

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Paul Bojko on August 24, 2017, in Trap Maryland. Thank you, Mr. Bojko, for agreeing to meet with us today, to share your story, to share your experiences during World War II, and to give us a glimpse into the kinds of experiences that were also common for those who were around you, including your own family.

I'm going to start our interview with the most basic of questions. The first one is, can you tell me, what was your name at birth. When you were born, what was your name?

Well, in Ukraine, Pawlo.

Pawlo.

It was P-a-w-l-o. That's the way that it was pronounced. And that's the way it was spelled. Bojko, I never changed it. That's still the same.

It's still the same.

Yeah, but was Pawlo, and I changed it to Paul.

OK. And Pawlo is the Ukrainian version of Paul?

Yes.

OK.

Yes.

And what's the date of your birth? I was born on July 31, 1937.

Ah, OK. And where were you born?

I was born in [? Chyparivka , ?] Ukraine.

[? Chyparivka ? ?]

[? Chyparivka, ?] Ukraine, yes.

Tell me, where is [? Chyparivka ? ?]

It's on-- Poltava is the county.

OK.

Or the state, rather, is Poltava. And it's not too far-- it's probably about a two-hour drive to Kyiv, which is the capital of Ukraine. And it's also not too far from the Dnepr. The Dnepr is a big river that starts in Russia and runs all the way to Black Sea.

Would this be, then, central Ukraine?

Yes, it was. Central Ukraine, yes, yes.

And did you grow up in this place? How do you pronounce the village again, where you were born? [? Chyparivka . ?]

[? Chyparivka ? ?]

Yes.

And did you grow up there?

No. I was six years old when-- we lived on a farm.

OK, excuse me. I should back up a little bit. By growing up, I meant not from 6 years old onwards, but until 6 years old. Did your family always live the place you were born? Or did they move afterwards to someplace else?

No, they lived right down at the farm where we lived.

OK. So had your family lived there for many generations?

Well, yes, two generations anyway that I know of. Now, before that, I'm not sure. It could have been.

OK. Now, was this the part of Ukraine that was part of the Soviet Union at the time when you were born? Or was this part of Poland?

No, it was Soviet Union.

It was the Soviet Union.

Soviet Union. Anything across the Dnieper, the river, across the river, was under Soviet jurisdiction. Anything on this side of the river, that was under Polish jurisdiction.

I see.

But Germany, they attacked Poland.

We'll come to that. We'll come to that. I'm talking now a little bit even before 1937, your date of birth. I'm going to want to get a sense of who your parents were, how did they come there, how did they-- you know, were they from this area, and so on.

So let me start asking this way. What was your father's name, his first name?

Hryhoriy.

Hryhoriy?

Hryhoriy Bojko.

And is that spelled with an H?

H, yes.

And does it translate into English for a G?

Yes.

So he would be, in English, Gregory.

Gregory, yes.

Gregory.

Gregory. But we called him Hryhoriy.

Hryhoriy.

Hryhoriy.

And did he have many brothers and sisters?

Yes, he did. He had two brothers. And as far as I know, he did not have any sisters. Did you know your uncles? I knew both of the uncles, yes.

OK, from the village?

Yes, from a village, and the one of them from--

Later.

--later, yes.

OK. And did you know your grandparents, his parents?

Yes, I knew his parents. And I knew my mother's parents.

OK. His parents, do you know their names?

No, I don't know their names. But we lived on a farm, one-room house. And we all made out just fine. Sleeping quarters for all the kids over top of the stove.

Oh, that was so common.

Like a balcony. We went up there. And that was sleeping for the kids. The adults, they slept on sofas or on the floor, any place at all. The house was made out of stucco on the outside.

Oh, stucco.

Stucco. And the roof was out of straw. Straw roof, yes.

So like a thatched roof.

Yes. I have some pictures. Oh, we'd like to see them later.

Over there on that table, there's some pictures there. I can show them to you. You can record them if you want to. Or you can take them with you if you want to.

OK. We'll be very much interested in seeing the pictures and probably we'll film them.

Yes. You can have the pictures and film them. And also I have the property which used to be our property and the pasture for the animals.

Now, because your village was in the Soviet Union, were you able to have personal property? Or was it part of a collective farm? How was it set up there?

It was private property. It belonged to my parents. That's who it belonged to. And it was ran by brothers and grandparents. Grandparents used to babysit all the time.

And then your parents and the others worked, the other--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah. The other worked, yes. They worked on a farm, whatever had to be done.

How many hectares was there.

How many what?

Hectares or acres. About how large was the farm.

Oh, probably, I would say close to 200 acres.

That's a lot.

That's a lot, yeah. That's including the lake. It's a pond. I shouldn't call it a lake. It's a pond. And the pastures for the animals.

And what was grown? What did you mostly grow there?

Well, wheat, a lot of wheat. And I threshed it by hand. And I made flour out of it. And then they make bread out of it, or buns, or anything like that. My mother made that and grandmothers made that. Yes, that was their job.

But a lot of potatoes.

A lot of potatoes?

A lot of potatoes. In fact, we were harvesting potatoes-- I don't know whether I should go this far--

Tell me, tell me, tell me. Yes, I'm asking.

--when we heard like fireworks going off. And that was the war. Germans were shooting at Russians. And the Russians were shooting over top of our heads at the Germans, back and forth. They were fighting.

Well, you know, we'll talk more in detail later. But this is an important moment. So thank you for bringing it up to.

To go back, so you had a lot of potatoes that you farmed.

Yes, yes.

You had wheat. Did you grow anything else?

There was a big garden, a huge garden, probably an acre or maybe even better for the garden. And we had sweet corn, of course potatoes, right out there in the field, and zucchinis and anything like that, peas.

Well, you know, there's this belief that the Ukraine was the breadbasket of the Soviet Union.

Yes, yes.

And so this sounds very much like the agricultural heart.

It's the soil. The soil was black. It was very rich soil. In fact, while I was in Auschwitz, I have seen trains go by. And some of them were sitting in the train station loaded with soil. They were going for Germany.

So it was not only the people, they were taking the soil.

Yes, and sending it to Germany. And Germany were using it on the farmlands and using it in gardens.

Now, did you have neighbors?

Not very close neighbors, no, we did not.

So about how far would the closest neighbor be from you?

I would say maybe a quarter of a mile or something like that. The farthest would be about a quarter of a mile.

OK. And on your farm itself, in addition to the one-room stucco house, did you have any other kinds of buildings?

Yes, we did. We had a huge barn that was built approximately the same way as what the house. It was stucco. And a straw roof.

A straw roof.

Straw roof. And inside, for the animals, it was divided like a barn.

OK. And what kind of animals did you have?

We had horses that we farmed with. And we had cows-- we had beef cows, milking cows. Usually my mother goes out there or grandmother goes out there, ties a cow up to a post, and milks it, and gets maybe a gallon of milk in the morning, gallon of milk at nighttime.

Was that enough for the family?

Oh, yeah, that was enough. Yeah, a gallon-- and they also skimmed the fat, the cream, off of the top, and used that for baking and making various bread, buns, and stuff like that.

We had a huge cellar outside that we-- the men, they cut the ice during the wintertime and put the ice inside.

And it stayed?

And it stayed there during wintertime and into summertime. And that kept the milk in there, kept the butter in there. It's like a refrigerator, a huge refrigerator. Yes.

Sort of like a homemade refrigerator.

Yes, homemade refrigerator, that's what it was. But it was large, filled with ice, cubes of ice. They were maybe 100 pound to a cube, something like that.

Oh, wow.

Yeah.

Oh, wow.

And whatever melted, it soaked into the soil.

And were the walls also of Earth in this--

Yeah, it was dug into the earth. It was dug in there. And the dirt that was dug out of there was put on top. Boards and logs and stuff like that. They covered it up.

And then earth on top.

Covered it up, yeah. And inside they put shelves in there. And they carried the ice cubes with-- they had special tongs for carrying ice cubes. It's like sharp, two forks that dig into the ice cube. And the men would carry 100 pounds at a time.

No, that's not light.

It's not light. No, 100 pounds is not bad. For me, as a kid, at that time, no, I did not carry it, not that big an ice cube.

But it worked.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

For the summertime, it kept-- milk, butter, and things like that.

Yes.

Did you have chickens?

We had chickens, ducks, and-- let's see, that's all I remember that we had. That's about it, yeah.

Was the farm kind of self-sufficient? What you had on the farm, where you would be able to eat--

Oh, yes, yes.

It fed everybody.

Yeah, definitely. We fed everybody that was there. And some of that was traded. Meat was traded for fruits. We didn't have much fruit trees on the farm. We had maybe a couple apple trees or something like that. But the animals, they got to the apples before we did. So we traded some of the meat for fruits and stuff like that.

Were there market days?

There was a marketplace in town. We did not go to the marketplace. I think mom and grandmother, they went to the marketplace. But as a kid I did not go to the marketplace. I remember going to the church a couple different times.

Well, this is what I wanted to also ask about. The closest town-- you were born on the farm or you--

On the farm, yes.

On the farm. And the town's name was--

[? Chyparivka ?]

[? Chyparivka . ?]

Yes.

I'm sorry that I keep forgetting.

It's all right.

About how large was the town, do you think?

The town maybe had, at most, maybe 20 homes at the most.

Oh, so small.

Small town.

It was very small. Was there a church there?

Yes, it was a church there. And the church is still standing there today. There's a graveyard still there. In Ukraine, in the graveyard, whoever is buried there has a description written on the stone and also the picture of that person is on the stone. And I have some pictures here of my great-great-parents that were buried in the church lot.

And I remember going to church. We walked to church. It was maybe close to a mile, something like that.

So not far.

No, that wasn't far. But we walked to church and we walked back home again.

Now, the church in Ukraine is right long. You stand up the whole time. And it's right long. It's probably two hours, 2 and 1/2 hours long.

Ooh, wow, the church service.

Yeah, the service itself.

Tell me the denomination. Was this--

Orthodox.

Orthodox.

Orthodox, yes.

Was there anybody in this small place that was not orthodox?

Not that I know of, no. Everybody that I know of who come to church was Orthodox. As far as I know, that's what they were, yes.

OK. And was there a school?

There was a school. But I was too young to go to the school yet. I had to be 6 years old or 7 years old-- I forget now what it was-- to go to school. And it was a one-room schoolhouse where you have three, four, or five grades in one school. And then you had the rest of the grades in another school or another room.

Was most everybody in the town also a farmer?

Most everybody was a farmer, yes. If they were not farmers they were shoemakers or barbers or something like that.

And they were there too.

That was in town. But they also had to have another job. Like a barber, he would not be sufficient. He would not make enough money to feed his family off a barber shop. So he had to do something else on the side.

Yeah. So I mean, with 20 families, that's not much.

No, that's not much for 20 families, no.

Did anybody have a car in this village, in this town?

I don't remember any cars. Mostly horses and buggies. It's just like today, when you go to Pennsylvania and you see the Dutch people.

The Amish.

The Amish people.

OK. So it was something similar to that.

Similar to that. Everything that we did on the farm was done with horses. We didn't have electricity or anything like it. We cooked with firewood. At nighttime we had a lantern that we lit for light in the house.

And how did it burn? Was it a candle? Was it kerosene?

Kerosene.

Kerosene.

Kerosene, yeah.

OK. And was there well outside? Or where did you get water?

It was a hand-dug well. And you throw a bucket down there with a rope tied in it, and pull up, get some water. I don't know. I would say it's 40, 50 feet deep, something like that. It was like 4' by 4', 5' by 5', something like that, 40 to 50 feet deep. And it was a crank or else you pulled a rope up by hand, whatever you wanted to do.

Mm-hmm. Let's turn to your mother. I didn't ask much about her. What was her first name?

Charytyna.

Charytyna.

Charytyna, yes.

And what was her maiden name?

Zelynska.

Zelynska.

Yeah.

OK. And was she also from the town?

From that area, yeah.

From that area.

From that area.

And did she have brothers and sisters?

She had a brother and one sister as far as I know.

OK. Did you know them when you were little?

I don't recall them, no.

You don't recall them.

No.

OK. Now, particularly in Soviet Ukraine, the 1930s, before you were born, was a very tough place because there was the famine, the induced famine, by Stalin. Did that touch your village at all?

No, not that I know of, from what I can remember. I was probably 3 years old, 3 and 1/2 years old-- I can start remembering that far back-- up till 6 years old.

But I'm saying, did your parents talk about this?

No.

Nobody talked about a famine?

No.

Not that you remember.

Not in front of me. It's just like the fight, back and forth, with Germans and Russians. My parents did not talk about that either. But I could hear it. And I started asking questions.

And then my father finally opened up and told me-- we were out in the field digging potatoes or working in a potato field. And this cannons, and hand grenades, and everything else that was going on in the fight between Russians and Germans going off. And there was a lot of-- especially at nighttime, the whole skies light up.

That must have been terrifying for a little kid.

Yeah. I didn't know what it was until my father finally told me that there was a fight going on between Russian and-- German.

--the Germans.

Had you ever seen any Russians up until that point?

No, I don't recall seeing any soldiers or anything like that, no.

And had you seen any Germans?

No, I had not, no.

Now, in your village, was there any political presence? Like was there a Communist Party official, or a little headquarters, or something like that?

No. There might have been, but I was not involved in that.

Of course. You were a child.

I was a child. So I don't know about that.

OK. So it sounds like you were in a very remote place.

Yes.

Remote, and small, and kind of forgotten, if I could say so. Because that famine, which I think occurred in '32, '33--1932 or '33, in the Ukraine, was devastating. And millions starved to death.

Mm-hmm.

So I can't imagine it wouldn't have touched you or touched where you were in your area. But maybe because it was so small it wasn't as noticeable or not so much attention was paid to it.

In your first years, did your grandparents ever tell you stories about their lives, about growing up there? Did you did you learn anything about who they were?

Well, they did talk somewhat-- what they used to do, going to school, what they did for a living, like farm. One or the grandparents, he was a butcher on the side. He butchered calf, cows, steers, and stuff like that.

Mother's father or father's father?

Mother's father. I don't remember too much about my father's father. He was there at times. In fact, he is the one-- my father's father and my father's mother, both of them went with us.

[EXHALES SHARPLY] When you were taken.

When we were taken, yes.

And which-- was it your father's parents who lived with you or--

Yes.

--your mother's? OK.

Father's.

So your mother's parents lived somewhere else?

They lived someplace in town, yes.

OK. Would you visit them?

No, not that I recall visiting them. No, not at all.

Did you know all of the people?

I knew some of the people. The reason I knew some of the people, I met them in church or else I knew them because they were out on the farm helping us doing something. Like men, a lot of times they get together, wintertime, to get the ice off of the pond.

And for threshing the wheat, they had a threshing machine that they divided between the different families and used the threshing machine. And what it was, it was all done by horses. Horses used to go around in a circle. It had a harness on it and just went around in circles and turned this one big shaft. And the shaft turned the belts and turned a threshing machine on.

So everything is manual.

Everything was manual, yes. It was done-- little bundles of wheat. And you just take a rope off, and throw the wheat inside, and you thrash it.

Or else, before that, before the machine came, I remember they were using like paddles. It was a stick about five foot long. And on an end, there was a stick maybe two feet long, something like that. And they beat the wheat to get it out of--

The kernels out? Yeah.

Yes, wheat, so they can have just the wheat itself, in a bag. And then they used to grind the wheat. It was a big churn. They turned it and turned it, put some more in there, and kept on turning it and turning it. And the flour would dump it out then into a bag, and put some more kernels in there, and turn it again.

To me it sounds like a fascinating world for a little boy.

Yes, it was very fascinating. And for me, just getting started, I wasn't doing much help. But I was asking a lot of questions. And it was interesting for me to learn everything that was being done, how it was being done, especially when this big threshing machine came in. That was really something else-- belt-driven threshing machine ran by horses.

Mm-hmm. And what comes out? What goes in, and then what comes out at the end?

What goes in was the wheat. We'd cut the wheat. It goes in there. And what comes out was in a bag of wheat. And then you had to make flour out of the kernels. And then use the flour for baking and anything that you want to use the flour for.

Were you ever hungry?

I don't recall being hungry while I was in Ukraine. No, I was never hungry. When I was hungry, I'd just go in the house and get a bun, get something to eat, in other words.

There was always something there.

Always something there. Yes, always, day and night. As a kid-- you know, kids, they do get hungry.

Yeah, sure.

So I went in the house, and just grabbed something to eat, and went back out again. Sometimes the grandparents were in the house, or sometimes they weren't.

So one thing I do remember very clear is, after a meal, the kids were babysitting some other kids. They were all taking a nap. And I was around 6 years old, maybe not quite 6. I didn't want to take a nap. I wanted to go out and see what the men were doing.

So I would climb out the window or something like that. Or sometimes I would tell my grandmother or something that I was going out. And I went out and see what the men were doing, and tried to learn something, ask questions.

And I remember mainly working in the garden or working in a field. A lot of the fields were just pasture for the animals. We just turn animals loose at nighttime. There was no fence or anything going on. And the animals had a piece of rope. It was like a [INAUDIBLE].

You put one in, put the other one in about 18 inches apart, 16 inches apart, and put it on front legs on a horse or a cow. And we only did that with the main ones, the one that the rest would follow it. There's always a leader.

So you would put the rope around the legs?

Around the legs, all the way down by the ankle, so that it cannot run. They cannot get away. It just walked and ate, and laid down if it wants to lay down to go to sleep and rest.

What a life.

Yes, what a life. But the animals, they were doing a job. Without the animals it would have been very difficult to get the work done on a farm.

Were there any woods around, any forests around where you were?

Yes, in a distance, but--

Not near you.

--not in a close view for me to see or anything like it. But yeah, in the distance, there was some woods around.

Did you ever go into those woods?

No, not that I can recall, I didn't, no.

Did you ever travel beyond the village, beyond the town?

No, not much. The most traveling I done was when we were picked up.

OK. So before then, your world really was your own farm and then sometimes going into town--

Into town, yes. To church and--

--church and so. And describe the town for me a little bit. Can you paint a picture of what it looked like?

Well, it was like homes in the town, they were maybe a couple hundred feet apart in town itself. And there were like, I would say, 20 homes, something like that.

Were they wooden? Or were they also stucco.

They were stucco. All the homes, they were stucco. And I have a picture to show you. They were stucco with a straw roof.

Straw roof.

Straw roof, yeah. All the homes, the barns, and all the buildings, they were straw roof.

OK. Did you ever know or see anybody-- earlier I asked about Russian soldiers. But was everybody in the town Ukrainian?

As far as I know, they were all Ukrainian, yes.

Were there any Jews who lived in the town?

Not that I know of, no.

OK. So there was no other different kinds of people. It was all, you know, Ukrainian people, and all orthodox.

Yes. As far as I know, yes.

And some of them, could they have been your relatives who lived in town? Because your mother was from around there and she had siblings.

It could have been some relatives, yeah. But I did not know them.

You didn't know them.

No.

OK. Were your parents-- had they gone to school?

Yeah, they went to school, either in town or someplace else. I don't know what school they went to. I think my father, he did say one time that he went to school in [? Chyparivka , ?] in the town. And all the schools, they were one room with about three grades in it, three or four grades, five grades, in that one room. And the kids, different ages, they learned arithmetic, history, and maybe, I don't know, they might have had some other language I'm not sure of. He didn't say.

Do you know about how many grades he finished?

No, I don't. I don't have no idea, no.

And what about your mother?

I don't know much about her history, about her schooling. I know she went to school right in town. Of course she was from town, [? Chyparivka . ?] And she went to the same school. In fact, they might have met right there in school. I'm not sure. Because they didn't say. They didn't talk about that.

Were your parents-- did they have time for you when you were little? Or were they busy working all the time?

Well, most of the time they were working. I got a chance to talk to them in the evening or when I was helping them, when I was working with them.

Did you have a favorite task you liked to do with them? You know, little children like to help their parents.

My father, mainly, with the animals. I took care of the horses. In fact, a lot of times, I led the horses to whatever he was

doing out in the field. He was either plowing, or hoeing, or disking, or whatever he was doing in the field. I was working with the animals. And when they stopped, you know, I used to pet the animals, and give them water, and stuff like that. And he tells me, that's enough. That's enough of that. Let's get the job done.

Did you have any siblings?

Yeah, there were some-- you mean in the family?

Yeah. Did you have any brothers--

I don't know in the family, no. I don't know--

I meant, did you have any brothers and sisters?

No. I just had one brother.

One brother.

One brother.

Younger or older?

He was younger, two years younger.

OK. So you were 6 and he was 4 when you were taken away.

Yes.

OK. And what's his name?

Victor.

And did he follow you around like the younger brothers do?

Yes, he followed me around some. But a lot of times he spent with his mother when we were on the farm. He just like lived in other places. I mean, he was with house parents or something like that. He always wanted to be with elders.

Yeah. Well, he was a little boy. He was little, little boy.

Yes, yes. Well, you know, just like my friend says, well, you never had a childhood, did you?

I said, well, come to think of it, I never thought of it that way. I had a childhood, but it didn't last very long. It only lasted for maybe six months or something like that that I can remember. And that's about the only childhood that I had.

Well, this is in-- for the six months that you've had, you've really painted a picture for me of what was part of that world. You know, when there wasn't any war going on, of what you grew, how you fed yourselves, what the place looked like.

Do you have a sense of your parents' personalities? You know, were they outgoing? Were they more reserved? Were they shy? Were they storytellers?

I don't remember too much about my parents, because once we left the farm, my father was gone most of the time. I saw him maybe five, six times. That's about all I saw him. The rest of the time he was gone. Because my mother, she was working either in a factory or cleaning houses.

And this is after you're taking away.

After we are taken away, yes. On the farm I didn't spend too much time with my mother. I was out with my father, with the animals and all that, working. But my brother, he spent most of the time with my mother and grandmother.

OK. Of the four adults-- your mother, your father, your grandmother, your grandfather-- was there one that you were particularly close to?

I was close to my father and one of my uncles, my father's brother.

What was his name?

Ivan.

Ivan.

Ivan.

OK. And did you have a sense-- before you heard those guns in the distance, did you have a sense that there's a war going on?

No, I didn't know what war was. I didn't know anything about fighting or anything like it. Because being on a farm, you try to learn to make a livelihood. You didn't worry about--

Of course not.

--what was going on.

Of course, of course. But it didn't touch you.

No, it didn't touch me. But once we got into it, then I found out what it was all about, yes.

So I'm trying to place, in my mind-- of course as a little boy you wouldn't know this-- but about what time of year it was that you heard those guns. Was this in June?

It was summertime. We were digging the potatoes. So yes, it had to be in June-- late June, maybe early July, something like that.

1941.

No, '43.

'43.

'43.

'43, OK.

1943.

June in 1943, and you're digging the potatoes. And then what happens after that?

Well, with the potatoes, when it was dinner time, we used to make a fire right out in the field and throw a potato in. And

then Mom, she used to bring butter out or grandmother used to bring butter out. And we'd just put it on there and eat right out there in the field.

Delicious.

And the war was getting closer and closer and getting louder and louder. And I started asking more questions because I wanted to know what was happening. And then I found out-- my father finally told me that the Russians and the Germans, they didn't get along. They were fighting for land, who has more land. Germans wanted all the land. And Russia wanted to keep what they had or a little bit more.

So I guess, even today, Russia, they're fighting with Ukraine, trying to get more land, more property. They got some, but right now United Nations, I guess, is stepping in and stopping them from getting more property, more land.

Did that satisfy you as an explanation?

Well, somewhat. It satisfied me for what was happening at that particular day. But then once the soldiers got us and all that, then I started asking more questions-- why? And my father's explanation-- should I go into it?

Well, let's first step back a little bit. After you hear those guns, did you still have your potato meal out in the fields?

Oh yeah, yeah.

OK. How long did this fighting last, do you think?

Well, we were digging potatoes, I mean, with a horse and like a plow with rails in the back. You go underneath the potatoes, and you dig them up. And they would come up. And then you had to go pick them up in a bag, throw them in a bag. I was picking them up, but I put them in a bag.

I didn't handle a bag. Either one of the men handled it, or mom, or grandmother, somebody like that. They would take a bag and put the potatoes in. And they would take some potatoes into town. And some potatoes would stay there on a farm for our use.

And here, again, it's the refrigerator that come in handy, very handy. Because potatoes, they lasted all way till--

The next year.

--next year, yes.

So in that point, when you're digging those potatoes, how soon was it before a soldier appeared-- any soldier appeared?

Probably a week digging the potatoes. We were digging potatoes for one week. And some they would take into town, and some of them we would keep in the bags, putting them inside our refrigerator. And then, after a week, then soldiers showed up.

Whose soldiers, Russian or German?

German soldiers.

OK. And whether many of them?

Well, I think there was like three trucks, big trucks, like a two-ton truck, and a Jeep. The head man, he was in a Jeep. And then the soldiers, they were in trucks.

OK. And did they pass through or did they stop? What happened?

They came right into the farm like they knew where they were going. They turned in. Because I watched them come on the road. And then they turned in the driveway, came right up to the house. And they were yelling in German for everybody to come to the trucks.

And next thing you know-- we didn't know what they were talking about. And my father, he started talking to I'm assuming it was the officer. He was in a Jeep-- like a Jeep. And my father talked to him. And then he found out that we had to go with him. Didn't say where.

So everybody that was there got in the truck.

And who was there? My mother was there and my grandparents were there, my father's father and mother, they were there.

And your younger brother?

And my younger brother and Uncle Ivan, he was there.

OK. And did you know your other uncle, your other father's brother?

Oh yeah, I knew him. But--

He wasn't there.

--e was not there.

What was his name?

I don't remember, to tell you the truth. I don't know. I did know, but I don't remember now.

OK, OK. And it was your small family and your grandparents and uncle.

Yeah. I think there was like four, six-- I think it was like eight of us had to get in the trucks.

Were there other people in the trucks?

No, there was nobody, just the soldiers. Just the soldiers. But later on, we found out that they-- another day, they went farther into town, get some more from town. Because we saw them in Auschwitz.

I'm going to go back. I interrupted you as you were saying something. And that was did you have to take something with you, or were you allowed to take anything with you?

My parents, they took some clothes. That's about all. And all the potatoes were left.

Everything was left behind, yes. And when we were leaving, everybody was in trucks. Then I heard a lot of shooting. And I saw they were torching the house. And they were also torching the barn. And the shooting, I find out later on, was for the animals. They shot all the animals that they could get a hold of.

I can't imagine what that was like for a little boy.

Oh, for me, because I was very much in love with animals-- it's just like today. I like animals. I remember crying and crying and crying. But I had to stop crying because it was upsetting my parents, my grandparents. And so I just did the best I could.

But it really hurt. It hurt a lot. Because I had names for all the animals, and like the horses especially, and cows. I had names for all of them. And I was in love with them. I liked them.

Yeah. How did those soldiers treat everybody?

They made us stay in the trucks. They stopped one time, in the woods, for us to relieve ourselves. Just go in the woods while they were watching us the whole time. And you couldn't get away.

And I asked the question, why did they have to shoot animals? Why did they have to burn everything? And their reply was, so you don't try to escape and go back. They figured that if you didn't have a place to go to, you wouldn't escape. That's the way they looked at it.

And maybe that's true, maybe not. I don't know. But nobody tried to escape. Nobody escaped. They took us right straight to Auschwitz.

Incredible. Your father, did he speak any other language besides--

Not that I know of, he did not, no. He might said "nein" or something like that, once we were in Auschwitz. Because he was like a carpenter, working on buildings. And some of them were digging ditches and some things--

But the first interaction-- so the first time you see German soldiers is when you are taken away from your home.

Yes, that's the first time.

You didn't see any soldiers of any army before then.

No. No, that's first time I've seen them. And I didn't know what was making that noise. But then I find out, later on, it was cannons that they were shooting.

As you were doing the potatoes.

As we were doing the potatoes, yes. And that's what's lighting up the skies and making that noise.

Now, in the truck, how did you get that answer? Did somebody of the German soldiers speak some Ukrainian or some Russian?

I don't know. I asked my mother, why did they--

Do this.

--have to shoot the animals? And that's what she told me. So I'm assuming that she got it from the soldiers somehow. I don't know. One of them-- somebody must have spoke a different language to communicate.

Mm-hmm. Were you in the truck the whole time on the way to Auschwitz?

Except for stopping to relieve myself one time, yes.

So the minute you were in Kirichenko? What's the name of the village again when you were born?

[? Chyparivka ?]

[? Chyparivka . ?]

Yeah. That was the other direction.

Right. Yeah, but [? Chyparivka ?] is the area-- the town.

Yeah.

OK, the town. And your farm is about a mile away from there. So you're in this Poltava region. You're picked up one day in summertime, early July, late June, something like that, 1943. And you're taken by truck, from there all the way to Auschwitz--

Auschwitz, yes.

--without any change of transport, completely-- do you remember what you saw on the way?

Well, it was a canvas top, canvas sides. And in the back-- I mean, I could look out the back sometimes. And that's all I could see, what was in the back.

What was in the back?

Most of the time it was dust.

Of course.

You know, the trucks made dust.

They made dust, yes. These were dirt roads.

Dirt roads, yes.

And what about-- were there trucks behind your truck?

Yes. We had three trucks. German soldiers-- we had one German soldier. He was sitting in the back with us. And the rest of them were in the other truck.

So more people from [? Chyparivka ? ?]

They must have had more people in them, yeah. I didn't know. At that time, I wasn't sure. And I was too upset, because of the animals, to find out what was going on with the other people.

Yeah, of course. Do you remember how this German soldier behaved?

Well, he was very strange. I didn't know how a soldier should behave. But I know that he was sitting there, holding a rifle. And I kept on watching his belt. He had big, round gas mask on his belt. He had some bullets in a pouch on the other side of him. And he had this bayonet. And he was just sitting there. But he didn't say anything the whole time that I can remember.

As a kid, I might have fallen asleep there for maybe a couple of minutes or so. But I remember coming to the gate in Auschwitz. And I remember we had to dismount, unload the truck. And they kept on yelling, "aus, aus, aus, ausrasen." And we got out of the trucks.

And then they separated the men and the boys-- I mean the men and women, they separated, male and females. All the males go in one line and females go in the other line. And there were tables set up on both sides of the road, white tablecloth on them. And we had to take our clothes off, except for our underwear, and get a haircut. And then they use some kind of white powder, sprayed us with a white powder, sprayed the head.

Sounds like delousing.

I guess that's what it was, delousing. I guess that's what it was. And they did the same thing to women. They cut all the hair off.

And all the women had to undress too.

They had to undress too. And they got the haircuts, all the hair. And they got sprayed. And then they threw shirts out, or clothes we had to put on. For a man, it was a shirt and a pair of pants.

Do you know about how long it took to get to Auschwitz?

I know I was very hungry by the time we got there. That much I do remember. It was probably--

It's not so close.

No, it's not so close it. I mean, it took like 24 hours or something like that, probably, a day and a night.

So they drove all night. They didn't stop.

No, they didn't stop. They changed drivers. I guess that's what they did. I don't know. I didn't pay too much attention.

And got into Auschwitz. And--

Had you ever-- I mean, how could you even know that such a place exists?

I didn't. I didn't have no idea what that was. I had no idea whatsoever of what Auschwitz was.

Or even your father-- how would your father know?

I don't know if my father knew what it was. I really don't. The only thing I know, that as days went on, other kids in that area, they kept on yelling not to take a shower. If you go in to take a shower, you're not going to come out alive. You were getting gassed-- gas, instead of water, comes out of a line.

So other kids would say that?

The other kids told us that, yes. And that saved our lives really. Because if it wouldn't be for the other kids-- they were about the same age as I was, maybe a little bit older.

Were they in barracks? How did you-- well, let me step back a little bit. When the men and the women were separated, your little brother came with you.

Mm-hmm.

And your father.

Mm-hmm.

And your Uncle Ivan.

Yes.

And your grandfather.

My grandfather, yes.

So only your mother and your grandmother were in the other line.

Yes.

And did you see them after that, your mother and your grandmother?

Yeah, we got together after that, yes, with the parents. But then mother, her job was, after that, to clean the barracks.

So my question is, were you in a barracks as a family?

As a family in the barracks, yes.

OK. And these barracks, can you describe them to me? Can you describe how many families-- were there hundreds of people, or tens of people, or were they very small places? Can you describe to me what they looked like.

Some barracks were one floor, some barracks were two floors. And my father, his job was to build barracks.

Your barracks, the ones that you stayed in.

No, new barracks.

OK. But I want to know about the one you were in.

OK. We were in-- there might have been, I don't know, 50 people, something like that, and I don't know how many families. That much I don't know. But as far as the headcount, it might have been about 50 people.

Were they all Ukrainian?

No. There were some Polish. The reason I say Polish, because of the language that they were speaking. And I did not know what Polish language was. But I asked my mother, and she told me they were Polish.

So you had never heard-- did you know that there were such people as Polish people until then?

No, I did not. No, I didn't know. But I found out. I learned real fast that there's other people that exist besides us, and different languages.

I want to stop here and cut the camera for a minute. Is it time--

OK, so you found out real fast that--

Yes, I learned real fast what it was all about, the different people, different languages. And the kids that were telling us, they were telling us in different languages. Some language might have been German. I'm not sure. Some were Polish, and some were Ukrainian language.

And they told us not to take a shower. Because if you go in that, turn on a spigot, we're going to be gassed. We're going to die. And I didn't see anyone-- I saw people being carried out. They were covered up, being carried out.

Of the barracks.

Out of a barracks and out of a shower room, and put in a ditch. That ditch was for burying people. I saw them digging the ditches just on the opposite end of where the barracks was. And our barracks was in the middle. They were building on the left-hand side. That's where my father was working. And the ditch that they were burying in was on the right-

hand side, away from a barracks.

And did you recall, was there a sea of barracks? That is, where there many barracks buildings where you were? Were you in the middle of them? Were you--

We were on one end of it. Because there was fence on the right-hand side. And they were digging the ditches outside the fence. That's where they were digging, in the field. They were digging the ditches. And that's where they were burying the dead people.

When was the first time you got something to eat after you were taken away from your home?

That night, once we got to Auschwitz. We got there in the late afternoon. And once we went through, got haircuts and got sprayed, and they took us to the barracks, then we got a bowl of soup and a piece of bread. That's what we got. And that was already dished out. And piece of bread was laying alongside the dish. And a spoon was laying there. And you just sit down and eat the potato soup. What that was famous, potato soup, peels and all.

Peels and all.

Peels and all. And a slice of bread. And the bread that you got was entirely different from what we used to have on our farm.

How? How was it different?

It was dark and it was hard-- dark bread, and it was hard. And the whole time we were in Germany, that's what we had. It was potato soup. Sometimes it was just different, to potato soup. Some was thin, some was thick. And a slice of bread that's all the same. If you get a heel, you get more of a bread than you do--

When it's the middle slice.

Yeah. And--

Was it enough to satisfy hunger?

Well, it had to because you didn't get no seconds. So it had to be enough. For me, yes. For my father, my uncle? No, I'm sure it wasn't enough. Because they got the same amount as what I did.

I keep going back to it-- you're 6 years old.

Yes.

And I can't imagine what it's like for a 6-year-old in this situation. Did you have questions that you asked or did you have questions that you couldn't ask?

I had questions that I asked. And sometimes I was afraid to ask a question. But I got answers every time I asked a question, either my father or my mother. I asked questions. And at that time they always gave me an answer.

So what were some of those questions?

Well, about what that place was, what we were doing there, why we were there. And my parents, they already talked to somebody else there. And they found out they were going to Germany to work in factories.

Right now we were just being there, waiting for more people to come so that they fill the train up. That's what was-- we were in the staging area. And they were keeping my father busy. And some other people, they're keeping them busy by digging a ditch. And--

And so they would share with you what they knew.

Oh, yes. My father and mother, yes, they always did. If they could tell me, they would tell me. If, for some reason, they couldn't tell me, then they would say so.

Well, that's comforting for a child.

It is, it is. And I was satisfied with the answer. But later on, I wasn't satisfied because of what was going on. And my parents couldn't tell me really what was happening. We were staying in different places once we left to Auschwitz.

We'll come to that. Let's stay in Auschwitz for a while.

OK.

So there were other children in the barracks?

Oh yes, yes.

And were the children put to work too?

No, not to a certain [INAUDIBLE]. I mean, I wasn't put to work. Maybe 12, 13, something like that, maybe they were put to work. I don't know. I didn't see any kids working. I did see my father working. And I was with my father, and I was helping him.

And I asked him what I can do. He says, you can make me some nails for me. And I said, well, how do I make the nails? And he had a roll of wire there that he made the nails from. He had a pair of cutters. And he showed me how to make the nails, how to straighten them, and how long to make them, measuring. And I made the nails for him just to keep myself busy--

Of course.

--give myself something to do.

And you were with him.

I was with him, yes.

You were with him. That's so important.

It was getting colder and colder as the time went on. And then probably sometime in September we had the first snow. And once you don't have the proper gear, you're cold. You're very uncomfortable. Now, I was uncomfortable for a good while. In fact, I was uncomfortable until I got inside the boxcar. Then it was so tight in there that you were just body to body. And you kept yourself warm.

Until you got inside what?

Boxcar, Cattle car, to travel from Auschwitz, Poland, to Germany.

So tell me, how long were you in Auschwitz?

We were in Auschwitz probably about between four and six months.

That's a long time.

That's a long time, yes. We were there the whole time. We got there-- it was summertime. And we didn't leave till-- actually I'm going by what the weather was doing, how cold it was. Because I didn't know. We didn't have no holidays. I couldn't go by the holiday. I could ask my parents, but I didn't for some reason. But I do know that we were there for a right good while. And it was cold the whole time. I think I finally got another shirt to put on to go outside and help my father.

Did your parents' physical appearance change?

By what they had to do? Yes, definitely. They had to-- like my father worked outside, building new barracks. They were two-story barracks what he was building. Some were one story, some were two stories. And I guess maybe, later on, might have had three stories, I don't know.

But some places that we went to in Nuremberg they had three stories.

Mm-hmm. But in Auschwitz, your mother was cleaning the barracks.

She was cleaning the barracks. She was sleeping the floors. And anything that was on the floor, she was picking up and laid them on the bed.

And who was minding your little brother? He was with my mother or grandmother. The grandmother was still with us, and grandfather was still with us, and our uncle, until we got in the boxcars. I call them cattle cars is what I call them. Might have had 100 people in there. I'm not sure how many people were in there. But I know, once we got into the cattle car, we didn't have room to lay down, or sit down, or anything like that. You had to stand up.

And was this everybody who was in your barracks was taken to that boxcar?

Yeah, again, I'm not sure. But everybody out of our barracks. I think most everybody was in there. And there were some other people in there from different barracks.

Now, I want to ask something. The kids who were left, the little kids who were in the barracks who were left there, the kind who told you don't go take a shower, what did they do during the day? Was anybody playing? Was there any kind--

There was no games going on, not that I never seen, no. I don't know what they were doing-- sitting around, looking at each other, talking. But I was outside with my father most of the time. So I really didn't see anybody playing any games. And for me, I wasn't very happy being there. And we were forced to do that. So we had to do it. We had to be there. We didn't have any choice.

I mean, I seen the guards-- some of the guards, they were not very friendly with the people.

In what way?

Somebody doesn't do as fast as what they want them to do getting someplace, they would take a butt of a rifle and hit him, or push him with a rifle, or something like that. In fact, one time, I even saw an officer take his pistol and shoot a man, right there in front of all the people. I don't know for what reason. I wasn't there. I was in the distance. And I saw him pulling the pistol out. And bang, he was gone.

And then of course other guards showed up there with a stretcher. And they carried that one fellow off-- covered him up, and carried him off, and put him in that ditch that they dug.

I know it's a strange question that I asked, would children be playing in a place like Auschwitz? But I wondered, when children are idle, and they're allowed to live, whether or not they block the rest of the world out. And what you're telling me is that there is no way to block that out.

No, not really. There's no way to block it out because it's not a very happy place to be. And even the kids, they sensed that there's something wrong here. I don't belong here. I don't want to play games. I want to get out of here. But you couldn't, because of the guards. And they meant business.

Were there people who died in the barracks, naturally? That is, I mean, not naturally in the sense they might have starved to death. They might have gotten sick. But that weren't shot. Did you see anything like that?

No, I didn't see anybody die naturally. No, I just saw people that took a shower and were killed in the shower room with gas. And they were being carried out, and put in a ditch, and covered up.

So you saw live people going in and--

I saw people going in and not coming back out again. They were carried out. At least I saw people being carried out. I don't know that it's the same ones or not. I'm assuming that it was the same people.

Was this close to your barracks or further away?

It was attached to our barracks on one end.

Really, that close?

That close, yes. Yep. It was actually a shower for our barracks. And you go in. If you turn the gas on, turn the spigot on to get water, you get gas instead of water.

And I'm just amazed that it was that close. Was it a small kind of building or a large kind of building?

It was a barracks, holds-- well, we were maybe 100 people in there, downstairs.

So does that mean that, in all the time you were there, nobody took a shower.

Nobody took a shower. No, we just washed up. Because we didn't trust. We wanted to stay alive. If you take a shower, you wouldn't come out of there.

So are you thinking it's probably around December, January, that you were--

I would say so, January, that we left. They made us get back in the boxcars. And they took us to Nuremberg, Germany. That's where we went to.

And that means the whole family-- grandpa, grandma.

Grandma, no, they didn't come with us. And uncle didn't come with us. It was just my father, mother, and my brother and I.

And what about Grandpa?

He didn't come with us. He stayed behind.

So three stayed behind.

Yes.

What happens to those three?

OK, we are assuming that because grandparents, they were older-- they were 70s, 80s, something like that-- they were

probably killed. Now, uncle, later on, uncle was discovered. And I'll get to the story--

We'll talk about that later.

--later on.

So he survives.

He survived. I don't know how, but he survived.

OK. But your grandparents disappear from sight.

They disappeared. We never seen them again, never heard from them again. And we don't know what happened to them. We assume that they were killed right. Because we seen other people getting killed.

Their names-- do you remember your grandparents' names?

No, I don't, no.

It was Bojko, but--

Yeah, it was Bojko, but I don't know what the first name was. I remember seeing, someplace, like Ivan something. But I know that Uncle Ivan, he is the one that, later on, we found him.

OK. So you don't know that your grandfather was also Ivan. He might have been, he might not have been.

That's right, yeah. I'm not sure.

So you were taken from Auschwitz, after half a year, to Nuremberg.

Nuremberg, yes.

OK. Nuremberg, the famous city, where the trials were held after the war?

That's correct.

That one. And you were taken by cattle car.

Train-- cattle car on train, yes.

OK. And do you remember about how long it took to get there?

Well, I know we were fed twice. So I'm assuming like about 36 to 48 hours to get there.

Interesting. Longer than it took from Ukraine.

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yeah, longer to Nuremberg-- from Poland to get to Nuremberg, yes. We stopped, I don't know, three times or four times. Either three or four times we stopped twice to eat, and then twice to relieve ourselves.

And so now we're talking probably December 1943, January 1944.

Yes.

Something about then.

That's correct.

OK. So you're taken to Nuremberg. And what happens then?

OK, my father, he had to register us in Nuremberg. Once a month, the head of a family had to register the whole family, every month, to the police department, police station. And then he had to go to work. And he worked in a station factory. That's where he worked.

In a factory.

In a factory. I don't know what he did in the factory. All I know is, a lot of times, his hands smelled. And mother's hands, they were the same way.

They smelled. Yeah.

They smelled.

Did she work in the same factory?

She worked in the same factory, yes. And she also cleaned on the side, and to get paid. And my father, he-- later on, not right away, not the first day or second day, but I think like first week, maybe second week-- he had some kind of injections in his stomach.

I don't know what kind of injections they were. I don't know whether it's to help him or to kill him. I don't know what kind of injections they were. And he didn't know it neither. He couldn't tell me what they were. But later on we found out that it's experimental injections. That's what they were.

And we were in a barracks.

I was going to ask where were you living.

We were living in a barracks with maybe, I don't know, whatever, 300, 400 people.

Huge.

Three-story barracks. Three stories. It was huge. And you had a gate. You go in and out. But you had to sign in, sign out.

So you were able to leave.

You were able to leave, yes. My parents, they worked in the factory. They leave in the morning. They had to sign out. We walk with them up to the gate. At the gate, we had to turn around and go back in again.

So then it's you and your brother and no one to mind you.

That's right, just the two of us.

And you're 6 and 1/2 and he is 4.

6 and 1/2 and he was 4 and 1/2. Yeah, that's what it was. And it wasn't so bad until the air raids started. And they started probably maybe three, four months after we got there, they started. Air raids started night and day, night and day. And if mom was home, we would run to the air-raid shelter, it wasn't so bad.

But if they weren't home, if it was during the day, if they were at the factory, or a cleaning job, or something like that, I took care of my brother. So I grab him, and we would run for air-raid shelter.

And some of the air-raid shelters weren't so bad, but some of them were terrible air-raid shelters. It was just a ditch dug, with railroad ties of wood, telephone poles, laying on top, covered up with dirt. And a bomb goes off someplace, a half a mile away, everything shook. And the dirt would come down, fall down on top of you. And many times we come out of there full of dust and dirty-looking if we had to go into it that kind of air-raid shelter. But we always tried to pick the best air-raid shelter that they had there.

And what was the best like?

The best was outside the gate.

Did they let you go?

When the air-raid shelter siren goes off, the guards would run. We didn't have no guards. So we could go out, go into the professional air-raid shelter, which was down in the basement of the house. And there were all brick, block, whatever. There was cement. And--

These were residential houses? Were these residential houses?

They were residential houses, yes. And we got into the basement of the residential houses. And that was the best.

And these air-raid shelters-- well, I guess the whole barracks, the whole compound-- was it in the city center of Nuremberg or on the outskirts?

On the outskirts.

It was on the outskirts.

Yes, on the outskirts. The reason I know, because some days we would walk into the city. And I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Parades were going on in the city. The banners were flying in the city. The people, dignitaries, standing on the balconies, waving to people down below. Things like that were going on.

I didn't know where we were. All I know, we were in the big city. And I knew how to get home, how to get back to the barracks. I knew where we walked out of there. And it was quite an experience, not knowing where you were, what you were doing there, why you were there. You had so many questions and no answers. But then, later on, once my parents were there, I find out from our parents why we were there, who was holding us there.

So tell me, why were you there?

We were there for our parents. Because our parents were healthy. And they needed healthy people to work in the factories. That's why we were there. That's what they were told.

And my mother, she was working on the side in residential areas, whatever she could, to make some money to give us some clothes, give us something to wear, and something extra to eat. Sometimes we were so hungry we were eating out of garbage cans because we didn't have no food. So if air raid goes off, let's say, 3:00, 4:00, 5 o'clock in the afternoon, that's dinnertime. And if you don't get the dinner, you might as well forget the next day before you get something to eat.

And my mother, if she had some money, she could get something, get some bread or something like that, and bring it home so we have something to eat so we wouldn't have to eat out of garbage cans. But many times, my brother and I, we ate out of a garbage can because we didn't have nothing else to eat. And we were just lucky we were alive.

You know, the picture you paint is so bizarre in some ways. You live in one world, which is not a very nice-looking

world, which is a scary world, which is life-threatening, where you have more questions than you have answers and you know that there is danger. And then yet you are allowed out to go into another world that could be on a different planet even, where people have parades and they have dignitaries.

Oh yeah, I found that out, yes. But the whole time we were there in Nuremberg, I was scared, I was hungry, and I was cold. That was three factors that were the most serious factors of all. So the hungry, scared, and cold. And for myself and for my brother.

And same thing for my parents. [INAUDIBLE] sometimes I knew where they were or I knew where they were supposed to be. But I don't know whether they're dead or not. Because it was British bombing during the day and Americans were bombing at nighttime. That's what I found out later on. I don't know if that's true or not, but that's what I heard. But when the air raid goes off, the only thing I say is, you better run to get a good air-raid shelter.

Because them bombs, they come falling down. And when then they start falling down, the buildings fall. They start burning. So you got fire. And you couldn't get the fire engine to the fire because a building collapsed. It was quite a serious mess. And I didn't know whether we were going to survive it or not.

But Nuremberg-- I know towards the end, close to '45, early '45, every building was collapsed. As far as you can see to the naked eye, the buildings are collapsed.

Were bombed.

Yeah, where they found the buildings for the trial, Nuremberg trial, I don't know how they were standing there, not being touched. But the buildings where we were, on that side, we were there where the factories were. So naturally that's where the bombs were falling.

Did you ever find out what kind of factory your parents worked in?

No, I never found out. The only thing I found out was-- and I got them papers from Red Cross--

[PHONE RINGS]

Hang on a second.

She got it now. She got it.

OK.

You found out--

The buildings that they were in, that my father also was taken and shown how to dismantle a machine gun and how to shoot the machine gun. Yeah.

That's so bizarre.

He was trained. He was trained. That's not his job. He was not a soldier. But he was shown how to dismantle it, take it apart, machine gun, how to clean it and how to put it back together.

He told you this?

No, I saw it on a paper, on the papers that I got from Red Cross. I don't know whether you had a copy or not. But I have a copy from Red Cross. It was shown that he had to go someplace, to some town, to learn how to handle a machine gun.

That's dangerous to take a forced laborer and do that.

He had never used it. He never had to use it. But he was shown how to do it in case. And he was also a firefighter. He had to fight the fires. If a building's on fire or a whole block's on fire, which a lot of cases that was the case, he had to--

You found this out through Red Cross papers?

Yes. Now, the fire, he told me that.

Ah, I see.

As far as the Red Cross papers, the machine gun, that's what I find out about that. I didn't know that. But you might have the same copies. I don't know. But in one of the copies, it stated that he was taken to such and such a place. The names are given, who was taken to learn how to dismantle and clean a machine gun and how to shoot it. So that's what was on the paper there.

And they had, like, swimming pools made out of brick. Every block had one of them. Let's say there were 30 feet wide, maybe 50, 60 feet long, about four or five feet deep. And they had a pump right there. And that was for the fire. If in case a building's on fire, they hooked a hose up to the pump, turn the pump on, and squirt water. Drew the water right out of a--

Swimming pool.

Well, I call it a swimming pool. It looked like a swimming pool. But when I first saw it, that's first impression that came to my mind-- oh, that's a nice place to go swimming. But I found out different what the water was for.

And of course, as the time went on, a lot of them filled up with brick and stuff from a building when a building fell down when the bombs [INAUDIBLE].

So I can think-- I mean, I don't want to put words in your mouth. But if I were a 6-year-old, and there's the siren going off that a bombing mission is happening, and my parents work in a factory, I'd be wondering whether they're going to come home.

I was wondering.

Yeah?

Many times I was wondering what they were doing, where they were at--

Whether they'll come back.

--if I'll see them again.

That's huge.

Yes.

For a little boy, that's huge.

Well, I had to grow up fast. And my mother was talking about changing my-- of course, at that time, we did not know that the war was going to come to an end in '45. But--

Excuse us. Let's cut for a second.

That's probably our sandwiches.

OK, I'm sorry for the interruption. You were saying something about your mother had some thoughts of what needs to happen.

OK. But she found out that when I get to be 8 years old, I had to sign up for "Hitler-Junger."

Jugend.

I had to sign up for "Hitler-Junger." And that was like-- "Hitler-Junger" was like Boy Scouts, but they were 8 years old. And they were taken away. They were given a uniform. And I seen a bunch of little kids marching up and down. But I didn't know what they were.

But then I found out, later on, they were "Hitler-Junger." And about the age of 10, they were taught how to shoot a rifle, how to shoot a pistol. And she was thinking maybe she should change my age. Because we didn't have any paperwork at all. Everything that we had was taken away from us in Auschwitz. So we did not have anything. We had to sign in every month, my father did. He had to sign every month. And that was easy enough to put it differently.

So what would have been the advantage for you joining the Hitler-Jugend?

"Hitler-Junger?"

Yeah-- Jugend, Jugend.

Jugend? Well, it's--

What would have been the advantage, in her mind, for you to join it?

I had to do it. It wasn't that we voluntary had to go. We had to do it. All the kids--

It was compulsory.

Compulsory. It's just like, right now, for military, when you get to be 18 years of age-- used to be, not anymore, that you had to--

But why would she want to change your age to make you older? Or did she want to make you younger.

Younger, make me younger, so I didn't have to sign up for it.

Ah.

So I don't know. She never said anything more about it. I don't know whether my age was ever changed or not. I'm assuming it's still the same.

Like everywhere? OK, OK. I didn't understand. OK, now I understand. Yeah, she didn't want you to be part of it.

Exactly, exactly. And I really didn't want to be a part of it myself. Because I saw what they were doing. And then I heard more stories about it-- where they were going, what they were doing, they enjoyed it. Well, being a boy scout, you know, going for a hike, going in the mountains.

Well, those are very attractive aspects of being a scout.

Yes.

But there was all the other stuff that was involved as well.

That was involved that was not. That's correct. And that's what I didn't like. So I didn't have to do it because war was over. When the war was over, I don't know what happened to me. But I was picked up someplace.

Hang on a second.

OK.

I think I'd like to break now and we'll come back later. But we're breaking at the point where you're still in Nuremberg. Your parents are working in this factory. You have the British and American bombers, one at daytime, one at nighttime, coming. And you're in this environment. And when we come back to your story later on then we'll start from there and we'll go forward. OK?

Yeah.

Thank you very much. OK.

OK, before the break, we were talking about where you were in Nuremberg in these barracks, the air raid shelters, the good ones, the bad ones, the fear that you don't know what's happening to your parents as the bombs are dropping, and things like that.

I want to circle back to a question I had about your hometown. I believe it was at the very beginning of our conversation. It might have been on camera or off camera, you said you can't find it on the map today. Why is that? Does it not exist anymore?

That's what I assume.

Have you been back there?

No, I have not personally. I have not been back there.

But my brother's been back there with an interpreter and a chauffeur. And they cannot locate it.

Oh.

Cannot locate it.

And did you learn from anybody, later, was there more houses set on fire besides your own farm? Was the entire--

The whole village was burned from what I hear--

The whole village was burned.

--from different ones that the whole village was burned, yes. In other words, all 20 homes plus.

So the church would have been burned too?

No, the church was not burned. The church was made out of stucco. And evidently the roof was tin roof or something like that. It would not burn. So they did not bother the church. There was nobody in the church.

OK. But the rest of the village was torched.

Yes. The village was torched. That's correct. That's what I hear.

OK, so I just wanted to clarify that. OK, so let's go back, now, to Nuremberg. How long did your family stay in Nuremberg? You arrive in around January '44.

'44.

'44.

We stayed there until the war was over.

Oh, so almost a year and a half.

Yes. And when the war was over, we were running around looking for something to eat. And it was hand-to-hand combat.

OK, let me back up then. If you were there over a year, almost a year and a half, did your life change? Did you stay in the same barracks? Did your parents keep working at the factory? Did your circumstances change at all during that year and a half?

Well, change was made in where we stayed. We were moved around all the time. The whole time we were in Nuremberg, we were moved around. We did not stay in one location. And the other thing that changed was the food. We had a hard time finding something to eat. We got to a point where we were eating dog food one time. And that was--

Does that mean, when you were in the barracks, were you fed there? Was there a regular meal time?

The food was available to eat if there was no air raid. Yes, if there was no air raid, the food was served. We can go in into cafeteria--

Canteen or something, yeah.

--and get something to eat, which was a bowl of soup and a piece of bread.

So the same potato soup you were talking about.

Yes. But that's always potato soup, or the other thing was-- what was it? Oh, horses like it.

Corn?

No, not corn.

Carrots?

Huh?

Carrots?

No, not carrots. It grows in the fall. It grows in the fall. It's like a beet.

Turnips?

Turnips.

Turnips.

Turnip soup. You cut it up, slice it.

OK. So it was either potato soup or turnip soup.

One or the other. That's all that we had, nothing else.

When you were moved around, were you moved to different barracks?

No, not necessarily barracks. We were moved sometimes to residential areas, and stayed in residential areas for six months, maybe a couple months, something like that.

So in an apartment or in a house?

In a house, in a house.

And would you be working still? Were your parents still working in the factory?

Yes, yes, still working in the factory. And mother was still cleaning-- working in a factory and cleaning.

So how did they control your parents movements when they were no longer behind a gate that had a guard and that they sign in and sign out from?

I don't know, but they moved us.

They moved you.

So since they moved us, my father had to go to the police station and--

Register.

--register once a month, to give them the new address where we were located, what we were doing, what they were doing.

Did you have contact, then, with the local German population, when you were moving in apartments and houses rather than in barracks? Sometimes we did, sometimes we didn't. It all depends. And not necessarily German population. It was any-- Polish, Ukrainian--

So other forced laborers.

Other forced laborers that were living in the same home development.

I see, I see. Were you learning any other languages?

Oh, yes. I was learning other languages, a few words now and then, especially German.

Do you remember the first words in German that you learned?

Nein or schnell, jawohl.

[CHUCKLES] Yeah.

That I learned fast.

Yeah, I can imagine. I can imagine. So you move around in different places. And did you stay in any one place for longer than a couple of months?

Might have been six months, at the longest, in some locations. Right before the war was over, I think that last location, we were there for maybe six months, five months, something like that.

OK, OK. And I take it there was nothing like school for you.

No schooling at all, no, no school.

What about other kids? Were there other kids with parents who were forced laborers? Or were you the only--

Oh, yeah. No, there were some other ones there too. But they were in the same situation, same boat, as we were in. There was no school for them kids. Well, you really couldn't have a school.

Yeah. OK, yeah, no, but it was that sort of situation. You're half-prisoners.

Yeah, yeah.

So you say that, as time went on, did the food situation-- when you lived in private residential places, was there someone who supplied meals for you from the administration? No, not really. It was up to us to get our own food.

OK. So that's when it became difficult?

It became very difficult to get food. Because we didn't have money. And sometimes mom couldn't clean, or didn't get paid, or something. So she didn't have no money. So it was one of them situations where, if you don't have the money, you can't buy food.

That's right.

And if that was the case then we didn't have the food.

So you went hungry.

So we went hungry. That's right.

And there was dog food.

And we ate dog food one time, I remember. And my brother just reminded me of that, I think the last time we were together or something. He said to me, in so many words, you remember when we were so hungry that we ate dog food? Well, how can I forget something like that, you know? You can't really.

And your parents, they didn't have anything, then, either.

No, they didn't, unless they had something in the factory or the work. I don't know. Somebody else might have had something they gave them. Or else they didn't have anything. I don't know. But I noticed that my father lost a lot of weight. And I think-- I can't say for sure, but I think that the injections that he had had something to do with him getting sick and dying just as soon as the war was over.

So he gets sick, weaker and weaker and weaker.

Yes, he was weaker and weaker. Lost a lot of weight. And same thing with mother. She lost a lot of weight too. And she was singing in church choir and passed out.

Really?

And that's when she fainted. And they took her to a hospital. And she was paralyzed.

And this is after the war ends?

Yes, after the war ended, yeah.

Let's go back a little bit to before the war ends. The picture that I'm getting from you is that your parents continue working in the same place as they were before even though your residence changes.

Yes.

And the more that time goes on, the less food there is. And there's no way that you get fed by some administrative body like you had in the barracks if there's no air raid going on. However, if you're walking the streets at all, from what you told me before, there was not a building that was left standing.

Very few buildings.

There were just ruins and ruins and ruins. So was there fighting going on in Nuremberg? Did you experience anything like that?

For hand-to-hand combat, yes.

Hand-to-hand combat.

Towards the end-- it was in '45 already, I don't know, March, April, May, something like that. I don't know when it was. And the streets-- you can see the soldiers running back and forth, and sometimes running, flop down, get shot, or sometimes come running out from behind a corner there with a rifle and the bayonet on the end, and to fight until one of them goes down.

And you would be in your--

I would be hiding someplace. Or else I'd be in the house, looking out the window.

By the time this happens, are your parents still going to work every day?

Oh, yes, they had to go to work. I was surprised that the factory did not get hit.

Yeah.

You know, I was waiting for the factory to get hit. But from what I hear from my parents and other ones that the factory was hit, but on the outskirts. And the factory was so big that, what they were doing, it didn't bother it. They still had to do it.

And who were they fighting against? If this was Nuremberg, what armies were the enemy armies.

It was Germany and Americans.

Oh, so it was the US.

Oh yes, US.

US, OK.

Because US are the ones that picked me up. And I wound up in the field hospital.

OK, tell me about-- did they pick you up before the end of the war?

Before the end of the war.

So tell me what happened. What happened? How is it that you saw your first American?

I was looking for food with my brother. And I don't know what happened, but I was passed out. I was down. And an American soldier picked me up and put me in the ambulance. And they took me to the field hospital. And when I was in the service, I tried to locate people that were involved to thank them for saving my life. But I could not locate them. If I knew the unit number or something like that, it might have helped. But I did not know anything.

Aw.

All I know that I was picked up.

With your brother or by yourself?

By myself. I was picked up. And I was taken to the field hospital. And I stayed in field hospital for, I don't know, maybe a couple of weeks. I really don't know.

And I do remember this much. I was getting penicillin shot. I had to roll over, and in my butt, get a penicillin shot. But after penicillin shot there comes the good part that I really like. I got a candy bar or a stick of gum.

[CHUCKLES]

Yes, every time-- every time I got a penicillin shot, I also got a piece of gum, or chewing, or a chocolate bar, or something like that.

And that's the first time you had anything like that in almost two years.

Yes. I didn't even know what it was. They had to show it to me what to do with it.

Really?

Yeah. I'd like truly, but I never had chewing gum before.

Had you had chocolate?

I had chocolate, but not chewing gum.

OK, OK.

Chocolate, you eat, and chew it up, and swallow it.

That's right.

The gum, you just chew on it.

And it has a flavor.

And It Has a flavor until you spit it out.

So you lose consciousness somewhere while you're searching for food. You don't know who picks you up. You're out.

You're not conscious. And they bring you to a field hospital. And when you wake up, there are all these strangers around you.

Yes.

Do you remember that sense of, oh my God, where am I?

Yes, until they start giving me some goodies. When they start giving me goodies, I knew they were friends. They couldn't be enemies and giving me all them goodies-- chocolate bars, and sticks of gum, and stuff like that, and made me well.

And was there any--

And I had something to eat in my stomach, belly. I had something to eat. And I was warm. I was in the tents.

Yeah. And was there someone who spoke a language you were able to communicate in?

German. They spoke German. And by that time, I could pick up a few words. I could understand a few words in German. It's just like, well, right now, I can do quite a bit. I can do some good right now. But then, just being there for a year or so, I could just barely pick it up.

So I'm wondering whether these soldiers realized you weren't a young German boy, but the boy of a forced laborer.

Oh, they realized that because the Red Cross was looking for me. They came over and got me there. After I got well, Red Cross got me and took me to Weisenberg, to DP camp, and got me reunited with my brother and my parents.

Ah, OK.

My parents were already there.

So this was March or April? When was this?

I don't know. It was starting to get warm. That's all I can tell you.

OK, so it was probably April.

Because we did not have a stove or anything inside the tent. And it was right warm. Of course, nighttime, you had a blanket. And they covered me up nighttime.

And I was in with the soldiers in the tent.

OK. And so with regular army soldiers, you were sleeping in the same tent.

Yes, yes. Field hospital for army soldiers, yes.

OK. And so after two weeks the Red Cross finds you.

I don't know how I was located. But they located me and they came over to pick me up. The doctors there already knew who I was. And I guess same thing with Red Cross. They knew where I was. How that was done, I don't know.

Of course, of course. It must have been your parents, through some way, found a way to put inquiries out.

Well, could have been my brother too. I don't know. You know, they were looking for my body someplace. And they couldn't find my body. So next thing you know, it was out that I was in a hospital, field hospital. And I remember small

planes taking off and landing. And I remember how the soldiers, later, made a runway. I remember that. It was 10, maybe 18, 20 inches wide. It had holes in it. And that's what the plane landed and took off on.

So even then, in the hospital, you're a curious little boy who sees what's going on around.

Oh, I could see what was going on right outside. Because the door, they left it open during the day. It was daylight coming in. And I could see what was happening out there. Small airplanes, like a single engine, they were landing and taking off.

OK. So when you are brought back, you were brought to what place you said?

Weisenberg.

Weisenberg. And was that a DP camp?

DP camp in Weisenberg. Yes, they created a DP camp in Weisenberg. Different towns-- they created a DP camp for different nationalities. Each nationality had their own DP camp.

And in Weisenberg it was Ukrainians?

Weisenberg was Ukrainian, yes.

Anybody else? Was there any Poles there? Any--

I don't know. Not that I know of. As far as I know, they were all Ukrainians in there. But maybe--

I'm just asking.

I have a picture of different ones that were in DP camp in Weisenberg. But I don't know if you can make anything out from a picture or not.

Yeah, probably not.

My father's in a picture, and my mother, and my brother's in a picture.

Are you in the picture?

I am in a picture too, yes.

So when your parents-- your parents knew you were alive.

Yes.

And you come back to them. And you're restored by that point? Are you healthy again?

Well, I guess I was better than I was before. But I don't know if I was up to the same weight as I was when I left Ukraine. Maybe I lost some weight, something like that, because of food-- undernourished.

Yeah, yeah. Now what was the living situation at Weisenberg? What kind of place did you live in, sleep in?

Well, in Weisenberg we had our own room for a family, which was done by prisoners of war or something like that. It was different groups-- United Nations, Red Cross, UNRA, all different kind of nationalities, different groups, that were helping out. And that's when they tell me they cannot locate my father, for that reason.

Ah, we also talked off camera that you've been trying to locate your father's grave.

Mm-hmm.

But at that point your father is still alive.

Yes.

When he's there, he's still alive.

Yes.

OK. And were you were you fed as a family? Was there somebody who was then taking responsibility for feeding all of the people?

It was given us, for a family, that they give us food. We had to fix it ourselves the way that we want to. But the we did get food for the first couple of months or something like that.

What kind of food was it?

Well, potatoes, bread, milk, butter.

So milk and butter, you hadn't had for a while.

No, we hadn't. I didn't even know what it was-- [CHUCKLES] till I got it. Then my mom, she knew what it was. So she took care of that, and fixed some meals.

And how was she-- so your parents were then no longer working anywhere.

No, they were not. No, not for a while. Because the first year-- and let's say this is-- 1940--

'45.

--'45. And my mother, she was singing in the church choir.

So there was a church choir, a Ukrainian Orthodox church choir that was established.

Yes. And she was singing in the choir, and she fainted. When she fainted, they took her to the hospital and found out that she was paralyzed. And that was the end of that.

And our father, he was hospitalized not too long after that. And Richter, my brother, and I, we were out without--

Parents.

--anybody taking care of us. So we stayed with some friends for a while till the Red Cross came, and picked us up, and took us to Prien.

Prim?

Prien, Chiemsee. Chiemsee was a big lake. And Prien was the name of the town next to that huge lake. And there was a hotel right in the middle of the town, next to a railroad station, that was for children under 18 years of age.

But was this in '45, '46?

'45. No, I'm wrong, '46.

So '46. So the rest of '45 you were together with your parents and part of '46 you were together with your parents.

Yes.

Do you know about what time of year your mother fainted? Was it spring or summer?

We were putting in garden. So it was spring.

OK. It was springtime. She faints, and then your father gets sick, and then you're taken.

He got sick. And he was hospitalized. And he was in the hospital then-- well, he was in the hospital until he died.

Did you ever see him in the hospital?

Oh, yes. Yeah, we went to see him. We got a ride from Weisenberg DP camp. We got a ride to the hospital. I think, at that time, he was in either Weisenberg hospital or Regensburg Hospital, one of them two.

And we got a ride to see him. And then we got a ride back. So we did see him. We saw our mother. And then--

Excuse me. Were they in the same hospital? Yes, they were in the same hospital for a while.

And they were conscious?

Oh, yeah. My mother didn't know what she-- who it was that was talking to her. She was just laying there like a log. She didn't understand what you were saying to her. She couldn't talk. She couldn't do anything. She was just-- like she was out of it.

My father, well, he could talk, understand. But he had, I think, three, four, or five operations on his stomach.

Wow. So that injection that you talked about really sounds like it did have something to do--

Well, I told the doctor about the injections. And he says, well, we're going to consider that, that that's what's causing the problem. But we don't know for sure. We haven't got that far yet.

And then my brother and I, we went to Prien. So we never did see the doctor again. And then from Prien we went to Bad Aibling.

And this is in 1946.

This is '46, maybe going into '47.

OK.

It's '46, late '46.

So about half a year you're in Prien.

Yeah.

Something like that.

Yeah, something like that, yeah.

OK. And what was it? Was it an orphanage in Prien?

Yeah. Oh, yeah, it was an orphanage, a hotel right in the middle of Main Street, across from a railroad station. And it was a huge hotel. And it was an orphanage.

I remember climbing a tree, getting my first walnut. I didn't know what walnut was till, I don't know, some Czechoslovakian boy or some boy from some other country, he climbed the tree and he got a walnut, and showed me what to do with it.

And then another boy, I remember he was on crutches. I don't know how old he was. But he could play the piano. Oh, I'll tell you, he could play the piano. Right now, when I hear "The Pennsylvania Polka" or something like that, I can think back to him playing the piano.

Oh, wow.

That's how good he was.

Wow.

The piano was sitting right in the hallway on the first floor. As you go up the steps, you could get in the hallway. There was a piano. And almost any time of the day you go in there, he'll be sitting there next to the piano. And if you listen, he'll play the piano for you. Anything you want to hear, he'll play.

Wow, what a talented kid.

Yeah, he was. I don't know-- I'm just trying to think what country he was from. He was either from Czechoslovakia, or Poland, or one of them countries, that much I do remember.

So were you getting to be familiar, then, with kids from all over the place?

Oh, yeah, from other countries, yes. We were making friends, like kids usually do. And we go to the lake. And we get a rowboat and row around the lake.

And some other kids showed us how to fish. There was a little stick, maybe a foot long, with little fish on it about two, three inches long. And they were smoked. And they were delicious. I don't know what kind of fish there were. I couldn't do it again if I had to. But we got them little fish, just scoop them up, bring them in, put them on a stick.

And you got to have a fire to smoke them and all that. But originally, from what I understand, they smoke them in an oven-- an oven, with the heat. And you put him in there. And they--

So they were still delicious the way you were doing it.

Oh, yeah, they're still good. Because we were doing it ourselves, I guess. And we were there for about six months, something like that. It was cold-- getting cold. And--

Were you well-fed there? Were you well-fed there?

Oh yeah, in Prien, yes, we were fed very well, clothed very well. When it was starting to get cold, we got additional clothes to wear.

Who was running the place?

Well, different agencies were running it. It was ran under United--

UNRA?

--Nations, UN. It was Red Cross. It was UNRA.

All three agencies?

Well, there was more agencies than that. There was also agency from Australia. Because we had visitors from Australia. And they told us that they are taking care of us. So they're taking care of us. OK, fine. Well, thank you very much.

And they were a couple well-dressed dudes-- heavy overcoat, with a hat on, that came in on the tour. I guess they saw what they wanted to see. And they told us if we needed anything, to let them know.

So who were the people you met day to day? Were they Germans? Were they foreign workers? Were they-- [COUGHES] excuse me. [COUGHES] Excuse me. You know, the ones that you would interact with.

No, they were just kids like me from different countries. Most of them were Polacks, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakians.

Any Jewish kids?

Yeah, I imagine there were a few Jewish kids there, yeah. Because we started going to church. Every Sunday, they had a church service-- different religion had a service. One Sunday we would have Catholic. Next Sunday we would have Protestant. The next Sunday we would have Jewish.

And all the kids went to every single service.

Yes, yes, yes.

Oh, that's interesting.

Whoever goes to church would be there, yes. And not necessarily that everybody went to church. But my brother and I, we went to church. Because they started using my brother and I in church, in the Orthodox Church, preacher's helpers-- or the priest helpers. They made gowns for us.

Like altar boys?

Yeah, like altar boys, yeah. We would light the candles. And we carry--

Incense.

--incense for the priest. And we load the incense up in them for the priest, and light it. And whatever is necessary, just the helpers.

And where would these church services be held? In the same facility?

The largest facility that they could possibly get. And in Prien, it was held downstairs in the basement.

Of your hotel?

Of the hotel. That was the largest building that they had, the largest room that they had. And of course there was no sitting. Everybody had to stand. And once we moved, then there was bigger rooms. But still, churches that we had, like Orthodox church, there was no sitting down. You stand there for a couple hours.

OK. But if you went the next week, for example, to a Catholic service, would you be sitting down? Would they put

chairs--

No.

OK.

No.

OK.

No, we never got to sit down. We always--

Stood.

--stood up, yeah. And my brother and I, during the Orthodox Church we went to, we always helped the priest out. Whatever he needed, we helped him. And a couple times, he traveled. He went to different DP camps. And he requested that my brother and I go with him to help him out.

And would you?

Oh yeah, we did, yeah.

And so did you go to services that weren't orthodox as well?

Oh yeah, went to other services, sure.

So you got an introduction.

But we did not help the priest out. We just went to other services to go to church and pray.

And were they very different?

No, it was not that different. Some were somewhat differ. But the Catholic and Protestant, it's not that much difference. I didn't see that much difference myself.

Well, I didn't know of this. But it's an unusual way for children to get exposure to other religions. It wouldn't normally have happened. Had you stayed in your own home, you might not have ever-- if the war hadn't been there, these things wouldn't have happened. But once they did, you get to meet kids who are from Czechoslovakia, from Poland. You see-- there's a bit of the wider world that is open to you.

Even though the reason for it is chaos, and terrible things, and tragedy, at this end, you're seeing more than you would have otherwise seen.

Sure.

What else did I want to ask about this? While you were in Prien, did you have a chance to visit your father in the hospital?

Yeah, we visited him one time.

One time.

One time, yeah. And then when we moved to Bad Aibling, then I think when we-- at Bad Aibling, we didn't visit him at all because that was too far. Yeah, we went by train, one time, from Prien to Regensburg, and visited him one time.

Was this the last time you saw him?

Yeah, that's the last time we saw him, yeah. And my mother was still in the hospital too. So we also went to visit her. But now when we were in Bad Aibling, she was Rosenheim. Every Sunday we went to see her by train.

Was this after your father passed away?

After the father passed away, yes.

How did you find out about that?

How what?

How did you find out that your father had passed away?

We got a phone call to the barracks that he passed away. So one of the house parents-- well, I never did find out who it was. But somebody took us to Regensburg, to the funeral.

That was my next question. So you were able to attend the funeral?

Yeah, we attended the funeral, yes. I'm not sure what town it was. I think it was Regensburg. I have a handwritten death certificate from a doctor that got it from the Red Cross. And I think it's got a town on there. I think it's Regensburg-- doctor's name and signature.

And were you given a cause of death why--

No, no.

And did you follow the casket to the graveyard?

Yes.

So did you see the place where he would be buried at that time?

Yes and no. There were a lot of people there. And they carried him to the grave and put the casket in the grave. And of course I was beside myself. So was my brother and my mother.

Was she there?

She was there too, yes. They brought her in the wheelchair, yes. That's what makes me think she must have been in the same hospital at that time. But then, later on, she was in different hospitals. After father died, then she was in [? Weinstadt ?] Hospital. I think she was there in Regensburg when father died. And then she was in--

Eichstadt did you say?

No, [? Weinstadt. ?] And then they moved her to-- not too far away from Bad Aibling. Rosenheim.

Rosenheim.

Moved her to Rosenheim.

And Victor and I, we could go every Sunday by catching a train. We walked into town, catch a train, then go to Rosenheim, then walked up to the hospital.

Still little boys on their own in post-war Germany.

We had to do it. That's the only way we could have done anything at all-- on our own.

Who-- you said there were a lot of people at your father's funeral.

There were a lot of people from Weisenberg.

And from the DP camp.

DP camp, yeah, Weisenberg.

So other Ukrainians who he had gotten to know and--

Mm-hmm.

What had happened to your uncle Ivan? Has he come into the picture again?

Yes. He comes into the picture later on, after Red Cross, when they were looking for my father's grave. They located that he left Auschwitz. And he was in the German army. And then, when the war was over, he went back to Ukraine and got married, and got himself in trouble, and I don't know what else.

But anyway, he died. So I never did get to see him. But I did get to see his family. Well, pictures. I got to see his family in pictures. His wife died by the time we located him. And his son and daughter married. We were sending, back and forth, letters and things like that. And we got to see their pictures. They sent us pictures. They were in Black Sea, in a boat.

On vacation? Like vacation pictures?

Well, that's where they lived. That's where they lived. I guess on vacation, yeah. But that's where they lived.

Like they lived in Odessa or someplace?

Well, it's right on the outskirts of Odessa, yeah. Not too far from there is that Russian submarine.

Do you know what kind of trouble your uncle got himself into?

[EXHALES SHARPLY] Drinking.

Ah, so not political trouble.

Not political, no, no, drinking. And he died something like in '86 or something like that. And of course Red Cross didn't locate him until 2009 or '10 before Red Cross located him, whenever--

So for well over 50 years, you didn't know what had happened to him.

No. We were sure that he was killed. Like we were sure that same thing happened to our grandparents, that they were killed because of age.

I see.

But evidently he survived the war. And he made it, and he got married, he got in trouble, and then he died.

Yeah. But there was nobody in your family who made it to the Western part of Europe, into the DP camps, aside from your two parents. And your father dies, and then your mother, who is sick, and the two of you.

Yeah.

He does not figure in there. Uncle Ivan. Is not in the picture.

No.

OK. Did you see any progress in your mother as you would go to visit her? Would she start getting better?

Yeah, somewhat. Somewhat. We could see when she could walk. I think it was the left side that she was paralyzed. She could move her hand somewhat. No, the right side-- right side. Because she's right-handed. And she couldn't write your name. She could move her hand up and down. And she could walk with a big limp and things like that.

And of course biggest increase in her problem was when she came over to America. That was the biggest increase.

She had more problems when she came over to--

Oh no, she didn't have problems. Biggest increase in her condition.

Oh, I see. In betterment.

Better, yeah.

OK, improvement.

Improvement, yeah.

OK. We'll come to that. So she's in Rosenheim. And you are in Bad Aibling.

Bad Aibling, yes.

And do you know about how far the distance is between the two places.

I would say about 20 miles, roughly, I would say. I don't know right off hand. I would say 20 miles.

So let's talk about Bad Aibling now.

OK.

You're moved from Prien to Bad Aibling. And was that a different kind of situation, or was it also an orphanage?

Orphanage, same as-- it's just a different place. And more room, more space, and a different kind of food because they had different cooks. They fed us, like, I don't know, five, six times a day they fed us.

Wow.

They tried to-- we were so skinny. I mean, you could count every rib on my chest. You could see the bones on my fingers. That's how skinny we were. And they're trying to fatten us up.

Nighttime, before we go to bed, they give us a little glass of milk and a couple of cookies. That was the last thing that we had. That was one time. We had dinner. That was two times. The afternoon, middle of the day, we had a cookie or something to drink. That was four times. Lunchtime-- six times, five times. So six times a day they fed us. And that was

good-- good food. I was satisfied.

Now, in that book that you have, that you read that was in a library or something-- homeless, in that book, a lot of kids were not satisfied with the food. I was tickled to death with that food. I was satisfied.

When you have nothing to eat, when you're starving, when you're eating out of a trash can, anything's better than eating out of a trash can. And that food was good that we had. I was happy. But some kids were not satisfied.

Now, where they come from, I don't know. What they were doing there, I don't know. I can't answer that question. But I read that book. And I found out that some were not satisfied. And I was surprised. I was really surprised.

Was there any schooling going on?

Schooling, OK. Because you hadn't been to school at all.

No, till now, we had not. But in Bad Aibling, in 1949, let's say--

You're 12 years old.

I was, yeah, 12 years old. And I still have not been to school. But they started English. Everybody had to take English for one hour a day. And then you get German, then you get a history, then you get arithmetic. And then, for the rest of the day, in the afternoon, usually you get like shop work.

Ah, some sort of vocational training.

Some kind of vocational school, yes. Now, I had shoe repair, shoe-making. I can make a pair of shoes in no time at all. Because--

People needed food.

We had good teachers.

Yeah. And they needed to have something to wear.

I had a good teacher. And they showed us how to do it. He had all the patterns. So size 9 and 1/2, size 10, size 11, 11 and 1/2.

Could you still make a pair of shoes today?

No, I don't think so.

[CHUCKLES]

I might be able to repair a pair of shoes, put a patch on a heel or someplace like that, or put a heel on, or half soles. I might be able to do that. Make a pair of shoes is a little bit more difficult.

But yeah, he told us how to do it. And he was a German ex-Nazi. He showed us a lot of stuff. We learned a lot from him.

How did he get to work there with you in this orphanage, somebody who was an ex-Nazi?

Oh, him?

Yeah.

I don't know how he got there. But he was there every day. He might have stayed--

How did you know he was a Nazi?

He told us.

He told you.

Yeah, he told us. I mean, when you're sitting in a workshop watching somebody do something, or like him instructing something, you pay attention to what he's saying. And then you ask questions. And that's how we found out.

And he was a right big character. I can tell you that right now. He was a character. But he was a good guy. He knew his business.

And of course, over there, a pair of shoes, you might have it-- as long as the exterior is OK, you have your souls, your heels, repaired for a couple of dollars instead of buying a new pair of shoes. And it was-- all was well. But here in America, you just throw it out and get a new pair of shoes.

Yeah. Well, shoes were important.

Yes, shoes were important. If you don't wear the right shoes, you can ruin your feet. And I have been to doctors quite a few times because I did not wear a right pair of shoes.

Now, during the time that was the hard time, when you were taken from your home to Auschwitz and so on, did you have a pair of shoes that you had had on when you were taken?

I think I did. I'm not sure. I know I was cold in Auschwitz. I can tell you that right now. It was cold when the cold snap started coming in, in the fall. It started snowing in September and all that. I was cold, working outside, helping my father.

I'm not sure what I had for shoes. I must have had something. I know in Prien I had a pair of shoes. I remember that. A pair of shoes were given to me. And they were my size. And same thing in Bad Aibling. They had a birthday party every month for somebody that has a birthday during that month. And in July, it was my birthday. Now, there were, I don't know, two or three other kids that had birthday in July, out of 200 kids, something like that. And I got a pair of shoes, tennis shoes. They were maybe two inches too big for me, something like that. But I was tickled to death with them shoes. I walked him shoes until they were completely worn out. I just put paper in the toe and they fit.

It sounds like you weren't very fussy.

No, I wasn't. I'm not hard to please. But if somebody is wasteful, wasting food or something like that, that bothers me. I mean, a lot of people, you go see in a restaurant, they order something, no, they just throw it out. I don't like it. It doesn't taste right or something like that.

To me, if I get something, I go ahead and eat it whether I like it or not. If I got it, I eat it.

Was there any talk at that time, when you were in Bad Aibling, about going back to the Ukraine, about returning back to where you had come from?

No, not a word. Because we lost our father. Mother was in the hospital, ill. We didn't know what was going to happen with her. So nothing was said.

I did find out, from the papers that we got from Red Cross, that our father, before he died, some of them papers that he filled out for police department before the war was over, he put on there, well, we want to migrate to Canada.

"Winnypool--"

Winnipeg.

Winnipeg, Canada. That's where we want to go. Now, that was news to me. I never heard about that. He never said anything. Of course I guess he probably knew that it was just a dream. So that was never going to happen. I don't know whether he did or he didn't.

Well, this brings me to another point. You have gotten your papers from the Red Cross. That is, you did a search through the Red Cross to get documents about your post-war years. And we found some of them through the international tracing service at the museum. And it seems they're the same documents.

Now, in those documents, the place of your birth is given not as "Chirichenko--" how is it that your real town, what is it called, in Poltava region, where you're born.

It's right there at the top of that paper there.

OK, take a look. For some reason, I just can't remember how to pronounce it. [? Chyparivka . ?]

[? Chyparivka, ?] all right. Not [? Chyparivka, ?] in the Poltava region, but a place called Stavok in the region of Lviv, in the Lviv region, Rivne and Lviv and so on. Why is that?

OK, that was done-- my father, he did that. Nazis, they we're looking for different people from certain areas. And that was an area that we were in. They were looking for those people. So my father, he just put on there that we from Poland instead of Ukraine.

Nazis were looking for such people or Soviets were looking for such people?

Nazis were looking for those people before the war was over.

Before the war was over.

Oh yeah, when he first filled out paperwork for police department. You know, once a month, he had to fill out the papers?

Yeah.

That's when he filled that out, that we were from Poland, we were not from Ukraine.

And what was the advantage in doing that?

So we wouldn't be in any trouble. Because of people that were from that particular area--

In Ukraine.

--in Ukraine, they were in trouble. And they would be in trouble. If they would have got a hold of us, they would have probably killed us.

How interesting. See, I made an assumption that it was a post-war type of thing because of repatriation, that if you came from the Soviet part of Ukraine, there was more a greater chance that you would be repatriated to the Soviet part of Ukraine, whereas if you had said you came from the Polish part, what was Poland before the war, you might not be repatriated. That was my assumption. And you're saying that's not the case.

Well, my father said it was not the case. [CHUCKLES]

OK, so this is a pre-war thing.

Yeah.

But it stays on all of those documents from post-war time too.

Post-war, yes.

So he didn't change it.

No, I didn't change it. It's changed now. Because it's changed from the time that we came to America. It's changed. But before that it's not changed, no. Because I didn't even know that there were so many different documents. I didn't know that he had to fill it out once a month. I didn't know that. I found that out. And then I started getting all these papers from Red Cross, and then I found out some more.

And when did this start happening? When did you first start getting documents that you didn't even know the existence of?

Well, when I asked the Red Cross to look into-- see if I can find my father's grave. And that was in 2003, '04-- either '03 or '04.

So we're talking almost 60 years-- not quite 60 years after he dies. Like 57 years, something like that. That's when you start looking for your father's grave and you start getting documents.

Mm-hmm.

And that's when you see these different forms that he filled out and that were-- OK.

Yeah. I didn't know that something like that existed.

But he had told you that-- how did you know that-- did he tell you when he was still alive that he was saying you were all from Poland because the Nazis were looking for people from the Soviet part of Ukraine?

No, he didn't tell us that. So how did you know why this was--

Our mother told us that.

Ah, OK.

Because he was already dead when she told us.

Oh, I see. I see. OK, OK. OK. OK, back to Bad Aibling. Who was running Bad Aibling?

It was Americans, United Nations, Australians, different countries that were involved.

Were the Quakers involved?

Different countries. Yeah, Italy was involved, France was involved. They were like about five different countries that were involved, and different organizations were involved in running Bad Aibling.

Because they had inspections. Once a week they had inspections. They come around. They start asking questions. They might be there for breakfast or lunch, or dinner they might be there. Start asking questions about the food-- how do you like it, what do you need, and things like that.

And was Bad Aibling also in a-- were you in a hotel like you had been in Prien?

No. No, Bad Aibling was a military installation. German army air force.

So it was the old military installation of the German air force.

Mm-hmm.

OK. And so you lived in those barracks?

Yes.

OK.

We were the first ones there, in 1948, till '51.

You were there three years.

And about--

Might have been four years. I'm not sure now. Might have been from '47. Might have been '47. I'm not sure.

That's a good chunk of time.

Oh yeah, yeah, definitely. And we were well taken care of-- well taken care of, with food, clothing, everything we need, education.

In '49.

'49-- that's when it started-- '50, and '51, for three years.

And I mean, did you have any adults there who actually took a personal interest in you as children?

Well, yes. House parents, they're supposed to take personal interest. And they did. Natalie-- Mr. And Mrs. Kent is what I call them. I have pictures of them over here. I'll show them to you. They took special interest in Victor and I. And they wanted to adopt this. But they couldn't adopt us because we still had a mother that was alive. And she was getting better.

Did you want to be adopted?

At that time, I didn't know anything. I didn't know anything about the adoption until 1998 either '98 or '99. That's when I found out about it. Diana and I, we went to see Natalie, Mrs. Kent.

Mrs. Natalie Kent?

We went to see her.

And Diana is your wife?

In Maine.

In Maine. In what year?

1998 or '99. I'm not sure. One of them two years.

OK, so she had been your house parent.

After I retired. I retired in '98. And we had a motor home. We packed up the motor home. And we went to see her. And we stayed with her for a week, 10 days, something like that. And that's when she asked me if I knew. I didn't. That was the first time I heard of it.

But to answer your question, if I didn't have a mother, yes, I would have gone with her. Because she was nice to us. She was really nice to us. Her and the caseworkers, they were supposed to take extra-special interest in you. And Joan Atkins, she did. And I'll show you a picture of her. I think she was then, early '50s or late '40s, she was just straight out of school. And she came over to help us out.

So in the 1940s and '50s, she was just a young woman who had finished school.

Very young, yeah. Same thing with Natalie. I mean, Mr. and Mrs. Kent, they just got married. And they were over there, helping us out. They were young.

Were they Quakers?

They were Quakers, yes.

So was there Quaker involvement in running the place?

Oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah, there were a lot of Quakers there. In fact, Mr. and Mrs. Kent were Quakers. I'm not positive, but I think that Joan Atkins was Quaker. We had some house parents that were Quakers. There were quite a few Quakers there, quite a few.

And they took extra care of us. Like for example, Joan Atkins, she had a place that she bought in the mountains. One year, in I don't know, '51-- no, couldn't have been '51-- had to have been '49 or '50, we had like two feet of snow on the ground. And it was great for skiing, especially at her lodge which she had up in the mountains.

So she took Nicky, his brother, me and my brother, the four of us, and I don't know, and somebody else. I think there was somebody else there. Oh, I think she took-- well, I'm not sure now who it was. But anyway there was somebody else. And took us up to [INAUDIBLE] that place up in the mountains, and let us ski the whole afternoon.

That must have been a treat.

Up and down the hill. In Germany-- well, not now, but then-- when you ski, you enjoy going down the hill. Now, you think about good exercise going up a hill.

Oh my goodness.

[CHUCKLES]

I was thinking, boy, you were tired out by the end of that day.

Yes, we were. But we were kids. We didn't mind it.

Yeah, of course not.

We didn't mind it at all. We enjoyed it. And we were very grateful for it. And yeah, what else can you say for somebody that does that for you? They really care. And they did that for us.

How many kids were there in Bad Aibling?

Any given time, there were at least between 250 to 300 kids, any given time. But at some times there were as many as 500.

Wow. And you were there from the very beginning.

We were there from the time that-- we opened the place up. There was a stream running through the middle of the military installation. One half of it was for orphanage, the other half was for families, a DP camp for families. And I don't know what nationality, maybe any nationality. I'm not sure. Just like orphanage, it was for any nationality at all. As long as you're under 18 years of age, you qualify to be in there.

And we had some Czechoslovakian kids that came across the border to Bad Aibling to be in the camp because they were under 18 years of age. And they needed help to get started. So they came across the border.

So was Bad Aibling close to the Czechoslovak border?

Yeah, right across the border there it was Czechoslovakia.

So it was Bavaria, probably, to Czechoslovakia.

Right, right.

And your mother was slowly getting better.

She was slowly getting better, yes. And she finally-- well, she got better when-- we talked to her by telephone right after Queen of England. That year, 1951, they finally agreed-- the doctors-- that they were going to release her to come to America. And a year or so after that she was here in America.

She came to Philadelphia, a Philadelphia nursing home. Then, from there, she went to New Windsor. She stayed in New Windsor for a while.

Connecticut, yeah.

No, Maryland.

Maryland.

Carroll County, just outside of Westminster. And from there, then everything was OK then. She was getting better. And she came here. So we were--

Did you ever live with her again?

No, we never lived with her again. Victor, he worked on a farm.

We're talking about the United States now.

Yes, on a farm, yeah.

OK, so I'll get back, still, to Bad Aibling. What was the language that you spoke with one another, the kids?

German. Or if they had just arrived, they didn't know enough German to speak, then we spoke their own language. And like I said, I could speak seven different languages when I came over here. I learned that from the kids, speaking to the kids.

So what were the seven? Tell me.

OK, Ukrainian, Russian, Poland-- "jak sie masz" and so on, you know-- Czechoslovakian-- German.

Well, German, yes, Yugoslavian, and Bulgarian.

There you have it.

But they're so close together. You know, they're similar.

Aside from German, they're--

No, German is little different. German is a little different.

But they're all Slavic.

Yeah, Slavic, that's the ones I'm talking about. So close together. You know, it's just--

Did you make best friends there? Did you have any close friends?

Yes, I made all kinds of friends with-- I'll show you the pictures. Boy Scouts-- we had a Boy Scout group. And we made a lot of friends. We went camping almost every weekend or every other weekend up in the Alps. And we went there without taking a bite of food with us. And we survived. We learned how to fish. And we learned how to fix the fish. We learned how to do everything for us, ourselves, so that we can survive. And that's what we did.

Well, it sounds like it was a relief after all that you had been through.

Oh, definitely, a big relief, big relief.

And if I asked before that awful question, were there children in Auschwitz could play? And you said, no, there weren't. They didn't. They were too upset and too scared.

They were.

Then, at this point, it looks like you could relax. And even though some of the children truly were orphans, you could play. You could have fun.

It was different, yes. Bad Aibling was entirely different than Auschwitz.

[CHUCKLES]

Auschwitz, you knew what Auschwitz stood for. And of course I didn't because I was just a dumb farmer just came there.

You were a little boy.

Yeah, I didn't know that. But I learned that Auschwitz is nothing to mess with. Although Auschwitz was one place. And there was another place that we were-- no, I don't know whether that was a death camp or not. There was one place that we stopped in, going by train from Auschwitz to Nuremberg, we stopped by--

Buchenwald?

No, it starts with a D.

Dachau?

Yeah, I think that's what it was. Outside of Munich?

Yeah, Dachau.

OK, that's it. We stopped there. But we didn't stay. We couldn't get off of the train. They told us to stay on a train. And they did something there and changed something. And then we went on to Nuremberg from there.

OK. So you learned these different languages from the different-- from the kids from these countries. You were there from the beginning till at least 1951. What happened? Why is it that you didn't stay? Were they closing the place?

They were closing the place, yes. I have pictures right there, the closing ceremonies. And they had parties with all the Quakers and the house parents that-- parties.

Did most of the kids-- were most of them really orphans?

As far as I know, yes, but I can't say for sure. They didn't have no parents. The ones that I know, Nicky and Alex, the two brothers that they thought they were Ukrainians, and then they found out that they were Russians, they definitely are--

Orphans.

--orphans. And they were adopted. When they came to America, they were adopted. And let's see, who else? Mitka-- oh with Mitka, that's different story with Mitka. He is a fella that's living in Reno, Nevada. And he's got a huge family. I have pictures of him. When he goes on vacation, he has to have a-- I think it's a 40-foot motorhome or something like that to go on vacation with his family because it's so big.

And also I don't know what happened with him, but Natalie, the house mother that we had, she told me to watch out for him because he doesn't always tell the truth.

[CHUCKLES]

So I don't know. I socialized with Mitka when he was in Bad Aibling. And I know that he was different from anybody else. He spoke differently, he acted differently. But I did know that there was something wrong with him. And he also ran away from Bad Aibling. And they picked him up someplace in Rosenheim or someplace they picked him up. Then they kept him in the hospital for three or four days, trying to find out if there's something wrong with him. And I never did find out whether there is or isn't.

And he tells a story that, well--

Well, if you don't think that it may be true, then let's not--

I don't know. I don't know, so I'm not going to say.

OK, so yeah, from this, I get a sense that, yes, you did have friends there.

Oh yeah.

And that they were real orphans.

Yes.

Your situation might have been one that was a little bit more unusual that you had your mother still around. And when they closed the camp, what was going to happen with you and your brother? Where were you going to go? Had that already been arranged?

Well, that was arranged to come to America.

Through what organization?

United Nations.

UNRA?

UNRA. As far as I know, that's what was arranged. But they didn't ask us any questions. But they told us, you're going to America-- fine. What's going to happen to mother? Well, she's going stay behind. She's signed the papers to release us to come by ourselves. And if she gets better, than she was going to come later. That's the way it was arranged.

And she did get better. And she came later. And then she had that accident where she burned herself.

When was this?

In 1963.

And what happened to her?

She was working, helping somebody do some cooking on the outside grill or something. And she had them long clothes on. And I don't know, they had a fire going. And her skirt caught on fire. And of course, with her being handicapped--

It was hard for her to put it out.

Yeah. She burned herself. She was something like 70% burnt, through the whole body. And they took her to the Lancaster Hospital. And she lived for almost a week, 10 days, something like that. And then she died.

So you lost her when you were a young man.

Yeah. I remember that was September 1963.

Sounds like she had a hard life.

Well, take the good with the bad, I guess. So what else are you going to do?

Yeah. So when you were told that you were coming to the United States, did you know where you were going?

No.

So tell me, what was it like coming over? How did you get over here?

OK, when we left there were 13 of us. I have the names over there and all. And I have a copy of that C. C. Ballou, the ship that--

C. C. Ballou, mm-hmm.

--that brought us over here, and the write-up. But it's all in German. Once everybody was OKed to come over here, caseworkers took us all to train station in Munich, put us on the train, and told the conductor, these 13 kids, they don't

get off until they get to Bremerhaven. That's all the way across Germany.

That's right.

So we stayed on the train all day long until we got to Bremerhaven. Bremerhaven, we get off. And they took us to a barracks. Somebody was there looking for us. And once we got there, they took us to a barracks. And we waited, I think, another week or so. And then they put us on a boat. And the boat, one week, seven days, from Bremerhaven to New York City.

And in New York City, we came one afternoon, late afternoon. And we just couldn't believe-- we were close to New York City. And we just couldn't believe how dirty it was. Paper flying all over the place. It was windy. We left Germany. It's so nice and clean. And New York City is just like a dump.

Well, anyway, we stayed-- I have the address over there-- at a Jewish settlement in New York City. And we stayed there for two weeks. And they treated us great, gave us a quarter a week for helping them wash the dishes and things like that. And I think it took us like \$0.10 to go to a movie and a nickel to buy a candy bar or something like that. It was OK, nice.

And we stayed there until Family and Children's Society showed up. And they took my brother and me to Grand Central Station. And we came to Baltimore. And then they put us on a farm with Mr. and Mrs. Cole in Parkton. And everything was fine.

I helped Mr. Cole as much as I could with whatever I could. We stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Cole. She was a schoolteacher and he was a farmer. And then, next thing you know, a couple weeks later, he dies.

Oh.

I don't know why. No reason at all that I know of. But he died. And Family and Children's Society says, well, you can't stay with two women then, because her daughter was living with her. So they found us another place in Woodbine, Carroll County.

So but while we stayed with Mrs. Cole, I went to school in Baltimore City, Vocational School 298, on North Avenue and Broadway. I'll remember that as long as I live because that was a vocational school. And this is what I needed, what I wanted. And that was nice.

And then they find us a place in Woodbine with Mr and Mrs. Crumb, on a farm. And he has a dairy farm, a huge dairy farm, 250 acres or something like that. Oh, that was great. We went there right away and started working. And then--

Were you taken as foster children there?

Yes.

Was that the idea? You're foster children.

Yes, yes.

OK.

Well, Family and Children's Society, that's the only way you can go. And they took care of us. He had dairy cows. We got up-- at least I got up 3 o'clock every morning. Go back down to the barn. Fed the cows. And then he would show up by 6 o'clock. And Victor would show up by 6 o'clock. And we milked the cows. I forget now. It was 70 cows or something like that. They had to be milked.

Same way as in the Ukraine?

No, no, no, no, no. Ukraine, did it by hand.

Yeah?

Here, you had milkers. He had Surge Milkers. Put the milkers--

OK, let's cut.

Yeah, wait till she gets the phone.

So this was a different way of doing it. This was mechanized.

Oh yeah. He had Allis-Chalmers tractors. And I worked quite a few nights, late, plowing a field with two-bottom plows or three-bottom plows, whatever he had there, Allis-Chalmers WD tractor. And what else was it?

Oh, and I was going to school at that time, in Mt Airy. He also-- Mr. Crumb had a son that was-- let's see, I was 16 at that time. He had a son that was, I think, 10 or 12. I'm not sure. Younger than Victor.

Anyway, but he was a little bit on the lazy side, so to speak.

The son.

His son. He wasn't too encouraged about working or anything like that. He wanted somebody else to do the work. So that's fine. We did the work for him.

And then Victor was hurt one time. Victor went to get the cows and water the cows and a calf. And he got a little friendly with the calf--

And the mother didn't like it.

And the mother didn't like it. You got that right. And ran him down. And he fell over. And the cows, they take out the horns so that they couldn't hurt you. But she just knocked him down and then ran across him. And hind leg-- I don't know, the hind leg, one of the legs, got him someplace here on the muscle. And it was nasty-looking. And they had to take him to the doctors or the hospital and make sure it's cleaned out, didn't get infected. But within a couple days he was OK.

And we stayed there-- at least I stayed there-- for maybe a year or so. And then Family and Children's Society came to him, wanted him to pay me more money. And he was-- I don't know, I was satisfied but they were not satisfied. They wanted me to do a little bit more for my mother. She was ill.

And he said, no, he's not going to pay any more. Because I was still just a young kid, 16 years old. So he said if I was a little bit older then it would have been OK-- and get my driver's license. I didn't have a driver's license.

Well, you see, we talk about-- one of the reasons I asked, you went there as foster children, to me it sounds like you went as unpaid workers, or more as workers than as children to be taken care of.

Well, I thought the same thing. You know, they say one thing, but they do something different. So I don't know. One way or the other, I don't know. I was just, whatever they told me to do, I did it.

But they wanted him to pay me more money so I could take care of my mother. And I was satisfied. I didn't say a word. So they said, OK, we're going to find you another place.

Well, they probably saw you were being taken advantage of.

Yeah, well, maybe so. I don't know. But they found another place with CP [? Hackman ?] in Parkton. He had a farm, had black Angus beef cattle. And he also delivered Eastern States feed. And of course he needed somebody with a driver's license. And I didn't have a driver's license.

And he said, well, you're going to have a driver's license. OK. So he got me a driver's license. He put a ton of feed on the back of a pickup truck, and said, come on, let's go. I said, where are we going? He said, to get your driver's license.

He took me to Westminster with a ton of feed on the back of a pickup truck. He said, you're going to get your driver's license. I said OK.

So yeah, I got my driver's license. I filled out everything that I had to fill out, and took it out on a road, went around the block, parked it. OK. I said, did I pass? Yeah, you passed.

So then I delivered feed for him. He had a-- I forgot now what it was-- 100 tons of feed come from St. Louis, Missouri to Parkton, Maryland, in a freight car. And he had to unload it.

Was Victor with you too?

No, no. Victor stayed behind. And then Victor, from Crumbs, he went to Pennsylvania and lived with our mother in Pennsylvania for a while. Yeah, he lived for a while in Pennsylvania. And--

Can we cut for a second? Do you want to take a break?

So we were talking about your brother went to stay with your mother a little bit in Pennsylvania.

Yes.

Do you know about how long he stayed with her?

Well, he stayed with her until she died. But--

I see.

--also he went to school. And he worked on a farm, same farm where she worked on. She helped carry the milk. Dumped out of the milker into a bucket. And she carried bucket of milk into the dairy room. And in the dairy room, she put it through a strainer and so on. And Victor did the milking. And they both stayed there for a good while, maybe a couple of years, until Victor finished school. And then Victor, he got married.

And your mom stayed in the same place?

Yeah, she stayed in the same place. And then Mom, she found somebody else that needed a cleaning lady. And she could clean. So she went for an interview. And she got the job.

So she moved over to this one couple that needed a cleaning lady. And she worked over there until she had the accident. Yeah, until she had an accident in '63-- yeah, in 1963.

But you say she was disabled too.

Yeah, she was disabled. She was walking with a limp. She didn't have full strength in her right hand. She could hold a paper in her right hand or something like that, or hold a pencil. But she could not sign her name with her right hand.

OK. So it was not such a disability that she couldn't do some manual labor. Because clearly, carrying those milk cans, you were doing that.

She used her left hand. And then she used her right hand to get the bottle and dump the bucket.

I see. But it was not easy for her.

No, I'm sure it wasn't. I'm sure it wasn't. But that was about an hour a day, something like that. An hour in the morning, an hour in the afternoon, two hours a day.

Oh, that's not a lot. That's not-- no, that's not a lot.

That's about what she spent. She might've spent a little bit more time there by washing the milkers and things like that.

Now, here's a question that may be a little bit unfair but I'll ask it anyway-- I mean, unfair to your mom. Did you feel, after she fainted in the choir, back in Germany, and then got paralyzed, and then was sick, did you ever really have a mom again? Was she your mom in that sense of--

No, in a sense of speaking, no, she wasn't. But technically speaking, yes, she was my mom.

But as someone who looks out for you, someone who you can go to--

No, she didn't do that part. That part right there, actually, she lost that. She didn't do that at all. So I just had to overlook that and forget about that. I didn't know whether that's going to be for forever or what.

But by the time she got over it, by the time she came over here to America, I was already married and I was of age. And I was doing OK. I really didn't need her help. But I needed to help her. So that's the way I was looking at it.

So when your brother then goes to Pennsylvania, you're still working for this guy who got you that driver's license.

Yeah.

How long did you work for him?

Oh, from 1954 to-- two years, I guess, 2 and 1/2 years.

OK. So by that point, you're 19 years old.

Yes, yes.

What happens when you're 19, when you stop working for him?

I signed up for the military. I went in the army. I wanted to go to the Rangers, but the Rangers were filled up at that time. They didn't have enough to start another class.

So they told me to wait a while. So I waited a while. But that time never came. So I just said, OK, I'm just going to go ahead and sign up for whatever you have available. Because, since I was signing up, I had my choice of whatever I wanted to. Now, if I would have got drafted, that would have been a different situation. But at that time they were still doing a draft. That was 1956.

So what did you choose?

So I just chose, well, what whatever was going to be available. And what they had available was automotive. I said, fine. So they put me through the school, automotive school. I had the certification. I had the degrees. I could take care of cars running at that time, in 1956, up to '59.

But when I got discharged and I tried to find a job, where we were living, there was nothing there.

Were you married by that point?

Yeah, we got married, yeah. So the only place I could go was in Baltimore, taxi cab company. But if I go to Baltimore, that would take me two hours in the morning, two hours in the afternoon to get back home again. So I would spend four hours a day driving on the road. Because in those days, 83 was not open yet.

And where were you living?

We were living in Parkton, on Mount Carmel Road. And we had to use 111 from Baltimore all the way up to Hereford. Had to use 111. And that took time.

So the neighbor to where we used to live, he was at our wedding, Corky Bailey. And he said to me at the reception, if you can't find a job, I have a job for you. And I said, what's that? He said, working at Black & Decker.

Well, I knew what it was. And I said to myself, when I was working at [? Eickmann's, ?] before I went in the service, I will never work in a factory. I just didn't think I would like to work in a factory.

OK, so 1956, I went in the army. And then I got discharged in '59. And Corky came to me and told me that he had a job for me. I said, OK.

So he took me in one afternoon and signed me up. And I was to report for work that night, third shift. So I said, OK. But see, I already had the training while I was in Baltimore-- vocational school, I had the training. And I had the training when I was in Mt Airy school, on sheet metal working, and power tools, and use of instruments, things like that. I had the training on

Them. So while I was at Black & Decker, they checked me out. And yeah, they were satisfied with the way I was doing the job. I could read the blueprints. And so they promoted me to a planner. The planner that they head, he took another job or something. I don't know. And so they promoted me to a planner.

We had to move, then, from Towson to Hampstead. So we moved from Towson to Hampstead. And started everything fresh in Hampstead.

And they give me a stack of blueprints. And my job was to make up a operation cards, how to get that part done, how much it would cost to get the part done, and so on, like for military or for private contractor that wants some parts.

So you needed estimates and specifications.

Right. That's what it amounted. So OK, so I learned how to do that in no time at all because I was already trained for that, some of it. So that's what I was doing for Black & Decker.

But I still had a mind about automotive job. But then we moved to Hampstead from Towson. And we started in Hampstead in 1970. OK, 1970, from there, all right, so first of all, they had openings in [? Tarboro, ?] [? Maryland. ?] And I turned them down in [? Tarboro. ?] Because Diana didn't want to leave her family. And I don't blame her.

So I turned that job down. So they offered me a job in Easton. Well, that was close enough-- two hours away-- so I accepted that job. Then I had that job, then, from 1975 until 1998.

So you had your career at Black & Decker.

Yes, I had my career with Black & Decker, not that I wanted to, but that's what I did anyway. I had a career with Black & Decker for almost 20 years. And I wanted to get 40 years in. But I couldn't. I had to leave. They were moving. They were moving to Mexico, and I didn't know that.

Were you happy during the time you worked, Though was it satisfying work?

Oh, yeah, it was. It was OK. It was fine work. I didn't have no problems.

OK. We've come full circle. And my last questions have to do with going-- with Europe again. Did you ever, before you retired, go back to Europe to visit the places you had been in?

Yes, I have.

Mm-hmm. What years were these?

Well, first off, we went back with a church group. A Lutheran minister took us. It was 1998.

So just about when you finished Black & Decker.

When I finished with Black & Decker, yes, when I retired. The minister, he needed a couple more to fill in his roster. So we signed up. And he took us to Germany, France, Europe.

Were these any of the places you had lived in?

Yes. When he found out that I was in an orphanage in Bad Aibling, he got the bus driver to go through Bad Aibling. But I didn't see anything in Bad Aibling when they took us through there.

So he circled around. He went back to Austria. We went to Garmisch-Partenkirchen. We went there and a couple other places.

Oh, in Austria, we also find out-- we learned something that we didn't know. In Austria, when they bury somebody, they bury them standing up. Did you know that?

I knew that that happened in some countries.

Yeah, that's Austria. And we didn't know that. You know, usually they lay somebody down. But in Austria you're standing up. That's how they bury you.

And I've heard from other people I've interviewed that sometimes those plots are not forever in Austria, that they can be resold because there's no land.

Ah, oh, well, that could be. I don't know. But then, after that, in 2003, we went back to Germany, Bad Aibling. And we stayed in Bad Aibling for a week.

And that's yourself and your wife.

Right, yeah. We were looking for my father's grave.

Were you able at least to identify the cemetery he was buried in?

No, I didn't go there. We made a phone call to Regensburg. He died at Regensburg Hospital. Made a phone call. And they said, no, he is not buried here. So that was the end of that.

Do you know the date of his death?

Yes, I have a date, yeah. I have a birth certificate the day he died.

The death certificate, yeah.

Yeah. It's a handwritten death certificate.

Yeah. Did you ever go back to the Ukraine?

No, never went back to Ukraine. I did not go back to Ukraine. Because when I was in the service, training that I had, my commanding officer told me, if I ever go back to Ukraine, they're going to-- I don't know. Let's see, how did he say? "The Soviets are going to get you" or something like that. And I don't know, he sort of scared me.

Then he said to me, if you ever go back, make sure that we know about it. So my brother, he went, I don't know, three or four times I think he went back. Three times anyway.

And he asked me if I wanted to go. And a couple of times I couldn't go because of my heart. Doctor told me I couldn't travel to Ukraine. Because if anything happens, I didn't have insurance.

But you told me, I believe, either off camera-- it might have even been on-- that your brother never found your village. Is that right?

Yeah, he found the village. But there's nothing there. I have pictures right there, to show you, of the church in the village. It says [? Chyparivka ?] 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, you know, the view.

Right. OK, [? Chyparivka . ?] But there's nothing there except the church and the cemetery.

There's a church and cemetery. That's the only thing that's there. And right next to it, I don't know, a couple miles away, there is a small village there. The name's on the back of the picture. And he looked at that picture. That's what I wanted to show you-- the roofs and the houses, how they were made. Because what we lived in was exactly the same as what this is. Stucco-- it was made out of stucco. And the roof is a straw roof.

OK. Well, that's what we'll do right now. And Mr Bojko, thank you very, very much for sharing your story with us today, for taking us through the tough times, the hard times, and sharing with us the things that brought you contentment and joy, and making this available for people who had no idea that these kinds of experiences happened.

You are welcome.

With this, I will say this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Paul Bojko on August 24, 2017, in Trappe, Maryland. And now we will film some photos. OK.

Thank you.

OK, so I'm rolling.

OK, Mr. Bojko, tell me, what is this photograph of?

This photograph is of my family-- my dad, mom, Victor, and me.

And you're holding something. A ball? Are you holding a ball there? Victor is holding a ball. I'm holding an accordion.

Oh, but I thought you were the older brother and he's the younger brother.

He is.

He looks taller than you.

No, it's just the way he's standing.

Oh, I see. OK, sorry. That's right. That's right. Now I see you are the older one.

And about what year was this taken?

1943.

Do you remember when it was taken?

Not really, no.

Not really. OK. And you parents look quite young.

Yes, they were right young. I don't know exactly what age they were, but they were right young.

OK. Thank you. Then you can pan to the other side after we start talking.

OK.

OK, can you tell me, Mr Bojko, what is this a photograph of?

This is a photograph of a wagon with straw or hay on it, and a house next to it with a straw roof-- stucco house with a straw roof.

And that was like your house?

Yes, exactly like our house, yes.

And about when was this photograph taken, do you think?

This was taken 1943.

Excuse me. It couldn't have been '43. This is when your brother went back.

Oh, that's right. That's right. I don't have my glasses. I can't see.

We're going to-- let's cut. We'll do this [INAUDIBLE].

OK, oh, excuse me.

Pardon me. We've cut. OK.

OK, Mr. Bojko, tell me, what is this photograph of?

This photograph is of Maria's house in [? Chyparivka . ?]

Except that it doesn't exist anymore, [? Chyparivka . ?]

No, it doesn't exist anymore. But that's on the property where it used to be. And the house is made just like the house that we used to have, with stucco around it and a straw roof. The roof is made out of straw.

OK, I'm a little confused. Because is this house built on the same spot where your parent's house used to be?

Well, I don't know exactly it's the same spot. It's approximately this same location, yes.

OK. And who is Maria?

Maria, I'm not sure. My brother tells me that Maria is my mother's sister. But the age does not work out. So I'm not sure.

OK. And did he meet her during one of his trips back.

Yes.

And about what year would this have been, this picture?

2005 approximately.

OK. All right. Thank you.

OK, Mr. Bojko, tell me, what is this photograph of?

This photograph is of a graveyard where our great-grandparents are buried. And it's in [? Chyparivka , ?] approximately the same place where our farm used to be.

OK. And you've mentioned that there is a church there.

Yes, there is a church there. But--

It looks like nothing else.

Well, I don't see anything else.

Yeah, OK. And your brother took this picture?

Yes.

In 2005?

2005, yes.

OK. Let's stop there. Thank you.

And upwards for the cross later.

OK. Got it. OK, rolling.

And tell me, what is this photograph of?

This photograph is of our great-grandfather's grave in Portachenko. And that's my brother that's kneeling down there.

So that's Victor on the left?

That's Victor on the left, yes.

And your great-grandfather was Mr. Potapenko?

Well, that's what it says. I'm not sure. [CHUCKLES]

OK. And this was, again, about 2005.

Yes, that's when the picture was taken, approximately 2005.

Thank you. Thank you.

And Mr. Bojko, this is obviously your brother again, brother Victor. And whose grave is this?

This is the grave of my great-grandmother-- supposed to be of her grave-- in [? Chyparivka. ?]

And this would have been your mother's side.

Yes.

OK. All right, thank you. OK, Mr. Bojko, then tell me, what is this photograph of? And when was it taken?

This photograph was taken right after the war, 1945. And it's my family-- father, mother, Victor, and me.

Are you in between your parents, or are you at the side of your father?

I'm on the side of my father.

OK. And everybody looks quite-- can we cut for a second? Everybody looks very young in this photograph still. Your mother looks very young. You look-- yes, you're about 8 years old, aren't you, something like that? And your father looks still quite young. And this is after all the difficulties.

6-- yeah, that's when it was taken, right after the war. That's what my brother told me. I don't know. Isn't that what he said, Diana?

I don't know about that picture.

I'm not sure then. I'm not sure.

You'll have to look at your size.

OK. And you told me, off camera, that your father had bought you new uniforms or new suits or something for this picture?

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, he got the-- well, I'll call them the outfits.

Outfits.

Outfits, yeah. It's the shorts, as you can see, and suspenders.

OK. Do you remember when this picture was taken?

No, I don't. No, not really.

OK. Thank you. Can you tell me what is this photograph of?

This photograph is of some of the people in DP camp in Weisenberg, right after the war, probably of about '46 or '47, something like that.

And this Would have been the Ukrainian DP camp.

Yeah, the Ukrainian DP camp. That's correct.

And you said, earlier, your father is standing in the back.

Yes, he's right there in the back by the pine tree.

So his head is sort of at the base of the pine tree.

Yes, yeah.

OK. Thank you. Mr. Bojko, and who is this picture of?

That picture is of me. It was taken probably about 1949, in my room in my barracks.

In Bad Aibling?

In Bad Aibling, yes, in Bad Aibling.

All right. Thank you. OK, Mr. Bojko. And who is this in the photograph?

That picture is taken in Bad Aibling, by the mess hall, of my brother and I, by the stone wall, with our friend dog in front of us.

What was the dog's name? Do you remember?

No, I don't know. We had quite a few different dogs come around. They were just stray dogs-- come around. We'd give them something to eat.

Do you know who took the picture?

I think the picture was taken by our caseworker. Well, she's no longer with us today. Diana, what was her name?

Joan.

Joan Metcalf. Just like that.

OK. Thank you. OK, Mr. Bojko, then this looks like some sort of document for you. Can you tell me what it is.

It's my ID card-- fingerprints and my picture on there.

OK. And your date of birth.

Yeah, date of birth, and the whole works is on there.

So tell me, when was the first time you saw this identity card after, you know, leaving Bad Aibling?

Well, I probably saw that-- I don't know really. I guess when I got the rest of the pictures from the Red Cross.

And this would have been in 2000 and--

2009, '10.

OK. And what did it mean to you when you saw these documents and these pictures that you got from the Red Cross? Did you ever expect to see them again?

No. I didn't know they existed, to tell you the truth.

OK. And does it have a meaning for you?

Well, it's my identification card at that time, which was in 1947, '48, '49, somewhere along in there.

OK. Thank you. OK, and can you tell me what this one is.

This is an identification card for my mother.

OK, same as you had.

Same as I had, yes, with the fingerprints and her picture.

And it's dated the third of March, 1948. And it says that her birth date is the 4th of October, 1909, which means that she would have been just 39 years old--

Yeah, that's about right.

--in this picture.

Yeah, that's about right. Because my father, when he died, he was 42, I believe.

A young man.

So that's about right. Well, the war didn't help matters. [CHUCKLES]

No. These documents, it certainly shows what they were at the time, that this was your ID card and this is her ID card. Does it have a special meaning for you outside of that, for your children, for your family?

Well, yes. It actually shows that, back in 1947, '48, we did have ID cards for everybody. And this is one of her ID cards.

OK, OK. Thank you. OK, so tell me, what is this photograph of?

OK, this is Boy Scout group in Bad Aibling.

OK. Which one are you?

I'm the second one from this end, right here, from the right.

The one who's looking in the camera?

Yeah, the one that's looking in the camera. The first one is Vassil. He is scout helper. I'm the second one. Nicky is the third one. And Victor is the fifth one. And the sixth one is Alex.

OK, so Victor is the second from the left, and Alex is the left, the final one.

Yes.

And then there's somebody in there who you don't remember.

There's two, right there, that I don't know who they are. I don't remember.

And do you think this was 1947 that this was taken?

No, it's later than that. It's probably about '48, '49, I would say.

OK. All right, thank you. OK, Mr. Bojko, can you tell me, who is this a photograph of?

This photograph is of Mr. and Mrs. Kent. They were the Quakers. And they were our house parents in Bad Aibling orphanage. They took good care of us.

And they're the ones who were thinking of adopting you.

Yes, they're the ones that were thinking of adopting us, yes, Victor and I.

And if we could pan up to the other photograph-- wonderful. And the young man in the middle, who is that?

The young man in the middle?

In the lighter jacket.

In the lighter jacket-- that's Mr. Kent.

OK. And the boys around him are--

Yeah, some orphans around there. But I think the one on the right hand side is Mitka.

Yeah, that's what's written down underneath there.

Oh, is it? OK, that's Mitka. The other two, I'm not sure who they are.

OK, you have written down there, Stoyen at the far left. And the little boy is Rodeck.

Oh, OK. OK.

So these are some of the kids. And Mr. Kent, who looks very young himself.

He does. He's just out of school. And when the orphanage closed in Bad Aibling, her and him were sent to Africa.

Ah, I see.

And he was killed in Africa.

Was he? Aw.

Yeah. He was driving a Jeep. And somehow, I don't know what happened, but it flipped over and killed him.

What a handsome young man.

It was. And they lived someplace around New York State. I'm not sure where they lived.

OK, thank you. Thank you for sharing that.