

My name is William Koenig. Today is what, the 11th month, the 10 day, 1987. It's Phoenix, Arizona. I am a survivor of the Holocaust. I was born in the city by the name of Lwów. In my day, was Poland. In 1939, it was Russia. And they called it Lvov. In '41, the Germans came in and they called it Lemberg.

What's the date of your birth?

I was born July 31, 1922. We were four children. My mother passed away when I was young. I was the oldest of four. There was two brothers and two sisters. My father and my brother got killed during the war. Of course, we had a family too beside them, which I don't know whether I should talk about or not. But everybody had a family. They all disappeared.

Could you give us the names of your brothers, your names of your parents, please?

Well, my mother, like I said, passed away before the war. Her name was Brenda-- Bronia in Polish-- Koenig, which is the same name. Her maiden name was Weichbrot. She had three brothers, two of them born in Czechoslovakia and one of them in America. The one in Czechoslovakia didn't make the war, didn't survive. He was killed by the Nazis. One of them survived and died after the war.

The names of your own brothers?

I only had one brother. His name was Moses, which he calls himself Mark-- Max. It all depends how he felt like. Sometime, was Mark and sometime, was Max. I had two sisters. They survived. But they have survived as Gentile. The reason they had the opportunity is my father had some Gentile friends.

And they give him some birth certificates from dead girls, Gentile girls who passed away. So one of them was Ukrainian, papers-- birth certificate from a Ukrainian. The younger one was a Ukrainian. And the older one was a Polish. They both had to leave town, go to different cities. And they worked as maids. And that's how survived the war both of them. Their names?

Both are alive. Their names-- one of them is Sima and the other one is Hanka, Henja, really.

Your grandparents' name?

From my mother's side, I didn't have no grandparents. They passed away before I knew them. But for my father's side, I not only had a grandma, I had a great-grandma. But the great-grandma died just right before the Russian came in. But my grandma died when the Russian-- when the war broke out, when the Nazis invaded Russia. She died just before that.

Well, what year?

And that was in '41.

That was just before the war started. Otherwise, you're still-- we was still under the Russian. We still didn't expect a war. And that's when my grandma died. And they were both born in Russia, my grandparents. And what was I going to say? I didn't say.

Were they all Jewish?

Naturally.

What was your father's profession?

My father was-- had a transportation company. Actually, by trade, he was a butcher. But he didn't like to practice his trade. So he had a transportation company. And during the time-- during Poland, before 1939, he even had-- not only he had a lot of Belgian horses, but like seven or eight pair, and a lot of wagons.

And he had contract with two factories, which they were under Polish baron who used to own it. And they used to make leather. And my father had to-- did the transportation, like bringing in coals to the factory, bringing in raw skins to the factory, rawhides, which they used to come imported from Argentina and Brazil, from South America, and then hauled the leather to the train station for export, whatever they produced.

They were tanneries. And it was-- used to be owned by a Baron. My father used to be the only Jew in Poland that I ever knew that had a permit of a gun. Why? Because he was the baron's Jew.

Can you tell me about your childhood, your school?

Schooling, I didn't have a chance to have too much schooling because being one of the oldest and my mother being sick, suffering from cancer-- at age 14, she died. And my schooling was just as far as age 12 or so. After that, and being the oldest, I had to take over the duty. My father was too busy to do anything about the house and the family.

So I had to take over. And I was the father. And I was the cook. And I was everything in the house. And an aside, I used to go help my aunts and uncles, which they used to have-- been in meat business. I used to help work with them. That's how I knew the meat industry. And I liked horses very much.

And prior to the war, just as the onset came, were there changes that you could feel in your community?

No, prior to the war, there was not much changes. During the time of the Polish-- during the Polish-- during the time of the Poland, when there was no war, we were a minority. Jew was mistreated. I knew who I am. I know my place. And I kept it there. I was never afraid of standing up for my rights. I fought. I used to get many bloody nose. But I used to give it to them. My father taught me not to be afraid.

And you--

I talked back. So I used to come home with bloody noses and beat up. But I used to fight back. And the war broke out. And my father was drafted. Why, I don't know. Of course, maybe, he had the ability. He was in the reserves, supposedly, yet from the Austrian time. I don't know how and why, they just draft him.

And he wasn't there long because the war was-- it wasn't-- Poland was already taken apart before the war even started because the Russian were-- they supposed to come in there. So the Germans didn't even put up too big of a fight. The only fight the Polish Army did, we had a big mountain in the city, over the city. And the city was in a-- it was a beautiful city, by the way. Lwów is a big, known city.

And they had a cannon on top of the mountain. And they just give one shot. That's all they used it because a Russian tank came over real close and knocked it all off with part of the mountains. And that was the end of the Polish war. And the Russians took over. They came in in '39.

Me being young, knowing already some-- I was about 16 by then. And I already had a passport. So I was already independent. The children grew up already. My father remarried. And I was on my own. I got a good position for the Russians. And I had it pretty decent. I didn't care. Communism didn't bother me one way or another.

My father was bitter because they took everything away from him. And they nationalized it, made it-- belong to the government forever. And they wanted to make him a manager there, was-- because he was good to his employees. See, anybody, a small businessman, anybody-- small enterprise, if you had one, and if you were good to your employees, they made you a manager. Otherwise, they gave you a position to work for the government.

Well, my father told them to go to the devil. He worked on his own again. He got himself a horse and wagon again. And he did it. And he did it. And he got himself a man to help. And he kept on doing his job. There were still private enterprises. Because even everything was nationalized, they were still doing black marketeering.

And there was still private enterprises. There were still private bakeries. They were still selling sugar and coal on the black market. And they needed somebody to haul it. So that's what he used to do during the Russian time.

But I was on my own. I lived for myself. I used to come to visit my younger sisters and brother. And they were pretty well-off. I mean, they had enough to eat and everything. They didn't need my help. If they would, I would help them. And then the war broke out. And I found out, I have no friends.

I had a pretty good friend of mine, a Ukrainian man-- guy-- man, a man my age, that what you considered a man. When the Russian came in, he became a policeman. He joined the police. It's nice. He was Ukrainian. As soon as the Nazis invaded the Russians, he was the first one to stay up in a church steeple and shoot at the Russian soldiers with the rifle that he obtained from them. Naturally, he must have had enough ammunition.

And then he came to hunt after me. He knew my hiding places because we were both raised and brought up in the same neighborhood. And that was a matter of me or him. And that was me, not him. That's why I'm here.

But I didn't-- I was the black sheep in the family. I didn't get a chance to even get to know my way around how the Nazi operate. I was the first one in a camp. I was round up like the sheeps, they round up all the Jews.

And I was in the-- I was the first one in a camp. I was in a camp which-- it was a destruction camp. It was-- the name of the camp was Janowska. The only place everybody ever heard of it is when you go to Yad Vashem, you're going to see the name. But because nobody-- you know why you never heard of it? Because nobody survived from there.

The first job what I did being in that camp is to-- there was a Jewish cemetery not far by the outskirts of the city, on the outskirt of the town. Was a Jewish cemetery not far by. So the first thing what they did is took us with wagons, with wheelbarrows, with whichever they could. We were building little-- we put little tracks with little railroad cars on it.

And we load-- we broke down all our monuments. And years ago, the cemeteries used to have real tall monuments, marble stones. Some of them, we had to split in half. And we built a highway for the Nazis. And imagine me working on my mother's headstone, and picking it up, and laying a highway. But there's nothing I could do about it.

Not far away from there was a place where they used to make bricks. In Polish, we used to call it [POLISH]. Over there, they used to-- anybody who was sick, anybody-- they didn't even give them a chance to die, just shoved them in the oven and burned them. So I seen burning before anybody else even knew what burning is.

And being healthy, being strong, they put me up to their kind of work too. Then one day, we worked on a-- they put us out, the Kommando to work on a place where we used to do cement cut work. We used to build-- see, European sewages used to be like-- you practically could drive a truck through it underground. They were giant.

And we used to build those, made it from scratch. They were so big, it took about 20 men to roll one of those, to roll one up on a truck. And that's what we used to work it. They call it in German Betonwerk.

Anyway, but it was so rough, the job was so tough, and the beating we used to get on the job and off the job, and running home-- they didn't drive us, they ran us. Depends on the Nazis who-- most of the time, our Nazis were just one German. The majority were Ukrainians with the black uniforms who chased us, who gave us then.

Once in a while-- I spoke the language, naturally, being born and raised there. They were supposed to have been people-- my kind. I used to, once in a while, talk to them growing up, two of them. And once in a

while, I got a break. They brought me a sandwich, they give me something to eat. But this doesn't happen often, not with Ukrainians. They got-- they just murders.

Anyway, being on their job, from the Kommando, let's say, we were 30 in one group. And if one of them escapes from the job-- which there were-- you could escape. It was easy. You hide in one of those things. And some of them are even smaller. You can crawl in in one of them small-- the concrete-- cement things, you can crawl in one of those. And you hide, you can lay there forever. Nobody will find you. There's so many of them.

So if one of them escapes, when we came-- when we come to the camp and they count us, for every one escaped, 10 getting shot right on the spot. They don't even take you out of the line. When the count us, we stay in a line in five rows, five rows. Between the rows, the Nazi was walking around. That wasn't a Nazi, was just a Ukrainian with a gun in his hand, shoved the gun to your neck, pulled the trigger, push you forward.

One day, I was standing in the line, two guys right in front of me were there beside me, blood all over. And I said to myself, no, I'm not going to be there. I don't care if they kill people after me or not because of me. I'm going to escape. We wanted to make it different. We tried. There was 10 of us. We brought some insulated pliers from the job and some-- a lot of bags in order to throw it on the barbed wires.

And 10 of us made a plan to escape one night. What happened-- they cut a hole mixed out. We did cut the wires. We did break through, made a hole. And the wires, we had to cut through, not only one, because there were one line. And then there was-- in the middle was empty. And then there was another layer of wires. And we cut them both through.

But what happened? They got them mixed up. One guy, I don't know what he did. He touched off a spark. And the Gestapos on the towers with machine guns throw the light at us. And we started running like scared rabbits. The plan was off.

And as I was running, I got shot in my leg in both sides. I got shot on the bottom. The bullet went right through. And I got hit right here in my thigh. And I was just out like a light. Next day, I don't remember nothing. I just fainted away. That was the last thing I remember is laying in between the two barbed wires inside-- like on a pile of dead people around me.

And my mother comes to me. And she said, my son, you cannot be here. You got to get out. Go back to the camp. And I don't know how, with all that strength-- see, I just crawled close to that main gate. The main gate was open. The soldier was standing there. And he didn't see me.

And I crawled and went into the barracks back to my barrack, where I used to belong. And I just slept through the night over there. In the morning, I begged two guys to take me along with me. And two guys were holding me. We marched out to work. And I never came back. I went to the ghetto. There was still a ghetto in the city.

Yeah. Could you backtrack to when you were rounded up in Lwów? Did you go to a ghetto first in Lwów?

No, I never seen a ghetto. The only ghetto I seen is when I escaped from the camp. And the ghetto was towards the end anyway. They didn't keep the ghetto too long. I was in the camp for quite a while. When I came to-- when I ran away, the camp--

Was the whole city of Lwów liquidated when you were picked up? Or were you picked up prior?

No, I was picked up prior to that.

Prior.

And I was there for quite a long time. But when I ran away from there, the ghetto was being on the verge of being liquidated-- not completely yet, but like they used to do in a lot of ghettos, they used to come in and

take out a certain amount. They wanted, let's say, 20,000 people. I'll give you an example. I mean, who counted it? Who knew? They wanted a certain amount of people. And that's how they got it.

So when I ran away from there, being in my town, I know, I was all wounded. And I was crippled on one leg, still bleeding. But I wrapped myself around. And I tried. When you're young, you don't pay attention to pain. And I got in the ghetto. They didn't want to let me in. I mean, I snuck in through a fence because I didn't go through the main gate. They would have shot me. You would ask me, why would they shot me? I had on my head-- I had shaved off like that like a mohawk. That's how they did it from the beginning.

Gosh. Instead of the star?

Instead of stars, instead of anything, they used to shave us right here. The star, I got rid of it. While I was running, I know where I was, I threw that jacket what I had out. And I found some-- a woman who was doing some laundry. I just picked up some clothes on the way. I mean, it was my city. I know where I was going.

The ghetto was in Lwów?

In Lwów, yeah, on the outskirts of the city, which there wasn't-- a Jew never used to live even there before. They otherwise-- they uprooted the whole Jewish neighborhoods. And they just pushed them in in a place where a poor section of the city used to be. Maybe before the war, some Jews used to live there. It's possible. But it was a very bad section of the city.

But anyway, I didn't stay too long in that ghetto. When I came to the ghetto, they didn't want to let-- they just were afraid. Every household I came, I wanted to stay a night. I couldn't. I had to be on the street. And that was cold. That was in the wintertime. It must have been December or so. So anyway, when I was there, I found, my mother had a cousin.

The guy used to be-- not a blacksmith, he used to be a tinsmith. He used to do things from tin. And she was the cousin of my mother's. But she seen me. She says, I don't care if they're going to burn us down or they're going to kill us, if my cousin's son is alive, I'm going to take care of him. And she took me into the house.

Little did she know that two days later, the Nazis liquidated her. They came in. And they were going from room to room. I was hiding under a little tiny stand. They were walking behind me. And nobody seen me. It's just meant to be. I would have been caught-- captured and sent to Treblinka. That's where they took them is to Treblinka.

How do I know? When-- after the they took out all people, then they didn't bother no more. The ghetto was still on. But it wasn't too many people in the ghetto left anymore. What they were doing is making the ghetto smaller. They make the fence closer.

And the reason I know they took them to Treblinka is because one of my cousins-- well, he was a second cousin to me-- escaped, ran out from the window. They was shooting on him. He didn't get a scratch. He just rolled off that train, just like a little ball. A little guy he was, he just rolled off like a little ball. And he came back to the ghetto. He wanted to go with me. But I couldn't take him along because it would have been harder to hide two. I escaped through that ghetto through the sewers. And from that time on, I was on the run.

I cannot put my thoughts real together. I never had my story right because I was in a lot of places afterwards and ran away from too-- small little places, like camps that were never heard of them. They weren't concentration camp. They were just places that Volksdeutsche, a German descent of Poland had some land, and then he got a bunch of slaves.

He came to a place where you buy Jews. And I was in a lot of places like that, working on farms, doing cow milking, work in the fields. And it got rough, it got tough, I just ran away. And I was from one to the other.

And were conditions a little better on these private farms?

Yeah, it was better as far as feeding you because you had enough bread to eat. But you didn't have nothing else. The soup-- they feed you the same thing they feed the pigs. But there was more better than I had before, better than I had in the other camps. But what happened-- it got tougher. Once he-- the guy started beating on you, you would have died from getting beat up. So you just had to run away.

So anyway, I make the story short. I wind up in a forest. And the forest was Lubelszczyzna. It was the biggest forest in Poland. Over there, they had-- it was so thick, that forest, that no human being in some places was never there. But I was looking for some Jewish people, which I was told they are around.

But I never found them. I wound up with a group of Polacks, antisemites, who they used to call themselves akowcy-- Obrona Krajowa in Polish, you would call it. I wound up with them. And I had to prove myself that I'm worthy of them. And I told them who I am. And I was still crippled on my leg. The leg was still swollen. Medicine they didn't have. They were just give me aspirins, that's about all.

But anyway, the guy who was the leader happened to have a Jewish girlfriend in town. So he had some sympathy toward Jews. But their motto themselves was to kill Jews just like the Nazis because they were not pro-Jews. They were strictly white, Aryan Polacks.

Were they aware that you were Jewish?

I told them right away.

You did?

Yes, I did. And see, that's why I was the black sheep in the family. Coming back to the story of my brother-- he never wanted to go to camp. And he never went to camp. They killed him on the street. Somebody point a finger at him. But he could have go to a different town. And maybe, he would have survived. He got his way with the Germans. He was good on languages. So was I.

And he just was like-- to one of the SS men, he was just like his little bodyguard. He used to shine his shoes. He's like his porter. But after-- then I found out that the German ran away-- not ran away, he was sent out somewhere else. And he lost his meal ticket. So one day, he was walking on the street. And somebody pointed a finger, says, here's a Jew walking. So Ukrainian police seen him. And they killed him.

Some local person? Were the Polish people that you were with, were they underground?

Yes, in the forest.

In the forest-- against the Germans.

Naturally, they were against everything. They want-- they just want a pure, clean Poland. They were against the Russian. They were against the German. They thought they're going to be supported from England, but they never were. They had to be supported from the Russians, I mention, otherwise, they wouldn't.

But they supported themselves. What they used to do is they used to go to farmers and take their stock of it, confiscate. So that's how they used to live, as far as food. And as far as ammunition, we used to go and stick up some police stations, and take everything away, and just destroy them, kill them-- whoever-- there was stations 10-12 people in the station.

The first assignment I got, they gave me a wooden piece of pistol, cut out of wood, painted with shoe polish. And I took a machine gun away from a Ukrainian guy in a police station. And they got in. And they took machine guns, and hand grenades, and a whole bunch of it. And he killed them all. That was-- that's the way I proved them that I'm not afraid, that I'm not a Jew with scary things. And I'm not worried to be a partisan with the Polacks.

When that happened, I figured, I'm going to-- I took his machine gun, I thought, this is going to be mine. I'm going to use that for protection. That wasn't the case. They give me an old, sawed-off rifle from the First World War and two bullets only. I had a chance to fire it only once. It was a-- Ukrainians came in.

And one of them was real close by me where I was hiding with a dog, with a German Shepherd by his side. And I used that rifle once. When I shot that rifle, I made three somersaults afterwards. But the Ukrainian had a bullet in his chest on the other side. It went out, about that thick. I mean, he wasn't alive. And the dog, I don't know, just got scared and kept on running.

He was a Ukrainian collaborator with the Germans?

Well, he was a Ukrainian with a black uniform, with a dead hat. He was a Nazi. He was a German dead hat, a Ukrainian with the black uniform. They did all the dirty work for the Nazis. When they raided the forest, it used to be one German and the rest of them all black uniforms.

And these were people-- local people that were--

The Ukrainians who used to live in Poland, who used to-- who thought that they have a country.

Did they come with the Russian invasion? Or were they local people?

The majority were local people. They didn't come with the Russian invasion. The Russian Ukrainians, they were a different breed. They did different kind of work. But that was just the people who joined the Nazis. They wanted to destroy the Russians. They didn't have no use for the Russians. They didn't have no use for the Polish.

So they thought, the Germans are going to give them a country. So they sympathized with the Germans. So they did everything the Germans told them to do. And they did the most dirty work, the most destructions-- the most killing was done by the Ukrainians. The German, zero comparison to what they did. They were just cold-blooded murderers.

How long were you with these partisans?

Not too long. I got typhus. And I wind up the-- I don't know what happened with me. I just know, I've been carried. At night, I was laying on top of an oven in the farmer's house. And during the day, I wind up laying in between hay in the barn. And one day, again, Ukrainian came in with a horse and buggy to collect some wheat what the farmer was supposed to give to the Nazis.

And he didn't because how could he? He was giving it to the partisans. He didn't have enough to give. So they thought that he's cheating on him and he's hiding. So they came to the barn. And they used two pitchforks. And they kept on going between the hay.

And here I am, already-- I'm already alive. I'm not already-- the typhus is already over with. I already felt a little better. If they would have given me one more or two more days, I would have been back with the partisans.

And I feel sorry for the farmer, what they did to him afterwards. Because as bad as I was, as drowsy as I was, I remember them saying it, if there's going to be a hair missing on the Jew's head, you'll be dead, and all your family will be burned up with you together. That's what the partisans told him. So he was in a bad shape from the partisans and from the Nazis.

So anyway, when they kept on going with that pitchfork in the hay, I turned around. I says, hold it. I'm here. Who are you? A Jew. What are you doing here? I says, I just hide. Where are you from? I told him where I'm from-- not where I come from originally. I remember, there was a ghetto in that city. There was a lot of Jews over there. I says, from there.

They wrapped me up in rope and throw me up in the wagon, just like a pig, and dragged me into the

Gestapo station. Came to Gestapo station. They put me against the wall and start beating on me. And I told them the whole story-- not exactly everything. But I told them where I'm originally from.

Do I know a guy by the name of Ornstein, Dr. Ornstein? Said, sure. How do you know him? I says, I know him. I lived here for a while. Why did you run away? I says, I didn't want to live in the ghetto. I wanted to be free.

Did the farmer? See, I tried to save even the farmer. Did the farmer know that you were there? I says, no. How did you live? I says, I know where the farmers keep their breads after they're baking. And that's what I used to do. I used to get some bread and butter from them. And that's what I used to live on. And that was a fact. Until I got there, that's how I used to live, until I got from one part of Poland to the other. Anyway.

Anyway, I came-- after they gave me a beating, my head was like a balloon. They got me against a corner of a wall. And a guy by the name of Wegner-- I never forget him, the Gestapo-- beating up on me.

And he asked me again, do you know Dr. Ornstein? I said, yes. So he calls another ugly-looking guy, like Frankenstein, a German. And here, I'm trying to find out his character while he-- they put a rope on my neck. And he dragged me like a dog through the town. And he was leading me to the little ghetto where they had over there. He turns around.

And while I'm going, I'm trying to talk to him in Polish. See, I'm trying to find my way around to get to talk with him. So he answers me in German. He says, you're Polish swine, says, you don't speak no Polish. I know you're blabbering something, he says, in Polish. I don't speak it. You understand German. He says, why don't you talk to me in German? So I try to strike up conversation.

And I see that the guy isn't as-- he only has a mean look. Even he is a SS, he's not that mean. He's a mild person because he didn't treated me that bad. Even he put that rope on my neck and he lead me like a dog-- I had to go behind him, naturally-- he wasn't rough on me.

So the reason I want to find out whether he speaks Polish, because I had to jump ahead of him to tell that guy Dr. Ornstein that he knows me. And as he brings me in to this place, it was like an office in the front. He made-- what happened is they destroyed all Jews from this township. And then the Dr. Ornstein was a venereal-- was a specialist on venereal diseases.

That Wegner, that whole Gestapo guy who was the leader of the whole city, who had his jurisdiction-- the whole town of Hrubieszów, was-- caught some venereal disease. And that Dr. Ornstein helped him. Whether he cured him or whatever he did, anyway, he helped him. He must have cured him of it. So to be good to this Jew who saved him, he says, I'm going to make a ghetto. And you can-- you'll be in charge of 150 people. And I'm going to keep them busy in town, send them out to restaurants with German officers.

Dr. Ornstein?

Yeah. And the doctor, he didn't do nothing. His family didn't do nothing. There were three brothers and there was a sister. They didn't do nothing. But he was running the ghetto, the Dr. Ornstein. He was sending out people to work to some restaurants where Germans used to-- officers used to eat and to some farmers, to help some farmers.

Once in a while, they found some Jews hidden by Polish people. They used to send out-- there after they killed them, they sent us out to load them up on a wagon, and haul them up, and bury them. That's the kind of work we used to do in the city.

But anyway, this-- I'm jumping the gun. If they bringing them in, before they bringing in, as soon as they open the door, I jump ahead and I tell them-- the doctor in Polish, you better tell him that you know me. My name is so-and-so. You tell him you know me. I told him where I'm from. So he turns around, he hugs me, he says-- and he tells me in Polish that he had a girlfriend from my city.

And sure enough, he turns around and tells him in German, sure, I know that boy. I don't know. I was



wondering what happened to him. He must have disappeared on me. Oh, thank you for bringing him in. Thank you, thank you. Takes the rope off of my neck. And this is it.

And then what happened to your foot? He says to me. He lays me out in the hospital. And he cured my foot. He got me straight. And then they've been sending me out to work, like I said, doing all that kind of things-- chopping wood for some restaurants.

One time, they sent me out with another guy. And we-- there were two Jewish kids shot, little babies. We wrapped them up in blankets. They were still hot and bloody-- and buried them. All that kind of work, we used to.

Finally, that picnic had to go get all of it. And nothing lasts forever, the ghetto. One day, they came in, says, dress-- take the best clothes and put it on on you, whatever you can. And whatever you can carry in your hand-- in your pockets-- I mean, in your hand-- no suitcases, just a bundle, whatever you can carry on the one hand, that's all you can take with you. And you're going.

But I'm going to make sure, he said, that you're going to be-- you're not going to go to the chamber-- to the gas chambers. You're not going to be destroyed. That's what they just told us. Because the doctor told us this. But that's what he promised them.

And they put us on-- not on railroad cars, but still on cattle trains. And we went through Majdanek. But we bypassed it. We've seen it through the windows. It was Majdanek. We went through a lot of camps. And we wind up in Hrubieszów. Not Hrubieszów, I'm sorry. I'm jumping the gun. It's not a camp. Like I said, I didn't have my story correct.

I wind up in Budzyn. In Budzyn, the camp had only one Gestapo and all Ukrainians. And Budzyn was a camp originally from Polish prisoners. So all Polacks that got loose, all Ukrainians they let loose, whoever were in the Polish Army from 1939 yet. But all Jews, they kept, they still had some Polish uniforms on their people.

You can imagine it's already year 1942, almost '43. And they still got Polish uniforms left from '39, all Jews. There were Jews from Wilno, Grodno, Dubno, all territory of Poland used to be. Because Poland used to go in deep into Ukrainian part during the Polish time. Anyway, there were Jews from all over, from Warsaw, but none from my town that I could think of. Anyway, I didn't ask around too much.

Excuse me, were these military uniforms?

Military, from 1939 in the Polish Army.

These men served in their--

In the Polish Army against the Germans, naturally, protect Poland. They were drafted. Of course, a Jew was only drafted-- some of them were in the army. See, when you were 21-- and during the normal days, in Poland, you had 21, you had to serve two years regardless, unless you're crippled, you don't qualify, regardless of what your nationality. Even if a Jew became an officer, they put him in the reserve. They couldn't be a soldier anymore. But anyway, they were drafted or whatever. And there were still soldiers there.

Then they brought in-- we were the first civilians they brought into this camp. In this camp, what saved us, that Wegner, he was bad. But he treated-- he protected that Ornstein. See, I fell in in a group that I knew I'm going to be protected unless they kill me. That Ornstein was protected because we work for a company by the name of Henkel. That company still exists in Germany. If it wouldn't be for the Henkel, we would have been destroyed. He saved us once, for sure, that I know of, from Budzyn.

Anyway, over there, they divided us-- some of them worked in a factory to make an ammunition and making parts to tanks and airplanes. And me, I don't know. Most of the time over there, I was lucky. I worked for Ukrainians. Because I knew their language, they used to pick me. Sometime, I got beat up, kicked. I had to protect myself at all time because they used to take me on the weekend. And they had parties. They were

drunk.

And I had to shine their boots, clean their uniforms because they were filthy from drinking like pigs, getting filthy, rolling all over the mud. And then if they didn't like the job, then I was beat up. Or if I was lucky, I was rewarded with some beer and food.

Anyway, and then there was one German over there. He was Volksdeutsche-- that means a Polack from German descent. And he had a rank of a Obersturmführer. He used to-- there was a big army headquarter, a German Army headquarters over there. And they used to collect from the farmer's potatoes.

And he used to sign them how much they brought in. And the farmer said, you-- you see, you have to check the farmer, what he brings in. And he used to give-- and sign him that he brought in his amount, what he was supposed to bring in, providing that they brought him some whiskey, sausage.

And I used to be the smallest. I used to pick that stuff up from the farmers. And I used to tell them, well-- he says, do you think he brought in 500 kilos potatoes? I said, sure because the farmer gave me whiskey-- but not me, I turn it over to him. If he wanted to give me something, then he says, take it. So anyway, I was lucky there too for a while.

And then-- and nothing lasts long. One night, the whole camp is surrounded with Ukrainians with machine guns. That was a bad night. It was raining that night. And the big German SS man-- I don't know who the hell they were. Because my barrack, where I was living in, was right by the gate, close by the gate.

Through the cracks of the boards, I used to see what was going on outside. I knew that the camp is surrounded. And I heard them saying, we gotta destroy them. We gotta destroy all Jews. And all of a sudden, I see a car coming. It had lights and pointing straight at me, almost, because through the crack, I see it.

And a guy comes up. And he says that he's Henkel. And he said, those are my Jews. You cannot destroy them. I need them. They're qualified workers. They are support of Germany. If it wouldn't be for them, we wouldn't have ammunition to fight with. We wouldn't have airplanes to fly with. You Messerschmitts are built by those Jews. And you got to save them. They're my Jews. And they're your Jews.

All right. He says, we cannot keep them here in this camp. We got to destroy this camp. That's the order from the führer. And anyway, they come in in the morning, as cold as it was and nasty. They strip us all naked. We have to drop all our clothes. They chase us for about two miles, naked in the snow, sleet, and mud, down in the forefront of the German barracks.

Over there, they had a bathhouse. And they give us all showers, warm showers over there. Because that was for the German soldiers in their barracks. They give us one section. And we showered. But everything was beating-- fast, fast, fast, fast. On the way out, they give you a hot-- the first time when I got the concentration camp uniform and stripes.

It was hot because-- I don't know where they got it from. They must have disinfected it. And it was still hot from the dryers, what they had, the machinery. Because they used to use it for the soldiers, the same machinery, to dry their clothes.

Anyway, they gave us that uniform. And they put us on trains right away. And it didn't take long. The train was going. It wasn't stopping and going slow, it was just going. And we wind up in Mielec. In Mielec, they have a factory. They built bodies to Messerschmitts.

Excuse me. Could you describe your trip in the cattle car a little bit?

There's not much to describe. There was going fast. And they gave us food. And I happened to be lucky. I wind up in one of the cattle trains, in one of them wagons in the train-- a half a carload was loaded with loaves of bread and a half of people. It shows you if you got to live. Forget about it. I did that too. It's-- I have to go back now.

It's-- finish your story now.

All right, anyway.

We'll go back to that.

When we came to Mielec, they had a factory over there. And there were already Jews from different camps. And we were treated miserable-- not by the Nazis. Because by the Nazis, we were recommended as A class. We were all fed well. We looked good. We didn't look like concentration camp people because we were treated good all over.

And the people in the camp were jealous of us. Look how they look. And over there, where they tattooed us right away when we came in and put the KL on us. As we were doing it-- and now that I give you another incident-- if you just put your hand out and you didn't say nothing, he did a beautiful tattoo job, neat, small like mine.

If you shook your hand slightly, you got that thing down big. If you wore a little rougher, you got that down from-- he put a big K here and a big L here. And this hurts. One guy was shaking so bad, they put his-- they lay him down on the floor. And they put-- a guy put his foot on his throat. And they tattooed him right in his forehead. That's the kind of miserable Nazis they had over there.

Anyway, over there, there was-- that's where I broke my back in this camp. Why? I don't know why, for no reason at all, because of the one Nazi worked with. Over there, what we were doing is just burying the bodies for the Messerschmitts. As we got through with the body, like an assembly line, used to go-- when we got through with the body, we used to push it out.

And they came in with a-- from the other side. See, they didn't trust us with the motors. We only did the bodies. The motors were done by Germans, and by some Polacks, and maybe Ukrainians that they trust. And they brought in-- otherwise, we pushed it in and the engine was already hanging. And that's all as far as we went. And then they chased us back, five or six of us pushing it.

A Messerschmitt body was light. Everything was made out of aluminum. And it was light. Actually, normal two people could push it. That's how light it was. But there used to be six or eight of us usually to make sure that everything is going straight and fast. And after that, I chased it back.

One day morning, I come in on a Monday. They chased us to work. From the camp wasn't far, just like a straight line of highway, like to the factory. They used to chase us to work in the morning after they'd counted us and everything. And I come in. And we had to finish a job from a night before on the tail end. We had to do some extra plates. I don't know what they needed extra plates on the tail end.

My job was crawling in in sight. And we were doing riveting. And we used to get along nice with that guy. I mean, we didn't talk much. But we had an understanding-- when the rivet was formed. And you see, nowadays, they have rivet guns that you don't have to even go in in any place. But years ago, they didn't have that. You had to form it from the inside. And they use a hammer from the outside.

And I had a piece of steel. It was heavy piece of iron in my hand to form the rivet, while he was pushing it in. And as soon as I give him two knocks, he had to stop. I knock and knock, I used my hand. I couldn't knock too hard with that piece of iron. If I would-- aluminum is very weak. You can make a hole with a thumb if you're strong enough. He made a hole through and through with that hammer.

And then they pull me out of the airplane, drag me into camp, took me for a saboteur. Two German shepherds were holding my leg-- bite my feet. If I move, they bite harder. And they give me 125 on my bare back. Three days out of my life disappeared. I don't know what happened. But I licked my wounds. And I came out.

Some people did help me with some food. I was laying underneath over there in the barrack in the dirt

because I was filthy. Because when you get a beating like that, you don't-- your body function, it comes-- you don't even know. And I was laying there. And finally, I cleaned myself out. And I went back to work.

All right. Coming back, while I was in that camp, they picked up 10 the healthiest guys they could in that camp and Hrubieszów. They brought in 30,000 Jews from all over around. We didn't know that they were going to bring them. I found out after that later. They took us. And we were digging a hole. We were just digging, and digging, and digging.

And that hole got so tremendously big that it took you some time-- 15 minutes to climb out of it. We made-- we created-- of course, there were engineers who showed us how to do it. We were digging out, and having a wheelbarrow, and go around, and around, and around, and around, and coming up with the dirt. That holes was so big, what we almost hit water, almost like digging a-- we made three holes for them like that.

We didn't know what the hell was for. And then, by the way, they kept us, all 10 of us, they kept us in a jail, in the city jail. Ukrainians were watching us. The doors were open. We weren't in jail, like-- but the doors were open from the jail. You could go out to the washroom. You could go out, take a shower. You used the same shower, the same washroom what the Ukrainians did. You had food galore. You had a whiskey. You had beer if you wanted, everything.

We didn't know what the hell for. One day, they don't take us on just a pickup truck, like they used to, open. They put us in a panel. And they bring us there. And we sit there in the panel. They don't let us out. Of course, you still had little cracks to see what's going on.

And we hear people. They're bringing in truckloads, and truckloads, and truckloads. And they're shooting them and shooting them, lay them out, lay them out. One was half-full. They tell us to come out, cover them, and pour-- whitewash, they used to use. It smells like Lysol, there a certain chemical. And we pour this over. And then they take us back to the panel truck. And they fill in the hole again all the way.

One incidence, which I'm never going to forget-- a guy turns around while I'm-- the hole is already full with people. While I'm covering it, one guy turns around to me. And he says to me in Yiddish that he's not hurt at all, that he's still alive. I shouldn't bury him. And I don't move. I don't move my head at all. And I turn around. And I says to him, I'm not going to put too much.

And you drank.

All I just-- is I hear him saying that he's still alive. And he's not even shot. So I says, I'm going to cover you mildly. And close your eyes while I put a little dirt on you. And at night, I says, you're going to crawl out and go about your business. There is a ghetto, I says. They still got 150 men. And I gave him-- I even told him who the guy is. Says, the guy is Ornstein, is there. And he says-- and that's it.

So another yokel comes in and starts having a conversation with him. And a Ukrainian sees that, he jumps right into that hole, and takes that shovel from that guy, and chops the guy's head off, just in a split of a moment. And that's the end of this story. I would have saved maybe one life, but what could I do?

I wasn't saved either. You don't know the story yet. I'm coming to it. We finished all the job. There was one hole-- we had three like this to cover. There was-- in each one was 10,000 Jews. They had it figured out exactly to the-- everything was engineered. The Germans knew how many people will fit in this hole. And every hole had-- there was 10,000 Jews. It was three holes like that.

Believe me, when we got through with some of those holes, the Earth was still moving. And it was in my eye-- in my head for days, and days, and days, and still is. And it's never going to get out of my head. And a lot of times, I don't want to talk about it. There was years I didn't want to talk about it. But even the people who were with me in camp, I didn't want to talk about it.

But they weren't with me. We had to run away. We had to break out. On the end, we had to break out from jail. We had to kill a couple of Ukrainians in order to get out. And we ran.

But what we did, we knew that we cannot run anywhere else because in the forest, we know who it is. I knew who it was there. And I know he wouldn't accept me anymore-- and especially when I had nine men with me. And domi opus-- some of them are so far fanatic. Some of them were even-- one of them was even a Hasid who still had his payos or rolled around his things. And he still had this [NON-ENGLISH] with the tzitzit and all that constantly. And you wouldn't see him without a cap. And I don't know whether he survived.

I know the Ornsteins did-- not all of them, but one of them did-- or two because they were my witness when I needed for Wiedergutmachung. I sent away a-- did I call or I sent away a paper? You sent away a letter. And Ornstein remembered me very well and signed for me. So what happened? Putting-- going back to the story, what we did is we hide in the ghetto after we ran away.

And Ornstein didn't-- he not supposed to know. He didn't know, let's put it that way. We made sure he didn't know. See, the ghetto was open. The ghetto wasn't like a ghetto anywhere else. We just had one street. And there were houses that when I came, they put me up to the two widow ladies who they took their husbands away in another clean-up when they clean up Hrubieszów city.

Those 30,000, they got them from all over. I don't know where they found them. But they felt that this is a place where they can bury 30,000 people. And that's where they planned it. And that's where they did it. So honestly, I'm not supposed to know where I was-- where we were.

So we went back to our places where we used to live. One of them had even a wife, one of the guys-- that dummy who turned around to talk to the guy. And I thought always he's a smart. And he was one of the guys. You know what he was before the war? He had a horse and a buggy.

And he was-- they used to call him droshky. Do you know what that was? A carriage. See, there were no cabs. That was a cabbie. That's what he was. So he was a down to earth guy. I mean, he been around. He was a street man. He'd been in a city, doing it day and night. And he'd been around.

But he was so stupid to turn around and talk to that guy. That's what he was. That's the guy. And I thought he's the bravest-- me being even a little younger than him, I was looking up to him. And then I didn't want no part of him. Of course, we didn't last long because in a couple of weeks or so, the ghetto was-- like I was saying before.

Evacuated?

Yeah, they told us to get dressed the best we know how. And they referred to us because I didn't go out of the house. And the Gestapo didn't know where we disappeared. He figured, what the hell? We only killed two Ukrainians. We didn't kill no Germans. So they didn't care. They didn't look too far. They figured, they're going to get the Jew anyway, regardless. So they didn't look too far for us. And they never imagined that we were going to go and be in the ghetto. But we didn't-- we weren't sent out to work because as far as the doctor goes, we weren't--