

This is Coby Rothstein interviewing Mr. Sigmund Turner. This is July 7, 1981. We're in Readville, Massachusetts. First of all, Mr. Turner, these are a set of questions that relate to pre-war conditions. Describe those people who comprise your household before the war. Who was actually in your home?

My family consists of three older sisters, and I was the youngest, the only son. I'm born on October the 10th, 1918, in Kustrin, Germany. In 1924, we moved to Kraków, Poland, where my parents on my mother's side lived. And my father opened up a shoe store. And, actually, I was raised in Kraków, Poland.

Your father was raised in Kraków?

I was raised.

You were brought up.

Yeah, I was brought over there. As a matter of fact, if you look here--

At the picture on the wall?

This is the picture of my three sisters, and myself, and this is my father right here.

I see.

And as far as my memories is coming back, he was a comfortable middle-class citizen. We had several shoe stores at the time, with manufacturing of men's shoes as our speciality. My grandfather was already retired then. And he was in the shoe manufacturing business. And his business, he left over for his two sons. So this was the background.

What was the-- religious wise, what sort of upbringing was there?

I bet your pardon?

Religious wise, what was the religious--

Religious wise--

--in the home?

We was, I will say, not Hasidic, not my grandfather, nor my father. Very much-- very much progressive. But very strict as far as kashrut, and the attendance, and stuff like this.

It was traditional. It was--

Very traditional.

Holidays were observed? Everything, everything. Everything was-- our business was closed on Saturdays and stuff like this. Even when-- Kraków is one of the big cities in Poland, used to be the capital of Poland until the 18th century. We was living and our business was in the center of Kraków, in a big-- big marketplace, what they call it, Rynek Główny.

And I lived-- we lived over there. We had the businesses right here. We was the only one whose business was closed on the Saturdays.

On Shabbat, on Saturdays. What-- do you recall any-- what sort of relationship there existed between your family and non-Jews?

Oh, yes. Since we lived in the center of town--

We'll just pause for a second.

OK. Since we was living in center of town, naturally, my neighbors, and the majority of the people living over there, were Gentiles. And I was actually brought up in a Gentile neighborhood or mixed neighborhood. The majority was Gentile. And I-- our trade-- our customers was all Gentile. We was catering to the Gentile-- trade. And as far as anti-Semitism concerned, naturally, we was exposed to it more or less.

Everyone knew that the shop--

I beg your pardon?

Everyone knew that this shop was owned by Jews?

I beg your pardon?

They knew that the owners were Jewish, though.

Oh, naturally-- naturally. They knew. As a matter of fact, especially in the winter time, when the days are shorter, they was waiting Saturday afternoon for the-- the stars to come. And was calling, ringing our bell-- Mr. Turner, come out. We saw the star. You can come down and open the store. But they-- in Kraków, in general, not before, I will say 1935, until the General Pilsudski was alive, we didn't feel too much of anti-Semitism.

You didn't?

No. But right after his death, when the government changed and the anti-Semitic segment of the government took over, and they start announcing boycott of Jewish stores and stuff like this. Especially for us in the center of the town, where the Endeks, this was the anti-Semitic-- the anti-Semitic organization of students of the university. They was going around, and making all kinds of noise, and even prosecuting people and stuff like this.

I, personally, had the experience standing in front of our house, I was beaten up-- beaten up, I believe in 1936 or '7 was it.

By this youth of gangs?

No, no, by the students, by the university students.

What prompted that? How did that happen?

No, no, they just walked by. You see, a Pole will detect a Jew miles away. Even my-- I had payots then. I didn't look-- in America, nobody will even believe that I am Jewish. But they right away, they recognized. And they-- I had a black eye. I believe I was bleeding from nose and stuff like this.

But this was sporadic. Nothing-- nothing-- the organization was quite weak. And pretty soon, they had to do with their own problems. And the war started in 1939. We didn't--

What effect did that particular incident have on you, though?

No, we--

Having lived among them very peacefully for so long.

I will tell you something. As far as I know, we was brought up always in Poland not to go to certain parts of town or be careful if you're going to the countrysides, especially in the mountains-- the mountaineers, big anti-Semitic.

And even we was Boy Scouts-- the Jewish Boy Scouts-- I belonged to the Shomer HaDati, what is Bnei Akiva today. And we had the camps in the mountains and stuff like that. We didn't worry then because we was in a bunch. But as far as go singularly, that wasn't to accept it.

As the war became closer, what sort of--

As the war became closer--

--what sort of options--

I beg your pardon?

What sort of options did your family have? What to do about--

The options was-- we didn't have any options to start with. The prime reason for it, my mother had in Kraków three brothers and a sister, everyone married, with family. My grandmother was living with us. We had three big businesses, quite sizable, with permanent year-round people employed. And we had quite a sizable manufacturing.

Financially, we was fine. But nobody-- but nobody would leave a place like this. Where you got born with all the family, everybody know you. And especially where you had a mother to consider, and brothers, and stuff like this. This was out of the question.

No one talked about leaving probably.

No. No. By stretch of magic, my cousin, what you met right here, she is born in Hamburg. This is the brother of my father, the younger brother of my father, five years younger. He was in Hamburg.

In 1935, by coincidence, he won a ticket-- a free ticket to Israel, with his family, from the Jewish organization. He paid for the ticket because they had to export and import eggs and butter over there. But he went to Israel. But in Hamburg was a different situation. So he liquidated in '35-- not officially.

Yes.

He smuggled the money to my father. My father helped him to Switzerland. With the money, he went to Israel. And they are alive. They escaped. But as far in Poland is concerned, to go-- if somebody was established, like, for instance, if you was-- right-- Established financially, established socially, and family, everything together, the idea of gone was only possible going with the whole family.

One part of the family to leave, impossible. Especially my-- both-- older sister was then married. They had already children. This was not a matter of just picking up the basket and leaving-- impossible.

How old were you when the war first broke out?

When the war started--

How did you hear--

--I was 21.

How did you hear about it?

Oh, the 1st of September-- as a matter of fact, it was very-- I remember the last few days before the start of the war, it was very, very a tension, a big tension. Was the ultimatum-- Hitler gave the ultimatum to Poland about the corridor and stuff like this. And everything was very nervous.

We had the Jewish paper over there, in Polish-- in Polish language-- Nowy Dziennik, a very popular paper.

And it was the Polish newspaper and the radio.

So on Sunday, the 1st of September, at probably 4:00-- 4:00 or 5:00, the first bombing started. And what I remember was that this was intentionally made by the Germans. They plant spies, and they organized chaos. How they did it, they put a rumor that the Germans are going first to get rid of all the men, not the women, but the men.

So all the men start wandering. Where? To the East, towards the Vistula River, towards Russia. And my three uncles, all my cousins, my father, my two brother-in-laws, we got together. And Sunday morning, early, we decided we're going too.

We start walking. We make-- we maked about 130 kilometers in a few days. And in meantime, Poland-- and it took us about a week time. We was on the way.

And what this-- the idea was that there was hundreds of thousands people on the road. And the Poles couldn't organize a defense because the people was blocking-- the people was riding by buses, was walking, was riding by horses and buggies, all kinds of transportation.

But this was a planned-- a planned diversion by this German spies to block the roads. And as they was blocking the road, they bombed the main stations, the rail stations.

So we came up to Tarnów. And my older brother-in-law had a sister over there. And the whole family came to their house. And then it was a few days and the Germans came to Tarnów. When they came to Tarnów, we returned to Kraków.

What immediate effect did it have on your household, the fact that the war broke out, as far as the shop was concerned ad the home?

No, I will tell you. This was the first day of Rosh Hashanah, in 1939. We had a quite large apartment, of eight rooms. And we had a minyan over there, the whole family. And as we was saying our prayers, the German came, officers-- Mr. Turner, may we have the keys to the factory and to the shops. And this was this-- it's all over.

Then they called up my father, that he shall come back. Because he was established so many years. And they give us a commissar, a Ukrainian young boy, who was-- who was getting the money. He was having a hand on the--

Financial aspects.

--merchandise. And finally, after a couple of months, I was not yet-- I was not more in Kraków then. I had to escape because I had a fight with this commissar. And he was threatening me, to kill me.

So my parents was afraid, and they sent me away, beyond the German line, beyond the Vistula, to the-- the Russian occupied the Eastern part of Poland. They sent me to smuggle myself over. And I went to Lemberg, to Lwów.

What was it-- just before you go on, what instigated that fight?

I beg your pardon?

What instigated that fight with that--

Oh, he was a bastard. He was a bastard. He was insulting my father, and me, and my sisters, my mother, and everybody. So, naturally, I couldn't stand it. So I had a fight with him. So this resulted, I escaped. And this was in November of '39. I escaped to Lemberg.

And over there-- and my parents gave me some money, some gold pieces, and some dollars, and some

zlotys. And I came to Lemberg. And I found a whole group of Polish-- of Kraków boys, with whom I was brought up. And we rented a room. And I start working in a restaurant as a bookkeeper.

Meantime-- in meantime, I had to register myself to the Russian army. And they took me as a good specimen. And they gave me right away an assignment, five years to the Black Sea float, to the Navy. Naturally, I didn't want to go.

So a friend of mine gave me the idea to go to the Polytechnic, like MIT here, in Lemberg. The secretary of this university was the brother of the Jewish deputy in Poland, Dr. Sommerfeld, his younger brother, a Zionist. And since I finished a Hebrew gymnasium in Kraków, I entered his office, and I started talking Hebrew to him, to send away the two secretaries, which he did, and I explained my situation.

So he said, don't worry about it. The Russian got a law that so long you are a member of any university, they will not touch you, except when the war will be. If Russia is in war, it's a different story. So I applied to the engineering over there in Lemberg. And he put it through in one night.

And I was working in this-- nights in this coffee house, as a bookkeeper, in order to-- because the trouble was with food then. But working in this nightclub, in a restaurant, I had all the food in the world. And during the day, I was going to these-- to the lectures.

And this was until June 1941, when the war between Russia and Germany started, the 21st of June. And I was making my balance, nights, when I was listening to the radio. All of a sudden, the music stopped-- Hello, hello, [SPEAKING RUSSIAN]-- Stalin. And right away, we heard Lemberg, Lwów, it was another-- at least a city the size of Kraków. It was a half a million people or more.

Anyways, we was in war with Germany. So since I had the papers, the Red papers, I shall-- the next six hours, get myself right away in contact with the Army-- or the Navy-- but I was not in a hurry to do it. So I hide myself.

As a matter of fact, a Ukrainian waiter from the same bodega, the same nightclub where I was working in, they had-- the Ukrainians was in contact with the Germans. And they had-- and he told me exactly seven days will take-- and the Germans will be here in Lemberg. But you don't go. You come-- he was a bachelor, maybe 70 years old.

70?

70. He said you come to my house. I own a house on the outskirts, in the suburbs. And I will hide you. And when the Germans will come, I will get you back to work. You will go with me. And this was--

That's what happened?

Yeah.

How long were you--

I was seven days-- seven days hidden in the south. And then he was traveling with me daily. Because the first week was terrible. They was killing the Jews in the street in Lemberg-- the Ukrainians, not the Germans-- the Ukrainians.

How is that he was so different? What made him so different? How did you trust him, this particular fellow?

This fellow was an old timer, like I say, about 70 years old. The old timers, Ukrainian, they was brought up under Austrian government. And they was very much-- very much on the-- they was never-- never anti-Semitic.

As a matter of fact, they was pro Jews-- pro Jews. But the young generation, they was-- the terrible thing. Later, they was working for the Germans, killing Jews in the concentration camp-- the young generation, not

the old ones.

Anyways, as I start going back to work, and being aware that Kraków is under German, and I am here under German, so I manage to smuggle myself back to Kraków. But again, then, by this time, they liquidated the businesses of my father. They took everything to Germany-- merchandise, machinery, and everything. And they took away-- they took away our apartment. And the Jews had to leave the center of town, to the outskirts.

Is that where they were building a ghetto or--

No, before-- before the ghetto. The first phase was to move the Jews from the permanent settling, the apartment, to one or two rooms in the outskirts. Meantime, they start build the ghetto. And whoever had the Kennkarte, a Arbeitskarte, was allowed to come to the ghetto. He was necessary.

If not, they didn't allow them. They make-- they gather all the people that they didn't want to have in the ghetto, and they send them away. We didn't know where.

Anyways, my problem was-- when I returned to Kraków, my problem was that too many people knew that I was away. And I was afraid. So I was hidden.

In Kraków.

In the outskirts of Kraków. I was hidden by my parents, by Goyim, not to live with them together. And this took about four months, until my parents got the permits to go to ghetto-- to the ghetto. And when we came all together, then I was not worrying anymore. Because the Goyim what knew me, that I ran away from Kraków to Lemberg. This is the one-- because I was brought up with the Goyim. And they knew that I was away.

Where were you hiding for those four months? Where were you, in a house?

They rented a room for me.

And you were in that room?

Yes.

You stayed there for four months.

Yes, as a matter of fact, my wife was my girlfriend then. I was going steady with her. And she was coming to see me only nights-- evenings. So we walked a little around the house. During the day, I didn't dare to stick my nose out in the street.

Anyways, we came to the ghetto, and that was-- this was 1942.

Can you describe the ghetto, what it looked like, the formation, what it was--

They took a part of Kraków-- actually, Kraków had two parts, the main city, and the Vistula, the river, divided the other part, Podgorze, from the main city. And in Podgorze, they took a few streets, a few blocks of houses, mostly occupied before the war by the Jews.

But they built a wall, a high wall, around it, with one, two, three entrances from the outside. The streetcar was still going through the ghetto. But the Jews were not allowed to use it.

They're not allowed to go in and out.

Right. No, the streetcar-- we couldn't use the streetcar. But the streetcar was going through it. The Goyim was going through the ghetto in the streets of [PLACE NAME]. And everybody, like I said before, who had

the Kennkarte-- this means a paper that he is employable, was allowed to come to the ghetto.

Naturally, each one who had a three, four room apartment had to take three, four families in his apartment. So they crammed us together good.

Housing was very tight.

Very tight. As a matter of fact, in one room, I was with my father and mother, plus my sister, with her husband, and a child, in one room.

One room-- everyone slept in that same room?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, cooked, and slept, everything.

What there any medical attention there? Food?

Yes. The food was rationed, very tight. But was a black marketeering going on, where the Germans and the Polish police had their fingers in it. And the Jews was selling gold, and diamonds, and dollars in exchange for food.

Was there schooling there, any religious activities at all?

Yes. There wasn't any official synagogue.

But people prayed privately, in private homes?

Privately, yeah. But there was a hospital, or they made a temporary hospital. And later on, naturally, they destroyed everything. As far as our living in the ghetto, was very chaotic. Because we was-- beside the walls, they had those round up by the police, by the Ukrainian militia in the black uniforms, and the Lithuanian militia, and the Polish policja-- Polish-- what they call it? The policja-- policja-- what they call it-- the cops, the Polish cops.

The kapos.

Cops-- cops-- the policemen, no kapos. No, kapos was Jews-- but policemen. But our biggest trouble was with the Poles, even bigger than with the Germans. Because the German, when you didn't put your armband, and you was walking the streets of Kraków, the German would never recognize you that you are Jewish or not Jewish.

Roaming the street and they was bringing hundreds and hundreds of Jews to the Germans.

The Polish were.

Yeah.

Do you remember any smuggling at all-- in the ghetto, itself, was there any smuggling going on?

Yes.

Behind the wall of the ghetto.

Yes, there was-- very little, but there was. There was-- like for instance, the mafia here-- was certain individuals, who had the contacts with the police. And the police was looking through their fingers. And he had connections outside for smugglers to bring him certain articles, like bread, or meat, or whatever this is.

And he was making a tremendous profit on it. And mainly the underworld, the Jewish underworld, who meantime, got the position as policeman in the ghetto, all the underground.

Was there any resistance that you can remember in the ghetto? Any resistance at all?

Yes. As a matter of fact, I was partly involved in it. There was the Akiba-- Akiba, by Shimshon Draenger. In Lohamei HaGeta'ot, there's a big picture of Shimshon Draenger. He organized us. He was my school friend. We went through the schooling together.

And there was Liebeskind, Shimshon Draenger, and the brother of my brother-in-law, Benek Wexner. They was the leaders of the underground. And they decided not to go to the ghetto at all. They went on the [NON-ENGLISH]. But from time to time, they came. They organized us in the ghetto.

How did they get in?

They was jumping out of the streetcar when the streetcar was passing the ghetto. And naturally, they threw the bomb on the-- in the center of town, there was a big coffee house, a famous coffee house. I forgot the name of it.

And this is in the ghetto?

No.

In the center of town.

In town. And this coffee house was designed for the high officers of the German army. So they threw a bomb through the window, and they killed maybe 20 or 30 them. And they all got killed. They round them up, and they run away to the-- to the outskirts of Kraków. And the Poles gave them away. Each and every one was killed. Yeah.

As far as in the ghetto itself, was there resistance going on that you can recall?

We start organizing something. But they start to bring Jews-- liquidating other ghettos to our ghetto. All of a sudden, from 30,000 we was close to 80,000, without a special place to live. And they start to segregate people, all the younger children, and sent away, one after another.

And, finally-- this was in '42, in October, they made-- the [NON-ENGLISH]-- what this means, the Aussiedlung. They decided from the 80,000, to send away about 50, to leave only 30, and to cut the ghetto in half.

And naturally, all of my-- no-- two of my uncles, with their wife and their children, they was taken in this-- in this Aussiedlung. The oldest one, with his wife, was shot on the place in the ghetto. And I looked at the--

You saw this?

Oh, yeah. And--

Shot for what reason? Was this--

No reason.

Did he try to escape?

No, there was not a reason. This is the way they worked. And we was cramped from our side-- they liquidated the side we was, with my parents, and my grandmother, and my sister, and my brother-in-law, and their kid. And we was-- we went to the other side.

And they start-- they start-- on the end of '42, they start building outside of the ghetto, about 6 kilometers, the concentration camp, Plaszów. So they took a group of people for establishing this camp. And on March

the 13, '43, they liquidated the ghetto. And out of the 30,000, they allowed only 10,000 up to the larger. The rest was sent away.

My grandmother was shot then. She was 88 years old.

Where were the-- were the rest of them sent, where to? Do you know?

We didn't know where. We didn't know where, no idea-- just sent away. There was-- there was nobody giving us the information. Nobody came back telling us about where-- we heard the rumors that they sending them away to Ukraine or someplace else, but nobody knew for sure-- at least, I didn't know.

You said you were in-- you were in a concentration camp. Is that--

Yes, this was the first concentration camp.

Plaszów.

The Plaszów lager.

The one that was outside the ghetto.

I was over there until October 15, 1944. When the Russian front near it, they liquidated this concentration camp, and they sent me-- they send--

Who was in that camp with you? Were your parents with you in that concentration camp?

I beg your pardon?

Who was in the camp with you? Were you sent away--

I was, my father, and my mother, and my sister, and my brother-in-law, my girlfriend. I married her in the concentration camp.

In the camp?

In the camp. We married on June the 20th, 1943.

To get into the camp, before you got in, was there some sort of selection at all? How did they choose who was going to go in and who was not?

Now, with me was a peculiar stuff. When they liquidated all the other ghettos in '42, they established-- in Kraków, in the ghetto, they established a-- they took a couple big houses, and they established-- they established a place where they brought all the electrical appliances. And they needed somebody to be in charge of it, to repair it, and then send it to Germany.

My wife, my present wife, was one-- fiancée then-- was working then for the same outfit, the SS, in the Schneiderei.

Tailoring.

Tailoring, fixing up dresses coming from other ghetto, and this they were sending. So the Sturmbannführer liked her very much, and ask her, in the beginning, did she know anybody what she could recommend to head this electrical appliances department.

I was working pick and shovels then, on the Luft-- on the airstrip. And it was miserable. It was wintertime. And there wasn't any-- I was strong, fine, but without food, the snow and the rain, it was a quite an uncomfortable situation. So she recommended me. And he told me to get 20 best electricians in Kraków,

master electrician, and I will be in charge of them.

You've never done that sort of work before.

Hmm?

You've never done any sort of--

I never knew any more than changing a bulb. And this is-- then, when they liquidated the ghetto, was still the whole halls of the house is full of material to be repaired. So they cleaned up the ghetto from people, and they ask, after a week, all the people who was working in ghetto, to come back under police protect-- not protection. But the Germans was going with us back and forth to work, to the ghetto.

And we had quite not bad over there. Because we had the contact with the Poles. Because the ghetto was empty. And the condition was much better than working pick and shovel.

And then I was granted to have a wedding, on Sunday, the 20th of June, by the SS. And they brought my parents. They brought a rabbi. They brought her sister, brother-in-law, and the mother, my sister, my brother-in-law. And he give half a day off to all the 300 people working over there to attend this wedding.

How do you explain that? I mean this generosity.

Very simple. He was an invalid without a hand, a young boy.

This German commander?

Yes, yes. He was crazy. He was shooting on the sight without any reasons. He had a very soft heart as far as my wife is concerned. He never believed that my wife is not German. She said she specially went to camp because of me. So you can't ever figure them out. How? But this was the idea.

So you actually had a wedding ceremony.

I had a ceremony, a [NON-ENGLISH], like it should be.

With a rabbi.

A rabbi and everything.

And this was in the concentration camp or in the ghetto?

No, in the ghetto.

In the ghetto still.

In the ghetto, in the empty ghetto.

That's incredible.

Yeah-- not incredible. There are people alive who was attending this wedding. Yeah. Anyways, for the honeymoon, she went to the-- after the wedding, we went upstairs, back to the camp. So I went to the men lager, and she was-- she went to the women lager.

Great.

That's all.

Great honeymoon.

And then they sent her away in September, to Auschwitz-- In '44, September. And I was in Plaszów until October the 15th. And since September, I didn't know about her, anything.

What happened in Plaszów, though, when you arrived in the concentration camp, itself?

What do you mean?

What did they do with you? What sort of--

Oh, they-- everybody got an assignment to work. We was working.

As what?

I was working in Entlausung room.

What is that?

In a bathhouse, where the people was coming to get rid of the lice. So when they brought in a transport from, let's say, from Hungary, came 5,000 women. I had to undress them, take away their-- they gave me, everyone, the clothing. And I got to give them their lager clothing.

You were in charge of that?

I was not in charge. I was employed with it. There was quite a few people employed.

How long did that last for?

This lasted-- I I'm telling you, from 43rd March, I was until October '44. And they sended me away, and my father. My father was working in a [GERMAN]. They had work-- workplaces. They was making shoes over there, Schuhmacherei.

They was making dresses over there, the coat, sweaters. There was electrical. Was building motor, rebuilding motor, all kinds. There was a Schlosserie, all kinds of stuff.

Your father was employed as what?

As a shoe cutter.

A shoe cutter.

Yeah.

And your mother, what was she doing?

She was in the-- I believe she was in the sweater-- she was knitting-- knitting by hand for the Germans.

Anybody else?

My sister was over there.

What was she doing?

One moment, I will ask my wife. She will-- Jusi! Stop it.

So she was a Schneiderei also?

Yeah, yeah.

In tailoring.

Yeah, yeah, and my wife was Schneiderei. Everybody was doing something.

What sort of relationship existed between the family, you and your family?

Yes, we was getting together, evenings, after the evening appell on the appellplatz. You know what it is?

No.

OK. Every evening and every morning, before work and after work--

Counting.

Counting on the appellplatz, regardless of the weather. After this, we had a couple hours what we could eat, wash ourselves, and get together. It was-- we could go to the women's side, and they could come to our side.

How close was it guarded, that camp?

Hmm?

How close was it guarded?

Oh, they electrically-- electric wiring around the camp. And inside the camp was the Jewish kapo, the Jewish police.

What sort of-- how did you relate to that?

That was-- one of the factors why we get married, because, as I told you before, the kapos, they was mostly the underground people. And they was after every young girl who was not married. And that was one of the factors for them decided to make the wedding. So she will get rid of the kapos over there. But we had over there quite a few animals.

Any interaction between you and kapos?

No. No, no.

No incidents at all?

Huh?

No incidents, any incidents?

No, I didn't have any incidents.

Or your family, any members of your family?

I beg your pardon?

Any members of your family?

No, no. As a matter of fact, let's put it this way, nobody wanted-- nobody wanted to have any bitter relation with the police. Because they could finish you if they want to like this.

Without any reason or excuse?

No, they don't have a reason. No.

Can you describe just what a typical day was like in the concentration camp for you?

Was getting up very early. I believe the appell-- the counting in the morning was probably about 6:00 in the morning. Then we-- everybody go to his assignment. And lunchtime, we was getting the soup. It was coming, the big-- the big--

Pots?

Yeah, yeah. But the food was terrible-- terrible, terrible-- terrible food.

Was that the first meal of the day, or was there something in the morning?

What?

Was it the first meal of the day?

I believe in the morning we had only a coffee. That's all we had. And once a day, we-- in the evening, we got the bread. On every barrack-- the barrack-- the barrack had a man in charge of the bread. And as we come evenings, he was giving everybody 400 grams of bread. And this bread, you had to divide by yourself to have for morning and the whole day, and a soup, that's all we was getting.

And the soup was mostly-- looks like spinach, but it was maked out of-- out of leaves or something. Who knows what was it. I don't know. I really don't know. We was so hungry that we ate anything.

The same food every day, the bland-- the same--

Mostly, every day the same food. Mostly, the same food. Nothing like meat or anything. Even sugar was maybe 2-- 5 gram of sugar a week or something like this. Margarine, a little drop of margin for a week-- starvation diet.

So our stomach, naturally, shrinked. And we was very hungry. But there was some black marketeering in the barracks going on. Whoever had the money, so he could buy a piece of bread or something, like the cigarettes or whatever. But most of the people were starving. I will say 99% of the people were starving.

And we was working. Depending on the type of assignment you had, you was watched by the-- by a Jewish kapo. And from time to time, they came and they made a unexpected visit, the SS, unexpected visit. And there was a lot of shooting going on, without any reason, just on sight.

What-- who made up the camp mostly? Mostly Jews or non-Jews as well?

Then they built a Polish lager to. They build a gypsy lager too. And they build a whore house for the Germans and for the Lithuanians. And they took the Polish women to it, right joining us.

And then, in 1944, in the beginning, they brought in from Germany Germans from-- from the penitentiary, the lifers. And they assigned them to be kapos. And they was all professional killers, each and every one-- professional killers. So we had some--

[BACKGROUND TALKING]

There's a paper boy. Anyways--

What--

[BACKGROUND TALKING]

Was there a relationship to non-Jews in the camp at all?

We didn't have any contact.

Not at all?

No.

No Polish or gypsies, or--

No, no, no-- no contact whatsoever. No contact-- they were strictly-- strictly separated.

Did you encounter any-- were there any forms of resistance in the camp at all?

No.

None that you can remember? Were the attempts to escape at all?

The attempts to escape was only in the beginning. Like I said, the 13th of March, '43, when they transferred us from the ghetto to the camp, a few of the people escaped. Between them, my sister-- my older sister with a child.

Had escaped?

Escaped, yeah.

What happened to her?

I beg your pardon?

What happened to her?

I helped her to go through the-- through the canals, what you call--

Tunnel?

What?

Tunnels?

Not tunnels, sewer pipes.

Sewer system.

Sewer system, she went out of the ghetto. And my cousin, who is now in New York, a engineer, a civil engineer, I brought them down by the first occasion, when they returned to the ghetto to work. After the ghetto was empty, after five or six days, they called us back. So I took them in my group.

And as he come to the ghetto, I gave him a carbide lamp, and a piece of bread, and he escaped through a-- through a sewage system.

Is there any reason you didn't escape as well at that time?

Yes, yes. First of all, I had parents over there in the camp. They didn't. My sister had a three-year-old baby, and she knew that no way she can--

Pass.

--pass. So this was this. I wouldn't leave my parents and run away. But like I say, my oldest uncle, who was shot with the mother, this was his son. So he didn't have any parents anymore. So he did escape. And there was-- then there's-- even before we went to the camp, there was-- one boy escaped from our group, when we was-- when I was then working for the SS.

And naturally, what they did, they picked up another boy, the same guy who gave me the permission of the wedding, gathered this all 300. And picked up on that boy and shot him on sight in front of us, just as retaliation because the other one escaped.

Well, there wasn't any talk of--

Mass escape, no.

Or resisting-- I mean, as time went on, people-- you didn't know what will happen.

You don't understand it. Toby, you got to understand that the Germans, with the final solution, they worked point by point. First of all, they took away all the leaders and destroyed them. Secondary, they took away your personal life. You didn't have a apartment. You didn't have your bed. You didn't have your belongings. They degraded you to this point, that by the time--

And with the-- with all they were shooting and destroying, what you saw, you got so psyched up and so hardened inside. There was completely no resistance possible. They took away from you the will of living-- no, the will of resisting. Never the will of living, because that's an instinct.

Nobody wants to die, no matter how bad he is off. But as far as the resisting is concerned, if you put somebody in a situation like this, where his hair, he doesn't have the hair. You haven't got what to dress. You haven't got what to eat. Haven't got no home. He haven't got nothing, just the bare life left.

What's the point? Where are you going to run? Between the Poles-- if you knew that they are just waiting for you, you shall-- they shall get the 5 kilos of sugar for delivering you. There's was no difference between our Jews and the Jews in Eastern Poland, where they had the White Ruthenia, where they had some minorities. And they had a lot of forests around them.

They could escape.

They could escape. We didn't have anything. We was in the industrial part of Poland. There was nothing, no place to escape for us, no place.

And, like I said, finally, nobody wants to die, except, yes, like Shimshon Draenger. He knew he is going to die. But he said, fine, if I'm going to die, let them die too. But how many idealists was it like this? Takes a character to build up.

Yeah.

So this was this story.

Now in the concentration camp, again, was there some sort of cultural activity at all, or religious activity in the concentration camps? Nonexistent? Privately, in the homes?

No homes-- what kind of homes? You had a barrack of 2,000-3,000 people. Each and every one was three stage-- three stage-- this one beds. How can you do anything?

No private sabbath observances.

No privacy whatsoever, nothing-- nothing, nothing. Yes, when a holiday came, Passover, or Yom Kippur, or something like this, whoever remembered something-- we didn't have any Siddurim, we didn't have anything.

Was this-- Plaszów, was this the only camp you were in?

Oh, no.

What happened after that? How did you get out of that?

I didn't get out of it. They send me over. When the Russian came near, like I said, October 15, 1944, they send me to Nieder Silesia, to the industrial part of Germany, to a factory.

Who else was sent with you?

My father went with me and my brother-in-law went with me.

And your mother?

No. We was divided. The men lager was sent separately, and the women were sent separately. Anyways, we went-- first of all, we went to Gross-Rosen. That was the most terrible camp I ever was.

And where was that located?

By Breslau. In Germany.

How were you sent there?

In the--

A transport, or?

Transport.

In a train?