

Good morning. I'm glad that you've agreed to come here this morning and interview with us about the holocaust, and surviving it.

Can you tell us your name?

My name is Mike Jacobs. I was born in Konin, Poland. Our city, the Jewish people settled in our city 1397, one of the first cities of the Jewish people who settled in Poland. I had a family of three brothers, two sisters, and my mother and father, and a lot of relatives. In 1939, when the Nazis marched into our city, the first thing they did, they put a curfew. The Jewish people were not allowed to walk out from their homes from 6 o'clock at night till 6 o'clock in the morning, and the non-Jewish people from 9 o'clock till 6 o'clock in the morning.

They took hostages, Jewish people and non-Jewish people. They put them to jail. They took also all the intelligentsia, the teachers. They took them. They brought them up to the Jewish cemetery and they were shot, 99% non-Jewish teachers. Went into our beautiful ancient synagogue, they took out all the prayer books, the Torah, the five books of Moses, the prayer shawls and all the religious memorabilia, and they put it into the square.

After they empty it, all everything from the synagogue, they made a horse stable. And I remember as a little boy singing in choir. We used to wear prayer shawls with the little you know high yarmulkes, kippahs, high ones, special ones. And I wanted to save. And I went in over there, and I saved my prayer shawl and a little yarmulke, or the--

You mean your own yarmulke?

Yeah, my own yarmulke, my kippah.

Now did you say that the Nazis made a horse stable out of the synagogue?

That's correct. They made a horse stable out of the synagogue.

And I remember like today, they brought out our rabbi, an elderly gentleman in the 70s, and they told him to put a match to it, to the all the prayer books, and the Sefer Torahs, or the five books of Moses, and it caught on fire.

I can remember like today, because we used to live in the square. When it stopped burning, a miracle happened. That's what I think was a miracle. It start raining. For three days and three nights, it was burning. For three days and three nights it was raining. When it stopped burning, it stopped raining. We were not allowed to congregate for our daily prayers. All the synagogues, and the small and the big synagogues, they used to have small little synagogues, we used to call the shtiebel, that we were not allowed to go and pray.

If somebody prayed, they had to watch in the front of the house and congregate and pray. One day, on Friday afternoon, they said that everybody should come to the other square. In Poland, in the cities, you got small little squares.

Well how large a town was Konin?

We had about 3,500 Jewish people. And the whole town was about 15,000 people.

15,000?

15,000, yeah. And there was 3,500 Jewish people.

That's correct, yes. And nobody wanted to go to the square. But I decided as a little boy, 14 years old, going on 14, I decided to go to the square over there. I thought just the orchestra is going to play, the soldiers are going to march, and I was waiting. They brought up two hostages, two people, one Jewish person and one non-Jewish person. The Jewish man with the name was Schlotzky, and the non-Jewish man was Kurovski.

And they put him into the wall, not knowing what's going to happen to them. All of a sudden, I saw both people get shot. That was the first time in my life I saw people get shot, and the first time in my life I saw blood floated down. I guess that was the start of the beginning, or the beginning of the start. When I came home, and I told my parents and my neighbors what happened, they couldn't believe it.

They said, why? Those people didn't do nothing. See, my father was a hostage too in those days. The reason was they said that some German was shot in the outskirts of the city. And they had to take out two people to be shot to let us know that no German should be touched. That was the biggest lie they could give. Nobody was shot. They put in a fear to the populace from this little city.

We used to live not too far from the German border. Konin is not far from Poznan, Posen, that's not too far from the German border. Now, the provost marshal, what you call the guy what was in charge from the city, came into our rabbi or to the elders. And says, OK. We want so much money from you people. And the elder said, we cannot deliver it, because the people were not rich. They were all working, hard-working people, very few business people that could afford. Most of them hardly made a living.

And I remember, I went around and started to collect money, and deliver to the Germans. There was 1,500 zlotys I had to deliver. And the 1,500, every day, they knew. They knew pretty exactly how much money is in the city. Later on, they said they want all the silver.

I went around and we collect all the silver. I remember I took a sack.

Well, what did you think about all of these things?

Nothing at all. You see, I was young. The question is always asked, what do I think? I knew I wasn't free anymore. I knew that I was not allowed to go to school. I knew that I cannot go to the synagogue, because I came out from an orthodox family. And our city, they were all orthodox, and ultra-orthodox families. That's what I knew, we're not free anymore.

I know we cannot go on Friday afternoon, but we had the chickens and other things to be ritually slaughtered. And we were not allowed to do it either. Nothing. All the freedom of religion was taken away from us, all the freedom of movement was taken away from us. I remember when I used to walk on the sidewalk, in a German SS man or soldier approached us, we had to walk down the sidewalk, because we are not human. We are dogs and dogs are not allowed to walk right away over there.

What did your family-- did your family have any discussion about this?

There was silence. They could not believe what is happening. We did not believe that we are going to be taken out and sent away again. We knew it's going to be a short war. They're going to leave. Nobody believed that so high-cultured nation as Germany can commit these kind of atrocities and genocide.

Was there a state of war at the time between Germany and Poland?

Oh, yes. The war was already over. I mean they occupied Poland.

OK, so when was your town occupied?

In 1939.

What part of 1939?

A few days after the war broke out.

What month was that?

September.

In September. Let's go back a little. Because I want to know a little bit about what life was like for you and your family in Konin prior to all of this. How would you describe that town briefly, and your life there, and your family life, and what was going on for you?

OK. In our city, as I mentioned before, there were all hard-working families. My family was working pretty hard to make a living. My father had to work very hard to support six children, till in 1935, if I'm correct, my brother became a master tailor. Let me explain to you what a master tailor is.

He had to go to a special school to get a diploma that he can keep apprentices, and to teach them to be tailors. At this time, we already did a little better living in our city. I remember that it was times that we at night, you didn't have anymore bread. Because it's not like over here, you go. You came into a home. You had enough bread. You cut as much as you want.

Over there, you had your slice or two slices of bread in the morning, and lunch, and they came home for supper the same thing. And you had to wait for the next day to have your other meal. Because it was a very hard living. But we always had enough meat on the table. Friday night we had a nice Shabbos. In the afternoon, we had our Cholent, and other things. We were a very, very close family, very, very close family.

Now, you're talking about your immediate family?

That's correct.

Did you have other relatives?

Oh, yes. I had three aunts over there, and lots of cousins, and all, they were all working people, all working, making a living.

OK, and this was in Konin?

All in Konin, yes.

Did you have relatives in any other part of Europe at that time?

Yes. We had not far, 10 kilometers was Tuliszkow. I had another two uncles and one aunt and cousins. I had another city the name is Kleczew, not too far away from Konin, another uncle and lots of cousins.

I had an uncle what I never met in Lask not far from Lodz, with lots of cousins.

And these were all in Poland?

All in Poland, yes. And I had also cousins in South Africa and Johannesburg.

And did you have grandparents at that time?

I only remember my grandfather. When I was a small kid, when he used to come in on Friday night, I had three aunts over there. The only thing he came to eat, he came to my mother to our house to eat, the grandfather. That's all I remember.

So this was your mother's father?

My mother's father, yes.

What do you remember about him?

Very little. I remember he was an old man. I remember he was a very pious person because he had his own shtiebel. That's people used to come in on Friday night and Saturday during the day, across the street of the synagogue. They used to have a small shtiebel where people should come to pray. They used to have small shtiebels.

Yeah.

I'm sure you know about it.

Yeah.

And when he passed away, and the Sefer Torahs, I remember was given to our big shul. And all of us in Simchat Torah like to carry, was a small Sefer Torah. Was small. As a young boy, I used to try to carry, and walk around the shul, the bimah.

How old were you when your grandfather passed away?

I was about 11 years old.

OK. So this was three years before the events of the holocaust?

Yeah. Maybe longer.

What were the conditions like for the Jews then? Was it very amenable towards them? I mean was it very accepting, the conditions in Poland prior to the holocaust?

Prior to the war?

To the war, yeah.

I call the 1916, why do I call 1916, the boys what were born in 1916, part of another part of the city's antisemitism was very big in Poland. We used to live in the cradle of antisemitism, Poznan. Posen around over there. They didn't bother us in our city, because we had the youth, 1916 there were tall boys and strong. And they always said, don't you try to come in from the small little cities or small little villages to put up a fight or pogrom. We never had this experience over there.

At school, I had problems. What problems? Because I always left-- they call about busing over here. I say I was bused in 1937 by foot. We used to have a Jewish school. That wasn't just me, but only Jewish kids used to go to the school. We used to start to go where the non-Jewish kids used to go, because it used to be Catholics and the boys were separated from the girls in the same school, but separation.

And in 1936, they said they're going to integrate the Jewish school with the non-Jewish school. They took out six boys. And I was the lucky one to be between the six boys. And we had to walk about a mile and a half, a mile every day to school. And it wasn't so easy. I mean one and a half mile was nothing for a small boy. But in winter, with the clothes and other things, and the shoes, it was cold to go over there.

And we were separated, all the six boys, three boys in one 5A and 5B. And we had some problems because the non-Jewish kids, they used to call us the Christ killers. And over there in the school when you had to get up every time in the morning and say your prayer, and we didn't say the prayer. they crossed themselves. We didn't. They couldn't understand why we are not saying the prayers.

And the teacher used to tell them, or the or the father, the priest used to tell them, they have a different belief. They don't

believe in Jesus. And they don't have to pray. They could not understand. And this didn't stay good with us with them, because you know going to the church, they were always told about you know the Jewish people, about Jesus and so forth. And we had a lot of fights. We had a lot of Jewish kids had to pay off, every time because of the gang. I never did. I always fought. I never did.

And it was a quiet city. They didn't bother us. Because I remember one day, they tried to come into our city from a small village. The 1916 boys, born in 1916, they marched in front of the outskirts. And they say, OK, that's far as you can go. And if you want to fight, you can have it right now, and they turned back. They never came back over here to our city.

We knew everybody in the city, the Jewish people, non-Jewish people. It's a small city.

Now, when you say city, do you mean the ghetto, or that--

No, no. This was I'm talking before the war.

OK, so did the Jews live in different parts of Konin or just one part of Konin?

Like in any part in Europe, or any part when the Jewish people came to the United States, it was not the ghetto. The Jewish people used to live closer to the synagogues, or to the little shtiebels because over there, we didn't drive on Saturdays or on the holidays.

Because of the orthodoxy?

Yeah, seem that's all everybody-- very few Jewish people used to live on the outskirts of the city, very few of them. Where the most of them lived pretty close together, right. I wouldn't call a ghetto, because we used to have a lot of non-Jewish people living also too together. But we used to live very close together, yes, before the war.

When did you first hear about a war with Germany and Poland? Do you remember any of that?

Oh, yeah. Sure. We knew right away in 1939, September the 1st, I guess it was they declared the war, because my brother was in the army in the in those days. And we knew right away. Because right away the first day, I remember like today, the first day, they came in with the Luftwaffe, with the air force, and they bombed it. And all the Polish soldiers thought they're training. The Polish soldiers are training. When they came back, what they did they start to bomb not the city, but the railroad station.

They bombed over there the railroad station. At this time, they came back. They say, oh, no. Till we found out these people were killed that were over there. And I think a few days later, it's wasn't about-- it didn't take five, six days, they were in our city.

Was Konin bombed?

Konin was bombed on the railroad station, not the city.

Just the railroad station. Just the railroad station, yes. Just the railroad station was bombed.

What did you think about that? Still, it's always try to remember and, what can a young boy going on 14 think about? As I mentioned, I knew something is wrong. I always used to question why can I not walk out after 6 o'clock at night. And that's the only thing I was questioning. We did not know what's going to happen to us, still didn't know nothing, because this city was occupied before World War I too by the Germans.

So they had been occupied before?

Yeah, you see, by the Germans till 1918, after the World War II, Poland took it back over. And that was the life, when the Jewish people in our city what want to tell you about my city and the surrounding cities. Because what was going on

all over, I cannot make it up because I want to tell my story and my experience.

Sure. OK.

One day they came into our home and they said you're going to be resettled. Let me go back. You see, when I speak to you, it's like a picture. It's coming to me because that's the way I can express myself.

Just describe the pictures.

Yeah. It was I guess before Sukkot. And we had some geese. How are you going to kill, if you're not allowed? I said I'm going to do it. I took a bicycle, with a basket, two geese. And I drove into Golina, another 10 miles from Konin, and it was over there, a shochet, the guy what was killing ritually. And I remember I didn't go into his house. I don't remember how much I paid him. I guess I paid him a zloty. That was a lots of money, lots of money, a zloty.

And outside he had a little shack. He killed it. He let the blood you know dry out over there, and I put it back in the basket and I was driving. And all on the road you got lots of SS driving up and down, and soldiers, and ask who are you, Jewish or non-Jewish? And I didn't look like Jewish. And I was driving like a happy little boy, with the dirty pants, with torn pants, with torn shirt like I'm a little peasant, you know driving up and down.

But I could not make before 6 o'clock. And I came into the city. And the people know everybody was looking through the window. And I came in like nothing happened to the square, and I drove in. The door was open and I came in. You see we still believed, in our belief what's about the religion, about the upbringing and so far. That's what I used to do.

And they came in, as I mentioned before, so we are going to be resettled. We can only take with us but we can carry under our arms. We walked out very dark, sad faces. I'm sure my mother and my father, my older brothers, still didn't understand what's going to happen. We did not know what's going to happen. We went to the square.

We gathered all on the square and we marched out on the outskirts, where there used to be the Polish military school. They gathered us together over there. And we were waiting at night. Here it comes through the loudspeaker and they says, anybody what got has jewelry, or money, or valuables, should come forward and register, and leave it with them. When we are going to come to a destination, they're going to give us back.

And people believed it, like any good person believes it. And they went over there, and they got a paper. And I said to my mother and my father, how poor you were over there they had lots of jewelry. I remember my mother and everything, a gold ring with chains before going to the shul, to the synagogue, you know to come to show off, and so far.

And I said, no. We're not going to go. Now, it comes midnight. Everybody leaves. And we marched now again, everybody with a little under the arm or under the shoulder, a sack, is marching to the railroad station. As we came to the railroad station at night, they started to push us into the station.

Now, I remember like today that anybody, small kid, at night and you walk you lose the parents. And they used to scream mother, father, where are you? When they heard this, they separate the kids away. They closed the boxcar. I guess our boxcar was built, all the boxcars in Poland was built for 12 cows. I'm sure we brought over there between 70 and 80 people over there in the boxcar, very packed in the boxcar. And the kids were put in another boxcar, as the parents should not know if the kids are going with them or not. You see?

And they counted. And they say, when you come, you're going to come to the destination, if anybody is missing, the whole boxcar is going to be taken out and be shot. And I remember like today, the grown-up people used to stay at the windows. Some windows you could close and some of them you could not close, because they had the barbed wire on it. They used to watch that nobody should escape, nobody should jump through the window and escape.

When we came to the destination, they never counted. We came in. We were traveling for three days and three nights. I remember we came into Warsaw. And Warsaw, said, no. We don't want them. Because they were already crowded.

At this time, we were driving further up to Kielce, Radom, till we came to the city of Ostrowiec. It took us three days and three nights, no food, no water. The boxcar used to be our living room, our dining room, our toilet, our cemetery because people died of heart attacks, people were squashed for hunger. And we used to remember, we used to pile them up on the corner of the box car to make more room.

We came into Ostrowiec, I remember Jewish people were waiting over there from the city. And we went into a big school in front over there. They tried to put us in different homes. And I remember they put us in a home, with two little small rooms, 16 people, three families. Our family consists of eight. And my future brother-in-law, and some other two families, an aunt of mine with the two daughters, and another my future sister-in-law with the family over there, because we were staying together. And the rest of my family, my relatives, I mean were standing in different homes. And this was the ghetto.

People died of hunger, of sickness. I remember as a small boy, I still did not believe what's going to happen. I don't think so too many people believed it, what's going to happen. People died. You looked at them. I remember mothers used to put the smaller of the children used to beg for food, used to keep the small little child close to her breast, but no milk. The biggest killer was typhus, because typhus you had the head typhus and the stomach typhus.

And if the quarantine went through after 14 days, people survived, if not they were dead. In the ghetto again, I used to go out from the ghetto. I really don't remember on which arm I used to wear the armband, the Jewish people used to wear the armband with the star of David. Because very seldom I wore one. If I did wear one to protect myself, I used to roll off my sleeves and keeping something, say it's too hot.

I used to go out and organize, deal with the farmers. My brother used to make pants and a jacket, and go out and bring in some flour, some food. Or I used to go work for the German soldiers helping load bread and organizing. Stealing was a dirty word. Organizing was more sophisticated. And I used to bring home and give to my parents. My parents used to give to my relatives.

I used to do a lot of things going out from the ghetto. One the doctors used to say, they need oranges, oranges and vitamin C for the typhus people and so forth. And they couldn't get no oranges. But I knew. I remember like today I can see the picture. It was a brewery over there, and had a lots of big basements to keep the oranges. In the fall or winter, they put in the basement. But every basement had a little opening in the front, this air can come in.

And I said to my brother why don't you make me a coat, a long coat, with no pockets. If I put the oranges in the pocket they don't stay in the pocket I kind of put it in, and go down, in the thing and I filled up with oranges and I sneaked out. And I brought into the hospital. I remember the hospital. And they asked me, how much do I want. I said, nothing.

I said you asked. You need some vitamin C or oranges. Here's the oranges. And lots of people were saved. About that is true of lots of things in the ghetto. Go out deal with them, wheel with them.

How many people were in the ghetto?

Quite a few people, because I couldn't tell you how many people that was there in the ghetto, because if I would tell you, I would be dishonest. I know there was lots of people, very, very crowded. That's what I can tell you, crowded. And all the rooms, you used to live with-- if you used to live in Ostrowiec, and you had two rooms, one room was taken away from you to bring in another family. OK, or maybe two families over there. Over there in this city of Ostrowiec.

We worked over there till 1942. I had a sister. My older sister, she was blond and tall, and she used to be more out of the ghetto than in the ghetto. In fall of 1942, we felt something is going on. You can feel it. At this time, we said the night before to my sister, we tell her, why don't you leave ghetto and go back to your friend, girlfriend, and stay with her over there till everything is blowing over?

And she says, no. She's going to stay with the family.

So she had a friend outside of the ghetto?

The ghetto, yes.

A non-Jewish friend?

A non-Jewish friend, yes. And she didn't want to go. She says, she wants to stay with the family. OK, fine. What can you do? She didn't want to go.

So was it three years since you had been moved into the ghetto?

Yeah, three years, yes from 1939 to 1942, exactly three years. And they came in, in the morning. You could see the Jewish police the ghetto running around, scared already. So one thing I can be proud of, of my brother, when they came in, they want him to be a policeman because he was a war veteran. We were fighting the war. And he came home. He says, he don't want to be a policeman.

And I, myself, I asked him, why don't you want to be a policeman? Take a look. When you are a policeman, you can organize more, bring lots of food to the family. And he looked at us, and he says, look, if he is going to be a policeman, he will hurt other people. And he didn't want it. He didn't become a policeman.

At this time in the morning, again, they come into our home. And they said, there again, anything what you can carry. You leave, and we start marching.

Now this was the Germans that came in?

Yeah, the Germans. Yeah sure, yeah. Mr. Jäger was the in charge of the Aussiedlung, of the what you call to take out the Jewish people from the city. And we start marching. One brother and one sister, we says don't go. Go up to the attic. But they brought them back later on. They caught it, you know?

As we were marching to the square--

So are you saying that part of your family went, but part of your family didn't?

That's right. Later on, they brought them back, they caught them, brought them back to the square right away. You see, they knew. They knew with the attics. Because in this ghetto used to live Polish people too, not too many. They used to live there. They didn't want them to move.

Everything was worked so with camouflage. They don't worry about every-- still is a ghetto, still the only thing you can go out from the ghetto when you went to work, under-- you had to have your identification card, you're going to work. Or you went with the SS or the police to work. And they brought you back at night and you came back.

And when we went to the big square, I took a look to my left. And I see they're selecting people over there. At this time, I saw my older brother, the next to me, I said, come on with me. I'm going to go to the square. I said, come on. I grabbed him by the hand, and I said goodbye to my parents and relatives. The dark faces, the sad faces, could never see screaming and yelling people, and pushing and everything, not knowing what's going on.

And I came to this selection. They tried to push me and my brother back over there. They didn't want it to go over there. I sneaked through. As I sneak through, they put us in a small little street, in a small little place. We were waiting. And later, we marched in. And I still don't know how fast they built it, a small little ghetto, again small, very small, maybe 20 buildings over there. We were about 1,500 people. And I don't know where my parents went.

They went through the same thing. They went into the boxcars, and they traveled. We were in the ghetto. My brother in a short time decided to run away. He went to the underground, to the partisans, where he fought and he was killed in 1943, February 1943, in a small little city of Kunow. Fought the Germans, did a good job. But to my regret, didn't die



fighting.

We had two partisans in Poland, Armia Ludowa and Armia Krajowa. One partisan who was that they're going to fight together, Jewish, Poles, and other nationalities. And one underground says, no we are going to liberate Poland, Poland by Poles. They came in, not knowing what you call their word-- they knew exactly what is the answers. But they used to live underground, underground. They search underground.

And they said they wanted to check their weapons because they're going to be transferred to another place, to a bigger partisans, more bigger group to fight. And they believed it. As they give away all the guns to be looked over, the machine gun cut them down, threw in a grenade and three of them survived.

Was this the group of the mixed partisans?

Yes.

That's what the polish partisans, the Armia Ludowa.

Oh.

OK. And the three ran away, they were wounded. They came into my cousin who lives now in Canada. He worked for this guy. He never went to camp, my cousin. He worked for the guy in a distillery. And he was taking care of his pigs and his cows over there, and other things. And they came back and they told what happened. That's why my brother was killed over there. OK?

And my cousin later on ran away, also to the underground until the war was over.

Now, I'm not understanding exactly what you're saying. Are you saying that this was a trap, that your brother was killed in an ambush?

The brother was killed on the pretenses by the Polish underground, by the underground, what they said, that Poland can only be liberated by Poles.

OK. This was the other group?

Another group, yes. We had yes.

So the other group that was Polish and non-Jewish, they killed the mixed partisans?

That's correct. Yeah, this was only Jewish partisans, only Jewish. Because you had partisans that used to fight Jewish and non-Jewish together. They used to fight over there against the Nazis. But you had a group with only Poles, nobody else. They were the big anti-Semites. And they came in the pretenses that they're going to-- they had the what do you call the war? How do you say it in English? When you want to come in somebody, you give a no-- oh gosh. OK, that's slipped my mind. And that's why they were killed over there. My brother was killed.

So there's the regret that at least he would be killed fighting the Germans, not to fight, not to stay over there and be caught.

So he was really betrayed by the--

By the Polish underground.

By the Polish underground.

That's correct, yeah. He was betrayed. Yes. And myself, being in the ghetto, they took me out to work. What was my job

was to go in from house to house, and take out all the belongings and load on trucks. And I used to work under an SS man. The name was Holzer.

And we used to go from house to house, and take out the heavy furniture. It was small and thin. I was thinking we used to take out some furniture, that the furniture would put me to the ground and cover me. But I was strong. I had to be strong, never give up. And load different things. First thing, when you came in, you had to knock at the wall. If the wall was hollow, you passed it. If it wasn't hollow, you ripped away the wall, because the people still believed that someday they're going to come back, they can find the valuables or their other things what they hide over there in the wall, and have it.

Because nobody believed they're going to go away and never come back. You see nobody believed it. And sometimes you came into a room. It's unbelievable. That was spick and span. The people, what lived over there, they say, if we going to leave, they cleaned up quick the room, put everything in order. But they're going to come back everything is going to be nice and clean. OK?

And I was going from one house to the other. But I was always trying to push myself to go into where my family used to live. And I came to the room where my family-- can you imagine to come into the family, not knowing they're not over there. No, they're not over there anymore. And I had to take the clothes, my own clothes, and load on the trucks to be sent away. And later on, I found out they went to Treblinka.

And as you know, Treblinka was a camp of no return. But that's what I was told, between 700,000 or 800,000 people died over there. They went right away to the gas chambers and the crematoriums. This was a camp, and that's where they went, that's what the most people went from Ostrowiec, Radom, around the vicinity.

Do you mean your mother and father went to Treblinka?

Yeah, and my all my relatives, my brothers and sisters. Yes, all except one brother who had died in the partisans.

Except for you and your brother that separated yourself from the family?

That's correct.

When you separated yourself out from the family, did you say anything to your own family about why you were separating yourself out?

Nothing. You see, you have to make quick decision. They do not know. They say, say goodbye. I waved goodbye to them. And I moved away right quick, not saying what I'm going or not.

What made you think that that was the thing to do?

I had-- I don't know, some intuition or something what a drive not to go, because I was afraid if I'm going to go to the square, I don't want to go away anymore, be transported or do something. I don't know what the other group was selected to. I took a chance. I took a chance to go over there, and it worked out the right chance. I did the right thing what I did, because not knowing at all.

And the parents looked at me, and what could they say? Hoping that maybe I'm going to be saved or not. Let me come back now to the hardest thing was to come into a room, where you could not breathe, was smelling. Because the mothers left their infant children in the cribs, hoping that the Polish neighbor will hear a small little child crying, come in, and take her out from the crib, and take them into the house.

Because they will not know who the parents are. OK? God knows how long the diapers or the milk was not changed, how long the small infant child didn't eat. Some of them are already dead, and some of them were crying.

Sergeant Holzer says to me, go ahead, and pick it up. I picked up the small child, wet, crying. I can still feel the warmth

in my hand. I can still hear the small little child crying, and I was the most-- I was so scared my body was trembling, because I knew when I'm going to take this child outside, I will have to leave it outside to be shot, because anybody what was caught between the ceilings, between the floors and the attics and the basement, any Jewish person was hiding was taken out in front of their home, and everybody was shot.

You could see the gutters blood flowing down every day, hundreds of people being shot. I was going down, carrying this little child, trembling. As I walked down, he says to me. Sergeant Holzer says to me, the SS man, go ahead. Take it to the building, tall building. And I saw my friends also carrying small little children. I took it to the tall building. And they say, leave it over there and come down to work.

When I left it over there, I was the happiest teenager in my life. Because I said to myself, see? I left this child over there. They're going send it back to Germany. It's going to grow up as a German. They would not know who the parents are and that's all it's about, and I was going on with my work. And some food, I had pretty much food. Because people left the food. I sneaked. I ate as much as I could, because he was watching me that I should not stuff myself.

Sometimes I put it in my pocket, brought it into the ghetto. And I was walking down. I looked up to the tall building. I said, no. My eyes are playing tricks. I looked again. I said, no. It's true. And I could not understand and it's very hard for me to understand until today, those SS people, they were married people. They had their own children. They used to go home at night, played with them, cuddled them, loved them. How can they do this?

Those little children what we carried to the tall building were thrown out through the windows, and they were standing, and laughing, and smiling, and they were taking potshots on the small little children. That was not enough. They were taking bets which child is going to travel faster to hit the pavement. Smiling, like we throw out little balls. They took by the small little feet and they dropped it.

That's what one human could do to the other. If we are complacent and silent, and we say to ourselves, it's not going to happen to me, it's going to happen to the next guy. I can it happen to anybody.

As I do speak to you over here, as I'm interviewed by you people, I do not speak with hate. Because hate breeds hate. That's what Hitler with his machinery and his collaborator started all about. I'm not bitter either. I should be very bitter. I lost my whole family. Relatives, what I can remember, what I can count up to 80. I'm over here to share with you and the future generations my experience that future generations can listen to our holocaust, to the holocaust survivors, to the living holocaust survivors, what one human could do to the other.

If we sit back and say it's not going to be me, it's going to be the next guy, I'm over here to tell the story. It was a holocaust. 6 million Jewish people died, about a million children, non-Jewish people died too.

Were you the only survivor of your family?

I'm the only survivor of my family except the cousin. Of my family, yes. I'm the only survivor.

Of your immediate family?

Yes.

And you're the only survivor of your extended family except for a cousin?

A cousin who lives now in Canada. He was in the underground, and one cousin what ran away to Russia during the war. That's the two cousins, what were before the war living in Poland. And one cousin, as I mentioned before, went for long time ago to South Africa to Johannesburg.

And you counted that there were at least 80 members?

What I can remember, yes. What I can remember, counted down, because my daughter is making a tree, a family tree,

and she wanted to know what I can remember. And that was going on day in and day out I had to live. As a teenager, I had to live day in and day out, see the people get shot, and still I couldn't make no faces, I couldn't tell them-- show them that I'm weak. But always I had hope. I never lost my hope and my belief that someday I'm going to be free.

I remember one night in Ostrowiec, my mother used to look out from the window. Look out at night, nobody. We couldn't walk out. You could see still the Polish people walking on the street. Looked out through the window, was a nice clear night with stars on the sky. And she looked out with a sad face worrying about what's going to be the tomorrow. Maybe they knew about it. I don't know. They don't want to talk about, you see?

At this time, she looked at me and she says to me, Mendel-- my name is to be Mendel. And she looked at me and she says, Mendel, one day we are going to separate ourselves. You're going to go your way, and she is going to go her way. I still don't know what my mother is talking about. And she says, she's not worrying about me. She says, Mendel, when they throw you in a fire, you will not burn. You will always walk out alive.

And she says when you go by yourself and you walk the street, never forget. I never thought about it till after the war, when I was separated, when I was liberated, when I started to reminiscent. Back home, what was going on? How was life? How was a family life? Because I did not have a family life, because I was young.

See, one of us outside to talk about, how nice as a teenager to come home, to be scolded, to be screamed at. You cannot go out and in. I had not this opportunity. I didn't have this opportunity as a teenager to be a free teenager. I was a dead teenager. I did not experience the freedom what all the teenagers have now.

And she says when you walk on the street and a person is approaching you, and he says or she says, I'm hungry, if he don't eat, she don't eat, will die. And I say, OK, mother, he will die. And she looked at me with her eyes I can see it now, looking with the babushka on her head, with the shawl, because it was cold with the shawl. Looked at me, and she says, Mendel, your stomach is full. I says, yes. Do you have a penny in your pocket. I says, yes, mother.

I says, you hear what the guy said? If he don't eat, he's going to die. Give him the penny. I say, mother how can I give away my last penny? Tomorrow I have to buy me a slice of bread and fill up my stomach. And she says to me again, she looks at me with her eyes. And she says to me, you see, don't worry about tomorrow. With this penny, you're saving a life today. Then she stopped.

And I didn't think nothing about it. What do I think about it? OK, she told me the story. And that's what I would like to say is, how our family was again, as I mentioned, a very close family. And I was working day in and day out. Finally, one day when everything was cleaned out, the city was cleaned out--

So you were 17 when you saw your parents for the last time?

16.

16, going on 16. While in the ghetto, I decided it's time to go. I could hear. I could feel something is going to happen. But when, I did not know. At this time, I decided to leave ghetto. But I decided the wrong day. The whole ghetto was encircled with Polish police, SS people, gendarmerie, German police encircled already. At this time, I say, OK. I don't care. I'm going to take a chance.

I took two towels, like I remember like today. I took two towels under my arm. I went to the wooden fence I knocked out two planks of the wooden fence. Here stays a lady. She wants to go too. I said why don't you go first. She says, oh, no. You go first. The reason I told her to go first, now I'm now I'm egotistic already. When she goes out first, and somebody on the other side, she's going to get shot. I cannot go out of this thing.

She says, no. I'm not going to go, she says. At the moment she said this, I walked out. But it was before 9 o'clock at night. I'm walking. Here as a remember, I see the SS man, I forgot his name with his white shepherd dog, looking at the vacation pass, everybody I had my Polish. I forged. I had my [NON-ENGLISH]. And I'm whistling very nicely, nothing happens. I'm walking like, and he didn't bother me because he was busy with the other guy. And now I have to decide.

Should I run away through the fields, or should I go straight? If I go straight up, I'm going to the SS headquarters. Should I go down over there? The dogs are going to bark and they're going to see a Jewish guy is running away. They're going to say Jude, Jude, and they're going to catch me. I say better go to my right, around the cemetery. And I went around the cemetery.

Now I have to decide again to go through the field, through the orchards. And I decided not to. I'm afraid of the dogs. I'm going straight here. I'm hearing halt. [GERMAN], stop. Come over here. And I'm walking, finally they say [POLISH]. That's mean Polish. I have to understand. And I walk closer to SS men. And I would not believe it. Guess who it was over there? Sergeant Holzer, Ausweis, identification card. I take out. He looks at it. And I could not understand why he didn't recognize me, because I was different dressed like a Polish peasant and so far.

And he says, you know, it's close to 9 o'clock. 9 o'clock, you better get home. What it was, I used to work at the Hermann Görling Werke, and the identification pass had Hermann Görling Werke, they used to build a railroad cars. Over there was a steel mill. And I said, where are you going? I say I'm going to my aunt to fix her stove. And I remember like today I went through the little narrow street. I went into it.

Then I came to the field I wasn't worrying about. And here I'm walking through the fields. I had my gun. I had my gun already. And now, if they say come with us, to them, I had no choice to shoot him and run, or I would be caught or do something I don't know today.

And I walk, and I could see a shadow walking. And I say, this walk is very familiar to me. I went into the-- it was high wheat. I went into the wheat, and I saw him, and I knew who it was, Mr. Chmelnik. And he says, where are you going, I ask him. He says he's going to the ghetto. What for are you going to the ghetto? I said, they were hiding with a Polish family, by 18, 19 people. And he says he's going to go because they have hidden money over there you know underground.

I said, don't go now, because the ghetto is encircled. If you go there you're going to be dead. He says, he's going to go. I say, if you're going to go and honest, that's what I told him, I'm going to shoot you. You better get back. And he knew how I was. Because we were born in the same city. You know we were resettled.

A landsman?

Yeah, a landsman, yeah. And finally, he decided, it was more than this. Because I knew he was hiding someplace. Now I have the place where to go. And I'm walking with him. He says, Mike, where are you going? I'm going with you.

He says, you cannot, because we are crowded over there. We have so much money to pay for every head. We have to pay. We don't have it. Finally, I decided not to. I said the only thing I want from you is give me enough money to buy a bottle of vodka. It was not a bottle of vodka, I wasn't drinking anyway. You see, but OK. This will be you know the thing that I got from him. I went away. And I went to a little store over there. But I used to deal with them before, bringing pants and other things from the ghetto.

And I was sitting over there. They were looking for us. Yes, when I walked out from the ghetto, one guy was shot. They brought him back. They buried them. And guess who they thought was shot? Me. He looked like a blond like me. Everybody knew I was shot. I'm dead. I'm buried. OK.

I came into the store, and I was sitting over there. And here I hear cars going up and down. They're coming in and I say, uh-oh. At this time, I couldn't act this way. I put some vodka on me, and everything like a drunkard. And they asked, I could hear they asked the lady over there. Who's this guy? And she says I'm a farmhand over here on the thing. And they grab me by my hair up and down, and I'm dead drunk. I look up I'm dead drunk.

They talk to me. He says, oh he's a drunkard. Leave him alone. They walked away. But I couldn't stay too long. If the husband would be over there, he would say I'm Jewish. And I went away. I knew another ranger in the forest. And I was standing with them for four weeks over there, and everything you know I went to church on Sunday, and I knew all the

prayers, and everything. And they asked the people, the forest ranger where I came from. They say from Krakow. What I'm doing over here?

I'm sent by the German government to buy the lumber, they cut the you know the trees and send back to Germany and so far. But the neighbor, the neighbor the other forest ranger, they never talked to each other. All of a sudden, he came in and he looked at me. He talked to me. He couldn't recognize who I was again. At this time, we started to get a little bit fishy. We were afraid. He says, Mike, you have to leave. To go to his brother, about 20 miles away. And he will try to see that I will get to Germany, and to get to work in Germany.

And at this time, I walked. I came down I see a bunch of guys walking. And I say, oh there's some Jews in town, because I didn't know what happened to the ghetto. You And I walk. And they see me. Everybody knew me, because I was in the underground. Everybody knew me. And they were walking, and they passed me by. And I said, maybe it's an SS man not too far, and they don't want to say I'm Jewish.

I say, hey guys, don't you recognize me? And they look at me. They said, Mike, we were thinking it's a ghost. Weren't you shot? We buried you over there in the ghetto, in the cemetery? I say, no. It was a different guy. I said, what's going on? I say, it's a camp. It's not so bad. We go to work. That's my brother used to work over there, build fish hatcheries. And the guy, Mr. Jäger, the guy, the SS man was in charge on the transportation, now the Jewish people from the city. And he didn't want my brother come back over there.

My brother was so sure that he's going to be selected to go to work for him. No, the new people. And I say, I tell you something. I go back with you to the camp. And I went back to camp, because it was very hard as a Jewish person to run around you know in the Polish villages and so far, if you don't have somebody who will protect you.

What was the name of the camp?

Ostrowiec. I went into camp. Now you worked over there in camp till 1944.

Now, was this a concentration camp?

It was-- you can call it, it wasn't a crematoriums and gas chambers, no. People were shot and tortured, and buried right away in camp, outside camp. But it was a camp. You know, people died. I mean it was a working camp, what they called.

It was a labor camp.

A labor camp. To me, it's a concentration camp. You can call it-- anybody can call it what they want. All the Jews were concentrated over there. OK. It's very hard to me, it's very hard to make a definition between a concentration camp and a labor camp.

Now, you said that you were working for the underground.

Yes.

When did you start working for the underground?

At the time when my brother went to the underground, because I used to buy weapons from a German soldier for good money, and he used to sell me lots of lots of guns and ammunition.

And you used to provide that to the underground?

The underground, yes. Over there. In 1944, the Russians come close to Ostrowiec. And I was working in a brick factory upstairs, where all the ovens, and the heat was up there. We used to make the bricks, special bricks for the mill. And we heard the Russian are coming. We could hear the cannons and so far. One tank came in, one friend of mine ran away. I

didn't have a chance to put on my clothes and go. And they surrounded this camp they. Took everybody back to Ostrowiec, I mean to the camp.

I, with a guy who lives now in Israel, Mr. Neumann, I decided this guy never went to camp. He was a furniture maker, a craftsman. It's unbelievable what he was doing for this guy who was in charge, a German. And he was staying over there in this little factory where we used to work all the time. And I went to him. I said, look, they're taken us back to camp. God knows where they're going to send us.

At this time, we went up, upstairs in the attic. We were hiding. I guess somebody knew about it and they caught us. And I say to Neumann, OK, let's say the last prayer. They're going to take us down and shoot us. And I could hear them talking in German, the SS. We're going to save a few bullets. We're going to take them back to camp. Where did they go, they will never come back.

I guess again somebody upstairs had a look over us. I was 100% sure we were going to get shot. Went into camp, they put us into boxcars. We going to destination unknown again. We're traveling, we're traveling come into Birkenau. We came into Birkenau, the boxcars opened, went down on the ramp. And we were waiting.

As we were waiting, the orchestra was playing.

This was 1944.

'44, the orchestra was playing. And I say to my friends, my god. Take a look. We came into a paradise, clean, the orchestra is playing, welcoming us. Everybody's smiling and laughing. From the other side, the other side of the ramps was the women's camp, FL, the Frauenlager, what they used to call. A half a dozen women came out, and they were waving, on us, smiling.

I ask the prisoners over there, hey, what's going on. Where are we? The answer was a smile. I'm sure they were not allowed. We were waiting. I look to my right. And I saw smoke coming out from the chimneys. And I said to my friends, you know, when they ask me what profession I am, I say I'm a baker. You know, if I'm a baker, and they select me I work in a bakery. I will never go hungry.

OK, we were waiting. We were waiting. Here comes two people, more SS walking up and down, walking up and down, looking in the eyes, I remember I was short and skinny. I stood up on my toes, pulled in my stomach, looked them straight in their eyes. They pass by back and forth, and come back. And still don't know what's going on over there. You see? And now he says, to your right, to your left, to your right, to your left. I was chosen to your right, to my right.

We were waiting. Now, the first group to walk down the ramp was the people to the right. And I walked down with the ramp with my friends, lots of my school friends, walked down over there. one survived, lives in New Jersey. The rest of them, all my school friends, they're all gone.

From the original town of Konin?

Konin, yes. We walked down. We come closer to those chimneys, with the smoke come out. And I say, hey, you don't smell the aroma of bread, it smells like skin. I say, oh, so many prisoners over here. They're killing lots of horses and cows. They don't know what to do with the hide. They're burning the hide. We walked around to our right, and we went into a barrack. And we were waiting.

The door opened. They say, undress yourself. We undress yourself, they give us a towel and soap. We crossed over to the sauna. It was a little room over there with a little small pool. You stepped into the pool before you went in, because they had a disinfectant over there. You walked in. It was burning. Because the most of us had what they call boils, or cut feet. That's nothing. We had come in hot water, you hardly could stand it. The boy was going over our faces and our bodies, cold water.

You went into another barrack they gave you clothes. And I remember like today, they gave me a jacket I could go

around five Mikes. OK, they gave me the jacket, OK, with the pants. They gave me civilian shoes. Some of them got, wooden shoes. They were the Holland shoes. I had the civilian shoes.

We walked in to another camp, not knowing where the camp is all about, what we call the quarantine camp. As we walked into the quarantine camp, we were waiting. You had to stretch out your arm. As you stretched out your arm, they gave you a number, a tattoo number. They gave you the tattoo number. And as they gave me my tattoo, B4990, the SS men came to me. And they says to me, do you know what this number all about?

I said, no sir. OK, let me tell you now. You are being dehumanized. And you're a number. I still don't know what he was talking about. OK, I still don't know. OK. And I was waiting, and waiting, and waiting for my other friends to come. They went through the same procedure, no difference. But answer to go over the other side to the sauna, what they call it Kanada.