider European unrest make itself felt in Zydoska Street in Lodz?

Oh, yes. That time already, politics was very much in everybody's mind-- that Germany is going to expand. And what are we going to do about it? Well, we have a Polish Army. We have a Polish army. Poland was an independent country over there. And if Germany's going to invade, the Polish Army is going to protect you. But it didn't work out like this.

Do you remember the summer of 1939? That would be the last summer before September 1, just when Germany invaded Poland. Do you remember that particular summer? Were you out in the countryside like usual?

I think we were. I think we were at that year too.

Do you remember hearing when the war starts?

Well, the war started-- Yes, because we saw right away planes coming over.

German planes?

German planes came right over Lodz. They started bombing and bombing and bombing over there.

Were they bombing Lodz?

All we knew was all of a sudden, the Polish Army disappeared. Some of them disappeared to England. It didn't take more than three days over there. Germany took over all of Poland. They just went right through. All of a sudden, we saw German tanks and German trucks and everything just go right through over there.

In Lodz?

In Lodz.

And Lodz for those people who don't know where it's located geographically, what part of Poland is Lodz in?

It's actually central.

Central Poland?

From Warsaw to Lodz is about 100 kilometers or something.

And so it's further west than Warsaw?

I think so, yeah.

OK. By the way, had you ever gone to Warsaw--

No.

--before the war? OK. Had you ever traveled outside Lodz and the farmhouse that go to?

No.

So by the third or fourth day, you already see German--?

We saw German--

Troops.

--tanks and German trucks and German Army all over Lodz. But we didn't think that-- they're going through, but we didn't think that life was going to be so disruptive.

Those first couple of days after they arrive, did anything change much?

Yes.

What happened?

The synagogue was burnt down right away.

On your street?

On our street, we had things out over there that before the ghetto closed over there. They had bulletins all over the place over there to bring all religious books down to the yard over there by the synagogue.

Did people do that?

You have to do it. People did it over there. And what they did, they poured gasoline on it and set it on fire right away.

So nobody expected this to happen?

They burned this thing down and they burned the synagogue at the same time. All religious books over there and all the synagogues, right away they burned it up over there. So we saw already what we're dealing with over here.

Then what happened?

And the next thing, they said that they're going to clear the ghetto.

Was your street part of the ghetto?

Yeah.

Did that mean you have to move?

No.

Or you could stay in your apartment?

We didn't move, no. We didn't move. But we had other people moving in to us.

I see. So in your four rooms, did you have other families?

We had three or four other families moving in.

Wow.

It was a revolving door. Once they closed the ghetto up, it was a pretty big area over there. It was barbed wires with the German uniformed soldiers around over there. You couldn't go in and out.

And they had brought in people from Austria, people from France, people from other parts of Poland, from small towns over there. They brought them into the ghetto. And then we had to share the apartment with them over there. But then they took some people and send them out to labor camps.

The ghetto walls, was your street close to where there would--

No.

--be a border? So you were like in the middle of it?

We were in the middle somehow. Right. We weren't near the fencing over there. We were blocks away. The ghetto was a big-- it was a pretty big-sized ghetto over there.

And how did they create the enclosure? What did the enclosure look like? What was it made of? All made out of barbed wire with all fencing. And then they had posts, guard posts set up over so many meters. And it was patrolled by the German Army.

Was there any streetcar still going through the ghetto?

No. There was nothing, nothing over there.

So no public transportation anymore?

No, the only thing that they had was they brought in food with horse and buggies. They brought in food. And the only other horse that they had over there was to take the dead bodies to the cemetery.

We'll come to that. Your grandmother, did she have to move back?

No she passed away. I think she passed away I think before the ghetto closed.

But the war had started?

I think it was just before the war started that she passed away.

OK. And what about your uncle who had bought that modern apartment building? What about him?

Well he ended up moving into the ghetto. Yeah, not moving into the ghetto, with other families over there. He and his wife and two children.

So in your life, it meant you could no longer go to school.

No. The schools were transformed into tailor shops.

I see.

All the schools became work places.

And what about your father's own business?

The two older machines were taken out.

OK, so his business stops?

Everything stopped. Everything stopped. There was no more private enterprise.

So all his assets that is those-- gone?

Everything soon as the ghetto was created, you either work for the German government, for the German Army, or nothing.

And did you have any direct encounter with any German soldier or official or representative at any point during these early days?

Yes and no. In the evening, we had the gates were closed by the apartment over there, but you wanted to look out to see what's going on. So we went out. I went out, a couple of other friends. We stood out. We opened up the gate a little bit and looked out.

And there was a big SS man with a young boy. He must have been no more than about 12, 13 years old. They walked in the middle of the street. And he had a gun. And the kid had a gun. And they were shooting up into the air like this, just to show you that we are going by over here. We closed the gate and ran right home.

So this was a little German boy?

A little gentleman boy in a uniform. And in the German SS uniform. He must've been no more than 13 years old. The handgun shooting up in the air. So that's the encounter I had at that time over there. And this was right after the ghetto closed.

So you ran home after that?

Yeah, ran and closed the thing over there and ran away. We ran home.

Up until this point in what you have told me-- and it might be because I haven't asked the right questions yet-- I don't get a sense that anybody was murdered yet. I don't get a sense of anybody being shot or killed or somehow. The synagogue is burnt. The books are burnt. The ghetto wall was closed. Life gets a lot harder. People's livelihoods are taken away. But direct hostile action.

Well, the first thing they did-- the Germans when they took charge of the ghetto, they appointed Kapos. This was Jewish sort of police. Then they formed different brigades. They formed shops that make leather boots, furniture places, uniforms for the German Army. All this was set up in different factories. Primarily, the schools were right away set up with all the tailoring. And then what they did is they formed the hanging gallery in the center of the ghetto.

A hanging gallery?

And they would choose randomly. Every once in a while, you saw 10 people hanging on the thing over there. And everybody had to go out and look at it. Just to show you if something happens over here, I'm the boss.

So who would do the hanging?

Jewish people, people from the ghetto. Either somebody spoke against the German something, somebody spoke against the Kapo, or whatever. Of if they didn't like you, your attitude or whatever-- You didn't have to have a reason for it.

Who would put the noose around the neck?

I think the Kapos did it. If they wouldn't do it, they would get shot. But the Germans were right over there. The German SS men were right over there. So if they didn't do the dirty work, they had the Jewish guy do the dirty work for them. The Kapo had the band on that shows you he was a-- it was like a civil servant.

What color was the band? What kind of symbol did it have? Do you remember?

I don't know. I think it was white or whatever-- Oh, yeah, by the way, before the ghetto closed, you had to wear a Star of--

David.

--Star of David in the front and in the back. And that was before the ghetto started closing. Just for identifying yourself that you're Jewish. You could be uptown, but you have to have the yellow star on you.

Do you ever remember going outside what would become the ghetto for the last time?

Yeah. Yeah, I went out before the ghetto was closed. I had the yellow star. In the front and the back, everybody had to have it. That was a must. That was the first order that the Germans gave. Juden, Jews, must wear a Star of David. They knew what the Star of David was. So that's what you had to do. So this were you have to identify yourself against everybody else that you're Jewish. That was before the ghetto was closed.

And when you did that and you wore the yellow star, did you have a different experience when you were walking down the street?

Well, people would look at you differently. The Polish people didn't think that Jews had horns on it. But they know you were Jewish, you lived your own life over there. You lived in the same country, but you were a little different than a Christian. But with this Star of David, they knew that you were Jewish by the way.

But you see, when this happens, you're a 10-year-old boy or a 9-year-old boy. You're still a child. And I'm wondering whether or not you experience something as a child.

Well, you experienced that you were deprived of certain things. You couldn't go into a store and buy a piece of candy, because you weren't allowed to get in over there. Jews are not allowed to go in over there. And then the Jewish stores right away were wiped out.

So all the places your mother went shopping for pickles, for bread--

They were closed up already. Once the ghetto closed up, all the stores were closed. There was nothing over there. Because what you did is you get a card, a ration card that you can buy things over there-- but only whatever was bought in through the ghetto dispensaries.

So you had a ration card for--

The two dispensaries, right. There was no private enterprise.

Did you have to pay for goods? For food, for example.

You know something, I think you did, but I--

Don't remember.

I don't remember how or what, if you bought. But all I know is when I started working there-- there was no school over there. My father worked in the tailor shop. I worked in the tailor shop. My brother worked in the tailor shop. My sister, I think, worked in the tailor shop too for a while over there. And we got food, because we got a bowl of soup over there when we got in in the morning. So this I know.

Same tailor shop, everybody?

Well, we worked there because my uncle was a foreman over there. So we were able to get a job over there.

What kind of things were you making in that tailor shop?

Uniforms for the German Army. It was all-- assembly line. I did one thing. That's all I did. I sewed the sleeves in. I just sewed the right sleeve. Somebody else sewed in the left sleeve. But if you were holding back the assembly line, you lose your job.

Did you hold it back ever?

I don't think so. I don't think so.

But you were a little boy?

Well, but you had to keep up with everybody.

And so when you sewed it in, did you sew by hand or machine?

Machine. On the machine, which I know my father's machines because I used to go down over there, so I knew a little bit about how to handle a sewing machine.

It's also a 10-year-old boy handling a sewing machine.

I worked right along with everybody else over there. And I sewed one sleeve in over there.

Did you use foot pedals?

Yes. All foot pedals.

And the machines that you were using were your father's old machines?

Well, was his machines plus hundreds of other machines.

OK. So they gather them together.

They had tremendous factories over there, because we made the uniforms for most of the German Army.

So this huge textile city.

The huge textile city. That's why they kept Lodz Ghetto as a ghetto. They didn't go ahead and destroy the ghetto over there, because they needed free labor. They need free labor for the German war machine.

I want to ask about another element here. You mentioned earlier Jewish Kapos. And you mentioned that very soon there were various labor brigades that were organized. One of the features that the Lodz Ghetto was known for was its

production.

Right.

And many people-- maybe not all people-- but many people say that the reason why there was such production is because the leader in the ghetto was Mr. Rumkowski.

Rumkowski Chaim.

Yeah, Chaim Rumkowski. And he's a very controversial figure. And I'd like to ask you about that. Did he ever cross your path or your family's path?

No.

Did you have anything to do with him?

No, he was very aloof. The Germans appointed him figuring that everybody's going to look up to him over there. And whatever they fed him, he fed to the people.

Was he seen as a representative of the people or a stooge of the Germans?

I guess he was both. He played both sides of the fence. And it just so happen, when I went to Auschwitz, he was the next train.

Really?

I saw him in Auschwitz when he got off the train. And he went right into--

Where?

Right into the oven.

Wow.

They wanted to make sure that he is gone, because he left on the last train. I left on the train just before the last one over there, when they evacuated the Lodz Ghetto.

Wow.

So that was Rumkowski Chaim-- Chaim Rumkowski. I don't know what was he for the-- I mean he tried to tell you that-- try to calm everybody down over here. But then again, he played to the Germans the same way. Was he a politician? I guess he was a politician at the time.

How did people in the ghetto talk of him?

Not very favorable, because you couldn't blame the Germans, because you had very little contact with them, but you could bring your hostility to him, that he doesn't do more for you. They had songs about him over there-- that Rumkowski Chaim, he gives you water but nothing else. You thought he was going to bring food in over there. He promises that he is going to talk to the German and improve the life over there in the ghetto, but it never happened.

Well, in some ways, it's a very thankless position, because it could be that there's nothing you can do.

I'm not saying that he could do more.

I understand that.

I'm not saying that he could do more, but I'm saying the people brought their anger out against him.

At the same time-- and this is why I think partly why he's controversial-- is that there were reports that he took great advantage of his being in this position.

Probably, because he had-- The main thing in the ghetto, what you looked for, is food. A place to sleep. Wherever you slept over there. Working, you had to go to work. You didn't go to work, you didn't eat. But he had the food they brought. He took whatever he wanted.

But I wasn't privilege of being in his company. But from what I understand, he lived a pretty decent life over there. But he also must have had plenty of headaches with it too. I'm not saying that he had it rather easy. But life in the ghetto wasn't easy at all. Life in the ghetto was-- every man was for himself over there.

How soon after the ghetto was created did you start feeling hungry?

Very, very soon. As soon as it closed up over there, you knew that food was rationed. My father got sick. He passed away in-- I think in '42 it was. There were no doctors over there no more. The doctors were taken out over there. And either he died of sickness or he died of hunger. All I know is my mother said to the children, "You don't have a father anymore."

Did he die at home?

He died at home, right.

How did you bury him?

How? They took him, because you couldn't go out to the cemetery. They have the burial brigade, which they didn't have a horse at that time no more, because the horse was taken away. They had people that carried dead bodies out to the cemetery on a wagon on two wheels over there.

So who brought him down from the third floor?

I don't remember. Some people did it. I don't remember what goes on. My mother says, "Get out of the room. From now on, you're orphans." So that was my life over there. And a year later, my mother passed away.

In 1943?

So then we were left to fend for ourselves.

Now, your mother had she been working in the tailor shop too.

No, she didn't.

She stayed at home?

She stayed at home. Apparently, she might have got some kind of a ration thing over there that she was able to buy, get some food. But she doesn't go to the shop. We went to the shop. We ate over there. But if she died out of hunger, I don't know. It's possible.

Was it also at home?

She was at home, right. She died at home.

Were you work when that happened?

I think so, yeah. So easy it wasn't. So then we were left the four of us over there in that place, because the ghetto was already thinned out at that time over there, because children under 10 were taken out to go to better places. And people over 60 were sent out to-- the Germans-- to better places over there. So the better places were that they-- The trains were being sent out every day.

Did people believe-- In the beginning, I can understand that they may think that they're going to go to someplace else and they'll live there. Did, at some point, people stop believing that?

I think most the people believed that the Germans take the children out because they're a burden over here. They're sending them out to some kind of summer camps. And the older people, they're taking them out and sending them out to also better places, because this is only for the working people, people that are capable of working, people that are capable of producing.

If you're over 60, they're taking you out to some kind of a older people's camp. And the children go to children's camps. And most the people believed it. I believed it too. I never believed that they'll take people down to a crematorium, because when I got down to Auschwitz, I came down with my brother, my two sisters, my uncle, his wife and two children. We were on the same train.

And I looked up, and I saw a big chimney. I said to my brother, "Boy, I'm so glad that they have a big bakery over here. We're probably going to have all the bread we want over here." I didn't realize that this was a crematorium. Because I know every bakery had a big chimney.

And of those people that you mentioned who went-- your brother, your sisters, your uncle, his wife, and their children-- how many of you survived Auschwitz?

Me, my brother, and my uncle.

Three?

And my cousin.

Four.

His daughter.

So your sisters, no?

They went to the left. Mengele told them to go to the left. And anybody that went to the left went right into the showers. And my aunt with her boy, Mengele told her to go to the right and the boy to the left. She says, "I don't want to give up my kid." He says, "Then you go with him to the left too." So me and my uncle and my brother went to the right over there. We were there. So that's what happened.

OK. I'll come to Auschwitz in a little bit. But still back in the ghetto, did you work in this tailor shop the entire--?

Entire time, right.

So we're talking four, five years.

Until around September '44.

That's pretty late. That's like five years.

Till September '44 I worked in the tailor shop.

And how did that ghetto change in those five years?

It got thinned out and thinned out and thinned out constantly. Probably, Rumkowski had to produce every week or every twice a week or every other day so many people had to be shipped out.

Did he have to choose?

They had to choose. They had to send you an order someday-- you're going on to the-- pack your suitcase and come to the train station.

Was the train station inside the ghetto area?

It was right outside the ghetto over there.

It was close.

The train station was right there. But either the Kapos choose or whatever, but they thinned out the ghetto constantly. There were very few children in there, because most of the children were already shipped out.

You had made it just under the wire.

Right. Well, my sister, the younger sister, she was most of the time in hiding, because she was too young to go to work over there. But somehow we got food for her. If she didn't have anything to eat over there, we would go down to the kitchen at night and we'd scoop up the potato peelings. And we were fighting with the rats. The rats were there before us over there. Take it home and cook a soup out of it, just to have something to eat.

Remember, we also got one loaf of bread a week over there.

Each person? Each person got a loaf of bread a week over there. And you had to divide it yourself. And you had to make sure it last you for the week. Somebody ate it up in three days, the other four days, you had nothing to eat. So my youngest sister, we shared it with her. We share the foods with her over there. And there was a black market.

How did it operate?

Some people, if you could buy maybe a loaf of bread over there, half a loaf of bread, a slice of bread, if you have a gold ring or something, you give this and you buy two ounces of bread. So there was always somebody that gets something out over there that has what you call protection. But the bakery over there that gets a loaf of bread and he divides it and he sells it after for things. But that's how you survived.

Did you ever buy anything or sell anything on the black market?

No, I didn't have nothing to sell.

What about the things in your apartment? Did your parents-- well, during the time, were they both alive?

Well, I'll tell you the truth. Most of the stuff that we had, in the wintertime, we burnt up most of the stuff over there just to get some heat. And if there was an empty apartment over there, we would go in-- not just me, but others over there-- take part of the furniture, break it up, and use it for fuel.

No coal?

No, you had no coals over there. You had no wood outside over there. So if you had some, you broke furniture up over there just to heat your apartment in the wintertime, because you were freezing. Life wasn't easy.

It doesn't sound it at all.

And these are your early teenage years--

Right.

--that you're going through at this point. Was this a seven day a week thing? That is, you worked every single day?

No, I think we got one day off over there. I think Sunday we were off, I think.

And did people do anything on this free day?

You were looking for some food. Primarily, this was your most important thing to do is to see how you survived the next day. Although, we had-- even in the ghetto-- we had youth groups over there. We used to get together sometimes in the evening if you weren't too tired. There were like little Zionist groups. And we were talking about what's going to be after the war is going to be finished if we ever survived.

So we did have cultural things too. Even though in the ghetto, there was a Jewish theater group too. And Rumkowski Chaim, he was on the front seat. So I they tried to be give you a little bit of culture also. You were enslaved, but they try to give you a little bit--

Something to look forward.

--something to look forward. But primarily, your most important thing was to survive that day. Then you look forward to surviving the next day. And that was the most important thing over there.

Did you ever celebrate things like birthdays in the family anymore?

What kind of birthdays you going to celebrate over there? What are you go celebrate with?

Yeah, just wanted to know.

What are you going to celebrate with? There was nothing. You couldn't buy anything over there. You couldn't buy cake or anything. You couldn't bake nothing. There was no flour or anything like this over there. Birthdays-- you celebrated if you lived through the day, you celebrated. You celebrate that day over there. And you look forward to the next one over there. And you always hope to see that the war was going to end.

Did your parents personalities change in those years?

Well, I think everybody's personality changed. Everybody was worried what's going to be. How we going to live through this thing over here? How we going to live through atrocities like this? Nobody could imagine that something like this could ever happen. How can humanity do like something like this over.

Here the Germans were a very sophisticated country. Everybody looked up to them over there. The most scientifically developed country was the German country, right? And here, you think they would do anything like this? So but did my parents' personality change? I guess sadness set into everybody. That your life was completely turned upside down.

Did anybody talk to anybody else, or you had no energy to talk?

Well, we had energy to talk. But we always talked about when is this war going to finish. Everybody looked forward to the war to finish over there. We didn't have a radio, but one of my neighbors had a radio. All radios had to be

confiscated. All the radios there were confiscated. He hid the radio. And he used to open up sometimes the radio. And we just listened to BBC, the British Broadcasting over there in Polish.

So you were able to get it?

So we sort of knew what was going on a little bit.

Aha. Did you hear through the radio that there were such things like Auschwitz.

No.

No.

No. No, this we didn't know. This we didn't know. We believed what Rumkowski told us over there, that they're going to be relocated. The younger people are going to be relocated. The older people are going to be relocated. But we knew that the Warsaw Uprising took place over there. This we knew through the BBC Polish station over there.

So you knew of both the Ghetto Uprising and the other uprising?

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

That's all we knew about. We knew when this took place.

Because the Warsaw Uprising happened later. The whole city when it had the--

Right. The Warsaw Uprising I think took place in 1943, I believe it was over there. And then the larger one after the Ghetto Uprising was in '44?

Well, I'm talking about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

Yeah. You heard about that--

We didn't before this. We knew that the major uprising-- we knew it took place over there.

So also was any reports of the course of the war on the BBC, like when the Germans lost at Stalingrad?

Well, no.

You don't remember that.

I don't remember it, but all I know is we knew that Russia got involved with it over there. We knew this, that Russia is involved. And we knew that Germany was marching on Russia over there. This we knew. This we heard. But we all were looking to see what's going to happen by us.

Of course. You said you didn't have any direct contact with Rumkowski. But could you recognize him on the street?

Yeah.

What did he look like?

He was a very nice looking gentleman with black rimmed glasses. He always wore a hat. What do they call it over there?

A fedora?

A fedora.

He always wore a fedora. He was dressed very nicely with an overcoat. He looked like a gentleman.

What was his job before?

I haven't got the slightest idea what he did before. I don't know nothing. I didn't know nothing about him what he was before. But apparently the Germans picked him out to be the head of the thing. They had established the whole committee. And he was the head of the committee.

So when the ghetto was actually liquidated-- and it was liquidated really late September '44--
'44, right.

When you say your were on the second to last train, that means you were amongst the last people.

Almost. Almost the last ones, right.

So was the ghetto pretty empty by then?

Pretty much. Pretty much, because from what I gather is that the Russian's Army was coming closer. So the Germans decided, well, it's time to liquidate this over here, because the Russians were moving their front over. They went already to Warsaw. And they were heading towards our way. So the Germans decided, well, it's time to liquidate and get rid of all the people over here.

So do you remember when you got the notice and how you got the notice to go?

Well, we got the notice in the shop over there. Tomorrow morning be at this and this time over here. Bring your suitcase with your clothes. And you're going to a labor camp. So we're going to a labor camp. They're closing the ghetto. We're going to a labor camp. So everybody that got to the train over there, we got a loaf of bread, into the train.

Was this the first time you were outside the ghetto gates in five years?

Yes.

Did it look any different outside than it did inside?

All you did is march.

Got it.

People marching over there with German SS men on both sides with the German shepherd dogs on both sides of you over there. And just march, march, march. You came to the train. Parked you in over there, closed the gate, close the thing. They had a bucket in the corner of the cattle train over there. And there was enough room to stand. And that was it. Then we traveled like three days.

Did you know where you were going?

We didn't know where we're going. All I now is we heard the train stop. The train stopped and we heard the whistle blowing. They filled up water for the train because this was done on steam. People were looking out. You couldn't look out over there. There were little cracks in the thing. Maybe we're going to get a drink of water over here. And there was

nothing. Nobody gave us anything over there.

So for three days, no water?

People died in the train. And on the thing over there, somebody who sat down on the floor never got up. We're traveling this for three days. The trains got water because the locomotive was run on steam.

Of course, we didn't get a drop of water over there. We had this loaf of bread. You ate it up the first day, you had nothing for the next three days and doesn't make a difference. Until we got to Auschwitz. "Arbeit macht frei." Yep, we saw the gates. Over there they had different Kapos. They help you get the suitcases out there, and they put the suitcases down. And you go through this over here.

Through what?

And Mengele was over there. And he looks you over.

How did you know it was Mengele?

I didn't know. I knew later on his name was Mengele.

Do you remember what he looked like?

He was a stocky, I think, bald-headed, round face, and a big stocky little guy over there. "What kind of work you do?" I said, "I'm a tailor." "Go over here." My brother, tailor-- get over here. My uncle, tailor-- over here. That was it.

Did you get numbers?

No. They didn't number them no more, because they stopped. They didn't have enough time to tattoo everybody, because they got shipments, so many of them towards the end that they didn't have time to tattoo people. So I never got a tattoo. Because before, when they didn't have that many trains coming in, they had enough time to put the hot iron on you over there. But when we came, it was already mass production. So they didn't have time to tattoo you.

So you were put to one side and everybody else that you mentioned earlier went to the bakery?

Went to the other side.

Yeah, OK. When did you learn that that wasn't a bakery?

Pretty soon. Pretty soon. I found out from some of the people that work over there. They said this is not the bakery. They didn't say it's a crematorium either. They said people go in over there and you don't see them anymore. To me, it didn't make any sense. But the older people realized right away what it is. Then I found out what this thing was. It was a crematorium.

So no one really spoke openly?

When I got to Auschwitz, I had no idea. Nobody-- my uncle, which was an older man-- he was an adult-- he didn't believe it either. We had absolutely no knowledge of it, because you didn't think that this is what it is. But we soon find out. It didn't take long. In a day or so, you found out what this thing was.

And then it hit you that went there--

Then you knew, and you were holding-- I was in Auschwitz for, I don't know, close to two months or something like this.

OK. What did you do in Auschwitz?

Just clean barracks over there. And we went out in the morning. You had a head count in the morning. We had to go out over there for a head count. They stood out for about two hours in the morning. It was freezing cold.

Yeah, it was getting to be winter.

It was freezing cold. We all had this white and blue pajamas with torn shoes. And that's all you had. They didn't have any coat or nothing over there. You stood over there for about two hours in the morning-- about 5 o'clock in the morning or something this. They took head counts over there. And if you ever spoke to somebody, if you said over there, the SS men would take you right out and shoot you right in front of everybody.

You saw that happen?

Yep. Life didn't mean nothing to them over there. Life had no value to them. So that's what they did. I was there for about, I think, close to two months over there.

And you cleaned bags?

Well, they clean barracks over there. We cleaned the barracks. We cleaned outside. You didn't have any specific job over there. We were in a holding pattern at that time. In the holding pattern, they didn't know where to send us yet.

So it felt transitory?

Right. That's what we were over there. We had a head count in the morning and a head count in the evening, I think also. And then we got a bowl of soup over there in the daytime. We had a bowl of soup. It mostly was potato soup or kohlrabi or something like this. It was vegetarian.

Rolling.

So you were in a holding pattern while you were in Auschwitz?

Right.

And I was asking did you meet people from other places in the Lodz ghetto in there?

Yeah.

In the barracks?

Yeah. Yeah, a lot of them from Lodz. But it was a mixture of people-- people from Poland, people from Romania, people from Hungary. There were all kinds of people over there. There were I think Russian prisoners of war over there. It was a mixture of all kinds of people.

But each one had a different insignia on it other there, where Jewish had one type. If you were homosexual, you had something else. If you were Russian prisoners, had a different thing on your pajama things over there.

Were you all mixed together?

Yeah.

So you could have a Russian prisoner of war in your barracks?

Right, you could have everybody. Everybody was in prison together in the same big barracks over there, because you

were stacked like three or four high in the pigeonholes over there. But each pajama thing over there had a different color insignia on it. So whether you're a political prisoner, it had something else over there.

And in Lodz, you had worn regular clothes.

In Lodz we wore regular clothes.

And you never had an appel or anything like that?

No, we all had to have-- you had to have the yellow Star of David on you.

Yeah, but you didn't have to gather in the morning like you did in Auschwitz?

No, over there you went to work early in the morning. You worked till at nightfall over there. In Lodz, no. In Lodz, you went to work in the morning over there. You stayed in the shop all day long, because you got a bowl of soup when you got into the shop over there. And you got a bowl of soup when you finished.

OK. So talk about no food, but were you hungry on Lodz, or were you hungrier in Auschwitz?

Both.

Both. Yeah, of course.

I'll tell you both.

The same hungry.

I'll tell you both.

Yeah.

In Auschwitz, you didn't think of food over there.

Really?

You were hungry. But hunger didn't make that much of a difference already, because you knew that you're going to die here anyway. In Lodz, you were hungry because you went to work, because you had a different life a little bit before this over there. So it was new to you to be hungry. Here, hunger was already an old thing.

So you got a bowl of soup over there in Auschwitz. We got a bowl of soup over there. And that bowl of soup with a slice of bread over there, and that was it for the day. So it kept your body alive, let me say.

What happened to you as a person?

What happened? You were very bitter.

You were very bitter?

Yeah, that all of a sudden your family disappeared, you don't have any life over there. You were bitter against Germans, any German, whether this was an SS man or this was just a policeman or whatever. You were bitter that they made your life bitter. But you were hoping that eventually it's going to come to an end. You didn't know whether it will or not over there, whether you're going to live out the war or the war's going to live you out.

So this was your two months--

About two months over there, right.

Then what happened?

Well, then we were shipped out to Hanover.

That was a trek.

We were there. The Germans took so many people. And then suddenly now we're sending you to a labor camp. Fine, you're going to a labor camp. So we were shipped up on the train. I don't remember how many people we were at this time over there. We went to settle us down in Hanover. It was some kind of a barracks over there. And we were assigned to work in the rubber factory, Continental Rubber Company.

The US company?

Continental.

Continental, yeah.

Well, I found out later that it was partly owned by the British, in part American and German. They made tires. They made vulcanizing rubber. We did it on the tracks on tanks so the tanks can go on asphalt without ruining the asphalt, because tank is normally run on steel. So we vulcanized this thing over there onto those rubber tracks. That factory over there, I worked over there a couple of months.

So that brings you into deep winter?

Right. Yeah, we worked over there. So in the morning, we had to go out and had also a head count. We stood outside over there. And we still had the same blue and white pajamas over there. We're outside for an hour, two hours over there. They counted everybody out. And then they marched us into the factory.

And the factory, we worked mixing rubber vats with the big things over there. They had a German foreman. They wore the mask with goggles with rubber gloves up to here and boots up to here. And we were just bare-handed over there. We did all the dirty work for them over there.

Were there fumes?

Pardon me?

Were there fumes?

Fumes?

Did it smell?

Well, it all smelled from rubber. It was mixing all chemicals together, rubber chemicals together-- rubber plant, some rubber other thing, whatever. They put all the chemicals in over there. And we were just working it over there. We had to work the plants. We had to mix it. We had to clean it. We had to do this over here.

By working over there, then I was assigned to clean the floor over there. And I clean the floor. And there was some German civilians workings there too. They were sitting by the desks over there. I don't know what they were doing over there.

But there was a young woman, I don't know, maybe 20, 25 years old. She was working on one the desks over there. And

I was cleaning around there. It was lunchtime, and she threw out a piece of bread over there to the floor. And I think she threw it to me.

So I went down, and I picked it up over there. There was an SS lady-- also a young woman with boots up to here, with heels this size. Probably, we made it in the Lodz ghetto. She went ahead with her heel, got me right into the head and split my head open.

Oh my goodness.

And I had to throw the piece of bread away. Of course, I took something, whatever I had over there. I put the thing, and I held it over there until it stopped bleeding. It was bloody for a day or two. I still got the--

A scar?

--scar right over here. With her sharp heel, she went right out like this over here. First she went like this, and then she went other way and hit me right in the mouth-- for a tiny little piece of bread. So do you think I love Germans? Yeah? So that's the kind of work we did over there. And we walked a couple of months until we were useless to them. We were too weak already.

Was there any sabotage that you know of?

Not, there was no sabotage. We worked--

Nobody risked any sabotage?

No, there was no sabotage in this over here. We were glad to get through the day over there. And we finished working over there, we will march back to the barracks over there. We got another bowl of soup over there. And we waited for the next morning.

It got to the point where we were useless to them. And they brought in Russian prisoners of war. Apparently, they had gotten a hold of Russian prisoners of war, which was much stronger. They had them over there. And they marched us to another camp.

What was the name of that camp?

The name of other camp was camp Ahlem.

Ahlem?

A-H-L-E-M.

OK.

They set us up in the barracks over there. We must have been like 1,000 people.

And this was still near Hanover?

This was near Hanover, outside of Hanover. And we were assigned to work in a quarry, in the underground.

Oh.

And it was cold, wet, dark. There were dynamiting underground over there. Apparently, they must have been starting to build a factory underground over there-- ammunition factory. So we were the ones that they were dynamiting. We had to load things up.

Like the rocks and things?

We had to load the rocks up on a little trains and push them out.

That's not exactly easy work.

That was hard work. That was the hardest work we ever had to do over there. So this we worked for-- And people died over there. When we pushed out things over there, we also had the bodies on top of the thing over there. And when we pushed out the thing with somebody dead, the German soldier took a rock over there and stuck it into their mouth to get it out like this.

So you'd see a corpse coming out on top of the rocks--

We had a corpse, put him right on top of the little train over there with the rocks, and push them. We had like five, six, seven people pushed the train out over there. Each one was on one little train like this.

Yeah, a little trolley type thing.

Yeah. And it was on tracks over there. They had tracks going in. So we worked over there. And this was murderous work.

Were you with your brother and your uncle?

My brother was with me that time. My uncle was with me that time over there. And one morning, my brother couldn't get out of his bunk over there. He says, "I don't feel good." So I call down one of the foremans over there-- a Jewish foreman. I tell him he doesn't feel good. So he says, "Don't worry about it. We'll take him to the infirmary."

Well, they took him into the infirmary. I didn't realize what they do in the infirmary. They inject you with gasoline and put you into the back with all the other corpses over there. And that was the end of him. So that's how I lost my brother over there.

Your last family member of your immediate family.

Right. He was gone. So me and my uncle just left over there. So that was the end of it. And we walked over there. And day in and day out we worked. In the morning, we had to have a roll call over there. And we went down to the quarries over there. We worked in the quarries and pushed.

They were dynamiting and people died over there left and right-- from hunger and from cold and from disease. And people just died in the quarry down there. They were dynamiting. People just died, and we just pushed them right out over there.

How long did this last?

That lasted until the day of liberation.

OK, so this would have been like mid-February?

Till the liberation was around in May.

So you were liberated at the same time that the war ended or before?

I was liberated by the American Army 84th Division in Hanover.

How did it happen?

Well, all of a sudden, we heard that the Allied Army's closer-- coming close. We heard some rumors over there. We listened from the German soldiers. They were talking to themselves. So they took about 600 people on a death march to Bergen-Belsen-- all the people that they felt could work.

About 60 of us over there-- I was one of them-- that they felt don't worry about them over there. They were left behind. I understand that when they marched to Bergen-Belsen, some of them were shot and some of them died on the way over there.

But we were about 60 of us they left over here. And the Germans gave orders-- what I found out later-- was to kill everybody off and burn the camp. But all of a sudden, at night, we heard shelling close by. And then all of a sudden, there wasn't a German soldier to be found. They all disappeared. Early in the morning, there was nobody there. And then we saw Jeeps-- the 84th Division pulling up.

Did you speak any English?

No.

Any words of English?

We saw the American soldiers coming. I think there was some Polish prisoners by us too in that camp over there. The camp had all electric fencing around. Somehow he broke that fence over there. And we realized that everybody was free.

Just like that?

Then what happened, the American soldiers started giving people chocolate and gum and the people started eating and they died.

You saw this?

The stomach couldn't control food over there. They died from dysentery. A lot of the people just passed away right after liberation.

What about you? Did you eat any chocolate?

I don't remember what I ate. I don't remember what I ate over there. I'm not a chocolate eater to start off with. But I don't know what I ate. I really don't know. But I know they gave out rations, whatever the soldiers had.

They gave.

First of all, when they came up to that camp, they didn't know what they saw. They said, "Wait a minute, those are not human beings over here," because they were all skeleton. And people were laying on the street. People couldn't just walk up. They couldn't wake up over there. They couldn't stand up.

They said to themselves, "What did we come upon over here?" They couldn't believe that those were human beings. They were so astonished over there that they didn't know what it was.

Coming to this over here, I did something over there with a documentary about this thing about Camp Ahlem. There was one soldier, who was from Sioux City, Iowa. He was stationed-- for training, he went down to Louisiana.

Before he was shipped overseas, I think for \$1 he bought a color camera in pawn shop and took it with him. Well, when he came at this camp over there-- he was a private-- he just took some pictures of this. He couldn't believe what he saw.

And from this itself-- I'll tell you later-- but there's a whole documentary is done from this one little camera thing.

But this 84th Division which Henry Kissinger was part of this over here.

Oh, really?

Yeah. He was part of the liberation of my camp over there. He was in intelligence. Well, when he drafted into the army, they put him into the tank command over there. And they realized he speaks very good German. They put him into the intelligence over there. So he was part of the liberators of my camp.

And after that whole documentary came out, I got a call from a gentleman from Florida. I have his name written down some place over there. He says to me-- he gave me his name-- he says, "Do you remember me?" I says to him, "I don't know if I remember you." He says, "I'm 92 years old now, but I was the commander liberating your camp. And I was in charge on the civilian area for that whole area over here. And I took the civilian Germans to carry, to bury all the dead bodies that were on the back of the barracks."

Do you remember that at the time?

I knew there were bodies over there. I remember seeing German civilians digging holes. But he was in charge of this over here. He was a Jewish officer. They made him in charge of that whole area. So because he says to me, "Do you remember me?" I says to him, "No, I don't."

But that's what happened, how the liberation came. We were liberated by the American army. Early in the morning, you saw Jeeps and the gate was torn down over there. And we realized we were all free.

Although, we didn't care that much over there. In all honesty, when we heard bombing from far away, we saw planes coming, we said to ourselves, "I hope they're going to bomb this camp over here," because our lives didn't mean nothing over there. I said let the Germans get killed over here, because to us, we were dead anyway already. But of course, it didn't happen. But that's how the liberation came.

And then what happened to you?

Pardon?

And then what happened to you?

Well, after liberation I went with my uncle, because somebody said that the Bergen-Belsen was a camp for women. So my uncle says, "Let's go to Bergen-Belsen." Somehow there was the British Army was over there. The British Army was in Bergen-Belsen over there. But the British and American were interchanging over there. We were in Hanover.

So we got a ride on a British truck that was going that way. We ended up in Bergen-Belsen. And we started looking around for family. I figured maybe my sisters are there, because somebody told him there was a Kochanski over there. So he figured his wife is there. But instead of his wife, he found his daughter over there. And they told me what happened to my sisters and what happened to his wife-- went to the shower with the boy.

So then I went. There was nothing for me to do in Bergen-Belsen. We saw British soldiers with the Star of David. This was the Jewish brigade from Palestine. And they in turn said, let's get the young people together, and we want to organize them to bring them into Palestine.

So we traveled with the British trucks ran by the Jewish brigade, which was against their rule, against the British rule. And they took us down to a place in Sulzheim. It's in Germany.

And we were there about 600 of us over there. They're from Poland, from Romania, from Hungary, from Czechoslovakia, from Slovakia, from Czechoslovakia, from all over Europe, from France. And we were all young

people over there. Some were between 14 to 18 years old. They formed little groups over there, like a little kibbutz. You know what a kibbutz is?

Mm-hmm.

You know what a kibbutz is?

Tell me.

It's a cooperative village. We stayed over there and waited to--

So were you legal or illegal?

Well, over there?

This was a DP camp.

Oh, excuse me. I'm sorry.

This was a DP camp. It was a legal DP camp over there-- displaced person. But it had only young people over there, because the brigade wanted to make sure that save the young people. So we were there. And over there, we started learning a little bit Hebrew already, because they started teaching us. And we were trying to get passage to Palestine.

Well, before this, we were demonstrating over there. I'll show you pictures that to have. A demonstration, we walked in Sulzheim and in Frankfurt we walked, demonstrating for the United Nations to let the Jews come into Palestine, because the British put up a White Paper over there that they didn't let anybody in.

But in May of 1946, the British government allowed 600 children to emigrate legally to Palestine. So I was one of them. And we ended up in Palestine at the time.

You were 16, 17 years old?

Yeah.

My goodness.

It was 1946. We got into Palestine that time. 600 young people, that was the only legal emigration that the British government allowed due to a lot of pressure from the United Nations to save the children over there. So 600 of us got into Palestine.

And I settled in one of the kibbutz, which was a cooperative farm. And we were working over there. And then we went to school over there. We worked a half a day. We went a half a day schooling.

This is the first time you have any formal education since third grade?

Right, that's correct.

OK, that's six, seven years later.

So we went to work. I worked on the tractor over there. I went at 5 o'clock in the morning till about 12:00. And then from 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock till about 6 o'clock, we had schooling.

And how long did you stay in this place?

I stayed over there until 1948, when the war broke out.

OK. Well, that'll be another series of questions. But is there a time when you stopped feeling hungry?

When?

After the war, after you're liberated, how long did it take for you to feel like finally I've had enough to eat.

Well, that time already, you didn't think already about food, because we had food already then. So you didn't feel that I'm full, but we knew that we don't have to worry about the next meal over there. We're not going to be hungry now.

And what about the other parts? The part where I had asked you about Auschwitz of So how did that affect you as a person. So when you're liberated and it's over, is there any part of this time when you start to think about what those several years have been and what was going on with you?

You constantly think about it. That's one thing in the back of your mind that you really don't forget. You can think of a million other things, but--

You were thinking of this always.

--any trigger, you remember it. This is something that you never forget.

Even up to today.

Up to today. I can visualize every minute of what it was. All those years that passed already-- I had a completely different life since then over there-- but still you remember it.

You said in Auschwitz you were bitter. And did that stay? Did that feeling of bitterness stay-- once you were safe again?

Not until you think about it. If you don't think about it, you don't. But you think of when you got off that train over there and you saw that sign-- "Arbeit macht frei."

Work will make you free.

Work makes you free. And how deceiving this was. We came over there without any knowledge. Maybe some people knew what was going on. I'm not saying that everybody was as naive as I was.

Maybe some people had a feeling, because there was an underground that was working on things over there that did inform people. I just wasn't privilege of knowing it over there. Neither was my brother and neither was my uncle. He was a worldly man. In his young days, he used to be a bicycle-- he used to go on bicycle races in Lodz. He wasn't a backward person. And--

He didn't know.

--he didn't know.

Your uncle-- when you were one of those 600 children, is that when you split with your uncle? Did he go with you or did he stay?

No, he stayed in Bergen-Belsen with his daughter. And then he met somebody over there. He met an old friend, a lady, that he used to know over there. She lost her husband over there. He lost his wife. Later on, they were in the DP camp for about two years or so. And they got married over there. And the daughter went to Switzerland because she had TB. So she went to a sanitarium in Switzerland.

That's his story.

Well, she passed away. She passed away. But he remained in Bergen-Belsen. And they got married over there.

So in truth, you were all alone. There was no one else of whom you knew from your former life.

Absolutely not. Absolutely not. And I survived.

Well, when the war starts, you're a child. And when the war ends, you're still a child.

I know.

You're still a child. But how was this child different from that one?

I miss my childhood, let me say.

You didn't have one.

My childhood years were sort of wiped out by the Germans. And I went from a kid to adulthood, because from a kid I went to adulthood to fight another war.

In 1948?

In '48, right. So then I was an adult already.

And what did you do in that war?

I was part of the Haganah. I was in the underground. And when we were in the kibbutz, we learned how to use a rifle. We had to use other guns. We learned how to defend ourselves over there. And when the war broke out over there, we were ready. We didn't have much ammunition. We didn't have any armaments. But we were ready.

Then I joined the navy, the merchant navy. And then I brought people from the DP camps into Palestine, into Israel over there.

Really? For how long?

Until 1952.

Wow. That's quite a long time. That's a long time to have lived in a DP camp.

No, no, no. The DP camps, we emptied out from '48 to about '50, '51.

OK. It's still a long time, when people lived five years.

Well, people lived in DP camps in France, in Italy, and in Cyprus. The first thing we emptied out of Cyprus, because Cyprus-- the British government-- any ship that came in over there, they diverted them right into Cyprus to the prison camp over there. So when the state of Israel was established, the first thing we did is empty out Cyprus. So I was working on one of those ships over there. I had different lives.

Yeah, it sounds like it. It sounds like it. And you did that till '52?

Mm-hmm.

And then what happened?

'52, I came to the States.

And why? Why did you come to the States? Why did you leave Israel?

I figured let me change of life. I want to see what it's like being in the United States. I was here a couple times before, coming down with the merchant ship. And I had an uncle over here. My uncle was over here. The one that survived the war, he settled in Washington.

So he said, "Why don't you come? Come, come." So I'll come. Let me see. And then come to here, where I met my wife over here, joined some youth groups over there, some young people's group over there. I met her and then we got married.

How did you end up in Toms River in the Manchester Township area?

Well, I really ended up in Lakewood.

In Lakewood. OK.

I really ended up Lakewood because I had a friend of mine that lived in Lakewood. But Lakewood had the-- Toms River, they didn't have nothing over there. But Lakewood had the young Jewish groups over there. So my wife Hannah belonged over there. She came down over there. We had some dentists over there. And so we went there. But she is from Toms River.

Oh, I see.

Her parents moved to Toms River. She went to middle school over here. She came from New York. They have a poultry farm over here.

And what did you do then when you got married? Where did you work? What did you do?

Well, when I got married, the first job I got was for a painter in Lakewood. I know his name-- Mr. Strauss. He paid me \$0.75 an hour. And he had me work-- And I didn't drive at that time. I didn't have a car. I knew how to drive, but I didn't have a car.

So he picked me up at the apartment. I had an apartment with another friend of mine over there. We rented an apartment. And he picked me up like 7 o'clock in the morning, and we're supposed to work to 5:00. But of course, the job didn't finish until about 6:00, 7:00. And I didn't have a way of getting back home.

So of course, he says, "While you're waiting over there, why don't you keep on painting." I say all right. I figured all right. I figured he'll pay me. He came to pay over there. He says, "I only pay for 40 hours."

Oh.

So I worked for him like three or four weeks. And I said to him, "Mr. Strauss, don't you think I should deserve a little bit more money." He said, "Well, let me see. I'm going to think about it."

Well, somebody told me there's an opening in the carpentry shop, which is a union shop. So I went over there. And I met the owner over there. And he says to me, "Do you know how to hold a hammer?" I said, "What do you mean? I was a carpenter on a ship." He says, "You're hired." I got \$1.50 an hour.

Double. Double.

I made \$1.50 an hour. I said, "Now I'm rich." Now I'm rich. So I worked for him 10 years. After, I think, it was 10 years.

Well, you know, you got raises and this over there. And then by that time, I had already three children. For the 10 years, he gave me a nice silver tray for service. We had a barbecue in the--

Can we cut for a second? OK. So you got a silver tea set?

Yeah. I got a silver set. And while I was doing this over there, every time I got one week, two weeks vacation, I went to school in New York to learn how to be an orthotist, orthotic braces.

Ah.

Then after the 10 years, I said to my friend the boss, I said, "Hy, I'm going out. I'm going to open up a store." He says to me, "Henry, I'm very glad that I had you for 10 years." He says, "If you need any money, don't hesitate to come to me." And I opened up this store. And I had this thing for 20, 30 years.

Your own store?

And that was orthodon--

I sold it. I sold it. I sold it actually in 1980. And then I opened up another store. And then I sold it to a guy. And I worked for him for about 10 years over there. He wanted me to work for him. I worked for him part-time. And then I retired. But my wife was with me all the time. She was with me all the time. She worked in the store with me.

The first store and the second store?

And I miss her.

Did you ever go back to Lodz?

No. I wouldn't. I was asked-- I don't remember how many years back-- to go to testify against the Kapos in Hanover. And I told them, "I'm sorry, but I will not put my feet on German soil." I went to the consulate in New York, that I gave them my statement over there. But I would never go-- I wouldn't go to Germany.

Have you been back to Europe?

No, I went to Switzerland. I went to Italy. Last year, we went on a vacation to Switzerland and to Italy. But to Poland? I have nothing to go back to Poland. I couldn't find my parents graves, because they were buried in mass graves over there. There's nothing for me to go back over there.

I don't have a birth certificate over there. When I applied for my social security, they asked me for a birth certificate. I wrote back to the Polish government. They told me you can't find anything over there. Everything was destroyed. So what was I going to go back there for?

Yeah.

There's nothing for me to go back there. Some people like to go back. And I know the documentary that we did over there, people went back to Lodz because most of them are from large. And I didn't go back with them. That's what happened.

Did you talk much about those years with your wife and with your children?

No.

No?

No.

So you did your wife about things?

She knew I was in a concentration camp. But I really never discussed that with my wife. She didn't ask me questions. And I didn't bring it up. And somehow I put it in the back on my mind.

But when I was asked one time to speak before the high school kids over there, I spoke to them for an hour over there, told them about the atrocity of the war. Not really that much about personal things, but atrocity. But for that matter, I never spoke to my children about it.

That was my next question. Did they ask? Did you children want to know what happened?

Well, until my grandson Adam. He is very much into it. I had to write it out for him, because up till then-- Betty, did I ever spoke to you about it?

Never, you wouldn't speak about it. We would never ask, because we knew he could not talk about it.

I never brought it up to them. And I really never brought up-- they knew I was in a concentration camp. They knew I was in the Israeli Army. They knew this. This I would tell them. But as far as my previous life, I never spoke to them about it. Maybe I was wrong. But somehow it just-- it didn't want to come out.

Was there a point where it did want to come out? Or it was OK for it to come out?

I think now it's OK. Now it's OK. But until a couple of years ago, no. I don't know why. I couldn't explain to you why. You asked me why I didn't. I don't know. Maybe because in me, maybe I was ashamed that I survived.

Really?

Yeah. Maybe I felt guilty that I survived and they didn't. I don't know.

Of all these burdens to carry, you're carrying so many of them and so many sorrows, and then this one on top of it.

I really don't know why it never brought up. But I never had the urge to bring it up.

Was there in those six or seven years from September 1, '39 until the Americans liberate you in Ahlem, was there a moment or a series, let's say, a time that was worse than all the other times? Because what you paint is a picture of just unending sorrow and sadness.

Well, the day my father passed away. I felt we lost everything. Then when my mother was gone, we felt completely abandoned. Four young children over there all abandoned by ourselves.

And there's nothing over there that you can go to an uncle to help out, because the uncle had his own problem over there. The aunt has her own problem. They all had their own problems. So you actually had to fight to survive yourself. There's no such thing over there, "I'm going to go to a relative."

There was no rel--

"I'm going to go to a friend." Because everybody was for themselves over there. You got a loaf of bread over there. You had to slice it up and have seven days out of this. If you ate two pieces today, the last two days you're not going to have nothing. You had to be disciplined enough to do it.

And you were always afraid somebody else is going to come and steal it. You really had that piece of bread over there-- the piece of bread was like a piece of gold. But that's the worst time? I guess it was one of the worst times.

The working in the quarries over there was not an easy thing, because people just died off. Everybody was as weak as anything over there. And to do this kind of work and in this freezing cold, wet, and no clothing. Sounds like a way of just getting people dead.

Just those pajamas that you had on you. That's it. Pajamas and your shoes. Your shoes wore out over there, well, you found somebody dead over there, you took off their shoes. If their shoes were better than yours, you put them on regardless of what size it was-- it was big, small, whatever.

Or if could take off their jacket, their pajamas, you put it on yours so you had two pieces. You tried to survive whichever way you could. You didn't take it from a living one, but from the dead one, you took it. So those were hard times.

Were you able, after the war, to really put it out of your mind and it never popped up?

No, I'll tell you one thing what I did do after the war. When we were in Sulzheim, it was during the Jewish holidays. I don't know if you're familiar with Jewish holidays.

Some.

On Yom Kippur, you're supposed to eat. Well, we were about three or four of us young fellows over there. We went out from the DP camp. We went into a German little restaurant. And we ordered ham. Now this was against God. What you did to us, that's what we're doing to you.

Now, I never ate ham, because I never-- first of all, I never had ham when I was a kid, because my parents would never have it over there. And during the war, we didn't have it anyway. And then after the war, on Yom Kippur day over there, just to spite for God. Now, this was my fight against God. Will this answer your question?

Well, did it taste good?

Huh?

I'm being cheeky. Did it taste good?

I don't know. I really don't know. I ate it because to spite.

I know.

I didn't eat it because I wanted to eat this over here.

I know.

I ate it in spite of God. How could you let something like this happen?

Did you ever stop being angry with him?

Sometimes, yeah. I still have a bone to pick with him-- him or her, I didn't know who it is.

Many people had this conversation, even if it's in one direction, that was very important to them. They needed to have it because you need to keep on living.

That was my revenge. That was my revenge-- going out to have a ham sandwich on Yom Kippur. I fasted for five years. We didn't have what to eat. But this was a fast day. I could eat. I could fast. I could eat. So we went out over there and we ordered ham sandwiches.

We were talking about Sulzheim.

Yeah, we're talking about Sulzheim. Sulzheim, when we were gathered together by the Jewish brigade, we were all youngsters over there, but from all different countries. Everybody spoke a different language. Some of them spoke only Polish. Some of them spoke Hungarian. Some of them spoke Romanian. And some of them knew only Yiddish over there. So what we had to do is learn one common language. You learned Hebrew. That's how we started communicating.

So if only you had gone to the Cheder when you were little and not played ball.

I know but no. That wouldn't be Hebrew. That was prayers.

Ah, OK.

That was prayers. Hebrew language is not necessary prayers. It's a different thing. It's got the same alphabet, but it's different. But we had to learn Hebrew so we can all communicate together. And that was the main thing in Sulzheim.

Did it take a while? Was it difficult or not?

Well, we were there from '45 till '46, the middle of '46 over there.

So by the time you ended up in Palestine, did speak Hebrew?

I spoke Hebrew. Not good, but we could communicate. We could communicate with each other. We communicated with the people once we got to Palestine, because that's the only language that we spoke. So we did communicate quite well.

And did you ever meet any of the people that you were in DP camps with again?

Yeah, well, I have a couple of friends that one lives in Canada, two of them live in California that were friends of mine before. In 1995-- Or was it 2000? 1995, we went back to Israel. It was the 50th anniversary since we got there. So whoever was alive got together. From my group of 60 people, in the war we lost about 10 of them. They all got killed in the--

1948 war you mean?

1948. We got there in '46. So in 1956, we went back to Israel. It was the 50th anniversary.

So 1996?

1996, right. So we were there, and we all got together. The kibbutz took us all in over there, made a nice weekend out of it over there. So it was very nice. We made a-- that time not a DVD, but whatever they call it, a tape.

A VHS tape. Yes, of course.

Yeah. So that's what it was. But coming back to the Camp Ahlem.

Camp Ahlem.

With the documentary that was done. This documentary was done, as I told you before, this young soldier took a picture. He took pictures over there when he saw emaciated skeletons over there. He couldn't believe it. And he took some pictures over there. And then he sent it back to his mother-- his parents, I guess-- in Sioux City, Iowa. And she developed the pictures of them and put it in the cigar box in the basement. And it was laying there.

One of the people, one of the survivors, went ahead and wrote a letter to the army, to the 84th Division. They called them the Logsplitters. Say if any the man that took the pictures over there, if he's still alive, does he have some of those pictures over there of the survivors?

So something went into his head over there. He says maybe they're talking about me. He went down to the basement. He opened up the cigar box over there-- or a shoe box. And he saw those pictures. And says, "Yeah, I have those pictures. That was me that is asking for." So he got in touch with him. Well, when he got in touch with him--

With that survivor?

With that survivor. That survivor got in touch with other survivors over there-- into the paper. There's a survivor paper. It's called Together. So a couple of people got together. He wanted to meet as many people as he could from the pictures that he had over there.

Were you in the pictures?

I don't know I don't know if I was. I was in one picture. But some of them, I didn't see myself in it. But maybe I couldn't recognize myself. So they went ahead and started taking this soldier-- they got together, some of them. I wasn't involved with it.

And they started publicizing to see more people that survived this concentration camp, Ahlem labor camp. And that took him back to Poland. And I got a tape for this over here. I got on a DVD. To go to the Camp Ahlem. By the way, Ahlem, the German school made a journal of the camp, which I'm in it in the pictures over there. So when they started this over here, the University of Gainesville the School of Journalism--

In Florida?

--in Florida, got a hold of this article. And they say we want to make a documentary out of it. So their school was funding party over there to make a whole documentary on this. So then I saw in this newspaper, I see there was an article over there by Mrs. Lieberman from Connecticut. She says, "Is there anybody that was liberated in Camp Ahlem? Please get in touch with me."

So I called her up. And I said to her, "I was liberated in Camp Ahlem." She says, "We've got to bring this soldier." That's already the University of Gainesville was involved with this. They already had this worked out over there. They want to bring him into York and have a whole gathering in New York. But this man was dying of cancer. And he couldn't he couldn't travel to New York.

So she says to me, "Can you get down to Sioux City, Iowa?" I said to her, "In February? To go to Iowa?" It's like going to hell. It's cold like anything. She says, "Well, we cannot bring him into New York. And he wants to meet you." So I got on the next plane.

And then I said to my wife, she was going to come with me. So she fell down, and she broke her arm. She had her arm in a cast over there. So my daughter came to stay with her for a week. I went to Iowa. And in Iowa, we had the gathering with him in his house over there. He couldn't go out.

So we all gathered. He looked over the pictures over there. He showed me the pictures. Did I recognize myself over there? Then we had the Jewish Community Center, which is a synagogue and a community center, in Iowa, they had the Yom HaShoah.

They put on six candles over there for the six million people. Then we honored him. I presented him with the kiddush cap engraved with his name on it. He was the Angel of Ahlem. And I made the speech.

Oh, wow.

Do you want to see the speech?

Yes, I do.

Let me--

Well, when we finish the interview, we will look for it.

So I made a speech. And I told him-- in my speech, I said that one picture speaks a thousand words. And if it wasn't for you, this whole thing wouldn't take place.

It's true.

And then he passed away a week later. And we all contributed to his funeral. And one of the survivors gave the eulogy in the church.

Oh my goodness.

He lived one week more, because we took him down to the Jewish Community Center with an ambulance.

Oh, wow. He was that sick?

He was very sick. It was a very moving moment that time.

Were you interviewed for the documentary?

Yes, I was interviewed over there for the documentary. I had a whole interview with him over there.

OK. And this was when? When did all of this happen?

In 2005.

OK. So about 10 years ago?

Yeah.

This all happened about 10 years ago.

2005. February, 2005. It was a February. It was the coldest month.

It always is, isn't it? Things like that. So tell me is there anything you'd like to add to what we've talked about this afternoon-- anything that you think is particularly important for people to understand?

Well, all I can tell you is that I'm very proud of my family. And my kids were very understanding. They didn't ask me questions. I didn't have to give them answers. Until my grandson, who is very much involved in the Holocaust thing over there.

And he said, "Grandpa, I want you to do this over here." I said to him, "Why? There's so many stories out there where people know everything already. People know about the war already." He says, "No, you got to tell them yours." He was here a couple days with me over there. So he went on the computer, and he started doing the--

The search.

--the search with an interview. I said to him, "Adam, do me a favor. Stop it already." Then I get a call not from you. I got a call from Vicky or--

Someone from our museum?

Yeah. OK. It could be one of my colleagues. At any rate, what I'm sensing is it's through Adam that we've had this possibility to have our interview with you today.

Right, if it wasn't for him, I would've never done it.

Well, I'm very grateful to him that he pushed.

So he's the catalyst behind most of it. So that's what I can tell you. But I'm very grateful for my family. I have a beautiful family, three wonderful children, spouses, grandchildren, great-grandchildren.

That's something. That's quite an accomplishment and something to be proud of.

I got two great-grandsons over there. One of them is only five, six weeks old. Last week he just got a picture taken for his passport. They're going to England.

Well, that's wonderful.

They're going to England. They're going to English for a wedding.

Thank you very much.

And thank God the rest of it. I thank God I'm in halfway decent good health. And that's all.

Well, we appreciate it. We appreciate that you've taken the time, that you've delved into the past, that you've raised the memories, and that you've shared them with us.

You're welcome.

And so I'll say with that, this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Henry Shery, born Hirsch [? Gundsher, ?] on July 31, 2015, in Manchester Township, New Jersey. Thank you very much.

All right, thank you.