

OK. We're back. So you were going to tell me about the youth organization that you were part of.

Yes. In 1952, when I entered college, literally everybody, with the exception of one or two students, and they had very strong reasons why they didn't have to be members of this youth organization, which in the name was Union of Polish Youth. That was the official name in Polish. But what it meant is it was a communist organization. Over the years, the Communist Party, which, again, was not called in Poland Communist Party. They were called Party of Polish Workers. That's what was the official name.

Everything was camouflaged and not called by name. But the youth organization was preparation for the activity in adults' party, which was elite of people who have responsibility but also access to the special privileges, which involved purchase of the items which were not available for common people behind so-called yellow curtains, because they had yellow curtains in the windows from the street. You couldn't see, if it was at street level, what's inside. But you have special ID, and you enter. For very nominal prices, you can get-- almost like in the West, full variety of goods.

Some of these younger activists were members of the Communist Party and members as well of the youth organization. And I had several of those at my first year of college. They were sons usually or daughters of communist activists. In my case, I had several colleagues who were children of the ex-communists expelled from Belgium and France, and they were sent to Poland for their activities, communist activities.

They wound up in Poland. They had children. And these children got, without the exams, special exemption. They became the students at the elite, the best of the best schools one could get.

And they were my colleagues, so to speak. And we had ROTC exercises every Saturday. We had to walk to the field and then pretend that we are shooting or whatever, like every ROTC. Again, for boys only. Girls were excluded. But anybody who had two legs, and two hands, and two eyes had to be member. There was no exception.

In that communist organization during-- it was in March, I remember, of second semester in the college, and Stalin died. And there was a huge demonstration of solidarity and memorial in the front. There was a big podium. And all the officials, first secretary of the Workers' Party, all of them, they were on a big podium.

And we had to walk the long walk, and there was borders on these sidewalks. There were activists with the bands on their arms marking they are activists of the youth organization. And they were bordering so nobody could run away from that march.

So we had concentration places. When we gathered, a list were checked. Everybody had to mark his name with red, and there was mark that he is present. No school, whole days. It was for [INAUDIBLE] slightly snowing, and there was no good weather.

Anyhow, we gather, and then in orderly manner we had to walk in the front of these officials, waving to them cheerfully and then in somber kind of the mood because we are all in--

Mourning.

--mourning death of our leader, so to speak, in our day, leader of the communist [? work. ?] There were other-- [? even one ?] small digression. One of my colleagues was close to be expelled from the college because privately he said to another colleague in dorms that, oh, this old man finally kicked the bucket or something. Derogatively, pejoratively he said something about Stalin.

Somebody was listening to it. One of the-- reported to Communist Party. They made a judgment, big court case almost. Professors were seeking students, and he was called and had to testify. And they were going and [? find ?] a few professors. Because he was a good student and a good human being, he was not fired. That's the last resort.

But I remember all this show, all this drama, and it was so ugly. But it shows the incredible power of Communist Party

on every day living at this time, 1950s in Poland, in Warsaw. So when I was participating in that march at the beginning of March 1953, we had homework to do, classes to prepare. And we didn't have time to walk, and we hated them.

So I walk, walk, walk, and there was first opportunity that there was a staircase from the elevated road going down. Myself and 20 other colleagues tried to escape them. But we wanted to do it, all of us, at the same time, and we blocked the entrance to that staircase. Meanwhile this activists, several of them, they're pulling out people who are trying to escape them. And one of them was big guy, bigger than me, and I couldn't beat him because he had a lot of friends there. I would have been beaten there.

So he requested my ID card. An ID card was from the youth organization. So I gave it to him, and he didn't return it to me. He took it with him. And he said, you will come to our headquarters in the district, and you will find it there.

I didn't go there at all. I learned shortly after from a friend of mine who was activist. He checked. They couldn't find this man's ID. And later I learned that I was expelled from the organization for misbehavior.

So I was very, very happy. I couldn't publicly show my joy. Only for the best friends I shared it. Nobody knew that I was expelled.

All the officials, all the other members of that, they were-- I still had to come to the meetings, but I couldn't show my ID card. So I said, my ID card is in the headquarters. So they-- OK, OK. But then I stopped to come to the meetings. I didn't have ID card, nobody cared, and I was liberated from any official participation in the communist organizations.

Did it negatively affect you in any way?

No, it has no impact, just my satisfaction.

Yeah.

My satisfaction.

[CROSS TALK] --more of a positive part.

I was expelled because I tried to escape from the funeral, so to speak, of studying. And they caught up with me, and they took my ID card. And I was penalized, so to speak. But I didn't cry. I was very joyful.

Yeah, gives you a little bit of pride maybe?

Yes.

So do you want to go back to leaving Poland in 1970 and arriving in the US?

Yes. As it happens, because of my age-- I was 19-- I was 75 years old, 74 when I interviewed in American embassy, very rigorous interview in our language obviously and what I was doing, research. And I was not member of any organization when I was expelled from the youth organ-- I never was member of the Communist Party or this workers thing. I was not involved. So that was probably helpful.

And then they were interested what I was doing in my research. I had to document everything from my supervisors and all of it. And I was sent home, and they told me they would notify me soon. And there was no word for many, many months.

I went on vacation next year. I returned from vacation. It was August 1970, and I was told that I was approved and I should leave in two weeks.

Wow.

So I had two weeks time to put my ducks in a row. Made order in my desk and leave the work which I was doing with somebody else. And for one year I was traveling from monetary-- for one year I was allowed to buy a ticket. I believe I bought the ticket or was offered. I don't remember this moment.

But the Fulbright fellowship was extremely low. When I arrived to United States, I barely had enough money to pay a one room in dorm-like situation, but it was private house where I shared the house with 10 other students-- one kitchen, one refrigerator, maybe one or two bathrooms for 11 people, walking distance to the college. And I had to skip some meals in cafeteria because I didn't have enough money.

There were snacks. \$300 something per month to pay my dorms. Tuition was paid obviously, because I couldn't pay tuition for that. But I remember going to McDonalds was a luxury for me. I couldn't afford. I had to buy bread, simple foods, do my own sandwiches for lunch, eat very simple breakfast, and for dinner was big treat to go cafeteria and have a simple meal.

That was really, really-- you hear that somebody is on Fulbright fellowship. Maybe now they are paying them. But for us, when I arrived 1970, was so discriminatory and awful, my fellowship. I learned later from boys from India, from other countries who came, and it was unbelievable, simple lifestyle I had to endure.

So you arrived in Wisconsin?

Wisconsin medicine and engineering department. I had an advisor, professor of electronics department, who was of German origin. And I had interesting conversations with him. And they invited me to his house. His mother was a real German, old-fashioned German. And she asked me questions which I am ashamed to repeat because she asked me from what Poles I come, from these German Poles or the Russian Poles. She didn't know that Poland that was independent country and there are Poles Poles, not German Poles.

So was he in Germany during the war, or was he in the US?

No, she was.

She was?

Yeah. I think he was completely educated in this country and born in this country, probably, but his mother was old lady in her 70s, 80s in 1950. So you can imagine she was born at the end of the century, and Poland didn't exist that, and she acknowledged didn't. That was one of the curious points.

Anyhow, by mistake-- I learned later-- I was put on the regime, which was very unusual. There is this science-- this gentleman, a professor who was my guide, so to speak. And then there was one student advisor for the entire university. They applied the wrong paragraph from some regulation book. I was treated as Soviet diplomat. I was not diplomat.

I had passport, which I-- yes, it was not my private passport. Passport was the property of the government. When I was going to return to Poland, I had to next day to return the passport, because passport at that time was not my document. It was official document of the government, although it's my photograph.

But anyhow, they applied this new rule by mistake. I learn it later. So what I was told, that I cannot leave the town, Madison, Wisconsin. And this I report two weeks in advance. And I had distant cousin in Chicago.

So I was not able to go to Chicago from Madison, Wisconsin unless two weeks in advance I present a plan-- when I'm going to leave, who I'm going to see, what's the phone number, the name they tell the person I'm going to see-- very detailed plan to supervise me basically. And I couldn't go anywhere else. I was a prisoner in Madison, Wisconsin.

So you would have to submit these documents to your supervisor?

To the supervisor for the entire university.

Oh, OK.

Yeah. And then get approval. And after getting approval I would be able to go and also report after I came that I came on time, and all of it.

So even if you wanted to go just outside of Madison city limits, you had to get--

I didn't test that. I didn't, because I was told not to move. So I didn't move.

Yeah.

Although I have to admit, yes, I was invited by two girls with birthday party, and their parents live outside of Madison-- well, not far. And I kind of, you know, bending my back and hiding. And almost I got into the car, and nobody knew about that.

So I wasn't sure whether I committed crime at the time or not, but most likely not. But I was afraid. I was afraid. So I was trying to fulfill the--

So how long did you have that restriction?

No, the restriction was to the very end. At the very end was another professor there of Polish origin. And he privately told me, when I asked him why this distinction, he checked with that. And he being a professor, they told the truth. Then they realized that they apply wrong application, but what they can do? I mean, they couldn't restore my full freedom because it was all over.

I stay another year because meanwhile I met an interesting girl who eventually became my wife, and we became friendly in the library of the college, of the university. And so I apply to my employer in Warsaw, to a Polish Academy of Sciences Institute which I was employed, for a leave without pay for a year. And they grant it. They did this thing after some delays. They grant it. So I stay for another year.

So that's your second year in Madison?

Was my second year.

OK.

And I did some research, but mostly I was working because I was poor. And I didn't-- I couldn't pay my apartment. I couldn't pay food. So I was working through a mutual acquaintance. I'm working in some of the institutes of the university.

So I was able to stay with my fiancée at that time. And when I returned to Poland in 1970-- was '70, '71, '72 in summer some time, my fiancée joining me few months later. She came for a month, and we got married in Warsaw, in Warsaw Royal Castle, which was during the war destroyed, but one more wing was left, and there was a civil marriage-- there was an office where you could have a civil marriage conducted by officials and get the document. And we had small reception there, where I invited friends and family.

Did you have to have a second marriage in the US?

No, I didn't, because my wife received a document which we took to the American embassy in Warsaw. And they stamp her new name in some end of the passport in addition. And that allowed her to use the different name. Because at the beginning she was using hyphenated name, her maiden name and my name. And then eventually she dropped and she's using for many years now because it's more convenient.

Now, what's interesting is that because of the agreement between the government, US and other countries signed an agreement that if US is going to grant Fulbright fellowship, these grantees cannot apply for US citizenship or even for green card. And I was only-- at the time started to be counted from the day of the departure of this grantee from the US. So when I departed, what counted only that several months I was in Poland. And they were supposed to be 24 months period.

So in spite of being married to a US citizen, I was not able to be with my wife. So they recommended that I will go to Canada at first, and she would come to Canada-- stupid restriction. Henry Kissinger was secretary of state at the time. So this was the restriction by State Department, which was the one which was issued for my fellowship. And obviously I had to write a report for Fulbright fellowship institution and then write report for my institution in Poland. Anyhow--

So how long were you in Poland?

Several months. And I had to-- I had to apply again to get the-- without pay. And I was hoping to come and return to work on my PhD and so on, but things after arrival to United States and joining my wife-- I came to visit her on the tourist visa. I couldn't get another visa. And it was restricted to six months. So after six months I would have to go back.

So we apply through our local congressman for an exception and then waiting several months. I was granted the exception, and I could apply for green card first. I waited for then, and then for citizenship, which I became quickly a US citizen.

So did you get your PhD eventually?

No. Eventually-- no. My interests were changing gradually. And I became-- I realized that result of my research is not used for the purposes I believe.

What was your research?

I became more-- equipment which was used for civilian purposes, but also for military purposes. And that was becoming difficult for me. I became more-- thinking aligned of Quakers, which I met a lot of Quakers. And I became Quaker about 70 years ago.

And that changed my life many ways. My wife and my son, they're all Quakers. We're really active here in Great Barrington.

So views change, and I was changing too. I was, as I call it, going forward instead looking back. But my past is very colorful and had a lot of difficult times, which I had to overcome many ways and enjoy every day as it comes instead looking too much in the past. There was too many things in my childhood and in my early age, including-- as I often say, I was able to survive two totalitarian systems-- one German occupation and please, pay attention.

We in Poland, we didn't use the word "Nazi occupation" as used often in this country. We are saying German occupation, because Germany was occupying, not Nazis. Nazis was a party that took control of Germany. But there was Germans. Germany couldn't conduct the war without support of majority of the country. And their sons and daughters were dying on behalf of Germany, not Nazis.

And I wanted to emphasize it again and again because it's a very strong falsification of the history. This is not the way history is being seen in Eastern Europe. When I hear here there was a Nazi occupation of Poland, I'm getting the goose skin because when I was leaving home I would've been killed by German soldiers or Gestapo. I didn't care whether he was Nazi or not Nazi. Nobody in Poland was really paying attention to whether it was Nazi or not Nazi.

My father was tortured and taken concentration camp was not important for him whether Nazis or not Nazis. He was beaten, kicked, and was losing teeth because of beating and not because Nazis or not Nazis. He was beaten by Germans.

Yeah.

That's very strong, powerful point for me, but I wanted to make it because there is so much of distortion of the history. Only eyewitnesses can tell the truth. And all these historians who didn't experience that, they can have all kinds of fantasies. They can write all kinds of things. But we in Eastern Europe will learn how to read between the lines, and what's the truth, and what's the falsification afterwards.

One of the reasons I'm giving this interview is I want to present the facts as they were at the time, not as they are being seen from the perspective of 50, 60, 70, or 80 years. Because there is no substitute of living facts, experiencing on your own body. There is no substitute for oral histories. I think what the museum is doing is extremely, extremely important to have eyewitnesses. Yes, they might be sometimes colored by individuals, but they are giving a sense of the times.

You cannot fabricate what I am saying here. Those are all my personal experiences, or they were my friends, my family, whom I trust, that were not told to me by somebody occasionally at the bar drinking beer or whatever. So that could be colored by somebody being tipsy or purposely distorting the truth. No, those are the facts. They are part of my life.

Yeah.

And [INAUDIBLE].

Did you and your mother talk about the war afterwards. I mean, from the years after, did she--

We never had to sit down and-- I memorized a lot of conversation where we reminiscing or trying to figure out why things took the turn what they did, because there were mysteries quite often. I mean, there was things happening. People are disappearing. People were behaving the way we didn't expect.

The conspiracy of the underground army and the other anti-German organizations in Poland, which were not only linked to the Polish government in exile in London, which was really we considered the one which represented Poland and had the right to say something on behalf of Polish nation. There were other organizations. There were millions of Poles who were in Russia, and they created the whole army-- was an agreement between Stalin and a Polish general.

The name escapes me. Not Anders-- Anders who was general, who was commandant of the Polish army in Russia, in Soviet Union. But Sikorski, General Sikorski, whose plane disappeared near Gibraltar shortly after taking off-- very mysterious situation. A lot of things indicate that his plane was sabotaged and he was downed, and so was basically an attempt-- not only attempt, successful attempt to kill him because he became inconvenient. There's no proof who did it, either British or Russians. He became inconvenient.

Yeah. Do you think you would've returned to Poland had you not met your wife?

We had-- when we married in Poland and then we lived in-- both worked for Yale University, we had different plans than the life dictated to us. We're both cosmopolitan. My wife just returned from the research in Latin America. She was working towards her PhD dissertation.

We have different interests and most were inclining to live in Europe. I had some contacts. There were two possibilities. I had earlier relationship with organization in Canada, where I would work. And we had connections with my family and acquaintances in Belgium. A possibility was France. We're both fluent in French.

We wanted to travel, work in different places. We were work citizens. We are not [INAUDIBLE] necessarily. But then my wife's parents both became ill in different ways, and her father died in the '70s. Her mother died in our house in Great Barrington in the '90s. So we had to take care of them, and we just couldn't afford that.

And our son was born in 1982. And so there was more stability we needed, and we had to put our roots, so to speak, in some place. Our son was born in New Haven, as I said, 1982, but 1980, 1989 we moved from New Haven to Great Barrington, where we purchase a piece of land, built house by craftsmen to house three of us, my wife and my son, plus

Vivian's mother.

And we took her-- she eventually-- not eventually. Before we moved to Great Barrington, we're taking care of her mother who lived next door almost to us. She had the beginning of Alzheimer's. And then we're taking care of her in Great Barrington, and she died '90s.

So what were you doing at Yale? What was your work there?

I was doing the-- I was head of the electronic design lab. I was reporting to the deputy provost for sciences and doing custom-made measurement equipment for different departments, like astronomy, physics. They're coming and placing orders with us.

In the beginning of the chips in computers, there were mini computers, small computers, because there were PDF-11 already at that time, which was like a big refrigerator, big refrigerator really. And those are, many of them, in engineering department of Yale. However, people needed custom-made, like we would call it, laptop with special features today-- much more primitive than today's laptops, you can imagine.

But anyhow, it was '70s, and we're pioneering the work in custom made. Remember the CPU unit, the heart of the computer coming in the book, where it was with cellophane. It was glued to the page, the rigid page. And you had to cut it out, and then find the appropriate socket for it, and then build everything with the resistors, capacitors, and this iron, a hot iron, and solder--

Yeah.

--you [INAUDIBLE] on the printed board. Those are the electronics, basic electronics at that time. So they were interesting times. My interest gradually was shifting when I was already at Yale towards use of the alternative sources of energy. I was interested in solar, wind, and micro-- hydro, small hydro which you can install in streams. [INAUDIBLE] for that.

So I started with a friend of mine who was graduate of Yale School of Architecture. We started an organization called ATAG, Appropriate Technology Assistance Group. And we're giving consulting to the individuals and organizations which were interested in using windmills, having solar products. Things were very expensive at the time, like today.

When did you start that group?

That was beginning '80s. Well, in '89 we moved from Branford, Connecticut to Great Barrington. I was already doing several projects for utilities like United Illuminating, Dorsey Utilities, doing commercial energy audits for industrial facilities and the residential units, especially those which were exclusively heated and air conditioned, using electricity almost-- no gas, no oil, just electricity, because they were huge [INAUDIBLE] of electricity. So this is the utility started with these houses and buildings, which were exclusively supplied by electricity. That was huge, huge savings and make a big indent in the consumption of electricity with the benefits for the facility users as well as utilities, because they don't have to generate new power which was consumed by these customers.

So happily we live here for 70 years-- almost 29. No, 30 years already. This year is passing 30 years. And now we have a lot of projects. Hopefully house would allow us to continue them. I just few days ago turned 84.

Happy birthday.

Thank you. My wife is much younger than me, almost 10 years. And [INAUDIBLE] our son is in Boston, doing a lot of interesting things.

And hopefully we will be useful for society as we are now. We're very involved in the local organizations. And we are active in town. We're active in our Quaker meeting here. We are volunteering. Sometimes small projects we're being paid, but mostly we're volunteering.

Because taxes are very high in our town, probably we will have to soon get involved in organizations where we'll be reimbursed for our time because we cannot afford anymore to be exclusively volunteers without any pay. So I will volunteer somewhere to get our taxes lowered. Because in spite of discounts, and some rebates, and whatever the town is offering, taxes are huge for our property.

But overall, you feel like you've led a good life?

I felt that I did a lot of things my life interesting things. I don't mind to share my experiences with public at large, so to speak. There's a lot of things to be learned from other people.

One of the most shocking things for me to find when I arrived to United States in 1970 was the lack of the appreciation by young-- appreciation of the older generation and that experience by younger generation. The gap between certain age groups is, I think, very damaging for society and culture as it is. And societies as they are are losing a lot without consulting what they are doing with older generations. And I think it's a huge mistake culturally, I think huge mistake in educational system, that schools are not encouraging older people to come be tutors, be-- younger generation, they think they know everything, they know better, and they have no respect for older people.

So the gap between grandparents, children, and especially grandparents and grandchildren is, in my opinion, unacceptable. That needs to change because it's a question of survival of the nations, of people as they are. Not to speak about environment, which needs to be respected, but I would start with restoring the bridges, crossing the bridges, which are huge, huge gaps between the generations.

I'm sure it changed in Poland as well, but this was not my youth, not my middle age when I was growing up. The respect for older people was much higher in Europe, in general in Poland. Family links were much stronger, and friendships, and intergenerational communications, and the respect, and just spending time together and talking, talking about how was it to learn something from that, not to repeat the same mistakes again and again?

Yeah.

And I am observing that many things could be avoided if younger generations were more open learning from older generations. That's my main message which I would like to convey to younger people.

Yeah. Well, that's a good place to stop, unless you have anything else to add.

Yeah. Thank you.

Well, thank you, Wes.