

Good evening. It is August 20, 1990, and we are at Channel 2 in Buffalo, New York. And tonight, our guest is Irving Milchberg.

My name is Toby Ticktin Back. I'm the director of the Holocaust Resource Center. And Irving Milchberg told us about his life in Warsaw as a young child, and he took us up to 1943.

Irving, we're going to continue with your story. We heard the sad part about your family being taken away, and you're going over to the Aryan side. Would you please continue?

I was on the Aryan side, and I went to-- I was contacted with-- most of the people I worked in the [? omnium, ?] and the place where my father used to work. And I used to do them various favors-- do various chores for him, deliver.

And at the same time, I got to meet all over again those young fellows, the young kids, they used to come over to the place of work, where my uncle and father used to help them out. I used to see him all over again. And once we got together, they used to tell me that I have places where to hide, that where to sleep, and all these places.

And if I want to, I could join them. And I helped them out, money-wise, clothes-wise, it was winter. And it was Christmas-- around Christmas time. It was a very cold winter. We were very uncomfortable.

We helped them out once in a while. Once in a while, I used to sleep with them. But there were cramped places-- it was in a loft. It was five, eight kids sleeping like sardines. One, to keep warm, we used to lay one next to the other.

But it was the best-- under those circumstances, it was the best. At least was a place where to hide during the night.

I was-- the 1st of January, the 2nd of January, I was approached by a few people from the platz that they're organizing a fight against the Germans-- if it's possible for me to deliver them weapons from a certain part of Warsaw. So I gladly, without thinking, no objections, and there was no material reward to it, I went and I picked up those weapons. I kept on delivering them.

And I bought from certain friends, which I made with the Gentile people, the Polish people, around Warsaw. I had certain weapons, I brought it over to their place of work. And we used to smuggle them over to the ghetto.

That was going on till the middle of January. In the middle of January, I started, again, the Germans started shipping out Jews from Warsaw. They used to grab whatever it was-- whatever the reasons. And the first resistance, I was there, came into the ghetto-- I found out I had an aunt there, so I came to visit with her and the resistance started to fight.

Wasn't that taking a terrible chance, to come in to the ghetto, once you were on the safe side?

Yes, but at the same time, I never thought it will be a cleaning-- they'll take out Jews again. We thought that wouldn't happen anymore. So you wanted to warm up, you were lonesome on the other side, and you were alone, you were a stranger among strangers. And you felt to look for somebody. To hope-- you hoped to be closer to somebody.

So the chances were worth-- the lonesomeness was more important than life, itself. You wanted to warm up to your relatives. So I wanted to be-- to have somebody, it was the hardest thing, not to have somebody to completely to warm up, to hug, or somebody.

Yeah, family.

The family. And my aunt, the only one was left at that particular time, that I knew, so I decided to go back. And I was with her, and sure enough, the fight started out. And I hid in a place, and she went to work, and they took away my aunt. And it was a fight going on for two days.

And the Germans grabbed about 5,000 to 10,000 people, and shipped them out from there. And it stopped. And once it

stopped, it's the funniest thing, the best time in the ghetto was after that fight was going on in January till '43, they shipped out a lot of people. And all the possessions they left-- they didn't take them with you.

So you became an owner of somebody else's possessions. So people used to smuggle them out to the Polish side so they could buy weapons and so on. And I had more stuff than I could use, so I used to take it over to those boys. And they used to sell them for their clothes and money-wise, and so on.

Because you didn't need fortunes to carry around, because you didn't know what's going to happen with you today, or the next day, or three days. So you had enough for a day of reserves, you were quite satisfied in your own mind.

And we used to go to in the [INAUDIBLE] where they used to-- what they used to do. And I had approximately the same time, I got to know a gentleman, who used to make phony cigarettes-- contraband. And the cigarettes were against the law to begin with. And those were made contraband altogether-- they looked like German packages, and they were packaged. But in essence, it was plain leaves.

So I got a hold from that gentleman, some cigarettes, some packs.

Was this a Jewish man?

No, Gentile person.

An Aryan.

It was an Aryan person. And I brought it over to those fellows, and they were selling them-- start selling them to the Germans. The Germans were buying them, because there was a shortage of cigarettes. And they were rationed, too.

So a German at the station, he bought them, and he got on the train you never saw him anymore. They were always in a hurry to leave-- like in a station you were in a hurry to leave, you grabbed his money so he's gone. So that was for a while the next thing.

Somebody came back, or whatever, was in the gendarmerie was looking for us. Not as Jews, but as Gentiles, for selling phony cigarettes. So we had to get lost from that place, and we found ourselves on the place of three crosses.

And what does that mean, the place of three crosses?

There was a church, a known church in Warsaw, which has-- an old church, and it calls the Church of Three Crosses. And the place itself became the Place of Three Crosses. So it was a good place, in this respect. If it was raining, or the weather was bad, or whatever was the situation, you can go and hide yourself in the church and for a few minutes to warm up or forget yourself.

And this is-- in another respect, they would never suspect. Because that was a German-- already German part of the city that Jews are hiding, or selling cigarettes, or doing anything else. And it developed down there because we didn't have any competition there. For a while, at least, we didn't have any competition. We were doing quite well.

And how many children were you, and what were the ages?

We were a group from nine years, eight years old to 15. The oldest one was 15.

And were you all boys?

There were three girls.

Oh, we have a picture. So we should show the picture now.

Yeah-- three girls.

The picture will be on and you could tell us about it. Well, this is the picture of the book about The Cigarette Sellers, that tells about your stories. And now, we have a picture of the group, itself. Maybe you'll tell us who is who.

The first one is [? Biszek. ?] He--

Which way, when you say first? First row, which way?

On top, I'm going to go from the top on the left.

OK.

His name is [? Biszek. ?] He was exceptionally good-looking, fine fellow, full of jokes. And then, he used to keep us always in stitches. And he had a lot of humor-- natural humor.

He said-- many times we were hungry, and he always made a joke out of it and made us feel good. The next one, unfortunately, passed away right after the war. He got sick and passed away.

The next time-- the next one is Zambal. In the book, they call him Toothy.

Oh, Toothy.

Yeah, he's very enterprising young fellow. He was one of the best salesmen in the world. And he still is a good salesman. He lives right now in London, Ontario, and is a good businessman.

On the bottom, we have-- his name is Kinol to the left. He's a pilot with El Al in Israel. Very capable, has a very nice family. During the war years, he worked in farms, he helped out. He naturally sold cigarettes for a while-- he even peeled potatoes for a living.

He's one of the best potato peelers there is.

Has a nice reputation.

And the middle one is [? Borek. ?] Is a farmer-- he was at a farm once in a while. He was during the winter of 1943, he was on a farm.

But he came back to Warsaw. He had broken shoes-- it was wooden shoes-- from the snow and ice. They cracked. So he had shoes on top. And he was barely, actually, barefoot, feet, walking on the snow.

We helped him out, when he came into Warsaw, we gave him a bunch of cigarettes, we gave him a little box to hang onto it and some money. We found him a place where to stay till we moved him in with ourselves. And he developed-- he was fantastic, good boy.

He came to Israel after the war-- he fought in the '68-- the '67 war. He passed, unfortunately, on the Golan.

This, to the extreme right, his name was-- we call him Frenchman. He came to us-- we met him on a bazaar while eating soup, he was looking at us. And he looked kind of familiar, but he had a funny accent. He didn't have a Jewish accent, he didn't have a German accent.

And we spoke to him, he spoke Polish. So the next thing we found out from-- that his parents came from Paris, France for a vacation to visit their relatives in Poland before the war, and they got stuck. And he lost all the whole family. So he became part of us.

We gave him some money. He ate with us. And in the beginning, he didn't believe that we were Jewish, and he was acting as a Frenchman and we were acting as Poles.

Eventually, we became closer. And we got to know each other. And we told him, we are Jews. He, for a couple of months, he still didn't trust us, he didn't tell us that he was a Jew from France.

We had Teresa, a girl, which was a fine girl. She worked in a kitchen. She used to bring us some food once in a while out to help us out. It was another, Marysia, she used to sing on the streetcars, excellent voice. She used to give us directions, help us out with some of the laundry-- we used to give her so she used to wash it out.

There was another, Marysia's sister, which she was-- she used to sell cigarettes and sing on the trains from Warsaw to Otwock. Her voice, people-- they used to pay just to go to listen to her. She was a fantastic singer and a pleasant little girl. She was only nine, nine to 10 years old.

And she was Jewish, too?

Oh, yes--

They were all Jewish pretending to be non-Jewish?

--but-- non-Jewish, Gentile kids. And we kept all us in touch, whenever we got lonesome or alone, felt alone, we came to the roots, what we used to call-- [NON-ENGLISH], but it was the Platz of Three Crosses. We used to get together there, and we used to go to a restaurant, help each other out.

They used to be cheap restaurants. Three or four of us used to go and sit down and eat, and two of them used to watch outside. And we had friends, somebody come around, or Germans when we saw on-- if we saw friends, they used to send us in. If we saw unpleasant people, or somebody we had to be cautious, they let us know so we ran through the back door.

You had people on guard duty?

On guard-- we used to help each other, watch each other, for each other. And from then on, we were looking-- we knew, the times from the news, itself, we knew that the war will come to in favor of ourselves. So we start selling newspapers. And the newspapers, we used to twist them around instead of selling the Germans are marching forward-- we used to sell, they're marching forwards on their bellies.

We used to have various jokes about that, people got a kick out of it. We used to sell papers-- papers used to sell, let's say, for \$0.25, we used to get three times the amount or four times the amount, just it didn't mean much, but--

People liked your jokes.

Yeah, the jokes with the papers. And from there on, it really started out in 1940-- in April 1943, before Pesach, I decided to go back to the ghetto.

Will you tell us about the revolt in the ghetto, please?

Well, I went back to the ghetto because I found out from the people, that were still working in that place, in the place of work, of that [NON-ENGLISH], I found out that I have an uncle. The uncle was alive. So I went to visit with him.

I came-- very nice, Gentile lady helped me out, on April the 17th, exactly. We walked towards the ghetto. And it was 7:30 in the morning, it was very, very early, there was nobody around.

And somewhere, the German, and the policeman, was going in one direction, and I slid in through a hole. And I had a basket of eggs, and some stuff for the holiday, for Pesach. And I figured, I'm going to stay with my uncle.

I came to my uncle's place, and for whatever reasons, I picked myself up and I went into a separate part of the ghetto. This is-- there was a ghetto within the ghetto. I went in to see some friends.

I went-- spent time with my friends that day. And at night, I was going back to see my uncle.

The fight started out the next morning. And at certain places, the Germans were coming in. People were thrown from the roofs-- whatever they had, they were undermining. They had bottles with gasoline, and they were shooting.

There wasn't that much ammunition, but whatever they had, they were throwing against the Germans. We have seen, from the way we are, and we looked out through various cracks, we saw pulling in-- Germans were coming in with a Red Cross type of ambulances, and picking up the people that-- not the people, not the Jews, God forbid, but themselves.

German soldiers.

German soldiers were got hurt. And they were coming and going all day long, and then there was a constant going to fight going on. And obviously, people-- everybody was hiding in his own hole. I was, at that particular time, on [NON-ENGLISH] 54-- it's a section, which was a certain way that the fight wasn't going on at that particular time, yet.

At night, the Germans moved out, because for whatever reason, they didn't fight at night. So they moved out. So we walked out, and certain buildings already were burning. We had information what happened, what was going on.

So it was a constantly finding out in certain places, in various places, at the gates to the ghetto, people were fighting back. And there was organizations. And one particular party, which I knew, Miss Zivia Lubetkin, she was one of the fighters down there because I used to deliver weapons to her before the fights. I used to deliver [NON-ENGLISH], from the [NON-ENGLISH], itself, various weapons.

And she was the one that I didn't know at that time, that she was the leader. But she used to accept all those weapons. Sometimes she paid me, sometimes whatever money they had, they used to pay me.

But all in all, I don't know if it's four-- I know four guns I pulled in.

That you gave to the--

Yeah, underground. And a lot of bullets. Because bullets was no problems, because we used to put them in bread. I used to take them with bread and potatoes, and so on.

So you were actually a runner for the underground?

Well, I was smuggling into the ghetto. That was a double jeopardy. If they would have catch me, they would have killed me. For bullets or anything like that, they would hang me and kill me.

So that was just-- but at the time, I didn't-- I don't know. I didn't think about it. We were thinking just revenge, and just kill, or do something. Because we knew when they're taking those people away, they were taking them to Treblinka. And it's certain death.

And there's no-- ifs so everybody was trying to do his best to go at least with-- to try to take a German with him, while he was going. And I-- this is of interest-- in Pesach, I-- it was Pesach, the second day, the first day of Pesach, and I wound up in a basement in that building.

And I was a stranger amongst strangers. They didn't let me in till I found the place, and they let me into that place.

This is one of the bunkers? One of the underground bunkers?

One of the bunkers-- yeah. And there's a man came over to me, and actually, it's-- I missed-- I knew where my uncle's bunker was. But somewhere, I was afraid to go past the street. But in this building was a bunker. So I tried to get in.

And that was covered full of feathers, and I couldn't find a place. So I start panicking and I start screaming, let me in, because they'll catch me and I'll tell everybody else whatever. I didn't mean to, but it was just from--

Fear--

Being fear-- I almost, like I say, I blackmailed them, or whatever. And all of a sudden, they opened up the door, the trap door, and I didn't know even where it was because I didn't see it because it was full of feathers on top of it. So they grabbed me, pulled me down the basement. And this was-- went one way down, and then you climbed up, it was like a catch-- a basin catch type of thing.

I came in, there was about 65 to 70 people. The room was 15 by 20. We're all the while standing, and a gentleman, an older gentleman, tried to prepare for Passover. So he saw me, he says to me, come over, Itchele-- my name was Itche-- and I didn't know that he knew my father. He was a friend of my father's.

He says, you're going to do the Seder. I didn't feel like it, so there was a fight going on. Some people were saying, in that situation, there were certain people-- I'll never forget, the ladies were horrible at the time-- were saying, look at that. We took ourselves from Egypt, and had to drink-- and bring us into a hide like that, in a stinking place.

And to go through now, we have to [INAUDIBLE] this-- the Seder. It's something illogical. And was going on, and he just came over, didn't say what. He grabbed me by my ear, and he picked up a little plate, he had on a little bit of green-- a piece of matzo. I don't know where I took it.

He says, he gave it to me. And he says, come on, you'll say the Seder with me. And says, how can I say it? I cried. He says to me, he shook me, he hit me, he says to me, if you-- I'll never forget that-- he says like that, if you have to die, you'll die like a decent Jew, like a man.

And if you have to live, you'll like it or not, you'll give it to your children. And somewhere, I survived them out. And it happened about two days later, I was shipped-- I went-- I was shipped-- the Germans got hold of me. And I was shipped to the Poniatowa-- it's a labor camp.

From getting the labor camp, that was-- when they took us off from the trains, it was early in the morning. We were going down for 24 hours on the train. There was no water, no food, nothing. And we were starved. People were dead already in the train, itself, we had dead bodies.

When they let us off the train, we had to wait-- they was taking us to a narrow-gauge train. With a narrow-gauge train entered to the main camp. That was in the camp.

So that was buckets-- they gave us buckets for toiletries, for toilet and so on. So young Gentile fellows came into that group of people and they were selling water. For a little bit of water, they got a watch, whatever they could get from people.

Without realizing, I grabbed a bucket, and I ran up to that-- it was up the hill, a pump. And I pumped a bucket of water. And I came down, I figured I'm going to give it to my cousin-- my aunt, my uncle. He was with me at the time.

And by the time, I got to my uncle, people grabbed water, and they were giving me things. And I was already in business.

You were in business again?

Yeah. And I didn't even realize what I was doing. So I took the bucket, and I went upstairs to get some more water. And

I came for more water, there was a Ukraine policeman. Told me in Polish to give him everything what the Jews gave me.

And I didn't realize that the Polish fellows worked--

But you weren't--

No, no, the Polish fellows were in business with them. Because whatever they gave them, so they were splitting with those soldiers. And I didn't realize that.

So he made me take out everything from my pockets. Instead of sending me back to the Jews, he-- with his rifle, chased me in the other direction away.

Oh so he saved your life, essentially.

But he didn't realize--

He didn't realize it.

He didn't realize. He thought I'm one of those Polish boys that's selling water. So he chased me away. So naturally, from there on, I went back to Warsaw.

When I came into Warsaw, it was-- I happened on the train, to Warsaw, at night. And it's like a miracle happened to me. I was sitting on the train, and it was night, dark at night. And all of a sudden, I'm 20 miles from Warsaw, the train stopped.

And there was a lot of smugglers on that train, bringing in food to the city, Polish people. So the train stopped, and people start screaming, they're grabbing Polish people for work to Germany.

So people start running out, through the windows, from everywhere, they kept running. And I was left down there with a couple of parcels of-- I didn't know what it was. The Germans came over, and they checked me, checked everybody over. And all the people looked at me. And says-- and asked me in German, how old I am.

I said to him, I don't understand. So he hit me. He says to me, there's another fellow come on, I told him, I'm 12 years old. He looked at me, he says, he doesn't look anymore. He left me alone.

He looked over some other people he took off from the train--

Were you really just 12? Or were you--

No, I was older. And I was-- when the train came into Warsaw, and I was wound up with parcels, nobody was there to claim it.

[LAUGHTER]

What a strange story.

Yeah, and the next thing, I came up from the train, itself, there were people asking like a place where to sleep, or where to sleep. There was no hotels-- the only thing they took you where to sleep, for strangers came into town. So I went with that lady.

And she asked me-- a lady down there at the train station, I befriended her. And she said, she wanted people to stay-- where to stay with her. Usually people paid. It was like a hotel-- a hostel type of-- you can say, a hostel type of thing.

And her place, what she had, a floor, and that's all. If you lay down on the floor, and you paid for it.

So you were supposed to bring people to her hostel?

No, no, I came from the train and she was picking up people.

Oh, I see.

So she presumed I'm a stranger. She didn't know I was Jewish, or nothing. Well, I'm one of the smugglers. And so, the next thing she woke me up in the morning, and he says to me, aren't you going to go and sell your stuff? I said to her, I don't feel too well.

So I gave her all the stuff. And she-- I didn't even know what it was inside. So she took it to the bazaar, and she sold it and brought me some money. And I didn't feel for a few days good, and I had a good excuse.

So she had the money and I had where to stay.

Oh, so you were warm.

Warm, I was comfortable. And meanwhile, she gave me something to eat. And I made a friend of her.

But four days later, after I met her, she realized something is fishy. That I'm Jewish. So she chased me out-- she didn't give me nothing. She made sure I was gone.

She thought-- she was out, and she says to me, when I come back, I don't want to see you here. Because otherwise, I'll call the police. And sure enough, I didn't want to take myself any chances. I was gone.

And I went out-- that day when I left, I went out on the bazaar in Warsaw, a certain bazaar in a part of the city. And sure enough, when I went out on bazaar, I found my old friends.

The friends from the the Three Crosses?

From the Three Crosses. So what's going on--

So you had a reunion.

And we had a reunion. And they had soup, and they gave me some money, and I helped them out right away. And it was right away, it was fights going on-- who wants to do for me this, who wants to do-- it was very unusual. And it was like home. I had a group, I have a group, and I had where to belong.

And that was a part of belonging. And it's something it's just somewhere find out what was going on and you figured, they maybe know what's going on. What's going on.

And meanwhile, the fight in the ghetto was still going on. I was on the Polish side, but the fight in the ghetto was still going on. It was-- the place was burning, the whole city, they lit-- the Germans and the fighters, lit the whole city. And that must have been 300 blocks.

They said, there was a fight for two and a half weeks.

Yes, more.

More than that.

It was over four weeks.



Did you ever get to meet Mordechai Anielewicz? The leader of the revolt?

No, I didn't ever met him. But I met a lot of the fighters while I was in ghetto. I met various names. And I don't know the names-- I wasn't-- I was never interested in names at the time, or impressive-- we were all fighting.

You were wanting to save.

Everybody was fighting, and everybody was to save, and nobody-- at least, the people what I was with, wasn't interested in where do you come from or what's your name? It's just we were fighting one enemy, the enemy was trying to destroy us completely. It was no question about it.

He just didn't ask any questions. Or he just shoot you before he ask you anything. Or killed you, whichever way it was more convenient for him.

While we were on the Platz from Three Crosses, there were another few kids came out. We got to-- they ran away from the ghetto, or were, by chance, they were on the Aryan side. And they found themselves completely isolated, away from their own. So we befriended them and made them comfortable, and warmed them up.

So they became cigarette sellers, too?

So we helped each other in this respect. We helped whoever we could, or whoever-- anybody that needed help, we helped them. The same thing, at night, we used to take whoever came along, we took them in to sleep.

Where did you sleep?

That was, for one thing, in the beginning, when I came before I came, the kids were used to sleep on various garbage-- under garbage, hiding staircases. Lofts, wherever it was open. At the same time in Warsaw, there was many a burning, burned out building. So we used to go into the burned buildings, and hide yourself between whatever and sleep the best you could.

With me, when I came in, I had a few friends, and I went from previous from before. So I went back to the Polish people, which I knew. And some of them were more than glad to see me. They didn't believe that I survived, but somewhere they claimed that I'm like a cat. No matter how you throw me, I wind up on my feet.

So you were a good luck omen?

Yeah, somewhat.

And probably brought them a few gifts, too.

I brought them gifts, whatever I had down there. And I repaid them later on-- we were making money. And I had a friend, gentleman, he used to make phony cigarettes. And he used to give them to me. I was in the wholesale business, so I used to have the boys to give him the cigarettes to sell, and we were making money, so I repaid everybody else, whoever did me a favor.

And you just wanted-- you only way you could do something for somebody is just by paying. And everybody was poor, Warsaw was a poor city. It was the war years. So if you had something, you paid. You were that much more appreciated.

June, June in 1943, I was going on a streetcar, and all of a sudden, somebody taps my shoulder. And I look-- it's a teacher, Mr. Jdzikowski was a close friend. But I was afraid. I was afraid to tell him. He recognized me, and I didn't-- I wasn't trying to say that I don't know him.

So he grabbed me by my shoulder, took me down from the streetcar. He says to me, you little kike, what are you afraid? I'm going to give you away? Don't you know who I am?

So I said to him, yes, I know. But I was afraid for a while. I understand. So he took me over to his apartment.

He washed me with iodine, with whatever there was, because I was filthy. I was just filthy. Because he was afraid to clean me out. And a matter of fact, he gave me even a haircut, too. Well, never with a razor blade.

Still, I was clean. And gave me something to eat, and left me in his apartment not to go out. Two days later, he took me down to his wife-- and he had a wife and a child-- in [NON-ENGLISH]. He told me, I hope my wife likes you. And if she likes you, you can stay down there and help her out.

And I'll tell my wife that you are one of my students.

What is [NON-ENGLISH]?

It's a city, a small little town outside of Warsaw.

I see.

It's just like Crystal Beach here. It's just a summer resort.

Right.

So fine, I went with him. And she saw me, and she knew me from during the war and before the war. She almost fainted. She wanted me out. And it was already late. She wanted to get rid of me.

And she was afraid. And I don't blame her. Listen, at the time, it was dangerous, and she was-- she had a son. And she, herself, had a little grocery store.

She was afraid to keep a Jew.

To keep a Jew, and if I'm going to stay with them, they're endangering their own life. However, it got so late that I couldn't leave, because it was the time of-- war times. And curfews, and a curfew, you couldn't move around. At 8 o'clock, you had to be in.

So she gave me something to eat, and she said, the first thing in the morning, whenever the curfew is up, the sun comes out, I don't want to see you. I want you to get lost. So I'm glad to have at least one night's sleep, and it's a pleasure. I would like to help you out.

I'm capable. I don't think-- I was a student of your husband's-- and I don't think you'll have any problems with me. But she said, well, I don't want to take any chances. I've only one child, and we're alone. I don't want to--

I slept overnight. I couldn't do anything. I was-- well, I hoped for the best.

In the morning, I get up to leave, so she gave me something to eat, she gave me some tea leaves. And it was a special tea she used to brew-- and some bread. And as I was going to the station, she went to the station, too.

She asked me-- I asked her if I can help her out with those bags, she had potato bags. She said, no, stay away from me, leave me alone.

But that was heavy bags, potato bags. So I helped her out with the bags, anyway. And we came on the station. I asked her, well, where are you going? She tells me, well, I'm going down to a little city not far from Otwock-- there's a market in that particular there-- buy potatoes, and buy some stuff, greens, and we'll have something to sell, because it's hard.

Nobody brings anything to sell, you have to go to the market and buy it, and bring it into the little shop. So she'll have something to sell.

So I just volunteered. I ask her, maybe it would be possible for me to go and buy it for you. And I'll drag it down. And I wouldn't stay-- at least, it'll keep me occupied.

She didn't like that. She didn't-- she's kind of leery about the whole idea. But eventually she consented. So I took the bags and I went down to Otwock. Came into Otwock, to the city, and it was on market day. And sure enough, the whole-- there was SS and German soldiers, and so on, they were grabbing all the Polish people, farmers, young farmers, to work for Germany. They used to ship them off to slave labor places.

Everybody was on the run. So luckily, I run away, too, and I got a hold of a farmer. He sold me-- I didn't see Mrs. Jdzikowski from that day. Later on, I didn't see her at all. The farmer sold me some stuff-- he sold me four bags, it was potatoes and carrots, and it was red beets, and whatever the third one-- I don't even remember.

He took me back to the station. I paid him. I didn't know if I bought good or well, or overpaid. But I thought it wasn't bad.

He took me down to the station. At the station, it was funny, there was a gendarme-- a gentleman, an older gentleman, so I asked him, half German, half Polish, if it's OK if he'll watch. So I took off that stuff, and he stood and shook his head. And I don't know what he shook, and I was dragging those--

Those sacks.

Those sacks down to the-- I left them at the gate. And the farmer left, and I was the sacks-- I had to now-- I had to drag him in through the gate into the train.

So I dragged one, and I asked him to watch. I was afraid, and I don't know I made him into a partner, he was watching my--

You asked the German soldier to watch your booty.

[LAUGHTER]

So he was watching it. And it was funny, I took it and the next thing-- I had them on the train, and I loaded it. And I came in to Mrs. Jdzikowski, and I spent the summer. She liked me, she was happy, whatever it was.

And I create myself into a necessity. I don't know if she liked me, but that was a necessity. She couldn't help it. Her husband was away, and she needed somebody with the boy, and she needed somebody to help her make ice cream, or lift something, or go and bring bread.

So I did very well, because at the beginning, on the first load, I lost money. Later on, I made up. And she made money that summer, we both-- we did well.

And after the summer was over, I had an accident. I went to Warsaw to buy some stuff for some notions and small things, and she had some-- I went to a Polish bazaar. And some kids noticed me. And they start chasing me-- they knew me from smuggling days.

So started chasing me. I don't know if they wanted to befriend me, but I didn't want to have anything to do with it. I was so-- too cocky. I always thought that well, I'm already completely a Gentile. I was doing so well down there, the neighbors everybody knew me, and everybody liked me.

And I felt at home. All of a sudden, those who were chasing me there's a Jew, and they start screaming. And they

stopped a German soldier to chase after me, too. So a train came along, and I jumped on that-- a little train. It was a short train from Warsaw to the direction where we were living.

And I jumped at that train, and I broke my leg.

Oh.

And my leg was swollen completely, and people on the train asked me what was going on. Because they didn't know who it was. So I said, I'm in the underground and the Germans are chasing me. So everybody--

Hid you.

They hid me, till the first station, I just jumped off. And I went-- instead of going to [NON-ENGLISH], to the place where I lived, I went into [NON-ENGLISH], I had some people. And they were very fine to me.

Meanwhile, my foot swole, and I was afraid to go to the hospital because-- or anyway, to a doctor. Because he'll find out--

So nobody set it for you?

No, I went-- I wound up in a place, which some doctor, which I knew, I used to bring the medicine, and I befriended her. And she helped me out. She set it on a board and tied it up. And it healed after about a week's time I was there.

And meanwhile, the neighbors, or whatever happened down there, they found out. So I had to run in the middle-- with a broken foot and drag myself out.

Where did you go? Back to Warsaw?

I was-- this was in Warsaw when I was there. So I went back, I went out to the Platz of Three Crosses.

So you met your group again?

The group-- but they didn't know where I was. And I didn't have a chance to let them know exactly where I was, and I didn't think it was advisable for them to know what I was.

But they saw me. It was a party, by itself. They didn't know what to do. And meanwhile, they were all of them became rich, in a manner-- of that respect, that they had enough money to buy themselves shoes. They have clothes.

And places to stay.

Places to stay. They have a place where to stay.

We have some pictures that you might tell us about.

That grandma.

Now, who is this little boy in rag?

This is Bolish. This here boy used to come out to the place of work. He was about seven, eight years old. But he progressed. He was singing on the trains and on the streetcars in Warsaw. He had a beautiful voice.

But there were certain other Gentile fellows that the minute he collected some money, whatever it is, they used to blackmail him-- [NON-ENGLISH]. They used to take whatever it was.

He was so little, he couldn't--

Yeah, he couldn't find himself. So they used to take everything away from him. I mean, it was problems with him. And then, half of the city knew he was Jewish. He looked kind of Jewish. His behavior was-- and he was a youngster, nobody warmed up to him.

So by the time I got there, at the time with my broken leg, we decided-- it has to be a place where to hide him away to have him somewhere.

So we had a lady in a part of Warsaw, very poor-- she had four kids. And we had already a little bit of money, a certain amount of money left in the organization, a little bit of money. We befriended-- so we give them away to the lady. But we were afraid she'll take our money. The next thing, she'll give them away to the Germans. How will we pay her?

So we took some-- a piece of newspaper, we tore it up in slices, like in four. And told them, every week, give the lady a piece of paper so we know you're OK. Sure, the next week, we met the lady-- I met that woman, and the next day-- the next thing, I met that woman. She says, the Bolish brought you-- send you all some papers.

And I look at it, it's four pieces of paper. We thought he got killed. We got scared.

So where was he, really?

He-- so we forced that lady to bring him back. And he brought us-- she brought us back the boy. Because we were going to burn her house, we threatened her. She brought back the boy. She brought him back, the boy, again, he was hidden with her, but he wasn't smart enough to give her one piece of paper at the time, he was giving her all at once.

Oh, I see, so it was a false alarm.

It was a false alarm. So we were now, to give her back, he didn't like it. He wanted-- he was lonesome down there. So I prevailed on Mrs. Jdzikowski in the meanwhile to take him in, with us, with me, I moved back down there. She for her, it was a heaven.

He didn't go out, but at the same time, she was teaching him. She had a boy of his own age.

So he was a companion.

Companion, they became good friends. And they used to sing for them, and they used to-- they loved to teach him. He was absorbing like a sponge.

In no time, he read like a troop. He was good. In math, he was excellent.

So you saved his life?

He saved--

Irving, who is this? Oh, we just missed it. Who was the woman? There was a picture of a woman.

This lady was that missus-- that's the lady we used to get together and stay in her place. That was our hiding place. Her name is [? Jetchka-- ?] Mrs. [? Jetchka. ?]

Mrs. [? Jetchka-- ?] and she took care of you and you paid her?

Yeah, we paid for her. You know, it came holidays, we used to go down there and stay during the holidays, because you couldn't wander the streets on certain holidays. We used to have a good time down there. And it was an excellent place. This lady, we paid her well. And she was-- she was good.

And she took care of you?

She took care-- no, we didn't-- it wasn't a--

Who took these pictures?

The pictures were taken-- we had a lot of pictures, but they got destroyed. We used to take pictures for our own sake, for getting a kick out of it, whatever reasons.

But who had a camera? One of you?

No, there used to be on the Platz from Three Crosses, there used to be a place that they used to have a old fashioned box camera, with all kinds of views in the back. And they used to make pictures for Germans, as a memento.

So you had some money--

Yeah, we used to take pictures on our own, and the guy, used to sing it for him, or watch the camera, or whatever. And he got to know us.

These were pictures that you saved?

Yes, we saved all our pictures.

Now, there's a picture of you coming up. How old are you here?

This picture was taken of me in 1947. This was already--

Oh, that's after the war.

After the war.

Well, maybe we better move along, and you tell us what happens from '43 to '47.

Oh, '43-- all '43 and '44, we were together. We were selling cigarettes and doing various things. And meanwhile, I befriended the Jewish fighting group. And the Jewish fighting group, I was doing-- we were all doing various chores. They were on the Polish side.

So this was the underground.

Underground, so there was a called a [INAUDIBLE] under-- so we used to help them out. And they had various papers, and we used to make various-- we organized for them, actually, phony papers. Because that Mr. Jdzikowski, he being a teacher, and he was a principal in that school, he used to have--

Oh, so he forged--

Forged original, actually, it was-- he had [NON-ENGLISH], in a school, papers, that you go to school. You know, what your grades, and whatever it is. And at that time, you had to have a picture, too. And that was as good as paper as you could find, you see.

So or you were a janitor in the school, or whatever it is. And those papers helped out quite a bit.

Now, we were all through-- till 19-- the middle of-- May, 1944, through the underground, they sent me out for the army-- there was an army what they used to fight the Poles, they fought against the Germans. So I joined that group. And I

was fighting--

Free Polish?

Free freedom fighters. And we were-- I was fighting with them against Germany until the Russians came in. In the meanwhile, all those boys got stuck in Warsaw. And in Warsaw started out a revolt again. So most of them found themselves being soldiers for the underground. And they fought against the Germans, particularly there's known stories about that Pawel and Zenek, that they were the most ambitious fighters, the most heroic fighters in the Polish underground.

And they survived?

They survived, both in Israel. And they-- it's the funniest thing. When after fighting for the Polish underground, but when the Germans took over, they grabbed them all and they shipped them away to a POW camp-- as Poles.

As Poles.

So the Polish comrades, that they fought together, found out they were Jews, they tried to give them away.

Oh, my.

And there was a German--

After all they went through.

Oh, that's true. They thought they were German officers, there was the Wehrmacht, that they stopped it. And they taunted them, how can you do like that? They were fighting with you, and you find with them false, and they didn't-- they kept on saying, we don't believe it.

I went to one of the Polish officers-- Polish officers, they look over and control it, and it became something that they didn't taunt them around. They left them alone. And right after the war was over-- I mean the war, not after the Russians came in-- we found ourselves in a worse predicament altogether. Instead of the population that helped to survive people, instead of being heroes or being considered that they did something good, the most of the population considered them that they did wrong, that they helped to survive Jews, or helped to survive children, or whatever.

Helped to save the Jews.

And they were mostly against. So those people that had them-- chased them out. So we found ourselves nowhere to go.

Stranded.

Stranded completely. You have-- you're liberated, you're free, and certain people had where to go back. The people which we were comrades in arms, or whatever, they had to go back to their families, or their relatives, or wherever--

And you had no place--

We had no place to go. The city, Warsaw was completely destroyed. Our homes were completely gone. Our families were completely gone.

Couldn't you go over to the American zone?

No, there was a war going in between.

The war was still on.

And we weren't that educated, and nobody told us, you can go anywhere. You just by yourself, and you try-- and there was nobody there yet to warm up or give you a hand, or give you-- explain you what's happening. We didn't know. It was just an emptiness all over again.

So from there on, we were just urchins on the streets, running around loose, without any goals. The lonesomeness at that particular time, we felt completely disjointed.

That was at the end of the war.

End of the war. And the next five years were the same.

Terrible loneliness.

Didn't have any direction. There was nobody to give us a hand. Nobody to tell us to get an education.

No guidance.

No guidance whatsoever. Eventually, we tried-- and we got from certain people an idea to go to Israel. Because there, was another fight-- a continuation. A fight for your own, having a purpose, and a purpose for our existence, and purpose for our sufferings what we went through.

And something was becoming in this direction. And most of us, most of those boys wound up in Israel in the fatherland. In '48, in the war, and later on in '56.

Talking about that, we have a picture of a soldier, an Israeli soldier. Who is this?

This is that little Balusz--

The boy in the rags.

The rags. And he became an officer. And he wanted-- he's one of the boys, the first boys who went into Jerusalem, he liberated Jerusalem.

And he's alive?

He's alive, and he has a nice family. And he lives in Israel.

Now, we have the last picture. Will you tell us about this picture?

This picture was taken in 1968.

That's you with the circle.

Yeah, in 1968, I went to see the whole gang. We wanted to have a reunion.

Oh, the cigarette sellers?

Cigarette sellers. And at the time, we were already mature people. And you [? Jusef ?] Ziemien, that person that wrote the book, he wasn't well at the time already. He had something to do with his lungs from the war years. So I definitely decided to go.

And I came down, and we had a reunion. I had them in a hotel. And we got together, and our families together. And it was something--



I haven't seen [? Amchou ?] down there, sitting. And [? Amchou ?] is one of those men that we found him in 1943 in a hive-- we brought him soup, we gave him money.

And which one is [? Amchou? ?] The one on the--

On the extreme left, sitting.

So he was-- you saved him.

[? Amchou-- ?] I wouldn't say, saved him, God saved him, faith saved him. But we helped him out in our own way to give him as much as we could, whatever he needed. He was completely-- for younger people to get around, it was easier. We didn't think.

So was at--

He was not hiding-- it was an older man, he was sitting in a field. It was a-- we used to call it a rabbit hive. In a matter of fact, there was a lot of rabbits in that field. He was sitting down there, and living mostly on carrots and whatever you could use-- in the daytime, he was afraid to get out. At night, he used to steal himself out and just to get out to get a few carrots, and just to get some fresh air.

But otherwise, he was sitting--

In addition to saving yourselves, you saved this older person--

We saved him. There was another few people which helped out, too. There was no mentioning in the book, but at the same time, we helped quite a few older people we helped. Paper wise, and so on.

Who's the woman?

This young girl, her name is [? Halinka, ?] she was with us all the time. She used to sell cigarettes. And she worked on a hospital for a while, for the Red Cross in Warsaw. And actually for the German Red Cross, but they didn't know who she was, as a Polish girl.

And she was really Jewish.

She was Jewish, yeah. And she is, again, she used to come out almost every day, or second day, on the Red Cross-- on the Platz down there. And we were always together. We were chewing-- whatever was going on, how she was living, and so on.

And the middle fellow, that's sitting, is Mr. Ziemien, [? Jusef ?] Ziemien, he's the author of the book. We befriended him again.

In 1943, we were looking for a place, like we were saying before, we were eating in a place. And he came in, and he was afraid-- he was looking left, right, in the middle of-- he was so nervous, looking around, checking out the place. So eventually, I went, I walked over with another fellow, with this Kinol, he sits next to him.

And I said to him, mister, don't be afraid. We are Jewish. If you need any help, we'll help you. He looked at us like crazy. He says--

Little boys helping.

So he ran out. About 10 minutes later, he comes back. He says to me, are you sure you're Jewish? I said, yeah, I want to help you. I'm not afraid-- you're afraid of people, but I'm not-- we're not afraid of people. If you need any help, here,

take some money.

He says, well, I'll take some money. But I want to meet you tomorrow, and I'll help you. OK, fine, you want to help us, help us. The next morning, we were watching him-- we were expecting to come. We saw him all dressed up, he was going up and down the street.

He was checking out the place. He was afraid that maybe it's going to be a setup.

Ah, he was worried.

He didn't trust us. He didn't trust us. It was just so-- next thing, he comes along, he says, well, we have people like that, and people from the organizations. And you know certain of the people?

I said, yeah, I know those people. I knew them from the ghetto. So there are certain people in the hiding. And they would like to know how many guys are you? How many people?

I said to him, we wanted to help you, you want to know how many we are? What am I going to tell you? What else am I going to tell you? Where I sleep, too.

So he got kind of anxious. Anyway, became close friends. And then, he wrote the book.

Oh, he wrote the book, *The Cigarette Sellers*, about the--

The rest of it, we-- thank God, from the 22 of us, 20 survived during the war. Two of them just passed away. But we helped each other all through the war.

There's-- it's amazing what a home gives to a child, to a youngster. A certain upbringing, later on, you carry it the rest of your life. And as a child, even, too, you want to help, you want to be helpful. No matter-- and no matter the adversary, you're still looking for somebody to do something-- as much as you need help, you like to help somebody else, too.

And it makes you feel to be alive, without thinking too much. You always-- you wanted to be useful and helpful.

Unfortunately, none of us have any parents left. None of us have any sisters or brothers. We came out from-- each one of us came out fine families, but no uncles, no aunts, no grandparents for our children.

We hope the world will never have to be tested this way. We hope. And I personal hope there will be peace, and people will understand each other, we'll never have problems that one should taunt you-- each other. One should look for problems in each other. We should look for the best in each other.

And it could be a good world. Thank you.

I hope so, with people like you.

Thank you.

There's hope. Thank you very much, Irving, Thank you.