

Can you describe for me the difference in everyday life from before the war and then after the Germans came? Tell me how things changed.

Well, to begin with, life was disrupted immediately. We, I didn't go to school. I was glad that I didn't have to go to school. I didn't like the school I was going to. That's how stupid I was when the war broke out. But I grew up very quickly.

My-- it's difficult to really say that, because the disruption was gradual. And some things were very drastically different when the war broke out, and then gradually life became more normal but very different than it was before the war. So that for instance, we came back from the country shortly before the war broke out, and our cupboards were bare.

And my mom tried to buy food because she had survived the First World War, and she knew that it would be difficult to buy food in the beginning. But she couldn't get any staples. She couldn't get any bread. She couldn't get any flour. She couldn't get any potatoes. So she bought whatever she could, so we ended up having chocolates and halvah and caviar and pickled herring. Fun food, but not real food.

The Germans came into our city three days after the war broke out. So then immediately the first thing that happened, there was shooting that you hear. We didn't-- the first thing that happened is that no one walked out. We didn't leave our apartment. We were afraid to leave. And then of course, as soon as the Germans came in, they passed all kinds of decrees and there was a curfew.

Later on, some maybe-- I don't remember exactly-- maybe a week later, people started walking out into the street. People had to go out. Bakeries were apparently given permission to start baking bread. So that people were going and buying bread. I remember the first time I left the house with my mother very early in the morning. My mother didn't want my father to leave the house.

You kept men in the house if you could help it. That was true not just for the Jewish population. It was true for all of us. So I remember getting up very early in the morning because there was a curfew. But perhaps even before the curfew-- in other words, it may have been earlier than the time when we were permitted to leave because my mom was anxious to get into the bread line.

And I remember standing in the bread line. And I remember bringing a bread home, which was a wonderful thing because we didn't have any real food, as I told you, for probably about a week. Well, then I also remember, I remember that about perhaps 10 days after the war broke out that the Germans-- and that was a treatment that was apparently meant for the Jewish people, because I remember the soldiers came into the apartment house in which we lived.

Most people in Poland, if they lived in cities or big towns, did not live in private homes. They lived in apartment houses. And the apartment houses had courtyards. And I remember the soldiers came into the courtyard and started to shout that all the Jewish people have to come down to the courtyard. And I do remember coming down with my mom and my father and-- I was the oldest-- there were four of us.

And I think that our cook, who was Jewish, was still with us at that point. And she came down. And we came down and they took all the men away. They took my father. And I don't remember how long my father was gone. That was a very difficult time for us. But I do remember that my father came back. He may not have been gone more than a week. But I remember that my father had auburn hair.

And I remember that when he came back he was almost all gray. And it was shocking. And my father, now that I think about it, he was 39 years old. He was born in 1900, and this was 1939. So he was 39 years old, and he turned gray. And the I also know that some men didn't come back, because apparently the Germans killed some of the Jewish men.

Whether it was at random or whatever the reason, my father never talked about it. So that was-- I don't know if I'm describing the difference, but before the war, we had a very normal household. I went to school. I was the oldest. My parents were-- we were not rich, but we were very comfortable. My father owned a children's, infant wear factory. We

had help in the house.

We went to school. We went to parks. I had friends. I read books. I did continue reading during the war. That was the one thing that, in the beginning, was good. There were lending libraries. And we had curfews, and I did get an education in the beginning of the war. I was always a bookworm. And in the beginning, there wasn't that much to do, so I did a lot of reading. That was perhaps the one nice thing that happened.

Can you talk a little bit about how you continued in education after the schools were closed and how you taught your brother?

OK. Let me just tell you a few things kind of. There was no school. The first thing, of course, that the Germans did is that Jewish children were not permitted to go to school. All schools were closed to us. But my parents, my parents didn't know what was in store for us. No one did at that point. In fact, my parents felt that things may get better.

They felt that some of the horror stories, the shooting, that this was just what happens when a country is occupied and the occupiers want to put the fear of God into the population. So there is harsh treatment. But my parents thought that after a while-- and that was their memory of the First World War-- that life will become a little more normal. Of course, given the fact that there was a war out there.

And then of course, my parents hoped that the war will end and it will end the right way. So my parents, I don't remember exactly when, but probably maybe a month or two after the war started, we started private tutoring. Now, I don't mean that it was on a one-to-one basis. But the teachers who taught in the schools organized classes, and we would meet in different people's houses.

And I remember in my group there were maybe 12 or 13 of us. And we studied. We really had classes of sorts. We certainly studied Polish and Polish literature and history and geography. It was more difficult with sciences, because we had no labs. We did mathematics. And my parents were very, very concerned that we continue. Because they felt that once the war will come to an end, that there was going to be a world, and they wanted us to continue with our education.

So I was in such a group, and so were my sisters. My youngest brother was only six when the war broke out, so I started to tutor him. I taught him to read and write. And he was very good in mathematics. I think had he lived, he may have been really extraordinary. I have a very bright, very, very good, very bright son who's extremely good in mathematics, as a matter of fact, and I--

[BEEP]

And you can start just where you tutored your little brother.

My brother was six years old. So instead of sending him to some kind of a organized school-- not school, but organized tutorial-- I was the one who tutored him. And I taught him how to read and write. And I taught him arithmetic. And he was very bright. He was very good in mathematics. He was he was a bit of a whiz kid.

I remember that after a while, I used to take him around because, particularly in the evening when there was a curfew, in the courtyard, people were sitting in the courtyard. It was still before it got very cold. And I remember that my brother, his name was Lulek, people would say to him, how much is 5 times 75? And he would come back right away. Or more than that.

They would say to him, how much is 20 times 183? And it wouldn't take him but a second to give the answer. And as I said, I really think that he was extraordinary when it came to mathematics, that he had some kind of a gift. And he didn't live to realize his potential, obviously. So that was my little brother. Things were becoming normal, but they weren't.

The one thing I remember is how very quickly we were hungry for a piece of bread. There wasn't enough bread in the house. Food was rationed. And I remember my brother asking my mom for another slice of bread, and my mom say, no, that's all you can get. Sometimes one of us would give him a little piece of our bread, because we felt that he was little

and he didn't understand.

But my mother didn't encourage it. My mother felt we should all get our certain amount of food. But then things did improve some. My father's factory was taken over by the Germans, by a German [NON-ENGLISH]. That means somebody that the Germans trust. And my father worked in his factory. What it meant is that he taught the other men, probably, how to run the factory and what to do.

But that was good, because then we as a family-- he was getting paid and we were getting ration cards. Everything was rationed by that time in Poland. So it was very important to have the cards. And if you didn't work, you didn't have the ration cards. And my mother probably started to work at this time, too. I don't remember where she worked, but I know she was working. I also remember a few things that happened that were dramatic at that point.

One was that shortly after the war broke out, may have been shortly after my father started working in this factory, when the factory was taken over, there was a knock on our door in the apartment in which we lived. And my mom opened the door, and there was a German lady. She was a Volksdeutsche. So she was somebody who became-- she was maybe partly Polish, and she had some German family in the background.

And with two SS men, or two soldiers. I don't remember. And she walked into the apartment, and she looked around, and she said, I like it. All of it. And the following day, apparently she was able to get some big trucks, and they came. People came into our place and they took everything out of our apartment. All the furniture, everything that was there. All the rugs.

She was a nice lady. She sent us some broken chairs and table and beds and a old wardrobe. I remember that at that point, it seemed like not a tragedy anymore, but certainly something that we were upset about. Little did we know that there was much, much worse in store for us. We simply didn't realize it. In fact, I do remember, but that was later, that during the time when I was reading so much, I read a book.

It was called Forty Days of Musa Dagh by Franz Werfel. I don't know how to pronounce his name. W-E-R-F-E-L. But I think Americans know him because he wrote a book called The Song of Bernadette, I think, which was made into a movie. But in the book 40 Days of Musa Dagh, he wrote about what the Turks did to the Armenians during the First World War.

And I remember-- not right then, not in the beginning of the war, but maybe a year into the war-- I remember coming down to my father with that book, and I said, Daddy, Dad, that's what the Germans are going to do to us. And I was crying. And I do remember that my father looked at me, and he said, don't say that. How can you say that? The Turks were much less civilized than the Germans.

The Germans will never do anything like that. Not the Germans. They may do horrible things, but not what the Turks did to the Armenians. I'm just telling you this, because I want you to understand that we really didn't have any idea what was in store for us. I don't know why. My father at that point, I remember, did listen to-- we were not allowed to have radios-- but my father used to meet in the evening with some friends in the house in which we lived during the curfew, and they listened to BBC.

And we knew that France fell. We knew what was going on at that point. Of course, later on we no longer-- my father-- it was too dangerous to listen to. And maybe there was no radio anymore. But in the beginning, certainly the first half a year of the war, we did know what was going on in the world. It was easier to get an idea of what was going on. We also had-- that brings me to a couple of things.

I was telling you about the furniture that was taken. Some things didn't happen right away. We lived in what was called an open ghetto. What that meant is that during that period when the Germans took over our city, they did some shifting around. Some people had to leave their apartments because there were some areas in the city where the Jews were not allowed. Some areas we were allowed to stay in.

So what was happening is that people were doubling up. And that meant that many people had to take in other people

into their apartments. And we actually did get another family to live with us. And they happened to have been actually German Jews from Leipzig who must have been also sent into our city. And we could stay in our apartment, which meant that our street was part of that open ghetto.

Now, an open ghetto was-- what that meant was that we were not allowed to leave the area. We were not allowed into some streets of the city. We were only allowed in the area which was considered the open ghetto. But the non-Jews, the Poles could come into our area. And so could maybe-- and so, certainly, did the Germans. Of course, they did anyway. Because of it, there was some barter. There was some-- it was easier--

If people had something that they could barter, then they were able to supplement some of their food. And I am sure that in the beginning, that's what happened in my family. Even though the Germans took all the gold away, you know, and they came and took the silver. People had to give everything away. I'm sure that my parents may have hidden some. Maybe my mother hid some of her rings or something.

Because the first year of the war, once things started being a little more normal, there was some food that my parents were able to get probably on the black market. And the fact that it was an open ghetto made life, in that sense, easier. On the other hand, you couldn't go into many streets. And I have many memories of standing--

I do have a memory of, for instance, at one time-- and that was also maybe a half a year after the war broke out-- standing in front of the main street in our city, which was called, became Hitler Strasse. But it was the street of the third of May, which is when the Poles had a national holiday. And it was a beautiful street with many trees.

[INAUDIBLE].

Camera roll three, take three.

[BEEP]

So let's go back to the beginning of that memory on that street.

I have a memory. I remember my mom, when we started wearing our star of David and when it became obvious that we are not allowed into many streets, I have that memory of standing in front of that street just at the entrance knowing that I'm not allowed to go there. And I'll never forget how beautiful that street, that whole street seemed to me with all of those beautiful chestnut trees.

And I remember I would have given everything I had just to walk on that street once. And I remember that I had such an urge to go into that, to just disregard the fact that I'm not allowed. And then somebody pulled me back-- must have been a friend-- and said, don't. No, don't go there. And I went back. It's just a little thing. My memory of some of the things--

I'm trying to remember how long I was tortured. I think it was till about 1941, perhaps. The winter of 1941 was a cold one. I do remember that at somewhere around this time, I started to work, but I continued with my schooling. But at the end of 1941, things were getting bad. They were getting worse. And I remember we stopped school.

Things were getting worse because it was more difficult to get heat. People started to disappear. But most of them were young men and women who were taken to labor camp, to work camps in Germany. And there was contact. They were allowed to write a postcard a month, so we knew where they were. If some people disappeared and we didn't hear from them, that was not that well known. Although-- that's not true.

In the very beginning, a lot of the intelligentsia did disappear. And that was not just the Jewish intelligentsia. That was true for the Poles, too. So some professors, some doctors. And now we know what happened to them. That was, again, considered just the beginning. People always-- I remember that my parents felt that the things that happened in the beginning, horrible as they are, are not a sign of what's going to be but rather something that happens when a country is occupied.

They kept saying that. And then it's going to be-- somehow life would be a little bit more normal. They were wrong, obviously. And I now know that there was a psychological war against the Jews, that many of the things that were happening to us were gradual. I think that this is very important to remember. I think that if they had-- if things had happened to us in a more sudden way and more immediate, I think that there would have been a much stronger reaction in the Jewish communities.

This is my own feeling. I may be wrong. I think that when you strip a human being of his dignity slowly, he is not the same person. And I think that in a certain way, what the Germans were doing by putting us into an open ghetto, by taking away some of our rights slowly, it was a conditioning that permitted us to, that made us more willing, more able to accept it. But of course, I was a child.

But I'm thinking about my father. Because my father was a really, I think, wonderful human being. And intelligent. And so was my mom. And I wonder why they were so unaware of some things. And I think they were. Maybe they had a belief in the goodness of human nature, and maybe that was their undoing. Because they didn't see. I don't think that they saw what was happening.

They didn't realize where it was going. Of course, the fact that we were so cut off, that there was no communication, didn't help. Let me tell you a few things that happened. Let me go back to my life. In 1942, in the spring of 1942, somebody, a militiaman we had in our open ghetto-- we were still in the open ghetto. We had militia people. These were Jewish people who were kind of a ghetto police-- came to our place.

And they had a list. And I was on that list. And they were going to take me to a labor camp in Germany. This was very early. This must have been March or February of 1942. And I was not quite 16. I was born in 1926. So I was about 15 and a half. And they took me from the house. And they took me to a place that was called-- it was like a transit camp. In other words, I wasn't taken immediately to Germany but to this transit camp which was still in our ghetto.

And I was not the only one. There were a lot of young girls and women, ranging probably ages from about 15 or 16 to 25. And men, but separately. And we were waiting, now I realize, to be bought by some of the German firms to be taken to Germany. My father was devastated. I think I was his favorite. I don't think parents should have favorites, but I was his favorite daughter. And he was devastated, and he tried to get me out.

This is, again, ironic because Auschwitz was already operating, and going to Germany probably was not a bad thing at that point. Because it meant going to a labor camp. But my father didn't know about Auschwitz, and he didn't want his 15-year-old child to go to a labor camp. So he turned heaven and earth, and apparently this was possible.

And he made an arrangement with a girl who was about 18-- and maybe that's what permitted him to do it, because it was another child actually going for me. He paid for it. She probably was poorer than we were. As poor as we were. My parents may still have had something that they could pay these people. And she agreed to go for me. And maybe the fact, my father thought, that since she's 18, she's at least a young adult. And he was paying for it. And she was supposed to be my substitute, if you will.

I didn't know anything about it except that when I would come to the window at the transit camp and my father would be passing by, he motioned to me that he was doing something. And about, I don't know, four or five days, a week after I was taken, I was still in the transit camp. My name was called. And I was told to take my belongings. I had with me some clothing that I was permitted to take. I took it with me, and I was told to go out.

And as I was coming out, I noticed my younger sister. My sister was 2 and 1/2 years younger, so she was 13 years old. And I noticed her. And I was in this-- I was tired and in a state of shock. But as I walked out and I saw my parents were waiting for me not right near the place, but where they were permitted to wait. And I saw them. They were both standing and crying, I think.

And I started to cry. And I said, why am I out? And why is, what is Pina doing there? What is she doing there? And they started, they embraced me. And they took me home. And they told me that what happened actually is that that morning when my substitute was supposed to show up and go in for me, she changed her mind. And my parents were desperate.

And my sister, who was always kind of a tomboy, one of those kids that was never afraid of anything, said, I'll go for Bella.

And my parents thought, she's nuts. She's crazy. But I don't know. I don't know what happened. They must have been very distraught. She convinced them that she's going to go in for me. This was her idea. And that once she's in there, she's going to tell them that she doesn't belong there. She's only 13 years old. And they're going to send her home.

I don't know how she could convince my parents. But this is a true story. She convinced them, and she went in for me. And lo and behold, she was sent to a labor camp, to Sudetenland, which is in Czechoslovakia.