

Good morning, Mr. Schiff. My name is Irv Geidel. And this is Heidi Hampel. And on behalf of the Holocaust Center of Dallas, I want to thank you for agreeing to join us for this interview.

It's my pleasure.

OK, the first thing I want to ask you about is where you were born, what your name is, where you were born, and where you were born in Europe?

Well, I was born in Krakow, Poland. It's one of the oldest cities in this country, on December 20, 1918.

OK, and your full name is William Paul--

William Paul Schiff, yes.

William Paul Schiff.

That's the way I was named. I have two names.

OK.

How many were there in your family?

I have parents, one brother, and one sister. My parents, just like me, they married young.

How old were your parents when they married? Oh I think beginning 20s, or not even 20. I think my mother was a teenager, just like my wife when I married her, she was a teenager. I don't think I was barely 20.

And how old was your wife?

When I married her?

Yeah.

17.

OK. And you said that there were three children in your family. Where did you come in the line?

I was the second. I was the middle child.

You were the middle child.

My sister was the oldest one. Then I was about 1 and 1/2 younger than her. And then I have a brother which one was 1 and 1/2 years younger than me. We were just three kids. And that's all my parents had. And we were raised together.

OK, and I want to just ask you some questions now, so that I can find out what life was like before the war for you and your family in Krakow. For instance, what did your father do for a living?

Well you see, when war broke out, my daddy was somewhere on 40s, 40, 42, or 44. My mother was about a year or two younger than him. My dad was a barber, beautician. He has his own shop. As far I was remembering when I was a kid, he was on his own. When I was little, I remember he was doing a job. But when I was starting to be a teenager, he was on his own.

He had his own shop?

Shop. And when I was a boy, about around 13 when I finished my public school, I went to work, to help out the family. I was the only one in our family who was capable to work. And I was kind of very good in making money. I don't know how should I say it.

You had a good head for business.

Well, I work in this time, not in business. I was too young. But I enjoyed it, and then they needed help.

So what kind of things did you do to make money?

Well, when I finished school, I took a job in a store, repairing bicycles. And in evening, I used to go to high school. I mean I didn't-- I was kind of occupied all the time. Because I used to work eight hours in the morning. And after school I went home for an hour, and evening to school for four hours.

Well, how old were you when you first started working outside of the house, and making money?

14 years old.

14 years old.

Not even 14.

Yeah.

Now you said that you were the one.

The only one child who really worked.

OK, why didn't your sister work?

Well, she was the oldest child. She was the only girl. And she was the only granddaughter my grandfather has. And they spoiled her. And she was a very smart girl as far as I remember. By 20, she has already a degree of pharmacist. She was jumping three, four grades each year. She was an extremely smart girl.

And she had a degree in pharmacy?

Pharmacy.

Drugs?

At about 20 or 21, or 22 when the war broke out. That's why she got--

How many years was she older than you?

1 and 1/2 years, and she was kind of the idol of my parents. She was smart. She used to play theater when she was a girl, about six, seven years old. I remember when I was a kid, I used to be jealous of her because they favored her, because she was the only one girl, and she was the smartest. The smartest, she was bright. She in business, I don't know. But in school, she was very bright.

So she was able to achieve a lot.

In school.

In school.

Yes.

And you were achieving a lot outside of school.

Just working, yes.

OK.

Well, as a matter of fact, when I was a boy 14, I started working to help out my parents to send her to college.

And she went to college in Krakow?

Well, yeah. In Europe in this time, high school, you paid like college really. It was very expensive.

OK.

And I was the one who was helping. Now, my younger brother was just a quiet-- well, let me put it this way. I was ambitious and my sister was ambitious. But this boy was different. He was just a quiet boy following parents, following everybody.

And how many years were you older than him?

1 and 1/2 year.

So there was a year and a half between all of the children.

Approximately, about one month's difference. We're about same age raised together.

Could you describe for me, what was Krakow like? What kind of a town was that? What do you remember about that?

Well, the ways I used to remember it before war, but I changed my mind now after being there back after 40 years, this is a very historic city. Which each time was a war, they give it up without a shot. They have a castle, historic castle, where they believe a dinosaur used to live, just as history, and all Polish kings used to live in centuries back. Of course, like they taught us in school, Poland used to be, was a big country, and has a big history.

Which I didn't know, because I was born after the first world war.

In 1918.

'18, the war ended in 1918, and I was born after the war.

Did your father serve in the army?

No, not exactly. They never took him. He was in this, he was just like I would say, like you have a doctor today. He was a felczer, he was a barber. And he used to know how to-- they used to have medical-- I don't know how to express myself in English. He used to have many ways in curing people, like they used to put this baÅ,,ki, I don't know how you say it in English.

Bunkers?

No, I don't know how you say it in English. And my dad used to good in it. And they kept him back to help out just like a nurse. He was better than nurse. He was good in it.

OK.

So he was in war. He was in army, but he never saw the front. He was always in back of it. That's the way I remember he explained it to me when I was a kid.

OK. So he was like a medic, a medic aid.

Medic aid, yes, yes exactly. Just I didn't know the expression.

OK.

And they never sent him in front, they kept him behind when they brought their sick people or wounded people. Then he took care of it.

OK.

What I'm telling you about it, it's just ways he explained to me when I was a kid.

Sure. I understand. What was Krakow like? Was it a big town, small town?

Oh, in this time in Poland, used to be the second or the third largest city in the country. And it has about 180,000 population. But the life was beautiful. We children, we didn't have much, but we have a beautiful life, where I was a very advanced boy.

When I was 15 years old, already I was well dressed. I used to go out. I used to be on my own. The life I used to like, I never liked sport. But I enjoyed nightlife, dancing, parties, things like this. And I was good in it and I enjoyed it.

So you were successful socially?

Socially, yeah.

You had friends, and did you have girlfriends?

Well, not one, I used to date a lot when I was a kid. But I was too young.

Did you live in a ghetto? Was there a ghetto in Krakow? Yes, the ghetto started in 1940.

I mean when you were growing up and you were 14. Did the Jews live--

No. There wasn't exactly like a ghetto. It was just like you would say South Dallas now, for the Black people or like the Harlem in New York. There was a part of town where the Jews used to live.

So there was just a section, a Jewish section.

A Jewish section, Kazimierz we used to call it. That's where I was raised.

But you didn't have to live there?

No, I didn't have to.

People lived there by choice?

By choice, right. Exactly, my parents lived in at this time, we didn't know much. We didn't travel a lot. As far I was until

war broke out, I was about 19, as far as I was, was but around 100 kilometers, about 60 miles away from my home. We never travel. We could never afford it.

Matter of fact, my dad was the one who used to be better situated than the whole family. And we couldn't afford more. Can you imagine what a life was? They was a section of people who were really poor, who didn't have much, 100 zloty, just like \$100 today was a fortune then.

And I didn't know much, the way I was raised. And from the time I was a kid, 14, I have the ability to go out and work. I always made more money than also my friends working. Always kind of ways I sneak in, and sneak out, I have ability for it. I don't know, how would I say it.

Like at this time, some adults used to work for 25 bucks. We used to have zloty, but I would say bucks that you understand a week. And I used to make 50. I have uncles which were in their 20s, and they were not even making the money I did, working. But I always sold. I always have ability for it.

OK, now which uncles were they? Were they relatives of your mother or relatives of your father?

Just my dad didn't have relatives at all. My dad has two brothers, which were living in Buenos Aires. They died now. I never met these people. But I have a family from my mother's side.

And were they also living in Krakow?

They were living-- we live close together from each other, about a few houses, I mean a block. The houses there were different like here. Nobody has a house. We all lived in apartment.

Apartment buildings, one on top of the other?

That's the way they were. There were three-- the biggest one was about three floors average. And my mother's relative, she has about two, four brothers. Two were my age, and two my mother's age.

And you said you had a grandfather also living?

Yeah, well I didn't said I have him living. I said that my sister was his idol, when he was living. But the war broke out, he died. He wasn't living anymore.

And did he die before the war?

Oh, he died a long time before war, yes.

And he lived in Krakow?

Krakow, yeah. That's the only one grandfather I remember.

When did the war break out for you?

I think it was in September 1939.

Can you tell us what happened?

Well we have an order, the government came to give the order, all men leave home, leave women. And we were all young. I was then about 20, I think. My baby brother was 18. And my dad was about 43, all were young people. And we have the order to leave the women and go. I wouldn't do it.

Where were you ordered to go?

Just away from the Germans, because the German was pouring in. German was coming from the West. And they told us to keep running east, in direction to Russian border. I wouldn't go. But then my mother's brother came in. He took a younger brother. His brother is here now in Texas. I brought him here. He's my age. But the older one brother, my mother's brother, he was about 12 years older than me. He came in, and he insisted we go.

I wouldn't go. Then my daddy forced me. My mother ordered me. And I just took my dad, my brother, and we went with him. This was about, like I told I was later, two days before the German marching. They came from Czechoslovakia. And we lived close to Czechoslovak border, very close to the biggest mountain in Europe, Karpats.

Where did you go?

In direction to Russia. Lwow, they used to call, Lemberg, the direction of Lwow, which one today is part of Russia. Russia took it. And this way, we walked about around three weeks. Germany were bombarding. When war started, Poland had maybe three planes, no army. I was in army when I was running with my father, some officer came to me, and give me a jacket, army jacket, and a gun, which I never had a gun in my hand. I didn't have ammunition. And that's the way I was running with my dad and my brother and the two uncles.

How did you feel when this was?

Well, it was awful, for instance, they were just like you see people used to-- we didn't have cars. Most of them will have this buggies, just like here in Western movies. And people were traveling. And there was a lot of this wagon and German was-- wherever you turned you saw dead bodies, because German was bombarding.

There were thousands of planes, thousands of planes, I don't even know. German was very motorized, and Poland didn't have nothing. And each day, they were killing a lot of people. Around me, I just remember one time, about I would say just like from here to this corner there, it hit a wagon with 20 people, killed them all. And I was standing around. It was awful. I can't even explain what a feeling it was. I was just a boy, 20 years old.

And then I was taking care of my father, you know. He just run like a little child, scared.

What was his reaction?

Awful. He just cried. I took care of him. As I'm wondering sometime, watching my kids, how could they take it. I just don't know.

You mean if this happened in this country, how would they take it?

How would they take it? Just like in today's life, they're all working, making good money, but you still have to help them. It just doesn't make sense.

Yeah, I understand what you mean.

Yeah.

So what happened next? You are on the road.

We're on the road like this about three weeks. I see a lot of people killed. And then we came to almost Lemberg, Lwow, and then Russia came from other side. You see beginning of war, Germany hit us from west. But Russia went with Germany together there. I don't know whether you know the history.

Yeah, I do.

At the beginning of war.

Yes.

And Russia hit us from other side, and then-- but it took about three weeks we were almost in Lemberg. Russian army came in, and told us raise hands. We raise hands. And they just let us go. And said, go home.

Now a lot of people wouldn't go back home. But I took my dad and my brother, went back home.

What happened to your uncles?

Well, they went with us. It's just they were separate. We were separate, what was the reason you see, Polish people were very anti-Semitic. And each time they saw a well-dressed Jew, they show him to a German. And I was a well-dressed boy. And my uncle wasn't. He had just work cloths, not to be bothered recognized being a Jew, he took his brother and went away by himself, and left me with my dad. So everybody to himself.

That's the way I marched back home. I don't know. It took me another week or two. I don't know.

Did you experience antisemitism in Poland before the war?

Well, when I was born, well I was never a Polack. I was a Jew. You know, wherever you went, they ask you what are you, Polish or Jewish? That's the way I was raised and born. And that's the way I know I didn't know the difference. I didn't know that it existed anything else. It was from time I was born, that's the way I saw it.

Then I remember before the war, used to be a president, [PERSONAL NAME]. After him, came another one which one got very friendly with the Germans. And they start beating Jews in school. They beat up my brother, younger brother. And he didn't finish college. He just quit it. See, I was working to get them both to college. Now, my sister finished because she finished before war broke out. But my brother didn't.

And then he became a barber and worked with my daddy. See, somebody has to sacrifice to work to pay the bills.

You were the one.

And I did it. Yes. They didn't ask me. I just did it.

Were you ever beaten?

Well, when I came back home, Germans started taking out people to work, just to degradate you, to-- how would you say it, just make jokes out of you, laugh from you. They used to put us to cleaning streets.

To humiliate you.

Humiliate, yes. And there was an order that each week everybody has to go twice, starting from 18 years old, which means my brother went twice, I went twice. And twice a week, I went for my father. I wouldn't let him go.

What did you have to do twice a week?

Oh, whatever they told you. Just, I'm sorry.

It's OK.

I get emotional.

Your tissue is right over there.

Clean streets. They took me, there was a mountain, hit mountains, and move the rocks. Just whatever, just humiliate you all the time.

How long did that last?

Oh, until they closed us up in ghetto. Now before, it start even before they start putting us to work. How you say it? [NON-ENGLISH] work. This means, you have to work, but you are not paid for it.

You mean like slave labor?

Slave labor, yeah. And they found a job for me in nail factory. I always volunteered. They tried. They came after my dad. But I wouldn't let him go. I always volunteer for him. Excuse me.

Take your time. We have plenty of time. You're having feelings right now. What are you having feelings about?

I'm very emotional.

About your father?

Well. About the whole thing. It comes back. I was very attached to my father. It was a very close family.

So it was hard on your family and you.

Well, I'll get over with it. And then I start working in this nail factory. I used to go out almost each day. They used to pick us up in cars, just like slave laborers, and brought us back in.

And then in '40, they decided some Jews have to leave Krakow, and move away wherever they want to. And some, they give us permission to stay. They made a ghetto in a part of town and told us to move there. Describe the ghetto. What did the ghetto look like?

Well, just picked up a small part of town on site of the city. Now the city, I used to live just like here Dallas, and Oak Cliff. It was a river. And we used to live, the Jewish section was on this side river, not just like in Dallas, not in Oak Cliff, you see?

OK. So it would be--

From other side.

Yes, OK.

They used to call it Podgorze, Krakow and Podgorze. And then they moved to this other part of town. They took a part of town, about around three streets, and about seven, eight blocks long. And they close up with walls.

Were they high walls?

High walls, yes. Oh, about around eight feet. Eight feet, I don't know, maybe even nine, who knows? Then on top of them, they put glass, pieces of broken glass, that you cannot go over it.

And by that day, made two doors from one corner and the other corner, and Polish police used to watch us under the supervision of German.

So--

See I never have feeling to being Polish, because of that circumstances. And after war, after I moved to this country and

I saw that if I was kind of amazed about this, the ways the Black people used to live, because at the time I came here, they used to be place for Blacks and whites. Where you see, I just couldn't get over it, because this remind me always my past.

But then I saw the freedom we have here. I just don't realize what I was living it. But I was never a free man.

You mean in Poland, you were never free?

In Poland, now, I was not-- I was never Polish.

You weren't.

Here, I'm an American first.

And you have a--

My religion is Jewish. But there I was Jewish, not Polish. See the difference?

So you weren't recognized as a citizen.

No, for army, yes, but privileges, no.

Could you vote?

You didn't vote like here. They told you to do it. And you did it. And this was-- this was different. Everything was told to you. And if you were against it, you couldn't be against it. Because you will end up in prison. And this was a free country. We have a democratic president, which one the marshal of the army, he used to tell the president everything. He was a dictator. And he used to tell the president what to do. And that's the way I was raised. I didn't know the difference. I was born this way.

OK. How long did you live in the ghetto?

In ghetto, we were from 1940 till '42. See, they closed us up. They took my dad's store. And then they-- no, they start take away from all Jews, used to take away everything. He signed up the store to a man which would work for him 10 years, and put him in charge.

Was that man Jewish or Polish?

No, Polish, just happened this one was Polish. But if he would be Jewish, he couldn't sign it up to him, because a Jew couldn't own anything.

Well, I tell you another story. I came back after war. Right now, and found him in this store. And he said, sorry. I love you, but god the store is mine. I paid your daddy for it. And that's what you received after the war from the Polacks. I just walked out. What could you do?

This is what happened after war.

You went back there after the war?

Yeah, well, now let me go and tell you about it later. Let me go back where we started.

OK. When you were living in-- when you got into the ghetto, did your whole family go into the ghetto or what?

Whole family, brother, sister, my mother, just my parents, and my brother, sister.

So your whole family stayed together?

Stayed there. Stayed there, and we got two small rooms, very little rooms, just like closets. And we lived there, the whole family. Now, and we couldn't make a living. Let me volunteer and tell you the story.

Yes.

We couldn't make a living. At this time wasn't food enough. Somebody has to go out from ghetto, you see we used to wear these bands. And somebody has to go out to smuggle food in. Well, I made a decision. I'm going to do it. And what I did, I used to buy off the Polish policemen. The first time, I went out with my mother.

Well, I have to start another story. How did it happen? You see, I met my wife after I came back to Poland in war. She was just then about 15. I was about 20, 19. And we met. We started dating. And then when they liquidated Jews in Krakow, and moved them in ghetto, my wife, she was my girlfriend then. She didn't have a permission with her mother to stay there. Her father wasn't with her. He escaped same time I did, but he never came back.

He reached Russia. I didn't. And she was alone with her mother. She was the oldest one. She was 15. She has a sister about 13, and a little brother 10 years old. And I met her then. And well, I started dating. This was early. You see, I was an advanced boy. I was dating older people, older women. I just don't know how to go back to it, and I married a kid. She was a beautiful girl. And I just kind of went for it. I had to help them. That's where it started.

And when they moved us to ghetto, her mother didn't have permission to go in there. She has to leave town. And I helped them. I moved him to a small town, to a small country close to the city where we lived. And I used to go out from ghetto visiting her. She used to take out the band by a policeman who used to visit her.

And then I found out that they have market where they're selling chickens. Well, what do I know about chicken? I just came home and talk my mother in to go out with me one time. And she went with me. And we bought some chickens, and we smuggled them in, in ghetto. And we sold them, and we made a little profit. We have a chicken left, you see that profit was the chicken left. How we were doing it, money didn't have value at all.

We just took all the eggs, clothes, whatever was in value then, and we traded in. Everything was kind of black market. But it wasn't, because it was all in trading approximate in value what they figured out. You understood?

Yes, to trade.

To trade, yeah. Everything was kind of like a black market. But it wasn't really, because we didn't pay. We just traded in. But the hardest part was to smuggling in by of the policemen, Polish police on that, because that's the people were afraid of. And then this was a way, about around I would say about three miles, which one I have to walk. We walked. But first time when I went out with my mother, I did it.

The next day, I decided I go by myself. I wouldn't let my mother go with me. And I brought chicken, and I smuggled him in. How? Well, want me tell you the story?

Yes.

She sewed off a few sections from material, and I put, I smuggling about 4 or 5 chicken one time. I put each one in a sack. And bended, on me all around, and put an old junky coat on me. And I was walking like a junk man.

Then when I came, I use first time I went out, I took my younger brother with me. I come close to the ghetto. Then left him in some door from another building with the chicken, and came by and bought off the policeman.

And then, because I wouldn't take chances with everything, and with my brother especially I wouldn't take chances, and then when I bought him off, I just went back, took my brother, took the chicken, and smuggled it in. And that's the way

we made a living.

I mean this, I was doing it, we are in ghetto almost two years. It's a funny thing. I was doing it two years to save them. They all dead, and I was alive after the war. Isn't this funny?

It's strange.

Strange. I remember one time, I didn't come home in time. And this time I have my policeman. I bought him off before I left. I didn't want to take my brother. I didn't want nobody to take risk. I just did it on my own. Well, and I was supposed to be back 2 o'clock, and I showed up at around 6:00, 7:00. My mother, when I came there she turned gray in one day, after she saw me back by the door.

Because if they catch me, it's dead. And next day, I just packed and went away, and she didn't said anything. What could she say? Somebody has to do it.

Where were you going?

Just on the market. I was visiting then, I was visiting my wife too. She wasn't my wife. She was my girlfriend then. And then they decided, after living in ghetto about around several months, they decided all Jews around area got to move to the ghetto. And I picked up my wife, mother with a little brother, sister, and her moved in.

To the two rooms?

No. To one room. I just found him a room. I figured out everything for them, helped her out with it. Where there were times she has some family, but everybody look for himself.

Everybody had to take care of themselves by that time.

Sure, at that time, it's a funny thing, how people too selfish. I don't know if it's really selfish, when there's life involved. I used to think they was selfish, but now I don't know anymore. See, you don't blame people for things they're doing when their life is on stake. And I went through this thing.

It makes things different?

Different, yeah.

What happened at the end of the two years in 1942?

Well, in 1942, they decided they liquidate. First, they starting-- before they starting, they starting evacuating Jews, which they used to take to the crematoriums, but we didn't know. On first transport, they took my mother and my dad. And they said, they send them to another place. You see? I used to have saved up money. I took-- my kids wouldn't do it. Give to them the last penny I have with me.

She wouldn't take it. I wouldn't keep it. Then she was wondering how I got the money. And she ordered me. I loved my mother dearly.

Take your time. OK. Here's some tissues over there, if you'd like to have some.

It's all right. I get over. She ordered me to stay. That I have to stay and take care of my sister and brother. I did it. Because she wanted it this way.

Where was she going?

Well, they took her. They said they could move her to another place. My dad warned us that they're going to kill us. But

I didn't believe him. I just didn't believe it's possible they can take so many people. I was very advanced at this time. I was about 20-some years old, then 21 or 22. I hated communism. And I didn't believe in communism. I never believed in communism, because you can't make people equal. It's impossible because of human nature.

And my dad preferred communism. He said he'd rather go with them then towards Germany. And I-- I wouldn't listen. I said, he's not going to kill us. It's impossible. I just didn't believe that the most cultured people. The door from culture was Germany at this time. They were very advanced people. Who could believe they wouldn't do something like this? I feel guilty many years afterward about it.

What did you feel guilty about?

Because I didn't listen.

To your father?

He wanted to move to Russia. He wanted to escape to Russia. We have a chance, and I wouldn't listen. I said, no. I don't. I hate communism. And I hate it. I can't live in something I don't believe in it.

Not just because I don't believe in communism is good in book, when you write. It sounds beautiful. But in life, it doesn't work. It will never work, because of human nature, because people aren't perfect. You can't make a perfect world. Just for instance, like we're living in a beautiful country, because of the beautiful thing people are taking advantage of it. It's the wildest jungle, the best beautiful country, but it's the wildest jungle. That's the way I see it.

What happened to your mother and father?

Well, they took them. She's supposed to write me a letter, never hear from him anymore. About a week later, they took my brother. And I have-- I have two cousins I used to take care of, and one of my cousins. And I let them go because, I just didn't have a way out. He said, he's going to take care of her. And I never hear from them anymore.

And then passed several months, and we just realized that the people, we start thinking that the people are not living anymore that they killed him. And we were preparing ourselves to be killed, each one of us.

Now, in the same week when they took my brother with my cousin, they took my wife's mother. They just give her paper to stay here alone, and she want to stay with me. And then I promised mother that she can leave her with me, that I'm going married her before we move in. And she was still a kid then. And in this condition, she decided she's going. And she went, and took the younger brother, the younger sister and brother, and left me with her.

But still this was about a week later when they took my parents. And then we married.

Where did they tell your mother and father that they were going?

They're moving to another place. They don't know exactly where, but they let us know. The Jews cannot stay there. They move them around. Were these the Polish that moved him, or the Germans?

The Germans moved, and the Polish convinced us that that the way they're doing, they were against us, Polish and German, they were all against us because we're Jews. What do I have? What do I know about politics.

Was this 1942?

This was in 1942, yes. Yes.

What happened after that?

I married. My wife then moved in with us. I stayed with my wife and my sister. My sister was left with me, because

they took my brother with my cousin. And start this-- I didn't have what to eat in the beginning. I couldn't get out from ghetto anymore. It was hard to get out. We start selling whatever we have to trade it in food. I lived like this several months. Then after they took my brother and my wife's parents, they made the ghetto smaller. They took 2/3 of it, send away a half people, and moved us in like, for instance, I was moved in with my wife, with my sister, two other women, and three men in one room.

How we lived, don't even ask me? And that's the way we lived another six months or seven months. Then in 1942, they moved us to ghetto, the ghetto was moved in the same direction where my wife's mother used to live with her. But it was closer. It was still in Krakow city limits. There was an old cemetery. And on top of the cemetery, they built a concentration camp, which one they called Plaszow.

Did you ever hear of it, Krakow, Plaszow?

Just when I called you during the week.

Yeah. And that's where they moved us. And then they moved us in barracks. I used to live with men. My wife with women, and my sister with other women. Each one separate. We just have to sneak in to see each other once a day.

And this barrack we used to live about 100 people together. They were the shelves. The shelves, we were living on shelves.

And this was in Krakow city limits? In Krakow city limits, but not in Krakow city. Not in city, just on--

On the outskirts.

Outskirts, just like--

Richardson?

Richardson is too close, like Plano. So it would be a matter of 10 miles maybe.

No, you know today 10 miles in our living, it's close. But then even a mile was 1.5 kilometer. It was a long way. You see cities, Krakow used to be very small comparing to Dallas. Dallas is a huge city if it comes to territory. Population is small, but territory, it's almost I would say even it's bigger than New York City, Dallas with territory.

Yes.

Yeah. And--

You were in Plaszow?

In Plaszow. And there I couldn't get out. They built a little factory. I used to work in this little factory. My wife worked somewhere else. We used to sneak in, sneak out, to see each other.

Did they keep the men and women separate, you couldn't see each other?

We had to sneak out.

Yeah.

Well, I was a boy. I don't know I was always capable, be more than average, for instance, they made the Jewish police. You heard about it, which were taking care of Jews. And I never became a policeman because I couldn't do it. But I always have privileges from them. I was always-- I always have a way to get around.

For instance, if I went in work, and my wife, they picked up people for any kind of work. If they picked up my wife, and I know about it, I just went and took out, they let me take her out, the Jewish police working then.

Then they have to do. No, they didn't have to be a police, but somebody has to do it. And usually a good person couldn't do it. There was some rotten Jews too, you know? They did it.

There are good Jews and there are bad Jews.

Just like other people, that's right. And they did it. But I never been with them, but I could always buy myself off with them, you see?

You knew you could always deal with them.

Deal with them. I always have, for instance, every time that they touch my sister or her, I got them out of it. For instance, I have an accident one time. Well, I used to go from-- I mentioned to you that I was working in this nail factory. They used to, when they moved us to this concentration camp, I used to-- after being there a few months, they start sending me back to this factory.

Which means they took, and this time we have watchmen they were from Ukraine, they turned German. Did you hear about it?

They did what?

They were Ukrainian people which went with German, and Germany made especially army from the Ukrainian to work with them.

No, I didn't know that there was a special division.

Division, yeah.

And most anti-Semitic countries in Europe, besides Poland, they were Ukrainian, Litwa, Å otwa, were Estonia, I don't know how you say it in English.

Latvia.

Latvia and Estonia, they hate Jews. Why? I don't know. I didn't live centuries back. I don't know. They just hate them. And it just happened, I was a Jew. And I still don't think it's nothing wrong being what you are, because you didn't ask for it. That's just the way it's happened.

Not your fault.

Well, but it's nothing wrong. I'm proud of being what I am. It's nothing wrong to be, just well, I am not too religious person, but people believe in God. They're saying that God knows what he is doing. They should respect what he is doing. If Got creates the world, then puts certain rules on it. See? I am not too religious. But well even, whether it is, if people believe in it. But they see people don't practice what they preach. They're not living up. They just believe in it, but they're not doing what they believe in it.

They sent you back to the needle factory. And was it run by the Ukrainians?

No. They were sent, they were not sending just me back. They send a group of young people. And I was one of them. We were watched by this Ukrainian army. They were taking us, just like prisoners. You see, they were taking us down.

With rifles?

With rifles. And in wagons or picked up in wagons, on cars. And took us down, and brought us back evening. But we were not paid for it.

What were you making?

Nails, nail factory. I don't know we were working with the machines to produce nails. It was so many years back.

You mean like sewing needles?

No nails for--

Oh, nails.

Nails.

A nail factory.

Nails, yeah well, my English is Chinese.

A nail factory.

Nails factory, yeah.

OK. Yeah. And what's happened, well, like I said before, I went out there, I right now became a foreman. I just had the capability. I became a foreman. I could become the boss, but you see I was scared I wasn't good. Then you have to beat, and heat, and just I wasn't good for it. And I always tried to stay that I, to protect myself, but protect myself being a nice person. To do something what's wrong, I just couldn't.

So you wanted to get yourself in a position where you could protect yourself, but you wouldn't have to--

Hurt anybody.

Hurt anyone in the process, OK.

I always did. This mean I was kind of little foreman. Yes. And there in charge to us was one Polish engineer. And he must have been very anti-Semitic. He, each time somebody did something, he used to hit him. I watched him, and watched him, and watched him. And then I was a hero. I just couldn't take it anymore.

And I came, approached him, and told him. Look here, why are you hitting him? You know he didn't do anything to you. Oh, he did wrong, and he started telling me, cussing on me, Jews. Just many different ways cussing on me, and said, you just better stay away because I break your neck. I didn't said nothing, walked out.

Then this happened second time, and third time, and fourth time, he started threatening me. I said, well, you're no better than I am. They just putting big on you, like on me. And he said you dirty Jew. I said I'm just dirty Jew, like you a dirty Polack. And he raised a hand and slapped me. And I got mad. And I told him, you better don't hit me anymore. Because I will not let you get away with it. And after he hit me, I hit him back. And we start fighting. They called police. And everybody start fighting.

They took us up for sabotage, and sabotage was dead. It was my fault, because I couldn't take it. Then they put us in line with about seven men, took us out, never happened that they brought anybody up that they don't shoot them right away. But my luck again, when they brought us up before they brought us, they brought about an hour before us 50 people. And they caught food, smuggling food. They shoot them all.

Because they shoot them, they let us go, and put us to hard work. I don't know how would you say. What is this? I was a

hero. Just luck.

Somebody up there likes you.

Well, as I see, when you young, you're foolish. You think you are a hero. But now, I see what a fool I was. But I just couldn't help myself. And I survived this too. They didn't do anything to me. They're supposed to beat us up, we're about 12 boys. When I came up, they know me there because I was a hero. They pushed me back. Then they beat first four or five, then the next one they hit, then the German went away. They just let me go. They didn't even hit me. But they put me in work, and I got away again with it.

See, a lot of people will tell you that they were heroes. They did. I don't consider myself. It just happened. And like I said before, you don't have heroes, just fools. Because if a person told him there was something like this, it's just a fool. But being young, you're doing it, because you don't think much. That's my opinion.

Well, maybe you didn't think. But maybe you had a lot of feelings.

No, I was kind of jumpy for every little thing. I am a very sensitive person, very extremely sensitive, and I get hurt. I am disappointed about a lot of things today. See, I try to help a lot of people financially. I helped. But sometimes I ask myself, was it worth it?

And then I'm telling myself another way, I'm not doing it for them. I do it for myself. To please myself that I did something good for a change, and if I am not good paid, I don't expect anything in return. Then I don't get hurt. That's the way I see life now. But then I was different. I was young.

OK, should I still talk?

I understand what you're saying.

I am just volunteering, telling all my opinions. Well, you're telling me about your feelings, and how you look at life.

On life, yeah.

I think that's important.

Yeah, that's the way I see life. And that's the way I see today's life. You know, just sometime I am wondering, you know. You're taking people, you try to help them. They nice how long they need you. But then when they reach a certain point, then they think, well, it's you owe them it. Then when you start, it's no way to quit it. But then I am asking myself, how fortunate I am that I'm always on giving side, not receiving.

Well, you seem to have been able to do that throughout your life, which is--

Oh, most of my life, yes. There were times I have a very, very hard time.

OK, I understand.

I reached a point now, I did pretty well now. I sacrificed a lot of things, I sacrificed a lot of in this country in beginning. I suffered. I was hungry in times when we have food, denying myself things to go somewhere, to get somewhere. But I accomplish a goal. I'm doing pretty well now. I'm very good off.

How long did you stay in Plaszow?

From 1942 till I think it was September '43. One day, they took me out, and I came back, and my wife was gone. I got furious.

You went back where?

To work. And after I came from work, they brought me back, she was gone.

They brought you back to the barracks.

To the barracks. I was furious. And I used to jump on everybody. I don't know how they didn't kill me then. I jumped on everybody, everybody, who was in my way. I got furious. I was young, and she was my life then.

And then they start having another transport. They start sending out people. And there was a transport I thought is going in the same direction. I just jumped into it.

Because you thought that you would catch up with her?

That I catch up with her.

Was it on the same day?

Next day, second day. I just couldn't live there. I have a sister. I just never-- I don't know why I left her. I didn't thought about her anymore. I just got furious I just got-- you reach a point in your life that you don't care anymore.

And you weren't caring then.

And then just I didn't have anything anymore. Well, I didn't even-- I don't know how I couldn't think about my sister. I have her still there.

What happened to her?

I don't know. Now, it's another story I have forgotten to tell you. Let me go back to it. When they brought us up for the sabotage--

Yes.

I was expecting being killed.

Yes.

But then I could, there was a kapo, one from the Polish people tried to tuck me in, you don't even look Jewish. Who will know are you Jewish or not Jewish, just run! The doors are open, I'm going to close my eyes, run. But how could I? If I would escaped, whoever escaped, for one person they took up 50 people, and killed them. But first, the closest family of this person. And I have done then there my sister, my wife, and my mother-- this was my mother's sister with three little kids, her husband, and then one of my uncles. How could I escape?

I could. But I couldn't. And I know they're going to shoot me when I be back there. I even have one of the young men tried to escape, and I was scared. I fight with him, not to let him go. Because if one would go, they would take 50. They would take all of us. Us, I know that-- I expected to be killed when I get there. Who could expect that they kill before us so many people? And that's the reason I came back.

In ghetto, I have several chances. See, I went out. I didn't have to come back. But how could I? Who would feed my family? If it wasn't me, I was a kid, but this was my family.

Yes, I understand.

So you got in the transport the next day?

You asked me a question about--

Your sister.

Or if I ever joined the resistance. No. This one I never did. Because I was the one. My dad became just like a child.

So you stayed.

I just kind of feel obligated that I have to take care of the family.

Yes.

And my brother, he was just a child too. Then I used to think, I don't know. I just feel kind of responsible. And that's the way I went through the whole war.

Taking care of people.

Especially my family. I was a little selfish too maybe. I don't know.

What happened to your sister?

Well, they took me with this transport, and sent me away, and I don't know what's happened to my sister. We were on this transport. They put us in wagons, about around 30 people. And then when we arrived, they said Auschwitz. Auschwitz, and Auschwitz was that death camp. I mean whoever we went there, we understood was killed. I know I'd be killed.

What's happened, they brought us there, took everything away from us. I remember I have a little schnapps with me I used to carry, little frame my family pictures, and they took it from me. This is-- that's all I have on me. But they took it, everything. They shaved my head, took everything off on me. Put this tattoo number.

Put me in a barrack with about 120 people. And next morning I was worked up that I'm going to Raisko. Raisko was the place where they used to put in crematorium people. And I just thought it's dead. But it just happened they sent me to a laboratory in Raisko. They have a laboratory there where they were making experiments on people. They put me in a section where they were making experiments to find this medicine to cure diseases.

They have a Jewish doctor. His name was Miesel. And I became the Guinea pig. They brought me to him. And they tried the injection on me. I was their Guinea pig. And my luck was good. And next day, his assistant got sick. He met me. He looked at me, talked to me just like I'm talking to you now. He became fond of me, liked me. And the next day when they brought me, he wouldn't let the infection on me. They just told me his assistant got sick. He would like to have me for assistant.

And they tried it on another person. It killed him. See, what you were telling me this was. Heroism or luck?

You mean because he wanted you to be an assistant, they didn't give you a shot.

They brought me next day to him for the same shot, for some another medicine he tried to create.

But they had already given you one shot.

Before, and it was good.

And you survived it.

Survived it.

And the next day you came you were supposed to get a shot, but instead he made you an assistant.

An assistant. He asked them to make me an assistant, that his assistant got sick.

So they gave the shot to somebody else, and that person died.

What is this?

Luck.

That's what I call it. And that's the way I survived with him, 3 and 1/2 years.

In Auschwitz.

In Auschwitz. I used to go out from the barracks, to this laboratorium and work with him. And I must have be good with him, because he kept me all this time. He kept me there about almost two years. Then I notice we have a hard time to keep up in barracks. They, for instance they put you in barrack, about hundred to people. They put in charge, they make a kapo, for instance, the man who was in charge to us was a murderer.

He was-- we have politic signs, the red ones. He has a green one, which means he was a gangster, a murderer, who knows, whatever. Whatever.

A murderer?

Murderer, yeah. And he was in charge. In the barrack where I was they were bringing two people each day more, and adding two people. But when they brought these two, he couldn't have more than he has before 98 or 100, which mean he has a chance to kill two. They just told him to kill two, whatever, any way he wants. You can imagine what a hard time I had being a Jew, to survive this each day so many years?

In beginning I used to sneak out of it. Then they used to take us out to making segregation, left and right. Left was to crematorium, right to work. And I went through one, two, three times. And when I was going like this after almost a year, working with this doctor, I started thinking I have to make it easy on me. Just how long can you survive? There is going to come a day that I have to go.

I notice that they're bringing some animals, killed animals, to the garage from laboratory. Then I start talking to the doctor about it. And he explained to me that when they kill an animal, they afraid that somebody is going to put poison in it. Because there were a lot of people against the regime. That before they start using the meat, they checking it in laboratory, or the meat is good.

I have idea would be good if I be working in garage. Now being working on bicycles when I was a kid, I told him, I know about cars too. But I didn't. They put me in garage. There was one from Czechoslovakia man, and one was I don't know from Yugoslavia, Slavish people. I start working with him, working on bicycle. And they were car mechanic.

It's just I picked up the German language first. And after working there three months, I became the chief over them. It didn't took me a long time. I just became the chief over them. And then each time meat came in, I have idea. And then I made the idea work.

Each time they brought meat when it comes to the garage, I cut off about around 2 kilo. 2 kilo was about around about 4 or 5 pounds, and put it away. Then when they check the meat and told me it's good, I have to find a way to smuggle it in, in the barrack.

Well, should I tell you how I did it? Well, I hope you don't mind, you're a woman. I went to the barrack, told the man

who was in charge, the kapo man, the murderer. He was in charge. He was the boss. That I have idea I could bring him meat. I can't promise him for sure, but he has to help me with it, to sew me off some slacks. Is sewed me off, where I got to stand up to show you what I did.

That's fine.

Just take little pants, all around here with a little sack here. This was my idea. And I put here in between the meat, always about 2 or 3 pounds. And each day, I used to do it almost two years. They touched me one day, but I don't know how to explain to you. Did you understand exactly what I said?

Yes. I understand.

I understood too. So you used to carry-- you used to carry in the meat in a sack.

Yeah, but it's just flesh together when they touch me, they touch the meat, but I didn't know what they touched, because they used to touch us from top to bottom.

Yes.

They touched it, but--

But they didn't recognize that it was smuggled in meat.

Meat, yeah. And then when I started bringing in meat, I became his boy. You wouldn't believe how these people lived. He used to have his own tailor. They used to make him tailor made suits. Now I became his right hand. He has meat each day.

Yes.

And this why I survived 3 years, 3 and 1/2 years almost. Should I tell you exactly how it was? I was sitting with him. I was his Jewish ward. I hear, this is my Jew. They way, he said it, I saw how he liked me. But well, I was surviving. I didn't face any more of this segregation. He didn't send me out. Each time then in beginning, you saw this killing. You couldn't take it. But then what can you do about it? You just get used to it.

You see, people are just like animals. You get used to it. And nothing you can do about it. And that's the way I survived till January 1945.

What happened in January 1945?

Russia started pouring in. They start bombarding. There was an order to kill off all barracks, and--