

Barbara is not. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Allan Firestone on February 7, 2019 in Silver Spring, Maryland. Thank you very, very much, Mr. Firestone, for agreeing to speak with us today, and to share something of your own story and experiences during World War II and in the middle of what became known as the Holocaust.

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

Yes. I was born on January 31, 1933.

OK. And where were you born?

I was born in a little town which was then in Eastern Poland, the town of Kolomea. It is now part of Western Ukraine.

And what was your name at birth?

My name was Abraham Wiznitzer.

Abraham Wiznitzer.

Right.

How would I spell Wiznitzer?

That's-- as I remember it, it was W-I-Z-- Z with a little dot on top of it-- N-I-T-Z-E-R.

And with the little on top of it, is that make it sound a "zhuh" sound?

Right.

And is that from Polish or is that from another language?

No. That's pretty much Polish, as I recall.

OK. So Wiznitzer, Abraham Wiznitzer. And today, you are Allan Firestone.

Right. Which is another story.

Well, I want to know about it, maybe even now before we start into the other story. When did Abraham become Allan?

Well, I guess I would have to tell you how it all began. After the war, my sister was the only survivor out of our family, married this gentleman named Feuerstein.

Feuerstein.

We ended up-- to make a long story short, we ended up in Frankfurt am Main in the American zone of occupation, which was around 1946. When my sister and her husband applied for visas to come to the United States, they wanted me to come with them.

At that time, or maybe still the case now, the American government felt that I was not really part of the family because I was not--

Their child.

--their child. So the State Department employees suggested that I have to go through my own application process and take my chances whenever I get approved and so on. My brother-in-law didn't like that idea that we would be separated. And my sister didn't like that idea, either.

So they decided that all of a sudden that instead of being just a brother, or a brother-in-law, I would become my brother-in-law's son, because he was a little older gentleman. So that worked out quite well tactically as a problem-- it probably caused a few problems. But all of a sudden, I became Feuerstein. Of course--

So you were legally adopted?

Yes. So of course that turned into a name which was very difficult to pronounce. So after two years in Korea, I decided, well, maybe we can Anglicize it to Firestone. And voila--

There you are.

--I became Allan Firestone.

OK. Do you still feel like Abraham Wiznitzer sometimes?

Very-- once in a while. Recently, I was reading one of Elie Wiesel's books in which one of the books he was telling about Vyzhnytsia, which is a little town on the border with Hungary. And there he was talking about the wonder-working Vizhnitzer rabbi who is from that town. And I said, aha, now I know where my family comes from, what the relationship is.

Do you think that it's true that your family actually is from there and then migrated eastwards?

That's the only thing I can think of because somewhere in back of my mind, the name Krauthammer also is there. Now the Krauthammer, of course, was like the journalist for The Washington Post--

The recently deceased Charles Krauthammer.

Right. And I often wondered if there was some sort of a relationship. But I never had the guts to actually contact him. But also maybe a couple of weeks ago, I was reading The Jerusalem Post and there was a long article about the ultra-orthodox and what their affect would be on the elections and so on. And I found out that one of their major ultra-orthodox sects in Jerusalem is from Vyzhnytsia. And again, the head of the sect is the Vizhnitzer rabbi. So with all those things--

Have you ever done a genealogy search, an actual one?

No, I have not. My daughter has done that. And she found a long-lost cousin of hers from Los Angeles. And so she's been in touch with a cousin, but I have never done that.

OK. Let's go back now to Kolomea, and to the place where everything all began. Tell me, did you have brothers and sisters? You mentioned one.

Yes. I had altogether four older sisters.

And you were then the youngest?

Yes.

And the boy.

Right.

You must have been the favorite.

Of course. I of course don't remember it, but when I was born, I'm told by everybody that there was a big celebration in town.

That there was a boy.

Yes. There was finally a boy. OK.

What are the names of your older sisters?

My oldest sister was named Ruzhia. The second one was Frima, or Frieda. The third one was the one that survived, which was Yula, or Julia. And the younger of the four-- or youngest of the four-- was Rachel.

OK. Rachel. And what were your parents' names?

My parents' name was Yacob.

Wiznitzer.

Wiznitzer, or Krauthammer, whichever you prefer.

Oh, OK. So it could have been-- it was in this side of the family that Krauthammer also figured, not on your mother's side.

No, my mother was Clara. And her maiden name was Lachs, L-A-C-H-S.

And as far as you know, were your parents also from Kolomea?

Well, as near as I can tell, yes.

OK. In your early years, did you know of aunts and uncles and grandparents on either side?

No. Well, yes and no. The grandparents were all dead by the time I came around. So I never had any relationship with them. We did have my mother's sister, so I had an aunt and her husband and her children.

What was her name?

Her name was--

It's OK.

Sali.

Sali. Sali.

Right. And she had four children.

Were they about your age, or older, or younger?

They were mostly older. The oldest one was Hilda. She is now in her 90s and she lives in Frankfurt.

am Main?

Yes.

OK.

The next one was a boy named Yakov, or Jacob, who was about three or four years older than I was. The next one was Herman. And he was about a year younger than I was. And then they had a about a-- I would say, about a 6, 7-year-old child Lunia. And she was quite retarded, and we can tell about that story in time. Now in addition to those very close--

Let me ask one question here. What was their last name?

Spiegel.

Spiegel.

S-P-I-E-G-E-L.

So she was-- your aunt's name again, forgive me, that it slipped by my mind.

Sali.

Sali-- Sali Lachs Spiegel.

Right.

And then all of the others were Hilda Spiegel and so on?

Right.

The children. OK. Now you mentioned you were going to tell me about something else.

Yeah. What I was trying to say is that in addition to the very close members of the family, there were also some more distant relations. And we referred to them as the Russians because they were from somewhere from Russia, I guess. I never was really close to them, but I remember the name.

And where they from momma's or father's side of the family?

I don't know.

OK.

Sorry about that.

Did you ever meet them?

Once. I met them once.

Before the war, or after-- or during or after?

It was during the war.

I was during the war.

In the ghetto. I know I'm trying to take it out of sync, but when my sister and I were really in trouble, my sisters took me to the Russian family to see if they would have any food to share with me. And the lady of the house said, no, we don't have any. Go away, don't bother us.

The husband was a little bit more considerate. And he said, now we have a barrel of apples under the stairs. Now You didn't steal any of that? I said, no, of course I wouldn't do that. It was only about after I left him and two blocks down the road, I said, my God, what an idiot I was. He was actually inviting me to get some apples. But that was the only time I really met my Russian relatives.

Oh. What a bitter kind of experience.

Yes. Now in addition to that, my mother and her sister had a brother who lived in Germany. And he was expelled from Germany during 1938 or so.

Ah yes, when all Polish-- Polish Jews-- that is, they had come from Poland originally and had settled in Germany.

Right. And so I got to meet him, and his wife, and my German cousin. And you'll excuse me if I--

Sure. Go right ahead. Do you want to cut? Should we cut the camera here? OK. We were talking about your German relatives who were in Germany had they lived until 1938?

I'm really not sure.

OK. And where were they expelled to?

Well, they were expelled to Poland. And of course, having relatives in Kolomea, they ended up with us.

OK. So they came to that far eastern corner of Poland as well.

Right. Yes.

Did they settle there after 1938 and stay there?

Yes.

OK. And their last name was also Lachs?

Yes.

All right. Tell me as much as you can about them.

Well, there was not much that I could tell about them. I was too young to really get involved--

Do you have memories of them?

Pardon?

Do you have memories of them?

I have memories of them, but very vague. They were there. The family was there. They had one daughter, Yudit. And we saw her occasionally because they were family. They were cousins and my cousins from my aunt. We would get together and play or-- but that was very-- very minor, actually.

Well, yes. I mean, in 1938, you're five years old.

Right.

And these things are all happening in the late '30s, where there's a time of a lot of turmoil anyway.

Yes. Yes.

Do you remember their names at all or what they looked like?

I remember the name of the cousin, Yudit.

Yudit.

I don't really remember the names of the parents.

And what language did they speak with you?

Mostly German.

OK. And at home?

At home, we all spoke Polish.

You all spoke Polish?

Yes.

And how did you understand the German?

Well, we also spoke a little bit of Yiddish. So there was some similarity. So I could understand what they were saying, and of course they knew a little bit of Polish. So between all those languages, we got [INAUDIBLE].

Well, what you are painting is a picture of-- I wouldn't say a common, but also not very unusual family. There were people who had relatives from one country, another country, and they were related-- blood related-- but either were citizens or saw themselves as really belonging to different countries.

Yes.

The other question I have is, did your father have any brothers and sisters?

He had brothers and sisters, but they were living in the United States.

He was the only one still living in Kolomea?

Right.

How did that happen that he didn't join them?

Well, I guess my simplest explanation was he was more well-off than the others, and there didn't seem to be any need to go looking for a better economic situation.

OK. That makes sense. That makes sense.

[INAUDIBLE]

And how did he-- that brings me to another question, is, how did he support your family?

He ran a grocery store, bar combination, served the local clientele, including the peasants from the surrounding villages who would stop off to and from the market.

So that's kind of a hub.

I'm sorry?

That's a hub, sort of like the center of-- one of the centers of, let's say, village or town life.

Right. Exactly.

Huh. Do you remember that grocery store, pub place?

Yes, I remember it quite clearly. It was a typical grocery store with various merchandises. I remember in particular he was selling a coffee substitute, and the packaging included pictures of African life. And I was very terribly disappointed when he sold all that stuff without giving me a chance to steal all the--

Pictures.

Pictures, right.

The things that kids find fascinating.

Right.

Did your sisters help him in the store?

No, they were going to school. They were at gymnasium at the time that I remember that.

So they weren't really adults yet. They were still kids as well.

Well, I guess so, although my oldest sister was old enough to have been married around 1939 or 1940.

Do you know the dates of their birth-- their years they were born?

No. I don't. At the time, it didn't seem very important.

Of course. No five-year-old would go around with a pad and paper saying, when were you born?

Right. Exactly.

What kind of a house did you live in, or apartment did you live in?

We had a big house. Part of it was the grocery store bar. The other part was our living quarters where we had a number of bedrooms where my sisters lived and I did.

Did you each have your own room?

Except for myself, I don't remember that I had one. The sisters had rooms. I suspect they were shared rooms since there were four girls.

Describe the house to me, if you can. Was it of wood? Was it a stone?

It was stone. Each bedroom had one of those big stoves--

Coal ovens. They sometimes were very decorative.

Yes, exactly what they were. And the kitchen at one time, there was a gas stove. At some other time, it was back to a wood stove in the kitchen. And a nice place where you could sit and keep warm.

Tell me, was there indoor plumbing?

No.

OK. So where were facilities? All kinds, whether bath, or toilet, or water--

The water was in the outdoor pump.

Well. OK.

Well. Yes. Well water. And also outside of the house next to a kind of a warehouse, there was a toilet.

An outhouse?

Outhouse, yes.

OK. An actual little booth outhouse?

It was of built into the storage area.

Got it.

So it's not totally independent.

OK. And what about bathing facilities-- bathroom? Was there one?

There were bathtubs inside of the house, yes.

And so people would-- you'd have to haul the water in, heat it up on the stove-- OK.

Right.

OK. Did you have electricity?

Yes. We were modern to that extent.

Well, I ask because in this part of the world, it was very mixed.

Yes.

Some places didn't have any of these modern conveniences, some places had some, and life was very different. Some people didn't have refrigerators. They had other ways of keeping food preserved.

Yes.



Yeah. What about paved roads? Did you have paved roads, or were they cobblestone, or were they dirt, or how were they?

They were mostly cobblestone.

OK. Did you have a telephone?

Yes, we did.

That's unusual. That's unusual for that part of the world at that time. Did you have a radio?

Don't remember.

OK. What about automobiles? Did many people in Kolomea seem to have automobiles?

Not that I remember. The people who lived in the center of town, which were more modern, I suppose, had, but we were sort of like a suburb of the town.

Oh, so you weren't in the center of town?

No. No.

OK. And no, we did not have an automobile. We always-- as I remember, we always used a [POLISH], as we say in Polish.

What is a [POLISH]?

A taxi, a horse-drawn taxi to get from the house into the center of town to do shopping or something.

So you didn't have your own horse?

No. No.

OK. Did you have any other kinds of animals, from-- like chickens, or goats, or things like that?

Before the war, we had only a guard dog.

Did he have a name?

Ceaser. And later on, I think my mother had some geese which she used to stuff.

And your home in this residential area where there was also the pub area, when you say it was a suburb, can you describe to me how that suburb looked? Were you on a street with other houses close by, or further apart, or-- paint a picture for me of what it looked like.

OK, well, the houses were standalone. And there were houses across the street. I think my father owned several of them, which had tenants. And basically, it was a street that led from the center of town-- either by taxi or by local train from the center of town-- to within walking distance to our house. And the road led from the center of town to-- east towards Romania, towards the city of Cernauti, or Chernivtsi. And that's another story.

OK. So you're at one end of Kolomea itself.

Right.

So I would think that would have been the southeast, or the--

East.

East-- mostly east.

Yes.

OK. Yes. When I looked on a map for Kolomea, I saw one of the most interesting things was that it's surrounded-- it's very close to six or seven other countries, if you look at it.

Yes, exactly.

There's Slovakia-- well, there was Moldova, Romania, Slovakia-- was Hungary part of that?

Yes. Poland-- that's when it's-- now currently, in Ukraine. So a lot of different nationalities.

Yes.

Do you know about how many kilometers from, let's say, one of those borders Kolomea was? Was it 100 kilometers or 200?

Oh, it was probably less than 100.

Less than 100.

Yes.

OK. So it's really in the corner of countries, whether that would be Poland or Ukraine.

Yeah.

OK. And the house you say was made of stone. Was it built, do you think, in the 19th century or was it a modern house?

It was more modern, although it lacked some of the quote, "modern conveniences," such as indoor plumbing. But it was a modern, well-built house.

How many stories was it?

Just one story.

Oh, it was a one-story house.

Yes.

So you lived behind the shop?

Right.

OK. Did your mother help out in the store?

Yes.

OK. Did your father have other people who worked with him or for him?

Not that I remember, no. It was the old Mom and Pop store.

And did you-- were you often in the store with them just to hang around?

Yeah, I did.

Yeah?

Whenever I wasn't forced to go to school.

Was it interesting to be there?

Yes. It was really enjoyable to see them dealing with the local peasants.

And how did the customers-- how were they? Did they play with you, engage with you, talk to you?

No, not really.

OK. OK. And did your parents ever talk about their relations with these customers?

No, not that I remember. Again, I was five, six years old. I wasn't interested in any of that. I wasn't interested in what was happening. My cousin, Hilda, the one I mentioned was living in Frankfurt, keeps claiming that I had a bank account in Liverpool. So, again, it goes to the fact that my father was relatively well-off. He was able to open an account in my name.

Wow. Wow.

Did you feel comfortable? That is, I mean, if he was well-off, were you, compared with neighbors, better off than they were as a family? Or was it hard for you to say? I mean, I'm just trying-- I'm trying to figure it out.

That's hard to say. I know that I felt that my father was sort of a cut above the average around there when we went to synagogue, which was not too often, as I recall. He was always given the honors and so on.

So he could have been one of the more prominent members of the community?

Yes. He was.

And the area you lived in, was it a Jewish neighborhood or was it mixed?

It was mixed.

OK, can we cut for a-- OK. How do you think your father was able to accumulate his assets? Do you know?

No, I don't. All I know is that-- what was there. And he seemed to be among the, quote, "leading citizens," of that area because the others that I associated with were mostly tradesmen of some sort-- like shoemakers and other people.

Were there other shops next to your parents?

No. But there was-- I vividly remember one of our houses across the street from us was occupied by a shoemaker.

Uh-huh. Do you remember his name?

No.

OK. OK. So there was other trades in the street. It wasn't just a residential area.

Right. Yes.

OK. And do you know how your parents met?

No.

No one ever-- OK.

No one ever told me. I suspect it was arranged.

OK. Were they religious people?

Yes and no. They were religious in the sense that my father prayed at the proper times during the day. He went to services in the synagogue. Once in a great while, he took me to the grand synagogue in town for the high holidays. But he was modern, he didn't have a beard or a payot. I don't remember him wearing a skullcap or anything of that sort, except when we were in synagogue.

And all of his family, then, aside from him, who remained, were in the United States?

Yes.

Do you remember hearing about correspondence when you were still little?

Yes. Once in a while, there would be a letter, and my parents would talk about it, and get pictures of the family in the States.

OK. Tell me about his personality a little bit-- your father's personality.

He was no-nonsense type of person. He was busy with his work. He tried to do the best for his daughters and me.

Was he someone that you could play with?

No. No. He was much more stern, I think.

OK. Did you feel that he was engaged with the family or more engaged with business?

Well, I would say more engaged with the business, yes.

OK. OK. And your mother, what kind of a personality did she have?

She was helpful to my father in the store. She had her daughters to be with. She had me, and she was very worried about me because I wasn't developing as well as--

Did she did she think-- were you sickly?

No, but I wasn't as tall, I guess. And she took me at one time to some wonder-working rabbi, and gave her little-- what we call kvitel, a little piece of paper that would supposedly help me. Obviously, it didn't work. But once in a while, as a result of that trip-- or maybe aside from that-- whenever my mother would go into town, she would drag me along with her and buy me a banana, or a ham sandwich--

Oh jeez.

--to make me grow. None of it helped.

That's funny.

And I was sworn to secrecy not to tell my father what we did.

She sounds like fun.

Yes.

Did she have any help around the house?

Yes. She did. Once in a while, she had a maid helping her. I don't remember much about it, other than the maid was there helping serve, cook, or clean.

And what about your sisters, did they help around the house, too?

Very seldom. They were basically busy with their schools.

OK. Was there one sister that you were closer to than the others at this time?

No, they were all very nice and very pleasant to me. I suspect they were all a little bit jealous, having to take care of me, and-- because I was the apple of the eye.

Of course. How could it be otherwise?

That's right.

So I want to recap a little bit to understand where we are. Your father owned not only the bar and the grocery store, but also some properties in the vicinity-- that is, across the street-- --some several houses.

Right.

And he had apparently built this wealth on his own because his siblings had not had any, and that's why they left for the United States.

Right. Yes.

He was a little bit more serious a person, and concerned with the family, but also with his business. And was well-off enough that your cousin on your mother's side thinks that he opened a bank account in your name in Liverpool, which is really quite something for that part of the world, that it speaks to having some assets.

You had four sisters. Your mother had a sister and a brother. The brother lived in Germany, and they were expelled, and then came to Kolomea from Germany after 1938. You also had relatives-- from the Russian side, that is-- and they were also on your mother's side, do you think, these relatives, or your father's?

I'm not sure.

You're not sure. OK. But on your mother's side further, she had a sister named Sali, who had four children. And you were rather close with them.

Yes.

And Kolomea, as a place, was then in Poland, now is in Ukraine, and pretty close to several borders of other countries. And your family lived in a residential type of suburb on the Eastern part that would be on the way towards Romania.

Right.

The customers that came into the grocery store and pub, you said they were peasants. Were they Jews or non-Jews?

No, they were mostly Ukrainian. Kolomea was a mixture of Polish, Jewish, and Ukrainian residents. And of course, all the little villages around Kolomea were, by and large, Ukrainian.

OK. Did your father buy goods from any of these peasants that would come in? That is, farm goods that he would then sell in the store?

No. He didn't do that kind of merchandise, as I recall. Although we would buy things from the peasants for our own consumption.

Such as?

Such as the cheeses that they would bring on to the market or some fruits.

OK. So the grocery store itself, was it especially kinds of good? Was it really just like canned goods and nonperishables?

Right. Well, there were some sacks of maybe dried fruits or nuts, that sort of stuff. But I don't recall any kind of apples or tomatoes.

Were you free to go and pick up some fruits from those sacks if you wanted to?

Usually, yes.

And when the peasants would come in to do business there, either have a drink or buy some of the groceries, what language did they converse in?

Mostly Ukrainian.

So that meant your father spoke Ukrainian, Polish, Yiddish--

Right.

Did he speak Russian?

I don't think he ever had occasion to. Although later on, when the-- after his war started, yes. The town became part of the Soviet Union. And I suspect everybody was studying, learning how to speak Russian.

And were there Polish customers?

Yes. From the general area.

So the peasants were from-- I mean, the Ukrainians were from the villages surrounding Kolomea.

Right.

And the Poles were more town residents?

Yes.

OK. Were they more urban?

Yes. They were mostly neighbors of ours.

OK. And were there neighborhood kids that you would play with or not so much?

No. Mostly Jewish children.

OK. So were there Jews who were neighbors as well?

Yes.

And was the neighborhood, would you say, a Jewish neighborhood? Or was it a mixed one?

It was a mixed neighborhood, yes.

OK. OK. And when you were little, before the war, do you remember hearing any kind of talk at home about wider political things going on, whether or not it's-- well, you would have been two years old when Pilsudski died.

Yeah.

But did your parents ever refer to him or mention him?

They talked about politics, yes. And I became aware as time went on of some of the problems with the competition between the Polish and Ukrainian populations-- some competition from Polish grocery stores in their neighborhood.

And then of course later on, as the war started, there were all sorts of stories and rumors. And I remember learning about the German-Russian pact to partition Poland amongst themselves. So even though I was six, seven years old, I was quite aware of the wider world.

That was really the point of the question, is-- and that's part of why I ask if you had a radio, because how do people get news?

Right.

Did your parents, for example, subscribe to newspapers? And were they newspaper readers?

Yes, they did. I think it was a Yiddish newspaper that they subscribed to. And now that you mention it, yes, we did have a radio.

OK. OK. Do you remember-- did you start school before the war started?

Yes.

So did you have-- was it a public school?

Yeah.

OK. Do you have any memories of it?

Very vague. I remember that my maid-- my parents' maid-- would walk me to the kindergarten-- I think I was a kindergarten. And I was very embarrassed to have a maid accompanying me. Most of the kids didn't have a maid to

bring them to school.

And then my next memory is of after the war started. By that time, I was-- what-- seven eight years old. I went to a Cheder, the Hebrew day school. And that's where I learned how to smoke cigarettes.

That's one of the main courses.

Right.

Do you remember anything from the summer of 1939, right before the war starts? Anything that sticks in your mind? Are people more talkative about larger events? Are they nervous?

Yes. There was a lot of talk of problems and forthcoming war. One of the most unusual things I remember is at one time, there was a very strange cloud in the shape of the Polish state. And everybody in the neighborhood kept looking at it and marveling at that.

It was up in the sky?

Yes.

And it looked like the outlines of Poland.

Right.

Oh my.

And that was the most unusual thing I remember about that.

Did you remember seeing soldiers in Polish uniforms on the streets or policemen in Polish uniforms before the war? Was there a kind of a presence?

Yes, there was. It was mostly police. I don't remember Polish soldiers.

And do you remember-- again, I keep in mind that you're five or six years old. Did you get any warnings from parents that to be a Jew is not so easy? Did you have a sense of-- that you're different from some of the other kids?

Oh yes.

How did that manifest itself?

Well, as I mentioned, there was competition for my father from Polish grocery keepers. And so there was a lot of discussion about loyalties to the Polish government or the Polish state. I remember my father painted the shutters on his shop in the Polish colors to show that he is part of the Polish state. There was generally-- there was always a constant murmur.

Mm-hmm. As a kid, before the war, did you experience anything like this? Like did anybody call you names or--

Not really because I was in a cocoon mostly associating with the Jewish kids.

Mm-hmm. Let's go back to when the war starts. OK. The official date was September 1, 1939.

Yes.

How did it appear in your life? What was the first significant thing that happened? Do you remember that day?



That specific date, no, I don't remember that. I remember that the most significant thing that happened was that within weeks of the war starting, the Soviet troops came in and occupied the eastern part of Poland. And so there was a lot of talk about changes in the gymnasiums' curriculum. My sisters all started yammering about having to learn Russian.

They weren't happy about that.

No.

OK.

What about the pub and grocery store? Was your father-- was he able to continue operating it?

For a while, but eventually, he did have to close up.

And why?

Because it was part of the Soviet system. Everything was state owned. He could not operate a capitalist--

Enterprise.

Right.

OK. So did that mean he became unemployed?

Yes. And I don't remember how we survived or how we lived, but apparently it was-- he was able to manage other items, but things went along rather normally.

Did you ever see Soviet soldiers in the streets?

Oh yes.

And how did they interact with all the local people, including you?

They seemed very pleasant, very interested.

And in the time that they were there, did your school change?

My school, no, because I was too young to really be affected by it. But my sisters all had to learn Russian. And the Soviet Union at the time was pushing the nationalities, so the-- their gymnasium also emphasized Yiddish studies as opposed to Polish curriculum. And that was quite a difficult adjustment for them. But for me, there was no impact.

Well, if your sisters are Jewish, and there's more emphasis on Yiddish studies, then that would have been something that shouldn't be a difficulty.

No, it wasn't difficult, but it was disruptive of their normal curriculum with Polish poetry and Polish history, now you had to study Russian history. And instead of speaking in Polish in the gymnasium, you were supposed to speak either Russian or Yiddish.

OK. OK. OK. You say that the soldiers were basically pleasant.

Right.

Now I'm making an assumption that before the war, and particularly because your father owns a pub, people would stop

by to have a drink, and then they chat and they talk, you know?

Right.

And I'm wondering whether or not that changed afterwards-- of course when he had to close it down-- or was it taken away from him? What happened?

No. It was not taken away from him, but it was just basically closed down.

OK. So it no longer operated?

Right.

Was there a mood in the neighborhood when the Russians came as to whether they were welcome or not welcome?

Well, bearing in mind that it was a mixed population, the Polish people certainly did not welcome. The Ukrainians had mixed emotions because of the history of the 1930s problems. And Jews were ambivalent, but not really opposed.

OK. OK. So it sounds like it was degrees of reactions rather than any one of the groups being-- well, the Poles may be far more anti.

Yes.

And then the Ukrainians-- well, there was the famine, of course, in Ukraine. And as you say, the Jews, more ambivalent.

Right. But of course, the Ukrainians in Poland were not affected by the famine in the Soviet Union. But obviously, they like everybody else, had relatives across the border.

Yeah. And do you remember the talk at home, how your parents were thinking of what was going on? How they thought of these new things, these new developments?

No, not very much.

OK. And by that point, was the knowledge of that pact, which was the German-Soviet pact you talked about, was that known?

Oh yes. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Yes, it was quite well-known.

Mm-hmm. And was it surprising?

Probably not.

OK. Because in some quarters of the world, it was very surprising that there was-- excuse me, I dropped something-- that there was such a pact between these two particular powers. Was there any talk of-- or do you remember people disappearing during this time?

No, not really.

OK. Do you remember anybody talking about fear or being afraid that they might be in trouble with the authorities?

No, not really.

OK. OK. What were the next things that come to your mind? How long did this particular-- how long did the Soviets stay?

Well, it was from September '39 till June of 1941.

OK, so when Germany attacks the Soviet Union.

Right.

So that's a good almost two years.

Yes.

Not quite two years. And by that point, had you started school?

Basically, in the Hebrew day school.

So it was allowed to operate.

Yes.

OK. What happened in June 1941?

Well, that's when the German army started rolling into the Soviet Union. And there was a lot of talk of course of the coming change in the regiment, and what I would bring. And of course, my parents were well aware of that-- my mother's brother was expelled from Germany, and the problems of the German Jews. So there was a lot of fear of what would happen in the future.

Mm-hmm. And what happened? And I mean, not historically, but in your family, what's the first thing that happened that signified, OK, things are different now?

Well, Kolomea was first occupied by the Hungarian troops. And there was a lot of talk about forced labor, especially on a railroad because the Western size of the railroad tracks and the Russian size were different. And so there was a lot of forced labor to start working the tracks.

Other than that, the Hungarian occupation was fairly mild. I forget now at this point whether they need to wear yellow stars or armbands was during the Hungarian time or when the German soldiers actually arrived and took over.

Was your father able to reopen the grocery store?

No.

No. So when that closed, that closed.

Right.

All right. Was he taken for forced labor?

No, he was not. As I mentioned to you, we were sort of in a, quote, "suburb" of the town, and most of the action was in the city itself. So we were in some ways fortunate to be not involved with the problems.

OK. So you were more on sidelines?

Yes.

Did you ever have Hungarian military presence in your streets?

Not that I remember. But I do remember that during that time, we did get some visitors-- visitors-- some refugees from Hungary who were shipped to Kolomea.

Jewish?

Yes.

OK.

And some of the people stayed with us.

And what did they tell you? Or did they tell you anything?

They didn't tell me anything. They just were just there.

Yeah. I know that I'm asking somebody who was a little boy at the time.

Right. After the war, my cousin who's in Frankfurt am Main, she met a couple of the girls who stayed with us during this period. And they were so grateful to my parents for having--

Yeah, having housed them.

--housed them. But other than that, there was really no impact.

One thing I forgot to ask, were there many Jews in Kolomea? Was there a large Jewish community?

Yes. The total population of the city was about 30,000. And I would guess it was one-third of both the ethnic groups, Jewish, Polish, and Ukrainian.

OK. So about 10,000 each?

Yes.

That's substantial. That's quite substantial. And so that makes sense that you'd have a larger synagogue, and then probably some other synagogues, too.

Little shtiebels as we call them.

Shtiebels? Yeah.

Right.

OK. So while the Hungarians are there-- and must of-- I mean, to me, that's a bit of a surprise, that instead of the German army, you have the Hungarian one first.

Right.

Their role is basically to take people for forced labor and to work on railroads. Now I wish I could know the detail, because I do know of that-- it remained till this day that the Western tracks are of one width, and those in the Soviet Union are of another width for rails. So that when trains come, they have to-- at the borders, it takes a long time for them to be readjusted.

Right.

The question I would have is, what were they doing at that time, extending the Soviet type or extending the Western type?

I believe it was extending the Western type because of the German trains-- supply trains going into Russia.

Got it. Got it. OK. And did the Hungarians stay there long?

My guess is about two months.

Not long.

No.

OK. Then what happened?

Then the German army came in and took over. Of course, at that time, they were followed by the German police, and the German administration started recruiting Ukrainians into a militia sort of supporting the German army.

And of course, at that point, the restrictions started getting into full force, such as the Jews were required to give up their furs, and their jewelry, their other gold, and so on. And then the use of the armbands was enforced.

How did this happen in your family? Do you remember these expropriations taking place?

Yes. I remember my parents and my sisters having to go through their clothing and give that up. I don't know how much my father gave up in the way of gold or jewelry, but I'm sure there are some that he had to contribute. He was being known as the more well-off family. And of course everybody started creating arm bands with the star of David to show that we were Jews and were forced to wear these things.

Do you remember the first time you put one on?

Not me. I was too young. I was sort of exempt.

Oh interesting.

Yes.

But did your sisters have to wear them?

Yes.

Where did they have to wear them?

Any time they went out of doors.

Where did they wear them?

Oh, they were armbands.

OK. So on their arms-- right-- like the upper arm.

Right.

OK. What about their clothing? Did they have to sew the star onto their coats, or something, or--

Whatever they had to wear, yes.

OK.

And your father?

Yeah, he, too. All the adults had to wear the armbands.

OK. So by now, you're 8 years old when this happens-- 8 and 1/2 almost.

Right.

Do you remember the kind of conversations that were going around at home at this point?

At that point, the conversations were very somber, trying to gauge what else could happen, what more things would be involved, and how much more trouble we could get.

Was there any talk of doing something?

No. The people who had the foresight left East with the Russian armies as they were retreating. People like my parents, unfortunately, did not. And that avenue was closed to us. So it was just pervasive fear of what was going to happen, but no.

You said earlier that you had lived in kind of a cocoon.

Right.

At this point, did you still feel like you had a cocoon or not so much?

More so, I think, because the Polish and the Ukrainian kids did not associate with us. So it was always just within the Jewish community where I had my friends, and my playmates, and that.

I see. Now your father's prominence, both in the Jewish community, and as somebody who was relatively well-off compared to others, and as somebody who had owned a grocery store that became kind of like a hub because it had a pub there-- was that an advantage or disadvantage to him at this time?

Well, it was definitely a disadvantage when the roundups started.

OK. Can you explain why?

Well, once the German administration went into full force, the killings started. And the German administration together with the assistance of the Ukraine militia started rounding up the Jews and shipping them off to the concentration camp, Belzec, or alternatively, marching them off to one of the local forests to be killed in Szepariwice.

Szepariwice? That's the forest?

Right.

And so we were not immune, but certainly, we were-- as the more prominent citizens, more prominent Jewish citizens-- we were targeted for special attention.

How did that manifest itself?

Well, I guess the highlight of it was when the major roundup of the Jews-- the first major roundup-- happened on January 25, 1942.

OK. That's about half a year after the attack on the Soviet Union.

Right. And after all the rules and regulations about the Jews not allowed to attend movie theaters, riding on public transportation, and so on. So on January 25, the Jews which lived in the center of the town were being rounded up to be shipped off.

We were not affected until the following day, when a Ukrainian militia came calling on our house and my father was arrested. By that time, my older sister was already married, and her husband was an agronomist. Again, because of his occupation he was subject as a-- must be Communist for a Jew to be involved in helping peasants in their farming. So he also was a target.

So in the morning of January 26, my father was arrested. About two or three hours later, the militia-- I don't know if it was the same one or a different group-- returned to arrest my sister's husband and my sister. And the three militiamen made everybody lie down on the ground on their-- one of them was there with his rifle. The two others took my sister to the next room, and there was a lot of noise, and slapping, and hurting.

Of course it took me quite a long time to figure out what was happening. They were raping my sister. And my sister and her husband were arrested and taken. At that time, my sister had a baby. It was now maybe 2 and 1/2, 3 years old. So she told my mother, "Please take care of my baby," as she was being led off.

Your sister's name again?

Ruzhia.

Ruzhia.

And her married name?

Ziegler.

Ziegler. And her husband's first name?

Herman.

Herman Ziegler, the agronomist.

Right. And so of course we were all in shock. But that was not the end, because then that afternoon, the militia came again and arrested my mother. So that one day is imprinted in my memory as the start of a real disaster. My parents, my older sister, her husband were all were arrested, and my three younger sisters and I and the baby were set adrift.

Did you ever see them again?

No.

So that was the last time you saw your father, your mother, your older sister, or your brother-in-law?

Right. Did you ever find out what happened to them?

Not precisely. But the chances were that they were either marched off into the forest or were put on a train to Belzec. Those were the two normal destinations for the people from Kolomea.

But you didn't know that at the time.

No-- well, we knew that.

You knew that, that there was a place called Belzec, and that there was a concentration camp there.

Right.

You knew that. And then had there been shootings already in the forest before these arrests?

Not that I know of, no. That was the major-- first major roundup and march to the forest.

OK. And of the Ukrainians in the militia who came to your home, were any of them people you recognized?

No.

OK. So it's unlikely they were former customers-- or possibly?

It could possibly be. But we really had no knowledge of them.

OK. And all this happens in your home.

Yes.

Did any of your older sisters go out later and try to find out where the rest had been taken?

Yes, they tried. Somebody knew somebody who knew somebody that if you paid enough, you could get them out, which of course didn't work. How much my sisters paid, I don't know. They didn't know as much about finances as I did, which was nil, and, yeah, probably a lot less than my two daughters know and they don't know enough.

None of us do in those circumstances. When the four of you were left, how old was the oldest sister at the time then? The second oldest, it would be.

Yes. I would guess about 18.

So Yula-- is that right? Yula was the second--

No, the oldest one was Frieda.

The oldest-- so it Frieda who was taken or Ruzhia was taken? I thought--

Ruzhia was taken. And the next oldest was Frieda, or Frima, and she was, I would guess, about 18.

OK. And then Yula comes after that.

Yula comes after that.

And the youngest one was--

Rachel.

Rachel. And tell me a little bit about their personalities. Did you get to know them at all? Was one of them-- have particular hobbies? Or were they more introverted, extroverted?



They were all extroverted. They had lots of friends. They all were busy with their studies when they didn't have to take care of me.

I'm sure that it was not just a chore, that you were the apple of their eye as well as your parents'. OK. So she's 18.

Right.

Does she take charge then?

To the extent that one could be in charge, yes, she was in charge.

What did she try to do?

Well, the only thing she tried to do is to find somebody who supposedly could bribe the prison because the theory was that all these people were being arrested or being held in prison rather than being shipped anywhere. And that was the only thing.

And she was not successful.

No, not at all.

And how did things progress from there?

From there, things went obviously downhill because we did not really know what to do. Didn't know where the food was or how to get food. So things were in pretty miserable shape for the next couple of months when we were sort of left to our own devices until the next stage in a story was when we were all told to move into the ghetto.

Before we get there, I have another question that I forgot to ask. Do you know what was going on with your Aunt Sali and her family at this time, and then with the uncle Ziegler-- no, not Ziegler-- Spiegel, was it?

Yes.

From your mother's brother, your mother's sister.

Right.

After your mother and your father are taken and your oldest sister is, did you have contact with these other relatives?

Yes. They were pretty much in the same situation as we were, in that they were living in an area called [? Bachensburg, ?] which was a German community north of the town of Kolomea. And they were also not troubled at the time. There was enough work for the Nazis in the town. So my aunt and her husband and the family were fortunate not to have been troubled. But we kept in touch, but--

But you stayed separately. It's not like you three moved up there or someone from the adults came down to stay with you.

No.

OK. OK. So let's go back to when you're talking about the next phase.

OK. The next phase was when we were all ordered to move into the ghetto. The ghetto in Kolomea was created into three sections with a gate which allowed the transfer people back and forth. The gates were manned with the German Nazis or by the Ukrainian guards.

Can you tell me what part of town in Kolomea the ghetto was in? Was it close to where you lived?

Yeah, it was not too far. But within, I would say walking distance, we were-- when the time came, we just walked. And I don't know whether my sisters or my uncle was able to find us a house where we could all congregate, and it's at that time we all ended up together in one room or two rooms.

That's Sali's husband?

Right.

OK. So you were there with their whole family, their four kids and the four of you.

Right.

So you're 10 people, if we count your aunt, your uncle, the four children, and your four.

Right.

OK. And what were the conditions? What kind of a place did you live in?

I guess we were squeezed in together. Next door to our house, there were other families. At that time we started getting hunger pains and people were scrambling to get some food. My uncle started building up a little plot of land and trying to grow some vegetables.

My oldest cousin, Jacob, was at that time, I would say, about 13. And he was helping his father to not only plant something, but also to stay up nights guarding the plot. I have a feeling that they never got anything out of it. Things got rougher and rougher in the time. So we went in this ghetto--

When you say they didn't get anything out of it, you mean, nothing ever grew? Or was able to protect it from the thieves?

It grew, but it didn't really ripen before the time came to start moving-- closing down parts of the ghetto and moving everybody to another section of the ghetto.

So if it was late January-- and I realize that this catastrophe with your parents being arrested, and your sister being arrested, and her husband, and so-- happened right before your birthday-- right before your ninth birthday.

Right.

Was there any marking or commemoration of your birthday that year?

No.

OK. And the little baby, where was he? Now that your mother was taken, who took care of the little one?

The girls, my sisters did whatever they could to take care of them, give him some food, and to take them out for a walk or whatever.

Did he come with you to the ghetto?

Oh yes.

OK. What was his name? His name was Rysio.

Rysio.

Like Richard, I would guess.

OK. All right. So I was wrong. It was not just the 10 of you, there was a little baby there, too.

OK. And none of the other family, bear in mind, the girl six to seven years old was retarded and was a extra burden on my aunt.

Yeah. How long were you all together until this other phase started?

Well, let's see. We were left alone in our house from end of January till sometime in April, just before Passover. And that when we were all ordered into the ghetto.

And then in April, at around about-- before Passover, there you were. How long do you stay in that ghetto? How long are you in the ghetto, because then we're on to another phase where you say it's being shrunk, little by little.

Well, the next roundup occurred sometime during Passover, which is probably around end of April. Before that happened, my sisters felt they just could not take care of the baby. They prevailed on the paternal grandmother to take care of the baby. And so the baby was with its grandmother for, I would say, two weeks or so, when the next aktions, roundup occurred.

So that would have still been 1942?

Oh yes.

All of this is-- so January, your parents, April, you're into the ghetto, and then the next aktion happened soon after you're in the ghetto.

Right.

And the baby is with little paternal grandma.

Paternal grandmother. Right.

And so the people next door to us had the foresight to build some kind of a hidey-hole in the house. And so when the word of the aktion went around, the people from next door and all of us-- all of us, my sisters, and my aunt and uncle, we piled into the hidey-hole, except for the retarded child because everybody was afraid that she would talk, or cry, or something, so it would give us away.

So what happened? Was she left simply?

She was left in her crib.

So two things to be remembered. After the sort of all clear, we all came out of the hidey-hole. My retarded cousin was nowhere to be found. She disappeared. What happened to her, I don't know. As far as my little nephew was concerned, his grandmother was arrested-- or not arrested, but part of the roundup of an aktion, and he was used as target practice.

How did you find out that?

There are always people who survive. There are always witnesses. And so we were told that he was shot by a Nazi officer, and his grandmother was shipped to either-- either to Belzec or to Szepariwice. So that was the-- that part of the-

And all of this is in the first half of 1942.

Yes. Until 1942, had you heard of murders like this taking place?

No. No.

Had you seen a corpse in the streets?

In the ghetto, yes. People were dying of starvation. And there was a man with his wagon and a horse that drove around the ghetto picking up corpses. And he was always passing by our house, so I would see corpses piled up on the wagon.

Do you remember the name of your retarded cousin?

Lunia.

Lunia. Lunia Spiegel? No.

Yes.

Lunia Spiegel-- Spiegel.

Right.

She was two, three?

No. My nephew was two or three. She was, I would say, maybe six or seven.

Oh the poor baby. So she was old enough to know that some strangers are there.

Right.

And you are now nine years old. This is how your 9th year begins-- or your 10th year begins.

Yes.

What were you eating in the ghetto?

Yeah, that's a very interesting question. I seem to have a mental block as far as food is concerned. I don't know for sure what I ate. I know that while we were in the ghetto, my youngest sister, Rachel, somehow managed to get put on a work detail out of the ghetto to harvest beets. And fortunately for us, she was able to bring some beets back into town-- sorry-- back into the ghetto. And so I remember vividly that that was one of them major sources of food. And to this day, I can't stand the thought of beets.

Beets.

Unfortunately, one time as my sister was bringing some beets into the ghetto, she was caught with the beets and arrested. And again, we got word that she was arrested, but we never had word what was happening to her. So that left my second-oldest sister, and my third-oldest sister, Yula, and myself as the survivors.

How old was Rachel?

I have a feeling she was probably around 15.

And your uncle's family, were any of them also-- did any of them get targeted? Did any of them get lost in some way?

Did any of them come under-- in the crosshairs of the authorities?

Not specifically, no. They were just part of the parcel of the problem.

So now you were-- so you're still aside from Lunia, whom they lost, they're all there. And the three of you remain.

Right.

OK. That makes nine people, I think. OK. What happens then?

Well, the only thing that happened is that I tried to spend as much time as I could with my cousins and with neighbor kids. Nothing particularly happened other than I would always keep track of the man with his cart and the number of corpses on that cart. Where he went, I don't know.

I spent time playing as much as I could with me neighbors--

OK, let's cut. OK. We had a little bit of an interruption, and we were at a point where you were going to explain what happened next, I believe.

Well, next, basically, my time was just spent playing with the other boys who were still surviving after the aktion. Two things I should mention, that at one time, one of my sisters took me across one section of the ghetto to the other one, where there was an orphanage. And I qualified as an orphan. And she-- my sister, I forget which one it was-- took me to the staff and convinced them to include me in the orphan. And they gave me after a long line, gave me a bowl of some watery vegetable soup.

There was a rumor going around that the next aktion would target the orphanage, so I never went back. So I had my one bowl of--

Watery soup.

--soup, and that was that. So the rest of my time was spent just killing time with my cousins and my friends. One of the boys next door to our house and I became, quote, "friendly," and he wanted to show me his father's postage stamp collection. The father was long gone already, was arrested, and his mother and he were living in the house.

And the reason that I mention that is because we were going through the stamps, and we saw this beautiful set of postage stamps from Cote d'Ivoire. And what was very amazing about the stamps were two things. Number one, it's very voluptuous lady without a bra.

That of course would be of interest to young boys.

Right. And the other thing, more important, was in the background were all the tropical fruits of different kinds for different denominations of the stamps. And of course, I had dreams of those tropical fruits for years afterwards.

Not beets, but tropical fruits.

No. Right. And it wasn't until about 50 years later that I actually had a chance to visit Cote d'Ivoire, and be in the market, and try some of those fruits.

It took that long.

Right.

It took that long. Describe for me what this ghetto looked like, if you can. How is it the same or different from the house you lived in or the neighborhood you lived in?

Well, the houses were much more modest. They were, of course, stuffed with too many people. How we ever found a place to sleep or nap, beyond me. But again--

Do you remember how you slept?

No, I don't. So maybe that's just something that I tried to get rid of in my mind. But I don't really remember a lot of things other than the starvation because I was going hungry, and my sisters would feed me beets, and said, well, if you don't eat the beets, you're not getting anything. And just basically hanging around and killing. Time

Did your other sisters also go on work details?

No.

Did your uncle or aunt go on any work details?

Not that I remember, no.

So they were all hanging around?

Yes. And my uncle, of course, was busy tending his plot of ground.

It sounds that this all was occurring during the spring and summer of 1942.

Yes. That's correct.

OK. And did it go on for many more months?

Yes, after the aktion and on Passover, there was one more periodic aktion which really reduced the number of people in the ghetto considerably. And that's when the Nazis closed down two sections of the ghetto and moved those of us who were remaining into the more built-up part of the town with multistory buildings. And that's where we again had to find some place to live.

And that kind of brings us up to the fall of--

'42?

'42, yes.

OK. Describe those multistory buildings. I imagine high rises in my mind.

Well, they're-- not quite. They were two or three story buildings, as opposed to the little one-story sheds in the other part of town.

And were the one-story sheds of wood?

Yes. Basically.

And the multistory ones-- the two or three?

Brick, or--

Were they more modern buildings? The brick ones, I'm saying-- or did they have those types of facilities that I was asking about before-- indoor plumbing, electricity, things like that?

They were, in some extent, more modern because they were in town. But the facilities, some were the same, some were a little better. There were no-- we still had to depend on water from a pump. But instead of one being right in our own garden, we had to go to certain parts of town where there was a functioning pump, and getting water there.

And were people as crowded as before?

A little bit, yes. We again-- there was another aktion. And again, my two sisters and I took advantage of somebody else's hidey-hole, forced ourselves into it, and we survived another roundup.

When you say forced yourselves into it, can you describe what that meant?

That meant basically that people who took advantage of-- or who knew how to build some kind of a hiding place, we all knew that they were working on it. So we knew that when the time came, we would just--

Show up.

Push us-- show up and push ourselves in.

Did people not want to have you there?

Definitely not. But they had no choice because, again, if we were to be left out of the hiding place, we would be possibly able to-- or not able, but possibly would be showing the arresting people where there are other people. So like it or not, they had to accommodate us.

I see. So there was this kind of a threat or blackmail that was involved, in that leaving you out doesn't just leave you to your own fate. But because you wouldn't be accepted in, you might take revenge in that way. And that-- the reason they focus in on this is because human relationships change under stress and under such conditions. And I wanted to get a sense of how did they change-- how are they affected here?

Well, they affected things to the extent that it was almost everyone for themselves. By the time we got into the other-- newer section of the ghetto, my uncle and aunt and their children sort of disappeared. So we didn't know where they were and what their condition was. Later on, of course, we learned that they were already planning their escape into the outside of the ghetto. But--

So they disappeared from you and your sisters.

Right.

Wow. Wow.

So we were just left alone.

OK. We're going to break right here.

OK.

So before the break, we were talking about your days in the ghetto, and the changes, and the changes in human relationships. And you mentioned how your Aunt Sali and her husband and four children-- well, three children now-- just kind of dissolved and disappeared.

Yes.

And before we go on to talk about what your next experiences were, let's step back a bit and tell me, when did you find

out what had happened to them, and where they ended up, and so on?

Oh it happened that in the process of moving from one section of the ghetto to the next, ghetto one, two, and three, and we happened to be living in ghetto two. But then ghetto two and three were closed because of the number of people in a ghetto was no longer that big. So everybody moved into ghetto number one.

In the process of moving to ghetto number one, they just disappeared. And we, my two sisters and I, moved into one room or one part of a building. And they just went off.

And you didn't know what happened to them.

I didn't know, but they apparently kept track of us. That was when we were liberated, they knew where we were, which we-- I didn't know.

What about your mother's brother and his family who had come from Germany? Were they in the ghettos with you as well?

Oh yes. But they were again sort of separate from us. So everybody was on their own. And nobody really paid much attention to the other.

OK. So you were left with your sisters. You end up in one room in ghetto one?

Right.

In one of those buildings that has two or three stories to it?

Right. Exactly.

And then what happens?

Then my younger sister, Julia, or Yula, she had a boyfriend who made arrangements for her and for him to be hidden by his former maid. He also thought he could help my other sister and me to hide somewhere. And we arranged-- they arranged-- I'm just a follow-on-- they arranged to meet in the forest at a certain point, at a certain time.

So we jumped the fence from the ghetto, walked up to the forest, and my sister's boyfriend never showed. Obviously, he was arrested before he could come into the forest to meet up with us. And we had nothing else to do, so we just walked ourselves back to-- into the ghetto.

So that was the three of you, your two sisters and you?

Right.

OK. He was Jewish as well yes?

OK. Do you remember his name?

Pavel.

Pavel.

Wermuth.

Wermuth. OK.



Right.

Like the drink.

Yes.

OK.

So it became quite clear to my sisters, if not to me, that the ghetto was not long to be in existence. So my older sister, Frima-- Freida-- she and a classmate of hers from the gymnasium decided to try their luck outside of Kolomea. Their thought was to travel to a large city like Lvov, and somehow survive there.

So they got out of the ghetto, went to the train station, bought their tickets, and were on their way to Lvov when it so happens that there somebody recognized them as your being Jewish and reported them to the police, which naturally arrested them. And so now was the last we heard of her. And again, there's always somebody around who sees things, and we were told about this arrest on the train.

Was she together with that other friend of hers on the train?

Right.

And was that friend arrested, too?

Yes.

So it was a witness to both of them being taken.

Right. Yes.

OK.

So that left my third sister--

Yula.

--Yula and myself in the ghetto.

Was it easy-- I'm sorry to break your thought here, but was it easy to scale the fence of the ghetto?

Oh yes. There was no problem. The problem was what to do after you got out of the ghetto. Where did you go? And where would you-- what would you do?

So after that, my sister contacted Pavel's former maid and somehow-- excuse me-- even though Pavel was not there, she, my sister, talked herself into having the maid hide her. This took weeks because it happened-- that didn't happen all the time. But at some point, my sister scaled the wall of the ghetto, and went off to where the maid lived, and had her hidden. That left me on my own for a few days.

One time, my sister's friend was fortunate enough, or had enough money, to buy baptismal papers to show that she was not Jewish, that she was Catholic, or Russian Orthodox, whatever. And she also decided that she would volunteer to go to Germany to help with the farm work while the German men were out on the Eastern Front or the Western Front, as the case may be.

So she kept in touch with my sister. And one time she came into the ghetto with a message to my sister, to bring her certain articles of clothing. I knew about women's clothing as much as I do now at this point. But I gathered what I

thought was the right clothes, went over to a select piece of ghetto wall, climbed over it, took the package, and went off into where my sister was hiding.

I delivered the package-- turned out to be the wrong one, but so be it. And then we had a little chat, and I turned around ready to go back to the ghetto because I had nothing else to do. And my sister told me to wait. And she for-- somehow talked the former maid into hiding me also. So I was the recipient of the bad luck of my sister's boyfriend, so the maid agreed take me and my sister.

Rather than her former employer and your sister?

Right.

So it was still two people, but not the same man.

Right, exactly.

Can you tell me a little bit about what this hiding place looked like?

Well, the maid was the-- working for the mayor's office of the town, and had a little apartment right on top of the tower holding the mayor's office.

Wow.

So it was fortunate, it sort of had a semi-separate entrance to the apartment, just a matter of climbing the third or fourth floor, and there's the little apartment. And that's where she was hiding us.

The place where we actually were spending our time was a closet, like most European closets, which were not walk-in closets like we have in the states, but a big--

A wardrobe.

Wardrobe. Wardrobe, yes.

So a piece of furniture?

Right. And so that's where we stayed.

The same wardrobe?

Right.

The two of you were in that same wardrobe day in, day out?

Right. Most of the time when somebody came, we just stayed in the wardrobe trying not to make a sound. If we were forewarned that some people-- guests or others-- were coming, the maid's teenage daughter had a German soldier as a boyfriend. So whenever that was to be the case, my sister and I would climb into the attic above the apartment. And we would sit there, trying to be quiet till somebody had left and it was safe enough to come down to the-- back to the apartment, back to the wardrobe.

Now did the daughter know that you were being hidden?

Yes.

And it was just the two of them in this apartment?

Yes.

And do you remember their names?

Yes. I remember the maid's name, [? Francisca ?] Palyga.

[? Francisca ?] Palyga.

Right.

How do you spell her last name?

P-A-L-Y-G-A.

OK. And her daughter's name?

That slips my mind right now.

OK.

The maid was an outcast from her village because the daughter was born out of wedlock. So she had no place to go back to her village, she stayed as the keeper of the offices in the mayor's office.

Which is a pretty interesting place to be.

Right. It was.

I would take it that the mayor was under German authorities?

Yes.

And so they had to answer to the Germans.

Right.

And that she-- take it the German soldier boyfriend did not know of your existence?

No, obviously not.

Obviously not. Though there could have been some German soldiers who would have-- but one doesn't risk that.

But not in this case. Or at least we never tested that situation.

That's right. And how were the interactions between all of you? That is, between the two women, and your sister, and yourself?

Well, the interactions were in that my case, I tried to be invisible as much as possible. Although, in order to kill time, my sister tried to teach me some basics, which I did not have because I didn't go to school. And so that's basically how we spent our time. My sister and the ex-maid were doing very well and were very friendly. Otherwise, she wouldn't have hidden us. And that-- we just tried, from my perspective, just to stay and not to be a burden to anybody or to be a--

Well, to be more of one than absolutely necessary.

Right. Exactly.

But they didn't mistreat you, or--

No, not at all. They were very nice to us in many respects because there were certainly taking their own lives at risk.

Was the food better? Were they able to procure better food?

Well, they were able to procure food. I don't know if was better. But certainly, more than I had in the ghetto. So I guess I didn't make myself clear.

As I delivered my package and said my goodbyes to my sister to go back to the ghetto, she told me to wait. And before I knew it, she said, yes, you can stay with me. And that's how I survived. And we stayed in that situation from late '42 till February of 1944. It was a year and months-- some months.

That's a long time.

Yeah. It certainly was-- when we were liberated by the Russian army.

So it was February '44-- the winter of 44 that the Russian Army liberated that part of-- now do we call it Ukraine or Poland, because it had become part of Ukraine the first time--

Yes. We might as well call it Ukraine because that brings us to the next part of the saga that after we were liberated, I met up with Julia's to-be husband. There were two things. One, is there were rumors that the Germans were mounting a counteroffensive, so my future brother-in-law procured a wagon and horse to take us from Kolomea east towards the Romanian border. And we ended up in Cernauti, or Chernivtsi, where we spent a summer of '44.

Tell me, how did your sister and her fiancée meet?

We left the-- Mrs. Palyga's house when we learned there were Russian tanks in the streets, therefore it was safe to leave the hiding place.

And I'm sorry to interrupt again, but I wonder, what happened with Mrs. Palyga and her daughter when those tanks came?

They had no problem. They were Ukrainian.

But they had worked for the Germans.

Well, indirectly related, because they were working for the--

The mayor.

--mayor's office, but not directly for the Germans.

OK. So they didn't have any consequences.

No, not at all.

OK. So you left them.

So we left them. And [? through-- ?] that's when my uncle came looking for us, but we had already left the apartment. So he didn't find us, but somehow we got-- we met up with other survivors.

And all of us congregated in one of the bigger houses in town, which used to be the former senior doctor's office. And so he had a number of rooms and a bunch of us survivors congregated there. And then after a few weeks, when word was that the German army was counteroffending, we left and went to Romania. There--

But I want-- I'm sorry to interrupt here. When you said your uncle was looking for you, does this mean your mother's brother or your aunt's-- your mother's sister's husband?

My mother's sister's husband.

Sali's husband.

Right.

Spiegel.

Right.

OK. And did you know what had happened to the other one, the one from Germany?

Yes. My cousins were hiding in a place which overlooked the road to the Szepariwice forest. And at one point, they saw a group of Jews being led to the forest, and they happened to see my uncle, and my cousin, Yudit, who were being led to the forest. So we know what happened to them.

OK. And your uncle's-- that is Sali's family, aside from Lunia, did they survive?

Yes. They were one of the lucky ones, I guess, who survived as a family unit.

OK. And did they also end up in this former senior doctor's home or were they--

Yes. They did. And then they also ended up in Romania. How they got there, I'm not quite sure. But they ended up there.

One of-- some distant relative of ours, my sister's and mine, lived in Romania and survived the war there. So when we left Kolomea, we ended up living with them for a while.

And what town did they live in?

Cernauti.

Oh that town.

Chernivtsi.

OK. And you had mentioned, at one time the Russian side of the family, where during the ghetto years, you had gone to ask for food, and they said-- were they in Kolomea then?

Yes.

So they lived in Kolomea before the war or they had moved there when the Soviets came in?

None of the above. They lived outside of Kolomea. When the ghetto was created, the Jews from the surrounding little townlets or villages were forced into the Kolomea ghetto. And so my Russian relatives were one of those that had to be moved [? out ?] of-- go into Kolomea.

So in other words, they were also living in the ghetto when you were living in the ghetto.

Right.

And when you were looking for food, you went out into-- you were still going to someplace in the ghetto to see them.

Right.

And that was your one interaction at that point, when the woman said, no food.

Right. And her husband said--

There's some apples, and you wouldn't steal them.

Right.

Yeah. OK. Were there difficulties in-- or complications in crossing into Romania from what was now the Soviet Union?

No, because it was a very chaotic situation. And the Red Army was basically in control of everything. And moving from Kolomea to cross the border, the border didn't really exist to all intents and purposes.

OK. What did the roads look like? Were they full of people like you?

No. There were a few people like us because we were the ones who were directly affected. The Polish or the Ukrainian population didn't care one way or the other, German or Russian controlled made not much difference. Obviously, there were underlying feelings, but nothing major.

Nothing to prompt them to leave.

Right.

OK. So we passed by--

Can we could stop for a second? Your daughter wanted to ask a question. And that was, was the Polish underground operating as far as you knew or experienced in Kolomea?

No, as far as I knew, that-- such a thing did not exist.

OK. And again, at this point, you're 10 years old, 11 years old, something like that, yes?

Right. Yes.

All right. So you-- the roads were not as crowded.

Right.

Were they highways in the way that we would understand them, with many lanes, or were they dirt roads that go from Kolomea?

They were basically dirt roads, two-lane roads.

One going in one direction, one in the other?

I suppose. Yes.

And were you passing fields or towns as you went?

Well, we passed fields, we passed a couple of battlefields with a lot of debris from the war, destroyed tanks, dead horses, that sort of thing. But nothing of any significance, and nobody bothered us from going anywhere.

So then you end up at this distant relatives' home.

Right.

And how do things develop?

We stayed in that city for several months. It was during the summer of 1944. We actually ended up living together with our-- my Aunt Sali and her husband because we couldn't stay with the distant relatives for any length of time.

And when that period of time went by, then the word was that the German army was being pushed back, and there was no risk of them recapturing Kolomea, we all moved back, and again, into that old former doctor's house with a few other survivors. We stayed there for a while until the fall of 1944. And at that point, the Russian government-- or the Soviet government-- gave the Polish citizens a choice of either staying in Ukraine under Ukrainian administration, or could go to Poland.

We-- my brother-in-law and my sister chose to be with the-- take their chances with the Polish government instead of staying with under Russian administration-- or Ukrainian.

Did they have any-- did they have any views of the Soviet system or any thoughts about it? Any reason why they chose the one rather than the other?

I think they felt that being closer to the West would be safer for them or more comfortable. And so they chose to get on one of those transports filled with refugees. And we-- it seems like we traveled for a distance of about 400 or 500 miles--

That's a lot.

For over a month because we were being shunted aside for the military transports going westward-- ammunition, and supplies, and whatnot-- and bringing back wounded Russian soldiers back into the Russian hospitals.

So was this by train?

Yes.

This was by train.

And did you have documents to say that you had been citizens of Poland?

I don't know. Nobody really checked too closely. The Ukrainians were just as happy-- or the Soviets were just as happy-- to see the Poles get out of the way.

OK. And again, maybe you told me, but it slipped my mind. How did your sister meet her fiancée, Firestone-- Feuerstein? How did he she meet him? How did she meet him? I forgot.

Well, he was one of the survivors who ended up--

In the doctor's house?

Right.

OK. OK. So that's how they met.

Yes.

And had he been from Kolomea as well?

Yes. Yes. And he knew my family. We were friends. And so he sort of adopted us or tried to help us.

And how much older than your sister was he?

He was quite a bit older. I think it was about 15 years older than she was.

And she was how old at this point?

At that time, she was, I guess, about 21.

OK. OK. And so you three become a unit.

Right.

And you're on this-- you're on a train that gets pushed to the side for a long time, so it takes you about a month to get this 500 miles West.

Right.

Where do you end up?

We end up in a town called Katowice.

OK. And the rest of the family-- Aunt Sali, and her children, and so on?

Eventually, they end up the same place as we.

OK.

And we stayed in Katowice till about April or May of 1945, when the war was officially over.

Do you remember that day?

I know it was, I would say, about May 15, right after the war was over, officially declared. And at that time, part of Eastern Germany became Polish. And so whoever-- whatever Germans did not escape to Western Germany, their homes, their apartments, their businesses, were basically for there the taking.

And so my brother-in-law decided we would all move from Katowice to Breslau-- or now, as it called, Wroclaw, where he somehow ended up running a factory making chocolates.

Wow. Wow, I said.

Yes. And we took over some poor German person's apartment, which was very lovely.

Mm-hmm. What did it look like? I keep asking you about your housing situations.



Well, this was an apartment in a three, four-story building, very well-furnished. What impressed me most is they had a record player and records there. And of course I don't know any better, but I fell in love with the German records.

You mean the music?

Yes.

Was it Wagner's music?

Yes.

Oh my goodness. Well, for someone who hasn't heard music for a long time.

Wagner's music was great. So we lived there until the middle of 1946, where the pogroms start in Poland-- the infamous Kielce pogrom. And I guess again, my sister and her-- by then, her husband decided that time was to get out of Poland.

How did the news of the Kielce pogroms reach you? Do you remember hearing about that?

I remember hearing about it, but I don't remember the word of mouth.

And did you feel that in the streets, too, when you would go out in the streets? Did you feel-- did you have a sense of fear?

No. No, it was-- it was like a frontier town.

Wroclaw, yeah.

Right. And didn't have any problem or-- but of course the news from Kielce was bad enough.

Yeah. Yeah. So how do you, as they say in Poland, get out of Dodge?

Well, there comes another train full of refugees. This time, mostly Jewish refugees as opposed to just Polish citizens. And this time we get on a train at Wroclaw, and we travel to the American Zone of Occupation of Germany in Frankfurt am Main.

Were there complications to do that?

Yes. We traversed the British and French Zones of Occupation. And none of them wanted there-- these refugees. And neither did the American zone, but somehow we ended up in the American Zone of Occupation.

And what about leaving Poland itself? Were there complications there?

No. Again, you got on a train, and you--

That's interesting, because many people at this time who flee Poland have to do it by being smuggled out.

Right.

By trucks, by smugglers illegally. They're crossing a border that was basically closed.

Right.

And you didn't have that?

No.

We just had the train load of refugees, and--

And was it your mother's-- was it your Aunt Sali and her family that were with you here?

Yes.

OK. So it was not three of you, it was like the seven of you.

Yeah. Like a bigger family, including my brother-in-law's former mother-in-law, which was with us. That made things come more complicated because she was very observant. This is Feuerstein's mother? Or Sali's husband's mother?

No, my brother-in-law, Isaac Feuerstein--

His mother.

His mother-in-law.

OK. Oh his mother-in-law?

Right.

Not his mother, but his mother-in-law. Right.

So your sister was his second wife.

Right. And that wasn't a problem. The problem was she was very observant. She wouldn't eat some of the food we had. Eventually, when we got to Frankfurt, she decided to go to Palestine. So it was back to my sister, her husband, and me as a family unit. OK

And when you got Frankfurt am Main, where did you end up?

My brother-in-law rented an apartment somewhere in one of the suburbs of Frankfurt.

So you weren't in a DP camp?

Well, yes. My sister and her husband were not in a DP camp. I ended up in a DP camp in Frankfurt, or in Zeilsheim.

Zeilsheim?

Yes, for a couple of months until they decided they would go try to get to the United States. And that's when they brought me back from Zeilsheim and--

Adopted you.

Yeah. Right.

OK. I was in an orphanage in Zeilsheim.

And was this in primarily a Jewish orphanage?

Yes, exclusively Jewish.

Exclusively Jewish.

In a DP camp.

OK. Was the DP camp also Jewish?

Yes.

OK. No other nationalities there?

Not that I could tell.

All right. And was there a particular reason for this, why they would be separated?

No, not specifically. The people in the DP camp were either prisoners of war or people like my sister's friend who went to Germany to work on a farm. And the ones who were Polish or Ukrainian that came from Kolomea naturally wanted to go back to Kolomea, didn't want to stay in DP camps.

Yeah. Well, some of them might not have wanted to go back.

Yes. Some of them were helped along by the American military to go back, especially Russian soldiers who faced a very uncertain future. But they had no-- were not given any real choice.

Yeah. It sounds like a very chaotic time, even though it's a safer time.

Yes.

What did the landscape look like? I can imagine that after the war, Frankfurt, there wasn't much to it.

That's right. Frankfurt, as well as Breslau, also was in very terrible shape because both cities were called Festung cities, fortress cities, for the German defense against the Soviet army. So there was a tremendous amount of damage.

Yeah. And did you have any interaction with Germans while you were there?

No, not really. I was pretty lonely. Of course, being in a DP camp, I had no interaction with anybody outside of the camp. When I moved-- when my sister and her husband brought me back out of the DP camp to live with them in Frankfurt, I was quite lonely and had no interaction with anybody else.

Well, by this point, you're-- what-- 13 years old?

Yes.

And that's a tough age at any time, but I'm going to throw out a thought, and tell me whether this has any relevance or not. When people are in the middle of stress, and in the middle of fear, and have to think of survival, everything that they've gone through gets pushed to the side because they have something really immediate before their mind. But then when they're safer and they don't have that threat of needing to survive, then everything that they lost can come rushing back to them. Did that happen to you, because you lost a lot?

Well, not to me so much, maybe because I just was totally oblivious to everything and didn't really spend much time thinking about what did happen, what could have happened, where I was. I was still in a survival mode.

OK. Even then, at that point.

Right. And I also felt very awkward, sort of a fifth wheel. My sister had a husband, she was getting a new baby.

Where do you belong?

Yeah.

Did that change?

Did that change? No, I don't think it ever did. Not until I was drafted into the US army.

And that was how many years later?

In 1953.

So that's another seven years.

Yes. Then I finally felt like, here's where I belong. There's order, there's structure-- I'm where I want to be.

Wow. Well, take me through those years, between being in the DP camp and ending up in the US army, to be part of the forces in the Korean War. What happened to you in between that time?

Well, the same situation prevailed. I was the fifth wheel in the family, which now consisted of a baby girl, my niece, and eventually, a nephew. And I lived with them, but felt like I was really not belonging to them. Even though I'm sure they went out of their way to make me comfortable, that was my feeling. I really didn't.

So it was not-- it was not a sense from your brother-in-law or your sister?

No, not at all. It was me. I myself felt I was--

Well, in many ways, you lost your family.

That's right.

You lost them all. That family that you were born into--

Yes.

--that you had a rightful place in. When you left Germany, where did you go?

We went to New York.

OK. Was there anybody there to meet you?

Yes. My father's brother, the one-- met us and helped us along to get acclimated and set down. Also, there was my mother's sister--

Sali.

No. My mother's sister that lived in the United States.

Oh, we hadn't talked about her.

No.

What was her name?

I don't remember.

It's OK. It's OK.

Well, she was a very interesting person. When we first came to the States, we went to see her. She was very cold, very unsure that we really were family. She thought that we wanted her property or something. So we-- after that first visit, we never really had anything to do with her. On the other hand, my uncle from my father's side, he helped us quite a bit to the extent he could.

Where did he live?

He lived in Brooklyn.

And what did he do? What was his way of making a living?

He was a waiter.

OK. So he a-- I won't say low level, but a job where you have to work hard.

Right. Yeah, basically.

And he was helping all the refugee relatives coming--

Well, [INAUDIBLE]. Yeah.

And did you settle in Brooklyn, too?

Yes.

With him?

No. After a few weeks or so, my brother-in-law arranged for an apartment for us in Brooklyn, on Williamsburg, more precise.

And did you-- is that where you started school again?

Yes.

OK. How hard was it to adjust to an American school?

Well, it was pretty hard, because although I-- while I was in Frankfurt, I was studying English, I certainly was not fluent. And I certainly did not have all the basic background of grades one through five or whatever. So I had a lot of catching up to do.

For the first year, I was in a yeshiva. So at least I had the advantage of being able to talk in Yiddish as well as in English. But I quickly found out this yeshiva was not my cup of tea.

In what way? In what way was it not?

The religiosity of it. I just came in from losing my family. My feeling about God were very ambivalent, to put it mildly.

Were you an unhappy teenager?

To some extent, yes, because I-- as was we were saying, I was a round hole in a square peg, or something, or a square peg in a round hole. I didn't feel like I belonged anywhere. So in many respects, I was lonely, I was concerned. But when I got into the public high school, I was welcomed, made friends with a lot of kids. And I started feeling a little more comfortable then. And of course, as I was improving my language skills, I was able to also absorb the studies or the work.

What was it like living in New York City after a place like-- well, lots of places, but Kolomea is not-- not a cosmopolitan capital.

No, it was quite a change. I'll step back and say that one of the major changes that I was aware of when we came to Frankfurt in the American Zone of Occupation, where there were streets with cars lined up toe to toe. And the amazing thing was they were all so quiet. I never knew of such a thing as a muffler. So by the time we got to New York, it was a lot more acceptable.

The norm-- in other words, there was a new norm.

Yes. Exactly.

This is maybe an unfair question, but I'll ask it.

Go ahead.

Along the way, did you miss your parents?

Very much. Yes. I dreamed for a long time that they would come up out of a-- somewhere that they survived, and we would get together and live happily after. But of course that did not happen.

Yeah. Did you ever go back to Kolomea?

Yes.

When?

Back in the-- around the mid-'90s.

So-- OK-- after the Soviet Union comes apart.

Right.

And when the Ukraine becomes a separate country.

Right.

And what did you find when you went back?

Well, a lot of shocks. What I remembered as a child, the wonderful boulevards and wide streets or alleyways, and nothing to write home about. Second thing was I remember mostly it was a Polish city-- street signs, the parks were Polish. One of the major boulevards was [FOREIGN LANGUAGE], Freedom Boulevard. Freedom Boulevard was something unintelligible in Ukrainian. And aside from that, it was about half as much as wide as I remember it.

It had shrunk. The Boulevard had shrunk.

Very much so. And my house-- there was-- what-- 40, 50 years after I left Kolomea. My house was no longer there. The houses of the tenants were not there. So everything was torn up and built up. My house was-- instead of my house, it

was a big multifamily building. And we weren't quite sure that it was really the house because the street names and streets house numbers were different. It was a very disappointing trip.

We did manage-- my sister and I-- managed to go to Szepariwice to look at the forest, the killing fields. And then the former citizens of Kolomea who now lived in Israel set up a little monument in the forest. And not a happy trip. The thing that reminded me is that the antisemitism that we experienced from the Ukrainians was alive and well.

Was it?

Yes.

So you experienced something of that as well when you were there?

Yes. The main thing was the little monument, somebody used it to defecate on it. So it was a-- not a very happy experience. We were glad to leave

And it was yourself and your sister who had gone?

Yes.

That is, of course, very bitter.

Yes, it was.

Yeah.

So that's my story.

Well, thank you for it. Thank you very, very much Mr. Feuerstein-- Firestone, sorry. When did Abraham become Allan?

After I spent my two years in the military, I always had to explain and spell out my last name, Feuerstein, and how it's spelled. And so I said, to heck with that noise. When I got out of the Army, I--

You changed--

--changed my name to Firestone, which I felt was not really terrible because it was just a transliteration. And then that was the era in the early '50s, when people were not like they are today. They did not try to show off their ethnicity. They try to Americanize as much as possible. And so being Abraham Firestone just didn't seem proper. So it went Allan Firestone, nice Anglicized name. And so, poof, that's how I ended up.

Well, I am grateful both to Allan Firestone and to Abraham Wiznitzer-- yes-- for telling me your story. For sharing it.

Thank you for your patience and for listening to me.

It was an honor. It was an honor.

Thank you. Thank you so much.

So I will say with this, that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Allan Firestone on February 7, 2019 in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Thank you.

OK.

[APPLAUSE]

So Mr. Firestone, who is in this photograph?

This is my mother and father. And I believe this is their wedding picture.

They're a lovely couple. They look very handsome here.

Right.

Her name again was Clara--

Lachs.

Lachs.

Right.

And his name was Yacob Wiznitzer.

Wiznitzer.

Also known as Krauthammer.

OK. OK. And do you have an idea about when this might have been taken?

No, I don't.

OK. But it looks like it would be before 1920.

Yes, I would guess so. Those are pictures that my uncle gave us because we had really nothing. When we into hiding, we never thought of saving mementos, pictures, or anything that--

So these were American relatives who then gave you the photos after you arrived here?

Right. Yes.

OK. Thank you. OK.

There it is, right there.

OK, Mr. Firestone, tell me who is this? Who are the people here?

OK. From the right, of course, is my father. Next to him is my mother.

OK. Next to her?

And the next girl is my youngest sister, Rachel.

She's the one that's the lower one?

No, the--



Taller one?

The taller one. That's the youngest one. Then there next to her is the oldest sister, Rose. Standing in front of her is my sister Yula, the one who survived. And next to her, sitting, is my second oldest sister, Frieda.

So this is before your birth?

Right. I'm nowhere there yet.

Ah, because I thought that was sitting down there in the sailor suit.

No, no.

Oh my. So this must have been taken-- oh in the 1920s, 1930s, early-- something?

Yes. Early '30s, I would guess.

OK. OK.

Before 1933, that's obvious.

OK. All right. Thank you.

OK, Mr. Firestone, and who is this?

This is my oldest sister, Ruzhia.

Ruzhia, who was taken together with your parents on that same day in 1942 in January.

Right.

Beautiful girl.

Yes, thank you.

OK. And Mr. Firestone, who is this?

This is my second-oldest sister, Frieda.

Frieda who was arrested on the train?

Yes, that's correct.

OK. OK. And then disappeared from your sight then.

Exactly.

OK. Thank you very much.