

You're on.

Can you start by telling us about your background, your name at birth, some facts.

My name is Leo Laufer. I was born March 15, 1924 in Poland. The name of the city is Łódź. It's spelled L-O-D-Z.

The background of my family is a Hasidic family, very, I will say, ultra-religious.

And what I remember as a youngster is my father was married previously. He had two children, a son and a daughter, which were my half brother and half sister. Then my father married again, and with my mother he had six children. There was an older brother, and then myself. Then there was a sister, a brother, and two other sisters.

The ages were from-- I'm going back to 1937. They were from 15 to about seven at that time.

My immediate older brother died in 1938, and my older half brother married, and he moved out of our house in-- I believe it was 1937 or '36. So, still, we were a family of eight.

Let me go back a little bit before to give you a little outline of how we lived, and the type of living that we lived. Since my father was very religious, his time and devotion was mainly to the Bible, to the rabbi of his sect. And he felt that the living will come like manna from heaven. But manna from heaven did not come.

And recalling, as a youngster, the standard of living even then, back before the war, I would say we were way below poverty level-- if there is such thing as poverty level. We lived before the war in two little rooms. The dimensions are exactly 10 by 10, because I measured it in 1983 when I returned back to Poland. And I was fortunate enough to find the house that I was born still standing.

Without facilities of water, toilet, or cooking facilities. In other words, we did have a stove, but you had to chop your own wood, and we burned wood and coal. The water was pumped downstairs. We had to bring it up two flights from the yard. The toilet facilities are also in the back yard, which you have to go down, downstairs.

But even though that the poverty level was so bad, I believe that the love for the family and God was-- it was very close. I mean, I do not remember at any time that there was any arguments or dispute between my mother and my father, even though that I always considered that my mother, to describe us now in this day and age, that she probably was a slave.

If you can imagine having a family, eight children, a young mother who has to cook, wash every child without any whatsoever facilities, it was just a constant chore from 6 o'clock in the morning probably till 12 o'clock at night. You know, as a youngster, and as children, we do not realize it. We feel that this is a must. A mother must do it.

We never realized that the father had to help, except making a living. And unfortunately, my father was not, I would say, a good businessman or very ambitious enough to go out in the world and fight for a living, because his devotion to God and to the rabbi was more important than anything else in the world.

But I did, I believe, learn very good values even from my father. As poor as we were-- and I remember as youngsters, my brothers-- of course, my sisters never went to the synagogue, because the girls did not go to synagogues in my day and age. Only the boys.

And the synagogue was not as a synagogue as we would describe it now, a beautiful edifice and a beautiful place to go to worship, and have affairs, and dances, and weddings, and so on. It was just a room. It was a room just like any other room, that had a Torah, had benches. And the benches were not padded. They were strictly wooden benches that you sit on. And you had to go with your father, especially on Fridays and Saturday morning.

And I remember vividly that every Friday night and Saturday morning, after services, which were about 12, 1 o'clock, he used to bring home a person of less deprived circumstances even as we were. He was a man-- he brought him home for many, many years, as I recall. He was an elderly man who did not have a family.

And my father, he used to sit him to the right side of him. He felt that this is a privilege and a honor to have him next to him. And if I recall, he was a very big man. And we, as children, were always worried that he is going to eat up everything [LAUGHS] and there will be nothing left for us. But I remember a verse that-- a little saying that my mother used to say. She said, if there's going to be enough for 10, there's going to be enough for 11.

And I believe I learned certain values, that it was worth bringing it over to me and my children. Even though that you don't have anything, there is always room to give somebody else who is less privileged.

Let me give you a little background of my country that I remember, even though that I was not involved in politics or I did not know what politics are. We lived in a very, very unfortunate, poor neighborhood.

I remember the first time, in 1937, where the first little notes on telephone poles-- or electrical poles, rather. I don't think-- I don't remember seeing really a telephone. I'm sure they probably had some kind of devices, but we were not familiar with. We saw some little signs printed, Żydy do getta, which means, in English, "Jews, go to the ghetto."

And ghetto to us, you can refer to the Bible that the Jews lived in a separate place in Syria, or in the Middle East, or somewhere else. But being a youngster of 13 then, I did not feel it. I did not realize it.

But I did know, as I grew up, and when I got to know anything about my country, I always felt that I was a second-class citizen-- not me, but the rest of the Jewish people too. That is an inner feeling in you that you were not wanted in this country. You always heard Żyd, Żyd, Jew, Jew, and all this kind of thing. But we did not, I guess, believe that this thing is going to draw to this extent when the war broke out, what really would happen to us.

And we kept on living, we kept on fighting, and we kept on making a living. And it was very hard to live under the circumstances. And of course, this probably brought the Jewish people then in Poland to the type of living that we lived. And let me give you an example on what I mean by it.

My father would not let me and my brothers and sisters go to a public school, which there were public school, and you could have attended, because the abuse that you would take, being a Jewish boy, and especially of the type of kids we were-- I wore a Jewish type of clothes when I was a youngster. I had payos-- little curls under my ears. I wore a special type of hat which was identifying me as Jewish. And with this kind of attire, to go to a public school would mean suicide. So my father did not send his children and my sisters and brothers to a Polish school.

Of course, we were deprived of, also, of learning the language of Polish in a very proper way. But we did learn Jewish-- Yiddish-- which was the common language, especially in Poland. And I say that because I reflected it later on what actually happened to me as the only survivor of the rest of the family.

And as I told you, in '37 you could feel it more. We could also feel it when the first transport of Jewish people from Germany, which came into Poland, and the Polish-Jewish gmina, which is community, had actually to resettle the German, some German-Jewish people. And of course, if you read in history, Germany was an entirely different society as Poland was. They were more intellectual. They were more educated than us in Poland because of the reasons that I outlined. And it was very hard for them. But we did find room for them.

And then we felt that something is happening in Germany. We did not know what actual would happen in the future, and we kept on living. And of course, then came 1939.

In 1939, I remember it real, very, very vividly. I lived, as I told you, in a very, very poor neighborhood. The landlord of the building was a Pole of German descent. And it just by thinking of it, I recall even the name.

His name was Otto Weingold. It's a typical first and second German name.

And it was a four-story brick apartment building. I already told you the facilities in the building. And there was some Jewish people live there, mostly Jewish people, really, except for a few Poles. And some of them-- we felt they were all Poles.

But in 1939, as soon as Germany took over Poland, and Łódź, the city that I was born and lived in when the war broke out, was a very industrial city. It was a city. The population had about a million people. The Jewish population at that time in 1939 had about 25% of it-- 250,000 people-- which is really unheard of percentage-wise in the city. But since it was an industrial and especially textile city, mostly the Jewish people were involved in it.

And when the war broke out, and Germany took over, I remember so vividly we were staying outside this building. And the street was Dolna 4. It's spelled D-O-L-N-A. I was born there, and I lived until I was 15, until 1939-- till 1940, rather.

And all of a sudden, from the building, neighbors that we have known all our lives put swastikas on, and they were acclaimed as what we call Volksdeutsche. A Volksdeutsche is a Pole of German descent. Maybe his grandparents were Germany, or his great grandparents, or his uncle, whoever. They had some ties from Germany from previously. And suddenly the landlord, plus some other neighbors, became Volksdeutsche.

And of course, what was going on in Germany we heard. We were absolutely scared to death.

But we lived September 1939, when the war started. And of course, right away, they started with the Jews in Łódź. Since my father was so religious, and, as you can imagine, he wore a beard, and he wore his long robe, really identifying him as a Jew, he was scared to death to go out of the house. He stayed in his house day after day after day without going out, trying to do anything.

And of course we were very poor, as it was before. Now this tragedy with the Germans taking over, my father not doing anything, and nothing coming in, and just waiting for the little coupon to go downstairs and stay in line at the bakery for you daily bread rations, was a tragedy in itself.

And I remember so vividly because we lived, as I told you, on Dolna 4. And across the street, Dolna 9 was a bakery. So it was very easy for us, especially between our children, to go down early, like 11 o'clock at night, and start staying in line until they opened up the next morning, that we shift, my brother and myself, my sister, and so on.

And you could see-- and it happened to us too-- where the Polish people used to pull the Jewish people out of line. And they said, you can die. You don't need to stay in line. You don't need bread. And they called you by unbelievable name, because now they really had the power, because the Germans were with them. Now they finally had the opportunity to really unleash what they really meant by Żydy do getta.

And of course it hurts you to see your own people that you lived with all your life. They lost their country, and still their hatred toward the Jews was unbelievable.

When the war broke out-- I believe even before that-- I changed my attitude on life a little bit. I think-- I call it something. Maybe I was the black sheep of the family, and this is why I survived.

I felt that I couldn't go on this kind of living. I wanted something better in my life. So I cut off my curls when I was about 14 or 15.

I remember, I had a friend of mine, David Lemberger. And already he used to go out, when I was 14, with some young girls, as friends. We used to go out. And I used to go out with his sister, Bella.

Where do you go? They had movies. They had places to go, but you had to have money. I decided to go to work, right, when I was around 13 or 14.

I made some money, not a whole lot, but I had enough to probably go out maybe for a dinner, or maybe go out to a movie. And I wanted a little better things in life. And I remember I went and bought me a short jacket with a different type of hat, with a different pair of pants so I wouldn't be so recognizable as Jewish.

Of course, the tragedy would have been, if I would have kept this new attire in my house, it would have been thrown out immediately if my father would have detected it. So I kept it at David Lembergers' house. And whenever we went out, like on a Saturday night, I went over to his house, and changed my clothes, and we went out. And this kept on until almost when the war broke out.

When the war broke out, I felt, if I will not take what we call in English "the bull by the horn," some of my family is going to definitely die of starvation in the house. And I then decided to do something when they closed the ghetto. Now you must remember, September, the war-- the Germans took over Poland from September of '39 until May of 1940. It was about almost eight or nine months.

And starvation in the ghetto was not in the ghetto, but even before the ghetto. It was unbelievable. There still was some food that you could buy. The prices were enormous. The rations that the Germans gave you was, really, was absolutely nothing. And it was horrible.

But then, when the ghetto closed, I felt at that time that we were the most fortunate people. And let me tell you why I'm thinking this way. As I told you, we lived in the poor area of Łódź, which the area was called Baluty. It was the part of a city where you really have poverty. Like in any city, like in Dallas, or Houston, wherever you are, there is a certain part of the city where there is poverty, and this is where we lived.

When they closed the ghetto, the Germans took the area of Łódź, where the poverty-stricken area actually was, to herd in the 250,000 people to the area where really poverty was. And we were fortunate, as I said. We did not have to move. We lived in the ghetto before there was a ghetto, not even realizing that we were going to wind up down there. So that's the reason why I said we were fortunate.

The second thing we were fortunate, I believe the German governor had some kind-- the German government had a certain quota of how many people could live in a room-- family or whatever. And since we were then eight-- my brother already moved out a couple of years ago, my other older brother died, but we were still eight in the family. So they felt that the two rooms, 10 by 10, is sufficient, that we did not have to take in additional people, because some people did, if you would have three rooms, and it would be eight people, you would have to give up one room and take in an additional family. So we remained just the way we were in the two room with our family. So we didn't have to move, and this was the most fortunate thing.

Furthermore, the ghetto was surrounded. The back of our building where I lived, Dolna, was actually the end of the ghetto. On the other side of our back of the building was where the Christians lived. And of course, it was surrounded by all barbed wire. And you had guards every few hundred feet. It was really a big concentration camp with barbed wire. And then they had gates where you can go from one side of the ghetto to the other side of the ghetto.

When they closed the ghetto, as I told you, the poverty was so bad. I came up with an idea, and I had also a feeling, if I will not pursue it, that very soon I will see some of my brother or sister, or maybe father and mother die, actually, from starvation. I was a little different kid already, as I told you. So we used to play soccer in the streets. And we had some other friends-- not only Jewish. We had some gentile friends too.

I had a very good friend. His name was Joseph Grabowski. And he was my age. And we played together soccer. He was a good kid.

And I remember he used to go over to their house sometime, even before the ghetto. And I recall, even in 1938 I believe, or '39, before the ghetto, that his father was already serving in the Polish Army. And I had never called his father whatsoever. I remember his mother very, very well.

And I came up with an idea when I was over one time, when the ghetto was already closed. I slipped across the barbed wire from the ghetto toward the Christian side, and I went over to their house. It was, like, the next street. And I came up with an idea, talking to his mother. I said, Mrs. Grabowska, I have an idea that

you could make a lot of money, and you can also help us survive.

It was a tremendous risk for her to take. It was also a risk for me to take. And I felt this is the only way, if she consented to, that this would be the way to survive.

She consented, and we started what we would call in English smuggling food across from the Christian side to the ghetto. Now this is not smuggling on a broad, broad scale. I mean, I'm talking about smuggling one pound of butter across the barbed wire one day, and maybe the next day a couple of loaves of bread, and maybe the third day something else-- a food products. Everything food, nothing else but food products.

And I felt that if I can get a pound of butter, I can sell maybe 3/4 of a pound, get a tremendous amount of money, pay her maybe five, 10 time on what she has paid for it, reward her. And by the same token, I can take some of the butter and exchange it for bread or whatever. There was nothing that you couldn't get.

But you have to pay dearly for it. People were given away diamonds for a loaf of bread. This is how horrible it was in the ghetto.

And to tell you the real truth, that from around May, maybe two weeks in the middle of May, until October of 1940, from May of '40 until-- on October 1940, that my family was probably the best-fed family in the entire block. I felt it, because we had everything that we did not have before. We and my family had more food in the ghetto, in the five months, than we had before the war.

We never went hungry. My father didn't have to go outside. My brothers and sisters stayed home. And I did the real work.

What were the risks that you took?

The risk was very easy-- to get shot very quickly. But I guess I didn't know any better. I was 15 years old, and I felt a strong urge of survival, and I felt if I don't do it, somebody will die.

And you got to understand the circumstance in the house. My father couldn't do it, and he wouldn't do it. It would be impossible for him to take the risk just to go out of the house, because the Germans would have caught him and cut his beard, or whatever they could have done to him.

My immediate older brother died in 1938. I was the head of the house already. Then I had another sister, and she couldn't do it. Then I had a little brother. And I was only 15, so he was 11, so he couldn't do it. There was only little bitty children. And I felt this man of the house, like I wanted to tear it down, the world.

And I did. I became a real fighter. And I believe at that time I felt so good for what I did, to bring the food. And we ate so beautifully. And we didn't have to worry, to stay in line and wait for this card for ration to get this bread. We didn't need it. We really didn't need it. We had enough.

And of course, it didn't last too long. October of 1940, I was approached by a young man-- unfortunately, Jewish too. And he evidently was probably for a while tracing me to see that I am the smuggler, and I am doing well. And when I took a package across the barbed wire, when--

And you got to understand, it wasn't easy for the Christian lady to throw packages. The way she threw a package-- let me try to describe it to you so you'll get it. It's not a easy task. She usually used to take a dorozka. A dorozka is a horse and buggy, that you used to transfer passengers, like a taxi, but it was a horse and buggy.

And she used to have this big stole over her. Like in Europe, they wear the big stoles. And under the stole she kept a little package.

And evidently she must have bribed or paid this dorozka too, because the dorozka always came just about a foot away from the barbed wires. And she was watching the guard. When the guard changed to go the opposite direction, she took this package and just slipped it across on a predetermined way, because she

used to send me notes through the barbed wire with a little stone wrapped with a little twine around, a little note, telling me I will be at this particular street around 12 o'clock. And I used to be there, try to watch the approach. And sometimes she might have gone three, four time back and forth because the guard was not stationed at the proper way. And then, when the guard, turned she threw the package, and I was there to grab it and run.

Sometime it wasn't easy. I was shot at one time, but the bullet didn't hit me, so I survived. And this was going on, as I told you, for five months.

Then, at that time, this youngster approached me. It wasn't a youngster. It was a man, much, I would say, in their 20s. And as I grabbed the package, he came right in front of me on the inside in the ghetto. You must understand, on the inside the ghetto, for the only ones that we were scared of is for the Jewish police, because they could take you to the police station, maybe not give you the kind of penalty that the Germans would, but we were scared.

And this fellow approached me. And the wording that he said, he said that he wants to be a partner. And I did not understand, really, what kind of a partner. And I said, what did you do to become a partner? I said, what risk did you take, and so on.

And it was plain English-- I mean, plain Polish that he told me. He said if I'm not going to be a partner, next time, when I catch you, I'll turn you over to the Gestapo.

And then it irritated me. And I said you go and do what you want. And little did I realize that one Jewish person would have the courage to go to the Gestapo and turn me over-- not to the Jewish police, which I wasn't so scared, but turn me over to the Gestapo.

Well, a couple of weeks later, it was another incidence. This was already in October. And sure enough, the same man approached. And I was, I guess, very arrogant. And I told him, I don't need a partner. You can do what you want.

And sure enough, he did. He did go to the Gestapo. He told them who I am. He had my address. He had my name. And a few days later, the Gestapo did come to my house.

I remember very well. It was past midnight. And we heard knocking on the doors-- I mean, real rough. And my father opened the door. And the first thing they did, they hit my father, and he fell right across the room. And they ask for Leibek, which was my-- Leibel, my Jewish name, my first Jewish name.

Of course, I got up, and they hit me. And they said, put your pants on. And I put my clothes, whatever, I had quick. And they took me in a car. And they did take me to the Gestapo, which was across the street from the big church.

Everybody knew-- this was actually located-- you could go in from the ghetto because they had the station down there.

And immediately, the same night, I was severely beaten. And all they wanted me to tell them is who was the supplier, who gave me the package. Little did I realize-- and I thought I'm going to got myself out of it telling him that you got the wrong man, and I didn't smuggle, and so on. Little did I realize that in the Gestapo they called this man who told me I wanted to be a partner, confronted him at the Gestapo in front of me. And they asked him, is this the man who got the package? And sure enough, he said yes.

Then I didn't know what to say. And to this day, I don't know who it was, I don't know his name, I've never met him before in my life, and I don't know what happened to him.

They kept on beating me, and wanted to know where. And I think prior to that, people have warned me. They said, Leo, if you get caught, the best thing is to keep silent and don't tell them from-- because you're going to implicate the party who gave you, and they want to help you. But if you keep on saying no, you're a youngster, and maybe they'll let you go and be all right.

Well, this went on for almost two weeks. Every night, they used to take me, like in a isolation in the basement, and beat me up unbelievably, and telling me that they got to know where they come from. And I kept on saying no, and he kept on the same thing, until I almost got immune to it. And I told myself, I'm not going to tell them. And I did not.

After that-- of course, the beating was getting worse and worse every day-- I wound up in a hospital. They were beating me so much that I needed an operation. Excuse me to tell you, but this was on my behind.

And I came to the hospital. And I remember so vividly that at the hospital, at the door, there was a Jewish policeman who was guarding me like I was a vicious criminal. And he was guarding me so I wouldn't run away.

Of course, the operation was over, and I survived. And then they sent me back to the Gestapo, and from the Gestapo they sent me home, and everything was over.

When I came home, which was about almost three weeks later, I saw exactly what I was expecting will happen if I wouldn't smuggle. The family was like skeletons. It was unbelievable. My father still didn't go out the house. Yes, he did go out of the house, and they beat him up. They took him. Every day they used to come and take him down and take him out of the city or somewhere to dig ditches and so on, then bring him home. He was like a skeleton.

And my mother, of course, my poor mother was almost dead. And the brothers and sister. It was a tragic thing.

Then I found out what happened, actually, after when they took me, because I didn't see the family for almost three weeks. So they told me they came back, and they searched the house, and they took everything of valuable that they had. Because in the five months we accumulated certain things. We had a lot of food, and this and that. Everything was gone. They took everything out.

And two weeks later-- and then, when I saw all this happen, I said to myself, should I try all over again or should I give up? I mean, I had just going through such a trauma for three weeks.

Believe it or not it didn't take two days. I took a little stone with a little note and threw across the barbed wire to Mrs. Grabowska. And Grabowska didn't know what happened to me for the three weeks. I told her-- I didn't want to tell her anything. And they didn't do anything to her because I didn't tell her who gave me the package.

And she consented. She say, sure. And we started smuggling again. And it started very good for a few weeks.

And then it didn't last too long-- two or three weeks. And they selected people for the first slave labor camps to be shipped out. And of course, I guess I must have been on their black list or whatever, and I was selected to be sent out with the first transport from Łódź to a slave labor camps.

There is nothing I could do, because this was the German-- actually not the German, but the Jewish police came for you, and they put you in a quarantine somewhere. From there they ship you on cattle cars. And we came. We arrived at the first camp, which is called Ruchocki Młyn.

Can you describe-- just go back and describe the cattle car and the transport from Łódź?

The transport from Łódź, we went through like a quarantine. And they told you all the most significant thing of what's going to happen to you. You going to a Arbeitslager. Arbeitslager is labor camp.

That you're going to go to work. You're going to be rewarded very good. You're going to have a lot of food. Your group is going to go to a farm, which you're going to have a lot of food. It's around near Poznan, they told us.

And of course, the transportation as it was during the war, I'm sure you've heard of it, was strictly cattle cars. They put us-- I think there was one car and they put practically all of us in. There was about 200 of us.

And we traveled from Łódź to Poznań, which is a pretty good distance. I don't know exactly, but I would estimate 150 mile or 200 miles.

We had cans of water with us. We had some kind of buckets for toilet facilities. And we traveled just like this.

It wasn't really so horrible, because we were all youngsters. I was 16. I was the youngest one and the smallest one. I was a little shrimp. I probably didn't weigh over 90 pounds, or maybe a hundred at the most. And the rest of them were big kids, up to 25-year-old men.

And we came to Poznań. From Poznań we got out at the railroad station. And from there we had some trucks, like farm trucks. And they put us in. And we went from there to Ruchocki Młyn, which was on the outskirts of a little town called Wolsztyn.

Ruchocki Młyn really is not a city. It was the name Ruchocki Młyn. Ruchocki, I don't know what it is. It must be a name. But Młyn is actually, translated in English, it's mill. What it is. The place was a mill where we worked.

And when we came to the mill, it was really-- the reason I know so vividly now, because all my life, from 1940 until 1983-- 43 years-- I was dreaming, and fantasizing, and thinking, and maybe exaggerating about this camp. And I was telling my children and my wife, who is born Dallasite and it's hard for her to comprehend what kind of camp it was.

And I myself got almost to a stage that I didn't believe myself. I thought maybe I am fantasizing, or exaggerating. Maybe I'm dreaming that there was such a camp called Ruchocki Młyn, until 1983, when my wife and my younger daughter, Lisa, really persuaded me.

Daddy, you must go back to Poland. You must search for some roots or something. Let's go, let's see if it's all that what you have told us sometime. And believe me, what I told them is probably not 1,000th of 1% of what really transpired.

And I was persuaded. I didn't want to go to Poland. I had no respect for the government. I just didn't feel like I lost anything down there. I know I was a second-class citizen, but I was persuaded, and I went back. And this is why I so vividly can describe the camp now to you as I saw it in 1983, and remembering what happened in 1940.

You come into the camp. In fact, it was even-- something happened. I guess you might call it a miracle. We came to Warsaw. And from Warsaw we rented a taxi.

And I wanted to see four things, really, before I went to Poland, is to see the grave of my brother who died in 1938. I wanted to see if, by sheer miracle, if Mrs. Grabowska is still alive. And if she is, she would be about 75 to 80 now.

The third thing, I wanted to see if the house that I was born in is still there, which would be remote, because I was born 60 years ago. The home was already-- was then maybe 40 years old. So it's impossible.

And I also wanted to see this Ruchocki Młyn. This is so vividly to stand up in my mind that I wanted to see. And sure enough, we traveled, and we went back to Ruchocki Młyn.

Let me describe you the first camp when we came then in 1940-- not now. We came into the camp. It is actually situated in the woods. There is no such thing as a city, Ruchocki Młyn. It's a one farm house, a big farm, with a barn, two big barns, plus a little house on the left where this farmer lived. And incidentally, this farmer was also, as I told you before, a Volksdeutsche, a Pole of German descent, with the swastika and



with a rifle.

When we came then to the camp in 1940, the trucks came. They unloaded us. And we saw this big barn to the right, plus the other barn straight out, plus the little house to the left where this Volksdeutsche lived. And between the house and the barn there was barbed wire. And there were three other guards, and all-- they're all civilian.

Now I want this really for record, that from 1940 until September or October of 1943 we did not at any time see any German guard with us in all the camps we were. Only when we came to Auschwitz in October of 1943 did we see the German soldiers, the German guard.

Until from '40 until '43 there was all Poles of German descent. They were all Volksdeutsche. We never had saw any German guard at all.

We came into this camp, and we were lined up. And try to think of us. We were all youngsters, civilian, coming absolutely with no baggage at all, just the clothes that we had on ourself, whatever we could grab when we were called, and that was it.

Then these four guards, these Poles, told us in Polish to go to this other barn straight out and get some shovels. So we went down there and we got shovels. And they told us to go into this barn. They opened the gate, and they let us in through the barbed wire.

And when we came in, it was almost like a joke to us, that my gosh, this is not the place we're you're going to be here. They just want to give us a hard time.

So they told us to clean up the manure from this barn. And honestly, we could smell it, and see it with our eyes, that the cattle is probably out in a field, because there was nothing there. It looked like the cattle's just left.

And then, when we cleaned it out as good as we possibly could, without any water or anything, just whatever we could get together with the shovels, and they told us to go back to the other barn. And there is plenty of straw. And we brought straw, and we laid it out in this first barn right on the cement where we just cleaned the manure out.

And the smell was unbelievable. It was horrible. And then they told us that this is where we're going to sleep.

So you're under the gun. We didn't want to fight back, but we couldn't understand what made them do this thing for us to sleep this night.

So we were trying to philosophy and give them answers that we didn't even know. We thought maybe the barracks that we supposed to be in are not ready. We'll sleep in here one night. It won't kill us. To tell you the truth, we wound up staying down there until March of 1941-- almost six months.

The tragedy in this camp I think cannot be minimized. I have been in many, many camps. I've seen gas chambers. I've seen all kind of torture. But this camp was, I believe, the worst that human being can really instill on others.

And the reason for it is, I want you to remember, there wasn't any gas chambers there. There was not any random shooting. There was not anybody come over, and grab you, and take a gun, and really shoot you. We died like flies down there. When we left the camp in March of 1940, we had less than 100 left.

Let me give you a little illustration, if you can really absorb it, on what we went through. The area that we worked, the farmer had a mill. He was grinding his corn or whatever, flour that he had. The mill was a typical mill, as you could possibly see if you would go to Holland, a mill which operates by water. The blades picks the water up, and it picks it up from the-- the water runs, and it picks it up, and the mill runs it, and he grinds the corn.

The reason we were sent down there-- and later on, I realized that why we were sent down there at the latter part of 1940, because the weather, especially around in Poznan, is much colder than it is in the city that I came from. The weather down there could probably reach in the winter time between 10 to 20 or 25 below zero.

In the summertime, we couldn't work down there because the turf was shaky. You would actually sink in. So you had to work it when the turf was actually frozen or real cold, that you can actually cut in with the shovel.

And our work was to straighten up this Dojca River, which is around down there, so the water could run smoothly instead of crooked. The river was going a little crooked. So we straightened up for quite a few miles this area.

And if you can imagine, working in this kind of condition without any gloves, without any winter clothes whatsoever, just the things that we had on our back. So people started dying. And I think the main cause of death was there was from hygiene.

And let me give you what I mean by hygiene. There were no facilities of taking a shower. There was no facilities of even washing yourself, less a shower. We slept in this barn for almost six months.

The first week we were confronted with lice, which we never got rid of in the six months. Our pastime was really, I hate to say it, but I must, is scratching. And the lice were actually penetrating our skin. It was unbearable and unbelievable.

The only water facility that we had is in the morning, two of the boys used to go to the river and take a tin container with two little ears on it, and get the water, and bring it to the front of the gate. And everybody was privileged to take a little water with their two hands and wash your face. This was the extent of hygiene for almost six months.

Toilet facilities was in the back of the barn against the barbed wire, right in a open space, no facilities whatsoever.

And there was a little kitchen in the front as you come into the gate, and as you came in from work you got your bowl of soup. Of course, around 12 o'clock, when we worked, we got a bowl of soup, and in the morning we got some what I call ersatz coffee, or some coffee made up-- I don't know--