

Mr. Schiffman, we would like to start with your place of birth and your school. And you can start from there.

OK. I'm born in Poland, not that far from the border from Czechoslovakia.

The name of the city?

The name of the city is Dukla.

Your parents' name, how many in your family?

My parents' name was-- there was four children, two sisters and two brothers.

Please give us the names of all the--

Their name is Hinda, Hinda Schiffman, Gitel Schiffman. Just want the names from home, yeah?

Yeah.

Yeah. And Wolf Schiffman, and I am Ditzel Schiffman.

And your parents?

Parents, my dad was Chaim Hirsh Schiffman. And my mother was Greta Schiffman.

Your parents were involved in what kind of profession or what--

Mine parents, my dad, he was a tailor. And he was an invalid, an invalid from the first war.

Was he able to work?

Yeah, he got a pension from the Polish government.

Did your grandparents also live in the same--

My grandparents lived in the same city.

OK.

You want a name from the grandparents? They were Moishe Ziff and Ida Ziff.

And they were all Jewish people?

All Jewish people.

What kind of schooling did you have?

Grammar school.

Can you describe a little bit to us?

The school?

Yeah.

There was seven class by us. This because it was a small town.

This was public school.

Public school.

In your childhood, did you ever experience any anti-Semitism or--

Well, there always. Always there was. Especially in our town was not that anti-Semitism, you know. But enough was the high college students. So it was pretty quiet by us.

And were you living in the same town until the--

In the same town up in the war start in 1939, from 1913 when I'm born in up till 1939, same town.

Were you married before the war?

Please?

Were you married before the war started?

No.

No.

We was married with my wife, she sit here, we was married in Russia in 1940. We was married in Berdichev.

Did you feel any effects before Hitler actually occupied Germany? Was there any discrimination?

Oh, you mean, Poland before the--

Yes.

Well, sure, there was discrimination. There was discrimination. That's what I tell you. By us in the town, there not was that much. You know, and enough was the high schools. The most was when there was the colleges, the students. What they was making all the anti-Semitism [INAUDIBLE].

Did you see in the community, in the Jewish community, was there a real effect before Hitler's occupation?

What do you mean effect?

For instance, did the Jewish people lose their license to their business, or did they--

No. I no can say this by us in town, no. No, they're not. There was something, license or something.

Could you tell us then your escape or your--

I was [INAUDIBLE] I was 14 years old. When they come the first cars to us, I start to work with them. And that was mine, you know. Then I got already the driver's license in 1934. And I got a chance. I got a car this time, a cab.

Then I took my whole family, my close family, my mother and my father and my sister and brother. That's what I took them away. And the rest of the family, like the grandma, grandpa, all the aunts and nieces, everybody left, it was.

So was your occupation a mechanic?

My occupation was a mechanic and a chauffeur at this time. Very, very few Jewish chauffeurs there was in those years in Poland.

Did you have a good life in your town?

All that kind, there was a poor life. It was a poor life in [PLACE NAME]. It was a poor life.

Can you describe how many people lived in your town?

Well, yes, in town, there was 90% Jewish people. 90%. The Secretary from the town, there was a Jew. No, what you call him from the city, the burgermeister.

Mayor?

The mayor from the city, there was in the last year there was a priest. And he was very nice. He was very nice man.

Before you managed to escape, was there any oppression, German oppression? You left what year?

I left in 1939.

So did Hitler occupy Poland yet?

A day before Hitler occupied.

Do you know what happened to the rest of the townspeople?

The townspeople, the rest of the townspeople was, after a half a year, something this is what I hear, there was only or mostly some youngsters that was taken away. And they was working by us was-- what you call this-- by the stones. They call this kamienolom. They was working there.

A stone mine?

By a stone mine, by a stone mine they was working. And later on, my grandma, or my grandpa, my aunt and everybody, they was going. They was they was shot not too far away, in between the border of Czechoslovakia and Poland. And I lived there on the border.

Were they taken away? And were they concentrated anywhere?

They wasn't concentrated, no. The older people not was concentrated. They was shot there. Very few they took away to the concentration camp from our town.

Could you tell us a little bit about how you managed to escape and where you spent the time?

We escaped. We came-- it was the first time. We was in on the Polish Ukrainian this time. And then in 1939, the Russians, they come in to Poland. They invade Poland, too.

And then in October the 7th, we left. We left with a transport to the Ukrainians, on the Russian Ukrainian. There we was up when the war started with Hitler.

Then I was mobilized in the Russian army to send me away. That just-- it was they're a nice friend. And he came to the commander from the army.

He say you know what? You take not a Russian, not for this, not a Russian citizen, and you send them. And then they free me, you know, and they let me go home.

So when we come home, the first transportation what we got, we run away from Ukraine. And then we went up to-- I think to Rostov. We went there.

We come there later on when the German army start to go, you know. Then in '42, we left this place from Rostov. We went to this Dagestansky kraj.

They call this Makhachkala. This is on the Caspian ocean. Then we run away.

So we was there. And we start to work there. Then that was the main city from the republic. Then what we got on our passports, we got to know the statija, that we not-- that we know can stay there. We need to go away from the city, out from the city, to the-- out from the town. Then we got some friends from the court Kirghizia, this is like--

The Caucasus, Caucasus?

Kirghizia, this is--

Kurdistan?

--this is a-- no, Kirghizia. This is a Republic from Russians. And it was on the border from China, almost. There was maybe about 100 miles away or something from the border from China. Then we went there.

So then we went there with the whole family. We come over there. We start to be always sick. My father was-- my dad, he was sick, had a typhus. And then after two weeks, he died. Later on-- we had been-- a son, about 18 months. He was sick.

Oh, you have been married by now?

Yeah. We was married in Russia. We was married in Russia, in Berdichev in 1940.

You met your wife there?

I know my wife from before the war. And she was with us. We just find that there's 1,000 in one night. How we find, each went with us, that was a miracle. So then we come there. We start to be all sick same time that my father died and my son died.

Later on, I was in the same thing, in the same position, with the same typhus, just I come out. I come out. And I was about three months-- I was going with a cane. I was going and so on. I got all the kind sickness after to them too. So then we was suffering this time very, very bad.

How were the conditions as far as food?

Food, up to-- from 1939 to-- up to-- from the evacuation from the German when they invaded Russia, there was not too bad for us. We was working, all of us. We was working. So then no was too much problem. Just when we came to Asia, when we was sick all there, there was-- there start a bad time.

Does it have anything to do with the water or with the conditions?

That was with the condition. There wasn't a place what they're supposed to be 4,000 people. They come 25,000 or 30,000. We live in very bad--

Evacuating.

--in very bad condition. We all sit in a small room, like nine by nine or 10 by 10. We used to sleep on the floor about 10-12 people. So the condition was very bad.

So after you got well from your typhus--

After we got well, they start to be mixed. Once the time, there was good, the other time was bad. There was once so bad in 1942, in the end from '42, that we brought in there another child.

And we was in very-- in a condition-- we was in one room, a little room, one bed. He was sleeping in one bed where you turn. You watch for the baby not to-- and we was in this time in very bad condition. I was this time so that my skin that was so dry, peeling from there. No, I used to wear 160.

Starvation.

I come up 120 pounds. Then the dry come up. So still, later on, we come over from them. Then they start to be better.

And during all this time, you were in the Russian-occupied area?

Yeah.

And so did the Germans expand further? Or did--

No, the Germans did not come over. When we left already from Dagestansky, right, and from the Caspian Ocean, not far away, then they never come over there. We was 6,000 mile away from Europe. So then it was too hard to live in there.

Was this a very cold area?

Well, there was cold and hot. In the wintertime was cold. In the summertime, this was hot like here in Arizona.

How long did you spend near the Caspian Ocean? How long were you there?

In the Caspian, there, we was not too long. We was there about two or three months. Later on, they find out that we not going stay in this-- in the town. Then we don't want to go out from the town. Then we got friends in the Kirghizia. So then we went to there. It was a hard time to go. That not was that easy to go, especially no the youngsters didn't let go. We just was hiding to go there.

So then how did you spend the rest of your time in this?

The rest of the time, I was working there in a-- I was working for the agriculture. I was working for supply, for the tractors, combines, and everything for the agriculture. I was driving there. I was driving a truck.

As a mechanic?

I was driving a truck and I was a mechanic too. Yeah.

Were you able to earn enough money to get for your supplies, for food?

I tell you the true, you never can make not much money when you don't make money in the sides. I was-- I got the truck. And we was taking not legally the passengers. We was taking and they was paying us.

But then it was railroads there. There was railroads, just not was allowed to go with the railroad. They did pay us to take him from town to town. We was going. So and that was legal. They cut our license away and everything. Just we was

managing to have more.

Were there a lot of other Jewish families that-- in the same town?

Yes. There was a lot of Jewish families.

Refugee families?

Refugee, all the refugee families.

From Poland?

Refugee families, like-- yeah, from Poland, most of them from Poland-- from Poland and from Russia.

Yeah. Escaping also from the Hitler events.

Oh, sure. Sure, but-- from the occupied zones, from them areas.

Did you see any actual fighting anywhere in the war? No.

No. No fighting.

Did any of your sisters and brothers survive?

Yeah, all of them.

All of them.

Your parents?

One, no. My mother, she survived.

But your father died from typhus.

My father died, yeah. And mine mother, she came in 1949 to the United States.

Is she still alive?

No.

No.

She died years ago, about-- almost about 28 years ago. She died in 19-- when we came in-- then I went in '49. We went to Israel. But my wife, she got there two sisters from before the war. So then we went there.

And later on, in '58, my mother from-- she wants to be in Chicago. She wants to all the time to come over to come over. So then when I start to come over, in meantime, there was the Sinai, the Sinai War then.

And I was working in the army. I was 9-10 years working in the army, in the Israel. So they don't let us out. And so then when I come over here to the United States, already, then, my mother, she was already about four months, five months, she was already dead. She died before.

How did you manage to go to Palestine in those years?

Oh, this was already the Israel.

Oh, it was Israel already?

Was already Israel.

In 19--what year did you go?

1949.

'49, Israel, yeah.

Yeah, in 1949. We-- to out from Germany, it was very hard. We was with two little kids.

So from Russia, then?

We come to Germany. We was in Germany three years after. We come in '50-- we come in '46. We was in two camps there after the war. We was there.

So all this time, you were near the Caspian Sea up until you went to Germany?

No. We passed the Caspian Sea. We went to-- was by the border from China.

Oh, oh, I see.

In the end, we was on the border from China. They took us to go from then to Europe up to Germany, it took us four week-- four weeks for us to go in the train. Not was passenger train, it just the freight trains.

Freight trains.

Freight trains, there was ovens inside. We started to cook. And then they start the train to go. And everything was tipped over.

Did the Russians always help to move you when you were going from the Caspian Sea to the China border? Were you taken by the Russians?

They was taken by the Russian. The transportation, we got the transportation to go.

And how? What kind of transportation did you have?

With the railroad.

Railroad.

Railroad.

In freight cars?

No, I don't think so. There was the freight cars, no. We went there a bit with freight cars. We left from the war zone. We were ever going, I know that we was in Kyiv, all over there. You see, there was so bad-- there was killed and bombed when we was evacuated.

Then our train, what is supposed to be to go maybe about where we lived from Kazatin to Kyiv supposed to go maybe about two hour. We went 24 hour. There was just the German-- the aviation. It was just bombed on the railroad.

Tracks.

And they stop. And there was-- and the people, the Russian, they was just laying the tracks. We was going with them. So it took us about 24 hour. And this what happen. I remember, in Kyiv, when we was on the station, there was so bad that we was the family together.

And I got an uncle, even, from Germany with his wife and with his baby. We were sitting just together, when they start when the falling, and the bomb, they kill us, all of us, that nobody survive. So he thanks god, we escape without harm.

Can you describe the trip from Russia to Germany, that long trip by train? And how--

The long trip from Germany, there was-- from Russia to Germany, there was almost about three weeks or four weeks. I don't remember. There was very not comfortable, just we got prepared all the kind dry food and everything. And they supply us a little bit, not too much. So there not was a hunger for starvation.

What about sanitary conditions?

Sanitary condition? You know how sanitary condition that was-- for a week, to stay in the train, in the train.

How did you manage the human eliminating or washing? How did you manage?

Oh, washing, we just on the station, we run out. We wash our face or something. And that's all what was. So the most-- the worst thing was with the little kids, what we got about nine month old, one. And the other one was two and a half year.

How did you manage the eliminating process? You have to eliminate, human beings traveling that long.

Look, how do you-- some people survived in the concentration camp? Without nothing. It's the same thing. It's not was that bad like was in the concentration camp.

Did you have a pot or something in the train?

Oh, pots, we got. Sure, we got pots. We, when no one was standing around, we was pump the water. You was washing yourself.

And you mentioned that you did some cooking in the car on the train?

Sure, we was doing cooking. That's what I tell you. Sometimes, it was standing a long time. We cook and all. We got something. And another time, they start to go. And they shake everything. That then fall. We-- most of the time, we was taking from the locomobiles, we took the hot water.

So when you arrived in Germany, were you in a DP camp there?

Yeah.

How long were you there?

We arrived before on the occupied-- on the part from Poland, what was occupied from Germany. It was in Wroclaw, Breslau.

Breslau?

Breslau, yeah.

Breslau. And did they have--

It was there. And I tell you something, there was there-- I think not the Germans so far, like the Polish. The Polish people, I remember, then my wife, she was standing outside with two little kids. And my wife, she is a redhead. She was a redhead. And my kids, they was blonde. Then they come through some from the Polacks. And they ask for mine wife, [POLISH].

Could you translate that?

Yeah. What they-- they ask mine wife, why they take so many Jews what they come back? Then my wife, she was afraid. And she say, the first that we can go out, we go out. And with the first transportation what we can out, picking out from Breslau, we went out.

So the Polish population didn't greet, you didn't welcome you, huh?

No.

How long did you spend in Breslau?

I don't think so maybe about four weeks.

And you managed to go to Israel from there?

No. From them, we went to-- had one a second from then. Yeah, I think so. I need to ask my-- something my wife.

Sure.

Carl?

Yeah? Just going to cut off. One second.

Then we went from Breslau, there was supposed to be a special for older people and for kids to go out. Then we was out. Then we-- it was very hard time. It was very hard. I don't want even tell the whole story. It was very hard.

Well, we would like you to tell us exactly the conditions.

You see, there was very hard. We supposed to be to working to go. We got two small kids. And mostly, with the people, all the people, they went already to the Austrian. Then we got to two little kids. And we supposed to be to talk about five, six miles. And that was almost in the evening, for the night.

Then I think, that was the worst thing for us, that was this time. Then we come, that was in the Slovakia, in Czech, there was. And how long you can go with two kids, carrying two kids? It's something for the kids. I don't say nothing for us.

And then once we say, everybody went away. And I'm with my wife, with my kids. We sitting in the Slovakia. I think that was close to Bratislava. I don't remember which one, small town that was. We were sitting there. What will be will be, that we don't care. We not can go. Everybody went away and we was sitting there.

We sitting there that we know in Bratislava there was the same thing in this time. There was anti-Jewish exists. There was something, there was killing there, everything. I say this, well, what we can do? We sitting there.

Then they came one from the Czechs, the one farmer. They come in, start to talk to us. No, we know the language, start to talk. OK. Then he tell us to go in his house. We go to his house.

I talk to my wife. We say, I don't know what they going to do. Or they go kill us or they go do something, we don't know what they go do with us. So we went to them. And they was very nice, very behaved and everything.

He ask us what we got by them. We gotten a little suitcase. We got cigarettes. We just got-- bought cigarettes. There was-- this time was hard with cigarettes. I say, I got maybe about 100 cigarettes. He say, OK. You give me about 50 or 60 cigarettes. And they make for us to eat and to drink. And he say, I got the horses. He put up two horses like bears.

OK. And they took us to the Austrian border. And here, they was very, very, very nice. They took us to the Austrian border. But that by us the worst time, what we were sitting there, from maybe 600 people, or 700, or 800 people, they all left. And we not can go.

How did they go, went on the railroad, the rest of the people?

No, by-- no.

By horse and buggy?

Not by horse and buggy, just they was walking there.

On foot?

On foot. On foot, maybe about six mile or more. I was going with the kids. How long you can go? One mile. We was-- we got the older one. She was two and a half year or three years. She was going a little while. And then she say, Daddy, [YIDDISH].

So carry.

And how long I can carry? It was good. That was the worst tragedy was this time when we passed through from Poland to Austria.

When you got to Austria, what did you do there?

In Austria? In Austria, we was in the camp, but not too long, maybe about three or four days. And then we passed just-- we was in-- we went to Germany. We was in-- what do you call this, in [PLACE NAME]? [PLACE NAME], that was.

Oh, so a DP camp?

A DP camp, we was in DP camp.

How long did you spend there?

We was in the DP camp there, it was about a year and a half. And then there was-- we was transferred to another camp. They call it the lager Lechfeld. That was in Germany. That was not too far from Augsburg or something.

While you were in the camp in Germany, in the DP camp, how were conditions there?

Well, there was a condition that we were supplying-- supplied from the Joint, and from the IRO, I think. From the UNRRA, I don't know. We got from the UNRRA. And I was working on a-- I was working in the-- on a truck for supply.

Did you have fairly good quarters, a room? Or what did you live in?

Oh, that was not too bad, just was a life what you know that you not going stay there. That was our future. So from this time, then we went to Israel. Mine-- my mother, and my brother, and the sister, they went from them-- they went to the

United States. And we went to Israel.

Did you choose to go to Israel?

Yeah, sure. I chose to go. But I was-- in 1934, I was even on what you call this-- to prepare to go to Israel. What you call this, Hakhshara. I was a whole year in a kibbutz.

In Poland?

In Poland, yeah, in Poland.

So you were in the Zionist movement?

Oh, sure. All the years, I was in Zion movement.

And unfortunately, the war interrupted.

Sure, yeah.

Did it take a year and a half in the DP camp to get the papers to go to Israel? It took that long?

The-- no, took that long, didn't let this time to go with the kids.

Oh, what year was this?

We left in 1939-- '49.

Oh, that was already--

That was already-- there was already--

--the war.

--about four-five months, there was already the Medinat Israel. There was already the Jewish state.

But because of the war you couldn't enter Israel. So you had to wait.

Oh, yes, because the war. So it was hard to go from Poland to Israel in those years, to Palestine. We need to wait for a certificate what they give us. And there was very few.

But I'm talking about now from when you were in the DP camp in Germany to Israel.

Yeah.

Was it-- did you-- did they acquire-- did you acquire papers to go to Israel at that time?

No.

No.

No, no, just we just registered to go, and that's all.

So when you arrived to Israel, what were conditions like?

I mean, there, the conditions was not that good too. They was bad too, just we not was too long. But just my wife, she got there a sister. And she got a room there, she give us. So then we was there. And I start to work. So there not was very easy in the beginning too. That was very hard with everything in Israel too. It was very, very, very hard life, especially in the '40s. It was very bad with everything.

You didn't fight in the war, did you?

I not was fighting, just I was working for them. I was working. We was working sometime 20-24 hour, like it was the Sinai, what we was working to prepare the-- all the tanks and everything to prepare to go. So then we was working more like maybe he was working in the-- on the front.

How many years did you live in Israel?

10 years. From the day when I start, I was working in the army. On the day what I left, I was in the army working.

And did the conditions improve for you--

Oh, sure.

--and the life?

Sure, they put, sure.

Were your children educated in Israel?

Yeah, my children was-- they finished there grammar school. And my older daughter, she was even take a year high school.

What city did you live in in Israel?

In Jaffa.

In Jaffa. Yeah, you have a very interesting story. Tell me--

That's the story that-- you wanted the whole story, you need to sit 24 hour. Each details you want us to say.

Of course. I would like to hear some of the details, if you would tell us.

I don't know. This is too much. My throat is already dry.

What I wanted to ask you is that do you think with world conditions and with antisemitism on the rise, do you think that this could happen again?

What can I say, that can happen again? We have big, big people then I think they didn't know. How can I know? I know just only thing-- there's not too good, like after-- so much to suffer from the Jewish people. And we still have antisemitism now that I don't know-- I don't know how can we happen like that? I can't understand.

Well, I thank you very much, Mr. Schiffman.

Then especially what we have now, now here, Nazi parties. And we have everything, like even in the United States, free.

I thank you very much for your time.

OK, thank you. Thank you for listen to me. Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Sure. Thank you very much.