

Good morning, Mr. Silver. It's almost afternoon. We're so glad that you took the time to do this. I know it's difficult but we tried.

Thank you.

If you would just state your name, perhaps the way it was used also in Europe and your place of birth.

The name as it was used in Europe was Zilberstein. And I was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1917.

The names of your family, your mother, father?

My father's name was, in English, Jacob. My mother's name was Shifra.

Were there any sisters and brothers in the family?

I had two sisters and two brothers. My oldest sister was Sarah. My youngest sister was Deborah. And my older brother was Henry. And my next older brother was Joe, Joseph. And I was the youngest.

Any of your sisters and brothers surviving--

No.

--today? No?

No. None of them survived. Not only didn't they survive, I don't have a tenth cousin in my whole family who survived. After a prolonged search, after the liberation, which I looked all over Germany and wherever there was a camp, a displaced person camp, I went in search of anyone in my family with no luck.

That's very sad, very sad.

Was your father a professional man or was he a businessman?

He was a businessman in Warsaw.

What type of business?

He had two stores of leather, hard sole leather on the Franciszkanska Street.

As far as you can recall, did you have a comfortable life?

Very. We were, I would say, middle class, affluent. We had a nice home. My brothers were educated. My oldest brother went to the university in Krakow. For some reason, he couldn't get into University of Warsaw, for obvious reasons. Our lives, as far as I can remember, financially, it was well.

And you had a loving family, close knit family?

Very much so.

Did you yourself attend public school?

Yes, I did. I attended public school. I went to Talmud Torah. I went to the yeshiva. I come from a very religious home where Judaism, Zionism played a big role in our lives.

Attending public school, you then attended with Jewish and non-Jewish children as well?

Right.

Were you comfortable in public school?

Not very.

No. Did you experience any anti-Jewish feelings?

Yes. Living in Poland you couldn't help but experience. Anti-Semitism was not something that was hidden behind the carpet. It was on the surface.

Did you ever befriend a non-Jewish boy--

Oh, yes.

--and have a good relationship?

Oh, yes.

Yeah.

Oh, yes. We lived in a neighborhood where it was more Gentile than Jew. And I had friends, Polish friends, Gentiles. And our friendship went as far as the school social is concerned, nothing beyond that.

No playing? Never playing together?

Well, in school.

In school? During recess, maybe?

That's about it.

Yeah. When did you actually feel the war effort and the oppression that came upon more heavily?

Well, we started to feel the winds of war in '37 when Jewish people came back from Germany, deported.

Polish citizens?

Who were born in Poland, even if they were Polish citizens, if I remember correctly, or not, as long as their origin were from Poland, they were shipped back. And they told stories. And the stories that they told was not so farfetched that what we lived with in '37, in '38. So this is when we started to feel the anti-Semitic winds blowing from Germany. And then it went on till the war broke out.

Were you deprived of any privileges in this period? Or were you still--

Which period are you talking about?

In '37.

No.

No?

No. We had our normal lives. We just felt sorry for those people who came back. Some of them came back to families.

Some of them didn't have any family. They lived in Germany for many years. And if I recall, they were German citizens.

Did the Jewish community help them [CROSS TALK]?

Oh, yes. We had a very strong Jewish community in Warsaw. You have to remember there were 3.5 million Jews in Poland before the war. Warsaw was the capital of Poland, as you know. There were 1.5 million population in Warsaw. 1/3 were Jews in Warsaw.

That's 300,000, some 300,000 Jews?

No, a half a million.

Oh, a half a million.

A half a million Jews were in Warsaw. You could feel Friday afternoon, the Shabbat coming on. Store close. People rushed home.

I felt the same feeling when I was in Tel Aviv, exactly the same feeling, when people bought flowers to go home for Friday night. And the first time when I experienced this in Tel Aviv, I thought I was reborn.

So it was a beautiful life, then?

It was a very beautiful life. It was a beautiful life, cultural, religious. It was the cradle of religion in, I think, all the world in Poland. The yeshivas, the famous rabbis, it was something that people don't realize.

Poland, although it wasn't a rich country, but it was a self-sustaining country. It was an agricultural country. The Germans may have scientifically be more advanced than Poland. But they came to Poland to buy food. Not only the Germans, but other European countries. As far as the Jewish community is concerned, in Poland, particularly in Warsaw, some of the greatest close knit families, but we call it family, that ever existed in a community situation.

Was it in 1939 that you actually felt the change or the war effort that--

Yes. In 1939, when the war broke out, we knew that hard times are coming. But nobody in their wildest imagination could have ever imagined what was going to happen to us.

Did it any time occur to your family to attempt to leave or was there no chance to do that?

Well, everybody wanted to leave. But this was no possibility to leave. I remember my father said to me to go away. This was the beginning of the occupation in '39.

Where to go? The best way at that time in Poland was to go over to Russia. As you know, they divided Poland, there was between the Russian and Germans.

And we smuggled ourselves, there was six boys my age. Said an emotional goodbye to our parents and to our relatives and our sisters and brothers and we decided to go there, to Russia. We came over to Russia. And actually, we went to Polish-occupied Russia.

Can you describe how you managed to smuggle yourselves?

We smuggled ourselves over--

By night?

By day and night, you see this was the beginning of the war. The smuggling was to go over the partition between the Russian-occupied Poland--

And Germany.

--and German-occupied Poland. It wasn't too hard to do that. The hardest part was when we came into the Russian-occupied Poland. And we wanted to do something. We didn't know where to go, how to go, what to go, what to do.

And we kept going until we were detained by the Russian army. And we told them who we were and where we came from. And we told them we wanted to work in Russia. And we wanted to stay in Russia.

They put us in a stockade, sort of. And they kept us there for about a week on bread and water, not even that. And then they shipped us to, of all places, to Kyiv.

And we didn't know what's going to happen to us. And we heard-- we didn't speak Russian. You know, I was born in Warsaw, and I lived all my life in Warsaw. And finally we found out that they're going to ship us to Siberia. They took us for spies for some reason.

We found a Jewish-Russian soldier who spoke very little Yiddish, very little. And we told him. We begged him to tell us what's going to happen to us.

He came back after a day. And he said, if you can escape, escape. And told us the direction to go. At night, we did. We weren't so heavily guarded, really. We did.

It took us two weeks to come back from whence we came. We were taking our chances with the Germans instead of with the Russians. We knew what to expect from the Germans. We didn't know it that much, but over there, we didn't want to have anything to do with the communists. And we smuggled ourselves back in.

To Warsaw?

To Warsaw. Took us two weeks, over two weeks. We came back beaten, demoralized.

Did you find your family at this point?

At the time, yes, we did. At that time, this was the beginning of 1940. We were sick. for weeks, for days, the little food that we had was farmers that took pity on us. And this is how we survived till we came back to Warsaw. And then is when the whole thing starts.

About what age were you at this point?

In 1939, I was 21 years of age. And we had to report to the draft board in Poland at the age of 21. And I was born in July.

So before July, I had to report. And I reported to the draft board. And they took me, accepted me. And I was supposed to go into the cavalry, Polish cavalry.

I was supposed to go in, I think, in December of 1939. I was supposed to report for military duty. And war broke out in '39.

Excuse me.

Sure.

So you returned to your family at this point. And things were already--

We still were a family. We still lived in the same house. We were discriminated at that time.

It wasn't that bad in the beginning. People were still-- I wouldn't say it was a normal life. It was abnormal. But still was a situation where people could cope with.

One day they came and they confiscated all the merchandise in my father's stores. And that's it.

In other words, there was no more business.

That's it. That was the end of the-- that was 1940, beginning of 1940. Then there came a decree to turn in all the furs and gold. I had a big family in the fur business. And I was, at that time, learning to become a furrier.

And that was the end of my livelihood, too. Not that we had any plans for doing business. Everybody tried to survive at a time the best he could under the circumstances. And it really wasn't that bad at this point in time.

As the months went on, every day was a different decree. Then they started to come in and, particularly in the Jewish neighborhoods, we lived outside the Jewish neighborhood. We didn't live in the hub of the Jewish neighborhood. And they started to pick up people from the streets and put them in a truck and take them away to do some labor, menial labor, whatever.

At first it was a terrible thing. But then we got used to it. It wasn't so bad. We came back at night.

As a matter of fact, some people waited for them to pick them up. They got a meal. Because at that time, food started to be scarce.

But as long as there was not a dividing line of the city, that we could go, we had to wear those armbands indicating that we are Jews, the yellow band, the Star of David. But still we could provide for ourselves. So it wasn't good, but it wasn't that bad. But things to come.

Were you yourself ever picked up for this labor?

Yes, I was.

There was no payment for this?

No payment, the payment was a good beating.

If you didn't perform?

If I did or I didn't, it's the mood of the German soldier.

What type of work was this usually?

Well, we were clearing-- it was menial, hard labor for preparation for whatever they wished. Sometimes we took stones from one place. And in an hour we put them back in the same place that we took it from. It wasn't like building something or maybe some others did some building. But it was menial labor of-- I don't know.

But it doesn't sound like it's productive.

No, it was very nonproductive as far as where I was.

It was more or less to keep the people going or--

It was more or less of humiliating the people, to prepare them for more humiliation. And this was 1940, if I remember correctly. Then they started to send in people-- this was in later '40, the middle '40, 1940, and towards the end of 1940-- from little towns around Warsaw. They just drove them in. And that's it.

Didn't provide any housing?

Nothing. So we had to take them in. Every family who had a room or anything had to take in people who came from outside. And they came as far as 50 kilometers from Warsaw, all around, each direction.

And then they started to prepare to make the ghetto, the wall. And they came out with a decree that every Jewish family that lives around Warsaw have to move into the designated part of the ghetto, the designated part of the ghetto, I would say, 50 blocks, 50 square blocks, not more than that.

Was there a wall built around the ghetto?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Guess who built the wall?

The Jews.

The Jews. And when we were pushed in in this ghetto, I told you before, it was a half a million Jewish people living in Warsaw.

Plus from the surrounding areas.

The half a million was not from the surrounding area. The half a million was in Warsaw proper. When this decree came and they made the walls, and they pushed us in before the wall was erected, and when the wall was made, that means all the Jews in Warsaw and around Warsaw were pushed into this ghetto.

With, I think, it was four entrances exits which were manned by SS. In and out, there was no way to go out. In, they brought you in. If they found somebody who didn't get killed, they threw him into the ghetto. By the time the ghetto was finished in 1941, it was almost a million people.

They gave us ration cards, coupons. Because you couldn't get out. The coupons were not enough to live on, enough for slow starvation.

Did your entire family go into the ghetto? Were you still in contact?

Most of my family. My oldest brother lived about 30 kilometers, well, more than 60 kilometers from Warsaw. It was called Minsk Mazowiecki. When the Germans came into little towns, as well as to Warsaw, they called it a Judenrat federation, who they made responsible for the actions of every Jew. They made my brother the head of the Judenrat of Minsk Mazowiecki.

When they asked him to provide people for labor, and this was very early in the war years, he refused. And they shot him on the spot. This is number one. I didn't know this until somebody came when we were in the ghetto. And he told me about it.

I had my father in the ghetto. My mother died in the ghetto.

Did she become ill?

Yeah. Typhus, which was a spreading disease in the ghetto. I had my two sisters in the ghetto with their families. We

are still in 1941.

To go out in the morning and to see people, corpses, laying in the streets, at first you were naturally taken over. But then you were hardened. And you just passed over, like this is not anything out of the ordinary.

Because people died from diseases.

Malnutrition?

Malnutrition was the first thing. But people died from cold, beatings, and people died from giving up. Let me back up a little bit.

When they started to erect the ghetto, all kinds of rumors spread around Warsaw. They're going to put us in and eliminate us. They're going to put us in in the ghetto. And they're going to work us to death.

Nobody, nobody, none of our leaders had any inkling, any idea what is going to happen to us. The Germans kept us assuring that if we will help the Reich, if we will work for the Germans, they need our work, we'll live through the war. And at first we believed.

Then we started to doubt. At that time, we started to organize. How do you organize? You don't have anything to organize with.

How do you go to a yeshiva bahur, and you tell them we have to fight back? How do you go to a rabbi, a rebbe, and tell him to tell his Hasidim to learn how to use a gun, if we have one? How do you go to people and ask them to give up their jewelry because it isn't worth anything, anyway, so we can in turn trade the jewelry with the Polish underground for some ammunition, some weapon?

How do you tell your child not to step out of line with an SS man or with a German soldier, because you'll get killed? It won't do you any good. This was the situation.

First things came first. When they locked us in, we had to find a way to bring in some food from the outside. Otherwise, we would have all died. Thousands upon thousands of people died from malnutrition, as well as from all kinds of diseases. You name the disease and we had it in the ghetto.

So we started to dig bunkers beneath the wall to go out on the Aryan, of the Polish side. We took with us all kinds of different things some of us had at that time. The Polish money was still good, so we took money. We took whatever valuables anybody could get.

And the family who had somebody go out there risked their lives to contact some Polish people and trade for a loaf of bread or whatever we could. They came back to the ghetto with this, they were the luckiest people in the world. Everybody was empty. There was no way of surviving with the ration, with the coupons that they gave us. No way, couldn't.

So we bribed guards, German guards. We did everything we could. Until the Germans found out what was going on. So it became more difficult, but we still had to do it. Many of us were shot on the spot and displayed around the ghetto.

So then they organized a factory. This was '41, yeah, towards the end of '41. They organized a factory to produce fur jackets for the German flyers, for the Luftwaffe.

And they put a proclamation, anybody who is a furrier, who has a fur machine will be resettled out of the ghetto on two streets, Nowolipie street and will be working in this fur factory producing those jackets for the flyers, the German flyers and will be housed and fed properly with their families. You can imagine what was happening at this recruiting station. Somebody who was a shoemaker became a furrier overnight.

This factory was called the Schultz factory. We did get an Ausweis--

Permit.

--a permit to walk from there to the ghetto and back to see the family. At first we went by ourselves. They didn't allow the family unless a family member was working in this shop.

So anyway, they assembled there about 300 or more, maybe 400 people who worked at this factory. They also had other factories that did the same thing in Warsaw. If I remember correctly, they had a broom factory. We had the same thing outside the ghetto, with all the privileges that they could muster to give, for people who had knowledge in this kind of business.

The problem where I was, which I volunteered, naturally, and I was able to work in this factory and bring home to the ghetto enough food to keep my family. And others did the same thing. Over there, it wasn't a ghetto. So we took different things, valuables to trade with the Polish people, which knew what we are doing. And we bought food and essential things to sustain life, really.

I imagine at a very high cost.

That goes without saying. That goes without saying. We gave away everything we had in order to sustain life. That's all there is to it.

They fed us. They gave us housing which belonged to other Jews who were thrown into the ghetto. The house that they gave me-- the house-- the apartment that they gave me, I came in. And two people, husband and wife, were laying in bed, shot to death, but still laying in bed. And I don't know how long. So this is how we get out of the ghetto for a while.

In the meantime, the youth of the Jewish community started to organize themselves, naturally on a secret basis. We also had-- we called it Gemeiner, of the Judenrat.

What was it, like, a president?

The president of the federation or whatever, but it was more than the Federation. It was a Gemeiner is Jewish for a Waltung. It's like a federation, but has more power. It didn't levy any taxes. But we looked up to this. They provided for the Jewish community, in many, many different ways, who needed help.

You didn't have a welfare like you have here. Somebody needs help he goes to the welfare board. Over there, they went to the Jewish community.

When they ask the head of the Jewish community to provide workers for different projects to take and to go outside the ghetto, he did. They also established a Jewish police force in the ghetto. And when they needed 100 people, the Jewish police went over and grabbed people. Or they told you to come forward tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock so you can go to work.

There was no compensation for this work. It was forced labor camp. That's all it is. But they brought you back at night.

Then there was an incident when they gathered some 100 people and they took them to work and they never returned. And this head of the Judenrat went to the German governor and asked him what happened. And he was told that it's not your duty to ask what happened. Your duty is to provide whatever we ask of you.

He went home. He left quite a letter to the Jewish community. He committed suicide.

And he told them this letter that he has suspicion that they're making some kind of extermination camp in Treblinka, which is only 30 kilometers from Warsaw. And he cannot provide more labor, slave labor for the Germans. And that was the end of Mr. Czerniak<sup>3</sup>w.



And this is when the suspicion started to go around more heavily throughout the ghetto. At that time, there were different groups. And as you know, where there are two Jews, there are three different opinions.

And we had so many different organizations from communists to Bundists to revisionists, Zionists. You name it, we had it. It was an impossible task to bring them all together and organize together, although they did.

Every time somebody else, after organizing and laying plans, somebody else went their own way. But they did. They did organize. They were very brave young men who went on Kiddush Hashem.

There were very brave mothers who sacrificed their children in order to save a group of people. The heroism of the Jewish youth in Warsaw ghetto is beyond description. Nobody, but nobody can explain what was going on at the time.

Finally, when we started to find out about deport-- Treblinka, we took some very brave young men, three of them. They smuggled themselves out of Warsaw. And they went as close to Treblinka as they possibly could.

And they talked to Polish farmers. And they found out that it was true. They're building an extermination camp. We didn't know what magnitude, but it's true.

Two of them came back. One was shot. He was caught.

And when they told us what they found out, we started to organize in earnest. And this was 1942.

We did things that may seem to somebody who would listen to my interview here, seem, like, from a gangster movie. But we had no other alternative. We couldn't go to the slaughterhouse like cows without resistance. We wanted the world to know that at least we tried. We resisted in any way we could.

We went to the Jewish people. We asked them to give up whatever they have. It's not going to do them any good. Because every day they came into the ghetto. They took hundreds of Jewish people. And they shipped them away and never heard of them.

So we can buy some weapons. When the time will come, and we knew the time will come, we didn't know when, we didn't know how soon, that they will eliminate every one of us, at least we'll resist. We'll take some of them with us.

People were very strange. They reacted very strange. Some people can look death in the eye and challenge it. Some of them cling on to their material things and won't give up until they lower them in the grave.

We had no choice. We had to do things to scare the others in order to give up some things that we could provide for ourselves, pistols, Molotov cocktails, anything we could do to defend ourselves for a while. So we did certain things that I'm not proud of.

But I felt, we felt we had to do it at the time. And it did. People came forward after we explained to them it's no use of holding on to it. Oh, it's gold or it's whatever. We need this.

And we went with this money, jewels, diamonds, what have you to the Polish underground. It was called PPS, Polska Partia Socjalistyczna. And they provided us with little things to make Molotov cocktail, bombs, pistols, rifles, little ammunition, knives, hand grenades, naturally for a high price.

And this is how we organized ourselves in 1942. Some of them organized themselves in '41. They knew more than we did.

And this is how we started in the ghetto to make bunkers, provide certain things to survive in the bunkers underneath the houses. If there was an apartment with three rooms, we blocked up the window. And we blocked up the door.

And we made a crawl space from underneath the sink to go in if they'll come up, they won't see a third room. So we can hide. We did everything ingeniously.

Have you ever seen line up hundreds of people in the middle of the street with children in the backpack, a mother's back? And I'm talking children, I'm not talking about children five or six or seven years old. I'm talking about children a year, less, gag their mouths.

And we lined up in the middle of the street. And soldiers came by and picked people to go out. And the mother didn't want the child to make a sound. Some of them were suffocated.

One day I was told they came and they took away my sister but with her daughter. So I had left. I don't know what happened to my brother-in-law. I had left one sister with a child and her husband in the ghetto. The rest were gone.

Only problem was that we were so many in this factory-- this is still 1942-- who were not able to produce. And the Germans told us how much each one has to produce, those jackets. So in order for them to be there, we had to work 12, 14, and 16 hours in order to make the production for everybody who was there.

In the meantime, we prepared ourselves for the day that will come that we will have to stand up and tell them that's enough.

In 1943, at the beginning of 1943, they told us that they are going to move the factory to a town in Poland by the name of Trawniki. And the way they came out and told us this is on a voluntarily basis. The ones who want to go there can go and work and live through the war and be provided for. And the ones who don't want to go will go back to the ghetto.

So we had a choice. We had to go to Trawniki or go back to the ghetto where the typhus and lice and every disease in the world was there, where people were starving by the thousands, dying in the middle of the street. A part-- and I think the elderly-- when I say elderly, 40s, 50s, went to Trawniki.

The youth decided not to go, to go back to the ghetto. We also found out that the day before that the ones who had decided not to go to Trawniki will be forced to go.

So a day before, two days before, we escaped. We had an Ausweis. We had a permit we could go any time into the ghetto.

So we didn't show up for work. And we all went into the ghetto. There was no other place to go. Because if you go outside in the Polish side of Warsaw, any Pole will turn you into the Germans.

All they had to do was say, here's a Juden. Here's a Jew. And they were doing it. There were Jewish people living with Gentile families, very few. They were turned in.

So we went back to the ghetto. And this is where the real organizing started. We had supplies hidden in bunkers. And we trained with others.

And they came into the ghetto every day. They shot. They killed. And they took people.

Took them out of the ghetto and they never returned. There was no question anymore about going to work. It was just going to the Umschlagplatz. The Umschlagplatz was in Warsaw where the train was, the cattle train. And they were going to Treblinka.

What about the group that went to Trawniki? Do you know whatever happened to them?

Which one?

From work, the ones that volunteered to go?

No, two of them came back and told us that it's true. One was shot. That's why we found out that this Treblinka deal is true.

No, no, no. Excuse me. The ones that went to Trawniki, am I saying--

No, Trawniki is something else. Trawniki was a camp.

And those people did go to work?

Yeah, they went to work there. And then they were eliminated and they went to Treblinka. Trawniki was a camp. They still needed the people to work there.

Well, let me inject, in all this sorrow, in all this turmoil and sor-- horror. let me inject something that may sound funny to somebody. We made those jackets for the Luftwaffe, for the flyers. A fur machine, a fur stitch, is an overlap stitch. If you don't secure the end of this stitch, it unravels.

In the beginning, we started, we did good work. Then we started to--

You were sabotaging?

That's exactly what it was. We didn't secure the end of the stitching. And apparently they started to get complaints.

And one day they came in, the head of this, a man by the name of Klemanik. And he told us he's going to shot three of us unless we tell him who was doing it. Eventually, he took out three people who were shot. And after this, everybody did it.

So anyway, this was a little revenge. And we hoped that they will be someplace over Siberia or over Russia that this whole jacket will come apart. Apparently, it did. It had to do.

You have a glass of water or something?

Sure.

By that time, they were about 40,000 Jewish people in the ghetto. And of the 40,000, they were mostly young men and women. And they were sheltered by bunkers all around Warsaw.

I think it was the second day of Passover. We knew that climax is very near. We knew that the ghetto is to be liquidated. But we didn't know when.

We knew that this is the end of all of us. So there was no question of hiding. There was nowhere to hide anymore.

In the past, when a column of soldiers came in, SS, or Wehrmacht with trucks, and called out to the Jewish with loudspeakers so the Jewish people come down, and you go to work, some of them did. On the second day of Passover, a column of soldiers came into the ghetto and started to holler for the Jews to come down. And nobody showed.

They started to go up the stairs of different apartment buildings. Nobody was there. At one point, going down the stairs, apparently they heard a cry or a movement from a child. And they found a bunker with about 40 people in it.

And this was on Nalewki Street 35. This is where we were. Not in this bunker, we were in another bunker, but in the same building.

And they went in there. And they started to shoot indiscriminately. And whoever was killed there, was killed. The rest started to come up women, children, men.

And all of a sudden, all hell broke loose. A boy from across this building threw a hand grenade. He was waiting until all the soldiers came around to see what they found. And to see how many they killed.

And this little boy-- when I say a little boy, was about 14-- stood up on the ledge of a window and threw this hand grenade right in the middle of the soldiers. And about 10 of them were killed. And as he threw this hand grenade, he hollered to the people in Yiddish to escape.

And while he hollered to them to escape, the German soldiers noticed him. But by the time that they were going to shoot him down, he threw the hand grenade. They did shoot him down. But he did his job.

And this was the beginning. This was the beginning of the resistance in my part of Warsaw. Where I came from, we were organized. I don't know exactly how many of us. We were from different way of lives. We were young men, young women, young children who were willing to give their lives just to show them that they cannot just come in and take it like in the past.

After this incident, this was really the first time that anybody did something to the Germans. A column of tanks came into the ghetto. And there were other groups. We were not the only one. We were a small skeleton group, really.

We knew of them. But they did their things. And we did ours. And they were a lot better organized. We were just a small group of young men. We belonged to the [NON-ENGLISH] organization.

And this column was attacked. It was a column of tanks with many, many, many soldiers. And as they came into the ghetto, deep into the ghetto, they were attacked from all sides. They had terrible losses. And they never expected this.

The Germans had terrible losses?

The Germans had terrible losses. They never expected this. They were used to the Jew as a timid little thing like you can step on him and that's it.

The tanks tried to-- the cannons were spitting fire indiscriminately. Every building that was standing, up, down, and it still didn't help. They were attacked from all sides. They withdrew.

And there was a lull of about two days. They didn't come into the ghetto. Next day then, a few days later, they came in. And they started to demolish the building. By demolishing the buildings with tanks, I have seen a mother with a child jumping out the window from the fourth or fifth floor and saying Shema Israel. I have seen parents throwing themselves with Molotov cocktails at the Germans, holding their children close to their chests.

People were burning in their houses. Suffocated in their bunkers. The buildings were collapsed, were collapsing.

From this part that we had our bunker, on the Nalewki Street 35, there was an entrance to another street. And this was Kopiecka Street. And we, after they demolished this, Nalewki, apartment buildings, we went out from one roof to another. And thus we came to the Kopiecka Street. We were surrounded by German tanks.

And we went back. And luckily we had a exit to the sewer. And we all went into the sewer. We came out on the Polish side.

We took off our-- and we started to walk in different directions. And we met at one place, Falenica. It was a little town. It was a resort town.

This is where we met. And we started to walk.

We walked at night. We were hiding during the day. We walked for I don't remember how many days.

Finally, we got caught. At night we went into a Polish farmer and looked for some grain, anything to eat. And apparently the Polish farmer noticed us. And he didn't say anything, but he notified the Germans.

And the next day, we were picked up. They looked for us. They ask us where we're from.

And we told them we're from another town, going to Warsaw. If we would have told them that we were from Warsaw, we would have been shot. So they took us to the Umschlagplatz. This is the deportation center where the trains were waiting for us.

And lo and behold, I came to this place, and I see my sister and my brother-in-law. And my sister's little girl holding her hand. And we all were thrown into this cattle car. And we all knew where we were going.

For two days, it's only 30 kilometers, without water, without food, standing room only. You couldn't move. The only time you moved is when you fell down dead. And a third of the people who were in this car were dead on arrival.

And as we disembarked in Treblinka, they put the women and children on one side and men in the other side. And my sister said to her husband and to me aloud just before the SS pushed her away, you are the only two of our family to survive.

This is the last time I saw my sister. My brother-in-law and myself went to the other side of the selection. And all of a sudden, an officer from the SS came to the group that we were standing, all the men. It was quite a few hundred people.

And they asked who is a Tischler, a carpenter, who is a builder, experienced building masonry, to step forward. We didn't know. We knew we're in Treblinka. We knew this is the end of the line.

So I stepped forward when they said carpenter. And I nudged my brother-in-law to come with me. And he didn't.

They took out 100 young men. He was very selective. And I was told afterwards that this is the first time in the history of Treblinka that anybody stepped down there and ever came out. So 100 young men went back into the train.

And the first thing we did after they closed the door, we didn't know where we were going, is we said Kaddish for the people left behind. The emotions from each and every one of us was indescribable, unforgettable, and unforgivable. They divided us into groups. They took us to Lublin.

When we saw Lublin, we thought they took us to Majdanek. They took out 50 from the 100. And they took them someplace else. And I don't know where, to this day.

They took us to Budzyn. This is in Poland. It was not a concentration camp. It was an Arbeitslager.

We were placed there. We did all kinds of work there. Just like a difference between a concentration camp and that lager was we didn't have the uniforms from a concentration camp. We wore whatever we had.

And the kapos were Jewish-Polish war prisoners. In other words, a Polish soldier who was Jewish, who was taken into a POW camp in Germany, they put him in this camp. And they were the kapos of the committee responsible to the Germans for conduct of the prisoners of the camp. They were very nice. And they did the best they could under the circumstances.

They took us out for 5 o'clock in the morning. Everybody had this. And they let us stand there for two, three hours.

And we did very manual work, work that doesn't make sense. It didn't make sense to anyone. But this is the way they did it. And the carpenters that he asked for, he didn't get. Or maybe he got a few who did work for the rest of us.

One particular incident that I remember in this camp was that they found some American dollars. Everybody had a little can. I don't know what you call it in English, [NON-ENGLISH].

To eat in?

To eat in.

Yeah, it was, like, a cantina.

A cantina, a little can. And his can had a double bottom. How they found it, I don't know. But they did find it.

The punishment, he was very sadist, this camp commander, his name was Faik, Oberscharführer Faik. I'll never forget his name or his face. He took all the inhabitants of the camp, which must have been thousands more. He put us in a circle.

And he told this man to walk around. And everybody had to hit him. And whoever is not going to hit him hard is going to have the same punishment that he has.

And this man walked around and everybody hit him. At first, we hit very little, very easy, very light. And then we saw what's happening.

Skin split, blood was flowing. And he was going around and saying Shema Israel, hit me harder. Get me out of the misery. And this took about two hours.

And this was, I think, the hardest thing that I have ever witnessed in my life. And I have witnessed many things. But to be a part of killing a human being on purpose because of the command of an SS man.

I was in this camp, I don't know, eight months, seven months, eight months. And then they transferred us to Radon.

At Radon, they had ammunition factory. I think it was a Polish ammunition factory. And they took it over. And they made different.

And we were there not too long, either. And then they marched us to Czestochowa, Czestochow. And that was quite a march. They couldn't get a train.

From Radon to-- it took many, many days. Many, many people died on this march. And we came to Czestochowa. They finally got a train for us. And they took us to Germany, to Feudinggen. That is near Stuttgart, a little camp, concentration camp.

And this was the time when the Americans were bombing Germany. Americans and English were bombing Germany day in and day out. The Americans were bombing during the day and the English were bombing during the night. Any bomb that did not go off, we had to dismantle it.

So they took us from this camp to Stuttgart. They evacuated four square blocks, everybody, even the SS men were four blocks away. And this is when we felt freedom, even though a ticking bomb was next to us.

We were called the Himmelfahrts Kommando, because any time you could have gone up to heaven. I'm laughing. The only instructions that we had is to unscrew and disconnect two red wires. The bomb is alive 72 hours after it hits the ground and it doesn't go off. We were praying for the bomb to go off and take us out of the misery.

Then part of us were transferred to [PLACE NAME], which is also not too far away. It was a salt mine. We were digging salt out of the ground.

And then we were transferred to Dachau. And I was in Dachau till the liberation. But I was not liberated in Dachau.

Three days before they took us on a train. And they wanted to take us in to Austria. And apparently the Austrians didn't

let us in because they knew that the war is about over.

We didn't know that. We heard the shooting going on. We heard the bombing. As we were marching on the train, after the train, the train took us to a certain terrain, and then we were marching.

And we saw the airplanes coming down. We were hiding in the ditches. They told us to lay down in the ditches. And the SS couldn't do anything. So they had to take us back.

They took us to, if I remember correctly, Mittelwald. And the SS man who was in charge took us out to a sort of empty lot around this little town. And he gave orders to kill us during the night.

And we saw SS men changing from their uniform into civilian clothes. So we knew that something is near. And he gave orders to eliminate us during that night.

Well, when you lived through all this, and you came, got close, we didn't know how close it was. Three of us miraculously escaped, actually through the guards who were dozing off. And we started to run. We didn't know which direction we ran.

It just so happened we ran in the right direction. And we came to a barn. And we couldn't run anymore. We couldn't walk anymore. We couldn't crawl anymore. And we decided to take a chance to go into the barn and lay down.

As we went into the barn, we didn't see anything. It was dark. We laid down. Five minutes later, we see German soldiers with their pistols pointing at our heads.

We told them that we escaped. They knew. They saw our concentration camp uniforms, stripes. We told them we escaped. And we are waiting for whoever's going to liberate us.

And they looked at each other. There were about six of them. And I'll never forget.

One said to the other let it be. Let's go. And they went away. And we fell asleep, I guess.

Next time we woke up, we saw American soldiers standing over us. And this is how I was liberated. It was May 1, 1945.

They took us to Mittelwald, which is the nearest town. It's on the border between Germany and Austria. And they took us into a hospital. And we were the only prisoners that they came across.

There was shooting there. And I understand that when they started to shoot, the others, some of them escaped. Some of them were shot.

And they took us to the hospital. And they nourished us. And then they took us to Garmisch-Partenkirchen, which is not too far away from there.

Excuse me.

And then they took us to Stuttgart displaced person camp. And General Eisenhower told the Germans to take whatever they can carry and leave their apartments and everything in it. And we were different groups.

First they took us to Schloss Langenzeller, near Stuttgart. And then from there, they took us to Stuttgart. And we were the first ones to occupy this displaced person camp in Stuttgart.

Then I met two Jewish soldiers, one from Chicago. His name was Maury Erlich. And one from Brooklyn, New York, his name was Theodore Roslyn.

One of them, and I don't remember which, took off his military underwear and gave it to me. They cried like two little babies.

One, this Teddy Roslyn, was in the military police, the MPs. He took me to Schwabisch Hall, to a city. And he confiscated some material from a German.

And we found a tailor. He made us some suits, something to wear. I still see them, correspond with them. Teddy Roslyn was the one who was instrumental in bringing us over to the United States, he and his family.

When you say we, who else?

My wife.

Oh, you had married.

I married in Stuttgart by an American rabbi.

Chaplain?

Chaplain. I met my wife in a displaced person camp where I went around to see if anybody of my family, especially my brother-in-law. He did not survive. He went in to Treblinka.

And I met her in one of the camps in Landsberg. And I knew her from Warsaw. She's also from Warsaw. And we married before we came over here in 1940-- the marriage in '45-- no, we married in 1946, in January. We came over here in June of 1946. I lived in New York.

Can you tell us how this Roslyn, did he send the documents to you?

Yes. He sent the documents for us to come to the United States. And apparently he guaranteed that we will not be a burden to the government, whatever. And we came over through the HIAS.

But he was the one who sent us the certificate, whatever had to be done. We came with a ship to New York. He and his family were at the pier to pick us up.

Wonderful.

And I lived in New York for about eight months. Couldn't speak a word of English. I think that the worst moments of my life was when I realized that I was liberated, when I realized that I am not a prisoner anymore, that I realized that I am not facing death anymore. But who do I belong to and who belongs to me? This being alone in this world, having lost everybody and everything, they tried to take away the dignity from us. They succeeded partially, partially.

When I came to this country, and everybody's dream was to go to America, some of them went to Israel. I would have gone to Israel if not for this Ted Roslyn. Dream was-- I started to dream again. Had to reconstruct life with a wife. We both lost-- she had two brothers in Israel. I would have gone to Israel.

But the horror of the past stuck with us. We couldn't live without thinking of the past, our family. And consequently when you do this, you cannot build a future if you live in the past.

You cannot forget it, but you cannot dwell on it all the time. Nobody wants to forget it. Nobody should forget it. And that's the reason I had this interview. But to dwell on it, to live with it all the time, then you are defeating your own purpose.

So we started to build, build from ashes, build from defeat. We worked. I worked for people. I was eight months in New York. I worked in the fur market in New York.



Then somebody asked me to come to Colorado, to Denver. And I went to Denver. We lived in Denver. I worked.

And then one day in 1958, I went in business, my own. By that time, I had two children, two boys, Jack, who was born in '48 and Joe, who was born in '52.

Was it the furrier business?

No, they're both attorneys in Denver. And I opened up my fur business. And hard work and a little luck. And then we had a little daughter. And it was fairly successful.

I also got involved in the Masonic order, which I think restored my dignity and confidence in the human race.

I also got involved in the B'nai B'rith. But the Masonic teachings can be construed as a religion, but it is not. It's an organization that teaches you morality, and love, kindness, and so on. This gave me the strength to go on from that.

Then I advanced. I became a Shriner. I became an emissary of the Ministry of Tourism for the state of Israel. And I have brought in many hundreds of Shriners, Masons, to visit Israel. This was my contribution to Israel. I've been there many times.

I feel that Israel needs as many friends outside Israel, particularly the United States, as any place else. And you take a Mason or a Shriner, because he really comes back full with enthusiasm of this little state. And I'm talking about mostly gentile people.

In 1984, I became the potentate of El Jebel Temple in Colorado. This is the highest position that anybody can attain in the state as a Shriner. In 1984, I went with the group to Israel myself. It was over 110 people.

Today I'm retired. I sold my business a few years back. Denver is my home. I live in Scottsdale about four, five months out of the year.

And let me commend you, Mrs. Willinger and Mr. Afisher, for doing this work, which is very, very important for future generations. At first, I was very reluctant to do this. But as I was going into it and realizing that some may learn from it, not just what happened, but maybe be able to prevent it not happening again.

I just want to ask you are you still active in the Shriners?

Yes, I am.

Do you still hold the office?

No, this is just for one year. Now I'm a past potentate. But I'm still active. As a matter of fact, I'm active here, too, in this shrine temple.

It's wonderful work.

We, the Shrine, as you know, has 23 hospitals and three burn institutes. And let me thank you one more time for initiating this interview.

Thank you for coming. I think we have come to the end of the tape, unless we can--