

How do you remember the changes in 1939 when the Germans came, the changes in everyday life if you remember any of them-- persecutions, the effects on your family?

Well, it was 1939. And I was only four years old. So my recollections are only that. Just prior to the Germans coming into our town, we heard a lot of planes. And our parents would take me down, because at that point my sister was in Warsaw studying, to the basement for protection. And they would put a mask on us made from cotton.

That was prior to the Germans coming. And then within a few days, we all were standing outside and soldiers on motorcycles and [INAUDIBLE] cars and with big, heavy hats marched into our town. That's my first recollection of seeing Germans.

And then things started changing almost immediately. My mother and father were very protective of me. So we were not allowed to-- I was not allowed to go outside other than to my grandparents' home, which was three doors down.

And everybody was afraid. We started getting people, Jewish people, coming in from other parts of the country. And we had to share our homes and our means with them. We always had a full house of people.

And then the cruelty started. Then they started coming in into the homes and just taking people out, as I overheard, for no apparent reason.

In fact, one of those times it was at my grandfather's house. It was-- my grand parents lived in a home where there was a courtyard. So there was a big door at the entrance from the street. And you walked into the courtyard.

That door was closed for the night. And there was banging on the door. And my uncle happened to have opened the door for them.

The Germans marched in and walked over to an apartment, where a poor tailor lived that hardly could make a living, pulled him out, and shot him. We don't know why they didn't take my uncle. So that was the first beginning of what I overheard at that age.

And then I saw changes in my grandparents' place mostly for some reason, which I don't know why either. But I came one afternoon into their house. And my grandfather and grandmother were sitting on the side crying.

And when I looked at my grandfather, I couldn't believe it. His beard was shaved off. And my aunt was sitting in the corner and crying. I couldn't understand why. And nobody took the time to explain it to me.

Since that time, I haven't seen my aunt leave the house. It was only in the last few years that I have found out from my mother that at that particular time she was raped. And that's why she did not leave the house. It was such a traumatic experience for her.

And these are just things that were happening around me personally that I saw and felt the first week or two or three-- I don't know, before the ghetto was formed. My father was very upset. Nobody paid much attention to me except to make sure that I'm safe and that I'm always around them, that I don't wander off. And that was the beginning.

Tell me about the ghetto.

The ghetto was formed around the area where we lived. So we didn't have to move, other than give up some of our rooms and so forth to accommodate other people. There was more and more people coming into the ghetto.

But my father was a photographer. He was quite well established in the city, not only among the Jewish people but also among the Gentiles. And he still had permission to leave the ghetto during the day and had to come back at night.

Our studio was taken over by the Germans. They ran the business. And my father was there just working for them. So it

was really not our business anymore. And my mother too had to go and start going in.

My sister, as I mentioned before, studied in Warsaw because she was very talented musically. She was a pianist. And when the ghetto formed, my father had sent someone to bring her back home.

And other than that, life was a little bit more like normal for me because I had my sister at home where I didn't have her before. There was people coming in. And she was practicing and playing.

And, in fact, there were some Germans that would come in to listen to her at night. And we would have to put up sheets on the windows so nobody would see that they came in.

So that part was still a very-- we were still a very close family. And everybody was always mentioning who was shot this time and who was shot that time. And friends and families just disappeared.

They would catch people in the streets for working details to other parts of the country. And we were always concerned that my-- I had two uncles, that they would be caught and that my father would be.

So, actually, from day to day, there seem to be such terrible tension in the house. I just felt like I was always in the way because I was a nuisance, I suppose. I wasn't allowed to go anywhere. And yet, I was supposed to always entertain myself and stay out of people's way. I guess they had no patience for me.

Describe the importance of working and how your parents realized that very early.

My father had the foresight that if he is going to have employment and be a productive citizen that he'll be safe and so will my mother. So there was a camp that was being set up outside of our city. It was called Bodzech³w, a German company, I think, that was making electronics, set up a factory with free labor.

So my father through some [NON-ENGLISH] and money, was able to get to places for my mother and my father to work in that factory and to live on that camp, working camp, what they called. My sister through friends, acquaintances was taken to a Gentile family to continue her education because they felt that it will be very important for her to continue her musical training. And if she would be going to camp, then, certainly, there wouldn't be any piano, not knowing what was waiting for us.

So a family outside of our city, actually a duke and duchess, have accepted her as another one of their daughters. And my sister has spend the war with them with continuing her education. My father had worked out for a--

We have to stop. We have to reload them. Describe the work camp, the life. And define what a work camp is when you tell me. And then tell me how it is that you ended up in that kind of an environment and what it was like, but be sort of basic about it.

Well, children were not allowed. They were supposed to not exist because it was a working camp. So my father and mother had their specific work to do. I think my mother worked in the kitchen. And my father worked in the factory.

I was supposed not to exist. So certain days, yes, I was allowed to walk around in the camp. But whenever there was a-- first of all, the camp was supposed to have been maybe for 100 people to work in the factory.

But when a lot of people have heard that there was a place where maybe you could survive through the war, then they would come into that camp and it would swell with people. There would be-- instead of 100, there would be 200, 300, 400.

And the Germans would allow this to happen because at any given time they would come with a truck and just load up whoever they could find in camp that particular day and ship them out to Treblinka if they didn't have a full transport or anywhere else.

And because of that, there was a lot of elderly people there too and children. And they were the first ones that went out with these transports. Being that my father was known in town and he was a little bit influential, he would hear rumors when these trucks would be coming in because there was more people than there was supposed to be.

So, obviously, I would have to disappear. I would either go with my mother into the forest. And it was in the winter. It was probably sometimes around November, December.

And it was very cold. And I would spend sometimes days and nights in the forest with my mother just walking around and trying to keep warm. Occasionally, we would knock on a farmer's door. Some of them would tell on us. And we would have soldiers looking for us. And some of them were kind enough to let us come in. And they would take my shoes off and dry them and give me something to drink.

So there were some that were a little bit kind to me. But, unfortunately, a couple weren't nice at all. One, in particular, told us-- my mother wanted to buy some milk. Buy because she had money at the time. And the woman shut the door in our faces and said she didn't have any.

And we continued walking. And then she, in turn, went to the police station and told on us that there was a mother and a child, probably Jewish. The German at the police station was not there at the time. And a Polish policeman, I guess, came after us.

And when he saw us, he told us that one of the farmers had come to the police station and told them about us and that we should go to the camp that is just on the other side of the forest because that might be a safe haven for us. So that was a good one. And he even gave me a piece of bread. And we thanked him.

But mother and I knew-- or mother knew when she told me that we cannot return back into the camp because the selection at that particular time has not taken place yet. So it would not have been safe for me. And other times I would be hiding in-- it was a big like a warehouse where they kept some cars. And they had an office built in in that big warehouse.

And on the roof of that office, there was a distance where-- I was then six-- I could not stand up. I had to kind of crawl around on my knees between the ceiling of the big warehouse and the office. That's where I had to lie during the day very, very quietly. Because if I had moved or walked, they would have heard me in the office.

There were a lot of mice running around at the time and rats. So whatever food I was left with, I had to eat it as soon as it was brought up to me. Otherwise, it would have just disappeared.

In fact, there was two other children that originally had used the same hiding place as I did. And they refused to stay there. So, unfortunately, they did not survive.

But I stayed. At this time, I was good. I wasn't always. And, occasionally, my father would come up for the night and spend with me a couple of hours so I wouldn't be alone. Or my mother would come up during the day when she was missed. And that's how I spent my time at that camp.

One of the selections that were going on, I was hidden with other children in a hole in the ground where they kept potatoes right off the kitchen. And we were there up until the point when they were putting the people on the trucks already. The selections have been made. And somebody must have saw us going in there. And they had told one of the Germans.

And there was potatoes flying over us. So we were actually hidden. But somebody told them exactly where we are. So he came up. And he uncovered us. He pulled up all these potatoes away.

And he looked at us. There was a few of us there. And he said-- he was there with his handgun. And he said, stay here. It's not safe for you to come out yet.

I guess he had enough people for this particular transport. So he had a change of heart. And he decided to leave us there.

We were children. So we ran out. My mother was working in the kitchen, peeling potatoes. And she saw me coming. So a couple of the ladies and my mother grabbed me and put me into a barrel with sauerkraut in it until the trucks were pulled away. And I was safe that time. That was a good camp.

One of the times, we were caught in the selection. And we were standing in front of the gate. I don't know if it was inside the gate or if it was outside the gate. And we stood and we stood. And there was a line of Germans standing with the guns and waiting. And we were waiting and waiting.

And then we were told to kneel. We were lined up in rows of five. And my mother said to me, if they start shooting-- she changed places with me, actually. She went in front of me. And she said, if they start shooting, make sure that you get under me. And stay there, and don't move.

Well, we stayed there all afternoon. And for some reason, they decided not to shoot. So we were let back into the camp.

One time we were caught also in this selections. And we were taken to a ghetto. That was a terrible place. People were lying on the street and dying. And the filth and the dirt, it was-- it's just absolutely unbelievable.

My father was still left in Bodzech³w when my mother and I were caught. My mother was caught only because of me. She had permission to stay in the camp. She had papers. I didn't.

But they caught us together. So we both-- my mother wouldn't have let me go alone. So we went together.

And my father arranged with a Pole. Being that he was still working outside the camp occasionally in that factory, he arranged with a Pole to bring us back to Bodzech³w. There was an underground connection. I don't know exactly how I-- and we were just a few days in that ghetto. And somebody got in touch with us that we had to make our way to escape from the ghetto and make it outside of the ghetto and get below.

This particular ghetto was on a hill. And then there was a big-- what do you call-- can't even think now. Well, I'll get back to that. Anyways, we were supposed to make it outside of the camp-- outside of the ghetto and follow that Pole to the railroad station. And then--

Let's stop because we just ran out. So we can pick up that. Why don't you back up into that story a little bit so that if I can't cut the two together you start again-- a terrible place on--

Oh, the ghetto. The ghetto on the hill. As I mentioned, it was a terrible place-- the filth and the dirt and the people just lying on the street and dying. It was just a horrible thing to see for human beings to be in this kind of a situation and place.

Anyways, my father had made arrangements for somebody to take us out of there. And we were told that we have to make it out of the ghetto. And the ghettos were not as tightly watched as camps down the hill because this particular ghetto was on the hill over the fence.

And then he will be waiting for us. And we would follow him to the railroad station. And there he would give us the tickets. And we would be on our own. It's not that he in any way endangered himself.

I really, I guess, didn't want to go down that hill because I personally have no recollection of that. The only thing-- I had a conversation with my mother recently. And I have terrible nightmares about this particular place, I guess.

I keep running down that hill. And I'm just suspended in air. And then I come down. And it's quiet. It's as if nothing had happened.

Well, my mother had told me that when she finally made me come down the hill and we made it over the fence, there

was a street in the city. And the Polish people were walking back and forth. And it's as if they didn't see us that we were escaping from the ghetto. It was just unbelievable.

We followed that man to the railroad station. And during the same time, I guess-- there was always things going on. But there was some sabotage that was going on. So they were very watchful on the stations for people that were involved in it.

And there were two Germans from our town that had known my mother. As I had mentioned, my mother was a very beautiful woman. And we were well known in town. And these two Germans had known my mother. And they had a huge, big dog that they always went with.

We came to the gate at the railroad station where they were checking you. We showed them the tickets. He looked at my mother. Obviously, he must have recognized her. But he just told us to go on.

We got on the train. And we squeezed in. And, again, when the train was moving, they had made their way through the train to look for the saboteurs.

My mother made me kind of move away from her slightly because she said to me, in case he comes and he recognizes me again and this time he takes me, you stay on the train. So he came by us. He looked at my mother again. And he continued walking.

We made it back to Bodzech³w. We got off the station. And we made our way along the railroad tracks back to camp.

Well, it was at night at that time, which was to our advantage. But they also were checking the rails at the time because of the sabotage that was going on. And a train was supposed to have come through with maybe ammunition or soldiers, I don't know which.

So they were checking the train. There were two soldiers manually using that platform. And as we were walking along the railroad, it was all clear. We had nowhere to hide. And here this manual train is coming.

And the moon was bright. So my mother made me lie down parallel with the earth, the hill that was leading up to the railroad. And my mother and I lay still there. And they passed us by. And they didn't see us.

We made it back to camp. And we stayed in camp, I don't know the time span, until the camp was being liquidated. And we were sent to Starachowice, my mother and I. And my father was sent to, I believe, [INAUDIBLE] But I haven't seen my father up until Auschwitz again, towards the end of Auschwitz. And during that time, I was just with my mother.

Go back and tell me about some of the things you used to imagine. How did you pass the time when you were in the office? And who was below you when you were in the office hiding?

Germans doing a lot of office work because that was their office of running the camp. So that's the people that were in the office. How I spend my time-- dreaming. When mother would come up to stay with me for a few hours, she would tell me stories of home, of the wonderful things that we had, the wonderful times we spent together, pretending that the family was still alive, where she already by then knew that the rest of the family that was left in the ghetto when we left for Bodzech³w. They had a liquidation of the ghetto then. And they were all taken to the Treblinka, all of them.

Actually, of what I heard mother say later was that they did have a hiding place for them. But my grandfather coughed. So he said he didn't want to go because he will cough and they'll find him-- find a hiding place. So my grandmother said, well, she's not going to go if he's not going.

And my two uncles, my aunt and my other grandmother, weren't going to go into the hiding place on their own, not knowing what was waiting for them in Treblinka. So they all left with the first liquidation of the ghetto. And anyways, that's how I spent my time in camp, with the stories and the encouragement and the love that my mother was able to give me day in and day out.

In the first camp that we were, food was not a problem because, I guess, my father still had money and there would be food brought in from the Aryan side, from the Polish side. So food at that camp was not a problem.

But in the other camps, when we were in Starachowice and then in Ostrowiec lager and in Auschwitz, I mean, our portions were so small to start with. When I finished mine, my mother was always waiting for me. She actually made me believe that she was not hungry. And whatever she had, she shared with me. So that's why I'm here.

Can you tell about the time in the cornfield when you saw other kids playing?

Oh, yeah. One of the times from Bodzech³w when we were in the forest waiting out a selection, it was in the winter. And during the day, we had to find a place where we had to stand still because we couldn't move around. We would be seen. And that was near, I guess, a farm. And maybe it was also near a school. I don't remember that.

So my mother found a place to hide in a cornfield or maybe it was like a starting field of trees that has low trees that were just coming up next to a field because we didn't want to go too deep into the forest because then the trees were tall. And there was no way to hide. They would see our shadows.

So as we were lying there, some children came out on the field to play ball. And one of them kicked the ball. And it landed in front of me.

The child ran over, looked at me, picked up the ball, and went back to play. My mother and I just couldn't believe that this actually happened. So we stayed there until it got dark. And then we kept on moving.

And how many times did we come back to the camp. And the selection still wasn't taken place. So again we would have to go out.

Good. We have to reload.