

Hello my name is Sara Weinberger. And I'm here today to interview Mr. Mayer Bitterman about his experiences in the Holocaust. Mr. Bitterman, why don't you start off by talking a little bit about your life today, by telling us, first of all, a little about your family.

My family, everybody OK. My boy-- my son is married. He lives in Chesterland. And he works with retarder-- he got master's degree, works with the retarded children. And another boy is in medical school. He's in Canton. And he's doing pretty good.

And Mr. Bitterman, how old are you now?

I'm 83-- 84-- what I say? 63.

63.

63 year old. Yeah.

And what are you doing with yourself these days?

Now, I retired. I was forced to retired in '62. And I try do everything what is possible just to keep it up.

What kind of work did you do before you retired?

I was electrician, a union electrician, and was very slow. And I was forced to retire. And where do you and your wife-- so it's just and your wife at home right now?

Yeah.

And where are the both of you living?

Live in Heights, 3325 Tullamore Road, Cleveland Heights.

So you've done quite a lot since coming to Cleveland?

Yeah, right.

Why don't we start a little bit by going back, now, from the present to the years before the war? First of all, why don't you start by telling us where it was that you grew up?

No, I was-- I finished regular school. And I went after to business school.

And where was all this?

In Kraków, Poland. And I was working in a store. And after I was-- and my brother was-- he was electrician, learned to be electrician. And he finished school. And sometime, I helped him out. I learn electrical too from him. And that's what happened till and after.

Who else was in your family? You said you had a brother. Was he older or younger than you?

He's younger, one year younger.

One year younger?

Right.

And did you have any other brothers or sisters?

No, no more.

And how about your parents? Can you tell us a little about them?

My parents, they was-- he was a tailor. And he was working. And these-- keep it up us. And then he was working, helping by the last time before the war.

And your mother?

Mother was a housewife.

What was it like where you grew up in Kraków?

Well, Kraków living was already-- but the close to the war, was very bad for Jewish people because the antisemite start getting bad because was influenced from Germany. And there was a lot of bad things. There was lot of-- was like segregation. And every-- in the colleges, they tell them to sit different places. This was hard to get education certain time, certain places.

Did you have any problems with your education?

I didn't have problem because I didn't went higher. It was a little tough at that time.

And did you live in a neighborhood that was mostly Jewish?

Mostly Jewish, that's a Jewish suburb.

And how did things start changing in that neighborhood? How did you know something was wrong?

Know the-- right away, even before the war started getting bad because influence was all kinds non-Jewish store write the name, the non-Jewish, Jewish write that that-- that was not that, whether they write non-Jewish. You didn't wear a star or something before the war. Or they just was little bit on-- German got influence already. Build up antisemite.

So you kind of knew that something was going wrong.

Something was going wrong, right.

How old were you at that time?

Oh, I was 17-18 at that time, 19. When they broke off the war, I was 19 because I was born 1920.

And was your brother living at home with you at that time?

Yeah, we all lived together.

Was your family religious?

What?

Was your family religious?

I didn't hear.

Was your family religious?

Yeah, it was half, not too religion, no, the halfway-- not like Hasidim, what they call very religious.

How did you celebrate the holidays and observe Judaism while you were living in Poland?

Oh, in home. And they went in the synagogue and everything. It was pretty good that time. Yeah, we got nice synagogue, big one. It was almost run by the school and everything.

Were you involved in any Zionist organizations while you were growing up?

Yeah. From beginning, I involved in some Akiba, they call, Zionist organization. And after, I didn't involve and just tried keep make a living.

And did your parents speak Polish at home or Yiddish? Or what kind of language was spoken?

Polish and Yiddish-- Jewish.

Was your family a close family?

What?

Was your family close?

Yeah, very close family.

What kinds of things did you used to do together for fun in Poland?

Oh, that's like going synagogue or going on parks, and going in temple, going downtown, walk around, and see a show, or something like that.

Is Kraków a pretty city?

Kraków is a nice, big city. It's a very-- like museum, they got big museums. They got big-- they got kings, all from kings, from museums, and everything.

Did you have any ideas at that time about what you wanted to do for the rest of your life when you were--

Well--

--in your teens?

--I don't know. It's just still was too young to just take decision, actually. In case it would be good, maybe I would go in school, finish gymnasium and college.

Is the gymnasium the same as our high school?

It's a little different. It's different. I got maybe about, I would say, about 10-11 years school and three business school. And that's almost-- because the war broke off my time. Was start getting bad. Situation when--

So it really interrupted your education.

Yeah, start-- situation started getting bad when Hitler took over Germany.

Did you experience any personal antisemitism at that time while you were growing up?

Oh, yeah, when it was-- before the war? Yeah, when you were walking on the street, you must get-- when they recognize I'm Jewish, sometime, a person get ahead, or the bank, or the walkway, or the-- something like that. Certain-- there was a lot of bad organization.

So those things happen to you directly?

Yeah, that happened a lot of things sometime.

What did you do when that would happen?

Just walk away or there, that's all the best what you could do.

Did you have any non-Jewish friends or neighbors?

No. Most of them was Jewish section. No, there-- sometime, I meet a lot of in school. And there was-- in business school, there were-- we were together going. And I meet a lot of them. There was a lot of nice guys.

Did any of the non-Jewish people you know change when all this was going on?

That's what I hear, a lot of them change when the war broke off. They took over. They turn badly to certain people.

When you knew things started to get bad, how did you know things were getting real bad?

Well, you hear all kinds of papers, and the neighbors talking, and that. You hear all kind rumors.

And what did your family do? What did your family do?

What?

Did you make any kind of plans or talk about it?

No, there's-- it's no plans we can. You can do nothing, except you got a visa to leave the country or the something.

Did you-- your family talk about what was happening and make any decisions?

No, we talk always about that or the-- we could do nothing.

So you kind of just sat tight?

Sat down and see what's happens, what the future going bring.

Did anyone in your family ever talk about leaving?

The country?

Uh-huh.

Sometime, they tag-- they think to leave to Israel or they're just talking.

But did you have any friends that did that, that actually left?

Yeah, the some of them left, although not too much. It was awfully hard, awfully hard to go. It was not so easy because that time, the country was not Jewish. They was under English. And there was quite bad to emigrate. And it was tough everything.

How did you know when the war first broke out?

Oh, the-- from the paper. Because German wants to attack, they want to take this, Danzig and Gdynia. And

they wants to take away from Poland, that that's what the war-- and that was the excuse to break the war. And then did.

Can you remember that day that you actually found out?

Yeah, I remember, yeah.

Did you and your family talk then?

No, what you-- what-- you couldn't do nothing to that.

What did you think, then, when you heard that?

No, we couldn't do nothing. We just wait what's going to happen. And I was waiting, maybe I be drafted.

Into the Polish Army?

It was everything-- I think so was everything bad because most Poland where we lived, Kraków, was like Schlesien, they called Galicia by-- over there were a lot of them changing to German and German organized. Was very bad, just like a knife in the back. There was very-- everything was espionage. And there was against traitors.

So a lot of the Polish people went and aligned themselves with the Germans?

A lot of Polish people traitors, the terms was white German or the white Poles, or the something like that. And that's what happened. We was surrounded by every place. Because it was-- Kraków was not too far from-- near German border. And that's what happened.

How did your life begin to change as the war broke out?

Hmm?

How did your life begin to change as the war broke out?

Well, I tried the best.

When did things finally start happening to your family?

Oh, when the German attack and come to Poland was 1939, right around that time. And after when they come and then start-- right away, start very bad, getting bad.

What happened?

They started with you couldn't walk on the street sometime because they catch you to work. And they get all kind regulation, all kind. They tell the person have so much money and the-- you came-- after 5 o'clock, you have to be home. And when you walk on the street, they catch you to work, or somebody pass you, they beat. And they cut the beards the religious people. And it was awfully bad. It was not safety. You have to take chances.

So you were confined to your home in the evenings? You couldn't go out of the house?

Yeah, right.

Did anything ever happen to you? Did you ever get caught going down the street?

Yeah, I was caught couple times, or those lucky come back sometime. A lot of them, like 1939, after a week, they encircled the whole section, Jewish section. And there was about 60 people was killed just to watch

through the window what happened.

You saw that?

No, I didn't saw that. No, after this, we find out that were happen. And 60 people get killed that time. And they took everything what they could from each house, each store. They load up the trucks and everything for two or three days. And they took all silver, and rings, and watches, and anything with value. They rob. They come with the Germans. And there was a lot-- it was about 60 people.

Did you know any of those people?

60 people dead. No, some of them, I know on the street. That was the-- quite bad. That was the whole Jewish section.

Did your family and yourself continue to work during this time?

No, you couldn't work. There was-- at that time, it was in the house. You couldn't go. It was dangerous to look out because they shoot right to the window. They kill.

So you had to stay in your house--

Stay in the homes.

--all day?

And then what happened, and when they come in, they took everything. And we help them to load the truck, that up, what everybody have.

And they came in-- did they come into your home?

Yeah, they come.

And what happened when they came to your home?

No, they come in. We took the stuff. We take down what we got. And we load up the trucks. And they rob everything.

So they took all your valuable possessions?

Yeah, all valuable possession.

With your family not working, how were you able to get food?

Well, that-- still person was working. And what we got, we sell. And we bought. And we tried hide it what we can.

Were you able to go out to buy food? Or how did you get food?

Yeah, you could go out, although you took lot of risks because every time they say it, some truck come, and pick up, and catching to work. And lot of places was dangerous. When some German was killed, they hanged by the Polacks by 20-30, right on the street a lot of places.

Was there a certain area of Kraków that was walled off that you weren't allowed to go past that area?

No, not from beginning. After 1940, they make a ghetto. There was a suburb Kraków they called Podgórze. And that's-- lot of time, they catch on the street. A lot of time they catch on the street about 30-40 people. And they disappear. And after, we know, they kill them.

So your parents, and your brother, and you continued to live together during this time?

Lived together. And he was doing electrical works, get up in the morning. And I do. And we went. And a lot of time, I was there. They call Jewish people. And I was working in a place in a suburb. They took about 100. And there, there was the swamps. And the traffic, we dig over there. And we make a work over there, without a pay, without a nothing.

So it was like slave labor?

Like slave labor.

How many hours a day did you do this kind of work?

Eight hours, 10 hours.

Did they--

You have to come back before 5:00 from beginning because you couldn't walk more than.

What time would you start in the morning? About 6 o'clock, 7:00.

And did they feed you during this time?

No, no feeding.

So you worked for eight to 10 to 12 hours with no food.

Yeah, for nothing, yeah.

And what were your parents doing during this time?

No, he was a tailor. And he still was working. He got his customers. And that's what happened.

So he went-- how long was your father able to work?

Well, he was working till 1943 in ghetto too. Some of them were-- a lot of people, they couldn't-- they didn't take all of them in ghetto. A lot of them, they have to move out from there. Because those what was born in Kraków, they let them go to the ghettos. Those were not, they move out different places.

And you were born in Kraków?

Yeah, Kraków. And yeah, my father was not born in Kraków, what they call already.

But they were allowed to stay in?

Yeah, allowed us. Have to get special places to go. You have to-- at that time, we have to be lucky to go in the ghetto.

So the lucky ones?

The lucky one-- because nobody could live somewhere outside.

And did you have any family that had to leave the ghetto?

Oh, yeah. I had a lot of friends, a lot of would have to leave different suburbs, different places.

Did you think it was going to be this bad before the war?

No, I didn't accept that. I didn't accept. I didn't accept German people would do something-- such a thing like that. That's unbelievable.

As the war continued, what happened for you and your family?

Well, the war-- after we was living in ghetto, there was all bad. Wintertime, we used to go cleaning snow, every young person, and till succeed, they have to go once a week go cleaning snow. And by that, you get sometime be lucky you was not beaten by the SS or by the soldier. He was lucky.

Did you get beaten?

Sometime, I get beaten and sometime not. There was belong what places we was working.

So in the winters, you ended up shoveling snow all the time?

And shovel snow, and work, and that, and everything.

And how about your brother, what did he do?

My brother was working with electrical work. And he was working on buildings, and houses, and that.

Was that also for the Germans' slave labor?

No, he was working, like for a contractor.

How was he able to do that?

Well, that's-- he was working for the German government. They sent him working in the places.

Did he get paid for this?

I think-- no, he didn't get. He get something, although not-- nothing, almost-- it's just like nothing.

Did anyone help you during this time?

Nobody help that time, nobody. Everybody was-- got his own problems.

What happened as the war went on?

Well, after I was sent to a-- they picked me up. There was a-- they got a place where they send you for-- where you went over there. And they send you on the job, like for workmen, like a German organization, Jewish together. And they work. And they sent on places to work. And they send me a company-- Riedel, they call, name Riedel. That was a German company from. And there, we was working on the buildings and working as-- after was 1940, I was working in buildings, all kind jobs, the construction company.

Did you live at home while you were doing this?

Yeah, we work from home, from the ghetto, from everywhere.

And when did you start to work?

Transportation-- a Jewish person couldn't use transportation, like buses. They're not allowed. I mean, person was walking for some places to walk about 20 mile, 10 mile, 20-30 mile.

To get to work?



Get to work.

How far did you have to walk?

Once, when I was in ghetto, when was-- one time, I went to airport, was about 30 miles, I think so, to walk in the morning and come back at night. Jewish people couldn't use transportation.

Did you do this--

Because wear-- we wear at that time bands with Jewish star. And somebody, when they catch with that, could order disappear, or they get kill, order something.

How were you able to do this?

Well, it was rough.

What kept you going?

Luck. Everybody luck. That time was not so bad. It was-- according what happened later, this was more like gold because you still didn't bump in every place with those SS Germans. Because there were certain places you walk-- keep walking and you didn't see them. Like airport, you dig someplace trenches for cable for lights-- I was digging cable for lights. And you don't see them. So I come back. And that's it. Went in ghetto. And you have pass to go through and walk.

How many days a week did you work?

Five days or six days a week.

So if you were walking all that time to get to work, what time would you get up in the morning to go?

Oh, get up about 6 o'clock in the morning and keep walking. I would get so used to walking, I was going alone.

Did you do this with other friends? Or were you by yourself?

Oh, a lot of them. Bunch of them was walking. And they meet on the road. And we went to the airport and every place.

What were the conditions like in the ghetto by this time?

Well, ghetto was encircled with bricks. There was walls about 12-13 feet up. And there was walls. And there was entrance for the-- there was Polish police, what they was by the entrance. And you show them the pass, you went in.

And did the living conditions worsen?

Well, everybody tried do the best what they could.

Were you able to practice your religion during that time?

What?

Were you able to practice your religion during that time?

No, religion was not allowed. The children couldn't go in school, no, nothing. For Jewish person, could do nothing-- no school, no nothing. And sometime, we lucky, nobody get hurt. Sometime, lot of people get

killed going back to work. Because every SS man was-- most of them, they could kill and everything. And they get better rank, whether they're from corporal to sergeant or something because they kill. It was a bunch of bandits.

Did anyone try to pray in secret, or observe the holidays, or go to school in secret that you know?

Holidays was-- holidays, everybody pray in home. That's all we could do. Yeah. When they meet sometime in the synagogue or the some-- they couldn't be-- there was-- in ghetto was not synagogues. Was maybe one-two, or they was scared to meet together. They would just stay away. And they pray. Everybody can pray within the buildings or there, something like that.

Did your family continue to live in your own house? Or did you have to move in the ghetto?

No, you-- in this ghetto, you have to-- you couldn't live in the city. You could live only in the ghetto. Jewish person only live in the ghetto.

So your family had to move?

Yeah, have to move in the ghetto, yeah.

Could you tell us a little bit about where your family moved, into what kind of a living situation?

Oh, that was like squeeze in one room about three, four people. That's something like that. Because when they took so many pushed in the ghetto, they couldn't get too much in one place.

So who was living together, then, in that one room?

Oh, I was living with my brother and my parents. There was-- and that the place was Podgórze. That's a suburb from Kraków ghetto.

And this was in an apartment building?

It's apartment, most apartment-- old apartments building.

So for four of you living in one room, that must have changed--

One room and a small, that's was-- you're lucky you get that. Certain places was worse, was about two, three with this because there were so many people.

That must have changed the way you lived a great deal to have the four of you in one room together.

Well, you have to be-- everything was changed. You have to do the best. That's all what what's happened.

Could you say a little bit about how things changed for your family being all closed up in that one room?

Well, we adjust what we can. That's all. You couldn't do nothing, couldn't change it. There was no help. Nobody help us from another country. We was just like sitting duck and waiting till somebody shoot or do something.

Is that what you thought would happen?

It could have happened any day. But then it's-- every day was somebody's mind come out doing that. And that's what happened. After 1941, when the Russian war broke off, they started get worse that time. And it was.

When your family was all living together in the ghetto, did your father work, then, at that time?

Yeah, he was doing a little work, yeah. Sometime, little Poles got passes to go in. They get fix and they paid a little bit. Or some Jewish person needs something fixing. And there, they-- that's what we keep moving, what's patch it up what we could.

Was that allowed or would he have gotten in trouble if he were caught doing that?

Yeah. And after what they do, they bring to the soldier, from the soldier, from the army, German, brought the lot of stuff to fix too, what they have to do it for nothing, everything.

How did your father react to all this?

He could do nothing. That's all. Eat breakfast, eat lunch when you can, and that's it.

How were you able to get food at that point?

Well, we-- everybody tried their best. That's always.

Did they sell food outside? Or how would you go about getting food?

No, there was-- I went to work. When I could buy something, when I could bring it through, with luck, I bring it in.

So that-- you would have to sneak it in?

Yeah, right, bring it in with a luck.

And for the people who couldn't sneak it in, how would they get food?

Well, everybody's-- I don't know how, but everybody try fight it through.

Were people allowed to have any food stores open? Or were there rations given out?

There were some stores where the-- that was not like a store.

And how about your mother? What did she do during this time?

Well, try do the best like a housewife, try do cook and that. And that's it.

So your eating habits must have changed a great deal.

Well, have been change quite a little bit. What we could, that's everybody do the best.

With people being that crowded together, was there a lot of illness, a lot of sickness?

Yeah, was a lot. As usual, Polish people and all kind Jewish, they usual know to live more together. And they keep clean. Everybody keep clean. There was-- not even was eight, 10. And not even when you find eight, 10 person living in a room in Polish, not even when the Jewish, you could eat from the floor, not even was 10 kids because they keep clean everything. And that for keep clean over there too.

And how about--

Was rough, but they keep.

How about your brother? Did he continue to work?

Yeah, he went to work through. He got pass. He went to work. And somehow, he come back from different places.

Did you worry about things happening to people in your family?

You lived that time, you worry every day. It was not to worry. It's you worry all the time. It just was not time where you not worry. Because you live on the bandits' hand-- Nazi SS or the all kind. You never know what kind law going come out next.

So times we're very, very frightening.

Very bad, very bad.

What happened as the war progressed?

In 1944-- 1940-- what was it? 1941, the war broke out with Russian. '42, they started getting bad. There was a lot of killing already in the small towns, every places. They start-- Jewish people start get kill. And a lot of them, every-- they took all-- they eliminate lot of small towns, lot of that. And it was very bad hearing all over.

How did you know what was going on?

We know everything.

How did you find out?

Well, we just-- every rumors went from one place to another. Bad rumors go quick. Good rumors don't go so fast.

And during this whole time, you were still living in the same room in the ghetto?

Yeah. After 19-- what was it, 1941, '42, they start liquidating the ghettos. And they start putting people in they called Zwangslager. That was like they build barracks. And they live over there. I used to work-- after they eliminate, they make like-- they took all people together, put them on train. In 1942 start-- very bad start going.

Were the Zwangslater, you said they were?

Zwangslager-- that was like before concentration camp. It was just people worked, didn't get pay. And they get maybe a bowl soup a day with a piece of bread.

And those were within the ghetto or outside the ghetto?

That was outside the ghetto already, build some camps.

Were you put in one of those?

Yeah, I was put in. And I work on the airport on the company Riedel.

When did that happen that you were removed?

I would say about 1942, '43.

And was your whole family put there?

My parents was still in ghetto. My brother was working ghetto.

And how did they take you?

Well, they called right from this office. They got a office over there.

Where you were working?

Yeah. I was living separate and over there in a barrack.

I guess what I'm trying to understand is when did you first get separated from your family?

Oh, by 1942, something like that-- '42, '43. In that time, they make already-- 1942, '43, they start-- they took the half ghetto out. And they send them to death camps already.

And where were your-- did your parents remain in the ghetto?

They happened this-- that time remain.

And when-- do you remember the day they separated you from your parents?

Yeah. That's-- this was 1942. I'll just take the coffee. Yeah, that's what happened that time.

And they took you to that? What was the name of that again?

What?

The place that you-- the barracks that you went to.

Yeah, on the airport.

And what happened there?

No, that's-- I was working over there. And that's it.

What kind of work were you doing?

Oh, we do electrical cables for lights for the airport.

Were you taken away with anyone that you knew?

Hmm?

Were you with any people that you knew when you were taken there?

Oh, a lot of them, yeah, a lot of them. There still some of them living.

And how long did you remain there?

What?

How long did you remain there?

Oh, till 19-- after they eliminate the ghetto, they send away my parents. And they eliminate the ghetto, the parents sent away, was still the ghetto. My brother was lucky be over there. And after the-- my brother was belong to organization. They was fighting. And he was caught. And they took him away from the ghetto. I don't know what happen.

When did that happen?

1943, I think so.

How did you find out about it?

Oh, they come right away. The rumors come right away because they encircled the ghetto at that time. And there was Jewish collaborator. That's why he got killed through them. Because they found out where he was.

And what kind of work was he doing for them?

That time, my brother? Electrical work.

Yeah, but you said they took him away because he was involved--

He was working on the-- in some building in the ghetto at that time. That's-- there was Jewish collaborator what they helped the Germans. And that's what happened. Was some bad people too.

Was there any particular reason that they decided to turn your brother in?

Huh?

Was there any particular reason that they specifically decided to turn your brother in?

Well, that's-- it was just an organization were fighting the German. And that's what happen.

Did that organization have a name?

I don't know that time, not. I didn't know. I was that time on the airport, that time. I was not in the ghetto that time.

So he was involved in some sort of resistance?

Yeah, right.

And did you ever find out what happened to him?

No, I couldn't go right now. We know it's-- forget about it. He couldn't. When they're in their hand, you can do nothing.

And your parents were taken away after that time?

No, they was take away the-- before. Was take away. And we don't know, some death camp. That's all we know.

And that was also while you were living near the airport. And you found out about that through the rumors?

Yeah, right.

During that time, did you ever think that you would see your parents and your brother again?

No, never. Yeah. Special they are not so young. And when are young, got still chance. Or the older person didn't have a chance.

Did you have any other family?

Yeah, I got-- that's what-- that's my wife, my mother's sister was living. They got a family. I got one cousin left from eight, one person.

And they were also in the Kraków ghetto?

Yeah, they was in Kraków ghetto. Eight-- one person only live. And I got a cousin in New York. Was eight in the family. And I got another one cousin, although she died. She get sick in New York.

And how long did you continue to stay near the airport?

Oh, the airport, I keep till 19-- what was that? Let me see, 1943, I think so, and about-- from 1943, they liquidate airport. German come over there. The Nazi come over there. And they killed the doctor. They killed the wife doctor. They kill a couple people. And they took half into Kraków.

That time, they got Plaszów. There was a concentration camp, Plaszów. And they got-- and they took half, about 30 people, they took to a mile that was near Kraków. Plaszów, that was like a suburb from Plaszów over there. And they took 20 people. And I work in the factory. There was by Email company. Oh, excuse me. They called Email company. And they do over there some-- I think so that was for hand grenade. They do a factory over there. And we was working.

This was by that-- what the name Schindler. That was the-- he was the owner from the building. And he was the owner of the building. And he-- one thing, he protect the people over there, was you hear a lot of story about him. He died, I think so, in Israel. He was a German, Czech, something like that-- Czech, born in Czech, what was little mixed with German. Although he-- we always hear the rumors from Plaszów what they-- every day, people got killed over there, 10 of them, 15. That was the Goth. That was a concentration camp officer. And he was the killer.

And this was the people in Plaszów?

And we hear from the Plaszów because we was in the suburb. We was lucky. At that time, they put us a mark on the hand, KL. They put us in the-- every suit where we were, when we got still our own, now, there was mark with stripes.

So they were like prisoner suits?

Like prisoner stripes with yellow stripes. And we work for a bowl soup a day and a bowl soup in the camp because it was-- the camp was near the factory. Well, that was the good camp what they call. Because after the war, this-- he protect quite a little bit the people. Because when like Goth come, and then the bad men, the murder, Jung, Goth, those officers, German SS officers, he was working with them. And they was drinking together. And they give me-- he give them to drink and everything. And that's what happened. Was little-- we didn't want too much problem over there.

How many hours a day did you work?

12 hours 6:00 to 6:00.

And what were the living conditions like?

Living condition was in a barrack, like bunks over there. Bunks was.

How many people were to a barracks?

Oh, every one was living in a bunk, yeah, like up and down were four high, built with wood. And we was living.

What time would you go to work in the morning? 6 o'clock the morning. That was right next-- the factory was right next. And they was watched by-- there was-- most of them, the watchmen was SS, the Russian, Ukrainian, Slovenian. One time, we get up in morning, there was no watchmen. Every one of them ran away.

And how did those watchmen treat you?

Those watchmen didn't bother too much.

Why did they run away?

Because there was like Vlasov, the General Vlasov, the army-- the-- what they collaborate with Germany. When they saw the Russians start coming, they was already on Polish border, they know the war is getting more on the Russian side. And that's what they ran away sometime. We didn't have no watchmen one time. There was like-- each barracks on each corner, there was like big concentration camp like you see in jail, prisons, those big towers. And there was machine guns over there. And that's why.

How many people were in this camp, in this labor place?

Oh, that's by Schindler over there? There was about-- I would say was about maybe about 1,000, less than 1,000, something like that. It's a small camp.

Were there men and women?

Men on one side, women on other side.

And did the men and women work together doing the same sort of work?

Yeah, they worked together in that inside.

Could you describe in detail what kind of work you did?

Oh, that time, I was working on a machine over there by-- and I was working. And I was doing some welding and doing all kind work from the welding, do machine press, and something like that, and all kind work over there.

So you felt that was-- that you were lucky to be in this situation?

This one was lucky. I was not in Plaszów. Plaszów was next to the-- main concentration camp Plaszów was very dangerous. Every day, people get killed over there. Just by walking on the street, the guy walk on the street, just was fun, shoot people. Like just-- they got over there all kind.

Over there, they was working on bricks. There was working on what they call Steinbruch, they call it, like with stones from the mountains. They blast the mountains. And some of them went working all kind work over there. But it was every day, every morning. And another thing-- before work every morning, we went over there in the middle of the barrack. We stand for counting if somebody didn't escape.

Did people escape?

No, that time, nobody escaped. Would they escape, didn't have no place to go. And they call us every morning and every night, everybody was counted. And when somebody miss or they fall asleep, we staying hours, winter and summer.

How long did that take?

Oh, till they count everybody.

So that could be quite a couple of hours, I would imagine.

No, not too long because when they counted, it was about eight, 10 stay like that. And they counted over quick and went back.



You said this happened during the summer and the winter. Did you wear the same clothing in the summer in the winter?

No, that time, we wear our clothes, that time. When we were by Schindler, we wear our clothes.

And you said, they painted the stripes on.

They painted stripes and that's all.

And did you--

That one was lucky because some places was very bad. A lot of places was very bad. This was just like-- you didn't have good living, couldn't do nothing. Or they just-- you couldn't-- places where you hear get killed, death, this was not. Over there, this was lucky. There was two places. We work and go in factory. Day went over, come back, and lucky, next day come.

What happened-- you said they had divided the airport in two. And half the people went to where you went. And where did the other people go? Where were they sent?

Which?

From when you were living by the airport.

Oh, that was before. By the airport, we went the barracks. And we walk to that work. And we get a bowl soup and a piece of bread. That's all-- no pay, nothing.

But when they liquidated that, they sent-- half of you came to work with--

Half they sent to Plaszów. And half they send to Email. Email. They who went to Plaszów, I don't know what happened. And they who went to Email, there was-- that's what was by the NKF and Email. That's were.

That's where you were.

Right.

And how long did you remain there?

Oh, till 1944. 1944, I was over there. And after the half of them went-- because the Russian army start coming closer. They eliminate that. And half of them went to-- we went-- one day, we went to Plaszów. We stay on all day. And after, they send us, load up the boxcar. We went to Mauthausen.

OK. Getting back to where you were working under Schindler, what kind of interactions did you have with the other prisoners? Did you have any kind of a social life at all?

Well, we just talk. We just that. And that's always-- everybody got their mind to just knock off another day. Because you never know what's going be next, what's the law coming from them. Because you never know what's going happen. Just keep up what you could do and the best.

Did you develop any close friendships, either at-- while you were at the airport or-- near the airport or while you were there?

As long to avoid not to see them, that's what was most important-- the SS, not to see this bandits come around.

But did you make any close friends during that time?

Yeah. We-- most of them was from the same city. And we talk. And we try the best. And that's it what they

could do.

And how about when holidays came, was there any religious observance at all?

Not too much religious. Somebody say pray a little bit in the morning and night, and that's it. And not too much because any little prayers was scared of case somebody coming from Plaszów, some officers or anything because everybody was scared. Try do the best.

It sounds like, then, you-- where you were, people generally did their work for 12 hours a day. They would eat.

They did the work, come back, and get. That's it.

Did any people die during this time?

Oh, some were get sick. A lot of them get sick, yeah.

There were sick ones.

Not too much. There was not too much heart attack because they didn't get so fat. They get skinny.

How was your health during all this time?

Oh, was pretty good. Now, what is when you get hurt or do you get like-- when you get hurt or the cut, took long time to heal because you didn't get enough food to get enough vitamin to keep it up. Because the sore was keep long time.

During this whole time, from the time you were in the ghetto to the time you were working under Schindler, were you aware of any kind of underground or resistance? You had mentioned that your brother was in something.

My brother belonged to-- I know about that. Or the there was something going on, that. Yeah.

Were you involved in anything like that?

No I didn't work too much with that, not too much.

And then following-- leaving under Schindler, you went to Mauthausen. What did you think was going to happen? How did how did they finally close where you were working?

When the-- which place?

The place under Schindler. Well, what is the--

Schindler, the-- because the Russian Army started coming from another side. And they cross the border Kraków. They cross the border, the Polish border. We know they start coming.

What did you think was going to happen?

We didn't know because we know, maybe they go kill us, all of them. Then they decide to send away. We never know what the next day their mind are. Because you live between bandits. And you never know what's going happen.

Did you think you were going to eventually die during this time?

No, I didn't got the mind, nothing, just keep going.

How did you keep going?

No, just try do the best. Try do the best forget everything, try do the best, just occupy yourself. Work-- when you work, keep working, working, and just the mind get-- everybody do the same thing.

Did you work seven days a week?

Yeah, we work. Yeah.

So you got no day to rest?

Well, sometime, you get rest, although not too much.

OK. Why don't we stop now and take a little break?

Yeah, OK.