

Today is Thursday, January 31, 1980. My name is Fran Gutterman. I'm interviewing my mother, Mrs. Dora Gutterman, who resides in Norfolk, Virginia and who is a survivor of the Holocaust. OK, Mom. We're going to begin by my asking you some questions about your life before the war started. OK? First of all, could you tell me, who were the members of your family and who was in your family?

I had three brothers. And I was the only one girl at home.

What were your brothers' names?

My oldest brother's name-- Pinchas, who survived Auschwitz. He lives now in Melbourne, Australia. My second brother's name was Chaim, who was killed by the German murderers.

OK, Mom, look at me. OK. Who were the people that were in your household before the war? What was your family comprised of?

There was my mother and father and my three brothers-- my oldest brother, Pinchas, and my second brother, Chaim, and my youngest brother, Ephraim Menasha. My parents were-- my father's name was Eziel Orbach. He was a Gerer Hasid. He never was away for a Shabbos or any holiday from the home, except for Shavuot, where he went to the Gerer rabbi and spent there eight days.

Let me ask you, before the war, you were married, right? Before the war.

I was married in March 25, 1938.

What was your husband's name?

Berish Krothstein.

OK.

My family--

Well-- OK. I'd like to ask you a few questions about what your family's status was in the community and things like that, OK? What was your family social status? Do you know what I mean by social status? Like were they--

Respectable?

Yeah, right.

My parents were highly respectable people.

What would you say, like were they-- like in the United States, we have lower class, middle class, upper class. What do you think your family fit in along those lines?

My family, at that time, was a upper class family. My father and my mother were highly respectable people. My father was a Gerer Hasid. He was devout [NON-ENGLISH]. Every Shabbos in the holidays, [INAUDIBLE] shtiebel.

So your family was very religious?

Highly, strictly Orthodox, very religious. My mother was a lady who never ate a meal without giving a dinner or two to poor people. She was very charitable. My father had [NON-ENGLISH], containers for yeshivas.

Oh, what was the village that you were living in?

We were-- the name of it in Polish-- Wislica. In Yiddish, it was Vayslitz. It was a very small town, you call it that time.

So your family was very well-respected in the community of Vayslitz?

Very highly respected and, to that standard, in Poland, very rich. I don't know how it would be here in the United States. But at their standard, they were very rich and very highly respected, one from the few families in my hometown where people looked up to.

Really? When you say people, do you mean both Jews and non-Jews?

Jew, yeah, Jews and non-Jews. Found there were more Jews in that town than non-Jews. But the Jews and non-Jews looked up to my parents very much. If somebody had a dispute, they came to my father to ask his advice--

Really?

--what to solve it. Let me give you an example. When a poor girl and boy got engaged, the custom was that the girl's father gave a nadn.

A dowry?

A dowry, yes. And the groom was afraid to trust the girl's father the dowry. And the girl's father was afraid to trust him. So they came to my father.

Was there a judge that would resolve such things? Or they would just go to different people?

No, no. They came to my father and put the money to my father. They trusted the money. And sometimes, it came out a dispute, like when the engagement broke off. The khosn said, the money is mine. The kale said, the money is mine. And my father was in the middle. And at that time, they made [YIDDISH]. They took like a--

A judgment.

--a judgment. The bride's parents took two or three people. The groom's parents took two or three people. And they made a judgment. Whatever the judgment was my father did with the money.

Did both? Yeah.

And sometimes, I even asked my father, I said, Dad, why are you doing that? You put yourself so much trouble. And he said to me, he said, it's a very big mitzvah. I do it because I want-- if I wouldn't do it, they probably would never get engaged. 90% of the engagement go through and they get married. And this is a grosser mitzvah. But it would sometimes happen. And it doesn't materialize. Then, of course, I do whatever the Torah does. And I even tried to discourage him to do it. But he will never accept it. He always did it.

Let me ask you. Did both Jews and non-Jews come to your father, or mostly just Jews?

Mostly Jews, yeah, non-Jewish didn't, actually.

What was your relationship with-- of your family with non-Jews? Did you associate with non-Jews at all? Or did you have any--

Well, I didn't associate socially. When I was going to school, I had a lot of Gentile friends. Because in Poland, the Jews were open on Shabbos. Of course, the Jewish children did not attend that.

You mean, the school was open on Shabbos? The school was open Shabbos, yes. And when after I have dinner, I always had Gentile friends whom I went and took the walk, what was given on Shabbos or for

Monday, I will be prepared.

How about in your neighborhood? Did you have non-Jews that lived in your neighborhood?

Yes. Yeah, we had some non-Jews.

Were any of them-- were you friends with any of them in your family?

They-- officially, everything was all right. But inside, Jews and Poles--

Didn't.

--hated each other. Did you have any friends in the neighborhood that you played with that were non-Jews?

Most of them-- when I was a little girl, most of my friends were Jewish children.

So you got along OK with--

I got along OK with and openly.

But there was--

Hostility, very much hostility inside.

OK. How did your-- what was the means of support for your family? How did your family make a living? My parents had a leather business.

A leather business?

Yes. They were selling retail to shoemakers, who made shoes and boots for customers. They were selling also to neighboring town to stores wholesale. They had a big leather business. And they made a very nice living from that.

OK. Who worked in the store? Did your--

Well, it began with my oldest brother, Pinchas. He worked in the store since he was 12 years old, then my second brother, Chaim. And then when I finished school, I was 14 years old then, I worked in the business. My youngest brother, Menasha, was sent when he finished, about around when he was about 12 or 13 years old.

My parents, at that time, were wealthy enough to be able to send him to yeshiva. He went to Kraków-- Kraków. And he was there for four years in yeshiva. And when he came back from the yeshiva, he helped in the business too. He helped them with the business.

Menasha was how old when he went to yeshiva?

He went to the yeshiva, he was, I would say, about 12-13 years old.

So he returned when he was about 17.

About 17, yes.

What did he-- after yeshiva, did he have semicha? Or what was it considered?

He was there only for the simple purpose of learning Torah. He didn't went to a school like here in the United States, when you go to a school, you get the semicha. He didn't went like this. He was there to learn Torah. And he was one from the very few [YIDDISH], what he was, my brother Menasha.

OK. Could you tell me the-- if you can remember-- the dates that your brothers were born?

Well, we were three years apart. I was born in 1914. Chaim--

Around when? You said May?

My legal birthday is May, you know. Because at that time, nobody-- they didn't record the birth from children. It wasn't required. But my mother, olav ha-sholom, always told me that I was born eight days before Yom Tovim, whatever that was, in 1914. My brother, Chaim, was born three years earlier, which was 1911. My brother, Pinchas, was born in 1908. And my brother, Ephraim, Menasha, was born in 1917.

OK. OK. You mentioned that Menasha went to yeshiva. How about educational backgrounds of your brothers and yourself?

My other brothers went to cheder.

So Pinchas?

My brother Pinchas, my brother Chaim went to cheder.

In Vayslitz?

Yeah, in Vayslitz. And the rabbi taught them write in Yiddish, and Chumash, and Russian, and whatever they taught there. But they also went to a public school, where they learned write Polish, and read Polish, and arithmetic, and all that. They both finished public school.

And what age was that at?

Pardon?

What age did they finish school?

They were finished, I would say, about when they were 12 years, 12 or 13 years old.

And what was that equivalent to, like here in the United States?

This was equivalent to-- when I finished public school, this is what you call it like high school here. Because in the public school, when you want to go to a higher learning, you went right away to gymnasium, which is like college here. It was not a middle school, between public and gymnasium.

And how long would you go-- if someone continued to gymnasium, how long would they go?

I think it was four years.

And then that was equivalent to a college degree?

Yes. Yes.

OK. So your brothers, Pinchas and Chaim, went through until the age of about 13?

About 13 or something like that.

And then what did they do afterwards?

And then they opened the store, the business.

OK. And you yourself, you went also?

I also went to a-- finished public school. And I worked in the business. Our business was a very hard business, a very hard work. But I helped.

You mentioned to me at one time that you were interested in continuing to?

Yes. When I finished public school, I always was very interested in higher education, and more learning, and more developed education. And I was-- I wanted very much continue my education. Unfortunately, in the town where we lived, there was not a gymnasium.

I had to go away to a bigger town, like Kraków, or Kielce, or Warsaw. My parents didn't had relatives in those towns. And they were afraid to send me in a-- to a boarding home because the antisemitism in the gymnasium was very high. Jews had to sit in the back of the classroom.

Really? Even when you were growing up and going to regular school, you had to sit in the back?

Not in the public school, but the gymnasium. Because the public school was you had to go. Gymnasium was by your choice. And if you went to go gymnasium, you had to sit at the back of the school. I don't know how it was when I was in public school. But when I was ready to go to gymnasium, this way it was. And also, the students, the Polish students, were highly antisemitic.

And they did all they could to hurt Jews, Jewish students, especially girls. My father was afraid to take a chance. And he wouldn't let me go. Because this reason, I couldn't attend gymnasium. I was very, very upset about that. I want so much to go, to further my education. But it's no way my father would let me, not for money reasons, because he couldn't afford it, but for the reasons I just mentioned. Yes. And I didn't go.

OK. Did you-- Vayslitz, how would you describe that? Was that a big city, a small city, a little village?

Vayslitz was-- the whole town-- well, I would say, about like three, four blocks.

Right, the whole--

Very tiny.

So it's like a village?

Yeah, a village-- like a marketplace. And there were one street down then, which was named Ulica Dlugosza, there what we lived and had our business.

Do you have any idea how many people, how many families were there or about?

I really couldn't tell you, maybe were there about, I would say, 100-150 Jewish families.

How about families altogether, Jews and non-Jews?

Maybe were about 200-250 altogether. It was a very, very small-- in Poland, this was called a town. Of course, here, it wouldn't even be a village.

What did-- how did the town exist? I mean, what did people do there?

Well, there were-- usually, Jewish people had business. Jewish people were not allowed to have land. They were not allowed to be farmers. And some of them had-- they were shoemakers, some tailors, carpenters. And this what they made a living. Life was very poor. Make a living was very, very hard.

How close was the nearest-- the next town?

We had several towns not far away. One town was Busko.

How far away was that?

I would say about 20 kilometers.

Kraków, you said, was the nearest biggest city.

Kraków was, yeah.

And how far? Do you have any idea about how far away that was?

I don't have any idea how far it was. But when you went by train to Kraków, you had to go first on the small train and then change to the bigger train. It took about, I would say, three-four hours.

That was the nearest biggest city.

It was the nearest bigger city.

How about Łódź? Didn't you say to me that Łódź?

Łódź? Yeah, Łódź was a big town. Łódź was farther than Kraków. Yeah, Łódź was a very big textile city.

So you'd say that the village you grew up was more like country-ish as opposed to city?

Yeah, it was a very small place.

OK. Could you tell me what you-- growing up, if you experienced any experiences that could be called antisemitic? This is before the war, if you can recall any. Give me some examples.

I can't recall, not before. When Hitler came to power in 19-- I think it was in 1933, then when this poison began to come in more. Then the Poles began to put-- I don't know how to say this. They hired somebody to march back and forth in the front of a Jewish store and tell the customers--

To demonstrate.

--don't go in, it's a Jewish store.

You mean, to demonstrate in front of the store.

Yeah, of the stores, yes.

Who hired these people?

Those-- they had formed an organization, antisemitic organizations reported that.

This started after 1933?

'33 or '34, as soon as Hitler came to power. Then they begin to do whatever he did.

How old were you in 1933?

1933, I was 19 years old.

And so before 1933, you don't remember any?

No. I was going to school. I didn't-- there was in the air. You could feel this-- the sharpness, but it was never

openly, while when-- after Hitler came to power, it began to get openly. They didn't hide. They began to openly did. But my father one time told me, he was going to the train. And a Gentile boy throw a stone at him because he was going on a long [NON-ENGLISH] with a Jewish cap. And even with a beard, he was always a Jew.

Payos?

My father didn't had payos, but he-- very shortly. But he had a long beard, and the long [NON-ENGLISH], and the Jewish cap. And of course, he goes, he's a Jew. And he throw him-- he throw stones after him. And before, this didn't happen.

But then it began to happen more openly and openly. They made a law, the same-- in Poland, was like the Senate here. They made out a law, it is allowed to put a man in front of a store and tell them. You could do it. Because before, you couldn't do it, but then you could do all you can to aggravate Jews, to hurt them. This was everything after Hitler became to power and always become-- it became stronger and stronger and deeper and deeper.

OK. As a chance of war, as people began to see that war was coming, do you remember what options you and your family had about what to do?

Well, at the [INAUDIBLE], nobody didn't think it will actually break out because there were many other occasions before that it was OK-- that was-- or the war broke out. But something happened, it got smoothed out, and never was a war. So everybody was sort of hopeful that somehow, it will clear out this time too.

Well, let me ask you. You said, Hitler came to power in 1933, right?

Yes, yeah.

War broke out in 1938. And the war broke out 1939.

Right, '39, sorry. Were you aware as between 1933 and 1939--

Antisemitism? Yes, very much so.

Did it get worse, better? I mean, did-- how did-- did you see things getting worse and worse?

Things were getting worse up to the antisemitism. And also, in 19-- not only in 19-- 1928, it wasn't very-- it wasn't openly. But we could feel this inner hate, this antisemitism.

Prejudice?

Prejudice, yes, very much so. My father then decided that he wants to get out.

When was this, in 1928?

It was in 1928. He had applied already for a visa to go to then Palestine and by the Sephardes.

And by place, you mean like a field a piece of land?

Yeah, a field of oranges, that citrus, and settle there. And he had already made visas for him and my brother Pinchas. Both were planning to go there. And so were many other Jews doing-- going there. But when everybody who left took with him the money.

And the Polish government saw what's going on. So they made this called [GERMAN], which means, if you want to go, you can, but money, you got to leave here in the country. You can't take out the money. Of course, if we would have known then what's going to happen-- this is not only the money, but the life is at stake-- we would have left everything and go away.

But nobody didn't-- couldn't possibly predict this. And how can you leave everything what you-- and for generations worked for it, and establish something, and accumulate it, just leave everything and go start for the new?

And then when they gave out this law, you cannot take out money, my father said, well, what can I do? How can I leave everything and go? And then when he resigned. He didn't go to Palestine to try to settle there-- and then when it happened.

And in the '30s-- sorry, go on.

Then the antisemitism was very visible. You could feel it. When you spoke-- we had a neighbor who lived crossed from us. And when I spoke with them, openly, we were very friendly. But you could feel this inner antisemitism.

So it wasn't really much trust for someone who wasn't Jewish?

No, oh, between Jews and Poles, no, no trust at all, nothing whatsoever. And when the war broke out--

How about a few years before the war, as the war was coming closer and closer?

The whole time on the [? Torahs, ?] everybody was going to everyday business. Everybody worked and going to everyday business. Nobody didn't think that something will happen. I remember, this was about a month before the war broke out. And things were very, very serious. I was living then in Sosnowiec, where my brother, Pinchas, lived.

My brother had then two little girls. One little girl, her name was-- we called her Cesza. She was born in 1933. She was six years old then. And the other little girl, Helen, was three years old. And we decided to take the children to our parents. Me and my brother Pinchas went with the two kids and our parents.

And we took two suitcases with the jewelry, silverware, all those expensive things we could take in a suitcase. And we took it all to my parents. Because there, we assumed, in a small city, will be more safe. And also, Sosnowiec, where we lived, was very close to the German border, which was more risky. And we took them over there. And we came back and went to our everyday business.

And I remember, it was a Saturday morning. My brother, Pinchas, pointed out to me that there is a big fire by the city hall in Sosnowiec that was burning all the papers and money.

This was the 1st of September when the war had broken out. We hadn't known then. But my brother said, look, they're burning everything. What are we going to do? And I said, well, let's wait. Let's see. I spoke with my husband and with my sister-in-law. And we all discussed it, what to do. And Saturday night, we ran away.

What year-- when was this now?

This was September the 1st, 1939. It was on a Shabbos.

And when did the war break out?

And yeah, then by the war broke out.

Wow.

Saturday morning was the first shot.

Well, in '36, and '37, and '38, was there any talk at all of trying to leave Poland? Or trying to--

No. No. Nobody didn't think about that. Because even a war-- Poland had wars before. A war was a war. The private population was left alone. Nobody didn't bother them. So how could you possible-- how could it possible any human mind foresee this?

Well, at that time, there was no awareness that-- of what could possibly happen to the Jews?

No, of course not. We know there's antisemitism. We know-- we felt that if a war would broke out, there will be hard times. But what could be done?

For everybody, not--

For everybody, maybe for Jews a little bit harder.

Were there any ghettos then that had been formed?

No, of course not.

There was nothing like that.

No. But where can-- where could we run? Where? There was nowhere to run. Palestine was closed. United States was closed.

When you say closed, what do you mean?

To go to Palestine then, you had to have a--

Visa.

A visa-- not a visa, a permission. England gave out only so many permissions to Jewish peoples. In order to go to Palestine, there was a Zionist organization. You had to be for a year or two on Hakhshara, which mean you had to go--

Preparation.

--preparation for it. And then you got this-- I forgot what the name was of this permission to go to Palestine.

How about for the United States? Same?

The United States, we didn't even think about it. I don't think we would go there. You got to know people in high places. You got to be somebody very famous. But usually, normal people, the everyday people didn't have no chance to live. There was nowhere to live. Maybe if we would have a chance to go, to leave, we probably would. But since there was no chance, nobody didn't think about it.

Yeah. OK. I wanted to ask you also-- you mentioned-- earlier, when I asked you what your family consisted of, you mentioned Pinchas, and Chaim, and Ephraim--

Ephraim Menasha, yeah.

--Ephraim Menasha, and yourself. Also, during the '30s, your brothers got married, didn't they?

He got married in 1932.

Pinchas got married in 1930?

Yeah, well, my brother Pinchas got married in 1932.

And who did he marry?

He married a young lady from [PLACE NAME], which was a suburb from Sosnowiec. They were very rich and very respectable people. My brother, Pinchas--

What was her name?

Her name was Paula.

Paula?

And the Yiddish name was Pesel. We called her Paula. And my brother settled in Sosnowiec and opened a leather business.

Sosnowiec-- how close was that to Vayslitz?

This was far to-- it was close to the German border, Sosnowiec.

It was in Poland?

It was in Poland, yes-- or at that time was Poland. And he opened up leather business, a wholesale leather business. And he was pretty successful.

This was in 1932. So how old was he?

This was 1932. How old I was? How old was when he got married? He was born in 1908. He was 20-- 24 years.

And he had children?

He had two children.

What was?

Cesza and Helen.

Two girls.

Two little girls. Yes.

OK. And how about Chaim?

Chaim got married during the war.

When did he get engaged?

He got engaged before the war. He got engaged-- the pair--

What was--

--Chol Hamoed Pesach 1938. I got married eight days before Pesach. And he got engaged on Chol Hamoed Pesach in 1938. And his fiancée was from Jedrzejow.

What was her name?

Her name was Paula also. And her parents had a lumberyard business. They were not highly rich, but they were comfortable. And they are planning to get married right after the Yom Tovim of 1938. But the war broke out. And it couldn't materialize. And they got married on Shabbos [INAUDIBLE] of 1942.

OK. And you said you were married.

I got married on March the 25th, 1938. It was about eight days before Pesach.

March 25?

March the 25th, 1938. Yes.

And what was your husband's name?

Berish, Berish Krothstein.

And how long were you engaged to him?

I was engaged for five years. I got engaged in 1933. But there were difficulties because he didn't had a father. His father died when he was a little boy. And his sister, his older sister got married. And her husband manages the mill they owned. And apparently, he wasn't much familiar in that business. And he almost ruined the business.

They owned the mill?

Yeah, they owned the mill-- his mother.

Where was this?

This was in Ozarów, not far from Opatowiec. And my husband at that time was only 12 years old. And he was in Lublin. And his father wrote him-- his mother wrote him a letter about that. And he left-- and she came home. And he told his brother-in-law to get out. And he took it over.

And he managed to put it on the road a little bit. But it was never in a condition like a mill should be. And when I got engaged, my father was planning to put in money to bring it to a perfect shape so we can remain there. It would be ours. But other difficulties came up.

How old were you when you were engaged, when you got engaged?

I was engaged in 1933. I was 19 years old. Other difficulties came up. And my mother, olav ha-sholom, found out that my fiance's mother is a tough person. And she said, she would never agree for me to stay there, to be together with my future mother-in-law. And this helped to the other-- because this helped too. And we finally decided-- my parents decided not to put in the money and just to get out from there.

Was it a-- how did you meet your first husband? Was it like a--

With a shadchen, yes, with a shadchen. And my father discussed this with my fiance. And they come to an agreement that we will go on our own. We will get married and move to Sosnowiec. And that's what we did. And this took-- he had to find somebody to rent this mill, you understand. And it just took all those years.

What did your husband do in Sosnowiec?

When we moved to Sosnowiec, we had, in the beginning with a partner, a wholesale business from flour, all kinds wheat products. And then after about a year or not quite a year, our partners, two brother, and a partner, and my husband decided to go into business together. They rented a flour mill in Sosnowiec.

Was this after the war broke out?

This was before the war.

Well, you said you got married in March--

In 1938, yes. And we went to Sosnowiec and had the business for I don't know how long, eight-nine months or whatever.

Yeah, right. I see.

And then we decided to go-- shortly before the war, we rent this flour mill. And since my husband was a professional in this business of flour in a mill, there were four partners. And we rented this mill. It was a very good business. When the war broke out, we ran away. And when we came back to Sosnowiec, there was a lock on the mill, on the factory, with a note that is required-- is required, I mean, taken by the German government. And taken off this lock is death penalty.

When did this happen? When did this happen?

This happened-- we came back right-- we ran away the 1st of September. And we went to our parents. We planned to go by train, but the train never moved. And most of the time, we were walking. And we came to our parents. My father had already left.

The whole thing was crazy. Nobody knew what was going on. We just was trying to go away as far as possible from the German border. Everybody was sure the Polish Army will knock him down a day or two. Everything will be all right. So everybody was trying to run away from the German border as much as possible.

I see.

So when I came home, my father had already left, going to Lublin, there where my husband came from. Well, this was close to the German-- to the Russian border. My two brothers had already left. My mother was home by herself with the two children. And we came all together, me and my husband, my brother, and his wife, and his wife's sister, and her husband.

Three couples came, I remember, all together home. And my mother said, we had to run. Had to go away. I couldn't go because I had to be with the children. And women are more safe. But men are very dangerous to be here. You better go away. So the women remained here. My sister-in-law's sister had also a little boy, a baby. And she remained there, my sister-in-law, her sister, and the kids.

And my mother told me, since you go to your mother-in-law, to your home, why don't you go too? You better go too. And I went together with all those men. We were running to the-- far away from the German. But before we had a chance to come to Lublin and then go to Ozarów the German came in the front of us. They met us. Because they came to Poland on several-- you understand?

Right, several fronts.

So we didn't even have a chance to go there because they were there before we came. And we turn around and went back home. There was no other choice.

This was in 1939.

That was 1939.

Right. OK. So how old were you when the war broke out then?

It was 1939. I was 25 years old. Yeah. And that's what I wanted to say. When we came back to Sosnowiec, we found all we had, our whole fortune, was taken by the German government. We didn't own anything then. And the sign on the door was if you taking off the lock, the death sentence. Of course, [INAUDIBLE] wouldn't touch it.

And I'm not sure, maybe you already mentioned. But how did you first-- the very first word of the war reach you? How did you first hear about the war?

When-- in that Saturday in Sosnowiec, I don't remember exactly, but people-- the neighbors, did you hear? The war broke out. The German are shooting. Look there, the city hall is burning. The money burning. The paper's burning.

Why the city hall burning money?

Burning because they didn't want the German-- because at that time, they thought the Poles will [NON-ENGLISH]-- whatever, will knock him down. The Poles will be national. And the money will be money, will be valuable. They didn't want the German take their money. So they burned it.

Right. I see. OK. So you said then that happened. You then all-- everyone fled to Vayslitz. And when you got to Vayslitz, you found out that everyone was going to Lublin. So everyone went to Lublin. But by that time, you didn't even make it there because the Germans had already surrounded. And so you-- then everyone returned. So where did you return? You returned back to Vayslitz?

Yeah, turned back to Vayslitz. And we were there for a couple of days. And my father rented or hired a farmer who had a wagon and horses to take us back home to Sosnowiec because there was no other way.

And then you got back to Sosnowiec, you found that the Germans had taken the mill?

Yeah. And on the way, in the middle of the way, he throw us off on the wagon. He went back. And we had to walk. This way, he got the money. He wasn't going-- this is what he did.

Really?

Yeah.

And he didn't-- your father paid.

He said, get out from here. What could we do? We went down and we walked.

So when you found out the mill was taken, what did you do then? What could we do? We couldn't do anything. We were there-- one of those-- of our partners remained that. He didn't runned. And he-- before the Germans took-- put a lock on it, before they came in, of course, I'm sure they put a lock as soon as they came in, as soon as they form some kind office, some kind office where they--

Police or whatever.

--police, yeah, police, or whatever you call it. He managed to take out about 20 or 30 sacks of flour. And this was a fortune because as soon as he came back, money was nothing. But you could have 1,000, 100,000 zloty, you couldn't buy a loaf of bread for it.

A sack of flour was a fortune because this was your life. You could save your life. You wouldn't be-- you wouldn't starve. So he gave us about four or five sacks of flour. And we put it in the bedroom and covered it like the biggest fortune in the world. And from this, we lived for a few weeks.

So you just basically were waiting to see what was going to happen?

We didn't know. Everybody was very-- was like a dream. Even nobody didn't knew what's going to happen.

A shock, you mean.

Like a shock, a terrible shock. Nobody. In the meantime, they rounded up Jews, the Germans. They shot Jews.

Were you aware that this was going on?

Oh, yeah, sure. But what could you do?

You mean rounded up Jews in Sosnowiec?

Rounded up Jews. I went there. When I came back, was about maybe a week or two later.

So this was still in September '39 or October?

And this was maybe October, at the beginning of October, or sometimes in October. It took us several days to walk to my parents. Then we were there for two or three days. And took us about two days to come because the farmer, that man throw us off from the wagon. And we had to walk. So when we came back, we find out that when they came in, they rounded up many Jews. And they shot them.

But at that time, it was quiet. At the beginning, it was no ghetto, was quiet. Then suddenly, they hanged out announcements on the walls, with announcements that all men had to report to the city hall-- all Jewish men. But also all Jewish men at the age of 18 or whatever, 17 and older, have to report to the city hall.

Was this still in '39?

Was after-- yeah. Yeah, it was about when we came back. It was about a couple of weeks later. So of course, my brother and my husband were afraid. They didn't know what they were going to do. They know from experience that they rounded-- called Jews and they shot them. They didn't know what they're going to do with them. So naturally, we didn't want them to report. So they decided to leave.

To leave Sosnowiec?

Leave Sosnowiec. And they left to my parents.

This was Uncle Pinchas and?

It was-- yeah, and Berish, and my husband.

And what did you and--

And I and Paula-- yeah, and the children-- when we left Vayslitz on the way back, the children remained there. We didn't do children with us. The children were there.

And Sheila and Helen were there. And we sent the men home. And we remained at here in Sosnowiec. And I even wasn't in my apartment. I was together with Paula. We were standing in her apartment. Well, go home. There was nothing there. So we stayed there together. And they were there I don't know for how long.

How come you didn't go? Uncle Pinchas and your first husband went to back to Vayslitz?

Yes.

To stay at your parents?

To stay with my parents.

And why didn't you go with them?

Because they didn't call for women to register. They called for men to register. And I had there apartment. And I had beautiful furniture and a lot of beautiful things. And I just didn't want to leave this. I didn't know

what's going to happen, you understand. So I didn't want to leave this. So I remained there. And they didn't call for woman to register. So natural, I wasn't in danger at that time.

So what happened?

Well, they were there for about a couple of weeks. And they were-- nothing happened. And they came back. And about a few weeks later, they formed-- what it was there-- a Jewish Judenrat, a Yiddish Judenrat, about like a Jewish committee, a Jewish office. Whatever the German want, they went to this office. Like I want \$100,000, I want 1,000 Jews to work, I want 1,000 women, I want this-- whatever they want, whatever they demand, they went to the Judenrat.

And who was the Judenrat run by?

The Jews. They picked. The Jews came together and they picked a Judenrat. And there was a president of this Judenrat too. I do not remember--

Go ahead. Would you first explain to me a little bit about what a Judenrat was? I mean, how did they come to pass? Was there a Judenrat in every town?

Every town had a Judenrat. This was on the demand from the Germans. They wanted to have a office where they can put their demands.

So it was like the new politics? It was a new political head?

It was a Judenrat in every town, no matter how small or how big. They were there, I would say, about 10 people, about 10 Jews. And those 10 Jews picked between them the president. And they formed a police. There was Jewish police. When the Germans want peoples to go to work to build the highways or to send away to concentration camps, they came to the Judenrat, and they told them what they want. If they--

How were the people picked to be in the Judenrat? What was it looked upon as an honor?

No, it wasn't a honor. As a matter of fact, my father was begged to be the president. He wouldn't do it for anything in the world.

Who picked the people to be in the Judenrat?

The Jews came together and they picked. They brought out, I want this. And they put votes. And who got more votes became a member of the Judenrat. And they want to pick my father in my hometown for the Judenrat. And they wanted to make him the president. He wouldn't take it for the whole money in the world because it was a dishonor to him to serve the Germans. Because in a way, with this, you served the Germans.

Let me ask you. At that time, Poland was conquered, was under German rule.

Well, all Poland was taken to German.

So what happened to the Poles? I mean, the Jews were dealt with under a Judenrat, right, by a Judenrat?

The Poles were-- in a way, they were left alone, especially small towns, they wasn't bothered at all. In the big towns, where there were doctors, or lawyers, or the people who make medicine--

Pharmacists?

--pharmacists-- all the educated peoples-- I wouldn't say all, most of them were pretty much harassed. They were sent away to concentration camps on the way because--

The Poles?

The Poles.

The educated Poles?

The educated, yes. Why did the Germans do that? Because they were afraid of a revolt. The more-- the everyday common person don't have the brains to put out word, while the educated people, they were afraid they will form something.

But with Jews, educated and uneducated saved no life.

With the Jews, didn't make no difference. You could have a penny. You could be a doctor. You could have a million. You could be nothing. You could be the most-- everything-- everybody was equal.

Weren't the Jews a little suspicious about this?

Yes, they were. What could they do?

But at the time, you realized?

You couldn't do anything. You couldn't go anyplace. There was no way. There was no escape. When the war broke out, and the Jews began to see what the Germans doing, they saw that they're very much in danger. They never expected that they're going to build gas chambers and kill them-- of course not. They know that they're going to have to work hard. And they're going to have to be hungry. And they're going to be in a very difficult circumstances. But somehow, they will survive.

Like happened in the past.

Like happen in the past, natural. They knew that the Jews will be exposed to much more difficult times than the Poles. But nobody didn't suspect what's going to happen because if the Jews would have had idea what's going to happen, they would somehow form some kind defense. They would somehow try to do something. But nobody didn't have any idea what's going to happen.

OK. So you said that in Sosnowiec, there was a Judenrat that was formed.

Yeah, got a Judenrat too. And at one time, they hanged-- about a week or two, not long after my brother and my husband came back from home, they hanged out-- no, they didn't hanged out. Apparently, they sent the men to the Judenrat who, I don't know how many, 1,000 or 10,000 men, to send away to work camps.

And the Judenrat picked-- at that time, they picked most of those peoples who just recently moved to Sosnowiec. And since I just came, I just got married in 1938, so I was the very first one. My husband was the first one to get a notice to come to the Judenrat. And a noticed to come to the Judenrat, we know what it is, to send away to the work camp.

So you were aware at the time that there were work camps?

Yes, sure. We found out then. We found out that they're going to send away to work camps. And it's-- the way it happened, I was living then in your father's parent's house. And your father's sister was living there too, above me. Your father was living with her then because before the war, he lived what was then Germany. So he had to run away. He lived there. And since he--

Before the war, Dad lived in Germany?

No, it wasn't Germany, was Poland then. But as soon as the Germans took over, they--

Annexed it.

--annexed, yeah, right away to Germany. And then a few weeks later, they annexed Sosnowiec too. But at that time, it was still Poland. And since your father had also recently come to Sosnowiec, my husband and your father, they came at this-- got the same-- at the same time, they got it. This was a Friday afternoon. And he came down to me to ask. And he's asked my husband if he got a ticket. My husband said, yes. And he said, what are you going to do?

So Dad met your-- knew your first husband.

Sure, he knew him. And he said, what are you going to do? And well, what can we do? We have to run away. I'm not going to go there. I'm not going to go to German work camp.

Who said this?

Either one, either one going there. But how could you run away? There was the Jewish police. They had Jewish police. Then they were patrolling the streets. They were-- so it was very-- when they see were men, young men go, hey, come on, let me see who you are. What is your name? And they had the list of all the men who were sent papers to come to the Judenrat.

Let me ask you. Dad at the time was living with his sister?

Yeah.

Was he married at the time?

Yeah, he was married. He had a wife and a child.

And they were living?

Yeah, upstairs.

What was his wife's name, do you remember?

I don't remember.

Or the child's name?

No.

Was it a boy or a girl?

Was a girl. I knew her name, but I don't remember.

That's OK. Maybe you'll remember.

Yeah. And so we decided, it was Friday afternoon. It wasn't quite night, but it wasn't a very-- it was already so a little bit getting to the night. And we decided that they both will run away. And I will go in before them, about two, three houses before them.

And when I will see a policeman coming, a Jewish-- it was only Jewish police taking care on this-- and they had, of course, those stars where you could see he's a Jew. When I will see that here a policemen coming in front of me, there was a sign. I would bend down and try to fix my hose. And this will be a sign to them, they will go in in the hall there. They were going some way home, closest home.

And then after a few minutes, I will go look for them, tell them, it's all right. And they're going to come. And this way, they runned away. And they runned away to Bedzin-- Bendin, it was called in Jewish. Was the next town to Sosnowiec. And the following-- about the following day or two days later, they came back.

Why?

Because they lived there.

In other words, the workers had already been picked.

Yeah, well, all the picking sent away. And it was quiet down. So they came back. You understand this way?

In this way was. And then this was about-- I don't remember exactly the time. It was the beginning of 1940. It was the 1st or the 2nd of January of 1940. And my husband and my brother decided to leave, not to be in Sosnowiec, to go home to my parents. Because was always coming out those announcements, those-- there it's quiet.

How did you spend your days during that day? You weren't-- nobody worked, right?

No. Nobody worked. But somehow, people were trying to do something. Like I had a sack of flour. I sent a-- I sold-- I gave nice chunks, like kilo of flour for a kilo of sugar.

So it was like bartering. You would trade goods for goods.

Goods for goods, yeah.

Amongst the Jews?

Pardon?

Amongst the Jews?

Amongst the Jews, yes. There wasn't no money because the money was paper, was nothing there. But when you had a pair shoes, you needed for shoes, then you go and find who has a pair shoes. And you gave them a kilo of flour. And they would change.

I see.

You know who has butter.

This was just amongst Jews?

Amongst Jews, yeah. You couldn't trust Poles.

How big was Sosnowiec? Was that a big place?

Sosnowiec was a big place, yeah.

It was like a city?

Oh, yeah. It was a big-- today's standard, the Polish standard, I would say it was like consider here Baltimore.

Really?

Yeah, a big city. They were-- my husband and my uncle, Pinchas, were at my parents' house. And I decided to go home then too. Because I didn't have nothing to do here. I was alone. And Paula had her family, you understand. I didn't have nobody. I said, why should I stay here? I'm going to go home. And I went home.

To your parents in Vayslitz?

Parents, yes. Yes, my parents.

And your husband was already there?

There, yes. And Uncle Pinchas was there. Then after the-- the border was still-- there wasn't no border between Sosnowiec and-- was open. You could go there. Then after a few days--

Meaning that there was-- you say no border. You mean you didn't?

Because they made a border. After a few weeks, they made a border.

So that Jews couldn't go from one place to the other?

No, I mean, they couldn't go to Sosnowiec. They took Sosnowiec and all those sections there, they put it-- they made it the German Reich.

I see. So they put it as part of Germany.

Put it part of Germany, yes. There was a border there. Out of Sosnowiec, a few towns before Sosnowiec, there was a border, was a German border.

I see.

And Uncle Pinchas decided to go back. His wife was there and his wife's family. So he decided to go back and start-- live a normal life. There was no other choice. So he went back. And I was staying home with my husband. But then my husband didn't had nothing to do there. He didn't have nothing to do there.

So he decided-- and you got to-- you couldn't live from the air. All-- everything what you own was taken away by the Germans. And so he decided, he will go home to Ozarów. There he has people, the flour mill. Maybe the men who he rented the mill-- he going to be able to make something, to make some money. And he went there. And I remained with my parents. And I was pregnant at that time with Sheila too.

This was in 1940?

Yeah.

Let me ask you-- did people-- what did Jews do since Jews weren't working anymore?

Jews couldn't own anything, nothing. Jews-- the Poles had a ration. Jews didn't had any ration. Jews didn't had a right to anything. When a German came in and found by a Jew a bag of flour, he could take him out and shot him for that. Jews wasn't allowed to have the slightest thing. When a Jew had a business, they put in-- if it was a bigger business, they put in a-- called it a Treuhand, which means a Pole--

A manager?

--a Pole who they put him in. And this his. It was his business. The Jew didn't-- the Jew could work there. But this was his business. And if a Treuhander didn't want a Jew, the owner, he could ask him to leave too.

So the Jews could work there, could continue to work in some places whenever they could?

What do you mean they could work? If they have-- the German-- no, according to the German, they couldn't do anything. But if they couldn't find something to earn some money, the Germans didn't know. In our hometown, there was not a German office. That was in the neighboring hometown. It was called Nayshtut. In Polish, it was called Nowy Korczyn. There was a German office, a Gestapo. In our hometown was not a German. It was by-- they came by quite often.

So I was with my parents. And suddenly, after a few weeks, there was, I think-- sometimes in the middle or

the end of January, we find out with the newspaper that Germany had enacted Sosnowiec to Germany. There's not more Poland. It's the Deutsches Reich. This was not under the Poland anymore.

I had there everything. I had my furniture, I had everything what I-- just to me, was the biggest shock in the world. I lost everything. First, I lost all my money, all my what I had. And then I lost everything-- all my - everything what I had. So I decided to go there and see if I can save something, if I can do something. So I left. It was a Sunday morning when I left by train.

Did your husband--

My husband was in Ozarów. I was there at home with my parents and myself. I left my home. My mother told me not to go.