

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back, and I am the director of the Holocaust Resource Center in Buffalo, New York. It is July 30, 1990, and we are on Channel 4. Our guest this evening is Irving Milchberg of Niagara Falls, Canada.

Irving, we're going to be informal. Will you tell us your story and start with your childhood in Warsaw?

Well, I was born in 1927, September 15. I went to school till the war broke out. I had a normal, good family life. We lived in a decent apartment. There was myself and two younger sisters, one of whom was Sarah, and Rebecca.

When the war started, that was the first major shock. We were bombed. We were short of water. We were living with basements in the underground. And it was so bad that I always remember one thing. If people ask me, when did it start? I think it started in 1939 because my mother said, please, God, let it stop. Let the Germans already come in.

Because after all, they weren't that bad. In 1915, '16, and '17, the war, came into, occupied Warsaw evidently at that particular time. And they weren't bad to the population, to the civilian population, to the general population. So we presumed-- at least my mother presumed-- everything will turn out well.

And after the Polish government, the government of the day, surrendered to the authorities, the minute the Germans came in, they came with a power of reprisals-- hurting, beating. A lot of buildings were demolished from the war years. When they came into our house, to our buildings where we lived, they looked for furniture.

And I'll never forget. They came into our apartment and took our furniture. And they didn't take it, but they made my father and some other people they grabbed from the street to carry it down to them. And they were beating them while they were carrying down the furniture to their trucks.

They came into the city, evidently their families. And they were looking for to have decent furniture. So they were going around. And whatever they could take--

These were Nazi soldiers?

German soldiers-- that wasn't Nazis. I don't know the difference.

But they were taking furniture for their own use?

For their own use-- they took the furniture and whatever else they liked. And you dare not even say a word because they were beating you up. And already, at the time we heard a few days before, they were shooting so many people in one place and another place.

And a few weeks later, after they took away the furniture, in one place, it happened on Nalewki Street, not far where we lived. We had cousins. And some kind of a crook was chased by a Polish policeman. He stole something, whatever it is. And he came into the building. And he couldn't find them, so he brought Germans in.

And the Germans told everybody to come down. All the males come out from the building. They took them down in the courtyard. Matter of fact, I was there to visit my cousin, but I was afraid to go down. And they took 103 people. They lined them up against the wall and shot them all.

So you were just afraid to antagonize them?

I was afraid. I was afraid to go down there from the building. I was down in the apartment. I was hiding under the bed. And I didn't even go down. And whoever walked down, they killed everybody. It was a tragedy. We lost, at that time, I remember two or three cousins and friends and people.

So from then on, it was a panic not to give them any cause. It was going around the general population, do anything, but don't give them a cause to kill people. Because we presumed at that time, and people presumed, that this is still part of

the war effort or whatever it is. And the administration will come in. Maybe they'll behave differently. But it seems it was going from bad to worse.

It was getting into the fall of the year. And the windows from the bombs were broken. And we couldn't get any panes to close it up. So, consequently, we were freezing in our own apartments. And there was no coal or anything else.

Myself, I remember trying to get food, staying in line. Not as a Jewish boy, but as a Gentile boy, I stood in line. And my feet were freezing around my ankles. So somebody told me to wrap around newspapers. And it helped. Matter of fact, I still, at night, now I feel that tingling from that freezing from the problems what I had at that particular time.

Slowly, that was till 1939 or 1940. Obviously, at that particular time, you couldn't go more to school. As far as school, it was strictly against the German law for Jewish, in particular, to go to any school, any education whatsoever.

Had you already had your bar mitzvah?

No. I wasn't bar mitzvah, and it was in September. But the war was going on. They were bombing.

So you just couldn't study.

So I studied it. I knew the procedure. I knew the procedure. But basically, they didn't call me up to the Torah at that particular time. And from there on, it's where our synagogue was already bombed completely. We lived not far from the synagogue. And our building itself was 200 Jewish families in one building with a courtyard.

At night, we had a little bit of peace because it was the minute-- that was more what they used to call wartime zones. So you couldn't walk out on the street. At 8 o'clock, the gate from the building was closed. So you could come down because nobody came in and nobody went out. So you came out--

So you had curfew?

The curfew-- that's the word. That was curfew at that particular time till the morning. So at least you can go down. You come down out of your apartments, and you met other people. You associate. You talked. As children, even under those problem years, we played. We even learned how to smoke cigarettes.

During the day, it was very difficult. As Jews, you couldn't walk certain streets already. As a youngster, I used to go in certain places and buy cigarettes and sell them to other people. I used to do errands for my parents. My father used to be in the china, porcelain, and houseware business. And so he had customers in certain places. And he was afraid. He couldn't go. So I used to go and attend to his business.

Did he have a store?

Before the war we had a store.

And then he did it privately?

Privately-- the store was robbed during the war. And there wasn't that much left. Whatever it was, he had it at home. But there are certain people owed him money, so he tried to collect. And it was a difficult time too, because the inflation was such that it went from a spoon-- let's say it was \$1. All of a sudden, it was the same spoon \$150.

Oh, my gosh. You had inflation.

The inflation, it was big. So you couldn't buy for the same amount a loaf of bread. So it was trying times. But however, we tried to do our best. And from there, our grandparents moved with us. They were with us--

Where did they come from?

In the same city-- there are certain part of the city which became kind of endangered. And so they moved with us. So my grandparents would-- we converted from the living room. We put in four double beds.

There was nowhere to move around. It was just beds the place. And I slept with my dad. And my sister slept with my mother and my grandparents and uncles on top of it. So we did the best we could.

And were you hungry? Do you remember being hungry then?

At that time, we managed somewhere. It wasn't the greatest, but we managed. My grandma washed-- we had a kettle what they used to boil laundry. She used to wash it. And she scrubbed it out and cleaned it. And we used to cook soup, perpetual soup.

I don't think for the winter of 1939, '40, we ever washed that kettle. Whatever that came in-- it was carrots, they used to wash up the carrot, chop them out, and add to it. And constantly we were eating from the same kettle.

You had soup all--

It was a soup bowl. It was a constantly-- this whatever taste it was. But it was filling. And if that was food, it was OK at that time. But I suppose other people were worse off.

At the beginning of 1940, we heard stories from terrible atrocities from people from smaller towns. They burned them the synagogues, and they were shooting, killing people. They took away everything. And people were on the run constantly, came in from smaller towns as they didn't even create any ghettos, nothing, just to chase them out, whatever. They left all their possessions, and they came in. So the stairs to go into the apartments were full of people.

So they just lived in Warsaw? They just lived on the stairs?

On the stairs or there were--

And took charity from-- food?

Whatever-- it was a horrible winter. It was a very cold winter. A lot of people were hungry. And on top of it, from the dirt and whatever, it started out a typhoid.

Oh, so you had an epidemic?

Epidemic-- so every time there was an epidemic and some person got sick in the particular building, they isolated that building. And they closed the gate completely. And you couldn't get in or get out.

Did that affect your building?

It affect us quite a few times. So they took us out from the building-- you had to come down on the courtyard-- and took us out and marched us to a steam baths. It wasn't the steam baths what you see here, but it was a primitive, like a gas type of thing. And they called it the delousing. And they put on signs on the building itself not to go closer. In German, in particular, it has [GERMAN]. In other words, had typhoid.

This is quarantine--

Quarantine building and so on.

Who is the "they?" Polish authorities or German authorities?

No, that was German authorities, but the Polish workers were-- it was the health committee before the war was looking

after it. But it seems like it was a deliberate plan to isolate. People shouldn't come closer. If anybody was sympathetic, shouldn't come close to the Jewish population, for whatever reasons, even not to touch them because they're full of lice and whatever.

And the next thing, there was a propaganda going out-- signs all over the city. They compared Jews to lice, to mice, to whatever it is. And that was the whole propaganda that was going on and starting to grow on it.

And with the isolation on top of it, they walked out the people and marched them to those steam baths in the wintertime-- semi-clothed, hungry. And you had to go through because otherwise they wouldn't let you back in the building. You had to show them that you were there. So there, after you steamed yourself out-- they didn't give you that much water-- they used, it's like a poison, cyanide, whatever and--

A disinfectant?

A disinfectant-- and that used to tear off your skin.

It was so strong?

It was just with meanness. Oh, I don't know, whatever. It wasn't pleasant. So in 1940, from January or February or March, I think the time was very trying.

There was no ghetto at the time. But the people suffered from deprivation that, when they opened up the ghetto, I personally think they were glad to get in because, not only from the suffering from the cold, but on top of it, there used to come in some called themselves Volksdeutsche. And whatever they saw-- they came in to a apartment-- they took it. And they used to come and break whatever window wasn't broken, they used to break the windows.

Just deliberate--

Just deliberate act of-- not of vandalism. It was just mischievous, just meanness. And, God forbid, if you beat them back or you hit them back or you did anything or you stood back against them, there was always a German SS man--

Who would take care of you?

Not take care-- shoot you automatically and three more. So there was nothing for-- just looking at him in his eyes, it was sufficient for him to provoke him to shoot.

So you just couldn't protect yourself?

It was nothing protecting. It's just slowly you became like an animal. You became so weak in your mind, you didn't think about how to hit back or anything else. You were still hoping for hope not to provoke him. And maybe it'll be better. And once they start building the ghetto walls, I remember my mother and father, they were always talking about it. It might be better because at least we'll be isolated. At least those parasites--

You'll be away from the Volksdeutsche.

From all those parasites-- at least we'll be on our own. And we'll survive during the war. The war will be over. And somewhere we'll be fine.

So they were hopeful?

Well, we were living on hopes. And one day, it came out a law that from certain part of the cities people have to move into a certain confined part of the city. And the Gentiles in that part of city should move out. So people were switching apartments.

You had the Gentile population that lived in certain parts of where the Jewish lived down there. Obviously, the apartments weren't the greatest shape. So you give them usually a five-room or four-room apartment just for a basement to move in or whatever the situation was. And eventually the population itself became so smart, they didn't let you take the furniture. So whatever it was, you walked out with almost nothing, happy to get in, to have somewhere a roof over your head.

So you had to give up your apartment?

We gave out our apartment. And we moved over to Nowolipki Street, not far from where we were. And we were stranger among strangers all over again. And it was the spring.

In the spring, the situation, for one thing, became just worse because the rations, what they gave us to eat, it was very little. So consequently, I had to go out. I was going out anyway to the Polish side as a Gentile.

Was that difficult for you?

Very difficult. See, from when you were 11 years old, you had to wear a white armband with the Star of David. If you didn't wear it, they had the right to shoot you. And they told you automatically. So we had coats. And we shoved the armband into it. Or we took it off altogether. And we smuggled ourselves through. What did the smuggling consist of? The walls had holes for sewage, for the water to run through. You have to be small--

To crawl through?

To crawl through it, or through the top-- and the walls were, I would say, 10, 12 feet high. On top of it was barbed wire and broken bottles. So many a times you got scraped from glass. But the hunger was so great that you didn't bear--

Weren't there soldiers on guard there?

There were soldiers. But soldiers can only do so much. They were walking on the left, so you run to the right. And from there on, sometimes you did-- if they were chasing a group or shooting to one side, you running to the other side. And obviously, we always figured from 20, one of them might be hurt.

The same ticket was a gate to the ghetto. You stood. If the soldiers lit a cigarette-- he was busy lighting a cigarette-- you ran. So you made sure you ran with four or five or six guys so he didn't know where to shoot. And if you run among the crowd, he couldn't do because you didn't run into the ghetto. If you would run into the ghetto, [INAUDIBLE]. But this way, they only had rifles. It's not an automatic machine where-- they only had rifles. So they-- somewhere. I don't know.

So what did you do over on the Aryan side?

We used to take over-- people had, let's say, old watches or whatever they had goods they wanted to get rid of or they were hungry enough to get rid of. So you took those things. You hid them on your body. You went over the other side. And you bought goods. You bought potatoes, whatever. You had special jackets. And there were--

With lots of pockets?

Lots of pockets-- and the pockets, you filled them up. And again, the same thing. You stood. From 4:00 to 6 o'clock, they used to bring back Jews from work. With those workers--

You snuck in?

You snuck in. That's the word for it. It was difficult too, but, you see, it's-- many a times, they was catching people and so on.

What would happen if they caught one of these little boys?

They shot him automatically. There was no-- if he was a decent person, maybe he put him away to take him to the-- there was a special jail. It was called Pawiak. In there they used to shot them or used to shot them, as an example, right on the place.

So every day was a terrible chance you were taking?

Every day, my mother used to cry, look what happened. He is going. And we don't know if he's going to come back. And it was many a times I was caught. And I was lucky that I got a good beating and they would chase me over.

Many times I had to crawl into-- they used to find holes which was very narrow. And I was kind of well-built. And they tried to make me crawl through, so they was kicking me in the back and over my legs for me to crawl.

And I used to scream. So people used to grab me from the other side by the arms or by hair and pull me inside. And as they were pulling me, sometimes I had some potatoes or whatever. So I got stuck in the middle. So I was getting beaten up both ways, both sides. It's very difficult to--

1940 was just horrible. From there on, Germans organized work parties for the Jewish population outside, for a certain group of Jewish population.

Did your father go on one of those parties?

That's right. My father went and my uncle. Somewhere had to have connections to work, to get out. It wasn't just to work. You had to be lucky.

Privilege.

Privilege-- so they used to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning, stay down at the gate of the ghetto. From the ghetto, [NON-ENGLISH] was a place. And they used to count. There were so many of them, used to come a Volksdeutsche, take them. March them down the middle of the street and take them down to a different part of the city.

And he was working a place what they called [NON-ENGLISH]. There used to be-- the Russian-- the Germans already prepared themselves for Russia or whatever. They were bringing a lot of lumber. And they were making barracks for the soldiers for winter, to winterize them. And those people were making from the raw lumber, try to dry it, and making them to their specifications prefabricated barracks.

So that's what your father was doing?

Doing-- yes.

So that was hard work?

Well, they were all worked hard. In the meanwhile, mind you, at work down there, they used to get a bowl of soup. And while they were out, the Germans watched them. But they had overseers. Some of them were Jewish guys and Polish fellows. And some of them were tradesmen.

So there was a situation that if you brought over something on your body or something-- a jacket-- which you didn't want to take it back to the ghetto, so you could trade it. These people used to come over, Gentile people, and used to trade for whatever food. And later on, you put it in your pocket or in between your body and your shirt-- a few potatoes and so on.

And you tried to bring some extras.

And you bring them back supplies. So you ate a meal, at least, while you were out. And you could bring them back. It

was illegal, but everybody was doing it. So that was going on from 1940, '41, to 1942.

In the meanwhile, in the ghetto itself, the situation became unbearable altogether. They made it smaller. The population has a lot of people died out. They confined it. Most of the time-- all the time, seems to be confined it more to people. And more relatives of ours moved in with us. So it wasn't hardly a place.

So what were you in, in a three-room apartment?

No, one room.

One room?

One room-- my grandfather passed away, too, at the time. And my grandma was here and an uncle and my mother, in one room.

All in one room? And what about a bathroom and kitchen?

The bathroom was in the Hall. It was a bathroom. But it was all cold water. There was no such thing as water. The water pipes broke, so we had to go down in the basement to take water, to bring it up by bucket.

And typhoid was going on. A lot of people were sick. And matter of fact, our neighbors, a whole family, passed away. And at the time, we were afraid even to touch or whichever way to do. You wanted to help, and you couldn't help.

It was a dilemma, wasn't it?

It was a dilemma. My little sister wasn't well, my mother didn't think it was typhoid. And she was at home, not to let the authorities know because they used to come in and--

Quarantine?

Not only quarantine, but gas-- they used to tape up the whole apartment and put gas into it. And anybody that-- whatever they didn't like, they used to burn your clothing and so on. So we didn't even let her know. A matter of fact, she became well. But I don't know if it was typhoid or something else. But we were afraid to tell anybody that you have a sick person at home. And that was going on.

My father was working, coming home at night, after a while. I used to smuggle myself out the same way as I used before. I used to meet him at his place of work. And most of those people knew me. Instead of selling the stuff to the people that used to come to that place of work and they weren't bought it for next to nothing, they used to give it to me quietly. And I used to take it to a different part of the city. And I used to get three or four times more. So I was a help.

At the same time, I used to make a little bit whatever. And I became part of them. So at night, if I wanted to go back to the ghetto, I could walk with them. I march with them as one of theirs. And the German already down there-- it was a Volksdeutsche-- for a bottle of whiskey, he didn't--

He looked aside?

He looked aside. To him, it was nothing. It wasn't that important if he comes or go. He looked at us anyway as semi-humans, like playthings.

So it was insignificant for him.

We were insignificant. So I worked there. I used to come and go all the time, I would say, till the end of '41.

In the meanwhile, in the ghetto itself, every day we heard more people dying out. And there was a time was some kind

of a hope going on because we heard rumbling in May and in June-- tanks and heavy equipment going towards east. And came in a lot of people with ideas and saying, there most probably going to be a war with Russia. Maybe we're going to be liberated. And there was hope. And people were hoping something is going to happen. Somewhere a miracle will happen.

And somewhere in the middle of June or the end of June, it start. We could hear it in Warsaw. The earth was shaking, the rumbling, when the war started. And people, they were hungry and they fasted. They were fasting and praying that the Germans will be defeated. And a few days later, we heard Vilnius was taken. And Kyiv was taken. And the German Army is--

Did you have radios? Or did they confiscate the radios?

No, they confiscate their radios right when they came in, under the penalty of death.

So how did you hear this news?

From the Polish population-- when you smuggled yourself out, you heard it. And from there on, for the Polish population used to be newspapers. And you could go in certain parts of the city where the German population lived. You bought the German papers. And you smuggled them into the ghetto.

So when you bought a German paper, obviously, they didn't know who you were because you look like a Pole or a German, whatever you bought, or you could buy it for a German. So you bought that. I used to buy a German paper and bring them over to the place of work. And those guys used to-- some of them were quite educated, and so they knew what was going on from the German papers.

The first few weeks, as the Russian defeat, people were going through the last disappointment. Their hope-- everything was gone.

Their hope was crushed.

It was crushed completely. Everything was gone. From there on, it was--

I guess it was pretty desperate.

The people were desperate. The hunger was there. The rations became smaller. In the ghetto itself, the bread was more water with potato peelings than anything else.

You had a soup kitchen going all the time, didn't you?

Well, at home we had a soup kitchen going.

Your own personal soup kitchen.

Anywhere else, there was nothing. There was nothing. There was not enough sufficient food around. There was a certain soup kitchen. I understand it was a soup kitchen as long as the Americans weren't at war. But the minute the Americans came into war, there was no supplies whatsoever. There was nothing.

So even certain people that knew how to get around, they knew where the kitchens were. And certain people, if they were weak or hungry or too tired and they were walking like skeletons-- from day to day it became worse.

And what happens? Person used to die, so they didn't give him even a decent burial. They used to take him out before the building and drop him-- with the clothing or without the clothing, just drop him because if you had to take him to the burial grounds, you have to give them back that bread card. So people, they keep a ration card just for another month. So that was kind of a delusion.

And some people, they were so hungry, they had that little ration card, they sold it that, instead of should have last them for a month, they sold it before. And by the end of the month, they didn't have the strength even to walk. They were worn out completely.

The garbage in the buildings were not taken out. That was just the smell and everything else. The sewers were clogged. And everybody in the middle of the building, in the middle of the-- whatever the--

Courtyard?

Courtyard-- there was heaps of garbage, and the smell and everything else in the summer. At the end of the summer, it was just unbearable. The stairs-- the same people, people from not eating proper food and from the dirt and everything else, they had the dysentery. You could see them walking on the street and running over, whatever, the stairs to go on up to that building. You had to be a genius not to step into something.

From day to day, it became just worse. And it was nothing here. You only came and you heard. And my parents and my grandmother, whoever came in there, they'd only talk how wonderful it was before the war and how well what they eat, what they all used to eat, and they used to go for vacation, and how the times are terrible, and how we dream of a piece of bread, and that's all what we have the strength-- strength of dream and a clean little bit of water. And that was a problem because the water was filthy even too.

The electricity was off completely. And so they used to give us a certain amount of-- it's a type of coal. I don't know what the English word for it. I never thought about it. And they used to add water to it. You lit it. And it used to light up. I understand coal miners use it. It's like a phosphorous type of thing. The smell of that itself and the dirt--

It was quite powerful?

It was powerful, the smell. After a while, your clothing-- everything permeated through it. It took it in. And when you walked over among decent people, you went over to the Polish side outside of the ghetto, you smelled yourself. By the smell itself, they wouldn't recognize you, no matter how well you looked or how well you spoke. But the smell itself almost gave you away, whatever you wore. And that dragged on. This is '42.

In the beginning of 1942, they came a situation that they invited the Germans to the Jewish committee, young people to come and help them build buildings. And I don't know. Some people exaggerated. Maybe it's a good idea. Maybe they're going to build something special. And the Eastern Front, maybe they need builders and young people.

So there was a lot of people volunteered from 18 to 25. And those people, they were hoping at least they'll get something to eat. And they hope maybe they'll get out from this horrible hole. And they were dreaming of something better. So they took them away.

In the beginning, there was letters from those people that they're working very hard, and it's a possibility they'll come back for a vacation. And it's hard work, but they get enough food. Everything is fine. And hopefully they'll come back to Warsaw. After a while, we never heard of them, because I had two cousins went. We never heard. They shipped them--

Do you think they were gassed?

No, they were the ones-- they made them build all those camps. Those are the people that they took away young people. They took them in the beginning. They didn't know what they were building. You see, they were building barracks, people, fences. They didn't exactly know exactly what it was.

And from there on, once they used them up, they liquidated them. There was no questions. They used to bring in some other ones.

In April of 1942, we heard a lot of people coming-- not a lot, but quite a few people came back. They run away from Russia. And they told of the atrocities. They came in by smuggling, whatever, how they got back to Warsaw and told us what the Germans are doing to the Russian and Jewish population there. They used to take Russian trucks, convert them into the exhaust.

Gas vans?

Gas vans-- they used to put them into gas vans, drive them around, and throw them out. When they brought back those news, I would say nobody believed a thing like that. Germans are cultured people, people with-- by book and people that contributed so much to life would do things like that to human beings.

In the beginning of August, the first week of August, I saw outside of Warsaw they brought Russian prisoners. They brought them by the thousands of them. And they were sitting in a field. It was raining. They didn't feed them. They were going around like skeletons. Polish population tried to give them something or throw them over some food. They were shooting at the Polish population. They didn't let anybody come close to them.

So they just died right there?

They put up signs. Those are the communists. I don't know if they were communists, but they were humans. Who in the hell knows what they were? Everybody, whatever they didn't like, they put a label. It was a communist. We saw what they did to the Russian people. And people in the ghetto already presumed.

That they were next?

They're next. And next thing we heard, from certain around Lublin-- people came back, and they said what they're doing down there. They're taking small towns. They take them all to the cemetery. And they shoot them. They just make them undress. And they shoot him down. They make them build even-- create their own graves. As much as you heard from eyewitnesses and everything else, nobody--

Nobody believed?

--believed it. Polish people came out to the place of where my father worked. And they told it to my father, my uncle, all the people. See if you can save yourself because they're just doing inhuman things to your people. Don't even realize. They're going to make soap out of you.

And people had-- how mean can anybody-- we are downtrodden already. How can anybody be so mean to tell us stories of that sort? I believe they didn't want to believe. They didn't want to hear about those things.

And August the 22nd, a new law came out in the ghetto itself. All the indigent and all the sick and all the people homeless will be taken away for resettlement. Well, it was so terrible. Some people lived in the streets. And some people were so desperate and so sick that, in the beginning, they said they give them three loaves of bread and a jar of jam for the journey. People stood in line. People didn't have the strength to move. They moved the first few days, the first week.

Then came a new law. People that are not working for the Germans and they cannot show proper reasons to live here should resettle. The next thing we heard the president of the ghetto killed himself. From day to day, different people came from various places and told us what's happening all over the country.

The situation was worse?

The situation was worse. And with us, it was bad. You didn't have the strength to think because you were worn out. My father was worn out from work and providing for the family with a few potatoes and whatever he could put in his pockets around to bring it over. And every day it was his life on the line. They didn't know if we're coming or going.

All of a sudden, there wasn't sufficient evidently to fill up the wagons. They were grabbing people anyway, whatever they could. They grab anybody. The first week of September--

This is 1942?

'42. My father and I was coming back from work. My sister used to come at the gate, wait for us. So we used to give her something to eat. I always had something for her. My father had something-- my older sister. My older sister she was, at the time, nine years old, not even nine. She waited for my father and I.

And all of a sudden, there came through a wagon what they were grabbing all the people. They're grabbing them. We were on the other side of the gate. And I saw it with my own eyes.

They grabbed your sister?

They grabbed my sister. And they put her on the wagon. And she screamed. She was screaming, Irving! Dad! Irving! I still hear that scream. And she was alone. And they grabbed her.

By the time we got through that line, the checkup and we came in, I went out to the Umschlagplatz. My father went to see my mother, to see what's happening at home. Instinctively, I ran down there on the Umschlagplatz. And I came in.

It was hell on earth. People-- living and the dead were in one place. And the Umschlagplatz was a place you came in. From there on, they shipped you to the camps or whatever it was at the time. At least, I didn't know. And we didn't know.

As I came in, I asked. And I kept on screaming. And the Germans were shooting people to walk there low. They made them sit or walk on all fours. They didn't let them go anywhere. And the trains only could take so much. And there used to come a small train, load up with people, and come back again. So they accumulated them.

I kept on looking for her. And I asked people. Maybe they saw her. And they says, well, they brought a whole transport about an hour ago before. And they put them right to the train and they unloaded them. One man says to me, don't rush because you don't know. Maybe they'll send her somewhere else, and maybe you'll find her.

So I looked around for her all night long among those people. It was awful. The SS was sitting on the roofs with heavy machine guns. They had Ukrainians standing with whips, beating the people, with dogs. Every few minutes, you heard [BUZZES]. And you found somebody else dead, for whatever reasons they felt like it.

So there was a building down there where they used to-- it was a washroom. And there was a hospital, supposed to be a Red Cross. That was a sign with a red cross. So I crawled into that building.

Well, people told me as I crawled. They said, don't go into that building because whoever they catch in that building, they'll shoot them automatically. I didn't think. I went into the building from there. From the other side, I jumped out from a window, and I jumped into the ghetto. And during the night, I hopped from building to building.

By the time I got home, it was morning. My mother thanked God that I was here. They didn't know. They thought I got lost too. And my father-- they didn't know. And we were sitting.

So we decided my father and I will go over there one more day. We'll bring you over some food. And we'll go on the journey. They'll take us away.

And you would still look for your sister? Is that it?

Well, yeah, to join my sister-- at least we'll go the whole family. We'll be together, whatever it is. She was a youngster. And times were so terrible. Who's going to take care of her? And where can she warm up? Everybody's hungry. Who's going to do anything for her?

So my father and I went over. And we got some food. And I had some people who owed me some money I collected. And I went to a different part of the city, collected them, and said goodbye-- the Gentile people. They were very nice, very kind to me. And they gave it to me.

Matter of fact, they told me, don't go back because it's terrible. You have to save yourself. Save yourself. Never mind anybody else. I said, my family, my ma. They said, you save yourself. In times like that, there's nobody.

I came back with my father. I came back anyway. And I brought some butter. And I had some piece of sausage and all kinds of stuff. And we went.

On the border, I had an occasion. The German looked away. On one man he found something in his lower pockets. He had extra-long pockets. He found something. So he was looking at him so badly. He was beating him up. So I ran in between him and another German, between them. They were turned to each other's back. I ran in. I came over to the other side. And I was waiting for my father to be let through.

I stood about 20 minutes. I suddenly see my father. They took him in to a little-- they had a [NON-ENGLISH] house, a place where they used to warm themselves up, the Germans, whatever it was. All of a sudden, they walk him out. And they walked him towards direction to our house.

I said, my God. The parcel is not there. They had a little backpack. It's not there. And he's walking him. He was an SD, Obersturmführer. I thought maybe he found something because what happened-- the way they caught my sister, so my mother and father decided everybody will take something. She had an old ring, an old few whatever.

Money, we had to hide it on our own body. If we get lost, we should have something to sustain ourselves till we get together or whatever happened, because let it not be on one person. So maybe they found all that on my father. And I didn't know what he had. Maybe he's going home to look for more. So I was afraid. Should I go home or follow him? So I followed him from behind.

And next thing, the German grabbed another man, a Jew. He was going with a saw. And people thought at the time if he walks with a saw, he looks like a tradesman. He's useful. Maybe they wouldn't touch him. I don't know. I think that was the reason he didn't take off his hat and didn't bow to him.

He told him to join my father. And I was walking about 15 meters behind. And all of a sudden-- they came not far from the house we were living-- he told them to run. He took out his gun. He shot them both while they were running.

Your father and that man--

And that man.

--with a saw?

With the saw.

And shot them dead?

Shot them dead. Meanwhile, shots were going on. And there was like a burnt out-- I was passing-- there was a burned-out building. The next thing, somebody grabbed me, pulled me in, because they didn't know who was going to shoot next. I tried to tell the man, it's my father he shot. He says to me, you go close, he will shoot you too.

I was there in that building about 10 minutes' time. And I came out because I saw people already starting to walk down in the area. I came out. I came over to my father. He was dead, cold. I haven't got the strength to-- I didn't have to drag him. I don't know if the few potatoes with a few things what I had down there was more important.

I ran to my mother to tell her the bad news. I came. I told her the news. She was crying all day long anyway. She was for my sister. I told her the news, so we went. By the time we came--

Where did you go?

I came where I left my father on the street. I left him laying on the street. He was laying down there. And I told my mother I couldn't-- I didn't make any decisions. I don't know what it was. I just went, told my mother and left a few things, whatever I left with my grandma and sister. I left a few things. We came back. He was taken away already because there was like a push cart thing. And they were picking up bodies all the time.

And just took your father?

It was [INAUDIBLE]. They took him away. Where? To the cemetery, there was a [INAUDIBLE] cemetery. We couldn't go over there anymore because in another 10, 15 minutes, it was already curfew. So you can't walk. They'll shoot everybody, whatever. We came back.

The next day, they were grabbing people. And still, my mother said, we want to go to the cemetery. We went to the cemetery. In the meanwhile, we found out there was a mass grave. And they threw in all the bodies. They didn't even bother to give them individual burials. They just threw in all--

So your father went with them?

With them-- and we didn't-- nothing. We're sitting. I decided, my mother decided. You know what? We can't do for him anything. But for my sister, we'll go. So the next day, I went back because all the stuff-- people owed me money. I don't know, whatever. My mother told me to go and get some stuff for whatever.

On the Aryan side?

On the Aryan side-- and besides, the place of work was my father's place. Maybe the people-- they understand and they let me take his place because a place of work for the Germans was a valuable thing. It's like a card for life.

So I went over. I spent the day. I came back at night with some stuff. I came into the apartment. My mother and sister and my grandmother was gone. The Germans took them away.

They took them away?

The whole family, the whole building.

Do you know where they--

They shipped them away to Treblinka.

Do you know that they went to--

They went to Treblinka. All the transports went to Treblinka. They shipped them away.

So I came in. I didn't go anymore nowhere. I tried to find answers. But people told me already, we heard from Treblinka what's going on down there. I stayed in the apartment. And I just-- all night long, I think, I ripped everything, whatever was down there, to pieces.

You were all by yourself?

By myself-- and I didn't have anybody. Nothing. It was finished. I did not go. But we hear the bad news what is going on in Treblinka. And I didn't think it was advisable. I was too tired. Two days later, I smuggled myself out again to the

Polish side.

And you took your father's place?

I took my father's place, but they didn't want me because I was too young. And they already sold the place or whatever, whoever had more protection, to get somebody else. My uncle was still there, so--

This is your father's brother?

No, my mother's brother--

Your mother's brother-- and he was still working where your father--

He was still working with that same place. That night, he didn't even know because he stayed overnight there on that place. A few days before, they took his family.

He was sick, broken down. And he was taking care of those boys from the cigarette sellers. Then meanwhile, he adopted the whole bunch of them and gave them succor and gave them--

Who were the cigarette sellers? Do you want to tell us who they were?

The cigarette sellers-- there was a bunch of boys. They used to smuggle themselves over, like I before. And they lost their parents. Most of them lost their parents in 1941-- '40, '41. They lost their families from hunger, from typhoid.

Eventually it came a time that they didn't have nothing to go back to, but, still and all, they were hoping. So those people that worked on the Aryan somewhere, they felt comfortable that they came over. So they talked. So they used to bring them-- most of those people lost their family too, children of the same age. So they were bringing over whatever clothing was from their own family, just to help them out.

And they had soup for the workers. So they made sure there was enough leftover for those kids. They used to come over and help them out with the soup. And the kids became like their own.

And I became like a guardian for them. And I helped them out in whatever they needed. Sometimes they were afraid to come into the group because there were people looking for Jews later on to blackmail them. So they were afraid to come to close down there because Jews used to congregate. Later on, if you were on the Aryan side you were illegal, so they blackmailed you. So they were afraid to come too close.

So I used to collect from those people whatever there was and take it over to them. To see them, I made certain places. We make arrangements. And so we met each other. I needed them for the warmth because they were approximately my age, to have as friends. And they needed a few things. And we had more things--

So you became a group?

And we became a group. We needed to warm up because we never knew places where to stay. Or one helped each other. We helped each other with-- the worst thing was at night-- where to sleep. And in the meanwhile, I befriended a family, a old lady, not far a place from my--

Where your family lived?

My family lived-- and they asked me-- it's OK? OK? Cut?

I think we'll stop here.