

Hello. My name is Lee Rosenberg, and this is Paul Cyncynatus, a survivor. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section. Paul, why don't we begin today by you telling us a little bit about yourself?

Well, I'm born in 1917, the fifth month-- the fifth day in the 10th month. I'm born in Czestochowa, Czestochowa. My parents, with my family, moved back to a city not too far from Czestochowa by the name of Klobuck, Klobutzko. And I was raised, and I was there till the war broke out.

OK. How about today, Paul? Tell us a little bit about your family today, where you live.

Today?

Mhm.

Well, I live in Shaker Heights. I have three children-- two daughters, a son, and two grandchildren.

What do you do for a living, Paul?

I am in the building trade as a decorator and also a builder.

All right. And how old are you?

I'm 67 years old.

All right, Paul. Let's talk a little bit about what your life was like before the war broke out.

Well, in our city was a population of close to 10,000 people. The Jewish population was about 400 families. We have several organizations, Jewish organizations, like a liberal Zionist organization, a socialist organization. We have also a Zionist revisionist organization, what I was part of the leaders and the organizers.

Our main man in the organization was Ze'ev Jabotinsky. And the general leader in Poland was Menachem Begin.

And you were part of those organizations?

I was part, organized this organization.

What year was this, Paul?

This was in 1935, 1935. Prior to that, I was only involved in sport. I was a soccer player. We have a very good city. People were very nice to each other.

You mentioned there were 400 Jewish families in your town?

Yes. About 400 Jewish families.

Were you close to any big cities in Poland?

Yes. The city where I was born, Czestochowa, is a very known city is the Holy shrine next to the Vatican. The city of Czestochowa was approximately around 100,000 people. Well, there was about 20,000 Jewish families. It was a very nice city.

So the city that you were born in was different from the city where you grew up?

Yes. That was 17 kilometer from the city, almost like a suburb.

And how old were you when you moved to that city, away from your birthplace?

I was only about seven years old. In our city, my parents had a bakery and sort of a restaurant, a small restaurant. My father was not a baker, just I have two brothers. They were taking care of baking. My mother helped in the bakery.

We made a decent living till 1932, '33, when Hitler organized, when he came to power. The Polish-- a Polish fascist organized their organization in Poland. And they start giving us all kinds of trouble, so much trouble that we couldn't make a living anymore. What they did, they went in and went out before the store and didn't let any customers, any Poles to get into the store to buy anything from us. And slowly we went down to almost not have enough food in the house.

This was the Jewish merchants that the Germans would not allow--

Not the Germans. The Polish fascist organization.

Would not allow--

They're called the Narodowa, Nardowas. That was the name. We, as a youngster at that time, we start worry about between Hitler threaten us to occupy our country, and if not, we saw that the Poles-- if the Hitler is not going to come to our country, the Poles are going to take care of us. They start the pogroms in different cities.

What year was this, Paul?

Around 1936, '37-- they start very, very rude, doing anything what they want to.

This was the Poles?

This was the time when the Polish Marshal Pilsudski died. He was the man what he freed Poland from Russia, together with Stalin. Now he was very good to the Jews. When he died, there were the Poles, they start doing whatever they want to. And the government didn't stop them. They said, so long they don't kill, they can do anything they want to. It's a free country.

We, as youngsters belonging to the Jewish-- to the revisionist organization at that time already, start worry about. And one day we organized ourselves and decided that we cannot remain in Poland too long. We organized an illegal organization in the organization of the Zionist revisionist organization, with the leadership with Menachem Begin. We have meetings together. And we start working extra hours or weekends and buy ammunitions and get additional money to send our friends and organizations to Israel illegal because the English government didn't allow us to go to Israel unless if it's in the quota. Otherwise, you couldn't go.

Then we decided we cannot wait for that, and we're not going to stand for that. And our leader said-- Ze'ev Jabotinsky-- we're not going to be able to go through the door, we'll go through the windows, we'll go through the chimneys. We're going to go. We're going to organize our country. And that what we were mostly occupied.

We sent a lot of guys. What we organized, the Brit HaBirionim, became the Irgun Zvai Leumit.

And this was all against the Polish government at that time?

Yeah. Well, it was not the Polish government. We were worried about the Polish government-- not the Polish government. We were worried about the Polish people. They're going to kill us. We have no room there anymore to stay there. We knew that if Hitler is not going to come, they're going to do this job. And they were capable to do the job. And we knew that. And we were very much organized on that basis.

And we didn't care what the cost and what we have to do. And we slowly start getting bigger and bigger. The revisionist organization that time in Poland was 100,000 members. And we, in the organization were about 10,000 illegal-- was illegal in the organization in order to try to get ahead and see how soon we can leave this country, where we are not safe.

When do you recall that the Germans first occupied your town, your hometown.

In 1939.

What do you recall about that?

Well, that was a Thursday night, 12 o'clock. We were listening to the radio. And we hear when Hitler declared-- that Hitler gave the order to the German army to occupy Poland. Now we were only straight across. We're only seven kilometers from the German border. At 12:30 in night, 12:30 night, we already have Polish soldiers wounded, and they were already came over to our city. At 6 o'clock in the morning, the planes were already bombarding our little city.

And we decided we cannot stay in here. We were hoping that something might happen, that somebody is going to stop them. And we ran away. We ran away, away towards Warsaw now, in that direction, 40 kilometers from there, from us. Just they were faster than we. And by Saturday morning, they were already caught up with us. They caught up with us. And they stopped us.

And there were the problems start. The young people and-- mostly young people, they killed right there and then.

Now, how do you remember yourself in those days, Paul? What was your relationship with your family, with your parents and your brothers?

Prior to the war?

Right at the time of the outbreak of the war.

Well, I was with my father and my sister and two little children, and we ran away. Another sister and my mother went to Czestochowa, when we knew what's going to happen. Another sister was living there. And she was staying there till Hitler occupied Poland.

Now, we run away. I was lucky that I was my sister with the two little children. And I was holding one child or pushing a buggy, children's buggy.

These were your--

And they and they sort of let me go. Otherwise, mostly mine age people, they killed.

How old were you at that time, Paul? In '39?

In '39? I was about 24. I think, 23. 23 years old, I think, approximately.

And these were your sister's children?

My sister's children. Her husband was in the war. He was, you know, went.

So, and were you working at the time when the war broke out?

Right when the war-- right after I came back?

Mhm.

Well, after a while, I went back to work. Yes. And I worked for the German, for the German people mostly, for the mayor, for the police, all the officers. And I was doing painting and decorating for them.

And this was in what year?

This was in 19-- beginning of 1940.

When you were working for the Germans?

Yeah. Germans.

And they were occupying your city at that time?

They did. Yes.

All right. Now where did you, when you ran with your sister and her children, where were you going to?

To another city. The name of the city? The name of the city was-- I don't remember exactly. It was 40 kilometer away. It was closer to the Vistula, Vistula, the water there, the Rhine, what Poland has. And there we thought that they're not going to go that far that quick, that we're going to be saved there because we knew they were-- they're going to come in. They're going to kill left and right.

What feelings do you remember having at that time? Were you frightened?

We were all frightened. We all knew that there were the-- that our trouble is starting. And there was nothing we can do about. I decided that my only way to do it, to save time and see maybe something would happen in the world, that Hitler is going to be stopped. And I start working just normal working for them, hardly making enough for food. Just I was happy because I know I'm safer there.

And this is when you came back to your hometown. And you started working, then, for the Germans.

Right after that. Yes.

All right. How did the Jewish community react at that time to the Germans occupying the city?

Well, there was not much they could react. Soon they came in, a week later they took the president from the Jewish organization, from the Jewish community, and all the big leaders, including my father. They took them in the temple, to the temple, without food, without anything. And they gave them three days to go to all the Jewish people.

They should bring all their gold, all their money, all the silver, and copper, brass, whatever they have at home, and to bring it because they need it for the war. And after a while, whatever they got together from the people, they let them free.

Did the-- were people relocated at this time, or was the city just turned into a ghetto then?

No. The ghetto was about six, seven months later. They took away all the houses from the Jewish people. And our city was considered a German city. The Germans took the city, and they said this is part of Germany.

They went to Romania. Romania was what they call Bessarabia, the half Germans. They were half Germans, half Romanian. And they brought them to our city. And they took all the stores and all the houses, whatever they could from the Jews and gave it to them. They became German citizens. And us, they gave us three, four, five families in one small little-- little house, or little apartment.

And you were living there at that time with your family?

With my family. We lived three families in 1 and 1/2 room and then a half a bathroom.

And what members of your family were you living with at that time?

I was living with my father, my one sister not married, and one sister married with two children. And the husband already went into the camp, to the forced labor camp.

Where were your brothers and your mother at this time?

My mother was still in Czestochowa. She was sick. She tried. My other sister in Czestochowa tried to heal her, to go to doctors, just couldn't. There was very little that you could do. And then later on, she came back home.

Were you allowed to go and visit your mother at that time?

No. Only by special permit, and it was very, very difficult. Once I was allowed to go there.

And then, all of the businesses within the town were taken away from their owners. So the people of the town were not working at that time?

Well, they have to work for the Germans without pay. They have to clean the burnt houses, the bombed houses, do all kinds of work for the German people and not getting paid or no food.

And your job then at that time was painting and decorating for the Germans?

For the Germans.

Did you have any special privileges?

Yes.

Would you tell us about them?

Well, I was allowed to travel more freely than any other of the Jews because I worked for them. And I have a special permit. And in German I was called the [GERMAN]. That means that I was important to them, that I'm doing some good work for them and they need me.

And they gave me more privilege. They gave me some ration cards, like other Germans. And I was better off than a lot of other Jews.

When did the people from the town start to be relocated? Or were they relocated at that time?

After six or seven months, they relocated them to small quarters closer to each other, to a certain old section. As a matter of fact, they took away the old houses around in that section from the Poles. They gave them other places to live. Sometimes they exchange and there were the Jews were living together.

All right. Now, let's talk about what happened to you as the war was progressing.

Well, I was still-- was occupied with them. I was working with them. I became very sort of friendly with them. A matter of fact, they always have conversations with me, especially the police or the police chiefs. There was 3 chiefs. One chief of them I recall and that I'm never going to forget. His name was Doczek.

He was very nice. He was he was not an SS. He was an SA, what they call, a more, a better Nazi. He once called me. He

said, Paul, I have a question to ask you. I said, yes, sir, what is the question? He said, tell me, what are you wearing in here?

I said, what do you mean what I'm wearing? You know what I'm wearing here. What is this? And I said, this is the Star of David. He said, you are dumbo, a dummkopf. You are-- you are a dummy.

I said, what do you mean a dummy? This is the Star of David. It was cut out, yellow. You are dummy, he said to me several times. So I said, Herr meister, sir, what are you talking about? He said, I'll tell you what this. This is your death certificate.

And I looked at him. I said, so I'm a young man. I'm working. Why do you give me the death sentence? Don't I have a right to live? You have a right to live-- because I was very friendly with him. Your children have a right to live. Why do you give me the death sentence? What did I do that I deserve that? See, I wasn't afraid for them because I was so close with them.

He said, this is not mine doing. I'm just telling you what our top brass decided and what you have to expect in the future. And I left it that way.

What happened after that, Paul? Were you sent someplace else?

Well, when, in 1931-- in 1930-- no, 1931. No, between 1931 and '32, when there came the order, and we knew-- I knew in advance-- they're going to make it what they call, in Germany, judenrein. They're going to clean up the whole city.

Do you mean 1941 and '42?

I'm sorry. '41 and '42. They came, the SS came with trucks and trains. And they went and came into every house where the Jews were living. And they asked them to come out to the marketplace, you know, where was a big place. And they all brought them up there, brought them out there, with dogs, with machine guns

They took them on these trucks and took them on the trains, on the cattle trains. And they actually didn't take them straight to Auschwitz. They took them to another city from us, the same size city, what they call [NON-ENGLISH]. And there was the same thing, was-- they did the same thing in the same time.

And my father was in hiding. My two nephews hide him in a place there by this little camp what we have in our city. And he was hiding them with a little granddaughter, three years old. What kind of a camp was it, Paul? This was like a forced labor camp. They took all the young people, and they put them there in camp. And they were doing work every day. That's all what they got is food for that. They gave them hardly enough food to live.

What-- were there Jews in this forced labor camp?

Yes. There were Jews. They took all the Jewish people in that camp. And not too far in a little village, maybe a kilometer or two kilometers from our city, there was this camp. And not too far from there was where my nephews-- two nephews were. They took my father with this little baby. And he was hiding. There are a lot of others were hiding in a shanty. And of the babies start crying. And for some reason they found out, and they got a hold of them. They came and took them away.

They took them to this other city with the other people. They combined, they brought him to the same place. Now, there was Jewish, a couple of Jewish militia, police, what they were involved in the city when Hitler was-- when the Germans were there. And they went alone there with the transport. And when they came back, I asked him-- one was my relative. And I asked him, what happened?

He said they took all of them. There was a big--

A roundup?

Like a lake--

A lake. --a tremendous lake. And they chased them into this lake with dogs, big dogs, and machine guns. And they pushed them in that, deep in the water. And he said that the cries and the, all the thing what's there, that it was unbelievable. And he said my father was keeping the baby here in his-- in his-- with him.

And all the other children with him, whatever there was there, they kept him there for a little while. And they got him out. And then they took him away to Auschwitz, to the gas chambers.

Did you see your father after that?

No. No.

What happened to the rest of the people who didn't go in that first transport?

Well, they all-- no, they all took one transport. The only thing, they left this first little forced labor camp, where it was not-- there was no electric wire around. They were there, so they were going to work every day. And they didn't have too much to worry about because they knew where they were going to go.

And when Himmler gave the order that no Jews can walk around without any electric wire, then when they came to our city and they took away this camp, where I was not in the camp. I was-- the [NON-ENGLISH] Jude was-- they gave me the privilege that I could live in the city in another three, four families, like a watchmaker, a dentist, a radio mechanic, electrician, a tinner, and me as a painter. We lived together.

These were other Jews also that you lived with at that time?

Only this, the five, six families. That's all. The rest were all in camp. When they came to take away these people, they took us too. Now, by being when we were on the police yard there, waiting for the trucks to come to take us away or whatever is the cattle trains, I and my wife decided that we're not going to go because we're going to Auschwitz, to the gas chambers.

You were married at this time?

Right.

How long had you been married?

I was married in 1941-- Illegal.

How do you mean illegal?

Well, I was sort of, as far as the Civil marriage, that was fine. I already applied before and I was granted that.

You had to have permission from the Germans to get married?

Yeah. From German. He gave me the OK on it. Just according to the Jewish law and tradition, I couldn't marry because there was no facilities, nothing. What I did according, I knew because I went to a lot of Jewish Hebrew schools. And I know a lot of the halakha, the Jewish law, where you're allowed, in that instant, you can marry your wife by telling, giving her a ring and saying the Hebrew prayer, and two witnesses are there. It's just as good as any marriage.

That's what I did. And we got married because in order-- the reason I did it, because when I was the [NON-ENGLISH], when he gave me the permission to remain there, free I said, now, my wife, you know, I cannot be by myself. I need clothes to wash. And I need to cook somebody. He said, where is your wife? I said, she's out there in camp.

He said, well, bring her back, and I'll give her some ration cards and she's going to be with you.

She was in the labor camp?

She was in this little camp out there, not too far from the city. And after a few days, she came back.

And then she lived with you while you lived with the watchmaker and the electrician and the other people.

They have wives too. They have their wives there. Just they were older people. I was-- me and the electrician were the youngest. And there were we were there till 1942.

And then the order came that you would have to be deported also?

Yes. Just for some reason, they still-- the [NON-ENGLISH] got such a liking to me, me and another couple of guys, that he wants to leave me in the city after that. And he told me so. And he tried everything. He went as far as he called Berlin, and that didn't allow it.

There was another camp about 24 kilometer, 26 kilometer from our city, where there was a big-- it's not a farm. It had that-- like a big farm, like Cyrus Eaton, something like a--

An estate, a big estate.

Like a big estate, where this was given to General Smelt. He was the-- he was considered the president of all occupied areas, where German occupied, like France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria. He was the main guy. And they gave it to him, this big, beautiful area.

He had about a couple hundred Jews there, doing all the work there and just get food. And what the German Arms commissar decided, that he's going to take me and take another couple guys. He's going to take us out there. And he's going to send us out there, and then he's going to bring us back to the city-- illegal sort of it. He wants us very badly.

Matter of fact, he did. Not me because when my wife found out, she saw that I'm going someplace else, and she's going someplace else, she started crying. She said, why are you leaving me. I said, what do you want me to do? She said, why don't you go over-- what they call-- the leader what came from the SS to take us away. They called this the *hauptsturmbannführer*.

And she said, why don't you go to him and ask him that you want to come along, that he should send you along-- he should send me along with you. And I did. I went over to him. He came-- I saw him coming. And he came. And I went over. And I started talking to him. I talk German very good. And I told him in German. I said, look, I know that you're going to [NON-ENGLISH]. This is my wife. How about I would like she should come with me.

And he looked at me. He looked. And he said, who are you? I said, I'm a-- my name is so-and-so. I'm the [POLISH] the painter for the Arms commissar for [INAUDIBLE] for the-- he said, do you want to go with your wife? And I didn't get it right away. I said, yes.

He said, fine. Out. And start to send her with me. He sent me with her. He reversed it. No problem. Then when the Arms commissar came and he found out, he was furious what I did because he couldn't do anything anymore.

All of a sudden, there were a few guys there what they were not very smart. And I don't want to mention names because you know them. And they start saying, what did you do? What did you do? Everybody is going to the gas chamber. Why did you do that?

I said, I don't care. He said, you know that you're supposed to go with me to the [NON-ENGLISH]. I said, I don't care. Whatever it's going to be is going to be-- finished. And then afterwards, I start thinking about, thinking. I said,

something is wrong.

And I went, and I waited with another few guys, with my wife. And we decided we're going to run away. We were-- a lot of the SS were there watching us, with ammunition. And one certain moment, I waited up. And I saw there's nobody there. And I opened up a place, and we all ran out. When we ran out, we went in the woods in the-- in the corn, in the fields, and we were hiding there.

Prior to that, a few months before, I was in contact with the Polish underground. And I asked them, in case when something should happen, that they are going to take us. And I know they would not.

I ran out there, and we were hiding and waiting. They said, when we going to find out that they are taking you away to Germany, we're going to be there waiting for you. Just being in the corn for a few hours, they were looking for us. And they couldn't find us. Just two Polish young guys were there, not too far from there. They saw us there hiding. And they saw that they're looking for us, and they came over. He said here Jude. Here Jude. And they caught us. They brought us back.

Of course, my wife got a good licking. And they put us to the wall. And I thought they're going to kill us. They're going to shoot us. Just in the meantime, being there a few hours, two of the guys they killed. Yeah.

And they took me and the other guys what they caught, what ran out with us together, and they took us out to the cemetery to bury these two guys. The police chief went along, and he said to me, Paul, don't do nothing. You're going to Germany. You're going to the concentration camp, to a forced camp, labor camp. We're going to give you a letter that you were a good Jew. Don't run away. Don't do anything. The guy what is coming-- the SS is going to come alone. He's going to try to make you go away, but you should run try to run away, and he's going to shoot you don't do it.

And we buried the two guys. On the end, my mother was dead already at that time. She died a year before. And I asked this SS man. I said, can I go on my mother's grave? I want to just say goodbye to her. And he didn't let me. Just this police chief said, you know, you let him go. He's a nice guy. He let me go. And he told me, don't run away.

I went to my mother's grave, and I said a few words. I came back, and they brought us back. And that took us off the transport.

Where did they send you?

They send they send us, I think, about 40, 50 kilometers from Auschwitz, to a big camp. In that camp came the guy what he was sending all these young people. He's sending in different forced labor camps.

Was your wife with you?

Yes.

And other friends of yours also?

Yes. Yeah. We all work together. The name of the camp was Blechhammer. And there were we-- we knew in groups that we're going to-- that we're going to go to different places. And matter of fact, my name was-- I gave you my name. Just in the camp, when we were supposed to go in different places, I knew exactly where my wife is going to go, to which camp.

And there's another guy, another fellow what was in this little camp in our city. He knew where his brother is in a camp in another place. And he came over to me. He said, Paul, would you mind that we change places? I'll go to my brother. I know he is there. And you go with your wife. It was about three kilometers apart. We were not in the same camp, just close by.

And I changed with him. A matter of fact, when I changed with him because I ran away, I was afraid to have my name.

And I kept his name, Morgenstern. I kept my name that way. Nobody said it. Just in case they knew that I'm going to run away, they're going to give me a hard time. I was afraid, and that's what I did.

I'd like to go back to something else. In 1941, when was judenfrei, when I was already in this little ghetto as a [NON-ENGLISH]. My wife has two sisters and a brother and a mother in Czestochowa. And we decided we'll try to save them because we thought this little camp is going to remain that way till the end of the war, in our city.

This is the forced labor camp that was in your city.

The forced labor camp. We had a couple of guys what they came back and forth from Czestochowa. They were stonemasons in the streets, stonemasons. And I was very friendly with them. And we paid them off twice. And they brought the 11-year-old, my wife's younger sister, Frances, and the 12-and-a-half-year-old, my wife's brother, Arthur, to our city.

I was not allowed to keep them. That was against the law. And I didn't know what to do. To give her away to the Poles, I was afraid. I went to this, what are called the lagerfuhrer, the head of this camp. And I knew him because, through the [NON-ENGLISH], I knew all these people. And I told him. I said, now look. I have in here, in my house, my wife's brother. And he's 11 years old. He's a very strong guy. And he can work real good. Please, take him into this camp.

By certain means and certain bribe, I got him in. Mine sister-in-law, Frances, the 11-year-old was too young to get him-- get her into the camp. And I kept her hidden on the attic in hiding places and hoping for a miracle.

Can I go on? Now, when I found out that they're going free or they're going to take out all the Jews from Czestochowa, I again organized these two guys to bring my wife's mother and the other sister, Esther. And that was a day before Yom Kippur. It was Erev Yom Kippur, Kol Nidre. And my mother-in-law decided she's not going to travel Yom Kippur. And she refused to go.

She went and sent her daughter, Esther, to smuggle to the border on her own with a whole bunch of other people. And she came to our city. And I took her in. And again, what I did the same thing. I went over to this guy, and I begged him. And I went after him. I said, please, you have to get her in. And she got in in camp. And I was happy that I accomplished something.

All right. We're going to take a short break now.

Thank you.