

Today is Friday, April 16, 1982. I'm at the home of Pinchus Orbach, who resides in Melbourne, Australia. OK. Could you tell me where you were born and what year?

Well, I've been born in a small town called Wislica, Vayslitz in Yiddish.

That was in Poland?

It was in Poland, yes. And it was in the-- it was near Kielce. The main town in that district, in that state was Kielce. And I been born on the 25th of November, 1907. It was in Hanukkah.

November 25?

25, 1907.

You were the oldest? You were the first-born?

I was the oldest at home, yes.

Your parents must have been happy to have a son for the first one.

Yes, of course. I don't remember much what happened those first seven years. I think it wasn't any public school there. But it was a cheder, like in the small towns in Poland. And I think I went to that cheder, learning--

Cheder?

--cheder-- to teach me my thing, Jewish education-- Jewish, Chumash, and Hebrew, and what that.

So your parents were religious then?

Very religious.

What were their names-- their names?

Eziel and Ruhel Orbach. By 1914, when I was seven years of age, the First World War broke out.

Oh, that's right.

And the fighting was standing behind our doors, you can say. The German soldiers were behind the other side of the river. And the Russian soldiers were in town behind the houses. And the fighting was going on for about seven, eight months. We been in a cave in my grandfather's place.

Under the house was a cave where was standing me, my parents. My younger brother, he was Chaim, he was about three and a half. And my youngest sister, she was a few months old, Devorah. And we been there about five, six months, seven months, and a big fighting broke out. And the whole town went in flames.

And we ran away then. This was on a Friday night. We ran away to Busko, was the nearest town, about 15 kilometers from our town. It was winter. It was wintertime, I think. And we been separated though with our father. My mother and the children were with a wagon. There was a wagon train with the goods what we have gotten. My father stay still in Vayslitz.

And we come. It was on a Friday morning. We come to Busko. After a few hours, my father come in. We went further, to Chmielnik, another town. And we stayed there till the fighting stopped and the Germans occupied Poland. It was about 1915. We went back to our hometown. And my parents started-- start the business to run again, to open the

business again. We got our own home in that town.

Germans had meanwhile occupied Poland?

Yes, it was occupied by the Austrians and the Germans. It was from 19-- about '15, was occupied till about 1918. There still wasn't any public school in our town and all the small towns. Only was the Jewish education. The Jewish teachers-- called them [NON-ENGLISH]. And we've been learning only Jewish-- a bit of Yiddish-- a bit of Yiddish. Then by 1918, a new state was born in Poland. It was-- the Polish government was born. It was about-- I don't remember the exact date, but it was in 1918.

Germany had lost the war.

Germany had lost the war. German left-- German soldiers-- the occupation force left Poland to Germany. And Germans left, a Polish government was form-- was established.

OK. Were Jews--

Pardon?

Were Jews treated any worse by Germans during World War I?

Very good.

Jews-- I mean, though, unlike World War II, Jews were not singled out in World War I.

In World War I, Jewish were-- been feeling very well under the German occupation. As a matter of fact, that Jewish people pray to God that the Germans will stay with us--

Really?

--forever.

In what, during World War I?

During World War I, yes.

That's so interesting.

My mother used to pray every morning to God in-- she said in Yiddish, [YIDDISH]-- let the Germans stay with us forever. Jewish has been feeling very well in 1915-18 under the German occupation.

So you're saying that Jews were treated better by Germans than they were by the Poles?

Than they were before by the Russians. Yes.

By the Russians?

Yes.

Before the First World War, wasn't any Poland. Russian was the-- occupied by Russians for hundreds of years.

Was under Russian control? I see.

Yes. But 1918, Poland was established. Polish government was established. Then we opened the business again. And

the Poles opened public schools. Children enrolled into the public schools. I was already too old to enroll in the public. I been feeling-- I been helping a lot my parents in business. And I been feeling I'm a big businessman already. I was 11 years of age only.

But I took private lessons at nighttime. I haven't got time then to go to the public school at daytime. My younger brother and my sister, they went to the public school. But I have got to be with my parents in business. Most of the time, my father has been traveling to buy goods, do some business interstate. And I stayed with my mother in business. And I've been feeling very well as a businessman.

11-year-old, you were a busy man.

11-year-old, I enjoyed it. And all was going on. We have been established. We established our business. And we've been very quite well situated. Yes, we've been-- made a good living. And life has been going on like that.

How big was Vayslitz? Was it a big city?

300 families, Jewish people, mostly Jewish people. It was only about 20 or 30 Polish people living in it, Polish families living in that town.

So it was very small?

Very small. But it was farmers around the town. We make a living from the farmers. We bought from them food, everything. And they bought from us whatever anybody has been running the business. It wasn't a rich town. It was a few families, 20-30, maybe, 50 families, they could make a good living. The other one had been struggling all their life till all the time.

OK.

Well, by 1917, my youngest brother was born.

What was his name?

His name was Menasha. And life has been going quite smoothly. By about 1932, I married. I married a beautiful girl from Sosnowiec.

What was her name?

Pearl.

How did that whole thing happen? Was it a shidduch?

It was-- we were introduced. When I meet my first-- [NON-ENGLISH]-- wife, we meet in Sosnowiec. I meet her in a hotel. We been going out for a fortnight. And then we had been written some letters to each other, keep it down. After six months, we-- and the parents of my wife made an engagement party. My parents come there with me, with the family. It was a very nice engagement. After a few months, it was about-- we were engaged about July, August 1931. And I married in January 1932, early January '32. Was a big ordeal.

In Sosnowiec?

Pardon?

In Sosnowiec?

In Sosnowiec, yes, the wedding was in Sosnowiec. And I rented a flat and settled down in Sosnowiec. And after a few

months, I opened my own business.

What kind?

Leather business. And my first child was born June '33, a daughter, Tziri. And my younger daughter was born February '36. Her name was Hela, Hinda. Life has been going-- was very reasonable, very-- has been working out very well for us. I been doing good business. I had quite a bit of money. Well, we been running that. It's been going on very well till about August, September 1939.

All right. Now, do you remember when you were growing up if you encountered or had experienced antisemitism from Poles or from neighbors?

Oh, yes. There was very big antisemitism in Poland everywhere. But for me, directly, it didn't mean anything because I've been in the wholesale business. And they couldn't stop customers coming into to my store because it was most-- a lot of them was Jewish customers.

They been shoemakers, all kind of work they been doing. They been making the shoes from that leather what they bought from me and selling it to the shops. Well, they been doing business with the German shops, with the Polish shops, and with the Jewish shops. These people, the Jewish people, that running the shops, they have been affected. They been very much affected. And there was a lot of--

You're saying because you had a wholesale store that it was different for you?

Different for me, yes. Yes.

It was the retailers that were more affected?

The retailers were more affected, especially the Jewish retailers, because they put on picketers at the front of the shops. They call it in Polish [POLISH]-- go to my own people to buy. And Jewish people hasn't been mean to the-- they are Polish, they belong to the Polish government, the Polish people, separate sect. And the way they've been treating us. But that was mostly since-- my trouble was between '33 till 1939.

Hitler was in power then?

Hitler was in power already in Germany. A lot of-- they throw out some German Jews into the border, into the Polish border. They come to us. We have been living near the border, not far from the German border. By 1930, at the end of '30, there was a lot of Jewish people coming from Poland already from Germany, already to Poland, to us. And we have seen what's going on. But we didn't believe it. We didn't think of it, that could happen to us. That's the way it goes in life.

Well, when you say that you didn't think it could happen to you, you mean that you didn't realize that the end would be-- I mean Jews had experienced antisemitism throughout most of their lives.

Yes. But we lived-- we been trying to live with it.

Did you realize that a war was coming?

Yes. It was a lot of talking about war is coming. But still.

What did you think that meant for-- did you think that meant anything special for Jews in Poland or as opposed to Poles in Poland?

No, we been afraid that if war come, that will affect us more than the Poles.

How so and why did you feel that way?

Because we have seen what's going on in Germany. We have hear and we have seen what's going on already. We have seen--

What do you mean exactly?

Well, we have seen that they throw out a lot of Jewish people from Germany into Poland, into the border. We have seen over there in Germany, the synagogues has been burned down. And we hear it what's going on. And we been afraid that it will affect us. But we didn't believe it, it can come so far, what's happened. We still trusted. We still have been thinking that the Germans can't be so bad. We remembered the Germans from 1914-19. And we thought, it can't be as bad as it was.

So as war became closer, what options did you have? Did you think about leaving Poland? Did that ever cross your mind? Or did you have any ideas of what you would do?

Well, a lot of people who lived in German, in the border from Germany, left already Poland for Russia, just month, two months before the war. But not everybody could do it. With a family with two small children-- my older daughter was then six, the younger was three, where could you run? And what could you take with you? But I brought my children to my parents' place. Was far away from the border. And I thought, whatever happens, we still can run away.

When did you do this?

Well, by the 1st of September 1930-- by the end of August 1939, I brought my children-- went back to Sosnowiec. But by the 1st of September, 1939, when the war broke out, I ran to my parents' place too. But everybody has been running.

You ran with your wife?

With my wife, yes. Only my children were there.

They had already been there?

They had been already there, yes.

And why did you bring your children there?

Because I didn't-- to be ready to be able to run if that's happened, if I have to.

How old were you then?

1930-- 32 years.

You were 32 years old?

Yes.

You thought it was safer in Vayslitz because--

Yes we thought that too far-- it was far away from the German border. We believed that the Polish will fight back. And they will hold on the Germans. But it wasn't happens like that. When I come to my hometown, Vayslitz, my parents-- my mother was only with the children. My two brothers and my father have been run away already from there. I been running with my sister, Devorah, with her husband.

Of course, they have been living in Sosnowiec too. She married in 19-- my sister married in 1938. And she settled down

in Sosnowiec. And when we have run, she hasn't got any children then. We've been running. We've been running together. We come to our hometown-- nobody, only my mother with my children were there. And we left my mother and the children there. And we run further up to the Russian border. But when we come to a small town-- it was in Galicia. It was quite--

What were you running from?

From the Germans.

OK. I mean, you were just going to hide?

Run away from the Germans.

You weren't running from the Poles at that point?

No, the Poles themselves, they been running.

They were running. Right, OK. OK. And a lot of Jews were forced to or did join the Polish Army?

They have got to join the Polish Army. But the Polish Army has been running. From the first day, they kept running.

So they didn't really fight very much.

They didn't really. You haven't got a hope to fight. They've been fighting behind Warsaw. In Warsaw, the fighting was going on for about two or three weeks. But all over Poland, wasn't any fighting. There only was running. They been going by trucks, by cars, and moving on. And the Poles have been-- kept running all the time.

OK. All right. Why don't you continue?

But by-- it was--

You said, you and your sister were running.

Yes, and her husband.

Berish.

Berish, yes. My wife stayed with the children. We been running to Vayslitz. And she stayed with the children-- with my mother in Vayslitz. And we running. We come to a small town. It was very light in the night time. And we stayed there overnight. In the morning, the Germans got us. They come in. It was a town called [PLACE NAME]. Was near quite a lot from the Russian border, but it was still Poland.

Well, the first place when they come in, they couldn't see anything very bad. They been resting and this. But I've been told that in the nighttime when they come in, they caught a few people, Jewish people. They make them work in the water. There was a river there to make them work and make a bridge there, something like that. And they killed them there. But I haven't seen it. Well, after that, we stay there a day or two. And we start going back to home. We went back to two Vayslitz, took us about a couple of days.

They let you go?

Yes. Yes. They been going back. And they been going up. And we been going back home. Of course, there wasn't a way to hide or where to run anymore. We been in already. We been going back to Vayslitz. And when we come home to my hometown, my father and the wagons were already home. My wife and children were there. We stayed a day or two. And we hired a wagon train, a Pole-- a wagon train and paid him good money to bring us back to Sosnowiec.

Who was us-- you, your wife, your two children?

My wife, my two children, and my sister, and her husband. But when we come home, we still been afraid. And we send back-- my sister went back to Vayslitz with her husband. And my children too, she thought that it would be better them to stay there. And I been staying in Sosnowiec.

You and your wife?

Me and my wife been staying in my own home. After a few days--

What did you do? Did you work?

Yes, they took me. They make me work. I clean the streets, clean the streets.

Who's they? The Germans?

The Germans, yeah.

What happened to your business? I mean, sure.

That's what I'm going to tell you.

OK. Sorry.

The first few days when I come home, I haven't done anything. But after a few days, called me up. They have to take up some work. We working cleaning the streets. They were doing-- working for a German firm they called [GERMAN]. That means making the footpaths or something like that. And after a few days, there was established a German-- what to call it--

Police?

It's not a police. It was like a company. But they took over the Jewish businesses. And they come in with a truck into the driveway. I got my business. And they took everything what they have got in my store.

They nationalized everything? They made everything part of the government? Property.

They opened only one business, one business from all guys. And they took all the goods into that business. There was a German Treuhander, they called it. He was the boss. And he kept working for him some Jewish people in that business. And I have-- and my job was only to work for them. We've been going on with that for about 1939 till about 1942.

For three years, you worked for the government.

The government, for the German company, was not only me, a lot of Jewish people.

Right. I understand that. But did you work in the leather business or whatever they wanted?

No, no, what they wanted. Yes, what they wanted, what they gave me. Mostly, cleaning the streets, working with-- making the footpaths, making the road, mostly in that work.

Your wife was still in Sosnowiec?

She was still in Sosnowiec.

And your children?

Children were in Vayslitz there with my parents.

So for those three years, they remained?

For about two and a half years, they remained with my parents, by my parents in Vayslitz, yes. But they start coming on-- we start-- we hear it, they taking away some small towns in Poland, they taking away people into concentration camps, into Treblinka, into Auschwitz.

Had you heard of those camps?

We heard about that, yes.

What did you think they were?

Well, they say that they take them there to make them work for the German government. But we knew they taking them there, are a lot of them, to kill them. In that case, I heard what's going on, in my town, my parents were still there, and everything was quite all right. But I've been afraid for the children. We thought that we'd be safer to bring them back to have them at home. I hired a Polish woman, paid her money to go there and bring the children back to me. And she did that.

OK. Just one second. So this was before the ghettos happened, right? Or were they still ghetto-- had ghettos come about during those--

It was the ghettos already. That was the ghettos. We had been living-- we could walk in those two streets. The ghetto we had been living, we had been living before the war was the ghetto since 1941.

All right. So were you in fact-- and you didn't have to move because the ghetto became around where you were?

Only a family was put into my flat, another Jewish family has got-- I have got to take in a family with a child into my flat because there wasn't enough room. Some had been living in two families in one room, some-- I've got two rooms and a kitchen. And we been living two families in my home.

Where you worked, was it in the ghetto or outside of the ghetto?

Outside the ghetto.

Outside.

Yes.

And did you have to have passes to go in and out of the ghetto?

No. They collect us, the German soldiers, German SS men collect us from the ghetto. We come to that at that point, that Punkt. And they took us out. We been working, watching us, and they brought us back into the ghetto.

Was there a Judenrat in Sosnowiec ghetto?

Yes, there was a Judenrat. Of course, there was a Judenrat.

Could you tell me a little bit about that how it came about? Were you very familiar with that?

Yes. It was like that-- when the Germans come into Sosnowiec, they took all the men into a big hall. It was like a big

storms, big store places or what 50,000 square meter or something like that. They keep them all there for a day or two. The next day, one of the SS man or the Gestapo come in, and he say, [GERMAN]. There was a Jewish committee before the war. They asked the Judenalteste to come-- the Juden--

Jewish committee.

--the head from the Jewish community to come out. But he wasn't there. Was only-- was there a few, but had been in the Jewish committee working before the war. It was one young man who was like a boy-- he was a boy who has been putting-- bringing the mail, slipping that and that. And he was quite-- he said, I am the Judenalteste. And they make him as that. His name was Merit. And he was the Judenalteste all these years.

How old was he?

He was about 25, 20-- maybe 30, I don't know exactly now. But he wasn't married then. I knew very well his parents. And he has been running this business for all the time. He did what the Germans asked him to do. He's got the team, all those committee people who've been in the committee before the war. They have been working with him together. And the Germans only come-- the Gestapo only come to him, to his people, to tell them what they want, and what they have to do. And they did the job for them.

OK. Could you tell me a little bit about what life was like in the ghetto? I mean, did religious life continue?

Yes, religious life continued, but not in the way like before. In the house we have been living, we been going to do the prayers at a private home. The synagogues were closed. The was shtiebels what they call it was closed. But privately, you were-- whoever was doing the prayers at a private home, from that house. You didn't go into another building.

Was it forbidden?

It wasn't forbidden. But we been afraid to get together, all together, a big-- a lot of people. In that town, I believe it was only 20 or 30 families. And those 20 or 30 men from the house, whoever it may be, not all of us, went to the minyan every morning or every Saturday, yontif, and we did the prayers there.

How did you get food?

Well, it was cards. It was on--

Ration cards?

--ration cards, that's right. It was ration cards. And we got the ration cards. But you couldn't live on that. The ration cards were there-- were on before-war prices, were very cheap. But what you get with 200 grams of meat for a month, one bread for a family for a week, something like that. And it was very hard. And it was a black market. Whoever's got a lot of money could-- [AUDIO OUT]

OK. So you were saying that whoever had-- about the-- that you could-- that there was some smuggling going in or black market?

Yes, yes. It was a black market started going. And people risked their lives to be able to give food to the children, to give-- to keep up with the family as long as-- much as they could.

What-- did people have-- I mean, clearly, Jews were being singled out. I mean, there was a Jewish ghetto. Did people have any ideas about what was going on or why? You know what I'm saying? Clearly, we all know what happened. But I was just curious along the way if people had any sense, still, of the Final Solution, of just-- what did people think was happening?

They didn't believe that there will come to us a Final Solution, like it was happening.

Like it happened. Well, people knew of camps at that point. People knew there were concentration camps, right?

Yes, we knew that there was concentration camp. We still believed it won't come. And we hoped that the war will end. We all been told, oh, the war goes to end in a week or in two weeks. We been living with the hope that the war will end and there won't be a Final Solution. Whoever died, in the meantime, it's happened. You couldn't help. But a lot of people-- we have been in our town, in Sosnowiec, I haven't been till then. But mostly, people stayed till August 1943. In some other towns, Łódź, Radom, people stayed-- some people survived till August '44, even.

In the ghetto?

In the ghetto.

That's unusual.

What did your wife do in the ghetto? Did she have a job?

Yeah, she got a job working for the Germans too.

Was there a school? Did children go to school in the ghetto?

No. There wasn't any school. We didn't went to-- we didn't send them to any school.

Was there any political activity?

Not as much as I know. But there was some-- when they started with sending away the people into concentration camp, there were some young men who tried to tell us, don't go. They're going to kill you there. But they catch them straight away. It didn't took long to hang them and kill them. It was only a few young boys who did something about that.

And we didn't believe that it could happen. We been too much of afraid from the Germans to do. Not all-- it wasn't much-- wasn't much-- it was done a lot of-- in Warsaw, in Treblinka, and later on, in 1943, was a lot of people-- was a lot of activity against the Germans.

You mean resistance.

But it wasn't-- resistance-- but it wasn't much resistance in our town.

OK. Why don't you go on?

By August 1942, they put on placards on the walls that the Germans want to stamp our identity cards. We have to come. There was a small place where you playing ball, big place--

Stadium. --stadium, that, and we have to come there to stamp those passports, ours. And they said, everybody has to come with the wife and with the children. If anybody will stay home, anybody will be find in the town or hiding, he will be killed. We, I think, all of us went there.

Well, what they did, they made three segregations. When they come about 2 o'clock, the Gestapo come. They make tables, three tables, they make three segregations-- number 1, number 2, and number 3. The number 1, they stamped the-- they stamped the cards and let them go home. Number 2, they let us stay there. And number 3, they start pulling them out into-- to put them-- take em away to the trains to send them to-- it was a big rush and a big noise. And people who were in the number 1, they wanted to move into number 2.

What was number 2, what happened in that one?

Not-- it didn't happen anything. We been safe for the moment. We been-- at the moment, we been there. Well, they pulled out about 5,000 people. And sent them away to Auschwitz. And we been there-- we been there until about-- it was on a Wednesday. And we been there in that Punkt till about Friday afternoon.

And Friday afternoon, it was rain, and cold, and people had been dying, children had been dying. They took us Friday afternoon-- Friday, and it was dark already. It was about 8:00 or 9 o'clock. They took us into a house, called it a camp. They emptied a big house. And they took all these people into the house. It wasn't only that house, it was about two or three houses.

And at nighttime, we were afraid they're going to take us to Auschwitz. They're going to take us away again. My first wife, she was more conscious, more looking around what's going on. And she come to me. I been sitting with the children and dreaming on the floor and just dreaming a bit.

And she come, you see, people are hiding upstairs in a room. And they're putting the board up near the door. Come quick, we will go up there too. We had to. We took the children. I took one, they took the other one. We went up. An old woman has been standing and moving the [NON-ENGLISH] into-- the door is here, moved the [NON-ENGLISH] over the door.

And I stopped here. And I said, we want to go in. We went in. It was full. And she moved to round up. And after about half an hour or an hour, the crying was going on like hell. And they took away all the people to Auschwitz there what was in that camp, in that house.

Where you had initially been?

Where I had initially been, yes. It was Saturday morning. And had been left about 20 or 30 families with children in that room. It was-- when it quietened down and it was everything quiet, I went out and have a look what's going on. I went down, there was one German soldier standing, and from the Jewish committee was standing a few people.

And they said, nothing to worry. The worst thing has been-- is over. They coming in in a few-- in an hour or two, about 8 o'clock. The Gestapo will be in there to stamp your cards. And you will go home. But it wasn't true. It didn't happen like that. After an hour or two, they brought in from another house a few hundred, or maybe 1,000, or 1,500 people more in our home.

And still, again they been arrived with SS, with Gestapo all the time. And we been expecting the worst again. What's happened? Saturday afternoon, I been trying-- my older daughter, she was then-- it was '42. She was about nine years old. Told her, you go down. And maybe you can sneak out between the Gestapo into the street. And you know where we live. You know your uncle. You know your cousins. You go out and you see them. There you meet them, you will be there all right.

Outside the ghetto?

Outside-- into the ghetto.

Into the ghetto.

Yeah.

OK.

And she went down. And we didn't know what's happened. We didn't know what's happened. And my wife, she was a bit worried. She said, I will go down and have a look what's happened with Cesza. And she went down. When she went down, the rush started.

They started pulling out people to put them into-- to send them to Auschwitz. I was left-- I was there with the younger

child. And I went up into the first-- in that moment, we been looking everybody for himself to find a hiding place, not-- and I went into the same place. And another old woman has been standing.

And I went into that room with my child. There was a lot of small children. They didn't even say it one word. Only the child said in Polish, [POLISH]. Means, where is Mother? But in the-- the noise in the [INAUDIBLE] was so big that you couldn't stand it. And the same thing-- after an hour or two, everything quietened down.

And I come-- it quietened down. And somebody come and pulled away and said, you free. You can go home. I come down. And I meet my sister-in-law. She was providing things. They haven't seen us going to the-- and she said, everything is all right. Your wife and Cesza are there. They didn't took them away.

What's happened? They took away my older daughter with a transport to Auschwitz. But on the way from that house to the train was a cousin of my wife. He was working for the committee. He took her out, the older daughter.

Cesza?

Cesza. And my wife, when she has seen what's going on, she ran on the top-- into the boden, they call it. And she went into-- they call it a fessel. It was an empty box. And she went into that box. And she survived there. And I come down. And we all went home, back into our own flat.

Well, you're saying that was, in fact, a deportation. The whole town was in the middle of being deported.

It was deported-- in that month was deported about 10,000 people from that selection. Firstly, it's got about 30,000 people.

So it wasn't judenrein at that point. I mean, it wasn't--

It wasn't judenrein, no. We stayed in the ghetto. We lived-- we start as, again, the same way of living we living under the Germans. And we-- everybody has been trying to do his best to feed his family. I been-- at that time, I been without any-- say in Yiddish [YIDDISH]-- to make a living. I haven't got any money. I haven't got any goods, anything to sell, to buy, to have some money. Everything has gone. They robbed me. They stripped me of everything already.

After that date, I haven't been doing anything. By that date, by that time, I said, I have got nothing to lose. I have to do something to be able to feed my family, to feed my wife and children. We been starting to doing some black market business. I got a friend. He was a competition of mine who lived in Bedzin. He said, let's make partner. He was in my camp there. Said, let's make partnership. We will buy in Bedzin, sell in Sosnowiec. Buy in Sosnowiec, sell in Bedzin.

Leather goods?

We have got to smuggle it, to put on yourself half a dozen of these calf-- leather goods what you call it calf boxes. And we're doing like that, been going on like that from about the end of August till about the middle of February. And live quite comfortably. We got enough food. We got-- and we saved a bit of money. My parents were already in the bunker. The Aussiedlung in that town-- all the government in all these small towns were judenrein was finished.

All the deportations had already happened.

All the deportation had been finished. Only in Sosnowiec was a few thousand Jewish people, in L³dz. We pray to God and we hope that we will survive. They won't do it. They won't have enough time to do it or they won't do it. Otherwise, if you--

How did you know where your parents were?

Well, we heard about that Poles had been coming. And we heard what's going on. We knew exactly. But I received a letter from my parents that they are in cave with a Pole. And they knew-- told me where they are. I knew the Pole where

they were.

With a Polish farmer?

A Polish farmer, yes. And I received then a letter from my sister, Devorah, that she is-- she got put-- she is in jail with her little girl. And I knew exactly where they are and what's going on. I have written to them sometimes, not too many, might be one letter or two over those few months, from August '42 till about February '43.

By February '43, they put on placards on the streets that we will receive-- young men from about 16 or 17 till about 45 will receive invitations to go to labor camps. Whoever will receive the invitation has to be ready at home. They will come to pick him up one night, one time.

And if he will be ready, his wife and children will be stay there. And they will be all right, won't happen anything to them. They will stay till after the war till forever. Whoever won't come, whoever will hide and run away, the wife and the children-- anybody, nearest kin will be taken away to Auschwitz and die the same day.

Well, we have got a-- me, my wife, and the nearest family, my mother-in-law, was there still-- and some brother-in-laws, sister in-laws, we been discussing that matter. And we decided, we haven't got any choice. We haven't got where to-- we haven't got there to do. I have-- I received that invitation too. I have to be ready. Whenever they come to pick me up, I have to go. Let's hope to God, let's pray to God that the rest of you will survive.

I even say to my wife, she-- don't worry about me. I will manage with hunger, with hard work, with everything. They won't kill me because I will do my best to survive, and do whatever they say, and do whatever they want. But you keep on. I've been happy to because I saved about \$1,500 in then-- at that time from the black market.

I say, I'm happy they got some money. If you can do something by yourself, if you want, you feel-- I gave her instructions what she can do, where she can go, where she can buy, what she can do. And if you feel you can't do it, just too frightened, just don't do anything, just buy, eat, live yourself for the best.

One night, by the end of-- that was by the 1st of March, 1943, in the nighttime, was a knock on the door. And they come in, Kaufstein, and been dressed very quick, and got ready for me warm clothes, big boots, and everything what I need to go into camp, a labor camp-- a bit of underwear and everything. I took a rucksack. And they took me away, quite a few thousand people. There was a camp in Sosnowiec they called Dulag. That means in German Durchgangslager.

What does that mean?

Durchgangslager, that means passing through-- camp passing through, only took us there for a while. From there, they sent us into the labor camps. We've been there quite a few thousand people. And they make selections. They picked out 500 into one camp, 500. And they picked us up out about 1,000 or 1,200 into the labor camp. They call it Ottmuth. When we come in that camp, what we have seen there, it was-- I couldn't understand how you can make one people look like that.

What was the name of the camp? Ottmuth?

Ottmuth. It was just a labor camp, wasn't a concentration camp. It was only a labor camp. It was people from before there. They were like cripples, mostly [INAUDIBLE], all Jews run down like animals. They couldn't walk. They couldn't talk. They were dirty. And there was a lot of German Jews. They had been used to good living. They couldn't take it, people dying every day.

But we kept up. We didn't let that speech-- we won't let that happened to us, all those people what been together with me. We washed ourselves at nighttime. We tried to find something to eat a bit more. We kept up. And we have been there only four weeks. After four weeks, they took us away into another camp. We call it Ober Lazisk. That was in Oberschlesien. In that camp, become was-- it was a new camp.

Wait, in the first camp that you were in, what did you do during the day?

Working.

What kind of work.

Took us out to work at-- to clean the streets, to make the footpath, something, all those things. When we come to Auschwitz, it was really not too bad. In first place, we were all healthy men. Every kept-- everybody keep clean.

So wait, the third place they took you was to Auschwitz?

It wasn't. It was Ober Lazisk.

Ober, OK, sorry.

Yes. We stayed there.

How did you get there?

They took us by truck.

By train?

No, by truck.

By truck, sorry.

It was by truck. Was not far. Was about 30-40 kilometers. Was it open or closed vehicles?

Open.

And did you know where you were going?

No, we didn't know. But we come there. We could see we are not too bad off.

So what happened exactly when you arrived?

When we arrived, We got-- there already was showers and barracks, took us into the barracks. We went into one barracks with the best friends of us, people near each other. There was about 15 or 20 barracks. It took about-- was about 50-60 people in a barrack. We stayed together. We looked after each other. We going out to work.

They took us to work in the-- a factory where they built new-- they built-- called-- a Strassenbahn, a train. We built the track for the trains. They built the big factories, big-- it was a very big place. I have been lucky enough, the my city, the buses come, pick up people to work-- one picked up 20, one picked up 50, one 60. I been standing in that-- one man come up to me, you, come on. I went out.

And he said, you coming with me in German. I went with him. I've been think, oh, I'm very bad off. Of course, only one man, he will look after me. He will have me on his eyes all the day. But what's happened? I was lucky enough. I was lucky enough that when I come with him, he was a shirt-- he was a smith, a blacksmith from [GERMAN]-- from his profession. And he took me into a shed.

In the first place, was in March '43. March '43, it was very cold and snowy winter. It was in the shed. In the first place, was warmer, was a fire burning. And he told me, you sitting down. I will come back in an hour or two. And I will tell you what to do. Don't worry. You don't have nothing to worry. You sit and just do nothing. He was speaking a bit of

Polish, a bit of German. He was a Volksdeutsche. He was not too bad. He was quite a good man.

After about two hours, he went around in all these places where they've been working. And they brought the tools had been damaged. And he made them-- he repaired them. And he would come back. He showed me what to do. And I start there. I got my own table, chair, showed me what to do. And he left it with me. You do whatever you can. Don't hurry. And I have been working there quite a long time.

He was a man. He was living not far from that place where my parents-in-law had been living. And I start talking with him. I find out where he is from. And I ask him, did you know my parents-in-law? And he said, yes, of course.

Could you take a letter to my parents-in-law? Yes, I will take it. But nobody should know about it. He took from me a letter. He went home Saturday and Sunday, every Saturday. And I sent letters to my family every Saturday, Friday night, I received letters back Monday morning. Sometimes, they send me some coupons for bread some bread. And we been in touch.

This was your wife's family?

My wife's family. My wife. They've been to the-- he went to the ghetto. And he brought letters. And he brought me back letters. And this was-- that was been going on from the end of March '43 till the end of July-- till the end of July '43. By the end, the last month--

I want to ask you, this was a labor camp, right? This was not a concentration camp?

No. It was not a death camp. No. Not one man died in that camp.

Were there ever any selections in that camp?

No.

OK. Was the camp already set up when you got there?

Yes.

So you didn't have to help set up the camp. It was already--

Yes.

OK. And OK. And could you tell me a little bit about what your thoughts were or your reactions were about the camp? Were the guards Jewish or not Jewish? I mean, what was the system? Were there kapos in the camp?

There was a kapo, a man who I knew very well. And there was some poorer by these people we know. And they behaved quite reasonably. And Gestapo didn't come into the camp or the SS man didn't. They've been watching us outside. There was a wired fence around the camp. And they've been on the outside. And they didn't come in. Well, it wasn't at home. It wasn't a picnic. Yes, it was a labor camp.

What kind of food did you eat?

Well, they you gave us 250 gram bread a day, some soup, sometimes a bit of bread with a piece of salami, you call it-- sausage, sometimes a piece of margarine. But you got-- everybody helped themselves. We all got some connections. And we got-- we haven't been starving there. We could keep up. We got our own clothes, got warm clothes. We could survive.

Did you have a uniform?

No, no, our own clothes. We could survive there. I don't know what to say. It was not too bad.

OK, I understand what you're saying. It's hard to say it was a picnic or it wasn't wonderful, but it was-- you felt, that you could be a lot worse off.

Yeah, we could be-- [? but Aus let us. ?]

Once happened, one of-- our men, of our people went into a shop. And they got card from him to buy bread.

Were you near a city?

Yes, it was a small country town. It was a small country town.

Was the camp in a small country town or near one?

Yes, near the country. It was a shop opposite the camp. And you went there. And the men from the shop, the shopkeeper, went to the SS and tell them that are men coming from the prisoners and want to buy bread. And they find it out. And they punished him with 25--

Lashes. Whippings?

--whipping, whipping at night. It was a big shock, a big shock for us. We were all standing and looking it.

They wanted everyone to watch as a lesson?

Everybody has got to watch as a lesson. He was very sick after that. But he still lived, still survived.

Were there any women in the camp?

Yes, there was about three women who had been working in the kitchen.

But there weren't any women that were?

No, there been only three women working in the kitchen.

Do you know how big the camp was? How many-- do you have any idea how many men, how many prisoners?

It was about 1,200 people.

1,200 prisoners?

Yeah, 1,200 prisoners.

And were there SS? Because it wasn't run by the Gestapo. Was it run by the Gestapo or by the SS?

Yeah, was a few SS in the-- they got a office in front of the-- it was a Lagerführer. It was a German officer, a private man. He was the boss from this. And was a few SS to watch us not to have a riot.

OK. Were there any attempts at escape in this camp or resistance of any kind?

Yes, there was one. There was one escape. That was in July, in the middle of July 1943. A wife of one man was in that town. She ran away from the ghetto. He was there. And she let him know that she is here. If he can run away, he can-- she stay on there. And he find it out. And he ran away at nighttime over the fence.

In the morning, they start looking for him. They find his clothes in a side street, but they couldn't find it. What's happened to them, I don't know. I don't think so he survived the war because I never heard any more about him. That's the only escape what's happened. They make it very strict after that. They been more SS men put around around the camp. I don't think so everybody could run away or we should run away.

But as I told you, I got letters. And I keep in touch with my family. By the end of 19th July-- end of July, 1943. One Monday morning, that man come back, and he brought me a letter my wife. And she said goodbye to me. She sent me some money back. She said, I don't thinks I can do anything with that money. I think we are-- it's the last day for us. And let's hope we will meet each other.

And that's all what she's written in the letter. And the next-- some other people got Poles who brought them letters. They been there Sunday. And the Aussiedlung was coming. It was the 1st of August, 1943. They took all the people, all the women and children at that time from Sosnowiec to Auschwitz, to Auschwitz ghetto.

So they liquidated the ghetto?

They liquidated the ghetto completely. First two days, they took the people from the Gemeinde, they called it, the Judenalteste, took a while. And then they took all the people to Auschwitz. My family has gone there, all the family-- the wife, and the children, and the brothers, and all of them. They took them the same day, the 1st of August, 1943. We haven't got any more response, anything a word there at all. We stayed in that camp in Oberlausitz till the 2nd of November, 1943. But the 2nd of November, 1943, they come with trucks and took us all the way to Auschwitz.

You knew you were going to Auschwitz?

Yes, we knew we were going to Auschwitz. We haven't got any choice. We couldn't do anything.

Did they tell you you were going to Auschwitz?

I didn't try to ask anything. But we are--