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--to repeat me.

I will. Thank you. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Jonas Mekas on June 29th, 2018 in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, New York. Thank you. Thank you for agreeing to meet with us today, to talk with us today.

Oh, welcome.

OK. I'm going to start my interview with very basic questions, and we'll develop everything from there. So my first question is, can you tell me the date of your birth?

The date of my birth is 24th of December just before sunrise 1922.

So it was Christmas Eve day?

And it's Christmas, yes--

OK.

--which, of course, was a good reason for my mother's friends to make jokes about Jesus Christ.

Oh, really? So he's come. And he's born, and he's come into the world. And where were you born?

I was born in a small village, a farming village of 20 families, Semeniskiai.

Semeniskiai.

Semeniskiai, which is 5 kilometers from Papilys and about 20 kilometers from Birzai.

Oh, OK. Birzai was a larger city in the area.

Birzai was the city of the-- Lithuania was divided in 25 [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], areas. And Birzai was the capital of one of the areas.

OK And this--

Birzai-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

Yeah, district, region.

District of Birzai--

Yeah.

--which was also about 20 kilometers from the border of Latvia. It was about less than 100 kilometers south from Riga.

A major city, a major city, yeah.

Major city of Latvia, capital-- capital of Latvia.

So you were in the northeastern corner of Lithuania.

Yes.

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OK. And the village was Semeniskiai?

Semeniskiai. Yes--

And--

--not to be mixed up with-- very often they mix up with Semeniskes. There is another similar town near the town of Alytus.

Which is the other end of the country.

[INAUDIBLE].

Yeah.

[? Almost. ?]

And you said how many people lived in that village when you were born?

In Semeniskiai?

Well, before I left, I counted all people living in Semeniskiai in those 20 families. I think I came up with 98 people.

Did everybody know each other?

Absolutely.

[LAUGHTER]

Absolutely.

And your name when you were born, can you tell us that again even though it's repetitious?

That's OK. What do you mean?

What was your name at birth?

My name was Jonas.

Jonas Mekas.

Here, they pronounce, in English land, it's as Jonas. So I accepted it, because I got tired correcting--

Yeah.

But Jonas.

Jonas. And your last name, how is it pronounced in English? Is it the same as in Lith--

In Lithuanian, Mekas. In English, I allow people to pronounce the way it's easiest for them. So most of the time, they say Mee-kas, Jonas Mee-kas or Jonas Maa-kas. Some say Maa-kas. Most of the time, I'm Mekas.

Mekas.

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Only Japanese make special effort. They ask and insist they want to pronounce my name exactly like it was pronounced where I come from.

Interesting. Interesting.

Yes.

Politeness.

Yes.

How many siblings did you have? I have a son-- oh, you-- sibling?

Siblings.

I never understood what the sibling is.

Brothers and sisters.

I have one sister and four brothers.

And you, were you the oldest, the youngest?

I was the one before the last.

Could you tell me your brothers' names and your sister's name?

My sister, who is the oldest, Elzbieta.

Elzbieta.

My mother was also Elzbieta. My father was Povilas. Povilas, which is like Paul, Povilas. And Elzbieta is like Elizabeth. Then followed Povilas--

The oldest brother.

Oldest, then Petras, Peter, and then Kostas.

Kostas.

Kostas. And then me then Adolfas.

And he was--

Adolfas, he was the youngest.

And you were born in 1922?

'22. He was '25.

And your sister, what year was she born in?

I would have to check. The birth dates of my brothers were never really recorded properly.

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Really?

Yeah.

Not in the church records or anything like that?

With some digging I can find.

Well, approximately--

In any case, OK, I begin with Adolfas, '25, '22. Kostas was '19. Petras was, I think, '15.

1915?

'15. And Elzbieta was, like, two years earlier. So that makes--

And Povilas?

Oh, pardon me, Povilas, two years earlier, '15--

'13?

Then going '13, and then going to-- Elzbieta is '10.

OK. So about 1910, she's born. And 1925 the youngest child is born. And you end up being one two, three, five brothers and one sister all told?

Four brothers and one sister, we grew up six.

Yeah.

Six of us.

Six of us. And your father's name was also Povilas?

Yes.

All right. What was his profession? Or what did he do? How did he make a living?

He was a farmer. His parents were farmers, but he always wanted to be a carpenter. At the same time as he was running the farm, he was also known in the whole area as a carpenter.

Was he good at it?

And he was very good at it. He used to make special carriages that he was really good. I know that he used to fix up people's musical instruments.

Oh, wow.

Yes.

That's something.

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Music was always around our house, musical instruments. Yeah.

Did you play any?

I played them all non-professionally.

OK, OK. And had your family been in Semeniskiai for many generations, or had they moved there from someplace else?

I have to tell you that-- and there are many details come with it to which I'm not going. But I was very sickly in my young age. And I had somehow retreated just to myself. And I had very little interest.

Then because of that, I got to know-- went into it-- was-- you know, my world was books from very, very early age. And I was not interested in the world around me. I was not much interested in the background of my family, father, mother. Only much, much many years later when it was already too late to I got interested.

So I know that at least my father's family, they were farmers. That's all I know. And I know nothing. I knew nothing. I was not interested to find out who my grandfather was or grandmother.

You didn't know them.

I did not, no.

They had died?

Yes. They were already dead.

OK.

And my mother's family, they were also farmers from Mieleisiai--

Mieleisiai.

--about 5 kilometers west, southwest. And Mieleisiai became known as the birthplace of Julius Janonis the poet. And Julius Janonis, who was a neighbor of my mother's family in Mieleisiai, was a poet who caught tuberculosis in St. Petersburg where he was studying. And he died at the age of 23 maybe or committed suicide.

Really?

But he, during the Soviet period, became the number one point of Lithuania--

And why was that?

--and became translated into, you know, all the languages and was number-- because of his-- well, you have to go through the history of that area. He grew up to a certain young maturity in 1905, which was when the first revolution took place, I would say, against the Tsarist regime. And he got very politically involved as a student. His poetry was very, in that sense, revolutionary.

So it was the--

He was the revolutionary poet of Lithuania.

So when you say Soviet period, you mean--

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Not Soviet, Tsarist.

Tsarist, yes. But when he was the number one poet during the Soviet period--

He was-- oh, yes.

Yeah. Then he was someone who's views--

Socialists, communists embraced him, because all the others were sort of patriotic, but they were Lithuania, Lithuania, Lithuania. But he was not talking about Lithuania.

What is he talking--

He was talking with his poetry about the worker.

Interesting. Coming from a farm family himself or a farming village himself?

Yes. But he left the village, you know, when he was 15. So it's like there is no childhood. And he was immediately connected himself with other students, other revolutionaries, intellectuals, poets, already in St. Petersburg. He began in Birzai.

Did his poetry speak to you?

Yes. He writes very directly, very, very simple and direct and with great feeling.

It's interesting. Many people who write as artists get co-opted sometimes by regimes that don't necessarily have the best purposes. And their art becomes in some ways propaganda.

Yeah, exploited. But the choice, they were not wrong. He was a revolutionary. And he was with the workers. And at least officially, that's what communist socialism is supposed to be.

Did you learn about him very early on, because he was in the neighborhood?

Yes. Yes, from my mother. Because he was the neighbor. His mother already was telling, you know, about how-- they were very poor, poor family. So when he was already 10, and 11, 12, they used to send him to Latvia during the summers to earn some money by working as a shepherd-- Latvian farmers needed.

So he was hired out.

And the mother used to miss him so much that she used to come to visit him, but he did not show up. She used to watch him from the woods, in the edge of the woods, so that she could see him. But he could not see her, because she didn't want that.

She did not want him to be able to see her.

Yeah, no, to break his heart, so to speak.

So you grew up with this kind of story. His mother tells your mother, and it becomes known to you about this local poet.

Yeah, you know, farmers talk to each other. And they tell each other stories. They're all there. The village where I grew up until the age of seven, eight, all the 20 families were together. They were not this like later it happened in '27, '28.

I remember reading that you said that was a great tragedy for the village.

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Yes, culture and in many ways. That's another story. So we knew each other, you know?

And we got together every day. And we could hear them laughing or fighting. And if the fight was too bad, we used to go. You know, my father used to go and try to talk. So it was part of the whole psychology of the all.

And then we sang together. Later, you could hear somewhere somebody singing a song. But when they dispersed the families into settlements, it was completely different situation.

Well, from what I understand from the history it was that there was a land reform act.

Yeah. They said, oh, look at the Danish people. Look at the German, you see? They do very well, you know?

On single farm, single family farms?

That was the motivation.

And what you're describing is much more the Russian mir system, where villages were collected in one place. That is they lived in one place.

They were not collected. They originate, they grew from there and they're one. And then the neighbor-- ah, I like you. I will be here also. And I'll be.

Yeah. No, no, no. Not--

It grew.

Yeah. I used the wrong word. It was natural. It was not a forced thing.

Yes.

But that old system, the people who worked the land lived in one sort of area.

Yes.

But the land was somewhere else. The land was not the--

The land, each one had different spots there and there and there. Later, they joined. They said, OK, each one of us should have all our little places in one place.

That's right. So that if you had different plots of land in different areas, it's all united. And you have this one larger plot from the several.

Yeah.

So this was something significant for inter-war years for Lithuania, which was agricultural country.

Economically, agriculturally, yes, it was her program. But since man does not live by bread alone--

Yeah.

--it was a negative.

[INAUDIBLE]

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To me, at least the culture, there are songs. Also, the being together and the [INAUDIBLE], many human values disappeared.

It was lost.

We became wolves.

Really?

Each one, you know, I am on my own, you know? I have my own. Before, it was all together. It was a commune.

How large--

Now, we are dreaming about getting back into commune, but destroyed them.

That happens a lot. That happens a lot. How large a farm then--

20 acres, we had the top with 20 acres.

So it would have been more in hectares. It would have been about 30 hectares or something?

I never understood the difference in size of when we say in English 1 acre. And I don't know. All I know that our farm was about-- at some point, because to improve my health, which I said that's another big story, I picked up running 1 kilometer. So we measured with my brother Adolfas. From one end to the other end of the farm was almost exactly a kilometer.

OK.

And [INAUDIBLE] that's what we used to [? do the ?] run.

And how fast could you run it?

I was actually improving, so that I even participated in competitions, 1 kilometer. 1 kilometer was my distance. And I practiced it until I was like 60, 65.

No kidding, really?

Yes.

OK.

That's the basis of my-- when people like, oh, you're 96? [? What do you mean? ?] I says, you know, you have to take care of you. It does not come--

Naturally.

Especially when there are so many temptations.

Well, one of the reasons I ask the size of the farm is because that also was significant in dividing people into classes in the inter-war years and especially when there were various occupations. So 5 acres is a small farm. 50 is already--

Like our neighbor had 40. And how that was decided was, you know, it's wet land, some marshes or woods. And then the neighbor who had 40 acres, some of it was very sandy and a lot of woods. A lot of work was needed to put into it to make into, you know, usable land.

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Was the family able to feed itself from the 20 acres?

Yes, we had enough. We had land which there was variety in earth, richness. And we grew everything that we needed to for our life. Only we needed to buy salt, just some items like that.

Was there a surplus to take to market?

Yes, that's how we farmers survived. We grew extra rye, potatoes, vegetables, which every Monday there was a market day in Birzai. And every Monday, from early-- if you read my poetry, you will find out. Every Monday, there were carriages full. The roads were full of farmers on their way to the market.

And your family, who would go?

My father with the oldest brother.

With Povilas?

Yeah.

OK.

Or sometimes just with my mother when she needed something to buy.

Did you ever join them?

Sometimes-- which was also a meeting ground. Once a week, all the farmers from different villages that befriended for one or other reason, they met there. Sometime there were some drinks was one of the--

All the people in your village that you knew, the 98 or so, were they all Lithuanian?

Yes. Yes, they were all Lithuanian.

So it was a very homogeneous group?

Yes. Yes.

Were they all--

The whole area, or, I would say, the 10 surrounding villages, there were no other people from any other nation, country, or that spoke any other language.

It was all Lithuanian.

Yes, yes.

Had your father fought in World War I, by the way?

No. No, no.

He didn't. He stayed on the farm.

Yes. I don't know the details.

OK.

All I know that he-- oh, no, no. He was drafted in the army.

Tsar's army?

But he did not fought. He was in the Russian Tsarist army, because he was telling about how they used to train them. But he was not in the 1914.

OK. And also, he had been drafted in the Tsarist army, but he wasn't fighting in First World War?

Then at some point, he finished, you know, how many years a lot of, many years.

Then he ended back on the farm.

Did he have brothers and sisters?

He had one brother, who lived in one nobody villages. I found out that later. I did not even know that he was his brother.

And your mother, did she have brothers and sisters?

She had a brother and a sister. The sister never got married. She stayed always with her brother. And her brother was, became, Reformed Protestant pastor. That area, he started to-- that's also connected to why I ended up here.

OK.

He studied in Switzerland, in Germany, and Austria. He spoke several languages. But that area, the area of Birzai-- OK, Lithuania got Christianized on paper when Jogaila--

Jogaila.

--Polish, Poland said, we need a king. We will give you a kingdom if you marry--

Jadwiga.

--Jadwiga, our princess. But that's not-- sure, I will do that. But also, you will have to Christian-- at least on paper, declare officially that Lithuania on that day will become also Christian.

OK. But that meant Catholic.

So he accepted it all. And that's how, on paper, Lithuania was Christian. And well, Christian meant Catholic. Then Radziwill came.

And who is Radziwill?

Radziwill was a family of-- I don't know exact. There was some Lithuanian blood. But I think most of the blood was Polish blood-- who didn't like the idea of Lithuania.

Somewhere he connected with Luther and his followers. And there was a lot going during that time. So he counterattacked, wanted to chased out Jesuits. And Lithuania practically was becoming Protestant.

Like Latvia or Estonia?

Yes. Yes, which the Vatican panicked. And they sent teams of Jesuits, and a counterattack began. And Radziwill had

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built castles in Papilys and Birzai. I don't know why he was so tough-- he settled down in the north part--

Your hometown.

--of Lithuania.

Yeah.

And they pushed and pushed. They worked hard. And we didn't know how many years maybe, 50, 60. Lithuania went back to the Catholics, reconquered Lithuania. And only in the very, very north around Birzai there were like, I don't know, maybe 100,000 people that remained Reform Protestants.

And was your family also?

And so my family and most of my village and the villages around, they were all, I would say, 75% Protestant.

Was there a church in your village?

No, not in the village, but Papilys it was the closest. That's 5 kilometers. That you can walk. That's nothing.

Did you go to church on Sundays?

My parents went. And sometimes they took us children also.

But that wasn't something that was regular--

No.

--and obligatory.

They went regularly. My parents were very religious.

OK.

They were very religious. They did not miss-- but they did not insist that children go, too.

OK. So that was only occasional that the children would go?

Very, very seldom.

Interesting. Did you ever have to study the Bible? Did you ever have any religious lessons?

No. No, no, no, no. But my father he had all the-- like, his library was 20 or so books. And they were all religious, sermons, the basic, all religious, Bible, the New Testament, and commentaries, et cetera, et cetera.

Do you remember--

And he read it every evening aloud. At some point when everything was done, just before going to bed when he relaxed, people, you know, in the winter or when you just do some things that you do still for the farm in the evening at home, he would study and read from one of the books.

Out loud?

Yes, loud.

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OK.

Loud reading was very much part of my childhood. I had to read also. Even sometimes neighbors used to get together and do some things together.

And instead, just they got tired sometimes yapping. Say, could read to us something? So I read many novels.

So it's interesting, because that's a tradition that no longer exists. People don't read to each other.

No and used to read contemporary novels.

Was there a feeling that there's a difference in the culture? And I'm talking about in that sense of an individual's individual culture, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], between how you saw, you know, your life as a Protestant family and how the Catholic families--

Religion did not come-- nobody talked about it. Nobody discussed. You know, they led their lives according to their religion, but it was never talked about.

So there was never any differencing with the Catholics?

No.

OK. So there would not be sort of, oh, that's a Catholic village.

No.

OK.

No, that didn't have exist.

OK.

You could never know which one was Catholic unless you grew up together and you knew it. If you were not interested in that aspect, you did not know.

You didn't know. OK. One other thing that sounds interesting and not always emphasized was learning. It sounds like it was something that was valued in your family if your father read and read every single day.

Yeah. But you see, also, Povilas--

Your oldest brother.

--the oldest, was old enough for-- when we grew up, he was already in Birzai, in gymnasium--

High school.

--or like a high school. And he used to bring-- you know, he was avid reader. And it's amazing that there was a Lithuanian language Lithuanian books, writing, forbidden by Tsarist regime. It was amazing that, from beginning 1905, the real revolution began in Lithuania in culture.

Well, in Russia. OK, sorry.

In culture and-- And the declaration of regaining of independence in 1918, between 1918 and 1940, these 20 years when

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the Soviets came, it's mind-boggling how much was published, translated and published. I read already there, by the time 15, I had read American classics, those that when asked, have you read this or that, like Babbitt or The Jungle? Oh, no, no. I have-- some day I will read. I had read it all. Non PasarÃ¡n, the--

Oh, that's Spanish Civil War, Non PasarÃ¡n.

Yes. And Dreiser is [INAUDIBLE].

Yes. And the French classics and the German, I had read them all. Because my brother used to bring them during the vacation, during the summer. So he read, and I read. Whatever he read, I read.

So it was he who brought the world's literature to you.

Yes, yes.

OK.

Not only that, he was interested in the writers themselves. He had notes on Dreiser, on this, on Sinclair Lewis.

Well, I'll tell you that's not typical for a farm boy.

But he was sent, he ended up as, you know, a veterinarian. He was somewhere else.

Did he have--

And his friends, they were you know, writers and poets in the gymnasium. They became.

Well, he was born of that generation. If he's born in 1913, then he is exactly coming of age during the 20 years that you describe of this birth of writing and culture and literature in the country. But I want to go back a little bit. The books that your father had and read from, the religious texts--

Yes.

--were they all in Lithuanian?

Yes. Yes. They did not speak--

OK, so there was not Latin.

He spoke some Russian, but he was not very good in Russian. Yes.

How many years of--

He picked it up in the army.

How many years of schooling had he had?

I have no idea.

And your mother?

No, no idea.

OK.

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Basic.

Basic.

Very basic.

Was there a school in Semeniskiai?

No, no. It was like two villages further in the village of Lauzadiskis, primary school four years, you know.

Describe the school building for me, what it looked like.

Yes, because it's not there anymore. But you can see it in my film Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania. It's simple, two rooms usually, two rooms and living quarters for the teacher, who was in charge of the building.

So two classrooms and her private quarters?

And a private with the-- the teacher's family lived in the same building.

And in those two rooms--

Small building, there were never more than-- 20, 40-- 40, 50 students at any given time in those rooms, 25, 25--

So this would have been from age--

--between two rooms, which were four classes. So in each room, there was the first class there and the second class there. Actually, it was first class and fourth class and, yeah--

And did the one teacher teach all of them?

Yes. Yes. Sometimes there was additional teacher coming in.

Do you have any memories of school?

She wanted us to be specific.

Yeah. That's a very open question.

The question has to be--

You mentioned before that you were quite sickly. And my question is, did that interrupt your schooling?

No, I have to tell you now. In my whole education period in schools, primary school, then the next [? fall of ?] fifth and sixth grade school in Papilys, and then in Birzai was seven and eight class, because I skipped many classes in between. I did not miss a single day.

Really?

I did not miss a single day of school.

Well, how did you manage?

No matter whether, no matter of how I felt-- I never. My sickly period was before the school.

So when you were five or six years old, something like that?

Yes, that's when I was very badly sick. And I don't know what sickness it was.

Because that was next question.

But I was in bed for months. And I remember, you know, being very weak and all this medicine and all the women neighbors, some neighbors, sitting there near bed and talking about me thinking that I'm not hearing them. Oh, poor boy. He's not going to live--

Oh, well, that's charming.

--like very, very straight, very straight like that said. And that made me so mad, I remember, that I will show you. I'm going to live.

And here you are.

[LAUGHTER]

And here you are.

But that made me, that year or much of it [INAUDIBLE] being sick, sort I made my body physically also very weak and thin. I remember when I began going to school. And that was already like three years later after that. They used to call me skeleton.

Oh, really?

Yeah.

The kids?

Yeah.

OK.

[LITHUANIAN].

[LITHUANIAN]?

Yeah, [LITHUANIAN]. In any case, it took-- and I became, because of that, very sort of retreated. That's why I embraced books and whatever I could get to whatever the library that Birzai, Papilys. I went from A to Z to everything that was there, including the magazines, all the Lithuanian magazines. And by the time I was 15, I knew I had read practically everything that was available.

That was available, yeah?

And actually, so much that I would begin gaining reputation that when somebody wanted to find something in the capital later-- already, I was more 16, 17. And I had already published my sort of first miserable poems. Says, oh, you want to know? You cannot find it?

There is this boy in that village. Contact him. He will tell you where to find it. And I always knew where to find.

Were you--

But sort of my world became only books and reading. And I excluded-- I did not know what-- I knew that there was war, though, in Spain. That was even in the villages very much sort of-- people talked about it.

About the Spanish Civil War?

Spanish Civil War.

Why? It's so far away.

Because it, you know, was in the newspapers. And there was something that hit their interest somehow.

Well, this--

And that's when it continued. And then when the Soviets came, I was the-- OK, the war started.

You know, I want to interrupt here.

OK.

I want to interrupt here, because I don't want to come to--

I will go by your-- wiser to go by your questions.

OK. We'll come to all of that. But right now, I still want to get a better sense of pre-war life. When you mentioned the newspapers and you mentioned that the Spanish Civil War was something talked about, that leads me to another question. And that is how people got news in the villages. And I wanted to--

There was one family in the, village which later I found out was my father's brother--

Same village, Semeniskiai?

Yes.

So you never knew he was his brother?

No.

And he lived in Semeniskiai.

Yeah, I did not know.

Talk about secrets within a small--

No, not secret. I was not interested who they were, how they were connected. I had no interest in it.

It sounds like you were a very unusual child. I was very closed. I was totally closed in myself, again, with the sickness.

OK.

So only later I found out. He has a radio. So there was one radio in that whole area that sometimes they reported, you know, what's [? around. ?]

But then there were two weekly newspapers. One was for the farmers. The other was very sort of general.

What was the farmer's newspaper name?

[LITHUANIAN].

OK.

[LITHUANIAN].

And the other one?

The other one was very important, because the Binkis, Kazys Binkis one of the great poets--

Poets.

--he was from Papilys.

So close to you?

Yes.

So you had Janonis, was it, in one village and Binkis in another religion, and Mekas in another village?

Yes.

All within that area? OK.

He used to write for it, and we never missed. We bought it and subscribed only because he wrote for it. Right now, the names--

Escapes you.

--escapes me.

It might come to you later.

So there were two newspapers. There were some others that we did not subscribe, because there are limited fund for things like that on the farm. And they used to come-- not to come. They were not delivered. Somebody from the village had to go to the post office and pick them up.

Where was the post office?

In Papilys.

OK.

So that was the closest post office. The other one was in Birzai. And very often, they used to send me to pick them up. And then that was also I describe in the introduction to my book. I had nowhere to go-- how important it was to me, those trips.

Why? Why was it important to you?

Because there was this tall, lean, black-haired guy. He was about 40 maybe, who also used to come. You see, the post and the mail used to be delivered from Birzai to Papilys and a certain hour that they [? choose ?] arrived, like 2:00 in the

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afternoon. And that's when I used to go to pick up the newspapers or if anybody wrote. And he was always there.

So who was this tall, lean guy?

And he used to get very interested in mail, like with very strange, beautiful postal stamps and a lot of it. So one day, I collected my courage. I was about maybe 12. And I postman, who is this? And the post guy-- there were two of them-- said, oh, he's a poet. I know, he said, oh, he's a Jewish poet, Jewish poet.

What was his name?

So that guy became like one of the reasons for me wanting to go to pick up the mail.

Did you ever speak to him?

No, I wouldn't dare. I wouldn't dare. And I never, of course, found out his name either. But I knew. And then I decided that I will be a poet.

I remember reading that section in your book.

Yes. I was so impressed with all those magazines from Paris from all the places.

So do you make the assumption he was from Papilys?

Not that-- he was there.

I know, but does that mean there was a Jewish community in Papilys?

I knew at least in the class of-- OK, in my class of 25, there was one Jewish girl. And she was from-- and they had a store. I knew that at least there were three or four families in Papilys. But, you know, who-- now, I'm finding out that they were in war.

Yeah.

But, you know, according to me--

To your world.

--the world that I knew--

Yeah.

So there were, you know, at least three. Because, you know, there was a fruit general store. There was some other little store. I knew they were run by Jewish families.

So I knew. That much I knew. And there was one, but no that many. But I'm finding out now also how far off I was in my numbers, because I had no idea.

But this is what we want to know is what you knew at the time. And so in your world--

But the Jewish in Papilys, in that whole area, Birzai [INAUDIBLE], I knew only from, yeah, this girl. Yeah.

What's her name?

I don't remember, no.

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OK.

I don't remember. I remember some names from gymnasium, but I don't remember any names from--

We'll come to those. We'll come to those. But she was the only girl in your primary school in class?

Class, yeah-- not primary. OK, that is still primary. It was in between. The educational system was going through changes.

Before it was only four grade and then eighth grade, primary school and gymnasium. But during that period, '39, '40, they took two from-- gymnasium became like six.

Classes.

And they two in between.

Got it.

So with primary, it became six.

OK.

So in the six to-- grade, there was this young little Jewish, smart, very smart, girl.

Papilys, remind me again--

Which I later-- even Adolfas, my brother, he followed these six. He describes-- he does not tell, but I knew that was this, that he had a crush on--

On this girl?

Yes.

Oh, I had a thought. Papilys, again, how far was it from Semeniskiai?

About 5, 4, 5 kilometers.

Sounds like a much bigger place if it had--

Yeah. Papilys had between 500 to 700 inhabitants at that time.

OK.

Birzai had 5,000 at that time.

And you had, in Semeniskiai, 98.

98.

OK. Now, in Papilys, that was where your parents would go to church, was--

The churches were, that's where the church is, the stores, the doctor. They're all there that served many, many villages around.

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That was the church that your parents would go to?

Yes.

OK. Do you remember the name of the church?

We knew it as the church.

Just that. OK. Was there a Catholic church in--

No, [LITHUANIAN].

OK, reform church.

The Protestant Reformed Church.

OK.

I'm not so clear. I was not very good at religious history at that time. I'm beginning to know more now. And so I have no idea what the difference is. There was Latvia. There were Lutheran Protestants. In Birzai, there were Reformed Protestants. And there were differences, some essential differences, which I had no idea what they were.

Was there a Catholic church in Papilys?

Yes, yes.

And was there--

Because Papilys was already merging with the rest of the country, was already split. When you go north, it's like almost, I said, 75% maybe, with 25% Catholic. But from Papilys and around Papilys already, it was reversing with 75% Catholics, 25% Protestant.

And was there a synagogue in Papilys?

No. I know it was in Birzai, because I was [? trumped ?] up to go there, but not--

Not in Papilys?

But I do not know. I may be wrong. I would have to go now to somebody who knows, because so much research took place after the Soviets left, you know, about the Jewish communities.

Maybe I said there were three families. But maybe there were 10 families. And if there were 10 families, then maybe they had-- because Jews are more [? really ?] religion even when one is forbidden than Catholics or Protestants they follow. So they may have had. I don't know. That I cannot answer.

Did you visit the grocery store? Is that someplace where you would do shopping in Papilys.

Some. Because since I walked every day those 4 kilometers to fifth, sixth grade, so when my mother or father needed something, [INAUDIBLE] here is some money. Buy-- I need that and that and that, some thread or something.

Were there also-- you know, what is so common in East Europe is that there were Jewish peddlers going from town to town. Would you have that, too?

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We had no Jewish peddlers. I had no memory of any Jewish peddler. But gypsy peddler-- yes.

A-ha.

Gypsy peddlers used to pass by quite often. And sometimes if they come, you know, past the evening time, they used to set up their camps next to our house. And we had to, on every Monday if our parents went to Birzai or my brothers were not there, before they left they-- just see that you don't let in any of the Gypsies. And lock the door, you see? Lock the door.

So there was this belief that--

Not belief.

It was--

Reality.

--reality, OK.

So it's reality.

Yeah, that something could go missing.

Because during some visits, we missed some things.

I want to--

And they knew that only children and they have a chance. And they used to try to persuade through the locked door, you know, talk to us. Let us in. Let us in.

Let us in. Let us in.

No, you know. We just sat there.

I want to turn to another--

But they were all very happy and very nice. And people liked them, but they said just be careful. The people made jokes about it, but there was no hate.

OK. OK. I want to turn to another area, and then we'll go back to more larger topics. I want to know a little bit more about your family's personalities, your father's, your mother's, and your older siblings. So let's start with father. What kind of a personality did he have?

I think that he always wanted-- see, I don't know his childhood. I don't know his youth, you know, growing up time. I only began knowing him when he was, you know, 55 or whatever, you know grown up and doing work on the farm.

He was a typical farmer. But he was also a dreamer, because I always felt that there was some very good reason why he did not continue his carpentry. Because that's what he was interested in. He was like the poet carpenter.

But it's sort of a question of survival. He could not survive from that. So he sort of stuck to the farm.

Was he a sad person?

No. He was actually very happy.

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OK.

And he was very respected. He was always the-- like some-- 1, 2, 3, 4-- some six, seven villages that were the regional area, like Birzai, embraced all the villages and embraced even Papilys. Papilys was part [INAUDIBLE].

But then it was there were different-- that area was divided into smaller areas. They developed and stuck together sort of naturally. So there were seven or eight villages stuck around our village.

Was he like a [NON-ENGLISH]?

That's what I'm leading to-- stuck together.

OK.

And each of those areas had occasionally got together. And they usually got together in our house. And our father was always, for as far as I remember, [LITHUANIAN] [CROSS TALK].

So he was a village elder.

A village elder, so they trusted him and respected him enough to help sort of make some decisions when needed. So that much I know. And my mother was not too involved in any. She was always helping my father on the farm. But she took care usually of vegetables, vegetable garden. So that was her area with our sister. And sometimes we children have to help her.

Was she an outgoing person?

She was very religious and always singing. From early morning when I was still sleeping, I could hear her singing some religious hymns, melodies. No, no, no-- just melodies.

And I knew. I recognized them-- just for herself, quietly, not loud, for herself. But you could hear them. You could hear.

And she was very, I would say, mystical, which was also a joke sometimes of the family. Because that made her very angry, sort of in her own way angry. Because she was to come from milking cows and tell, oh, I saw them again. And they waved at me, little people on that blue stone on that big stone.

I saw what, little people on the blue stone?

So she saw almost like apparitions of some kind?

No apparitions.

What did she see?

I believed her. And I still believe that they were real. Those are real if you-- you have to live-- have you lived in Iceland or Norway? Then you would believe that they're real.

But I'm asking what, because I didn't quite hear.

Little people that-- they are spectral. They are not-- they're a very thin material.

Like fairies?

Like fairies, yes. They can disappear and reappear, because they're very fragile. They're like smoke and go. They come

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from the trees or from the stones.

If they like you, they dance. And they wave. And that's what they used to do to her.

So my brothers used to say, ah, you are crazy. You are crazy. And that's--

And she'd get upset, because they didn't believe her--

Yes.

--telling.

But I always believed her. Because I sat on the same stones.

Did you see them?

I made a rule. And many interviewers have tied me to break that rule, not to talk about my mystical experiences.

OK.

So I believe. I know. All I can tell that I know. It's all real, but that's all that I will talk about.

That's OK. That's OK.

So she was very, very-- she was like somewhere else in that sense.

Was she a warm person?

Yes. They were both-- that's very difficult to a child to talk what aspect they were born [INAUDIBLE]. Because a child has no real perspective to--

It's true.

--it. So of course, I would say she was-- because of her mystical sort of-- I mean, she comes from a-- her brother decided to become a priest. So there is already something deeper in the family going into that sort of direction.

Did you meet him?

Not only that I met him, even when he was studying still in Switzerland during the vacation, he used to come with his straw hats. And he always gave me, before leaving, his straw hat.

So you had the honored hat?

So I inherited this hat, not cap, hat from him. And then in Birzai, when I went to high school, the first year I stayed in some little old Jewish place, Jewish man who was running bagel shop and had an extra room. And the next year and after that, I stayed in his-- he had an empty attic. I stayed in my uncle's house, parish house.

Well, one of the reasons I ask--

And that's where is the next library of my life. That's where I already could read some French, some German, and retain my international [INAUDIBLE]. Because he had a very important large international kind of library.

I will come to that. One of the reasons I ask the questions, this more personal type of question, is to get a sense of who, of the adults in your life, would have had a strongest influence on you?

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I would say mother, my mother.

Your mother? Your mother, OK.

Yes, definitely.

OK. And of your siblings, like your--

And Povilas, yes, my brother.

OK. Your oldest brother.

Yes.

Again, because of his library.

Now, did your other brothers have the same interest in books and in reading?

Petras had some-- no, they did not have. They did not have.

Tell me, in a very--

But music, Kostas, he had this whole capella.

Oh, really?

He played violin.

Oh. So his field was music. Not only that he played, he composed lyrics, yes, which I used in Reminiscences of a Journey. Some of the songs are his lyrics.

Oh, wow. That's impressive. So it was--

And Petras was very good in organ and accordion. So if I'd say Povilas with books and with reading, Petras with accordion and-- did you say violin with him?

No, Kostas was the violin.

Kostas with the violin and composing-- yourself also with literature. And Adolfas, well, he was younger. But did he have--

The youngest, he was, you know, still being three years younger. Three books of his diaries that survived are out and [INAUDIBLE] read them.

Yeah.

He was just beginning. He was following me, more or less. He was very much under my sort of influence as an older brother. So he did all-- whatever I did, he tried to do also in that sense.

And Elzbieta, did she really play a role in your life?

Who?

Elzbieta, your sister.

Oh, really no. She got married early, sort of moved away from my sort of life of that period and did not really play much. She took care of me when I was, you know, three, four, five, six, during that period. I remember, you know, playing with her, doing something. So she was, but that's what I do not remember much.

OK.

But her influence was the smallest.

OK. Now, the struggle for Lithuanian independence, did that involve anybody that you knew, your father, your uncle?

If you talk about that period--

1918, yeah.

--then that is-- you cannot ask me. I was born in '22.

No, I'm talking about your father. Did he take part in anything? I don't know.

You don't know. You don't know. Now--

No, I had not noticed any Lithuanian, patriotic, nationalistic struggle when I grew up until the Soviet came. That did not exist, did not existed. We took it as natural. And we thought, oh, no, no, you know. We will be for 100 years.

Did people ever talk about Smetona, the president of the country?

No. They did not talk. He was there. He was our president. He was invisible. Again, you see, there I was in my shell.

Yeah.

But I don't know what was outside. They may have talked. Actually, now when I'm thinking, they did not talk, but I know that he was not always-- not he, but the government of the independent Lithuania of-- OK, at least the period of the Spanish war, I remember during that period--

OK.

--sleeping like-- you see, one end of the house-- this is a house. This was living room and there. And there was sleeping, the bed.

And there was a separation where we kids slept here. And there was another room where was Povilas. When he comes, he slept there.

And then any kind of meeting that he met took place there. And the wall was very thin. And I remember sleeping. And one of the people during that evening was Martinas, my father's brother, and some other people from some other villages.

They were talking politics. And they were talking-- OK, another footnote. My brother in Birzai, in gymnasia--

Povilas.

--in high school and some of his friends, like Kazys Jakubenas, later a poet, they got connected. They got already with some people who were discussing-- this was immediately I think after revolution.

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Russian Revolution?

Yes.

1917.

And they were discussing-- I remember very clearly lying there. I did not know, you know, what communist mean. If there was no-- but Social Democrats, they were talking about Social Democrats, which was opposed to Smetona.

So what you're describing to me, if I understand it--

And why I remember this, this is the first time I heard singing. [SINGING IN RUSSIAN], the International.

The Internationale.

And they were singing. They were singing in Lithuanian. And they were singing in Russian.

In Russian?

International.

International, the Internationale. So it was--

So that means what it means, that there were people opposed to--

Smetona?

Yeah. And so if I understand--

And that's where I also discovered that-- you see, Povilas was also trying to write poetry at some point, that he was publishing some of them in a monthly magazine of sort of socialist-- again, I don't remember now the name of the magazine. So that he was involved-- but we can talk about this later. Because I have other things to tell about Povilas' involvement.

So he had already more leftist ideas?

Yes.

OK.

For sometimes he was very, very close to [INAUDIBLE]. At some point, at some point when Paleckis did not want to accept the post, he conferred, I know, with my brother.

So your brother was a CP member? He was I do not know the details. Because many things during that period were very, very, very, very secretive.

Because I remember, in Birzai, people used to point near Birzu pilis, the castle of Birzai. There was a little valley space. He says, that's where it Smetona shot the six--

Communists?

--commies. More or less, they identified--

Is this the place where Pozela and so on were shot?

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Yes.

OK.

Yeah. Not that he was involved, but there was a movement, part of the Lithuanian between maybe generation that maybe was around 30 or so, 25, or between 20 and 30, had still-- and that comes from, I think, 1905, did not come directly from the newly created Soviet Union. It was still coming from there, that movement that clashed with the official Smetona ideas.

OK. I want to--

No.

Yeah.

This, what I am telling now, is sort of my deductions.

I understand.

Because-- yes.

I understand. But I'd like to articulate them back, so to make sure that I understood it correctly.

Yeah.

So when I ask you about Smetona--

I need some cold--

OK, let's cut.

--water. And I'm--

[LITHUANIAN]. OK. We're running.

So when I'm talking about, you know, now around the questions here, and I'm sort of trying to get to it. You see, intuitively and as a poet and who sort of was there-- and some of it, I remember undirectly. I know that I'm right. But I cannot really put my fingers on facts, on specifics.

But I know that I'm right undirect about the feelings of the people. I know, remember very clearly, you know, what I heard, some glimpses. And I don't need everything literally from A to Z to make my observation.

I understand that. I understand that. It is-- excuse us?

[INAUDIBLE]

[INAUDIBLE] OK. OK. I'm going to talk now more than I usually do. But it will be in two parts-- one, in trying to say back to what I think I understood, second, about the purpose of interviews like this and the whole idea of oral histories. When we conduct them, the strengths of oral histories are exactly what you say. You know you're right. It is in the impressions. It is in the experiences. It is in the memories.

The danger is always to make it too narrow, to restrict it. Permit a little bit to open, let air in, which sometimes undirect memories, observations are more truthful than some factual.

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Well, people say that about art.

Yes.

But in the purpose of what we're doing here is we're trying to establish an historical record through the memories of people decades after the events happened. And that's why, in some ways, it is a counter kind of purpose. And I would say, you know--

Why?

Forgive me for that. Because as much as possible, I need to anchor things in context, in dates, in understanding. And I think--

But that's what you are getting.

I know. But here's the thing. What you are telling me makes sense to me. But that is because I know of a lot of the history that people who will be looking at this interview may not.

So that's why I want to repeat it back and see if I have understood it properly, so that someone else can understand it properly.

Yes, do it.

OK, so here's the impression I'm getting is that at some point in 1936 and 1937, because that's the time of the Spanish Civil War and it is a topic that is discussed, you remember being in your bed area, you know, separate from the living room, and lying down in your bed and hearing others in your family behind the curtains talking about politics.

Not-- there's only one, Povilas and his invited friends.

Ah, OK. Not your father.

No, no, no.

Not anybody else.

So these are young men.

They had their own-- they slept in complete different area. Yeah.

OK. So for example, at that time, you're about 14 years old. Your brother is already a young man. He's around 23, 24 years old.

And he invites his friends over. And they're talking about the Spanish Civil War. And they're talking about social democracy of a certain kind. And in the end, they sing "The Internationale" in Lithuanian.

And then you remember, but you didn't know this at the time, but you remember at some point in later years hearing that when Justas Paleckis who is someone most American or English speaking people would not know about, but Justas Paleckis was a leftist writer who, when the Soviets came into the country, became the "president" quote unquote. I don't remember his exact title, but Snieckus was the first party secretary. Paleckis was the president.

And under his signature, a lot of people get sent to Siberia both then and later. And what you are saying is that you intuit that your brother was somehow or other a trusted person, because Paleckis--

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Now, I remember why.

OK. The name of the monthly was called [? Joniemas. ?]

[? Joniemas. ?]

[? Joniemas. ?] And they both wrote for it. And maybe Paleckis was connected with the editorial staff or something. But that's the sort of--

What their connection was.

--connection was, that he published some poems. And his daughter sent to me some of those poems. They were sort of-- OK, they would call it a little bit leftist kind of, political. They were obviously political poems.

And about when, would this been before the war?

This was before.

OK. So during independence times?

Yes. Yes.

OK. And so your brother is trusted enough by Paleckis--

To ask for this opinion.

--for his opinion to be asked should Paleckis take that post, which was quite--

I don't know what the discussion was. But I understood that-- I do not remember my brother's words. But I think in some way he was consulting him.

Should I take it or not-- trying to make up his mind. And I have no idea what my brother told him. All I know that I understood from Povilas-- he told me this later.

What does later mean?

Later-- already in '71 when I--

OK, when you went back?

Yeah.

OK.

Yeah.

So this is 30 years, 33 years later, something-- well, 30 years later.

My brother fell out of that very soon after the Soviets came in. Povilas abandoned that direction completely.

OK. OK. But he had it. In other words, if there was a direction of political thinking in your family, and Povilas sounds like the most political--

The other two brothers, they were not political at all. They were totally farmers, kind of immersed in the world of their

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own local.

And your father as well?

Yes, very much.

OK. But Povilas was an influence on you.

Yes, yes. He was in his books, his books. Yes.

OK.

No, I sort of looked up a little bit, you know? Yes. His political world was totally-- like he subscribed to Socialdemokratas, a weekly newspaper, which was social sort of Lithuanian party. And I hated it.

Did you really?

Well, it was so boring and so serious. And so the whole-- I could not read. I just--

So it didn't speak to you.

He used to subscribe to it. No, no. That was totally out of my interest.

OK. OK. Thank you. That's what I wanted to get a sense of what was not only the facts of pre-war life, you know, the circumstances of your family, but also the atmosphere. You know, what did people talk about? What was their world? What mattered to them? And in a very specific ways--

So there are glimpses. There were talks, political talks, also going about which I cannot tell more than what just told.

Yeah.

That one memory, I think, is pretty, though, revealing.

Yeah. So we come to 1939.

And more than that like between by Papilys and Semeniskiai, there was a village of Kubiliai.

Kubiliai.

And if you had to fix sometimes some shoes or also some sewing to do, there was a family, I think, of two brothers. They were specialists, crafts people [INAUDIBLE].

So they were--

So he was sometimes to stop-- my mother gave to fix something there. Whenever I was there, they were only talking politics.

Really?

Like, oh, you see, sorry for this mess. The police was here last night. And they looked for, you know, everything turned-- you know, they looked for--

Upside down.

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Upside down.

OK. Because they were really involved so much that the police was asked to look for--

They have socialist orientations?

There were maybe some publications. Or they were maybe involved. Oh, yes. Now, I remember that that week on the branches of the trees by the road, by the cemetery-- and the cemeteries were by our house. There were some leaflets attached, political leaflets. I have no idea what they promoted.

And it was next day after that that I had to stop at their house in Kubiliai for something. And the police was-- and I saw that everything was in a mess. The police was there. They probably suspected they did produce those leaflets and hung them there.

Were they known to have a particular political view?

People maybe knew. I had no idea.

So it could have been they were very leftist?

But I did not have any idea that they were any other views than those that came from Kaunas, from the capitol.

[LAUGHTER]

I was not in that age. I was still in my shell.

Yeah.

But those were glimpses into the real world, which I remember very well. There were people who were doing something. I don't know why and what, for what reasons and what they said, what was in those leaflets.

Because police came. People said, oh, don't touch them. Let the police deal with them and took. So I had no idea what was in those leaflets.

So you don't know if they were right wing or left wing.

Kill Smetona or--

Oh, I see.

--or embrace Stalin, I don't know. I have no idea.

When 1938-- well, actually, 1939 come around--

I will interrupt one more.

Sure.

Same as later with the Germans, same as Soviets, they did not come blindly with no preparations. They had already people working for years probably. And some of them were connected preparing, you know, here and there and there.

Germans had same. So some of those people maybe were, you know. I don't know. But none of those occupiers came like they do now. Sometimes they just go to another country. But I think they had planted people. I'm thinking that now.

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Yeah. Yeah. So let's come to 1939. Do you remember whether there was any reaction in Semeniskiai or Birzai or Papilys about the German attack on Poland, September 1st?

There were two reactions. The dominant reaction was, ah, we have now Vilnius now back.

Because of the controversy with Poland on Vilnius?

Yes. Vilnius produced happiness. The Poles were the most hated nation in the world for Lithuanians.

Why?

Why?

Yeah.

They took Vilnius. They took our capital away. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

So that's a little diddy in Lithuanian about Poles.

Yes.

No, no. They were more Pilsudskis and all those other guys. They were all most hated people.

So there was elation when the Russians decided eventually to reattach Vilnius to Lithuania. So for some time, that sort of elation almost canceled all the bad things at least for a moment until they began to think, you know, and see the bad part, the other part of it.

So you said there was another, there were two reactions. One was this.

Oh, the other reaction was, ah, now we may have another war. We are having another war.

So people started talking about that.

Yes, yes. I don't remember [INAUDIBLE]. But I cannot-- yes, every family already knew that this is bad.

OK. Now, when you mentioned that Russia attached Vilnius back to Lithuania, why would Russia do--

I don't know really-- again, see, I am very bad at dates. And so at which point that became real, because-- first, OK, Germany, they made a deal with Russians, divided sort of Poland.

That's right.

But at which point? And then Russians marched into Lithuania only in 1940.

'39.

'39?

'39.

Oh, so immediately. So that decision was--

The factual record--

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All I remember-- being in Papilys in sixth grade in the bench, sitting there in the middle of the class. And somebody comes in and take the teacher out. And then the teacher returns and asks everybody to listen carefully and tells that the war started and that the Soviets, the message was given to the teacher. And that was the situation. And so that's how we found out about that.

OK. The background to this, from what I have read, is that that Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed in August 1939, August 23rd. And one week later, September 1st, is when Hitler attacks Poland. And sometime in the fall, I believe it was October-- I could be wrong-- the Soviets start marching in, and then start marching in, but do not take over the country until 1940.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Something like that, yeah.

OK. So during those several months, did you continue going to school?

That was very intense. That was my first-- no, yes, my first year into-- that was fifth grade. Yeah.

If you were born December 24, 1922, you would have been 17 years old in December 1939. And were you by then in gymnasium in Birzai, or--

No. I was in sixth-- fifth-- sixth grade in Papilys. I was in Papilys.

OK, you were still in sixth grade?

I went began going to school very late, because I was needed on the farm. And then after the fourth grade, I skipped one year again before going to the fifth grade. So there were many-- the family was not even sure if I will ever go to high school or gymnasium.

OK, OK. OK. That makes sense.

Because, first, I was not in the best of-- my weakness body remained until I was at least 16 or so. And I did not talk to anybody. I was always in a book. I did not communicate with anybody.

And sudden-- and then it happens, as things happen, that suddenly, for some reason, I wanted, I was ready to talk. So neighbors said, he talks. Oh, he talks. It became a joke. But I was known as the silent.

So you weren't a very sociable person for a long time?

No.

OK.

I was in a shell. And I remained in the shell. Even today I'm in a shell.

What are your first memories of life changing when the Soviets appeared in Lithuania? What are your first memories of that?

Fear was you began to feel. I mean, you feel fear. You could feel it floating on, like everybody. How it manifested, that fear, I cannot describe now.

But you could feel it and see it almost in the physical movements in the faces, in the relationship. And silences creep in. And then we immediately began hearing about neighbors being arrested there. It started before the mass deportations, even those small deportations.

Of people you knew? Of people you knew?

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I knew by name not in our village, but in the neighboring villages, you know, families or individuals. We immediately heard. You know, that began happening immediately after the Soviets marched in.

And so what about--

We talk about, you know, the big deportations. But small arrests and deportations begin immediately.

Did your school teachers change?

Yes. The atmosphere felt like the joyful, sort of blissful, careless atmosphere like some cloud began descending.

Did that mean that the teacher who might have formerly been a friendly teacher now became more closed? Or did it mean it was a new teacher?

No, they were the same, but you could almost feel a certain kind of seriousness, a different kind of-- it changed through the villages. I mean, it's difficult to describe how a system, repressive system, like that, and especially when you begin to see the actual real results, can begin to affect, like produces kind of invisible atmosphere there that is there. You cannot describe it, but you feel it's there.

Let's cut for a second.

And then some of the neighbors that had larger houses, immediately some rooms were divided by the order from Birzai. And some people from other places, city strangers, total strangers, we did not know where they came from.

Were they Lithuanian?

Lithuanians planted there as a sort of-- you had to accept.

So was there anybody that you knew who was locally known to have been a sympathizer of the Soviets when they came?

Not in the villages that I-- not in our villages.

So it was really strangers who came and were planted in the villages, but not local people who suddenly unmask and say, all right, I'm a--

No.

OK.

No, we did not know. At least I have no idea that there were cases and places where that happened. But in the few villages around Semeniskiai, I have not heard cases like that.

Did you, during this time, you start going to school and Birzai?

No. See, there was sixth-- now, where I'm trying to place. I was in the fifth, not sixth grade. Then one year I skipped. I have notes somewhere. I tried to recreate.

Since I was too old, you had to be a certain age to go into the third class of the high school. There were six years. So since I was too old, I was at the age when I could have been accepted only in the seventh grade.

OK.

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But I wanted to go to high school. And it was actually my uncle, my mother's brother, who kept telling my mother and my father that he has to go. You know, kid has to go to-- because he sort of, I guess, believed in me.

Did they have to pay? Did it cost to send you to high school?

No, no.

No.

It was free. So that year I decided to go to-- he helped. My uncle rented a place, a room for me.

From the lady with the bagel shop?

Yes.

OK. And I managed to skip to-- I had to go through all those years, four years, or five year of languages, Latin and French and all-- oh, boy. That was very, very intense. And then there was an exam, and I passed. And when I passed, they said, you did better than most of our students did.

So this was to get into high school?

To get into the seventh class.

To the seventh class.

So I skipped four years of high school in one winter.

You mean it skipped four years of high school in one winter?

Yes. I jumped from the-- OK, second grade to seven.

Oh, wow. That's a jump.

That's a jump. And it was the sensation of Birzai for some time.

I can see why. I can see why. But you had to do home studying in order for that, to do that.

Yes. My uncle paid for the tutors and all that.

OK. And he was still pastor in Papilys, at the Reformed Church?

No, in Birzai.

Oh, so he had become a pastor in Birzai now.

Yes.

OK.

Yes. He was never in Papilys.

I thought that's where your parents went to church and that he was the pastor there.

Yeah. But you don't have to go to your pastor's church.

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Got it.

You can go to any--

Any.

--Protestant Church, like any Catholic Church.

OK. Got it. I misunderstood.

No, no.

Yeah. So this is when you actually moved to the city, the local city, Birzai.

Yes, for that winter. And then--

Now, the bagel shop-- excuse me now. The bagel shop--

[INAUDIBLE].

--was that in a Jewish neighborhood? Was there a Jewish neighborhood?

I do not-- there must be cluttered in different areas of Birzai. I only remember that there was not-- oh, what do you call? Not mosque.

Synagogue.

Yeah, synagogue. I don't remember any specific Jewish area, but there must have been. Because even in Birzai when I moved, as you can see, I did not have time to walk around and know the city to skip six class of gymnasium, five. And even later, I still remained a book person. Now, I regret that I did not walk, familiarize more with the city.

But in other words, you didn't really know whether or not it was a neighborhood that was predominantly Jewish or not. It was just a neighborhood.

No. You could see them there and there and there, different stores, scattered through the whole city. Tell you the truth, I did not know. I was not aware.

OK.

Even maybe there was, but I was not aware. I understood that they were, you know, scattered. There was suburban parts where there were no Jewish. But in the center, they were there and there and there and there.

Yeah.

And I could not even tell how many. I figured that there must be, in a city of 5,000, which I was told by the mayor of Birzai later in Brooklyn--

Oh, he also went-- he was also a refugee in Brooklyn.

Yes, Kulbis.

Kulbis. OK.

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That at that point was five-- he would have known how many Jews there may have been. I figured that there maybe 200, 300.

But then later, now, the information that I have seen was that there were 2,000 Jews killed in Birzai. I says, how could that be? Because that means if 5,000 people lived in Birzai and there were 2,000 plus killed, that means almost like a half. So there is something wrong. But I think that that figure comes that, when the Jews were killed in Birzai, they brought them from all other places, like including Papilys.

OK.

Probably, that's how the 2,000 come. That not come from the city itself.

OK.

I think they collected from all other areas. And this is the place where we'll do that.

We'll come to that.

Yeah.

But right now, chronologically we're in that first Soviet year of occupation. During this time, is when you skip four classes through your uncles sort of both suggestion and strong advice--

So my first gymnasium class the seventh was under the Soviets.

OK. Do you remember anything in particular from that year in this grade?

Oh, yes. I remember.

What can you tell us about it?

I mean, one thing is immediately in this, besides that-- no, no, no, no. The first year was still-- there were no Russians the first year.

OK. OK.

That's why I had one year of French-- not French. Actually, before that, I had two years of French and Latin. Because in the next grade under the Soviets, first thing went out Latin out, French out, Russian in. French, no good. Latin, no good. Russian, good. So I had at least one year of--

OK. Russian.

--Russian.

Well, that would make sense. Because the government, in July 1940, is when there is that vote to join the Soviet Union. And that would have been after your seventh class, but before your eighth.

Yes.

OK.

And then one new category was introduced, the political education, the political teacher, political.

And who was the political teacher?

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Don't remember his name, but very boring talking, like somebody who tells that this is what happened. This is what the Communist Party is. It's very good for the people-- talking always have a high monotonous voice and very like somebody who did not believe in it himself, somebody who was like assigned. But really he did not sound that he believed in what he was--

He sounds like a parrot almost.

--saying. But you know, first thing you had to learn by heart the history of the Communist Party. And then there was another one. He had a class to teach. That was the subject we had to learn.

But then there was another assigned general political supervisor of the gymnasium of the high school, don't remembered her name. She was a woman of some 40 years. And she was always there.

And we knew who she is and why she is there. And when she was approaching, passing, everybody became silent until she passes. But to me, it became very, very, very important, this woman.

She was also hated, hated by everybody for another reason, because she was Jewish. And because the mayor, as Soviets marched in, they appointed as the mayor a Jew educated in Moscow, Kerbel.

Kelmer?

Kelber.

[BACKGROUND NOISE]

OK.

--to the high school. And back to the political--

Officer.

--instructor in politics and the history of the Communist Party. And then--

What was her name, by the way?

I don't know. I don't remember.

Oh, yes. We come down to-- yes. And she was hated because of that, but also because of the-- not rumor, but a kind of be floating belief that much of the Communist Party in Lithuania is controlled by the Jews they take from Moscow. Because here we are, even in Birzai. They brought in this Kerbel, you know, the Jew mayor now.

You said it was K-E-R-B-E-R?

K-E-R-B-E-L.

Kerbel.

Kerbel.

So they called it Kerbelgrad?

Jokingly, the began calling Birzai Kerbelgrad. OK, but I will be back to the politruk that we used to call her. It's at that time, around that time, that I began seeing all this anti-Soviet little two page usually publications underground,

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published in the underground--

Where would you find them?

--underground publications, which some were passed by hand only to by those who had access to those publications, to pass to those that they really, really trusted. And it happened so that one of the students-- I do not remember his name-- trusted me. And he gave me some, which I then passed to people that I trusted.

And that's another, of course, story, not what I'm going to tell you now. But I used to carry them. You had to be very careful to whom and when you pass them.

And so you have to have them with you. And I used to carry them in my hat. Winter, it was winter. And the hats had heavy inside, you know, to [INAUDIBLE].

Lining.

The farmers-- you know, our Lithuanian cold winter hats. And they're big. And so I used to have them in my hat under the--

Lining. Lining, the lining of the hat.

Always one or two pieces [INAUDIBLE], winter. So you come to the high school. Our wardrobe was in the basement. And there were hangers. And we all had our spots.

And we hung our coats, big heavy coat. And then you go into the classroom. And there you are, become a student.

And one day the political woman comes in and goes directly to me. And come, I want to talk to you. Already, suddenly, everybody, you know, is silent. And I go, you know. And you're never happy when we went. Politruk calls you, I want to talk to you, you never know.

And then she says, come with me to the basement, leads to the basement, leads to my coat, takes my hat, take my hat. And then I'm already not only silent. I'm frozen-- and takes out little newspapers. And then she puts just looks with no blinking at me straight and says, never do this again--

Wow.

--and put the back, puts where it was. Says, OK, go now.

Wow. That could have ended a lot differently. Wow.

And that's one of the moments you never forget. Because it could have ended badly not only for me, but also for my family. And we don't know how far that would have gone.

But then all these years I have been also thinking, why did she do that? I mean, one thing was I was still very fragile and very naive and very sort of like-- she may have really meant, OK, he's a stupid little guy. He made a mistake. If I tell you maybe-- you know, she had pity on me.

But then I thought, maybe she played double game. Maybe she worked also for the underground. She may have worked, OK, here I am. I'm hated by everybody.

I will do that. But I will also help the underground. She may have been a double agent.

Do you know if she was from Birzai herself?

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No, no. She was not from Birzai.

OK.

But now, when you ask this question, I can guarantee really. We assume that she came from Moscow, but she may have had some relatives. So I will never know.

I will never have an answer. Because later either she retreated together when the Soviets retreated, or she was shot with the other Jews. But she saved my life.

Yes, she did. Yes, she did. And it's interesting how they-- I mean, did that mean that they look through all the caps of the students to see if there are papers in them?

They knew. They were educated. They went to KGB training where to look if somebody hides something. They knew where to look for where people usually-- they had track of record where people usually hide.

Did you speak of this to anyone at the time?

I could not. I could not. Because I could not let other students-- they were asking, so what did she tell you? I made a joke, something. But I could not tell, because then other students would know that I have connection with underground. I could not talk.

And they would--

And later-- no, but that was already under Germans. That's another story.

So did you ever--

But this, there I could not talk about it at all, to nobody, absolutely nobody.

Not even the student who had given you the leaflets?

No, I could not.

OK, OK. Now, you mentioned earlier someone who had been the mayor of Birzai, Mr. Klabis. Is that his name?

Klibas.

Klibas, Klibas. And then a new mayor comes.

Thanks to him, I bought my first Bolex camera.

Oh, no kidding.

He was the guarantor for when I had to buy and I had no money. I went to Perlas, and he was the guarantor so that I could pay in installments.

That's quite a significant step. Now, he was the mayor. And then comes the Soviet system. And then comes Mr. Kerbel, or Draugas Kerbel, Comrade Kerbel, from Moscow. Does that mean that Mr. Klibas was thrown out, or did he stay--

Must be, because-- must be.

OK.

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I don't know.

He never told you anything about-- because I was never interested.

Got it. Got it. It's OK. That's OK.

My interests-- people don't understand that. How could one be and done what I done with no interest in what's around me, in the social life. I don't know if you are aware. You might be aware that somebody did a very sort of dirty paper on me in the New York Book.

Review of Books?

Yes.

Yeah. And you know, it's all absurd, all these [INAUDIBLE]. But he could not believe, he could not understand, that one can be totally submerged in what one is interested in. And he was asked, OK, tell me, you must have been very involved in the local society of [? Birzai. ?] I don't know the society. I knew nobody there and was not interested to know.

Oh, but you wrote in your book I Had No Where To Go that you were very involved. I was. And people who were in literature, they knew. But that was my work. The rest did not exist at all.

So life was going there, you know, every [? city. ?]

Did you ever--

So I don't know. I never asked, same as never asked my own father who was your father. So to ask Klibas never came to my head. [? And more ?] that I met him here in Brooklyn and we had already a different problem here.

But of course, automatically, I think, what I'm amazed at he was not deported. Oh, I think he maybe had left before the Soviets came in. He knew.

He was not that stupid. So he ended up in German, in German displaced person camps like that. That's where I met him.

OK.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Now, after that, did you continue distributing those leaflets or had you--

Yes, and it would intensify. But that was a lesson. That was a lesson that how foolish I was. And you know, I did not carry. I had to be much more careful.

Well, who would you get them from? And who would you give them to?

OK. First, where I got them-- there was one teacher Kavalunas.

Kavalunas, OK.

Kavalunas, he later ended up in Chicago. And he started the Lithuanian department at the University of Illinois. He was a very, very important. And there was another one. There was Vaitekunas.

Vaitekunas.

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Vaitekunas. So I know what happened to Kavalunas. And I know what happened to Vaitekunas. But Vaitekunas, when he was studying, he studied history of literature.

And his pieces that he wrote was on futurists, Dadaists, the whole period, transition beginning with what was happening in Russian, before even Mayakovsky, with the young Mayakovsky and all that early constructivists et cetera, with the early modern arts. That was his dissertation.

And he was teaching literature in the high school. So one day, he said, don't tell anybody. But I want you to read this now. He said, now, it's forbidden even to read about the history of the-- and I read his dissertation. And that was my introduction to many, many, many things.

OK. So yes, of course, Mayakovsky--

So introduction to modern art in the West, [? meaning ?] Russia, Paris, et cetera. And then after I read it and thanked him and returned it. We sort of became friends. And then it was he who gave me the first leaflets. And then he did not introduce me personally. But Kavalunas and Vaitekunas were like that.

They were friends?

Yes. So he told me that you can trust this guy. So Kavalunas was the one-- Vaitekunas he was not so connected with the underground.

But Kavalunas was very involved. I don't even know how deeply. He was very, very, very So the leaflets came to me from Kavalunas. And we used to meet in Birzai at a castle somewhere.

And what was the content of such leaflets? What was written in them?

Mostly transcripts from BBC and some other shortwave radios, mostly news, news concerning what Soviets were doing and what Germans were doing in their areas.

So this is during the Soviet time?

They [INAUDIBLE] news. Yes. It began and continued under the--

Under the Germans?

Under Germans, it continued. But I got deeper involved. That's another story.

We'll come to it. We'll come to it.

Here, under the Soviets, I was only distributing, helping to pass.

And who would you distribute it to?

Only very, very close friends, and they distributed to their close, close friends.

And these friends, were they your age most of the--

Some older.

Some were older.

Some were older.

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But still your generation?

Not exactly, Petras Zablockas, who later helped me Miltinis to start the theater in Birzai--

Oh, yeah.

--he was really quite well-known poet. He was one generation before me.

OK.

So yeah, I worked within my generation and then one above.

So now, that you've got this very pointed warning from the politruki, did you put those newspapers in another part of your clothing, or did you continue with your hat?

No, I did not carry. No. Since then, I did not carry. Because I did not know. Maybe she informed somebody else about me. And I may have been followed. I had to be very, very, very careful after that.

So you didn't continue?

I continued, but I had to be much more careful how I meet to who I want to pass, had to be worked out.

During this time, was there any violence?

Also, that happened, actually, very close also to the German marching in. Yeah.

So that would have been spring 1941? Because they march in June in 1941.

Yeah, yeah.

OK.

And that's maybe why I don't remember her name, because I met her very soon after that.

OK. Now, during the Soviet time, was there any open-- you talk about this atmosphere of fear that's even hard to describe, but it kind of descends. Was there violence? Did you see people beaten up in the streets?

There may have been, but I'm not aware. I was not involved in it. And the news of any violence against the Soviets in Lithuania would have been very, very, very much kept suppressed. It would be difficult for facts like that to come out.

I even mean violence by Soviets. Was there any--

The violence was psychological or direct. You know, if you're arrested, you know what happens with-- how the Soviet police handled those who get arrested or deported. So if that is not violence, then what is violence? [INAUDIBLE].

I'm talking before the deportations, the actual deportations. In that interim months and so on when you talk about that, was there--

It was deviously-- control was like-- OK, it began immediately, because they came with a plan. And the immediate [INAUDIBLE] was critique, of course, in the press and presentation of the existing previous system, a preparation for collectivization. It was taking place immediately, so that they were restructuring every part of the society.

Under the Germans who-- they came in action. They were chasing somebody. They had no time to stop and control everything.

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Here, they came in, and they settled down. In two days, they began exerting their control. If under the Germans you give them first page of the provincial paper for the bulletins-- it had to be or [INAUDIBLE]-- then you can do whatever you want.

Under the Soviet, not a single sentence, not a single word you could pass without approval. Because they were there. They had nothing else to do but to control and transform it into their own system. And you know, they came prepared.

So it's that sort of total control you're talking?

I'm talking about total control, total, absolutely total. And the always managed to-- I mean, many came already prepared from Moscow, the key persons. But many satellites, local, either at the beginning maybe even had some dreams and fantasies that this may be good.

Because all the propaganda was that this is it. This is great. You know, that was real bad. But, now, it's going to be paradise.

And some sort of believed it. Maybe not 100%, but they thought that they can also have some impact themselves. And they say that, but I we'll shift it that way. We'll be OK maybe, maybe.

So what happened later, like maybe when the deportations began, is something else, even those who really believed, that maybe had fantasies about that this could be made somehow turn the right direction. I think they were very, very few who believed 10 months later.

So what was going on with your brother Povilas at this time? The Soviets have come in.

Like two or three months later-- he told me this later. He was already out of it.

OK, was he still studying?

But he was probably still leftist in his some ideas, which is nothing wrong. But he was out of there. If he had even any dreams that maybe this was clear, immediately it was clear to anybody.

At this point, Povilas would have been about, oh, 28 years old, something like that.

He was working as a veterinarian already.

OK. In Birzai?

No, no. He was in Kedainiai, and later in the Vilnius area.

Area, OK.

He became also very close just in his profession. He did not write anymore, did not publish.

Well, you know, for someone who has leftist leanings, this kind of experience was quite traumatic. Because it is belying the idealism that a person could have had, you know. And you have this inner immigration, what the East Germans call [GERMAN], yeah?

Yeah. That's what they say, that unfortunately these left ideas [INAUDIBLE] communism started in the wrong country in the wrong time.

I want to touch on something else that you mentioned earlier and that's on the antisemitism aspect. You say that both the politruki and the mayor were hated--

I think that fact that both were Jews, to the farming community who had just 20 years earlier managed to liberate from Tsars and had this very sense of being independent [INAUDIBLE] and still very, very fragile, to see that we are again controlled by somebody else, if not Tsars, then Jews, somebody, I think that-- I could feel that. It was not talked much about. But jokes were made about [INAUDIBLE].

I don't remember the jokes. But Russians, now we have, again, Russians and the Jews. And I think that aspect, this has not been-- maybe it has been written about, sort of mentioned that this instituted just fresh liberation and now, again, somebody else is there on top of us had important effect on why some of them ignored or did not pay too much.

And then especially the killing of Jews coincided with the big deportation, you know, for Lithuania. But that minimized, I think, sympathies for what was happening at the same time to the Jews. It affected. How much? You know, like same when now they discuss how Putin and Russian affected Trump's election. And one says this and this and [INAUDIBLE]. But definitely, yes.

And had you heard before, like before these events, before the Soviet takeover, had you heard people make jokes about Jews or say antisemitic things?

No, no. Jews [INAUDIBLE] some-- even if I could read in those transcripts from BBC-- and, later, I was typing them-- still it was so outrageous that many did not believe that this is really happening. You know, human beings are not made up to react personally to a abominable events.

OK, I have to confess that I did not react to the 9/11 event until I met some really people who just managed to escape, or the fireman from Soho right there where I live. Then it became real. When I watched the buildings collapsed, and I knew that thousands of people under collapsing, I had no emotional-- it was too big.

Does it mean that, when you had no emotional response, you didn't care, or it was too big?

No, no, that you are not made physically to-- it's like too big, abstract, too big. Only when-- it has to become more personal.

Well, you know--

I will tell you later another story where there's killing of the Jews.

Well, you know, that reminds me of what Stalin said, which many people say was his strategy and his tactic, that the death of 6 million-- or he didn't use the word 6 million. But the death of a million is a statistic. The death of one person is a tragedy.

Yes.

You know, I'm paraphrasing here.

That's a tsunami. It's too big. We are not made up psychologically, humans. You need something personal, something that you can identify.

So here's my question. When you--

So I was [INAUDIBLE] and people, when those-- again, the population did not get that information, those [INAUDIBLE] newspapers. Mostly the intellectual kind of community saw them. So that [INAUDIBLE] that, oh, you know, Germans there are killing all the Jews.

They take, you know, somebody in the village shoots one German soldier. They wipe out the whole village. They believe it, and they did not believe. It was like, how could anybody be so horrible?

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I'm going to try to anchor this in this particular time.

Yes.

You're talking about BBC transmissions that you are involved in distributing, not yet transcribing, but still distributing.

What the Soviets were doing in their own country, in the gulags, et cetera.

OK.

That was easier to [INAUDIBLE], because that was already happening to Lithuanians. And that was easier to understand.

That was real. That was actually real.

That was real.

What Germans were doing, it was not so real yet.

But was the BBC at this time, while they're still allies, the Soviets and the Germans, were they transmitting already the crimes of the Germans against the Jews? That is, was that something that you were picking up?

I think they were when they did already. They weren't doing that in Poland, you see.

Yes, right. That could have very well been--

Yes.

--that it was happening in Poland.

Yes.

So you would have been getting news of these atrocities--

Through BBC.

--through the BBC while the Soviets are still in power?

Yes.

OK. And people in their circumstances, non-Jewish people the Lithuanians and whoever else was not Jewish, was looking at the Jews who might have been put in power and saying, look at, they have brought a new regime. We're not independent anymore. And at the same time, if they get news from some underground press, they don't believe it too much.

Yeah. But as I said before, [? the ?] [INAUDIBLE] the population of the Lithuania did not know that, did not get that new. They did not read BBC then.

OK. OK.

That was known by some.

But you knew it? Yes? You knew it.

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I knew it, as hard as it was to believe. I knew it, yes

What was going on in Poland, you know, at that time?

Yes.

OK.

Yes.

OK. So this time when the teacher, the [NON-ENGLISH], the political officer, gives you this warning, is coming close to when the Soviet Nazi--

During the last months of the--

The last months?

Yeah, somewhere there. There I cannot place it. My memory--

That's OK. That's OK. Now, we come to June 1941. Do you remember the actual deportations? Did you see any of it?

During one period, but I do not know if it was during that period. And don't know what months. But I remember that with some other friends, students-- the railroad station in Birzai was a little bit sort of on this side of, not in the center. As in many old cities, it would be on this side of the city.

And I was very good in mathematics and some other things. And I was tutoring some students in mathematics not far from the station. And then as we walked back to my place, he says, let's go around. Those are the trains where yesterday they arrested somewhere. They are full. There are guards. And they're ready to go to Siberia or wherever [INAUDIBLE].

So someone told you, as you're going back-- first of all, the train station is not in the center of town. It's on the outskirts in Birzai.

On the side.

On the side.

So we looked at those trains, you know, wagons. There were, like, five, six, or whatever. And we knew that they will go to Siberia.

And did you see the guards? Did you see guards?

No, we were too far to-- no. But we just saw, could see the train. So that's the only thing that I could ever, ever-- and I don't remember which. I don't think this was, because I was not in Birzai during that June during that period.

During 14, 15.

I was on the farm.

OK.

You see, during the school season, I was in Birzai. But during from end of May, from May to the September, I was always on the farm helping my parents. So I know that during that period, we heard. You know, the rumors immediately

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you cannot-- they go, like, fast.

OK. So did anyone from Semeniskiai get deported?

No. No. Nobody from-- but from two or three other villages we know that there were deportations, yes, families.

OK. So we're talking now for the camera for those who will not know about this. The Soviets implemented a series of deportations in the territories that they controlled. And in the Baltics, the first wave took place June 14th, 15th--

As a mass.

--as a mass.

This is outside of the individual--

Arrests.

Many individual families deported before.

That's right.

Yes.

That's right. As a mass deportation in June 14, 15, 1941, which is about a week before the Nazis attack the Soviet Union, which Lithuania was then a part of. So this is what I'm asking about now is about these deportations. And was there talk in your family that, oh, we're going to be on the lists?

No, no.

No. There wasn't any fear.

My family was never afraid. Because by that time, Povilas, who was involved in politics, was in Vilnius. [INAUDIBLE] he was not part of the family already for, like, a decade.

He was outside in the studies then he went-- So they were just considered and would have been considered not very important. [INAUDIBLE] working, just workers working.

So their farm was too small.

Yeah, yeah, farmers.

Yeah, they're too small a farm to be deported.

Yeah. The people I know, they're from the village of Paroveja.

Paroveja.

There were some richer families there. Those who were affected, that's where. But I do not know.

I never had, again, much knowledge who lived in those villages. I was, again, in my shell. But there were some richer families, I know.

And also, there was one. [INAUDIBLE] the name was, was very connected with-- they had relatives in America. And they used to send money. And they had very special horses there.

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And everybody knew that that's because they have a family in America. So they were deported. Sometimes the reasons were not even clear why some people were deported. Somebody had to say something bad, you know.

So now, we--

You not always have to be a kulak--

Yeah, a kulak.

-- a rich one.

Yeah.

There were many other reasons.

Well, you know, that's why I had asked earlier about how many hectares you had, because that sometimes determined whether or not family was deported.

Yeah. But our family was not known for-- actually, the whole-- OK, not all of those seven or eight or nine villages of that time, talking like a bunch of villages around Semeniskiai when my father was [LITHUANIAN], like, families moved apart in individual plots of land.

That's [? for the ?] German--

Not at the same time, not at the same time, Semeniskiai was one of the first ones. And why I'm-- oh. And, therefore, they had to destroy their beautiful old houses. And to begin to build the whole set, you know, the living house, the barn--

Everything that belongs?

So the village was known, because of that, and it was, very, very deep in debt, very poor. I know from my father. used He used to send me monthly to pay interest monies to--

On the loan?

Yeah. He had so many loans from different people, from doctors from in Papilys. So that the village was known as pretty poor, really poor because of that.

So [NON-ENGLISH] we'd say in Lithuanian.

Yeah, yes.

They were in debt, because of having to build.

They had to build the new--

OK. Even now-- I watched it all built-- I can build a house. And I actually Serpentine Gallery in London would like me to build one.

Really?

Yeah, a Lithuanian living house.

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Oh, sort of like a farm house? An old-fashioned sort of--

No, they want a living house. Like five, six years ago, they asked me.

OK.

And I could do it, but--

Let's come now to the Nazi invasion. Do you remember where you were?

My Russian invasion I remember very well. And I have described it and told about it many times. You can read about it in my book, A Dance With Fred Astaire.

That's the Russian invasion.

Yes, also in the film that Douglas Gordon just made based on my book, I Had Nowhere To Go.

OK.

It's in the book by the way in the introduction, maybe not. In any case, the German, we did not-- also, the Russian invasion, besides, they came in with the tanks along the dusty country road with little wooden bridges-- and stupid. Tanks then later, you know, went on the bridge and, of course, went into the river.

Because the bridge couldn't hold it.

They could not hold, those bridges. They miscalculated. German, we did not see for weeks.

We knew that they are there. They are there. They past. We kept seeing army marching, passing along the road.

Main road? Main roads or through the villages themselves?

Through the main roads, of course, but through the only road from Birzai to Papilys. And that's almost 25 kilometers. Was the only road, the one that passed our farm, through our farm. [INAUDIBLE]

So you saw it? You saw them all march past?

Yes, the army. I saw. That's the only road that was.

OK, OK.

So we saw them. But you know, I had my lesson already with the Russians. So we just looked from the curtain.

OK. Well, tell us what that lesson with the Russians was when the Russians had come.

The Russian was when-- you see, to me it was the first occupation, the first army, the first war. But to the parents, it was the second, at least their second. They went through 1914.

So when they saw the tanks rolling, Russian from Birzai to Papilys-- or maybe it was the other direction. No, no, from Birzai they came from. The fear was there.

And they looked through their windows. The road was like 200 meters from the house. And only through the slit of the curtains, they were so-- you know, they knew what may be coming.

But to me, it was-- I just Povilas had just sent to me as a present a still camera, a tiny still camera, my first camera in my

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life. And there is a fresh roll of film. And I see, oh, the tanks are rolling, the dust [INAUDIBLE]. This is perfect. This is perfect first image.

So I run to the road. And others are trembling. I'm running to the road, because I'm an innocent, you know. This is just tanks rolling. And I run. It's the cemetery there. I sit on the edge on the stones of the wall of the [INAUDIBLE], relaxed. And kick, I take a nice picture.

Picture.

And of course, the captain, whoever was there, noticed that. You know, they look, you know. And somebody may be shooting us-- and runs to me, grabs the camera, pulls camera, rips out the film, throws it on the ground, and then rubs with his boot into the dust of the road.

The film and the camera?

The film.

The camera he hands, amazing, back to me, but with no film, and points to the house. And more or less, spoken Russian, but he said, I understood. You, stupid, you better go back there, you stupid kid.

And did you?

I ran. I did not have to be told twice.

Yeah.

But that's where my first image ever taken with my first camera-- in the dust--

In the dust.

Under the Russian boot. So when the Germans were coming in, rolling, I really-- I better--

You didn't take any pictures.

No more pictures.

Well, what do you remember of them in your mind's eye?

Oh, just see the same visually, I see the tanks. I see the dust, motorcycles, the soldiers visually. There's nothing-- it's very visual, very impressive.

I've heard people say that in that part of the country they marched for days, you know, days and days.

Maybe that was one of the sort of comfortable-- that's the road that led maybe-- no, to Riga there were other, maybe to some strategic spot. I don't know. That's not for me.

So how did life change under the Germans?

Not much, not like the Soviets. Everything changed from the second day and essentially. Here, for some time, I mean, Germans were in the war business.

And they were marching during that period very, very intensively in a concentrated way. Though I believe that they had planned and everything prepared what they will do in Lithuania, Latvia, and brought some people with them, who to [INAUDIBLE].

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But they could concentrate-- they were in action. They were in action, not like the Soviets who came and stood there. They were there.

Here, they were moving to Moscow. So they could not, I think, concentrate, could not pay enough attention to everything, to the details. They said, OK, we are going to win.

We'll do what we are going to do. But, now, we have no time. All we need-- your meat. So we need grain. We need food.

So requisitions?

Yes, requisitions.

Requisitions and confiscations?

And horses-- they were concentrating on that. And everything else, what would have come later, we don't know. But they immediately dealt with the-- what did you call it? Not the problem or question of Jews.

Judenfrage?

Yeah. And that they felt, I think that to the orders you have to deal immediately. And that's why, I think, that, OK, they marched in when? What time?

It was June 1941.

Which part of June?

It would have been the 22nd, I think is when the--

So end of June.

End of June, yeah.

And the killing of Jewish must have been July?

August. July and August, yeah-- started.

But most, I think, the same-- OK, you have more information. That happened in all of Lithuania same time?

Well--

Because I think that their plan had to be to do it at once and [INAUDIBLE], so that--

What we do know is that between June and December 1941, in that six month period, the majority of Lithuania's Jews were killed and a great many in the summertime.

As far as I have been told in Birzai, in that area, most of the Jews were killed right maybe in July, like in a very short period.

Well, what I've read is that it was August or early August, very early August. But what is interesting for us is, did you see anything of this? Did people talk about anything of this, of what was happening?

They talked. I don't remember how, you know. [INAUDIBLE] talk, but you couldn't see. If you are in the countryside,

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you don't see. But you could hear it.

Could you hear it?

Because, you know, farmers still went to every Monday to the market. So the farmers had to hear or had to miss. Like, OK, I know that my mother, every time she came back from the market, she brought us-- they used to make special tiny sort of, but very tasty, bagels.

And those bagels were made by one Jewish family. So of course, those who are used to buying certain things, the farmers, that they need-- and most of the stores, the key stores were owned by Jews. So they went and said, where-- they could see. They could not not miss.

OK. They could not not see it.

Yes.

Is this what you're saying?

Yes.

OK. And so the bagels stopped coming.

Yes. The bagels probably stopped coming.

Yeah.

I'm using as an example.

I know. I know. Did you yourself--

They were aware of it. They did not know the details, or they knew that they were shot and where they were buried. They knew that. You know, you cannot-- those are sort of basic facts of any situation.

Did you go to Birzai that summer?

I went to Birzai that summer. Like I think it was two or three, at least two weeks after the big, main killing. So it must be somewhere. That means in August maybe.

And the reason-- I don't know what the reason, because I still had my attic, all my stuff there. And also I was trying to get a job.

What kind of job?

Any job, but I ended up-- now that's where my memory fails. Was it next summer that I worked for two weeks in a pharmacy?

In a pharmacy.

In a pharmacy.

OK.

Pharmacy-- two weeks, because I could not stand the smell. They were packaging some powder kind of medicine into paper bags. And that powder was floating--

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In the air?

--in the air. And I used to get dizzy. But there was another reason, which is funny. And some of the workers, I noticed, they did not like me for some reason.

And the reason was, you know, I'm a naive country boy. Some noticed that some very strong macho guys come in, and they don't go to the-- I notice they always come to me, not to the young women who were also working there. They come to me.

And they sort of don't talk normally. But they say, do you have just conservatives, conservative--

Preservativy?

--something that I understood that I did not know. But you know, it was condoms. It was condoms. So I used to [INAUDIBLE], hey, do we have--

You shout it.

I shout it, which made those guys sort of blush. And then the girls, they took it. So they thought, oh, this crazy nitwit guy. Who needs you here?

But this, you don't remember if that was the summer of '41 or '42?

I would have to really try to trace it somehow.

OK. The summer--

I had later tried to recreate where I was, what I did what period. But that was then, like, 10 years later. And it's discovered I made some mistakes.

So I would have to-- but that was, must have been, in late-- I know it was very close to the school season. But then I went back to the village. But I think it was next year.

OK. Let's still concentrate, though, on the summer of '41. You hear of these things that are happening of the shootings of the Jews through, let's say, trips to the market that your parents would take. And they come back with news.

Through the people, through the neighbors.

Through people.

Yes.

Yeah.

I mean, events like that-- I mean, every farmer made friends. Many of the very useful items that the farmers needed were handled by the Jewish. It's like tradition. They had contact. They could import.

And the Lithuanians, you know, after 1918, they were all new still in the businesses. They were not that good. So some of the best stores were run by the Jews. So they knew that something horrible [INAUDIBLE].

When the Germans had marched in, was there the same feeling of fear as there had been with the Soviets amongst people, amongst the farmers, amongst the villagers?

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No, because the fear is generated by what they do to you. And immediately, they didn't do anything. They left everybody alone. They noticed Germans only with the killing of the Jews.

OK. So it was that non-Jews were left alone, but Jews were immediately affected--

Yes, I think so.

--immediately rounded up, immediately taken.

It must be, yes.

Did the people ever talk about anybody in the villages who was involved with this type of activity?

No, I never heard. Because I bet there were some involved, but they were not from the villages, maybe closer villages to Birzai. But we were 20 kilometers.

In those days in Lithuania, is like here would be 400, 300 miles. So we were really not in the vicinity of Birzai. Semeniskiai was not in-- or Papilys.

Did anyone have a car in your village?

[LAUGHTER]

No car. There was one radio in seven villages.

OK.

No car, no electricity, no nothing.

OK.

[LAUGHTER]

[INAUDIBLE] car.

And did anybody join the uprising, you know, the uprising against the Soviets?

I knew one student who was in the same-- it was not in my class-- who was later-- OK, one student, I knew him, because he was also writing. In high school, the eighth grade was divided. It was there were 20 students.

So it was on different floors, different rooms. But I knew him through the writing, sort of interests in writing. And later, he was the one who started like a week-- this is all that I'm finding now. For instance, people don't believe when I tell that we did not know in the villages that there was this temporary government created in Kaunas or Vilnius, wherever [INAUDIBLE].

The provisional government.

Yes, provisional government. We heard something about it later when it was already long gone. Why I'm-- oh, yeah. But the provisional government-- this, again, you know, I did not know then, but I'm finding out now-- instigated creation of provincial-- some, maybe four or five.

They were instrumental and originating or create newspaper, provincial newspapers. Not every provincial newspaper was instigated from. They just came very naturally, or they divided some of the former.

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So papers that--

But the paper in Birzai was-- I understand now from what I'm being told-- instigate original idea to revive [LITHUANIAN] came from this provisional government. And it was one of the students that I knew. Jonas Petronis was like one of the editors.

The paper, the connection, came through certain Lipniunas, who was teaching, and Rudis, who later ended up in Chicago and who later became very much connected with the underground.

Before Chicago.

But, originally, he was connected sort of very close to the provisional government. And he was the director of the high school for the Birzai school. So they started this newspaper and invited to do the main work, Jonas Petronis, whom I knew [? underground. ?].

But he had been part of this uprising then, this Petronis?

And he was part of the uprising. Again, he was-- it's then that I--

Excuse me for a second.

--discovered already in some two months later in the newspaper he published a poem by the local poet describing the underground, sort of poetically, activities of this mysterious group that called themselves The Six.

The Six?

Yes.

OK.

So then it's from that poem that I discovered that there was this underground activity going that I knew nothing about and that Petronis, whom I sort of knew in a small way, was connected with it.

When you talk about this Six and the underground, are you talking about during the Soviet times they were underground or during the German--

Under the Soviets.

Under the Soviets, they had been an underground group.

Yes.

OK.

And there was this Jonas Petronis was connected with it.

Let me ask this a different way. Did you ever see anybody in your village who wore a white armband or was a [LITHUANIAN] or something like that?

No, no, no.

No, no, no. And this Petronis, was--

What does that mean?

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[LITHUANIAN]? It was part of the people in the villages who were part of the uprising against the Soviets.

Oh, so my village is not very patriotic.

[LAUGHTER]

No. No, I did not see that. But I don't even remember later when visit for the first time Birzai. Maybe something that I saw and I forgot [INAUDIBLE].

But in any case-- and then, since I knew him a little bit when I was in Birzai, I decided to go and say hello to him. Oh, oh, you are the one who never misspells. because I was known as a--

A good speller.

I could have gone to the spelling bees. So when you have time sometime, come and help us to proofread. I said, maybe if I have-- because, I mean, you don't want 20 kilometers to just help when you are needed, the summer, the busy period.

But when I came back in September, quite often he used to be when he could not deal with his own proofreaders. And I helped him. That was my first contact with newspapers to help the proofreader.

OK, the newspaper, it was called Naujosios Birzu zinios, this one?

Yeah. I did not know. It was never used. No, Naujosios. It was known as Birzu zinios.

Birzu zinios.

Did you still live with your uncle now? After that first year--

That next coming year, I was still in the eighth grade until the spring. I was living still in the attic of my uncle.

Then you'd lived with the bagel lady the seventh year?

Yes. That was before, yes.

Yes. Was that far from where your uncle lived?

No, it was actually close to-- by the lake next to church of-- that may have been the Jewish section, because it was very poor little houses not very far, close to the Protestant church.

Did you ever walk by it after you moved out of that place?

No. Ah. Almost like two houses from where I lived with the Jewish old woman, bagel, there was another more modern official building, which, when Soviets came in, they moved immediately into it. And it became the secret police, the NKVD house.

Oh, jeez. OK.

So everybody stayed out from there.

OK. What was her name? Do you remember her name, this landlady that you had?

No.

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No, no. So after that, you'd never walked in that neighborhood, that part of town, again.

Very close, because I had very, very, very close friend there who happened to be Jewish. Also, he was more in philosophy. And that's when I began occasionally to go to with him and, actually, by myself to the Jewish-- I always forget.

Synagogue?

Synagogue, I used to stand in the back. I was interested. I was very much in Vydunas and Krishnamurti. That was the period I was very much in the Asian, you know, the mystics--

Mystics, yeah.

--and in religion in general. And I remember that I used to go to synagogue. Because some of the friends of my uncle, who was a pastor, told me, why do you go? You embarrass your uncle by going there, embarrassed. And they told me not to go to the synagogue.

So they thought that you're embarrassing your uncle by going?

Yes.

Was your uncle--

Because religious Catholics, Protestants, Catholics were not very happy that there were still some Protestants left. They were following the Jesuit plan.

And was your uncle embarrassed?

So that's why I remember it so well.

Was your uncle actually embarrassed, or did he mind?

I never asked him. He never told me that. He was very open. He was very kind of open person.

And do you remember the name of this friend, the philosophy friend that you had?

All-- Andrejauskas.

Andrejauskas?

Yes.

Yeah. And what happened to him?

I don't know.

OK. OK. So let's go back now. You're working on Birzu zinios.

Not working on--

But you're just proofreading.

Sometimes helping to proofread when they failed, because they had the official proofreader. But sometimes he could not deal with it [INAUDIBLE].

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OK. That's like if I would say bringing sandwiches for Scorsese that I'm working for his production.

Got it. How did your life progress then afterwards? How did your life progress?

My life in progress very [? well. ?]

Well, how did things go on then after you came back to school that fall?

I just stuck to my school and did a lot of writing. I did a lot of writing--

Poems?

--during that period.

Poems?

Poems and prose, a lot of short stories.

Did you get anything published?

I published some poems, yeah, some poems.

In what kind of publications?

The only one I knew.

Oh.

No, actually, I published-- before, I had published already in the [NON-ENGLISH].

The Farmer Adviser.

I published my first poems when I was 14.

Oh, wow.

So I had already-- was in some children magazines.

OK.

And then I think I published at least two in Birzu zinios, and maybe at least two later in Panevezio. I was not very [? good. ?] I wrote a lot, but it wasn't that good.

Well, in this article that you mentioned before, the one from the New York Review of Books, there is something there that you published regularly in Birzu zinios.

Not regularly.

OK.

To publish two or three poems and one end of day year Christmas sort of anecdotal story with farmers talking to animals.

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Ah, OK.

So that's called [INAUDIBLE] that's--

OK. So your association--

But this is not the end of the story. You see, we did not progress further from July or whatever.

OK, we're now in--

Because Petronis remained the main worker, though the paper was controlled totally by Rudis and Lipniunas. It was not even Petronis.

And that went for almost-- OK, Petronis, they began publishing very soon, whenever the Germans came in. And he remained the main worker until maybe March of next year.

So that would have been March of '42.

'42 [INAUDIBLE]--

OK.

--when he was arrested by Germans and sent to the East, in the army. He was drafted. They just came in. Germans went through the periods of when they surrounded the city. And any one of the army age was drafted automatically. I was in one of those cases.

Oh, really?

Almost.

OK.

I walked down dressed-- again, you can read it in my book-- up as a girl.

No, really?

It was my trans--

Vestite?

--moment. And I succeeded, because I went with two-- when they surrounded the city, I was tutoring two young girls math. Everybody thought I'm going to be rich mathematician.

And so what to do? The neighbors came in and said [INAUDIBLE]. We were on the edge of the city. I told you this before.

They dressed me up. And three of us walked out of the city and, actually, walked around the lake where I had a friend, friend family where I stayed then about three or four days. And that house was only a visible distance from Astravas where they shot the Jews, buried, killed and buried the Jews.

Did you ever walk by Astravas after that shooting?

No, that was the only-- somehow during that period-- later, the Soviets, you know, you could visit your [? children's ?] children. No, it was so like, again, another fear floating there covered, another horrible cloud. So it was even, when I

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was staying in the friend's house, we could not walk towards the-- we looked at from the distance.

There were trees. And you know, we knew it's there. And even so, it was horrible to be there and to know that even from that distance.

Did people talk about this after the event?

Not much.

No.

No, no. I think it was too, too horrible. You don't talk, but at least life goes on. You don't dwell on.

At least they may have talked, but I did not hear. I lived in a different world. Oh, OK. 10 months or so later, there he's arrested during one of those--

Round-ups.

--round-ups. And then Lipniunas, who is, you know, my teacher, walks with the politruk. Says, I want to talk. And he tells me this privately.

He says, we need somebody. You know, you're familiar with all the aspects, the printer, the one who sets it, all to a problems. Can you take, help at least for some aspects of Petronis work?

So you don't say to your teacher that I am not going to do it. And I knew. To me, somehow, my life being books, and literature, and writing made me also interested, what--

In publishing?

--to really touch everything, smell the lead dry. Because it was set letter by letter. It was no [INAUDIBLE]. So I said, sure, I will do it. And that's what I did for quite some time, you know, helping.

OK, so you were setting-- your job was what?

No. Lipniunas and his people bring all the materials ready. And I then take to the printer. They set. I do it appropriately.

And make up the pages, the layouts. And I did that. And I did it very well.

And you mentioned earlier the difference--

But I had some control about covering of the [NON-ENGLISH] artistic [INAUDIBLE]. Because they didn't know, and they were not interested. So there I had something, you know--

So does that mean you wrote about cultural things, or you were able to--

I remember-- no, I asked some of those who knew who were in the field. Because there was really somebody else. Petras Zablockas was pulled in also at the same time. And he was very already known poet and writer.

So he was like the editor. But there were some little things. Like, OK, I did the first and very good review-- I just found not long ago-- of the Miltinis' theater in Birzai, his first performance play that he presented in Birzai. And that's when I met Miltinis.

Oh, I see. I see.

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So I had some--

And he was a playwright and-- Miltinis.

He was theater director--

Theater director.

--friend of Jean-Louis Barrault in Paris and Louis Jouvet. He was educated in Paris. And he was another of my teachers who brought me into, like introduced to [INAUDIBLE] to Sartre to some of the-- part of my introduction to the Western culture, Western literature through Miltinis and his friend Keliuotis. But that's OK.

But then I was very much involved in local culture of Birzai. I was very interested who came. Because, OK, we had Binkis. We had Janonis.

But there were others before. So I did a series of articles on early in Birzu zinios, the early poets of the area. So that's my contribution to Birzu zinios.

You mentioned earlier that there seemed to be a difference in censorship. When you put the linotype-- not the linotype. When you would arrange, you know, you'd get the articles and you'd arranged--

And make up, lay out the metal.

Yeah, the metal. Was that already after a censor had looked at those articles?

No. No, no, no. OK. Germans insisted that every local paper, before it's printed, the main pieces would be summed up in a short paragraph-- they have no time to read-- and presented to some person the Germans had in the mayor's office as their representative. I don't know the details how that worked.

But that was done already by Lipniunas and Rudis before they handed to me the materials. Because, otherwise, suppose if you would do it later, it will be too late. Because it's already made up.

It's already set. It's already set.

So what they gave to me was already--

By the Germans?

They did not need to approve their own bulletins, which was usually first page. But they insisted. And that was part of the job of the publishers.

Were there antisemitic articles that the Germans wanted?

I was told by this guy who wrote this article that only that he told me, but he actually sent me the clippings. I have some clippings. There were.

I did not read too carefully, not so directly. But indirectly, it was clear that those were antisemitic--

Pieces.

--pieces, yes.

OK.

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But that was during the most before the killing. After the killing of Jews, you really have to find-- but I would not bet that in the capital in some of the maybe newspapers there was some continuation for another quite some time.

I see.

But at that time, no. But in the local newspapers, in the provincial, everybody had already seen where the Germans stand. It's no joke that this is real.

I think one of the sorts of implications in that piece in the New York Review of Books piece was that you had your own work published in the same--

In the paper that also printed the German--

Antisemitic articles.

But that was normal. And nobody even read just first pages. Without it, you could not publish.

And the job that the provincial newspapers-- I think that the contribution of the real work of the provincial newspapers during the German occupation are still being understood and recognized. Despite the situation and the politics, the writers manage to promote the local cultures. It was dealt with local cultures.

And that's why I had the series on the past arts in the area. That doesn't start with us. I mean, there was poets from the past.

Well, you know--

They did also risky-- they took chances devoting all the rest to the local, promoting local cultures, and reducing the German space to minimum, to usually page one.

And you know, when you say the German space, do you also mean--

Because the only other possibility would be, OK, now we have German occupation. So we should not write, should not publish, and permit them do everything. That would be the other option. You see?

We decided that we'll do, and we'll do our way. And the we will outsmart them. And we'll just give them crumbs.

Were the LAF-- [NON-ENGLISH]--

But that was not discussed. It was taken for granted.

No, OK. [LITHUANIAN], the LAF Proclamations, were these the--

Where is that? Where was it?

Lithuanian Activist Front.

What was it?

LAFs, have you heard of it before?

Not then. I heard about it for the first time by the guy who wrote the article.

I see. OK. Well, some of--

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Because we did not know that there was this provisional--

Government.

Is that identical, provisional government?

It was the force that started the uprising against the Soviets.

Yeah. But, you see, we didn't know even about the uprising. We only knew that Germans now came in, and there they are. We did not know in the villages. In our village, in Semeniskiai, we did not know. Maybe somebody knew. I did not know.

Did anybody talk about that there was Lithuanian help in getting rid of the Jews? Or did they usually phrase it--

I'm reading, and I'm told. You know, I'm one who, what somebody tells me, I believe. Later, that has caused me many problems sometimes.

But I believe. If they say that there were some help-- where I doubt is that some of the aspects that help are taken from the Soviet sources. There I become immediately very, very skeptical.

The participation it's clear there was. But when they say, even if it's a mild participation comparatively-- so we will shoot them. But you go and protect the property that is left, which is indirect, sort of difference slightly, which has been picked up from the Soviet sources. The Soviets were masters in making one guilty, inventing a reason, you know?

So that when Matuzevicius, one of friend of Petronis was-- or maybe his friends. I am told that they were asked to take care, protect the properties.

While the Jews are being shot?

Yes. Jewish properties--

Yes. Yes.

--while they were shot. So is it true? And when they say this they found out from confession during the Soviet investigation, I don't know it's real or not real. They did not like MatuzeviÄ ius, because he was part of The Six in the underground working against the Soviets.

But, otherwise-- especially when I was already after the war in Germany in displaced person camps-- and again, you have to read my book, I Had Nowhere To Go. Some of the young people between 20 and 27, they were so horrible. They could kill anybody. And they could steal, rob, kill.

Some were volunteers in the German army. Some were drafted by force. But while in the army, they became like that, but some volunteers.

So I have no doubt that they could have shot Jews or anybody with no blink of the eye. And I was living among some of them immediately after the war. Because they were, you know, just from the army.

Well, you highlight some--

So I have no doubt that there were some. Yes.

But you don't remember hearing about people saying--

No, no.

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--oh this guy down the street, he was involved.

No, no.

OK. OK.

But, again, that doesn't mean that people were not talking about it. But you have to take my case, individual case.

Yes.

I was still in my shell.

Well, you were in a literary world. It sounds to me that that's what you are trying to tell me is that it was literature and culture.

That was only one part. My retreat into the shell was caused by my illness. And the illness went me into the mystics. And that's where the period when I was totally in Bhagavad Gita, in Krishnamurti, in Vydunas. I was there. The only book I brought out with me was Bhagavad Gita, Vydunas' translation--

No kidding.

--from Lithuania.

No kidding.

I was completely in a different world, which later I began trying to liberate. It's not good to get lost in mysticism too much. It took me years to become more real. I'm still not there. I'm still with Eckhart, Meister Eckhart.

The literature takes you over. And you are with it [INAUDIBLE] your sensibilities have somewhere else, interests somewhere else. The muses take complete control.

But you become more involved in the paper. Now, with your setting the type and--

Not setting the type, those are specialists.

OK.

No, those are-- oh, that's an art in itself. But, yes, I was putting the pieces together.

The layout, excuse me.

Actually, sometimes there were a couple people. And actually, there was one who was connected. Later a find this out. And I stood by-- connected with the provisional government, Galvanauskas.

Galvanauskas.

Galvanauskas. He, Lipniunas, my publisher, used to bring together with-- this is all the-- articles by Galvanauskas. And they were all very long and involved. And I couldn't understand what he was talking about there. But I was read, you know?

Before I took to the printer, I always read them. Because there were many mistakes I had to correct, language mistakes. And I read those.

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And I could not believe that Lipniunas is giving me to publishing this. And two or three times, I persuaded him not to publish it.

What kind of topics were written in there?

Very political, I mean, the future of Lithuania. I could not-- they were so above my head.

Were they like, we're together with the Third Reich type of articles?

No, no, no. When I'm reading, you know, [INAUDIBLE], I would like to read. And maybe they had-- you could lead it to maybe it came from there. I don't know.

At that time, all I understood without having any much knowledge about the Third Reich philosophy of politics, all I knew that they want to occupy countries and spread [? ideas. ?]

Was it like the Marxist teacher who was saying to you by rote that this is what's important about the revolution? Is that what you--

No, I did not-- all I knew at that time about the communist [INAUDIBLE] Soviet system is what I had by heart to learn, memorize the history of the Soviet--

Well, this is what I'm asking. Were these articles of the same kind of boring--

Boring, boring, very boring, it goes and goes. And you don't know when you lose the sense what he's talking about. But I take to my credit that I manage to persuade sometime not to print. And they were long, those.

All right, so--

But I did not know that he was also-- he had a brother connected with--

But it sounds like, at this time, you weren't in any danger really through whatever you were doing. None of it was the kind of--

No, I was not in danger, except I had to be very, very careful. We are not even came to that, that very soon after the Germans came and I moved back to school, I was asked also to type those materials.

So I became already technical, the connect to underground. They used to give me transcript from BBC. They gave me special typewriter, which I had to hide.

Because Germans were looking for that face, a typeface. That was the only way they could detect who is publishing them. So this specific little publication, four page, which was not printed, no set in any of the printing shops, but typed--

So in other words, the--

And then multiplied by what was known as [LITHUANIAN]--

[LITHUANIAN]?

I had to type them on stencils, on special [? type-- ?]

Is this like a mimeograph machine?

Yes. Yes. Yeah.

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OK.

So they used to being texts. They brought it, the typewriter, which after I type I had to hide, because being searched by German military police. [INAUDIBLE] type. Then the guy comes, picks up the stencils. And they reproduce and do whatever else they do with it.

But that was my job. And the job was because those transcripts were written fast. They listen, and they [INAUDIBLE]. And they needed a lot of corrections. So I had to--

Were the--

--sort of--

OK.

Whoever was taking notes from the radio was doing that during the transmission time secretly also. And then those notes were given to me to transcribe on stencils.

OK. What I would like to clarify--

And that's where it became dangerous. And that's what brought me here to this table.

OK. I'd like to clarify again for my own mind--

Yes.

--what I understand you're saying is that when you worked for this Birzu zinios, which in the article is named Naujosios Birzu zinios, that is totally separate from this activity that you're talking about now.

But simultaneous, same time.

Yeah. You did the one, and you did the other.

Yes, and many other things, which we are not even talking about.

Well, what are some of those other things?

We would have to-- no, let's talk about what's [INAUDIBLE].

OK.

I was involved in the creating of the theater. And there are other activities.

OK. Let me get my train of thought again. First, you work, as well as going to school, at that newspaper. And then you take up underground activity again.

And working-- I was there. Because remember that this is when I'm still in gymnasium.

That's right.

That means I'm there. And between every week, certain days when the materials are ready. So I spent maybe some two or two different days, two or three hours. So that's my work to [INAUDIBLE].

Did you get money for this?

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No.

How did you live? I lived in my uncle's house. And my mother's sister was living there. And she fed me.

She took care of you.

OK. So you take up the underground activity again after a certain interruption.

Not again, there was no stop. Only that, under the Soviets, I was only helping to distribute, to disseminate. Under the Germans, I was helping to distribute and also involved in the production.

Did these leaflets--

I was also, you know, connection with-- because Jonas Narbutas, who later was editor of Panevezio balsas, he was involved in a bigger way, much bigger, national way, the underground publications. But I helped to distribute. But here, in Birzai, I was directly involved in the production.

Now, I have so many questions about this. First of all, did you ever listen to these transmissions?

Sorry, this light. Sometimes I--

Did you ever listen to the transmissions yourself from BBC?

No. No.

No.

I did not know English at all.

So everything came in English?

Yes. Everything came to me in Lithuanian.

So somebody who listened, took notes, and translated.

Immediately transcribed. Whoever listened knew English and immediately wrote notes in Lithuanian.

Did you ever know who it was who was listening?

No.

OK.

I bet several people.

OK.

There were several different handwritings. So I know it was different people.

And they started already with 1941, in 1941 in doing this?

I don't know when this started. But their contact came to me sometime in the late fall. In the fall, that means, like, four, five months later after Germans.

OK. Of '41? Yeah.

After Germans came in.

And during this, was it the same group that had been in the anti-Soviet underground? Or was it different people?

No idea. It was very, very secretive.

Really?

Totally. You could not-- I had only this one contact.

And who was that? Who was your contact?

And I don't-- now, I don't-- I knew him, because I knew his face. He was in a earlier class, one class before me. So I knew who he was. And I sometimes remember his name. Sometimes his name escapes.

You forget it, OK.

But that's all I knew. And he was very, very, very, very closed. Not only closed-- OK, now the time comes when one night-- I typed only at night in my attic.

I go for the typewriter. And there is no typewriter. The typewriter was stolen.

I used to hide it outside by the barn, sort of barn [INAUDIBLE] in a huge wooden stack. And I thought it was very safe. Nobody was coming there.

This is it by your uncle's home?

Yes.

But, you know, that--

That typewriter is gone. So--

I'm sorry, Jonas, I have to interrupt.

Yes.

I want to clarify one thing. So you were doing this for about four years? If you start--

No, no.

Three years?

Yeah, maybe, yeah.

Well, three years.

Something like that, yeah.

OK. And--

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Not even. So you are taking the occupation period, but I came in into the leaflet distribution already some time after the Soviets were there.

That's what.

I'm talking about German occupation, which starts in 1941.

Yeah.

And it goes till 1944. And if you start in the fall of '41, then you're there at least two years, three years.

Yeah, something like that. Yeah, yeah.

OK. So--

And I did only this, restricted only to that.

That was your underground activity to that.

Yeah, nothing else.

OK. Did that leaflet have a name? Did it have a title?

I don't remember. I remember once seeing a page from some museum in Lithuania with the different titles [INAUDIBLE]. And I wish I could have that. And I remember seeing it there, but I don't remember.

The same with Narbutas but I think it was [LITHUANIAN] or something [INAUDIBLE].

Word of the nation.

It was much bigger.

Yeah. OK. So you don't remember the name of it.

[INAUDIBLE]

And was it a page or two pages?

Usually, it was two pages, two long pages.

Front and back or two pieces of paper?

Two with text on both sides.

So it would be one sheet.

Like the full sheet, full [INAUDIBLE].

OK. In other words-- one sheet of paper, both sides.

Yes.

OK. Not two sheets of paper, both sides.

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No.

One sheet.

Some of them came in four pages, but not this one.

So when you would type it up--

Then he would tell me when he delivered that I will be back in two days. So we agree when he will come to pick up and picks up the type. And that's it.

And then they go reproduce it somewhere else?

Yes.

Did you ever get a reproduced copy?

Let's say you give them the one sheet.

Sometimes he used to bring me, yes, which I used then to pass--

To others?

Yeah.

OK.

Yeah.

Did you ever--

And stupidly, some of them-- and that's where-- stupid, naive. You learn lessons, but it's gradually. Many of them I stuck in my attic in the cracks, which I bet when the-- Germans never came.

But when the Soviets came, they looked into every crack. But that would be OK. It's not against them. It's against German.

So this would have been in the attic of your uncle's barn?

Yes.

OK. Never at home?

House. No, in the attic of the house--

Of his house.

--which he lived.

OK. OK.

I was in endangering him, too.

And did you ever see these leaflets? Did anyone ever give them to you not knowing that you had typed them up?

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No, no. I never saw them.

OK. And I want to ask again. Do you remember at least the first name of the man, of this person who you would--

No, his last name keeps coming. And I have written it down. I just [INAUDIBLE]--

Don't have it now.

--right now. Because I there was exactly the same name writer, playwright, in Chicago. So I thought he-- I did not know him-- moved there. This is the same person? Telling the truth, I never asked him-- I never met him-- if he is that person.

So you just knew that later in Chicago there was someone by that name.

Yeah. And maybe before we end the conversation it will come to me.

It's sometimes happens.

But he's quite well-known Lithuanian playwright. And he writes very Ionesco kind of, Beckett kind of plays. I don't like them, but Lithuanians like them.

[INAUDIBLE]. Nakas?

Huh?

Nakas?

No, no, no. Nakas is something else. No, no. Yeah. He lived somewhere there. He was teaching there. I don't know where it is now. He may be in Lithuania.

Well, nevertheless, it must have--

So I have his name.

OK. You must have trusted him.

He trusted me, because he admired me. First, he knew the reputation I had of perfect speller and that I was a good-- I knew Lithuanian language well. So I will be able to correct. Because it had to put it in good shape.

And then he was writing short stories himself. That's why I thought that maybe the connection is with the Chicago, the guy, which he used to give me to read. Because I had already a certain reputation, you see.

So he shared his stories with you.

With me-- and they were very bad. And I never put him really down. So he respected somehow me and trusted.

Because it's a huge trust.

Plus, I have no doubt he was connected, again, to Vaitekunas and Kavalunas.

The people who were in the anti-Soviet underground with you?

Yes.

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OK.

And they were also the same, continued, some of them-- continued.

Under the German.

And then I discovered that his name does not-- maybe later I thought that he was one of The Six. Because nobody knew who those six were even by the time Germans came. But I discovered from this guy who wrote this article who sent me the names that he was not among those. So he was not among these.

By the guy who wrote the article, you're talking about Michael Casper?

Yes.

OK.

He sent me an--

So I found out from Casper that he was not among The Six. That means he came from Kavalunas. So I'm just trying to put things, figure out together. Because he never told-- And the secret-- was coming to it-- was--

Sure. Let's get there now.

--that, so he comes to pick up. And I said, no. I could not type, because the typewriter was stolen. He immediately, like, panicked.

The change that took place on his face, his whole attitude, he totally panicked. Because he had told me before to take good care of this typewriter. We know German police is looking. Military police is looking for that time.

So what hit him remains a mystery in a way to me, because what his first act was he came. It was a raining. He had a raincoat. You pulled out a gun. He pulled out a gun and held it in my face.

Oh, jeez.

You are not faking? It's true. You know what this means? And what this means that this you could be end of-- not end of me. It could be end of you. You know this.

And then he puts down. But that act, I could not-- even today, I see that moment. But I don't understand his [INAUDIBLE] motivation.

But I think it was, like, a panic, sudden realization that this could be the Germans discovered. If the [? thief ?] sells it, it's discovered. I mean, it was bad. But his reaction was-- why didn't you could have just told me? Why did you take it-- have--

Why did he pull a gun on you?

Why did you pull-- yes. And that I'm still, you know, when I remember that moment, it's very vivid. And I'm still, you know, mystery.

But I think he sort of-- it was panic realization and panic, something. Maybe he thought-- but how he could have thought that I'm lying or faking? Because that would [INAUDIBLE]. I don't know. It's a mystery.

Do you think that maybe your uncle could have found it?

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No. No.

No. OK.

We had very-- because I told him immediately. I had to tell this. I said this. And then he pulls the gun. And even before he sort of like relaxes-- you have to disappear and immediately, immediately. And that's when--

You left?

That's when I left. But I told then my uncle, you know, what happened, so that he knows.

And what did he say, your uncle?

He agreed. He said, go. You have to go. And he gave me the official-- because one have to get-- OK, so the best would be like fake that you are going to the Vienna, Austria by train to try to get into the University of Vienna.

You were how old at this point?

This was '44. I was 21.

OK.

And he said, I have contacts. I will give you contacts in Vienna. And I will give you contacts. And he gave. I remember it was Frau [? Durberry ?] in Basel.

And then, if you go to there and there, you can just walk into Switzerland. It is no problem. So I have the names of the friend.

So he was thinking of a way to get you to neutral territory.

Yes, to Switzerland.

OK.

That was the plan. And that's what you just had to have from the Birzai local German police permit to board a train to Vienna. And that's what he got for us, uncle.

And why did you--

And why he got it? Because he was, in Birzai, maybe five people who spoke German. And Germans when they really needed somebody, needed, went to him. Also, he managed, because I was already at the age of being drafted into the army.

That's right.

And I got the papers to go to report. So he said, this is what you do. Here is a bottle of red wine. Take this and tell them that it's from me from him, a present. And I did not know what his plan was.

So I go there in that doctor's office. And I give it to the doctor, a present. This is from my uncle.

Pastor Jasonis. Yes? Your uncle's last name is Jasonis?

No, no. Jasinskas.

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Jasinskas, [LITHUANIAN]. Sorry.

And then the doctor writes a little piece. And then I showed this piece to my uncle [? right ?] [? then. ?] He says, oh, this says that you have a bad case of TB. And you cannot be drafter.

So the doctor understood immediately.

Yes. Because they were craving for wine. In Birzai, there was no wine. And my uncle had wine, church wine.

Oh my, look at that.

Church wine.

Yeah.

A bottle of red church wine, that saved me from German [? army. ?]

Was that the same year, in '44 or earlier?

That was like six months earlier or so before this event that I'm referring [INAUDIBLE].

OK.

And then he said, if you're [INAUDIBLE] then Adolfas maybe, why don't you take him with me?

And why? Why wouldn't you have taken Adolfas with you?

Because he was also in Birzai. He had a job working.

He's 19 years old and so on.

Yes. So in [INAUDIBLE] he not in danger now the danger is coming not very far. The Soviets will be here in two, three months. And then actually that's what happened. Anyway, and we would be in danger anyway. So let's take this chance and try to do what our uncle advises and go.

OK.

And then somewhere--

And so you leave.

We passed Tilsit. And we're really happy. We are on our way to Vienna. And then--

Hang on a second I want to interrupt just for the camera here that this is in July 1944. That's what I got from your books. It was July 12th--

Yeah.

--something like that.

This is already in my book.

Yeah, July 12th, '44 you leave. And you know, the interesting thing is that the assassination attempt on Hitler is 8 days later on July 20th. And I wondered whether you passed nearby the area where that attempt was made.

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Where? You know where?

Was in Prussia, in Prussia. So I don't know if you know--

No, we were directed later into the Prussia-- the train to Vienna was towards Poland first. But about three hours or so later, military police directed us to stop the train and directed it towards Hamburg.

OK.

And that's where our dream of Vienna ends.

Question, did you get on the train in Birzai?

No, in Panevezys.

OK.

Is there a record when the Soviets came to Birzai?

I don't know.

It would interest.

I don't know.

We were already, I remember, a month or two later in Hamburg in the camp where the newspapers-- we saw a photograph in which the church, our church, was there.

Your uncle's church?

Yeah. And it was [INAUDIBLE]. [? It ?] survived and with a news [INAUDIBLE], you know, bulletin that heavy fighting is taking place there. And we saw it in the German paper. So we knew that it lasted at least two or three months until they managed to reach the point.

I want to go back to the train journey. You get on in Panevezys. And you travel for a while.

Yeah.

Do you cross out of Lithuanian territory?

Yes, yes. We pass the bridge in Nemunas in Tilsit.

In Tilsit, so you get into Prussia there.

Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah.

OK. And did you ever have to change trains, or was it the same train?

No, no, the same train. The movements of trains were controlled totally by the army at that time. There were no regular. So we thought that it will go non-stop, you know, in that direction.

And that's when they took not only us. Then they went there. The military police walked through the train.

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And actually, the train may have continued. Because they took only us, myself, my brother, and like maybe 7 or 10 other young people.

All men?

All men, this because they needed workers for the factories. So that's when they took us to Hamburg in the forced labor camp.

So this, the--

And we told-- we were trying with our minimal German [INAUDIBLE]. No, we are students going to Vienna University. No, we don't need students. We need worker.

Were the trains also having families in them? Did they have women and children and soldiers and things like that?

Yes, many families, those that did not want to take chances. Germans still believed that they will win. But to Lithuanians, it was clear that the Soviets are coming back.

So some of them are more educated intellectuals. They had already left their own way, whatever. But these were mostly some more simple people, working people, that we saw in the train.

Were trains packed?

And sometimes not-- very packed. And not even clear where they are going. Every train during that period, whatever, was full.

And what kind of transportation were you put on to get to Hamburg?

They put us on another train.

Civilian train?

I don't remember. They were all the same to me. They were all the same.

Did it take long to get there? I may have it in my book.

OK.

But several days-- there were long stops. And many of the stations were destroyed. There were other reasons. It took several days.

Were there more people, more young men, who were added to your group?

Yes.

As you went along?

Yes.

OK, were they all Lithuanians?

No, no. There were only two other Lithuanians. I remember that. And we did not come to get-- we found them in the camp already.

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And they were Karaims. They were not really Lithuanian. They were from [? Trakai ?] area, two brothers Tinfavicius Karaimai. I remember the name very well, because they were all sort of amateur artists.

They were into cartoons. And they made a portrait of me. And I still have it.

What was their last name? Tinfavicius.

Tinfavicius. T-I-N-F-A--

So we ended up in the same camp. But like one week or so, they moved somewhere else. And we don't know what happened to them.

So when you get to this camp, is it in Hamburg itself?

No, it's like half an hour by train. It's called Elmshorn. It's a small town, Elmshorn.

They were very industrial town. What they were making I don't know. But maybe it was not that important, because it was never bombed.

Even when they bombed every night Hamburg, they never really bombed. Later, it was bombed. But during our stay there for 10 months, it was not.

Was it a [INAUDIBLE]?

They were always flying over our head. So we had every night to go to the cellars to a special-- you know.

Was the camp itself a large camp or a smaller one?

Quite large, it was a combination of-- I don't know how it worked. It was a war prisoner's camp. We were a camp, like 300 or 400 French, Italian war prisoners and mixed nationalities another, like, 100 in my barracks. They were all in different barracks.

Were there Poles there or Russians?

There were some Poles, many Russians.

Many Russians?

Many Russians, yes.

Also prisoners of war?

I don't know how they ended up there.

OK. OK.

There were also Ukrainians. And they were clashing always like that.

With the Russians?

Yes. And followers of Vlasov. Have you heard that, Vlasov?

So there were Russian forced laborers who were followers of Vlasov in this camp?

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They were sympathetic to him.

Sympathetic.

They were there. You could not [INAUDIBLE] Vlasov.

That's right.

We know there was one time when one of the Russians workers, at least it was rumored that one could believe, told to the head of the camp that two or three Ukrainians were siding with the Vlasov. The next day, they disappeared.

Really?

Yeah. From during our stay of 10 months in that camp, in that factory where we worked at least, 15 Russians were--

Disappeared?

--taken away, yes. And rumor was that the Ukrainians are slander-- is telling them.

But my history may not be that good, but I thought General Vlasov was somebody who was on the German side. And so if someone's accused of being with General Vlasov, then why would they be taken away?

Oh, so maybe they told the opposite or something.

Opposite, OK. But I know that it's connected somehow to Vlasov.

OK.

Yeah, yeah. Vlasov was [INAUDIBLE].

So you were able to see these sorts of things going on.

Not only to see, to live through them.

Yeah. How were you treated?

I was always treated-- OK, I will tell you this, another anecdote. Now, the food and life was miserable there. Like our weekly portion of meat was you could cook in your spoon.

Oh, jeez. That's not much.

And at one point, we began to see there is a reduced, like, a daily meal to cabbage soup and some pea soup. And then we see the soup we get. And there are just white things that are not peas at all. There are peas, but they're also just white worms, fat worms.

Maggots.

Maggots. So many pushed them away with your spoon, and you eat the rest, you know? But French, you know, they're more delicate.

They did not like that. They are not eating. So [INAUDIBLE] the soup.

And somehow I had developed relation with my brother with French prisoners, because they could get packages from home. They could get books. And so when one of them discovered at I'm writing poetry, I'm interested in books, he

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used to bring me books.

And I could sort of-- well, I had one year and a half of French. I could manage. And sort of a friendship developed. And they had certain kind of respect.

Then one day, when we had too many of those worms, they decided that the barracks should complain to the Elmshorn, to the German government that is in charge of the camps and prisoners.

So not even to the camp itself, but to the local government at Elmshorn?

Yes, that had took control of the barracks.

Too many maggots.

Too many maggots.

Too many maggots in the soup.

So this guy-- who was head teacher in France. And then he was drafter. Then he became a war prisoner. And he was writing poetry.

He came to me. And he said, we decided in our barracks that you should be our representative and go and complain about the maggots. I said, why not you? Who am I to complain?

But, hey. But with no second thought, I said, sure. I will do it.

So I go. I go to the-- who is-- and there sits this general-- I was told this later-- and stares at me. And more or less-- so what? And there I am. You know, I'm a nothing in this little--

You're a forced laborer.

--jacket. And he looks at me. And I said, oh, lately, we have these worms in the soup. And [INAUDIBLE] they ask me to tell [INAUDIBLE].

And he listened and still stares. And then he said, oh, the soup is primo. The primo was what's used most during that period.

So it's wonderful. The soup is wonderful.

Wonderful-- And then we gets to talk more. I don't even understand. And the tone he was talking to me was like when one talks to a child.

He looked at me. And he thought, this naive kid. He does not know what he is doing, what he's telling me. They tell, you know?

There he is. And he's stupid, some naive boy from Lithuania. And oh, primo, primo. Well, go and tell [INAUDIBLE], goodbye.

And this was-- he was a general?

Yes.

He was dressed in military clothes?

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And then later when I told to some of the others who were there before us, said, you know that you took this chance? I said, no, no chance. They ask me. I did it. I did not think at all that there's anything that I would be in danger.

Were you?

No, I didn't nothing at all. I was so naive and so innocent. And I think that's why-- because, you know, the previous two people who complained, they are not here anymore. Then it hit me that-- you know?

But when they were asking and when I was doing that, it was very normal to me. And that's how naive I was about life even then. Yeah.

What kind of jobs were you doing there? What kind of work did they put you to?

I was polishing some little metal piece that was fit-- silent and secretly, somebody said, oh, this is for U-boats, tried to make it to chip, to chip like one hundredth of millimeter maybe from some metal piece that it would fit wherever it belonged. We did not know what the factory was doing. We only had machines.

And we had instructed, you know, how to do that. And an idiot can learn that, so not every idiot. But you know, we were grown-ups.

So was this factory within the camp compound?

Gebruder Neunert Maschinenfabrik

Gebruder Neunert Maschinenfabrik. So it was a private company owned by the--

And that's still there.

Really?

Gebruder Neunert is still around?

Yes, yes.

Do they know what kind of history they've got?

I don't know. I don't know what they do now.

OK. And that was outside of the--

In this city.

In the city, but not in the territory of your camp?

No, the camp was separately. But camp was in the city, in that [? center ?] sort of part, like a little bit out [? center, ?] going into outskirts. Yeah.

What kind of conditions were in that camp? What were the room like?

Everything controlled, limit the time when you are to report, when you're out, and where you had to be to certain-- report. You are free to walk. Nobody is with you to the factory. But you had to be there at certain time. If you won't be there, they will dogs on you.

OK. Were there people who tried to escape?

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I have not heard during that stay. There may have been. But you know, you don't know everything about what's happening.

Did you see any go--

When you have 1,000 people in that-- know what's happening.

And who was your, let's say, direct authority?

But I managed to hide a Latvian who had escaped from Hamburg digging trenches, which were very, very dangerous at that time and somehow ended up in our-- and how, I have no idea. But some Italian captain, capitano, brings him. And later, I found out he's Latvian-- said, can you hide him under your bed for the night?

Again, without thinking, I said, sure, I will do that. And the check-ins were not every night. They were quite often, the check-ins, and why I did--

And then in the morning on my way to the factory, because I could not keep him for another night, I said, I'm walking. Don't walk with me, but walk like 20, 30 steps behind me. And I am passing the railroad station. From there, it's up to you.

And that's what I did. When I passed the station, I looked, he was not there. He was somewhere there mixed up trying to take a train. So I have no idea of what happened to him. But it was possible to do things like that--

Yeah.

--when you are stupid.

And you don't have a search that particular night, you know?

Yes.

The barracks, what did they look like?

Just shacks of wooden, made up, built in one week or three days.

And how many people?

There were beds.

Bunk beds?

Yeah. Actually, I have a drawing-- talking too long. I have a drawing in I Had Nowhere To Go. You can see.

And how many people were too a room?

Oh.

Hang on a minute.

I think we will have to fix them. You may need another session.

OK. Hang on just a second. Let's cut for a moment. OK. We're going to stop for today and conclude this interview two days from now on Sunday, July 1st.

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We're stopping at the point where Mr. Mekas is in Elmshorn labor camp. And when we come back, we will continue talking about his experiences there.

So for right now, this is a temporary pause in the interview with Mr. Jonas Mekas on June 29th, 2018 in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, New York. Thank you and until next time. And thank you for all the hours you gave us today.

Welcome.

OK.