

Make sure the values are. Maybe we should talk and then take it back.

Today is Friday, May 29, 1981. My name is Fran Gutterman. I'm at the home of Rose Murra-- M-U-R-R-A-- who resides in Brookline, Massachusetts. And I'm here to conduct an oral history interview. OK. Mrs. Murra, where were you born? Could you tell me where you were born?

I was born in Poland, Radzyn Podlaski May 16, 1923.

OK. Could you talk up a little bit, if you can? If it's difficult then we'll--

Yeah, OK.

So you were born May 16, 1923 in Radzyn--

Podlaski.

Podlaski--

Poland.

--in Poland. OK. What kind of place was Radzyn Podlaski?

It was a little city with 4,000 Jewish people lived there.

About 1,000 Jewish people?

4,000.

Oh, 4,000.

4,000 Jewish people. It was a nice community, Jewish community.

Was it mostly a Jewish community?

No, it was a lot of Gentile. No, in the city, mostly lived Jews and around the city. But the Gentile-- it just happened we didn't live in the city. We lived on a highway, away, a mile and a half away from the city.

From the center of the city, you mean.

Yeah, from the center of the city. We lived in a Gentile section. My grandparents used to own a windmill. They used to make flour.

OK. And is that why you lived in that section because that's where the flour mill was?

Yeah, it used to be. But then it wasn't-- when I was growing up, we didn't have a flour mill. My parents were in business in grain business. And we have a grocery. And I lived there with my parents. I had a little brother, Shlomo and a little-- and a brother a little younger than me, Moshe.

When was Shlomo born?

Shlomo was six years younger than me.

So he was born like in 1917?

No.

Six years younger, oh, sorry, 1930. So sorry, he-- I was thinking older. So he was born in 1929.

Yeah, probably. Yeah. And my brother was about year or a year and a few months younger than me.

And that was young Moshe?

Moshe, yeah.

He was born in 1924?

Yeah, that's right.

OK. Could you tell me what your parents did for a living?

Yeah. We had a grocery store. And in the grocery store, we used to have fruit and other things, a lot of things.

You had a grocery store?

Yeah, a grocery.

In Radzyn?

Yeah, in Radzyn. And my father used to buy grain from the farmers and bring it to the mill for flour. And then in the wintertime, we had a-- it's like a-- I don't know how you call it. They had to make oil. We used to make oil from the grain, like from [INAUDIBLE] or other things, made oil. That's what they used to do in the wintertime. We used to make for the stores the oil or the farmers used to come and make the oil for themselves and pay us so much for doing it.

What was your father's name?

Srul Hersh Zysman.

Oh, and your mother's name?

Rivka Grodowczk Zysman.

And you said you were born in 1923. How old were your parents?

My parents, when the war broke out, they were, I think, about 39 years old.

About 39?

39 years old. The war lingered on through six years. Well, that's the way it was-- six hard years we lived by the Nazis.

When you were growing up in Radzyn, you went to school there?

Yeah. I used to go to public school. And my brothers went to Hebrew school. It was a better school, the Hebrew school. Public was very antisemitic. It was really bad. They used to beat up the Jewish kids.

Why did they go to Hebrew school and you went to public school?

Well, because we had to pay a lot of money for Hebrew school. And three kids at one time to send was too much for my

parents then. Now, then after quite a few years, my parents were very sorry. They always-- every time, they used to talk, why we didn't send Rachel to Hebrew school? They were really sorry. At this time, couldn't afford it because it was then after the war too until my parents came on the feet. It took at the time.

You mean after World War I?

Yeah, they married after World War I. They married. So it was not easy for them. Everything was broken down. Like my mother's parents were rich before the war. And then they were poor. My grandmother died, the children died.

So it was difficult. Were your parents Orthodox? Or what kind of religious-- level of religiousness?

They were not Orthodox to the sense my father to wear a big payos or a big beard, no. You see, my father was a modern Jew. He believed in Judaism.

And did--

A Zionist-- he was a very good-- he was a Zionist.

Were they modern Orthodox then?

Yeah, a modern, yeah. And we believed in Shabbos. Our business was closed Shabbos and all the holidays. And their dream was someday to go to Israel. The children going to grow up, and going to be peace. They were thinking to settle Israel to settle in Israel. So Hitler made a different kind of dream.

When you went to school, you went to a public school?

Yeah, I went to the public school.

Did you have Poles-- so you were in a classroom with other Polish--

Yeah, with other Polish.

--girls and boys?

Yeah.

And the other Jews?

Yeah, was Jewish people too, sure.

Did you have any friends who were Polish?

Yeah.

Any girlfriends?

Yeah, I had a lot of friends Jewish because I belonged to like a summertime boys-- girl scouts, yeah.

Hashomer Hatzair?

Yeah, Hashomer Hatzair. I belonged to organization.

What was that? What kind of organization was it?

It's like a Girl Scout team. And when I came home, I had all Polish girls and boys playing with them because around us didn't live too many Jews. It was just a few Jewish families. So we were friends with them too. Some were older, some were younger. No, most of my friends were Polish girls and boys-- used to go together to school every day. We used to walk a mile and a half to school every single day.

So I made pretty good friends. I was thinking they're my friends. And came a holiday, we invite them to our house. And came Christmas or other holidays, they invited us to their house. And we lived very good with them. And my father used to borrow them money when they were in a tight spot.

Oh, you lent them money.

Yeah, lent them money when they were in a tight spot, help them out. And we lived very good until the war broke out. Then we saw who our friends are.

You said, your father used to lend them money. Were your parents-- you said they had it hard in the beginning. But how were they social-- I mean, economically?

They were like in middle class, the Jews. Yeah. They-- my father used to deal with grain and all the things. And like our neighbor, he had pigs. And he had to feed them. And he didn't have the money to buy. They were not farmers, those people. He worked like a city worker. And sometimes, they were lay off. And they didn't have this much money.

So sometimes, they went through a few months bad months. And my father always pitched in. And they were really good to us. And we were good to them. We lived like brothers together on one parcel. As a matter of fact, this neighbor lived with us. My grandfather sold him a piece of land. So he built this house there, his home.

Did-- when you were growing up and you had your Polish friends that you would play with, did you ever encounter any antisemitic experiences with them, either playing with them or in school?

Yeah, this was the funny thing. See, the Poles, they play with you. They-- I didn't feel any antisemitism. Now, the other Poles, when you-- when I walked in the street, was written on the fences, Hitler's coming. Don't buy anythings from the Jews. Be against the Jews. Hitler going to come and going to kill all the Jews out. And we going to have a Poland without Jews, all brothers. This was written all over the place.

And we didn't understand what it is. We were thinking it's just like a fairy tale, I mean, hoodlums playing around. It's nothing. But this wasn't a hoodlum. This was the government. The government was all behind this whole thing was the government. He didn't stop them it. He let them do all those things. And so then the Poles really were very happy if Hitler going to come in. They were thinking, they're going to come only to kill out the Jews. We used to tell them, if they come, they're going to destroy your country too and do this.

When you-- as the years got on, and Hitler came into power, did your relationships with your Polish friends change at all?

Yeah. Yeah. It changed drastically, drastically. They were afraid to talk to us. They're afraid to associate with us. They didn't want us to come into their houses.

This was before Hitler invaded Poland, right?

No, this was when Hitler just came in, just came in.

How about even right before then?

Before then it was a antisemitism, no, not those what they lived near you. The girl what I was going to school, she talked Jewish better than me. She was--

A Polish?

--a Polish girl, she was reading Jewish and talking Jewish just like me.

Why is that?

She was brought up in my house. We were in one house living. And we came home from school always. Or I went to her house or she came in my house. And we played. So the antisemitism was very big. Or we didn't let us touch us. We were thinking, it's not us, it's there. They-- those Polacks, where they were good to us, they weren't good to the next Jew. I like you. You a nice Jew. I don't like the other Jews.

In other words, they knew you individually. So they liked you. But Jews in general--

Yeah. They liked you. No, they didn't. They didn't. As a matter of fact, the Polish mothers, the minute the little girl, the little boy just start talking, they used to tell them stories about Jewish people, how bad they are. And they use blood for matzos and all those things, just to poison their minds. Sometime, a Polack, he didn't see what a Jew is. He lived someplace and he didn't know what Jewish people are. He heard about him. So when he met a Jewish girl or a Jewish boy, he said, you don't look bad. You just look like me. That's the poison they gave him. The antisemitism was very bad. I mean, in Poland was not too many other nationality, only Jews and Gypsies.

Were there a lot of Gypsies in Poland?

Yeah. There was a lot of Gypsies. And they were prosecuted too by the Polish.

Prosecuted.

Yeah. And then by the Nazis, yeah.

As the war got closer and closer, like in '37, 1937 and 1938, when things started getting worse, was there ever any talk in your family of leaving Poland?

Yeah. It was a lot of talk. It was a lot of talk. We should leave. We shouldn't stay here. On there lived such millionaires, real millionaires, Jewish millionaires. And they didn't budge. They didn't. They said, that's my Poland. I'm not moving. That's mine. That's mine. I'm a patriot here. I fight for this country. And the same thing with us, my parents talked. My uncles talked.

Everybody talked. Where are we going to go? Where are we going to go? Was no place to go. No country wants to take it in. To Israel? Israel was not so good either then, was depression. And the English didn't let in. You have to smuggle.

And you have to-- I mean, you go out from a home. You have a home established for hundreds of years. And you have to pick up a few little things and go. So we decide, no, we're going to stick out. And I heard my parents talking, the Germans weren't so bad in the First War. They weren't so bad. They were better with the Poles. I mean the Jewish--

They were worse with the Poles?

They were better with the Poles, the Germans, in the First World War. They were better. And they were living with the Jews very good. They understood each other very good. And they didn't see no reason why we-- couldn't be the Germans are so bad. Why they painting the Germans? See, that's what it is. People don't want to take it in if something is bad. They don't want to face it. They don't want to see it.

So you think people were denying what was going on?

Yeah, denying, that's right. It was written every place, papers were writing. And lecturers came, and they talk big lectures, they were talking, and telling how bad Hitler is, and what he is doing in Germany. He throws out all the

German people what they said they're not Jewish. They're German. And they throw them out. They have just a little blood of Jew-- of Judaism, they throw them out from there.

And still, we didn't want to believe it. It can't be a thing like this. That's our land. We are born in Poland. We don't have no other country. We fight. Our children fight for freedom for Poland. And where are we going to go? Where are we going to go? And that's what the question, that's what the answer, and that's the way the Germany came in.

OK. How old were you when the war broke out?

I was just 16 years in May. I was 16 years old, 1939.

War broke out in September '39?

Yeah, September.

And how did you first hear about the invasion?

The radios and the streets, was radios, loudspeakers. And the Poles were talking how strong they are. They never going to give up. We so strong. We don't going to give even a button from our uniform, never mind our country, even a button. And they talk very strong into unite, and everybody should unite. And we're going to win the war. We're going to beat the Germans. And we're going to beat Hitler, and that, and that.

And we hear that every day, every day the same thing till the bombs come-- stopped coming. And the bombs stopped coming from our planes, Polish planes. We saw the Polish planes. And we pulled out our hands. The Polish planes are coming. And the Polish planes were bombing. Because see--

They were bombing Poland?

They were bombing because it was Volksdeutschen were being in the government, Volksdeutschen.

Actually, they were Germans in the Polish government?

They were German in the Polish government. And the they picked up the bombs to go to Germany. And they land-- they throw them out all in Poland. They bombed all the city, the Polish Germans. They were Polish Germans. Volksdeutschen, they called them. See, a Jew couldn't be in the government in a high office. A Jew couldn't be in the military, couldn't be a high officer. He could fight in the front, but were not being somebody.

So the Volksdeutsche, they were [INAUDIBLE]. And that's what happened. They were traitors to Poland. Yeah. Poland was taken just in a day or two. And as it they start bombing in Friday, and the next Friday, all the war was over. The war was over. Was no more war.

What happened when the war started in terms of the men? Did they organize an army? Or what did they do? What did Poland do?

Yeah. All the men, sure, went to the army before the war broke out. My cousins went to the army. All my cousins were in the army. As a matter of fact, they were in prison in Germany. Then later, they came-- one came back. Now, doesn't live anyway. So they took all-- all the Jewish people went fighting just with the Poles together.

It just took a few days. And the armies were deserting. The armies were running away, taking off the mandyas, and putting on civilian clothes. It was nobody to fight to. I mean, the Germans were right away in Poland. They didn't have to go to Germany fight. They were right away in our soil because that's the way the war was organized. We were betrayed.

What did your family do when the war broke out?

Well, we finally-- they hide because of the bombs. Then we came back from the hiding places. And the Germans started coming in our side, the German, and the other side, the Russians. So who was lucky, the Russians came in. We were not this lucky. So in our place, the Germans came in.

I don't understand. When Germany invaded Poland, Russia also invaded Poland?

Yeah, the Russians start coming the other side, yeah. And we escaped the Russian. Mostly, we-- no, right away, in the beginning, they didn't come. They came just in White Russia. They were there. And the Russians, it used to be theirs. They didn't come military. They were there. And we Jews escaped there, to White Russia. We escaped. So like Bialystok and Brzesc nad Bugiem, we had a family there. So my mother sent out my younger brother. And my uncle went there with my brother. He's going to take good care on him.

This was in Russia, the Russian part?

Yeah, this was like-- see, like Poznan was the German part. So the other side was near to the Russian border. So the Jews concentrate more to the Russian border. Maybe they go over more to the Russian side before Germany going to invade all Poland. So a lot of people ran away there to Brzesc, Bialystok, all those-- Ukraine places, they ran away.

And the Germans came in just like they-- we were told they're going to come in. They came in with a big storm right away on the Jews, right away. All the Jews raus from the houses. And they start cutting beards. And they start beating kids and beating children.

Germans were doing this to Jews?

To Jews, yeah. Yeah. And right, right the first moment they came in, and they gave order, all the Jewish men to come tomorrow morning to work for the Germans. So the Jewish people went to work. They were thinking, listen, we're going to work.

This was still in 1939?

That's 1939, yeah. So we all went to work. We worked for them. They beat. They did terrible things. They cut beards. And they cut hair. And they--

But you continued to live in your home?

Yeah. Yeah. I continue living my home 1939 to 1940, the beginning of 1940. We had to move in our house. So we moved to a little city there near the Russian border, closer to the Russian border, to escape to the Russian border.

Why did you decide to do that?

Well, we saw we couldn't live in Germany. It was just impossible. They took away. Yeah, we had the store. They took away everything from the store. They took everything away. And we couldn't walk in the street. We couldn't walk after 6:00, all those things. We had to be in the house.

How about Poles?

The Poles had all the rights. They had-- they gave them card, rationing. They had food. They had everything. They had meat. They had fat. And the Jews were taken away. Nothing was given to the Jews.

Jews couldn't own any property then?

No, no property. Everything was taken away. They took--

Your father's store was taken away?

My father's store was all given away, taken away with the horse and buggy. Some things, we took it away ourselves before they came into the store. We hid it in basement in some places they couldn't find. If we had to live another year or two, we still would have food to eat if we lived in this house. When we moved out, we had to leave everything again. We couldn't take. That's all we could take is just the clothes on the back and a little bundle to carry. That's all we could take.

So you moved to a town?

Yeah, Slawatycze, called Slawatycze.

Slawatycze?

Yeah, it's near the Russian border, near to Brzesc nad Bugiem.

How far away is that from Radzyn?

Oh, it's-- I think they were going a day and a night by buggy, day and a night. And so we came to this little town. It was a lot of Germans there too because it was on the border. A lot of people escaped on the other side of the border.

It was still considered to be in Poland, though, right?

Yeah, this was Poland still, yeah, was the other side. So they used to shoot. And I don't know. I was afraid. And my little brother was afraid. And we saw a lot of people laying in the water shot with the heads off. The water was practically red. And then we waited till the winter going to come. Maybe it's going to freeze, going to be easier. So it was the same thing. The water was frozen. And still was a lot of Germans, every few feet. Yeah, few yard, it was Germans. And we still couldn't.

Jews would try to get across the river and go over to Russia.

A lot of did. A lot of did. And a lot of got killed, I mean, both ways. A lot escaped. My cousin escaped. And she is now in Canada. She escaped in the same time we wanted to escape. And a lot of people got shot we know.

How long were you there?

We were there about three-four months. When the spring came, in March, we came back to Poland. We came back to our city, to Radzyn Podlaski. And we worked there for the Germans. We had to work on a-- they built a new airport. Radzyn didn't have a good airport, was small, very small. So the Germans built a big one with the Jewish people working.

And my father went there a few times. He worked so hard and was beating all the time. So I said, I'm going in your place. So I used to go in my father's place. I used to come there to do the work. Was bad. The Germans used to beat the Jewish boys and the Jewish men. It was a few Jewish girls. So they didn't beat me. They didn't beat the few girls. They were very nice to us.

How about your two brothers?

One brother went to the Russian side with my uncle. And we didn't know what's going on there. And he was there with my uncle. And my little brother was home. He was a little brother. He was growing very fast. And even close to wear my father's clothes because he really grew up, got terrible fast. And my brother was still home because he was too young. They didn't take. Till about 12 or 13, they started taking to work. Till then, they didn't take.

So I worked most of the time for my father, for the airport, around the city. Every place, I went to work for my father.



And one time, a German came in in the house. He used to go by your house all the time to another village. And he was a murderer. He murdered my two cousins and another girl. He murdered them cold blood. So he took out my father from the house. And he chased him. He was on the horse. And he chased my father all over the fields.

He just came into your house for no reason?

Yeah.

Did he know your father?

No, he didn't know my father. He was just going by every day. And probably, somebody said, Jewish people living here. Probably the Polish people must told him because otherwise, he wouldn't know. And I was working then. And I came home, my father was so beaten, so beaten, strain and crying. He was not so much afraid of himself. He said, listen, I lived my life. I know what life is. I feel so bad for you kids. I feel terrible. I can't help it. I'm so helpless.

He felt very helpless.

Felt very helpless. He felt ashamed.

He felt what, ashamed? Of what?

What? Because he was so helpless, he couldn't help. There was no place to escape, no help, no nothing. It was-- we were trapped, just like in a mouse trap. We couldn't do anything-- no place you could run. We ran to the woods a few times. We stayed in the woods. Now, how long can you stay in the woods without food, without shelter, without anything?

And I mean, the war wasn't just like a week, or two, a month, a year. It's continue. And the Germans did more things, more things to the Jews. Every day was a different kind of orders given Out one day was ordered not to go out after 6:00. The next day, all the Jews must go and work, come out on the Platz every morning and go to work without food, without pay, without nothing, beating, and working.

The next day was you have to give away all your silver what you have, all your gold-- no gold rings, nobody can wear nothing-- gold, silver, diamonds, everything has to be bring there and give it away to this place where the Germans were there. The next day was another order. Nobody can wear furs. If somebody's going to be caught wearing a fur, silver, gold, diamonds, they're going to be shot right on the spot.

And they did shot a woman. She didn't even wear it. They said, she has a fur. And she didn't give it. And they shot her right in the middle of the town. Everybody saw it. They shot her. So we gave everything away. If somebody had a little fur collar on the coat, you have to take it off and wear it just like this, without anything. And we had to give away.

Somebody lives in nice homes, we have to move. Like my cousins had nice new homes built, they had to move out. And the Poles took it over. And they moved into a place. And they lived in this place what I told you, we used to make oil there. And they lived in this place. They lived in this silo where we used to buy grain and leave it there for some time. So they lived there. That's what they did.

A Jew couldn't own anything, couldn't work no place, couldn't go to school, couldn't go to library. We used to come together at night, and talk, and sing, and try to give some humor in life. [CRIES] There was no humor. My parents--

OK. You were saying about your parents?

Yeah, my parents, they tried to give us humor, to laugh, to tell us jokes, and things like this. But the end was we were sitting always, and crying, and being afraid, the next morning we be killed. And lay in the beds, we used to listen to the noises, to everything, afraid of touching the door.

The only hope was maybe we children are going to survive. Somebody should survive in the family to tell the story.

They knew what was going to happen. They said many times to me, I know, if somebody going to be alive, I hope you, Shloime are going to be alive. Moshe is away in the Russian zone. Maybe he's going to survive. Somebody going to be alive to tell what happened, how a thing like this can happen.

I know you're going to have a hard time if you live to tell the story because nobody going to believe it. And that's what it is. It's already 35, 36 years since we liberated-- not since the war, since we liberated. We-- the only one inside of us [CRIES].

We didn't tell the story because nobody wanted to listen. Nobody was interested. When I first came in this country and I want to tell, they said, no, it couldn't be. It couldn't be. Who's doing things like this? And they didn't want to listen. And we used to come together. Between us, we used to sit, and cry, and tell each other those stories, and cry. So it came a time we couldn't take it. We stop talking. So we lay at night. We sleep at night with dreams, with movies. You see everything in color-- the blood. The blood is so red, the faces so white.

When you were in Poland.

People were afraid, how people looked the last minute before they get shot, how they look, with the eyes open, and look for some help, for some miracle. It's not there.

The miracle never came.

When you-- you said one time that this German had come into your house and had chased your father. And he had been injured badly. What happened? This was in 1940?

Yeah, this was in 1940-- 1941-- 1940. In the summer 1940.

You were still in Radzyn, Poland?

Yeah, I was there in Poland. Yeah.

And so what happened after that?

What happened? So my father was sick, was laying in bed. And we comfort him. And we told him, going to come a better day.

Did you continue to work out in the field?

Yeah, I continued to work. I worked with a Polish woman in the fields. I worked even better with them, faster with them. He was staying over me with a big-- those things.

Whip?

Whip, yeah. No, he never gave him a reason to hit me somehow. Things got-- he didn't hit me. Because those where they got hit, was very bad to survive, because they really damaged people.

You were building an airport there?

Yeah, we were building an airport there. Yeah.

So why don't you just tell me what happen, how things progressed.

Yeah, so my father used to say, they never can win, never. I know, I'm not going to survive. I know a lot of people aren't going to survive. They not going to win. Somebody, some place, a Jewish person going to live through. And he's going to tell what kind of bandits they are. The world never knew things like this what they did.

I will never-- they took Poland, and they took Czechoslovakia, they took Hungarian, and they took all around the countries-- France. They took everything. Still, I don't know. The Jewish people used to tell themselves and the kids, they don't going to win. The end, they have to lose. We used to tell them, Father, how can you talk like this? How can you say this?

How can you say what, that they're going to lose?

They're going to lose. They're always winning, they're winning. He said, he's going to eat lunch in Moscow. He eats, he said, breakfast in Paris, supper in Belgium, every place what he says, he does. And he does. And he kills innocent people. He kills. He kills people without any resistance. See, when he came into Poland, right away--

He being Hitler?

Yeah, Hitler, Hitler. And Hitler came into Poland, right away, he took away all the intelligent people-- doctors, lawyers, big organizations, the heads from big organizations. He all killed them out.

Is that the air conditioner?

Yeah.

Why did-- just went on by itself?

Yeah. It hasn't got it. Want to shut this?

Yeah.

So you were saying Hitler.

So the Jewish people were left, just like sheep without a master. They were left broken down. They took away-- some of the kids, they took away in Arbeitslagers, they called it. It was not concentration camps then-- Arbeitslagers. They took them away someplace, a little field, and they make a concentration camp. And they took the Jews to work here, there, every place without food, without nothing. They used to die every single day.

Then they took away your pride, your ambition. They took away-- they strip you of everything. They stripped you like you are naked person, go out in the world. Could you? Could you go out naked and wander around the world? That's the way a Jew was stripped of everything. And we couldn't raise. We couldn't raise ourselves up to anything.

Then they start those camps. And then they start building concentration camps. So Jewish people were talking between them. They're building concentration camps. They're going to take us all to concentration camps. Everybody was thinking, well, I'm going to take me concentration camp. The war is going to stop. Any day, the war is going to stop. It doesn't continue so long. And until they're going to build, until they're going to take us--

What did people think concentration camps were?

Killing.

They knew they were death camps?

Yeah, yeah, yeah they knew it too.

How did they know this?

They knew. Listen, the people worked to build them-- crematoriums, they build. Words came out. In the first transport,

they went to Treblinka, some few boys came out. I don't know by what kind of miracle. They came in in the clothing. They took all the clothing, they throw it on on trucks. And the trucks went out from the camps. Was some miracle because it's really-- it's not. I was there. You can't really escape. This is just like a dream never going to come true.

Now, somehow, they came out. And they came back to the cities. And they told the people what's going on. Or we couldn't help ourself. We couldn't do anything. We were so surrounded by them. We couldn't do anything. See, that's what I'm going to start. When the concentration camp starts-- and my uncle, they took to Arbeitercamp. He never came back.

What kind of camp?

Arbeitercamp, to work. He never came back. Then they started taking more about the camps. And nobody came back. And we didn't hear a word from them. So we knew, that's it. It's finished. Now, they did it with such a concentration, with such a mind, this was the--

Intensity, you mean.

Yeah. This was organized by such a minds, you never could think of it. See, they stripped you from everything. Now, they start in all the cripples, all the people mental health people, sick people, everything, we should bring it out to the Platz, called Platz.

The plaza?

The place, like the place.

Center of town?

Yeah, the center of town. We should bring out those people there. Then starting older people, like my grandfather. My father went and cried all night there with my father, with my grandfather.

Your grandfather was living with you?

He was living with my aunt, my father's sister-- my grandfather. So we-- you had to come there. They went from house to house looking for all the old people. If you hide them, they take him tomorrow.

This was your father's father?

Yeah, that was my father's father. Yeah. So they have to bring him out to this Platz. OK. So the sick, the mental retired, the old already not there-- all young. Or the oldest was 45.

When was this?

This was in '42.

So you were still in Radzyn in '42?

Yeah, I was still in Radzyn till '42.

Still going out and working every day?

No, no, '41. I'm sorry.

'41.

This was '41. Yeah. '41, we didn't go to the ghetto. It was a ghetto already. Miedzyrzecz was a ghetto.

Miedzyrzecz, right.

This was already. Yeah, was a ghetto. And we didn't go yet to the ghetto. So one day, came all the Jews have to come out to this place. It's going to be judenrein, no more Jewish people. We're going to leave just, let's say, 20 or 25. They're going to be in one place those people. They're going to work for us. They cannot go free where they want to go. They're going to stay in our barracks. Only those people going to be in Radzyn. And the rest, everybody has to go to Miedzyrzecz to the ghetto.

Miedzyrzecz was another town?

Yeah, it was another town, 27 miles away from our town.

Was there a Judenrat in Radzyn?

Yeah, was a Judenrat.

Was that formed right away?

It was formed in 1940-- by the end of '41. No, '40. No, '40-- 1940, right away, it was formed the Judenrat. Right. All the workers were-- they had to come. If they didn't come out, so the Judenrat used to send out the Jewish police to get them, to bring them to work. And they made sure everybody's working. I mean, they make sure in town everybody's working. Everybody has food, nobody cared. No, everybody has to work for nothing. It come the wintertime, they used to chase them out naked without shoes to shovel the snow because--

Who used to come?

The Judenrat. The Judenrat used to come and tell all the Jews to go with the Germans. They used to come and tell, from door to door, out, out, shoveling the snow. So in our city, the train was 12 kilometers away from the city. And they had to transport coals and other things for the German use. So we had to clean all the highways till the train. And all the snow was more blood than snow. Everything was red-- the killing and the beating. And the people were frozen naked, it was so cold. Even the hair on the--

Eyebrows.

--eyebrows were frozen, so cold was. And they were beating them and beating them. And they had to work.

Who was beating them?

The Nazis, the German was beating the Jewish people because they stayed and took care of them, they should work faster, and faster, and faster.

The Poles saw this happening?

Yeah, the Poles-- the Poles were very happy about it, all of them, very happy. This has happened to the Pole-- to the Jews. As a matter of fact, my good friends, what I lived with them, and eat with them, and sleep with them, the minute the German used to come by with a horse, they used to come and run and oh, the Germans are coming, the Germans. So we used to hide or do something not to go out. So they used to grab things, like they saw where we hide the money or things, and steal it from us.

Your friends would do this?

My friends, yeah, my friends. I remember, my father throw some money under the head of the bed there, between the

head on the bed and the wall. And this Polish girl, my good girlfriend, went in. And she took away all the money there. They were happy seeing us going. So they went in. They took our furniture. They took our things.

And some things, we gave them ourself. My mother had a beautiful tablecloth like this and fisherman's net with bigger holes, with beautiful big roses and beautiful leaves, green leaves. So my mother gave it to this Polish girl to keep it for till the war is over or somebody comes to us and wanted for souvenir, to give it. I came back to Poland. I'm going to tell you the story later. OK.

OK. So in 1941, they decided to move people from Radzyn to Miedzyrzecz?

Yeah, Miedzyrzecz.

Miedzyrzecz.

This is 1941. Everything should be judenrein here in Radzyn.

So what does judenrein mean?

Judenrein? No Jewish people should live in this city.

Free of Jews.

Free of Jews, that's judenrein. So we lived not far from the woods. So we figured, instead to go to the Platz, we're going to go to the woods. And we're going to hide. We're going to hide. And that's what we did. We hide for a few days. We were in the woods, running around, sleeping around the woods, cold, and tired. We were very tired.

So one day, we decided to go home because it was too much. We had to change clothes. And we didn't take no clothes with us. And it was really tired. My brother was crying. And we had cousins with us. And my father, my mother, and I have a boyfriend, a lover, which I don't want to tell the story, it's too painful. During the war, I was in love. I was young, and we were in love.

You went back to Radzyn?

Yeah. This was in Radzyn in the woods, in Radzyn woods. And he came back to our house at night. And we washed, we undressed, and we ate. And we want to go to sleep for a few hours. We figured, we're going to go out from the house before 5 o'clock, maybe if the Germans come in the morning. At night, what German going to come? Meanwhile, the Poles where they live near us told them, we're going-- we are hiding in the woods. We didn't go to the ghetto. We're hiding. And probably, we're going to come back at night. So by 11 o'clock at night-- this was October the 27th.

1941?

1941-- no, this was 1942. I get mixed up with the years.

That's quite all right, 1942.

1942, right. This was 1942, judenrein. They came. And they took around our house.

They surrounded your house?

They surround our house all around. My little brother was sleeping on the bed with my father. See, we had a hiding place in our house. And my mother begged us. She begged us. Please, this night, please, let's go down with covers, with everything. We had made beds to sleep, I mean, on the floor, the covers. She begged us. And we didn't want to go there to sleep.

My mother went down by herself with a stepsister. She had a little sister. She was about 12 years old. So she went down with my stepsister or so. And we said, no, we're not going to go down. We're going to sleep here.

And when the Germans came around our house, they start shooting. And they start coming through the doors and through the windows. Oh, and my little brother was in the bed laying with my father and my cousins. They just start shooting, and shooting, and shooting. My father jumped to the window and was shot right away, took-- all the stomach was taken apart. They were shooting with the called [? uprising. ?]

The kind of bullet.

Explosive, explosive.

So your father was killed?

My father was killed right away. And I was running. And I yelled to my little brother, come. And he woke up. And he started running after me. He jumped right after me. And we were running through the field. And then near us was a new house. They're just building this new house. Sometime, we used to play around there. We used to say, someday, if we have to really run, and escape, and hide, we're going to hide in this house. We're going to find someplace to hide. And that's what my brother did. He was running after me to this house. I ran in in this house. And I hide under some wood, between wood someplace.

Was this Shlomo, your brother Shlomo?

Shlomo, yeah, Shlomo, my little brother Shlomele was running after me. And right away, I heard uhh. And that's it. He was shot. The Nazis shot him. And fell down right away. And I was laying right under. And the German came in with machine gun, buh-buh-buh, all over with the machine gun. [GERMAN]-- another dog ran in here. Called us dogs. Another dog came in here running.

And I was laying. I looked right at him with my eyes. I looked at him. And he didn't see me. I looked at him. And I was thinking, should I go out? Because what is life already? It would be better if he shot me. And I would lay nice and quiet. I wouldn't have to suffer so much.

Then another boy said to me, don't you do it. Don't you ever do a thing like this. Stay here. Don't go out. Don't go out. And he was yelling and shouting. And I hear so much voices screaming, my cousins, my uncles, my aunts. Everybody was screaming. It was such a war. And the dogs were barking all over the villages.

So all your relatives were with you when you had been hiding in the woods. And they were with you in the house.

Yeah, yeah, they were with us all day. Yeah.

How many people altogether?

11 were shot, 11 were shot. And I escaped. My mother, of course, with her sister in the bunker, she came out later from the bunker. And one of my cousins escaped. And one little girl, I'm going to tell you, my cousin's little girl, it's another story. So I was laying. And he was shooting in me. And I couldn't imagine he doesn't see me. I see him. And how come he doesn't see me? And he didn't see me. He went out. And the killing was going on, and on, and on.

And I fall asleep. I fall asleep. In my sleep, I had a dream, I'm going to survive. You're going to survive. You just hold on. You're going to survive. I had different kind of dream. I don't want to say it here, it's too painful. In the night, I went out. I don't know what time it was. I was in my nightgown. I went out. And I looked. I looked down at my little brother, was all stretched out with a puddle full of blood.

So your brother was dead.

My little Shlomo, yeah, I saw him dead. I saw He was all stretched out. Such a good boy, such a [? darling ?] boy. What he been through, listening, little boy, listening to all those stories talking and begin to live here, to finish it so fast. So the barking stopped. The noise stopped. Everything was quiet. I said to myself, I'm going to go. When I go-- where I'm going to go? So I went up to the attic in this same house. I went up to the attic. And then were another-- the wood, what you may-- how you call it?

The wood in the?

The wood chips.

Wood chips?

Wood chips. Was a big pile of wood chips. So I went in in this pile of wood chips.

This was this house that you had run away to?

Yeah, that's a house, a newly built-- it wasn't finished. It was start building up. I mean, it was almost finished. So I went in in those wood chips, lie down. And I don't know. I think I was covered. I don't know if I was covered. I know my eyes were covered. I don't know if they could see me. If they come by there, I really don't know. I know I was there laying during the day.

Then the Germans came back. The Germans came back. They took our house apart. Yeah. And my mother at night, when the noise stopped, my mother took the little sister. She came out. She saw my father dead. And she started running to the woods. She ran with my sister to the woods. She was in the woods.

With her sister?

With her sister, little stepsister. She was all day there in the woods. And I was hiding there in the top. And then in the morning, was all the Germans came back with wagons, so many Germans, yelling, with dogs, with dogs, with the German Shepherds, so much yelling. And I heard, like-- the house has been taken apart. They took our house apart. When my father falled, they started looking, maybe something there.

And this was there, the place where my mother went in through the wall. She went in. It was so nicely done, you couldn't see it. So they went in there. They ripped everything apart. And they looked. They ripped our house apart to pieces. They said, a lot of things is hidden, which it wasn't. It was hidden things to eat, like we-- my mother baked some biscuits and things in case we need some food, we should have it for a longer time.

And then they came to the house. And they took out my brother. And I heard the Polish woman, which she lived near us, she was standing. And she cried a little bit over him. She said, she never saw such a nice little boy like he was. He was really nice. He didn't talk loud to people. He didn't do no damage like other kids, climbing trees, and breaking things, never. Never. He was such a good boy. She admired him how good he was. And it's too bad this happened, and so many people killed, she was saying, and talking to herself--

You could hear her?

--or to somebody. Yeah, I heard her talking. I don't know if she talked to somebody else. And I know she made a cross because she said the prayer with the cross. This was going on all day. At night, when it got dark, I came down from this place. And I couldn't stand on my feet. I went to my Polish girlfriend. I had there coats, and dresses, and shoes. She gave me a big shoes. She gave me schmatta, things to put on. She didn't want to give me my good stuff. So I went to another Polish woman, where we concentrate. And my cousin came back. My mother came back.

Were these Poles that you felt you could trust?

Yeah, yeah, those Poles were nice. They were very nice. And I know my cousin knew them very well. If they're going to



come back, they would come back to those Poles, not to those where the whole thing happened. So 11 people were shot-- was my brother, my father, and nine cousins. One family was a mother. The father was taken away to Treblinka already-- a mother and five daughters, beautiful young daughters, from ages 17 to age six, five.

And they were shot, my mother's-- another aunt with a little boy. When she saw them coming, she start yelling. So they took the rifle from the other side. And the chopped off the little boy, the whole jaw, they chopped him off with the rifle. So she starts screaming. She took her hair, she pulled out all her hair from the head. They shot her.

How we know this? Little girl, she was six years old. She was in the cupboards. They throw her up and down with the cupboards. And she was in the cupboards, rolled in. And they didn't see her. So she came out. And she told us the story how this happened to her mother and her brother.

Your cousin?

Yeah, it was my mother's cousin, my second cousin. So then we were in a hiding place. I got together with my mother and my cousins what was there.

Did your mother know you were alive?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

When she went into the woods.

Yeah, we met. Then later, we met this Polish woman. We met. And my mother knew I'm alive. I was with my mother till 1943. I was with my mother. This was '42 in October. And I was till May with my mother, 1943. Now, I'm going to remember more the dates because I'm so mixed up in my head--

Well, you are doing-- you're remembering very well.

--with those dates. So I came back with my mother. And I was with my mother all the time.

You were in hiding.

In hiding.

In Radzyn?

Yeah, in Radzyn hiding.

By Poles?

By Poles. In halos outside, on the fields in halos, and at night, going to Poles, begging a piece of bread.

Haylofts?

Haylofts, yeah.

In barns?

Yeah, hay, with stacks of hay. It was very warm there to sit in it. It was warm. It was nice till the Poles discovered us. And they told us to go to the ghetto. It's a better life there. At least you go out free in the ghetto. You can walk around, so which we did. We did go to the ghetto finally.

And when was this that you went to the ghetto?

I went to the ghetto in '43, the beginning of '43. This was like Christmas, New Year's time. This was New Year's time.

You went to mid--

Miedzyrzecz, to the ghetto. Yeah. So going to the ghetto was plenty-- listen, I can't take this forever. And you wouldn't tape my story forever. No, I have to cut it short. It was a lot of Poles. They want to give us to the Germans. It wasn't easy to walk to the ghetto because a lot of Jewish people were shot.

And trying to get to the ghetto?

To the ghetto, was shot on both sides of the highways were a lot of Jews-- girls, boys, and men, and all kind shot because the Poles gave them out. And they were shot. For five kilos of sugar, they gave a Jew to the Nazis.

Poles that were hiding Jews would give them away? Or just if they saw them?

Just saw them walking. See, the Germans didn't really know who was a Jew. They would never know I'm Jewish, never in a million years. They wouldn't know I'm Jewish. But the Poles always gave me out. A lot of times, they gave me out, I was a few times to be shot.

How did the Poles know you were Jewish?

They know. They lived with me. I mean, they know. See, when I came here in America, I didn't know who was American, who was Jewish either. I didn't know. To me, all people look the same. I didn't know the difference. So now, I know the difference, who's a Jewish person, more where I did before. So it's same thing. When you come in a strange country, you don't know the people. No, the Poles, even little Polish boys or girls used to tell, the Jude-- that's all they knew German is Jude to say. That's all they-- the one and only, that's all they knew.

And the Poles lived pretty nice. They used to go to the churches, and theaters, and movies, and schools. Everything was for them, not for us. For us was nothing. And they had the rationing of food. They lived pretty good. And they were happy. We used to tell them, when they go-- they're going to get through with us, they're going to start with you. I mean, once a bandit is a bandit.