

--accurate-- Yes. Then-- I go back to the story. Then the last, I think I was is I was in Mielec, what I told you. I got the beating. And after the beating, I went back to work. I lick my wounds and all that. I got myself cleaned up. And I went back to work, being young.

I had some friends over there from my group only, those 150 guys, which they came, and they brought me some food. And they helped me along while I was laying there and recuperating. And then I got back to work, and that's all.

And I was acting normal. It was hurting. I was scrouched up. I was in pain. But that don't mean nothing. I wasn't the only one who got beaten up.

And after Hrubiesz<sup>3</sup>w, the front got--

Now the Orenstein teams wind up in Hrubiesz<sup>3</sup>w, too?

Yeah, but I didn't see them over there. I lost-- well, because him being a doctor, I don't know about the rest of the Orensteins. I know the doctor was good in Budzyn when we were in Budzyn with him. And he was a doctor there.

I got kicked from a Nazi a while back, and I had a rupture. And it was so bad, it was almost hanging onto my knee. And I kept on tying it up and holding it back. And I didn't want to be operated on it. Orenstein backed me. And it's a good thing I didn't, because if I would have been in the hospital, they would have-- the Ukrainians would have taken me out, because they were-- anybody who came to the hospital there, was operated or wherever, they took him out and shot him. That was the Ukrainians' job, to clean up, to keep the hospital clean.

And Orenstein backed me. He says, come and operate. It's going to take only five, six days. I says, no. I says after I survive, after the war is over. And if there isn't, let me die just the way I am.

I says, I can still control it. I can-- I'm still strong. I can do it. And I don't want no operation.

And you know when I was operated? Way after the war. I was already married.

In '46.

In Germany, in '46. In Germany, after the war, I was operated. I told her. We went to visit a uncle of hers. And I seen one guy being operated, a young guy. I ask him, would we operate on. He told me what, so.

And we've been in Germany. We were in Landsberg. In Landsberg I was a policeman. See, I'm mixing the stories up.

That's all right.

It's OK, I guess.

Now in Landsberg, this is after liberation.

After, yeah. But anyway, let me go back to the camp. I'm going to tell you the story afterwards. From Mielec-- where was I from Mielec? I'm trying to figure out. Yeah. They liquidate Mielec. They didn't know what to do with us.

Still, Heinkel was still there, believe it or not. Tried to save. Still try to save some of us.

They took us out to Wieliczka. Wieliczka was already a concentration camp. And they already had [PLACE NAME] on their hands too. I still belonged-- even Mielec was controlled over from Heinkel, that guy.

Was Heinkel a German?

Naturally, yeah. If you want to know who Heinkel is, their company is the first one who discovered rotary engine. Just happened recently, the same company. And they sold it to Japan. And for a while, Mazda had it. If you remember, I'm mechanically inclined, so I follow those things. I'm subscribing to Popular Mechanic, and I--

So Heinkel was still--

Heinkel still exists otherwise there. They're still in the mechanical business. They're still doing the same thing.

But one thing at least I can say, whether the man is still alive or not, but the company still goes on the same name. And if it wouldn't be for them, he saved quite a few Jews that way. But this is my experience.

So anyway, so we were in Wieliczka. In Wieliczka, I only worked a little while. They took us down to a mine. In Wieliczka was a salt mine, by the way. A lot of people worked in the salt mines, and a lot of people worked in factories for ammunition, and bodies for airplanes, and the same thing. And things, motor parts, to put the Messerschmitts together everything to do with war material, and everything Heinkel had. And Heinkel was involved in it.

And they did have all the flow of people, so they kept them to help the products in the salt mines. I've been there only a couple of days. I was down in the mine maybe once or twice. It's scary. It's not nice to be in a mine, a salt mine. But that's not the end of it. I was in mines again.

After we were in there for a while, they still tried to take the same group. There was 150. I don't know whether we, all 150 of us, were still alive. But anyway, there was 150 of us anyway. And they shipped us to Flossenburg.

Now over there, we were running. And until I came to Flossenburg, I was half dead. Now over there, I experienced really bad. They didn't feed us. They didn't give us nothing to drink. Whatever food we could gather before they took us, whatever anybody had with him.

But the people who somehow were with us, they shared with each other whatever they had, even if it's only a crumb. We divide it and we shared.

They didn't pack us in like animals, but they drag us. There's still cattle trains. But they didn't pack us like they were going to kill us.

See, in some places, what they did is that if there wasn't enough room, they took the butts of the guns, the rifles, and then start beating. And actually, when they beat, you jump. And we just like animals. They jump one on top of each other, they have more room, so they push more in.

But us they didn't force. Let's say 150, whatever, we could go in in one car load. They pushed-- they didn't push us in. We just says, can you push in a little more, they used to ask? And we say no, they closed the door and locked.

But anyway, we came to Flossenburg. In Flossenburg they gave us beds. Now over there was-- we were upstairs. And downstairs they had a crematorium. They were burning them. And we seen it. We seen little carloads with-- hands and feet hanging over it, pushing them.

Where did they brought these bodies from, I never could find-- discover. Whether they gassed them over there, whether they didn't, or they brought them in already killed, I don't know. But I know they were burning them there. And that's Flossenburg.

I still have a souvenir left from Flossenburg. While I was there, they give us blankets. But that's all they give us. They stripped us nude, took all our clothes away. We thought for sure they're going to-- we going to wind up over there, downstairs.

But we were walking around for about three days. And Heinkel saved us again, I presume, with blankets. They'd give us blankets. So at least we had something to cover. It was cold, awful. But we had to walk around. We didn't work for a

couple of days.

Then they give us some stripe uniforms again, with yellow triangles. They put us on a train and they shipped us to [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Leitmeritz. That's the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia. That's not far away from Theresienstadt.

We came to Leitmeritz. It was an international camp. There were French. There were Germans, gentile. There were gypsies, some of them would still survived. Everybody had red triangles. The Jews had yellow.

As soon as I came there, I got acquainted with one Ukrainian who was a Russian soldier. Now he was a good Ukrainian. You don't find too many like that.

The first thing what he did to me, he says-- he walks over to me. I'm looking for good Jews, he says. He came to our group. And I says, everybody is a good Jew. Did you ever see a bad Jew?

He turns around to me and talks to me in Yiddish. [YIDDISH] he says to me-- "Just like an ordinary Jew." Spoke Jewish better than I did at that time.

He says to me, you are a [YIDDISH]. I'm a Jew more than you are, he says. I was born and raised. And he tells me that. I says, you never ask me where I come from. And sure enough, he comes from the same town where I come from.

He was a Russian soldier. He wasn't one of those-- he was raised and brought up by Jewish people. He only knew he's a Ukrainian by his religion. But he loved Jews, and he lived among the Jews. He worked among Jews. And Jewish people were his people.

He adopted himself to Judaism. He just didn't convert to anything like that. And I happened to be lucky in catching him.

The first thing he did to me when I try telling him where I'm from, where I was born, which street and everything, he rips off that yellow thing from me. I was looking at him. What the hell are you doing? He says, you don't like it? He rips the whole jacket off. Takes me in a warehouse and gives me a jacket with a red stripe.

He says, you're going to be in my Kommando. You're not a Jew. And I've been working in that camp until the end of the war.

Anyway, being in that camp, I was lucky again. They assigned me, myself-- only me-- to one Nazi. To two-- I mean, one Nazi. To two Germans. But one Nazi was taking me to work myself every night. They took me away from his brigade. I still belonged to him, because he was still my commander. But I took me away after a while.

Two guys, two Germans, ones that took me-- there was a evening. We worked towards the evening one day. He seen me, and he says-- ask me what's my name. I told him, Willy, William Koenig.

He said, bist du Deutsch? I says, no, I'm not Deutsch. To him, I turn around and says I speak Yiddish. So he tells me [GERMAN]. I says, because I work in a-- he didn't care much.

I said, because I work in a Russian Kommando. And I don't lie. I says, he told me to be Russian. [GERMAN] Make no difference whoever you are. He says, I want to see what you can do.

So they take me in and they try me out. And I did practically every job they show me. Anything they show me, I did it. He asked me what we did, to give you an example. When we just start to work there, there was just a mountain. We wind up digging a mine. And from the mine we created factories. We made big holes. And electricity came in, and the railroad. Cars came in, railroad tracks and everything. Beautiful, painted in white. And everything with electricity, fluorescent lights and everything.

And before the war ended, they were producing modest tanks. They pushed them out on railroad cars. They came up

with a-- like a miner comes up from a elevator, a elevator, a railroad car. They roll it up. A whole bunch of mechanics stay there. They put in the engines in the tank, and the tanks are rolling down the hill and going to the front.

And I worked that with them, two Germans. And they were treating me like their own son. Every night I had an old Nazi who took me to work. I worked nights only, because they worked nights. What we did is did a lot of blowing out to make big places again, make another working halls. We were doing the blowing.

And the groups came in, the rest of the people came in during the day, and cleaning it all out. And then we came at night, and we chiseled the ceilings and put some whatever support we had to do, because--

In other words, you were dynamiting.

Yeah. And I was the only Jew, which they knew there was a Jew. The Nazi didn't know I was a Jew. The German who took me to work didn't know I'm a Jew. I carry his rifle. He was 80 years old.

So only the Ukrainian [CROSS TALK] actually--

No, not this-- only one man.

Ukrainian.

Yeah. And he said-- but I had a hunch that some of those Russian from my brigade knew, because Sundays we didn't work. Then we were laying around. Actually, being Jewish, I wanted to be between-- see what's going on between my people.

So a couple of Russians didn't know, because one of them turn around, and he said, hey, you're not Ukrainian. You're not Polish, either, he said to me. I says, what do you think I am? Ah, he says, you're Jewish. Because you don't see any of us going and talking to the Jews.

See, they thought they're better, but they're not. They weren't better. They were running away from camps, and they were hanging them just like they did the Jews. And they're bringing back, the Russians too.

These were war criminals.

No, not war criminals. Those Russians were prisoners of war originally, yeah. But the rest of the Christians were war criminals, like French resistance, were other French. I got acquainted over there with a Polish Frenchman who spoke Polish. But he was born in France. His parents were miners. And he worked for the resistance. And I made a good friends in there, a good friend in the camp.

But with the Germans, I couldn't get too close, the one in the camp, because they were running the camp. And yet they were still anti-Nazi. But they didn't care for any other nationality that well.

Didn't care for Jews.

Jews neither. Maybe if I would be a German Jew, maybe if I would-- yeah, if I would unveil my name, somehow, when I talk to those two guys, my masters, they were old coal miners. That's all they knew is mining. But over there, they didn't do mining. They just did the work, opening big holes for workshops, for machinery to take in. But their job was mining.

And they took a liking to me, and they didn't treat me like a Jew or anything else. They treat me like a human being. And they fed me, too.

Then were you liberated and--

Well, two days before the liberation, they took all the Jews out. And I had a fight with that Ukrainian. I says, let me go. He says, no. Over my dead body. If I have to nail you to the cross, he says, I keep you here. If I have to make another Jesus out of you, I keep you here.

And I didn't want to fight him anymore. I says, what's going to happen if-- I know there's a couple of Russians who says they know it. And I'm afraid of them. They got loose talk.

He says, they won't. He says, I already had a talk with them. He says, I took my group together, he says. And I had a talk with them. And they know when I say no it's going to be no. My life is your life. He says, you stay.

Were the Jews evacuated--

Two days, yeah, to Theresienstadt, only by 9 kilometers away. I didn't even know there was a Theresienstadt existed. But after the war, I found out. That's where I met my wife.

So how did you wind up in Theresienstadt?

Well, to go see where my Jews are? I was the only Jew.

After liberation?

Right. The Russians came in, and they moved us in in the officer's quarters. We moved in. We didn't live in camp. We lived in officer's quarters. They give us 24 hours. We could go out and take the city over, and do any revenge we want, anything we want. After 24 hours, we had to come back to camp.

We had beds. We had beautiful rooms. We had washrooms just like the officers we lived. Every room had two or three beds.

So who liberated you?

The Russians.

Russians.

Yes. Just like Theresienstadt was liberated by the Russians.

How did they--

That Ukrainian, by the way, didn't make it. Would you believe it?

Now see, I listened to him, but he didn't want to listen to me. See, he was a Russian soldier. He was a officer in the Russian service. They were his men, by the way. So that's why he could swear for every one of them. He says, they will not escape, because the Nazis are going to bring him back and hang him. He says, and they will not squeal on you. They will not say nothing against me, because I'm their officer.

They caught us. They caught us all together, he says. And we stick the war out together.

And towards the end, what happened, I begged him not to go, and he did. The whole camp was already surrounded with the Russian. We heard the whole night the artillery, that we didn't go out to work for the last two days. They kept us in camp. Kept us because we were supposed to be Christians. The Jews were already out for two days previous.

And we know. We knew that it's just a matter of minutes or something like that. Or maybe a day or half a day. And a lot of the guards who were in the towers, we didn't see nobody.

Escaped. They ran--

They just walked off. We got a hold of them, though, afterwards. Anybody who didn't leave Czechoslovakia, unless they left Czechoslovakia, then we caught them. We got him, and we hung him, and we shot him, and we beat him. And we made sure he's a SS too. We know where to look for and everything.

We had a court set up with a judge, with a jury. Everything was done [INAUDIBLE]. Hang him or not. Kill him or not. And that happened, everything, in 24 hours.

And after that, we had to drop our weapons, put everything away, forget about everything. We know the Russian rules. When they give you an order not to, you don't.

So anyway, I went to, after the 24 hours, I found out there's a Theresienstadt, that Jews survived there. And I found out the whole story. I told her what-- the whole story of what was supposed to happen to the Jews, that the leader, the Gestapo, who ran the whole camp, didn't want to be captured by the Russians. So he went to the International Red Cross. He didn't go. He couldn't go. He left a message with them because they used to come to the camp.

Because Theresienstadt was supposed to be a picturesque place. It was a show place for the Nazi, which Hitler showed that he treated the Jews right. What happened in the back of the camp, nobody inside the camp, nobody got in. He just only show him the frontage, like they show you in Hollywood.

They were-- Jews were sitting and drinking and whatever. It was supposed to have been whiskey or wine. If they were happy, they had some little black tea there in the glasses. Anyway. And they had some clothes on like human beings. But they didn't see what was going on in the back, that people were dying from hunger in there in the camp, in Theresienstadt.

So he asked the Red Cross to save the camp? Is that what--

Well, he-- no, he didn't ask for that, because he didn't want to save himself. He says, if you going to liberate me today, I tell you a secret, what I supposed to do. I have an order. He didn't give the order yet. He says, but he had directly the order. He had to just tell it to his henchmen, what to do-- to destroy the whole-- it was dynamite.

See, the camp wasn't dynamite. What happened over there in this particular city, they had underground prehistorical places. What did they used to call it?

Caves?

Caves. There were caves over there. And those caves were mined. And the order was chase the Jews down to the cave--

Dynamite.

--and light a match. Then everything was set up. Light a mine. I didn't have to light a match. Just pull the plunger, connected the few wires. So everything was set. They would have been just inside. That's it.

So he made a deal?

So he made a deal with them. And the Red Cross found out about it, as they found out. They took him under on one of them wagons. They took him over here. They send him over to the ally's side, which he know he's going to be safe over there. And the Russians. Because the Russians dealt [CROSS TALK].

As a trade for saving the camp.

Yeah, so what they did, they didn't know they're going to save the camp yet. But they figure that he's the only one who knows about it, which he told the truth. But what the Red Cross didn't take no chances. They went over to the Russian,

and the Russian to the Russian front.

And the guy who led this particular district happened to be a Jew himself. And he turned around and he said, there's an order from Stalin, that we have to take that city fast. And sure enough, they took it. They give everybody a drink-- a bottle of whiskey, a drink of whiskey. A Russian soldier gets a drink, he goes. And they took--

So it was like a surprise.

And they-- a surprise to the Germans when they took over the camp. And that's how over 40,000-- I don't know exactly. I think there was more than 40,000 Jews saved.

What happened to the Ukrainian?

Oh, the Ukrainian didn't want to stay in camp. He wanted to go greet his fellow soldiers. So there came a whole-- they went, a whole bunch of them, and they broke through the gate. It wasn't electrocuted anymore. It was already-- because they made sure the lights are out. The power is off.

And one stubborn Nazi was still sitting in a tower, and he opened a machine gun, and he laid out a whole bunch of Russians. Amongst them were other-- maybe not only Russians. There were other ones who wanted to go greet the liberators.

And he was amongst them, and picked up his hat, and he was bleeding from all over, just like you make a hole in-- holes in. Because the machine gun, it was just spraying on them over them. And he was just leaking blood from all over. And I couldn't get a word out of him anymore.

After you were--

After I was liberated, I met a whole bunch of girls. But she stuck with them together. And I says, why do you have to be here? She says, come to the officer quarters where I live. I mean, you don't have to live with the boys together. Women are going to be separate and men are going to be separate, sure enough.

So you took care of them.

I took them all over to their camp, and they settled there. But we weren't there too long. Maybe a week or so. Because the Russians didn't want to keep this up. We had too good. And they know if we-- they take us to Russia, we wouldn't have that great.

Used to go out to farms. She used to go out and bring some food galore-- fresh chickens, all kind of meat, veal. And we had places to cook and eat. My God, we lived it up.

And the Russians didn't want that. They want to take us on a train. They took us all to a place where they start-- they wanted to take us back to Russia. Now we know better, and I didn't want to go to Russia. I've been with the Russians before. I mean, I have nothing against the Russian people, but I don't like their regime. I didn't care for communism.

Our aim was to, like my wife said, was to go to Israel. But that was impossible.

Did you go back to your hometown?

No, I never did. I was afraid. I found out it was taken over by the Russians, because Lw<sup>3</sup>w was-- but see, they changed the map. From in '45, the map changed. See, what they did is they made Poland a little larger the other way, but they cut them short on the Ukrainian side. And Lw<sup>3</sup>w was a large city. It was almost a million population during the Russian time. In 1939, in 1940, there was a million population in our city. So that's not a small little town.

And it was a very industrial city. I mean, it was everything over there. We had from tanneries to steel mills. And not far

away from us there were even refineries. Not only refineries. They were producing-- there were-- had oil, oil fields. They had oil.

Were you hoping for some survivors from your family?

I was, and thank God I found out that my sisters, two sisters survived. I didn't find out until I was in Germany already after the war, in displaced person camp. And I then-- I went to Poland and she came to Germany, one of the sisters. One of them I didn't find out until I was already in the United States. [INAUDIBLE].

Did you ever get to meet them?

Oh, yeah. I've even brought them over to the States. But her, and her husband, and two children. As a matter of fact, they wind up in Brooklyn with my only other sister together. She wanted to-- I thought she was going to stay with me in Illinois, where I lived, in Skokie. But she wanted to go back to her sister. So she went back to Brooklyn and she settled over there.

It's a matter of fact, the two boys got circumcised in America. They were never born in Poland. They weren't circumcised.

See, she met a guy. He's a Jewish guy too. But he was during the war in Russia, her husband, her younger sister's. And they had-- he was a-- studied law in Russia. And he was a lawyer in Poland. But what kind of law could he study? It's all communist. If he defends somebody, he was accused of doing the wrong things.

Anyway, he couldn't stay there, so they had to leave. So they came to the States.

When you first came, you came to New York?

In New York I was only 24 hours. I was aiming to go. Then they put us on a train, and we came to Chicago.

And you spent the rest of your life--

Most, yeah, all my life, Chicago.

From the DP camps, did you have difficulty migrating to the United States?

For me, it was so easy. It wasn't that easy for a lot of people. I don't know. The reason it was so easy for me, I had been a policeman in the camp, in displaced person camp, there is. They give me a somewhat a better apartment or whatever. I was sharing. There was two rooms. I had to go through another room in order to get into my room.

And the two rooms who I went-- who I used to go walk to to mine-- because we were married, we were already as man and wife-- I had to go through their room. There were two girls, single girls, who survive as gentile, spoke fluently English. They worked for the. UNRRA.

--in the United States.

Yes, ma'am.

In Chicago?

Yes.

And would you mind stating their name as well as Anna did?

Yes.



Brenda Simon is my older daughter, who lives in Phoenix here, together with us-- not together with us. Just in this town. She's got a husband and two children. And they both teach. She does-- right now, she's not teaching study. She does--

Subbing.

She substitutes. But she is a licensed teacher. As a matter of fact, she got her license in Phoenix too, because she had it over there, her certification. So he had to go through some examination here. But she's certified for Arizona.

And you have how many grandchildren?

And I have a younger daughter who lives in California, and she is married to a surgeon. And they have three children. And this one has two. So I have four boys and one girl. Altogether, five grandchildren.

And for their sake, we hope-- or do you think that this-- an atrocity like this could happen again?

It happened once and it could happen again. And that's for our life. But if you go back to the Jewish history, that's been happening before. But I never believed in my life that something like this could happen and they could get away with it. But they did.

And if there wouldn't be by any miracles, we wouldn't be here either, because Hitler had it all sewed up to kill us all, to destroy us all. He couldn't of. There will still be some left. But maybe not as many. But he still killed enough of us. Most of us were destroyed.

Well, Bill, I thank you very much for your time, and we--

You're Welcome.

--you have a very-- you're very courageous man. Thank you very much.

Thank--