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Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back and I'm the director emerita of the Holocaust Resource Center in Buffalo, New York. It's March 29, 1993. We are at Channel 4. And our guest today is Mr. Samuel Sysman. Sam, will you tell us about your story, where you were born, about your childhood, and your family?

Well, I was born in Bilgoraj, Poland. That's Lublin Województwa, like it's like the state of New York, it's state of Lublin. And my father was a baker. We had our own bakery. And I was the third child. My mother should rest in peace, we had eight children. So I had three brothers, five sisters. And considering the Polish situation, I had a pretty good childhood. I was never hungry. I was dressed pretty good. I went to a good school. And we lived pretty comfortable.

Did you have grandparents?

Yes, I had my grandfather. For a little while, my grandmother too, then she passed away, but my mother's mother, my grandmother, lived in another town. I remember her very well.

So you had a nice extended family?

Yes, well, my father had two sisters. And they also had cousins.

Aunts, and uncles, and cousins.

Aunts and uncles.

We have a picture of your grandfather.

Yes.

Do you want to show us, you want to tell us about your grandfather?

Well, my grandfather--

Your grandfather is encircled there.

Yeah.

A very nice-looking man.

Yes, he was a nice tall man. He had blue eyes because my brothers and a few sisters had blue eyes too. They came after my grandfather. And he worked in a bank. He was-- you see, the picture there shows, it was a Jewish bank, belonged to the Mizrahi. And he had a pretty good life. He even managed to retire. And they paid him a pension. And he lived comfortable too.

Now, we have a picture of your parents.

Well, just my father.

Maybe you'll show it-- your father in the middle.

Yeah, yes. He was still not married then.

And the two women?

That's my father's sisters.

And nobody survived the war?

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No, not from my father's sisters, no, my father neither. But on the Germans cut in Russia, in Berdyczów, like I told you. And the other one passed away in Russia. She had six children. There was not enough food. Like her mother, she gave away her food to her children. But they survived, the children and my uncle survived. In 1948, they came to the United States. And my cousins live in New York. My uncle passed away about five years ago.

Now, let's get back to your story. You're in your city, and you're working in the bakery, and then the Germans come in 1939.

Right, yeah.

So tell us what happens then.

Well, they came in. And they, like I told you, our city burned down because of that spy, what they killed, the Polish government killed.

Well, why don't you tell us that story.

Well there was-- our town is a wooded area. There's a lot of forests there. So we needed like here, we call it a ranger, like a forest ranger. And his name was [PERSONAL NAME]. But I don't know. I was still a child. I wouldn't know that he should be German, or Polish, or Jewish, whatever.

He lived in?

He lived in the city.

So he was a Volksdeutsch.

A Volksdeutsche. And he actually was a German spy. And when the Polish Army start retreating, so there was a lot of officers. And also, where do you put up officers? Where there the ranger, there's a lot of place, big houses, stables, and all that stuff. That night, somebody from the Polish officers caught him taking pictures of their maps, of their-- and right away, they shot him.

Next day, our town was in flames. There must have been some other spies who, from four corners, the city start burning. And the city burned. And we had a bakery. So there was a law, they have a firewall. And it was already late, around 4:00 or 5 o'clock. And then the city got together.

And we had also a well. We need the water for the bakery. In the back was also a little factory where you make lemonade and soda. So we need a lot of water. So actually, there was a pump in the bakery. And there was a well outside in the backyard. And people went up on the roof and start pouring water over the firewall. And the fire stopped right there.

So that saved your family.

That saved our bakery and then the home where to live.

And it stopped the fire from progressing?

Yeah, from progressing. Then the fire stopped. And then the Germans came in too a week later, two weeks. They were in November 14-- well, in September, I think, the war started. Two weeks later, the Germans came in. They chased everybody out. All of a sudden, one German comes in. Who's the baker? Because they saw the baker. They saw the oven and all the equipment. So my father stepped forward and said, I'm the baker. He should bake him bread. There was no--

For the German Army?

For the German Army-- there's no flour, no wood. We still burned in the oven with the wood. There is no

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yeast. We'll give you everything. OK. We start baking bread. And they were pretty correct, the Germans.

They paid you?

They paid. And we could even scrounge a few loaves of bread. They weren't so strict. But by two weeks later, they came in, they said, they are leaving, and the Russians are coming in. Poland got divided between Germany and Russia. And our town was just-- but the Germans and the Russians had a little disagreement.

So the Germans left and the Russians came in. The same thing happened. We baked bread for the Russian Army. But then about two, three weeks later, they said, they are leaving. The Germans are coming back. Whoever wants to leave, they provide transportation, can leave, because the Germans are no good.

Well, my aunts, my uncles, their houses burned down, they didn't have where to live. They say, they're going to leave. My father was thinking about it. He said, well, here, we have a home. We still have the bakery. Maybe they won't be so bad. So we stood. One of my uncles, and my aunt, and their children-- they had four children too-- stood in Berdyczów.

And they went deep into Russia.

And no, they didn't go there. Berdyczów isn't deep in Russia.

No, that's right. It's not.

And my other uncle went into deep in Russia, to Kavkaz. In 1941, when the Russians attacked-- when the Germans attacked Russia, they caught my uncle and my aunt and they liquidate them. And my other uncle, and my aunt, and the six cousins, their children, they lived there. My aunt died of hunger. She had a small baby, the smallest was two years old. So like a mother, she tried to feed the baby first. She didn't eat till she fell sick. Finally, she died.

So nobody from that family survived?

No, from this family, they survived. My other, who stood in Berdyczów, nobody survived. But the uncle who ran away to Kavkaz, they survived. My uncle survived and my six cousins survived. In 1945, they came back to Bilgoraj. They didn't have nothing to go back. So usually, the Jewish refugees went to Germany. In 1948, they came to the United States. They all live in New York.

Oh, good.

Yeah, right. My uncle passed away five years ago. Well, he wasn't that old. But at least--

He had some years.

--he had some good years with his children. The children are all married. And they have already children. They have grandchildren already. Like two weeks ago, I came back from my cousin had his son, his grandson became bar mitzvah. And then I went to a wedding right away from another cousin's son.

Sam, let's go back to you. So where are you now? You're still in Bilgoraj?

Yeah, I'm still in Bilgoraj.

With your family?

Well, during the war, well, then after the Germans came back, they took away the bakery from us. They said, Jewish people cannot have no businesses. They took away the bakery. And they gave it away to a Polish family, which their bakery burned down. And my brother, the oldest brother, was already a baker, he knew already.

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So there was a Polish man who once worked for us. He learned the trade by my father. And he took over also a bakery. So he said to my father, if my father wants to go to work or my brother, he'll give him a job. So my father wouldn't go, but my brother went. And gave him a job. Well, at least there was bread to eat. And we also, like in the old country, well, like here, in the old time, maybe the farmers had also ovens to bake their own bread.

Oh, in the house.

We had in our kitchen, we had an oven, which fit in by 16 loaves of bread. So we start baking bread on the black market.

Oh, you got the flour and the yeast.

Well, you always find a way how to--

How to manage.

--get something on the black market, and this, and that. So we baked a little. And I went working for that like a roofer, like I told you. And I worked for the Germans. But the Germans by then start to prepare how to attack Russia. So they built a Feldlazarett, they used to call. That's a field hospital.

So I was working with that roofer. We covered the roofs on those barracks. And they make-- actually, they made everything fast. So they covered the roofs with tar paper. And the tar paper wasn't the best quality. We just nailed them down the fastest we could and everything. And wintertime-- well, Polish weather is just-- it's I wouldn't say like Buffalo, it's even worse. It's like in Chicago, maybe.

Very harsh.

Very cold. So the nails used to--

Pop out.

--pop up. So each summer, we had to go over which nail popped out, put them back in. And then we used to tar over the, again, all the seams.

How old are you at this time?

Oh, I was born 1925. I was maybe 15 years old, 16.

So there's no more school for you?

No, right away, no more school. Nobody went to school. Even the Polish children didn't go for school maybe for two years till they open up the schools for them.

And where were your parents, and your brothers, and sisters at this time?

Well, They were home. My father used stood home. At night, they used to bake, like I told you, a little bread in the house. And my mother, should rest in peace, and my older sister, they help. Everybody had to stay watch like guard in case they saw Germans coming there to be careful. And the rest of them were younger than I am. I was the third child.

Did you have other food beside bread?

Oh, yes, well, we had beans. We used to make noodles, potatoes, well, not much meat-- never, almost. The Germans used to give meager rations, like a little artificial honey. I don't know if you ever saw it. It's like they call it honey, but it's actually made out of sugar or something. Even the bread was mixed with sawdust, believe it or not.

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The sawdust?

It's sawdust, believe it or not.

Oh, my goodness.

Yeah.

The bread that you made too?

Well, it was right in the flour. Even in camp, we used to get bread with sawdust. Well, a elephant eats sawdust.

Right, to survive.

He eats wood. And we survived, somehow, three deportations. And we all survived. We stuck together.

How many were? How many Jews did you have in the town before the Nazis came?

Before, then maybe about 12,000. Was a small town, but it was a Jewish town. In one time, we had even a Jewish-- how you call them-- we used to call them a [NON-ENGLISH]. That's like a--

A mayor.

--a mayor, a Jewish mayor. But then they decided, they annexed a few small villages around the town. Then the Polish people got majority. And they elected a mayor. My grandfather was a Lawnik. A Lawnik, you would call like a city council. But there, you didn't get no money for this. That was an honor to be on the city council. It's just honor of your job.

So you survived three deportations because-- for any special reason?

Well, maybe it was a little reason there, how you call this, the elders from Judenrat was our neighbor.

Oh, he kept your names off the list?

Well, he kept out the names. And then my brother worked. And I worked.

So you were protected.

That helped a little too. And then it's like anything else. You could give a little bribe, a little this, a little that.

And what year are we up to now?

I started with 1941, still building those same barracks in for the army, the field hospital. And I worked for this. Even sometimes, I managed-- the Germans used to cook once a week, they had rice and milk with plums. The Germans hated it. They wouldn't eat it. And they much more, they even hated to wash the pots from this. I wasn't lazy. I knew Wednesday, they had this meal. So I used to offer the cook, I'll wash you the pots if you give me. So some days, I went home with two pails with rice, and milk, and with that.

Oh, so that helped the family.

Oh, that helped not only us, it helped a few neighbors too.

And we have a picture of somebody else from your town, the rabbi of your town. Maybe you'll tell us. Here's the picture. Maybe, you'll tell us about this man.

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Well, he's a very famous man. If you know, he's a Belzer Hasid. He became the Belzer Rebbe.

And his name is?

Mordechai Rokeach, [YIDDISH]. Should rest in peace, yeah.

And what happened to him?

Well, it happened to him, he ran away from Bilgoraj. And he ran to Lwów. That's Lemberg. And there, one night, Lemberg was occupied by the Russians. And one night, they came, the Russians came to arrest him. Now, each rabbi like this has a gabbai.

An assistant.

An assistant, yeah. And the gabbai is also dressed just like a rabbi.

Like he was.

So when he went open up the door, the Russians thought that he's the rabbi.

Oh, so they took him away.

So they took him away. And then his followers, the Rebbe's followers found out about this thing. They got get together a lot of money. And they bribed a German officer. And they took him over to Hungary over the border. In Hungary was still Jewish people by then because Hungary went with Germany. So by then, they didn't bother the Jewish people. And from there, they smuggled him into Romania. And from Romania, they brought him, somehow, over to Israel.

Palestine.

Palestine then, yeah.

So that was they brought him over in 1944.

No, they brought him in before, maybe 1941. Yeah.

And that's when he--

He survived.

--he survived and organized.

Well, by then, he didn't know what to do himself. But the Belzer Hasidim, they are the ones who get together all the money and all the effort to bring him out.

So that was the rabbi of the town.

Yeah. Now, his son is the Belzer Rebbe.

Right. Now, we're back to you. It's 1941, and you're still in your town. And your parents are with you. So tell us what happens then.

Well, then they start deportations. One summer, I think, in 1941, they came and they say, anybody who has 400 zlotys should get together by the train station with all their belongings and 400 zlotys. We going send you over to Ukraine. There, you going get a place where to live. You can work in the fields if you want to. If not, you can work by your profession. But never materialized. They send them away to-- there was not Tomaszów Lubelski, there was there, how you call, the Belzec. And there was already then an extermination

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camp.

Oh, so they exterminated them there.

Sent them to Belzec.

Did many people go?

Not many, because some realized on the end what happened, they start running away.

Did you know at this time in 1941 that there were concentration camps and labor camps?

Yes.

How did you know?

Well, I know there was one Polish man. He was a very distinguished man. And somehow, he worked for the resistance. One day, they came to arrest him. They arrested him. Two weeks later, came back a little box with ashes to the family. He died there, they said. So then rumors goes around.

So they put it together.

And then even some Germans start telling the story that Hitler's going to exterminate all the Jews.

So you're still in the town, it's 1941, and we're up to the third deportation. Is that when you're--

No, there was a second one. And then also, but we managed to survive it. And then was the third, that was the end, in November.

Are your parents hiding at this point?

No.

No.

No, no. No. Where will you hide? Nobody will take you in. There was no place where to hide.

So everybody was deported with this third deportation?

Yeah. Those who weren't, they were caught later, like my mother, should rest in peace, mine five sisters, my brother.

Where were they?

They were hiding. The Germans couldn't find them.

And where were they hiding?

There was an old house with a basement. So the entrance to the basement was from outside. So they covered it up with dirt. But in the house, the floor was a wooden floor, was a few boards taken out. And they slipped in in the basement there. And they covered again with the boards. And then at night, they had a little ladder and they went up.

And how did they get food?

Well, that's why I was there. And that boy whose father with his family was also there came to me to the-- I was in the ghetto.

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And you were working in the bakery?

No, no, no.

No.

I was working with that roofer.

So how did you get food for them?

I went to that baker which I know, who used to work for us. He sold me bread.

Oh, you bought it. You bought it.

I bought it on black market. Each day, I used to carry 16 loaves of bread, two kilo each. That's over four pounds each.

And you took it to your mother and your brother?

No, I didn't take it there. I brought it to the ghetto. Then that boy came at night.

Oh, the boy who was hidden in the house.

In basement, he came at night and picked it up, and even some good food.

And tell us what happened to them.

Well, to them, they were there maybe for six weeks. Then snow fell, like in the basement. In the old country, there was no toilets or whatever, sanitation in the houses. So they had to go to an outhouse. So during the day, they didn't go. They had everything in pails. At night, had to go out. So he went out with it each night. And then the snow came. And somebody saw footprints--

In the snow.

--in the snow. So then they came and they dig them out. And they took him out. And they shot them all.

And the boy?

The boy was-- at that time, he was in the outhouse. And he saw the Gestapo coming in. So he stood there. And then he saw what happened. Next day, he came. In the morning, he came to me in the ghetto. And he told me the whole story. He went back. His father had some money there in jewelry, whatever. He took out the jewelry and the money from the basement. And he bribed, I mean, the Judenrat. And they went to the Gestapo. And they bribed them. So they let them in in the ghetto. They figured, well, let them be in the ghetto. We going to finish them anyway.

But after the work was done, everything was done, they in January 8, 1943, they decided to liquidate the ghetto too. So all the men went out. And they took us to jail. And the women and children, they shot right in the ghetto there. And us, from jail, they took us near Zamosc, was a little village, Janowice. There was a SS barracks. And there, the SS learned how to ride horses. They used to call it, in German, Reiderschule for the SS--

Riding school.

--riding school for the SS. And we built there a barracks for the SS and stables for the horses. Again, I did work on the roof.

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What were your conditions like?

Well, there, I had some money. And there was Polish people coming in who had to work every day. They assigned them work with horses and wagons. And now, you had to bring bricks, you had to bring wood. So each day, another farmer had to come. So they used to bring bread in the wagon. And then for good money, they sold it to you. By then, I had some money.

You had money from the ghetto?

From the ghetto, yeah. Money-- well, after they liquidate the Jews, really, money wasn't that big of a problem. People left the money, they left their goods. And we had some jewelry and all that stuff. So you exchange one thing for the other.

And the conditions in the camp, how were they?

Well, it wasn't very good down there. There, we slept in a stable. There was just straw. And you slept on the floor.

Even in the wintertime.

Even in the winter. We had a wood-burning stove in the middle. You didn't worry about these things. You wanted a drink, you went out into the faucet outside, you took a cold drink.

Did you have enough food aside from what you bought?

Well, I could survive on it. I didn't have no luxury. I had bread and that's all. We had a soup every day and extra bread we bought from the Poles. Could buy a piece-- how you call this, a szynka, that's like a-- szynka is like ham from a pull-- or a little sadlo, they used to call sadlo, how you call that fat stuff, you know, like lard.

Lard?

Oh, yeah, there you eat it. You didn't worry about it. I tell you a funny story. That German one day, that Gestapo went out and he shot a big dog, a German, he shot. And he brought them into camp to the cook. And he told him, you cook it. And you give it to eat there, the Jews. And if you tell, next week, we'll cook you. Next day, actually. They brought a dog. And they cooked him, roast him up. And they set us up at the table. And everybody got that dog meat.

But you didn't know what you were eating?

No, we didn't know. And then he brought in a bunch of German officers with cameras. They all taking pictures. And then he asked us in German, do you know what you are eating? We said, no. Does it taste good? Yes. Would you like some more? Yes. Then he start, it's dog. So nobody was--

Were making fun of you.

--nobody cared.

You were so hungry.

It was good too, I'll tell you that honestly. So the joke was on him.

So malicious.

Well, when you're hungry, you'll eat anything.

You have to survive.

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Yeah. But by then, the work start finishing, and we were there 80 people. From the 80 people, a third, a fourth had to be liquidated. So he took us all out. And he went around with his finger--

The German officer.

--the German. You, you, you, till he got 20. Each time he walked by, your heart went like this.

Shattered.

And they took him there in Zamosc. This was near Zamosc. Zamosc used to be like a fort. There was an old fort. They used to take them there to kill him there and bury him right there in the fort.

When you were in this labor camp, were you all by yourself? You didn't have any relatives?

No, I had a good friend.

You had a good friend.

Good friend, yeah, a neighbor of mine. Actually, until Majdanek, I had two friends.

Did they survive?

Yeah.

Oh, so tell us about Majdanek.

Well, then after, they liquidated the whole camp. And that really started when it was the-- how you call this-- the uprising, in Warsaw, when the Jewish people did revolt in Warsaw.

In 1943.

'43. Then they liquidated our camp. They took us all together on the train-- no, on trucks. And they put us in Majdanek.

What was that like?

Oh, Majdanek was a concentration camp. That was bad. And there, nobody-- but luckily, by 1943, in the middle of 1943 already, the Germans started running low on labor, on people who be able to work. So they stopped young men, strong men, healthy men. They mean for a while, they stopped the killing.

Tell us how they processed you when you first came through it.

Well, we came into Majdanek. First, you went in, you took off all your clothes, you went in in a place where there was barbers. Well, they weren't even barbers. They had those electric-- Shavers.

--shavers. And they all your hair from all over, they took off from your head, from your private parts, from under the arms, everything. And then when you went out, was again a German. He looked at you. If you look a little sick, this way. You looked healthy, this way. So those who went this way never came out. Those who went this way went in a shower like you went in a shower. And after the shower, there was a big tub. It was made out of a cement. And in there was some kind of solution. I don't know, it stinked.

Chlorine?

Excuse me. I don't know what it was. You went in that and you had to put all your body and your head into. The German was staying with a stick like this. There was a stick. And there they had a fork-like. And you put your fork right in your head. And we got in on your neck and put your head. If he liked, he kept you a little

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longer there. If he didn't like, he took the stick off, and you ran out. And that's it. Then you get in a pair of pants, those striped pants and a jacket. That's it.

Those are made out of wool?

That wasn't, it was made out of paper.

Paper.

Paper, some kind of paper.

You got clogs? Did you get clogs?

Clogs, and a pair of pants, and then a little jacket. No hat--

No underwear?

--no underwear, no stockings, no nothing.

What season of the year is this?

That was around May or June '43. And you wore that in the wintertime too?

Well I wasn't there in the wintertime, luckily.

So how long were you in Majdanek?

In Majdanek, I was there maybe about eight weeks.

And it was bad?

Oh, it was bad, real bad. You got in the morning, you get a little burnt oats for coffee, but no sugar, no nothing. There was saccharin in it, was sweet though. And during the day, you had a soup. And at night, you had a piece of bread, sometimes a piece of margarine, sometimes not. Like I said, the bread was baked with sawdust. And it was baked in pans. If not, it would run around someplace. It was like glue, almost. That's all.

And what did you do?

There, we-- Lublin was also bombed. So they needed bricks. So we used to take apart-- some people went out from Majdanek on trucks and they brought in old bricks from old buildings. And we were sitting there and cleaning up the bricks with a little chisel like this. And used to carry them to the builders, who built also barracks and all that stuff.

So you stayed there for eight weeks. And what happened after that?

Eight. Well, then one day, came in, and they said, barrack three, four, and five, all the people out. So we went out. In each barrack was about 1,000 people, was big barracks, and there was three-story beds. And there was not much room between one bed to the other. And they said whoever, who knows how to work with, how you call, sheet metal and all that stuff should step out.

So actually, I knew something about it because I worked with that roofer. I stepped out. And they took us away. And they put us in a barrack, empty barrack there. And we stood there all night. We didn't know what will happen. Next morning, they came, everybody out. And they took us to the train. On the way to the train, they gave us a piece of bread, a piece of blutwurst. You know what blutwurst is?

Some kind of meat.

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No, no, it's some kind of-- how you call this-- salami made out of blood. How you call-- there is a name for it here. And the Germans used to call it blutwurst. And a piece of cheese, and they packed us in on the train, closed like--

Cattle car?

--cattle-- no, not passenger.

Not passenger.

Like a cattle or any other stuff. And we arrived in Skarzysko-Kamienna at maybe around 6:00, 7 o'clock at night.

Where is that?

That's in Poland, Skarzysko-Kamienna. And there was a factory from ammunition factory. There, they used to-- they maked all kind of bullets for guns, for revolvers, for, how you call this, grenades. They made it for, how you call them, for big guns, what they calling, all kinds of stuff. So I was assigned to work, they called it the Wascherei. But it wasn't a laundry.

It wasn't a laundry.

In a way, it was a laundry because the Germans didn't have enough-- not enough brass, not enough copper to make their bullets there, so they made them out of steel. And these parts came like what you put on your finger to sew. I call this--

A thimble.

--hat, like thimbles, little thimbles, heavy though. And they came rusted. And so we have to clean them up from the rust. So I was working on a machine like this. I used to call my banderka. A banderka is a machine you put them in, it went like a snake kind. It started up, and then it went in-- first, it went in in acid. That was that acid what you call what you put in to clean, like soda acid, but not diluted, the real stuff.

Did you wear gloves?

Gloves. I didn't have no.

So you burnt your hands?

No. I didn't have nothing to do with this. I just put them in the machine. In the machine, the machine took him around this, but not enough that was such a rough acid, such bad smelling. It was even heated. And that was bad.

So you inhaled this too?

Well, I did. And that went through the other side. After they came out, first, they went in that acid, then they went in the cold water. Then it went in hot water with soap. Then it went in in some kind of a lime, diluted lime. And then it went in again in cold water, then again in soap, and then it went into an oven, where it dried up. From this, it went to the machines where they stamped them. And then they came back, they were double the size.

/ they'd enlarged.

And then the same process again. And after this process, I didn't see them no more. Then they came out already the length from a bullet if it was for the guns.

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So you worked on this assembly line?

No, I had my own machine. And I had to put in-- the factory had to make a million bullets a shift. We worked 12 hours a shift, day and night.

Did you get breaks?

No.

No breaks?

No. During the night, no, because they didn't feed you during then. During the day, you had a soup. And usually, I could have-- if I worked during the night I could have had it done before. And luckily, like I say, the Polish people, there was civilian Polish people there who worked there. They used to get milk because they worked near that acid, but not the prisoners, not the Jewish people.

But the German boss somehow, I don't know, maybe my face, maybe he-- he liked me somehow. And when he had any milk left over, funny to say, he used to bring me a little milk. If he even had one night, I didn't have to make so much, and I guess everything is luck. And I went between the machines. And I fell asleep. There came another German boss from another department. And he saw me.

Who could have been your death.

No, he took a hose from cold water and he start spraying me. My boss, my job came to say, what are you doing? He say, the swine sleeps. That pig's asleeping. He said, don't you bother him. He done his job.

So he protected you?

Protected me. And one day, I got cut, and they wanted to beat me. If you got cut, you get sometimes beating. But we went, each time, they cut 10, 15, they brought them in a special room. They put your head under a sink of water. You head was full water. And then they start beating you. What happened that night? All of a sudden, all the light went out. There was like an alarm about bombs. And we didn't get beated.

Oh, my goodness. It's all chance, too.

It's like the things like chance. I didn't get a beating.

So how long were you in this camp?

In this camp, I was till 1944, when the Russians start advancing. And they stopped near Warsaw, maybe if the history of what happened. And the planes stopped. But the Germans were afraid that they going keep on going. So they took us out. And they took us to Czestochowa. There was another part of HASAG. And some of the Russians stopped and they were able to take all the machinery out from Skarzysko and brought them over to Czestochowa. And we start. And I worked in the same place.

The same detail.

Same place.

Did you have friends? Did you make friends who went with you?

Yeah, one of my friends, he lives in Israel now. He went with me. And we worked in Czestochowa. But there, also, like in Skarzysko, you did get all the clothes from all the dead people what they brought back from the crematoriums, like civilian clothes. One day, I stood in line for some clothes. And I got myself a nice winter coat.

And there was a Polish man, a civilian, he walked in. He wanted to buy from me this coat. I said, I don't

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have another coal to wear. Bring me another coat and I sell you this. So he bought me his old coat. And I sold him mine. And he got me 600 zlotys. It was a beautiful coat. And for this, I could buy-- for 60 zlotys, I could buy a two kilo bread from all the Polacks.

So you had a lot of bread money.

I had a lot of money. Yeah. And I took it with me to Czestochowa. And me and my friend, who lives now in Israel, we were partners. Whatever he got, he had, was mine. Whatever I had was his. And we lived together like this. But in Czestochowa, then, in December the Russians maked order offensive, the same year, '44. And they start advancing real fast. And it was already January 19 if I remember-- or now January 20 the latest.

How did you know, did you have a calendar?

Well, we had contact with some civilians. Oh, you'll be surprised. Some Jewish people had calendars. They knew the holidays, they knew everything, believe it or not.

Could you observe the holidays?

You see, that's what I was about to tell you, on Yom Kippur, I tried even to fast. But I had to go down. I worked, that time, I worked night shift. And during 12 o'clock, I had to go get my soup. Me and that friend who lives in Israel, Israel guys, he's in that book too. And said, we're going fast. It was 2 o'clock. It was 3 o'clock.

You couldn't do it.

The soup was staying on top by our bed. And finally, I say, I couldn't do it. I had to eat.

Well, you were so weak.

But we knew that when it's holidays and all that stuff. So in Czestochowa, I told you, so the Russians start advance. So I was working then night shift. And my friend worked day shift. So all the people who worked night shift, they got them out to the train. And it's funny. We came out to the train. And there was the Hungarian Army and the German Army actually were fighting between themselves who will get on the train because the Germans wanted to run away on the train. And the Hungarian wanted.

Well, in there, they give us-- they put us on the train without any fighting. It was very funny. But those people who work day shift, they couldn't get together. They were all over the factory because the Germans didn't have time. Those who worked night shift, they put all on the train in boxcars. And they send us out to Buchenwald.

And what happened to the day people?

They got liberated next day.

Oh, so that wasn't lucky.

Wasn't lucky, no. My friend got liberated in Poland in January, 1920 or 1921.

1940.

And I was taken away to Buchenwald.

And how long were you in Buchenwald?

In Buchenwald I wasn't very long neither because they needed people to work. And the same story, they needed people who knew sheet metal work. And they took us away to also was a labor camp. That was in a

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town, like I told, you near Magdeburg it's-- Borne was the name. And there, there was how you call this salt mines. And the Germans said, in a salt mine, you don't need any pillars, anything. That stays up by itself. You should see that factory. Trucks go down there. And there was maybe 1,000 meter underground, in a factory from airplanes.

And you worked in there?

I got there also. And you know, I worked-- we had to make one, I call this a frame for a plane. It was small fighter planes. So the guy gives me a air gun. I should shoot those rivets. And the rivets had to be perfect. If one wasn't perfect, it's like came a guy with a dentist goes in with those little mirrors. If the rivet wasn't right, it had to be drilled out and put in another. He gave me that gun. That a gun flew over the-- I said, look, hey, I--

Can't do it.

--I can't do it. But the pressure was on him because he had to produce. He was a German worker. If he didn't produce, there you go to the front. So he used to bring me pieces bread, sometimes his soup what he used to get.

And he taught you how to do it?

Oh, yeah, he taught me how to do it. And I was pretty good at it.

How long did you do that before you were liberated?

Oh, for about three and a half months.

And then you were liberated?

No, no, no, no, not so fast. Then I worked with him. And then one night, they came. And at night, we didn't get no food. But the Germans used to get-- he used to bring me a little soup. And then it was left over, they used to give to the people, but those which they liked. If you didn't like you, you didn't get. So one day, I was staying in the line, on one line, my boss came and pulled me, you get away from here. I didn't know what happened.

What happened? Those who was, again, in the barracks they took him out. And those who worked stood in the factory. Those who they took out, I don't know what happened to them. And that night, we came home, we didn't go back no more to work, but the half the people were missing. Well, they took him out. We stood a day in the barracks not going to work.

Then one day, we heard already cannons going and rifle shooting. And they didn't let us go yet. They say we going march. And we tried to go to Magdeburg. We marched maybe about five kilometers, six, came across us a German soldier with those-- they were like the military police here. They used to wear those things with the German eagles, with all that stuff. Said, where are you going, he asked our commandant. He's going to Magdeburg. Oh, see, you cannot go to Magdeburg. There is street fights already there in Magdeburg.

So he didn't know what to do with us. He went out with us in the field, sit in the field, and they watched us. Then they said, we going back to the barracks. We start marching back, then came night. Came night, I see people running away, even SS. They had, under their clothes, SS clothes, they had already civilian clothes.

Civilian clothes. What month are we talking?

That's April.

April 1945?

No, April 11, 1945. And I see it. Some run away. How did they run away? There was, like on the road, there

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was like those ditches when you travel on the Thruway, you see those ditches where the water runs off. And I see people, they lay down, and they roll down in the ditch. They roll down. And I did the same thing. And then after everybody pass by, I went in the field. And the Germans had in the fields hay for the animals pressed in those square bales.

Bales.

I pulled out a bale of that hay. And I crawled in there. I say, well, OK. I fell asleep. In the morning, I hear talking. I hear talking Russian. I hear talking all kinds of languages. I say, there must be people from camp. I looked around, there was maybe about 50 of us hidden in that high pile of hay. But then we see soldiers on the road. I didn't know what they are. Are they Germans here? It was far away. Are they Americans? Are they anybody? We were laying there till around 12 o'clock at noon. 12 o'clock at noon, I see Black people driving trucks. I say, there is no German Blacks.

So you were liberated by Americans.

So we knew that's the Americans already there. We went to the road. They saw us. And they start throwing on a chocolate. I say, who need chocolate? I need a piece of bread. But we ate the chocolate. What can you do?

And that's when you were liberated.

I got liberated, yeah.

The happiest day of your, one of the happiest days.

No, not really. Would you believe it? I never cried. But that day, I cried. I said, what do I do here?

You were all alone.

All alone, nobody, nothing.

When did you meet your wife? Well, and I left Germany right away. I couldn't stand it there. Somehow, there was a train. There was a few of us. We hopped on a train, we go. We go. We went into Holland, till Holland. Then in Holland, sometime, well, those people ride a train-- no money, no nothing, no papers, anything. And finally, we got in from Holland, we went into Belgium.

Oh, that's where you.

We went into Belgium to Liege. That's a border town. But there, they stopped us. Hey, what are you doing? By then the Jewish Judenrat, how do you call this, the Jewish Gemeinde, the Jewish organizations--

Right, the community organizations.

--heard that some Jewish people arrived, and no papers, they arrested them, they put them in a special place. Actually, they didn't arrested us. They put it in barracks also. They fed us there. So they arranged they should take us into-- dispersed us in some towns. Some people went to Antwerpen. Some people went to Brussels. I went to Charleroi. And some stood in Liege.

And that's where you met your wife?

In Charleroi, I met-- actually, I met my mother-in-law first.

Oh, you met your mother-in-law. That's very clever.

Yeah, because she was a good lady.

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Excuse me, Sam. We don't have much time. And we want to show the pictures of your family. So tell us who you have here, this beautiful family.

Should I look there?

Yes. Look on the screen.

Well, I'm in the middle. Oh, here. I'm the middle. How do you say this, to my left, that's my oldest. Well, they are twins.

Your twin sons.

Yeah, there, the older son in the glasses. The other one is the other son. Peggy, that's his wife. My wife is in the middle with me. And this is Inna. She's a Russian girl.

And now, we have another picture. And this picture is?

Now, this is my oldest son--

With his wife.

--with his wife and the two daughters.

And now, we have another picture here.

This is my son-in-law, my daughter, my daughter's daughter, and my grandson.

So you have lots of pleasure, naches from your children and your grandchildren. And what you went through is in the past, fortunately.

Well, the older--

You never forget it.

--I'm getting, the more I think about it.

You have more time to think.

You can never forget it.

Never forget. If you have to give a message to young people, what would you say?

What would you say? They should never forget. They should honor their parents. What can I say? They should love each other.

We should try for a good life.

And if they have family, not to fight with them. What can I say more? I don't know.

We're glad that you're--

Well, I'm glad.

--that you're here today.

Can I say something?

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Sure.

When I left, like I told you, my mother, I didn't want to go. And my mother came with me to the gate from our home, my ex-home, and they said, Sam, you go. Maybe, you'll survive. And you'll rekindle. And I'm thinking about it a lot. I did what I had to do.

You're the one to tell the message, to give the message, to tell the story. There was a reason for you to.

I try to think sometimes.

And to have this wonderful family--

Yeah, well, I, thank god, have nice kids.

--that will perpetuate.

They are good children.

Right. And the history goes on that way.

Well, I hope so. I hope they don't forget.

Thank you very much, Sam. I know it was hard. Thank you.

Yeah, well.

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