

This is Koby Rothstein. This is November 3, 1981, and I'm interviewing Mr. Max Arbeiter in Newton, Massachusetts. Mr. Arbeiter, would you describe those who comprised the members of your household before the war, who was actually in your house?

My family comprised of my father, Yitzchak, my mother, Haggadah, and four brothers, Eliyahu, me, Mordechai, Israel, and the youngest, Joseph.

What is the family's social status as far as religious, cultural background, educational background? What sort of status was the family?

The family was a middle-class family. My father owned a tailor shop. He employed--

This was in--

In Plock.

In Plock, Poland.

In Plock, Poland. We employed some people. He was making suits to order, uniforms for police and people working for the post office and officers for the Polish army.

What was the--

And he was making a very good living off that. We belonged to the-- because it was a large Jewish community in my city consisting of something around between 10,000 and 15,000 Jews, and so the most of the people were religious people. And there was many synagogues and temples and Hasidic temples.

Your particular family-- was it religious or--

My family was not very religious, but we would go--

Traditional?

--but traditional. We was going to the temple every Saturday for prayers, every Friday and Saturday, on the holidays.

A little bit--

It was a kosher house, and everything was-- we were observing all the Jewish holidays.

Education-wise, were you sent to religious schools, all the children?

Yes, all the children was going to--

--to cheder?

--to cheder, and after that they was going to the public schools. My older brother went to the gymnasium, and I had a few years of lyceum.

Did anyone start to work before the war, anyone of you or [INAUDIBLE]?

In the--

Up until the war.

In mine city, anybody that could work was working. I started to do some tailoring when I was about 10 or 11, and I was helping out after school. After school, I was helping out my father.

Everyone did the same? The other brothers--

Everyone. Everybody was helping out.

Were there any antisemitic experiences that you can remember as a young child, any incidences--

There was very-- there was a few antisemitic happenings which are worth to remember. One specially-- we had a cathedral in mind town where the bodies of the two Polish kings-- it was Kazimierz Wielki and the King Krzywousty.

This was the nicest place in our city, on a high hill, and at the bottom of the hill the largest Polish river, the Vistula, was flowing by. There was gardens there with flowers. So every Saturday after the prayers and after the meal, Jews used to come there and having a nice time congregating in this place.

One day, the students from the near gymnasium-- we had two gymnasiums in our city-- decided to beat up the Jews. And a couple of them came with sticks and iron clubs, and they were starting to-- most of the people coming there was not the youth. The youth that afternoon was busy with other things, with other-- and the older generation was going in this place. And they came, and they beat really badly up the women, the children, and the older men in that area.

You saw this?

Yeah.

What age were you? What age were you at the time? What age were you--

About 16. The police was around, but they didn't intervene. So then the next day, the leaders of the Jewish community went to the Polish starosta complaining about that. He said, if our children don't want you there, then don't go. Find you another place that you congregate.

But the Jewish youth organized in different Jewish clubs like the Maccabi, the Hakoah, the Dror, decided that it's our country like theirs, and we are not going to be pushed around, let our people be beaten up.

So we organized themselves a couple hundred of us, and the following Saturday, we went there and with-- we had pieces of wood and different-- all kinds of stuff to protect ourselves. And when the students came, we really gave them a beating good. There was more of us than them. They didn't expect that. And we really gave them a beating, that we brought some arms and really beat them badly up. And the police came. Then the police came, and they arrested-- they arrested some of our people.

So I remember, too, there was once a case that an older Jew was killed right in front of our house. He was going to prayer on Saturday morning, and he was killed. There was--

What was the reason?

Just antisemitic thing. He just-- a Christian just--

How much time before the war?

A Christian just ran over-- this is before the war. It was about, let me see, maybe a half a year before the war. The situation started to get bad about a year before the war. They started to boycott the Jewish stores. There was a Christian organization named [NON-ENGLISH], and this was the Polish fascists.

And they organized groups, and they was standing in front of Jewish stores with signs saying, "Don't buy from Jews," "Jews, leave the country," "You're eating our bread," things like that, and preventing Christian customers to go in the Jewish stores.

Or there was a few cases that was beating up students in the gymnasiums. I had once a very-- I had once a fight in the school where I was going. There was a classroom, about 40 students in the class, and there was three Jews. And we was being bothered every day was coming to school.

One day, I was sitting in my desk, and the student behind me took the pen and put it in the ink and just went over my back of the pen of the side of my face. I turned around, and I told him to stop it. You'll do it once more, you'll have a fight. He didn't do it.

I was sitting and waiting, keeping my pen ready with the point towards him, and not long after, he again put a piece of paper in that ink and went over it again over my neck. I just twisted and hit him with the pen right in the eye. It was a very big commotion. I was thrown out from-- I was thrown out from school. And there was other-- there was other--

Incidents.

As closer to the war, the--

It became worse.

That became worse, and the antisemitism was getting stronger. And there was a telling by the government official to leave, to go to Palestine, and we felt that the situation for the Jews is getting worse day by day as closer it come to the war.

The closer it got to the war, what sort of options did your family have closer to the war it got? Did they have options of leaving or staying? Did they have those sort of options as the war came closer?

There was no-- there was no options. We had relatives in the United States, my uncle, and we have here two aunts and other relatives too. And they was trying to take us-- to help us to come to the United States.

When, '38, '39?

Yeah, '38, '37, really. They started '37. And we got quota numbers from the American government, but the quota was so huge that the war broke out, we never had the chance to--

But you were thinking about leaving?

Yeah, we was planning to leave.

It was just not in time.

Yeah.

How old were you when the war broke out, when the war started?

Probably 18.

And what happened? How did the family respond? What exactly happened when the war broke out?

The war broke out in September '39, and in about seven days, the Germans--

--overtook the town.

--overtook the town. When they was coming close to it, all the youth-- the Polish government announced on the radio that people which-- the youth should cross the river, the Vistula, to the other side, because Poles didn't give any resistance on this side, that we are going to resist the Germans from the other side. We won't let them cross the river.

So me and most of the youth of my city crossed the river to the other side, which the name of it is Radziwie. But the Poles were so disorganized that I never got a gun.

This is now the Polish army. You were not in the Polish army, were you?

I was in Polish Przystosowanie Wojskowe, which means--

A youth organization of some sort or--

It's preparation--

--for the army?

--military preparation before the army. So I used to go with the Polish-- with the Polish army to learn how to shoot, how to use guns, going through military equipment. We used military equipment.

So I was expecting there to get a uniform to get to me, but--

Nothing happened.

Yeah, nothing. It was so disorganized that the Germans was coming with airplanes and was bombing. All the highways was blocked with Polish-- the Polish army which crossed that river, and they are supposed to give resistance. So they blocked all the highways, and thousands and thousands of people, of young people, crossed the river too. There was a terrible crowd there. No one could move any place. And the Germans came, and they were just throwing bombs and machine-gunning and killing thousands of people.

There was no-- the Poles was shooting back a little bit with cannons, but--

Not much resistance.

But the whole-- they was holding them back maybe for another week or so, maybe 10 days. And they crossed it finally. They blow up the-- there was two bridges there. The Poles blew up the-- blew up the bridges. But finally, the Germans made pontoon bridges, and they crossed. And when they crossed there, they started to chase us we should go back to our places where we came. So then we--

--went back home.

We tried to cross the river back, which wasn't one of the easiest thing because the bridges was destroyed. So we was trying to use little boats, and it took me a week--

To cross?

--to cross the river. It was a week on the other side because the Germans was-- they was picking up women and children, and all the men was waiting for less. So I was a week waiting for that opportunity to--

--to get back.

--to get back.

What did your family do when it started?

My parents was still-- they're doing-- still running the tailor shop.

As if nothing happened?

As if nothing happened.

It didn't affect them that much in the beginning?

In the beginning? No, it didn't affect them at all.

So was the first change actually that took place?

After a while, the Germans announced that the Jewish people have to give a huge contribution of foreign currency, and they arrested about 60 Jewish people. They put them in jail, threatening that if the money will be not delivered in a week or two weeks, all of the Jews-- those people will be killed.

So the families of those people, the Jews, was just getting money together to make that contribution, which was a huge contribution which emptied all the pockets-- all the money what the people had. And after they received the contribution, they killed-- they shot the people they-- they shot the people anyway. One of them was my neighbor next door by the name of Kerstein.

What else change as far as jobs and school--

Then they organized a Jewish committee--

The Jews?

--with the name Judenrat. The Germans. They used to come in the houses and grab Jews for work and in a very brutal way. There was beating and killing Jews while grabbing them to work, coming in the house and breaking up things. So the Jews decided that it would be better to do it-- if they need-- if they want Jews to work, they do it in a civilized way.

So they organized the Jewish committee named the Judenrat, and the Germans used to come every morning and say, we need today 500 Jews, or we need 200 Jews. So the Jewish Judenrat just called and ordered Jewish people to come to the Judenrat, and it was done voluntarily. And so some of the work was needed, but most of the work was not needed at all. It was just-- it was just to--

They created work.

Yeah, they created things just to-- and it was-- on the work, there was-- they just mistreated the Jews. I, as a tailor-- they--

--work for the SS Obersturmführer.

--occupied the gymnasium named after Jagiello. And over there was the headquarters of the SS. So they came to the school, to the community [NON-ENGLISH], and they asked-- they need a tailor. So they knew that we are tailors, and they came to my house. And my father was scared, seeing an SS man, so I volunteered, and I went.

Your father didn't want to go?

He got scared, seeing the guy with the machine gun, and they know how they mistreating people. So I volunteered, and I went. I said, I'm a tailor, and I went. And the SS man with the machine gun was taking me over to that gymnasium, Jagiello, and took me up to the second floor. And there that SS general was, and he gave me his pants to-- his uniform to

press.

I was pressing his uniform, and he was telling me that from now on, every 7:30 in the morning, I have to be here to press his uniform. He asked that every day--

Every morning?

Yeah. Every day before he put on this uniform, I have to press it. So every morning, I was going to there and pressing his uniform. So he was giving me other things to make for him after. Yes, I had a boat on the river, on the Vistula. I made for him some swimming trunks and other things that he needed. While I was looking there in the window, they brought in some Jews sort of for work, and they gave them to clean out the ovens. They was burning coal there. It was in the winter, and they was to clean out the ashes-- the ashes were still red-- to make the new-- this is from the night, to make new fire for the day.

And I was looking through the window how they was tying up some Jews there and there are some trees there. They put the ashes, the hot ashes on their heads. And they was very badly burned.

And they was beating them. I noticed there how the Jews was carrying the-- they ordered the Jews to carry a very big wooden box. They asked them to put the nails in it, all around on all the-- on all the panels nails. And then they took two Jews and pushed them in in that box, and they locked up that-- they nailed up that box. I seen ordering other Jews-- asked them to carry that box, and they carry it up two flights of stairs, and they asked them to dump it.

Those two Jews lying in that box-- they died from being-- the nails was just-- I came back later on to the Jewish Community Council or the Judenrat. I told them what I seen there. What could I do? I don't know if they mentioned anything or they mentioned at all. It was part of the-- just the [INAUDIBLE] life of the Jews, and the Jews were living.

This thing was going on until they ordered again that the Jews have to write down all their possessions for a certain date, and if this wouldn't be written on paper in a certain date-- like our place, that all the machines we have, all the Singers we have, all the material we have, and all the people that have businesses, stores, everything of their merchandise has to be written down. If everything would be skipped, they'll be shot.

So everybody done this. They gave an order that they should be delivered to the magistrate, which is-- and a week later, there was a new order, that if any of the stuff will be missing-- from now on the Jews had not the right to sell it. If this would be-- [INAUDIBLE] are missing, the Jew will be killed.

They came after that with-- they asked them to-- they asked the Jews to hold this. And then they came with trucks, and they took everything away. They came to our house, to our shop, and they took away all the machines and everything of any value. And that's what they done with other things from Jews.

After that, they just gave an order that all the Jews living from the city have to gather in a certain section, a few of the streets which are the most dilapidated streets, not the good streets, have to live just in one area, and they call it the ghetto. And they announced that anybody who would be found out of the ghetto will be shot.

When was that? When was it set up, the ghetto, what year?

Well, this is about 1940.

A year later, the ghetto was set up?

Yeah. And the Jews from all the city was dragging in any position they had like beds and mattresses.

Was it closed off?

It was not closed off, but there was-- they made a map. They put it on the walls of the city that everybody should know

where the area--

--where the ghetto is.

--where the Jews-- where the ghetto is, and anybody will be shot, will be-- like I mentioned, if you were found outside, will ever go out of ghetto will be shot. So people was crowding into that-- became very crowded there, and there was scarce of food. There was no food. Food started-- Jews started to smuggle in food from--

Where did you finally find the place? What kind of place did you find?

Our place was in the ghetto.

So you didn't have to move.

No, it was the first house. Our house was in the first-- the first house from the ghetto. So we didn't have to move. We stood in our place.

And what was it like to be enclosed?

The only change was that it was crowded, and there was not much food. There was not much food, and--

Any medical attention?

We had-- there was Jewish doctors, which was-- which was there from the other places. They was in the ghetto, and they was helping Jews. There was no much medicine, so we done-- we done with the services there was there.

Any schooling at all or religious life?

The religious life was going on.

And school? What happened to--

Jews couldn't go anymore to the-- there was not-- all the schools was closed--

Within the ghetto?

On the outside of the ghetto. In the ghetto, there was still cheders going on. There was this school going on. There was a HaZamir, which is a choir which was performing, and there was a Jewish paper going out. The cultural life was quite rich.

Even in the ghetto.

Even in the ghetto, yeah.

Was is there any smuggling going on or food or--

Yeah, there were kids without-- like five, six, seven years old and which-- they looked more not Jewish, but were blond. So they was sending them out from the--

To get food?

To get food. At that time, I got a job in-- I got a job in a German-- in a German company.

You did it?

Yeah. It was through that SS general. There was-- all the merchandise which was taken away from the Jews-- outside of the ghetto, they took a few buildings. And they made a giant department store, and all the merchandise like shoes and clothing was-- trucks was bringing it in there, and this was for Germans, for Germans only, and the Germans was getting it on coupons. It was rationed, rationed like.

I got a paper from the owner from that place which was Mrs. Lee, which was the sister of the Wirtschaft Ministerium in Berlin, and she was the manager of this place. And while being there, I was helping a little in smuggling. There was-- the store was on the border of the Jewish ghetto, so I broke the wall, made a hole in the wall, and I was taking merchandise from there.

I was carrying out-- every day, after the day of shopping, there was empty boxes, so I was supposed to take those empty boxes and bring it to the end of that-- of that place for the garbage to take away. So I was filling up every day some boxes and merchandise from there, and I was bringing cover to that wall. And I made-- I broke one of the walls, and I was pushing it through the other side. My younger brother was coming from the other side and was taking it away. It helped us to-- it helped us to make a living.

No one saw this? No one--

I was taking-- I was taking-- I was taking a risk, but I was doing it.

How much was it guarded, the ghetto? How well was it guarded?

Guarded? There were just patrols. There were just patrols walking back and forth on the outside, not too--

Not too well.

Not too well-guarded, no. If anybody wanted to go out of it, I assumed they could, but the threat of death was enough to keep the people in. But to live, there was-- we had to do-- we had to manage. So that's why everybody was trying to do something to stay alive.

How long did this sort of lifestyle go on? How long was that for? What were you-- what were your brothers doing at the time and your family in the ghetto at the same time?

They was doing the same thing. There was no--

They worked--

Yeah, there was-- they took away the-- they took away the--

--machine.

--the machine for us, from us.

[? --or the guns. ?]

But in the next-- our next door neighbor, which was a doctor-- feldsher, we called him in Plock-- they had a machine.

So your father worked?

Yeah, so we couldn't work in our place, but they couldn't-- because they couldn't find out that we didn't give them everything. It would be like ours, so they would've shot. So they gave us a room in their apartment.

And your father worked there and your brothers?



Yeah, we was working there.

Tailoring?

Yeah, and they doing tailoring in their apartment, and in the place where I was, they took away all the equipment, and I smuggled back some material, silk, needles, all kinds of threads. So we have--

So you were able to continue sewing.

So we continued to--

How long did this last for? This--

This lasted until February 27, 1941. And on that day, thousands of Germans surrounded the ghetto.

February '41?

Yeah, February 27, '41. And they very brutally came in Jewish houses, screaming "Juden raus," beating and killing people and pushing them-- hitting them to leave their apartment or not giving a chance anybody to take anything. And--

--loaded that-- was pushing in, beating the Jews to--

--get on the trucks.

--to get on the trucks, hitting them with the guns, and packing in those trucks the Jews like sardines the Jews were very crowded there, and those trucks took the Jews to the Polish-Prussian border near Konigsberg.

This is you and your family as well?

Yeah.

You were on the trucks as well?

Yeah.

Where were they taking you to?

To a place of the Polish-Prussian border. Used to be there the Polish border army. Or the border police used to live in those barracks. There was the military-- a military camp, a Polish military camp. And they made a camp of it. While they came there, there was these empty blocks, empty buildings. We had to-- we were there for a few weeks, laying on the floor, down, without any heat.

Everybody from your town, all the Jews from your town.

All the Jews-- all the Jews from my-- all the Jews who survived from the town. And they was just giving us just water with potato skin and a piece of black [INAUDIBLE].

And what were you doing there, nothing in the day time?

No, there was just-- they ordered that the Jews had to go through a screening, and there was two boxes there, two wooden, big boxes. And there was two SS men with machine guns staying near the box, and every Jew have to go by in the middle and through in all these valuables in the boxes.

And one box was for watches, but in the-- watches and gold and other things. The other box was for foreign currency. Those Jews that went through to that screening after that was transported to the train and transported to the Russian border. Or at that time, the German government organized sort of a miniature Poland, which they called [NON-ENGLISH]. And Frank, General Frank, was the-- he was the leader of-- he was the manager on that place.

And so the place where they took us-- they was taking Jews to all kinds of places in that area, to Warsaw too. The place where they took us was the name Starachowice. Starachowice, another place was the Wierzbnik.

This is you and your family? They took the whole--

Yeah, they took us there, and they put us in the market. And they ordered the Jews there that the Jews had to-- the Jewish people living there have to divide-- have to take-- every Jewish family have to take some Jews from the market home. So our Jewish family took our family, and we was living together with them in their apartment.

In what town? Where--

Starachowice.

It's in Poland?

In Poland. So I would say between Radom and Warsaw.

What was the purpose of it?

The purpose was to clean up the area of Plock, it was near Prussia. And they wanted to make it Judenrein to make it a German province. And later on, some Germans was moving in the town because they wanted to make this area clean of Jews.

So they brought you to an area where they wanted other Jews to take you in?

Yeah, yeah. And those Jews took us in. And was again-- there was a ghetto there. They made a ghetto there, and they was living together with the other Jews.

With another family?

Another Jewish family. All the--

So who's living-- was your whole family together still at that time?

Yeah.

All your brothers?

Yeah. It was a large, rich Jewish family at that time. They owned a baker shop. They still owned the baker shop at that time, and they had-- they owned-- they occupied the whole building, the family, a three-story building. And we got we got--

Your parents were still there?

Yeah, we got-- we was living with them together, and we're eating together. And we was cooking together.

How was that?

We become one large family.

How was that ghetto in comparison to the one in Plock? How were the conditions there?

Oh, the condition there was--

Worse or--

--in beginning, better than it was in Plock for a while. And they-- the Germans ordered there that there was no-- they wasn't giving any Jews-- any food to the Jewish ghetto. But in this place, they had ammunition factories, Starachowice. And they was making there parts for U-boats. They was making bullets. They was making cannons, all kinds of-- they was making iron.

So they announced that any Jew that wants food-- they still go to work, work in those-- then it was factories. And they will get a card. They will get coupons, and they'll be able to get some food.

So I and my brothers went to work, and I was working in a factory making parts for U-boats. And my other brother was working making bullets. He was making 55 for cannons.

And what did your parents do?

My parents again found--

Something to do?

The family had a machine, so they were still tailoring. And we sort of--

You managed.

--managed. There wasn't too much of food, but we managed to--

How long did go on, this ghetto?

And on October 27, 1942, the Germans surrounded this ghetto in a very vicious way, beating and killing and shooting. They was just beating and chasing the Jews up to the market.

Just one day, they came in and started to shoot?

Yeah. And they gathered all the Jews on the marketplace and announced that those people which are employed in any of those ammunition factories should step out. So me and my brothers-- we worked there. We just stepped forward, and they gathered us in one group, and they asked us to march.

And they marched up to a place called Zimnica, which was again a Polish army camp, and put us in wooden barracks, a military place. And the other-- or my parents-- they all the rest of the Jews. They packed in cattle wagons, on a train and sent them to a extermination camp called Treblinka. And they gassed them there.

This is what you heard?

Yeah. It was--

How far was that?

Not far. I don't know exactly the mileage, but it was in the area. And when we was living in those barracks, and continue to march. It was marching every morning back to the factories, and we used to work making a-- on the same jobs that we had before, working on the same work, and living in those barracks with the small rations of a piece of bread a day

and again potato skin in water and a cup of chicory.

The four brothers and you were always together?

Not the four brothers. The older brother, Eliyahu-- the first month when the Germans came in, he was taken to work, and he was very beaten-- he was very badly beaten and injured. After he came back from work, he just decided-- he just decided that he couldn't take it anymore, and he crossed the-- he crossed the river Vistula and was traveling to the Russian border. And he crossed to-- he crossed to Russia.

What happened?

He went to the city of Lemberg, Lw<sup>3</sup>w, and he went there to-- he went there to school. And after that, he was sent to the Urals in Russia, and he was teaching English there. He was an English teacher.

And after the war, my brother went to Russia to find out what happened. We never heard-- in the United States, my relatives were getting letters from him and contact from those places, from Lw<sup>3</sup>w and from-- the city named Ufa in the Ural Mountains. That's why we knew that he went there.

And after the war, we just never heard of him. My brother went to Russia to find out. He was told by the Russian authorities that voluntarily he left his job as a teacher in the school there and he went to-- he disappeared someplace. No one knows where he went.

You don't know where he is now?

We still don't know where he is. The youngest brother, Joseph, went with my parents to the extermination camp.

OK. So there are two of you left.

Three. There was five of us.

Five brothers.

The three of us. Three of us are left.

When Eliyahu left, was any of the other-- any of you-- others of you thought about doing the same thing as him, leaving to Russia?

We thought that we're going to hear from him. Then he left, he said he'll get in contact with us. And anything will be able to tell us how it is there--

Then you'd go.

--tell us how to do it.

But how would you have heard from him? Where would he have written to you, in the ghetto?

Well, we didn't know-- we didn't know how it's going to be. This was in the beginning, when the Germans just came in.

I see.

Yeah, this was still this was still 1939.

But no one else thought about going with him? He was--

With our family? No, he went with a few friends from the gymnasium. But we never heard of him, and we don't know--  
--where he is.

--don't know where he is.

And what happened to the three of you, the two brothers? You continued to work?

We still continued-- we was working in the cylinder-- in the ammunition factory in Starachowice. It was-- and we got a new commandant there, and he stopped-- and he was very-- a very bad, sadistic guy. And he had a pleasure of shooting Jews. Every morning, his biggest pleasure was he shot at Jews, the first Jew he met when he came to the camp.

He was living outside the camp, and he was mistreating-- the Germans was mistreating very badly people.

And this was going on until August 1944, when--

Two years you--

Yeah.

Approximate two years you were working in the munitions camp?

It was in the munitions camp.

And what were what were your conditions physically, health-wise, you and your brothers? What was the physical condition?

We was getting, I would say, skinnier, but we managed. We managed. It was tough. We was working hard, and--

Any medical attention?

No. There was really no medical attention.

If someone got sick, they just did away with them? Or what did they do with people that they--

Yeah, if someone got sick, they got shot.

And this was two years? What happened afterwards?

And so in August of '44, we heard rumors that the camp is going to-- that they're going to liquidate that camp, and so we organized--

How big was that camp? How many people?

I would say probably 15,000 to 20,000 people.

Just men?

No, the most was men, but there was a few women.

Mostly Jews or--

All Jews.

All Jews.

All Jews. And then in 1944, we start to organize ourselves a little bit whatever we could. We got a few guns, so we had decided that--

How'd you get the guns?

It was smuggled in. While I was working in the ammunition factory, there was Christians working there too, professionals. And there was German engineers there and German professionals, so for money we got a few guns. And we decided we're going to break out.

So there was four posts with Germans and machine guns in four corners of the camp, so we have decided that we're going to send over four Jewish policemen-- in the camp was Jewish policemen which was taking care of us. The Germans was outside the camp. Most of them-- there were some coming in the camp, too, and the four guards was in the four corners of the camp. We decided that the best thing to do to take the four-- to take four Jewish policemen and try to send them over to the place where the guards are and try to talk to them--

--occupy them.

--occupy them and, if possible, to shoot them or-- and then we'll be able to break out. We prepared some iron pieces that we smuggled in from the ammunition factory, iron bars, and--

Was that camp closed off?

This place was closed off, yeah, with a fence, with a double fence, two fences.

You would have to climb over it?

We have to climb or break it. And when they started to-- it seems that the organization-- because there was a few families there with women and children, those were the families of the policemen. And the rumor spread very fast between the Jews that this is going to happen. Everyone wanted to be the first one to get out.

So not waiting for the signal, not-- it was at night. It was in the dark, and we couldn't see what's going on, what the policemen are doing there, if they got rid of the guards. Someone said go, which-- the signal was not right. We thought that something happened, that the guards was taken care, and they started to run against the walls, against the fence and hitting it with iron bars and other thing. We broke it.

We broke the fence in one big place. They broke a big hole, and people started to--

--run out.

--run out.

Were you in the middle?

Yeah. And those guys on the towers had the machine guns. There was one of them was-- the signal was because one of the guards was shot.

I see.

This gave the signal there was a misstrike but the others was still there. Just this one was taken care of. This was at night, in the dark, when the people couldn't see what happened. They thought that this is it.

And they started to run, and the other three started to machine-gun them. It didn't take long over there in the barracks,

those barracks with other, some more Ukrainians and SS men, and they heard the shooting. And hundreds and hundreds of trucks came, and they surrounded-- they surrounded the camp, and they surrounded all the area there.

And I noticed someone was laying on the ground, and they shoot with the machine gun that was going on. And then the machine-gunning stopped. So I was maybe a few yards out of the fence. I--

--continued to run.

No, I pushed back.

Back to the camp?

I heard shooting in front of me. It was the guard, the trucks with the other SS men, the other-- so to me, it didn't make any sense to run towards them. So I backed into the camp. So a lot of-- most of the people which was close--

--went back.

--went back to the camp.

And were they shot?

Anybody they found out of the camp they shot.

Where were your brothers?

My brothers was still in the camp. I don't know how-- if they were out, if they wasn't out, but they were shot there. The main [INAUDIBLE] and after that, the next day, the chief of the Gestapo came by the name Baker, and he-- and they surrounded the ghetto with SS and Ukrainians and all kinds of military units. And they make us march to the trains.

And I could just mention it, that after the war, a few years ago, I went to Germany as a witness, me and my brother. Three of us went to Germany for the trial. I mentioned here to the Jewish organization, to Mr. Robinson, about this Gestapo chief Baker and--

You testified against him.

And all three of us went to--

Berlin?

No, Bremen, Bremerhaven, to testify against him.

The trains pulled up, and we all was packed in the trains. And--

Do you know whether this instigated that whole-- the reasoning for why people wanted to escape?

They wanted to run to the woods to become partisans.

Any particular reason for that time? Did you get a sense that the war won't stop or--

No. So there was a rumor that at that time-- that was after the Warsaw Ghetto, and after they liquidated the Warsaw Ghetto, they send some of them to Auschwitz and some of them to Treblinka. And a group of people from the Warsaw Ghetto came to our camp, to Starachowice. And the people from the Warsaw Ghetto told us that they killed all the Jews.

I see.

And they told us what happened in the Warsaw Ghetto and they're killing Jews in other places, so we decided to break out. It's time to break out and go in the woods and join partisans. But it didn't work for me. A few people-- a few people escaped in that breakout. I don't know how many, but I know some escaped.

And what happened the next day?

Then they packed us in the cattle trains again and was traveling towards Auschwitz. What was that like?

Oh, when we came--

The trip.

The trip? Oh, we were so packed in those-- they told us when we was coming in the train that we should behave, that we're going to another place like this one, ammunition factory, and we're going to-- we was very good workers. The war is going on. The Germans are winning the war. We need workers. We have so much experience working a few years for them, and we are very valuable. So we should behave, and nothing will happen to us. Everyone got a piece-- got a huge piece of bread.

Before you went on the train?

Before we went on the train, and they--

And what was that like?

And they said that we'll come to another place, and we will to continue to work, and nothing will happen to us.

No one believed-- people believed that or--

No, we didn't believe, and there were some people who jumped from the-- I was-- there was-- they packed in all the cattle trains with people, but then there was still a group of maybe 50 or 60. There was no place where to them, so they brought another car, which was an open one like they transport coal. And we went in the--

--open one.

--in the open one. But in the open one, there was two-- there was two SS men with machine guns. They was staying in two corners of that thing. And while we--

And your brothers were in the open one?

Yeah. We was always trying to--

--stay together.

--stay together. And we was traveling to-- the train was going towards Auschwitz. We didn't know where it was going, but we're going to find out. And while we was on the way someplace, it was in the middle of the night. The train was attacked by partisans. We didn't know. It was just-- machine guns started to shoot against the train, and on the train was - one car was filled with SS men.

They all jumped off the train, and they started to pursue them, to pursue them to-- that they stop. And they started to shoot back.

Did you see anything? Were you able--



It was a dark night. We couldn't see anything. We can just see the fire coming from the-- was woods there. It was coming out from the woods, and we can see that they was shooting. The SS men was shooting back. And there wasn't so many people on the other side, but there must have been a few. It was just some-- just a few-- the whole thing lasted maybe five minutes. Within the five minutes, some of us started to jump from that open car.

They tried to escape?

They tried to escape, yeah. And they was all shot.

You didn't--

But I could see them laying. They was laying right in front of the-- they didn't go far because the SS men was laying underneath. The laying stretched out underneath the car, and as soon as someone jumped off of the car-- I wanted to run too, but I see my friend-- I see jumped up just from the train, started to run. He was shot on maybe 10 feet from the car.

I was right behind him, going to jump up already. But then it was already-- he was laying there. So in five minutes, things quiet down, and then the thing continued. And then we went through a sign. And it says Oswiecim.

How long it take to get there?

I really don't know remember the--

Days or hours?

I would say probably-- maybe two days.

You were two days [CROSS TALK]?

I don't remember. What?

Any food or drink?

No, just the bread, just the bread what we got. Or maybe less than-- maybe a day and a half. I don't remember exactly how much. It didn't take long. And we came-- the train pulled in through the gate in Auschwitz. It was at night, and we pulled in there.

And they asked us to-- when they opened the car, to lay down on the floor, not to stand up, just to lay down, not to look out out from it. So they started to get out with a light. I raised up, and I looked out because the two SS man went out, left-- when we came into Auschwitz, inside, they left our--

--car.

--our car. And I see all the people in striped uniforms in the-- they're far away. The next morning, they opened all the cars, and we marched. There was staying there are few SS men. One of them was Dr. Mengele, and he was looking at us. And he was-- most of us then went to the-- went to the right. He was-- some of them-- the women, the children, and some people that looked pale or they looked small or they-- he just pointed with the finger to the left. But the majority of the group-- I would say probably 90% of us-- went to the right.

Did people know at the time what the selection was?

No. We didn't know. It looks that-- they took the majority because those people was workers. I don't know if you knew about that because people came from working camp and they've seen that those are people which are good for work. But the most of us went to the right, and the women and children went to the left.

And they asked-- they told us to march to a building there to take showers. And they took away our clothes for disinfection. We went through showers. They shaved off our hair every place and covered us with carbol against lice and other things, infection lice. And we came out from the other door, and they gave us