

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Harry Kamel on December 17, 2015 in New Rochelle, New York. Thank you very, very much, Mr. Kamel, that you have agreed to speak with us today. Did I pronounce your name wrong?

Yes, and I want you to mention Chaim Kamelmacher.

That is going to be my first question.

Yeah, I see.

And that is we'll start from very basic questions, and the very first one that I ask is what was your name at birth?

Very good.

What was your name at birth?

OK, my name at birth was Chaim Kamelmacher.

And how did you get to be Harry Kamel.

When I came to the United States in 1951 through my mom's brother in Kansas City, Missouri, Izzy Gladstone, the whole family got together the first Friday night. And I was sitting in the center, and they said, Kamelmacher, it's a little bit too long. So I said, I will not change my name completely, so we decided to off the "macher." So my name became Kamel instead of Kamelmacher. And then Chaim in English was actually Hymie, but they said Harry is much nicer. So I wound up Harry Kamel.

Did you get used to it?

Yes, I got used to it.

If somebody calls Chaim down the street, do you turn?

Yes.

Do you?

Yes, I do. I do.

OK, so tell me now what was the date of your birth.

I was born July 1, 1925.

Where?

In Eastern Poland. That time it was Eastern Poland in Volhynia called Rozyszcze.

Rozyszcze.

Yes.

Spelled R-O-Z-Y-S-Z-C-Z-E.

Wow. It takes some practice to pronounce it properly.

Yeah.

Rozyszcze.

Yes.

And tell me what was Rozyszcze? Was it a village or a town?

I would say it was a large village.

OK, and about what does that mean? Paint a picture for me.

I really don't know if it means anything, but I was only about four years old before my family moved from there to my Maniewicze.

Maniewicze.

Maniewicze, yes. Spelled M-A-N-I-E-W-I-C-Z-E. And it was Polish until 1939.

OK, so Maniewicze, was that a larger place?

A smaller place.

It was a smaller place.

A smaller place. But my father was a tailor. Somehow did not do so well in Rozyszcze, so he moved to Maniewicze.

So if you say that Rozyszcze was a big village, then Maniewicze was--

Well, I would tell you about the population about 8,000 before the war. And, well, about 4,000 Jews and the rest Ukrainians and Poles.

Who had the majority in the town?

The Jewish people.

So it was more of a Jewish town or a Jewish place.

Yes.

OK, were there many synagogues?

There were about-- let me see, one, two-- maybe about four synagogues.

And churches?

Churches, I know of only of two.

Two Polish churches or Ukrainian?

Two Polish churches. No Ukrainian church at all. The Ukrainians had to go to about four kilometers away, which was called Okonsk, and they have a church called a tserkva. Ukrainian there.

OK, and what language did you speak at home?

I spoke Yiddish.

OK, did you know any other languages?

Well, I do. I went to public school in the morning. It used to be called *szkola powszechna* in Polish. And up to the seventh grade, it was a mandatory. I don't think they would come looking for Chaim Kamelmacher if I wouldn't show up to school, but nevertheless, it was mandatory.

And in the afternoon, I used to go to Yiddish school called cheder.

Cheder.

Cheder. And the teacher was just a religious Jew. Perhaps he had a beard or so. And we learned some Hebrew, and Yiddish grammar, and all that.

Oh, I see. So you were learning language as well as religion in cheder.

Yes.

Did girls go to cheder?

No, girl did not go to cheder. As a matter of fact, in the film *Yentl*, she had to actually-- Barbra Streisand, she had to actually change--

Pretend.

That's right. And all that to be able to go to cheder.

OK, was your family very religious?

No, my family was not very religious. My father-- I should say should rest in peace, Avram-- as I mentioned before, he was a tailor. In Poland, they-- I mean, the house-- the wife, whatever, she did not-- it wasn't accepted that she should go out to help out, so the spouse's job was the cook and to raise children.

So my father used to work long, long hours, and we were a family of five. And I wouldn't say they were hungry, but on the other hand, we didn't live in luxury either. So my father was maybe a little bit of a socialist. A little bit.

Because of his circumstance.

Because of the circumstances. But my father never worked on Saturday, and when they had to finish something he used to close up the window so nobody should see. So even though he was not that religious, but he didn't want the people, our neighbors, should know.

So in other words, if he should not know-- if he were religious, he would not work on Sabbath. But he would, but he kept a respect of a certain kind.

No, no, no, no. He never worked on Sabbath. Never worked. I don't think it had to do with religion, but he just decided that way. And I think it was very good because if not, he would've worked seven days a week.

OK, so he worked hard.

He worked hard. You said there was a family of five. Did you have brothers and sisters?

Yes, I have an older brother. He was born in 1912. Name was Simche Wolf. Then I had a older sister. Name is Hannah. I think she might have been born in maybe 1918. Then I had twin brothers, and then it was me.

So you were the baby.

I was the baby. I was the baby. I was the baby for four eight years, and then I had twin brothers.

Ah, I see.

I had twin brothers. Actually, I said eight. For five years, I was-- I had twin brothers, Motel and Mendel, who were born in 1930.

So your brother was born in 1912 you say?

Yeah.

And so your mother had children over the span of 18 years.

Yes.

What was-- OK.

So as a matter of fact, I still remember my mom saying she used to tell neighbors she thought she'll never become pregnant after so many years, but it happens. And, you know.

There were the boys.

Yeah.

Yeah, so you were four boys and one girl.

Yes.

OK, and tell me a little bit about your parents. Your father's name again was--

My father's name was Avram Kamelmacher. I think he was born in 1889. I'm not actually sure, but nobody in Poland had a birth certificate. And he was born somewhere in the Ukraine.

He served in the Tsarist Army, and as a matter of fact, he told me he ran away. He ran away and actually served in Yekaterinoslav, which now it's called the Dnipropetrovsk.

Ah, Dnipropetrovsk.

Yeah.

OK, so Eastern Ukraine.

Eastern Ukraine. As a matter of fact, I wrote to them not long ago because I heard that they have an archive, the Dnipropetrovsk. And I wrote to them and asked perhaps they know anything about my father, who served in the Tsarist Army. And they were nice enough to answer me. They do not have any information.

So then he ran away from the army, and then maybe a year later, he came back. And when he came back, the Sergeant told them you know something? All your friends are dead already.

Oh my gosh.

But somehow, he was not court martialed. He survived the war, but he was also injured in his left leg. And my mom--

Where is her family from?

Also from Russia. My mom's name was Leah. And her maiden name was Gladstone.

Oh, that sounds so English.

Yeah, Gladstone. In English, actually Gladstain.

Gladstain.

Gladstain.

All right, and how large was her family?

Her family, well about four. Yeah. I don't actually know that much about her family. You know, when I left my parents, I wasn't even 17 years old. So I'm kind of limited.

Sure. But they didn't live around you. Her family, did they live around where you lived?

No, they lived more Rozyszcze. All I know, she had a sister, and I think she had a brother. And the sister lived in Rozyszcze.

All right, how is it that the families of both parents came from the east to Poland?

Well, that time, it wasn't Poland. It was part of the Ukraine. It became Poland in 1918.

Oh, I see.

It was part of the Ukraine. It became Poland-- I mean, a part of Poland in 1918, and it was Polish until 1939.

So in other words, when they moved in the early part of the 20th century, then it was still part of the same country.

Yeah, it was still part of the Ukraine.

Ukraine, which was part of the Russian Empire.

Right.

OK.

Right.

OK. Got it. Now did your father have brothers and sisters?

My brother had--

Your father.

Yeah, excuse me.

It's OK.

My father had two brothers, and both of them got killed in World War II-- in World War I. I'm sorry.

Oh, World War I.

World War I.

They were fighting in the Tsarist Army?

Yes.

OK, so he remained the only child.

He remained the only child.

And he and your mother married then probably between-- do you know what year they married?

I really-- well, I would say in 1910.

OK. Tell me a little bit about their education.

OK, unfortunately, my mom and my father, and I'm not ashamed to say, did not know how to read and write.

Really?

They came from a very, very poor family, and when my father was about 12 years old, they gave him up on apprentice to learn tailoring. But he actually-- the tailor used him as a nanny to take care of the kids, so he learned very, very little. And my mom also comes from a very religious family but a very poor family.

And when my mom was about maybe 13 years old, they gave her up to a big landowner, and she slept there. And she lived there actually. She cooked and she baked for them, and she was too small to reach-- almost everybody there had a baker's oven because they're almost all Jewish people. They bake challah for Saturday, and all kind of goodies, and even bread. So she actually lived with that big land owner.

Was this a Polish landowner?

Yes.

So she lived and worked for a gentile family?

Yes.

OK.

And so, as I say, I'm not ashamed to say that my parents did not know how to read and write. They just didn't have a chance.

Of course not. It was a hard time.

It was a hard time, so therefore they sent me to school. And so as I mentioned before, public school was free, but the Yiddish school, the cheder, and also the Hebrew school called Tarbut, you had to pay. So my parents actually, I would say, saved on food and send their Sonny boy, which means me, to school.

What about your older brother? Did they send him too?

My older brother just finished public school, and I don't think they send him to-- for some reason to learn Yiddish and Hebrew. And as a matter of fact, he helped my father in tailoring.

I see. So he worked together with him.

Yes.

OK, and did your sister help your mother in the household?

My sister-- you know, it's funny. It sounds so funny, but my sister also went to Polish public school when-- but when my mom gave birth to the twins, she had to quit school and wanted to help my mother. As a matter of fact, I still remember she was a very good student, and most of her teachers were sorry that she has to leave school.

So did she finish seventh grade?

No.

Oh. Did she cry, do you remember?

No, I don't think so.

OK.

I don't think so.

It was just what people did.

It was just what people did. She was not the only one. It was accepted that-- well, maybe it had to do with Poland. A Jew was Jewish. They were either a shoemaker, a tailor, a barber, or in Yiddish-- I don't know how to call it in English, but a [YIDDISH] was making-- I mean, the wooden part for wheels for the wagons. A Jew could never get a job-- a city job, or a [? state ?] job, or a government job. So I don't think that education was so important for the Jews in Poland.

So the Jewish people who lived in the second place, can you tell me again where you moved to? It begins with an M, the village. I forgot.

OK, Maniewiczze.

Maniewiczze. The Jews in Maniewiczze, were they also almost all in such occupations that you just mentioned?

Yes, they also have the small grocery stores. There was a cap maker because, as I said, a Jew could not get any job working, as I said, for--

In the state.

Yeah, for the state.

So tell me the Jews that lived in Maniewiczze, were they orthodox? Were they Hasidim? Paint a picture for me of the different groups that might be there.

OK, well, I can say usually the working people, which I mentioned before, they usually were not that religious, but they always, of course-- some of them went only on Saturday. And, of course, everybody went to Rosh Hashanah and Yom

Kippur whether somebody was religious or not religious. I would say that the so-called small businessmen [INAUDIBLE] but made out. They felt they were a little bit more religious.

They were a little bit more religious, and also they actually-- but many, many people used to get some help of the United States whether a brother, or sister, or something like that, and especially when somebody had a daughter and she did not-- well, nobody fell in love with her until she was about 24, so she was considered an old maid more or less. And they used to be people who actually were able-- were actually, I can say, specialists to write letters to relatives in the United States, you know, to help. Like Yankele. We both come from the same place, from our mom, this and that.

They were matchmakers for her? That is they would be matchmakers for the old maids? Is this what you're saying?

Well, there were matchmakers too.

OK.

There was matchmakers too.

No, but when you're describing-- who would be the people who would write letters, and what would they write for?

Oh, not matchmaker. Not matchmakers.

No, no, no.

One is actually-- one was a shoemaker. He just knew supposedly how to write a letter, so actually-- so the relative in the United States should actually feel sorry or something like that and try to help.

So that is that he would write a letter so that this family or this young woman, who is now too old to be married, would get some financial support.

Yes.

I see. I see. Yeah, it was those times, wasn't it?

Yeah, it was those times. As a matter of fact, I remember once a gentleman-- well, I call him a gentleman. He came from the United States. He was an agent for an insurance company, and everybody came to Maniewiczze. Maniewiczze was a very nice area.

There were very nice pine woods, and people used to come to fix their health in summer, especially the ones who had TB, which, at that time, incurable. So everybody ran to this particular agent to see-- to find out, oh, is my brother maybe insured with your company? Unfortunate I don't remember what insurance company it was.

So it was an event. Someone comes from the United States.

That's right. I still remember it was in the summertime, and he wore a white suit, and was nicely groomed, and all that. And everybody, oh, this is the way Jewish-- he happened to be Jewish. This is the way Jewish people live in the United States.

Yeah. So did many people have-- I want to find out about the level of modernity in town. So let me ask some questions about that. Were the roads paved?

No, the road's not paved, but I was there two years ago. I was back in Maniewiczze two years ago and which we'll talk about it, and then the roads were paved.

OK, but when you were growing up.

No.

OK.

So we had a bazaar every Tuesday. It's a big area. You could buy anything you felt like. The farmers used to bring all kind of stuff to be sold, and many times their wagon used to sit after a rain, used to sink.

In the mud.

In the mud. And the horses-- pull horses, they were-- they used to beat them, hit them, and pull out their wagon. And many time they were late to the bazaar so because the roads were not paved.

I see.

I think maybe I'm wrong about Poland. I cannot say. Poland did not make a big investment in that area.

In that part of the country.

In that part of the country because that's part of Eastern Poland. And as I say, it was only Polish from 1918 until 1939. But then when it became part of the Ukraine, they, of course--

Did more.

--did more.

OK, so let's-- I still want to get more of a picture and a sense of what it was like when you were growing up. So let me ask this. The roads weren't paved. Was there electricity?

No, we did not have electricity. The story goes like this. Maniewiczze was actually divided by the railroad into two parts. It was like this part and the other part. So they actually build a generating plant about the-- in Poland, the railroad was nationalized because it used to be called Polska kolej [SPEAKING POLISH] which means Poland-- Polish railroads.

And so the way I understand, the railroad wanted so many kilowatt hours in order for them to let the wiring, whatever. And I don't think they were able. They couldn't get along. Besides, the generating plant, which was built maybe in 1937, and therefore there was no electricity when I left Maniewiczze in 1939.

So let me ask another question. So when your father was sewing and was a tailor, his sewing machine he operated by a foot pedal?

Foot pedal. Foot pedal, and it also-- I can say I remember when my father had an old sewing machine, and he used to break down. And most of the time, he used to break down-- You know, my father was not busy, like, a whole winter, but he usually get busy around Purim.

Now Purim is six weeks before-- four weeks-- sorry. Four weeks for Passover, so everybody wanted to have their suit for Passover. And the sewing machine you used to break down, but there was actually a mechanic. His name was Shvartsblat.

You used to call him. You used to hope he's home, and he used to come and fix the sewing machine. But my father and my mom, they always say they saved in order to buy a Singer sewing machine. And that agent who worked for a Singer, and he was to come and always wanted to. So my mom sometimes would say, you know, we didn't buy any meat this week so we saved a little bit more power Singer. So, finally, maybe after-- I don't know exactly-- maybe after four years, they had enough money to buy a Singer sewing machine. And it was like a big holiday.

It was an event.

It's an event. And actually, it was around Hanukkah. And, you know, the Jewish people believe in and they-- what happened on Hanukkah that they find a small amount of oil and it lasted for eight months. So this happened around Hanukkah, and my father said, I really don't know what is a bigger event on [INAUDIBLE] in Yiddish, but Hanukkah, oh, this Avram the tailor was able to buy a new Singer sewing machine.

Did he also sew the family clothes?

Yes. Yes. I can say I used to get a suits, say, every Passover or something like that, and I used to envy-- like, we had a doctor, Dr. Tarkowski, but although I must say, he was very, very good. He was very good to the people of Maniewiczze. If you didn't have-- you know, he didn't mind to come at that time-- I mean, to come and help you or whatever.

If you didn't have money to pay.

If you didn't have money to pay. But I envied their son. He used to bring to my father-- you know, my father used to make for his son six pair of pants at once, and I had to wait. I had to wait for a holiday to get this together a suit, or a pair of pants, or something like that.

You're painting a lovely picture of life as it was. It's very nice to hear. Tell me a little bit about your family inside, that is what kind of personalities did your parents have as people?

Well, I think my father was a very hard worker. Used to get up every morning about 6 o'clock or so, go out to the shed, and bring in some logs and saw, and light the over. And then he used to work late at night. He used to actually make his own cigarettes. And then the matches, the matches were actually in Poland were made of wood. And in order to save, I used to be able to split every match in two, in half--

Oh my.

--so we saved a little bit.

Oh my. I never would have thought that. But, yes, that's a way of saving.

I was a specialist in that. And of course, my father used to buy the cheapest tobacco called makhorka.

Makhorka.

Makhorka. You know, like this. And what else?

Was he a storyteller?

My father?

Mm-hmm.

No, but he liked-- he wasn't religious, but he had to remember some-- before Rosh Hashanah, he remembered some-- he used to sing some parts of the prayers for the Rosh Hashanah.

So he would sing them to you, to the children?

To the children.

OK.

And like [NON-ENGLISH SINGING] Rosh Hashanah. [NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

Yom Kippur. [NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

And you remember that from your childhood?

I remember from my childhood, yes. And actually, the man that got actually signs on every name of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and then actually about 10 days-- they're called 10 days to make good, to improve. In Hebrew it's called [SPEAKING HEBREW] So according to the scriptures, every Jew, if you didn't eat any kosher, you didn't observe the Saturday, you had a chance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to improve so God will give him another year of life.

Another chance.

Another chance. Another year of life.

Your mother, was she religious?

My mother was much more religious. Although, she couldn't-- well, what can I say? Her parents were very religious. Her father, my grandfather, Simche Wolf-- his name was Simche Wolf-- lived in Rozyszcze. And the Jewish people, part of their prayer, like three times a day, they say--

It's OK.

OK, they have a prayer. It's called [SPEAKING HEBREW] In Hebrew means 18. Doing the 18 pages, a religious Jew stands up and, of course, is taught all about the almighty. And he doesn't talk until-- he shouldn't move. He doesn't talk. He shouldn't move until he finishes the 18 pages.

The story my mom told me-- you know, at that time, they used to use wood. So when you use wood, you have to clean the chimney every so often. If you don't, the chimney catches a fire. Well, this exactly what happened to our father.

While he was doing--

While he standing these-- the 18 pages [SPEAKING HEBREW] So supposedly, I don't know if it's more the Ukrainian or what. He knocked in the winter and said, Simche Wolf, your chimney is on fire. He didn't move until he finished the prayer.

Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh.

So anyway, she was very religious, but I think she changed somewhat because my father was not the religious.

OK, but you know a lot about it for growing up in a family where the father was not too religious.

No, I know more about it. As a matter of fact, I, myself, a little bit of a socialist because it was instilled in me when I was small. How can I say we only had one bedroom. We had one bedroom, but I would say maybe-- and this is about 1930 that-- maybe in 1932, we added a shed where my brother and I used to sleep during the summer. But otherwise, as a matter of fact, I wrote about it. The table was very versatile. My father used to, of course, used to iron on it and used to cut the--

The cloth.

--cloth and everything else. And, of course, we used to eat on it. And at night, it became my bed. I slept on it. My mom used to bring in a straw mattress, and it became my bed.

Which of your parents were you closer to?

I think even. I think even. I think even.

Evenly.

I think evenly. I think evenly. And even now, the way I think the way I live and the way I lived, and if I remember the way they lived, you know, it still hurts me a little how-- and they were not the only one. There's many, many Jews in Eastern Poland in the small shtetl and the small towns lived like that.

Tough. Tough lives.

A tough life.

A tough life. But you're painting the picture beautifully for me.

Thank you.

What kind of relations did you have with the gentiles?

Well, here-- OK, we had-- we lived, it was a small street. A small street. There were-- let me see-- one Jewish family, two Jewish families, and an Ukrainian family. So I think what many, many, many time the people ask me, why did the Ukrainians and the Poles-- I mean, why did they decide to sort of help the Germans? And my answer would be that a Jew maybe they didn't have any meat all week long, maybe a potato or a [? bread, ?] whatever, a tiny bit of meat.

But when it came Friday night and Saturday, they had a nice meal. That time, they didn't have electricity, but the lamps were burning bright. I mean, my father became a king of the small apartment and the living room, and the table was covered. There were two challos.

My mom, I can say, kindled the candles. And so what happened is my Ukrainian neighbor, when they walked in on Friday night or Saturday, there would say, look at the way the Jews lived not realizing that they spend on whiskey much more than the Jews spend to make Shabbos, so I think envy. So, for example, when the Germans took Maniewiczze. And they would say, all Jewish people, they organized a ghetto. All Jewish people should appear in a particular space.

The Germans didn't know where the Jews lived, but the Ukrainian neighbor, the Ukrainian Pole, they knew. And for a pound of sugar or two pound of salt, they said Chaim Yankel lives there, and there, and there. So I think they envied, I think, the way the Jewish people-- the Jews lived. I'm talking-- but I cannot say. This actually was more pronounced in the small towns in the shtetl. Maybe the bigger cities was a little bit different.

Well, tell me this. What you're describing now, something that takes place during war time.

Yes.

What about before the war?

Before the war was fine. Before the war was fine. As a matter of fact, our Ukrainian neighbor, Kovachuk, she used to invite us for Christmas. We used to always sing songs together.

Oh, really?

Yeah, we were fine. Fine. But the way I understand that I must give credit a neighbor Kovachuk. Supposedly, they held my mom in the ghetto. I was able actually to speak to their daughter, Lucy, after perestroika on the phone.

Really?

Yeah.

OK, interesting.

And then Poles, we didn't have any Polish neighbor, but we used to buy-- they were Polish grocery stores and Poles who used to used to sell all kind of non-kosher food. And many, many people used to patronize them because they weren't that religious. But it was-- we didn't have any problems.

OK, so before the war, it was peaceful.

Before the war, it was peaceful.

And you spoke Polish.

I spoke Polish, yes.

Did you speak Ukrainian as well?

Not then. I wouldn't learn Ukrainian until I attend the Ukrainian school.

OK, that's later.

That's later.

But during your childhood growing up there.

Polish, Yiddish, and some Hebrew.

OK, OK. And the doctor that you mentioned before who wouldn't always take money if you didn't have to pay, was he Polish or Jewish?

Polish.

He was Polish.

Yes.

OK, I thought the last name--

Polish. And it's very interesting, he was very good to all people. He didn't make any distinction whether somebody's was Polish, Jewish, Ukrainian. And as a matter of fact, my father does his tailoring for him, and my brother used to bring it to them. So my brother always wanted-- so when he was home, he used to give him a tip.

For bringing the suit.

Yeah. Used to be called in Polish, used to be called bronfn gelt, which means bronfn whiskey in English. Used to give him in Polish like a dollar. There used to be zloty. Used to give him a zloty or two, but he used to give it to her, to my brother, not him.

What do you mean? Only the doctor used to give it to your brother?

The doctor.

OK.

Not his wife. When he brought the suit or whatever, you know, and the wife was there, she never. So he prayed to God [INAUDIBLE]. He should be there. And it's also interesting and when we became part of the Ukraine in 1939 and there was almost a shortage of everything, a shortage of clothes or this and that-- as a matter of fact, some Ukrainian-- I mean, wives of the party members or whatever, they bought anything which was still available in the stores.

And in many occasions, they used to buy a prayer shawl, [INAUDIBLE] Yiddish a tallit. Buy a tallit and make a dress out of it or something like that. The reason why I bring it up is Dr. Tarkowski's wife. Her name was Harenka. And she decided to leave because she said, I wouldn't like to wear the same dress that my-- can I say-- I mean, that I wouldn't like to wear the dress that my Ukrainian and Polish helper wears, the same dress.

So they actually left. They left to the German side. I don't know what actually happened to them. But the only reason why they left is because she said she wouldn't like to wear the same clothes as the innkeeper or whatever.

OK, well, it could be other-- I mean, that was a chaotic time.

Yes.

And a very painful time for many people for different reasons. So they could have had more serious reasons too for leaving.

Right.

What is another question that I had here? Did you have a radio at home?

The war broke out in 1939. In 1937, we bought a radio, but then they radio needed two batteries. Now batteries for the-- at that time, they used tubes. So needed two batteries, and, of course, the batteries have to be charged. But when we became part of the Ukraine, they wanted all radios, and I think we had to get rid of it because I don't know why. I'm sure it's for political reasons, so we only had a radio for two years.

I see. Do you remember listening to any particular programs?

Yeah, I used to like to listen songs we used to get. How can I say? A few of the countries are very, very close to each other, so we like to listen to all kind of songs, like Czech songs, which was similar to the Polish. As a Jew, I understood a little bit German. We used to listen to some German Jews.

And of course, the news every day. Although, we had many, many newspapers. We used to get every day some newspapers. Most newspapers used to come from Warsaw, and they used to come every morning.

We used to have-- it actually was a Jewish guy, and his job was to go to the train every morning and pick up the papers. And used to have the-- the most known Polish paper used to be what's called Gazeta Polska, which means the Polish paper. But we also had maybe four different kind of Jewish papers, which were published most mainly in Warsaw and which we used to get.

Well, you say your father and mother didn't read and write. Did you get any of those papers?

Yes.

Which ones did you get?

I used to get the Polish paper. I used to get the Polish paper. I used to get some Yiddish papers.

And who in the family would read it?

My older brother. My older brother and I.

And you would tell your parents what's in there?

Yeah. As a matter of fact, I used to read the paper before Germany attacked the Soviet Union. I mean, before Germany attacked Poland. And we used to write-- and the Polish paper used to say-- I still remember-- oh, Germany will never attack Poland. They don't have enough oil. They don't have this and that.

And the reason why I read the papers is when I was in the sixth grade, the teacher taught us Polish. He insists we should actually read a paper, and I'll never forget. He said read two opposite papers, and somewhere in between is the truth.

Really?

That's what he said.

Well, you know, that's a very progressive kind of way of thinking--

Yes.

--for the time and the place.

Right.

That one should-- it's a very, I would say-- many people would say that's a very American way of thinking that you need to have many different voices in order to be able to know truly what is going on and how you should think about it.

Right.

OK.

And Poland, I must say, that education was a very high level, a much higher level than anything United States, much higher level. I remember, for example, in the second grade, we knew from geography almost about the five continents. We knew about most of the countries, and not like here. We have social studies, which is almost nothing. So what I'm saying, the education was on a very, very high level in Poland.

So your father's clients, and going back to his business, where most of them Jewish, or was it mixed?

Mostly Jewish.

OK.

Most Jewish. Most Jewish, but, of course, there were Poles. There were Poles. Ukraine-- less Ukrainian because they kind of were a special wardrobe, which my father did not make, did not sew.

You mean the kind of clothes that they wore.

The kind of clothes that they wore.

OK, and your father made suits mostly?

He made suits, coats, anything.

And what about for your mother and your sister? Did he sew their clothes?

Some. And they used to buy.

OK, so tell me, in 1933, how old were you?

Well, in 1933-- I was in '25, so about eight years old or something.

Do you remember hearing that in Germany a certain Adolf Hitler comes to power?

Yes. Not did I hear. I knew about it.

All right.

I knew about it. As a matter of fact, many German Jews came to Poland then. They were able to leave.

Did any come to your town?

Yes.

And did you talk to them? Did you meet them?

Yes, as a matter of fact. How can I say? As I said, we had one living room, one bedroom, and kitchen. So during the summer, my father worked in the kitchen. So my mom and my sister, they fixed up the living room.

My mom would actually be on her knees and her hands and color the floor red and all that. And my father worked in the kitchen. And in the wintertime, my father could not work in the kitchen because it was very cold. We used to call it a Siberian kitchen, and he used to work in the living room. So I'm trying to bring up that in 1939 when Poland was divided between Germany and the Soviet Union, many Jewish people wound up on the Russian side-- on the Soviet side.

And one actually-- I want to bring something up. And one actually came to my father to iron his suit. He only had one suit. He wanted it ironed. So he had to-- how can I say?

He was only in the underwear, so he was waiting in the living room. He said, you know, I would give a million dollars in order to sleep. We had a nice couch. So we let him. He slept there. Slept there for two weeks about.

Really?

We let him sleep. Yeah, we let him sleep. And so but what happened many, many Jewish people and non-Jewish wound up on the Soviet side had relatives on the German side. And so many of them signed up that they would like to leave to cross over to the German part of Poland. And the Russians used to say, [SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

What does that mean?

What that means, anybody who is not with us is against us. So for them, it meant that they wanted to go to the German side. So they took them all and they sent them to Siberia.

So they deported them?

They deported them. So in other words, when it comes to the Soviet Union, I, for example, had a Soviet passport. I don't said that I have it. You know, I had a hard time, but I survived the war. And to me, it means a lot. To the ones who wound up in Siberia, they have a different view about the Soviet Union.

Yes.

You know what I'm saying?

Yes. So here's a question. I want to get back-- we'll talk about this.

Yeah.

But I'm still in 1933 when Adolf Hitler comes to power, and you say you knew about it. Did you find out through people, through newspapers, through-- how did people find out that he has come to power, and what did it mean in a small shtetl in Eastern Poland?

Well--

Did it have anything to do with your lives?

Not in the beginning. Not in the beginning. I mean, the only time we actually started to think about is when people-- when Jews left Germany and they couldn't take anything with them.

So that's what you would hear about is how Jews had to leave Germany after he comes to power.

Yeah.

And that their situation is not a good one.

Yes.

OK, and one of those is somebody who came to your father to iron his suit and he ended up staying on the sofa for a couple of weeks? That was a person from Germany?

No, no, it was a person probably outside of Poland. I think he was from Warsaw.

I see.

Warsaw or Lodz. I don't remember, but he was from Poland.

Were there any German Jews that you ended up meeting in your village?

No.

Did any come through that you met?

No.

OK, so as the '30s progressed, you're still going to school. You're going to Polish school, and then you're going to cheder in the afternoon.

Right.

And your parents continue working, your mother at home, your father in the tailoring. And then the summer of 1939 is right before the war. Do you remember that last summer? It's the last summer of peace. What you were doing, where you were?

Yeah, well, in 1939, Poland was divided between Germany the Soviet Union.

Did you know that?

Yes, as a matter of fact, I liked it because I was able to go to high school. In 1939, it our territory became part of the Ukraine. And the people who took over the government, who came from Kiev mainly, from the capital of the Ukraine, they had children, and their children needed a high school. And so they're up in the high school, and I was glad to be able to continue my education.

OK, but now we're talking the war has already started when that happens.

Yeah.

OK, I'm talking right before then, right before the war starting.

Right before it's started, I believe is in 1938 or something.

Yeah, and up until the summer.

Well, we be continued-- my father continued working, and, of course, the new Singer sewing machine did not break down. And I, due to the fact that I could not-- how can I say? Most of the time, the children do not like their father's trade. I didn't want to be a tailor. So, anyway, I wound up working for a short time for a capmaker.

A where?

A capmaker. Making caps.

Oh, you made caps. OK.

Making caps, so this was in 1938, yes.

Had you finished your seven years of schooling?

This was already-- I finished already the seven years of schooling, but '38. I think I finished in '37. And as I say, I could not go to high school because-- could not attend high school because there was no high school where we lived in Maniewiczze. And my father, being a tailor, could not send me to a bigger city like Kovel to the west or Sarny to the east and pay for her room and board and tuition.

I see. It was too much money.

Too much money. My father just couldn't afford it.

OK, so that meant that your formal schooling for you was over. It was done.

Yes, it be over if our territory would not become part of the Ukraine.

OK, so we'll get there. We'll get there.

And also maybe I should mention something. I was also in 1937, I wrote a letter to President Roosevelt.

Did you?

Yeah, and I didn't have any-- we only have stamps. And Poland, we used to write our relatives in the United States. So a letter to the United States was 55 groszy. A zloty is a hundred groszy.

This was 55 groszy. I pasted on an envelope 11 stamps, 11 five cent stamps to make up 55 cents. And I wrote it to

President Roosevelt, the White House, Washington DC, USA. What did I say?

What did you want to write to him?

OK, I wrote them that I'm Jewish. I have no future in Poland. Told him what my parents-- what my father did, and I would like to immigrate to the United States just like that. It was maybe three weeks later my older brother kept running through the cheder, to the Hebrew school.

Harry-- I mean, Chaim, you got a letter from the consulate in Warsaw. What's going on? So what happened, they wrote a letter. I got a letter from the American Conciliate in Warsaw stating there's a recession in the United States. And I said, they would still like to-- I said, of course, I'd like to go.

Even if there's a recession.

Even there's a recession, I like to go. So maybe another two weeks later, I got the whole kind of papers at the Gotham City Hall, take some pictures, this and that, and then in Poland, it was a trade. A special man like a notary public they were also writing letters. So if you needed a letter, it should sound good, typed.

So there were people who knew how to write letters and got paid for doing that.

That's right. That's right. His name was-- I still remember-- Mr. Kleiman. As a matter of fact, I remember he was [INAUDIBLE]. He was later a member of the Judenrat. Judenrat when the Germans took cover.

So anyway, I send it back, and they send me a number, which I understood it was the quarter number, 37,000 something. So then the war broke out. I didn't remember to take that postcard, but when I wound up at this displaced person camp after the war and I told them that, they said, where is the postcard? Now who remembers to take the postcard?

Did that help you?

No. Unfortunate, if it wouldn't. If not the war, maybe it would have helped me. If not the war, maybe I would have been able to go to the United States.

Well, I'll tell you, I think that's great chutzpah for a 10, 12, 13-year-old boy to think, you know, I want to go to the United.

I want to go the United States.

And I'm going to write President Roosevelt about it.

Yeah, well, my mother had actually four brothers in the United States, but somehow, we never wound up at the United States. As I mentioned before, my father's two brothers were--

Killed.

--killed, and everybody knew once you go to the United States, that's it. You won't see them anymore. You won't see her.

You may come back as an insurance agent wearing a white suit.

That's right. That's right. That's right.

So that is really an interesting thing to have.

I was always-- well, what can I say? I was always doing things, what I like to do, doing things, what I--

Were you the mischievous one in the family?

I wouldn't say the mischievous, but I felt very bad. And I feel now-- I feel terrible to others. I complained to my parents why did they bring me into the world if they can not give me an education, which I thought was so stupid from my side? But at that time, I felt.

And also I knew, by example, one girl, who happened to be Jewish, and she was kind of-- I would call her-- I don't want to call her stupid, but when it came to geography-- and we learned about Mexico. Mexico has two million square miles-- square kilometers. And she only said about 200,000. And she was able to go-- Poland high school used to call gymnasium. She was able to go to gymnasium and come every holiday with a uniform and all that. And Chaim Kamelmacher was always a good student, wasn't able to do it.

Yeah, painful.

Painful.

Painful.

But now I realize my parents do their best, and it was kind of silly from my side too.

You were a kid, and that's what kids--

I was a kid.

You were a kid.

But one thing when I left my parents, I was always, always good with my hands. Always good with my hands. And my mom-- the war started the 22nd of June.

You're talking about the second phase.

OK.

Yeah, we'll get to that point.

OK.

So I want to focus now on the very beginning of World War II. You said that there were newspapers who were saying the Germans will never attack. They don't have enough oil. They don't have enough this, enough that. So do you remember where you were when you found out that the Germans actually attacked?

I was home. I was home, and I heard in Polish.

On the radio?

On the radio. I had a radio. Still the radio at that time, that Germany crossed across the border and is bombing Poland. As a matter of fact, it's late already. It's 1941. But what I want to say that I heard all kind of-- I didn't know what it meant, but in Polish 4045 is came. 4049 is coming, but I think the military took over.

You heard numbers like 40?

Numbers that-- yes. And, of course, we were kind of scared. We were scared what the Germans will do to us, but I want to say--

Did they reach you?

No, and then I was still-- OK, this is in 1941. I get mixed up.

OK, so you heard it over the radio, and you were scared. Your family was scared. Did people start talking about what's going to happen? What's going to happen?

That's right. Not only that. On the second-- how can I say? Maniewiczze's a small town, but there's a very-- the railroad is very important because at that time, anybody for-- excuse me-- anybody, for example, who was traveling from Berlin to Moscow or to Kiev had to cross Maniewiczze. That was the only railroad station. So the railroad station was important for the Germans to bomb, so they bombed the station the first day.

Really?

And a bomb fell down near us and create-- near where we lived, and it created a big crater. And our house, one of-- it was made actually of horizontal boards. One of the boards, from the impact of the bomb, fell down, and you could see the outside. So we actually, can I say, realized what the war is and will be on almost the first day.

Almost immediately.

Immediately.

Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness. And so were you anticipating that the Germans are going to come?

Yeah, but the only thing is my mom still remember the Germans from World War I, and she claimed that the Germans were very good to this civilian population. But on the other hand, we heard what Germany is doing to the Jews there, so we were kind of--

You didn't know what to expect.

That's right.

OK.

But about the 18th actually--

18th of which month?

The 18th of the same month. 18th of June.

No, September.

Excuse me. Yeah, 18th of September, was [SPEAKING RUSSIAN], 18th of September, we heard that the Russian army is taking over the area. So the 18th of September.

OK, that sounds about right.

Yeah.

About two weeks later.

Right. Two weeks later.

Was that a surprise?

Yes, it was a surprise.

OK.

And I still remember something. Maybe it's not important.

No, tell me. What it was?

In Russian, they said in Russian, maybe you'll-- OK, [SPEAKING RUSSIAN]

What it meant that the 18th of September, the 18th day of September, the Red Army decided to cross over the border and take over part of the Ukraine and part of Bielorussia because the Polish government stopped to exist, and it also said that from now on it's forever ended the exploitation of men to men.

Man against man.

Man against man. So this-- I still remember that.

Well, I also heard of a joke. They said what is capitalism? It's the exploitation of man against man. What is socialism? The other way around.

[LAUGHS] Yeah. And also USSR in Russian Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik, which means the Soviet Union. So the Jewish people came out what SSSR meant. So the first S mean [RUSSIAN]. I mean, there was nothing there.

The second S means [RUSSIAN]. There's nothing there now. So there wasn't anything. There isn't. The third S means [RUSSIAN], it wouldn't be. And R means [RUSSIAN]. Don't even think about it.

[LAUGHS] So that's what SSSR--

SSSR.

So the first one is--

[RUSSIAN]

There was never anything there.

Yeah. Now the second S means--

[RUSSIAN]

--there isn't anything there. The third S means--

There will never be anything there.

--there will never be anything there. And the R means don't even think about it.

That's right.

That's funny. Never heard that before. OK, so when you saw the first Russian soldiers, the first Ukraine Soviet soldiers, what was your impression?

Oh, no, no, no. So what happened, we said-- so this had happened 18, so we were told around the 22nd this unit of the Red Army will come in and come in from the area which I mentioned before, Okonsk, where I said that only they were by the Ukrainian church.

Right.

So, as a young man and a little bit of a socialist, to me, it was a big event. I'll see the Red Army coming in. And not only me, all the Jewish people, the working people, told that the Soviet Union is a heaven. I mean, to begin with, nobody knew. Everything was like a secret. Nobody knew.

Nobody knew what's doing in the Soviet Union, but the people, the Jewish people, thought this after the October Revolution in 1917, everybody's equal. Imagine. A Jew should be able to work for the government. You know what I'm saying? Equal. You know what that would mean?

So anyway, so when we find out from [INAUDIBLE] that there were maybe half of Maniewiczze, half of the people, were waiting for the-- were waiting to meet--

To greet.

--to greet them. Yeah, to greet them. So anyway, so, finally, we heard music incoming, and they wore new uniforms, new shoes, new hats with a hammer and sickle. And everybody, many people, would run over to kiss them, and then they had all kind of speeches. Excuse me.

That's OK.

All kind of a speeches that, at that time, it was the time when the silk stockings came out.

What's that? What do you mean?

Oh, silk stockings for women?

The United States women. And they knew about it, and they say, the United States, they have silk stocking. This promote prostitution. I still remember how that promote prostitution? A young lady, a poor lady, she wants to buy a pair of silk stockings and doesn't have any money. How can she make money? To sell her body.

And so she can afford the silk stockings.

[INAUDIBLE] that time. And also there was a pansionat, Jewish. His name was Horowitz, and used to be like, I think, maybe 150 or so rooms. People used to-- when the Polish police had a get together, they used to, you know, there. When the Red Army came in, he said until now it was mine, and now it's yours.

He gave him the key, and it was also another Jewish guy, Geller [? Yedavilla. ?] He also gave him the key. He says until now it was mine. Now it's yours. And I think this is the reason why they did not send him to Siberia. You know, capitalists, all capitalists were sent to Siberia.

Well, tell me about that. What happened when the army came? They're met, and you greet them. And they're met, and it's sort of like here they come from a society that's equal. Then what happens?

Well, they start telling guys like ourselves-- you would say-- a soldier would say I'm only 18 and a member of Komsomol. Komsomol mean the youth communist party or something like that. So what happened, just a few Russians came in, civilians I'm talking about. But they were-- in Poland, many Jews were communists.

And as a matter of fact, my sister's future husband, he was also among them. So the Polish government used to arrest

them and used to send them to the German part near the German part. So when the war broke out, the Germans opened the prisoners, and they become the temporary government. Most of them Jews.

So they came back to the east?

They came back home, and they became part of the new Soviet government until maybe a month later, maybe three weeks when actually Ukrainians were sent from Kiev and from the Ukraine. But there was a big difference. Everything was nationalized. There was no private initiative in the Soviet Union.

OK.

OK, now Poland was a capitalist country. And even though the Jews didn't have it so good, but there was never a shortage of bread, never shortage of butter, the daily necessities. When the Russians became part of the Ukraine, everything became a shortage.

So anyway, what happened was the Jews had a small grocery store. They hid everything. They hid everything. So for example, if some-- I still remember that one wanted my father make a suit for him, but my father charged him the same price from before. And he paid him with--

With food.

--food. Yeah.

OK, let's cut. Yeah.

But I would like that. This is some people-- I mean, everybody lived through, but not everybody has the possibility. Everybody wants to talk about it. So to me, it's very important that all these things are recorded for future people.

Thank you. Thank you because you come from a very-- a territory that had a very tragic fate, and what you're describing is on the individual level in a small shtetl who have-- which happens to be geographically in a certain place all of the different forces that converge on that place and then what happens to everybody. So I much appreciate that you are doing this.

So they would pay in-- so instead of money, your father would get paid in food. Is that right?

Yeah, but this only lasted for a short time because they couldn't replace it.

OK, I have a question now.

Yeah.

Were there Poles and Ukrainians who came out to greet the Red Army?

No Poles. No Poles because it was Poland until now-- until then, and then they lost it. It became part of the Ukraine. So they didn't. They did not care to greet the Red Army. Some Ukrainians did.

Some Ukrainians did, but it's also important-- our neighbor Kovachuk, they had a son. Son's name was Grisha. And what happened in small towns, we used to call it in Polish [POLISH], that you had to, once a year, to join a policeman and just like walk around, walk the time.

Be a patrolman.

A patrolman, yeah. So what happened? What happened is when Grisha, the Kovachuk, their son, when he-- just so happened that he was with a policeman that night, and they arrested two Ukrainians because they thought they were

communists.

No, no, no. So this is when? In 1939?

When the Red Army came in in 1939.

OK.

In 1939. I'm talking about-- you asked me about-- yeah.

Yeah, so was he a policeman for the Red Army or for Poland?

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

OK.

Kovachuk had a son. He had two daughters and a son. The son's name was Grisha.

Got it.

OK, in Maniewiczze, and I think in other small town, once a year everybody who lived in Maniewiczze had to join a policeman just to go to walk.

So this would have been for a Polish system.

Yeah.

Still under the Polish system.

Yes.

OK, that's what I wanted to know.

OK, the Polish system. So what happened? It just happened that the police that time arrested two supposedly--

Communists.

--two Ukrainian communists. When the Soviets came in, they found out about it, and due to the fact it was-- he was innocent. He didn't know-- But due to the fact that he was with policemen that night, they sent him to Siberia, and our neighbor, Kovachuk, was never able to find out what happened to him.

Oh my.

So this is the Soviet Union.

Wow.

You know, he was innocent. He just so happened that--

There was a sort of civilian duty.

Civilian duty, and they are-- and the Polish, the policeman, arrested supposedly two--

Communists.

--Ukrainian communists. So they sent him to Siberia and, to my knowledge, never found out what happened to him. So, for example, somebody-- also Mrs. Kovachuk-- I forgot her name. She said to my mother-- she said, you know, when the Russians-- well, once we heard the Red Army is coming in and if we camp out of the Ukraine, she said when the Ukrainians will come in and they'll become part of the Ukraine, you will be like my mother.

She liked my mom because she always used to go and come in and borrow her two eggs, a little bit of salt, a little bit of sugar. But once they took away her son, she changed her mind about the Red Army and the Ukraine, so it depends. You know what I'm saying?

And you say your brother-in-law became part of the authorities, the structure, until communists came from Kiev and the other place.

Right.

So what was he in charge of? What was his job?

OK, there were big-- actually, how can I say? They just to call it in Polish parkiet. They used to make parquet floors.

OK, parquet floors.

Parquet floors, and actually, there was two Belgish families. They were Belgish.

Oh, Belgian.

Belgian.

Belgian family.

Belgian family. So as a matter of fact-- so in other words, he became the-- how can I say he was [NON-ENGLISH]? He would pay the workers. There were about maybe 300 workers, and he used to get cash and pay them and pay the workers.

So the Belgian factory had been nationalized.

Nationalized. The two Belgians, they ran. They ran for their life, and it was everything was nationalized.

And so he was then in charge of this factory.

Yeah, not the factory. He was just the cashier.

OK, so he was giving out the pay for the workers there.

Yeah.

Did he stay in that job, or did he last in that job?

No, he left. And as a matter of fact-- it's a long story. I write about it. I have written maybe 50 stories.

Oh, wow.

And are being actually added, and maybe they'll-- so everything is written down.

He left and something happened to him. What happened to him?

Well, in 1941, when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, as a former communist, he ran to the Soviet Union. And he ran-- as a matter of fact, all communists, and especially, I would say, the one in charge, was such a coward, they were the first one to leave and leave the population without any government at all. So maybe for four days in-- we're not there yet.

Yeah. In 1941.

In 1941, they just had a terrible time, the Ukrainians especially. And I'm sorry to say that, and to a lesser extent, the Poles. They came in, and they robbed. They took everything--

In 1941.

--in 1941 because the Soviets left, and the Germans didn't come in yet so about four days. As a matter of fact, I read in the Yiskeh book that the Ukrainians and Poles came from 50 miles away. They took off the doors. The Jewish people there had a horrible time, even much more than in the ghetto maybe the first four years. It was a terrible time.

We'll talk about that, but, OK, so that's something about your sister's husband. Let's go back to after the people come from Kiev and they replace-- do they replace, let's say, the local authority?

Yes, they replace. Very few remain. They replace the local authorities. Everybody had to get a passport. And on the passport it said, for example, Chaim Kamelmacher, Jewish or my statues, student, or what have you. And as a matter of fact-- so the best passport was if they would say I'm a [RUSSIAN], which means the best passport would be that would say I'm a son of a worker.

Ah.

It's just so happened, my father, who worked so hard and saved so long for the Singer, is he employed at one time. He had an employer at one time, which meant already that my passport did not say I'm a son of a worker. It said that my father was a little bit already a little bit of a capitalist because he had a worker. And, of course, he paid the worker. Otherwise, the worker wouldn't work for him, but this is the Soviet Union.

It's very hard to realize what happened. I loved it. For example, they took away-- there was one that used to make parts for pencils, which meant he was a capitalist, and he ran away. So they took over for the youth, the house. And we sang Russian songs and all that. I liked it, but there was nothing to buy. For everything, you had to get in line.

But at this point, when-- remind me again. When is your birthday? What month?

July 1st. July 1.

July 1 is your birthday, yeah? And you're born in 1925, so when all of this happens, you're just turned 14 years old.

Right.

You know, how much does a 14-year-old kid really understand about all of it? You can just see what's going on.

Well, I don't know. I was-- as I say, how many 14 kids write to President Roosevelt.

Well, that's true too. That's true too. Yeah, I don't want to-- by saying this, I don't want to say that you weren't smart or clever. What I'm saying is that at 14, how were you to know things that you then learned later? When they come in, it's natural that you would like things because there are some advantages to the system.

Yeah.

You know? And you get to go to school.

Yeah, that meant a lot for me.

Yeah. So tell me about that. Tell me how your father reacted, how your mother reacted. How did the family react to all of this?

Well, my father-- as I say, my father liked it very much. The only thing it had some drawbacks because everything became a shortage of everything. You couldn't buy anything because they-- and also, for example, we had a neighbor. We had a neighbor. The last name was Schtule.

As a matter of fact, they had some relatives in Baltimore, and they had a small grocery store. And what happened, actually, he didn't make a living from the grocery store because they had rich relatives, supposedly, in Baltimore. And one of their young ladies was a teacher. And I said to myself a teacher? A teach in the United-- only in the United States, a Jew can be a teacher.

So anyways, so when the Russians came in to begin with, they couldn't get any more help in the United States. Whatever he had maybe-- he had a small little store. I think it was just the kid to keep busy. Didn't make a living out of it.

But what had bothered me, there was a line to buy sugar or whatever, they pull their family out from the line because he was a capitalist. Now here is a guy who when somebody didn't have any money and you needed some flour, oil, whatever for Saturday, he would write it down in the book. And many times nobody-- the book was all yellow and curled because many-- his name was Isich. Isich, would you please write it down?

But it bothered me that the Soviets took over, and he was a capitalist. He was so good to poor people, but, of course, they didn't know it or whatever. So we used to help them with some salt and this and that.

So you started to see such things.

I was sorry, yes, to see such things.

OK, when did you start going to school.

I started going to school in the fall of 1939.

And what was that like? Describe it to me a little bit. Who were some of the kids in the classes?

OK, well, we were actually five young boys, five young men or whatever, who decided to-- who could not afford to go to high school and thought that here's our chance for us to go to school. It was actually in the same buildings where the Polish school, was in the same buildings. And I still remember the one in charge, like the principal. His name was Kucharuch, a real Ukrainian. And his wife was Olana Nikolai Kucharuch, and she taught chemistry.

Ah-ha.

She taught chemistry, which wasn't too good. So anyway, and this is why I'm here and being interviewed--

Really?

--by the Holocaust Museum. You'll ask why.

Yeah.

Because in 1941 when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, and, as I said, they bombed us the first day, I was afraid to

remain there not because I was a Jew. The Holocaust was years away. I was afraid that the Germans will say that I'm a communist. After all, I attended a communist or socialist school, whatever you want to call it. So if I wouldn't attended a school, I would've never been here because I would have never left my parents.

My mom-- she rest in peace-- she said, Chaim, you always-- I was always a schoolboy. You with your schooling. Now you have to leave us. So in other words it was--

Because of the school.

Yeah, if another school. But the only thing, as I mentioned before, she said [INAUDIBLE] if you don't get lazy, you'll always be able to survive.

Your mother said that?

My mother. So we check [INAUDIBLE] again, I-- I did some tailoring. I became a shoemaker.

We'll get to there.

We'll get there.

We'll get to there. All right, so right now, though, you're in this new school. Well, it's school in the old buildings, but now it is a Soviet school--

Soviet school.

--run by the Ukrainians.

Yes.

OK, what were some of the other subjects that you had?

Oh, very-- we had Ukrainian as a language.

OK, did you have Russian?

Yeah-- no, no. No, no. I'm sorry. Everything was taught in Ukrainian. We had Russian as a language. I still remember the Ukrainian literature.

Their biggest writer, the Russian writer Taras Grigoryveich Shevchenko. They had Mariia Vovchok, Karpenko-Karyi, Lesya Ukrainka. And then we had-- and then, of course, we had Russian as a language. Pushkin. And then, of course, we had chemistry. We had math, geometry.

Did you have--

History.

You had history?

Absolutely.

OK.

History, yeah.

Did you have any kind of political courses?

Absolutely. We used to have a political [RUSSIAN] which means a politician--

A political officer.

--a political officer to make sure that we grow-- schoolchildren, even though it's high school but make sure that we grow up good Soviet citizens. As a matter of fact, we had like-- used to play like we would be members of the Red Army and train how to use-- how can I say-- words which they used in the army and all that. And we had-- how can I say? After the revolution, the Russians wanted to be different. So instead of having [INAUDIBLE], they used to have their insignia on the collar.

Ah, OK.

So anyway, we used to have officers. We used to fight, used to fight like members of the Red Army.

So you got a little practice.

And there went a time with snowballs and all that.

And who was the-- who were the other kids when you were going to grammar school?

The other kids, not too many Jewish people, mostly Ukraine. Not too many Jewish, but more Ukrainian. More Ukrainian. Some Polish. Yeah.

So the majority would be Ukrainian rather than Polish or Jewish.

Yes.

OK, did you happen to hear of any Ukrainian-Polish tension during this time?

A little bit. But also I must say about the Poles, when the Germans came in--

The Germans or the Russians?

No, no, I'm talking about the-- no, no, I mean, when the Germans came in 1941, they recruited-- I just want to mention they recruited Ukrainian policemen. And as a matter of fact, they claimed that Ukrainian policemen were worse for the ghetto than the Germans. As a matter of fact, one of my friends called Kolya [INAUDIBLE] went with me to the same Polish public school. He became a policeman, and he was terrible.

He used to hit. He was merciless. All he wanted was gold, and, of course, a Jew usually has a gold with his wedding band or whatever. They took it away the first week, and he was bad that after the war, he actually-- he ran to England. He was afraid to remain there.

What I want to bring up, they didn't trust any Poles. But the Poles volunteered to help the Germans to find the Jews and all that. So they were very, very big anti-Semites. And what I would say if not the Ukrainians-- and, of course, I mean, when I say Ukrainians, there's always good people, bad people.

But if not, the bad Ukrainians and the Poles, I would say maybe 20% of the Jews maybe would survive because, as I said, the Germans were cowards. They knew this was so many Partisans in the wooded area. Did they go there? No, they didn't. But in the cities when they carry the big gun, they became the bosses.

Yeah. It's tragic. It's tragic.

It's tragic, and also this is my opinion. My opinion, I think Germany did not suffer enough because nobody can tell me they didn't know. There was always somebody in the family, a son, a husband. They always used to send to Germany clothing and many times even jewelry if they could, so they knew what was going on.

You're talking about people in the Wehrmacht, the German Army.

Yeah, the German people in Germany. So what I'm saying-- what I wanted to say-- yeah, what I wanted to say is after the war when Germany was divided between the big four, the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union, the occupation should have lasted much, much longer. So what happened was the only one who lasted longer was the Soviet sector, the Soviet part. And, of course, at that time, many people will [? dispute it ?] with me because of the Eastern Republic of Germany or something like that.

Did it-- the German Democratic Republic.

That's right, the German Democratic Republic. So they [INAUDIBLE] us all, but-- and then I say that the rest of the Germans from the French, United States, and in Great Britain, the German did not suffer enough.

For what they did.

I think they should've suffered a little bit more. And now it's one of the most richest, I mean, country-- the most developed country in Europe.

It's true.

I mean, that's my opinion. That's my opinion.

I can understand it. I can understand why.

If you think maybe 12 million Russians maybe died in the war, 12 million. And this is why, for example, General Eisenhower decided to let-- even though the US Army was near to Berlin, but he decided they let the Red Army take Berlin because they suffered so much. And, of course, the US forces held back, and the Red Army took Berlin. And not only that. They lost maybe a million and a half soldiers, but--

It was important for them.

--it was important for them.

Let's talk a little bit more now about that first Soviet occupation in Poland before 1941. And then we'll take a break, and then afterwards, we'll come back to this. I would like to find out more of what your life was like up until the time you leave.

So you say that you attended school. You had various courses. You even had a [RUSSAIN] come and give instruction, and the kids would play in the schoolyard as if they were in the Red Army but with snowballs. How did the next couple of years-- did you hear of-- you mentioned also before of deportations of Jews who had said we want to join our relatives on the German side.

You're talking in 1939.

1939 to 1941.

Yes.

And you said they were picked up, and then they were sent to Siberia. Did you know of other people who were arrested for some reason? Did your family or did you sense a certain kind of presence that it wasn't safe to talk, or it wasn't safe

to express things?

Oh, yeah. Yes, we knew it wasn't safe to talk. It wasn't safe to talk. But how can I say? It was good and bad.

I was good because for the first time, a Jew could say-- they advertised, you can be a doctor. You can be an engineer. You can be this. I bet it would never happen during Poland. So this was a positive thing.

And also but the Russians said that the reason why we have a shortage of this and that is because we are like an island, a socialist island, a heaven for the working people, a heaven for the-- and we are an island among a sea of capitalists who want to destroy us, and therefore we spend more money for the fence. So this is only a temporary thing. And many people--

It has a logic to it.

Yeah, logic to it.

OK, so let's go back to deportations. Do you know of any people personally who were arrested and picked up?

A few. The ones who were picked up, so-called capitalists.

OK.

So-called capitalists. Yeah.

And was that man who you said who was such a nice grocer--

Something similar like Dr. Zhivago.

Mm-hmm. OK, but you didn't have that fear.

No, I didn't have the fear. Although, I was not 100%. I was not 100% a son of a worker because my father, at one time, had an employee.

OK, and you say they took away the radio. That is you had to give up your radio.

Right.

OK, what about the Singer sewing machine?

Oh, no, no, they didn't touch that.

So was your father able to continue working?

Yes, was to continue. Yes, continue able to work, yeah.

OK, all right. So let's come up to-- is there anything else about that Soviet period that you think is important to talk about?

Yes, well, I'll think about it. Let's see. Well, as I said they did away with but also called capitalists. And also I was a little bit disillusioned.

Although, for me to go back to school was really-- but I thought that life became a little bit harder, the daily life, because you had to-- for everything you had go in line, stay in line. And the problem was-- well, I cannot explain. You remember there was a shortage of gasoline.

Yes.

If you had a half a tank and there was a short line, what did you do? Got in line.

You get in line, yeah, of course.

You don't do it now. Why not? Because that's all you know. Gasoline will always be there.

Right.

Now this was the problem with the Soviet Union. They didn't have enough of everything, so people would buy things even they didn't need them. Say they buy, say, rubber boots. They used to say what do they give today?

They didn't give. You had to pay. You had to pay with rubles. But they used to say what did they give today? So even you didn't need the rubber boots, what did you do? You bought them because you didn't know when you'll need them. They'll be available. Meanwhile, if I needed the rubber boots, I wasn't able to buy it.

Because they were all sold out.

They're all sold out. So this the main problem. Also no competition. No competition. If you look at the computer from the mainframe computer until the personal computer, they're now cheaper than when they came out with the personal computer, and they do more things.

There was no-- in the Soviet Union, it wasn't such a thing. Everybody used to get salary. So why should I work very hard if I get the same salary?

What about your father? How was he paid? By--

Rubles.

But who paid him?

I mean, the people usually got some rubles, and they used to work and get paid in rubles.

OK, but he wasn't paid by the state. He was still paid by the clients.

Yeah.

OK, so for him, it was if he didn't have a client, he didn't have any rubles.

No.

But for somebody who is, let's say, a waitress in a restaurant, it doesn't matter how many customers she has. She gets the same wage.

She gets the same wage.

OK.

And also here they're trying-- every manufacturer. Take what comes through a suit. This what you need. The sleeve should look nice. The lapel should look nice. It should fit you.

There, most of the time, you have to buy it ready made, and it was done as so-called artel. What is an artel? Artel, they

would say that take maybe 20 or so tailors, and they would make clothing for the stores. There was no competition, so they didn't actually care the stitch is even or something like that. No competition. You have to buy whatever was available.

So these sorts of things-- a disillusion for you starts to set in.

Yes.

OK, did the disillusion set in for your father too?

A little bit. A little bit. But maybe some, especially Jews, figured, well, [INAUDIBLE] better off because there's more or less equality when it comes to get a job or something like that.

Well, that's-- I mean, I can understand that's very important to a person.

Yeah.

If you haven't felt equal before, you want to feel that equality. You need to feel it as a human being. So let's come up to June 1941. Are you still in school May and June 1941?

Yes, I'm still in school.

OK.

I'm still in school, and as a matter of fact, they gave us some positions what we should do. And they gave me and a friend of mine actually a position not far from the railway station that when we see German planes, we shoot signal or something like that.

So there was a sense that Germany-- well, let me step back a little bit. You say in 1939, when the war starts, you were expecting Germany. Instead, you get the Soviet Union, which is better. Did you ever get an explanation as to why? What kind of relations Germany had with the Soviet Union at that time?

Well, all we knew that Ribbentrop and Molotov got together, and they decided to divide Poland between them. I think now what Germany wanted-- how can I say-- I think Germany knew that the Soviet Union is not ready for war. It doesn't want a war.

And they decided by making a pact with the Soviet Union, they'll gain. Now what did they gain? They gained oil. The Soviet Union, there was a shortage of wheat, but they gave Germany a lot of wheat and all this thing. And I think Stalin was ready to give Hitler no matter what he wants.

And Germany hated the Soviet Union and hated the Russian people. They told them they are worse than dogs and that they're not cultured. They don't have any culture, and they're this and that, this and that. So I think Germany actually wanted to buy some time, and therefore-- and meanwhile, they got everything they wanted from the Soviet Union. But then Hitler's decided, why should I wait what they give me? I'll go and take everything that I want. But, again, when it comes to politics, it there was a big mistake what Hitler did attacking the Soviet Union.

He underestimated them.

He underestimated them, and he did take a good example of Napoleon in 1812 with-- had a half a million army, and he attacked the tsar. And the tsar decided to burn everything and leave. And also both of them underestimated the [? horrendous ?] climate of Germany--

Of Russia.

--of Russia and then the Soviet Union, the vastness of the Soviet Union and the climate. The Germans, it's not such a nice, but it's a little anecdote. But something to reach out-- I'll take the liberty of saying it. I mean, there is a story.

There's a painting in [INAUDIBLE] in Poland. It's Napoleon. Napoleon always liked that greyish horse, and he had the special--

Hat.

--hat. And it showed on the painting that he's in Moscow, and Moscow is burning. And it's very, very sad. And one a high officer said, your majesty, we are under capital of the tsar, of the tsarist Russia. Why are you so sad? He said, we lost the war.

So anyway, so the officer continued, why do you think we lost the war? We are Moscow. He says, I saw something yesterday which I'm sure we lost the war. So finally, why did he see?

He said, I saw a Russian take out from his knapsack a piece of bread, which was hard. He couldn't eat it. And he is not such a nice-- he said, he peed on it, and he ate it. So he said, the Russia, the hard-- people are used to hardship, not like the French.

Right. And so in that way, he sees that they can withstand a lot of hardship.

That's right.

And they don't give in.

And they don't give in. And they don't give in.

And that's what happened.

Yeah, so Hitler thought he came out of the blitzkrieg, it'll be very, very-- a speedy war. And also he miscalculated. When they first entered the Ukraine, the Ukrainian people, I guess, actually liked him. They treated them like friends with--

They greeted them.

That's right. Why? Because he promised them an independent Ukraine. He promised them an-- they never wanted to be part of the Soviet Union. But then what happened?

Hitler, I think, have about a three million army. The army has to eat, so where do you get food? You got the farmer to take his cattle, and then they said, hey, wait awhile. They're not so nice. And this is when they started the Partisans.

OK, and what was happening before that happens? You are still in school, but you have a job. And the job is to signal if you see German planes.

Right.

So did that mean that at that-- in that section of what is now Ukraine, that used to be Poland that was divided because of Molotov and Ribbentrop, the local authorities were nervous? Were they already suspecting something would happen?

So this was actually the signal when the war broke out in 1941.

Oh, I see. This is afterwards.

Yes, it's afterwards in 1941.

OK, so my question is were they nervous about this before the German attack?

Yeah.

Did they think they would attack?

Yeah.

Yeah?

Yeah, I think.

Or you don't know?

Maybe I should say I don't know maybe. Maybe I should say I don't-- but anyways, we've almost got killed because the German planes had no opposition. They used to fly so lower, used to see them laugh by their shooting with a machine gun.

So you could see the face of the person with the machine gun?

Yes. They almost kill me. I ran home that time. We ran home. See, the Germans, they flew so low, and they also told the Ukrainian farmers to wear something white when they tilled the earth.

OK, why would that be?

So to make sure that they're not shooting at them.

OK, so here's another question. You mentioned earlier that the second day of the war, there was a bomb that fell close to your house and created a crater.

Right.

Was that 1939 or was that 1941?

I thought it was 1941.

OK, so you didn't sense any Germans in 1939 at all?

No, we didn't see any Germans, just maybe a few Germans. And this was actually something new. We didn't know that the Soviets will take over one of our-- our path where we lived.

OK, so in 1941, this bomb falls, and you run away home after the--

[INAUDIBLE]

Yeah.

The war started 22nd. I left the 26th.

And tell me again. What were the circumstances of leaving? How did you come to this decision that you've got to leave?

Well, I mean, one of the things they used to say that the Soviet Union was not ready at a new border, which was a new border at the River Bug.

That's right.

But they said the Germans will reach the old Polish-Russian border. We'll be ready for that.

Ah-ha.

So many of us, including myself, thought it's a temporary thing. But when the Germans bridge reached the old Polish-Russian border, they just kept going. And I think after maybe a few weeks, they were able to see Moscow through their binoculars, so this was part which made this easier for me to leave. I thought it was temporary.

OK, and you left because you had gone to school.

Absolutely. If I wouldn't have gone to school, I would have never left.

Did anybody from your family leave with you?

No.

What about your older brother?

My older brother-- the way I understand, the war broke out the 22, and when I was heading east and the Soviet, the Red Army was still heading west, they said, where is you from? Where is you from? Where are you going? Where is you from? Where is you from?

The problem was that the Soviet Union was not ready for war, and Stalin got rid of all their marshals, and in the [INAUDIBLE], and the purchase whatever marshal.

General Tukhachevsky.

Tukhachevsky. Tukhachevsky and all that.

Yeah.

So they were sure. As a matter of fact, Rokossovsky, which was in prison, which was Marshal Rokossovsky was in prison. They let him out for prison in order to take over. So the problem was they didn't-- the Red Army did not have any leaders. And Stalin did it because he was afraid of them. He was afraid that they had charisma. May cross this line or something like that.

And your brother then stayed where you-- with your family, and you left.

My brother was mobilized into the Red Army the 23rd.

I see.

And I actually do not know 100% what happened to him.

Oh, I see.

I don't know what happened to him. The only thing is if somebody's is alive, somebody would see him. Although, in the memorial book-- in Maniewiczze memorial book, it said that I served in the Red Army and was killed. So sometimes the information is not-- according to this book, I'm not alive. I was killed.

OK, so it's not accurate. It's not accurate.

Well, I'm alive.

You're alive, yes. But, I mean, but for your brother, there's no way--

My brother, I'm not sure whether-- the Red Army, they were so disorganized. They didn't know what they were doing. It's just a pity.

And your sister and her husband, what did they do?

OK, my sister's husband, the one who was a so-called communist, he escaped to the Soviet Union. I don't know why he didn't take my sister because I left the fourth day of the war. I don't know why he didn't take my sister. And my sister gave birth to a baby girl.

And they were there with your parents.

Yeah, with my parents. And, of course, then a few months later, they organized a ghetto, and they took my, I think-- not that time. The Jews in Maniewiczze was actually-- how can I say? The first group was shot in 1941. They supposed to take them to work. Took them to work about maybe 80 or so Jews and then never returned. They shot them. So my mom was on her own.

Os, so she was-- your father was taken? Other people were taken from that first group? They were part of that first group?

As I said, in 1940, a group of people, maybe 80 or so Jews, was taken, supposedly, to work, and they were shot. They never return. So my mom was by herself. She was taken to the ghetto, and--

OK, I'm sorry that I'm interrupting. You say in 1941 after the Germans come, yeah--

Yeah.

--a first group is taken to go to work. Was your father in that group?

Yes, supposedly to work.

I see.

But they shot him and never came back.

What about your twin brothers?

OK, now this is-- my neighbor's daughter, which I'll talk about, Lusaka Volchuk, she said my twin brothers were not in the ghetto. It could be-- it's a few possibilities. The one who became a Ukrainian, the head of the police in Maniewiczze, was a very, very big anti-Semite. So it's just a possibility. The parents used to send the children out to neighbors.

Right.

Maybe neighbors have a pity. Gave them a few potatoes, or a piece of bread, something like that. So when he-- so I read in the Yiskeh book that when he saw some children coming back with some, he used to shoot them personally. That's a possibility because my mom maybe send out my twin brothers--

To get food.

--to get food. Maybe they were shot. There's also a possibility that many, many parents would give up their children to a

Polish family, to a Ukrainian family, and then many, many times they-- how can I say-- I mean, they became Poles. They became Ukrainians. Although, my brothers were born in 1910--

'30.

In 1930 rather. I'm sorry.

It's OK.

1930, so they were 11 years old. So 11 years old, maybe they would remember. Maybe not. I mean, so I really don't know what happened to my twin brothers. There were 11 years old.

So they disappeared.

They disappeared.

Your sister?

My sister went to the ghetto with her daughter, and they were shot in 1942, about 4,000 Jews. So when I was there in 2013, I went with a group, and my son joined me. And my grandson joined me. Perry joined me, and Jonathan, my grandson. And I had the privilege to say Kaddish, the prayer for the departed, El Malei Rachamim.

So there were about 4,000 Jews shot in 1942, and I also when I was in Maniewiczze in 2013, I met-- they were actually celebrating the independence of the Ukraine, and there was there was an elderly lady. And she looked at me. She says, I know you.

So I say, how do you know me? She says, we went to public school together. I said, what's my name? She said, I don't remember your name. Sorry. Said, who were the teachers? Who was the principal?

She said the principal was Jan Postula. One of the teachers it was Maria Dembrovska. She recognized me but didn't remember my name. So the same one, she said, do you know more a little bit-- a little bit more what happened to the Jews in 1941? So she started crying, and she said, I'll tell you.

They told the population to stay home, not to go out. And, of course, they went with 4,000 Jews, and the Ukrainian policeman, and Polish policeman, and, of course, and German, they were about maybe two miles from Maniewiczze. And she said she was, at that time, my age. She was a little bit of a rebel.

She said she went. She wanted to see. She wanted to see what's going on because the German and the Ukrainian police said to stay home. So I said can you tell me how many Germans were there about and how many Ukrainians? She told me there were maybe five Germans and maybe 20 Ukrainians and Poles.

So she said she almost ran-- so they brought the Jews. There was already the-- what do you call it? A grave dug. And they asked each one to undress, and they shot everybody in the back of the head.

So she said the Ukraine-- the German police notice them all, and they almost ran into trouble because they thought that they were Jews. So the Ukrainian policemen, they have to vouch for them. No, they're Ukrainians. So they said they chased them home. They chased them away.

And they didn't even care. She told me and some other Ukrainian people that many times they actually-- many Jews were still alive when they buried them, that the Earth was moving a little, was moving for some time before they. So it's very, very tragic.

And your mother and your sister were part of this group?

Yes, and, of course, her daughter. And in many cases, the Germans wouldn't even spare a bullet. They would take-- they would hit their head on a brick wall or something, an infant or so, in order to save on a bullet. But the world forgot about it, and even I, you cannot always think about it because then you'll always be sad and be-- just can't do it.

But it's just unbelievable. And where was the world, you know? I don't say that refugees from Syria, wherever, Afghanistan should not be helped. But where was the world when they killed six million innocent Jews? Where was everybody? Where was everybody?

When you went back to--

The Ukraine.

--this town. How do you--

Maniewiczze.

Maniewiczze. Was that the first time that you had been back?

Yes. After 72 years.

After 72 years.

Yeah.

And was that the time that you learned these details of what had happened? No, I learned a little from the Yiskeh book, from the memorial book--

I see.

--because we didn't talk much about that. I made a speech in Ukrainian, and I actually mentioned the so-called bad people, bad Ukrainians, but I had to be careful. And as a matter of fact, believe me, there were no Jewish people since 1941, and they were very, very-- a group maybe of 20-- very, very nice. They were, I must say. Didn't know what to do for us. Although, I had a guard, a Ukrainian guard with a big gun with me all the time.

Where? In--

In Maniewiczze when we went back.

In 2013?

Yeah.

Why?

Why? Because there's still many nationalists, and here comes somebody who lived in Maniewiczze 72 years ago and telling a story of how the Jews of Maniewiczze lived. And actually-- but you know something? If somebody would have wanted to kill me, you know, because I made the speech near the library.

But when I was told, said, Harry, you will need a guard. I said, what? But I was there already. So he had a bag and a big gun. He showed me once the gun, and he was with me from the morning until at night.

And this is now still part of Ukraine.

Yeah.

OK, to this day?

To this day.

OK, I'd say let's break here. We'll have some lunch, and we'll come back and talk about your experiences after you left, after you ran eastwards.

Yeah.

OK?

Yeah.

All right, thank you very much. All right, before the break, we were talking just up to the point where there is the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union going through Poland, which was under their control crossing over into the former Polish territories that were now into Soviet control. Before we continue that, I wanted to ask you something.

Sure.

And it's a bit of a sensitive question, but it goes back to what you were saying earlier when the Soviets first came in and many, not all, but many of the Jews in the town greeted them and welcomed them.

Yes.

How did the Poles react to this? Did they show any kind of feeling? Did you see any kind of reaction?

Well the very, very few Poles over there to greet the Red Army, and also I mentioned before Pilsudski was very, very good for the Jews more or less.

So tell me who was Pilsudski because people on the camera won't know.

OK, Pilsudski was the first Polish marshal, and, supposedly, he actually marched from Krakow, which is a medieval city with a Polish division or something like that, to Poland. And as a matter of fact, there's a little song, which I still remember.

OK.

And it goes like this. [NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

What it means?

OK.

That Jozef Pilsudski was that first Marshall, and he marched. It's important for our country to become independent to take the capital. So he marched in with the first-- I don't think it was a division, something smaller, to Warsaw. And he said even it's a long wait from Krakow to Warsaw, but we'll get there as long as we keep doing it, keep walking.

So this is for the fight for Polish independence.

Yes.

I see. And you remember that song.

Yeah.

So, again, that goes back to my question in some ways. Independence was very important to them.

Yeah. OK, so after-- what I wanted to say when Smigly-Rydz took over--

After his death.

--afterwards and Hitler became to power-- came to power, anti-Semitism very, very increased in the middle-- central Europe. So as a matter of fact, even in Maniewicze, sometimes a Jew was afraid if he had a beard that some Polish, I would call them, hooligans would not cut off-- cut off his beard. As a matter of fact, we had a neighbor, and I don't know why exactly what happened. But he was a Jewish neighbor, and they beat him up.

And so-- but how can I say-- Maniewicze was a small town. If you needed an X-ray, you have to go to Kovel. So they took him. They beat him up, and they had to take him to Kovel to hospital. And he lost one of his eyes.

Oh.

So but I'm saying the anti-Semitism very, very increased a lot.

In the late 1930s.

Yes. After Pilsudski died and, of course, after Hitler came to power.

Those two things.

Those two things. So actually, some of the Soviets took over. It was like a relief for the Jewish people. You could walk at night, 8 o'clock, at 9 o'clock, at 10 o'clock. Nobody bothered you. So in a way, it was good for the Jewish population.

No, I understand that explanation, and I understand how it would be that Jews would find it more acceptable and would greet the Soviets. My question is what kind of reaction did the Poles have when they saw this?

Well, they didn't like it. They couldn't show that they don't like it. But after all, they actually lost a part of Poland, the eastern part of Poland, which was maybe-- and Poland's like here. They call it state, like state of New York, state of Nevada. They used to call it wojewodztwo.

Wojewodztwo.

Wojewodztwo. So they lost many, many, many, so-called wojewodztwos like wojewodztwo wolynskie, where we lived, wojewodztwo tarnopolskie, wojewodztwo stanislawowskie.

Wojewodztwo Lwow, like near Lwow as well.

Lwow, yes. With wojewodztwo lwowskie, yes. Also lost Lwow. So now it's called Lviv.

That's right like the Ukrainians do.

In Polish, it used to be called Lwow.

OK. Do you think, though, that that had an effect on how when the Germans came, the Jews were treated?

Maybe. I wouldn't say yes. I wouldn't say no. There's a possibility. It's a possibility. The Germans were against communists and the Jews.

Yeah.

The communists and the Jews.

OK, so let's go forward. You are now-- you have run east. You are escaping the fourth day of the German occupation.

Right. Before they came in.

Before they came into--

No, they came in the 27th. I left the 26th.

Wow. By one day.

One day.

And you say your mother was crying and crying.

Crying the evening of the 26th.

Yeah, how did you leave? By truck? By train?

Walking. Walked to the railway station in Maniewiczze and took a-- it was a cattle train and stopped off at the old Polish border. The reason why we stopped off because we didn't know about if we need a passport. I mean, we need-- I had a passport, but if you need something in order to cross the border. But we make that big mistake. There were thousands and thousands of Red Army soldiers, and then you always somehow recognize a Jew. A Jew feels better with a Jew just like a Lithuanian feels better with a Lithuanian or whatever.

So we went over to him. He was an officer, and we told them where we were from. And he said, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

All of us had to fight for the Soviet motherland. I said, OK, take us to the army, and we'll fight. But he didn't-- they didn't know what to do with themselves. So while we were still talking, another train stopped at the station. And this was already shot with many bullet holes. We got on that train, and then the train stopped near Stalingrad in a suburb.

So that's really far.

Yeah.

The train kept moving, kept moving, kept moving, and it stopped near suburb of Stalingrad. Two representative form a collective farm came over and said, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

He said to us, why don't you go down, leave the train? You'll walk. You'll rest. You'll work in our collective farm because when you travel, you don't have an opportunity to shave. You know. I don't have to tell you. Yeah.

OK, but let's go back a little bit. You say that at first you went to a soldier, and he said, everybody needs to fight.

Not a soldier. He was an officer in the Red Army.

An officer in the Red Army. And then you said we. Who was with you?

OK, we were five-- six friends.

Ah. Six friends.

We were six friends.

Who were all leaving together.

Yes.

The same six friends who had gone to the school.

No, no, no, not the same.

Different ones.

Not the same, no.

OK.

Not the same.

All right. But six who decided we have to leave.

We have to leave.

All right, and you had you said you had papers and passport. Does that mean you had your Soviet passport?

Yes. I had my Soviet passport.

Were you also-- you were also considered a Polish citizen.

I was considered a Polish citizen, but when I got my passport, there was a Soviet citizen.

Did you ever get a Polish passport? Did you ever have--

No.

You never had Polish papers?

Never had a Polish. I only had something, and what we had to do-- what we wanted-- you could do is take a picture, go to city hall, and testify that's on the picture is Chaim Kamelmacher. So this was like kind of like a-- I really call it a passport.

Identity card.

It was an ID.

OK. It was an identity card.

But, as I mentioned, when the Soviets came in, everybody had to get a passport. In the United States, if you don't travel, you don't need a passport.

That's right.

But there everybody had to get a passport.

And so it identified--

Had to get a passport and pledge allegiance to the Soviet Union.

OK. About how long did it take to get to the suburbs of Stalingrad?

I would say about a day.

Not long.

No.

Not long. And who else was on that train? You said a bullet-ridden train.

People from that particular area or didn't care to remain under the German rule. All kinds of people.

OK, was it fill filled, the train? Was it full?

Oh, yes.

OK, were there places-- were there no places to sit? Were people hanging onto it, or was it fairly empty in the sense that you found a seat?

I think in our car, it was fairly empty in our car, but each car was different.

Different. OK. All right, so there you are in Stalingrad, and someone comes, says, rest here.

Two people.

Two people come and say we're from the kolkhoz. Come. Rest at our kolkhoz. You will recover.

And you'll work.

And you'll work.

Yeah.

And what do you do?

We looked at each other. We looked at each other, and we went. We decided to go down. So did we do the right thing?

No. Why not?

Why?

You won't experience-- during wartime, you have to be near a railway station. If the enemy gets near or whatever, you hop on the train. You're gone. This was 70 kilometers from the railway station. I mean, they put us in an old rinky-dink car, and they took us to the collective farm.

All six of you.

All six of us. Actually, there were two cars. There were two cars. And so as I say, we made a big mistake. Why? Because maybe three weeks later, German planes started flying in the area, in the Stalingrad area.

And we, as Jews, we ran once. We felt we shouldn't run twice. So but we went to the office and told them we would like

to leave. They became furious.

Really?

Why? They said, our husbands and sons fight the war since 1941-- out on the front fighting the war, and you don't even care to help us with-- what do you call it?

With the farming.

With the farming and all that. Well, in a way if I think about it now, maybe they were right. On the other hand, we were afraid because we were Jewish. If we were the Poles, Ukrainian, or so, we would've been no problem. So anyway, there was no public transportation.

So what did you do?

So how do you get from the collective farm to Stalingrad? The only ones who would actually travel to Stalingrad is the one who supplied oil for the tractors, for the combines. But you cannot take too many people because of the nature of the-- what would they call it-- of the container of which it is like a container for oil. And also he was afraid. The guy was afraid to take us.

He could get in trouble.

He could get in trouble because you have to understand-- you have to think about the Soviet Union was at war, and you couldn't just walk into the railway station and say give me a ticket to so and so and so. And in order to get a ticket, you needed-- you had to be sent by some authority. For example, they had a centralized industry.

If I belt-- I'm just saying a belt, which moves two machines together or whatever. If this broke, you had to write to Moscow. Moscow had put in an order, and then it may be in the next republic, but you still have to go through Moscow. It was a centralized system. So in order to buy a ticket, somebody has to send you.

Somebody has to give you that permission.

Permission. That's right.

Somebody has to give permission to pick up something or something. So we didn't have it. We were actually running away from a collective farm. But then I still had a good suit. I had a nice shirt and some other things. And like I said in the Soviet Union, they just didn't have that kind of stuff which they had in capitalist countries.

So anyway, he just couldn't resist. He said I'll tell you what. Why don't you come 4 o'clock in the morning. He said, all he could take-- can take two of us. So we got together with the other four and said, look, we'll wait for you at the railway station for three days.

Well, we waited six days, and they didn't show up. But most likely, they couldn't find any transportation or what have you. But the fact was they didn't show up. So luckily, we saw a train again, a cattle train, marked-- the door was marked Tashkent. Now Tashkent is the capital of Uzbekistan. And it's way, way in Central Asia. Thought this is for us.

The Germans won't get there.

No. We got on that train, and it took us maybe over a week or so because-- maybe even more because the military transport at priority, soldiers, tanks, whatever. So when the train stopped at-- there's two of us already. Instead of six, two. When it stopped in Tashkent, it didn't let us off, but it took us further down to a Soviet farm. Actually, two differences. There's a difference between a Soviet farm and a collective farm.

So we're talking [INAUDIBLE] and sovkhos.

That's right. Girl, you got it.

OK.

Sovkhoz and kolkhoz. You know what the difference?

Tell me what the difference is.

The difference is in a kolkhoz, a collective farm, it depends how many people of the family work, husband and wife, maybe a son, or whatever. And Uzbekistan specializes in cotton. Cotton needs a special climate. No rain. That type of plants cannot have any rain, and their roots have to be-- they used to water the roots. OK, so--

The difference between a kolkhoz and a sovkhov.

Yeah, OK. So after whenever the cotton is collected and the government thinks it's worth so much money, they got their money, and they divided it. It depends, say, if there were 100 people, one whole family had 10 people, they divided it evenly, the money.

Oh, OK, so it could be that in a sovkhov, if there are 100 people, it's 100%, and each of them gets a percent.

Something like that.

And in a kolkhoz.

No, no. So this what I described is a kolkhoz.

It's a kolkhoz.

Yeah.

OK.

In a sovkhov, they sell the stuff, and you get money.

I see. So in the kolkhoz, the government buys it.

Yeah.

And the money is distributed.

Yeah.

In a sovkhov, who buys it generally?

No, no, no. In both cases, the government. The government takes over.

OK.

The government takes over, but the-- in a collective farm, they get the product. In a Soviet farm, they get money.

Ah. OK. OK, so for the goods that they provide, the state in the collective farm, they get goods in return.

Right.

In a--

Soviet.

--Soviet farm, a sovkhov, they get cash in return.

Right.

OK, which one's better?

I think a sovkhov is better.

Really?

I think so. So anyway, so what happened, they gave me-- I had a little room.

You're still with this friend from-- you're still with this guy that you left with.

Yeah, this guy. But, OK, so what happened, I lost the guy also. How did I lose him? I lost him because when I worked on the collective farm near Stalingrad, one of my jobs, for example, is to take grain to the elevator and actually use oxen. And the grain elevator was a former church, a [RUSSIAN]. They still had the-- what do you call it?

The paintings.

The painting and all that.

The frescoes.

And I still remember. I'll never forget. The Russians did not believe in religion because-- I'm not sure who said it. I don't think Lenin. They said religion is opium for the people.

Marx.

Who said it?

Karl Marx.

Karl Marx, OK. So anyway, so I still remember there was a lot of wheat, and there was a lady-- a few ladies who kept asking me can you bringing in the wheat that we used to spread. And they kept putting it on top of each other. And one of the ladies-- I'll never forget, an elderly lady, she decided to cross herself. So she looked up at the painting, whatever. You don't call it painting. What do you call it?

Fresco.

Fresco.

Icon.

Fresco. Icon. And she crossed herself. Well, the guard kicked her. She could hardly get up. It made, for me, such a bad impression.

OK, so mostly likely when I was-- I worked with another Russian who helped me empty the bags with wheat. And I don't know exactly what it's called, but I got a disease where everything was itching. Everything itching. So I went to

the hospital, and they asked me if I am a member of the Komsomol. Komsomol is a youth party, Communist Party member.

And I said, no. I said, why are you asking me? He said, well, if you were to be a member of Komsomol, we would find a space for you in the hospital. But you are not, and therefore there is no space for you. But they said-- they gave me a prescription, which they said is not available in Uzbekistan. It's available in Kyrgyzstan, which is a neighboring Soviet Republic.

And I think-- what did I-- I got it by train. And they gave me a liquid and said put the liquid on all across your body. Keep it on for three months and then shower, and it helped me. Somehow when I got back, my friend was gone. He wasn't there. Now I'm by myself. From six--

To one.

--I'm one. OK, so anyway, it was-- so, well, I can describe the day. We would get up about 7:30. We had breakfast. What for the breakfast? Coffee, slice of bread, maybe sometimes a fruit or so.

And the field was so long, so the cotton-- it was a beautiful thing when they bloom. All kind of colors, magenta, dark blue, light blue, white, beautiful. It's a beautiful thing to see. So when the next-- so I had an apron. And I and the problem was the cotton does not mature all of them the same time, so you have to pick.

You have to pick and put an apron. And then when the apron was full, we had a bag. Put it in the bag. So we made about three of those lines. Was time to have lunch, believe it or not. It was huge. You didn't-- because it's all nationalist land.

That's right.

So lunch we had soup, and most of the time we could actually tell when a horse died because then it was some meat in the soup. Otherwise--

No meat.

Otherwise, no meat. The soup kind of blue.

Oh, gosh.

And, again, back to work. The water actually-- we had to drink the water, which was yellow. The water, which was used for irrigation. There was no supply of drinking water. I don't know how I lived to be 90.

So anyway, so this the way it was. And then about 5 o'clock, the gong rang, and it was time again for dinner. [INAUDIBLE] some coffee, a piece of bread, sometimes a fruit, and all that. I got to know in the Soviet Union, there was such thing as called a feldsher. It's between a nurse and a doctor.

OK.

A feldsher could not write any prescription. But, for example, if I feel-- if I didn't feel well and I couldn't go out to work on the field, he was able to give me a note that Chaim Kamelmacher has a headache and this and that. OK, so he-- I got to know him, and he still remembered the tsar. He remembered the tsar, and he used to say to me, let's go to my study.

He used to lock the door, and he actually-- he was so silly. I could have put him in jail just like that. He remembered the tsar. He was telling me he doesn't care for the Soviet system and all that. And so--

When you say-- I understand what you mean by you could have put him in jail, but for people who don't know, how was it that you could have put him in jail? Explain.

OK, all I had to do was to go to-- that time, they had the KGB already instead of [INAUDIBLE], and say the feldsher Petrovski is so and so is against the Soviet Union. He still like the tsar.

So the KGB and the NKVD, what are they as bodies?

Like here, the FBI, but a little-- not as nice as the FBI. So if I would say that, that would be enough to pick him up and send him somewhere to Siberia.

Got it.

They were very afraid, well, can I say, that something may happen to the Soviet system, which eventually happened.

It took a few years.

It took a few years, and it took Gorbachev who wanted to better a little bit to make it better.

Yeah, so--

So anyways, so when it's time to [? bring ?] out, they had a sewing machine. And they had two grandsons. I was able to make for them a suit, to make a coat, and I was like-- I became like their--

Relative.

--relative. And also they always sent enough food. Why? Because if you were a farmer Uzbek, and everybody at that small piece of land, and you wanted worker on your land, you would go to that feldsher, and he would give you a little note. And for that note, he expected--

A little something.

--a little something, whether it's a chicken, whether it's some-- whatever. So they always had enough food.

So you learned from your own father how to be a tailor.

Yeah.

OK.

Yeah. And also I'm never afraid. I think what if I spoil something? It's always spoil. So I'll learn the next time how to make it better, how to make it right. OK. Was 19-- time flew. It was 1943.

And you've been in Uzbekistan two years.

Yes. The time in Uzbek was flew, but I was able to buy something what I wanted to say in Uzbek and this and that. So in 1943, the Polish General Sikorski, he [INAUDIBLE] part. He was actually a part of the Polish government in exile--

In London.

--in London. He went to Stalin, and he said, look, we have so many Polish subjects, and your prisons in Siberia, and the Gulags, and all that. Why don't you feed them? The former Polish division will fight for you. Stalin thought, well, not so bad idea. He agreed to it.

So what happened? I mean, they were told to, for example-- I don't exactly remember the-- I think in Frunze, but everybody should meet, all the free prisoners. One of them decided not to go, and he wound up in my-- on the farm where I was.

A released Pole.

Yeah, it was a Jewish boy-- a Jewish young man. And you know, happened to be from Warsaw. And I had pity on him. I still had some pence, whatever, from Poland that I gave him. I gave him also-- he had a [INAUDIBLE] shirt. I gave him one of my shirts.

But he had-- he was a little bit smarter than me. He had an idea. He started to tell me. I still had some stuff, you know? And he decided to get it.

So what he started to do, to talk to me and said, you know something? There's nothing here. Why don't we go to a bigger city?

And was this to join the Polish army--

No, no, no.

--or was this just to live?

I didn't want to join. I didn't want to join. So he decided to take away whatever I had. But he also thought about it, how to do it. So he talked me into we should leave and go to a bigger city called Samarkand.

So I took everything with me and, again, on a cattle train. In order to get to Samarkand, we had to stop off and sleep over called a city, Kokand, which is also a big city. So as I said, there's a warm climate there. All I had was shorts, a short sleeve shirt, and sandals. It's a very warm climate there. Although at night, you know, it cools off a little.

We found a place that was a hospital, and it was a brick wall so we slept there. In the morning, I get up, and said, you stay here and I'll go and pick something up for breakfast. Well, there I picked up like here yogurt. They call it in Uzbek qatiq.

And they have such thing-- it's called [RUSSIAN]. It's something like a pizza with no cheese. And then I bought a drink or something I think. Another thing it's called kvas, which they use bread to make-- old bread to make to fermentation a drink.

When I got ready, I should be able to see him. He wasn't there. I got there. He wasn't there. He took everything, and he turned back from where we came I found out later.

So he took all of your things?

So no, no, no, no. He took my things, and I found out later he returned back to the Soviet farm. Meanwhile, I had some pictures of my family. I thought he knew where they were. I thought maybe he'll put it in the crevices of the brick. Nothing there.

And he took my passport. My passport was there. In the Soviet Union during the war without a passport? You're in big trouble. I went to the police, which wasn't too far, and I told them what happened.

The sergeant, I don't know if he wrote it down, didn't write it down. OK. Meanwhile, I said to myself, Chaim, what did you do to yourself? You had a place to be. You had friends. You put yourself in such trouble now without a passport.

And this letter is a true story. So meanwhile, time passed and it was already late in the afternoon. And as I said, even Uzbekistan where it's warm, but late in the afternoon and evening cools off a little. I picked up two newspapers, went to the park nearby, put one newspaper on the bench. Another one covered myself, and, again, all I had is shorts, and a short sleeve shirt, and sandals. I fell asleep. Maybe it was maybe midnight. I felt, like, somebody--

Poking you.

--poking me. I open my eyes, and two soldiers. [SPEAKING RUSSIAN], means get up. Get up. Get up. OK, yeah. Passport?

Told them what happened. So one says you always with your stories. Where's your passport? What are you, a spy or something? Took me back to the [? police. ?]

So anyway, I saw there was maybe another 20 guys like me. The only difference, the other-- I was still clean more or less, clean shaven. The others were very dirty with a beard, this and that. They took us to the same police prison.

And there was the same sergeant was still on duty. And when I spoke to him, he didn't care even to listen. So they actually kept us in the police yards.

So in other words, he didn't corroborate that you had been there earlier and had reported that you didn't have a passport.

No.

And when the soldiers poke you and they take you, it's because it's illegal not to have this passport.

Yeah.

Who could you be? You could be a spy.

I could be a spy, yes. And what am I doing in the park at night, you know? So anyway, so we were there the remainder of the evening, all next day without food, without drink until the day after. And then they took us-- I think it was-- I don't know-- was a party member. I never found out.

They were a member of the secret police, the KGB, and they said, look, all of us, we can put-- all of you belong in prison. But the only thing you can save yourself-- well, how can I say? What the Soviets used to do is before they left the town-- by the way, when they left the town, it took maybe two days before they announced it as they left a particular town. So what the Soviets used to do was dismantle a factory, move it to a safe area like Central Asia or whatever, like Uzbekistan, and, again, re-erect it so they can keep producing whatever they used to did-- the used to do.

So this was actually a sugar refinery, which was brought from the Ukraine. But it was a very, very, very hard job. I don't remember maybe six or seven bricks, and especially it made something like a harness. You used to have to walk up to the third floor. And for this and also during the war, everybody was entitled. Of course, in the Soviet Union, everybody worked.

I don't know who actually came up with it, but some received, if it wasn't such a hard job, you used to get 400 grams of bread. You have to get a bread card. 400. In our case, we were so-called hard workers. We used to get 600 grams. But the problem was they didn't bake the bread 100%, so it was very heavy on the scale.

But there you were in the police yard, and they say, you all belong in prison but something will-- could save you.

Yes.

And what was it?

To work on that sugar refinery.

OK, and so what happens to you?

OK, so I worked there-- I don't know-- maybe two months or something like that, and I lost my bread card. I don't know

if I lost it. I don't know if somebody took it, snatched it from my pocket, but, again, no experience. What people do-- people use to do is cut it into three parts, the 10s, 20s, 30s, the 31st. So if you lose, you lose a part of it. But who thought about these things?

So maybe the second of the months-- I think it was in February or March-- I lost my card again. I don't know what happened to it. And the Soviet Union at that time, when you lost a bread card, you out of luck. You're, like, dead because to buy bread was very, very expensive on the black market.

And so there were only these two possibilities, either with a bread card at state prices or on the black market.

On the black market. But nobody could afford to buy bread on the black market. So anyway, it was the 20th of the month, and we used to sleep-- well, how can I say other than [INAUDIBLE]. It was like a low very, like, a bed made. Maybe 40 people slept on it along-- you know, boards and some straw, not even a straw mattress. Some straw and old cover, and this was where we slept.

It was on a Sunday morning, and I was up. And my neighbor to the right with whom I worked together, he said to me-- he knew that I lost my bread card. He said, Chaim, how would you like to eat some bread today? Oh, bread? I didn't have bread maybe for two weeks.

But they had a law in the Soviet Union. It was legal if you left Kokand, the city, you were able to sell your card, to give the card.

To somebody else.

And it's legal for me to pick up bread even though it was not-- my name wasn't on it.

It was legal or not?

Legal if somebody left the city. It was legal. So I asked him. He said, oh, no, I bought it. I bought it from somebody who left the city. I was kind of skeptical, but I didn't have bread for such a long time. And the bread, I thought, would taste better than the best cake, so I went.

Meanwhile, my neighbor to the left-- I don't know if he had to relieve himself of whatever. He came back, and he saw that he gave me a card, which was very crucial, very important. It worked out for me. And also you were-- you couldn't just stop off at any bakery. You were assigned a bakery.

So when I went to the bakery, which was, like, almost on the premises and I gave the young lady behind the counter the card, most likely somebody already notified them that somebody stole their card. So there was a guard. The guard, I think the rifle was maybe from Napoleon's time.

Anyway, they tell them, hold this guy, to me. I said to myself, oh my god. I'm in big trouble. So they asked me, where did you get a card? They said, you just stole the card from so-and-so.

There was a name on the card, but I didn't-- so the guard calls out the police, and they said now we know who's stealing cards. Listen to this. We know now who is stealing cards.

It's Chaim.

Chaim. I'm the one who steal cards. So anyway, they took us. So he called the police, and the police said, of course, bring him over. So he took me-- and, again, the police wasn't too far.

There was a big, big guy sitting at a desk. He didn't even ask me to sit down, and he said to me, one bread card is not enough for you, huh? You have to-- you steal people's cards, huh? And while I was standing, he hit me on my head. I thought that I made a hole in the wall.

So anyway, he said-- I said, look, I have a witness who saw this, that the guy, the neighbor, gave me the card. Said the same guard, he said, go and find out. Guy comes back. He goes back to us, and I pointed out who it was. I don't know whether he saw or whatever.

He may believe is sleeping. So the guards wake him up, and he said, do you know this guy, me? He said, well, we worked together, but I don't know much. So the guy thought maybe that I'm putting over something of somebody innocent. And so the guard looked at me like I would be the liar, that I stole the car.

So I said, why didn't you do me a favor and wake up-- you know, it was a Sunday and everybody was enjoying the nice baths, sleeping a little bit later. So he says, look, he said to the guard, I don't know exactly what happened. All I saw he gave him a bread card. All three of us, let's go. Took all three of us to the police, and there were a stenographer.

So they let the witness go. Of course, he's innocent. And both of us, they took to the prison called [INAUDIBLE]. OK, so they take us to the-- I'll never forget. So there was also an old rinky-dink car, and, of course, the driver was the guard too.

Came to the prison, like a gate. So first, they had to identify himself, open the gate. Then there's was a metal door. So they opened up a small-- and he gave him most likely a document, this and that, and they let us drive in. So they took us to our room, and they didn't change. Like if you a prisoner, they give you different--

Clothes.

--clothes. Didn't give us anything. They just took away the belt and whatever we had in our pockets. So then, of course, a barber came and he--

Did he shave your head?

--shaved it. So they said it's cleaner. No lice. So they put us into a room. There were maybe 100 people.

My goodness.

I looked. There's no mattress. No nothing. Bare cement. Bare cement, and this-- So anyway--

And were you put in that room with that other guy?

Yeah, and actually I asked, I said what did you do? He said, look, let's not talk about. It is done. He goes, what are we going to do? And what would you do? Well, what can you do? What can you do?

So anyway, a few guys came over. You know, one thing I realized, they didn't care for somebody who was there for a stolen card, bread card. They were looking for somebody who beat somebody up. You killed somebody.

Well, if they weren't looking for someone who's stolen cards, why did they put you in prison, both of you, if that was small stuff?

No, no, no, no, no, what I'm saying in prison, the prisoners--

Ah, they didn't care.

The prisoners didn't care for somebody like us with a bread card because they came over and asked me, what are you for?

What are you in for?

So when you tell them, they didn't care for. They cared like a macho man who did something.

Oh, I see, so you got prestige if you actually killed somebody.

That's right, killed somebody, robbed somebody, burned somebody's home, or what have you. They figured this was, like, sissy stuff. Yeah, a bread card. All right, so then it came, it was lunchtime, and, of course, I didn't have any container or whatever.

So at lunchtime, there was, again, a big door and a small, tiny, little door opened up. Everybody formed a line, and, I mean, they gave me something, like a metal container. And there goes the ladle of soup and a piece of bread.

So you got a container.

You got a container. Everybody went back. Some sat in the middle of the room. Some sat-- support himself at the wall.

And then it came-- and then a few hours later, there was dinner, also almost nothing, watery soup or some-- oh, and a piece of sugar and some coffee. And so I actually found a few guys whom I was able to talk. They were also educated and this and that because you have so much time there.

How long did you stay in this prison?

Three months. Until the trial.

Oh my goodness. So there was a trial for this.

Three months. So actually, the people, the prisoners, they slept-- only in the Soviet Union, the prisoners, they slept so close to each other, just like sardines in a can of sardines. So at night-- so when if you have to go-- excuse me-- to pee, what do you do? They had a barrel. And the barrel, they used to call it in Russian, [RUSSIAN].

[RUSSIAN]

[RUSSIAN]

OK.

A barrel and a cover. And of course, you had to go at night. One night, I was maybe there already-- I don't know-- maybe a month and a half. I got up at night and had to urinate. Now what do you do?

People sleeping all around that barrel. You can't do it. I mean, I-- and the barrel was overflowing almost. So what did Chaim do? I went back and took my-- what I used to get the food in it.

The utensil. The bowl.

--utensil and peed in it. The biggest mistake I made is put it on top of the barrel. I should have taken it back. And so in the morning about 6 o'clock, the gong rang. A guard would come in and then take out the barrel with the urine.

They said, who did that? I look. I had to say I did it. So he put down my name, and I forgot about it. Maybe two weeks later, a guy comes in and calls my name.

Said all the prisoners, oh, you're going free. You're going free, but I knew better. So he took me out from the room, whatever you call it. And he said for not abiding hygiene, three days in solitary.

I didn't heck know-- knew what solitary was. I didn't know what it was. So we went back to the end of the hallway. You opened up one door. It was already dark.

Then he opened up another door, a little cubbyhole and kind of pushed me in there. It was already after I had the coffee, whatever, and I had to pee again. So I knocked on the door. It took me quite some time before they guard got in.

And he said you are a specialist. You pee all over the place. Pee on the floor.

Oh, dear.

It was small, about this big like a square. And, of course, I couldn't see the ceiling. And I stood in the urine all night.

Oh, dear.

And in the morning, he gave me-- what do you call it-- a rag and a pale.

How demeaning.

Excuse me.

How demeaning. It was very demeaning.

Well very, very demeaning also, but I think now-- so actually, I was figuring-- so how many of us-- now there's four or five locks, the gate that they drive in, and actually and then to the prison, and then actually under lock in the big hole, which were dark, and then in this small cubbyhole. And I didn't think about it at that time, but now I think, what would happen if there's a fire? You think they would remember to come and let out Chaim Kamelmacher?

Anyway, to make the story short, after three, I came out. I couldn't see anything. The guard had to take me to the room to the prisoners. And everybody had pity with me. As a matter of fact, a few guys even gave me their bread they felt sorry for me. And then another thing I remember, the shirt became holy when I was in the prison.

You were still in the same shirt--

Yeah.

--that you had been arrested.

Still in the same shirt. Yeah, the same shirt. So one of the guys noticed, one of the prisoners, he said to me-- called me over. He said, [INAUDIBLE] because it was illegal. He said, Chaim, you see this shirt. I have another shirt underneath. I can give you this shirt for one lunch-- for two lunches.

I said, oh, good. Good. He gave me his shirt. I had his shirt. I didn't even care for it, but it was-- it didn't have any holes. So all these episodes I remember. Finally, the day came. They took us to court.

Came to court. It was in my room with pictures of Lenin, of Stalin, of Marx, Engels, and then-- and the Soviet Union. They had one corner. They used to call it [RUSSIAN]. It means red corner.

What was there? They had the biography of Stalin, the get together of the party-- the 19th session Communist Party, all that. And, of course, we were actually chained to each other, my friend and I.

The one who gave you the stolen card.

Yeah. So they brought us there. There were maybe another 10 or so prisoners. But a big red table always covered with red. Red is the communist color and all that. There were a few secretaries and this and that.

And so I said, where's my witness? You know, without the witness, it's my word against his. So who would they

believe? So when I mentioned the name of the witness, I was so lucky that one of the stenographers-- oh, I know him. He works with me in a particular factory. They postponed the trial.

Two weeks later, again. You know, my sandals were worn out. The world was, like, cobblestone. My feet hurt me and all that. So we get back to the trial, and this time-- of course, I didn't want my friend to go to prison, but one of us is guilty. And he'll be found guilty because I have a witness.

So anyway, to make a story short, they gave him six years. Three years-- but this wasn't the end. They gave him three years for stealing the card, and they gave him three years for using an extra card because the felt when somebody using an extra card, it prevents somebody else to have a piece of bread.

And they believed you.

And they believed me. I had a witness. So it was already getting dark, and I said to the judge, listen, I don't have anywhere to sleep. Can I sleep in the prison?

Oh, no, no, no, no, you're a free man. So where do you go? So, luckily, the witness said, I'll take you in. I'll take you in where I work. So he took me in.

Something was missing to one of his co-workers. Whom did he thought stole it? I. I'm a newcomer there. I was a newcomer.

Anyway, to make the story short, I went back and got my job back.

In the sugar factory?

Yeah, in the sugar factory. And then the problem with the Soviet Union was there wasn't enough food, so I was walking and fell on the cobblestone and wound up in the hospital, and then I went into a coma. Near me, there was another Jewish young man, and he had parents. So they used to come and bring him-- usually, Jewish parents had maybe a wedding band or something so they would sell on the black market to maybe buy some flour or make a buttery soup or something. I didn't have anybody.

So when I got out of a coma maybe a week later, I asked where is my-- oh, he died. So anyway, what I want to bring up, one day I saw the guy who got the six years. I said, I was so happy to see him. I said, what happened?

He said, before they actually sent me to Siberia, they said maybe should put me in the hospital because they'll have to bury me on the way. And I think all the six years was nullified, which is good. Did I want him to be in prison? So this time, so I went back. I went back to where I used to work.

Where you used to work way back where the first person who stole your--

Yeah.

--in the cotton fields.

In the cotton field.

OK.

And somehow I was ashamed to go back to the cotton field. I figured I did such a stupid thing. So here I am without a passport, couldn't get a job. I went to the shoemaker. I think I explained before what I tell you. And they said they can't get give me a job. You don't have a passport.

I went for a passport. They said you're not working. We cannot give you a passport.

So you were stuck.

Stuck. So I slept in old dilapidated Uzbek homes, houses. I begged, became a beggar. Very dirty, didn't shave, and this and that.

So then I said to myself-- and I would actually go-- I used to smoke. Used to find a cigarette butt, and it was too small to hold in my fingers. I used to use a needle. Put a needle in the cigarette butt so I can hold the needle and get a few--

Puffs.

--puffs. So I--

Was this your lowest point?

Excuse me?

Was this your lowest point when you were--

I think so. Maybe, yeah. So anyway, I knew I'm dying. I couldn't steal. I couldn't steal, rob, or whatever. But then I remembered that my father was a little bit of a socialist.

I said I'll try to speak to the secretary of the Communist Party in [PLACE NAME]. In the Soviet Union, the secretary of the party, he was everything. He was the highest, secretary of the Communist Party. Each town had a secretary.

So picture me dirty, not shaven. I think I was barefoot at that time because my sandal gave way. And there was a guard there. I said, what are you doing here, the guard? I said, I would like to see the secretary.

He said, what? You like to see the secretary? You have an appointment? I say, no, I don't have an appointment. And I was almost in tears.

The door was open, and the secretary at the desk heard me saying-- hear this. So the guard said to me, hold on a minute. Hold on. So he described me as a young man, not shaven, dirty, no shoes. He wants to speak to you. And to my-- I was happy as a-- he said, show him in. OK, now what a difference between the guy in the prison.

That's right.

He said, sit down. A cigarette, gave me a-- he poured me a drink of vodka. I said I don't know the vodka, but I'll take the cigarette. He said to me, tell me what brings you here.

I told him the story. I said, look, this what happen. I made a mistake, but what do you think I should do?

You made a mistake as far as what?

As far as leaving the collective-- I mean, the [INAUDIBLE] and going to a bigger city, going to Samarkand.

OK.

Yeah, during the war. I had everything.

You were comfortable.

Comfortable. So I said to him, do I have to die? He said, no, no, absolutely. He said, what can you do? I said I'm a shoemaker.

I was never a shoemaker in my life. I was a shoemaker. He said, did you go to the hotel. I said, yes, but I have no passports. I told him already the story.

He said, just a minute. He picked up the phone. This is the secretary of the party, blah, blah, blah. Did somebody come to you-- and, again, he described me, the way I look. He said, yes. He said, look, I, the secretary of the party, tell you--

[PHONE RINGING]

All right, so--

All right, so you called him up, and he said he should give me a job. And he said, give him a bread card. So I went there. So I made up-- due to the fact that I was not Uzbek, from Uzbekistan, I made out with him I'll pay you 15 rubles a day, and the rest what I made was mine.

Oh, I see. That's to the shoe atelier.

Yeah, shoe atelier.

OK.

So what did I do? I find myself a low chair without a back. And I sat on it, and I worked near a sidewalk. And so anyway, it helped me to survive because when you came to fix a pair of shoes, I couldn't say I don't want the rubles, but I could say I'm hungry. Bring me something to eat.

Well, anyway, I was doing well. I was doing well. I was able actually to rent a place where to sleep, and as I say, my mom was right. She said if I'm not lazy, I wouldn't die. I used to make the uppers for the shoemakers in [PLACE NAME]. The landlady where I had the room, she had a sewing machine, so I was doing fine.

And it's funny. In the Soviet Union when you were-- if I would've been continue to be like a street guy, street man, I would have never been mobilized with the Red Army. But I looked good. I was able to buy some clothes and this and that. And I used to know-- there happened to be a Jewish lady, a doctor, who was actually a member of the drafting board. So she always said this, I have a bad heart somehow.

Did you ever get another passport?

Oh, yes.

OK.

Yes, got another passport. Everything was fine just because I've entered the secretary of the--

Communist Party.

Yeah. So anyway, to make the story, she said you have to be careful because I won't be there anymore [INAUDIBLE]. So when I got before the doctor, they said where were you? You should've been on the front since 1941. Anyway, to make this story short, I was in the Red Army.

You were mobilized into the--

I was mobilized into the Red Army. And we trained maybe for six weeks, and then they took us by train. And I didn't know at that time that it's a good omen or a bad omen. Obviously, it was a good omen. I survived the war. We disembarked maybe after 2,500 kilometers in Rozyszcze where I was born.

No. Really?

Yeah.

So that's where you're first-- after your training, where you're taken. And was that-- was this now under Soviet control again?

Yeah, it was still under-- 1943 it was under control, the Soviet.

No, no, no.

Oh, you mean the Ukraine. It was part already the Ukraine, which the Ukraine took back from the Germans. So actually, I helped. I helped, as I say, to free Rozyszcze, where I was born. I helped to actually to help to fight for Maniewiczze, and for Kovel, and Sarny, all the towns around there. And I was injured the 22nd of June in my right leg. I was in the hospital for six months.

OK, until you get to the hospital, when you say you were part of the Soviet Army, and then you were mobilized, and then active duty, what did your active duty involve when you helped?

To fight with the Germans.

OK, so you were a soldier.

Yeah, I was a soldier.

That was your job, and you were infantry.

Yeah, infantry.

You were infantry.

I still remember-- as a matter of fact, I'm keeping in touch. They have a museum. I was in the 370th infantry division, 1,232nd brigade. And they have a museum in Siberia, and we correspond with them. I correspond with them.

Oh my gosh.

I always, always write. So anyway, so then after-- when I say six months, first, I was in the field hospital. They took me to field-- well, how can I say?

How did the injury take place? Were you in the battle, or what happened?

OK, we were in the trenches, and then the Germans forbid us maybe like from here to the restaurant, maybe a little bit further. And then the lieutenant says for Stalin, for this. We got out there, and we ran against toward the German trenches to displace them.

So I was shot in my left femur, and I fell face down. It was a hot summer day, and there were Germans also were dead. And so what happened, I didn't get any-- so the blood was gushing. I didn't get any help, and the flies. Now flies, they like-- what do you call it-- blood.

To made the story short, I had to wait almost three hours before Russian-- and also I still hear talking German, which meant I couldn't twitch. I couldn't do anything because they took me for dead. The Germans took me for dead. So then maybe after two hours or so the Russian-- what do you call them-- the one who helped the--

Well, the field-- I guess, the medics.

The medics.

The medics.

The medics say, hey, [NON-ENGLISH] hey, Russian, answer if you are. So I still wasn't sure it was a fake. I kept and I - and I said to myself, oh, they are Russian. So they took me.

And I think back now what people can live through. And so anyway, there was no road there. So what they used to do, used to go into-- it's part of the Ukraine at that time. Ran into an Ukrainian farmer and recommended a horse and buggy. And about three of us were put on the train.

Meanwhile, all they did is make a tourniquet, but the bone was broken. And each-- a bumpy road. So anyway, they took us to the field hospital, and I'm usually not kind of a believer. But when I was laying on the floor-- I don't know-- I thought I saw my mom. I thought I saw my mom, and she walked in and was looking, looking. She still had black hair at that time, but now she was, like, gray and like a white dress and she-- so looking, looking and when she saw me, that's what I--

In your mind, yeah.

In my mind. And she said, Chaim, you know, you'll be OK. And I opened my eyes. I said, oh. And, well, there are some other soldiers laying on the ground. They said, shut up. Anyway--

So how did you know-- excuse me for that I interrupt at this point. You were-- kind of go into action in your birthplace.

Yes.

Did you know, by that point, what had happened to the Jews of the area?

Yes.

How did you find out?

When I was-- OK, when I was actually assigned the 370th division, I asked one of the one in charge, lieutenant. I say my mother had a sister in Rozyszcze. I mentioned before. I would like to go and see what happened. He says to me, you're looking for trouble.

He said, the Germans in some areas are five miles or whatever. You're looking for trouble. But I was young, and I said, who cares? So he said, who's your friend? I had a friend who actually was a Tatar.

His name was Mishka. He said, take Mishka. Ask Mishka if he wants to go. Take a loaded rifle, and go to Rozyszcze and find out, but make sure you come back during the day before [INAUDIBLE]. OK.

So the Ukrainians for so many-- let me see. This was 1944. For three years, they didn't see a Russian soldier, so to them, it looked like-- and then we saw it was maybe a good two miles or maybe three miles, and then in the middle, we saw a lady, and she was selling candles. She had some cigarettes. She sell soap, some other things, happened to be Jewish.

I said, what are you doing here? The front is so near. And when I told on her I'm from Maniewiczze, she said, there's somebody here from Maniewiczze. But she said he was in the Partisans. He should be back within-- what did she say-- 15, 20 minutes.

And then, sure enough, I saw he was wearing a German uniform. I was almost ready to shoot him. And it turned out to be his name was Shmerel Zafron. Shmerel. We went to Polish public school together.

You recognized him?

Huh?

You knew him?

Yeah, we went to school together. And he told me what happened to my parents, the whole family, so I knew that my family's not alive. And I still remember-- now I shrunk, but at that time, I was much taller and healthy looking. He was kind of-- to me, it looked like he shrunk. Not so easy to be in the Partisans.

So anyway, we continue to Rozyszcze. The street was burned. There was nothing there.

Oh.

So I did know that nobody is alive from my family. So from there-- so, again, when I was discharged-- and, actually, I had the discharge papers sent to the museum, the Holocaust Museum. When I was discharged from the hospital, they say, where do you want to go?

Many other cases, they had-- many had parents, many had sisters, many had brothers. I didn't have anybody. I said I'll go back the way I came from, [INAUDIBLE]. So it took him a few houses to find the map.

So you were going to go back to Uzbekistan.

Yeah. I didn't have-- where else to go?

So did you? Did you go back to Uzbekistan?

Yeah, I went back to Uzbekistan. And I was using crutches. There were Jewish refugees from Poland, from Romania, and they knew me. They knew I was a shoemaker.

They kind of helped me. They kind of help me, maybe, I would say a month with food. Gave me a place of sleep and all that until I was able to go back to my shoemaking.

And so there you stayed.

I stayed until the war came to an end in 1945.

And then what happened?

In 1945, a Polish representative had gotten in touch with me, and he told me when the train will be leaving the city Andijan that the train will be leaving to Poland. And he said to me, you, meaning me, as a Polish citizen, are entitled to go to back to Poland. I'll furnish you with a piece of paper. I said, you know something? I'm not going to Poland. I don't want to go to Poland.

So he said to me-- he said, you'll be sorry. I figured-- I didn't know. I mean, I knew that nobody is alive in Poland. I didn't know I'd be able to emigrate from Poland. And I had so many friends, Russian friends.

My Russian was perfect. And as matter of fact, I knew many boys and girls, and I still know about 50 songs. He's a witness.

So anyway, one of my friends, a girlfriend, she actually worked for the KGB. And I trusted her, and I said, look, what will happen-- No, no, no, but then I saw that everybody's leaving. So I said to myself, am I the smartest one? Why is everybody leaving the Soviet Union?

For one thing, I know you have to keep your mouth shut, and so I did. So then I saw, for example, what they used to do. Say you had a daughter. I had a son. I was from Poland, so the parents arrange a fictitious wedding so you, as a Russian family who lived in the Soviet Union, could also leave. And in many cases, they paid a lot of money for that in order to leave--

That's right.

--the Soviet Union.

So you were seeing this go all around you.

Yeah. So then I got in touch with a guy, and I said I decided to leave. He said, you are not leaving. I told you you'll be sorry. So but I was young, and I said to myself, I am leaving.

So when the train-- when they all got on the train, I was there in the morning. And I got in, and he didn't see me and tell me where I was-- almost halfway. We were almost reaching the Ukraine when the-- so on the train, there were Russian representatives and Polish representatives. And each Polish citizen had a document.

I had was in Russian. I have in Polish. So the Russian part, they would take at the border, the Russian representative. And the Polish part would serve us a document in Poland. He went to the Russian authorities on the train and he said that I'm illegal on the train.

So they called me, and I said, look, I'm a Soviet citizen. I served in the Red Army. I was injured. I'm not going to Poland. I'm going back to my home. It's now part of the Ukraine.

So the Polish guy said, he's lying. Well, anybody-- you know, the Russians didn't care. So one of the Russian officer, what do you do for food? And I said, I'll tell you sometimes I eat. Sometimes I don't.

He said, why don't you come to us? We'll always give you food. OK, everything was fine. But then the train came to the border, stopped at the border. Now I don't have any documents. So what I do?

The Polish-Russian border.

Yeah, the new Polish, which is now.

OK, so you had passed where your home used to be.

Yes, passed. Nobody was there.

Of course.

Passed. OK, so I don't know, but I decided-- OK, so they started to control the train from the end and the beginning. I was in the second train from the end, so I say it worked for me because it was already getting like a little bit dark. They're not from the--

Train car.

That's right. I went around the corner. Supposedly, I had to take care of something. Meanwhile, I heard they came into the last car. And when they checked, they said [RUSSIAN]. In Russian, it means see you and [POLISH] in Polish.

I looked and I got back into the last train to the last car, which was already-- they checked the document there. So I made it. I crossed the border, so I was in Poland. Still no documents. Poland, no documents.

Train stops in Tarnow, which is not too far from Krakow, and the [INAUDIBLE] western part of Poland. It was a nice

day, and I stood at the door. And then like two angels, a young girl and a young man said to me, Yiddish? Jewish? Yiddish?

I say, yes. Says, why don't you come down? They have a kibbutz here. You know what a kibbutz is?

Yeah, yeah.

OK. So they said-- so I found out that JDC, the Jewish Distribution Committee, supplied the money. There were about 40 boys and girls, and we had nice three rooms. We had a kitchen and all that and had a great time.

As a matter of fact, I taught the geography of Palestine. We had a great time. I was also a tailor, and they gave me-- it was like heaven-- new clothes-- not new clothes. I mean, clean clothes. I was able to shave and all that.

And after six months-- after six weeks rather, we decided that we have to start traveling. Couldn't stay in Poland. So, again, they took us in Polish trucks, which means the Polish army was paid off. They took us across the Czechoslovakia border. That time, it was still Czechoslovakia. Now they are two countries-- Czech and Slovakia.

They took us to a Jewish [INAUDIBLE]. And there were-- I don't know-- maybe 100 of us or something like that, young men who did never have to go. And then we were there maybe, as I said-- I don't know-- maybe two weeks. We rested.

About what year was this?

This was 1945 when the war was over.

So just the same year the war is over.

Yeah, because I left the Soviet Union, crossed the border of Poland, so I wound up in the kibbutz there. And then we started-- actually, they took us. I'm sure it was all-- I must say, and I'm very thankful, it was all paid with American Jewish money.

Although, there was some others. there was Ukrainians. There was some others, but mainly Jewish. And so they took us to Ebensee.

Ebensee.

Ebensee.

So that's in Western Germany. No, Ebensee is actually in Austria.

In Austria.

Yeah.

I'm so sorry.

Yeah, Ebensee is in Austria. And what I couldn't get over, they took us to Ebensee, which was a concentration camp.

That's right.

There was many hundreds of Poles who were actually guest there, and everything was still there, the ovens, a tremendous cross. And I don't know why they took us there. We were on the-- US Army was in charge of us, and they gave us all kinds of-- how can I say? In order to prevent disease, they gave us all kind of powder, this and that, and they used to give us-- people used to big piece of bread or something. They used give-- the US Army, a tiny piece of bread, a

little this, a little that.

So anyway, to make this story short, we kind of stole some old cars and this and that. Anyway, the only thing which was good-- it was very smart. They had telephone books of big cities. So I knew that my uncle lives in Kansas City. I didn't know the address. I knew the name, and I found out. So from then on, I was able to write to my uncle.

Your mother's brother.

My mother's brother.

And so I said they had telephone books from all big cities in the United States. So from there, they took us to Germany, the US zone in Germany. They took us, first, a small city, Cham, C-H-A-M, where we lived in tents. And every morning used to be a truck with bread. They used to throw the bread, and we would go out and grab a bread or something. So people complaining, so, finally, they took us to Germany to US zone in Germany to a city called Wetzlar.

Wetzlar.

Wetzlar is known for the Leica camera. There made the Leica camera there. So I was in Wetzlar, and then I was in three other camps. Wetzlar, Wasseralfingen, and then Lechfeld, and Landsberg.

Oh, so you were in all of these DP camps.

All DP camps. And all this is documented. I sent everything, picture, about 80, 90 pieces, pictures. At one I was planning to get into the University of Munich in Munich Hochschule. Everything, I sent to the museum, so everything is there.

Also you heard about the ORT, organization for--

Tell us.

So I took up, when I was an Wetzlar, I took up electronics, which helped me to get a job in the United States.

OK, so the ORT. This was through the ORT.

Yeah.

And tell me what is the ORT so that people would know.

ORT is organization for rehabilitation and training. Their aim is to teach Jewish people a trade, whether it's electrician.

Is this an international organization, or is it a--

It's located in the United States, but they take care of Jews all over the world.

Got it.

As a matter of fact, I keep in touch with them. I keep in touch with them. And so anyway, I was actually in Germany six years.

Wow, that's a long time.

I had chance to go to Israel, also a chance to go to Australia, but I was told in Australia, there are not enough women. And, of course, Israel, I didn't-- my mother had four brothers there. One was still alive. Shouldn't I go to family?

Yeah.

So finally, in January-- also we had to go through a vigorous, rigorous doctor's exam. And who were the doctors? You guessed it. Germans again.

Really?

Maybe Nazi Germans. So, again, I used to think-- I thought to myself, the German, they still control where the Jews will be. And in many cases, there was a test, which you didn't care to have because it was kind of hard, they kind of go into the stomach with a tube, if you pay them a little, they said you had it done.

So anyway, so in January, everything was actually fine. I was lucky. I was healthy, this and that, and they gave me a date. And there was maybe-- I don't know-- maybe 300 of us. They took us from Landsberg, the last DP camp, to Bramerhaven, which is a port in Germany in the US zone, put us on General [INAUDIBLE], and we were on the way to New Orleans.

New Orleans?

New Orleans.

Not New York.

No. New Orleans. No, I'll explain. Kansas City more or less is more south than north.

And you were going to Kansas City because your uncles were there.

Yes, my uncle was there. And so many, many people who had relatives went to the southern part of the United States got off at New Orleans, and the ship continued to New York.

Oh, I see. And this is what year? January of--

So this is actually January 1951.

That's one of the later years. Many people had already gone to the States.

1951.

OK.

Because it took time to get the visa, and I think at that time when Truman was president, I think the Congress came up to, especially quarter for people who do not have where to go or do not care to return to their homeland because of the political system. At that time after the war, the Cold War, like Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, all became, like, Soviet satellites.

That's right. And so was it your uncle who sponsored you into the United States?

My uncle was a tailor, but he did very well for himself. He was a tailor. A Jew tailor, what else? And he had his own fabrics, so if you wanted a suit or a coat, you selected the fabric, and he would make it for you. Again, could not read or write.

He had a Black man who worked for him, and when somebody walked in-- and the Black man was-- he also did some cleaning. So when somebody walked in and the Black man wasn't there, he said, you know, I'm so sorry. I misplaced my glasses. Can you-- the cleaning is there. Can you [INAUDIBLE]. But he did very well for himself. He had five children.

And he sponsored you in.

He sponsored me in. Actually, I was supposed to go through the HIAS, Hebrew immigration society. But when they found out that I have an uncle, they called me in and say, look, he has to be reasonable. Some people who do not have anybody in the United States. And we can use the visa for them. You have an uncle, so, of course, I agreed.

And did you stay in Kansas City long?

Well, so this would happen. It just happened that one of his sons, which means my cousin, got married. So I had his room. The room, I still remember was all-- everything, the furniture, everything was red. So my uncle-- I want it bring something up.

My uncle had five children, and he had a hard time to find an apartment. But when he bought a house-- and I still remember 400 East 63rd Terrace. When I used to tell the people where I'm going, they say, oh, your uncle must be a millionaire. He was able to buy a house in the best area of Kansas City. And guess what? He only rented to a banker who didn't have any children.

So anyway, I used to go to school to learn English sometimes four nights a week. I also used to go with the weekend to the movies. It's very--

Helpful.

--helpful. And then when I was older, I had my keys. When I used to go home, used to come home and open the door, the were elderly people. They were in the 80s. They used to twist and turn, and I used to wake them up.

And also in the morning, used to get up, have a piece of cake with some orange juice for me. I had to go in the breakfasts. Orange juice and a piece of cake in the morning.

That's right.

So anyway, so I moved. I got a furnished room. I still remember 2662 Woodland Avenue. So this lady had like rooms for four, four rooms for rent. And I got the job working in a-- I was fired. Got another job to work in fixing car radios.

And I also went that time-- so no, no. So after about a year and a half, the one I worked for in Kansas City, he said you are entitled for a week's vacation. You can take another week's vacation without pay. But if you don't come back after two weeks, you lose your job. Guess what? I never went back. I remained in New York.

So you went to New York on vacation, and you remained here.

Right.

And you met your wife here.

I met my wife here. My story's short. I had a furnished room with also people that came from Germany, and one night-- it was a Saturday night. She came-- they came back, and they were Zena. And his name was, I think, Jack.

And anyway, they came back from-- I'm not sure-- from a wedding or something. And he said, Chaim, do I have a girl for you. So this was the girl.

What was her name?

Her name was Trudy.

Trudy.

Trudy. Actually, her name was Giddle, but she never liked the word Giddle. She liked Trudy. She was born on the Lower East Side. Her father had unfortunately passed, and we knew each other maybe less than two months. We got married, and it lasted 43 years until she succumbed to breast cancer.

What year did you get married?

I got married in 1954.

So three years after you come to the United States.

Yeah.

Tell me, how many children do you have?

I have four children.

The names.

My oldest son is Alan, of course, Alan Kamel. He has a son, Matthew. He's a teacher. He teaches in California near San Francisco. He has a daughter.

The daughter is Elizabeth, and she just graduated college. I don't know what she'll do. Some people take up space in college.

No, don't say that. But tell me the names of your children.

OK, so Alan, Perry, Lisa--

Lisa.

--and Julie.

And Julie. Two boys. Two girls.

Two boys. Two girls.

And the first time you went back to Europe or to your hometown was in 2013.

Yes. Now this would happen. I always wanted to go there, but I was afraid. I don't if I told you this. After perestroika, I was actually corresponding with a Ukrainian lady, and she went-- OK, I'll get to it. And so I was--

[PHONE RINGING]

Let's cut. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] Ask about going back. You said that you corresponded with a Ukrainian lady. You always wanted to go back to--

To the Ukraine.

That's right.

But I was afraid.

OK.

I was afraid.

And you were afraid because--

Because there were no Jews there, and it's actually I wanted-- my oldest son, Alan, wanted to go with me. And then also what happened, Trudy became very, very, very ill, you know, dying of cancer. So we kind of forgot it.

But I found on the internet, the name somehow, the name Susil. Now Susil is not such a common name, and I had one of my best friends who was in the Partisans, his name was Susil. It turned out that this was his son, and he lived in Denver, Colorado. So he said he was in Maniewiczze, and he is going back to Maniewiczze in 2013.

Oh.

So Perry, my son, said, dad, I'll join you. And my grandson, Jonathan, said, grandpa, I'll join you. So this is how we wound up. So that lady, she found out-- I actually wrote to her that I may be in Maniewiczze. So she came, and we met.

And the Ukrainian regime in Maniewiczze, she came to see me. And she recognized me, and she told a story what I did after perestroika. I wrote a letter, and I put down-- always write. I put a letter and put on the Kovel railroad. And she-- Maniewiczze and Russian, the Kovel [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] this and that, which means the Kovel railroad. So they kind of delivered it to the railroad station. And she was working there, and she got the letter.

Oh my goodness.

She got the letter, and I wrote this. I didn't say exactly who I was. I just said I lived in Maniewiczze in 1941, and I would like to come back, and I would like you to send me maybe a map, some newspapers, some pictures. So she said, well, you can come back. You can either take a plane and fly it to Lviv and go east by train, or you can fly to Kiev and go west by train or bus or something.

And that's when we started to correspond. Also I wrote and I put in \$3 in the letter, and when I didn't get any answer maybe for three months, people said, you made a big mistake by putting in the \$3. She must've took out the \$3 and threw away the-- no, but after three months, I got a big, like, a package with papers. And it was, at that time, just 100 years of Maniewiczze, and we started to correspond with each other. Well, she found out that who I was, that my parents, everybody--

Had she known your family?

No, she didn't, but I gave her the address of my neighbor, Kovachuk, and the daughter was still alive. And she looked her up, and she told-- her name was-- the one I'm talking about, her name is Valentina Lazarchuk. And she said to me, Chaim, we cried all day when she told me what happened to your parents and all that. So that's--

And when you saw--

Maniewiczze.

--Maniewiczze for the first time after so many decades--

After 72 years.

Yeah, what did it look like to you?

Much worse than I left it. Much worse. All Jewish houses were burnt. I only recognized three-- I can say three things-- the railroad station, a Polish church, and what I mentioned where the first action was with Doctor Tarkowski at this office. I didn't recognize anything else. Everything was destroyed. Anything Jewish was burned.

Gone.

And the houses which replaced it wasn't even near as nice. Though the only thing is, I said, it was much bigger, and, I mean, the streets was paved. I mean, the sidewalks-- I didn't care too much for the sidewalks, but the streets were paved. And for first time, it had a hotel.

I think you've told us a fascinating story today, and I thank you for the time you took.

No problem. No problem. Anytime. No problem.

And I appreciate the detail that you went into, and I would say that we've come to the end, you know?

OK.

We started there, and we went full circle--

That's right.

--and back to there.

That's right. And I, myself, I'm so glad, and I say I'm always willing to spend as much time as somebody will want to spend with me because I think, to me, it's very important that the future generations, if they want to find out that they should be able to find out how their ancestors, relatives, or whatever lived.

OK. Well, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chaim Kamelmacher now known as Harry Kamel.

That's right. Kamel.

All right, so this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Harry Kamel on December 17, 2015. Once more, many, many thanks.

Thank you. Thank you. I thank you. Thank you so much.

You're welcome. You're welcome.

It was a pleasure.

Thank you. OK.